John Ruskin's Europe
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Ruskin's Ontology of Architecture

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Abstract Ruskin's critique to architecture is usually understood from the subject of style, as the defence of Gothic against Classicism. If that had been the case, his writings about architecture would have lost all of their pertinacity. But that is not the case. This paper inspects the topicality of Ruskin's thinking about architecture. His observations on the subject are phenomenological observations *avant la lettre*: the result of his own experience, highly sensitive, and of his personal reflection upon it, deeply human. Almost a century before Heidegger, Ruskin describes the anthropological responsibility of architecture in a very similar manner to the one the German philosopher. My understanding is that Ruskin is revealing the 'dwelling' ability that pertains to architecture, and that gives it its proper identity. Without architecture's stamp on the landscape, it would not be possible for men to 'dwell' on Earth, and hence, it would not be possible for men to be rightly humans, i.e. to re-member (in Ruskin's terminology) – to accomplish that specific human trait of existence that is necessary for an authentic living, which is to be self-aware.

Keywords Architecture. Drawing. Design. Novelty. Memory. Dwelling in. Shelter. Humanity. Ruskin. Phenomenology. Intentionality.

1 Introduction

"If Mr. Ruskin be right", wrote a reviewer soon after the publication of *The Stones of Venice*, in 1853, "all the architects, and all the architectural teaching of the last three hundred years, must have been wrong". "That is indeed precisely the fact", replied Ruskin in a later edition. "I believe the architects of the last three centuries [and he would probably agree

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in adding the ones of the next two] to have been wrong; wrong without exception; wrong totally, and from the foundation".[1]

Quite a bold statement! This sort of peremptoriness, the patronizing tone, drives people today to deem Ruskin's views outdated, not politically correct in the least.

Twentieth and twenty-first century theory of Architecture[2] allots to Ruskin three main views on this matter: his advocacy of the gothic;[3] his emphasis on ornamentation;[4] and his vindication of Conservation against Restoration as relates to ancient buildings.[5] Only this latter argument is considered up-to-date. Yet these perspectives match neither the whole nor the essence of what Ruskin has perceived in architecture. He was a man of extreme sensitivity towards beauty and, specifically, the beauty of architecture, a sort of sensitivity that was so correspondent to Proust, for instance (consider his introduction to the translation of the *Bible of Amiens*).[6] Disregarding Ruskin's views would be thriftless.

Let us consider the quotation at the opening of this paper. Ruskin says, first, that all architects have been wrong "without exception". This implies that he does not see architecture as mainly a matter of personal talent, of artistic ability, otherwise some architect would have been rescued from this all-inclusive condemnation.

1 Links 1960, 9.

2 Consider: Clark 1964; Di Stefano 1983; Choay 1992; Wheeler, Whiteley 1992; Lang 1999; Botton 2007.

3 "But there is a farther reason for our adopting of the pointed arch than its being the strongest form; it is also the most beautiful […]. Not the most beautiful because is the strongest; but because its form is one of those which, as we know by its frequent occurrence in the work of Nature around us, has been appointed by the Deity to be an everlasting source of pleasure to the human mind" (Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, I, § 8 [1853] = *Works*, 12: 25). Ruskin, despite all his insight, is a 19th century character, and he is not an architect. His mindset usually rests in taxonomies (*à la* Linnaeus); and his thought is analytical: he is not acquainted with the trial-and-error procedure (abductive) of architectural design. Thus, for him, to design a piece of architecture is to *choose*, among the elements of a certain language, and to *compose* – rather like finding the right words for a particular speech. The required unity of the work of architecture would be achieved through the correct *choice* of elements and correct *assemblage* of them – not from the beginning, as in a growing living being: something that someone familiar with the design process would have known. To imagine the possibility of a new style, specific to its time – as happened with late 19th century painters or early 20th century architects – or, even, the absence of style – as happened with the architects of the late 20th century – would be asking too much of Ruskin. For him, therefore, the main issue about aesthetics of architecture was the alternative between the two present systems of forms: the Classical or the Gothic. That is not, of course, a subject people of our time engage with. Nonetheless, his remarks about the Gothic, the reasons he presents to vindicate his pick, are quite topical. These reasons mainly have to do with the agreement with Nature. About the topicality of this argument see Abreu 2020.

4 "Ornamentation is the principal part of architecture. […] The highest nobility of a building does not consist in its being well built, but in its being nobly sculptured and painted" ("Addenda to Lectures I and II", *Edinburgh Lectures*, § 57 [1854] = *Works*, 12: 81). Also topical are the reasons Ruskin presents in favour of ornamentation – although generally forgotten. Since the somewhat broad social refusal of the purist architecture of the 20th century, architects begin again – especially around the 1980s with the Post-Modern Movement – to give careful consideration to ornamentation. In a way, Ruskin anticipates the claim of Robert Venturi – that "less is a bore". He realizes that the order of a design should manifest itself in the details of such a design; otherwise the design will be felt as cold and incomplete. Moreover the refusal of ornamentation leads to a downgrade of the artisans involved in building, which brings about important social and economic consequences.

5 Regarding Heritage, Ruskin's thinking has been thoroughly considered since at least the Athens Chart of 1931, and it has coalesced, as one of the mainstays in the modern theories of Restauration, especially in Italy. "We have no right to touch them [the buildings of past times]. They are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us. […] Better a crutch than a lost limb" (*Lamp of Memory*, § XX = *Works*, 8: 245). These Ruskinian claims still inform the contemporary and most accepted way of relating to Heritage.

6 Writes Proust, in the "Préface": "C'est Ruskin: si sa statue n'est pas à la porte de la cathédrale, elle est à l'entrée de notre cœur" (Proust 1904, 38).

Therefore, the issue is not of a personal or individual nature; it must be of a more substantial kind. Second, he says that all architects have been "totally" wrong, and "from the foundation". Again, identifying such profound or structural misconceptions about architecture in his contemporaries means that he has an understanding of the nature of architecture that is radically different from the one that surrounds him. Finally, he agrees that the tragic change in the understanding and practice of architecture took place about three centuries before, around the fifteenth century. What happened then? What does he really mean by all of this?

