

Obvious or hidden. Evolution of forms used for temporary or permanent small sacral spaces at the turn of the Millennium

Obvio u oculto. Evolución de las formas utilizadas para pequeños espacios sacros temporales o permanentes en el cambio de milenio

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RESUMEN

Los estudios sobre la orientación de los espacios sagrados cristianos aparecieron a principios del siglo XX. La reinterpretación de la relación entre los elementos funcionales colocados en el espacio también ha incluido la cuestión de la jerarquía. La posición simbólica de estos espacios o elementos sacros es decisiva también en la comunidad dedicada a la liturgia. Con los cambios de los conceptos litúrgicos, la cuestión del uso central o longitudinal del espacio ha determinado todo el siglo XX. Al mismo tiempo, en torno al cambio de milenio ha surgido una creciente necesidad de utilizar el simbolismo secreto de lo escondido para diseñar del acceso a los espacios sacros, en lugar de utilizar el enfoque directo que había sido el habitual durante cientos de años. La ruta indirecta, realizada mediante cambios de dirección, fue pensada con la lógica del descubrimiento y la comprensión gradual. Es particularmente interesante que esta composición arquitectónica aparezca sobre todo en edificios temporales o efímeros, o bien en pequeños espacios sacros proyectados con pocos medios arquitectónicos.

ABSTRACT

Studies examining the orientation of Christian sacred spaces have appeared at the beginning of the 20th century. The reinterpretation of the relationship between functional elements placed in space has also investigated the issue of hierarchy. The symbolic position of these sacral space-elements is decisive also within the community engaged in the liturgy. With the changing liturgical concepts, the issue of central or longitudinal use of space has determined the whole 20th century. At the same time, around the turn of the millennium an intensified need has emerged, which used the symbolism of hidden secret in the concept of the access to sacral spaces instead of a direct approach that had previously been usual for hundreds of years. The indirect path, designed with changes of direction, was composed with the logic of discovery and gradual understanding. It is particularly interesting that this architectural composition appears typically in ephemeral—like temporary buildings or in small sacral spaces formed simply, only with a few architectural means.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Jerarquía, misterio, orden geométrico, secreto sagrado.

KEYWORDS

Hierarchy, Mystery, Geometric Order, Sacred Secret.



Abb. 29: Rudolf Schwarz, „Heiliger Ring“, 1938

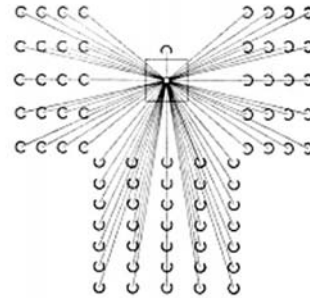


Abb. 31: Rudolf Schwarz, „Heiliger Ring“ - geschlossene T-Form, 1938

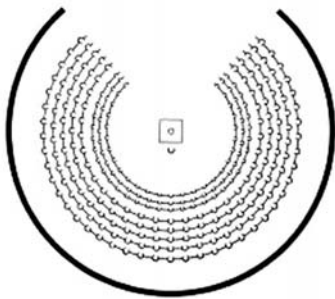


Abb. 30: Rudolf Schwarz, „Heiliger Aufbruch (Der offene Ring)“, 1938

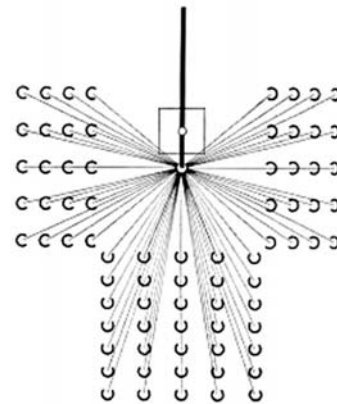


Abb. 32: Rudolf Schwarz, „Heiliger Aufbruch (Der offene Ring)“ - offene T-Form, 1938

Fig. 01. Rudolf Schwarz, Space compositions, from *Vom bau der Kirche*, 1938.

