

HEALING SPACES IN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract :

Winston Churchill concisely expressed the effect of architecture and our surroundings with the comment that: “We shape our buildings and later they shape us.” The intent of this paper is to explore how architecture can inform healing or provide spaces and events where healing can take place. We as human beings have an inner connection with our environment by physical, mental, emotional and spiritual means. This connection can create a dynamic life that people can thrive in every aspect. Through work, aging or learning, people are able to participate and contribute to this connection with our environment. Furthermore, the arts and art therapy have, over the years, been used to heal different ailments such as cancer, mental illness, aids, addiction and the elderly have been successful in doing so as it heals across all ages and race. The question I pose is can architecture do the same? Besides, can architecture play a superior role in healing? In our built environment we often interact with the buildings themselves without realizing the great influence that such built environments and surroundings hold. Can we create those interactions by evidence based design methods? Mental health has been a debated topic to centuries and still today, the common being has not grasped its complexities that bound us all unique. This research paper represents an attempt to summarize my findings on the role of planning and architecture in the healing process.

Introduction

Healing is the process of re-establishing harmony within the organism. Illness implies a loss of this balance and the need for reintegration with the body’s natural ability to heal and regenerate. Healing cannot be understood in isolation from the factors that operate in the dynamic life of an individual. These include the self, the family, the community, the environmental context within which life is carried forth, and the world of spirit

or essence. Healing is dependent on restabilising successful relationships and developing reciprocity between these factors. In fact, healing is not a process of curing or fixing, but rather a return to balance between all of these components. Health, therefore, is understood as the presence of this balance; illness is its lack. Far from being inert containers, spaces can be understood to be fully participant in the healing experience. It is possible to conceive and create structures that heal.

Pic: 1 ART: THE ANTIDOTE



Art has always been a part of our culture, tradition and society. The human race has evolved with some form of art with cultural practices since our early beginnings and it seems inherent in all of us whether it is through praising of the gods, healing or rites of passage. Yet, as evident as this may be, many disregard the healing qualities that art possesses and the enhancement of lateral creativity that it can bring to us. To look at art as a tool for healing we have to transcend thresholds that rigidly bind us to the confinements of our rational consciousness.

Figure2:Visual art as healing

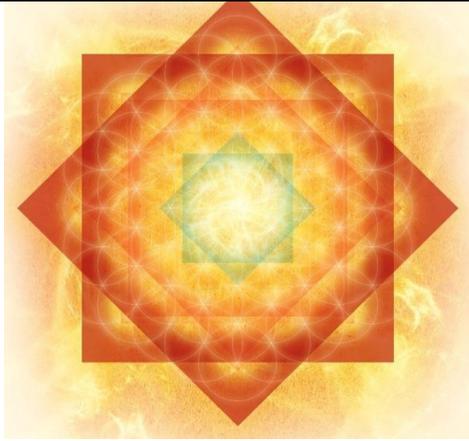


Figure3:Meditation as healing medium



We need to understand art beyond the traditional technical approach of artist and canvas. We need to free the boundaries from the terrestrial rules of art and explore the therapeutic qualities that it can enhance in all of us. The arts, whether in the performing arts, painting, sculpting, cooking or gardening are a form of meditation where the creator is in tune with his/her centre. In this sense, art is a spirit that one unconsciously experiences with a sense of a healing.

For me, art is the creation of what the soul is crying out to express. It is the harmony that tunes the soul with what is tangible. If we are all architects of our reality, then art is an expression of how we see ourselves within ourselves in relation to the world around us. This means that artistic expression is personal and it is a journey of self-discovery -much like healing.

“...If Illness and health are nouns, then healing is a verb. It is movement in a desired direction- a journey that takes you from illness to health.”By this interpretation, therefore, healing is an action: a decision one makes in search of better well-being.

ARCHITECTURE AS A HEALING ATMOSPHERE

With this in mind, I would like to explore architecture to see how art can be used as a tool for healing. Architecture takes a holographic approach by looking at the effectiveness of art to promote healing. It is a therapeutic experience aimed at connecting with the inner-self to bring about change in a person's lived experience. The question that needs to be asked is that, if art does have a healing effect how can architecture as an artistic science contribute to this? Can our environments heal or can it make us sick? I would like to explore the architecture which can be used as a tool for healing.

