

CHAPTER SEVEN: ARCHITECTURE AND THE VIOLATION OF SPACE

It is fitting that at the centre of a monstrous house there be a monstrous inhabitant. Jorge Louis Borges, *The Book of Imaginary Beings*.

Introduction

In the previous chapter we examined how the concept of structure was made prerequisite to an organic conception of architecture; how that structural conception of architecture and its relation to the other two aspects of the Vitruvian Trinity was considered fundamental to the genesis of style and architectural beauty by a small group of English architectural theorists. They had absorbed the engineering traditions developing in their own industrializing country; had assimilated relevant ideas alive in France and Italy and had found a theoretical substructure extant in the mathematical analysis of pressures confirmed by the archaeology of the Gothic as it was being performed in Germany, France and England.

This chapter will take the argument one stage further, examining how the concept of utility, in its various guises, similarly cannot be dislodged from the Vitruvian trinity without violence; how, in fact, utility is fundamental to Garbett's conception of architecture, especially with regard to his aesthetics of architectural expression and the consequent formulation of an architectural etiquette.

Utilitas

Utility weaves itself into the fabric of English nineteenth-century architectural theory on several levels. Traditionally utility constituted the way that architecture sought to differentiate itself from the other fine arts. Architecture was, so it was argued, first and foremost a *useful* fine-art. Such fine distinctions automatically take us back to the revealing deconstruction of oppositions such as uselessness and usefulness as talked about earlier. Through the agent of *use* architecture often attempted to gain in status relative to the other arts and crafts, or

was alternatively forced to lose it.¹ The usefulness of a building could reside in providing shelter for the owner or the occupant for whom it provided a physical setting for certain activities. Wider purposes, for which architecture had to assume a symbolic role in society, were thought of as essentially separate to these physical

1. William Chambers for instance: *Amongst the various arts cultivated in society, some are useful only, being adapted to supply our natural wants, or assist our natural infirmities; others again are instruments of luxury merely, and calculated to flatter the pride or gratify the desires of man; whilst others there are, contrived to answer many purposes, tending at once to preserve, to secure, to accommodate, delight and give consequence to the human species. Architecture, the subject of our present inquiry, is of this latter kind; and when viewed in its full extent, may be truly said to have a very considerable part in almost every comfort or luxury of life.* Chambers (1826) p. 55.

needs. But during the eighteenth century, especially in the France of J.F.Blondel and Ledoux, architecture was consciously given a normative role in society. As a consequence of this, architecture could also be used as a barometer of civilization. This meant that the symbolic use of architecture could be directly related to the other physical uses of architecture. This is what Garbett attempted to do.

In the first chapter to his *Treatise*, Garbett defined good architecture in terms of a projection into perfection of the three interdependent elements of the Vitruvian triad: Firmitas, Utilitas and Venustas. In the preface to the book Garbett anticipated that definition:

Architecture, he wrote,...is the art of building Well,- well as regards every purpose intended in building, and not only the actual fitness of a building or its parts to their several purposes, but also the fitness of their appearance thereto...²

2. *Treatise*, p. iii-iv.

This observation, in which the concept of purpose or utility plays a central role, especially when it is seen to stress the social purpose of architectural beauty, forces architectural theory to turn back on itself. Architectural theory in fact becomes indistinguishable from moral philosophy. In a recent article on the architectural metaphor, John Onians investigated the way society constructs itself using architectural activities to describe social, political, philosophical and religious relations and structures.³ With Garbett this process comes full circle. In the *Treatise* architecture is described in terms of social metaphors, the concept of architectural selfishness and politeness illustrate this clearly. One can speak of a process of reciprocation involving the exchange of metaphors: Architecture is often used to explain society's relations and structures but in Garbett's case this role is reversed, social qualities are used to explain and prescribe qualities in architecture.

