

Re-discovering the Creative Collage in the Architectural Representation

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Abstract: *Collage has been termed the most important artistic device of the twentieth century in artistic representation. Collage proposed radically different ideas about the nature of order, and about the nature of artistic space. It is not limited to the visual arts, but also provides a means of contending with a diverse sense of order by association and dependence on the relationships of disparate elements, not necessarily the elements themselves. It is a unique means of presentation that has had a profound effect on art and architecture. This paper raises two critical questions: which new order does collage propose? How has the idea of collage affected the making of architecture? As a means of understanding the implications of collage as a method of representation, this study aims to describe how these principles – order, relationships, and communication – have been used in the contemporary architectural representation.*

Keywords: *collage; order; relationship; communication*

Introduction

The idea of collage has affected many different arts in the twentieth century. The collagists proposed radically different ideas about the nature of order, and about the nature of artistic space. The collage substitutes an order that is constructed on relationships for the more rigid order of traditional art. The collage employs a figure-ground principle through which the background of a picture is an object, or consists of objects, much like any of the objects in front of it; and it is equally susceptible to any manipulations. In addition, the relationship between figure and ground is, on the whole, quite the same as the relationship between one object, or a group of figures and another – such as still-life objects and the table on which they are resting, or simply between one object and another. The background serves the special function of defining and confining the space depicted in the picture. As the statement of the limits of the depth of the picture and of the confining and supporting foundations as well, it provides the frame of reference by which, as it were, we get our bearings in experiencing the picture's spatial content.

Collage was first introduced to fine arts in 1911 when Pablo Picasso attached a piece of oilcloth patterned like chair caning to the surface of *Still Life With Chair Caning* (Butler, 1980), and Juan Gris gave his forms strong outlines in *Bottle of Wine* and *Water Jar* (Cooper, 2002). This is the first manifestation of one of the most significant artistic ideas of the

twentieth century – collage. Collage involves a fundamental change in the artist's view of the world. Collage is mainly dependent on the individual elements that comprise the work of art and the relationships between them, rather than an overriding order that is superimposed on the work of art. The relationships between the component parts of the collage create much of the significant content of the work and are also used as a device to involve viewers in the work of art by encouraging them to determine these relationships (Butler, 1980; Evans, 1983; Janson, 1986; Krauss, 1980; Libeskind, 1981; Wolfram, 1975). This is the essential idea of collage, of bringing into association unrelated images and objects to form a different expressive identity.

Collage has the potential to have profound effects on the architectural process, the modes of perception of architecture, and its physical form. Drawing analogy between other art forms that have come under the influence of the collage idea and architecture may serve as a valuable tool in understanding the changes which architecture is undergoing today. This paper raises two critical questions: which new order does collage propose? How has the idea of collage affected the making of architecture? As a means of understanding the implications of collage as a method of representation, the making of architecture in terms of its implications of order, of relationships and of communication with the viewer are discussed.

New order proposed by collage

As collage developed, and became more sophisticated and diverse, its role expanded and the uses for its properties of association and reinterpretation grew. The Russian Revolution embraced many of the avant-garde notions of the day, and constructivist art had much to do with the ideas behind collage. In 1919, Yurii Annenkov had experimented with collage and showed how three-dimensional characteristics and the use of intruder elements change perceptions and add a sense of ambiguity and abstraction to the compositions of painting (Lodder, 1983). These principles have found themselves utilised within the field of architecture as well. When examining past works, such as Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli, significance can be explained through such notions as collage.

