Architecture in the Age of Reason
CLAUDE PERRAULT
ORDONNANCE
DES CINQ ESPÈCES
DE COLONNES
SÉLON LA MÉTHODE
DES ANCIENS

Par M. PERRAULT, de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, Oblation au Medecin de la Cour de France.

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Chez Jean Baptiste Cognard Imprimeur du Roy
publie en France, mêmes en Italie et en Hollande.

M. Du L. LXXIII
Avec Privilege de Sa Majesté.
The ancients rightly believed that the proportional rules that give buildings their beauty were based on the proportions of the human body and that just as nature has suited a massive build to bodies made for physical labor while giving a slighter one to those requiring adroitness and agility, so in the art of building, different rules are determined by the different intentions to make a building more massive or more delicate.
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These differences between the orders that are based, with little exactitude or precision, on their proportion and characters are the only well-established matters in architecture. Everything else pertaining to the precise measurement of their members or the exact outline of their profiles still has no rule on which architects agree...
ARCHITECTS AGREE THAT THERE ARE / SHOULD BE DIFFERENT ARCHITECTURAL ORDERS...
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BUT THEY DON’T AGREE ON THE ABSOLUTE AND CORRECT PROPORTION OF THEM.
...the beauty of a building, like that of the human body, lies less in the exactitude of unvarying proportion and the relative size of constituent parts that in the grace of its form.
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A face can be **both ugly and beautiful** without any change in proportions...whereas, the dissimilar proportions of two different faces can be equally beautiful. Likewise, **in architecture, we see works whose differing proportions nevertheless have the grace to elicit equal approval...**
SO...DOES BEAUTY REQUIRE PROPORTIONS OR NOT?
One must agree, however, that although no single proportion is indispensable to the beauty of a face, **there still remains a standard from which its proportion cannot stray too far without destroying its perfection.**
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This shows just how ill-founded is the opinion of people who believed that the proportions supposed to be preserved in architecture are as certain and invariable as the proportions that give musical harmony it beauty and appeal...
One must suppose **two kinds of beauty in architecture** and know which beauties are based on convincing reasons and which depend only on prejudice.
FOR PERRAULT, THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF BEAUTY:

POSITIVE BEAUTY AND ARBITRARY BEAUTY
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POSITIVE BEAUTY IS UNIVERSAL AND UNCHANGEABLE.
For Perrault, there are two kinds of beauty: **positive beauty and arbitrary beauty**

**Positive beauty** is universal and unchangeable.

**Arbitrary beauty** is relative and variable.
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PERRAULT (A MODERN) CONSIDERED THEM AS ARBITRARY (RELATIVE) AND SUBJECT TO
FASHION, TASTE, AND THEIR RESPECTIVE EPISTEMS.
FROM PROPORTION TO SYMMETRY
The word symmetry has another meaning in French; for it signifies the correspondence in a building between right and left, high and low, front and back, whether in size, shape, height, colour, number, or placing -- indeed in everything that can make one part resemble another; and it is rather odd that Vitruvius never spoke of this kind of Symmetry, which accounts for much of the beauty of Buildings.
PROPORTIONS ARE ARBITRARY BUT SYMMETRY IS POSITIVE.
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DIALECTICS ANYONE?
LOUVRE EASTERN COLONNADE, 1667-1670
ESSAI
SUR
L'ARCHITECTURE.
Par M. Laugier.

A PARIS,
Chez Duchesne, rue S. Jacques, au Temple du Goût.

M. DCC. LIII.

Avec Approbation & Privilege du Roy

1753
It is the same in architecture as in all other arts: its principles are founded on simple nature, and nature’s process clearly indicates it rules. Let us look at man in his primitive state without any aid or guidance other than his natural Instincts.
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He needs a place to rest.
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...the scorching heat of the sun forces him to look for shelter. A nearby forest draws his to its cooling shade.
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He needs a place to rest.

...the scorching heat of the sun forces him to look for shelter. A nearby forest draws his to its cooling shade.

