# BEYOND WALLS AND ALTARS

## Shaping Spiritual Landscapes in the Modernist Chapel

Potentiality, Embodied Search for Transformation, Architectural Evolution of Spiritual Space

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# I. Introduction

The design of sacred spaces has, throughout history, navigated the delicate balance between expressing the aspirations of religious communities and responding to the complexities of the social and political world. Modernist architecture, with its emphasis on functionality, rationality, and a break from traditional forms, brought a revolutionary shift to the concept of religious buildings. While visionary architects sought to create spiritual spaces that fostered individual experiences and reflected societal progress, their utopian ideals have often been scrutinized for their disconnect from the realities of lived experience.

In his seminal work, "Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development", Manfred Tafuri (1976) offers a powerful critique of utopianism within architecture. He argues that by promoting idealized visions that ignore existing social, economic, and political structures, utopian thinking can mask underlying inequalities and power dynamics. Tafuri's skepticism raises essential questions about the limitations of utopianism in shaping the built environment and its capacity to facilitate genuine social change.

Conversely, Giorgio Agamben's potentiality theory provides an alternative lens through which to examine the transformative possibilities of architecture. Agamben's concept of potentiality highlights the dynamic interplay between the actual and the possible, emphasizing that the present moment holds the seeds of future change (Agamben, 2004). Applying his theory to architecture suggests that even within existing constraints, there lies an inherent potential for new forms, experiences, and interpretations to emerge. This perspective invites us to explore how architectural spaces can foster moments of disruption, challenging established norms and opening up alternative ways of understanding the world.

Within this theoretical framework, modernistic religious architecture offers a compelling case for exploring the complex intersection of utopian vision, potentiality, and the evolving nature of spirituality. Architects such as Peter Zumthor and Le Corbusier reimagined sacred spaces with stark geometries, innovative materiality, and a focus on the manipulation of light, often departing drastically from traditional architectural forms. While these spaces embody a utopian desire to transcend past limitations, they also exist within specific social and political contexts, shaping and being shaped by the lived experiences of individuals and communities.

This study delves into the interplay of utopianism, potentiality, and social change within two seminal modernistic religious structures: Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel in rural Germany and Le Corbusier's Colline Notre Dame du Haut in France. These case studies exemplify the nuanced relationship between architectural vision and the broader landscape of social and political transformation in post-war Europe. Through close examination, the thesis will reveal how the manipulation of form, materiality, and light within these spaces can create moments of disruption within the visitor's experience. While embodying elements of utopian aspiration, the chapel's success or failure to deliver on those aspirations becomes dependent on the visitor's ability to connect and interact with their design elements.

This approach extends beyond Tafuri's exclusive focus on the inherent limitations of architectural utopianism (Tafuri, 1976). By drawing on Agamben's theory (2004), the study explores how Bruder Klaus Field Chapel and Colline Notre Dame du Haut offer spaces where potentiality can manifest, allowing for personal and spiritual transformation. Furthermore, the analysis considers how these experiences might differ from those evoked by more traditional religious structures, where the architectural design primarily acts to reinforce existing hierarchies and power dynamics.

To expand this discussion, the essay also examines modernistic religious spaces beyond Western Europe. Tadao Ando's Church of Light in Osaka, Japan, offers an example of how minimalist design, light, and shadow can create a powerful sacred space within a bustling urban context (Ando, 1995). The inclusion of Oscar Niemeyer's modernist Cathedral of Brasília demonstrates how a nation's aspirations for progress and social change can be embodied within the bold, optimistic form of religious architecture (Niemeyer, 2000). Analyzing these global case studies provides a broader, more inclusive understanding of how modernistic principles have translated into diverse cultural contexts, revealing the universal potential of architecture to shape and reflect spiritual experiences.

The thesis of this study juxtaposes the pursuit of spiritual transformation through modernistic religious architecture exists within a complex and dynamic interplay of utopian idealism, embodied experience, and the realities of social and political power. By examining case studies from diverse contexts, it aims to contribute a nuanced perspective on the transformative potential of architectural space, offering insights into the ways in which the built environment can both facilitate and hinder the realization of a more just and equitable world.

# II. Theoretical Framework

## A. Tafuri's Critique of Utopianism

Overview of Tafuri's critique of utopianism

Tafuri's critique of utopianism, particularly as articulated in his influential works like "Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development," focuses on the historical failures and ideological limitations of utopian thinking within the context of architecture and urban planning.

One of Tafuri's central arguments is that utopian visions often fail to account for the complex social, economic, and political existing realities that shape the built environment. He criticizes utopian architects and planners for their tendency to prioritize idealized visions of society over practical considerations, leading to projects that are disconnected from the needs and desires of actual communities which is touchable in the daily life.

Moreover, Tafuri argues that utopianism can serve as a form of ideological justification for the status quo, providing a distraction from the inequalities and injustices inherent in capitalist society. By promoting unrealistic fantasies of social harmony and technological progress, utopian thinking can mask the underlying contradictions and conflicts that define modern urban life.

In contrast to utopianism, Tafuri advocates for a more critical and historically informed approach to architecture and urban planning utopian visions ignoring the role of the utopian visionary in valuable architectural structures. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the ways in which power structures shape the built environment, and he calls for architects and planners to engage with the messy realities of contemporary society rather than retreating into utopian fantasies.

Overall, Tafuri's critique of utopianism highlights the dangers of ignoring the complexities of social and political life in favour of idealized visions of the future. By challenging utopian thinking, he encourages architects and planners to grapple with the complexities of the present and work towards more socially just and equitable built environments.

## B. Agamben's Potentiality Theory

Explanation of Agamben's potentiality theory

Giorgio Agamben's theory of potentiality is a key aspect of his broader philosophical framework, particularly articulated in his work "Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy." At the heart of Agamben's theory is the distinction between "*potentiality*" (potentia) and "*actuality*", drawing upon classical philosophical concepts from Aristotle and others.

Potentiality vs. Actuality: In traditional metaphysics, Aristotle distinguished between *potentiality* (dynamis) and *actuality* (energeia). Potentiality refers to what something can become or its capacity to change, while *actuality* refers to what something currently is, its realized state. For example, a seed has the potential to become a tree; its growth into a tree represents the actualization of that potential. From these two concepts, Agamben distinguished some terms to explore the socio-political realms. His theory was driven by the basis of distinguishing between *potentiality* and *actuality* through language, the first tool invented by collective individuals to communicate.

Zoe and Bios: Agamben extends this distinction by introducing the concepts of "*zoe*" and "*bios*." Zoe represents mere biological life, the bare fact of existence shared by all living beings. *Bios*, on the other hand, refers to qualified or politicized life, the life that has meaning and value within a particular socio-political context. For Agamben, much of modern politics revolves around the management and control of *bios*, rather than simply preserving *zoe*.

