
GLOBALIZATION: THE NEW MOOD-CONSCIOUSNESS OF ARCHITECTURE

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Experience of Architecture

The trite and simplistic Modernist slogan “form follows function” tells us more by what is absent than by what is stated: my already understanding architecture and my always-open relation to form as well as function. In its formulation, the most important ingredient is missing—my experience of architecture. Its lack is not in whether it directs us to arrive at right or wrong form but in how it appears to stand on its own without any relation to my “beholding.” What is misconceived in the formulation of this phrase is the structure of my “already understanding” through “mood.”¹ Oblivious to my “always” already understanding, the old conception in the phrase imagined both architecture and ‘I’ as mere objects in an extension of Euclidian space. By extension, much of Modernist architecture, in its disregard of the whole of architecture with the totality of its significations, failed to understand the full complexity and intensity of its experiential dimension. What was extremely meaningful with the potential to globalize our mood had been taken as a meaningless object of use or aesthetic beauty.

Standing Ground

In contrast, **Globalization**, from *globus* “sphere,” is derived from *globti* “to embrace, support.”² This interpretation of *globalization* cannot be viewed as a fixed idea, concept, or belief system. It expands far deeper than any particular marketing plan, economic feasibility, political strategy, or design agenda. Globalization understood this way is a direct consequence of change and articulates any *evolutionary* process that *supports* and *embraces* life itself in its most fundamental way.

Change, from *kamb-* “to bend,” with the sense of “evolution,” is perhaps derived from “to turn.”³ Change understood this way, goes far deeper than what ordinarily meets the eye. This change goes beyond anything we can see, hear, or comprehend in terms of change in shape, color, status, and such. This change always happens on the basis of a *bending*, *turning*, and hence *evolving*.

The traditional concepts of human being, emotions, and experience that take emotions to be something happening inside of us in response to something outside, lack the foresight or framework to support such expanded definitions of *change* and *globalization*. Yet, *globalization* cannot mean anything for us without our experi-

ence of it. Without understanding how change happens and how transformation takes place, we have no concrete way of discussing globalization in architecture. In contrast, this interpretation overcomes all difference at once and understands seemingly opposing ideologies as fluid aspects of a shared world constantly in flux.

Reorientation

The extremely influential German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s highly radical interpretation of human emotions provides us with the very language to discuss *globalization* by way of a “transformation” that takes place in our own experiences. Without this full understanding of our own “experiencing,”⁴ which by way of the evolutionary process of globalization bends, turns, expands, and unifies, architecture would essentially mean nothing to us. For Heidegger, the constant renewal process that belongs to life itself is always necessarily “underway.”⁵ Death and destruction belong to nature. Deconstruction follows nature’s own processes. However, a sustainable approach requires that what gets deconstructed merge back into the ever-changing cycle of life. With that understanding, phenomenology follows a restorative attitude toward nature. This approach to architecture understands the complex web of interrelations of the world as a whole. Interpreted in this way, architecture comes to stand on its own with a full responsibility toward the world in general.

In this essay, we will explore these challenging yet important concepts directly through a descriptive and photographic encounter.⁶ An exceptionally vivid, mood-invoking work of architecture, the Therme Vals by Peter Zumthor, will carry us through our experiencing. Like Juhani Pallasmaa and Norberg-Schulz, Zumthor is among those architects who have been influenced by the insights of phenomenology. The direct influence of Heidegger’s philosophy is apparent in its full understanding of human emotions and our experience of space, which leads us to an expanded definition of **Phenomenology** by way of which we come to understand the new “**Mood-Consciousness**” of architecture.

The Art of Architecture

Peter Zumthor’s project Therme Vals⁷ counteracts the rigid thinking that has characterized architecture of the past, which only responds to the rational utilitarian side of our own self, ignoring the deeper

aspects of our being as well as of architecture. This work, a spa in the Swiss town of Vals, completed in 1996, deeply challenges our ordinary understanding and takes us to an approach to architecture that is based on a full understanding of what it means to be human. This work appreciates all aspects of our being – our rationality and intellect as well as their deeper counterpart, our mood and emotions. It finally takes us to the full experience of being as a whole. The mood of this state of being can be described as being “as effortless as it is beautiful.”⁸



Figure 1. Therme Vals, exterior image (Author)

It is not what you see, hear, or touch, or any other thing in particular, that “works” in this project; rather, it is what happens along the way that gives a new meaning of “art” to the art of architecture.⁹ The full potential of this project does not lie in its technological or aesthetic accomplishments, but in what is made available in attuning your understanding of mood. What is made available is a primordial journey capable of redefining what “work” means in a work of architecture. Only through this new definition of work in

architecture can the full meaning of the art of architecture come to light. Here, a new definition of mood as well as of architecture is encountered anew, not by way of some theoretical articulation, but arising on its own terms. Emotions encountered in this way have the power to change the very meaning of architecture.

