

Steven holl – ideas on architecture

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



Steven Hold: Thoughts and Ideas on Architecture As I sit and listen to the rainfall, I can't help but wonder about the changing of seasons. Winter to spring, Spring to summer, summer to fall, fall back to winter. While each droplet of rain must have Journeyed long and far before it descended upon me, now it's just a pool of droplets. The best part about spring is the rain showers. Without the spring rain we would have no summer flowers, no gardens, not leaves or grass. Spring marks the direction of a new change. One with more life, a new beginning of sorts.

A precedent for the following months; a metamorphosis from one season to the next. Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclites found fascination with change in its most simple form. He believed that all is flux, and nothing stays still. But what if he was wrong...? If flux could be stopped what would happen? I could walk out into this storm and not be wet, for the droplets of rain are still and the clouds stationary. In the moment, I find tranquility in the storm.

Peacefulness rests among the stillness of earth. Not a splash of water made, not a scour in the trees, not even a whistle to the wind.

I think to myself, 'The serenity of nature is unlike anything else in this world. All of a sudden, CLASH!! Lightning strikes followed by a violent boom of thunder. A nearby tree creaks like an old door opening as it falls to the ground; unexpectedly I became drenched by the rainfall. I sought shelter under a roof, but it seemed as if the world was at ease. Almost as if earth made a treaty with itself to remain motionless for the rest of time.

Nevertheless, it wasn't because if nothing changed then storms wouldn't occur, seasons couldn't transpire, and life would be lifeless.

This earth we live on is one of a kind and distinct from anything else. Earth speaks for itself and Heraclites states this excellently, " Not I, but the world says it all: All is one. And yet everything comes in season. " In comparison to the precedent of spring to the rest of the seasons, a person's early life can shape the following years in their life. Steven Holly's career was foreshadowed by his earliest years when he and his brother built a 3-story tree house and also an underground clubhouse. This was not only outlined in his childhood, but also in his years of education.

While growing up in Beaverton, Washington, he developed the desire to make things, sculpt, draw, and build. After high school, Hold went to study architecture at the University of Washington. His Junior year he left the states and engulfed himself in the great city of Rome, moving from Beaverton, a shipyard city with little architectural density, to Rome, the pinnacle of architectural history. 5 While in Rome, the Vietnam War was taking place so, Hold, instead of developing his thoughts and ideas on architecture, wrote a conscientious objection on philosophical rather religious grounds.

After receiving a reply, he was dismissed due to " physical deformity' and never had an actual physical examination. Hold obsessed over his objection because he didn't want them to falsify his opposition, and consequently left Rome with no projects. Upon returning to Washington, he had difficulties finding a firm to hire him. After a year at a small firm outside of Seattle, Hold left to go to San Francisco, where he formed a union with William Stout and Bill Zimmerman; they called themselves " Opus 411 . " Together they

entered competitions and wrote declarations of architecture, but all ended too soon, for Hold was broke and needed a job.

In search of a job and possible graduate school, Hold was accepted at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, and on top of that hired at Louis Khan's office in Philadelphia. He made the decision to take the job and decline the schools. Confusion descended once Hold received word of Khan's death. He declined acceptance to graduate schools for a job that was no longer possible. Fortunately in 1976, Hold was offered to study, tuition free, at the Architectural Association in London by a man named Alvin Boyar. ⁵ For that reason, Hold made another life-changing decision and packed his bags to go to London.

During that time he traveled to every possible building to experience them first hand and to sketch them. Living as a vagabond in the streets of London, by some means, Hold managed to find a client from Paris. His new client was upset with his noisy and crowded vacation home so Hold made large pencil drawings of a new retreat house offset from the shore. In one of the drawings he sketched a man on a boat headed to his refuge home, his back to the home and face to the shore. Hold comments, " The character in the rowboat illustrates the way that all of us must work. He cannot see where he is going, only where he has been.

Progress is tempered by a sense of mystery, of doubt. " ⁵ A couple years later, Hold made more elaborate pencil drawings of a project for the South Bronx called Gymnasium-Bridge. This project won a Progressive Architecture Award in 1978. Upset by the way his work was presented in Progressive

Architecture, he called his colleague Bill Stout, who had opened a bookstore back in San Francisco to make a publication of manifestos and single projects. This was the inception of what would be known as " Pamphlet Architecture. " Hold set specific guidelines for him and his colleagues to follow for this publication.

This was an avian-garden idea at the time and gave new and unusual ways of looking at architecture. These anthologies feature groundbreaking works by forward thinkers of today's most well-known architects, including Steven Hold, Living Timidity, Lubbers Woods, and Gaza Had. 6/7 Holly's excerpts from Pamphlet Architecture are very much concerned with typology and morphology, that is, a study based on classification and also a study on building forms. " Pamphlet Architecture #5 The Alphabetical City' speaks on the nature of urban buildings during the first half of the 20th century.

Hold inscribes, "... The notorious portions of cities that evolved on gridiron plans - certain letter-like buildings recurred. The " L", or the " I" type depend on their adjoining structures for meaning. They become " dead letters" when left stranded as free- standing buildings. " 6 You can see here Hold had been analyzing buildings and then classifying certain buildings by the letter in the alphabet they resembled. The forms of these buildings from the generation before him caused him to question the idea of architecture from that time.

