

Right
Louis I. Kahn, Richards
Medical Research
Laboratories, University
of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia, Pa. 1957 – 60,
south façade ca. 1959



to express that which is worth expressing, that which has grown to be a distinct characteristic. When one is characteristically different from another, I don't want to make a homogenous mixture of the two. I want to bring out the difference. But I care very little if one pipe goes east and the other goes west. I don't want to make a special characteristic out of pipes, because I know that mechanical things are the first things that are going to be changed or altered; but the space you live in must be alive for a very long time. The space is a new landscape, which is to last as long as the material lasts. But the spaces which are serving it are made to change. Their position must be very general and they must be big enough for change and addition to take place. This is truly the nature of architecture. It is not giving service an individual shape.'

(Wurman, 1986, p.205)

This division into served and servant spaces was seen by Kahn as the present-day and relevant order of architecture:

‘The space order concept must extend beyond the harboring of the mechanical services to include the “servant spaces” adjoining the spaces served. This will give meaningful form to the hierarchy of spaces. Long ago they built with solid stones. Today we must build with “hollow stones” ’

(Latour, 1991, p.80)

There is, though, another and different reading of the Richards Medical towers. Kahn travelled widely in Europe and the Middle East at different times. His travel sketches record his impressions (Johnson and Lewis, 1996). Many of these depict massive vertical forms; the solidity of the form and its relation to light are the most recurrent theme. It is evident in the watercolour of the towers in San Gimignano of 1928, in the drawing of the hypostyle hall at the Temple of Amon in Karnak of 1951, the pen and ink drawing of Carcassonne of 1959, or of the cathedral in Albi from the same year. This preoccupation with columnar forms in light and shade is already evident in one of his earliest illustrations, that of the main portico of the Palace of Liberal Arts at the Sesquicentennial International Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1926.

The influence of these buildings, Kahn claimed, was indirect. In a conversation in 1971 he put it like this:

‘How do you integrate sites in Italy such as Siena or Carcassonne into your architecture?’

‘I have not integrated.

‘That’s the point that is missed in the statements that I’ve made. People don’t understand what I’ve said.

I respect Carcassonne – not because it’s the only example. I haven’t scurried around the world and picked on one thing and said: *Carcassonne*! I come upon things all the time which are new to me, which were there all the time.