State of Exception: Agamben explores how the distinction between *potentiality* and *actuality* intersects with politics, particularly in his concept of the "*state of exception*." He argues that in times of crisis or emergency, governments often suspend legal norms and rights, thereby exposing the inherent *potentiality* of power to override established structures. This suspension of normal legal order reveals the potential for authoritarianism inherent within the political system.

Homo Sacer: Agamben also introduces the figure of "*homo sacer*," an individual who is stripped of legal protections and can be killed without consequence, thereby existing in a *state of exception* where their bare life (*zoe*) is exposed to sovereign power. The existence of *homo sacer* demonstrates the *potentiality* within the legal system for a person to be reduced to their biological existence, devoid of political significance.

Messianic Time: Another dimension of Agamben's *potentiality* theory is his exploration of '*messianic time*', drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of *messianism*. Agamben argues that the *messianic* is not an event in the future, but rather a *potentiality* inherent in the present moment, a suspension of linear time where the possibility for radical change exists. This *messianic* potential disrupts the status quo and opens up new possibilities for politics and ethics.

# C. Theoretical Bridge
The bridge in between the theories and the existing architectural designs

With a comprehensive review of Tafuri's skepticism towards utopianism and an examination of Agamben's theories on *potentiality*, a nuanced understanding emerges regarding the complexities of envisioning alternative futures within the social-political milieu.Tafuri's critical perspective highlights the limitations of utopian thinking, emphasizing the importance of grounded analysis within the current social-political context. His vision underscores the necessity of acknowledging the realities that shape the built environment and urban landscapes, cautioning against the pitfalls of idealized visions disconnected from practical considerations.

Agamben's framework of *potentiality* offers a complementary perspective, suggesting that while utopianism as a new alternative of visionary may have its shortcomings, it can also serve as a catalyst for envisioning new possibilities. His theory posits that understanding the dynamics between *potentiality* and *actuality* is crucial in navigating the complexities of modern politics, particularly in the management and control of bios, or qualified life, within society.

Recognizing the interplay between utopian aspirations and the underlying social-political milieu becomes essential for grasping the drivers of change from the mere biological existence (*zoe*) to the politicized life (*bios*) we observe. Agamben's emphasis on the management of *bios* underscores the significance of engaging with utopian visions as potential avenues for transformative exploration, rather than dismissing them outright.

Finding Possibility in Change: Agamben's Framework vs. Tafuri's Critique - In contrast to Tafuri's caution against utopianism, Agamben's perspective encourages a more nuanced approach, one that acknowledges the inevitability of change and the *potentiality* inherent in alternative visions. Thus, while Tafuri's critique provides a necessary grounding in the realities of the present, Agamben's theories offer a broader framework for understanding the possibilities for change and transformation within the social-political landscape. This perspective resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the constant and untouchable desire for change, suggesting that any potential can ignite this transformative process, leading to new explorations and manifestations of *bios*.

# III. Historical Framework

## A. Modern Architecture

A New social-political dynamic

Modern architecture emerged in the early 20th century as a response to the rapidly changing social, economic, and political landscape of the time. Movements such as Bauhaus, International Style, and various new art movements sought to break away from the ornamental excesses of the past and embrace a new aesthetic grounded in functionality, simplicity, and technological innovation. This period witnessed a reimagining of architectural space as a reflection of modernity, with a focus on creating environments that could accommodate the needs of a rapidly urbanizing society.

However, alongside the aesthetic and technological advancements of modern architecture, there emerged a growing awareness of its social and *political potentiality*. Architects such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius envisioned architecture as a means of shaping society, advocating for designs that would not only meet practical needs but also foster social cohesion and progress. This era saw the rise of utopian ideals within architectural discourse, with visions of ideal cities and communities that promised to transcend the constraints of the past.

Yet, as the 20th century progressed, the utopian aspirations of modern architecture came under scrutiny. The failures of large-scale urban planning projects and the rise of postmodern critiques highlighted the limitations of architectural determinism and the need for a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political dimensions of built environments. Critics like Manfredo Tafuri cautioned against the dangers of utopianism, arguing that idealistic visions must be grounded in the complexities of social reality to avoid becoming mere fantasies divorced from material conditions.

Against this backdrop, contemporary architects continue to grapple with the social and *political potentiality* of architecture. Projects such as Le Corbusier's Colline Notre Dame du Haut and Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel exemplify attempts to navigate the tensions between visionary aspirations and practical realities, offering spaces that challenge conventional norms while remaining rooted in their socio-political contexts.

## B. Religious architecture

Reflective social-political dynamic

In modern religious architecture, the architectural design goes beyond mere functionality to embody deeper spiritual aspirations, offering spaces that facilitate contemplation, transcendence, and communion. The innovative designs of structures like Le Corbusier's Colline Notre Dame du Haut and Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel serve as powerful manifestations of this *spiritual potentiality* within modern architecture. These chapelss eschew traditional forms in favor of dynamic, experiential spaces that engage the senses and evoke a sense of the sacred. Light, space, and materiality are orchestrated to create environments conducive to spiritual reflection, inviting visitors to transcend the mundane and connect with something greater than themselves. In this way, modern chapels exemplify the *potentiality* of architecture to inspire awe, wonder, and transformation, transcending the limitations of the physical realm to evoke the divine.

By situating modern architecture within its historical framework, this paper seeks to contextualize the exploration of architectural *potentiality* within broader and more contemporary socio-political dynamics. It acknowledges the complex interplay between architectural form and societal values, tracing the evolution of architectural thought from the utopian visions of the early 20th century to the critical reflections of the present day. Through this historical lens, the paper aims to shed light on the enduring relevance of architecture as a site of social and political discourse, inviting readers to reconsider the role of built environments in shaping our collective futures.

# IV. Research Methodology

## A. Application of the theories to the analysis of modernistic architectural spaces

The interdependent relationship between *potentiality* and *actuality* becomes particularly poignant when examining modern architectural chapels such as the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel by Peter Zumthor and Notre-Dame du Haut by Le Corbusier. These architectural marvels not only serve as places of worship in classical term but also reflect broader social and political contexts, embodying the potential for transformative change within the built environment.

