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Article Summary: Space tells us about time. It demonstrates what time has done to the buildings of the past and shows what conceptions of time were important when the buildings were constructed.

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Photographs / Images: (Fig 16) the farm home near Shickley during its heyday; (Fig 17) Nels Anderson, Bengta Hakanson Anderson, and Bessie Anderson Olson in front of the Shickley house; (Fig 18) the chapel at the Bethphage Mission, Axtell, Nebraska; (Fig 19) the church at Gårdståga, Skåne, southern Sweden; (Fig 20) the Hradčany and the Malá Strana, Prague, as depicted on the proscenium curtain in the Bílá Hora ZČBJ Hall at Verdigre; (Fig 21) Sam Kills Two winter count; (Fig 22) the foundations of American law, tryptich panel by Lee Lawrie on the south pavilion, Nebraska capitol; (Fig 23) thunderbird (tile decoration at base of dome), Nebraska capitol; (Fig 24) the rose window of Plymouth Congregational Church, Lincoln, with enlarged details of the flanking peacock and phoenix symbols; (Fig 25) architectural model of the National Bank of Commerce, Lincoln, by architect I M Pei, New York; (Fig 26) Ziemer house, Lincoln, general view; (Fig 27) Ziemer house, detail of the west gable wall; (Fig 28) Stuart Building, Lincoln, 1929

READING SPACE AS TIME

in Great Plains
RECOLLECTIVE
ARCHITECTURE

By Paul A. Olson

At some time in the 1960s, I went with my mother to visit my extended family in Shickley in southern Fillmore County, Nebraska, where the family had settled piecemeal between the early 1870s and the late 1880s. After a family celebration, we drove out west of town and slightly north to look at what might remain of the farm where mother grew up. Occupying the south side of the farm was the "pond"—part of the south central Nebraska wetland system that is so covered with environmental controversy, an area now converted into a hunting ground for Ducks Unlimited. In the time of mother's residence, however, the pond was both my grandfather's bane and his insurance policy, a place that one could not farm in normal years and that one farmed intensively when drought precluded farming

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elsewhere. The farm, as I see it in the albums that we keep, was never much of a place, and the outside buildings were already gone in the 1960s. All that stood was the house with its weathered paintless siding, the three small rooms (as I recall) where a family of over a half-dozen children was reared, the mulberry and burr oak trees around the walls embracing the building as if holding it up, their arms sweeping in through the broken windows.

When my mother—a generally unsentimental woman—looked at the wavy kitchen floor, the walls empty of all cupboard or ornament save for a few peeling pieces of wallpaper, she wept silently

and said repeatedly, "It was so hard." Though to me the place seemed pointless and drab, ramshackle and devoid of presence, for her its space was history: the ghosts of her Swedish childhood moving about, her work crocheting and tatting to make money to go late to high school and college reappearing before her imagination, her aging father's harshness and struggle to survive on an almost worthless piece of land, and her mother's baking of bread to sell to the neighbors to make a little money. All of these lived in the weathered grains of gray wood, the broken windows, and cracked door panels (Figs. 16–17). She was experiencing, simultaneously, the past and the present in the space of her house.

This sense of simultaneity, of a past in present space—recreated in my mother's case in the humblest of settings—appears to me to be one of the central features of much of our aesthetic perception of architecture and



Fig. 16 The farm home near Shickley during its heyday. Courtesy of author

one of the features that architects, both folk and sophisticated, simulate in the use of “quotation” in the construction of new buildings. Concerning the sense of simultaneity and the recovery of the past through the experience of present space, Marcel Proust is our prime theoretician. Proust describes this sense by telling how memory and history work in the liberating of present perception. In his best-known passage on this subject he writes of how

“The [experienced] unevenness of the pavement in the court of the Guermantes residence, similar to [the remembered unevenness of] that in the baptistry of Saint Mark’s, draws its sustenance only from the essence of things” in that it focuses neither on the past nor on the present but exists “simultaneously in the present and the past, real without being of the present moment, ideal but not abstract.”

This sense of the simultaneity of past and present in a certain space or in two spaces giving rise to a like sensation, gives one a sense of “a single minute released from the chronological order of time,” and, in Proust’s view, creates, in the person remembering, the sense of profound release, of a deeper self liberated from the oppressive push of time present.¹ The experience is like theme-and-variations music. An additional part of its power, as Proust sees it, lies in the contrast between the changes in people and the “unchangeableness of our remembrance,” a trace from the past that creates in us an incredible longing to recover the material counterpart of the unchanging in our memories.

This desire for the static moment recovered, mingled with the experience of change, encourages us, in building structures, to try to recreate past time through architectural quotation or quotation-with-variation. We have an impulse to use space as a symbol for time through our manipulation both of architectural configuration in new buildings and in our efforts at restoration. The stone and wood of decayed old buildings are the literal picture of time passed, but “quotation” is the spiritual equivalent of architectural restoration,

appealing as it does to the sense of simultaneity.

The search for this sense was probably especially strong in the Great Plains for European-based peoples in the first one hundred years after settlement as they tried to re-root themselves, partly by recalling their roots in another land.



Fig. 17 Nels Anderson, Bengta Hakanson Anderson, and Bessie Anderson (Olson) in front of the Shickley house. Courtesy of author

However, the search for the experience of simultaneity also appears in Native American architecture, rooted as it is in a many thousand year old tradition in the Plains.

For my mother in her family’s shack at Shickley, architectural space functioned as a metonymy for time—her time—and she had the advantage over me in witnessing the old farm because she could view it from an insider’s *emic* perspective.² I was the outside *etic* observer. To have had anything like her

experience, I would have had to study documents and oral histories, histories related to Shickley and the old country in Skåne; I would have had to examine the remains thoroughly until I half imagined my way into the things that she saw in her mind. Even so, my experience would have fallen short. I would still have been outside the self that was seeing the stream of ghosts thronging from the past at the same time as she saw the broken fabric of her house before her.