'In [Hadrian's Villa], apart from physical collisions, we are, above all else, in the presence of a highly impacted condition of symbolic reference; and which is further to introduce an argument,...., that, in [Hadrian's Villa], we are in the presence of something like what, today, it is customary to speak of as collage' (Rowe, 1975, p. 82). This physical representation of a pre-existing order, the order of the city of Rome, was used as a model for the order that finds itself recreated as an order of the Villa. The set-pieces are themselves representative of city fragments, and the structure that binds them is very similar to the methods found

in the art of collage. While Lawrence Vail produced a collage depicting the confusion and haphazard senses of order in a set of three panels created in 1941 (Wolfram, 1975), Leon Krier found the classic European city as a place of order embedded in its past that at the same monuments celebrated those classic values of historic order and represented a utopian vision of current harmony reflective of his views of what the city could be. This comparison shows the diversity possible within the medium of collage. These two extremes and opposites begin to set up the sense of orders that are constantly interacting; the notions of harmony and chaos, unity and fragmentation, reality and abstraction, truth and fantasy that begin to define the order, the meaning of the city and its architecture.

Order in architecture is not seen as a static, in which all tensions are resolved, but as a situation in which conflict plays a primary role. Many architects are using fragments of various sorts to recall particular ideas and to give their buildings greater depth of meaning. Charles Moore and Robert Venturi used architectural fragments for their associative value. 'Moore uses isolated and partial lexical figures such as roofs, windows, and colonnades and composes them in ways that are characteristically modern – that is to say, according to a syntax that is functional and picturesque and to a semantic which verges on the parodic. In both Moore and Venturi the figure tends to become isolated as a sign no longer restricted to the specific category of the architectural sign' (Colquhoun, 1978, p. 35). Moore and Venturi tend to use fragments that are literal copies or very slight deviations from their referents. The fragments remain legible in this way, and their associative value is relatively clear.

Aldo Rossi (1983) argues that architecture had to achieve formal autonomy, to gain identity, in order to communicate meaningfully. Rossi makes use of fragments that are related to memory. He draws on both his personal memories and on the collective memory as sources for fragments which will evoke the order of memory of his buildings. Rossi wanted to take in the whole of reality, object and subject, history and memory (Tafuri, 1987). This fragmented construction of forms left the observer to play out the game proposed by the architect, throwing oneself into the deciphering and recognition of the elements of his puzzle (Tafuri, 1987). This construction takes place in the memory of the viewer. In such readings, the meaning comes from motivations behind the architecture, individual and collective (Rossi, 1983).

The incomplete, clashing structures in the whole creates tension directed toward the realisation of potential order. Therefore, the order of collage leaves room for conflict and for tension, and defies any attempt at totalisation. This different view of order is significant for architecture as an art that has traditionally been associated with the creation of order. The order which collage proposes can be incorporated into the work of architecture to produce a work based on elements rather than an overriding concept or form.

Representation

In collage, the deliberate discontinuity of the collaged work of art defies any simple reading of the whole. The work is understood on the basis of the numerous relationships that it establishes. The tension or harmony and the dialogue that is created between the components of the collage replace the overriding order. The message of the collage is contained in a web of relationships both within and outside of the collage. The construction of these relationships into a comprehensible whole or their acceptance as a random collection of elements is left to the viewer. The relationships within the collage; between the various elements, and those which relate to things which are outside of the collage; between the fragments and their referents, and between the artist and the viewer, are what ultimately creates the order of collage.



Figure 1: Model, Jewish Museum, Daniel Libeskind, 1992.



Figure 2: Interior View, Jewish Museum, Daniel Libeskind, 1992.

The work of Daniel Libeskind serves as an example of how collage has been introduced into an architectural context. His plans and three-dimensional representations of those plans are extraordinarily pure in their use of the medium. Libeskind carves existing plans into meaningless segments and then reassembles them with concern not for spatial implications of the diagram, but textual preferences of how light and dark interact. His assemblages are an attempt at re-definition of architectural values by allowing fragments to assume a renewed vitality through the seemingly arbitrary disposition of once united architectural elements (Figures 1 & 2).