Healing in psychology, medicine and even nature involves a process where the patient or the recipient receives a physically external antidote in order to help.



Figure4: Piamo Sanatorium, Alvar Aalto-View of Corridor

However, if we ignore the qualities of physical context it could involuntarily slow the healing process. The study published in Science magazine in 1984 showed that when hospital wards looked out to nature the patients healed faster. It was modernist architect, Roger Ulrich who performed the experiments that proved that window views could affect healing. Ulrich chose 46 patients, 23 of which had beds near windows that overlooked a landscape of trees and the other 23 looked onto a brick wall⁴. After studying their vital signs and their pain medication doses it showed that the patients that

were positioned by the window needed fewer doses of pain medication and were healing at a rapid rate than the others. This meant that hospital wards provided for treatment facilities in the ward where medication and rest were provided for, and healing facilities where one could relax and enjoy nature and the healthy rays of the sun. In addition, natural sunlight and air were the most effective ways of purifying the air and killing bacteria.

**PLANNING APARAMETERS:
CONVIVIAL ENTRANCE**

First impressions matter a great deal. The first encounter deeply tinges our further experience and thus means a very great deal. Almost instantaneously we create for ourselves an image, not just of the building but of all its activities. Indeed, Stefan Lundin in his book *Architecture as Medicine* wonders whether the response and expectations thus generated do not make an important difference to our own response to the care which is to follow.

In many instances, the entrance situation has been a neglected point in the design of healing spaces. Descriptions from the world of psychiatry testify to obscure, by entrances next to loading bays and waste bin rooms. This has the effect of degrading the patient, making him / her feel unworthy of neatness and but the basic intent to make it as simple as possible for the patient to seek care.

From this precedent, the coherence between the entrance and the good first impression is interpreted.

- A good first impression
- A welcoming entrance
- An entrance for everyone
- A special entrance for emergency cases

ESTEEMED ENVIRONMENT

Frequently, a mentally ill person has a feeling of elimination combined with a negativeself-image. The patient's self-esteem can be boosted by offering them dignified environment with premises signalling: "OK, so you're ill and may not always be on your best behaviour, but help and sympathy are for the coming from those of us who, for the moment at least, are better off."6

Care must be made evident in details both large and small when designing the premises. It is

occasionally argued that many sick persons come from squalid backgrounds should not be offered anything that seems exaggeratedly posh, something which, not being significant of the patients' everyday surroundings, may feel strange and uncomfortable. But shabby surroundings are probably not freely chosen but are the consequences of a generally disadvantaged situation. Stefan Lundin's ideologies are more inclined to believe that it is connected with the actual care situation, with being looked after and having people around one for company, people who cater to one's need of security. Arguments are also Presented for psychiatry buildings being solidly and robustly constructed –hard to wreck and easy to maintain.

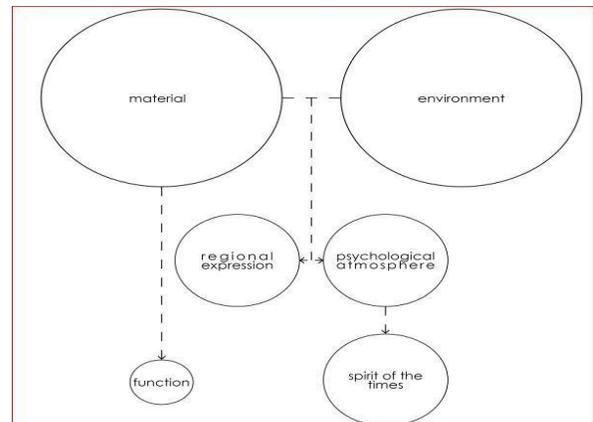


Figure 6: Explains the balance between environment and other criteria in Peter Zumthor's design of Therme Vals

Moreover, Christopher Alexander in his book, *A pattern language* expressed "the explicit recognition of the life cycle as the basis for every individual life will do a great deal to help people's health in the community life cycle; this pattern describes the more specific institutions which help people to care for themselves and their health. More than 90 percent of people walking about in an ordinary neighborhood are unhealthy, judged by simple biological criteria."

