SEMIOTIC NATURALISM IN ARCHITECTURE THEORY

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This paper seeks to present a kind of skeptical, and, in an indirect way, Wittgensteinian perspective upon purpose and meaning in architecture. The argument presented here revolves around the two notions that, first, there are different categories, which we have available for making architecture seem intelligible to us, and, second, that there are distinct historical discourses in which architecture has been made intelligible in specific ways. The implication of this discourse argument will be a skepticism regarding the prospect of an encompassing theory of architecture, or a theory that would fully and adequately capture the purpose and significance of individual buildings. This skeptical argument will build around a distinction I will make between what a rational subject can perceive and what can be said about it—a distinction based on Gilles Deleuze's distinction between the visible and the sayable.

It is argued that there are four categories of things that can be said about architecture: construction, style, use, and ideology, and that a difficulty of architecture theory is the possible unification of these categories. The problem of unity, it is argued, has been obscured by the tradition of architecture interpretation originating in Hegel, and which implies that there is an unproblematic semiotic relationship between construction, style, and meaning such that construction serves the purpose of style and style serves the purpose of embodying the collective aspirations of a community. Thinking through this problem in terms of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language will allow us to defamilarize

> " THE PROBLEM OF UNITY ... HAS BEEN OBSCURED BY THE TRADITION OF ARCHITECTURE INTERPRETATION ORIGINATING IN HEGEL "

ourselves from the notions that there could be a natural relation between style and meaning in architecture and that there could be an encompassing discourse on architecture such that all the categories of what can be said about buildings would be articulated within a unifying concept. The following paper thus presents the reasons one might have for being skeptical about a theoretical discourse concerning architecture that would do justice to its totality of significance. This discourse skepticism is, it must be said, at one remove from descriptive or prescriptive statements about particular buildings or building styles. Thus, unlike, Tafuri for instance, philosophy is not claimed (or a theoretical argument grounded in philosophy) is not claimed as assuming the normative power of grading the merits of individual buildings according to general criteria. The relevance of the skeptical program for architectural practice and architectural practitioners is thus indirect. That is not to say, this skepticism about meaning is without consequence for architectural practice. To say it more bluntly, it is believed that modernism and its avatars—functionalism, deconstruction, and the 'iconic' style of building—have overstated the power of theory within building practice. The modernist program of the early twentieth century and its continuation in architecture theory of our time can be defined as the effort to provide an aesthetic rationale for an industrial process of production and then to amplify this aesthetic program within a fitting social ideology: concrete is an industrial construction tool. Concrete produces an anti-ornamental aesthetic. The anti-ornamental aesthetic is egalitarian. This would be the basic pattern of argument. This theoretical assertiveness and this trajectory from construction—through style to ideology—relies on a conception of the unity between style and meaning, which is herein called semiotic naturalism and which, it is argued, is problematic.

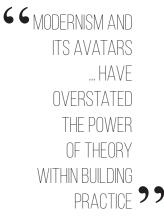## MEANING SKEPTICISM IN WITTGENSTEIN

Wittgenstein exhorts us to be skeptical about the notion that there is, or that there must be, some such entity as meaning in order for language to be meaningful [1]. For language to make sense, does not in turn mean that there is a sense which language makes and which we, the linguists or philosophers, could subsequently isolate and study as if it were a self-contained mental object. It is not clear from Wittgenstein's texts, or from the scholarly interpretations of his texts, what the implication would be of holding this skepticism about meaning. The pragmatic and anti-theoretical stance pervading the *Philosophical Investigations* sits uncomfortably with the extraordinary ingenuity of Wittgenstein's thought experiments and search for candidates that purportedly should satisfy justificatory or foundational

criteria, but which under his skeptical scrutiny always collapse [2]. This painstaking search reveals something other than mere opposition to particular theoretical positions, conceptions of meaning, or conceptions of consciousness. It reveals an attitude of puzzlement or bewilderment regarding that which seems natural. It is true, of course, that Wittgenstein's puritanical sensibility would lead him to search for a higher, simpler, or more essential naturalness in which our thoughts about language would contain nothing superfluous [3]. This sensibility is evident in different ways in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, but in the latter text, his own method of skeptical scrutiny runs counter to the ideal of simplicity.