Architecture capitalises on its relationships with things that are present within the building. Context, history and memory can all serve as referents for the work of architecture. In this sense, buildings are texts which are generated by assembling three-dimensional mosaics of fragments, excerpts, citations, passages and quotations; and every building is an absorption and transformation of other buildings (Frasconi, 1985). James Stirling showed the dichotomy in Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart between the formality of museums in the past and the informal approach: representational and abstract, monumental and informal, traditional and high tech. The new additions are treated externally with a grid of stone pilasters used to establish visual order on walls where the random positioning of windows relates to the varied size of rooms. In addition, the handrails of the outdoor ramps have swollen into colorful guides of bright blue and pink which house the lighting system. Like the glazed sweep of the entrance (Figure 3), they undermine the monumental posturing of the stone-clad, U-shaped building with its classicising overtones, and thematise access to the building. The climax of the highly allusive architectural collage is the sunken rotunda in the courtyard (Figure 4), where the U-shaped palazzo building is echoed and placed on a high plinth above the traffic.



Figure 3: Entrance, Staatsgalerie, James Stirling, 1977.



Figure 4: Courtyard, Staatsgalerie, James Stirling, 1977.

Arata Isozaki explored the principles of collage within the practice of architecture. Isozaki freely borrows previously used motifs and reinserts them into his own compositions. In a Surrealistic collage the elements of the Tsukuba Civic Center, some of which have been derived from Ledoux, are reconstituted to make a fragmented heterogeneous assemblage (Drew, 1982). This use of precedent endows his work with a specific cultural meaning, and imparts to that meaning an inertia that permits a universal and enduring perception. The Tsukuba Civic Center explored design as the provision of equipment in the environment for encounters, creating a theater of actions, a foundation upon which narratives may unfold. Isozaki supplied a narrative – a spatial core based on program requirements and the surrounding context. Thus special attention is given to the analysis of desired situations that give rise to encounters, and particular obligations of architectural elements that contribute to those situations, in particular program, boundary, surfaces, and circulation.

In terms of circulation, pedestrian movement was separated from the vehicular movement by positioning the highways and roads at ground level with elevated pedestrian walkways above. In addition, the variations in material such as concrete, tile, and aluminum, together with their reflectivity highlight the different volumes and forms in the figural space. The forum at the center is patterned after the mythic symbol of Rome's elevated center, *Campidoglio*. In the Tsukuba Civic Center, topographical position of the monument is reversed: while occupying the center it is at the lowest point of the complex providing a view of the collage of buildings from the bottom of the hole. Like the Tsukuba Civic Center, Scarpa used the notion of narrative in the restoration of Castelvecchio in Verona, Italy (Figures 5 & 6). His restoration has brought out tension between the different phases of construction over time of the castle and the transformation into an active narrative through time of museum art works. The ideas of purpose, memory, event and procession enhance the visitor's experience.

Scarpa's plan is clearly visible to the visitor because it consists substantially of a circuit which starts from the entrance gate after the castle's drawbridge and develops in straightforward fashion, providing the visitor with opportunities to emerge into the open and then re-enter on the tour of inspection (Licisco, 1982, p. 79).



Figure 5: Entrance Courtyard, Castelvecchio, Carlo Scarpa, 1958.

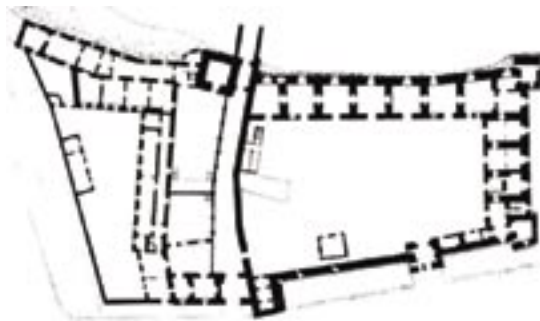


Figure 6: Plan, Castelvecchio, Carlo Scarpa, 1958.