Contextual Parameters

Zumthor speaks as though it has “somehow always . . . been there.”¹⁰ Embedded in the gorge is the source of the natural spring water that flows into the open exterior pool. The spring is hidden from view, where the rational structure of the Modernist hotel façade rises in front. Only after a full range of experiences can you finally get a full sense of its overall design. Nothing is given at once. Your long-awaited journey begins in this dark, narrow, and seemingly never-ending corridor before you explode into an astonishing spatial celebration, only to finally be able to reach out into the light of the open atmosphere fully renewed.

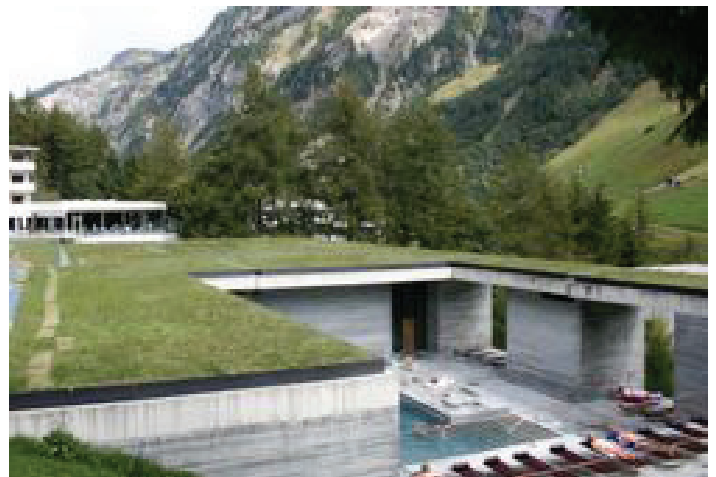


Figure 2. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

Preparatory Attunement

The moment you approach the hidden entry from the side, beneath the concrete driveway, you experience a curious discomfort; your emotions are already warning you of the coming experience of destruction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. In an attunement of mood, an unspoken understanding of death with an endowed meaning of life manifests itself in anxiety. It is too late to go back, as your curiosity builds up every step of the way, which helps you to forget time. Space, however, takes on a new meaning, with the potential for deeper engagement. What begins here as an experience began for Zumthor as a question, when he once wondered: “... can I achieve that as an architect – an atmosphere like that, its intensity, its mood. And if so, how do I go about it?”¹¹

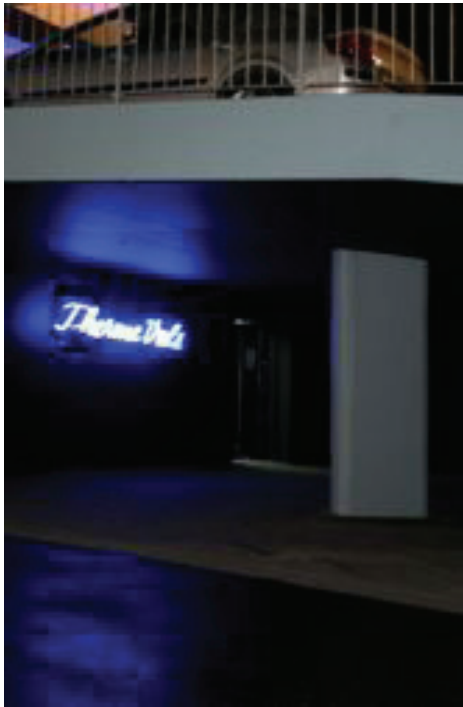


Figure 3. Therme Vals, entrance view (Author).

Curiosity

The cool radiating blue florescent light of the sign's slanted letters on the wall, which read "Therme Vals," make an initial reference, of where we are heading in our very first encounter. Directly ahead, in the front wall, the bold hint of indigo fluorescent letters in the square frame are repeated, but they fail to prepare you for the intensity of the play of light and the fluidity of reflections of the multiple square skylights that await you deep inside.