In the context of modernistic architecture, which holds significant importance according to Tafuri's perspective, the application of Agamben's theory provides a lens through which to understand how social-political interactions shape architectural spaces. Agamben's concept of *potentiality* underscores the notion that within the current socio-political landscape, there exists the potential for alternative expressions and forms of architecture to emerge. This *potentiality* manifests in actual modern chapels and churches, which exhibit unconventional expressions across various layers of design. These modern spiritual structures serve as compelling case studies for analysing how architectural spaces interact with Agamben's distinguished terms of *potentiality*. In these spaces, the spiritual experience transcends traditional notions, offering tangible encounters that go beyond merely feeling awe in the presence of spiritual power. Instead, modern chapels challenge classical characteristics of churchs, redefining how individuals experience spirituality in the realm of architecture. This evolution reflects the dynamic interplay between *potentiality* and *actuality*, as architectural designs respond to shifting socio-political contexts.

By examining modernistic spiritual structures through the lens of Agamben's theory, this research aims to delve deeper into the ways in which these spaces reflect and interact with the socio-political dynamics of the present. These chapels become sites for exploring how architectural forms negotiate the complexities of contemporary society, embodying both the potential for transformative change and the realities of existing power structures. Through this analysis, a certain insight may be arisen regarding the role of architecture as a mediator of social and political discourse, shedding light on the ways in which built environments shape and are shaped by broader societal forces.

Bruder Klaus Field Chapel (2007): Minimalism and Experiential Architecture - Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel represents a contemporary approach informed by several evolving architectural trends. While minimalism emerged as a major force in art and design from the mid-20th century, Zumthor's work highlights its application in a 21st-century context. His focus on the sensory experience of architecture – a philosophy often referred to as 'atmospheres' – gains prominence in contemporary discussions of architecture. The chapel's austere form and emphasis on the interplay between light and raw materials aligns with a renewed appreciation for craftsmanship and a deeper exploration of how architecture can foster contemplative states.

Notre-Dame du Haut (1955): A Modernist Masterwork in a Post-War World - Le Corbusier's Notre-Dame du Haut embodies the spirit of architectural modernism, a movement that rose to prominence in the first half of the 20th century. Having already pioneered functionalist designs that embraced technology and new materials, Le Corbusier embarked on a more expressive turn in his career. The chapel reflects a post-World War II era yearning for renewal, with its dynamic form offering a break from the rigid traditions of the past. Notre-Dame du Haut also aligns with the broader interest in abstract forms and textures explored by artists and designers during the mid-20th century.

In both cases, these modern architectural spiritual structures serve as manifestations of the *potentiality* inherent within the built environment. They reflect not only the individual visions of their architects but also broader social and political aspirations. The Bruder Klaus Field Chapel embodies the potential for architecture to forge connections between the spiritual and the natural world, while Notre-Dame du Haut challenges established norms and conventions, opening up new possibilities for religious experience. Moreover, these chapels serve as sites of social and political significance, transcending their function as places of worship to become symbols of cultural identity and collective memory. They offer spaces for community gathering and dialogue, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among diverse populations.

## B. Field Research Method

Research trough personal experience and archiving

This research into modernistic spiritual architectural structures, such as the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel and Notre-Dame du Haut, draws on both theoretical frameworks and direct experience. Firsthand visits to these architectural marvels have allowed for sensory engagement with the spaces, revealing deeper layers of meaning beyond their structural forms.    A personal archive of photographs, sketches, and notes from these visits offers a rich source of data. This archive aids in analysing how these churches embody Agamben's theories within the modern socio-political framework.

By drawing upon personal experiences and observations from these visits, the researcher can offer a nuanced analysis that goes beyond theoretical abstraction. Through detailed examination of architectural elements, spatial configurations, and sensory experiences, the researcher can uncover the ways in which these spiritual structures negotiate the interplay between *potentiality* and *actuality* in the built environment. Furthermore, personal encounters with these spaces allow for a more intimate understanding of how they interact with broader socio-political dynamics, shedding light on the ways in which architecture mediates social and political discourse in contemporary society.

Incorporating personal archives from these visits enriches the research methodology by grounding theoretical concepts in lived experience as Tafuri emphasized. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, the researcher can offer a more holistic understanding of how modernistic spiritual structures embody Agamben's theories within the context of the modern social-political landscape. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the researcher aims to contribute to a deeper appreciation of architecture as a site of social and political significance, offering new insights into the ways in which built environments shape and are shaped by broader societal forces.

# V. Thesis and Sub-Questions

This thesis aims to unpack the complex interplay between modernistic architectural spaces, social and political currents, and the potential for individual and collective transformation. To achieve this, the following sub-questions will guide the analysis:

*Potentiality* vs. *Actuality*: How do the structural forms of modernistic religious architecture embody Agamben's concepts of *potentiality* and *actuality*? Specifically, in what ways does the design of these spaces evoke a sense of possibility, transcendence, and potential for change within the existing social and political landscape?

Beyond Utopianism: How do case studies like the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel and Colline Notre Dame du Haut challenge or nuance Tafuri's critique of utopian thinking in architecture? Does the pursuit of visionary ideals in these spaces offer new ways of understanding the relationship between architecture and societal aspirations?

The Embodied Experience: How does the manipulation of spatial elements – including light, materials, and form – influence the visitor's sensory and emotional experience within modernistic religious structures? How can these experiences be linked to a sense of personal and spiritual transformation?

Social and Political Context: What insights do case studies like Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel and Le Corbusier's Colline Notre Dame du Haut offer regarding the social and political dynamics of their historical moments? How does their architectural language reflect the broader aspirations, fears, and power structures of their respective contexts?

Global Perspectives and Expanding the Discourse: How do modernistic religious structures in diverse cultural contexts, such as Ando's Church of Light or Niemeyer's Cathedral of Brasília, contribute to our understanding of the universality of architectural *potentiality*?

# VI. Case Studies

## A. A Pilgrimage to *Potentiality*: An Extended Exploration of Bruder Klaus Field Chapel

### A. I. A Landscape of Duality: Nature and the Geometric Form

Nestled amidst the rolling fields of western Germany, Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel stands as a stark geometric counterpoint to the surrounding organic landscape (figure 2). The gentle clop of horseshoes from nearby farms and the rustle of wind through the tall grass create a symphony of nature, further emphasizing the organic character that envelops the structure (figure 5). This stands in stark contrast to the chapel's geometric form, its clean lines and precise angles appearing almost out of place.

This intentional juxtaposition embodies the tension between *zoe* (bare life) and *bios* (socially-shaped life) as explored by Giorgio Agamben (2004). The chapel, in its very form, invites contemplation on the inherent *potentiality* that arises from this interplay. It challenges the viewer to question pre-conceived notions of sacred spaces, resonating with Manfred Tafuri's critique (1976) of imposing utopian ideals through monumental architecture. The chapel, in its stark otherness, compels the observer to confront their own expectations of religious architecture.