In the next pages these questions will be examined. I shall firstly try to understand what decisive change happened in the field of architecture in the fifteenth century, and how this change could affect the understanding of the nature of architecture. Then I shall review Ruskin's understanding of the nature of architecture, of its essence (because if he perceives a deficit it means that he has a more comprehensive view), presenting the reasons for his complete disagreement with the current understanding. In conclusion, I will highlight some considerations about the actuality and topicality of Ruskin's understanding of architecture.

2 Part I: The Change of the Design Method in Architecture

2.1 A Matter of Style?

Three centuries before Ruskin, we find ourselves in the heyday of the Renaissance. We all have had a general idea, since high school even, of the important changes this period brought to architecture; most people suppose that the key change was in the dominant language, from gothic to classical. Therefore one assumes that Ruskin is criticizing the use of the classical formal vocabulary, which became current during and after the Renaissance. This view would be coherent, moreover, with many other lectures and writings of Ruskin, where he defends the shapes and procedures of the gothic period, versus those used subsequently. Nonetheless it would be superficial to presume that his criticism is against classical language. Ruskin clearly confronts this misunderstanding in his 1859 lecture "Modern Manufacture and Design":

> Perhaps one of the dullest and least justifiable mistakes which have yet been made about my writing, is the supposition that I have attacked or despised Greek work. I have attacked Palladian work, and modern imitation of Greek work.[7] Of Greek work itself I have never spoken but with a reverence quite infinite. [M]y effort has been not less continually to make the heart of Greek work known than the heart of Gothic: […] and my complaint of the modern architect has been, not that he followed the Greeks, but that he denied the first laws of life in theirs as in all other art.[8]

7 A note of the Library Edition of *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, specifically indicates that: "Reference to the General Index will show how much attention Ruskin paid to Greek art".

8 John Ruskin, *Modern Manufacture and Design* (A Lecture delivered at Bradford, March 1st, 1859, in *The Two Paths*, Lecture III, § 80 = *Works*, 16: 325-6). Sometimes, moreover, Ruskin shows even contempt about the subject of language or styles: "And so strongly do I feel this that I would, for my own part, at once consent to sacrifice my personal predilections in art, and to vote for the exclusion of all Gothic or Mediæval models what-

Ruskin, furthermore, occasionally even praises certain Renaissance buildings, as in the whole volume three of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), dedicated to the architecture of that period. Still, if it is not a matter of language, what is it a matter of? I dare to say it is a matter of *method*.

2.2 Drawing's Appearance in Architectural Design

Renaissance architects discovered *drawing* as the fundamental tool to produce architecture; and drawing, in multiple forms, including models and Computer Aided Design, has continued to be used as such until today. This apparently small change began a long series of marked ripples in the pond of the discipline.

2.2.1 Architectural Drawing in the Middle Ages

Before the Renaissance, drawing, or at least scale drawing, was not used to imagine and anticipate or simulate the future edifice. The Middle Ages used drawing in architecture, but mainly as a technical instrument, one that was solely used in the process of construction. They used to draw, in pavement covered with a layer of gypsum or in a whitewashed wall (although sometimes also in parchment), the stone or wood pieces that the craftsmen were to carve afterwards. These, however, were drawings of constructive parts of the building, drawn in real size (not to scale), so the artisans could take measurements and make the pieces.[9] Drawing was used neither to study an architectural idea/design nor to communicate this idea/design to the building staff – the two most essential kinds of architectural drawing that were inaugurated during the Renaissance. From the Middle Ages only a few global architectural drawings remain, but these are not drawings of invention or design.[10]

soever, if by this sacrifice I could obtain also the exclusion of Byzantine, Indian, Renaissance-French, and other more or less attractive but barbarous work; and thus concentrate the mind of the student wholly upon the study of natural form, and upon its treatment by the sculptors and metal workers of Greece, Ionia, Sicily, and Magna Græcia, between 500 and 350 B.C." in *The Study of Architecture in Our Schools* (1865) § 17 = *Works*, 19: 36-7.

9 Pereira 2011, 945-1539.

10 The word 'design' in the English language, and in the field of Architecture and Art, seems to have at least four different meanings, which correspond to three different words in the Latin languages. The word 'design' translates to 'projecto' (in Portuguese), 'proyecto' (in Spanish), 'progetto' (in Italian), 'projet' (in French), meaning the process by which an object is idealized. It is the use of the word that occurs when someone speaks about 'Design Methods'. In this paper 'design' should be understood in this sense. The word 'design' also means the documents or objects by which the ideas are communicated, which represent the object prior to its building. I will use the word 'project' to translate such a notion. 'Design' also translates into 'desenho', 'diseño', 'disegno', 'dessin', which means the shape of an object from which a certain style or personality emanates (in a diverse sense from which these Latin words translate to 'drawing'). This meaning occurs when someone speaks of a "good design", or a "bad design", or the design of some architect (or designer). The fourth meaning of the word designates the discipline, that focuses on giving form, with aesthetic value, to any kind of instrument. It matches what in Italian is called 'Disegno Industriale'. In this last sense, as a discipline, I will capitalize the word: 'Design'. I will also use the same logic about the capitalization or non-capitalization of such words as Architecture: the term written with capital letter should be interpreted as the discipline; without a capital letter it should be interpreted as the object(s) produced by the discipline.

2.2.2 Villard de Honnecourt

It is true that Villard de Honnecourt left a notebook with specific architectural drawings: elevations (though not sections), ground plans emphasizing the spatial and geometrical modules, analysis of the geometry of important building parts (columns, vaults, trusses…). He would have done these around the thirteenth century. Still, that is more a notebook of memoranda – serving as a manual – where he took notes of the buildings he examined, in order to refer to them in the future.[11] Nothing similar to the architectural drawings of Leonardo, to the recommendations of Alberti in the *De re aedificatoria*, or to the adventures of Brunelleschi.

