Memorial and Meditation;
Material and Metaphor

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Abstract

Memorial and Meditation; Material and Metaphor

Susanne M. May

' (One aspect of) “design” is an attempt to capture both the struggle and the cooperation between the meaning which the material itself implies and the meaning of the form which is given to the material.'

This thesis is an exploration in the relationships between material and site, history, nature, & culture. I seek to explore the nature of material selection for architectural projects.

The project is a place of healing for the human spirit — a meditation/meeting space located in the dunes of the Provincelands on the peninsula of Cape Cod, MA. Although primarily influenced by the necessity for expression of ceremony, community, and contemplation brought about by the AIDS (auto-immune deficiency syndrome) crisis, it serves as a welcoming place of gathering for many.

In this thesis I examine some of the ways that material influences design and design modifies material leading to a greater understanding and development of design method.

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For Tappy
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'You must be like the dog, he will not find the rabbit if he goes directly to the hole. He must first find the scent then he will get the rabbit. If you go directly to the hole the bunny he is hopping. You never get!'

Fernando Dooreyko
(on the importance of site and context analysis)
Chapter 1: Geologic Form

FIG. 1-3 Photograph of Cape Cod from space (Spaceshots)
ice

Cape Cod is a late addition to the North American continent. Twelve thousand years ago, long after the continent had formed giving us New England more or less as we know it, Glaciers from the Laurentide ice sheet covering the land mass began to melt, depositing in its wake large boulders, rock, and gravel from the Maine and New Hampshire Mountains and parts of Massachusetts. The entire Cape is made up of these deposits of marble and granite and in many places solid bedrock is many feet below the topsoil.
SUSPENSION AND PRECIPITATION

'Architecture is produced and time's flow, and architecture also activates time. Architecture must not remain, a toehstone, within that flow. Architecture delivers a place's memory to the present, and transmits it to the future.'

Tadao Ando

waves
Due to the currents of the sea there has been and continues to be an enormous amount of erosion on the Cape. Currently, erosion is estimated at three feet per year on the Atlantic Ocean coast and one foot per year on the Bay side creating shore drift. This has resulted in the formation of many new areas. The most interesting deposit made by the shore drifting of sand is known as The Provincelands, and form the 'wrist' and 'fist' of the Cape

FIG. 1-6 Path of pebble or grain of sand (Strahler)

FIG. 1-7 Growth of shoreline in successive stages (Davis, "The Outline of Cape Cod")
Cod arm, enclosing Provincetown Harbor (Fig.1-5). This area located at the furthestmost point of the Cape is formed entirely of sand from erosion of the coast of the Cape.

**wind**

Many are familiar with an area of the Provincelands known as "the Dunes." For decades they have been the subject of artists and writers who take advantage of their special features.

The wind has contributed a tremendous amount to the formation of this area. Dunes of Provinceland are referred to as parabolic dunes by geologists. A parabolic dune is a ridge of sand curved into a bow, increasing in elevation at the strongly bent part of the curve. Within the curve of the ridge is a flat, open sand floor, in the form of a shallow basin or depression. From this depression sand has been removed by wind and carried up to the dune crest. Sand which is carried over the dune crest falls upon a steep slope, which is very smooth and straight and has an angle of about thirty-four degrees. This smooth slope is called the slip face of a dune. As the slip face advances, it may encroach upon a forest, killing the trees, whose bare trunks and branches protrude grotesquely through the sand. The parabolic dunes also advance landward over salt marsh.
The prevailing winds which formed these dunes blow from the northwest, oblique to the shoreline. The dunes run in belts, and each belt has been formed from the sand of a former beach. The Provincelands area was built of a succession of beaches, each one representing a recurved spit-bar pointed west.

FIG. 1-9  Photograph of Landscape Model
Chapter 2: Provincelands

And thus it comes about that the spot where the Pilgrims first landed is the spot where one may look for the "last word" in literature and art. — Boston Post, September 1916

The cultural history that is most influential in my reading of the site is that of the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century. How this land became a haven for gays, lesbians, artists, writers, bohemians and many others that wished to escape oppressive rules of the mainland. First, I will give a rather brief account of the Provincelands history prior to this era.

