“We shape our buildings, 
Thereafter they shape us.”

-Sir Winston Churchill
Building for the Need: Shaping for the Mind

Our built environment influences us, users and wanderers, physically and mentally.

Simply a shape of a table could change the way users interact. Circular table is center focused by bringing people into a group discussion, while rectangular table with over six seats tends to produce separate conversations.
In the ancient time, dwellings are group in a circle to give a sense of community and security.
We react differently in different environment. The atmosphere of the space leads us to behave differently, not just physically but certainly mentally.

In some spaces, one can totally relax.

Some spaces give a sense of quietness and calmness.

Francois Boucher, Madame Boucher, 1743

House, Wales, by Christopher Day
Some places give a sense of insecurity. However, they could be a shelter for homeless people.
“The life goes in an environment, not merely in it, but because of it, through interaction with it.”


By M.W. Shaw
The facades and the walls of a building are just the container, what is the most significant is its content: internal space.

We interact with the space through our senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste.

Through interaction, we recognize the value of the space, and it becomes meaningful to us.
Home: not just where one lives, but where one could feel comfortable and relax.
“Each of my works originates from a simple desire to make people aware of their surroundings, not just the physical world but also the psychological world we live in.”

Maya Lin
Vietnam Veterans Memorial

“For death is in the end a personal and private matter, and the area contained within this memorial is a quiet place meant for personal reflection and private reckoning.”

The black granite walls effectively act as a sound barrier, yet does not appear threatening or enclosing. The actual area of the memorial is wide and shallow, along with the sunlight and the grassy park, it gives a sense of privacy and serenity.
The wall allows visitors a chance to see themselves with the names.

The wall creates a mirrored space where we cannot enter. It symbolizes an interface between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

This memorial is not only for those who have died, but also for us to remember them.

This memorial combines the tactile experience of sight, sound, and touch. It activates a full-bodied response of the viewers. It connects the viewers with its material aspects as well as with the private memories and thoughts that transform past events into awakenings in the present.

As people gathered around the circle, the circle closes and becomes more intimate; as the tears fell onto the table and become part of it, we then become part of the experience of the memorial.


It is the intangible aspects that are the most significant for one’s experience in a space.

Intangible elements fill the space, while the tangible ones only sit in it.
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The Church of Light

Light reveals the truth, and at the same time, it gives things new meaning.

By using the seams of the concrete walls, deforming its visual impression of the massive volumes, Ando makes it seem that light is pouring through the opened cracks.

Flowing over, around and through the slits left between the intersecting planes, light becomes a form within the space, but not merely an illuminating medium.

“Church of Light”, No Date, Online Image, Church of Light by Ando Tadao, 21 February 2005, <http://intro2arch.arch.hku.hk/arch/Ando/church_1.htm>
Entering into a space surrounded by concrete wall, one enters into a truly coldness and darkness. It is the light of cross that gives the warmth and luminosity.

“Church of Light”, No Date, Online Image, Church of Light by Ando Tadao, 21 February 2005, <http://intro2arch.arch.hku.hk/arch/Ando/church_1.htm>
“What the eyes see and the senses feel in questions of architecture are formed according to conditions of light and shadow.”

The simplicity of the form and the complexity of the structure that Ando has created speaks for the nature, and shows how temple architecture evolved from nature. Light flooding in from the strips of the lattice walls creates a wonderful play of shadow in the space. Walking around and through the central space, it is an experience of entering a man-made forest, a protected space that allows you to feel the nature and be touched by the sunlight.
It is through touching that our relationship becomes intimate and meaningful.
The Japanese created an unique way of life by elevating the mundane practice of drinking tea to a spiritual discipline. The purpose of tea ceremony is to allow the host to express the utmost hospitality to his or her guests through a series of ritualized actions.

Tea ceremony is a quiet interlude during which host and guest strive for spiritual refreshment and harmony with the universe.
Before the guests are greeted by the host, they have to pass through a few doors in the garden and the guest room. This gentle passage through doors symbolizes the getting away from the everyday world. It also allows the refreshment of the senses to enjoy the ceremony.

The full tea ceremony is a full experience of the multi-sensory. Tea ceremony involves an understanding and appreciation of a complex combination of sensual and spiritual elements.
The simplicity and purism of the tea room is a result from emulation of the Zen monastery. It is a place where people can be away from the vexation of the everyday world, and refresh themselves.

Its simplicity and purity also allows each guest to complete the total effect in relation to himself through imagination and through the experience of multi-sensory.
Oyodo Tea House
by Ando Tadao

Ando’s use of natural material and light penetrating through milky white glass creates a simple and calm space. The intention is to eliminate the non-essentialness for not to disturb the intimate quietness that the tea house seeks to achieve.
Relaxation: it is not merely for our physical refreshment, but also for our mind and body.
Thermal Bath
by Peter Zumthor

Zumthor wishes to create a space with soul, which could become part of everyday life and stand against the general artificiality of the world.

This project is a play of material, light and shadow. It gives the sense that one is in the natural cave where part of its shell has fallen, letting light streams in.

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Everywhere, the presence of water is emphasized by the natural light: reflecting, rippling, shimmering, refracting, tinkling, splashing, trickling, dribbling, squirting, gurgling and spraying.

One experiences the thermal bath through the sense of touch. One feels the materiality with the body, like walking bare foot on the stone, sitting bare on the stone, and in water. Natural light streams through the slots and onto the skin, along with the warmth of the steam, it gives a sense of comfort.

Zumthor believes that all design works start from the physical sensuousness of architecture, and of its materials. To truly experience architecture is to feel it with one’s body.

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Zen philosophy: the true wealth is one’s inner wealth.

Our built environment, like Zen garden, can certainly affect our behavior, mentally and physically.
“Our senses connect us intimately to the world through the relationship of mental and physical phenomena to our inner and outer perception.”

Barbara Crisp, Human Space, Massachusetts: Rockport Publisher Inc, 1998, p.7
We touch to feel the roughness, softness, gentleness, etc.
We touch when we see something interesting, something we love, something we seek a better understanding.
We can also be touched by the nature, the most intangible elements: sunlight, shade, wind, water…
“Our culture of control and speed has favored the architecture of the eye, with its instantaneous imagery and distant impact, whereas haptic architecture promotes slowness and intimacy, appreciated and comprehended gradually as images of the body and the skin.”

“For me you’re only a little boy just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you have no need of me, either. For you I am only a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, we’ll need each other. **You’ll be the only boy in the world for me. I’ll be the only fox in the world for you…**”

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