2.2.3 Brunelleschi

Brunelleschi is the first who is known to have used drawing to simulate constructed reality. He was so sure of the potentialities of such a tool to communicate his thinking that he didn't bother to follow the building process. He left his drawings for the façade of the Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence to a subordinate and went away to visit other construction sites for which he was responsible.[12] (Later, even Michelangelo did something similar when, in Rome, he sent back to Florence a scale-model, in clay, for the execution of the stairs of the Laurentian Library, whose previous plan, done when he was at Florence, had left him unsatisfied).[13]

2.2.4 Alberti

Alberti theorized about this procedure and commonly used it. In his *De re aedificatoria* (1485), the first treatise of Architecture after the one of Vitruvius (first century B.C.), he recommends the use of scale-drawings and/or scale-models (Book II, Chapter I) inasmuch as:

> [T]here you may easily and freely add, retrench, alter, renew, and in short change every Thing from one End to the other, till all and every one of the Parts are just as you would have them, and without Fault.[14]

Also,

> [Y]ou will thereby have a clear and distinct Idea of the Numbers and Forms of your Columns, Capitols, Bases, Cornishes, Pediments, Incrustrations, Pavements, Statues and the like, that relates either to the Strength or Ornament.[15]

11 "[I]l suo Taccuino non è destinato all'esecuzione: è un insieme di idee e di forme raccolte qua e là negli edifici di cui aveva apprezzato qualche particolare o che aveva 'amato', come scrive a proposito di una finestra di Reims" (Bechmann 1988, 45).

12 Tavares 2003, 79.

13 Tavares 2012, 106.

14 Alberti 1986, 22.

15 "I therefore always highly commend the ancient custom of Builders, who not only in Draughts and Paintings, but in real Models of Wood or other Substance, examined and weighted over and over again, with the advice of Men of the best Experience, the whole Work and the Admeas-

It is worth noticing that Alberti highlights the specificity of architectural drawing – which should be "plain and simple" – in contrast to "the design of a painter", insofar as the architect when drawing "only designs to show the real Thing itself". He even warns against the seduction of letting oneself be driven to a more artistic representation of the architectural "contrivance".[16]

Alberti moreover consistently declines visiting the construction site – thus, to inspect and correct the experience of space he had anticipated – and frequently complains about the builders who do not follow his scale-drawings and alter the proportions he figured.[17] This demonstrates his entire reliance on the drawing, both to communicate his ideas, and to totally conceive a piece of architecture. One may already perceive a drift in the understanding of architecture's essence, inasmuch as the focus on drawing pushes him to consider the core of architecture as "a specific eurythmy, where the agreement between a visual factor and a similar musical universal basis was pursued".[18]

It is no longer the experience of space that matters, but the "experience" of the drawing, of the geometrical logic of what was designed. Possibly due to this, he was considered the first modern architect.

2.2.5 Leonardo

But perhaps the most articulated statement is the one of Leonardo. By the time he was painting the *Last Supper*, at the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan (1495-1498), he was immersed in deep anatomical concerns. He wrote then in his notebook that if he draws a human member in 3 views (approximately the ones

urements of all its Parts, before they put themselves to the Expence or trouble. By making a Model you will have the Opportunity thoroughly to weigh and consider the Form and Situation of your Platform with respect to the Region, what Extent is to be allowed to it, the Number and Order of the Parts, how the Walls are to be made, and how strong and firm the Covering; and in a Word the all Particulars which have spoken of in the preceding Book: *and there you may easily and freely add, retrench, alter, renew, and in short change every Thing from one End to the other, till all and every one of the Parts are just as you would have them, and without Fault*. Add likewise, that you may then examine and compute (what is by no means to be neglected) the Particulars and Sum of your future Expence, the Size, Height; Thickness, Number, Extent, Form, Species and Quality of all the Parts, how they are to be made, and by what Artificers; because *you will thereby have a clear and distinct Idea of the Numbers and Forms of your Columns, Capitels, Bafes, Cornishes, Pediments, Incrustrations, Pavements, Statues and the like, that relates either to the Strength or Ornament*" (Alberti 1986, 22 = *De re aedificatoria*, Book II, Chapter I). Emphasis added.

16 "I must not omit to observe that the making of curious polished Models, with the delicacy of Painting, is not required from an architect that only designs to show the real Thing itself; but is rather the Part of a vain Architect, that makes it his Business by charming the Eye and striking the Fancy of the Beholder, to divert him from a rigorous Examination of the Parts which he ought to make, and to draw him into Admiration of himself. For this Reason, I would not have the Models too exactly finished, nor too delicate and neat, but plain and simple, more to be admired for the Contrivance of the Inventor, than the Hand of the Workman. Between the Design of the Painter and that of the Architect there is a Difference, that the Painter by the Exactness of his Shades, Lines and Angles, endeavours to make the Parts seem to rise from the Canvass, whereas the Architect, without any Regard to the Shades, makes his Relieves from the Design of his Platform [horizontal representation], as one that would have his Work valued, not by the apparent Perspective, but by the real Compartments founded upon Reason. In a Word, you ought to make such Models, and consider them by yourself, and with others diligently, and examine them over and over so often, that there shall not be a single Part in your whole Structure, but what you are thoroughly acquainted with, and know what Place and how much Room it is to possess, and to what Use to be applied" (Alberti 1986, 22 = *De re aedificatoria*, Book II, Chapter I).

17 Brandão 1964, 818.

18 Brandão 1964, 10. All the translations, unless otherwise specified, are by the Author.

suggested by Vitruvius, in his newly found architectural treatise)[19] he can see it as if he had it in his own hand, and have a more thorough knowledge of it than if he slashed more than ten bodies.[20] He produced several drawings with this. Meanwhile he began to sketch architectural drawings in his notebook. Curiously, these drawings refer to architectural structures that look very close to what Bramante was doing, around the same time (late 1470s to early 1490s) and in the same place, in the cupola of the main chapel of Santa Maria delle Grazie (Leonardo's painting too is in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie): drawings of churches/temples with a central ground plan and four or more chapels around, distributed according to the main axis, and with semi-spherical vaults above. Later, Bramante will repeat approximately the same layout as the module of his project for Saint Peter's in Rome (the plan was coined in a medal of 1506). It is possible to infer then, although without any solid proof, that some kind of contamination between Leonardo and Bramante took place during those overlapping years in Milan. Who gave what to whom is difficult to ascertain, but surely, during the process, drawing became the current media and space-geometry the chief concern in Architecture.