The significance and purpose of a building is similar to meaning in Wittgenstein's sense in that within a natural, non-skeptical attitude we may think that there is a purpose or a significance that we can isolate intellectually and think about. It is argued that just as Wittgenstein encourages us to be skeptical about meaning as an isolated ideal entity, we should also problematize the notion of purpose as a unifying meta-category within the architecture discourse. This problem is addressed in terms of distinct categories and with reference to distinct discourses in which architecture has been made intelligible, or in which one has sought to make architecture intelligible. The semiotic principles at work in these efforts at making architecture intelligible are questioned and problematized.

> " MODERNISM AND ITS AVATARS ... HAVE OVERSTATED THE POWER OF THEORY WITHIN BUILDING PRACTICE "

HEGEL AND THE SEMIOTICS OF ARCHITECTURE

In studying modern architecture theory, one cannot fail to notice that particular assumptions are made again and again regarding the purpose of architecture. These assumptions are semiotic. The philosophical origin of the semiotic assumptions appears to be Hegel's theory of architecture in his lectures on aesthetics as embodying collective

beliefs [4]. The legacy of Hegel is rooted in the thought that buildings are meaningful because they are bearers of shared, historically specific aspirations, which make up their purpose and their meaning. Within the Hegelian perspective, purpose and meaning appear identical, or at least convergent.

The Hegelian legacy is referred to as 'semiotic naturalism' because it consists in taking for granted that buildings convey meaning and that these meanings can be clearly and univocally determined. For instance, in historical research the following is a common thought formation: there is here a natural, that is, non-problematic relationship between a presupposed cultural signified and the concept of the building as signifier. This way of thinking leads us to a view in which style choices such as choices of ornamentation, referring to the three orders of antiquity, or choices concerning internal spatial disposition between rooms, or choices of materials, or even the relation of a building to its surroundings, can be reconstructed as having been made for reasons that are culturally transparent. The building may not be a sign in the sense of a message or a tool of communication, but it appears as a depository of cultural meanings. The cultural meanings can be of various kinds: religious, political, social, etc. The argument for a distrust in this semiotic principle will be given in the last section of this article, where the ideological positions taken in Alberti's theory of architecture are discussed. If the assumption of cultural continuity between construction, style, and ideological meaning is broken, so is also the idea of a building's cultural intelligibility and transparent readability. One may also say that this skeptical approach to ideology is directly opposed to the Marxist social and contextual reading proposed for instance by Tafuri.

When Hegel writes about religious medieval architecture he is inspired by Winckelmann's idealization of Greek civilization on the one hand, and guided, on the other, by his own notion that the European Middle Ages was a spiritually saturated period [5]. His idea of churches summing up the spirit of a community subsequently became influential in architecture theory as a basic semiotic premise. The premise was taken to mean that buildings are constructs made within, for, and in some cases, by a community. That buildings are successful to the extent that they express the beliefs of that community.

One follower of this Hegelian perspective is the twentieth century architecture historian Christian Norberg-Shulz. In his synthesis, *Meaning in Western Architecture*, he presents architecture as a cultural response to a given environment. According to this model, the succession of civilizations

presents different solutions to the question of how to create, and articulate a meaningful space. He describes how, in other words, to appropriate the natural environment and integrate it into forms of construction, that are not merely monumental and not entirely aloof from their surroundings.

A less idealistic, more empirically historicist, but also implicitly Marxist, account of meaning in architecture is Tafuri's analysis of post-war Italian architecture [6]. The analysis is committed to a normative idea of social progress, which is used as a benchmark and tool of distinction for evaluating and comparing social building projects. Some buildings are good because they have a style, which implies a commitment to modernity, while other buildings imply a more muted position. Tafuri also evaluates projects in the context of a wider historical narrative. In Tafuri's account of Italian architects' ideological responses to urbanization, he envisaged architectural and urban design as embodying rival propositions around the notion of progress.

In Hegel, Norberg-Shulz, and Tafuri we arrive at the position that buildings are made for ideological purposes and that, in this, they carry meaning. For Hegel, buildings are meaningful when they embody religious beliefs. For Norberg-Shulz, buildings are meaningful when they articulate and appropriate a space. For Tafuri, buildings, or design projects, are like actions according to Jean-Paul Sartre: buildings take sides in an ideological battle between progress and reaction [7].

The different approaches to architecture from a historicist, phenomenological, and Marxist perspective shares the assumption that the relationship between architectural style and architectural construction—as well as the relationship between these two and whatever can be said about the meaning or significance of a building—is obvious. It is obvious, according to Hegel, that aesthetic form expresses a moral ideal.