My mother’s experience may be a touchstone in how space functions as the messenger of time in our aesthetic perception of buildings. The hovel near Shickley led mother to imagine or remember other hovels—the hovel in Skåne in Sweden from which her parents came, the dugout near the extinct town of Carlyle, Nebraska, where the immigrant family survived its first year in a domicile so leaky that the family would occasionally crawl under the large, oilcloth-covered table to protect themselves from rain. What separated my mother’s memories from fairy tale was only that the places, the spaces symbolic of time past, remained, at least in part. One could go to see them as one could not go to see the fairy world.

We know little enough about the common life of ordinary people in most parts of Nebraska, say during the early white settlement period—the 1850s to 1890s. We have some details from diaries and letters. We have the fictionalized novels and autobiographies of Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz and Bess Streeter Aldrich and Ole Rølvaag and Sophus Winther. But how do we know that what they are presenting is not fiction in the invidious sense? We “know” because we possess, in our old buildings, the spaces that their works fill with historical imaginings. We know because we have photos and paintings of those buildings. We know because we have, from our ancestors, memories that correlate with the historical artifacts, whisperings that also fill the spaces. The reconstruction of what it was like to be an early European in Nebraska depends

heavily on our examination of the sod or straw bale or log houses that the poorest of the settlers built, using the spaces that they left as a "text" that confirms or contradicts other written texts and represent time.³ It is so that space becomes the primary token of historic time.

Though to my perception place or space for my mother was metonymic with time, not everyone would accept my perception of what was happening in that scene. Despite the commonsense understanding among archeologists and preservation architects that the space they study symbolizes time, a school of criticism and historiography has arisen, in the last thirty years, that argues that history is only text without "reference" to anything outside the texts. The texts have a meaning wholly constructed by the subjective interpreter of texts. As Lee Patterson has put it: "[I]n trying to discover the historically real we enter into a labyrinthine world that not only forecloses access to history in its original form but calls into question its very existence as an object of knowledge" in the sense that "[w]riting absorbs the social context into a textuality that is wholly alienated from the real 'even if,' as Paul de Man notoriously said, 'these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions.'"⁴ But how can one know that something is alienated from the "historically real" if that "real" cannot be known?

For traditional history and archeology, as well as for my mother, the words that go with the spaces recollective of past time and the spaces that are tokens of time past go together to form what we know of what has happened. It is not accidental that the textualist view of history has little use for archeology or for the reading of spaces as a telling of historical narrative. If texts do not have a reference to things outside of themselves, if reference does not exist except as a vague shadow of objects traced in the mind, time becomes an entity understood entirely in the subjectively read texts. For such a theory, the words and images that ran through my

mother's memory could not relate to the spaces that she viewed, and were indistinguishable from fairy tale or hallucination. But my argument is that time and history are space in the most literal sense, space filled in by such "texts" as my mother's talk filling in the Shickley house. Neither history nor time exists except as marked by spaces—on sun dials or clocks or the movements of objects in the sky—and the meaning and status of a text are confirmed in the world of their referents and potential referents.

Consider Troy before and after Heinrich Schliemann's excavations. Homer's accounts of the Trojan War and its aftermath, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were, for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, almost totally fictitious accounts, though earlier writers and historical figures from Alexander the Great through Caligula had seen them otherwise. As Arnold Brackman has pointed out, "[I]n Schliemann's day, the dawn of Western civilization as portrayed by Homer was almost universally considered a product of poetic imagination."⁵ Schliemann thought otherwise, and his archeological discoveries made it clear to the world that there was a referent for at least some of the events contained in Homer's Troy story: that there was such a city as Troy, located about where Homer locates it; that the city had been involved in a great war; and that many of the kinds of artifacts and building complexes described in the *Iliad* are like artifacts that were found in the layers of the city that Schliemann uncovered.⁶ The space in which Troy was found made it possible for the archeologists to show also the strengths and limitations of Homer's history. From an examination of architectural space, we have been able to determine, at least with some likelihood, what parts of Homer's presentation of time are entirely fable and what parts are probable history. Before I saw the remains of the house near Shickley, I do not think that I

made up the stories of her childhood, but, had I thought so, when I saw the visible fabric that surrounded her childhood and the stream of emotions that crossed her face, I would have known otherwise.⁷ The simultaneity of told stories, visible fabric, and traces of memory in her face told me of what Proust calls an essence.

In many immigrant cultures, both folk architecture and sophisticated architecture are designed, I would argue, to create the sense of simultaneity—past and present commingled—that Proust analyzes and that my mother experienced.⁸ The stepped-gable architecture of the chapel and other buildings at Bethphage Mission at Axtell is based not only on the general idea of a national romantic revival, but explicitly recalls the architecture of south Sweden's medieval churches and the imitations of this style promoted by the Danish folk school architects of the nineteenth century.⁹ Coming to Bethphage, a pietistic Lutheran from Skåne in southern Sweden would have had Proust's experience of simultaneity, of being in the New World and simultaneously living with the architectural forms of his or her childhood (Figs. 18–19). Rølvaag writes in *Giants in the Earth* of the medieval Scandinavian style house-barn that Per Hansa builds on the prairies of South Dakota both for pragmatic reasons and to recapture the time-past of the old country. German-Russians in the Russian bottoms in Lincoln, Nebraska, built variations of the long, narrow houses that they had built in the old country, and the settlers at Sutton at first arranged their houses along a single thoroughfare as they would have in the old country until enforcers of the Homestead Act told them that they would have to place their houses on the private property that was the "homestead." One could go on.