Reduction of Minimization

Once you approach nearer, the check-in counter, at which you can register and check out the white robes and sandals for yourself, attracts your attention. After a persistent stretch of minimized sensual experience, the soft touch and pure whiteness of the towel robes give a hint of delight to your starved senses.

Involvement

Unlike an ordinary building of a typical traditional spa, which would immediately provide you with a list of typical functions, here your journey begins to unwind, not by engaging you with the multiple events, but by disengaging you from your previous concerns. In its lack of detail, familiarity, warmth, or intimacy, the long narrow corridor in glossy black paint continues to impede any kind of *involvement* as you drift through this dark alley.



Figure 4 & 5. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Evasive Turning Away

In this limiting of possibilities, any variation in movement, form, color, or texture creates heightened levels of awareness through at-tuning and focusing of involvement. This effect is multiplied ten-fold

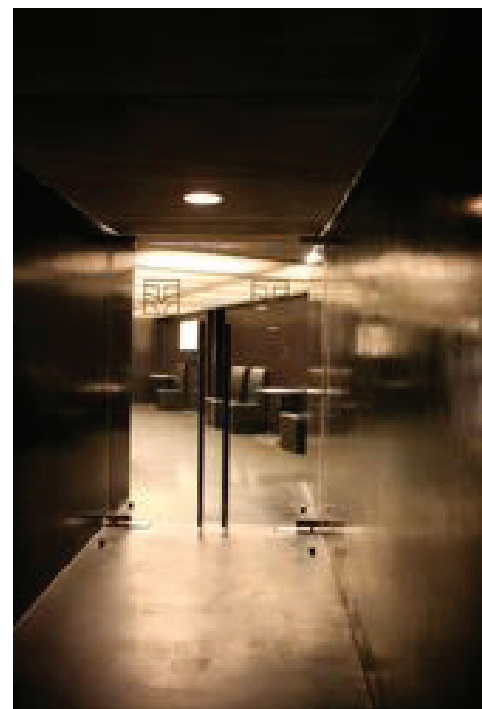


Figure 7. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

when you get to the repetition of vertical order of the dreary drip of the spring water from the embossed reveals on the right. A narrow

channel at their feet carries the meager flow. The only interruption to this line happens at the foot of each mouth of the spring, where the iodized discoloration of the splash of each spill radiates out onto the ground. The rusty deep brown of a series of half circles, facing the wall, fade away toward you and turn into salty white patterns on the gray concrete floor. An uncanny sense of desperation fills the air, only to propel you out when the first possibility arises.

Devaluation of Mood

It is by way of your mood that you have been carried to this lowest possible ground, through a lack of involvement and minimizing character of fear. The anxiety of this devaluation of mood prepares the way out through an attunement of understanding by way of mood when you least expect it.¹² That explosion will act as the very reaction you need for the escape.



Figure 8. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Anxiety of Falling

Against the cold weight of gray concrete wall on the left, wavy fabric curtains in deep Persian blue gently suspend at each changing room opening, offering the possibility of relief. Encased in deep mahogany lockers room offers a warmer alternative. Such a welcoming caress acts as the exact thing to counteract the gloom of “Being that has become manifested as a burden.”¹³ In this *spatial* journey, only *thrownness* prepares the way for alleviating the weight of this *burden*.