3. Onians (1992) pp. 192-200.

Garbett sees architecture as a way to express belief in the purpose and progress of civilization, as a method to further civilization. This had earlier been expressed by the seminal influence on English architectural thought, namely Quatremère de Quincy who writes in his *Dictionnaire d'architecture* of 1788, that architecture is only possible in civilized society:

L'art de bâtir suivant des proportions & des règles déterminées & fixées par la Nature & le Goût. L'art de bâtir se trouve chez les peuples même sauvages; l'art de l'architecture au contraire n'a pu être que le fruit de la société la plus perfectionnée par la civilisation, par toutes les causes morales, par les concours de tous les autres arts.

and again:

L'architecture ne commence à être un art chez les différens peuples où elle peut s'introduire, que lorsque déjà ceux a sont parvenu à un certain degré de culture, d'opulence & de luxe. C'est alors que, s'éloignant toujours de plus en plus des travaux & des occupations rustiques, &

*s'enfermant dans les villes, les hommes cherchent à remplacer les plaisirs de la Nature qu'ils perdent de vue, par les jouissances des arts qui en sont les imitateurs.*⁴

But as we have seen, Garbett would not have found himself in Quatremère's distinction between building and architecture. Nor would he have agreed, as we shall see, with the assertion that savages are not capable of architecture. But most architectural theorists, especially, Ruskin Quatremère de Quincy and Garbett, shared the perceived connection between architecture and civilization, between architecture and the need for its incorporation into a greater social purpose. That is what motivated many of them to concern themselves with architecture in the first place. Garbett specifically sought that connection in his definition of architecture.

4. Quatremère de Quincy (1788-1825) the entry "Architecture" in vol 1.

That definition became the basic ingredient in a sort of gnosis -a salvational knowledge- in which the concepts and the prescriptions which follow from those concepts become the symbols of an elaborate ritual, a form of magic with the specific intention of promoting a specific attitude or emotion in the architect or the spectator.⁵ That attitude or emotion, in

5. The word magic is taken from Collingwood (1938) p. 66: *..the similarity between magic and art are both strong and intimate. Magical practices invariably contain, not as peripheral elements but as central elements, artistic activities like dances, songs, drawing or modeling. Moreover these elements have a function (...) they are the means to a preconceived end,...this end is the arousing of emotions.* p. 65. and again *The primary function of all magical acts, I am suggesting, is to generate in the agent or agents certain emotions that are necessary or useful for the work of living; their secondary function*

Garbett's case, served to further the process of civilization through its architecture. Morality welded itself onto the concept of good architecture in the sense that good architecture becomes prerequisite to a healthy society.

The climate for such a broad purpose for architecture had been made much earlier. Edward Gibbon had sketched the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, using its architecture as a unit of measure to calibrate decadence.⁶ Every utopia started from a political structure which had its equivalent in architectural forms determining the ideal geometry of specifically utopian activities; ideal political structures had to be maintained by their architectural forms. Architecture as the gradometer of social and political relations was and still is the primary standard of

is to generate in others ...emotions useful or detrimental to the lives of these others.

6. Vidler (1987) pp. 178 ff. & Haskell (1976) pp. 217-229.

measurement of any civilization. Peter Legh, following Alberti, illustrates this directly by emphasizing the moral even specifically Christian role of architecture in a moral world.⁷ Legh writes that it is the duty of every man to do everything in his power to promote universal civilization, so that the promotion of architecture is a necessary part of that program. This would, similarly have sounded as music in the ears of James Fergusson whose *Historical inquiry into the true principles of beauty in art, more especially with reference to architecture*, (1849), had precisely this goal.

7. *...an art which as the chief of those arts, which are emphatically called the 'peaceful arts' is highly calculated to lead the human mind, (which by its nature must be active on something,) from war and bloodshed, to the contemplation of what will afford unlimited, pleasing and useful occupation for the mind, nor, it seems to me, can we sufficiently despise those, who, while speaking of the late improvements in London, declared architecture an art only calculated to fan the vanity of the world. I cannot help thinking, that the encouragement of an art, of so elegant and fundamental a nature, and so full of endless variety, may be productive of the greatest benefit of society, it may be laying the cornerstone for a multitude of other arts of a peaceful nature, and perhaps, if I may allude to Scripture in a secular work, for the commencement of that period when they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; when the nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah II,4.) and they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat fruit of them; they shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat. (Isaiah, LXV, 21,22).* Legh (1831) pp. ix-x.

