

PREFACE

What is architecture? Why is it important? How should one build? These questions have never been more urgent, but architects and theorists now seem hesitant to answer them in a serious and systematic way. As Hans Sedlmayr wrote, in *Verlust der Mitte*, ‘the new type of architect has become hopelessly uncertain of himself. He glances over his shoulder at the engineer, he fancies himself in the role of inventor and even in that of a reformer of men’s lives, but he has forgotten to be an architect.’ In the present work I approach the subject *ab initio*, making as few assumptions as I can. Although the book is in the first place an application of philosophical aesthetics, the confusion of architectural theory seems to me so great that no philosophical enquiry can refrain from engaging with its arguments. I hope to show that the urgent questions which confront the architect are indeed philosophical questions, and that they can be clarified, and sometimes even solved.

The book has both a theme and a thesis. It is designed, first, to introduce the subject of aesthetics to those who have an interest in architecture, second, to explain the nature and value of aesthetic taste. In taking examples exclusively from architectural thought and practice, I hope to cast light both on the nature of architecture and on the nature of aesthetic judgement. The argument will benefit, not only because aesthetics stands in need of a systematic application, but also because the thesis that I wish to present – a thesis which relates aesthetic judgement to practical understanding – is most vividly illustrated by those enterprises, known collectively as the ‘useful’ and the ‘decorative’ arts, of which architecture is the most important.

The thesis is more elusive than the theme, and will require me to steer a middle course between two separate disciplines in a way that might at times prove offensive to the practitioners of both. My thoughts may prove insufficiently abstract for the philosopher, and insufficiently concrete for the architectural critic and historian. But my hope is that the kind of systematic application of aesthetics which I envisage will be of value, not only as a clarification of critical theories, and not only as an intelligible introduction to aesthetics, but also as a valid form of philosophical speculation. In order that the theme should be as clear as possible I have attempted to provide illustrations wherever these are appropriate. Architectural critics and historians may disagree with some of my interpretations, but this should not matter. My purpose throughout is to illustrate the application of certain concepts to the discussion of buildings, and to derive an overall conception of the nature and value of critical argument. It would take me too far afield to pursue any particular interpretation to its conclusion.

Again in the interests of clarity, I have removed from the text almost all reference to the technicalities of modern philosophy. This is not because these are irrelevant to aesthetics, but because it has seemed to me important to try to convey a sense of the subject without their aid. However, specific arguments are elaborated or referred to in footnotes, and the interested reader is provided with material in the bibliography to pursue the philosophical discussions that occur in the text. Despite all these trappings of scholarship, however, I hope that the book can be read with pleasure by someone who prefers to ignore them. The footnotes in particular contain nothing that is essential to the continuity of the argument, and I have therefore placed them all at the end of the book so as not to discourage those for whom footnotes are a waste of time. I have also provided a summary, and those unused to the circumspect style of modern philosophy may prefer to begin with this; but I hope that the argument of the initial chapters moves gently enough to enable them to dispense with it.

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