

F U + V: strategies and tactics of desire in architecture

This essay sets out to do two things. It will look at the idea of desire as it relates to beauty and it wants to propose that the three conditions of good architecture as formulated by Vitruvius are still relevant and useful today if seen in relation to each other. This essay will attempt to describe that relationship.

A beautiful relationship...

In the first book and second chapter of *De Architectura Libri Decem* Vitruvius provides us with three criteria for the judgement of architecture. Three conditions which, if met, can lead to *good* architecture. All buildings (in fact he implies all forms of *facture* *facture*) have to be made with due consideration to *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas*.¹ Later, in the early 17th century they were translated by Henry Wotton as *Commodity*, *Firmness* and *Delight*. Recent research into the conditions of good architecture has hardly penetrated deeper. Bill Hillier, for example, rewords the same conditions to some extent and adds a fourth which however, can quite easily be reduced to one or other of the original three.² The important thing about these three conditions is their irreducibility. One cannot reduce stability or *firmitas* further to some other quality, nor can one reduce usefulness or desirability to a more elemental concept apart from perhaps being. But that would deliver us to another level of discourse. Good architecture is a question of good design, good building and *good using*. The meaning of the first two is self-evident. The meaning of the last is no less so. A building which is incomprehensible, which cannot be "read" properly in terms of its routing or constituent logic, can surely only fulfil its potential if that incomprehensibility is its goal. In short the criteria of *utilitas*, *firmitas* and *venustas* have served us well, no more so than when they were being tested by creative sceptics, dreamers and others creatures who don't accept everything that is told them. The point here is not so much to test these criteria as to critique the tendency to treat them as in some way autonomous; as if one could exist without the other. As if, for example, *venustas* might be somehow possible without reference to *utilitas* or *firmitas*. It is, I believe, enlightening to define them *in relation* to each other. The argument here is simple. It is precisely because of their irreducibility that each *has* to be seen in the context of the other. Otherwise their description becomes merely tautological.

Good architecture we could describe as a special form, a *sophistication*, or, if you will, a *resolution* of all architecture, including the "bad". But wherein does that resolution or sophistication reside? This essay will argue that we need concepts that concentrate on the way properties are a description of a relation between an object and an experiencing subject.³ Properties constitute the relationship. A property is a predicate and a predicate is a quality pronounced by someone about something. It is a relationship. A relationship is a difficult thing to catch and isolate. Central to the argument is that a relationship *always exists external to its terms*.⁴ That means that a relationship has no necessary connection to the things it relates. By describing a

¹ Vitruvius, *De architectura Libri Decem*, Eng. vert. F. Granger, Loeb Classical Library, (1970)

² Cf. Bill Hillier, *Space is the Machine: A Configurational Theory of Architecture*, Cambridge Univ. Press (1999)

³ The categories object and subject have been much criticised. I sympathise with that criticism to a great extent, but for my purposes here they can be legitimately left intact for the moment.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "Hume" in *Pure Immanence, Essays on a Life*, (New York: Zone Books, 2001) pp. 48-49

relationship, one tries to approach something as hellishly complicated and perplexing as "good architecture" by focussing on the sympathetic play between terms, in this case, the building and the observer. The play, although *performed* by the terms is separate to them. A relationship is a concept that relies on a network of other concepts to "work". The concept beauty describes a relationship which manifests itself as a feeling in the beholding subject, requires a whole list of conditions to be satisfied before it can be predicated to an object observed. A leaf to appear translucent and bright green, such as the one in front of me now, requires not only its own peculiar make up, but also the light coming in through the window as well as the position of my eye at the right angle to perceive its freshness and translucence. A relationship is, furthermore, never visible or made manifest except in the behaviour of the subject *undergoing* the object to other people in his or her environment. Tennis, as a game is only made visible as a thing by the behaviour, gestures and movements of its players within the configuration of a certain space, marked out and with the help of a number of implements. That is also a valid description of beauty. Beauty is that which engages a situation and a situation is an array of objects in relation to a body playing or doing something which we might for the moment and slightly irreverently call a game. To take an example: I may show I find something beautiful by talking about it in glowing phrases. The glow of the phrases would then indicate my relationship to the thing described. The problem is that we often desire these fleeting and conditional moments to become permanent and generally valid, which, given a Vermeer painting, they often seem to be: objective, or, if you like, universal.⁵ There aren't many people who would deny the beauty of a Vermeer on the basis of compelling arguments. Perhaps, because of the success of some things to convince so many people of its properties, relationships, by nature fluid and situational, become politicised by definition. That is to say their dynamic nature is hardened, ossified and used in the various departments of everyday political life from the settling of domestic priorities to the large scale polarisations into ideological camps.⁶ In this way, people still feel that beauty can be an absolute or universal quality, a quantity in fact, something that is always the same; that can be relied upon. In fact that opinion informs their political life! The history of aesthetics is littered with attempts to make beauty something that does not depend on the network of relations between things and people in a particular situation. These have, quite rightly, all failed. Such definitions attempt to subvert reality and make it dance to our rather limited understanding. One of the practical consequences of this process of hardening are that the three conditions of good building can be talked of as separate things and as such imbued with the power to act alone. In the common language of the design studio this is frequently the case. Beauty is something that can be *added on*. I think it would be useful to see why this isn't the case and how we can then benefit from another way of looking at the problem.

