

PART III

FINE ARTS

1. ORIENT AND OCCIDENT. SPECIFIC SPATIAL IMAGES

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Abstract: *Geographical factors, the landscape are key factors in establishing the spatial images. There are differences between the spatial organizations of southern Europe, where assemblies and volumes have been developed horizontally, and Northern Europe, where forms have been developed vertically. The intermediate zone has made a balance between these two trends. At the global level, there are differences on the East - West direction: in the East were developed symmetrical and monumental ensembles and volumes, while the West has developed free and asymmetric compositions, Far East balancing the two tendencies. At the cultural level, the differences in the organization of space are difficult to see. There are models of investigation of Frobenius, Spengler and Lucian Blaga. These theories provide a useful analysis for each culture, rather from inside than outside. This study proposes, in addition, an analysis from the interference of cultures.*

Key words: *spatial images, Orient, Occident*

Introduction

We often put the question to what extent the geographical frame, the physical environment, in which a culture appears, are determinative in the constitution of specific fundamental features of that culture. At a general look one may notice that spatial images have specific ways of organization, according to the geographical or landscape elements as determinant elements in cultural acts.

North and South. Natural light

The natural light has generated certain types of spatial organizations, depending on its intensity²⁰⁷. In the South, where the light is very strong, the architectural shapes have developed horizontally, the shadow given by the horizontal architectural profiles, being thus emphasized. In the North where the light's intensity is weaker, the architectural shapes have developed linear, vertically, with bold relief in depth for a more pronounced effect of shadow. This may also be one of the explanations for the genesis of the gothic style. The strong and very brightful light of Egypt lead to the preference for incision, for bas-relief, speculating the contrasts, the brutal passages from light to shadow, different from Italy's light which, through its gradual passages has generated the round smooth continuous shapes in architecture and sculpture.

At the level of spatial organization, one may notice the same tendency. The southern perspective, through the speculation of the clear effects of light-shadow, has been constituted through the organization of the component objects on a horizontal direction. Each of the three elements of the perspective image

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²⁰⁷ Michelis, P. A. (1982), *Estetica Arhitecturii*. București: Meridiane 1982, page 286

(observation point, intermediate field and terminal element), aligned according to a horizontal axis (the main axis of view) have a visual weight contributing to the constitution of an unitary equilibrated image with congruence between the constituting elements. The very generous light also asked for the detailing of the secondary elements of the image.



Figure 1 The Uffizi Galleries, Florence

The point of observation (the arcade), the intermediary field (the façades with the columns on the left and right), the terminal element (the Signoria's Palace with the tower): unitary equilibrated image with concordance between the component elements.

In the northern perspective only terminal element of perspective is important (the cathedral developed vertically), the intermediary field and the observation point, usually developed horizontally, are minimally treated, a higher rate of detailing being unjustified.



Schwerin Cathedral, North Germany
Figure 2 Perspective, Figure 3 Aerial View

Between north and south, the intermediate area offers equilibrium to these tendencies: the terminal element is sustained by the intermediate field which is less important as a visual weight. Thus, the temperate zone offers suggestive examples from this point of view. At a level of architectural object, the Christian architecture of the East has the vertical marked (by the tower of the church) but also the horizontal (by the longitudinal axis of the church's nave).



Figure 4 Plopiș church. Maramureș, România

Similar to this, at architectural ensemble level, the monastic precincts have, as vertical axis, the church with its tower but also the cells, developed horizontally.

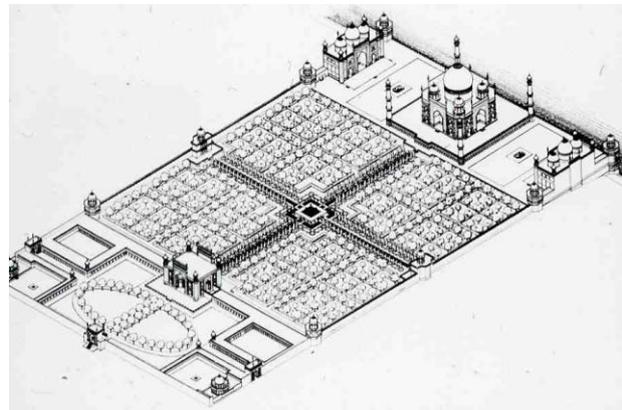


Figure 5 The Dragomirna Monastery, România

Specific spatial images of East and West

In the traditional societies the cardinal points were assimilated to the directions up-down, left-right. The up-down direction is expressed by the organization of the constructed objects horizontally, subordinated to the gravitational force, or by the vertical organization, opposing this force. The left-right direction is assimilated to the East-West direction at geographical level. One may observe the differences of spatial composition on this direction too.