The surrounding waters were well mapped by the explorers and cartographers, although not much was recorded about the land. Nomadic Native American tribes inhabited this peninsula. They were devastated by the European settlers as in the rest of the continents history.

FIG. 2-1 Earliest view of Provincetown Harbor. Drawn by J.W.Barber (MA Historical Collections)
GULLS DURING VERY SEVERE STORMS

I wondered where the gulls went during storms
Too great to lift through like blown paper forms.

I heard the exploding surf assault the strand.

What blanket of gray stirred over this dark sand
That dipped to the kind shelter of the land?

The sudden sun, like a light-stricken moon,

Swam rapidly forth, to disappear as soon.

It was then I came upon the gulls that stood

Thick as abundant branches in a wood,

Waiting the wind's fall. Of their multitude

Not one rose up, with wavering drifts to follow

From the safe shelter of the dune's dark hollow.

They feared the storm more than my near surprise.

A stir went through them, but they did not rise!

Harry Kepp
“In 1636, sixteen years after the Mayflower had left for Plymouth, Harvard College was founded, but Provincetown, the Pilgrims’ landfall across the bay, was still a fringe society...Before the eighteenth century, no one stayed on — neither fisherman nor explorer nor Pilgrim.” Due to its remoteness and lack of natural resources, Provincetown developed slowly and was virtually uninhabited until the nineteenth century.

p44...a one-hundred year struggle against avalanching sand. Provincetown faced up to this threat as it had to others, with prolonged indifference.
In my heart I will always live in Provincetown, and so it esp pleases one that you are there. Sometimes all through the night here in the midwest the dunes keep one asleep. I roll onto them. Don't worry too much abt getting any work done there. The work is out in the dunes.

From a letter to a friend
Relation of HIV + Provincetown

Two seemingly different kinds of abilities of human beings go into the making of a culture. The first is an ability to follow rules, to adopt practices and to observe customs. The second is an ability to invent such rule following activities and to create practices and customs. The first enables human beings to partake in a given culture and, in the process, to acquire a particular common way of expressing human nature. The second enables human beings to create different kinds of cultures and to provide in this way different common ways of expressing human nature. Observance of customs, adoption of practices and following of rules is a participatory form of behavior which makes for a spiritual bond among human beings. It demonstrates on the part of its practitioners an attempt to adhere to a well-trodden path, to comply and conform. It also constitutes a form of behavior in which an attitude of submission to authority is manifested. When successful, it both sustains and provides for tradition in a culture.
The second ability which human beings bring to the making of a culture, that of invention and creation of cultural practices is initiated by behavior which is original and unique. It is a kind of behavior which demonstrates an attempt by its performers to do things on their own, to go the whole way by themselves. It expresses a desire to blaze a trail, rather than to follow one. It is also the kind of behavior which rightly seems to other members of the cultured community as deviating from accepted norms and as breaking with cherished customs. When successful it contributes to the *spiritual progression* of a culture.

What unifies these two different, spiritual paths into one common enterprise is the social backdrop against which they are sought out and practiced. For they are both dependent, and dependent in the same way, on a community for becoming *culturally significant*. In cultural observance, this is managed by joining in. In cultural invention, it is managed by attracting others.
I use this passage as a reference to the form of culture and the forming of culture, in particular, the relationship of a terminal, communicable disease and a small town—auto immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and Provincetown, MA. I do not go into detail, that is better done by others more familiar with the subject than myself. I seek to set the stage for an understanding of a program for a design project which investigates things more architectural and less anthropological.

Provincetown, having a history of unconventionality, became home to a large number of gays and lesbians during the 1960’s. AIDS, having a history of fatally infecting gays (male homosexuals) became part of a way of life beginning in the late 1970’s.