2.3 Advantages of Drawing in Architectural design

The use of drawing, as the main instrument of design, has opened wide and delightful landscapes to architects since then: first and foremost, the pleasurable game of creation (almost like a semigod, while doodling their ideas with pencil and pen); then, the emancipation of artisanship.

> The architect was […] the idealizer of a space, was the one who had the 'idea' of the volume, its peculiarities, its secrets; he was the individual who conceived abstractly, who conceived with 'drawing'. […] Likewise, an architect is not a manual worker, he is the one who commands the workmen. He gives his knowledge, not his manual labor. […] As soon as the mental conception has been defined, the building process should follow *pari passu* the drawing: the 'model' of the mental image.[21]

Not only has the architect no longer to dirty his hands, like a common workman, but he is now able to control, on his own, bigger and more complex buildings, to command more workmen, and by this increasing the size (thus, his wage) and rate of production (decreasing the length of time for the building process). Henceforth architects will be on par with the other intellectual professions; drawing has allowed architects to climb the social ladder.[22] Notwithstanding, this trend brought about several nuisances.

19 The three kinds of representation, according to Vitruvius (Book I, Chapter I, § 2, of The Ten Books on Architecture) are: *Ichonografia* (ground plan, representation on a horizontal plan), *Orthografia* (elevation, representation on a vertical plan), and *Scaenographia* (view from the side, in a foreshortening way, that allows to see simultaneously the front and side elevations) (Vitruvius 1998).

20 Leonardo da Vinci, *Quaderni d'Anatomia*, foll. 2*r*, 13*v* [in Quaderno di Anatomia B, Windsor collection], cited in Murray (1972, 124).

21 Brandão 1964, 10, 11, 14. Brandão makes other important remarks: "The most important concern of the architect is 'order', 'reason', 'ideal image', this being the converging result of spatial-mental-abstract procedures" (Brandão 1964, 13). "In short, the architect would be the thinker, not the craftsman, the philosopher who materializes his theories in spatial elements in stone. These elements portray, more or less accurately, eurythmies, symmetries, and harmonical proportions, both of the universe and of the human being" (Brandão 1964, 17).

22 Alberti writes on the Preface of the *De re aedificatoria* (first and second paragraphs): "But before I proceed further, it will not be improper to explain what he is that I allow to be an Architect: For it is not a Carpenter or a Joiner that I thus rank with the greatest Masters in other Scienc-

2.4 Nuisances of Drawing in Architecture

While the architect is socially elevated, the artisan is downgraded, becoming, in the building process, something not that different from machines or animals, whose thinking is not worth considering (Ruskin calls attention to this phenomenon several times).[23] Furthermore the design itself loses much richness, as it no longer includes the input of the different craftsmen in the building crew: it would be enough to compare San Lorenzo or Santo Spirito in Florence – designs of Brunelleschi – with other medieval churches of the same city to see it: the coldness of the former is striking in comparison to the latter. Over the course of this story, what the architect feels to be the core of his discipline has changed: it has become the design, not the building. From here seeped in the splitmind effect that took over the discipline of Architecture.

2.4.1 The Experience of Architecture

To the layman the judgment about the value of piece of architecture requires its full and direct experience. A person enters a building and evaluates whether or not they have a pleasurable experience from it. Such an experience develops from the input of all of the senses working together and interacting with each other. According to specialists,[24] the experience of space involves twenty-one kinds of perceptive stimuli – far more than the usually assumed inputs of the five senses. The layman's experience of a piece of architecture is, surely, aesthetical, insofar as it depends on the sensations ('aesthesis' being at the root of 'sensation'), and also because it involves an assessment of a pleasurable effect – or, in other words, of beauty. Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to say that the layman's common experience of a piece of architecture is an 'aesthetical' one (in the

es; the manual Operator being no more than an Instrument to the Architect Him I call an Architect, who, by sure and wonderful Art and Method, is able, both with Thought and Invention, to devise, and, with Execution, to complete all those Works, which, by means of the Movement of great Weights, and the Conjunction and Amassment of Bodies, can with the greatest Beauty, be adapted to the Uses of Mankind: And to be able to do this, he must have a thorough Insight into the noblest and most curious Sciences. Such must be the Architect" (Alberti 1986).

23 Consider *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* (1854) (Addenda to Lectures I and II, § 74 = *Works*, 12: 97): "[F]or on the acceptance of this [principle] depends the determination whether the workman shall be a living, progressive, and happy human being, or whether he shall be a mere machine, with its valves smoothed by heart's blood instead of oil, – the most pitiable form of slave. […] And it is with especial reference to the denial of this principle in modern and Renaissance architecture, that I speak of that architecture with a bitterness which appears to many readers extreme, while in reality, so far from exaggerating, I have not grasp enough of thought to embrace, the evils which have resulted among all the orders of European society from the introduction of the Renaissance schools of building, in turning away the eyes of the beholder from natural beauty, and reducing the workman to the level of a machine"; also, sections 15 to 16 of "The Nature of Gothic" (in *The Stones of Venice*, 1853 = *Works*, 10: 194-5): "It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure. It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own; for they feel that the kind of labour to which they are condemned is verily a degrading one, and makes them less than men. […] But to feel their souls withering within them, unthanked, to find their whole being sunk into an unrecognized abyss, to be counted off into a heap of mechanism numbered with its wheels, and weighed with its hammer strokes – this, nature bade not, – this, God blesses not, – this, humanity for no long time is able to endure". See also *The Bible of Amiens* (1884) (Chapter IV – Interpretations, § 5, last note = *Works*, 33: 125 ff.); *The Two Paths* [1858] (Lecture I, § 15 = *Works*, 16: 268). See also Arendt 1958, especially Chs. 3 and 6.

24 VanPutte 2014, 462-3.

usual Baumgartean sense, which implies the appreciation of an artistic accomplishment).[25] They may be overwhelmed by surprise, but regardless, they will return to that place only if they have felt alright there.

When the architect was the builder as well – as happened in medieval times and still happens in vernacular architecture – he could have the same experience that was described for the layman (with the twenty-one perceptive stimuli), just after the building was completed (regarding some aspects, even before). And he could immediately appreciate the result and, if necessary, correct it. Not so when the heart of the discipline is considered the design.