Studies examining the orientation of Christian sacred spaces have appeared at the beginning of the 20th century. The reinterpretation of the relationship between functional elements placed in space has also investigated the issue of hierarchy¹. The symbolic position of these sacred space-elements is decisive also within the community engaged in the liturgy². With the changing liturgical concepts, the issue of central or longitudinal use of space has determined the whole 20th century³. At the same time, around the turn of the millennium an intensified need has emerged, which

used the symbolism of hidden secret in the concept of the access to sacred spaces instead of a direct approach that had previously been usual for hundreds of years⁴. The indirect path, designed with changes of direction, was composed with the logic of discovery and gradual understanding. It is particularly interesting that this architectural composition appears typically in ephemeral—like temporary buildings or in small sacred spaces formed simply, only with a few architectural means.

The organization of Christian sacred space focuses on the mysteries taking place at the altar⁵. For two thou-

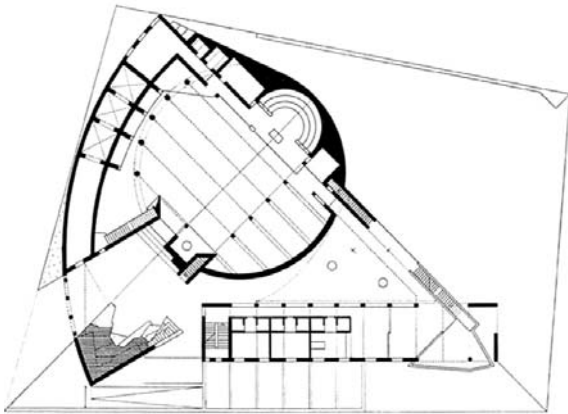


Fig. 02. Ferenc Török & Mihály Balázs, Church of the Hungarian Saints, Budapest (Hungary), 1994/96.

sand years, the way of approach has been built upon a progressive revelation, on the event of arrival, typically along a straight axis. The forecourt of early Christian basilicas, the row of narthex spaces, the center of holy acts opening up at the east end-wall together provide a scenic revelation drama. Even in case of temporary sacral spaces, it is a general concept to show clearly the designated sacral center—at the same time, recently we can more often notice spaces that are formed with the concept of spiral-like space organization, trying to position the place of the holy mystery hidden, to elongate and prolong the experience of revelation in time. This aim is achieved by breaking the path approaching the sacred space with changes of direction. The bases of the composition's sacred geometry can be found in the logic of the spiral design; however, we don't want to go in details in the logarithmic spiral growth pattern or in the symbolic secrets of the Fibonacci sequence and the golden ratio⁶. The beauty of the growth geometry existing in nature and the deeper mysteries of its specific applications are not the subject of our thesis. However, we would like to examine factually the revelation of spaces based on this kind of geometric compositions.

In case of building complexes located in urban environments, the changes of direction in the access of the space may also be influenced by the geometries determined by the available area. Architectural compo-

sitions, which prefer focusing on the sacred space and turning the altar towards east, often opt for a longer unfolding of the approach path. The *Christ-pavilion* of the former *Hannover Expo* was placed between parallel alleys, from where one could get to an intermediate atrium-space, and then, changing the direction orthogonally, he could turn to the axially lined spaces of the church interior. (At its new place, the relocated building complex already follows the system of axial space sequence that was applied at early Christian basilicas). The *Church of the Hungarian Saints*, Budapest-Lágymányos (Fig. 02), planned also to be an expo pavilion, turns with its eastern-oriented altar space to the boulevard that provides access⁷. Thus, going around the circular body of the church, we have to pass through an open space the geometry of which is first narrowing then revealing; finally, making a complete turnaround, we can enter the space through the gate placed in the sacral axis of the building. The composition, built on the changes of direction in the approach path, is not only typical of the Christian sacred spaces. For example in case of the *new synagogue's* construction in Dresden at the turn of the century, taking into consideration the changed urbanistic situation, the architects did not decide for a direct approach but they left the place of the former sacred building empty and formed an intermediate space, from where one can get to the place of