" WITHIN THE HEGELIAN PERSPECTIVE, PURPOSE AND MEANING APPEAR IDENTICAL, OR AT LEAST CONVERGENT "

It is obvious, for Tafuri, that design choice expresses a stance with regard to the opposition between modernity and reaction. It is this obviousness or naturalness of meaning that is problematic and which Wittgenstein helps us to think of as problematic. The assumption that buildings and building design must have a cultural meaning is not self-evident. At least, this is what this paper goes on to argue—but in doing so it will be helpful to return to Wittgenstein.

WITTGENSTEINIAN DIALECTIC

To approach the assumptions and the semiotic naturalism of certain kinds of architecture theory, it is useful to return to Wittgenstein to draw from another more specific trait of his thinking in the *Investigations*. The trait of interest is a methodological trait. Rather than putting forward views directly and systematically, his thought moves dialectically in relation to a number of putative theories presented in rudimentary form—the most famous of which is the so-called private language argument. The movement through, or via, alternative and rival theoretical scenarios has the obvious advantage over a straightforwardly systematic discourse in that it avoids, or at least postpones, the petition of principle inherent in any dogmatic statement of a systematic set of propositions: as soon as there is a starting-point, something must have been assumed which is not quite explicit in the self-justification of the system. At the outset, the position will not be argued from the plane of a specific conception of architectural meaning. In itself, the argument from potential scenarios has the advantage of bringing into play, simultaneously, different theoretical possibilities and thus to highlighting the element of choice in the formulation of a theory. In this paper on semiotic naturalism, and an alternative to semiotic naturalism, a non-natural and less obvious, less straightforward understanding of the meaning relation in architecture is unfolded, one that is manifest in a certain kind of architecture history. Next, semiotic naturalism as consisting of a set of potential scenarios, or theoretical propositions, indirectly addressing a certain semiotic question of intelligibility is considered.

CATEGORIES OF ARCHITECTURE DISCOURSE

We can now think of the Hegelian tradition of semiotic naturalism as consisting of alternative theoretical propositions. These are all predicated on the assumption that the problem of how to articulate intellectual and visible space has already been solved, or that it need not emerge. In order to analyze these assumptions closely, we need to consider the categories within

which we speak about architecture. For architecture is only, and can only become, intelligible in terms of the things which we can say about it. Anything we may predicate belongs to some kind of category. The question would be, therefore, what are the discourse categories relevant to architecture? Does architectural discourse, that is, the kind of language which seeks to make architecture intelligible, possess its own distinct categories or does it employ categories that are common to architecture and art, architecture and the city, architecture and society, and so on?

Before suggesting an answer to this question, one can take as an example of a category problem, the concept of modernity. Now, we may think of many different sorts of things as modern, for instance, in no apparent order: the modern state, modern lifestyle, modern painting, modern technology. It is clear that within a general historical narrative, all these different phenomena could somehow be related. It is further clear that by doing so the historian will have to make certain fundamental methodological choices regarding the relationship, for instance, between society and politics, between science and society, or between the social and the aesthetic. These are precisely category questions.

All of the examples above further present a relevance to the question of architecture discourse in that architecture could be said to have something in common with all of them. One could write monographs on the relationship between the modern state and modern architecture or on the relationship between modern lifestyle and modern architecture. The issue of modernity and the category questions it immediately raises are thus apt at bringing out the precarious ontological status of the phenomenon of architecture as it exists somewhere between art and society. The ontological precariousness is another problem for the naturalist semiotician, for it gives rise to semiotic

"THE ASSUMPTION THAT BUILDINGS AND BUILDING DESIGN MUST HAVE CULTURAL MEANING IS NOT SELF-EVIDENT"

problems of classification. If architecture is like painting, if Le Corbusier is like Picasso, one set of questions concerning meaning will arise. If on the other hand architecture is technology, if Mies van der Rohe is the apogee of the historical development that produced high speed trains and motorways, another, entirely different set of meaning questions will ensue.

