

The Sovereign Built Metaphor

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Later “**The sovereign built metaphor**”: monograph converted to Power Point for presentation to Southwest Florida Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. 2011.

http://globaluniversity.academia.edu/BarieFezBarrington/Books/1449761/Architecture_The_Making_Of_Metaphors

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Preface:

Based on “Architecture: the Making of Metaphors” (Fez-Barrington, B.), *the sovereign built metaphor* takes as its focus the process, result and analysis of the metaphor in architecture. The key to understanding its existence comes from the knowledge that it is distinct from its creator, programs, process and stands as something which has an independent existence of its own. Just as a corporation is a sovereign entity - so is a metaphor. The essence of the creative process and its product is that they encapsulate not only their own inherent qualities by those which have origins elsewhere (other lives, contexts, metaphors, symbolism plus distant and near-source contexts). Indeed, while each constructed element has a metaphor between it and its referent, this metaphor ignores this relationship and is only concerned with how selected elements work with others where such orphans (isolates) are in the mix of the extant metaphor. It is self-potentiating and independent. However in its external context it is but one referent of a contextual metaphor composing a rural, sub-urban or urban context which with its companions operates analogously as a metaphor.

Introduction:

“Metaphor” (Ortony, A) (transfer in {metapherein} Latin), the noun and “transfer”, the verb, are products of a process of synthesizing a physical intervention in any given context or non-context (as a model in the studio) (Bernhart, C. L). Such interventions become society’s metaphors each involved in a narcissistic introverted conversation; much like those described by Ayn Rand in “The Fountainhead” (Brandon, B). They are narcissistic and introverted because they centre on an internal unspoken but seemingly telepathic dialogue - in the process of which - its parts undergo a sort of physical and biological osmosis. These relationships, which are read in physics, mathematics and science, underpin the properties and strength of materials plus the engineering and aesthetics of any given project. These relationships inform the manner in which the parts support, attach, migrate, bond, flex and bend to accommodate one another. So in essence they form a synthesis which begins with the practicalities and the aesthetics of proportion, scale, color, texture and culminate in the end product – the building.

After assembly, creation and manufacture, the whole or parts of a building may never be perceived, seen, or understood, by a third party. Often the metaphor of the sovereign metaphor deals with commonplaces pertinent to its social, historical and cultural context (Fez-Barrington, B). Both art and architecture metaphor-building clarify our place, status and value. As metaphor is the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning, so works of architecture inform our social, psychological and political condition (Lakoff, G). What is built is first thought and conceived separately from *building*, as thinking

and conceiving are separate from outward expression. Architectural metaphor - like its linguistic/cognitive associate - is a process and what we see is the issue of that process and not the manifest metaphor. For example, when we hear a symphony, poem; watch a dance or see a painting we [perceive the whole – the synthesis of the creative process with all that entails. What we don't see quite so readily is the component parts, the structure, the context, the aesthetics and the story etc.

Content:

A train ticket takes you on a journey. The process of travel is not merely a physical thing it involves the act itself, the idea of the act and the process of the act. It also involves leaving one mode for another both in a physical and metaphorical sense. The process is one of being transferred but not transformed. In a similar way, one can say that the architectural metaphor does not transform its elements but places them in a system of relationships where they carry over their own unique qualities, properties, characteristics and functions. Whilst they are often in direct connection and sequence – at other times they are remote and apart – but nevertheless remain part of the same construction. Just like travel – architectural relationships and metaphors can be contiguous or not as the case may be. Consequently, referents' characteristics can be transferred, sometimes by direct contact and on other occasions, circuitously. They can also be functions, uses, areas, goals, ideals and site conditions. Buildings are a diverse conglomeration of orchestrated programmatic, material and system elements that transfer, carry-over and make the strange familiar. By being one of a class of building types, they talk about that type in terms of its present permutation. Direct transfer is also the way weight is conveyed from one object to another by gravity, force and juxtaposition.

