Introduction

Architecture and Phenomenology

Brendan O'Byrne, Patrick Healy, editors

The relation of architecture to discussions in philosophical aesthetics, it might be argued, has taken two turns. The first turn is an aversion of architecture to philosophical reflection. On such a view architecture has for the most part, and in the long span of its history, had little or nothing to do with philosophy. Even given the development of aesthetics as a discipline in the eighteenth century, with the publication of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750/1758), architecture received only passing, often glancing attention. In Burke's *A Philosohical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the principal reference to architecture relates to a ridiculing of the Vitruvian body/building analogy, and some considerations on the question of scale and monumentality for the sublime. In the third *Critique* (1790), Kant deals with architecture in a passing fashion, and cites buildings he had never visited, for example St. Peter's in Rome, to suggest a sense of magnificence and to consider the monumental which overwhelms and provokes an experience of the sublime. An attempt at a fuller and detailed treatment emerges only in the lectures of Hegel, published as *Lectures on Aesthetics* (first published by Hotho between 1835-8).

The second turn might be described as the movement into theory from practice. In so far as one finds a consistent thread of theoretical reflection, it came for the most part from practitioners, a point that is clearly detailed in Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (1949), especially in the work of Alberti and Palladio. The questions which emerged from such theory was often circumscribed as: What is the difference between architecture and building? Another question that became dominant in the theoretical work emanating from practitioners was: Are there normative values attaching to architecture? In some sense the second turning is reflected in the dominant directions of responses among philosophers.

Roger Scruton, in his *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (1979), exhibits the Kantian inheritance, and in the work of Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997), a challenge has been issued to architecture as practice to be more than a 'decorated shed'. This provocative address of a philosopher to architecture, came from what can be called a Hegelian-Heideggerian position. However this provenance needs to be modified in light of the explicit situation of Harries's *The Ethical Function of Architecture*. There is clearly a rejection of the important tradition emanating from Ruskin's Lectures on Architecture from 1853, where ornament is regarded as the principal part of architecture, a position that Harries vividly de-constructs.

As long as architectural theory remains ruled by the aesthetic approach, it has to understand architecture as Kant did, as a functional building with an added aesthetic component, that is a decorated shed. (Harries, p. 26)

No doubt it can be shown that the response of Harries against ornamentation is close to the early

modernist reaction to the implications of the Neo-Gothic espoused by Ruskin as exemplary, and especially in the response of practitioners such as Loos and Le Corbusier. Although it should be said that Harries in no way achieves the crescendo of fury and polemic that characterises Loos's diatribe on ornament, *Ornament und Verbrechen* (1908), which was succinctly characterised by Karl Kraus as demonstrating that there is a difference between an 'urn and a chamber pot', and in that difference there was scope for culture. This concern of Loos also transited to the ethical, and was caught in Loos's view of ornament as a deceit, an embellishment, a *tromperie*.

Loos often has the exuberance of a preacher tracking sin to its lairs, and his denunciation of ornament as degenerate, diseased, was also his call to arms for an architecture which would exhibit truth as nudity, and form as the triumph of grace over the sin of ornament. More pragmatically, Loos's thought that if a member of a modern society tattoo his skin, it is a sure sign he suffers from criminal or pathological tendencies. Modern man, he argued, had transcended ornament. The evolution of culture is taken by Loos as identical with the removal of ornament from objects of utility, since such ornament is a waste of labour, material and capital.

Harries has added in a paper delivered to the DSD in 2005 a further argument from his publication of a decade earlier, and suggested that 'theory' in architecture now functioned as 'ornament'. Harries calls for a new understanding of the ethical function of architecture, which however is at odds with the work of Scruton and Watkin (David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture,* 2001, 2nd edition), both of whom remain in a functionalist Kantian interpretation. Harries, through his Hegelian-Heideggerian argument, calls for a new understanding of the ethical function of architecture. This has been noted by Gordon Graham in his influential entry for the *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (ed. Levison, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 555-71):

Harries gives Hegelian expression to themes and issues that can be seen to occupy all the principal philosophers of architecture… Haldane, Scruton, Carlson, Pevsner.… (p. 569)

What needs to be considered here is the meaning of the Kantian inheritance, which has its most significant consequence in the way that his discussion of 'free' and 'dependent' beauty affected functionalist and mimetic theories for an ethics of architecture, since for Kant architecture exhibits a species of 'dependent beauty'.