Vitruvius presents us with what we might call a *triadic prison of judgement* that we have not yet been able to escape.⁷ The question is do we break out, do we undermine the system from within, or do we

⁵ Kant's aesthetics, especially with reference to one of its most curious concepts, have been adequately criticized by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. I do not feel called upon to repeat their incisive destruction of the categorical imperative.

⁶ For a dominant aesthetic theory which concentrates on the issue of experience and situation see Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated, edited, and introd. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Univ of Minnesota Press, 1994

⁷ Triadic relationships in philosophy are often looked at skeptically precisely because they are so "strong", the same reason why they are so attractive in construction. This skepticism is completely justified in my view.

learn to live with this prison? After all it wouldn't perhaps be the worst... The three terms of the triad taken together, **utilitas** (use, usefulness, utility, serviceableness, service, expediency, benefit, profit, advantage)⁸ **firmitas** (firmness, durability, strength, steadfastness, stability, endurance, constancy, power) and **venustas** (loveliness, comeliness, charm, grace, beauty, elegance, attractiveness) present a symphony of criteria that can help to form a fuller judgement about buildings and design strategies whereby aspects of use take a central position. Together they make up a "network judgement" in which not a pseudo-objectivity (the hardening of relationships into things about which I spoke earlier) or a form of logical extremism (whereby a partial logic brings us into absurd situations) supplies the method of approach, but a gentle subjectivity formed by the mobile, dynamic, fluid and rich possibilities of empathic criticism.⁹ Architecture, literature, art, philosophy, law, politics etc share one basic characteristic, namely that they are all concerned with the human-being-in-his-environment. Literature is a useful method to get into someone's brain and so to arrive at the dispositional map of concerns and consequent priorities that is part of the job of consciousness to find a useful direction in. Part of architecture's way of achieving a prioritisation of its concerns is to use those strategies and tactics assembled under the unhappy chosen word common sense, or, what comes to the same thing: empathic displacement, or allocation. That is, it invites the designer, just as the forensic scientist, the detective, the analyst and the novelist to dive into the mind of a hypothetical user. That mind is largely portrayed through (auto)biography.

Situation, Strategy and Tactic

The *application* of your thoughts to a particular problem, are dependent on a given situation, that is, a network of visible and invisible relations that place you in that situation. A situation is generally so complicated that a mere rationalisation of a situation is hopelessly inadequate; it simply cannot take into account a sufficient number of factors.¹⁰ We need what Spinoza called intuition. Intuition is conscious thought complemented by the whispers of experience, which is that which we have learnt to discern but not necessarily yet learnt to describe in conscious thought. This means that in order to *apply* our thoughts to a problem, we must *live the problem* by way of empathic displacement. To do this we must be delivered over to the world around us so to speak, to the situation at hand. Your deliverance to the world, is a giving to it of your *self*, that carefully nurtured "self" that represents the compound interest of your body's experience of its interaction with the environment. Because of the essentially fuzzy nature of this process, simple algorithms or systems of approach tend to lead to inadequate solutions. Instead, to deal with a complex problem or a challenge we need a strategy that takes account of the projected and virtual landscape of your existence, a self-created stability, that is the climate of our mind, the people we can count on, and the tools and materials at our disposal as well as a conception of the limitations and conditionality of all these together.¹¹ The word strategy did not

⁸ Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* 1879

⁹ The wealth of possibilities in the concept of empathy have not yet been exhausted. See especially Mallgrave and Ikonomou, *Empathy, Form, and Space, Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, Getty Center, Santa Monica, 1994.