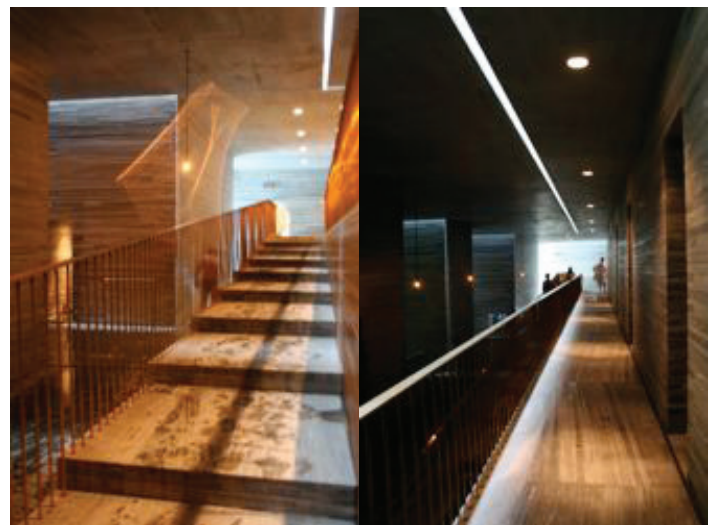
Thrownness and Confusion

This sweet preparatory excursion points to another world with rejuvenating characteristics. Before you can slip into the white towels and sandals that you have been carrying with you, the weight of your previous belongings needs to be stripped away. In the corner opposite the door through which you entered, another wavy blue drape carries an unprecedented antic exuberance. Yet, even though the possibility is limited, you are already preparing your escape.



Figures 9 & 10. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

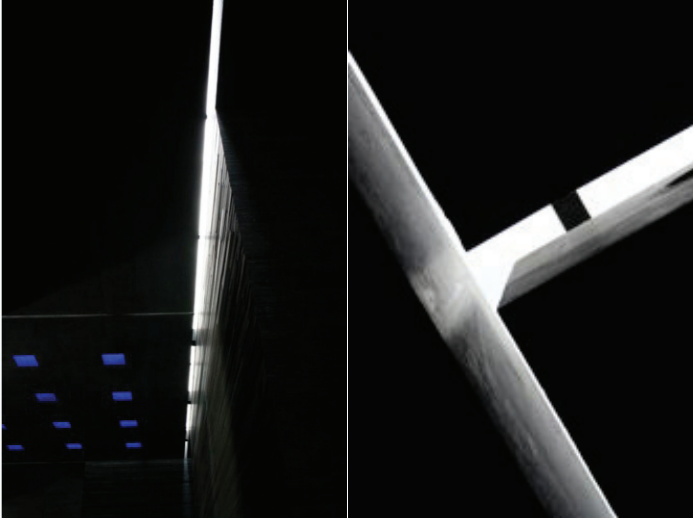
In the first attempt to pull aside the drape, the sudden shock of a *primordial* encounter explodes in light and space. Such instantaneous lightening of spatial character occurs in a single blink of an



Figures 11 & 12. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

eye. What happens may be described as a funneling effect of what is minimized and concentrated, to open into an expanded spatial complexity. In a dramatic breaking apart, a new mood unfolds without warning. Only your attunement in understanding grounds you.

Light of Encounter



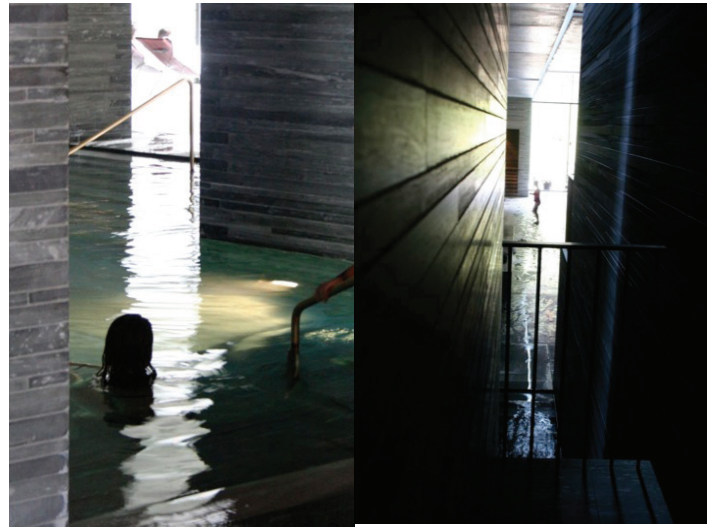
Figures 13 & 14. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Where the ordered row of Roman-style, regularly spaced, punctured changing room openings march behind you, standing on the verge of this generous platform, you cannot but “linger.”¹⁴ In a chaotic explosion of rays against the darker context, the shattered slits of intersecting lines blind in their brilliance. Being in such intoxicating brightness is paralyzing and exhilarating at once.

Attunement of Understanding

You do not reach this state by searching for it in the midst of other places. Even the *possibility* of this new space is made available in your understanding only due to the effect of minimizing and the absence that was created in you during this spatial journey. Such an explosion in time and space that belongs to the work of architecture is encountered by mood. This intoxicating play of light and shadows opens and expands the *experiential dimension* of primal dreams that you never knew you had.