Recently James Kirwan in his *The Aesthetic in Kant: A Critique* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004; pp. 19-28), has offered a strong defense of what he robustly characterises as the misappropriation in almost all subsequent debates in aesthetics of the original meaning of beauty in Kant, which has disastrously distorted and perverted Kant's arguments in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

Part of this misappropriation he sees as the result of the fact that most subsequent theories in aesthetics are dependent on Hegel, and this is where the root of the mis-reading of Kant lies. How can one retrieve the distinction of free and dependent beauty? Kirwan's argument, put briefly, is that the Kantian requirements for the judgement of taste, the aesthetic judgement, which establishes the analytic of the beautiful, involves a pleasure felt by someone reporting such a judgement, a pleasure which is apart from any interest in the object, that is non-utilitarian. The immediate apprehension is of beauty in such a judgement, and is not related to a concept or a determinate cognition. Its manifestation is given immediately in its pleasing, but also universally, the stipulation of this latter part of the claim says that this very subjective judgement can be grounded in common sense, so, in saying 'this is beautiful', we also impute our satisfaction to every-

one else; otherwise there would only be a hedonistic solipsism, an aesthetic autism. The judgement even in its singularity, immediacy and disinterestedness communicates the notion of a *sensus communis*.

Kirwan argues that there are two points which are fundamental to Kant's discussion, two matters of fact we must accept if we are to understand Kant correctly; one is that objects appear to please us immediately, and that such an object which pleases in this way is to be called beautiful, and this is the notion of 'free beauty', which is the pleasure attendant on the mere reflection on a given intuition.

Nevertheless Kant goes on to argue that there are two forms of beauty. One is free beauty which presupposes no concept of what the object should be, and the other is 'dependent' beauty which presupposes a concept and in a certain sense is less pure than free beauty. What is at play in this distinction is that the idea of dependent beauty has become conflated with the idea of normative and evaluative aesthetic claims, and indicates that the study of art is the principal activity of aesthetic education.

Perhaps the distinction is just simply that on one hand there is a beauty that is relative, as when we admire a craft, an artwork, or a skill, and on the other hand an intrinsic beauty which literally is its own appearance, which is breath-taking, such as a beautiful flower, or the sound of bird song; something in nature.

Further we could say that in judgement of free beauty according to form, the judgement of taste is pure, the play of the imagination is unrestricted: there is no concept of any ends for the manifold which should serve the given object, or of what the latter should represent. The imagination is, as it were, in play, in the very observation of the shape.

In stark contrast, the beauty of the human being, of a horse, a building, such as a church, a palace, and arsenal, or a garden-house, the examples cited by Kant, presuppose a concept of the end of what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, 'and is thus merely adherent beauty' (*Critique of the Power of Judgement,* section 16).

For Kant beauty must be distinguished from usefulness, even though it is compatible with the object. Kant argues that the combination of aesthetic satisfaction with the intellectual can lead to rules, which are not however universal, and that these rules can be prescribed in regard to certain purposively determined objects. In effect these rules are the unification of taste with reason, through which the beautiful becomes usable as an instrument of intention with regard to the good. Where there is an intention, and an end, or, in a thing that is possible only through an intention - a building, an animal - the regularity that consists in symmetry must express the unity of the intuition, which accompanies the concept of the end and belongs to the cognition. Where, however, only a free play of the powers of representation - the understanding not suffering any offence - is in issue, for example in pleasure gardens, the decoration of rooms, tasteful utensils, and the like, regularity that comes across as constraint is to be avoided as far as possible. The English taste in gardens, or the baroque taste in furniture, pushes the freedom of the imagination almost to the point of the grotesque, and makes this abstraction from all constraints by rules the very case in which taste can demonstrate its greatest perfection in the projects of the imagination. Thus stiff regularity is contrary to taste, and the consideration of it affords no lasting entertainment.

The freedom in the play of our cognitive powers also allows a double 'as if' for Kant, posited for the hypothetical assertions about art and nature. In a product of art one must be aware that it is art and not nature. Yet, its purpose in form must still seem to be free from all constraints as if it were a

product of nature. It is this freedom in the play of the cognitive powers, which must at the same time be purposive, that gives pleasure; the pleasure which is alone universally communicable. It is this which is alone universally communicable, 'and can only be beautiful if we are aware that it is art and yet it looks to us like nature' (*Critique of the Power of Judgement*, section 45).

It is genius, which as a gift of nature and as a talent gives the rule to art. Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind, its *ingenium*, through which nature gives the rule to art, by which Kant means that genius is a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given and its primary characteristic is originality.