The Orient is characterized by symmetry, monumentality, grandeur, an order and domination spirit more emphasised, given by the imperial power and by the religious authority. This may be noticed at the level of architectural object but also at the level of the ensemble. In the East the architectural objects are submitted to this natural fundamental law which is symmetry.



The Taj Mahal Mausoleum, Agra, India
Figure 6 Frontal perspective. Figure 7 Axonometric view

Axial perspective, conceived as an extension of monumentality and grandeur of the monument

In the West, America, through its complete isolation from the East, independent, expresses this liberty through an equilibrated asymmetry in the spatial organizations. In Mexico, the buildings are placed in ensemble, by astronomical considerations. Because of this symmetry and monumentality are not present, the overall composition having a natural, organic character.

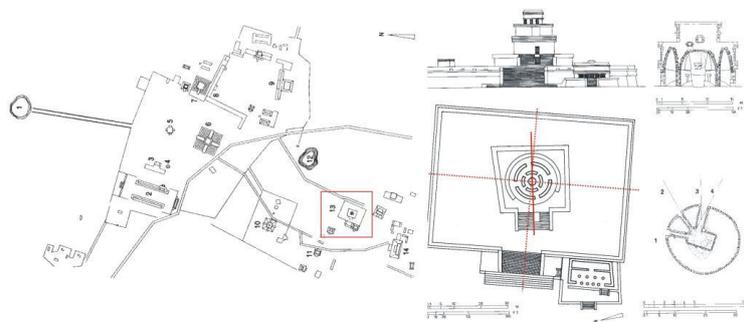


Figure 8 Mayan city. The Observatory. Yucatan, Mexico

Usually the democratic societies have developed asymmetry as a free adaptation to nature and the dominating societies have preferred symmetry, as

an instrument of artificial organization, imposed to the nature. Greece, in its democratic period, has developed the asymmetrical type of construction (see the asymmetry of Erechteion, the symmetrical temples perceived in perspective at two vanishing points, not in a frontal perspective, which would need a symmetrical manner of organisation on the direction left-right).

In the western thought, the emphasis has been put upon ration, in the Orient it's been put upon intuition, upon sensibility. In India, for example, the emphasis has been put upon a certain metaphysical substance of the soul²⁰⁸. The Extreme Orient offers equilibrium between these two tendencies: vertical-horizontal, symmetry-asymmetry, material-spiritual, as a proof that the extremes reach each other.

The West has put an emphasis, during the modern period, more on the object of architecture and less on the ensemble, and the Orient, and especially the extreme Orient, has emphasized the ensemble, the way that Europe has done, more or less, in the modern period. And this is because the Orient and the Extreme Orient have remained faithful to the tradition, through the subordination to nature of the constructed ensembles. The buildings here complete the site, they clarify and define it. In the ensemble compositions the dominating dogmatic axis is avoided, the axis being used only as a direction for the view but not as a direction in the plan. The compositions are asymmetrical, the architectural objects are symmetrical. We can find here a model of the nature: in the nature the organisms are symmetrical, but the environment in where they spend their life is asymmetrical.

These differences between Orient and Occident can be explained at a philosophical level by the fact that the modern way of thinking appeared sporadically in the oriental countries, but it didn't develop enough and it disappeared in its incipient phase. Concerning the modernism, in the Orient there have existed rather conservative thinkers than progressive ones. They rigorously perpetuated the traditional or medieval ways of thinking²⁰⁹. This may also explain the preservation of tradition even in the spatial organizations. In the Extreme Orient, for example, the Japanese traditions have passed from the stage of „*philosophical thought in agrarian communities*” directly to the stage of „*universal religions*”²¹⁰. This feature is more or less valid for the nations of Southern Asia and Northern Europe too (England, Germany the Scandinavian Countries that weren't at all or were only partially part of the Roman Empire so they weren't fundamentally influenced by the Romans' civilisation, guarding they're own traditions). The Romans, in they're expansion to a world-wide level, through they're capacity of synthesizing specific elements of different cultures, have imposed some ways of organizing the spaces of the conquered regions.