From this platform, a glorious stair, parallel to the platform itself, recalls the original of its type at the ancient site of Persepolis, only to descend toward the circling flow of a central bathing pool, reminiscent of the mysterious Turkish-style bathhouses of the East. Even if Zumthor himself may discount these references, they nevertheless “work” in creating the ambiguity of an other-worldly character that one finds oneself falling into. In *falling*, this *downward plunge* will be found to be most *illuminating* after all.¹⁵



Figures 15 & 16. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

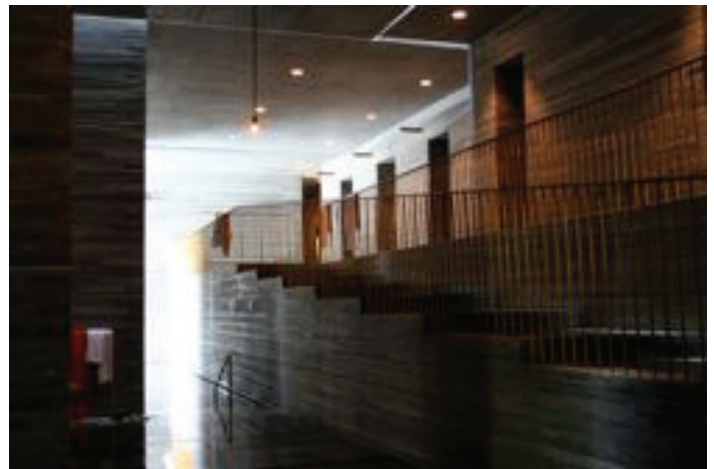


Figure 17. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Extreme Deconstruction

Across from this platform, directly ahead in the open air, your gaze falls into the wondrous pool below, a *preparatory attunement* in your mood. This pool is filled by the same spring water that you encountered earlier dripping down the bare concrete. Yet here, engulfed in its spatial fluidity, you swim in the fantastic *rays* of its *intensity*. In the light of such a spatial explosion, expansion, and opening, there is nothing in the air but a pure phenomenal celebration of emotions.



Figure 18. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Shattered Form and Function

This is where the rigidity of form and function is *shattered* in the brilliance of the contrasting character of extreme dark and light or the cracks between the edges of walls and ceilings. A new language of architecture is born here that instantly collapses all previous definitions of architecture that take it as a mere utilitarian object of shelter for our daily activities, or in terms of aesthetic beauty, or as a technological masterpiece. What sets the standard for evaluation here goes beyond all the traditional stylistic models or idealized theories about

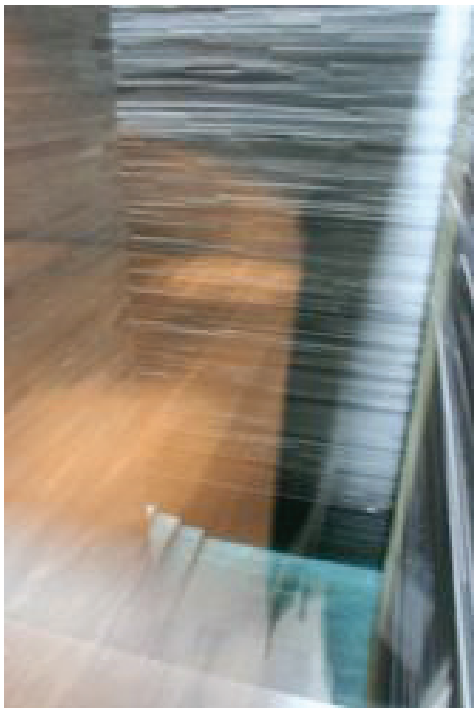


Figure 19. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

form and function. The power of this architecture is understood only in its ability to cut through any *physicality of space* or in its defiance of the presumed *linearity of time*.

Contextualizing Character of Mood



Figure 20. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Without a clear progression to follow, you wander around the central pool, among numerous individualized smaller spaces that provide a series of intimate encounters, each with a different character. Although everything is easily accessible, nothing makes clear sense as it did before. In the absence of certainty, one is lost, circling among the intoxicating spatial characteristics—confusion rules. In being carried on in reminiscence, each experience explodes out of its own time or place.



