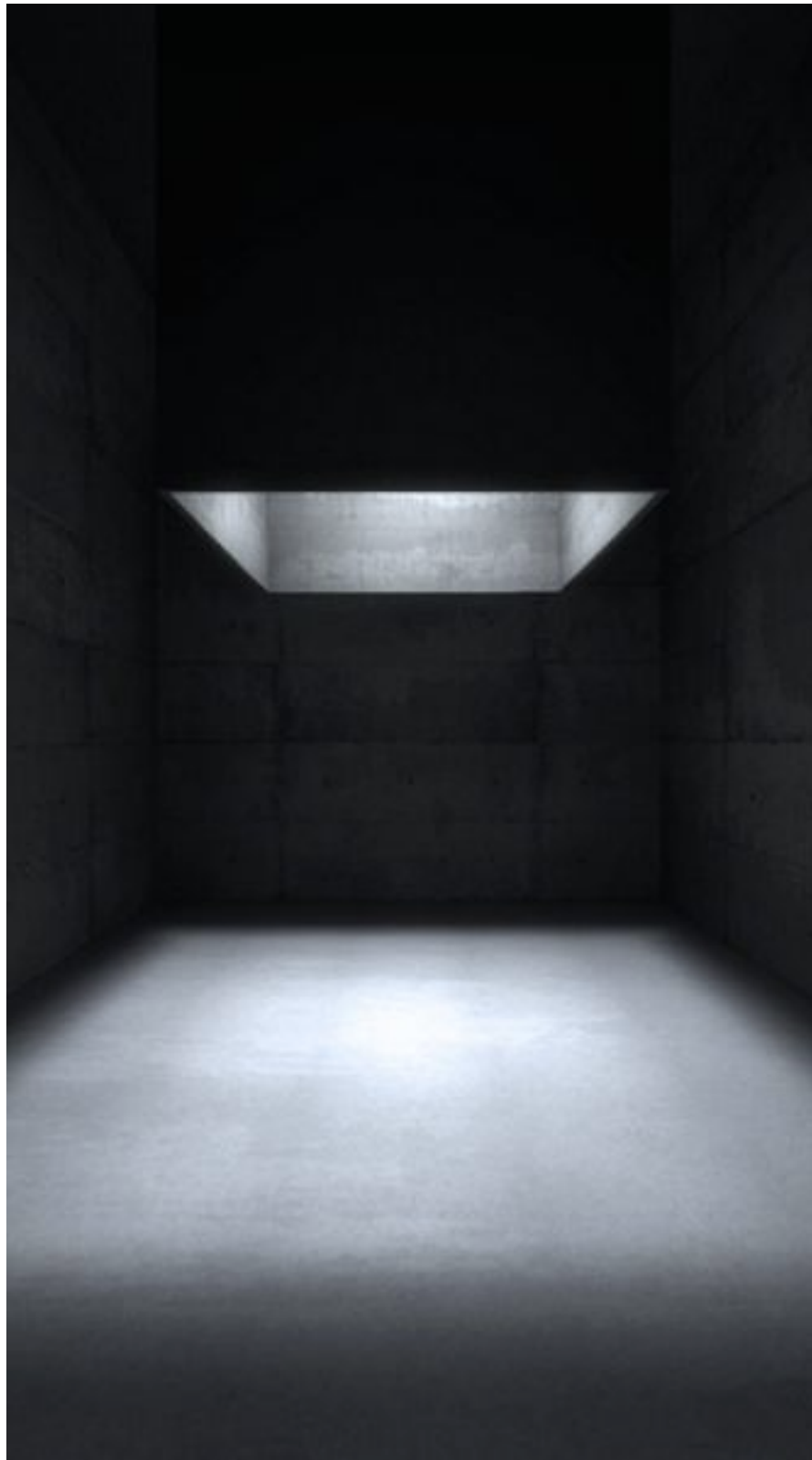


the architecture of contemplation

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Visions of an Industrial Age,
Uno Tomoaki // 'Temple House'

Retrieved from <http://tomoaki.com/templeproject> at 10-05-17

Contemplation //

con·tem·pla·tion (kon'tem-pla'shen)

1. The act or state of contemplating.
2. Thoughtful observation or study.
3. Meditation on spiritual matters, especially as a form of devotion.
4. Intention or expectation: f.e.: sought further information in contemplation of a career change.¹

The word contemplate derives from Latin, meaning "to observe, especially in a space (temple) marked off for observation". With the word space integrated into the actual origin of the word, inherently a concern for the relation between the designed space and the act of contemplating arises. This mutual connection and influence creates the starting point of this research; the physical manifestation of contemplation in architecture.