¹⁰ The literature regarding intuition in decision making is extensive. Useful recent additions to the debate are Gary Klein, *Sources of Power, How people make decisions*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999. And more recently intuition: its powers and perils, Yale Univ. Press, 2004 and Hogarth, *Educating Intuition*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001.

¹¹ I use the simile climate because it is a generalisation of what we call the weather discussed from day to day. A climate has different kinds of weather.

appear from military concerns for nothing. Tolstoy's general formulates a plan on the basis of his experience and his knowledge of the terrain, the people and the advice of his trusted advisors.¹² But as Tolstoy described so compellingly in his *War and Peace*, the best generals are those who acknowledge, at least to themselves, the unstable character of their strategy. They know that during mobilisation of the strategy, in the unfolding of the drama on the battlefield the strategy never follows the path set out for it. The enemy, after all, also has a strategy, and... there is always the weather, not to mention the logistical problems of supplies, the reluctance and understandable fears of the soldiers, the unforeseen consequences of wild rhetoric, the quality of your weapons. Large aggregates of small factors whose outcomes are difficult to predict help to determine what eventually happens. That is why the greatest quality of a general, and this is crucial, is the calm with which he can convince others that the tangential tendencies in a situation are completely under control. After all, we have another weapon! To supplement a strategy, to make it react quickly to new situations, we have the tactic. The tactic plays the moment, reacts, sometimes blindly, to the situation. An unfortunate side effect of the tactic is that it has the tendency to loosen its grip on the means to achieve a goal. This can backfire. Means should never be sacrificed to the goal. That is after all the tragedy of all of humanity.¹³ But more of that later.

Back to FU/V

Traditionally the first two terms *utilitas* en *firmitas* are completely uncontroversial in their relation to architecture.¹⁴ *Utilitas* means usefulness and usefulness is a clearly desirable characteristic of architecture and offers it *stability* within the sphere of human society in that a useful building will be cared for, loved, maintained and even reproduced. It will survive in an evolutionary sense. Use is a quality with which a building celebrates its own existence by answering a desire. Use is the clearest answer to desire. An architecture must, whatever else it aspires to, be useful. You must be able to use it in achieving the purpose you have set for yourself, or failing that, discover, serendipitously, some other purpose for which it, by way of a revelation, manifests itself as peculiarly suitable. It has to work, or, if you will, *function*. You can define functionality either in a narrow way or very broadly so that even the most poetic aspects of architecture are granted their use and purpose. This does not need to be emphasized, nor do we have to revisit the critique of functionalism.¹⁵

¹² See Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. His commentary on military habits appears throughout the novel.

¹³ Cf. Michel de Certeau, *Arts de faire* (1984) transl. Steven Randall, *The Practice of everyday life*, University of California (1988) pp. 29 ff.

¹⁴ With the exception of Ruskin's curious and intriguing definition in his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849.

¹⁵ A lot has been written about functionalism, I do not want to repeat it all here. See for example: Horatio Greenough, *Form and Function: Remarks on art, Design and Architecture*, (1947) originally 1852; Frederick Kiesler, *Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture*, *Partisan Review* (July, 1949):32 Edward de Zurko, *Origins of the Functionalist Theory*, (1957); Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960); Theodor Adorno, "Functionalismus heute," (1965) translated as "Functionalism today" in Neil Leach ed., *Rethinking Architecture* (1997); Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750 - 1950* (1965); Peter Eisenman, "Post-Functionalism" in *Oppositions* (1976) nr. 6; Brent Broolin, *The Failure of Modern Architecture*, 1976; Peter Blake, *Form Follows Fiasco; Why Modern Architecture hasn't worked*, (1977) Stan Anderson, "The Fiction of Function" in *Assemblage* (1987) nr. 2 pp. 18-31; Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity, A Critique*, (1999) "Het Functionalisme en zijn Schaduw", in Hilde Heynen et.al., *Dat is Architectuur*, (2001) pp. 699 ff.

The second term of the Vitruvian triadic conception of the world of facture is even less controversial. The useful, in order to be useful has to achieve a measure of stability and for that it has to be firmly built. At least a structure has to be adequate to its purpose. Firmness, stability, strength is thus *an aspect of use* without being able to be reduced to usefulness. It is one of the things a useful thing must be in order to be useful. It is the other side of the coin. Or rather it is the material the coin is made of. Firmitas is also an answer to a prayer, an answer to a desire without being that desire itself.

