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# Architecture as the Psyche of a Culture

John Hendrix

Architecture can be seen as the psyche, or collective mind, in spatial and structural form, of a culture. Until the invention of the printing press, architecture was the primary means of the expression and communication of the ideas, values, and beliefs of a culture. There are important ways in which architecture is still capable of more completely communicating the human condition than the printed word. It is essential that architects not lose sight of the potentials for architecture to communicate and represent the human psyche and the human condition, and not stop developing the potentials for architecture to play those roles. Human beings have examined and explored what it is to be human since the beginning of civilization, through the mechanisms of tropic language in written and visual expression, in the condition of the self-consciousness of reason. The self-consciousness of reason and rhetorical expression define the human condition, and should therefore define architecture as poetic or artistic expression, as the manifestation of the psyche. In that architecture is a product of collaboration, and has a functional requirement, it is the most complete expression of the collective psyche of a culture, and the relation between the psyche and the functional, physical requirements of a human being in life, and the operational requirements of a culture. The relation between the mind and the material world is as old as philosophy, as in the relation between the *nous poietikos*, creative intelligence, and the *nous hylikos*, material intellect, of Aristotle.

Before the invention of the printing press, all important architecture engaged that relationship. There is no reason why it should not continue to do so, as architecture is capable of expressing that relationship regardless of its materials or means of material production. Form follows function in that the principal function of architecture is the poetic expression of the human spirit. Such an expression is achieved through the use of linguistic models, such as the elements of rhetorical language or the laws of structural linguistics; mod-

els from philosophy, such as the structuring of the intellect, the dialectical method, or negative dialectics; and models from psychoanalysis, such as the structure of the psyche, and the relation between the individual ego and the cultural matrix of language which Lacan calls the Other, or the unconscious.

In the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Fine Art* (or the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*), delivered in 1818, Hegel described the task of architecture as “shaping external inorganic nature that it becomes homogeneous with mind.” Architecture is the first step toward the realization of the identity between the organic and inorganic, that is, Spirit or *Geist*. Architecture overcomes the duality between mind and nature, and purifies and coordinates the external world through mathematics and geometry. But because the forms of architecture are inorganic, and can only imitate the organic, they are symbolic, and cannot achieve an identity between the organic and inorganic, between the universal and particular, in the way that other artforms, and philosophy, can. Spirit cannot be contained in the material forms of architecture, and idea and form remain distinct, and can only be related abstractly.

In lectures delivered in Jena in 1802, collected in *The Philosophy of Art*, Schelling also described the forms of architecture as inorganic, and constructed according to geometry and mathematics, which make the forms schematic, and allow them to symbolize the particular through the universal. Only organic form, not architectural, can express Spirit, as the expression of the Idea. Reason is only indirectly related to the inorganic, and thus to architecture; it is only mediated through the schema or concept. In order to be an art of the Spirit, architecture must be in identity with reason, without mediation. Only in the organic are form and concept identical, the subjective and the objective. Architecture can symbolize Spirit only when it becomes independent of function as a mechanical art. It must become independent of itself, and an imitation of itself. Architecture can only be an idea or an allegory of the organic. The only way that architecture can achieve an identity of the particular in form and the universal in Idea, an identity between subjective and objective, is when it imitates its own requirements of necessity, satisfying necessity and being independent of it at the same time.

Communication in architecture depends on the sequential development from schematic representation, as in signification in language, to the allegorical, the placing of the schematic representation in a narrative, and then to the symbolic, the reading of architecture as concept divorced from physical presence. According to Hegel, mind becomes alienated from itself in self-consciousness, and physical sensation and concept (or the Imaginary and

symbolic of Lacan) become separated in mind. The symbolic is the self-realization of the artificial construction of meaning.

The crisis of the symbolic is the manifestation of self-consciousness in spirit, or the synthesis of concept and physical sensation, ideal and real. Reason can only perceive itself indirectly in nature in the inorganic forms of architecture. Architecture stages the problematic relation between reason and nature, the inability of mind to perceive itself in matter, and architectural forms are the product of the struggle between mind and its self-perception in nature. Architecture can only represent through the mediation of the concept. Architecture cannot achieve the synthesis of the subjective and objective in form; architectural form always displays the incompatibility of the concept and the physical sensation within reason, to which it is bound. Architecture depends on its identity with reason in the realm of the concept, and thus of the existence of the physical sensation within the concept. According to Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln in the thirteenth century, the *species apprehensibilis*, intelligible form, or form understood as concept, was necessary for the *species sensibilis*, sensible form or *eidos*, to be perceived.