One of the central appeals of architecture that quotes from previous architecture is to give one, through artifice, the sense that it rehearses or simulates experiences of simultaneity, the remem-



Fig. 18 The chapel at the Bethphage Mission, Axtell, Nebraska. D. Murphy photograph, 1979



Fig. 19 The church at Gårdståga, Skåne, southern Sweden. Joni Niefeld photograph, 1990

branches of things past recovered in solid forms. For some, such as the Czechs, even representations of past spaces served as mnemonic devices (Fig. 20).¹¹¹ Such experiences of space as time must have been extremely important to most European immigrants as they placed simple architectural features on the relatively featureless and, for them, memoryless landscape of the Great Plains.

The same motive may also be visible, as I shall presently argue, in the work of relatively self-conscious architects busy echoing the features of European architecture, often employing old forms and styles to consecrate new kinds of human endeavor. But the remembrance of things past through architecture also appears, in another form, in Native American Plains cultures and serves another purpose. I wish to argue that, when self-conscious designers of buildings use the construction of space to represent time or to simulate experiences of simultaneity, they may do so from the perspective of several sophisticated versions of what time is. They may see time (1) as a circular entity (as in Lakota culture or the Nebraska capitol); (2) as a circular progressive entity as in medieval liturgical culture and in some Nebraska churches; (3) as a progress away from an attractive stable state as in "decay of Nature" theories of time and history; or (4) as a

progress toward a utopian or stable state as in post-Baconian progressive theories of the movement of time and in modern buildings that celebrate that progress. Though the fourth assumption is by far the most prominent one for mid-twentieth century architects, inspiring much of their use of architectural quotation to conquer time and history through the overreaching of traditional European-based architecture, the first two assumptions are not without their significance in older forms of Great Plains architecture, and the third has a place at least in the perception of architecture if not in its designing. Let me begin with the idea of circular time, looking at its appearance in Plains Native American architecture and in the Nebraska capitol building.

1. Space as a metaphor for circular time in Native American architecture and in the Nebraska capitol.

When time appears to its observers as a circular phenomenon cycling through grand recurrences (e.g. Plato or Nietzsche), the emphasis often goes to seasons, hunts, plantings and harvests, and related festivals or to recurrent cycles in the life of the civilization. When time is seen as linear, the emphasis goes to what are seen as unique, unrepeatable actions, often actions by what the historian regards as a Carlylean "great man" such as Caesar's crossing

the Rubicon, Napoleon's invasion of Russia, or Churchill's turning World War II around with his "blood, sweat and tears" speech. For the Native American groups that inhabit this state, time was visualized and, in traditional homes or kinship groups, still is visualized as circular (or cycling in a square figure that has the same effect as a circle). The winter counts give no attention to great men, and the emphasis on the "great" Native American leader seems to come only late in the struggles of Plains Indians with Euro-American groups.

The idea that space is time appears especially vividly in Lakota sacred story and architecture. In Lakota creation accounts the sky is commonly seen as the tipi cover of the world and the earth as its floor. Parallel with this, in the Lakota account of the creation of the world, as told by Sword to Walker, the four direction-brothers begin their work by dwelling in Tate's round lodge, whose door opens to the south. One brother sits to the right of the lodge door, the west; one directly opposite to it, the north; one to the left, the east; and one beside the door, the south. When the four brothers journey to establish the four directions—west, north, east, and south—of the earth that is their larger domicile, they establish directions identical with the directions they occupy when seated

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in the lodge. They are able to do so by performing a series of feats to outwit the wicked powers inhabiting the cardinal directions, powers that seem to have seasonal characteristics. As the first brother performs his conquests to establish the west, he appears to capture some of the spiritual power of the thunderbird he outwits, the power of the thunderbird in the west. In turn each of the other three brothers establishes the direction correlative with his place in the lodge—the spot of the icy winter of the north, of the beginnings of things characteristic of spring and dawn in the east, and of the fecundity of summer in the south. The brothers can then return to the tipi of the central figure, a woman, Wohpe, who has the characteristics of lover and wife and mother (or home maker). The four directions in the myth appear to be syndetic with the four seasons of the year and to create

the four corners of the domicile, which is the world.¹¹

This idea that the world is a domicile or tipi whose four directions rehearse the passage of time and the seasons is made even more explicit in *Black Elk Speaks* and in the dictations by Black Elk that are its basis. Black Elk describes the sky tipi of his great vision as containing the six grandfathers of the four directions and the up and down directions.¹² He further makes the circle of the seasons and the circle of the tipi and of the camp symbols of one another.

[T]he Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many

nests, where the Great Spirit meant us to hatch our children.¹³

Finally, he thinks of actual tipi directions as symbolizing seasonal time. When he performs his first cure, he goes to the west, then to the north, then to the east, and to the south of the tipi, "stopping there where the source of all life is" (i.e. the south and summer).¹⁴ When he performs the bison ceremony, he says that he and his helper "made a sacred place like a bison wallow at the center of the nation's hoop, and there we set up the sacred tepee," painting across its circle "from south to north . . . a red road" that faced the white cleansing wind of the world or winter.¹⁵ In both the Sword and the Black Elk accounts, the memorializing of seasonal time/space is done through the creation or marking of the architectural space of a tipi that in its structure appeals back to the first creation of time and space.



Fig. 20 The Hradčany and the Malá Strana, Prague, as depicted on the proscenium curtain in the Bílá Hora ZČBJ Hall at Verdigre. P. Michael Whye photograph for NSHS, C998.1-525



Fig. 21 Sam Kills Two winter count. John A. Anderson photograph, NSHS RG2969-2-1

In *Black Elk*, the notion of the cyclical in seasons is also extended to the cyclical in cultures, as the wheel of the four directions and the diametric paths across the wheel of time are used in the tipi ceremonies to rehearse the notion of a cycling in the culture from integration to chaos to reintegration.¹⁶ Hence, in *Black Elk*'s version of the Lakota episteme, the action of constructing time and the action of constructing space are the same action driving toward the construction of a home. The action of structuring space is a metonymy for the structuring of time that we call history.