The third term, *venustas* is never experienced as problematic. What is strange is that Vitruvius chooses not to use a perfectly adequate Latin word, *pulchrum*. *Pulchrum* or *pulchrae* is the Latin word for beauty. According to most translators he wanted to indicate beauty with the word *Venustas*. Now Vitruvius' reputation as a lousy Latinist had been rubbed in by Alberti in the 15th century. He stands, even now, as an author who hardly knew his own language which he polluted with foreign import and who had a suspicious obsession with proving his own innocence with regard to plagiarism, and obsession that would seem to prove his guilt.¹⁶ But whether his choice of words was due to ignorance remains to be seen.

Cette obscure objet du désir...

The Lewis and Short Latin Dictionary, which is available on internet, translates *venustas* with the words *charm, allure, attractiveness, seductiveness, appeal, attraction, enchantment, fascination, loveliness, mystique, sex appeal and desirability and gracefulness*. Venus is the goddess of love: and love is the compulsive music of desire that overcomes us when confronted with *venustas*.¹⁷ Love is a convulsive, paradoxical movement of centripetal and centrifugal forces that want unity in order to generate an infinite multiplicity; that wishes for a molar union in order to disintegrate and divide frenetically into a multitude. Venus was taken over by the Romans from the Greeks who called her Aphrodite. She is not just responsible for the juiciest stories from ancient Greece, but also for the word aphrodisiac, a substance that screws (excuse the allusion) our libido to Dionysian urgency. The prime function of Venus in the divine state of the antique world is quite simply that of a gorgeous woman without equal and the stories are about the difficulties that this creates within a divine state full of gorgeous, brilliant and jealous women as well as lusty and vengeful men. She is the object of urgent and irresistible desire: she is what a man wants to own, whatever that really means. Her complement and sometimes son Eros, is, according to Plato's *Symposium*, (where he is *not* the son of Aphrodite) the poor half-god that doesn't have what it desires to possess and is forever in-between, striving towards possession, working to fulfil his substance.¹⁸ The erotic aspect of desire in relation to possession has to be emphasized here.

The erotic relates desire to use; in fact, possession can be defined as a peculiar form of use. Possession can never mean anything but "having the use of" or "being at the pleasure of" which in fact is no different. Possession is use in the sense that possession is a method whereby the virtual substance of the self is increased and enlarged, gathering unto itself the multiplicity of its environment for which it has a purpose, however arcane.¹⁹ Each story in which

¹⁶ Cf. Leon Battista Alberti, *De Re Aedificatoria*, Book VI, Chapter 1.

¹⁷ See for a beautiful essay on the link between beauty and love, D.H. Lawrence's essay on "Sex and Loveliness" in *Selected Essays*, Harmondsworth, **

¹⁸ Cf. Plato, *Symposion*

¹⁹ In the King James bible *Job* (Job 1.3) is described tellingly as follows: His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred

Aprhodite plays a central role is a story in which the erotic services the relationship between desire and possession.²⁰

Shapely

When Vitruvius writes about *venustas* as a criterion of good architecture, he writes about well proportioned forms where everything is given (in terms of possession) *its proper place*. We don't get much more than this. *How do you mean everything in its proper place?* What is meant by that? In English we use the word *shapely* to indicate that something of that propriety has been achieved. Perhaps then, that is a better translation of *venustas*: Venus, before she becomes anything else, is above all "shapely". However, with shapeliness we bump up against a tautology. Everything has a shape, even time, it stretches and shrinks. So in one sense everything is shapely. But is shapely merely an adjective meaning shape-like? Now we know that that is not the case. Nevertheless we cannot get rid of the tautology completely; there is a process of reciprocation involved. When we call something shapely we mean that it possesses a certain *pull*, it exercises an attraction; something charms us, we are under a magic spell altering our behaviour.²¹ Shapeliness attracts because it constitutes veiled promise. It suggests, through the behaviour of the that which can be experienced, processes, structures, systems, and actions that have been so adjusted to each other's workings that hope for the future becomes possible. Shapeliness is *the language* of usefulness. The shapely works so well that the use of it gives pleasure simply in performing the actions necessary for that particular use. People who can appreciate a well-designed doorknob at the moment they turn it, know exactly what I mean. Shapeliness is the *revelation* of desire.