Early attempts to deal with the disease included a volunteer driving service which took patients from Provincetown to Beth Israel Hospital in Boston two and a half hours away. The only Cape hospital in Dennis (forty minutes away) was bypassed in order to receive the better care that Beth Israel gave.
An organization called Provincetown Aids Support Group (PASG) provides • daily transportation to Boston medical appointments, grocery, laundry, or other errands • "afternoon dish" lunches delivered to homebound clients • volunteer home care up to 24 hours/day • homemaker care • respite care • legal service referrals • crisis intervention • short-term loans • emergency housing assistance • food pantry • bereavement groups • community education • school presentations • guest speakers • monthly newsletter • fundraising events • buddy program • support groups • anonymous testing referrals • primary care referrals • fundraising events that are held there yearly.

In addition to this organization, there is the PWA Coalition located on Commercial Street in Provincetown.

**ritual**

George Dunlop, a resident of Provincetown, has been deeply effected by the crisis of AIDS. He has witnessed the death, painful, horrifying, or peaceful, of many of his friends and others less known to him. He related a particular story to me about a close friend of his who had died from AIDS.
For the anniversary of the birthdate of Dennis, his mother and sister were invited up to Provincetown from Philadelphia for a ritual called a “Celebration of Life.” Dennis’ relatives had never before met any of the friends that invited them up. They were given places to stay and asked to bring a memento/remembrance of Dennis. Announcements were printed and distributed. His mother, sister, a group of his close friends, a horse, and a dog or two assembled at the dunes of the Provincelands. After walking through a part of the dunes, a rainbow flag was anchored into the sand. Various speakers recited poetry or prose, stories (funny and otherwise) were told about the deceased, and someone read aloud his recipes compiled through the years and enjoyed by many there. Music was played, flowers were abundant, and photos were passed around. Afterwards a potluck dinner was held at a closed restaurant nearby.

This is one example of the process of creating a ritual to deal with a situation (grief) because an appropriate form of expression was not available. This strengthens a spiritual bond in the community and contributes to the spiritual progression of a larger community.
Part II: The Project

INHERENT CHARACTERISTICS

'Architecture is autonomous, and at the same time, its basic significance lies in the construction of a distinctive place. However, no matter how autonomous architecture is, it cannot be cut off from the site. Traces of the distinctive meaning inherent in the site must be preserved in the architecture.' - Tadao Ando

FIG. 4-1 Charcoal drawing of High Head, marsh, dunes, & ocean (May)
From nature separate/filter out elements that connect us back to spirit. By being alone consciously, we reconnect to what is human, to humanity.

FIG. 4-2 Photograph of High Head from dunes (May)
attitude towards site
hierarchy/passage/filtering

**large scale**
A process of filtering:

> leave continent
> peninsula
> end/tip of peninsula
> less dense/more remote, non-urban/peopled
> towards nature.
intermediate or local scale

relationship of southwest edge to northeast edge in terms of:
density
landscape views

site scale

Hierarchy:
1. profane >>> sacred
2. natural landscape >>> architectural form
3. materials: less built >>> more built
4. inhabited >>> uninhabited

temple scale:

see Temple Design section
wall

The wall begins as granite markers placed at intervals along the vehicular path leading from Route 6 through the parking area to the entrance of the site's footpath. Changing into an arched vine-covered arbor (node 1) limiting views, creating tunnel-like focus, path is sand. Leads over crest of High Head (northeastly direction), opening to first view of temple site, dunes, ocean beyond (node 2). Wall begins again as seating at this viewpoint, sharp curve in path to left (northwest) cobblestone path with low wall (seemingly) rising as path descends and curves again to northeast. Path descending further wall grows becomes protection from wind + a retaining wall turning southeast towards temple reaches across gulley as bridge continues on to temple metamorphosing into bench, platform, overpass, troughs for rainwater and fountain irrigation splintering into fingers forming terraces around temple.