It is not accidental that Lakota history, written in winter counts, often goes, on the winter count diagrams, in circles similar to those on which the direction-brothers travel in the Sword account (see Fig. 21), and it is also not surprising that many tipis contain the chronicles of the owners' lives, battles, or vision creatures.

Something of the same sense may be suggested in the Nebraska capitol building. Hartley Burr Alexander speaks of the capitol as organized as follows:

The exterior of the capitol falls into two major units, the peripheral Square and the central Tower. Their architectural forms

naturally suggest their related significance in a monumental sense. The circuit of the Square is emblematic of the quarters of the Earth and the historic course of human experience. The Tower, in its upward sweep, serves as a gnomon of the Heavens and symbol of the more abstract conceptions of life derived from historical experience. Unitedly they express that combination of action and thought which is the essence of all human life, social as well as individual.¹⁷

That "[t]he circuit of the Square is emblematic of the quarters of the Earth and the historic course of human experience" suggests a circular or perhaps a spiraling conception of the passage of time and history related to the four directions. The "circuit" suggests repetition while the word "course" may suggest that things move in a progressive direction. Indeed, one finds this cyclical or spiraling view on the Square in a series of sculptured panels on the outside of the building that represent times when law was founded (or refounded) prior to its development in various civilizations: Lee Lawrie's three sculptures concerning the foundation of American law (south pavilion) (Fig. 22), the codification of Roman law under Justinian (terrace circuit, south side), and the codification of Anglo-Saxon law under Ethelbert (southeastern corner). The three events repeat the same phase in the history of culture, although the suggestion may be that the foundation of American law is a more elevated event than the codification of Anglo-Saxon and that the codification of Anglo-Saxon law is a more elevated event than the codification of Roman law.

Above, the tower represents both what the heavens say about history and what is "abstracted" from human history by thought, the perception that history runs in cycles or spirals: "The Tower, in its upward sweep, serves as a gnomon of the Heavens and symbol of the more abstract conceptions of life derived from historical experience." "Gnomon" here means "interpreter" or "discerner" of the Heavens in its original meaning, and here Alexander may mean that the tower reveals "heavenly" paradigms (the Platonic view of history). But the

tower apparently also assimilates what can be otherwise abstracted from the observation of the particulars of historical patterning.

What is this understanding derived both from the heavenly “gnomon” and from history abstracted? It is that time repeats itself in a theme and variations pattern as humanity repeats like events or as it moves upward while repeating similar events. The tower contains the golden dome supported by the eight thunderbirds of the cardinal and semicardinal directions, perhaps a combination of the Pawnee and Lakota senses of the thunderbird symbolism, which suggests the recycling of the seasons and of time that would lead to the creation of more abstract conceptions of life through the repetition of human experience (Fig. 23). Surmounting the dome is the statue of the sower facing to the northwest, the direction between autumn and winter in the time-space of Lakota iconology, the time at which sowers would be sowing winter wheat, and when Alexander hoped that future citizens would be “casting abroad the seeds of noble living and of wisdom, justice, power, and mercy.”¹⁸ Alexander certainly knew enough about Pawnee and Siouan notions of time to make such a move, and his interpretation of the Square below suggests that he did.¹⁹

2. Space as circular time in Western liturgical architecture. Time is not often seen as circular, or represented as recurrent, in the recent architecture of the European and European-based world. In the Judeo-Christian and classical world, time, from the Fall and especially after the Exodus—as many scholars have pointed out—is mainly linear: the Jews cross the Red Sea once, Christ dies “once for all” in the Biblical phrase, death is an irreversible event as it is not in portions of the Eastern and Native American worlds, where reincarnation is posited. As Jacques Le Goff has pointed out, in primitive Christianity and in Judaism, time centers in God and in His acts of intervention in history,



Fig. 22 The foundations of American law, triptych panel by Lee Lawrie on the south pavilion, Nebraska capitol. Detail, D. Murphy photograph, 1982

and eternity is not for the Christians (save in the case of a few sophisticated theologians like Boethius)—as it is for the Greeks—another dimension characterized by the absence of time. Eternity for most Jews and Christians is limitless time. For Jews, earthly time has an end in the messianic event and the establishment of the kingdom of God. For Chris-

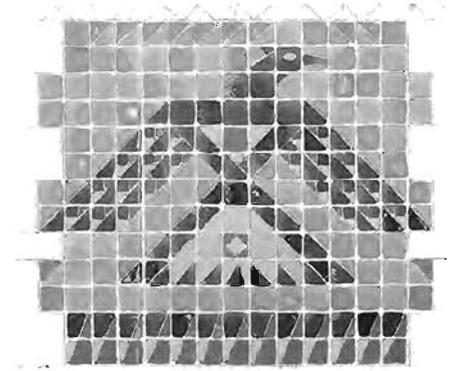


Fig. 23 Thunderbird, Nebraska capitol. “Tile Decoration at Base of Dome,” detail from original color cartoon, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue & Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue Associates, architects, March 12, 1929. Nebraska Capitol Archives

tians it has a first terminus in the messianic events symbolized by the Passion, Resurrection, and Pentecost, and a second one in the Second Coming. When the Second Coming faded as an imminent possibility, the European Christian saw himself or herself as on a pilgrimage toward God in a time filled with unique acts of the will that carried him or her either toward or away from God.²⁰

Still, despite the dominance of the linear view of both individual and collective history (the *translatio imperii*), the circular view of time remained a powerful force parallel to the linear one in medieval civilization. After all, medieval agriculture was exposed to the cycling of the heavenly bodies and of the seasons. The cycles of the seasons and months, of the zodiac, and of the church festivals are powerfully represented in medieval sculpture on the fronts of cathedrals and in medieval art. The rituals of the hours in monastic culture include both daily and annual repetitions that symbolize the circular passage of time on the journey to eternity: "More for reasons of practical necessity than because of the underlying theology, the concrete time of the Church, as adapted from antiquity, was the time of the cleric, given its characteristic rhythm of the religious offices and the bells which announced them."²¹

Still there is a kind of progress in this circling unlike that in Lakota culture, a pilgrimage toward a teleological end of history for the individual or the culture. Though the development of mercantile time and its rendering in architecture comes in the urban centers of Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the peasants of Europe—who formed a large portion of the immigrants to the Great Plains—still lived primarily with a time marked by the movement of the sun, the planets, and the seasons, punctuated by the repeating ceremonies of the church year as the markers.²² One could point to examples of the effort to render this circular liturgical time in the space of liturgical churches in Nebraska, but the symbolism of such churches is

almost altogether derived from European models without much adaptation to Great Plains circumstances.