As one approaches, the meticulous details of the structure become apparent. The horizontal, layered facade, reminiscent of organic forms like sedimentary rock, emphasizes the building's stability and its groundedness in nature (figure 3). This approach signifies a modern interpretation of the establishment of spiritual spaces, traditionally manifested in grand, sky-reaching edifices. Zumthor, in his design, emphasizes the intrinsic essence of churches – their role as facilitators of *zoe*, a focus on the bare essence of being – rather than solely reflecting the historical and social-political context embodied in the *bios* of classical churches with their towering structures (figure 4).

### A. II. A Minimalist Invitation: Entering the *Homo Sacer* State

A triangular metal door, positioned precisely in the center of the facade, adheres to the chapel's overall geometric character. Atop the door, a small, unadorned cross subtly hints at the religious purpose of the space. Unlike classical churches with their towering crosses dominating the skyline, Zumthor situates this symbol at the point of entry. This minimalism invites the visitor into a space stripped of *grandeur*, focusing instead on fostering a sense of contemplation and introspection (figure 6).

Here, the initial feeling of being a *homo sacer*, an individual existing outside the social order as described by Agamben (1998), comes into play. The chapel stands alone, devoid of the usual trappings of organized religion. One approaches it not as a member of a congregation seeking solace in the familiar, but as an individual seeking a unique encounter with the potential for transcendence. The thick metal door, which might initially appear daunting, easily pivots open with the touch of a smooth, hand-shaped handle. This element, both functional and symbolic, invites the visitor to actively engage with the space, a stark contrast to the passive experience of entering many traditional houses of worship (figure 7).

### A. III. A Journey Through Light and Form: Embodied Experience

Passing through the threshold, the senses are immediately engaged. The sound of the heavy door closing behind you (figure 8) is followed by the subtle, smoky scent emanating from the charred wood lining the interior walls – a result of Zumthor's unconventional construction method. This unique sensory experience immediately transports the visitor away from the familiar (figure 9). A narrow passage, designed for single occupancy, echoes the solitary experience found in Japanese Zen gardens (figure 10).

The initially inward-curving walls, reminiscent of Richard Serra's sculptures, subtly transform the triangular entrance into the main chamber. This manipulation of the threshold highlights the visitor's active role in shaping the space. It's not just a physical act of entering; it's an engagement with the architectural elements that define the experience. The visitor becomes an integral part of the space, their movement shaping their perception.

A. IV. Nature Reclaimed: A Reflection of the Unshaped Self

Upon entering the main chamber, the bent walls now curve outwards, culminating in an irregular opening in the roof (figure 14). This organic form stands in stark contrast to the perfect circles seen in structures like the Pantheon. This shift away from geometric perfection reflects a yearning to reconnect with nature and the unshaped essence of human existence (*zoe*). The dominance of *bios*, the social structures that often constrain us, gives way to a space that celebrates the potential for a return to our primal state, a state of being untainted by the pressures of societal expectations.

A. V. A Multi-Sensory Experience: Fostering Self-Reflection and Transformation

This multi-sensory experience fosters a sense of self-reflection, prompting the visitor to contemplate their place within the grander scheme of existence. The mirrored water reflects (figure 11) not just the physical form but also the essence of the individual. In this state of introspection, the interplay of light and shadow cast by the dappled sunlight streaming through the strategically placed glass openings in the facade further enhances the experience.

A. VI. The *Messianic* Potential of Bruder Klaus

The space is now imbued with the presence of the revered hermit, Nicholas von Flüe, also known as Bruder Klaus (figure 13). A solitary bench carved from rough wood sits next to the statue depicting him, inviting visitors to sit and contemplate the space (figure 12). Here, the juxtaposition of elements takes on a new dimension.

The geometric structure represents the rational and ordered aspects of existence (*bios*). The irregular opening in the roof, the natural pool, and the rough wooden bench symbolizes a connection to the organic and the unshaped (*zoe*). Presiding over this interplay is the statue of Bruder Klaus, a figure who embodied a life of solitude and spiritual transformation.

In this setting, the once seemingly random glass holes scattered throughout the facade gain their true meaning. Sunlight streams through at various angles, casting dappled light on the interior walls, illuminating the statue and reflecting in the shallow pool. This interplay of light and shadow evokes a sense of the divine, a potential for a transformative experience.

Therefore, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel transcends the mere function of a traditional place of worship. It becomes a vessel for a *messianic* event, using Walter Benjamin's term (1969). By reconnecting with the natural elements and the unshaped essence of existence (*zoe*), visitors are invited to shed the constraints of *bios* (societal structures).

A. VII. A Space for Embodied Transformation

Gazing upon the statue of Bruder Klaus, a symbol of profound faith and solitary contemplation, while surrounded by the play of light and nature, the visitor is encouraged to contemplate their own potential for transformation. The act of sitting on the rough wooden bench, a simple and natural element, further grounds the visitor in the present moment.

Bruder Klaus Field Chapel thus becomes a facilitator for a pilgrimage of the self. It is a space designed to evoke a reconnection with nature, a shedding of social constraints, and a potential for personal transformation. The visitor is no longer a passive observer but an active participant, their senses engaged in a multi-layered experience that transcends the physical and enters the realm of the spiritual (figure 15).

A. VII. A Duality Resolved

Bruder Klaus Field Chapel stands as a testament to the power of architecture to evoke contemplation and transformation. Through its intentional juxtaposition of geometric forms and natural elements, the space creates a unique atmosphere that facilitates a reconnection with the essence of being (*zoe*).

The presence of Bruder Klaus, a figure renowned for his piety and solitary existence, serves as a potent symbol of the *messianic* potential that lies within each individual. The chapel invites visitors to shed the constraints of *bios* (social structures) and embrace the possibility of personal transformation.

Therefore, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel is more than just a building; it is a space that compels us to confront the duality within ourselves – the rational and the natural, the societal and the individual. By fostering a connection with our inner essence and the potential for transformation, the chapel offers a unique pilgrimage towards a state of spiritual wholeness.

## B. Colline Notre Dame du Haut: A Pilgrimage Through Duality and Revelation

### B. I. Atop the Vosges Mountains

High atop the rolling hills of eastern France, nestled amidst the verdant southern slopes of the Vosges Mountains, lies a unique architectural landmark - Colline Notre Dame du Haut, a modernistic Roman Catholic chapel designed by the visionary architect Le Corbusier. This case study delves into the chapel's design elements, exploring how they embody the theoretical concepts of *potentiality* (Agamben, 2004) and challenge the limitations of utopian ideals in modernist religious structures, as critiqued by Tafuri (1976). Through a detailed examination of the chapel's exterior, entrance, and interior spaces, we will uncover a rich tapestry of architectural choices that foster a transformative experience for visitors.

