

words to describe our experience. Goethe famously wrote in his notes: 'Ich nenne die Baukunst eine erstarrte Musik ('I call architecture a kind of petrified music'). In the opposite way we often hear musicians talking of the 'architecture' of a composition, referring to its structure and organization. Architects speak of the 'rhythm' of a façade, and musicians talk of the 'colour' of a note. One of the books I have struggled to use to help me improve my awful flute playing requires me to play a particular note as either 'yellow' or 'purple', and the author even paints a little word picture for the student, of 'an aquarium with deep, dark green water and silent fish swimming gracefully about', when describing how I should play a piece by Saint-Saens.

How buildings can signify

So how can three-dimensional objects and spaces such as buildings carry this external reference or meaning? In fact, it seems a number of mechanisms of perception can all contribute to this phenomenon. Our perceptual system allows for both what we might call 'iconic' and 'symbolic' representations, and we seem to handle these rather differently. As we walk along the street, we might see a cat cross the pavement. How do we represent this event in our minds and store the memory of it? There are at least three possibilities (Fig. 4.8). The first is that we have a totally accurate record of the image as it fell on our retina. If this happened we would be likely to be able to re-examine this image and recall detail, perhaps even beyond that which we noticed at the time. The police who try to get witnesses to recall events and people will testify that unfortunately we do not normally show evidence of having what we might call 'photographic memory'. Bartlett's experiments in perception and memory referred to in the previous chapter also suggest that this is not how we operate. The second possibility is that some iconic representation might be stored. Here some visual features or characteristics are recorded while others are not, but they are coded in terms of other well-known geometrical or visual elements. I remember as a young student of architecture that we had to be able to draw plans and elevations of famous historical buildings from memory in our examinations. Thankfully this pain is not normally inflicted on today's students of architecture! I can recall sitting with my fellow students as we helped each other to find iconic ways of doing this. These consisted not of single representations, but sets of rules for reliably reconstructing the images. The plan of Sancta Sophia in Istanbul could be generated by drawing a square, adding various rectangles, drawing a circle in the centre surrounded by another square, with various semicircles added on and finally making some minor adjustments. Similarly, our cat can be represented iconically by drawing a large circle with a smaller one above it and adding lines and a squiggle for the whiskers and tail. Such representations carry some