Transfer works in the metaphor by acting on other referents passing a property such as power or quality from one to the other. The quality is conveyed without necessarily losing the originators or composure. An attribute is conveyed from one to another. Yet the attribute conveyed still remains in the original although it is shared. It's a matter of positioning. Side by side the weight of one will not exert on the other until it is attached or placed on top. As in a literary metaphor, the positioning of words and phrases matters in that its transferability and importance are dependent on one or another referent. Now both weigh, illuminate, radiate, etc. The element may not be structural but an operation or goal aspect, where the commonplace will draw the referents into affecting one another.

In the literary metaphor "Richard the Lionheart", Richard and the lion still remain "Lionhearted" although by sharing the same context they interact. They are presumed to have a commonplace and this presumption is the very inertia that defines their commonality. One attribute radiates, exudes and transfers to the other. In the case of the literary metaphor, human perception is needed to discern the commonality that it expresses. Yet without such discernment the habitable metaphor actually has this same potential. A unique potential which transfers based on this one commonality, a commonality which works even when a body stays at rest until acted upon by an outside force. As in nature, the reification of such actions, stress and repetition in architecture couples unlikely and apparently unrelated elements.

Manufacturing, design and construction all rely on the ability of unlike, disparate and different elements to transfer and work together. In a habitable metaphor transfers are encouraged, discouraged and prevented; prevented as in the case of moisture protection and the

application of paint, stucco, masonry, etc. Metaphors may, of course, be positive or negative. Transfers may be desirable or harmful but they are always present in the elements of a work.

“Metaphor, we know is a literary term which means carrying-over”, it associates meanings and emotions which otherwise would not be related. Words (essences) known to have a preferential or primary use in one context are explicitly employed in another. Such terms as ‘screaming headlines’, ‘brute architecture’, ‘foxy grandpa’ and ‘Richard the Lion-Hearted’ take terms normally used in one context and bring them into another with the object of illumination making more evident something in the second domain which would otherwise remain obscure. But this definition makes it sound as though metaphor were a one way process, whereas the best of metaphors allow us to explain two truths at the same time. The metaphor points beyond each of its members to the reality they diversely express, articulating a power common to both, telling us they both have an intrinsic nature.” (Weiss, P.) The key to the metaphor is that it transfers. It is a transfer mechanism. Simply by juxtaposition of two seemingly unrelated elements each seeks a characteristic common to both, whether in literature, science or design.

“*Richard the lion-hearted*” is a model of a literary metaphor where one referent is stated in terms of the other. Were Richard an animal he would be a lion and were the lion a human he would be Richard. Both parts of the metaphor point to something beyond their physical nature: they are both brave. Richard and the lion have the bravery of the lion and head-of-state in common. By juxtaposing the two, the lion and Richard’s commonality is made manifest. Similarly, two apparently unrelated structural components have a commonality beyond the obvious as well. This commonality is not always on the same level or hierarchy of values. The lion is known to be brave and Richard was known to be the king. Both are noble, strong and lead. The horizontal flange of the WF (wide flange) beam and the horizontal surface of the slab, transfer their loads so that the slab bears on the flange while the beam supports the slab. Richard is the first referent and the lion the second. In the structure, the slab is the first and the beam is second.

In the literary model the ideal they both share is bravery: Lion-hearted conditions Richard and Richard conditions the lion. In a structure this is mirrored by the compressive and tensile strength of both the slab and the beam. The literary metaphor is limited to the transfer of the referents and ideals but neither is inherent or apparent in either referent. In this literary metaphor we are unaware of all the conditions, operations and goals that pertain to it. Not all literary metaphors are one-liners, many are found in stories, scenarios, poems, songs, etc. They have the full range of conditions, operations, ideals and goals.

The other characteristic of the metaphor was well defined as talking about one thing in terms of another. (Gordon, W. J. J.). There are three such permutations of this, the first of which is the “direct analogy”, which is a comparison of one thing with another. This exemplified when we make the strange familiar by imparting to the new thing characteristics of the old. Designers do this by borrowing materials from one context and bringing them into another, for example, *thermae* and Palladian windows used as an architectural device/motif rather than as windows. The second permutation is “personal analogy”, which refers to role-playing and identification with either living or non-living objects as when a designer adapts the spider’s web to tensile and tent and cable structures. The third is ‘symbolic analogy’, literally expressed as ‘tears of joy’ or ‘exquisite pain’. These are two word phrases whose components contradict or oppose one another. (Gordon, W. J. J.).