It may be more interesting to look at the presentation of circular liturgical time in a building that belongs to an organization as far from liturgy as any in the ecclesiastical world, the Congregational Church. When Plymouth Congregational Church was built in Lincoln (1930), much of it was built to give a sense of simultaneity and local culture. Its bricks—of red, yellow and orange colors—were chosen, as Rev. Benjamin Wyland writes in his autobiography, to recall "western sunsets" and "harvest fields."²³ The church's design also recollected another time—that of the primitive Christian church in its adoption of the Roman basilica style that emulated such edifices in Rome as St. John Lateran, St. Paul's Outside the Walls, or St. Cecilia in Trastevere.²⁴ Wyland makes clear that the style was intended to recall the idealized pristine Christianity that Congregationalists thought they emulated (ironically, the basilica style was simply mandated by Constantine in imitation of Roman civic forms, and probably violates symbolically the strong Congregationalist interest in decentralization and the separation of powers).²⁵ Hence the space of the building is an effort to recollect an ecclesiastical time prior to the rise of a powerful papacy, a time when the Church was thought by Congregationalists to have been simpler and purer.²⁶ Since modern Congregationalism has putatively recaptured this purity, the building stands for a kind of progress, at least since the time of the Reformation.

Though the general symbolism of the church is informed by this progressive view of history, the tower and circular window on its front relate its statement about time to the circular ecclesiastical view of time, the view of time central to the very ecclesiasticism that the building in general rejects.²⁷ The main circular front window contains the cross made up of the wheat and grapes of communion to celebrate its cyclical

memorialization of the passion and resurrection within the church. This memorialization is enacted also in the tile portraits beside the window portraying the phoenix and the peacock symbolic of the perpetual renewal implicit in the renewal of communion that was fulfilled in resurrection (Fig. 24). The phoenix and peacock symbolism, in turn, comes from Western Catholic and Byzantine liturgical and circular ideas of time.²⁸ Wyland says that the peacock is a symbol "of immortality" and of perpetual renewal (this symbolism is drawn from Lactantius' poem, *De Ave Phoenixe*). He also remarks on the appearance of the peacock as a symbol of resurrection and immortality in Ravennan Byzantine art in Apollinare in Classe, and Apollinare Nuova.²⁹ Plymouth Congregational would not be possible apart from the efforts of archeologists and preservation architects that have preserved the churches in Ravenna and Rome that it quotes. In another way, its space "quotes" other spaces that have been preserved to make a statement about time past, and many of these spaces are ones in which circular liturgical time is the crucial time celebrated in space.

3. Linear time and the idea of the decay of nature through time in architecture. With the increasing dominance of the idea that time equates to a progress that can deliver human culture from the disturbing happenstances in the cycles of the seasons and from most natural disasters, we more and more begin to think of temporal events as happening once and only once. When we view time as linear, we are increasingly likely to measure it by changes in the spaces we observe, in new or altered buildings, or changes in the spaces we discover at archeological sites. Change in space is a mark of time's having passed, and change in time over eons is marked out, at least partially, by the changing of the spaces carved out for and by buildings—say changes from Pawnee earth lodges to sod houses to



Fig. 24 The rose window at Plymouth Congregational Church, Lincoln, showing the flanking peacock and phoenix symbols. D. Murphy photographs, 1975

Victorian Gothic houses to Frank Lloyd Wright-style Prairie architecture. The decaying space of buildings obviously marked by time records not only the reality of time passed but the character of the changes in the human societies that constructed those buildings and watched them go toward desuetude.

However, time's movement, with persons or people that believe in linear time, is not always perceived as moving toward improvement, and particularly after World War I, there came a period when it was fashionable to view the passage of linear time as describing a long downward curve. The 1920s pessimism that followed World War I—the view of time contained in Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918) and the general disillusion affecting the world of *belles*

lettres—made it possible to see dissolution everywhere. One could easily represent the notion that the current architecture that came after World War I symbolized a kind of running dry of the creative impulses of human culture. Though its general layout belies a faith in progress and "Reason," Plymouth Church does a bit of playing with the idea of decline in its appeal to the purity of the early church and its eschewing of Gothic "ecclesiasticism."

However, the reading of architecture's time-space as a symbol of decline is more often a matter of perception than of creation. Not very many persons or groups having sufficient wealth to construct a building would erect it as a monument to decay, especially of their own decay. Perception is another mat-

ter, and a literary example. *The Professor's House*, provides one with an opportunity to examine a work where architectural change is seen as a symbol of time running down. The hero, the Professor, in Willa Cather's novel, *The Professor's House*, lives in an old house that appears to be of Second Empire style: a nondescript square house, probably of the kind built for large families in the late Victorian period. While building and moving into a new more stylish house suited to his prestige, he discovers that he cannot really work or live in the new house because his family is falling apart, as he may be also.³⁰ The new house is not satisfying because, of late, he has essentially wasted his life over family rivalries, as have also his children and wife. When he decides to return to

his first house, he also determines to edit the diary of his student, Tom Outland, killed in World War I (a student whom his wife resented and made into the *bite noire* of the decline of her marriage to the Professor).