The shapely is a syncopation of shapes, a com-position. Why do certain people charm us? That is of course a difficult question. Vulgarly and in excessively plain language, but a language which nevertheless serves our purpose here, we might give the following reason: "She/he is beautiful: I want to possess her/him, make love to her/him, have his/her babies." Whether babies and making love are essential as immediate urgencies or can be deferred to the realms of wistful imagination is not what is at issue here. Possession is intangible except in behaviour and some forms of possession reside merely in the thought. Desire and procreation may be co-evolutionary phenomena which came together by happy accident and just happened to be useful in combination. It is easily arguable that sexuality and procreation are both independent working parts of a larger *machinic aggregate*.²² It is after all interesting that sexuality addresses all the senses, senses that have other functions besides scouring for possible mates. Their causal relationship is none too certain but their complementarity is. Do I want to make love to her *because* she is beautiful? How exactly does her beauty relate to my possessing/using/making love? Here we have the crux of the matter. If we can describe that relationship cogently we have, however curious it may sound, the basis of a design theory. In any case it is difficult without the affirmation of the earlier tautology: The shape makes Venus womanly and womanliness is the object of man's desire. To

yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

²⁰ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth (1955)

²¹ For a wonderfully pragmatic description of magic see R.G. Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, 1938

²² Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-oedipus, capitalism and schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983) see especially "The Process" and "The Territorial Machine; see also Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987) especially "1837, Of the Refrain" But also D.H. Lawrence, "Sex and Loveliness" See previous note.

what extent that is further reducible is difficult to determine. Nevertheless it is plain that *his* quest is to possess *her*, as a physical attribute of his own body, in extension of his Job-like "self", in the form of an interior and wholly private desire, in order to be able to face society with confidence by having her on his arm, for the purposes of procreation of his self, his self in multiplicity, or for the purposes of drunken and Dionysian sensual conflagration in which the intensity leads to a delicious kenon, a nirvana of emptiness. Her shape speaks of her potential as limited only by man's imagination. Her appearance as human being, as soul, as the creation of our fantasy, our narrative capacity, is reduced to that which she reveals to us through the veil of her dress and her shapeliness. The cause of the *pull* or *attraction* is the promise, the entertainment of a possibility, of junction, of absorption into the substance of the person possessing her for his or her own use. It is the purpose of tectonics to speak of junction and make it suggestive of whatever quality we have decided in our wise politics of taste to privilege. The cause of appeal, the cause of the attraction is, from the point of view of social norms and values, perhaps rather banal in that it is encapsulated in our sexuality. Nevertheless, sexuality in the sense of use is the ultimate framework for form and structure.

That relationship is famously exploited in society on all levels. A divine play of form suggestive of its potential, its potential in relation to man, speaks of the potential of man. The intensity of that power is not lost on the designers who explore it commercially, from those designing Alfa Romeos and Bugattis or those designing shampoo bottles. The Italian car is a highly sexed being, especially when its shape, its form, fulfils its promise in the sound of its engine, the way it holds the road, the fluidity with which it is handled. But that is not all. In a negative sense sexuality is antithetically present in those designs that deliberately try to avoid that association. As Plato indicated in this *symposium* there are different levels of desire, or eros, or love than mere sexuality. The anti-erotic is also a form of the erotic. It is, furthermore, not at all certain that sexuality and desire have a causal relationship. The desire for the anodyne or for the desexualized might appear a welcome reaction to the hyper sexualised world we appear to live in, but has nevertheless a basis in our attitude to sexuality. Victorian and Islamic primness are, as we all know, highly sexualized forms of asceticism, precisely because they want to avoid all reference so strenuously. There are so many possible goals for desire; sexuality is merely an important one among them. We appear not to be able to escape.

From this point of view we can perhaps forgive the translators of Vitruvius who have consistently exchanged *vesustas* for beauty. Shapeliness as the object of desire is an obvious function of beauty. From a Platonic perspective the beautiful is the sign of the good. I believe that, but in a special way. The question "what is beautiful?" means "what is good?". The question what is Beautiful architecture is the same question as "what is good architecture?" But before we are give a licence to discriminate against the "ugly" we have to beware. From a Spinozan perspective, who made beauty and goodness always relative to the experiencing individual, the answer to those questions only tells us *what is being desired*. Good architecture, says Vitruvius is an architecture that satisfies three conditions: *utilitas, firmitas en venustas*.... Venustas is simply that-which-needs-to-be-satisfied with regard to a desire. It is that what must be possessed by the building *in relation* to the user. It is the shape or form, and structure in relation to use that takes central position in the word *venustas*. I would therefore plead for a future translation of Vitruvius to use the word desirable for *venustas*.

Beauty would do, but it seems so separate from the person undergoing beauty. Possession of that which is desired is a form of use, even if only in potential, always related to the individual. And for that relationship to be shared among others, for it to achieve something approaching the generic its structure must be adequate to the task. Here we are again, the three conditions working together.