Holly's current language of architecture wasn't uncovered until he came across the works of French philosopher Maurice Merle-Pointy in 1984. 1 This was a time when Hold radically changed his methods for making and understanding architecture. Subsequent to the discovery of Merle-Pointy,

Hold brought light to the idea of deriving projects from concepts outside of architecture. Over the years, he harnessed this method and played with it as a departure for his work. From there on out, Hold became preoccupied with the idea of experience.

Merle-Pointy expresses, " We know not through our intellect but through our experience. " ³ The phenomenology that Merle-Pointy writes about is what Hold achieves in his architecture. While most architects work outside-in, Hold takes an opposite stance and works inside-out because he affirms that, " space is the incredible media of architecture. " ⁸ It is an extraordinary responsibility to be an architect because the buildings we make are for people to use. Hold understands this and attempts to make people perceive space differently, to make something visible that they normally wouldn't.

A work of his that exemplifies this is the Chapel of SST. Igniting in Seattle, Washington. In this project, Hold starts with the concept, 'Seven Bottles of Light in a Stone Box. ' Each of the openings for light allow the sunlight to reflect off colored walls in a way that causes a conversion to colored-light. You can imagine being in the space that funnels colors at you making light ever more noticeable. This making of architecture relates building, site, and situation with body, space, time, light, and movement. ⁴ Holly's buildings really execute the interaction between architecture and phenomenology.

It doesn't come as a surprise that Holly's major preoccupation is the phenomena of light. We live in a world that we know through vision, which can only be possible with the help of light. The dynamic of light defines

several of Holly's works including: Writing With Light House, Porosity House, Sun Slice House, Kinsman Museum of Contemporary Art, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Addition, Chapel of SST. Igniting, Museum of the City, and NYU School of Philosophy. ² However, these projects epitomize his thoughts on light, all of his works constitute and deal with light.

Specifically in Writing with Light House, Hold inscribes light in such a way that celebrates light and, its counterpart, shadow. Strips of white light coat the interior in accord with the time of day and season. Shadows then become the strokes on the reface causing an ornament of pattern. This strategy shapes light that really gives it meaning and insight. It's not only the approach on light that makes his architecture original, but also his ability to take familiar ideas and transform them into something new. It wasn't until the ass's when Hold started consistently getting things built.

Part of the struggle in his career was becoming famous. This can be challenging because of cruel criticisms or lack of attention towards your work. For Hold, it wasn't until after his Pace Collection Showroom in New York, that he received a world-known status. He was given a huge amount of critical attention in New York, Europe, and Asia for his new and fresh take on modernism. It took a couple decades but he now has work in Italy, Germany, France, Japan, Finland, Switzerland, Norway, The Netherlands, Denmark, and China.

Holly's originality that is known throughout the world is, in part, due to his way of thinking and developing ideas. It is not necessarily theories of architecture that shaped this, but phenomenology and science that have

shaped his beliefs and ideas. Ideas are very important to Hold and this is where he derives his inspiration. He is fearless when it comes to addressing the world at large for inspiration in his projects. Many shy away because of the criticisms one will face for fear of comparison to larger ideas, nevertheless Hold is audacious.

Audacity is exactly what Hold advocates. He encourages students to question everything and this is one reason he, himself, has become such a success. 8 One part of being an architect is that you must be able to fluently articulate your personal thoughts and ideas, rather than simply following the ideas of someone else. It then becomes a push for what you think should happen. Holly's character is tested when working with clients because he must be uncompromising and demanding if he wants to pursue the realization of his concepts. His self-assurance comes from the knowledge of himself.

He has never had any doubts on who he is and what he wants to accomplish, and this has lead to his triumph. Even though he must be adamant and resolute, he has sought criticism from respected colleagues and peers of his designs over the years. 2 Hold discusses their commentary and evaluation with them after overcoming his incredulity. This is a testament of his respect for other people's opinions and ideas. It also reveals his wisdom in seeking out honest and tough critiques. This may be the reason he is able to keep his knife so sharp.

Without the help of others, he would become dull, thereby making his architecture banal. This essay ends with a glimpse of the way Steven Hold

sees architecture for the 21st Century. Hold was born in 1947. He lived in latter half of the 20th Century; he saw and helped change the way architecture is defined today. He truly sees how architecture has been grounded by the physical aspects of having limited resources in the past, to the increasing technological ways in which we can now build. The constructive ramification into modern life and new ways of seeing are vital traits he believes today's architects must have.

Hold elaborates, " Any architect caught up with the current speed of globalization of today's architecture realizes that this is an unprecedented time in the history of architecture: requiring an unprecedented philosophical commitment. " He continues, "... The challenge of extremely diverse lands, cultures, and climates and their urban conditions set unparalleled obligations for architecture today... A theory reversing specific to universal - a black swan theory - suggests an aim for larger, more complex building types.

A twenty-first century position that strives to airframe the inherited dualism of the last century's suffixes might spark a new paradigm shift toward a new focus on architecture's potential to shape experience, interrelating body, brain and world. " 3 A new generation will emerge after the passing of Steven Hold, one inspired by the books and buildings he bequeathed to humanity. For now, Hold will continue to be a leading architect in the world. It's a great field to be apart of with myriad possibilities, and it is my hope to one day be given the chance to make a richer environment and Join the field of architecture.