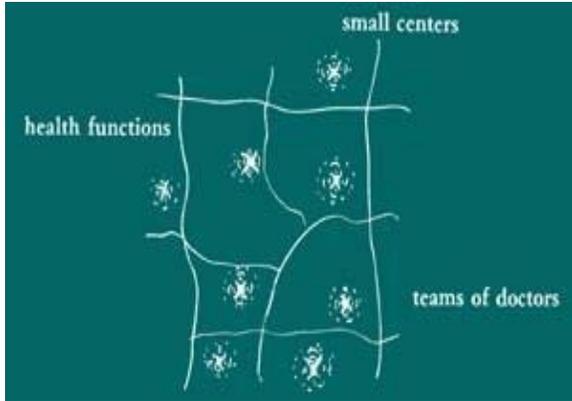


Figure 7: Christopher Alexander's Pattern for Health Care

Alvar Aalto's rise to success as a modernist architect to the level of modernist pioneers such as Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe is by his new architectural visions of his time to service the sick and isolated people, this predominantly largely seen the design of his sanatoriums in modernist times. He practiced his own version of modernist architecture diverging from the doctrine of modernism.



Figure 8: Piamo Sanatorium, Alvar Aalto, View of an entrance

CONCLUSION

The ability of architecture to heal the mental and physical illness with the different planning parameters and the elements that can enhance healing has been explored. Without compromising on the need, the ability of all patients to be outdoors in a good environment is, in my view, the absolutely greatest strength in the design of this caring environment.

The spontaneous process of making architecture, it's almost as if we formulate our own "abstract"

ideas of what we envisage a space to be, through special images from memory we assemble architecture to be apart of there al world. It not only seems that art is inherent in all of us, it is also possible that architecture is inherent in all of us. From the development of the first human shelter, humans have always connected the craft of making to a significant act of personal growth and of being in tune with ourselves and the world around us, which is essentially an act of healing and therapy. As an act of healing it is symbolic of our perseverance as a species to live a fulfilled existence. In exploring art as healing, architecture as an art and lastly, architecture as a healing space, I can deduce that the common bond between them is that art does have healing qualities and it can be said that such healing qualities provide therapeutic harmony in all of us. I believe its effects may be limitless in measuring the benefits to the Self. The journey of healing through art seems to be a process of retrospection, Self growth and Self discovery. This investigation has brought about key design objectives that may be crucial in space making concepts for my architectural intervention.

Patients often experience different needs from time to time, and so the architect should consciously design the place or the environment so as to facilitate the process which recovery. In the design process, the architects should consciously reduce the institutional ambience and achieve normalization for the patients. As I see it, there is scope for the patients to use different parts of the environment, both indoors and outdoors depending on the stage of the recovery process they have come to. Outdoor spaces are always with lush green and the sound of water to heal their agitation. Indoor is more towards the sunlight that enhance the healing and the ventilation to give the patient high level of conformability.

With the aid of my detail study and the precedents I have drafted four connections that has to be consciously addressed while designing. The connection to Self: Healing begins when one is in a space of retrospection. The space however is one that must be comfortable and a reflection of oneself.

The connection with the City: The city environment is harsh and busy and tends not to offer many places or spaces of retrospection and

contemplation. The site should be a part of the city but detached from the fast pace. The end-user should be able to arrive conveniently with public transport to the site to allow a large catchment of people seeking a place for healing. The site should also be in a place that is not difficult to navigate and find.

The connection to Nature: Human beings cannot live without natural surroundings. The symbiotic relationship that exists between the two is one that has to be nurtured. A physical and visual link with nature has positive beneficial qualities that help in healing and health in general.

The connection with Light: Natural sunlight kills harmful bacteria and cleans air. Apart from these obvious natural benefits of sunlight, natural light - when controlled - gives a space character that is sensual so giving a space an emotive quality which can be felt by the end-user. Light is also a symbol of growth and life as it benefits the natural world in that way.

This study on 'Healing spaces in architecture' is an endeavour of understanding the conceptual way to achieve healing. Since it is vast field of study with the number of ongoing researches, this has profuse scope for further investigation

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