Rugby, Tennessee: English Mountain, Tennessee, the Chattanooga Choo-Choo Hilton and Belmopan village in Belize are all borrowed from another familiar context to make their

current context familiar. Adaptive use, restoration of landmarks to contemporary uses and restoring neighborhoods, are all good examples of using materials, buildings and places used in one way to be used in another. In these cases the transfer is by association and once completed there is a conscious perception for the two uses, times and applications.

Rugby as a town was developed around the idea of establishing a home for English settlers in Tennessee. The houses were to be familiar “English” vernacular homes but built with Tennessee materials. Today, the remnants of the town stand with many inhabited houses looking like typical English pre-Victorian weatherboard cottages with decorated gable-ends and lace curtains. This and the many Tennessee barns, which had been designed, constructed and shipped from northern states, were examples I later used to “make the strange familiar” in the 20th century developments on English Mountain and Sugar Tree, Tennessee. Especially significant was the adaptive use of an existing pole barn into a sophisticated restaurant on English Mountain called the ‘Black Bear Inn.

Rugby, Tennessee, the restored Victorian village founded in 1880 by British author and social reformer, Thomas Hughes, was envisaged as a cooperative, class-free, agricultural community for the younger sons of English gentry and others wishing to start life anew in America. At its peak in the mid-1880s, some 300 people lived in the colony. More than 65 buildings of Victorian design graced the townscape on East Tennessee's beautiful Cumberland Plateau.

Each building has a variety of vertical and horizontal wood siding painted in various colors including orange, green, brown, etc. I used these colors in the design of the mountain houses on English Mountain (Sevier and Walker Counties, Tennessee). Also, I clad my houses with shutters and other trim used on these buildings. The English mountain models were clad with US Plywood's texture 1-11 and set on platforms which engaged the severe gradients of the mountain slopes. The shapes, simple square boxes and rectangles, were also borrowed from the original 18th century development.

When constructed, planes, volumes, space and scale have peculiar relationships. Planes limit and bound space. Were a plane habitable it would be a space and were space limiting it would be a plane. By their juxtaposition they manifest characteristics they both have in common and some that are different. Each maintains its own property of plane and space just as Richard maintains his humanity and the lion its nature. Each points to a property beyond its own inherent characteristics. They both are the properties that make a volume, a volume in any scale or proportion. The property that is common to all the planes is the space or sub-spaces which the planes themselves delimit. The planes define, float and/or define spaces. The space is the reality all planes have in common. The volume of the spaces varies by the way the planes are arranged. Planes that limit and planes within the space modulate and form relationships. Similarly, the facades or colonnades that surround a square, plaza or atrium define the void and make it what it is – ergo, part of the whole.

These relationships oppose one another in tension and compression and can be at any scale. They may be symmetrical, or asymmetrical, they may unify or separate. Scale is the proportion of the planes, space and volume of one sub-space to the whole construction. The planes, spaces, sub-space(s), volume and scale have commonalities and differences between them. They all point to a reality beyond their individual and common nature to their external context and potential occupant(s); occupants whose culture and behavior may vary. The relationship between occupants and context is explored in the properties afforded by scale, volume and plane. The scale and elements of Rome's St. Peter's drafts its structure and decorative

elements to a scale beyond any single inhabitant and always suggests accommodating much larger sized inhabitants or crowds. Scale, volume and size are the commonplace demanding references to something beyond any single space or detail. Like its illustrations and characterizations, it is about the universe and the vastness of creation. Scale is the commonality between the proportion of elements within a construction as well as the construction and occupants, particularly an area, room, corridor entry and an occupant. The proportion of one to another structure in an urban setting or a construction to its surroundings (trees, plains, desert etc.), involves a transfer and carry-over from one side of proportion to the other (people vs. columns, spaces, vistas, scale etc.). When the two achieve equipoise they seem to be right; when one is too large or too small the scale is off-kilter. In either case it is a metaphor whether aesthetic or not.