(But) ...soon, torrential rain pours down on this delightful forest... He creeps into a nearby cave and, finding it dry, praises himself for his discovery.
MAN NEEDS SHELTER AND ENCLOSURE.
He leaves (after the storm?) and is resolved to make good by his ingenuity the careless neglect of nature. He wants to make himself a dwelling that protects but does not bury him.
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Some fallen branches in the forest are the right material for his purpose; he chooses four of the strongest, raises them upright and arranges them in a square; across their top he lays four other branches; on these he hoists from two sides yet another row of branches which, inclining towards each other, meet at their highest point. He then covers this kind of roof with leaves so closely packed that neither sun nor rain can penetrate. Thus, man is housed.
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...cold and heat will make him feel uncomfortable in this house which is open on all sides but soon he will fill in the space between two posts and feel secure.
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THE PRIMITIVE HUT DISLODGES ESSENTIAL BEAUTY IN ARCHITECTURE FROM CUSTOM AND CONVENTION.
THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SUBLIME
Beauty

PURPOSIVENESS WITHOUT PURPOSE

(IT'S USELESS TO US BUT WE CAN UNDERSTAND IT THROUGH CONCEPTS)
SUBLIME

DISORDER AND PURPOSELESSNESS
(WE DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING THAT WE CANNOT ORGANIZE OR CONTAIN)
A sublime experience is one in which we cannot determine a delimiting organizing principle in the thing because the thing itself has no (conceptualizable) limits.
WHAT IS IT TO UNDERSTAND?
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WE UNDERSTAND SOMETHING FULLY WHEN WE’VE REACH THE LIMITS OUR ABILITY TO CONCEPTUALIZE THAT THING (COGNITIVELY).
WHAT IS IT TO IMAGINE?
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TO *IMAGINE* IS TO FORM NEW IMAGES AND/OR SENSATIONS (COGNITIVELY) OF SOMETHING THAT IS NOT PERCEIVED BY THE SENSES.
WE CAN ONLY *IMAGINE* SOMETHING WITHIN OUR **COGNITIVE ABILITY** TO **UNDERSTAND** IT AND VICE VERSA.

ARCHITECTURE, FOR EXAMPLE, (ALWAYS IMAGINED BEFORE ACTUALIZED) CAN BE UNDERSTOOD AS A PRODUCT OF A (POSSIBLE) **FORM OF UNDERSTANDING** (OF A SITE, A PROBLEM, A PROGRAM, A SOCIETY, THE WORLD, ETC.)
THE SUBLIME VIOLATES AND DISRUPTS THE IMAGINATION/UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIP.
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IT FOLLOWS, THEN, THAT WE CANNOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THAT WHICH WE CANNOT IMAGINE (FOR WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND SOMETHING FROM NOTHING) ...
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IT FOLLOWS, THEN, THAT WE CANNOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THAT WHICH WE CANNOT IMAGINE (FOR WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND SOMETHING FROM NOTHING)...

...AND THAT THE SUBLIME OPERATES ON BOTH SIDES OF OUR COGNITIVE ABILITIES (IT SIMULTANEOUSLY NEGATES AND TRANSGRESSES THEM). ONCE THIS HAPPENS, WE EXPERIENCE A MOMENTARY CONCEPTUAL/PERCEPTUAL DISRUPTION IN THAT:

1) WHILE OUR DESIRE IS TO UNDERSTAND, WE CANNOT FULLY UNDERSTAND AND/OR IMAGINE THE SUBLIME THING; WE NEED MORE THAN THINKING ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE IT.

2) WE COMPENSATE FOR THE THREAT BY REFLECTING, REFRAMING, REANALYZING, RECONNECTING, RESYNTHESIZING, ETC. I.E. WE USE REASON TO MINIMIZE THE THREAT.
3 TYPES OF SUBLIME
TERROR (DREAD AND MELANCHOLY)
NOBLE (QUIET WONDER)
TO EXPERIENCE **THE SUBLIME** IS TO NEGOTIATE **EXCESS.**
The most architectural thing about this building is the state of decay in which it is.

Architecture only survives where it negates the form that society expects of it. Where it negates itself by transgressing the limits that history has set for it.

To really appreciate architecture, you may even need to commit a murder.