However, since there can be original nonsense there is a further requirement, which is that the products of genius must at the same time be models, that is they must be exemplary, and whilst not themselves the result of imitation, they must serve others in that way, as a standard of a rule of judging. Genius cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being, it is an individual inspiration from which original ideas come. Since something beautiful in art must be thought of as having an end, it is essential that there is no beautiful art in which something mechanical can be grasped and followed according to rules. Thus, something academically correct does not constitute the essential conditions of art. Examining then the genealogy created by Graham, one sees that the main problem contested moved away from Kant, as the question which concerned it was no longer centered on the play of the imagination, the pleasure of the aesthetic or judgement of taste, the distinction between free and dependent beauty, but rather: How is architecture to be secured a place in the sphere of the aesthetic?, or: What makes architecture art? What makes a building architecture? What is the difference between building and architecture?

As John Haldane shows in his 'Form Meaning and Value: A History of the Philosophy of Architecture' (*Journal of Architecture*, no 4), the distinction between the mechanical and the fine arts, which is so essential in the positing of such questions, is not ancient. The question of the meaning about value and the difference between building and architecture is tied to the growth of aesthetics as a discipline within philosophy. Unlike earlier Renaissance theorists, such as Serlio, no agreement was reached as to the relation of practice and theory, and instead the philosophical uptake was to posit certain periods in their relation of building to philosophy as exemplary.

In the early pre-Modern there is a veneration of the Gothic, which is said to manifest a marriage of the material and the metaphysical. The example thus revered also demonstrated the broad purpose of the social in the figuring of the monumental, and these exemplary structures became the paradigms of architecture. This valorising of the Gothic also indicated an integrity of form and function which led theorists to reject papered-on classicism.

In the writing of Pugin and Ruskin this interpretation, which is directly counter to the Kantian idea of the exemplary, moved towards another claim, namely that the issue of integrity was a concern with appearance and therefore ornamentation. It could be shown that the concerns of Harries with the issue of the social, the ethical and the functional is closer to the thinking of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, than to the host of eclectic Gothic flowerings from St. Patrick's College Maynooth to Princeton University, as the blooms of Neo-Gothic. Graham makes the point forcibly that the neo-Gothic revival was mistakenly identified as a belief in aesthetic ornamentation, and in opposition the Modernist school was regarded as functionalist. There is however a formalist concern which is directly evinced in the work of the Bauhaus, where design is the a priori of architecture. The significance of the Gothic was that

it bodied the ideas of a time with physical manifestation; material was adequate to the ideal, and not sundered from it, or held as being in irredeemable conflict. Gothic was a built theology.

Historiographic misunderstanding has embroiled the discussion of fundamental questions into abstract oppositions, which are then taken as real difference for practitioners. In clear reaction to the a priori of design, one can place the neo-vernacular as argued for by Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (2nd ed., 1990), as the aesthetics of banality. The latter idea has its foundation in a conflation of Hegel's reflections in the aesthetic lectures on the achievement of Dutch still-life painting and the creation of a collective figuring in Dutch art, and secondly in the revolutionary politics of the everyday which situated the new requirements of stylisation away from elitist ideologies.

Significantly for cultural and media studies it was in the discourses of architecture that the terms modernism and post-modernism emerged as stylistic categories: in the very attention to de-construction of notions of style through valuing of anarchic and subjective intuitions, post-modernism could be viewed as a savage parody of the concerns of the neo-Gothic, where ornamentation becomes a surrender to the flatness of surface visualisation, and to the features of assemblage which the material object requires as contextualised via ideological domains in order to posit both agent activity and a complex, widening notion of assemblage for which only a method of montage is adequate. There is a risk of the collapse of denotation and connation in its wake, effectively as in the work of Walter Benjamin which construes an evocation or a joining together of fragments from the ruins of the past, rendering the archaeological filmic.

The questions which came then to dominate were: How do buildings look? How does the building function? What is the meaning of the building? Nelson Goodman's 'How Buildings Mean', provides a bridging point which links directly with the concerns of Harries, and Gadamer, and a rejection of the problem of the empiricist search for variables which inspired Burke and ultimately led to the work concerned with the psychology of architecture.

The relation of the question of meaning and symbolisation requires a radical re-appraising of the question of experience, and indeed how manifestation occurs which makes what is true in experience visible, expression as making the simply given object accessible. Further, the question of environmentality, of world and the question of subject also points to the broader concerns of phenomenology. The turn to experience cannot result in a science of the sensible, because it does not ask the more adequate and guiding question of phenomenology, which is that of access to the realm of beings within the environmentality of world. Phenomena show themselves. The work of phenomenology is the work of laying-open and letting be seen, which involves the methodologically directed dismantling of concealments.

In this issue of *Footprint* the contributions of the various authors bring to the discussion of architecture and meaning the problem of world and environment, fresh perspectives and discussion. Much of this will allow a re-appraisal of the relation of architecture and philosophy, and a turning again towards more a fundamental questioning of building, dwelling, thinking and architecture.