The context of any construction, likewise, is the commonality between the volume and their common scale. The proportion and characteristics of volume and context are always interlinked. They can be infinite, limitless and without bounds or limited. Transformation of the volume of the construction and its sub-volumes to the context is a scale of the metaphor to inhabitants of both contexts. As Richard the lion hearted - the construction and the context each point to a nature beyond their respective metaphors - and is a bridge by which their respective value is defined. Were the context a construction it would be this volume and were the construction the context, it would be the same volume. Like Richard and the lion's bravery, the magnitude of the volume is beyond context and construction and reaches to values intrinsic to both. These values operate independently of anyone who perceives or recites the metaphor but nevertheless these properties are implicit in the distinct nature and sovereignty of what is constructed.

The planes that define the construction may differ from one another as each must be the commonality or difference between its adjacent space, sub-space and context. It may also be affected by the inhabitant's uses and volumes of the space and itself be the characteristic common to both. As such, its faces may be differently colored, constructed or supported thus forming a bridge for its referents (inhabitants and volumes). As this element becomes a sub-metaphor so it is with each other plane, volume, space and sub-space. Each links to adjacent or related element and in so doing makes a metaphor. It's like the *do-se-do* movement in square dancing in which two dancers approach each other and circle back to back, then return to their original positions where one exchanges one partner for another. There is a continuous domino effect among the circle of dancers and in the construction, where each element bridges and affects the other. Each plane, volume and space bridges the other. One and the other take on common properties.

The commonplace of planes in space is their tensional asymmetrical or symmetrical relationships which give them equipoise, equipoise that could fix them in space were it not for gravity or the laws of physics. Hence they need some structure in the form of tensional wires, or skeletal gravity supports such as columns, beams and slabs. Yet equipoise is the commonplace beyond their own sizes, weights and composition, which composes their form and allows them to transfer their properties. They form positive and negative spaces; positive being within and negative being without any given relationship, where there would not be a negative without a positive. The two, positive and negative, transfer their commonality of space and volume between one another. For a literary metaphor it is grammar, syntax and language that are its commonplace. It is the same for a sovereign metaphor – it transfers its original properties from one level to the next to achieve equipoise.

Just as there are agglomerations of words, phrases and sentences, so there are compositions comprised of planes, lines, volumes and spaces which are not metaphors. However chaos, dissonance and vacuity are also 'qualities' associated with language. Line and volumes transfer their opposition to one another in tension and through this tension balance not by symmetry but instead by asymmetrical *yin* opposition to one another. The commonplace of the lines is their opposition and tension in space.

For example, the two rooms of the log cabin are joined by the fireplace; the common fireplace which removes the smoke and fumes of the fire common from both rooms. The rooms which are formed by logs are common to both the interior construction and the external context – a context filled with trees and nature. The planes of logs forming the wall divide the interior warmth from the attack of wind, temperature, snow and rain. The upper diagonal planes form the roof and keep out the elements as well as retain the heat generated by the fireplace. Metaphorically it is easy to see how the single double flue model could be adapted to accommodate a second floor using the common fireplace. This model gave way to the lower floor kitchen/living rooms and upper bedrooms. In the US example, a "log cabin" was usually constructed with round rather than hewn or hand-worked logs and often it was a first generation structure which could be erected quickly as frontier settlement required.

The first log structures were probably built in Northern Europe in the Bronze Age (about 3500 BC). By stacking tree trunks one on top of another and overlapping the logs at the corners, people made the "log cabin". Men developed interlocking corners using notches at the ends, resulting in strong structures that were easier to make weather-tight by inserting moss or other soft material into the joints. (Bomberger, D.)

