In the transfigured person of Jesus, the apostles saw something of the Kingdom of God (Mark 9:1-10.)
The cloud that covered them with its shadow and appears in various Biblical episodes, indicates and simultaneously hides the mysterious presence of God. Ex. 19:16; 1 Kings 8:10; Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:32-34.

This essay intends to point out the significance existing in the passage from the hidden aspect of an ideal and its clear implementation as a thought by means of a parallel between the “Dancing Building”\(^1\) by Frank Gehry\(^2\) and the “Metamorphosis”\(^3\) of Franz Kafka.\(^4\)

In both examples, an architectural one and a literary one, in spite of the distance between the authors in space and time, we can determine a common denominator consisting of three parts: the Jewish roots of their authors, the place where the works compared here were developed (Prague), and lastly, the basic concept of “meta-morphosis”.

What leads us to compare these two symbolic works is the evolutionary spirit that they bear in themselves, that is, the idea of transfiguration, transmutation, or transformation as synonyms of metamorphosis. Although we already know that the two works possess a content and a conclusion that are as open as the interpretations that can be obtained from reading them are interminable. What is interesting for us to underline definitively is their metaphorical content, according to our own interpretation.

The administration building of Nationale Nederlanden is located at the corner of Rašínovo Nábřeží 80 and Resslova Street in front of the river. The lot was previously occupied by a building destroyed by a bomb dropped by mistake by the American air force during the Second World War. The projectile

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1. Dancing Building (Prague, 1992-96) is the nickname for the administration building of the Dutch insurance company Nationale Nederlanden. The nickname is due to its shape, which resembles a dancing couple; before calling it like this, Gehry himself while he was designing it had named it “Ginger and Fred” as a joke, making a reference to the Hollywood star entertainers Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Ginger is the glass tower and Fred is the compact one.
2. Frank Gehry, born in Toronto, Canada, in 1929.
4. Franz Kafka, a German-speaking Bohemian author, was born in Prague in 1883 and died in Vienna in 1924.
was destined for the nearby German city of Dresden. The ironic comments of some Czechs recall the fact by saying that the Dancing Building by Gehry, built in such a historic place as the Czech capital, is one more American bomb that by chance and by mistake falls once again in the same place, Prague, and ends up destroying the urban harmony of the area. For the more conservative, the Dancing Building is a meeting with a terrible reality transmuted in the center of the city, one that resembles the nightmare of Gregory Samsa in Kafka’s Metamorphosis. In the area where the building in question is located, Nóve Město of Prague, and in Gregory’s family, one notices that a tragic and unexpected situation overtakes them. Where it was expected that everything would continue naturally, the transformation causes a suddenly strange shock. Various residents of the area in front of the Dancing Building, in the same way as Gregory’s family, do not even wish to look at it, since it somehow scares them. However, there are others that observe the building in the same way as the bachelors in the novel, who beyond being interested in the violin music played by Gregory’s sister, are captivated by the impressive spectacle of the giant cockroach, meaning something different, innovative, attention-provoking, and strange, compared to the normal and regular.

Anyway, both Gregory in his apartment and the Dancing Building on its site, stand proudly on their deformed feet and look at the tranquillity surrounding them with a certain joy and pride.

The joy of liberation expressed by Gregory when he finds himself hanging from the skylight of his room is also found in the Dancing Building, emphasized by its crowning with the sculptural dome named “Medusa”, which is formed by perforated, almost flying, metal sheets that show themselves unabashedly on the roof of the compact tower that represents “Fred”. And the pride of having in their own depth a secret good intention in favour of those that surround them, even though the latter may not feel any special attraction towards the former. The hidden intention of Gregory was to support his sister’s studies at the conservatory; that of the Dancing Building is the material exhibition of the transcendence of individual freedom. In both cases, without taking into account the financial cost implied by this.

The above description gives us the opportunity to think positively about the value of an incidence of metamorphosis, since over time one may be capable of understanding the necessity of such an event by discovering its hidden essence.

At this point, we meet two versions of the same reality: the literal and the phenomenal. The literal only shows us what we see as it displays itself before our eyes, while the phenomenal shows what something means to us in accordance with our mental reality. In this case, we face a more profound interpretation, one capable of explaining metaphorically what hides itself from a simple look. The objective of going slightly beyond the apparent is nothing more than to make us think critically about the truth and the certainty of the events to which social, daily, and current reality has accustomed us. In other words, what is attempted is to reach the reality that has been stated since
Pythagoreanism, which establishes the contraposition between the sensible world, or appearance and mere opinion, and the real and true world that is hidden from the senses and lightweight opinions.