The precarious ontological status has to do with the relationship between the primary categories within which we can talk about buildings: construction, style, ideology, and use. It is difficult to conceive of anything that can be said about buildings that does not belong within any of these four categories. It is also difficult to think of a principle according to which we could identify their unity. If we think of the development of architecture theory since the Renaissance we find a gradual shift in the relationship between these categories and their relative importance. We also find different efforts at identifying a unity between them. Alberti's work is often considered as marking the beginning of modern architecture theory and his primary focus is construction—but he also introduces the notion of the importance of architecture for human life. The notion is referred to as ideology so in order to distance this analysis from Tafuri's more prescriptive notion of ideology, which is based on a normative battle between socially modern ideas and socially reactionary ideas.

At the end of the 16th century, Palladio writes about construction in terms of a prescriptive notion of style. In the course of the eighteenth century and in response to the need for domestic houses for a bourgeoisie oriented toward comfort rather than ostentation, architecture theory becomes concerned with pragmatic questions of what is pleasant and practical. Issues of style will thus be interpreted in terms of ideological questions concerning use. In twentieth century architectural modernism there is the effort to integrate construction, style, and an ideology of use. Le Corbusier is famously prescriptive in his ideas of use, and the functionalist school equally presents a formidable unity of construction principles, aesthetic norms, and norms of social life: functions are finite and simple and correspond to a clarity of design, and it is inconceivable that the purpose of a building could be to enhance a messy overlap between many kinds of activities in the manner, say, of a medieval city.

The latest modernists, the so-called deconstructionist Bernard Tschumi and post-modern Koolhaas, seek to explore the relationship between construction, style, and ideology while arguing—against functionalism— neither in terms of style nor in terms of use but in terms of a direct relationship between construction and ideology. The ideological principle is in both cases one of freedom of creation. Tschumi's notion that the

basic grammar of buildings, such as walls and roof, is open to question or his embrace of the principle of the grid in his Parc de la Villette project implies that construction dictates style and use. Koolhaas' surreal conception of New York as a place designed by the settlers for a future invention and use challenges the functionalist principle that we already know what use is, or should be. This brief sketch of the history of architecture theory and the shifting relations between categories is meant to indicate the motivation behind semiotic naturalism.

NORBERG-SHULZ AND HEIDEGGER

The grand synthesis of Norberg-Shulz is based on the idea that the categories of construction and style are inseparable and that both find a common expression in the context of a natural environment, which architecture has the mission to order, manage, structure, in short, articulate. The environmental aesthetic synthesis does indeed make the architecture of different epochs appear purposeful, and in a sense meaningful, as each epoch with its characteristic and distinct style and construction method, appears to offer fresh solutions to the environmental, or one might say anthropological, problem of man's relation to, and management of, his physical surroundings. Norberg-Shulz's theoretical position is referred to here in some detail because it constitutes a particularly explicit and ambitious formulation of semiotic naturalism. With his aesthetic and spatial understanding of Heidegger's phenomenology, Norberg-Shulz presents a theoretical position that is much more sophisticated and detailed than the vague philosophical reflections on building and living put forward by Heidegger himself in his famous article "Bauen Wohnen Denken" from 1951 [8].

In the article, Heidegger develops a rhetorical context in which the phenomenon of architecture

> " THE PRECARIOUS ONTOLOGICAL STATUS HAS TO DO WITH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRIMARY CATEGORIES WITHIN WHICH WE CAN TALK ABOUT BUILDINGS "

appears anonymous and traditional, as something objectively manifest—in the way of having already been made—rather than as something planned or invented on the basis of style and construction choices. Norberg-Shulz, on the other hand, keeps the door open to the perspective of the practicing architect and is attuned, with his flexible concept of articulation, to the element of choice in architectural creation. At the same time, choices appear in retrospect to be culturally coterminous with other contemporary choices: this does not imply that the individual choice is determined by collective beliefs, perhaps, but it at least means that we cannot make sense of the individual choice outside of the context of the culture with which it is contemporary. Formulated thus blandly, architecture historians might agree with this principle, but it implies the attribution of a degree of internal coherence to architecture, which is perhaps excessive and which does not do justice to the multiple contingencies of architectural creation.