A corridor enclosed by walls implies adjacent rooms, a beginning and end to the corridor - and in the case of a multi story building - connecting stairs and elevators that serve as ambulatories (transfers and connections). The space limited by horizontal and vertical planes in the context of a school carries over into adjacent spaces. Bound and limited spaces characterized by a matrix of connected spaces of varying or equal volumes collectively form a beehive-like metaphor or interrelated and connected "cells". Multiple horizontal planes forming building floors when stacked become a "high-rise" whereas adjacent vertical planes separated by volumes can become a shopping center. The program for buildings with multiple areas such as hotels, schools, shopping centers, offices, apartments and prisons, is a basically conditioned by a core of vertical and horizontal transportation, utility links and service areas supporting apartments, guest rooms, class rooms, shops, cells etc. Owner -occupied, specialty buildings differ uniquely in their uses, functions, occupants, adjacencies, pedestrian and vehicular access and each begets a singular and paired transfer as regards the condition of structure, utility and support systems. The ideals of such a structure will influence the scale of the operation and the segregation of differing types and classes of operations from administration, executive, staff, patients, guests, workers, etc.

As 'live' (people and furniture) and 'dead' (structure and fixed building materials) loads are transferred from the top of a structure to be resisted by the ground and its foundation, so are all the other components of design. That is, they invisibly, subtly and inherently exude their meanings and implications. They do so by their own physical properties and designers' perceptions of those properties. In fact, it is the reckoning of those elements and properties that control of the metaphor manifests. While they do inform one another's conditions and operations, ideals and goals transfer (the synonym for metaphor) from one to another while the

ideal is the repository for the commonality between the other three (housing the ideals of “efficiency”, “grandeur”, “plain vanilla”, “values” etc.). The ideal is the characteristic of bravery in the Richard the lionhearted metaphor and is the value people bring to the creation of the structure which determines its scale, selection of materials, structural, mechanical and electrical systems, etc.. It is easy to see how operations would transfer to structure influencing its volume shape and form permuted by an ideal toward some overall goal; goal being typified by the ultimate function of the structure (residence, hospital, office, factory, school, etc.).

Goals transfer to operations identifying the functions, circulation, adjacencies and connections between one and another discrete function. Equally metaphoric is determining the way function transfers from one to another determining their relative proximity, connection and location to each other. The sub-goals transfer to the operations and the ideals their volume and magnitude. The operations condition the selection of materials for the horizontal and vertical planes. Even each material itself has a transfer value (R-value is a measure of thermal resistance used in the building and construction industry, where “r” is the resistance to heat flow). Under uniform conditions it is the ratio of the temperature difference across an insulator and the heat flux (heat flow per unit area) as defined by ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers). Knowing the R-value of any given material aids in their selection based on the goal of the operation and ideals: to retain heat, cold and moisture; to reflect sunlight and radiate heat; building codes, industry standards, local codes and ordinances, condition, site selection and the structure’s relationship to its context. These also affect the location and choice of windows, doors, openings and protection from extreme weather and other natural conditions such as hurricanes, earthquakes, etc. Metaphors of corridors, rooms, vertical and horizontal access and traffic compose the metaphor determining its form, structural system and selection of materials. (Oakridge)

Just as the hanging of furs on cut branches transferred to the log cabin, so the European models of the country house, the hacienda and the vernacular transferred to the frontier shack, workshop, cabin or colonial mansion. Similarly, the same process applies in the case of the factory and the office. This development saw the visual extrapolation from a one-storey structure to a multi-storey version complete with elevators, plumbing and air-conditioning shafts and stacks. The replication of floors is not a metaphor but it is analogous of the lift-inspired move to develop higher and higher structures. The lift became the medium for the skyscraper because without it few buildings if any would have risen above 100’ and our cities wouldn’t have developed in the way that they have. This development might be considered as a classic case of the tail (the utilities) wagging the dog (the building). These structures – may differ in volume, space and scale but they reflect a broad array of goals which transfer from one to the other. Conditioned by zoning, city ordinances and statutes, they form a complex matrix of metaphors able to make their commonalities and differences in the context of areas, sub-area, nodes (known as cities), neighborhoods and blocks.