²⁰⁸ Nakamura, Hajime (1997), *Orient și Occident. O istorie comparată a ideilor*, Humanitas, București, page 234

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, page 535

²¹⁰ Ibidem, page 539

Theories and interpretations regarding the constitution of spatial images

All these observations are in agreement with morphological theory that places the geographical elements first in the constitution of a certain feeling of space and, last, in the constitution of spatial images specific to different cultures. Spengler and Frobenius have put at the basis of the process of forming a culture, the feeling of space, characteristic to people in a certain place, as an element that generates culture.

The theory of the spatial symbolism defends the idea that a certain space, structured in a certain way, may become the symbol of a certain culture. Thus, there may be equivalences between the landscape, the constructed place, in which a culture and its specific spatial vision is developed. The space becomes, in the culture morphology, a creator of sensibility variable from one culture to another. Frobenius and Spengler have detected spatial symbols specific to some cultures, without talking them all out. Leo Frobenius, starting from the legends' content, from the epic poetry and from the primitives' cosmogonical images, has identified, two spatial symbols in Africa: the cave space or the space limited by the cosmic vault of the Hamite culture and the infinite, unlimited space of the Ethiopians, generalizing up to the difference East and West. Oswald Spengler does the same generalization, giving to western culture the symbol of the infinite, three-dimensional space. Spengler ascribes the vault or the cave as a symbol of the Arabian culture, including here Christianity too, with the cosmogonic representation of the sky rounded off towards the earth, explaining this through the fact that Christianity, in its first millennium of existence, has formed in the frame of the Arabian world. Spengler identifies spatial symbols in other cultures too: the isolated solid in the ancient culture, the labyrinth path in the Egyptian culture, the way through nature in the Chinese culture, the infinite plan in the Russian culture.

In history of art we can see these differences. Ancient Greece has conceived the space as a simple presence of the shapes in space, as a condition of the limited physical existence (the symbol of the apollinic soul, according to Spengler). Ancient Greece put more emphasis on the outer space, the buildings being conceived as huge sculptures in space, built much more for the exterior perception, the interior being usually inaccessible. The Hellenistic epoch is the passage from the type of temple – object in space, convex, to the U shaped temple, concave; from the edifice – isolated object, to its integration into the ensemble, this being another step in the conquest of the depth.

Egypt walks the other way around from Ancient Greece, concerning the spatial depth. They didn't look for depth in plastic representation. The Egyptians were hiding in full, in the material more than they wanted to free from it. The direction in temples and pyramids is from empty to full, from light to darkness, from profane to sacred. Ancient Rome brings as a novelty the container space similar to the vault space of the Close Orient (identified by Spengler as spatial symbol in the Arabian culture)

There are also theories that deny the relationship between the spatial vision specific to a culture and the landscape in which it appears. Lucian Blaga

accepts the fact that the landscape may ease the construction of a certain spatial vision but he also draws attention upon the fact that, at the same time, in the same landscape there may be totally different spatial views. He brings to forefront the individual or collective unconscious which contributes to the construction of a specific spatial horizon. Thus, every culture, clearly formed, has a corresponding spatial horizon, generated by its unconscious inner structures.

The feeling of space, as a characteristic feature of a culture, is replaced with the spatial horizon of the unconscious. Blaga makes the difference between the real landscape of the conscious sensibility and the spatial horizon of the unconscious. Between these two, there may exist, in some cases, agreements, but also disagreements. He proposes the term of „stylistic matrix”, a complex of determinants, discontinuous elements, responsible, among others, also for the spatial horizon. This theory excludes the idea of spatial symbolism of Frobenius and Spengler. In their theory, the determinative element from the basis of the style is the feeling of space. According to Blaga, style is never the product of a conscious individuality, but the product of an unconscious complex. It doesn't represent an individuality, but an anonymous reality. The spatial horizon of the unconscious persists no matter the variability of the landscapes. This explains the fact that in the same landscape may coexist cultures with spatial horizons fundamentally different²¹¹.

In Transylvania, the Saxons have built homes and farms in a different style from that of the Romanians, closer to the German style, even if they were born in Romania. Similarly, contemporary homes of Gypsy minority are totally different from the Romanian architectural style, being rather like the Indian traditional construction. The matrix space is very important in the construction of a culture. It is „*the determinative element for the stylistic structure of a culture or of spirituality be it collective, or individual*”²¹².