The dictionary explains contemplation equals meditation on spiritual matters, but contemplation can't be considered to be an equivalent of meditation. Meditation is focussed on something or someone specific; a subject.² Meditation is often, for many centuries in the Western Church, referred to more cognitively active exercises, such as visualisations of Biblical scenes or *lectio divina* – the practice of a slow, thoughtful, "savouring" reading of a Bible verse.³ In this definition, also physical activities such as yoga, can be considered meditation, as this entails a physically focussed exercise in order to reach cognitively active state.

Contemplation on the other hand is a relation between two equal subjects.⁴ The human subject tries to open itself towards the other subject (often God) by just being in its presence. In the Western Christian tradition contemplation entails the spiritual meeting of God. In this definition of contemplation, no activity is involved.

In modern society, the definition of contemplation is often used in a non-religious context. It is referred to as a mode of profound self-reflection, the devotion is not necessarily addressed to a super mundane power, but rather towards the essence of the subject's own spirit. In this research into the architecture of contemplation, both the religious as the non-religious manifestations are considered.

¹ Oxford English Dictionary

² Watts, Alan. "11 _10-4-1 Meditation." *Eastern Wisdom: Zen in the West & Meditations*. The Alan Watts Foundation. 2009.

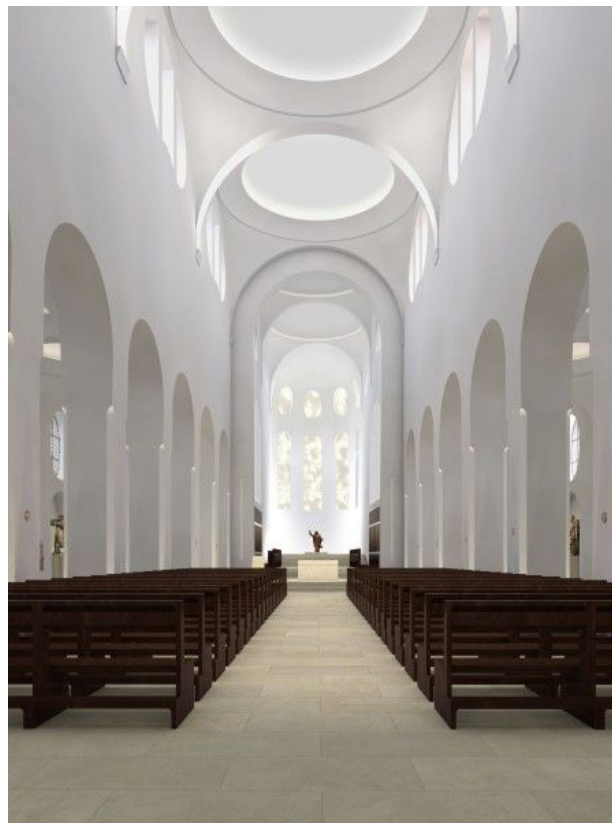
³ Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, 1986.

⁴ "Contemplation", Catholic Encyclopedia, New Advent. Retrieved March 19, 2017.

Types of manifestations of contemplative architecture //

It is undisputed that physical design affects mind states and social interaction. As Bermudez writes, architecture has the power of "moving us from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the profane to the sacred."⁵ The physical design responsible for such movement can be a range of contexts, from sacred spaces such as religious buildings, to calming gardens, to spaces of refuge in vibrant urban centres.

Jones distinguishes three significantly different ways of conceiving of the relations between built forms and the act of contemplation.⁶ Firstly, she defines the so called "theatric mode", the prospect of architectural forms that provide the stage-setting or backdrop for theatrical spiritual activities. Here, the built forms themselves are mostly not the objects of the ritual. In these cases, it would be more accurate to say that people experience the ritual performances that the architecture facilitates rather than experiencing the architecture itself.⁷



Theatric mode:

John Pawson's St. Moritz church, 2013

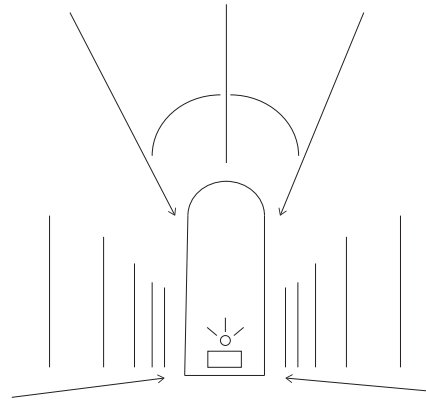
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⁵ Bermudez, Julio. *Transcending Architecture*, Washington, 2015, page 22.