### B. II. Contrasting Approaches: Unveiling the Mystery vs. The Revealed Landscape

Unlike the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, with its air of secluded mystery hidden within the contractionary geometrical shape of structure in comparison to the surrounding landscape, Colline Notre Dame du Haut takes a contrasting approach. As visitors ascend the long stairway, the chapel progressively reveals itself. The initial glimpses offer only fragmented views – a hint of a curved white wall, a peek at the dark, heavy concrete roof (figure 17). This calculated unveiling stands in stark contrast to the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, which remains shrouded in mystery until one reaches its very doorstep.

### B. III. A Duality of Form: Geometric Power and Landscape Harmony

The organic form of the chapel, dominated by the dark, heavy, curved concrete roof, establishes a powerful presence on the hillside. This grounded character contrasts with the light-curved white structural walls that rise beneath it. These white walls, however, don't simply stand in stark opposition to the landscape. Their gentle curves echo the rolling hills of the Vosges, creating a sense of harmonious integration with the natural world. This duality – a geometric structure both powerful and responsive to its environment – sets the stage for the interplay of contrasting experiences that awaits visitors.

### B. IV. Multiplicity and Duality: A Play of Perspectives and The Allure of the Unknown

With continuing the ascent, the chapel's multiplicity of facades comes into view. Each facade possesses unique characteristics, reflecting the diverse views it frames. The western facade, facing the valley, features a large window offering a unique vista. The souther facade, bathed in the light, presents a more introspective character with smaller, strategically placed openings (figure 18). This interplay of perspectives contributes to the chapel's overall *potentiality*. Agamben (2004) suggests that *potentiality* lies in the space between the actual and the possible. Here, the multiple facades, with their diverse views, hint at the various experiences that await within the chapel walls, drawing visitors towards the entrance, yearning to unlock the interior's secrets (figure 18 & 19).

### B. V. The Main Facade: Unveiling the Threshold and The Human Scale

Reaching the summit, you finally encounter the main facade, a clear distinction from the other sides. A single human-scale cross, a window, a balcony, and a structural column supporting the roof all unify on a raised platform (figure 20). This facade is subtly elevated, emphasizing its significance as the entry point. Here, Le Corbusier avoids the monumental scale often associated with religious structures (figure 21). The inclusion of the human-scale cross emphasizes the chapel's purpose as a place of human connection with the divine, rather than a classical place of awe-inspiring grandeur.

### B. VI. A Tactile Threshold: Embodiment and Interaction

Standing before the main entrance, a custom-made, dark metal handle embedded within the pivoting rectangular concrete door welcomes you. The handle's curved, inward-narrowing design invites you to reach inside and grasp it (figure 22). This tactile experience contrasts with the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel's rounded metal handle. Here, the act of grasping becomes a metaphor for the visitor's active engagement with the space. It's not just a physical act of entering; it's an intentional gesture that marks the beginning of the transformative experience within. The pivot mechanism further emphasizes this duality. As the door swings open, it transforms into a separation wall, highlighting the act of both entering a sacred space

and potentially leaving it forever changed.The emphasis on shared humanity within Colline Notre Dame du Haut extends beyond the seating arrangement. The lack of a raised pulpit or prominent altar reinforces this concept. Here, there's no single focal point for the congregation's gaze. Instead, the focus shifts to the individual's inner experience and their own connection with the divine. This aligns with Agamben's (2004) notion of *potentiality*, where the space allows for a multiplicity of interpretations and personal encounters with the sacred.

B. VII. Light as Revelation: Unveiling the Sacred and The Transformative Power of Natural Light

As you navigate the narrow hallway between the seating and the windowed wall, natural light streams through, illuminating both you and your fellow visitors. Here, the windows function as spotlights, revealing the functionality hidden within the seemingly thick "*De Stijl*" window frames (figure 24). Unlike the Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, where natural light is a more controlled element, here it floods the space with light freely. This abundance of natural light serves a dual purpose. First, it acts as a revelatory force, drawing attention to the space's beauty and simplicity. Second, it fosters a sense of communion among visitors, bathing them all in the same ethereal glow (figure 23).

B. VIII. The Holy Shadow: A Play of Light and Presence and The Allusion to Mystery

Directing your gaze towards the main window on the facade, one encounters the statue of the Virgin Mary. Bathed in natural light from behind, the statue appears almost as a shadow, a subtle presence imbued with holiness. This echoes the initial impression one receives upon entering – a sense of mystery and a yearning for spiritual revelation. The play of light and shadow surrounding the Virgin Mary statue further reinforces the concept of *potentiality*. The lack of a fully illuminated figure allows each visitor to project their own interpretations and beliefs onto the sacred image (figure 25).

B. IX. *Messianic* Light: Redefining the Sacred Experience and The Potential for Transformation

The natural light within the chapel evokes Walter Benjamin and Agamben's concept of *messianic time* (Agamben, 2009). Here, each visitor becomes a potential holy figure, a faceless shadow illuminated from behind. This transformative experience transcends the limitations of space and time, prompting a reevaluation of one's place within the world and a potential shift in ethical and political perspectives. The natural light, acting as a symbol of hope (figure 24) and potential, allows visitors to envision themselves as agents of change, carrying the message of the chapel's transformative power outward into the world.

B. X. Light as Separator: Uplifting the Structure and The Duality of the Sacred Space

The light's role doesn't end there. The distance between the roof and the wall allows a subtle linear stream of light to enter, further emphasizing the separation between the heavy structure and the light-coloured structural wall. This interplay imbues the light with a new *potentiality* – that of a separator, highlighting the structure's duality. On one hand, the chapel feels grounded and monumental due to its dark concrete roof. On the other hand, the light creates the illusion that the roof is floating, separated from the walls by a luminous halo. This duality reflects the chapel's ability to hold seemingly contradictory experiences – a place of both grounded spirituality and one that transcends the limitations of the physical world.

B. XI. A Pilgrimage Through Duality

Colline Notre Dame du Haut, through its contrasting facades, its unique threshold experience, and its masterful manipulation of natural light, offers a novel interpretation of the sacred space. It challenges Tafuri's notion of imposing utopian ideals (Tafuri, 1976) by fostering a sense of *potentiality* and individual engagement within a religious context. The interplay between the geometric structure and the natural world, and the transformative power of light, all contribute to a powerful architectural experience that transcends the limitations of a traditional chapel. Visitors embark on a pilgrimage through duality, encountering contrasting experiences that ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. The chapel becomes a catalyst for personal transformation, a space where visitors can shed the constraints of the social (*bios*) and reconnect with their core humanity (*zoe*), bathed in the transformative light of *potentiality*. In this way, similar to Bruder Klaus' Chapel, but with a distinct architectural vocabulary, Notre-Dame du Haut facilitates a spiritual experience defined by personal exploration and introspection.