The reciprocation of cause and effect between architecture and society is essential to Garbett's proof for the necessity of architecture; a healthy society, or civilization cannot exist without a similarly healthy architecture. Without architecture, civilization would cease to exist. Without civilization, architecture would be impossible.

Utility

In the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, the idea of utility played a central role in contemporary ethical thought generally. For Jeremy Bentham the concept of utility became the keystone of his philosophical system. But to appreciate Garbett's assimilation of this more general concept of utility, it is necessary to go back to earlier links in the chain of this development, notably to the ideas of the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson and David Hume. Their thought, which had a seminal influence on English art-theory, illustrate clearly how the disciplines of ethics and art-

theory both let the formulation of norms be preceded by a descriptive aesthetics defining a society's icons and ideals.

For Shaftesbury and Hutcheson this had far-reaching implications, they reinvigorated the desire for a link between appearance and the quality of moral action, producing what may be described as a moral functionalism.⁸ Words such as fitness, aptness and propriety in their writings describe a relationship between (social) form and function which, though Socratic in origin, was more directly based on the immensely influential Ciceronian concept of *decorum*.⁹ It was because of the broader European revival of the concept of *decorum* as well as its centrality in the thinking of the Earl of Shaftesbury, that fitness had become increasingly

8. On the origin of the word functionalism see De Zurko (1957) and Joseph Rykwert (1982) p. 117-118.

9. Cicero, *De Officiis*, I. 93 - 151 (1967) pp. 72-93.

important to English art-theory during the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Burke, Hogarth and Reynolds, all of whom discussed the concept of fitness in their writings, were all three direct influences on Garbett.

The moral philosophy of David Hume, partly worked out in response to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, attempts to trace some of the implications of an aesthetics of utility by which civilization is allowed to progress. We shall come back to this in due course.

The extension of functionalism; the example of Palladio

To understand the function of the concept of utility in Garbett's argument, we have to return to the question which forms the thread of this inquiry and begin by quoting *in extenso* the passage in which that question occurs:

Why, are not convenience and stability enough to constitute a fine building? -in other words, Whence the necessity for architecture proper? Observe, it will

10.Schrijvers (1992) 5-7.

be no answer to say, that it is man's nature not to be satisfied with the supply of necessities, but to seek for luxury, and to admire the beautiful. This will not do, because it is generally admitted that in all other arts, at least all other useful arts, and in all objects of use, whether natural or artificial (buildings alone excepted), the appearance of design, the correct adaptation of means to an end, seems in itself to constitute beauty, and even a beauty of the highest kind; so that those who have undertaken to investigate the laws of taste in general, as applicable to all the arts, have commonly ended by referring them all to this principle; in fact denying that beauty can ultimately be distinguished from utility. Thus they say, that a piece of furniture, or an utensil, appears well-formed, or well-proportioned, whenever its form or these proportions are such as fit it best for the end it is to serve; and that whenever, by deviating from this form or these proportions, it becomes less fit for its purpose, so will it appear less beautiful. (...) Not so, however, with buildings; they may be perfectly fitted to their purpose, and yet not only devoid of beauty, but positively hideous and disgusting to the eye. Indeed, they are always so, when really designed with no view beyond utility and strength. If mere building, or engineering works, not affecting architecture, ever appear pleasing or even inoffensive, it is because they were intended and designed to please, and

*therefore are really architectural, and their designers really architects.*¹¹

This passage plots Garbett's exact attitude to a classic Socratic functionalism as applicable to architecture.¹² Later in the *Treatise* Garbett would confirm that *the highest beauty is fitness*, even using the words beauty and fitness interchangeably. By this he meant that beauty erupts from a symphonic play between form and its cause.¹³

The relationship between form and function in which the idea of utility plays an emphatic role in architecture, had become

11. *Treatise*, p. 3.

12. De Zurko (1957) treats Garbett's relation to functionalism on pp. 140-144 & 221-222. First in relation to Ruskin and secondly in relation to Horatio Greenough. On the Socratic origin of Functionalism see Xenophon's, *Memorabilia*, III, viii; Tatarkiewicz (1980) p. 133.

