

the use of gesture

In the design of architecture and landscape, the role of dynamics is evident not simply in accommodation of the (presumably) mobile behaviors of the occupants and their perceptions but as an indicator of a 'signifier-ness' (a sense of meaningfulness without any particular meaning attached). 'Gesture' stands for the ways in which material form can be imagined to express in ways analogous to human gesturing: pointing, opening, perching, facing, gazing, sneaking, waiting ... in short, the full range of dramatic positions that an actor on the stage might take to indicate attitude, intention, emotion, or rôle. Gesture typically involves symmetrical signing. Thickening of one element is accompanied by the thinning of another. A opening directed skyward requires an opening (or closing) at a low point. These pairings can form an 'idiotic symmetry' (each element, though balanced by another, equally lacks an assigned function or meaning). Alternately, pairs can refer to a missing or silent third term that works to prevent or foreclose some spatial/temporal relationship.



1. gesture in general

Gesture is the 'language of the body', a means of silent speech that can be read as intentional or unintentional. Gesture animates and re-configures the body, its parts, and their relationships. Gesture can create divisions, such as an audience and stage division. It can indicate impossibility (biting one's elbow, an Italian gesture), difficulty (biting one's hand), intelligence (pulling down the lower eye-lid), discovery (pointing to the head), idiocy (a screwing motion with the index finger to the cheek, an offensive gesture in Germany), and the countless obscene gestures in all cultures that are used for insult or mockery. Gesture transforms the body into not just a sign but to a theatrical space able to frame itself from the inside out.

2. what is an organ?

Typically we think of organs as specialized parts of the body devoted to specific functions: lungs for breathing, hearts for pumping, brains for cognition, etc. More generally (and usefully, for architecture), an organ is a relationship between the body and the world. This is clear in cultures where medicine has not yet identified 'scientific' functions of organs. The heart is the sum total of relationships involving sympathy, love, etc.; the head is the sum total of functions relating the individual to the divine; the feet relate to the earth; the lower bodily stratum to eros and fecundity.

In fact, the ancient/cultural view is more accurate than the popular culture view of organs as strictly limited to one function. Organs in the body work in complex cooperative ways that defy simple isolation by function. For example, the heart is able to detect blood pressure and secrete a hormone that causes the kidneys to retain or filter salt, changing the volume of the blood. The lungs, heart, liver, brain, etc. each operate as a mirror of the body as a whole. When one malfunctions, all others sense the change.

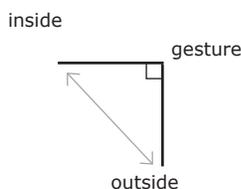
The primary action of gesture is to blur the inside-outside distinction and to place organs into the external world. Perception is, thus, based on a transposition of bodily qualities (empathy, disdain, desire, etc.) to the objects in the external landscape and to the landscape itself, including the

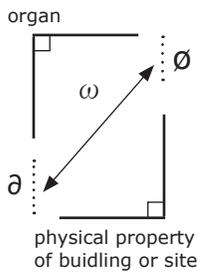
sky and imagined invisible domains lying past the reach of the senses. Space is given two hands, in the sense that it is viewed as having a 'left' and 'right' — the property of handedness. Handedness relates to the attributes of 'face' and 'back' given to parts of the landscape and objects in it. The perception of heights relates to the head as the highest part of the body, verticality in general can be related to the body's height and the ratio of its vertical parts. Ingestion, digestion, and excretion all have their counterparts in the external world. Mental properties and attitudes can be found in qualities such as isolation, rest, places of contemplation, etc.; synaesthesia relates the sounds, textures, and other qualities to the merely visual correlates of these identities.

Weather effects constitute a broad range by which organs can be displaced to the external environment. Thus, weathering as channeled by architecture and the landscape can be specific in the 'uncanny' way that the subject is turned inside out. The sky cannot be permanently angry, but a roof can provide the kind of shelter that give clear evidence that this anger from time to time requires some defense.

3. symmetry, 'idiotic' and otherwise

Traditionally, masons splitting stones so that a 'clean face' could be used in a wall, would locate the halves distant from each other so that the match would not be evident. The same idea can be expressed in many media and ways, to provide a strategy for constructing a series of 'match-lines' running across and through a project. Splitting can begin with whole that is divided into halves or with a pair of terms that are naturally divided (thin-thick, high-low, light-heavy, etc.). The split of a whole into two parts creates a face that is the same as the surface of an imagined re-union of the parts. Romans





used *tesseræ*, a piece of pottery with an inscription, broken on the occasion of the parting of two friends. When the friends re-united, the two parts were re-joined at the fracture, their perfect fit indicating the identity with the original act of breaking at departure. With the split of a whole, the theme of fracture is emphasized. Departure and reunion constitute a circular event that 'competes itself' at some future time, whether or not this is materially possible.

The use of paired opposites offers different kinds of associations. One can emphasize placement (high v. low), material qualities (heavy v. light), action (going out v. going in), or materiality (heavy v. light). With this approach, qualities generally must be exaggerated in order to be noticed as such. This is the phenomenon of 'signifier-ness' — not signification of anything in particular but the indication that something has been taken out of its usual functional context and used specifically as a sign. Signifier-ness creates its own context: a 'past', in which the intention to leave a sign was formulated and executed; a 'future', in which some action may or may not be intended; a present, in which one sign may lead to the discovery of others, as a full 'syntax' of clues to be strung together.

5. actions

The most common use of gesture involves actions that pull, push, lift, depress, squeeze, explode, etc. elements of a building or landscape. Here, literal physical motion need only to be given markers. The motion itself, if imitated, spoils the idea and is superfluous. If something is being done, it will not be necessary to express it symbolically. The designer need only show the traces of what has been done and the effects of the action.

Gestural action works well with the materials of architecture and the landscape because gesture can push the material's physical properties to the point where artifice is required. A cantilever, for example, should provoke a sense of wonder and not be readily understood as a simple accomplishment. Thinness, reflectivity, and other qualities perceived through surfaces need to be well planned so that the quality *as such* is read as a part of the intended design. Darkness, lightness, openness, enclosure, and so on should not be perceived as 'accidental qualities' that occur 'naturally', but rather as intended results that have come about, often surprisingly, as a component of a space's quality.

What is a trace? Like a clue, a trace is something left behind that needs to be re-associated with its original context. That context can be an action, intention, crime, event, or some other complex of causes and effects. Contexts need not be complicated; in fact, the simpler the better, since the reunion of a clue with its context will be all the more surprising ('Why didn't I see it before?'). The trace is a kind of track, and motion in particular is linked to tracks left behind. Walls are, naturally, built from the bottom up, but walls can be made to seem to have moved from one position to another, to have 'thickened' or 'thinned', to have been burdened or relieved of a burden. Ruins can make walls into heroes who have struggled unsuccessfully. Weathering can be a sign of the length or manner of use.

5. inactions (mental states)

Position and orientation can signal the kind of stasis that is associated with mental states. In particular, 'outlook' is a matter of how elements of the landscape or a building 'contemplate each other', 'establish communion' or 'conversation', maintain a silence, or other tokens of relationships. Orientation can be animated by terrain, sunlight, horizons, profiles, or edges. Movement through a site can 'animate' these states, parse them into sequences, and give a structure that is not evident in plan view.

What is a mental state? A designer should not go beyond simplifications. A good mystery is better than a feeble explanation. When gesture is used to indicate a mental state, the 'players' of a site should be easily identifiable. They should have some identifiable marks, special ways of moving, looking, talking.