Much of the significance of collage comes from the relationship that the artist establishes. This dependence on relationship gives the collage numerous levels on which it can be read and a complexity of intention that may be difficult to achieve with a more traditional media or method. The viewer has a larger burden of interpretation placed on him or her by such work, which requires their active participation in the interpretative process. Therefore, architects may use the formal and compositional principles of collage to increase a building's dependence on relationship, and thus encourage the viewer to be involved in the interpretation of the building.

Communication: sign and meaning

The elements of the collage play a double role; they are manipulated, cut out, overlaid, drawn on or painted over to give them a representational role within the painting, but they retain their identity as scraps of material; fragments of the real world. Their function is both to represent and to present (Janson, 1986). In fact the collaged element is simultaneously a part of the work of art – something that is bound up with its physical context, and an autonomous fragment of the world outside of the work of art. The modern work of art no longer seeks to depict its subject matter, but attempts to recall it through the interplay of a system of signs. As a system of signs, the meaning of a work such as a collage depends of the relationship between a signifier (the collage element) and the signified (the meaning of the element) (Saussure, 1959).

A general application of the signified/signifier in architecture can be related to Vitruvius's comment about the arts that are composed of two things: the actual work and the theory of it (Granger, 1985). The theory is the signified and the work is the signifier. In Book I of *The Ten Books of Architecture* the section on 'Arrangement' describes the architecture signified: 'The modes of drawing arise from imagination and invention. Imagination rests upon the attention directed with minute and observant fervour to the charming effect proposed. Invention however is the solution of obscure problems; the treatment of a new undertaking disclosed by an active intelligence' (Granger, 1985, p. 25). It is through the signifier of drawing and signified of thought which Vitruvius makes reference to as imagination and invention that composes the architectural sign.

Edmund Husserl observed that the sign is indispensable for every representation that relates past or present to one another (Habermas, 1987). A phoneme or grapheme is presented in an operation or a perception, however, it can function as a sign, and in general as language, only if a formal identity enables it to be issued again and to be recognized (Habermas, 1987). The presentation, as form or image, of the sign, changes with each re-presentation. Any word, collage fragment, or architectural figure which acts as a sign first marks itself as a sign – as something which is different from that which it signifies. This marking necessitates both the self-conscious use of an element as a sign and the creation of a sign that is different in some way from its referent.

Charles Moore and Robert A.M. Stern attempted to reinforce the historical figure into their work to add a greater depth of meaning. When a person imagines the function of a column or roof, that person sees in their mind's eye a particular column or roof, and proceeds to make associations of meaning. In Frank Gehry's California Aerospace Museum

(Figure 7), the airplane is literally a sign for the building, but also a marker for the door and entrance. The disruption of the viewer's frame of reference which is brought about by using an airplane as an architectural element could lead the observer to reflect on the nature of architectural and aeronautical elements, the use of signs and symbols, the appropriateness of materials, architectural decorum; it confronts the viewer and asks him or her to think about the relationships between airplanes and architecture, more significantly, architecture and themselves.



Figure 7: California Aerospace Museum, Frank Gehry, 1982.

Like Gehry's work, what does the architectural figure mean? Colquhoun (1978) explains the architectural figure similar to the concept of collage's symbolic representation. 'By figure I mean a configuration whose meaning is given by culture, whether or nor it is assumed that this meaning ultimately has a basis in nature.... The figure gives an approximation, as faithfully as possible, of a content which remains ineffable. Thus when we look at figures we do not see truth itself, but its reflections, or its emblems' (Colquhoun, 1978, p. 28).

The figure is a relatively simple architectural form, such as the aedicule or the Vitruvian orders which can draw together and crystallize a series of complex experiences that are diffuse and imperceptible. The figure, hence, is a condensation, the immediate effect of which is to suggest the complexity of reality (Colquhoun, 1978). The figure's meaning, like that of the collaged fragment, is established through associations that it evokes in the viewer's mind and becomes conventionalised and refined through repeated use.

