

The term *potent space* was introduced to me by the instructor of my final studio project at Iowa State University—a built folly in a meadow called *Field Chapel*—which was the result of a joint independent studio with a classmate. The project was derived from a question that framed our inquiry that semester: When a work of architecture is devoid of program, how can we measure the success of the built work? The answer lies in the work’s ability to trigger haptic, olfactory, auditory, and visual responses that elicit feelings and thoughts indicative of an altogether positive experience.

Potency is closely related to beauty, but it is not so trivial as Vitruvius’ delight. Ornate details and geometric proportions do not determine a space’s potency. Potent spaces have a material presence, highly refined details and a historical, natural, and spatial context. When we design potent spaces, we seek to move the users of the space on both an emotional and intellectual level. Potent spaces are not generally propagandistic or loud, they speak a far more subtle language. They do not challenge us to dissect the architecture; they invite us to discover it.

As the son of two architects in suburban Chicago, I have been exposed to world-class art and architecture for much of my life. Though buildings never interested me much as a child, drawing and art has fascinated me since I was able to hold a crayon. Putting pencil to paper, drawing my surroundings entertained me for hours on end and forced me to look see them with more scrutiny. At the time, it was lost on me how special our biannual treks into the city to visit the Art Institute of Chicago were, but in hindsight those trips to see Grant Wood, Hopper, Picasso & co. provided me with an almost endless supply of inspiration. Although I was well rounded academically—I was two years accelerated in math, enrolled in honors and advanced placement courses, and a competitive soccer player outside of school—art class was my arena. Honing my skills in drawing allowed me to form an identity unique from my twin brother.

Growing up in a predominantly white, middle class town made me appreciate the unique cultural traits of my family. My grandmother, a Japanese immigrant, imparted a world of traditions to my siblings and me and taught us all to value those cultural differences. I’ve been fortunate enough to travel extensively, including a trip to Japan to visit my brother and view Tadao Ando’s work at Naoshima, as well as Katsura and Shugakuin Imperial Villas, among other fine examples of Japanese architecture. My semester-long study in Rome was equally rewarding. In addition to knowing intimately many Roman works of art and architecture, my travels throughout Europe allowed me to visit works by Carlo Scarpa and Peter Zumthor, which I won’t soon forget.

I have known for several years that I would someday return to graduate school following a period of working professionally. Since 2010, I have been focused solely on the discipline of architecture, my primary concern has been gaining experience of a professional design process and learning the technical knowledge of building construction. In choosing not to gain credentials or build a business, I have been able to divorce the political nature of practice from these, perhaps more pure, architectural concerns. I wish to know architecture. I

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Comment [BH1]: Chicago Manual of Style okays the use of italics for emphasis in 7.47: “Use italics for emphasis only as an occasional adjunct to efficient sentence structure.” You’ve done that here.

However, according to chicagomanualofstyle.org’s Q&A section, “Chicago style discourages the use of italics for emphasis ...” If you intended this as emphasis (I also see that you may be using italics here to link this term to *potent space*, defined above. If this is the case, I say leave it as-is.), I would argue that having the word “potency” beginning the paragraph is enough to alright indicate this word’s importance.

One other note—you may want to consider whether or not this is necessary to italicize in order to indicate that you are defining “potency.” I would argue again that italics are unnecessary due to the construction of the sentence.

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Comment [BH2]: Corrected for parallel structure.

Comment [BH3]: Added extra space for emphasis. Decide how you would like this to look, and correct as necessary. There should, however, be a blank line between paragraphs.

Comment [BH4]: Consider “Though buildings rarely interested me as a child, ...”

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Comment [BH5]: Consider the structure of this ... [1]

Comment [BH6]: Hyphen added to alleviate ambiguity.

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Comment [BH7]: This is a nonrestrictive clause ... [2]

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Comment [BH8]: See discussion in comment 1.

wish to *teach* architecture. And, through my advanced studies, I hope to *test* my ideas for a better kind of architecture.

In my own way I am working towards a comprehensive theory of aesthetics and experience. I do not expect to “solve” this problem in a two-year Master’s course, but I hope to pursue these ideas under the direction of [REDACTED]’s extraordinary faculty. I believe the rotating cast of guest instructors, like Kersten Geers and other esteemed architects, are well suited to advise me. Finally, I believe the resources and facilities on campus, especially the incredible buildings by Lou Kahn and Paul Rudolph, can provide me with an informal education that harmoniously augments my own line of inquiry. It would be a privilege to continue my studies at the [REDACTED].

Comment [BH9]: Keep italics here.

Comment [BH10]: See discussion in comment 1. Here, the emphasis comes across as heavy-handed. Parallel structure might argue you keep the italics here, but I would say, again, that the emphasis here comes with the sentence’s position in the paragraph.

Comment [BH11]: Quotation marks, such as these are being used, are discouraged in academic writing (according to CMS). I would recommend rewriting this sentence to avoid the egotistical interpretation that you would ever “solve” this problem. It seems to me that that is what you are hinting at anyways, so I would suggest being your (much more true) humble self and addressing the problem as a life-long endeavor to which you’ve devoted your work.

Comment [BH12]: See comment 13.

Comment [BH13]: For consistency’s sake, use either “The [REDACTED]” throughout or simply “[REDACTED]”

Consider the structure of this paragraph. This sentence hangs at the end of the paragraph without prior knowledge of your relationship with your brother. You might either eliminate it entirely or choose to elaborate on the importance (to you) of establishing an identity separate from your brother while framing it around your growth as an architect. Personally, I like the connection to building your identity, but you may want to move this to a position earlier in the paragraph and write a new concluding sentence that solidifies/ties together the thoughts represented in this paragraph as a whole.

This is a nonrestrictive clause requiring the use of "which" instead of "that."