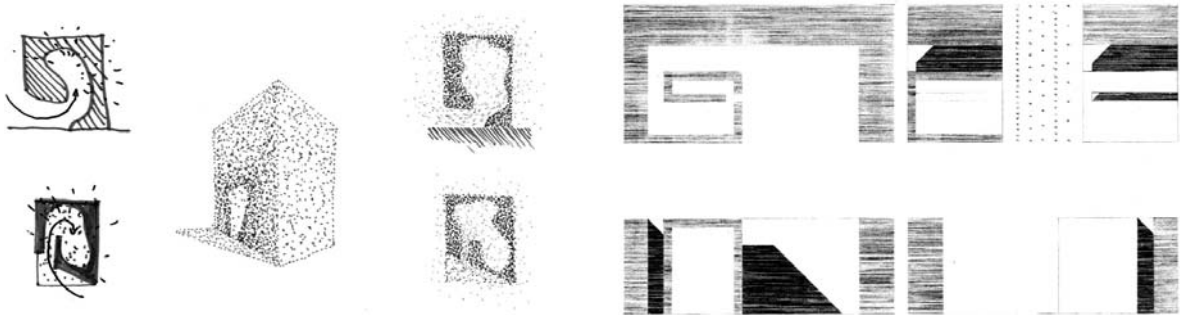


Fig. 03. Students of course, Spiral form chapels, BUTE Sacral Architecture Studio, Budapest (Hungary), 2012.

mystery along changing directions. In this example there is a special interest in the interior space organization of the synagogue, which interprets the symbol of the Sacred Tent in several layers, transcribing again the thousands years of tradition of linear space organization. The *Buddhist Water temple Hompuku-ji* designed by Tadao Ando to the island of Awaji was established with a completely different cultural background and symbolism. From direction of the main approach, the shell of curved space walls protects the chapel that was placed under the elliptic water pool—in this case again, the architect designed an extra spiral of spaces into the seemingly axial composition even inside the house.

The decades of teaching experience directed my attention to the fact that though the modernist approach of space is very popular among the growing up architect generation, they finally use different tools when forming a sacral space.

In the works of the *Sacral Architecture Studio*, being held since 2002, the demand of revealing the space indirectly came to the fore very often. During the two semester course students first get acquainted with the Christian liturgies in details, and in the second semester they give an account of their own space idea related to sacrality during a design work. In point of fact of the task, they have to plan a small chapel, assuming traditional construction methods⁸. Very often the

intention of hiding could be noticed in the drawings and models of the students; with this tool they try to form the already small buildings in a way, that the entry should not be so quick and sudden. (Fig. 03) May the spiraling of the composition generate a hidden, protected feeling? Does a solution like this examine the relationship of direct and indirect? Do the several changes of direction articulate the transition between the sacred and profane world?

At the turn of the millennium, several small sacred spaces were built regarding the legitimacy of these questionings.

Applying traditional construction methods may be very important in case of a community building. When creating the *Shingle Church*, Kärsämäki (Fig. 04), the idea of the young Finnish architect Anssi Lassila has also emphasized the above approach: from the felling of the tree to putting the beam into place he gave the opportunity of an active participation to the members of the community⁹. From our presentation's point of view this is only a minor line of thought, while the layout system of the created building composition is a much more important aspect. Around the chapel space, which presents the inner core built from thick beams, a light-weight structure was raised also from timber. Between the exterior skin and the inner core there is the path of access leading to the remote corner of the transitional