The three conditions of good architecture are in fact inextricable functions of each other. To see them in isolation of each other is to reduce them all to absurdity: $X = f(FUV)^n$

The beauty of everything

I believe that the analysis of the living human body in relation to these three conditions of good architecture can be useful. However the concept of usefulness would have to be treated with some sympathy and a lot of generosity and a wakeful scepticism: awful things can happen when we *reduce* people to the level of *useful object*: the slave whose strength is used against him by reducing him to a possessed machine, the woman who sees her sexuality used against her by being reduced to an object of unambiguous lust. These are very pregnant examples of such a reduction. We must therefore not seek a reduction in use, but an equivalent expansion in use. For every use we identify, we must be aware that we have done just that: extracted one use from of an infinite choice of uses. We can legitimately state that we, as subjects, *make use* of our bodies and our minds and our environment, constantly and everyone in their own way. We say, for instance, that people have a *role* in society. The most successful of these people, the people of our dreams would appear to have fine tuned their three conditions of the good, a symphonic fine tuning that is often given the complement in the creations of man as being *organic* a word that emphasizes the relationship of the thing admired to the epitome of the beautiful: the living and the vital. Life is an aggregate of machines working within and with an environment, whereby the constituent parts are dependent upon each other and work together towards a goal that we often describe as self-fulfilment: What use is life? The use of a life is to *fulfil* itself, whatever that means. Parts are geared to each other, mouth, stomach, liver, anus, they work together at that what they do best individually, they complement each other. Each process complements the other whereby the construction of the body, sets the terms of its uses in the service of its conscious and subconscious as well as instinctive desires. The usefulness of the whole is dependent on the body's construction, the possibilities this offers, its limitations and the wish. The *uomo* or *donna universale* is somewhere a deep wish, the representation of the fullest life, or not?

It does credit to human being as an activity that we have developed a generous view of our species. Within certain margins we have always been able to appreciate people in whom a particular quality has been dominant: people with a wonderful intelligence within a meagre body, or people with a wonderful body but an indifferent mind. We have even developed stereotypes for such people: the dumb blonde and the clumsy scholar. There are many different types. But surely we are at a new phase in our generosity in that we can now even appreciate such people as anti-heroes. The fact is we have developed a sophisticated and more fully reasoned attitude towards what we call perfection. In fact traditionally "perfect" people, the James Bonds and Miss Worlds of this world have almost achieved something absurd. They have become caricatures of the human. Human is that which has incurred and shows the dents of life. With the sense that we are in a position to understand nature we are in a position to be generous and to give many sorts of people a place in our own home-decorated universe. Man, in my opinion, is the first

animal that has entertained the possibilities that many sorts of creatures, including those with a handicap can *function* well in society (functioning meaning no more than self-fulfilling) without believing that such a handicapped creature might form a threat to its own existence. Please take note of the silent-seeming choice of words: *functioning*. So-called *failings and defects* have become increasingly invalid criteria for rejection. We take on everyone and organize and design the city so as to be able to give everyone a place, even those rather sad creatures who have fallen into extremism in order to maintain the idea of a "pure race" or a "true religion". We are in a position to take everyone in and organize our cities accordingly. Slowly but surely. Everyone has a function in society, simply because everyone has the capacity to fulfil themselves. Everyone is useful. The pressure to "contribute" economically is large and some people even make the mistake that this form of contributing is the only legitimate form of self fulfilment. That tendency has to be resisted. Everyone has the right and duty to be. That is profit. The "defects" of not so long ago are no longer collected under the idea of "the lesser" but under the idea of "the different" and we have discovered that everyone has a right to difference. Our attitude to the handicapped is unique an evolutionary system, of which we are merely a part. Evolution is generally unforgiving and relentless in its demand that organisms survive in their environment or go seek another. But we have created an environment in which many creatures can survive that hitherto could not. We are in a position to appreciate people not only for their body, or indeed their mind, but for broad array of qualities that are often situationally determined. This generous view is, I believe, a consequence of an aesthetic sensibility whereby the beautiful has, during the whole history of our reflection upon it, never allowed itself to be captured in absolutes, only in relationships. This is because beauty is a relation the terms of which are external to it. The beautiful always escapes us the moment we believe we have isolated it as a *thing*. Because even though we can point to something and say "that is beautiful" a moment later that beauty can start qualifying itself. But from the subjective desire, everything is capable of *being found* beautiful. Beauty is a discovery. The relationship that is beauty is linguistically described as a *finding*. Well trained people can find it everywhere. Everything can be found beautiful if we look at it from the right perspective. Perverse people, from the perspective of a society, can find perverse things beautiful. And, because beauty is related to use, other uses need not be taken into account so that beauty is always conditional. Similarly, from an evolutionary point of view, scarcity value may well have been the complement to the feeling of deep emotions of wellbeing on seeing that scarce good. To have something that is scarce is a great good to the individual. This would account for that feeling of disappointment when things are no longer exclusive. But practicing one's disappointment can help overcome even such limitations. The question is, are there people who have practiced their seeing to such an extent that they can even appreciate the common, the everyday and make that special? These are the great writers and the great readers. The seeing or finding of beauty, considering it exists everywhere, requires a great deal of practice. It is a quality of the generous view, the view which assumes that everything has a place, a function, a use, as long as we think about it creatively enough. The finding of beauty, picking it up from the floor, studying it and cherishing it requires practice. It is for this reason that a practiced appreciation of architecture discovers jewels precisely where the balance between the three conditions