13. *Therefore, when you see a thing highly beautiful, beware of copying it till after mature study; for the more beautiful (i.e. fitter) it may be in its situation, the less likely fit for any other.* In: *Treatise*, p. 255.

increasingly popular during the eighteenth century. The Abbé Laugier had used "the first cause" of architectural forms such as the column to justify their emphasis in contemporary architecture. This first cause was reconstructed in a mythical tale of a noble savage with the intelligence of a Deadalean demiurge. Any forms that were excluded from that cosmological reconstruction of the origin of architecture, such as the pilaster were rejected as derivative and therefore not belonging to architecture's essence. The concept of architecture was reduced to first needs, the refinement of bare necessities. Carlo Lodoli also determined form on the basis of structural needs. Form had to be seen as structurally efficient. One can recognize both ways of justifying form in Garbett's *Treatise*.

The point Garbett was making however, is that these forms of functionalism could not be applied to architecture without being qualified and extended:

*Every structure that is really planned on these utilitarian principles every one that is really unarchitectural, is ugly, -not merely indifferent, but positively offensive.*¹⁴

Garbett does not reject functionalism as a suitable aesthetic dogma for architecture. Nor is he prepared to make concessions to Ruskin's dislocation of the Vitruvian trinity. The severance is precisely what makes something *unarchitectural* and those who attempt such distinctions are actively involved in what he later calls *anti-art*, that is, performing an unnatural act of artistic aggression.¹⁵ Instead Garbett is imposing a hierarchy of functions to which architecture has to answer. As architecture approaches semantic completion the elementary concerns and needs of the individual for shelter and protection are dissolved into the greater concerns and needs of the masses, of society generally. Architecture's usefulness becomes increasingly

generalized as we move up the ladder of architectural beauty. The so-called higher reaches of architecture play upon the so-called higher qualities of life, the higher uses, primarily intellectual and more broadly beneficial to the processes of civilization as a whole.

At one level there is the primordial need to provide shelter to various human activities, each of them with specific geometrical and structural needs. That is a basic architecture, amply covered by a classic functionalism. Pevsner's bicycle shed would qualify to be called architecture on those grounds. Transcending that level of utility, the frame of reference of a building is extended from its inhabitants and users to incorporate the needs of the people always on the outside of the building. This is a civic functionalism, concerned with the use of geographical, temporal, political, economic and social identities. The battleground of this civic functionalism is the elevation. The physiognomy of the elevation institutes social difference and

14. *Treatise*, p.4.

15. *Treatise*, p. 254.

integrates that difference into the concept of beauty.

Palladio, to take Garbett's example, would adjust the proportions of his buildings to indicate a studied progression, not only satisfying what convenience *required*, but what it *suggested*, meaning that he would make use of symbolic sizes in his architecture to indicate differences in significance and thereby modulate value. It is a process similar to the one used by Garbett's publisher to arrange the title-page of Garbett's *Treatise*:

...where a mere constructor would have made two things of the same kind equal, because convenience and stability afforded no motive for making them unequal, this true architect [Palladio] somewhat exaggerates one, and reduces the other to the least dimensions that its use will allow, in order to carry out the beautiful (because natural) principles of variety, subordination and contrast. Or again, where an ordinary builder would have made certain divisions in the height or breadth of a building equal, or varying according to no definite law, simply because, in the first idea which occurred to him, the dimensions suggested by convenience happened to be equal or irregular, this artist-builder by consideration, and

carefully distinguishing between what convenience required, and what it suggested- would contrive, without sacrificing a particle of convenience, so to adjust these dimensions as to make them exhibit a studied variety, a contrast, a law of variation, a gradation, a progression a proportion, a fanciful idea, a quaint trifle if you will. light as air in itself, but weighty and valuable as an indication of mind, of thought, of unnecessary design, of care bestowed on the spectator, and therefore pleasing; or in other words, adding to the beauty of the building.¹⁶

Even though convenience is to some extent limited by structural possibilities, it dictates the division of space and mass. Most builders quietly submit to purely utilitarian demands, varying spaces and masses on the basis of physical needs alone or by way of an uncritical habit. In other words, most builders conform to classic functionalist demands or to tradition. To become an architectural quality, convenience has to confirm the relative values of a society by emphasizing one space or mass at the expense of another, making every part of a building conform to the vicissitudes

16. *Treatise*, pp. 14-15.

demanded by social hierarchies. This is done by the thoughtful application of symmetries and orders, which consequently become part of a social aesthetics.