Figures 21 & 22. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

GLOBALIZATION

The complexity of the archetypal and metaphoric scene and what is encountered here is beyond either belief or explanation. One has to experience it for oneself to understand its immersive and transformative qualities. All this is good only if one is able to pick up the pieces and move on. Nevertheless, all this exists and is made possible only in the phenomenon of our own existence by way of our mood.

Clearing and Opening

Finally, the *clearing and opening* of spatial phenomena is at work, relieving the solidity and predictability of architecture. At last, the direct assertion of the interpreting power of mood will be a definite necessity to take you outside into the light and openness once again.

The only way out that remains is in swimming down and out through the gate. Freedom calls, with the light of clear air and open space preparing you to swim under the suspended chain-link gate for good. This mood carries you through.



Figures 23 & 24. Therme Vals, interior space (Author).

Dematerialization of Materiality

In the midst of earth and sky, emerging out into the evaporating mist and fluidity, line after line of perfectly constructed, lightly knit parallel lines of fragmented walls toss and turn as they dematerialize around you in their own dancing reflections. As one is immersed in the ephemeral character of this fragmented ruin, a new understanding of solidity develops.

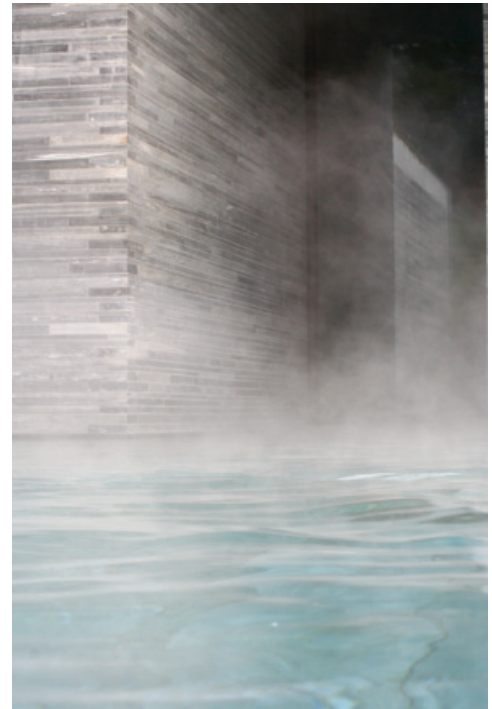


Figure 25. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

Dwelling Free

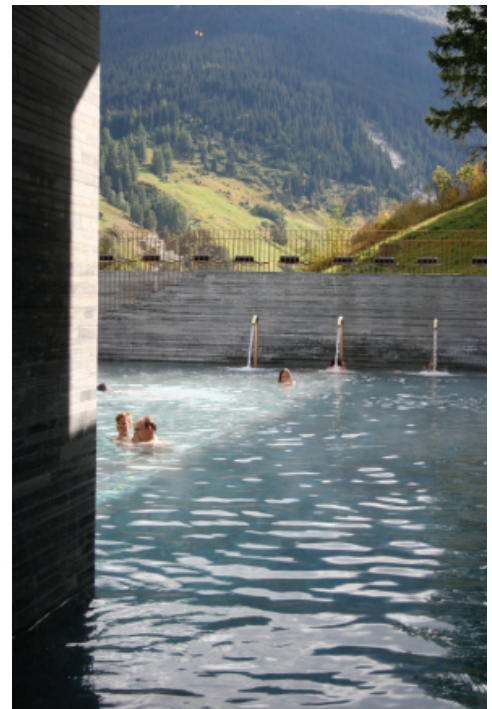


Figure 26. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

Having been immersed in the full range of possibilities of your mood and more, it is not an exaggeration to say that you feel you have died and been born again, fallen into an abyss of fluidity, passed through the primal depth of serenity, and arrived at the “utterly enthralling,” sparkling pinnacle of your existence anew.¹⁶ This state of letting “be” in the “free,” in “sparing and preserving,” is what Heidegger, in his later essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” characterizes in terms of “dwelling.”¹⁷

The difference is clear only because you have been *there* and have experienced how it feels to be emptied out in your emotions as well as the fulfilling power of being entranced. In your mood, you have been carried to this *sparing and preserving* experience, from which the ultimate meaning of pure *health* and *wholeness* or the real experience of *happiness* arises. A new definition of language itself as well as a new language of architectural composition finally comes to light. Architecture experienced in this way sets up a clear contrast with our previous architectural encounters. It is on the basis of this special moment that all of your future interpretations of architecture are going to be *formulated*.