2.4.2 The Experience of Designing

The architect plays with forms through drawing, making models or, currently, through 3D computer drawings; he then critiques these and elects one design/idea instead of the other to be pursued and developed again, through drawing or modelling. However, the reality on which he bases his judgment and makes his choice is just a plain drawing/model. He does not engage in the full range of space perception one has of a real building. Of course it would be possible to argue that the architect, while he is drawing, is not just experiencing a drawing, that he can foresee the experience of the space he has drawn. Considering the wide range of stimuli involved in the perception of space, such a statement is quite difficult to accept – it would require a lot of experiences of spaces, then converted to drawings or models, in order for the architect to have something as a vocabulary of drawn forms, from which he would perfectly know the whole environmental experience. Even so, the architect would be limited to applying, in his new drawings, the forms which he had experience of, the ones which belong to his vocabulary. Regarding all the forms that one architect invents – nonexperienced spatial forms – it would not be possible to claim he has a complete idea of its perceptive and existential repercussions.

2.4.3 Drawing as 'Abstraction'

The use of drawing in the process of design, when one is not aware of its repercussions, brings about a reductive way of thinking about Architecture.

The phenomenological *intentionality*[26] no longer invests the architectural object represented in the drawing. Therefore, it is not humanly possible to relate with it in a thoroughly architectural manner.

Moreover, the use of drawing to invent a space, even when using complex drawing systems that allow the imagination of different perspectives of that space, imparts an abstraction from reality, thus a subtraction of several elements of this reality. The dimensions of the perception of space which are not possible to be represented in the Euclidean space are overlooked in the drawing. Reality is reduced to what is possible to represent by such a medium.

25 Baumgarten coined the term 'aesthetics' in his work *Aesthetica* published between 1750 and 1758. He diverged from Kant and supplied the grounds a Philosophy of Art. Thereafter, 'aesthetics' has been commonly used in reference to art.

26 By phenomenological intentionality – in coarse words – I mean that the perception of every thing or being always presumes an intention; the perceiver is always engaged in some kind of expectation, of which they are usually unaware. Husserl coined the term and presented it; Merleau-Ponty (1976) detailed it.

The architect, however, when designing by drawing or modelling, tends to forget this reduction, inasmuch as it is compensated for by the continuous flux of new information, despite being closed within oneself. This leads to a kind of inebriation and estrangement. The process of design is substantially a process of dialogue between one that proposes something – the subjectcreator – and one that assesses, accepting or rejecting, what has been proposed – the subjectcritic.[27] The use of drawing enables one person alone to perform, at times, both the role of creator and the one of critic, dialoguing through the drawing; one is never playing alone, which is why it is so inebriating and alienating. Besides, when reducing the elements of space, they become easier to handle and faster to process, offering themselves to endless play. Accordingly, drawing used in the architectural design process enables an immensely intense and enjoyable game of creation. Yet in this process the architect tends to forget he is only dealing with an object which offers itself to be looked at (and, beyond that, a mental object) – not an object which offers itself as dwelling place.

Insofar as the architect does not have the full range of space experience while completely immersed in the creative game, he tends to neglect elements of space perception that are not shown in the drawing (sound behaviour, scale etc.), or to neglect the change in the experience of certain elements present in the drawing when transported to reality (changes in the perception and appreciation of colour, light, proportions etc.). Subsequently, the architect tends to concentrate on the immediate feedback of the apparent elements (mainly on the harmonically aesthetical relationships) between the whole and the parts depicted through projective geometry.[28] Yet, as stated above, throughout these periods of abstraction and absentminded drift of focus, the one who is designing does not feel he is losing something. On the contrary, the relevant elements of the foreseen architectural experience that are missing are replaced by others, which grow in importance, levelling the resulting self awareness. The final perceptive score is that the one who is designing is in total contact with reality.

2.4.4 The Criterion of Novelty

The absentminded change of focus on the architectural perceptive elements leads to an absentminded change of criteria of assessment. The aesthetic judgment, performed during the moments of critique of the design process, is not implemented towards the full experience of the imagined architectural space, but towards the elements of the space that are manipulable and controllable in the drawing: (balance, order, form dynamics, harmonic proportions – in sum, aesthetic aspects of the form.[29] The architect, unaware of such a change, begins to evaluate the imagined space 'plastically' – as if it were a sculpture – both because he does not receive in-

27 See Hurson 2007; Cross, Roozenburg 1992, 333; Schön 1983.

28 Regarding the concentration of the architect in the design, and namely, in the Proportion, Ruskin writes, in sections 106 to 109, in Lecture IV (1875) of the *Two Paths* (*Works*, 16: 354): "Our conclusion is – must be – that you will not amuse, nor inform, nor help anybody; you will not amuse, nor better, nor inform yourselves: you will sink into a state in which you can neither show, nor feel, nor see, anything, but that one is to two as three is to six. And in that state what should we call ourselves? Men? I think not. The right name for us would be – numerators and denominators. Vulgar Fractions. § 109. Shall we, then, abandon this theory of the soul of architecture being in proportional lines, and look whether we can find anything better to exert our fancies upon?".

29 Arnheim 1977.

formation from the drawing about the elements that are specific to the architectural experience, which are impossible to represent in the drawing (scale, light, sound behaviour etc.); and because he is not investing the represented space with the phenomenological *intentionality*, proper to dwelling (which would raise more natural expectations about the space). Hence the assessment does not concern the imagined space's appropriateness to dwell in, as it was supposed to.

But there is more. The architect has the notion and the actual experience of the inconsistency and controversy of an aesthetic judgment upon a plastic event. Thus even this judgment tends to drift away towards something more tangible: novelty. It is complicated to verify whether or not a plastic event is beautiful, whether or not it has an aesthetic value such that grants it *raison d'être*; but it is easy to verify if something – even a plastic event – is new: it suffices that no one has ever done it before. Even if an architect discusses his design with other colleagues of the same profession, examining together the drawings or models (as is done traditionally in architecture schools and *ateliers*), because the plastic beauty of a form is a rather elusive quality, discussion will then tend to slip towards novelty: "You might not agree with me", could one perhaps say to a fellow architect, "about the balance or dynamism of my idea/design, but not about its novelty. My design is novel and that's objective – no one has ever done anything like it! I will surprise everyone".[30]

2.5 Current State of Affairs

This – I believe – is the understanding of Architecture, which Ruskin took up arms against. Since the Renaissance, architects, through the process of design, have tended to focus on the aesthetic aspects of a space that can be represented by drawing, thus neglecting the full perceptive impact of a piece of architecture invested by dwelling intentionality.