## VII. Comparative Analysis

While Bruder Klaus Field Chapel and Colline Notre Dame du Haut serve as compelling examples of *potentiality* and spiritual transformation in postwar Europe, a comprehensive analysis demands consideration of modernistic religious spaces within diverse social and political landscapes.

### A. Japan: Church of Light

Tadao Ando's Church of Light in Osaka, Japan, offers profound insights into the minimalist potential of modernistic religious architecture. Constructed in the 1980s during Japan's economic boom, the Church of Light stands as a stark concrete structure within a bustling cityscape. Ando's signature use of light and shadow creates a meditative space within the urban context. The cruciform slit in the wall behind the altar is both a symbolic and practical element, flooding the interior with light and emphasizing the connection between the spiritual and the tangible. Ando's work rejects the monumental scale typical of Christian architecture, emphasizing the interplay of light and darkness as a catalyst for introspection. This approach highlights the capacity of modernistic religious architecture to transcend cultural and historical boundaries, offering a universal language of spirituality.

### B. Brazil: Cathedral of Brasília

Designed by Oscar Niemeyer and completed in 1970, the Cathedral of Brasília stands as a bold expression of modernist architecture within a nation undergoing significant social and political transformation. Its sweeping curves and stained-glass facade represent a departure from traditional cathedral forms, embodying the optimism and progress associated with Brazil's modernization. Despite its monumental scale, the cathedral's open and airy interior fosters a sense of community and equality. Niemeyer's vision aligns with Agamben's *potentiality* theory by reimagining sacred space and challenging the hierarchical structures inherent in traditional church architecture. The Cathedral of Brasília serves as a powerful testament to the capacity of modernistic religious architecture to reflect and shape national identity within a rapidly changing socio-political landscape.

### C. Beyond Tafuri and Agamben

The inclusion of these global case studies expands the theoretical framework beyond Tafuri and Agamben. Church of Light demonstrates how minimalist design can transcend cultural boundaries, while the Cathedral of Brasília challenges the dichotomy of utopianism vs. grounded reality. Additionally, introducing Deleuze and Guattari's "philosophy of desire" could explore how these structures create spaces for individual and collective desire for change and transformation. Exploring different forms of change in different regions further highlights how change is constant but occurs in unique ways, showcasing the potential of these spaces to evoke change that goes beyond their architectural features.

By analyzing modernistic religious architecture across diverse socio-political contexts, this thesis establishes the complex relationship between architecture, spirituality, and the evolving social landscape. It demonstrates that the pursuit of *potentiality* is not confined to a single style or ideology but instead manifests through a dynamic interplay of form, function, and cultural context.

## VIII. Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis offers several distinct contributions to the existing body of knowledge within architectural studies, religious philosophy, and social theory. Firstly, it provides a unique analytical framework for examining modernistic religious spaces through the complementary lenses of Tafuri's skepticism of utopianism and Agamben's *potentiality* theory. This approach illuminates the complex dynamics between visionary aspirations and the lived realities that shape sacred architecture. The result is a nuanced understanding of how these structures both reflect and influence broader social and political contexts.

Secondly, the comparative analysis of Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Colline Notre Dame du Haut, and the additional global case studies expands the theoretical conversation beyond Western-centric perspectives. By exploring the interplay of light, form, and spirituality within diverse social and

cultural landscapes, this thesis demonstrates the universality of architecture's potential to evoke introspection, transformation, and a reconnection with the essence of humanity.

Finally, the thesis suggests new avenues for future research. The introduction of Deleuze and Guattari's "philosophy of desire" opens the door to examining how modernistic religious architecture facilitates individual and collective aspirations for change. Further investigation could explore the differing manifestations of "modernism" across cultures, the varying audiences for these spaces, and the distinct ways in which they evoke personal vs. societal *potentiality* for transformation.

# IX. Conclusion

This essay has examined the complex interplay of utopianism, *potentiality*, and socio-political transformation within modernistic religious architecture. Through close analysis of Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Le Corbusier's Colline Notre Dame du Haut, and additional global case studies, it has become evident that these spaces both embody visionary aspirations and navigate the constraints of lived realities. Manfred Tafuri's critical perspective (1976) has served as a grounding force, highlighting the risks of utopian ideals becoming disconnected from the complexities of social and political power. Conversely, Giorgio Agamben's (2004) concept of *potentiality* has functioned as a lens for exploring the transformative possibilities inherent within disruption and a reimagining of the expected.

The case studies have revealed that the pursuit of spiritual transformation through modernistic religious architecture is not a linear or predetermined path. In Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, the interplay of natural and crafted elements, together with the chapel's stark otherness within its rural landscape, offers a unique pilgrimage experience. The focus on an individual's sensory engagement and the potential for contemplative solitude challenges traditional notions of sacred space. Unlike more traditional religious structures, where architectural hierarchy and symbolism act to reinforce existing power structures, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel creates a space where the visitor is more active in creating their own experience of the sacred. This focus on individual experience aligns with Agamben's concept of *potentiality*, where the space itself holds possibilities rather than imposing a singular spiritual narrative.

Colline Notre Dame du Haut, with its contrasting facades and masterful manipulation of natural light, offers a more dynamic architectural encounter. The abundance of light within the space acts both as a revelatory force and a symbol of potential. The chapel's interplay between geometric form and organic elements echoes the tensions between a grounded reality and a striving for spiritual transcendence. While Le Corbusier's vision arguably embodies utopian elements in its bold departure from tradition, the space allows for a multiplicity of interpretations and experiences, reflecting the potential for transformation that Agamben identifies in disruptions of expectation.

By expanding the analysis to include Tadao Ando's Church of Light and Oscar Niemeyer's Cathedral of Brasília, the universality of architecture's power to shape spiritual experiences within diverse social and political landscapes becomes clear. The Church of Light demonstrates how minimalist design can create a space for contemplation. Its juxtaposition of light and shadow within a bustling urban context further emphasizes the power of architecture to offer sanctuary even within constrained environments. The Cathedral of Brasília, designed during a period of significant national transformation, exemplifies the ways in which modernistic religious architecture can embody a society's aspirations for progress and self-identity.

Ultimately, these case studies demonstrate that modernistic religious spaces are more than just vessels for spiritual practice. They are agents of *potentiality*, offering possibilities for individual and collective transformation. This potential, however, is contingent on the visitor's engagement with the architectural elements – the light, the textures, the manipulation of form and space. The success of these spaces in facilitating a transformative experience lies in their ability to disrupt traditional expectations and create moments where visitors can actively shape their own encounters with the sacred.