From the diary, the Professor learns of Tom Outland's discovery of the history carved in space of what appears to be a Hopi-like people. Their comely Mesa Verde or Chaco Canyon style houses, now in ruins, their artifacts and the remains of their daily living explained to him by his archeological mentor, a Father Duchene, tell him of an ancient peaceful people who had domesticated turkeys, a people with a strong aesthetic sense wiped out by a "roving Indian tribe without culture or domestic virtues." In short, those symbols of time's decline came at the hands of a brutal and cultureless people, a little like the people that Cather found in Nebraska at the end of what she calls the first cycle. As Tom Outland reads the *Aeneid*, he experiences Proust's sense of simultaneity, reading two stories—that on Virgil's page, of Roman civilization with its mingled grace and brutality celebrated in epic verse, and that in his imagination, of his discovered peaceful southwestern Indian culture with its "little clustered houses clinging together for protection, a rude tower rising in their midst, rising strong, with calmness and courage—behind it a dark grotto, in its depths a crystal spring."³¹ The space of the dwellings of the pre-contact Hopi-like culture that Tom Outland, as surrogate for the Professor, discovers become a visible emblem for the opposites to the Professor's own decline and the emptiness of his family, but also for the emptiness of the imperialistic time that Cather saw coming after World War I. Paradoxically the "progress" that Cather's time sensed as its greatest achievement appears in her work of this period as decline.³²

At a very different social level, when Per Hansa, in *Giants in the Earth*, builds a combined house and barn in the medieval Scandinavian style, the style

adopted in his "quotation" from the past becomes for a pietistic Beret a symbol of the demonic and animal-like existence that her family is living on the Plains. Style signals to her that the time that has passed between her emigration from Norway and the narrative present has been one of long decline.³³ I do not know of efforts to capture time in the space of architecture that bespeak a similar reading of architecture outside of fiction, but I do know that many first generation Scandinavian immigrants with whom I talked in the 1970s did see the new world to which they came as a decaying world, even more decayed than that from which they had come.³⁴

4. Style and simultaneity. The conquest of time in a progress-dominated world. The idea of time as recording the history of human progress has been part of our vision of time ever since Francis Bacon published his *New Atlantis* advocating the extension of human empire over the natural world, "to the due accomplishing of all things possible." Bacon's vision that human beings can radically dominate and alter the face of nature so as to ameliorate the lot of humankind gathered force in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and seemingly received objective endorsement from Darwin's discoveries, however incorrectly they were understood. The notion that humankind is involved, almost genetically, in the mastery of the material universe could hardly escape being embodied in architecture, most obviously of course in the endless murals paying tribute to "manifest destiny" or those showing the ascent of humankind from the cave to the skyscraper.

But there is a subtler way in which the idea of progress and the mastery of nature can be embodied in architecture's construction of time. Walter Benjamin writes of the glass arcades in nineteenth-century Paris, where the "inside" seems to be "outside" as symbolic of the idea of progress and the domination of nature implicit in the capitalism of the pe-

riod. As the arcades became grungy and fell into disuse because their aesthetic purposes and their shopping purpose clashed, they were rendered aesthetically useless, as he sees it, by "the primal landscape of consumption."³⁵ However, they remain as metaphors for their age's will to progress and domination. One finds something like this situation in Lincoln in the I. M. Pei building constructed for the National Bank of Commerce (Fig. 25). There, the massive use of symmetrical materials unavailable to previous periods combines with size and grandeur to speak of institutional dominance. The "air-curtain" doors originally installed in the building that kept out the heat and cold bespoke the same notion, and the lobby contained trees bigger than those in the street, suggesting that the masters of this building could turn nature inside out. The outsized flag decorating the lobby said it all. No historical stylistic gestures decorate this building. It is pure progress and pure domination.

But other modes of asserting the idea of progress and the conquest of the past may relate to the mythos of progress as time's twin and the explicator of the sense of quotation and simultaneity. Those who built grand houses for themselves as a rapidly "progressing" Nebraska was leaving the frontier behind—with its Indian or pioneer parsimonious relationship to the natural world—said what they were about through their houses. Affluent people building their own living quarters had sufficient resources to try to call up, in the memory or the imagination, another place and time. They commonly did not discover what Cather's professor discovers, that their time and space might be a diminished version of a former one. The great house built in a Richardsonian Romanesque, Queen Anne, Victorian Gothic or Colonial Revival style celebrates the progress created by the industrial or financial power of the magnate that built it, his mastery of materials, and his provision for the domestic comfort of the family that resided inside.



Fig. 25 Architectural model of the National Bank of Commerce, Lincoln, by architect I. M. Pei, New York, shown prior to the decision to add an eleventh floor. Nathaniel Lieberman, New York, NSHS RG0809-65

The defenses of neo-medieval architecture that Ruskin advanced as part of his Christian Socialist program for English culture were not, for the most part, relevant to the Great Plains neo-medieval “great house.” Such houses do not celebrate Ruskin’s idea that the kinds of collaborative communities that were thought to have built the great medieval buildings—the stones of Venice—can now build great neo-medieval ones. The goal of such houses appears to be to celebrate the solitary power of the owner and builder of the house and his mastery over the material universe in his vocation and in his domicile.³⁶

Consider an example from Nebraska: the 1909 “Richardsonian” Romanesque Ziemer house in Lincoln. Richardson’s own original Romanesque, based on some cursory study of the Romanesque Midi, imitates the great round arches of the lower colonnades or the west fronts of Midi churches and makes them into the front door of a domestic dwelling.

Similarly, he takes the smaller upper arches of Romanesque ecclesiastical interiors and makes them into window spaces of living houses, and he turns the fortress-like corner turrets of the Midi Romanesque into window nook, study, or observation areas. To these features, he adds huge amounts of steamed shingle work on the walls and roofs.³⁷ The Ziemer house follows Richardson (Figs. 26–27). Done in magnificent opulence, the house turns the round arches of the austere ecclesiastical Romanesque naves or baptisteries into a solarium-porch where one can take the sun at one’s leisure, and turns the turret of Romanesque military architecture into a dining room where the stained glass window speaks not of religious messages but of flowering dogwood and abstract art-glass designs from other worlds. The library, facing west, contains a perpetually setting stained glass sun that rivals the natural sun and does its work on cloudy days.