⁶ Jones, Lindsay. *Architectural catalysts to contemplation*, Washington, 2015, page 170

⁷ Idem, page 178

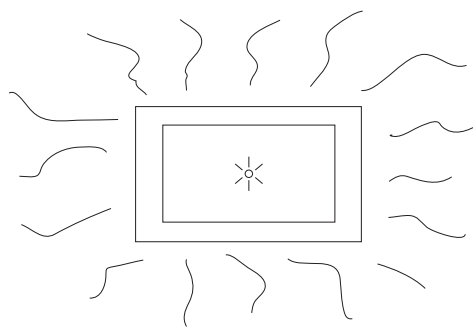
An example of an architectural piece built in theatric mode, is a traditional protestant cathedral. With its clear focus point on the altar and the spectacle of the mass, the building has a clear facilitating theatrical function, giving meaning and spirituality through its scale and impressive but modest architecture, that doesn't form an object of devotion on itself.



Theatric mode:
Facilitating the spiritual rituals, creating a focus point

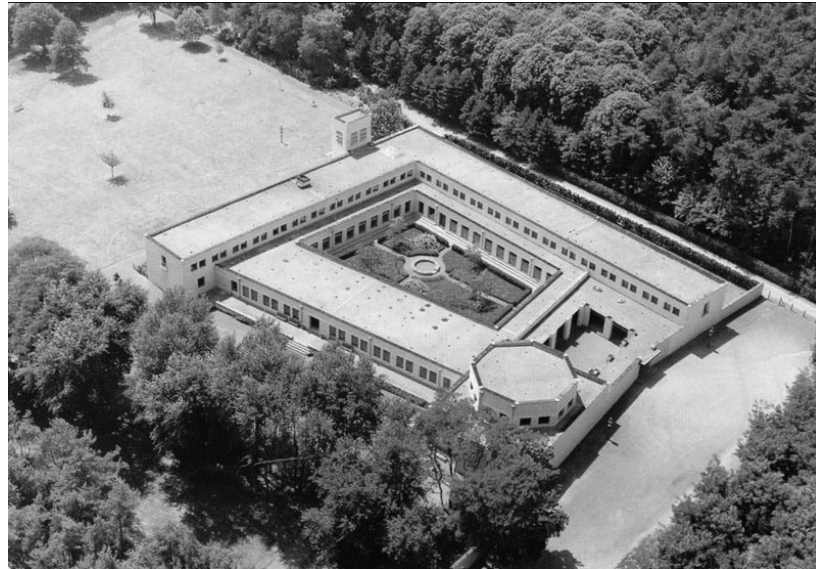
Secondly the "sanctuary mode" is distinguished. This type entails architectural forms that simply provide boundaries between the wider, presumably more prosaic, environment and some special "sacred space" in which the experiential engagement with "the divine" takes place.⁸

The Christian abbey or monastery is a clear example of a building in sanctuary mode. Most Cistercian abbeys and monasteries share their introvert typology, closing the inner spiritual environment off from the outside world, thereby creating a contemplative atmosphere in its heart; the court yard. In some orders, traditionally the monks and nuns inhabiting the monasteries lived their lives completely between the walls of the domain, having no contact at all with the prosaic world. The boundaries between the two worlds create a mythical secluded experience.



Sanctuary mode:
Closing off a spiritual place from the prosaic world

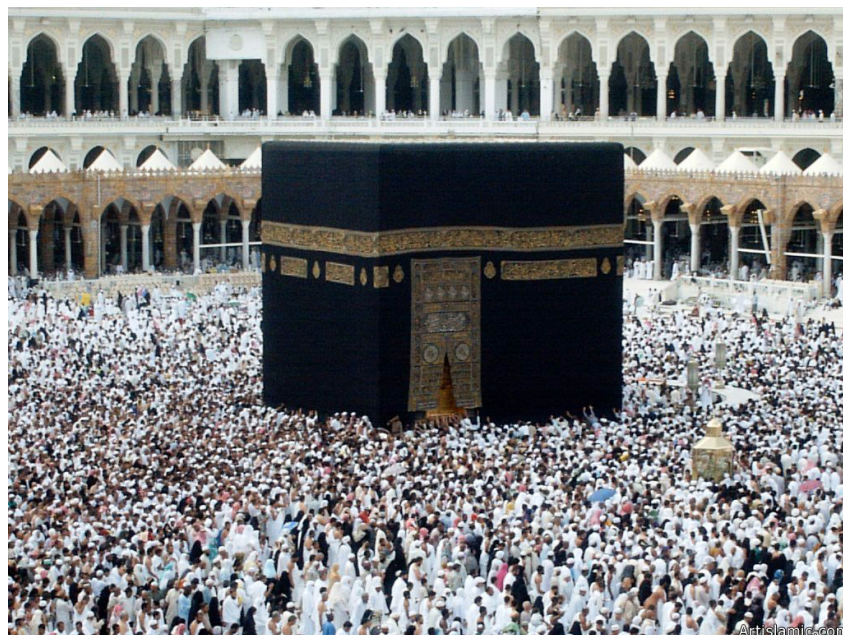
⁸ Jones, Lindsay. Architectural catalysts to contemplation, Washington, 2015, page 170, page 180