The naturalist assumption Norberg-Shulz makes is that architecture is successful always or that architecture is identical with successful architecture. There is no reflection upon the relationship between vernacular or folk architecture and stand-alone, deliberately conceived constructions. There is scant reflection on the relation between public and domestic space, since his focus is religious and political architecture: building on a grand scale. In this identification between the general concept of architecture and the narrower, normatively charged notion of successful architecture, Norberg-Shulz turns out to be close to Heidegger. For in Heidegger we see that the position of normative discrimination between different buildings in terms of their aesthetic merit is problematic. For such a normative aesthetic authority implies that the power of viewing and thinking of an individual subject is somehow higher than the weight of tradition. Yet, Heidegger would exhort us to think of architecture as a kind of prolongation of the natural environment. Buildings and bridges are there in our midst. They impose themselves upon us and create a coherent space and landscape, but they do not offer themselves to judgment. In other words, judgment is not the most relevant attitude that we can have towards them.

Thus, the aesthetic perspective which privileges style and, on the other hand, the construction perspective, which evaluates craft and technique, are both rendered irrelevant to a large extent within the rhetorical space that Heidegger creates for architecture. What Heidegger and Norberg-Shulz share is thus a kind of transcendental perspective where the activity of making buildings, on the one hand, and the activity of perceiving and judging them, on the other, are set aside. The phenomenological method consists in part in the transcendental. By putting aside certain

questions—such as empirical causality—other questions, concerning meaning or the essential properties of phenomena can come into view. In the field of architecture theory, this phenomenological essentialism has the authoritarian implication that aesthetic and ideological discussion will appear irrelevant. Architecture appears in its history as a kind of general anthropological phenomenon. It manifests itself outside of the distinctions and disagreements which individuals can make, and which would form the topic of theoretical discussions among architects.

CULTURAL INTENTIONALITY

Normative or evaluative discussions and reflections appear in the history of architecture in two distinct forms. On the one hand is the discipline of architecture history, which develops as a part of art history, largely in the course of the twentieth century. On the other hand is the kind of architecture theory that is produced by architects. The analysis herein will attend to the former first and come back to the latter at the end of this article. Architecture history has been practiced in different rhetorical and methodological modes in different countries, with Italian architecture history often being attentive to craft, whereas the German tradition has been predominantly style, and the Anglo-American tradition of recent years being positivist and contextualist.

The analysis is now primarily focused on the naturalist semiotic assumptions of contextual architecture history. A prominent example of the naturalist semiotic method is Ákos Moravánszky's *Competing Visions* text devoted to the themes of eclecticism and modernism in large cities of Central Europe during the early twentieth century [9]. In this work, he reconstructs a complex cultural intentionality underlying the making of individual buildings by the preeminent architects of the time.

> " A NORMATIVE AESTHETIC AUTHORITY IMPLIES THAT THE POWER OF VIEWING AND THINKING OF AN INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT IS SOMEHOW HIGHER THAN THE WEIGHT OF TRADITION "
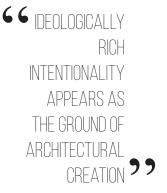
Moravánszky's account keeps alive both the notion of individual creation and the notion of collective belief, a balance which was not achieved in the synthesis of Norberg-Shulz. He is able to correlate specific choices of ornament or construction with general aesthetic and ideological currents prevalent at the time the building was conceived so as to demonstrate how general trends are taken up and inflected by the personality of individual architects. The architects, Moravánszky argues, impose their own personality and idiosyncrasies upon the ideas made available to them in the surrounding culture.

The subtle, multifactorial historical approach cannot properly be named simply contextual or positivist, since it is carried by a phenomenological idea, similar to that of Norberg-Shulz. The complexity of the notion is captured in the title of the book, *Competing Visions*. At the horizon of the study is principally the philosophical idea that architecture embodies a vision. The vision is both aesthetic and moral. It is embedded in style and construction. It involves an open question as to what constitutes modernity. It concerns the historical development of large cities and brings into view questions of how one should live in modern society. Moravánszky is some senses similar to Norberg-Shulz in thinking of architecture as a sort of synthesis, but differs from Norberg-Shulz in that the arena of such a synthesis is neither the appropriation of space nor the articulation of space through choices of construction and style. The arena of synthesis is instead the relationship, that the historian reconstructs, between style and ideology. The relationship, once it is painstakingly reconstructed, can be retrospectively attributed to the agents—the architects and theorists of architecture—so that it appears as the backbone or structure of a complex, cultural intentionality. This ideologically rich intentionality appears as the ground of architectural creation.

