

Statement of Interest

Brett M. Wilbur

The University of Texas at Austin
Master of Science in Architectural Studies

To the Graduate Admissions Committee:

Jun'ichiro Tanizaki once pondered the quality of darkness as it fell from the ceiling of a Tokyo teahouse, the "fragile light of the candle unable to pierce its thickness"¹. So too does the mist of silence settle upon us; deep and broad as "darkness seen by candlelight"². One could say it is the consequence of frozen music; a borrowed phrase by which Goethe describes architecture; the phrase that is the reason for my proposal. It is this seemingly simple notion that I wish to address in this graduate degree program. Music and architecture are intimately related; not just by historical anecdote or mathematical analysis, but because they both reference a timeless correlation to the dynamic inner self. Each is bound to the other by the interaction of silence and light. Silence and light are synonymous with frozen music. Each reveals the essential aspects of architecture and music. Together they delineate a sense of place.

We already live in an increasingly oculocentric world. We have foundered on surface, on empty space; marooned in mirrored caverns. Hence, it is difficult to find place amongst the multitude of reflections and images. Though we see ourselves reflected, we see ourselves in drifting solitude. Not only are we unable to see the meaning in the structures around us, we are unable to hear our own lives resonating within them. It is a strange world where we carry the soundtrack of our lives in our pocket. Music as a teacher and guide is influential in fulfilling a deeper need for primitive tribal relations; however, in a world where information is instantly accessible, the connection between our selves and our environment has become neglected. We have looked outwards to find what we believe is inside and found only representations of the specious duality of our existence unaware of the view from multiple vantage points at once. It is a frightening human condition, and a harbinger of things to come. The monuments we build for our selves today are the ruins of tomorrow's kingdom.

Raised the second son of a soldier, I traveled quite a bit as a young boy growing up in the service. I earned my undergraduate architecture degree in St. Louis at Washington University. My grades bare little witness as to what was actually learned there. In addition to required architectural courses, I took classes in literary criticism and

Statement of Interest

Brett M. Wilbur

The University of Texas at Austin
Master of Science in Architectural Studies

deconstruction, general philosophy, and literature of intoxication. From there I gravitated to the San Francisco Bay area where I worked for several firms until I became licensed in 1993 and opened my own practice. My designs concentrated on ancient geometry, ecology, and biomimicry; years ahead of the current trend in sustainability.

Post-baccalaureate, I have taken courses at the San Francisco Institute of Architecture with Dr. Eugene Tsui. His conception of the seed-germ intrigued me and led me further into the idiom of organic design. With Dr. Keith Critchlow at the Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture, I studied ancient geometry and realized that history is rooted in the discovery of the basic principles of proportion and harmonics. I have also taken classes in pharmacology and counseling to further my interests in neuroscience and the philosophy of mind. For a time, I worked with adolescents with substance abuse problems. This allowed me to develop a form of three dimensional design therapy which used architectural model building to compare the components of a building with the inner self. As a building has walls and a roof, so too does the human self have boundaries and the same need for shelter.

Currently, I work full-time for Page Southerland Page and will continue to do so during my graduate studies.

Though I will always remain an architect at heart, at the completion of this graduate program, I hope to mature into a more articulate essayist. Matriculation into an educational role after many years of being in the profession is daunting; however, I expect my talents and course of study to be well received in the architectural community, both as a consultant and as a critic.

If accepted into this program, I intend to pursue a multi-disciplinary investigation that involves the cognitive aspects of frozen music, perception, and inspiration, and their relationship to architecture and the self; a course of study that is intrinsically relevant to contemporary architectural practice and will provide guidance for future architects and designers. Generally, the treatises will layout the justification for a sense-based qualitative architecture – a sensual architecture of experience and of reflexivity. I am not a musician but I am interested in the perceptual qualities of music and their affect upon the inner self in terms of projected mind in architecture.

Statement of Interest

Brett M. Wilbur

The University of Texas at Austin
Master of Science in Architectural Studies

Frozen music is a cross-sectional slice through the properties of music embodied in architecture – rhythm, scale, proportion, composition, intonation, and the weaving of sound and silence. It is a bridge into otherly realms; the moment stretched into eternity. The poetics of silence dwell in frozen music; at once both the substance and the silhouette of silence. More than mere absence of sound, silence is a positive discursive phenomena. It is the source of dreams; the fertile soil of imagination and the root of creativity. It is the ground of being and being itself. It is found in the folds of a flower and the roar of a waterfall, the cross-timbers of a teahouse, and the gaze of lovers and passing strangers. The omnipresent qualities of silence embody place as the pervasive element of being-in-the-world.

Hence, place must be distinguished from space. Place provides and embodies spirit while space receives our projected dreams and memories. Space is aseptic; it models nothing but itself and unfolds no meaning, hidden or otherwise. It is a void carved out of matter and energy in which we project our unseen selves. Thus, place is an emergent state of self. It arises from the cacophony of signs and symbols projected into a space; rustling vibrations, the caress of light upon form, and the attachment of meaning.

I will also examine the relationship between self and other using architecture as the mirror and receptacle of our psychic projections and how the limits of perception affect how we come to know, and to be known by, our environment. I will show that we gain self-awareness directly from our environment as it is reflected in the other as a manifestation of place. It is well to understand the nature of art and inspiration. We must examine the fall of light upon the edge of the mind, and the deep penetration of reason and the juxtaposition of shadow. It will be important to show how light and sound essentially build our understanding of the environment around us, providing us with a more profound understanding of our inner selves.

There are many facets of this self worth exploring too; the metaphoric self, the mythic self, the embodied self, and the projected self. Each is related to memory and originates in the imagination. Each is a reflection of that self

Statement of Interest

Brett M. Wilbur

The University of Texas at Austin
Master of Science in Architectural Studies

developed during childhood as models for our being in the world; the totality in which we find our true selves reflected in the shadows of our art.

Lastly, I intend to show that architecture is a representation of mind, and perhaps mind itself manifested in the physical world as a projection of the poetic image. Bachelard eloquently describes this poetic image as a “sudden salience on the surface of the psyche”³. The image is born there in the shelter of the abyss, on the threshold of a dream, mirrors of our memories. In them we see our selves; as a lost child whistling in the darkness the tune of his own soul. In them are the echoes of our past experiences, cultural influences and genetic endowments. It would be interesting to explore the nature and source of creativity. An architecture of the future must address the human self - the experiencer and perceiver of nature and the environment; not as the epicenter of its universe, but as an integral component of the unified field of total being. We have been lost in a world of mirrors and have accepted duality as our normal state of existence. So it is that we covet this world with no measure of our own being, save the reflection of our selves around us. Place collides with mind as shadow collides with light, and in-between we find silence.

My ideas include inspiration by Louis Kahn, Robert Hunter, Jacques Lacan, Jean Piaget, Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Maeterlinck, Juhani Pallasmaa and Michael Benedikt. In fact, it is Professor Benedikt that draws me to this program.

END (1436 Words)

Brett M. Wilbur
January 2010

Endnotes:

1. Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (Stony Creek, CT: Leete's Island Books, Inc. 1977) p.34.
2. Ibid
3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) p. xi.