ARCHITECTURE AND THE RECOLLECTION OF THE BODY

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In the famed chapter entitled "Printing will Kill Architecture" from Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the author claimed that the development of thought, language and architecture was simultaneous and interdependent.[1] He used two images; "architecture" and "printing," as metaphoric tropes to address the broader philosophical issues of language, human thought, expression and consciousness. He proposed that the shift in dominance from "architecture" to "printing" represented a fundamental shift in the means of expression and therefore, also in the form of human consciousness.

In Hugo's text "Architecture" stood for a form of thought that was based on sensory experience of the body. It is a type of thought in which form and content are one. Cassirer, in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, referred to this as the "mimetic gesture."[2] It implies no distance between the object and knowing subject. In such a case the knowing subject becomes the thing it is referring to. This form of thought and expression is presentational by nature.

By contrast "Printing" is a systematic form of abstract thought, wherein an arbitrary sign stands for an absent present. The sign, or form, is a symbolic representation of an idea, for which it stands. Cassirer referred to this as the "indicative gesture" whereby the individual refers to an object outside itself through the act of pointing, either physically or intellectually. It is representational in nature. Hugo's discussion of the shift from "architecture" to "printing" as the dominant art form can be read as a shift in means of expression and by extension a means of thought and consciousness as well. Hugo while accepting the dominance of this abstract form of thought, was critical of it, claiming that it was the second Tower of Babel of the human race. How is abstract thought a tower of Babel?

The contemporary philosopher Ernesto Grassi identifies two fundamental points of traditional western logic. The first point for Grassi is that modern epistemology interprets scientific strictness to be the logical deductions of original principles, from original premises. He states:

We claim that we know something when we are able to prove it. To prove (apo-deiknumi) means to show something to be something, on the basis of something. To have something through which something is shown and explained definitely is the foundation of our knowledge. Apodictic, demonstrative speech is the kind of speech which establishes the definition of a phenomena by tracing it back to ultimate principles, or archai. It is clear that the first archai of any proof and hence of knowledge cannot be proved themselves because they cannot be the object of apodictic, demonstrative, logical speech; otherwise they would not be the first assertions.[3]

As a result modern philosophy and science deny their own origins in these non-deducible assumptions. Grassi has labeled this the scandal of modern rational metaphysics.

Since all forms of logical thought must be derived from original premises which cannot be proven rationally (this includes Descartes, Kant, and Hegel), formal logic must deny the scientific character of all metaphysics. What this leads to is a denial within the rational structure of logic, of discussions of those concepts which exist outside the demonstrative sphere of knowledge, because they cannot be demonstrably proven, in the modern sense. Hence, ethics, morality, religion, rhetoric, myth and emotion all become suspect and are excluded from what is considered proper fields of knowledge.

The arts and humanities fall outside this rational structure of logic. Therefore, they are denied the status of "science," defined as disciplines which lead to "the state of knowing," or "a department of systematized knowledge as an object of study."[4] In order to overcome this architectural theory from the Renaissance to the present has embarked upon a process of rationalizing the discourse of architecture. We can find this as early as Alberti whose writings claimed that the arts, because of their reliance upon perspective and geometry were a form of science,[5] and as late as Le Corbusier who in *The Villa Radieuse*, of 1933, called for the construction of the Cartesian skyscraper.[6] His methodology in both *The Villa Radieuse* and *The Modulor 1 & 2*, of 1954 and 1958 respectively, shows the level to which architectural discourse had become restricted by the structure of rational logic.

Yet, the history of architectural theory reveals a continuous concern for the relationship between the built environment and ethics. Alberti, had specifically used the historical concern for *Decorum*, found in Vitruvius, to link architecture with ethics. This concern within the discourse of theory has remained persistent through Pugin, Ruskin, Morris and Le Corbusier, all of whom saw architecture as a reflection of a societies ethics and morality. This duality in the concerns of architecture produces a logical inconsistency. It would follow that architecture is either, not a science, because it concerns itself with metaphysical issues, or it must jettison its traditional concern for ethics and become completely rationalized as a science.