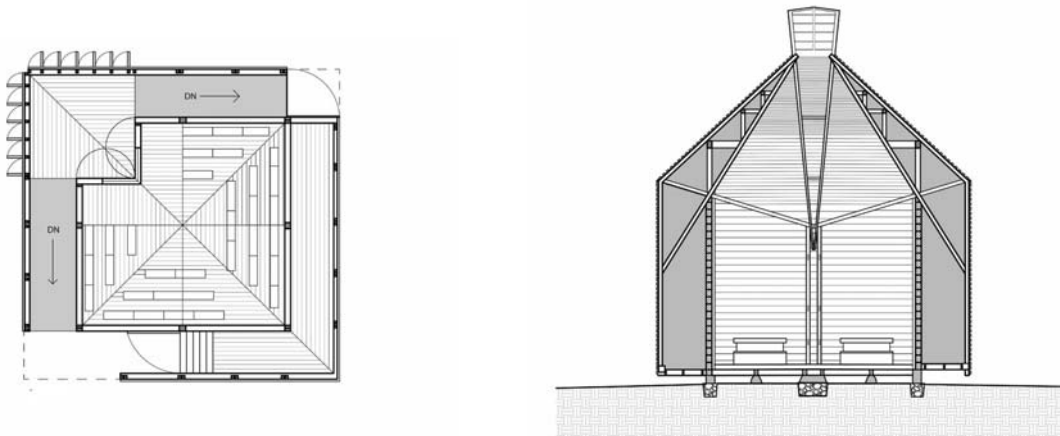


Fig. 04. Anssi Lassila, Shingle Church, Kårsämäki (Finland), 1998-2004.

space so we can enter the space full of emotions only by turning back. This way the small chapel, which stands on a clearing nestled among forests, is extended with a transitional space, thus allowing preparation to enter the sacred space.

The bounding wall composition that could be seen in the above mentioned student works has appeared also in the geometry of *De la Piedra Chapel*, Cieneguilla¹⁰ (Fig. 05). The long bounding wall is also a boundary for the landscaped garden, but its definite direction emphasizes the most the path leading to the sacred space. The space of the chapel is attached to the horizontal mass of the wall as a vertical bulk standing high out of the composition. The entering believer arrives with a turning over the access, actually turning back towards the garden. The changes of direction in the path of approach prolong the mystery of the already often mentioned preparation in time—giving enough time to stillness. When opening the rear wall of the altar, the interpretation of the space composition expands more, this way the view of the garden becomes an inherent part of the sacred place. True, by this gesture the mystery of the approach that moves towards the sacred secret may be lost.

This inward going composition, hiding the secret deep, is the way of understanding as well. The closing composition presents a meaningful densification on the

horizontal surface. The architectural counter-balance of this introverted design is the revelation of the ultimate secret, the glimpse at the place of mystery. The embracing space appears in the strong unity of the community. But at the symbolically richest moment of the sacred act the space expands too, the structure that protects and shelters us gets burst. The *Bruder Klaus Field Chapel* in Wachendorf designed by Peter Zumthor continues this drama also with architectural tools¹¹ (Fig. 06). The building block of an irregular pentagon layout, composed with sensitive geometry, hides an interior designed with soft lines. Inside, the massive, thick concrete walls make a spiral of space formed with a soft arc. The graphics of the timber, which was used as a formwork and later was burnt out, attracts the eye upwards, the bounding walls wrap a vertically stretched space above the small space, which is only physically finished in the drop-shaped open option.

The *Field Chapel*, Boedigheim, realized during a student workshop of IIT, USA tried to create similar spatial compositions¹² (Fig. 07). The engineering construction and the right-angled design are multiple oppositions of the chapel presented above. Despite the slightly artificial positioning (designated area at the intersection of dirt roads, location on a raised space-platform) the solutions create coherently the same intention of space composition: opening the space by