Architecture can never be completely independent of the material, of necessity and cause and effect, thus architecture achieves its communicative potential when it becomes a free imitation of itself. Architecture achieves freedom in mind in the same way that mind attains freedom: architecture becomes conscious of itself, and it becomes alienated from itself in its doubling of itself, its self-recognition as other to itself. In such a way architecture mirrors the activity of mind in self-consciousness; it enacts the process of reason in imagination and understanding, and in that way is identical to reason itself, and can thus represent the synthesis of the organic and inorganic within the concept. Architecture imitates itself as physical sensation imitates itself in concept, as the *species apprehensibilis*, or the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of Freud, the dream image which imitates the perceived image which imitates the perceived object. In architecture the laws of necessity and cause and effect imitate themselves in reason.

All art is the objective representation of the identity between the subjective and the objective, between the universal and the particular, in the object. Architecture achieves the representation of the universal by representing that which is other to itself within its form, in the discontinuity between the subjective and the objective, while other forms of art are able to represent the continuity of the subjective and objective as far as it is possible in the material, as given by reason in perception. As art, architecture must present the

possibility of the precedence of the inorganic to the organic. As thought is a process of abstraction, the universal derived from the particular in the schematic, as given in language, then thought entails a return to the inorganic which precedes the organic. It is necessary for architecture to present the organic as the result of the inorganic in order for architecture to appear to reason as reason, as the synthesis of the subjective and objective, in the real or physical sensation. Architecture cannot represent reason alone in the organic because architectural forms cannot escape their necessity in matter, except as imitations of that necessity. The representation of reason in architecture requires both the organic and inorganic, that which precedes necessity in logic in reason in the material, that is, the *nous hylikos*. The precedent is being-in-itself, unconscious being which precedes conscious being, which could be found in the *nous poietikos* of Aristotle.

Architecture contains a representation of the relation between the organic and the inorganic, between reason in physical sensation and the absence of reason in physical sensation, between belonging in the world and alienation from it. In architecture the organic can only be represented as preformed within the inorganic, belonging in the world as preformed within the alienation of reason from the world. As the human being builds a place for himself or herself in the world, he or she constructs the incompatibility between himself or herself and the world. In order for the organic to be present in architecture, in order for belonging in the world to be present, for reason to recognize itself in physical sensation in the identity of the subjective and objective in architecture, the organic must be represented by the inorganic allegorically. The inorganic forms of architecture must signify the organic, must suggest their opposite or their other, the presence of reason in physical sensation, as linguistic tropisms, and organize them in a temporal progression to represent the process of thought, so that thought can see itself in physical sensation, in the inorganic, geometrical and mathematical, forms of architecture, from which it is *a priori* absent. Architecture is necessarily allegorical; it necessarily represents that which it is not.

The symbolic in language functions as a product of the inability of reason to see itself as itself in physical sensation or perception outside of its relation to that which it perceives. It is a product of the thrownness of reason from itself and from perception in self-consciousness, thus the symbolic becomes an instrument for the return of reason to itself. The same can be said for the allegorical, which is the narrativization of the symbolic. In architecture the organic form is only presented as an idea, as representation or imitation of

itself, the representation of the perception within the concept. The organic is not present in architecture outside the framework of the inorganic, outside the framework of the inorganic as allegory of the organic, thus outside the framework of language. The symbolic is only given in architecture as a product of language. The symbolic in architecture is the being-for-self of consciousness, a product of mind seeing itself as other, and attempting to return to itself. The symbolic in architecture signifies the self-alienation of mind in consciousness, and the inability of reason to see itself in that which it perceives, as enacted in the Lacanian Gaze, that which is exterior to perception in vision. In that the symbolic in architectural form is a function of language, language itself is a symbolic mediation between perception and concept in the impossibility of reason to identify itself in perception. Language is an allegorical construct of thought in imitation of physical sensation in thought, as in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.