Secondly he states "traditional logic claims through its notion of the "definition" to express the "essence," the *ousia*, of phenomena by "grasping" the phenomena in terms of their universal character. By reference to genus and specific differences, rational thought forms the definition."[7] Since these essences are fixed within the object, the concepts of time and place become unessential attributes to the understanding of

these essences. Because time and place would lead to a situation of the particular, and not the universal, they are seen as unessential to scientific thought.

How has this affected the discipline of architecture? Within traditional logic only the universal gives access to scientific truths. Architectural theory in order to structure a discourse of knowledge, has been forced to focus upon universals at the expense of particulars and specifically of issues which concern time and place. It is precisely this, that occurred in the French academies following the initiation of the Enlightenment, beginning with Laugier's *Essai sur L 'Architecture* and its postulate of the "Primitive Hut." Laugier proposed a universal model from which a rational system of criticism could be devised. Quatremere de Quincy's theories of typology also carried on this classification of architecture according to universal models and Durand used the notion of universal models to develop an abstract theory of composition. It is precisely this denial of the particular to any status as scientific thought that poses a problem for the discourse of architecture if it is to be conceived within the condition of human reality.

It is both the insistence upon the universal and its inherent denial of the particular of time and place, and the denial of the *archai* as an originary move of rational thought which has lead Grassi to claim that "Rational thought no longer represents the originary approach to the understanding of the being of beings. In such a context being is enveloped in contradiction, in the abyss of what is rationally undefinable."[8] Grassi's point is that the modern tradition of rational logic hinders our understanding of human reality. The result is Babel.

If we choose to accept this position—that the traditional concern with the abstract universal has served as a hindrance to the accessibility of the human- then we must, given the assumption that architecture is fundamentally concerned with human reality, ask ourselves the following question.

In what way is it possible for architecture to give access to human reality? While I do not purport to have the definitive answer to this question I will attempt to answer it in light of a remark made by the contemporary philosopher Donald Phillip Verene.

In his essay "Vico's Humanity" he claimed that it is the image, not the fact; language, not the concept; the activity of the imagination, and not the rational inference, which give access to the human.[9] Verene's position stems from the fundamental belief in two forms of logic one based upon the logic of the imagination and the traditional one based on rational deduction. This position can be traced back to the 18th century philosophy of Gianbattista Vico. In his *The New Science*, he stated that man begins with a poetic logic out of which develops rational logic. Cassirer for his part, agreed with Vico as well.

Grassi has claimed that "Verene's aim...is to gain access to the 'human' in its singularity and concreteness through a logic of imagination, an access which traditional logic, because of its concern with the abstract universal, had failed to reach."[10] I find Verene's remark intriguing, in that it sets up a dichotomy between that which gives access to the human and that which does not. It is the image, language and the activity of the imagination and not the fact, the concept, or the rational inference which give us access to that which is uniquely human. This statement implies that traditional logical structures, because of their concern with abstract universals, deny or at least hinder access to that which is singularly human. If we take this

to be true, it poses serious questions for the future of architectural theory.

Since Freud the conception of the ego, as the "I" of self actualization, has played a central role in the definition of what it is to "Be." Medard Boss, a student of Freud and Jung defined the ego in this way:

"Whenever I say 'I, ' refer to myself as that creature which at a given moment is concerned in precisely this or that receptive or active form of behavior with something confronting me in my world...the steadiness of man's self-being, however, shows itself in a way that matures in the execution of a person's existential possibilities relative to the given characteristic of his world. The self-ness of human, being there occurs only in the form of a (temporal) maturing of existence."[10]

It is only possible to have a human existence, as a self-actualized being, insofar as the self must have an object before it which at the same time is not itself. The ego only emerges within a moment in which the individual, as subject, lends meaning and significance to that which the senses reveal. This meaning is not immediately present within the phenomenal world of things.

The ego, as self-actualized being, must create a human world of "directive signs," semantic signs, or what we might call ideas, to decode, or more accurately to encode, reality. For this reason self-temporalization has a historical character. Therefore, we can state that the specific character of being human, as we distinguish it from non-human, is caught up in self-temporalization, in a specific place and time, as an aspect of the bodies existential experience. It is this moment, of the positing of an other outside the self, that divorces the self from its inclusion in nature and sets in motion the creation of a human world of meaning and knowing.