Garbett's Palladio assumes that the inhabitants of his buildings constitute a community of separate but interdependent beings. They live within a clear social structure, confirmed by the relative sizes and emphasis of the various parts of the building. Every part of the building has a clearly defined purpose, that purpose extends all the way to the building's spatial and decorative iconography which confirms relative values.

Palladio's architecture thus becomes an *architecture parlante*, in a sense very similar to Ledoux's designs for his ideal city of Chaux. Palladio's architecture, in Garbett's interpretation of it, not only informs the outside world about what goes on inside, it also directs and supplements physical barriers such as walls and doors with psychological ones. Certain doors, because of their size and because of their decorative emphasis, will only allow certain

persons to use them. Because of its symbolic content, form becomes socially selective. Palladio's architecture exudes an emotive quality in order to guide social intercourse and confirm social values. Such an architecture performs magic in Collingwood's sense of the word, by dictating a social liturgy, defining sacred spaces and setting them apart from the rest.

The violation of space

So far we have explained that Garbett wants classic functionalism extended to include architecture's iconographical and symbolic purposes. We have not yet explained why. The thread of the argument presented here is the question why Garbett believes we need architecture. According to Garbett that need is caused by one single feature which distinguishes buildings from all other human products. It is because of that single distinguishing feature that a classic functionalism cannot be sufficient as a full theory of architecture, particularly when architecture is consciously being

asked to participate in social intercourse. This distinguishing feature puts architecture at an immediate and necessary theoretical disadvantage with regard to the other arts. Buildings are subject to an *inherent ugliness*:

whence the inherent ugliness of buildings, which it is the first object of 'architecture proper' to correct? As there seems nothing analogous to it in other useful arts, it must arise from some evil peculiar to the nature of building, as distinguished from agriculture, gardening, furniture, pottery & c.

In 1893 August Schmarsow would connect architecture and space in a normative equation.¹⁷ From that moment on, the spatial qualities of architecture would dominate its theoretical substructure. To borrow Emerson's phrase, the concept of space would give *an all excluding fullness*

17."Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung," Inaugural lecture Leipzig, 1893; "Malerische Gesichtspunkte in der Baukunst," Schmarsow (1897) pp. 5 - 10, quoted in T.A.P. van Leeuwen (1982) 88-92; see also van de Ven (1978) pp. 90-93.

to the object and become *the tyrant of the hour*. There had been earlier anticipations of the equation between space and architecture but they did not emphasize the same prescriptive possibilities of Schmarsow's essentially painterly conception of architecture.¹⁸ Alberti had described the origin of architecture in terms of the subdivision of spaces into public and private functions.¹⁹

Garbett also refers to space in his concept of architecture. Architecture sets itself apart from the other arts through the philosophical collision between space, (that is, its division or interruption), the several levels of utility and the physiognomical working of the concept of property. The idea of space is specifically used to emphasize the philosophical gap between nature and culture. The products of human activity are seen as

18.cf. van de Ven (1978) Parts 1 & 2.

19.Alberti (1965) I,ii, pp. 2-3.

metaphysically separate from the products of nature. That dichotomy, as we shall see, sets architecture at an immediate disadvantage in a culture where the romantic worship of nature has taken a firm foothold.

