

**THE BEAUTIFUL
NECESSITY: SEVEN
ESSAYS ON THEOSOPHY
AND ARCHITECTURE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649023431

The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture by Claude Bragdon

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CLAUDE BRAGDON

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Seven Essays on
Theosophy and Architecture

by
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ROCHESTER, N. Y.
THE MANAS PRESS
1910

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I

THE THEOSOPHIC VIEW OF THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE

ONE of the many advantages of a thorough assimilation of what may be called the theosophic idea is that it can be applied with advantage to every department of knowledge and of human activity: like the key to a cryptogram, it renders clear and simple that which before was intricate and obscure. Let us apply this key to the subject of art, and to the art of architecture in particular, and let us see if by so doing we may not learn more of art than we knew before, and more of theosophy, too.

The theosophic idea is that everything is an expression of the Self,—or whatever other name one may choose to give to that immanent unknown reality which forever hides behind all phenomenal life,—but because on the physical plane our only avenue of knowledge is sense perception, a more exact expression of the theosophic idea would be: Everything is the expression of the Self in terms of sense. Art, accordingly, is the expression of the Self in terms of sense. Now, though the Self is one, sense is not one, but manifold, and so there are arts, each addressed to some particular faculty or group of faculties, and each expressing some particular quality or group of qualities of the Self. The white light of Truth is thus broken up into a rainbow-tinted spectrum of Beauty, in which the various arts are colors, each distinct, yet merging one into another,—poetry into music; painting into decoration; decoration becoming sculpture; sculpture, architecture, and so on.

In such a spectrum of the arts each one occupies a definite place, and all together form a series of which music and architecture are the two extremes. That such is their relative position may be demonstrated in various

ways: the theosophic explanation involving the familiar idea of the "pairs of opposites" would be something as follows: According to the Hindu-Aryan theory, Brahma, that the world might be born, fell asunder into man and wife, became in other words, *name and form*.^{*} The two universal aspects of name and form are what philosophers call the two "modes of consciousness," one of time, and the other of space. These are the two gates through which ideas enter phenomenal life: the two boxes, as it were, that contain all the toys with which we play. Everything, if we were only keen enough to perceive it, bears the mark of one or the other of them, and may be classified accordingly. In such a classification music is seen to be allied to time, and architecture to space, because music is successive in its mode of manifestation, and in time alone everything would occur successively, one thing following another; while architecture, on the other hand, impresses itself upon the beholder all at once, and in space alone all things would exist simultaneously. Music, which is in time alone, without any relation to space, and architecture, which is in space alone, without any relation to time, are thus seen to stand at opposite ends of the art spectrum, and to be, in a sense, the only "pure" arts, because in all the others the elements of both time and space enter in varying proportions, either actually or by implication. Poetry and the drama are allied to music inasmuch as the ideas and images of which they are made up are presented successively, yet these images are, for the most part, forms of space. Sculpture, on the other hand, is clearly allied to architecture, and so to space, but the element of *action*, suspended though it be, affiliates it with the opposite, or time pole. Painting occupies a middle position, since in it space instead of being actual has become ideal,—three dimensions being expressed through the mediumship of two,—and time enters into it more largely than into sculpture by reason of the greater ease with which complicated action can be indicated: a picture being nearly always time arrested in mid-course, a moment transixed.

In order to form a just conception of the relation between music and architecture it is necessary that the two should be conceived of, not as standing at opposite ends of a series represented by a straight line, but rather in

^{*}The quaint Oriental imagery here employed should not blind the reader to the precise scientific accuracy of the idea of which this imagery is the vehicle. Schopenhauer says: "Polarity, or the sundering of a force into two quantitatively different and opposed activities, striving after re-union, . . . is a fundamental type of almost all the phenomena of nature, from the magnet and the crystal to man himself."

juxtaposition, as in the ancient Egyptian symbol of a serpent holding its tail in its mouth, the head in this case corresponding to music, and the tail to architecture; in other words, though in one sense they are the most widely separated of the arts, in another they are the most closely related.

Music being purely in time and architecture being purely in space, each is, in a manner, and to a degree not possible with any of the other arts, convertible into the other, by reason of the correspondence subsisting between intervals of time and intervals of space. A perception of this may have inspired the famous saying that architecture is *frozen music*, a poetical statement of a philosophical truth, since that which in music is expressed by means of harmonious intervals of time and pitch, successively, after the manner of time, may be translated into corresponding intervals of architectural void and solid, height and width.

In another sense music and architecture are allied. They alone of all the arts are purely creative, since in them is presented, not a likeness of some known idea, but a *thing-in-itself* brought to a distinct and complete expression of its nature. Neither a musical composition nor a work of architecture depends for its effectiveness upon resemblances to natural sounds in the one case, or to natural forms in the other. Of none of the other arts is this to such a degree true: they are not so much creative as re-creative, for in them all the artist takes his subject ready made from nature and presents it anew according to the dictates of his genius.

The characteristic differences between music and architecture are the same as those which subsist between time and space. Now time and space are such abstract ideas that they can be best understood through their corresponding correlatives in the natural world, for it is a fundamental theosophic tenet that nature everywhere abounds in such correspondences; that nature, in its myriad forms, is indeed the concrete presentment of abstract unities. The energy which everywhere informs matter is a type of time within space; the mind working in and through the body is another expression of the same thing. Accordingly, music is dynamic, subjective, mental, of one dimension; while architecture is static, objective, physical, of three dimensions; sustaining the same relation to music and the other arts as does the human body to the various organs which compose, and consciousnesses which animate it, (it being the reservoir of these organs and the vehicle of these consciousnesses); and a work of architecture, in like manner, may, and sometimes does include all of the other arts within itself. Sculpture