Blaga's theory that can be applied to each culture comes to support the idea of preserving and revaluation of the traditional culture, especially of the popular one, the birth and the survival of a culture depend on this preservation of the matrix space in the unconscious structures. Blaga said: „*The Romanians have been born when the matrix space took shape in their souls*”²¹³. The popular art, which proposes eternal patterns, beyond the specific originality of the personalities, preserves this hallmark of the spatial horizon. Because of this the tradition must be preserved in architecture even at a level of spatial organization, the popular art being an eternal source of inspiration for those who create. At a first sight, this type of analysis becomes useful to each culture much more from within, to support preserving the tradition and reevaluate the popular culture. From without, we cannot speak of preserving the tradition, but of a revaluation of the creations from the interference of cultures. But with all the specificity of a culture or of a certain style the cultural contamination is still possible. The

²¹¹ Blaga, Lucian, (1985), *Opere filosofice. Trilogia Culturii*, Minerva, București, page 195

²¹² Ibidem, page 194

²¹³ Ibidem, page 201

influence between cultures can be explained through the fact that the stylistic matrix of a culture may contain common elements with the matrix of another culture²¹⁴. And from here results the validity of the theory of the unconscious spatial horizon even in the areas of cultural interference.

At a more general look upon these theories one may observe that they aren't contradictory. If we admit the influence of the geographical elements, of the landscape when constructing the conscious spatial symbols, specific to the culture and, if we admit in the same time the theory of the existence of some unconscious spatial structures, as determinants of culture, we can follow the line of the determination or inter-conditioning between conscious and unconscious. The unconscious doesn't always oppose to conscious, although it has other laws of organization than the conscious. Sometimes the unconscious is subordinate to the conscious, being in synergy with it.

All these actions and psychic processes contain conscious and unconscious processes. The stylistic matrix has a general, anonymous character, being generated by a collective unconscious. In the collective unconscious stylistic features of culture are fixed, features that result from the community of the dwellings, from language, traditions, myths, way of living, becoming archetypes, as Gustav Jung names these synthesis.

From here we may conclude that the landscape, the geographical frame may be important elements in establishing spatial images, as determinative elements in the construction of some cultures, to the extent to which they contribute, partial, to the construction of the collective unconscious. In this vision the two territories become one, complete each other, in the hypothesis that the landscape, the geographical areas can act fundamentally upon the unconscious psychic structures. When Frobenius started from the legends' content, from the poems and from the primitive cosmogonical and when Spengler started from the representation of space in architecture and art, aiming to identify the fundamental elements that are at the genesis of cultures, they were, in fact, identifying archetypes, as fundamental images of a collective unconscious.

Conclusions

The measure of emphasizing some different or common features of cultures becomes justified and necessary because we thus follow the line of the identification of the areas of cultural interference, (as areas of stylistic superposition, as cultural schemes generally valid) and of identifying of the specific areas (as traditional schemes).

The problem now is to what extent did a culture has the capacity to assimilate values of other cultures. What is the criteria after which this selection is done? Can we accept the hypothesis that the selection has been done after unconscious pre-established structures that coincided, more or less, with the assimilated values: The selection and the appropriation of values is made in

²¹⁴ Blaga, Lucian, (1985), *Opere filosofice. Trilogia Culturii*, Minerva, București, page 185

accordance to the personal unconscious pre-established structures, and the purification, the essentialization of these values is made to the extent to which the stylistic matrix, is more or less defined in the unconscious structures of a nation, of a community.

The identification of the differences or similitude on the lines of comparison North-South or West-East is set up as a measure of identification of some fundamental features, specific to the unconscious, obvious, structures explainable on limited areas or on its globality.

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Illustrations Source

Figure 1: The Uffizi Galleries, Florence. (processed image)
http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galleria_degli_Uffizi

Figure 2: Schwerin Cathedral, North Germany. Perspective. (processed image)
<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/32120534>

Figure 3: Schwerin Cathedral, North Germany. Aerial View.
http://www.tripadvisor.de/Attraction_Review-g187362-d651393

Figure 4: Plopiș church, Maramureș, România. Autor Maria Urmă

Figure 5: Dragomirna Monastery, România. (processed image)
<http://www.flickr.com>, autor Stefan Petrescu

Figure 6: The Taj Mahal Mausoleum, Agra, India. Frontal Perspective (processed image)

Figure 7: The Taj Mahal Mausoleum, Agra, India. Axonometric view.
<http://web.mit.edu/4.611/www/L14.html>

Figure 8: Mayan city. The Observatory, Yucatan, Mexico. (processed image)
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