For Vico the origins of consciousness lay in the self's troping of the body (the only thing which it knows) onto an object. Hence the originary move of consciousness according to Vico, was the construction of a metaphor using the body.[12] He had defined this moment as the creation of the imaginative universal Jove/Thunder. The *bestioni*, caught in the immediacy of sense perception feels the earth shake and the sound of thunder, and for the first time recollect this sensation. To come to terms with this recollection they attempt to understand it in the only way they can by troping what they know onto what they do not, in their animal ignorance the only thing they know are thier own bodies. It is the self's actualization through the act of self-temporalization that not only separates man from nature, in the sense of the biblical fall, but also causes man's inherent anxiety in his own existence. It can only be overcome through the "humanization" of nature. This "humanization" is carried out through the process of coding reality in terms of the sensory experience of the body. Thus Vico's claim that "man in his ignorance makes himself the rule of the universe...he has made of himself an entire world."[13]

An architectural analogy to this is be found in Filarete's *Tratto di Architettura* of 1461. We are told that Adam, upon leaving the Garden of Eden, raises his hands to protect himself from the torrential rains that beset him and Eve. According to Filarete all shelters are an imitation of this first gesture.[14] The origin of architecture lies in the imitation of a human gesture, a gesture in response to a particular bodily experience that occurs at the originary moment of self actualization and the creation of

a truly human reality. Through the imitation of this gesture architecture gives access to the origination of "humanization," through its recollection of bodily experience. Filarete's theory of the origin of architecture lies in the form of thought Hugo referred to as "architecture." Its origin lies in the "mimetic gesture."

By contrast Laugier claims the origins of architecture lie in the imitation of nature in the form of the "little rustic hut."[15] This origin begins as an abstract concept, as a universal model, from which all other subsequent works are to be judged through logical deduction and demonstration. For Laugier it is not the body, but the mind, that gives access to the origins of architecture. Laugier by beginning with the universal denies the *archai*. His is the form of thought Hugo referred to as "printing." It is an "indicative gesture."

The process of "humanization" is not solely a past historical event but rather a continual process whereby each self, when confronted by a sensory experience for which there exists no code, attempts to "humanize" that experience through the creation of a new code. Grassi states it in this way "That which is...manifests itself in reality exclusively in a concrete historical situation, defined by the here and now of existence. All beings, in their openness to being, are expressions of a call, an appeal, in whose realm we exist, are ever-changing and new, and the meaning of beings is transformed according to the modality of our responses to the appeals."[16] It is an understanding of this process that lead Verene to his stance. The fact, the concept, and the rational inference, because they are products of the conventionalized code are not causes of human being but rather the effects. They do not give access to the "human" in its singularity and concreteness, only its products.

To gain access to the *verum*, or truth, of human reality we must first come to understand how that reality is made and transformed. This is Vico's postulate *Verum Ipsum Factum*, the true is convertible with the made. The process of making, is the origination of "humanization." It occurs in the manifestation of the image, the manifestation of language, and the manifestation of the activity of the imagination. These by definition are derived from the particular historical condition in a given place. To address a particular situation, for which there exists no previous code for making, requires the creation of an image that presents itself as the solution to a given problem, at a given time. This image then initiates a linguistic code.

In architectural terms this occurs within the architectonic detail. Marco Frascari writes that "In the details are the possibilities of innovation and invention, and it is through these that architect's can give harmony to the most uncommon and difficult or disorderly environment generated by a culture."[17] As a condition of having to gain access to the *verum* of human reality we must first come to understand how that reality is made and transformed. The problem of the architectonic detail can be addressed by the creation of an image that simultaneously expresses the initial problem of the particular historical condition, as well as, the solution-given in terms of bodily experience.

