COMMUNICATION IDEAS
OF THE JUBILEE CHURCH

- RICHARD MEIER
THESIS
Richard Meier is recognized as a late modernist due to his extension of the visual language of Le Corbusier. In particular, his Jubilee Church in Rome, Italy (2003), is designed with aspects of abstraction, projection, weighing and layering.

BACKGROUND
Richard Meier is a late modernist architect born in 1934 in New Jersey. After earning a bachelor of architecture from Cornell University in 1957, he went to work for firms including, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in 1959 and then for Marcel + Partners in 1963. Today he has offices in Manhattan and Los Angeles, with major projects in Taiwan, Italy, Germany, Turkey and Brazil.
COMMUNICATION IDEAS

Richard Meier extends modernism with the use of simplistic forms, pure values, graceful logic and geometric shapes which fit together perfectly. Meier stated that he believed “modernism suits our time: architecture is about making space with linear, planar and abstracted forms with opaque and transparent surfaces.” (Stephens, 2013)

EXPANSION OF LE CORBUSIER

Greatly influenced by Le Corbusier, Meier “refines his principles of geometrical progression by playing with structure, space and elements of formal precision.” (Furuto, 2013) In the Jubilee Church, Meier uses the idea of a free facade, open floor plan and ribbon windows in new light.

THE ABSENCE OF COLOR

The use of white, or absence of color, is a key aspect of Meier’s architecture. He is grounded on the belief that light can be used as the “main material to give form to orderly, sculptural and linear architecture.” (Furuto, 2013)

“A Meier building is a sensuous experience before it is anything else. It is an exploration of solid and void and light and texture, and an essay on composition. Every Richard Meier building is visually compelling, they are deeply beautiful.”

- Paul Goldenberger, The New Yorker, 2009
OVERVIEW

The Jubilee Church is a Catholic church and community center built in Rome, Italy in 2003. For the new Millennium, the Vatican wanted to “show and highlight the basic role that architecture plays in holy and religious spaces by founding 50 new churches in Rome. Meier explained that the design concept of the Jubilee Church is based on the “contrast between the cube and the sphere and the clean division, or connection point, is the main space of the church.” (Richard Meier, 2009)
ABSTRACTION

EXTERIOR
The prominent abstraction on the exterior, the three concrete, curved shell walls, were abstracted from the idea of the Holy Trinity - God in three persons as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Their structural idea derives from a sphere being cut in half.

INTERIOR
The interior design composition was an abstraction of the circle, square and grid. The pews are arranged in traditional formation, while a sense of movement succumbs the occupant when the curved concrete walls connects with the angled glass ceiling tiles.

FEATURE
The traditional pipe organ resides in an extended, grid cubical, which is supported by a piloti. This structure is a three dimensional extension of the gridded glass window wall. Although this organ pulpit contains elements of its surrounding structures, it stands out amongst the wood paneling, stone and glass.
PROJECTION

EXTERIOR
Projections of geometric shapes occupy the exterior of the church. The three curved shell walls are sliced and then projected up into the sky. Opposite of the three walls is a singular horizontal plane wall. All of these structural features project lines that extend beyond the physical church.

INTERIOR
Traditionally centered in the church sanctuary lies the crucifix. This cross is suspended in front of box with vertical lines leading back to window, leaving the symbolic illusion of the crucifix being lifted up.

FEATURE
Natural light is projected through the gaps between the solid structural wall elements in the pipe organ pulpit. Light weaves through the geometric shapes, projecting the space with brightness, giving the impression that it expands with more light.
WEIGHING

EXTERIOR
The heaviest aspects of the church lie in the three concrete walls. These suggest heavy weight as there are no surface openings; however, the curved glass enclosing between the walls break it up, leaving the overall structure with a sense of airiness.

INTERIOR
The window walls, open floor plan and ceiling height give the feeling of lightness, as if one is outside. The surrounding supportive walls are heavy in their stature, yet light with their white and the light reflects off their surface. The abundance of space gives meaning to all the light that enters.

FEATURE
The pipe organs are raised upon their own stage, ahead from the windows, paneling, and surrounding walls. The single piloti on the right gives the illusion of lightness, as if that is the only structural element maintaining this prominent piece.
CASE STUDY

LAYERING

EXTERIOR
The most prominent layering of the church occurs on the exterior with the three curved walls. These shell-like walls give the illusion they could be flattened to fit on top of one another. The floor-to-ceiling window walls add another layer between.

INTERIOR
The layering of the exterior walls is also brought to the interior. Outside of the sanctuary lies the halls with floor-to-ceiling glass which are stacked upon one-another. Smaller references to layering can also be spotted in the windows behind the crucifix.

FEATURE
Elements of layering are also found in the extended organ pulpit. The structure of the pulpit is a rectangle that has sections removed, exposing the internal remnants and frame, as if layers were pulled back.
Although the Jubilee Church is not designed in a traditional format, this modern space has helped the Catholic Church move forward in various artistic and social senses. Through the expansion of Le Corbusier’s ideas of a free facade, an open floor plan and ample natural light, Richard Meier creates this simplistic form that exemplifies the aspects of abstraction, projection, weighing and layering.

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