

MYSTICISM IN THE EXPERIENCE OF ARCHITECTURE

VOLUME ONE (of two)

Submitted by, Rodney Cresswell Furze, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology.

September 2010.

This thesis is available for library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

.....

MYSTICISM IN THE EXPERIENCE OF ARCHITECTURE.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue that architecture can sometimes evoke a sense of the numinous, or a sense of God. In volume one, beginning with Christopher Alexander I set out his theory of centres, and his argument that ‘the Blazing One’ can be known in and through building. I then turn to my own account of this experience, which draws especially on the Neo-Platonic tradition.

In the second chapter I set out the aspects of architecture which seem to me to make possible a sense of the numinous in the building, and I illustrate how this might be achieved in buildings of my own.

Chapters three and four are analyses of four great buildings, two sacred and two secular, which in my view evoke the numinous or mystical.

The fifth and last chapter proposes a Temple for the ‘Universal Order’, a group interested in Neo Platonism. In the submitted plans and sketches for this, I hope, show how a sense of the numinous could be achieved.

Since an architect’s language is through drawing, a large part of this thesis comprises drawings and illustrations. In volume two, these, with commentary, will support my argument that architecture can in itself, speak of God.

MYSTICISM IN THE EXPERIENCE OF ARCHITECTURE

VOLUME ONE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	Page
CHAPTER ONE	7
Architecture and the mystical	7
The theory of centres	9
Reality as wholeness	11
Mysticism and architecture in the twentieth century	22
CHAPTER TWO	39
The work of the architect	39
Architecture as the enclosure of space	43
The need for wholeness	47
Unity	50
Order	51
Scale	52
Proportion	54
The concern for beauty	57
The Norfolk house at Colton	59
The Theatre	62
An Office Block in Norwich	66
A small housing development in Norwich	69
Ard Allah. The house in Morocco	75
The work in the Arabian Gulf. Intellectual background	80
A Recreation Centre at Doha, Qatar	83
Al Ain, United Arab Emirates	87
Summary	92

Title	Page
CHAPTER THREE	92
The Eleventh Century Cathedral at Norwich	94
Medieval building	95
The Cathedral	100
Summary	110
The Chapel of Notre Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp by Le Corbusier	113
The Modulor	115
History and genesis of chapel	117
The approach and promenade	120
The Chapel	122
Summary	134
CHAPTER FOUR	137
‘Falling Water.’ by Frank Lloyd Wright.	137
Summary	151
The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by Frank O. Gehry	153
Analysis of Gehry’s techniques and approach	157
History and genesis of museum	159
The competition	162
The museum at Bilbao	164
Summary	170
CHAPTER FIVE	170
The design of a Temple for the ‘Universal Order’	173
The Fintry Trust	174
The Universal Order	175
The Ideal of Unity	176
The Ideal of Truth	177

Title	Page
The Ideal of Goodness or Harmony	177
The Ideal of Beauty	178
Ideal Philosophy	179
A Temple for Fintry	180
The site location	183
The genesis of the temple	185
Concepts or ideas	190
SUMMARY OF THE THESIS	194
BIBLIOGRAPHY For Volumes 1 and 2	196

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Title	Page
Fig.1. Piet Mondrian. Artist	14
Fig.2. Frank O. Gehry. Architect	15
Fig.3. Daniel Libeskind. Architect	16
Fig.4. Antonio Gaudi. Architect	17
Fig.5. Sydney Opera House, Architect Jorn Utzon	26
Fig.6. Villa Savoie Poissy, Architect Le Corbusier	28
Fig.7. Villa Savoie Poissy Section.	28
Fig.8. Le Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, Architect Le Corbusier	29
Fig.9. The Farnsworth House. Illinois U.S.A. Architect Mies van der Rohe	30
Fig.10. The Farnsworth House. Illinois in its setting	30
Fig.11. Willits House Illinois U.S.A. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright	31
Fig.12. Willits House Illinois in its setting	32
Fig.13. Darwin Martin House Buffalo U.S.A. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright	33
Fig.14. Darwin Martin House Buffalo U.S.A. In its setting	33
Fig.15. Annexe to the National Stadium Tokyo. Architect Kenzo Tange	42
Fig.16. Schwandbach-Brücke in the Canton of Bene. Robert Maillart	42
Fig.17. The Johnson Wax Company Administration Building. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright	43
Fig.18. The Architect's House Cologne Müngersdorf. Architect Oswald Mathias	56
Fig.19. House at Utrecht for Gerrit Thomas Rietveld	57