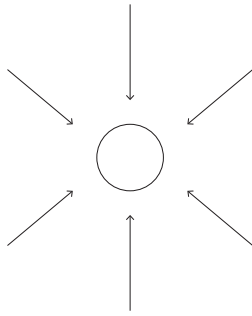
Sanctuary mode: Abbey of Roosenberg, 1975
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The third way of conceiving the relationship between architecture and spiritual or contemplative experience, is the mode of actual architectural contemplation, the "contemplation mode". This involves built configurations that serve as the actual object of direct and purposeful, meditative attention.

An example of the contemplative mode where the architectural elements are not just helpful but instead are absolutely crucial in instigating the subsequent religious experience, is the Buddhist stupa. Temples like Angkor Wat in Cambodia or Borobudur are sacred subjects of worship, becoming a holy object an sich. The most famous example of the contemplative mode is probably the Hadj in Mekka.



Contemplative mode: Hadj in Mekka
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Contemplative mode: architectural object focussed

Whereas Jones' three types of modes are mainly used to describe different religious ways of reaching a contemplative state, these modes can very well be applied to non-religious ways. Applied to the abbey of Roosenberg as the religious institute it was, the theatric mode can be found in the church. With its circular shape, clearly focussed on the central altar, it provides a stage for ceremonial activities. The church is shaped not to astonish by itself, but to facilitate a collectivistic way of reaching a spiritual mode, where the priest and his words are the actual catalysers. The ceiling that reaches its total height in the centre, the light, everything focusses the attention on a stage that by itself isn't particularly initiating any mental mode of contemplation.

When seeking for a new function for the church, this specific theatric quality of the space should be well considered. Ideal for inspiring lectures, or maybe even collective contemplation in a non-religious way. When designing spaces for collective or more ceremonial functions, one should very well be aware in which of these contemplative modes to design. Too much attention on the architecture itself will withdraw attention from the actual act, the difficulty is to facilitate rather than demand.

The sanctuary mode is most strongly present in the abbey of Roosenberg. Most Cistercian abbeys and monasteries share their introvert typology, closing the inner spiritual environment off from the outside world, thereby creating a contemplative atmosphere. It is this sanctuary quality that is very much useful for contemplation in relation to educational functions. When designing spaces for studying or concentrating, this cloister like sense of isolation helps to create an inner world in which all disturbing factors are filtered out. Architecture that provides an island of peace and a serene atmosphere of pure concentration is ideal for a retreat centre as is planned in Roosenberg.

The contemplative mode, where the architecture itself is the object of inspiration, wasn't initially designed on purpose by Van der Laan. In contrary to the lavish gothic cathedrals that are undoubtedly instigating devotion, the Roosenberg abbey is built in the modest style of the Bossche School. Van der

Laan wanted the architecture to facilitate the rituals in the most ideal way possible without distraction. Van der Laan's architecture is therefore arguably more fitting in the tradition of the protestant builders, than the catholic ones.

Today however, the contemplative mode can arguably be found in the specific Bossche School architecture of Van der Laan. The sole existence of this course, proves that the abbey has become a subject of admiration. The contemplative mode can therefore be found in the specific style and atmosphere of Van der Laan's gesamtkunstwerk, making the abbey worth to preserve.

All three modes, described by Jones, are present in the Roosenberg abbey. On different levels these modes can fulfil an important role in determining the direction of design. Whereas to preserve specific aspects of Van der Laan's design as well as to create new spaces of contemplation, categorising and analysing raises awareness and understanding of the building. Contemplation has always been the leading factor in the Roosenberg abbey, and it will remain to play a crucial role in the Roosenberg university retreat centre.