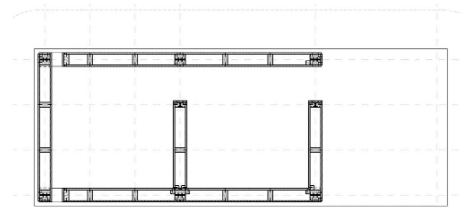
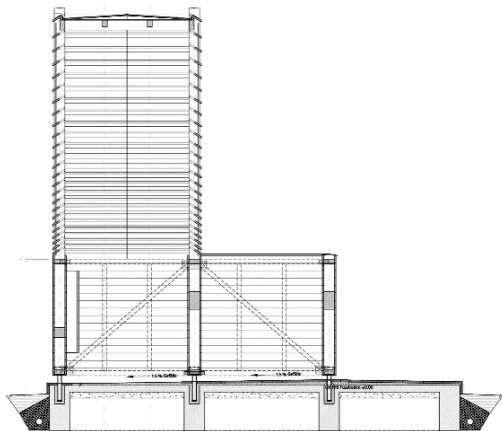
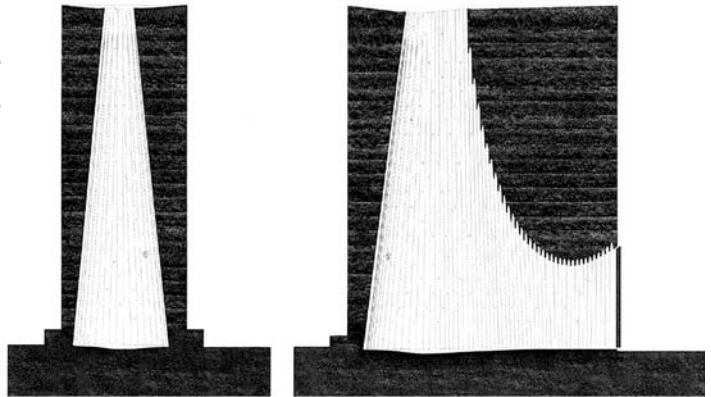
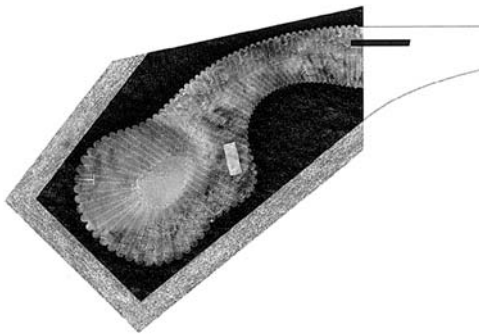
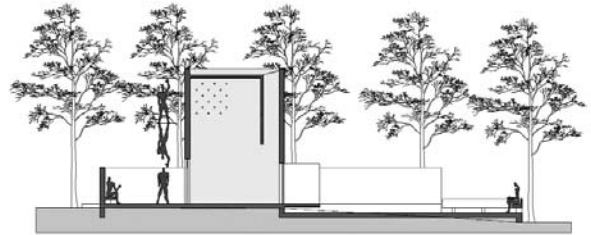
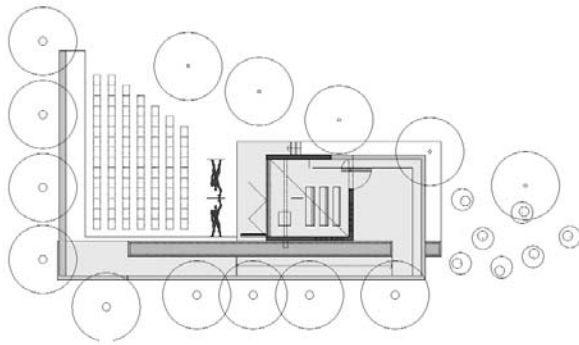


Fig. 05. Nomena Arquitectos + Ximena Alvarez, De la Piedra Chapel, Cieneguilla (Peru), 2009/10.

Fig. 06. Peter Zumthor, Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Wachendorf (Germany), 2007.

Fig. 07. Students of the College of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Field Chapel, Boedigheim (Germany), 2009.

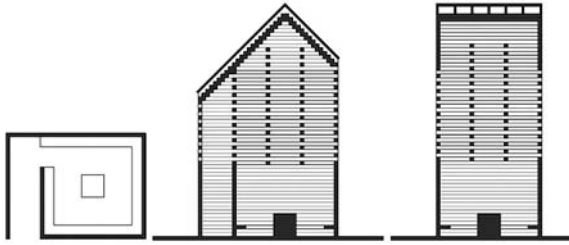


Fig. 08. Tamás Czígány, Forest Chapel, Pannonhalma-Cseidervölgy (Hungary), 2010.

means of several changes of direction leads through space forms which were didactically assigned to it. A stone-bounded part is torn out of the horizontal plain of fields, a platform is raised, stepping on which one can get to a rectangular/cubic atrium enclosed by walls; and when passing on, the sacred space opens up vertically in the end. The spiral of the layout is completed with a series of space, unfolded in the third dimension.