In the definition of the schematic in the *Critique of Judgment* (§51) of Kant, “In schematic hypostasis (or exhibition) there is a concept that the understanding has formed, and the intuition corresponding to it is given a priori. In symbolic hypostasis there is a concept which only reason can think and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate....Schemata contain direct, symbols indirect, exhibitions of the concept. Schematic exhibition is demonstrative. Symbolic exhibition uses an analogy (for which we use empirical intuitions as well), in which judgment performs a double function: it applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition; and then it applies the mere rule by which it reflects on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the former object is only the symbol...” The double function of judgment in the symbolic is as the imitation of the organic of itself in the inorganic in architecture. Symbolic mediation is the product of the doubling of thought in the consciousness of its other. In the schematic, in signification, the perception of thought is a function of its return to itself, in its rediscovery of itself as prior to consciousness, prior to symbolic mediation. In Structural Linguistics, language is seen as systematized signification, where in fact language is not possible without the mediation of the symbolic as the doubling of thought of itself, as the organic imitates itself in the inorganic in architectural forms.

Thought in language cannot overcome its alienation from physical sensation in its being-for-self, in the necessity of symbolic mediation; it is only in signification that the possibility exists for an identity between reason and what is perceived, and such an identity is only found in the organic, which is

impossible in architecture. Architecture is thus the expression of the most self-alienated form of reason in mind, which is why, in a certain respect, it is the most representative of the human condition. According to Schelling in *The Philosophy of Art* (§39), the symbolic facilitates the representation of the identity of the universal and particular within the particular, or the identity of the concept and physical sensation in perception. The symbolic, the mediation between perception and concept, Imaginary and Symbolic of Lacan, can be seen as a “synthesis of two opposing modes, the schematic and the allegorical...” The schematic is that form of representation in which the particular is understood through the universal. The allegorical is that form of representation in which the universal is understood through the particular.

The schema is the means by which the concept or the idea becomes a particular form or image in architecture, the means by which particular forms are chosen and arranged in relation to the universal, so that they contain an identity of the particular and universal. Mathematical and geometrical structures are schemas which are translated into architectural forms; if the arrangement of architectural forms corresponds to a mathematical or geometrical structure, then the particular forms are understood through the universal concept. According to Schelling, Kant defined the schema in the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the “sensually intuited rule for the production of an object.” The schematic transition between idea and form in architecture has a linguistic basis. Language is “nothing more than perpetual schematization.” In language, “we make use of merely universal designations even for the designation of the particular.”

Schematization is the correlate of signification in language, in which a word with no particular relation to that which it designates substitutes for that which is designated, the basis of communication for Lacan. The idea substitutes for the object, and, in architectural terms, the inorganic imitates the organic. In the schematic the idea becomes a parody of the physical sensation; the idea assumes a life of its own, in imitation of the physical sensation, in order to describe the physical sensation, with which it has lost an identity through the intervention of the schematic or the signifying in language. The schematic in language and thought is at the core of architectural production, because the organization of architectural forms always corresponds to an idea or a concept, and thus always represents the presence of the universal within the particular.

The allegory is seen as the reverse of the schema. Like the schema, allegory contains the identity of the universal and particular, but in allegory the

universal is understood through the particular, while in the schematic the particular is understood through the universal. In allegory the particular signifies the universal without being the universal. All language is allegorical in signification, because a particular word in language has no universal quality in and of itself; its universal quality is only given to it by the idea or concept which is applied to it, as in the transformational grammar of Structural Linguistics, or the *point de capiton* of Lacan, the point at which the association is made between a signifier and a signified, only through retroactive anticipation, in the *glissement* or sliding of signifiers and signifieds.

The schematic and the allegorical represent the two directions of transference between concept and physical sensation, mind and matter. The schematic is the transition in signification from the mind to matter, and the allegorical is the transition in signification from matter to mind. All concepts in mind, and all particular forms of matter, are seen within the framework of the schematic and the allegorical. Such a framework can serve as a compositional tool in architecture, particularly in the arrangement of forms schematically, in the concept, to the end of representing the universal in the particular, and the arrangement of forms allegorically, in the material, to the end of representing the particular in the universal. The allegorical content of an architectural composition allows the particular forms of the architecture to participate in the universal, as individual expression, in the same way that language in individual expression participates in the universal through allegory. Allegory in language is defined as the narrativization of the symbolic, thus allegory in architecture would involve the introduction of the temporal element of language into the spatial relationships of architecture.