And unfortunately, in time, this understanding has become theorized and effectuated. It would be pertinent to examine now the occurrences of such an understanding until and after Ruskin's time. I hope some brief notes can be persuasive enough.

Already in Leon Battista Alberti, the drift towards novelty and the emphasis on the artistic quality depicted in the drawing are present. He says that the architect should

> principally enquire in every building that which, by virtue of a well-thought artifice, profound thought or invention, is rare or admirable; and gain a habit of approving nothing but what is entirely beautiful and praise-worthy, due to the ingenuity it manifests.[31]

The architectural experience of the built edifice receives no mention. Boullée (1780) underlines the task of conception over that of building, in Architecture, disregarding once more the full experience of the building.

> What is architecture? Shall I join Vitruvius in defining it as the art of building? Indeed no, for there is a flagrant error in this definition. Vitruvius mistakes the effect for the cause. In order to execute, it is first necessary to conceive. Our earliest ancestors built their

30 Regarding "novelty", Ruskin says in § 7 of *The Poetry of Architecture* [1837] = *Works*, 1: 8: "[I]n the wild struggle after novelty, the fantastic is mistaken for the graceful, the complicated for the imposing, superfluity of ornament for beauty, and its total absence for simplicity".

31 Alberti 1485, 142. The excerpt above was directly translated from the Latin, because the English version that was quoted throughout the paper was not faithful to the original (see *De re aedificatoria*, Book IX, Chapter X).

> huts only when they had a picture of them in their minds. It is this product of the mind, this process of creation, that constitutes Architecture and which can consequently be defined as the art of designing […]. The art of construction is merely an auxiliary art.[32]

Accordingly, Le Corbusier, in 1923, defined architecture as "the masterly, correct and magnificent play of volumes brought together under light".[33] The inappropriateness of the former definition, in what regards Architecture, becomes obvious when applied to Sculpture – because, strangely, it also applies to it although they are distinct fields.

More recently, one might recall the 1982 controversy between Christopher Alexander and Peter Eisemann, where the latter maintains that architecture issues forth from the world of 'ideas', as intellectual play.[34] Creativity and novelty become, consequently, the main drives; the dwelling's phenomenological intentionality has been put aside.

Like the tamed beasts that regain their savagery once they have a taste of human blood (despite momentarily keeping their gentle gaze), so it happened with architects of the modern and contemporary ages: the taste of drawing in the architectural design process drew them into an unrestrained hubris which perverted Architecture. That is, I believe, the motive of Ruskin's condemnation. Nonetheless, the condemnation implies an alternative, which now ought to be inspected.

3 Part II: The Nature of Architecture

3.1 What, Then, is Architecture, According to Ruskin?

3.1.1 § 1 Lamp of Memory

In the first section of the *Lamp of Memory,* Ruskin starts by describing a very charming and smooth landscape. But then – he tells us – he is seized by a sudden chill, when it occurs to him that this exact landscape could be in the "New Continent". Immediately the experience of beauty and amenity vanishes, and the whole landscape becomes grey and cold, even oppressive. Only when he sees from afar the wall of Joux and the castle of Granson does the landscape regain its cheerfulness and its delightfulness.[35]

32 Boullée 1976, 83.

33 Le Corbusier 1986, 29.

34 See *Katarxis* 2004.

35 *Works,* 8: 221-4.

3.1.2 § 2 Lamp of Memory

In continuity – and in his customary tone – he writes:

> It is as the centralisation and protectress of this sacred influence, that Architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought. We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her.
>
> […] there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality […]".[36]

What a bundle of puzzling statements!

First: "We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her". Beyond being puzzling, it is also a poor claim about Architecture. Nowadays, Memory is not that important. We can get by just fine without memory: we have books, computers, photos, digital memories…

Secondly: only Poetry and Architecture preserve Memory – so then what about History, which is usually considered the main tool in preserving the Past…?

Thirdly: Architecture includes Poetry – but is it not the other way around? Assuming 'Poetry' to be a synonym of Art (and we can presume Ruskin means exactly this, since he explains this use of the word elsewhere),[37] Architecture is normally counted as one of the three visual arts…!

Finally: Architecture is mightier (than Poetry) in its reality. One could consider that the materials used in architecture endure more than those used in other arts – stone more than canvas and colour or engraving – but his point seems to be more profound.

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36 *Works*, 8: 224.

37 Consider a small remark on the note of the last page of *The Study of Architecture in Our Schools* (1865) = *Works*, 19: 40fn: "[P]oetry meant, as its derivation implied – the *doing*. What was rightly done was done for ever, and that which was only a crude work for the time was not poetry; poetry was only that which would recreate or remake the human soul. In that sense poetical architecture was separated from all utilitarian work". Also, *Modern Painters*, Vol III (Part IV – "Of Many Things", Chapter I – "Of the received opinions touching the 'grand style'" = *Works*, 5: 28-9): "§ 12. It seems to me, and may seem to the reader, strange that we should need to ask the question, "What is poetry?" Here is a word we have been using all our lives, and, I suppose, with a very distinct idea attached to it; and when I am now called upon to give a definition of this idea, I find myself at a pause. […] § 13. I come, after some embarrassment, to the conclusion, that poetry is "the suggestion, by the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions". I mean, by the noble emotions, those four principal sacred passions – Love, Veneration, Admiration, and Joy (this latter especially, if unselfish); and their opposites – Hatred, Indignation (or Scorn), Horror, and Grief, – this last, when unselfish, becoming Compassion. These passions in their various combinations constitute what is called "poetical feeling", when they are felt on noble grounds, that is, on great and true grounds. Indignation, for instance, is a poetical feeling, if excited by serious injury; but it is not a poetical feeling if entertained on being cheated out of a small sum of money. It is very possible the manner of the cheat may have been such as to justify considerable indignation; but the feeling is nevertheless not poetical unless the grounds of it be large as well as just. In like manner, energetic admiration may be excited in certain minds by a display of fireworks, or a street of handsome shops; but the feeling is not poetical, because the grounds of it are false, and therefore ignoble. There is in reality nothing to deserve admiration either in the firing of packets of gunpowder, or in the display of the stocks of warehouses. But admiration excited by the budding of a flower is a poetical feeling, because it is impossible that this manifestation of spiritual power and vital beauty can ever be enough admired. § 14. Farther, it is necessary to the existence of poetry that the grounds of these feelings should be furnished by the imagination. Poetical feeling, that is to say, mere noble emotion, is not poetry. It is happily inherent in all human nature deserving the name and is found often to be purest in the least sophisticated. But the power of assembling, by the help of the imagination, such images as will excite these feelings, is the power of the poet or literally of the 'Maker'".