The spiral of the row of spaces appears in a more natural way in case of the *Forest Chapel*, Cseidervölgy, on the ancient sacred hill of Pannonhalma¹³ (Fig. 08). The staff of the architect studio involved students in the construction of the model-like forest chapel that has retreat houses in the neighborhood. The simple, piled-log *altar-mensa* stands in the center of the small congregational space. The timber log wall weaves a space of intimate atmosphere around the community, which space is airily opened by leaving some parts of the elements in the upper third of the wall. The place is covered with a simple pitched roof that goes down onto the small access corridor in the most natural way. The small construction on the edge of the forest can be entered through this narrow part of corridor, which rises high—and thus a spiral emerges from the layout. The geometric orderliness dissolves—the chapel carries naturalness by using wood, but in spite of its planned nature it is aware of its ephemeral role too.

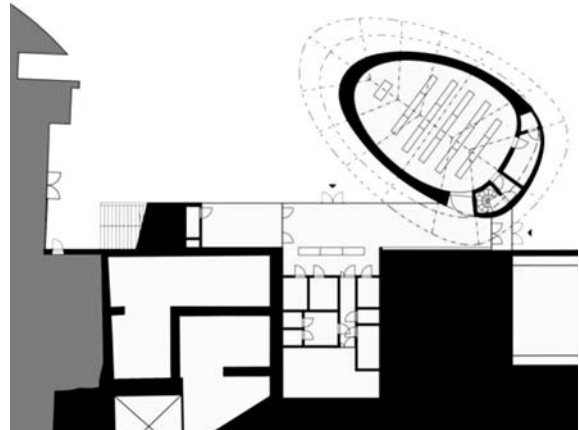


Fig. 09. K2S architects, Kamppi Chapel, Helsinki (Finland), 2008/12.

Temporality gets a completely different meaning in case of a meditative space for contemplation, located in the downtown of Helsinki¹⁴ (Fig. 09). The chapel is placed at the garage ramp of the underground parking lot of the shopping mall and it can be accessed directly from the noisy downtown urban square. The interior design of the small space suggests protecting-sheltering intentions, it tears us out of the noisy urban crowd and forms an almost cozy space. However, at the same time its homogenous use of materials is ethereally clear and cool. The form of the urban chapel, which can be conversed-transferred-demolished at any time due to its position, is not composed with the concept of geometric clarity. Here the configuration does not carry some deeply hidden symbolism—its trendy space, which was created admittedly with a master design, is aware of its ephemeral situation.

After the reality of built spaces, as an interesting suggestion, let's examine some other space ideas too. In recent years, within the courses of Sacral Architecture Studio new student-made model series have been prepared, which are almost about abandoning the space itself. (Fig. 10) These concepts are based on the idea of community formations instead of the formation of space. Building is replaced by the idea of construction. Internal construction. The identification and definition of our own inner spaces. The establishment of groups of

individuals is based on this as well as the renewable Church that is supported by the collaboration of these communities.

CREDITS OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 01. Rudolf Schwarz, *Vom bau der Kirche*, 1938.

Fig. 02. Ferenc Török, *Török Ferenc* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 1996).

Fig. 03, 10. Illustrations of the author.

Fig. 04. www.paanukirkko.fi/english.htm.

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Fig. 07. www.iit.edu/arch/profiles/field_chapel.shtml.

Fig. 08. <http://szakralis.wordpress.com/2011/04/21/pannonhalma-csiedervolgy-kapolna-2010/>.

Fig. 09. www.archdaily.com/252040/.

NOTES

(1) Cf. Esteban Fernández-Cobián, «Arquitectura religiosa contemporánea. El estado de la cuestión – Contemporary religious architecture. The state of art», in Esteban Fernández-Cobián, ed., *Arquitecturas de lo sagrado. Memoria y proyecto* (A Coruña: Netbiblo, 2009), 8-37.

(2) Cf. Albert Gerhards, Thomas Sternberg & Walter Zahner, *Communio-Räume. Auf der Suche nach der angemessenen Raumbgestalt katholischer Liturgie* (Regensburg: Schnell+Steiner, 2003). The reflection of liturgical remodelling the Permanent Chapel at Rothenfels (originally designed by Rudolf Schwarz) is meaningful, see: Walter Zahner, «La construcción de iglesias en Alemania durante los siglos XX y XXI. En busca de una casa para Dios y para el hombre – Church-building in Germany during the 20th and 21st centuries. In search of a house for God and Human», in Fernández-Cobián, *Arquitecturas de lo sagrado*, 38-71.