Linguistic transformations as enacted in architecture are devices for the self-perception of reason in perception in consciousness; the product of the devices is the doubling of reason in consciousness, its becoming being-for-self, the self-perception of reason as other to itself and its self-alienation from itself. In that architectural representation is limited to the allegorical and schematic, or the symbolic as the combination of the two, it displays the self-alienation of reason from itself at the point of self-recognition in its other, which is that in mind which is given by the symbolic. Architecture is the art of the self-alienation of reason, the representation of the thrownness of reason from being, in the process of reason attempting to return to itself, but not being able to overcome the symbolic mediation, as given by the inorganic forms of architecture, which can only imitate the organic.



Allegory was described by Fredric Jameson (in "From Metaphor to Allegory," in *Anything*, ed. Cynthia Davidson, 2001, p. 27) as "a structure that designates difficulties, if not outright impossibilities, in meaning and representation, and also designates its own peculiar structure as a failure to mean and to represent in the conventional way." Allegory is a product of a crisis in representation, as the expression of the crisis of reason in its self-alienation. As a narrative process, allegory stages the crisis of representation as a dialectical struggle between the concept and the physical sensation. Jameson explains that "Allegory is a narrative process precisely because it needs to tell the narrative of the solution to its representational dilemma." Further, "in allegory the crisis of representation and of meaning is conceived precisely as a dramatic situation that the allegorist is called upon to resolve in some way. The narrative here is thus very often a dialectical one: the crisis embodies a contradiction, which is articulated as a binary opposition, and the allegorical narrative will consist in the attempt to overcome this opposition in one way or another, which obviously does not always have to involve a synthesis between the two allegedly irreconcilable terms."

Allegorical representation itself is the product of the struggle of reason in relation to perception in self-consciousness. It is the drama unfolding in processes of perception, in language and architectural forms, of the struggle between reason and non-reason in the concept. Architecture, as an allegorical art, stages this crisis of representation, in its limitation to the symbolic. The drama of architecture is the drama of the crisis of representation in the symbolic, reason struggling with itself in its relation to sensation, and in its self-alienation in self-consciousness, which precludes the possibility of a resolution in the framework of symbolic representation.

As Jameson puts it, "If the allegorical is attractive for the present day and age it is because it models a relationship of breaks, gaps, discontinuities, and inner distances and incommensurabilities of all kinds. It can therefore better serve as a figure for the incommensurability of the world today than the ideal of the symbol, which serves to designate some impossible unity" (p. 25). A complete allegorical representation in architecture would involve the mechanisms of the allegory itself in relation to reason, in order to stage the crisis of reason in the crisis of representation. The inorganic imitation of organic forms in architecture represents no crisis in representation, but rather celebrates representation in imitation, and preserves the perception of the identity of mind and matter in matter, the belonging of reason in the world.

Architecture at the beginning of the twenty-first century requires a more thorough development of its capacity for allegorical representation if it is to continue to expand as a form of human expression. Allegorical representation in architecture requires the symbolic enactment of the relation between mind and nature, between reason and that which it perceives. Architectural compositions are capable of enacting allegories of perception, linguistic structures, conceptual structures in logic, philosophical and theological structures, social relations, ethical and moral values, and dramatic and performative structures. All of these conceptual structures can be translated into particular forms through schematic devices, enacted in architectural materials and compositions, and then read as allegories in the transference of the particular back to the universal, in the two-way transference between the schematic and allegorical and the universal and particular which defines artistic expression in the enactment of the dialectical struggle between reason and that which reason perceives in sensation, between reason and its self-alienation from itself in self-consciousness, and between reason and the absence of reason which it perceives in matter. Philosophy and psychoanalysis can be applied to architecture for the purpose of designing strategies for composition and expression, for the purpose of continuing to express the human condition in the twenty-first century.

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