In trying to find the cause for *the inherent ugliness of buildings*, Garbett looks to Ralph Waldo Emerson. As a prelude to an early statement of the machine aesthetic, Emerson's essay on "Art" complains of

*the selfish and even cruel aspect which belong to our great mechanical works...*²⁰

I cannot help suspecting, writes Garbett, that these words touch the roots of the evil. Have we not here a clue to the solution of the riddle? and is not an unarchitectural building ugly simply because it looks selfish? It will be observed that the productions of other arts have not this inherent defect: they are goods to their owners without being defects to anyone. But a great building is, in certain respects, a necessary evil: it shuts out from us air and light, and

20. Emerson (1883) p. 81.

*the view of beautiful nature; it encumbers a portion of the earth's surface, and encloses a portion of the free atmosphere. It has no right to do so, without making or attempting what compensation it may for these injuries.*²¹

The evil in building is antecedent to any possible good because every building is an obstacle in nature. Every obstacle is an evil for as long as it does not compensate or resolve the obstruction it causes and make what amends it can for its necessarily *rude* intrusion into the natural creation. A building's quality as obstacle makes every building subject to an inherent ugliness, a prepossessed evil. Ugliness, like pain, is by Garbett to be considered similarly palpable and obstructive.

Ugly furniture does not constitute a necessary evil simply because it is avoidable. Furniture can easily be made to withdraw by being moved. A chair does not impose itself on the spectator with the same inexorable compulsion as a building. Every spectator is inevitably forced into

21. *Treatise*, p. 5-6.

submission by a building's hard and immovable presence. Buildings by their very nature are forced to thrust themselves upon the environment; they even inflate themselves and by extension their owners towards those who do not need to enter the building, who want nothing to do with the building. Most people experience every building primarily as an obstacle. Nearly everything else thought up by the mind of man has at least the element of choice woven into its existence. Most things are made on a scale that they can be easily ignored. The only other choice a building has, if it is to be avoided in any way, is not to exist at all. In order to perform their function therefore, buildings have to divide and intercept nature. For a building to lose its quality of inescapability is for it to lose its nature, to be destroyed.

Garbett chose this quality of obstruction as the point at which Architecture had to be separated from the other arts and the point at which a simple or narrow functionalism

lost its suitability as an all-excluding paradigm for architectural design.

That was new. No other theorist had chosen the violation of nature and of free-space as the point at which architecture distinguished itself from other human products. Nor had anyone been so decisive about the nature of the relationship between a building and its environment before. Building, according to Garbett, was a metaphysical deed. Buildings channel human activity, provide direction, define free space by becoming obstructions within it. A building, to promote the health of society had to avoid being a blood-clot.

Writing in the year that Garbett's *Treatise* was published, Schopenhauer reformulated and elaborated some of the central ideas he had first expounded some thirty years earlier in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819). Schopenhauer is unlikely to have been known to Garbett but he is all the more useful to illustrate the peculiar character of the idea that the act of obstruction must be considered a positive

evil. In the section of *Parerga und Paralipomene* (1851) which deals with the suffering of the world, Schopenhauer compared normal life to the flow of a river. Pain or evil in that description were defined as *positive* obstacles to its easy flow. *Evil*, Schopenhauer argues, *is precisely that which is positive, that which makes itself palpable, while the good is the negation of that evil.*²² Garbett similarly sees the act of obstruction as a palpable and positive evil.

22.Arthur Schopenhauer (1985) p.41: *I (...) know of no greater absurdity than that absurdity which characterizes almost all metaphysical systems: that of explaining evil as something negative. For evil is precisely that which is positive, that which makes itself palpable; and good, on the other hand, i.e. all happiness and all gratification, is that which is negative, the mere abolition of a desire and extinction of a pain.* The theme of comparing life to a river was particularly popular at the time as a subject for representation. Ruskin compares life to a slowly cooling stream of

Jacob Voorthuis

No earlier architectural theorist had been quite so pessimistic about the nature of buildings as Garbett. Architecture constituted the profanation of nature. As a child of his times, Garbett defined nature anthropocentrically as *belonging* to humanity as a whole. Therefore it was not nature so much as humanity that had to be compensated by a building's inherent evil.

That compensation had to be in the form of an architectural politeness. Politeness thus constituted the translation of unavailability and obstruction into its compensation. That compensation had to be added to the concept of functionalism to make it adequate as a theoretical dogma for architecture.

The first step towards refinement, whether in language, manners, or any useful art, such as building, consists in mere politeness, or

lava, cf. *Seven Lamps*, "The Lamp of Life." § III, p. 177

*the avoidance of the expression of selfishness.*²³

But how is it possible for a building to be selfish? Does it live?

23. *Treatise*, p. 11.