FIG. 4-6 Plan drawing of High Head project site (May)
FIG. 4-7 Charcoal drawing of footpath entry, Node 1 (May)
'A site always has a distinct field of force that affects man. The field is a language, yet not a language. The logic of nature affects one subjectively, and it is made gradually clear only to those who seriously attempt to perceive it. Architecture is ultimately a question of how one responds to these demands made by the land. To put it another way, the logic of architecture must be adapted the logic of nature. The aim of architecture is always the creation of an environment where the logic of nature and the logic of architecture are in fierce conflict yet coexist. One logic is not subsumed by the other, nor is there a complete fusion of the two.'

Tadao Ando
marks in the landscape

example: Cristo's canvas ribbon in the landscape, Cristo's yellow umbrellas, Cristo walked entire site research/prep/build 10 years due to intense, thorough mapping of hills in order to understand the landscape + develop relationships

Space is continuous, but human perception is discontinuous.

journey through site

to go into nature, escape/turn your back on nature in its midst to appreciate separation from/connection to connect to ourselves thru nature. deriving form and architectural space from nature to connect ourselves with ourselves. to separate from the day to day existence in order to project ourself into a different psychic space. example: masks worn by various cultures in rituals meant to change the psyche of wearer as much if not more than those viewing the mask. entering into the meditation space the last stage of the filtering process.
FIG. 4-9 Charcoal drawing of Node 3 (May)
Memorial and Meditation; Material and Metaphor
Chapter 5: Temple Design

NATURE MADE ABSTRACT

'The moment that nature enters into a relationship with architecture it becomes no longer whole. It
changes its appearance and is reduced to elements like light, wind, water or sky. Light, wind, water or
sky become the symbol of nature. Nature, which up to that point had remained definite, becomes, through
its resonance with the geometry embodied in the architecture, an abstraction.'

Tadao Ando

FIG. 5-1 Sketch (May)
early sketch models
temple proposal

My proposal is for a pavilion/temple/meditation space which will allow an opportunity to expand on ritual and a place to solidify and contain "memory" of the past for the present and future. In other words, the structure will be alive in the present by providing a situation whereby being on that land is conducive to memory, grieving, celebrating — a space for performances of music, readings, ceremony, contemplation by individuals or groups. It will also be a reminder of the past and a warning to the future.
Memorial and Meditation; Material and Metaphor

FIG. 5-8 Working model (May)
FIG. 5-9 Working model (May)
Memorial and Meditation; Material and Metaphor

FIG. 5-10  Temple in landscape
FIG. 5-11 Temple plan (May)
ENCLOSED NATURE

'Architecture shuts out or opens itself to the outside depending on its own distinctive rhythm. In this way, architecture ingeniously introduces nature into itself. Nature — enclosed with elegance or severity by architecture — and the architecture itself interpenetrate, and nature maintains a relationship with the environment.'

Tadao Ando
FIG. 5-13  Final model (May)
Portal — Leaving raw nature gradually by entering along site-size wall through openings in smaller walls perpendicular to it. At this point views to nature are limited to sky only.

Threshold of building, then step down into an indoor outdoor space area is visually cut off to outside solar heated floor walls light-weight obscure view allow light, sound, smell to enter ceiling translucent crossing over water into darker, heavier space, time is registered by sun moving across casting shafts of light into main gathering space which is multi directional to accommodate varying uses and size gatherings.

natural light connects you with outdoors, artificial light contains your experience in the space.

water= thread that develops, connects different levels.

water table two feet higher than sea level, increases as land elevates purification, rejuvenation, gravity, erosion, irrigation
FIG. 5-15 Final model with dawn lighting and water coursing thru building (roof on model off to expose interior view) (May)
Memorial and Meditation; Material and Metaphor

FIG. 5-16  Perspective south
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page 11, 24, 30, 35, 42. Ando quotes from Tadao Ando 1983-1993 El Croquis

page 16. from Poet of the Dunes by Harry Kemp

page 18. from The Peaked Hills, A Collection of Writing and Drawings

page 20. from Yuval, Lurie Geniuses and Metaphors The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism

PHOTOGRAPHS: All photographs taken by author except

page 9 -- Spaceshots

page 17 -- from Provincetown As A Stage (Egan) p.142-143

page 26 -- Spaceshots