



16th Century Timber Church: Debno, Poland

“As I stood within them, moved to tears by the experience, I knew that I knew everything about them at their surface level. I had studied their plan and construction I knew all there was to know at the level of information, in truth there was not that much to know at that level. Yet what they expressed came not from that realm. It was not to be grasped at the level of information, the experience came from the complete integrity of the process. There was a unity of purpose which bound the unpretentiousness of the villagers who occupied them with the environment that surrounded and generated the buildings. It lay therefore not in one element or another but in the total ensemble which lifted the ordinariness of it all to an extraordinary aesthetic union with Nature. When buildings such as these find such a union with Nature there is nothing to adjust, nothing to move. The balance between all elements rest in equipoise, they hold a stillness “...the still point of the turning world.”¹ When the buildings invite us into that deep ordinariness we are invited into our own aesthetic silence, our own inner selves which turns out to be more extraordinary than ordinary.”

'The CREATIVE GAP: A theory of Form, Beauty, Spirit and Meaning'. Frank Lyons

We see ourselves as working within the tradition of Modern Architecture, but within that tradition focussing on a number of issues which define the practice's character and philosophy. This approach is developed more fully in a forth-coming book on the subject of 'Humane Architecture', entitled '*The CREATIVE GAP: A theory of Form, Beauty, Spirit and Meaning*'. Excerpts and images from the book are used to support this text.

1. **Listening:** The creative process very often begins in silence; it is as such a listening process. Great buildings are generally the fruit of a good client architect relationship, but the listening process is not just about listening to each other, the silence calls on us to listen to the site, to the slope of the ground, to the wind and to the materials against which the brief will be tested. Paraphrasing the words of Louis Kahn perhaps we can listen to '*what the building wants to be*'.
2. **Ordinariness:** The ordinary was a key feature of the Arts and Crafts Movement; we take ordinariness as the starting point of our work, we see it as the earth out of which buildings are born. Concerning ourselves with the ordinary does not limit our creativity but ensures that it is grounded in the reality of the needs of the client and users, the environment and the context. By having our roots within this reality our creative response is more likely to be appropriate and hopefully the ordinary may be rendered extraordinary.
3. **Care:** The quality of attention and intention define the quality of a work. Genius has been defined as the transcendent capacity of taking care. Caring for each detail and understanding that it forms a critical and essential part of the whole is central to the way we work. In this regard we like to

practice philosophy



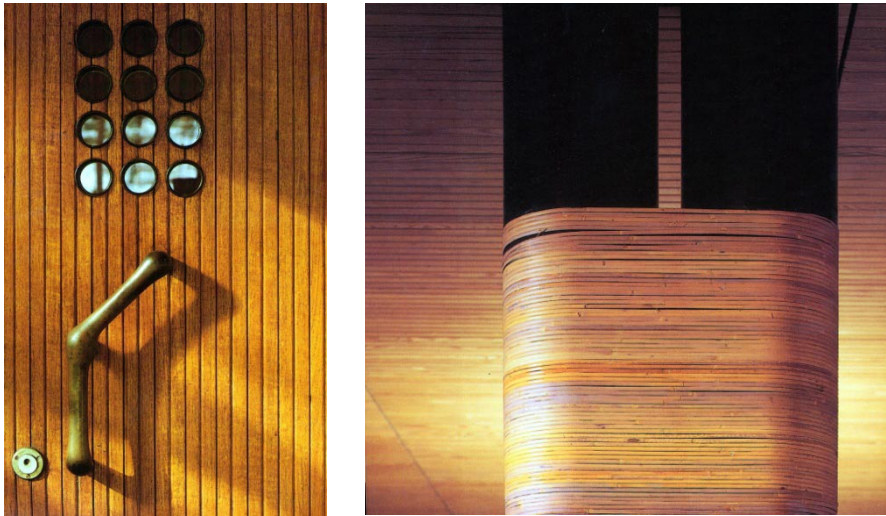
Animal architecture has a symbiotic relationship with Nature



Materials at the threshold reveal use.

think that we are prepared to go the extra mile. We seek to keep our attention focused on the highest intentions and in this way introduce a contemporary spirituality into architecture, not in any formal religious sense but as a direct connection to the organic essence of reality.

4. **Context:** If architecture has wholeness then its wholeness is only properly understood and experienced when the context has been fully engaged. A building that ignores its context speaks to itself, rather like an ego looking for attention at a party. When a building fully and appropriately engages its context the relationship is mutually beneficial, the landscape holds the building and in the best examples the building somehow reveals the landscape. This is best seen in Nature's Architecture.
5. **Materiality:** In some ways the Modern Movement in its hey day became preoccupied with '*surface*' rather than with the materials that comprised those surfaces; sight was the dominant sense. In our reading of architecture materiality and the experiential dimensions of architecture take on a much higher significance. Our position develops from the realisation that buildings are not read only by the eye but are perhaps primarily engaged through touch. Materials, particularly those that are close to users, are therefore selected for their tactile and even for their sensual qualities as well as for their benign contribution to the environment.



"...the simultaneous reconciliation of opposites." Alvar Aalto at Villa Mairea

"This gap, the vital middle ground, as we have seen is the realm between subject and object that defines the 'mean' and gives the meaning. It is the gossamer thin surface between the two halves of a seed, or the blissful moment between man and woman that gives birth to new life. These infinitesimally fine gaps of nothingness that fill our existence are in fact a realm of infinite possibilities. The anonymous author of the medieval text *The Cloud of Unknowing* writes: "Let go of this 'everywhere' and this 'everything', in exchange for this 'nowhere' and this 'nothing'. Do not worry if your senses cannot understand this nothing for this is why I love it better. Who is it that calls it nothing? Surely it is our outer man and not our inner man. Our inner man calls it All.""

The CREATIVE GAP: A theory of Form, Beauty, Spirit and Meaning. Frank Lyons

The 'Organic Logic' of the nervous system so much a part of the natural functioning of ourselves, will; given half a chance return us to the organic and spiritual order of Nature. These ideas which are really no more than a return to natural order, a return to Natural Law, have the capacity to re-integrate life and establish a deep connection between cultural contributors and their public. If we want it, they show us a way to create a more humane culture and offer the opportunity for a spiritual regeneration of architecture and the arts.

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6. **Passive Energy Systems:** Environmental and ecological issues are related to the context discussed above, a building well conceived does not only respond to context in formal and topographical ways but also as part of an environmental totality. Using the local environment to meet some or all of the buildings energy needs is part of our design ambitions.
7. **Formal Ordering Systems:** Achieving a state of balance between the building and its context is important in terms of both form and energy but it is also important that the building is balanced within itself. Good proportions, juxtaposed and balanced opposites, rhythmic sequences, human scaling are all part of the formal ordering systems that mediate between a building and its users. Here again the principle of care discussed above resurfaces, extreme care needs to be given to these formal relationships since it is in these relationships that the building and its public communicate and the opportunity for beauty emerges.
8. **Management and Cost Control:** The issues discussed above if conscientiously pursued by client, architect and consultants could produce a good building but a great building will only be achieved if all the above are managed carefully with strategic cost management and coherent administration. We therefore believe that the same care and attention that goes into the conception and design of the building needs to be applied to the cost and management of the building process whilst it is negotiated through the various stages of its development.