


*The Architectural Symbol
the creative manifestation
by one
for all
of an understanding
an acceptance
of that which we know
of that which we don't
of that which we must strive to know
and of that which we may never know.*

 ur present architectural situation is one characterized by an ongoing polemical discourse, set amongst a number of ideological camps, each concerned with resolving the issue of what constitutes the elements of an appropriate and relevant symbolic architecture. An architecture that is relevant and meaningful within today's frame of reference of time and place. At its most elementary level the act of creating a symbolic architecture is one which involves the representation of an idea, an emotion, or of an artifact.

The ability to engage in representation must involve the articulate and knowledgeable reinterpretation of that which we choose to symbolize. It is by embarking upon a conscious voyage of both inner and outer discovery that one becomes truly capable of symbolically understanding the world within which we live.

The voyage becomes a metaphor for the personal challenge to understand the elements of the external environment within an interpretive personal framework.

This undertaking involves not only an understanding of the realm of the designed and built fabric but it also involves the careful analysis of present day societal concerns. This component of the architectural investigation has to this day occupied a somewhat important position within the

range of pre-design activities that the architect performs even if such an investigation has always held the numerical and statistical product as the basis of its importance.

I wish to claim that there is a component of our external environmental understanding which has been in lacking and whose signs of neglect are apparent throughout the resulting spectrum of existing mediocre representational architecture. This component is that which asks of an individual to understand his position within his environment vis à vis a greater order, an order which fundamentally directs and molds the terrestrial environment of man. Defining such an order is a somewhat difficult task in our age of scientific certainty, for we live in an age where only that which is physical, and that which can be quantified is that which is understood and accepted as a source of knowledge.

In and of itself such an order can only be defined relative to a body of experience. The order requires that one actively engage within an experiential framework that searches to answer for each individual what constitutes their contextual position. This order establishes a hierarchy which places man not at the pinnacle of the triangular strata but rather below that of the generator. It requires of the designer to possess the ability to search for relevant knowledge, knowledge which will allow us to better comprehend those immutable and

metaphysical elements found within the union of all spheres of existence. Such an order is an order of our senses, of our intuitions, of our beliefs. This order becomes the element which each individual must embody in order to truly derive a personal "storia", a story which establishes the basis for the creation of a true vision. An architect must have a personal vision, one that is rooted within an acquired understanding of the knowledge that resides within the experiential environment of man.

It is only through the reconciliation of one's personal vision with that of the hidden universal order that the elements of a truly symbolic architecture can be revealed.

"Through symbolization, knowledge has reconciled the finite with the infinite, the specific with the universal, the temporary with the eternal, expressing the inexpressible in authentically human terms."

NOTE

Alberto Perez Gomez, "Architecture as Embodied Knowledge", *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 40:2.

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