This requirement, that the detail must contain a reference to bodily experience, is not the traditional position of Modern architecture. When Frank Lloyd Wright read Hugo's text he came to the conclusion that in order for architecture to compete with printing it had to adopt printing's methodology. Wright called for the mass production of the architectural detail.[18] Le Corbusier reinforced this position in *The Decorative*

Art of Today, when he called for the standardization of the architectural detail.[19]

Without the metaphoric trope of the "human" into the detail, the solution degenerates into a rational explanation of conditions. In such an instant the detail ceases to give access to the origination of "humanization." It would by definition have to fall back onto a previously established code. It would fail to address the issue of human reality in its origination as a moment of self temporalization.

Kenneth Frampton uses the term Tectonics to refer to this type of detail. He makes this claim "I am not alluding to the mere revelation of constructional technique but rather to its expressive potential. Inasmuch as the tectonic amounts to a poetics of construction it is art, but in this respect the artistic dimension is neither figurative nor abstract."[20] That the tectonic is never merely the rational exposition of constructional form and must rely on the addition of, or rather origination in, something more, is found in Eduard Sekler's original remarks on the subject. Frampton paraphrases him as saying "tectonic [is defined] as a certain expressivity arising from the statical resistance of constructional form in such a way the resultant expression could not be accounted for in terms of the structure and construction alone."[21]

In this paper I have attempted to illustrate the role of the body in the making of architecture. The denial of the particular in architectural creation is also the negation of the origination of "humanization." The originality of architecture does not depend on creating a new form. It resides in the manifestation of an image that may have no prior existence but addresses the particulars of a specific location at a certain time. The tectonics of architectural details responds to this immediacy of sense perception. Architects cannot generate these by relying on established codes. In the architecture of the Postindustrial age the tactility of the body can help us recollect that which is difficult to comprehend. The presentation of the self is prior to the representation of an idea. As architects, we should first rely on our animal ignorance to recollect the changing needs of our time. Only then can we understand and codify the reality of the postindustrial age.

NOTES

1. Hugo, *Notre Dame de Paris*, New York, 1930, Gosset & Dunlap. p. 209-211
2. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms Vol. 1*, New Haven, 1955, Yale University Press, pp. 176-189
3. Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy; The Humanist Tradition*, University Park, 1980, Penn State Univ. Press. p. 19
4. This definition of science comes from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield, 1983, Merriam-Webster Inc. p. 1051
5. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Grayson, New York 1991, Penguin Books.
6. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, New York, 1933, The Orian Press. pg. 133. "In opposition to New York, to Chicago, we offer the Cartesian skyscraper- translucent, cleancut, gleamingly elegant against the sky of the Ile-de-France." In the chapter entitled "Is Descartes American?"
7. Grassi, "Vico Vs. Freud: Creativity and the Unconscious," *Vico and Humanism Essays on Vico, Heidegger, and Rhetoric*, New York, 1990, Peter Lang Pub., Emory Vico Studies, vol. 3.. p. 119
8. Grassi, *The Primordial Metaphor*, Binghamton, 1194, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, p. 9
9. Verene, "Vico's Humanity," *Humanitas*, May 1979, p. 228
10. Grassi, "Vico Versus Freud: Creativity and the Unconscious," *Vico and Humanism Essays on Vico, Heidegger, and Rhetoric*, New York, 1990, Peter Lang, Emory Vico Studies, vol. 3, p. 118
11. Ibid., p. 125

12. Vico, *The New Science*, Ithica, 1988, Cornell University Press. par. 363.
13. Ibid., par. 405
14. Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, Bk. I folio 4v I trans. Spencer, New Haven 1965, Yale University Press, p. 10
15. Laugier, *An Essay on Architecture*, trans. Herrmann, Los Angeles 1977, Henessey & Ingalls, Inc. p. 11-14
16. Grassi, *The Primordial Metaphor*, Binghamton 1994, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, p. 10
17. Frascari, "The Tell-The-Tale Detail," *Via 7* 1984, p. 23
18 Wright, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," transcript from a lecture given at the Hull House in Chicago in March of 1901
19. Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. Dunnett, Cambridge MIT Press, 1987
20. Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, Cambridge MIT Press, 1995, p. 2
21. Ibid., p. 19