(3) Cf. Esteban Fernández-Cobián, «Pianta longitudinale vs. pianta centrale: una lettura dalla Spagna», in Giorgio della Longa et al., eds., *Architettura e Liturgia nel Novecento 4. Esperienze europee a confronto* (Venezia: Stella Edizioni, 2006), 15-19.

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(5) Cf. Andrea Longhi & Esteban Fernández-Cobián, «Istentszetelet, liturgikus tér és templomépítészet», *Utóirat – Post Scriptum* 3 (2012): 3-7.

(6) Cf. Stephen Skinner, *Sacred Geometry* (London: Gaia Books, 2006).

(7) Cf. Ferenc Török, *Török Ferenc* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 1996).

(8) Cf. Zorán Vukoszavlyev, «From Idea to Reality», in Juan Pablo Aschner, ed., *Proceedings of UIA2011 TOKYO Academic Program: Research Papers and Design Works* (Tokyo: Japan Institute of Architects, 2011): 478-482.

(9) Cf. «Shingle church project of Kärsämäki parish 1.1.2000 - 31.12.2003», Paanukirkko, www.paanukirkko.fi/english.htm (accessed October 1, 2013).

(10) Cf. «De la Piedra Chapel», *Archdaily*, October 10, 2010, www.archdaily.com/80836/ (accessed Oct 1, 2013).

(11) Cf. «Einsegnung Bruder-Klaus-Feldkapelle», *Bruder Klaus*, May 19, 2007, www.bruderklaus.com/?id=754 (accessed Oct 1, 2013); and «Bruder Klaus Field Chapel / Peter Zumthor», *Archdaily*, Jan 26, 2011, www.archdaily.com/106352/ (accessed October 1, 2013); with personal views: Zorán Vukoszavlyev, «Bruder Klaus kápolna / Peter Zumthor», *Szakrális építészet*, Mar 7, 2007, <http://szakralis.wordpress.com/2007/03/07/zumthor-chapel/> (accessed Oct 1, 2013).

(12) Cf. «Field Chapel, Boedigheim, Germany», IIT College of Architecture, www.iit.edu/arch/profiles/field_chapel.shtml (accessed Oct 1, 2013); and «The Chapel That Is Also a Bridge», *iitmagazine*, Sep 27, 2013, www.iit.edu/magazine/online_exclusive/the_chapel_that_is_also_a_bridge.shtml (accessed Oct 1, 2013); and also: «Field Chapel in Boedigheim / Students of the College of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology», *Archdaily*, Oct 15, 2009, www.archdaily.com/37921/field-chapel-in-boedigheim-students-of-the-college-of-architecture-at-the-illinois-institute-of-technology-ecker-architekten/ (accessed Oct 1, 2013).

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(14) Cf. «Kamppi Chapel / K2S Architects», *Archdaily*, Sep 24, 2012, www.archdaily.com/252040/ (accessed Oct 1, 2013).

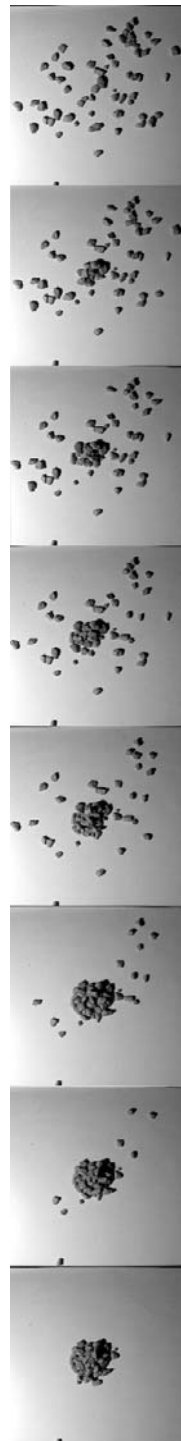


Fig. 10. Tamás Buzássy, Barbara Csillik, Zoltán Nagy, Organic space composition, BUTE Sacral Architecture Studio, Budapest (Hungary), 2012.