The process of making metaphors is affected by the maker’s perceptions and craft. Both art and architecture share (Schon, D. A) *generative metaphor* which “carries –over” perspectives from one domain of experience to another where the artist builds one thing in terms of another where the other is the model – and - what is built is the application, the model being the “ideal” of the proposed design. While designers may initially state an ideal, it most likely evolves and even radically changes by the time the design process yields the finished building. Once achieved the “*parte*” (concept/gestalt) manifests and can be articulated.

No construction is devoid of the human decision-making process. (Reddy M. J) Both art and architecture *peculiarize, personalize and authenticate* for their metaphor to live. This way the user metaphorizes the using process and the user and work empathize. In this is the art of making metaphors for the architect of public works. His metaphor must “read” the cultural, social and rightness of the metaphor’s proposed context. An excellent example of this the Paul Rudolph’s Art & Architecture building at Yale University, though initially an architectonic of planes and shapes, it soon becomes conditioned by building codes, operations, ideals and complex goals. The asymmetric tensional relationships of planes and solids are shifted from their primary positions to allow for clearances and access.

Basic parameters

But what are the COIG (condition, operations, ideals and goals) of a habitable sovereign metaphor? How does it work (modus operandi)? Of what is it composed? What conditions the habitable metaphor? What are its models (ideals)? What are its goals? What does it achieve? Does it have scope and size limitations? The basic parts to the architectural metaphor are its conditions, operations, ideals and goals (COIG). In fact these four are the basic aspects of any one metaphor of architecture. (Millard, P.) Likewise a literary metaphor has the same four aspects. However, any two metaphor referents may not find a commonality on the same level. The circulation of operations on one level may have nothing in common with the structures on another. It is only when the “ambulatory” becomes the corridor do they transfer. Richard and lion may not transfer until one finds the commonality of bravery and king.

For each possible pairing it is necessary to sort through the commonalities and differences to find their shared characteristics. The process also works in reverse with elements sharing a common characteristic without having the other referent. Given a flow diagram, volume and goal, what is the structure? Having selected the structure, what is the column spacing, beam locations, flooring and cladding? Not only pairs but whole scenarios, storeys, paths and flows potentiate by the decision to use any one or other element. The dominant goal of one building type will immediately call to mind a history of the ones in its class, quality and context. A school type will be sought for its similar size, capacity, features, costs, materials, etc. A 600 student capacity middle school will be paired with a similar size and budget to determine budget, plan, features, etc. Public and corporate buildings are not programmed nor designed in a vacuum.

Planes, spaces, volumes and scale carry-over, transfer and refer to their antecedent dominant, sub-dominant, tertiary condition, operation, ideal and goals. Habitable metaphor is conditioned by building codes, zoning ordinances, site and local statutes, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) regulations, structural systems, utilities, heating ventilation and cooling systems, site and site conditions, contexts, and building materials. Metaphor is conditioned also by operations such as identified functions, areas, sizes, human and vehicular access, traffic, circulation, and adjacencies. Metaphor is also symbolized by standards, class, quality level, relationship to context and like uses and final metaphor is established by its goal to accommodate what purpose, for how many people in what context and what period of time. Disregarding conditions of regulation, structure, circulation, numbers of people and quality class will transfer and seek a commonality; usually of building –type in or outside of its context. Metaphor is a very practical and pragmatic matter. Habitable transfer mechanisms are in our midst, everywhere and demanding our attention. Look at them knowing they too have a life of their own - it is incumbent on us to find a way to relate, understand and enjoy their presence.

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Published: Feb 2012
12 Back Chapman Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE6 2XX
United Kingdom

Edited by

Edward Richard Hart,
0/2 249 Bearsden Road
Glasgow
G13 1DH
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Lecture:

http://globaluniversity.academia.edu/BarieFezBarrington/Books/1449761/Architecture_The_Making_Of_Metaphors

Note: The symposium: Architecture, the Making of metaphors was founded and presented in 1967 at Yale University by Barie Fez-Barrington with invited speakers such as Paul Weiss. Peter Millard, Kent Bloomer, Vincent Scully, Christopher Tunnard, William J.J.Gordon, Forrest Wilson, Turan Onat and Charles Moore.