appear to be slightly off, where buildings are the target of loathing and ridicule.

Utilitas

In the history of architecture there are countless buildings that have put the triadic conditions of good architecture under tension. Take for example the pilgrim's cathedral of Ste Foy in Conques (1050-1120): A Latin cross derived from Santiago de Compostella, the final destination of nearly every pilgrimage during the 11th and 12th centuries. Ste Foy was built with massive stone walls covered with an equally massive stone barrel vault in order to reduce the very real danger of fire. The symbolism of the cross will not have been lost on anyone, but the plan of the church was not just concerned with symbolism. There was a liturgy that made grateful use of the long nave and the aisles as if it was a street in a city of onlookers that had something to celebrate. The most important function of this pilgrim's church was the routing. Many people on their way to Santiago visited the church in order to worship and admire the relics which could mediate their prayers to God. For so many people an efficient and safe routing through the church and past the relics was indispensable. This provided for ample aisles and a wide ambulatory or choir. The construction of the Romanesque church and the need for an impressive height determined the sheer mass of material used in the construction. The superabundance of mass made the church also useable as a stronghold in times of animosity. Because the construction only allowed small windows, the fantastic Romanesque light was born, a Caravaggesque light with a strong direction that models the volumes of the interior space, making the space comprehensible as well as grand and mysterious. This is the light surely referred to in Le Corbusier's beautiful definition of architecture: "*L'Architecture est le jeu savant, correct et magnifique des volumes assemblés sous la lumière*", the masterly play of volumes assembled in the light. We see here that specific qualities of the building are products of other qualities; qualities now much valued may have been fortuitous by-products of practical considerations with reference to the desired working of the building and the limitations of the site.

Firmitas

The gothic cathedral is a very different kind of building. Take Beauvais (1247-1569). The intention was to simulate the jewel-like light of a heavenly Jerusalem about which the man who may be said to have been the inventor of the Gothic, the Abbé Suger (1081-1151) had read about in the Book of Revelations: "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." (Revelation 21,21).²³ In order to achieve this effect a construction had to be conceived that would redirect the weight of walls into columns and allow the placing of large windows in which the stained glass could achieve its full effect. The light in a gothic cathedral is a very different light to the light in a Romanesque cathedral, it does not give as much direction, it does not mould the form of the space instead it leads the eye upward in wonder. In order to concentrate the effort on the interior, the construction was externalised resulting in an increasingly sophisticated lacy structure of buttresses, pinnacles, thin columns, ribs and decorations. The rivalry between the cities around Paris caused an increasingly daring race for the highest, thinnest most vertical church in an effort to

²³ Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, (ed.), *A Documentary History of Art*, (1957) Vol. 1, pp. 22 ff.

make man seem ever smaller in the face of God while his sacrifice to that God in the form of the gift of a beautiful house, appeared ever greater. The Gothic cathedral is an example of the sublime, centuries before the concept would be given its definite place in aesthetics by Boileau, Burke and Kant. At Beauvais it all went horribly wrong. It was to be the highest and thinnest of the lot and as a result it was never completed. Bits of its kept falling down. The story of the tower of Babel was threatening to repeat itself in one of many possible variations. The hubris of man in the service of God had reached its limit. Nevertheless, the view of the choir of Beauvais is one of the most impressive constructions there is. Firmitas was driven to extremes in the service of the other two.