Thus, by placing the focus on ideology rather than construction, while retaining style as a central category, Moravánszky is both in continuity with Norberg-Shulz and decisively different. Both start from the assumption that architecture is predominantly a phenomenon of style. Yet, Norberg-Shulz interprets style in terms of anthropological needs and Moravánszky interprets style in terms of specific ideological commitments. We can elaborate on the divergences between to two thinkers in terms of the four primary categories and the relation between them. In Norberg-Shulz we find with his concept of articulation a claim that the satisfaction of spatial anthropological needs is simultaneously a feat of style, of construction, and of ideology. For articulation corresponds to anthropological needs and is expressed through style features and construction choices. With

this anthropological focus on the task of creating spatial articulation, Norberg-Shulz interestingly downgrades the normative importance of those features of style that are purely ornamental. Style is so intimately related to construction through the articulation of space that any style choice would become significant within the context of molding that space. Moravánszky's method, on the other hand, is symbolic rather than anthropological. For him the specific ornamental choices on the façade of a building are ideological signifiers independently of the building's functionality. Thus, with architectural historians such as Moravánszky, we find the concrete elaboration of the ontological assumption that buildings are primarily visible, which is to say, buildings are something akin to three dimensional paintings amenable to aesthetic analysis.

In a less nuanced version of this type of intellectual history of architecture, such as Pelkonen's book on nationalism and internationalism in Alvar Aalto, the ideological strand in the argument becomes so dominant that other considerations are clearly subordinate [10]. In Moravánszky's study ideological commitments do not command the analysis [9]. Moravánszky's text deftly and incessantly moves between different types of consideration. It is, however, in the balance and subtlety that the method betrays its semiotic assumptions. For the seamless transition between different categories and apparently effortless integration of different sorts of material is only possible if it is assumed at the outset that style, construction, and ideology cohere and form a necessary unity. The assumption may of course turn out to be the case, but how do we justify such a general, idealistic, semiotic conception of architectural unity? It is this sort of unity that was referred to as a naturalist conception of purpose earlier, that is, an idea of what a building is for.

"IDEOLOGICALLY RICH INTENTIONALITY APPEARS AS THE GROUND OF ARCHITECTURAL CREATION"

The different kinds of theoretical synthesis discussed involve   not questioning the possibility of coherence between different categories. These are the categories within which, or at the aid of which, architecture purportedly becomes intelligible in its purpose and significance within the discourse of architecture historians. It is suggested that the synthesis of different categories, which justifies claims for intelligibility within architecture history (and which are referred to as semiotic naturalism) rest upon a denial. Or as psychoanalysts might say, foreclosure, of a possible scenario in which the visible and the intelligible might drift apart. Such a drifting apart takes place in discourse and is perceivable as a skeptical scenario occurring within the discourse. If that which drifts apart are intelligibility and visibility, there must be also a scenario of something, which is presented to visual perception but which does not immediately fall within the realm of discourse. That being said, the relationship between the primal categories varies greatly both within the history of the discipline of architecture history and in the history of theories produced by architects—which is in some cases distinct from the discipline of architecture history (though not always, as Tafuri and Norberg-Shulz are both examples of).

This is the sort of theory now considered in order to argue that it highlights a specific problem of ideology. In its implications, this problem of ideology poses, I will argue, a challenge to semiotic naturalism. As I said, the term "ideology" is used here not in the Marxist sense, for instance by Tafuri in his discussion of competing stances taken towards urban or social modernity. Tafuri attributes definite ideological positions to individual architects and deftly correlates these positions with style and construction choices. My view of architecture is less concerned with positions and choices; it is Platonic, rather, in its focus on rival conceptions of the good life or the sort of life that architecture is for or that it should enhance and promote. There may well be many different conceptions of the good life, depending on geographical and historical circumstances. The concept of ideology thus does not come with a theoretical—in Tafuri's case, modernist and social historicist—script, which would provide the ground for identifying individual positions contrastively and contrasting them with others as on a structural grid. Ideology, in this context is a conception of life, of what life should consist of, and of how architecture can enhance this good or appropriate life. The ideological conception of life has to be both related to style and construction choices and separate

from them.

ALBERTI'S IDEA OF THE GOOD LIFE

Alberti's *On the art Art of Building in Ten Books*, which appeared around 1450, pursues a painstaking and detailed reconstruction of everything that the craft of architecture entails as a material process of construction [11]. Yet, in doing so, in presenting the meticulous inventory of principles, problems, and prescriptions, Alberti also introduces his own presuppositions concerning what matters in life. In short, in the margins of the text we find his ideology. His ideology coheres with his construction principles, but significantly, is not correlated with style, a topic about which he has little to say—and what he says is theoretically bland.