It is necessary to surpass one’s reaction to the apparent at first sight, and to generate a dialogue with what underlies it, in order to introduce us to where the essential part of what is apparent to the simple sight is found.

The visual objects, The Dancing Building and the Giant Cockroach into which Gregory was transformed, are simply two formal expressions of a more profound reality. Gehry’s building displays itself as a symbol of liberation or of the passage from the hard-line Communist regime to democracy, which took place ideologically starting with the Velvet Revolution\(^5\) of 1989, which included among its participants intellectuals such as Václav Havel (later President of the Czech Republic) and Vlado Milunič (a Croatian architect associated with Frank Gehry for the project in question). On the other hand, the Cockroach could be interpreted as the bodily consequence resulting from an extremely critical psychological situation. In this case, it is highlighted metaphorically by means of an insect that is normally disdained because it incarnates the idea of filth, garbage, and debris, whose only destiny would seem to be to disappear.

The administration building of Nationale Nederlanden attracts attention seriously with the transformation that it causes in the compact morphology of its immediate surroundings. An environment built through history with buildings possessing architectural principles that correspond to different eras, which, collectively, create a solid environment. In a similar way, the transformation of Gregory into a cockroach provokes a serious imbalance within his family environment which was relatively ordered, placid, and comfortable. And just like Gregory, transformed into a cockroach was not comfortable in his room because of the dimensions that he had acquired, the Dancing Building does not fit within its site and has to invade the area of the public walkway.

Gregory no longer needed his legs or arms in order to get up from his bed, since instead of them, he had multiple feet with unusual shapes. Nor does Gehry’s building set out the idea of a free plan with pillars in conventional dimensions and shapes. Instead of this, he designs curved columns that end up representing allegorically the calves of a dancing woman, which will be partly covered by a curtain wall like a dress. The paradox of this comparison becomes evident when Gregory is transformed from a human being into an insect and the glass tower of the Nationale Nederlanden building is transformed from a constructed shape into a metaphorical human form.

However, for the building in question, it is interesting to highlight two urban and architectural aspects: the response to its corner location and the

\(^5\) During a six-week period, between November 17\(^{th}\) and December 29\(^{th}\), 1989, the “Velvet Revolution” took place. It acquired this name because the revolution, guided by the poet and later President of the country, Václav Havel, was not violent and deposed the Communist regime that was present in Czechoslovakia since 1948.
concepts of insertion and transformation produced jointly within the existing urban framework.

In the former case, a dynamic conception of articulation or an idea of exploding the form of the block is attempted at a point where theoretically, the perpendicular planes of the façades should join each other. At this concrete point, a change in shape, color, texture, and material is produced, eliminating in the end the idea of a corner or a normal polygonal shape. The clarity of a corner closure for the compact mass at this specific point of the block is transformed into an irregular articulation of shapes, which provokes a strong contrast with the existing forms. A new definition of the corner displays itself, one which does not distinguish itself for the clarity of its planes, but rather, for its hyper-expressivity and individual volumetric voluptuousness. This produces a discontinuity in the plane of the surfaces of the existing façades, which rigorously follow the building line. We cannot completely deny the way in which the idea of an urban corner is strengthened, although in a hardly orthodox way, without a meeting of the perpendicular planes of façades or cubic and rectangular completion. Instead, it presents a flowing explosion of its internal space through the shape of its outline, without exaggeratedly exceeding the height of the surrounding buildings, even though it has two more floors than they do.

Regarding the combined concepts of insertion and transformation, it is possible to point out that the possibility of including a different volumetry from the existing ones is provided in a stimulating way, due to the fact that the frame in which this intervention takes place is clear and perfectly defined. In other words, the immediate urban context is so volumetrically solid that it resists transformation from the insertion of an architectural object that is as different from the rest as the Dancing Building is. We find ourselves in front of a genuine architectural episode, which today, ten years after its completion, has been turned into a landmark for the city.

Gehry’s formal interpretation of Prague’s townscape becomes evident when we perceive the presence in more than a few 19th-century buildings in the city of towers with domes, as well as ornamental frames for windows.