Isozaki and Gehry seem to have manipulated the sensuous qualities of matter (by means of reflections, colors, shadows, forms) until they begin to resonate with the memories in the mind of the viewer. After a building is built, these memories develop from the proximal effects of the experience of moving through a building, as well as from images of long

forgotten experiences of forms. In this way forms begin to come alive, as an aesthetic object, simultaneously imposing itself upon the viewer, but also opening up the possibility for multiple interpretations. In addition, a key to an architect's method of formal investigation in relation to collage is on the basis of vision and experience, through color, line, reflection, shadow, touch, smell. A method of architectural signification could be conceived based on the physical and psychic relationship with the forms with which the viewer comes into contact in terms of all the senses.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental shifts made by collage is the change from viewing art as an artifact to conceptualising art as a process in which the object is only one part. Collage alters the nature of the artwork from a complete, finished work to one that is unfinished and open-ended. Architecture generates numerous physical points of view due to its nature as a three dimensional object which both occupies and defines space. Procession, movement, and relationships with various viewpoints have always been fundamental to architecture. Multiple messages and complex thought are all possible outcomes of the communication between the architecture and the public. Architecture is by nature a complex art form, having to combine pragmatic, artistic and intellectual concerns. A work of architecture is simultaneously a functional shelter and a cultural expression. It is a compendium of ideas, a palimpsest of concepts that must be judged from numerous points of view to be richly understood.

First, the architecture is, like collage, seen as a desire to divorce architecture from traditional cultural and programmatic concerns. Just as the collagist sought to abolish the single viewpoint of illusionistic painting, modern architecture sought to abolish the single, axial viewpoint for comprehending the work of architecture. The identification of the autonomous in architecture is more a matter of tendencies than one of accountable and specific items. Thus the concept of autonomous architecture allows for the possibility of a self-referential architecture. Eisenman's House X is a symbol of the loss of physical and conceptual unity that pervades contemporary society. Formal relationships may be fully explored since functionalism is rejected as the primary determinant of form. The autonomous architecture in Eisenman's work is discovered through the exploration of the relation between plane, line or column, and volume; a relation organised by a rule system borrowed from the linguistic system. Therefore, autonomy is artistic activity as play, conducted within conventions.

Second, the notion of discontinuity attempts to create through the use of collage and collision an architecture that controls movements and emphasises major architectural spaces. Design discontinuity embodies an approach contrary to the Modernist idea of spatial

continuity. Space is interrupted and broken into figures that create places. By producing places people know where they are and who they are. The space is designed for activity. Discontinuity is a device that enables the architect to create a rich and lively architectural promenade, a variety of spatial conditions. In the figure/ground composition, the inherent intrigue is in the solid/ void sustained debate. This joint existence creates illusions of perspective, movement and directional invitations that produce a satisfying setting for people.

Third, collage creates a figural space in architecture, which is memorable, and which creates a sense of place and a hierarchy in spatial sequence. The figure, like the collaged fragment, represents a certain set of ideas and associations but is also an abstract, yet a physical part of an overall composition. A figural space is the void within; a recognisable enclosed body of space. These defined spaces express the nature of the building and incorporate the rituals of society. Architecture has traditionally been concerned with monuments – to one God or to many, to the power of a ruler, to the glory of a republic, or the dynamism of a machine. The critical nature of collage is one of its most significant effects on the world of architecture, for, as Heidegger said, 'building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything' (Heidegger, 1971, p. 117).

Finally, architecture necessarily exists in the world of three-dimensional space and time, and must use various subterfuges to allow the viewer's mental sense of space to supplant the actual space that is presented, or to suspend the viewer's sense of time. The collagist can destroy visual space in order to create space within the mind of the viewer. For the architect, this means using actual space to redirect the viewer's attention from the space that he or she creates to the space that the viewer creates in his or her mind.

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Acknowledgement

This work is supported by the Korean Science and Engineering Foundation Grant.