This study suggests several avenues for future research. Firstly, a deeper exploration of the role of embodied experience in shaping religious architecture would enrich our understanding of how *potentiality* manifests within a lived context. Employing methodologies such as phenomenology or embodied cognition could offer insights into the connection between architectural design and its affective and spiritual impact on visitors. Secondly, introducing Deleuze and Guattari's "philosophy of desire" into the theoretical framework would open up possibilities for examining how modernistic spaces respond to both individual and collective yearnings for change, exploring concepts such as lines of flight deterritorialization in relation to the built environment.

In conclusion, modernistic religious architecture offers a potent site for exploring the complex and often paradoxical relationship between utopian vision, lived experience, and the pursuit of a transformative potential within the realm of the sacred. By shedding light on the ways in which these spaces both reflect and challenge the social and political realities of their time, this study reveals the enduring power of architecture to shape our understanding of ourselves, our place in the world, and the possibilities for a future that transcends the limitations of the present.

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# Figures
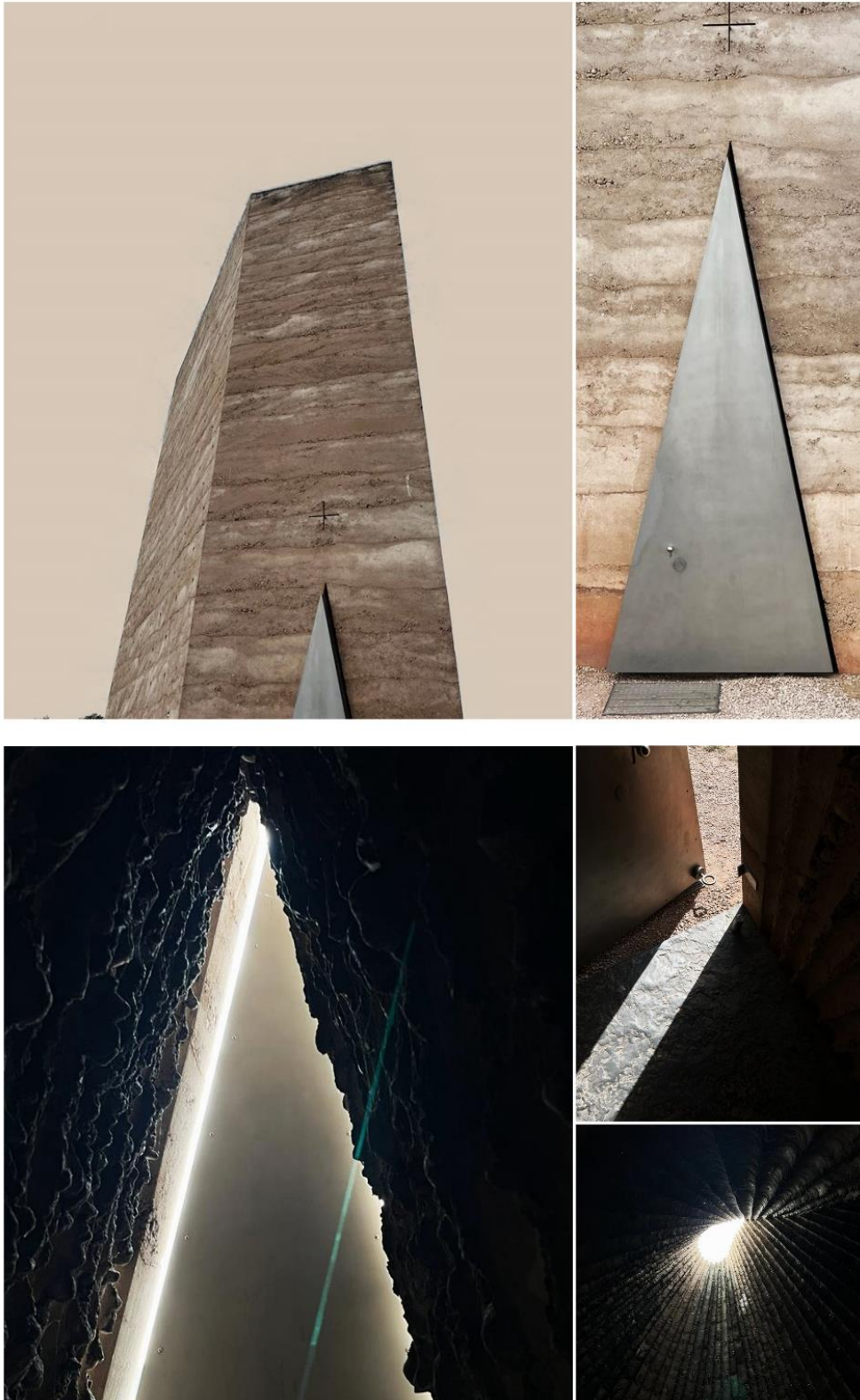


Figure 1: A Pilgrimage to Potentiality: An Extended Exploration of Bruder Klaus Field Chapel

Figure 2: Reaching the chapel



Figure 3: Investigating the chapel



Figure 4: Confrontation with the chapel



Figure 5: Surrounding of the chapel



Figure 6: Threshold of the chapel
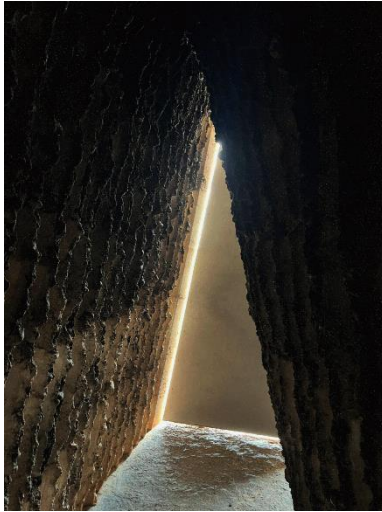


Figure 7: First touch of the chapel

Figure 8: Enlightenment of the chapel


Figure 9: Toward the Altar of the chapel
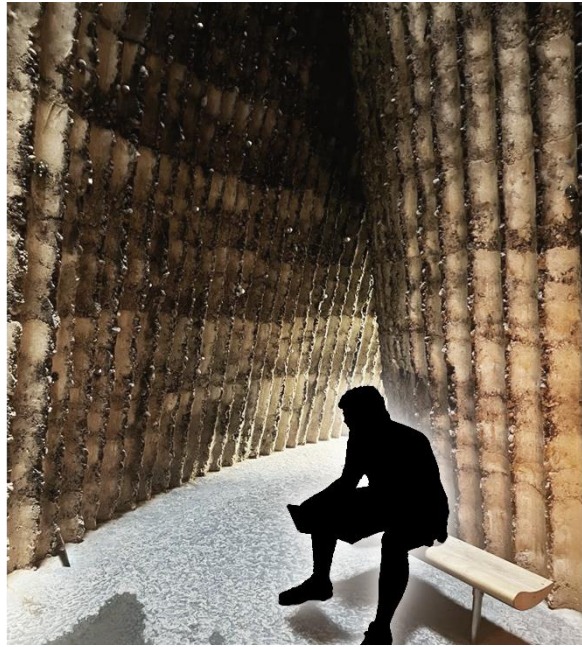