Concerning the final result, it is necessary to point out that the final shape of the dancing couple is reached after an evolved design process. We need to remember that in the first drafts, the two towers were rectangular, then they joined and one of them was conceived using glass, and with articulation it began to assume the form of a woman's dress, finally attaining the present result. This tower hosts meeting or conference rooms on each of its floors.

The articulated interplay of the windows in the façade towards the river seems to attempt a visual interplay that astutely hides one more floor than those of the neighbouring building, the Apartment House “2000” 6. In order to

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6 The Apartment House “2000” (1904-05), in addition to displaying the influence of the residence on Rue Franklin (1902-03) in Paris designed by Auguste Perret, is the place where in the mid-'80’s the story and idea of the construction of the Dancing Building began. The Apartment House “2000”, designed by Osvald Polívka (designer, among other projects, of the Prague Municipal House (1903-12)) and Václav Havel (grandfather of the former
achieve this exterior articulated effect, the internal windows are divided, in the form of pictures, between those that reach the ceiling and those that start from the floor. The undulating textural lines in the render along with the movement of the windows would seem to represent materially the reflection of the façade in the river’s moving waters. An image which unfortunately gives the building a slightly post-modernist character.

An interesting topic for consideration is whether the final result completed on the corner where the Dancing Building stands should follow and imitate a language similar to the existing one or it is correct that a transformation should be produced in accordance with the spirit of our time. In our judgment, the attempt of a divergent language and volumetry, with a reference to the immediate urban surroundings as is done here, is an attractive way to contextualize, and for this reason deserves praise. Another issue is whether the morphological solution adopted by the designers is the proper one, understanding “proper” as what is generally accepted. The problem of form is a subjective topic for every designer and every spectator; therefore, the question is solved halfway. What is certain is that something different should not be rejected only because it is disliked. All in all, the question that remains with us and that everyone should answer individually is whether with the acceptance of diversity as the basis of the problem, the final result would have been more or less interesting with a single or pure volumetric stigma, whether this is rationalist, minimalist, deconstructivist or possesses other characteristics within the evolutionary framework of modernity. However, what we must recognize, for the architects of this building in particular and in concerning any work of architecture, beyond whether it represents or pleases us, is whether the proposal in question will last, whether it will resist the passage of time in architectural terms. Since that is what judges all works of art inexorably, without exception.

Returning to the comparison between the work of Gehry and Kafka, we could say that they are characterized by the expression of uncertainty, perplexity, and anxiety. The idea of reaction to positivist thought in Kafka’s literary work is similar to Gehry’s architecture with respect to minimalism or geometric order. We could equally say that the internal transformation of man is what supports change and a new search in both cases, probably through the intimate impulses of Judaism. And just as Kafka’s characters are anti-heroes, Gehry’s buildings, without reaching the status of anti-architecture, reach the border with sculpture and deconstructed architecture.

Overall, in this comparison where both Gehry and Kafka show the absurd in an ambiguous way, we meet a different ending. While in Kafka’s work and particularly in the case in question, the Metamorphosis, Gregory’s struggle to escape from the situation of a cockroach is one without the intention of triumph, since his only way out is like his ending, death. With Gehry’s Dancing Building the opposite takes place; the final objective is the triumph of creativity and freedom over any political, cultural, social, or economic limitation.

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former President Václav Havel and the architect Vlado Milunič, co-author of the Dancing Building with Frank Gehry.
Both the reading of Kafka and the analysis of Gehry’s work are always a particular experience, in which artistic – literary and architectural – values attain incommensurable dimensions, and in turn require, in order to be understood with their true magnitude, a special will on the part of the reader. The narratives by Kafka and the spaces designed by Gehry display a fifth dimension that surpasses the three of space and the fourth, time. This is the psychological dimension, which makes the reader experience different situations from the usual ones in the known world. We find ourselves inevitably placed before what is moving, worrying, alarming, disturbing, and sometimes even a cause for anguish.

In both cases – Kafka in literature and Gehry in architecture- it is possible to read the full and complete representation of the absurd. We understand as absurd that which is contrary to evident logic and finds itself devoid of rational arguments, and if there are any, they are inadmissible for the strict principles of logic. The results are faithful proof of this, since they are closer to the strange and illogical than to the ordinary and rational. Consequently, it is possible to assert that we find ourselves in front of a distinct logic, one based on different foundations than the ones to which the logic of reason has accustomed us. In the concrete cases that we are studying, these are the paradoxical or the real dimension of the impossible in Kafka’s literature and non-Euclidean geometry in Gehry’s architecture.

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