The interior pulls together, with imperial ease, the styles of the blue-tile Dutch kitchen, the Romanesque, Art Nouveau, Moorish, and Spanish mission. The interior is done in materials gathered from throughout the world: mahogany, oak, gold mingled with glass, Tiffany lamps, and crystal chandeliers.

The builder of the house controlled the local telegraph for the Burlington Railroad—with its service to “progress” on the frontier. He appropriately owned a worldwide travel agency, dabbled in interior design, and ended as a Christian Science healer, asserting through his faith the degree to which mind and spirit could control matter. A publication apparently issuing from the now defunct Lansing Opera House calls Mr. Ziemer “a real bohemian ... a lover of all the classic arts, and an amateur in most of them.”³⁸ Still the building has an ambiguous relationship to time past, for while the traditional styles used in the building ask us to engage the sense of simultaneity and relation to other places and times—especially if we have experienced those styles elsewhere in the world—the multitude of the styles and the control over materials asks us to see the house as overreaching previous times and places, and expresses its owner’s domination of all lands, materials, and styles.

A more explicit case of the celebration of progress in a building that still pays deference to past architecture and makes some effort to create the sense of simultaneity is the Stuart Building in Lincoln, a skyscraper built about twenty years after the Ziemer house when steel had come into use; a building much more explicitly a tribute to control over materials and the power of capital and yet one that, unlike the Pei building, asks us to recall another time (Fig. 28). The National Register of Historic Places nomination form speaks of the building as having “a decidedly vertical emphasis, transforming a blocky mass into a skyscraper.”³⁹

Part of what transforms the “blocky mass” is the emphasis on verticality in the lineation of the building, including



Fig. 26 Ziemer house, Lincoln. General view showing the porch and tower. D. Murphy photograph, 1974

the ten-story-tall piers that incorporate central ribs like those that, on a Gothic pillar, ascend to the high arches. The narrower piers incorporate such a rib at the tenth story level. The rib has no structural function other than to emphasize the loftiness and verticality of the building, going beyond the High Gothic or even Victorian Gothic of earlier times. At the top of the building, Gothic tracery derived in style from late English fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Henry VII Gothic (where the tracery is also laid on without even the pretense of a structural function) is included to give the building a kind of lightness, and the tower above the main mass of the building includes similar detail.

Within, the now altered theater was modeled in many of its details after the Florentine Palazzo Davanzati, including a frieze celebrating the stock characters of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, characters in the improvisatory folk drama of the Italian Renaissance that would have contrasted in their gawky lack of sophistication with the marvels of the silent movies that played in the theater. The whole appearance of the building is that of a skyscraper that pays tribute to

late Gothic and early Renaissance forms, and yet conquers them as "progress" always does in its own myth. Like the Ziemer house, the building is made of fine materials, magnificently crafted. The agreement to build the building emphasized the will of the owner in that Stuart reserved the right to change the building plans as he saw fit once construction was under way. In the Stuart building, one sees "quotation" used to remind one of other times and places and, simultaneously, to remind one that these have been superseded.

It is a long way from Black Elk's tipi to the Stuart building. Clearly most cultures and periods impose one or more narrative plots on time and space (I have written of four that were part of the recent past of this state). It may be that we will need soon to return again to a celebration of the cyclical in our architecture. If the ethos of domination that goes with linear, progressive notions of time is as destructive to our environment as the Club of Rome (and other successor study groups looking at the future of the planet) have suggested, then perhaps we will have in the future to return to more modest visions of simulta-



Fig. 27 Ziemer house, Lincoln. Detail of the west gable wall. D. Murphy photograph 1974

neity and human possibility in the buildings that we create.⁶⁵ Such an architecture will have, once again, to make use of local materials, stress the cyclical in human culture and in the natural world, and allow for an openness and vulnerability before the latter. Instead of emphasizing massiveness and reach in the collection of architectural materials, we may have to emphasize parsimony and elegance, what the oldest occupants of this territory sought in their buildings.

Earlier I argued that the words that document history and the spaces that are tokens of time past go together to form what we know of what has happened. The extreme textualist view of history does not believe that history is something from which we can learn. It makes time become our entirely subjectively understood texts. But the textualists are wrong. Space does tell us about time. Often the spaces of buildings tell us not only about what time has done to them, but about what conceptions of time were foundational to the buildings. If we explore the time and

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space of the first buildings in this region, it is altogether possible that we will empower ourselves to relearn what a parsimonious use of time and space would be like. In that case we would be circling back on the past to recover from the effects of over-domination. We would be reaching, once again, toward a circular view of time.

Notes

¹ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1934), 2:296.

² Ruth M. Brend and Kenneth L. Pike, *Tagmemics*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 1:87–90, 100–114.

³ For one deep reading of a Cather place see David Murphy, "Jejich Antonie: Czechs, the Land, Cather, and the Pavelka Farmstead," *Great Plains Quarterly* 14 (1994): 85–106.

⁴ Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 59; cf. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 165.

⁵ Arnold Brackman, *The Dream of Troy* (New York: Mason and Lipscomb, 1974), 3; For issues of historicity and the Trojan War, see Caroline Moorhead, *The Lost Treasures of Troy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994), 234–39.

⁶ Cf. Brackmann, *The Dream of Troy*, passim.

⁷ To give an example parallel to Schliemann's work from recent efforts to reconstruct Indian history on the Plains: The relationship of artifact to the combination of fable and history, in the modern sense, that appears in Indian oral history has forced some archeologists that deal with matters relating to Plains Indians to pay attention to oral histories as a possible guide to the location and meaning of architectural remains. These in turn assist in assessing the verisimilitude and meaning of stories from the oral tradition. Stories that once were deemed wholly fanciful are now seen as having a historical core that can be validated through archeological exploration. This does not mean that words or texts are unimportant in our effort to know the past; it means that space tells us as much of time as texts.