Figure 1 An interpretation of Ruskin's allegory. Fotomontage of Nuno Mesquita according to the instructions of the author

3.1.3 An Image

Let us start with the last clause. Imagine one of us wins one of these foolish TV contests. The award is that your biggest wish be fulfilled. Our character is an artistic type and, therefore, he wishes to be left alone with his favourite work of art – let us say, the *Monna Lisa* of Leonardo (which is always so irritating to see in its overcrowded room) – to experience it calmly and thoughtfully **[fig. 1]**. Thus he asks to be taken to the African Savannah, to a part where there are no men, and to be left there, alone, with his favourite work of art. And so it happens: he is taken by a noisy old Land Rover, of which there are so many in Africa, to noman's land. Then the old Land Rover goes noisily away and he remains completely alone, in the wide silence of Nature. Let us imagine: he is fully absorbed, he is having an experience of intense pleasure, without any intromission, any interruption. He goes deeper and deeper into contemplation, scrutinizing every inch of the picture in perfect delight. Yet, in an instant, he hears a strange susurration – it could be the rustle of some leaves. He cannot help feeling alarmed: it could be some lizard, or a poisonous snake, or even some sort of predator. He had been so deeply involved in the contemplation of the painting that the murmur could have been happening for a while, without him even noticing it, and – he figures – the predator could be quite near him now. He is startled: he gets up, looks around. He sees nothing. He tries to calm himself down and get back to savouring the painting. But he cannot. Something in him has been unsettled. Despite his will, this something does not allow him to relax and take pleasure in the piece of art. He is preoccupied with his survival, and this preoccupation prevails over everything else, every other desire or volition – he is completely overwhelmed by it.

And, consider now, if the predator really comes up… The nature of this most dear piece of art would be completely forgotten, and it may even end up being used as a protective weapon – to shield himself from the beast – without any concern for damaging the painting.

Now – we may ask – what would allow our character to regain the possibility of enjoying the piece of art? Architecture, alone!

3.1.4 Shelter?

Architecture, not simply a shelter! A strong bunker, with its thick concrete walls, would not be a good place to enjoy a work of art. Inside its thick grey walls, without windows, one cannot help thinking about some kind of menace – the building 'speaks' of it – although being, in fact, safe. Only a home – not just a house – a true piece of architecture, would provide the peaceful environmental experience, which would free me from the frightening pressure of the outside and orient me in doing what I really want.

3.1.5 The Significant Other

On the other hand, consider that this sort of event happens not only in relation to works of art. If our character was with his or her dearest, something of the kind would also take place – it would not be possible to continue with kisses and tender words if a menace hovered (though even imaginary).

Even if our character just wanted to be alone to think about his life or to meditate, under such circumstances

that would also be impossible. And not only in the moment of the irruption of the threat; even afterwards, such a mindful state would be very hard to achieve. Concerns for survival trump everything, at least in the first moment; to overcome these, solid spiritual training is required.[38]

3.1.6 The Anthropological Reality of Architecture

So this is, in my opinion, what Ruskin means by architecture being more powerful in its – I add – 'anthropological' reality than poetry/art. And this is, in my opinion, why he says that architecture "in some sort includes" art – it really does it, physically, materially: architecture offers the capsule where one can have the experience of art, and more.

3.1.7 Memory

I will not deal directly with the second puzzling statement I have mentioned above – the one concerning Poetry/Art and Architecture being the main guardians of Memory rather than History[39] – but some remarks about the latter notions and their intertwining are necessary.

According to Le Goff, "memory" comes from "mens", an Indo-European root, which refers to the essence of Mankind.[40] Such a root is present in words like man/men, mental etc. In his examination of the notion of memory, Augustine found it to be the storage place of "humanity", of the human qualities that one gains through life

38 Of course a mother with her child does it – but not in the first moment; and again one may say a mother has the "solid training" I'm talking about, having in mind the reordering of priorities being a mother signifies and all the time that, consequently, she spends with her child. One can also notice this in the Christian martyrs at Nero's colosseum, when allegedly he said: "not even dead I can take out your smile"; or, nowadays, in the Buddhist monks of Tibet, who sacrifice themselves by fire. One can accept that in these situations, a solid training occurred.

39 Concerning this issue, Ruskin's perspective is profound and deserves some study. I can only offer some brief notes about it. The clearest explanation of this difference may be found in the instruments that History and Architecture use to preserve Memory: History favours documents; Architecture, monuments. The etymology of "document" refers to the verb *docere*, which means to teach. The etymology of "monument" relates to the verb *moneo*, which means to remember, in an imperative sense. One can therefore infer that a document 'wants to be' outside the subject, so to speak, while the monument needs the subject to partake in it. Since memory is an event of the subject, *in the subject*, the re-happening of memory needs monuments, not documents (see Abreu 2008). Besides, memory is something of the present, not of the past – one remembers *now* something of the past, and so memory is always contemporary (despite having its reference point in the past). Therefore, memory requires something to reenact it, to put it into action again. That cannot be a document – or History – because it does not need the self; it exists by itself, alone, as an "impartial proof". On the other hand, an artwork demands the subject's participation – it does not exist in an objective realm; a computer, a robot, is not able to identify a work of art. A work of art always requires a human being in order to be, in order to perform its task. Only if one accepts becoming involved with a work of art, is it able to impart its message and thus to fulfil its task. Accordingly, art is an exceptional vehicle of memory. Borges speaks about it in "991 A.D." (Borges 1976). In order to be preserved, the past needs the poem, the poet, that sings of the historical event. Kierkegaard deals with it as well (in the "Eulogy on Abraham" of Fear and Trembling), saying that the hero cannot survive without the poet (Kierkegaard 1983, 15-16). Memory, in fact, being something of the present and of the self, requires something to be activated, in the subject, subjectively. Only works of art, in spite of living in a reality outside the self, possess the ability to awaken the human spirit, to partake subjectively in a human subject.