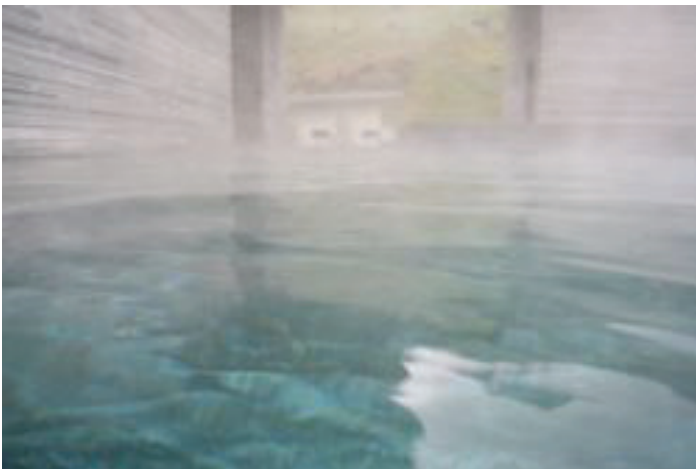


Figure 27. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

Care of Resoluteness

This resolution of time and space happens in the reversal that occurs when all that is constructed in the solidity of stone find itself floating on its own reflection in the fluidity in water. Finally, a renewed understanding of architecture begins to arise, not merely by opening up the experience, but by *careful reversal* of the *spatial temporal dimension of experiencing* architecture. In this careful composition, through decomposition and re-composition, a total experience of health is endowed in the healing of the phenomenon of *being* in general. In this state of contentment, floating in water without being projected away

or toward anything, finally our *burden of being is lifted*. In our full openness to the atmosphere, wholeness characterizes this state of our Being. Who wants to be anywhere else or do anything else? This experience is *complete in itself*. It is precisely this very state that Heidegger highlights in discussing language:

“We would like only for once, to get just where we are already.”¹⁸

In the *historical* event of simply being *there* in the absence of desiring anything else, being contained in this equilibrium by way its own mood, we simply understand the full meaning of being. Intelligence or morality can only exist in light of this experience of our own self that is open to the world in a state of pure care rather than being held back by worries or concerns. This care is the *authentic spatiality of temporality* expressed in architecture. Here, our renewed attunement of understanding *embraces* its full meaning in its being *free*.



Figure 28. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

New Interpretation of Architecture

Finally, here, the extreme instability in all that belongs to *ethos and pathos, rational and emotional, material and immaterial, solid and void, rigid and fluid, visible and invisible, tangible and intangible* in architecture finds the *groundless* ground of their mediating equation. There is no doubt that architecture fulfills its “primal mission” when all that once appeared to have a resemblance to *clear or distinct*¹⁹ is shattered, to float in the pool of light and the full shimmer of its expanded horizon of experiencing. Here, against the absolute Swiss precision, a set of the most fluid primal encounters shatters yet carefully sustains our experience while changing the essential mood of everything. Nothing needs to make sense anymore. Architecture, interpreted in this way, allows any “building” to find its new meaning in “dwelling”²⁰ on the ephemeral edge between *rationalism* and what Heidegger refers to as its crazy “counterplay” of *“irrationalizim.”*²¹



Figure 29. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

Beyond Elation

This is where the call of *authenticity* has been aiming all along. In the perfect balance between *earth and sky*, without needing the support of thought, free in the flow of mood, you experience the familiar equalizing balance of this most common ground. After a century of constant struggle, architecture finally finds the contextualizing character of *groundlessness* as the new ground for its situatedness. Heidegger's challenge was to show us the problem of sciences is in the limitation of all that can be seen or come to "presence." As we discovered, the most essential characteristics that define life's most powerful and illuminating moments are beyond perception, beyond cognition, and therefore beyond measurement. Naturally, this means that *human condition* may not be imagined as a very assuring place to give us peace of mind through the security that it provides for us. Yet, like the stone platform anchored gently on one side, letting go of this need to rely on something solid turns out to be life's most important lesson after all.