Alberti's starting points are climatic and geographical. He shares with Machiavelli the notion that place is a category defined by geographical security questions. In Alberti's case, however, it is not only the advent of potential enemies that buildings and towns must be prepared for but also natural disasters, and, more generally, contingencies. In book 3, chapter 7 book 3/7 he thus says, programmatically, about weather conditions: "Moreover, it is self-evident, without looking for any less obvious reasons, that the assault of the weather will be responsible for loosening and breaking the bond of anything that has grown or been forced together" [12]. We could of course gloss this statement pragmatically, seeing it in continuity with Vitruvian norms of adapting to the environment, but the emphasis here is very different. Against the happy common sense of Vitruvius, we find here an anxious *memento mori*, an acute and poignant awareness of the fragility of all things made by humans. There is a kind of existential dimension to Alberti's architectural thinking in which contingency is not far from his mind. The adequate response to contingency

"IN THE MARGINS OF THE TEXT WE FIND [ALBERTI'S] IDEOLOGY"

according to Alberti appears to be control—and control is according to him based on knowledge. The required knowledge is by no means limited narrowly to the architect's craft but includes detailed and specific geographical information. It is a kind of highly specific knowledge which ideally should inform choices of material and hence construction. In Book 3, Chapter 12 he thus talks about controlling natural conditions when it comes to choosing wood: "The beams should be related if at all possible: that is, they should be of the same type of timber, from the same forest, raised under the same climatic conditions, and felled on the same day, so that by having the same natural strength they will perform their function equally" [13]. There is an elegant slide in this passage from reflections upon conditions to a prescription concerning structure. In fact the arc of Alberti's argument is formed by this integration of control and structure. For construction is for Alberti essentially a control of structure. The purpose of this kind of control is a wider sense of control of contingency. Hence, in Book 3, Chapter 14 he develops an analogy between biological organisms and architectural construction with the aim of articulating a concept of structure: "In short, with every type of vault we should imitate Nature throughout, that is, bind together the bones and interweave flesh with nerves running along any possible section: in length, breath and depth, and also obliquely across" [14].

His reflections on use and usefulness are similarly climatological and informed by a sense of insecurity and need of protection. In book 5, chapter 2, for instance, he discusses the internal division of private houses: "Inside, the dining rooms, storerooms, and so on should be appropriately located where their contents will keep well. Where the air is right and they will receive the correct amount of sun and ventilation, and where they can serve their intended uses" [15]. We find a similar climatological idea of usefulness in a reflection on urban planning. In Book 5, Chapter 7 Alberti discusses the location of monasteries in towns: "But I would have any cloister within the city, be it for women or for men, sited in the healthiest possible place, lest emaciation of the body and sleeplessness prevent the inmates from attending fully to their minds, and lest illness make their lives harder than usual" [16].

The running thread of geography and contingency forms the ideological basis of Alberti's thinking. The purpose of architecture is safety. It aims to protect us against decay, illness, natural disaster, weather conditions, and enemies. The ideological conception that he projects and presupposes is that life is precarious, in need of support and security. The good life is essentially one in which one survives. This may be a bleak vision of

the good life, but it is explicit, articulate, and clear. Through his reflections on structure, Alberti integrates his ideas of protection and solidity within his precepts on construction. Alberti's aim is to integrate construction and ideology. He thus indirectly problematizes the later programs of categorical synthesis in which style is central, either in relation to construction as in Norberg-Shulz or in relation to ideology as in Moravánszky.

Returning to Wittgenstein, the skeptical conclusion of this comparison between different styles of architectural reflection is that the relationship between the four suggested categories of architecture—construction, style, ideology, and use—is more contested and more controversial than one might think if one starts from the assumptions of semiotic naturalism and the presupposition of coherence.

ENDNOTES

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982).

[2] Reidar A. Due, "At the Margins of Sense: The Function of Paradox in Deleuze and Wittgenstein," *Paragraph* 34, no. 3 (2011): 358-370.

[3] Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: Nothing is Hidden* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

[4] G. W. F. Hegel, *Ästhetik* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1965).

[5] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007).

[6] Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana* 1944-1985 (Torino: Einaudi, 1986).

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