Architecture is defined by the actions it witnesses as much as by the enclosure of its walls. Murder in the Street differs from Murder in the Cathedral in the same way as love in the street differs from the Street of Love. Radically.
There was ample evidence that a strange man had been present in the room, and the police theory is that the murderer accompanied his victim to her house. None of the other residents of the quiet residential street saw him arrive, or leave after his bloody business was completed.

Masks
Architecture simulates and dissimulates.

The game of architecture is an intricate play with rules that you may break or accept. These rules, like so many knots that cannot be untied, have the erotic significance of bondage: the more numerous and sophisticated the restraints, the greater the pleasure.

ropes and rules
MORE ON EISENMAN, TSCHUMI, AND LYNN LATER...BUT FOR NOW, THE POINT IS THAT...
ARCHITECTURAL AESTHETICS STRADDLE BETWEEN OUR CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ITS BEAUTY AS AN OBJECT IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND OUR SUBLIME EXPERIENCE OF ITS EFFECTS AS A SMALLER PART OF THAT ENVIRONMENT.
WHILE WE INTEND SPECIFIC CONCEPTUAL BIASES ONTO ARCHITECTURE, ARCHITECTURE PROJECTS ITS AMBIGUITIES BACK TOWARD US.
REVOLUTIONARY ARCHITECTURE + THE PICTURESQUE
Picturesque = "like a picture"
ARCHITECTURE AS A SMALLER PART OF A LARGER ATMOSPHERE
THE FEELING (THOUGH NOT UNDERSTANDING) OF ARCHITECTURE OUTSIDE OF HISTORY YET INSIDE OF TIME
J.M.W. TURNER, TINTERN ABBEY, 1795
FREDERICK EDWIN CHURCH,

NIAGARA, 1857

FREDERICK EDWIN CHURCH, NIAGARA, 1857
ARCHITECTURE PARLANTE
("SPEAKING ARCHITECTURE" OR "ARCHITECTURE THAT SPEAKS")

CARACTERE
(THE ONLY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROJECTS ARE THEIR CHARACTER AND SCALE. CHARACTER TRANSCENDS FUNCTION TO EXPRESS CONTENT DIDACTICALLY)

ARCHITECTS PURIFY THE SOCIAL ORDER
(ARCHITECTURE EXPRESSES SOCIAL COEXISTENCE)
I am a monument

Highway

Duck

Eat

Decorated shed
ARCHITECTURE AS A LANGUAGE OF SELF-REFERENTIAL SIGNS. THE EFFECT VALUE IS PRIVILEGED OVER THE PRACTICAL (FUNCTIONAL) VALUE.

CLAUDE NICOLAS LEDOUX, HOUSE FOR BARREL MAKER
CLAUDE NICOLAS LEDOUX, HOUSE FOR THE WOODSMAN
ETIENNE-LOUIS BOULLEE

Yes, I believe that our buildings, above all public building, should be in some sense poems. The images they offer our senses should arouse in us sentiments corresponding to the purpose of which these buildings are intended.

TABLEUX IMAGES
(Images that reveal the poetry inherent in architecture)

SYMMETRY = ORDER AND COHESION / REGULARITY = BEAUTY OF FORMS / VARIETY = THE ASPECTS BY WHICH THEY ARE DIVERSIFIED

PROPORTION IS NOT A UNIVERSAL ARITHMETIC RELATION; IT IS THE EFFECT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYMMETRY, REGULARITY, AND VARIETY.

IF YOU WISH TO BE AN ARCHITECT, BEGIN AS A PAINTER.
THE SPHERE IS THE MOST PERFECT SOLID BECAUSE IT IS ABSOLUTELY SYMMETRICAL AND REGULAR COMBINED WITH THE MOST AMOUNT OF VARIETY.

MONUMENTALITY IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SUBLIMITY OF NATURE, WHOSE MAGNITUDE IS REFLECTED (IS PART OF THE CHARACTER OF) THE MAGNITUDE OF THE ARCHITECTURE.

THE LESS PURPOSE (OR MORE PURPOSIVENESS) A BUILDING HAS, THE MORE PURE ITS GEOMETRY.

GREAT SIZE IS THE SIGN OF SUPERIOR ABILITIES.
ETIENNE-LOUIS BOULLEE, THE ROYAL LIBRARY, 1785