40 Le Goff 1985.

experience.[41] Since Ruskin was familiar with Augustine,[42] one may also reasonably presume that when Ruskin mentions "remember", he is addressing those deeper nuances of meaning in the word Memory.

"To remember" would then signify to get in touch with the inner self, to be recalled to one's humanity, ultimately to the good (the human) that one is made of. And – who does not acknowledge that?! – in order to get in touch with one's inner self, some conditions are required: one is not able to do it not in the midst of a struggle, but rather where one senses a homely atmosphere. Says a Portuguese writer within the surprise of one of his characters: "He had never suspected how all this [he was recalling his beautiful family house] was the core of his own soul".[43]

Would it be possible to foresee a better purpose to Architecture, a more necessary goal and effect, in the realm of human existence…?

3.1.8 Mental Health

Consequently, Ruskin states, in the first page of his first lamp of architecture, "The Lamp of Sacrifice":

> Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure.[44]

It is now possible to acknowledge the full weight Ruskin gives to the word 'mental', and, after the above analysis, one can accept that he speaks the truth: if the environment is not transformed, even slightly, in order to favour a total and mindful human existence, people will feel uneasy, under assault, they will not be able to freely express themselves, anxiety will grow and, in time, (if unable to overcome this anxiety) they will become depressed.

4 Conclusion

According to Ruskin it would be plausible to say, therefore, that a piece of architecture is the transformation of the surrounding environment as it allows for a person to be human, to feel human, and to think and act humanly.

4.1 From the Castle of Granson to the Greek Temple

Although uncommon among architects and somewhat peculiar, Ruskin's understanding of Architecture does not stand alone and it is backed by quite a number of thinkers, who, more or less directly, tackle architecture. He

41 Augustine 2014-2016. Other than the Confessions, *passim*, refer to *De Trinitate*, books X, XI (especially), XII, XIV.

42 George P. Landow (1971) extensively writes on the influence of Augustine on Ruskin's allegorical method. He writes: "It is uncertain whether Ruskin knew *On Christian Doctrine*, though it seems likely, yet even if he did not, he had encountered similar arguments in the Confessions, which he several times mentions". (Landow 1971, 396-7) This information was kindly provided by Emma Sdegno.

43 "Corou, calou-se. Estava a pensar na sua bela casa de Azurara […]. Nunca soubera como tudo isto era o miolo da sua própria alma!" (Régio 1993, 30).

44 *Works*, 8: 27.

was, however, the first to look at architecture so profoundly. Heidegger,[45] Lévinas,[46] Broch,[47] Eliade,[48] and Gregotti[49] are among those who articulated Ruskin's view. I shall discuss only one.

In several texts, Martin Heidegger addresses this subject with an understanding very much akin to that of Ruskin. In a talk to architects and engineers about the post-war dwelling crisis, Heidegger, never saying what one should understand by architecture, demonstrates that the goal of building is dwelling in.[50] Then, analysing the phenomenology of dwelling, he unveils four semantic *facies*, which prove to be quite in alignment with Ruskin's perspective. 'Dwelling in' implies, first of all, a sense of protection. But not a random one: a sense of protection that imparts a feeling of peace. But not a general sense of peace: a feeling of peace that allows one to perceive oneself as free. And again, not any kind of freedom, but such a freedom that enables a human being to be totally in touch with their own self. Protection, peace, freedom, being oneself – all are implicitly encompassed in the poetical allegory of the first section of the *Lamp of Memory* discussed above; and the last feature of the four – being oneself – states essentially what is 'remembering' in Ruskin's terminology.

In a rather similar allegory to the one of Ruskin – describing the purpose and effect of a Greek Temple (a work of architecture, by antonomasia), placed alone on a cliff near the sea – Heidegger brilliantly synthesizes:

> The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their *face* [Gesicht], and to men their outlook on themselves.[51]

Without architecture, the surrounding environment would not be able to gain a 'face'; in other words, one would not be able to figure out how to properly relate to what is around. And if the environment does not gain a 'face', men will not be able to see themselves and, consequently, to be themselves. It is as if architecture spills a sparkling and sweet perfume over things, albeit an inconspicuous one, which allows us to get in touch with things, with the other, with ourselves; a perfume or a captivating veneer, which makes things sing out: I am for you.

45 Heidegger 2001a, 2001b.

46 Lévinas 2011, 152-74. Lévinas's view about architecture is very synthetical, and usually neglected. He says, speaking about the home (but his observations can apply to any piece of architecture or place), it is an object among objects, yet it is a pre-condition to human existence. For, in providing a sense of welcoming, an experience of hospitality, it allows for recollection – "Recollection refers to a welcome" (Lévinas 2011, 152-6). "Recollection" can be interpreted as the specific human activity of 'reflexion' upon oneself, becoming aware of oneself, self-conscious.

47 Broch 1986a, 389-91; 1986b, 397-8.

48 Eliade 1997, 65-8; 1990, 3-116; 1987, especially "The Sacred Space".

49 Gregotti 1996, 340-4.

50 Heidegger 2001a, 72 ff.

51 Heidegger 2001c, 42. The word 'face', in italics, does not feature in the current English translations. Nevertheless it is the term most correspondent to the German original: "Der Tempel gibt in seinem Dastehen den Dingen erst ihr Gesicht und den Menschen erst die Aussicht auf sich selbst" (Heidegger 1977, 29).

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