⁸ See the buildings of nineteenth-century immigrants in Dell Upton, ed., *American's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America* (Washington, D. C.: The Preservation Press, 1986), 100–165.

⁹ Paul A. Olson, "Scandinavians: The Search for Zion," in Paul A. Olson, ed., *Broken Hoops and Plains People* (Lincoln: Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, 1976), 259–61.

¹⁰ Another way of viewing the proscenium curtains in Czech-American community halls is their elicitation of a profound sense of time-space simultaneity; cf. David Murphy, "Dramatic Expressions: Czech Theatre Curtains in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 74 (1993), esp. 175–80.

¹¹ James R. Walker, *Lakota Myth*, ed. Elaine A. Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 58–89.

¹² John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 17–39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 164–65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁶ Paul A. Olson, "Black Elk Speaks as Epic and Ritual Attempt to Reverse History," in *Vision and Refuge: Essays on the Literature of the Great Plains*, ed. Virginia Faulkner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 3–30.

¹⁷ David Murphy, "Symbolism and Inscriptions: the Contributions of Hartley Burr Alexander," in *A Harmony of the Arts: The Nebraska State Capitol*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, "Symbolism and Inscriptions," 42.

¹⁹ Alexander's sense of the full repertoire of Plains Indian—especially Pawnee and Lakota—symbolism can be found in his several works of creative and critical art treating of these groups, *God's Drum*, *The Religious Spirit of the American Indian*, *Sioux Indian Painting*, *Taiwa*, and *The World's Rim*.



Fig. 28 Stuart Building, Lincoln, 1929. McDonald photograph. NSHS RG2183-430408-4

²⁰ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 29–34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36, cf. 44, 48, 49.

²² *Ibid.*, 29–52.

²³ Unpublished autobiography of Rev. Wyland in MS 4004, Series 1, Folder 2, Chapter 2, p. 3, in the Nebraska State Historical Society.

²⁴ The description of Plymouth Congregational Church in the *Architectural Record* 45 (1923), 419–22, by the architects H. Van Buren Magonigle and Robert W. McLaughlin, speak of the interior as “basilical in its simplicity.” For the origins of the Roman basilica style of church building, see L. Michael White, *Building God’s House in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 12–17, 114–16, 128–39.

²⁵ Rev. Ben F. Wyland, the pastor of the church when it was built, writes that the architect went back “to the Basilica Church and the Greek Forum,” using “ecclesiastical traditions near to the fountain of our religious faith.” See Wyland, *Carillon Tower and Forecourt of the First Plymouth Congregational Church*, pamphlet in the Nebraska State Historical Society, [1–2].

²⁶ Wyland sees his church as a break with what he calls “ecclesiasticism” defined as sectarian Protestantism and Catholicism. *Ibid.*, [5].

²⁷ The round carillon tower contains the portraits and symbols of the four gospel writers, but here the circular motif seems to have no particular function. Wyland, *Carillon Tower*, [4], says that the placing of the four evangelists with their four symbols on the carillon emphasizes their prophetic character.

²⁸ Cf. the article quoting Wyland in the *Lincoln State Journal*, Nov. 2, 1930. Wyland says that the

peacock is a symbol “of immortality” and of perpetual renewal (this symbolism is drawn from Lactantius’ poem, *De Ave Phoenix*). He also remarks upon the appearance of the peacock as a symbol of resurrection and immortality in the Ravennan Byzantine art of San Apollinare in Classe and San Apollinare Nuova.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 3–4, 149. I owe the analysis of the architectural character of the houses to Susan Kosowski, Kari Ronning, and James Woodress, editors of the Nebraska scholarly edition of Cather.

³¹ Cather, *The Professor’s House*, 250–52. For Black Elk, the immediate movement of time is also toward decline, the reverse of progress. The marking out of Great Plains land in large bordered sections, and the building of houses in square forms, represented a movement from the stability of the circular architectural and land use world to one where the whites had shut the Lakota up in “pens” and forced them to live “in square gray houses, scattered here and there across this hungry land.” Neilhardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 123, 181, 195. However, Black Elk sees time as ultimately moving toward the reconstitution of the tipi and the culture

³² Willa Cather, “The End of the First Cycle,” *Roundup*, ed. Virginia Faulkner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), 4–8.

³³ Per Hansa fools himself into thinking that his house-barn is his own idea, but then he has “a vague recollection of having heard how people in the olden days used to build their houses in that way—rich people even!” Cf. O. E. Rølvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), 53

³⁴ These immigrants were among those interviewed for the Scandinavian chapter in Paul Olson, ed., *Broken Hoops and Plains People*, 237–90.

³⁵ John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Anxieties of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 240–42.

³⁶ One could argue that the Nebraska capitol building is a celebration of mastery over materials and of “progress” also, but much of its symbolism is retrospective and cyclical.

³⁷ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966), passim, esp. 290–304; for a sense of Richardson’s relationship to power, see 328–30.

³⁸ Pamphlet in the Ziemer House file, (LC13.D6-2), Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, Nebraska State Historical Society.

³⁹ David Murphy and Edward F. Zimmer, “The Stuart Building,” *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society and City of Lincoln Planning Department, January 10, 1980, Item 7, p. 1 (copy in Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey file LC13.C9-3). The owner subsequently withdrew the request for nomination, and the building has not been listed.

⁴⁰ The first of several reports to the Club of Rome is Donella H. Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth. A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972). Other titles include *Mankind at the Turning Point* (1972), *Reshaping the International Order* (1976), *Goals for Mankind* (1977), *Energy, The Countdown* (1979), *Beyond the Age of Waste* (1981), and *One Hundred Pages for the Future* (1981).