Figure 10: Shaping the interior of the chapel


Figure 11: The wadi of the chapel


Figure 12: The Altar of the chapel


Figure 13: Bruder Klaus in the chapel
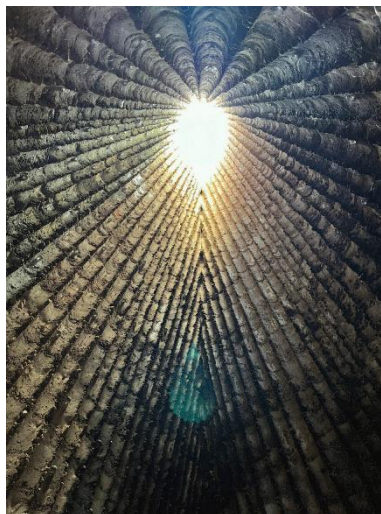

Figure 14: The holy light in the chapel
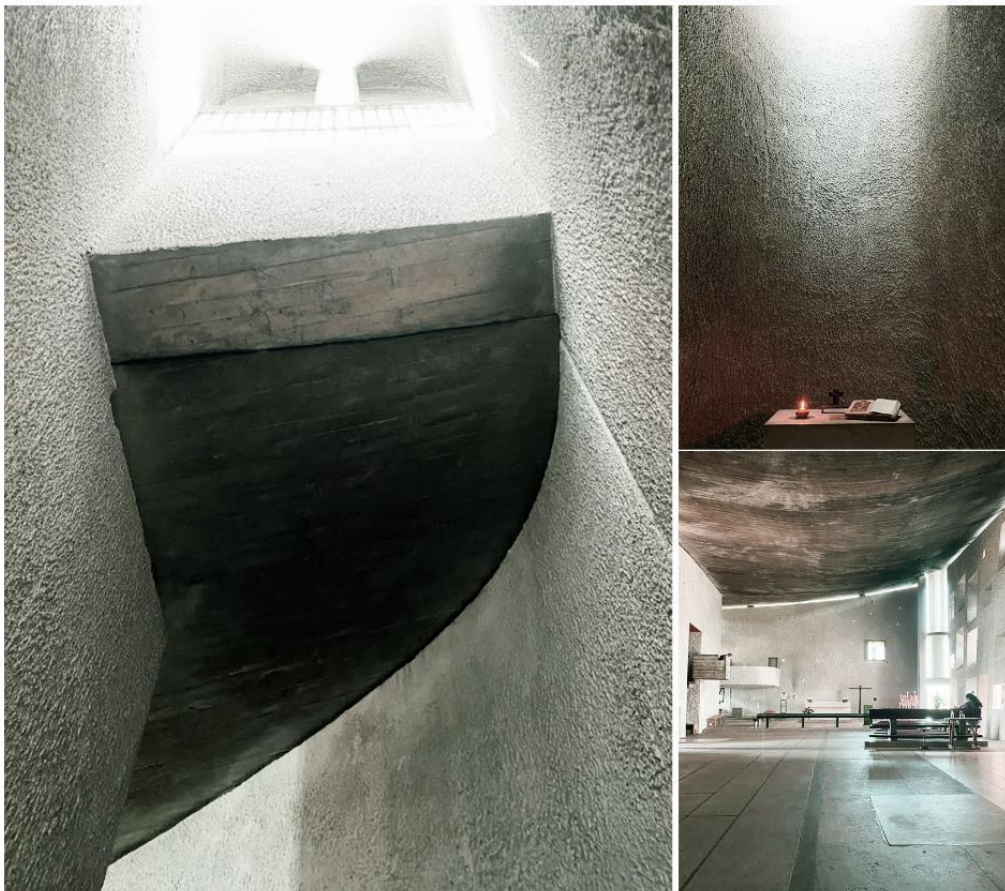

Figure 15: The *messianic* moment

Figure 16: Colline Notre Dame du Haut: A Pilgrimage Through Duality and Revelation

Figure 17: The first glimpse of the chapel



Figure 18: North façade of the chapel



Figure 19: South façade of the chapel



Figure 20: Main entrance of the chapel



Figure 21: The threshold of the chapel
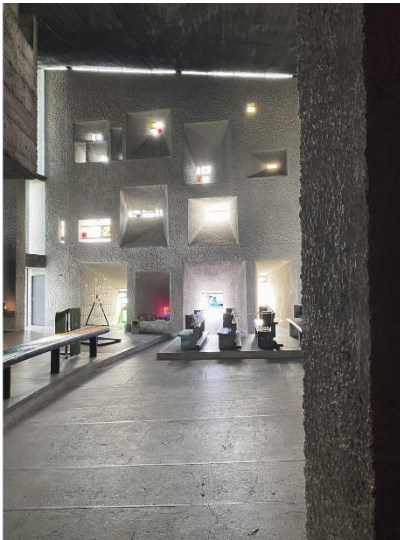


Figure 22: First physical interact with the chapel

Figure 22: Bath with holly natural light



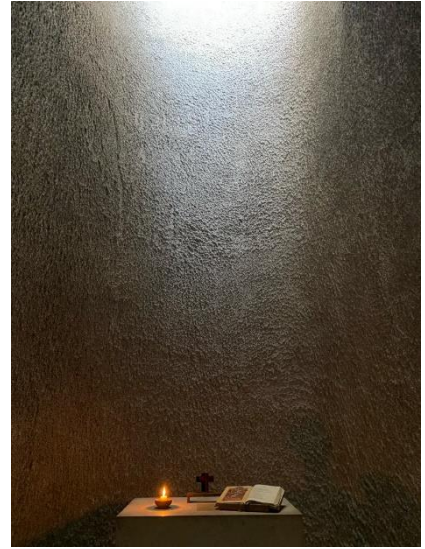Figure 23: ''De Stijl'' window frames



Figure 24: Holly light of the chapel



Figure 25: The illuminating figures of past and present



Figure 26: Interior reflecting exterior, soft treshold