After having encountered various possibilities of architecture, in our attunement of understanding of mood, greater levels of *sensitivity* develop in experiencing: any clearing of space, brightness of light, fluidity of water, or texture of stone begins to have greater impact on contextualizing character of our experience. *Globalization* has been at work to finally unfold a new language of architecture that unifies and supports our being in the context of this new attitude that has let go of the need to be secure. With the new understanding of being free develops a more accurate understanding of self and the world that gives rise to a whole new meaning of *Mood-Consciousness* in architecture.²²

Even though Heidegger himself never used Jean Paul Sartre's term "consciousness," due to its cognitive resonance at that time, I nonetheless feel that, after clarifying mood to the extent that there is no

mistake of taking it as a cognitive phenomenon, we are now in a position to introduce its rightful place in understanding mood. The process or the "work" that takes place here characterizes the new definition of *Globalization*. In light of these new *deconsiderations* and *reconsiderations*, I feel confident at this point in suggesting the *Mood-Consciousness of Architecture* as the *ultimate potentiality* of architecture in its full *attunement of understanding of mood*.

Architecture understood in this way belongs to the *contextualizing* character of *situatedness* by way of the *globalizing power of mood*, with *change* as its essential *transformative vehicle*. On basis of this, we always have an understanding of our experience of architecture. Through our feelings and affectivity in every moment our emotions give us the mediating character of our constantly changing, constantly transforming *character of Mood*.

New Mood of Architecture

Having *let go* of the fear of the reductive state of minimization as well as thrownness in desire of the mood of elation, our old definitions of time and space lose their meaning. For Heidegger, only "ecstasy"²³ defines the characteristic of this state of limbo in which your attunement and understanding merge in the completeness of this experience in mood.



Figure 30. Therme Vals, exterior pool (Author).

Here, by its *globalizing potentiality*, Therme Vals "works" as an exemplary work of architecture: clearing the way of our preconceptions and opening the way for what we can now understand as *Mood-Consciousness* of architecture, through which architecture has the power to overcome all difference, transform itself, and celebrate humanity on its own accord.

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- 7 Therme Vals website can be accessed through the following address: <http://www.therme-vals.ch/>
Therme Baths at Vals Switzerland, Peter Zumthor Therme Vals description, drawings, and additional photographs are available in Scribd at the following web address: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/31384347/Therme-Vals-by-P-Zumthor-Conceptual-Approach>
- 8 "The Pritzker Architecture Prize," Whitehouse, accessed July 30, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/06/02/pritzker-architecture-prize>.
- 9 Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1889-1976), 15-89.
- 10 Sigrid Hauser and Peter Zumthor. *Peter Zumthor therme Vals*. (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2007), 23.
- 11 Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: architectural environments, surrounding objects*. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), 19.
- 12 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 175.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Homa Fardjadi and Mohsen Mostafavi. *Delayed space: work of Homa Fardjadi and Mohsen Mostafavi*, 8-12.
- 15 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 223.
- 16 Hauser and Zumthor, *Peter Zumthor therme Vals*, 27.
- 17 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 143-161.
- 18 Ibid., 190.
- 19 Nolan, Lawrence, "Descartes' Ontological Argument" at "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy" in <http://plato.stanford.edu>, accessed July 31, 2011, available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-ontological/>.
- 20 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 143-147.
- 21 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 175.
- 22 Afsaneh Ardehali. "Mood-Consciousness and Architecture: A Phenomenological Investigation of Therme Vals by way of Martin Heidegger's Interpretation of Mood"; (MS Arch., University of Cincinnati, 2011).
- 23 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 329-365.

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Figures 1-30

(All the visual images in this work are photographs of Therme Vals in Vals, Switzerland, designed by Peter Zumthor. I took these photographs during a research trip to this particular project in September 2009).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 168-224.
- 2 "The Online Etymology Dictionary," last modified May 22, 2012, <http://www.etymonline.com/>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Eugene T. Gendlin, "Befindlichkeit: Heidegger and the Philosophy of Psychology," Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry: Heidegger and Psychology XVI (1978-79) in [focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org), accessed Sept 3, 2009, available at: http://www.focusing.org/gendlin_befindlichkeit.html.
- 5 Martin Heidegger. *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The way to Language (1964)*. Rev. and expanded ed. Translated by David Farrell Krell. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 397.
- 6 All the visual images in this work are photographs of Therme Vals in Vals, Switzerland, designed by Peter Zumthor. I took these photographs during a research trip to this particular project in September 2009. For me, these photographs capture the mood of this magnificent work of architecture that I encountered when I went there myself. My trip was sponsored by a Faculty Development Grant from the University of Cincinnati.