Venustas

The Pazzi chapel (1430-61) by Brunelleschi is again completely different. Perhaps it is one of the most beautiful buildings of all time. Perhaps that is just me and a small club of admirers. In terms of construction it is unambitious, quite a contrast to Brunelleschi's Dome. In terms of use it is not exactly complex either. A monument to the violent deaths of two brothers, condemned because they had taunted the power and tested the resolve of the most powerful family in Florence, the Medici. It is a small monument to things going horribly wrong. The shapeliness emerges from a fine-tuned composition of lines, the texture and luminosity of the material, and the simplicity, that is comprehensibility, of its proportions, the wealth in allusions of its iconographic programme, the way the ornaments quietly differentiate the spaces and its sometimes rather awkward use of historicising references such as columns and capitals. This building appears to be about an artificially purified form of venustas; a form of it that has been loosened from its bonds to construction and use. The composition of surfaces in pilasters and architraves, ornaments derived from construction, bear no relationship to the actual construction of the building. Their purpose is to order the spaces and help order the mind, a purpose for which this building is peculiarly appropriate. Ornaments have been "stuck on", the building has been "dressed up"

Desirable Architecture

All three are examples of masterful architecture. Brilliant examples of extraordinary intentions well executed enriched by happy accidents. The buildings are desirable in the very concrete sense that one is glad to possess them by simply looking at them breathlessly, by walking around and through them, by being proud to live nearby, or having visited them, to have heard music inside them, to see them discussed by others. All three appear in the first instance to deny the truth of the Vitruvian conditions of good architecture. In none of the three buildings do the conditions appear autonomous and in any harmonic balance with regard to each other. On the contrary they appear invalids, one because of its massive nature, the other because it fell down and wasn't completed and the third because it flies in the face of the anti-ornament asceticism which characterized modernism. All three have, in fact, functioned in periods of an Apollonian certainty in matters of taste as targets of ridicule and censure.²⁴ But that of course only shows up the

²⁴ For a definition of the Apollonian, which I still find a haunting concept see Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872) Apollonian is related to Schopenhauer's world of representation, in metaphysical terms it stands for the false, the illusory, mere appearance. Epistemologically it stands for a dream-like state in which all knowledge is knowledge of surfaces, while aesthetically it stands for the beautiful, the intelligible, the ordered.

narrowness of the Apollonian perspective. All three are buildings that were created on the basis of a critical debate with reference to use in the broadest and most generous sense of that word. They are all machines of some sort. They work. Sometimes they work in ways that haven't been intended but that doesn't stop their working. They are useful in that they fulfil the promise of a desire, whenever that desire was conceived. The first has managed to make use of its massive and heavy construction; the second makes use of a construction that is light but wildly ambitious. The last appears to have no concern with construction at all except as a method of differentiating space, which it does awkwardly and almost hesitantly. The conclusion is clear: desire is sensitive and very critical with regard to her goal. It is easily disappointed and at the same time highly creative in finding purposes that were never intended. There are an infinite number of purposes and every situation creates its own desires and its own ways of satisfying them. That is what makes good architecture so exciting and so difficult. The three conditions of good architecture are not autonomous; they represent different aspects of each other and, most importantly, are always judged situationally. In fact U,F&V are the irreducible parts that make up any machine: the social-space machine as well as the thing-machine. The one is a function of the other two. That is why, over the 2000 odd years that they have been formulated, they have never really been improved upon. They are irreducible and fully related. Firmitas is useful and desirable. For things to be desirable they have to be useful and durable. For things to be useful etc.. Perhaps this circularity is a sign of their emptiness. But I don't think so. They don't have to be full. They are filled the moment we define what is desirable, how it is useful and what their structure consists of. That is the moment we are playing a game, in which there is a purpose. Their coherence, their interplay ensures the only valid criterion of success: has it been able to entice us, attract us, charm and endear us? Has it been able to awaken our desire? Is it a building that cherishes a desire? Can we imagine being there? Good architecture is the product of a reflective exercise in uses in the broadest and most generous sense of that word, not only during the design process but also during the building and in the recreation of it in the critical appreciation of it by the user. And perhaps because each building, despite its potential for intensely experienced beauty never conforms to a generic sense of perfection, they illustrate the human capacity for generosity, whereby judgement is broad and inclusive, whereby things are given a place, not because they fulfil a narrow purpose but because their purpose is, first and foremost, to exist. An their existence allows their multiplicity in interpretation. Sometimes the poetry that results is dependent on a strategic intention, sometimes it is the result of a lucky tactic. The conditions of good architecture are sensitive to the accidents and demands of the situation and they are also sensitive to the sensitivity of the person undergoing the building. That is why there is so much space for beautiful architecture.