On The Place Of Culture In The Theoretical Edifice Of Architecture

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I.

If culture has a place in discourse on architecture, it is not readily located in the various theoretical edifices that have been construed in the field since the Renaissance. This is not an oversight. The concept of culture, in a number of different guises, has figured prominent in the history of theoretical discourse on architecture. However, every attempt to locate the place of culture inside the theoretical edifices of this discourse inevitably leads to the outside. We find a majority of architectural theoreticians erect the figure of culture only to chastise and deprecate it as the figure of the particular and the arbitrary.

If by 'culture' we are to understand a set of values, beliefs, rules, and ritual practices that are subject to variation in space and time, i.e., particular and to an extent arbitrary, then we may safely say that more often than not the justification given for theoretical edification, or more appropriately fortification, is to keep culture outside the realm of architectural practice. We may begin with Alberti who justified his theoretical endeavor as an attempt "to free the science of architecture" from the mistaken belief "that men are guided by a variety of opinions in their judgment of beauty and of buildings; and that the forms of structures must vary according to every man's particular taste and fancy, and not be tied down to any rules of art."[1] The assumption that the

practice of architecture may be tied to anything but eternal and absolute rules is, Alberti tells us, "a common thing with the ignorant," who "despise what they do not understand!"[2]

Nearly three hundred years later, Laugier justified his theoretical endeavor as an attempt "to rise above a prejudice unfortunately so common although so pernicious and blind." A "sad prejudice," he tells us, that "confronts all reasoning with an arrogant obstinacy that simple ignorance would not have."[3] At issue for Laugier, as for Alberti before him, is a "way of thinking which makes what is right simply dependent on custom." Although this way of thinking appears to Laugier as "a very easy expedience for ignorant and lazy artists," he adamantly condemns it, because "it obstructs the progress of the arts too much to be generally adopted." He insists that, "If only arbitrary rules are wanted for the arts one can insist on custom, but if the processes of art must go back to fixed principles, it is necessary to appeal to reason against custom and to sacrifice to the light of one the force and sway of the other."[4] Laugier's theoretical edifice, as Alberti's before him, is thus construed with the adamant intent of sheltering the absolute and the universal while fighting to repel the force and sway of the arbitrary and the particular that are characteristic of custom, or in contemporary terms, culture.

Both authors, we should note, are motivated not only by a strong preference for the absolute and the universal, but also by an equally strong aversion to the particular and the arbitrary. The latter is seen as powerful and persuasive, on the one hand, and inherently dangerous and destructive, on the other. The critical efforts of these authors are, therefore, as much directed towards the enumeration of the universal as the identification and condemnation of the particular.

Alberti and Laugier's contempt for the particular and the arbitrary are not exceptions to the rule. Ruskin, for instance, summarized a prevalent motive for theoretical edification in the field when he wrote that, "I have long felt convinced of the necessity, in order to its progress, of some determined effort to extricate from the confused mass of partial traditions and dogmata with which it has become encumbered during imperfect or restricted practice, those large principles of right which are applicable to every stage and style of it."[5] This reasoning is similar, if not identical, to the one offered not only by Alberti and Laugier before Ruskin, but also by Viollet-le-Duc and Le Corbusier after him - to cite two more examples among others.

It is important to note that what each of these authors shelters within his or her theoretical edifice as the universal principles of design could not be any different from one to the next. Virtually every style of architecture in vogue since the Renaissance has been justified by its proponents as the only mode of design that is based on universal and absolute rules of formation. Each has also been condemned by the proponents of other modes of design as arbitrary and particular, when compared to the latter's universals. This is to say that although specific formal preferences vary in accord with an ever changing historic context, nevertheless, the critical justification appears to remain constant.

Since our current interest in the relationship of architecture to culture must necessarily assume the weight of this tradition - respond to it, or else be overwhelmed by it - it is important to explore the critical reasoning behind what appears to be a historic aversion to culture in the theoretical discourse of architecture. It is important to know why a majority of architectural theoreticians find it necessary to ground architectural forms on universal principles and justify specific formal preferences with recourse to absolute rules.

With this in mind, what I wish to focus on in this paper is not as much the particular nature of what is purported to be universal, as it is the ways and means of universalizing the particular. What I wish to focus on is, on the one hand, what appears to be a singular motive for theoretical speculation on architecture, and on the other, the exclusionary critical methodology that accompanies it. In sum, what I wish to explore in this work are the reasons for the historic devaluation and exclusion of culture as the figure of the particular and the arbitrary from the theoretical edifices of architecture.

The exclusion of culture, we should note, pertains primarily to the question of architectural form and formation. This is to say that, on the critical path from the particular to the universal, the theoreticians of the field do at times concede to culture along their way. These concessions fall under the category of commodity or convenience. Of the Vitruvian triad - better known in Henry Wotton's paraphrase as commodity, firmness, and delight - commodity is the one that allows the most for the particular.[6] We find the theoreticians of the field more tolerant of the particular insofar as it pertains to the determination of specific needs and services. Alberti, for instance, was more than willing to accommodate the particular needs of a "tyrant" as well as a "prince," the "middling sort" as well as the "meaner sort," going so far as suggesting that "in these particulars, the customs of every country are always to be principally observed." His tolerance for the particular, however, only extends to the determination of need and never to the determination of form. Whereas the former is allowed particularity, the forms that accommodate it must always abide by universal rules. The proponents of Modernism, we may note in passing, tried to reduce commodity to a set of universals as well.

If the theoreticians of the field are on the whole more tolerant of the particular insofar as the question of commodity is concerned, this is partly

because they believe it to be of little consequence. We are consistently told that of the Vitruvian triad - the validity of which has never been a question in the field - the principle of beauty or delight is the most decisive. This is because beauty, in effect, constitutes the limits that separate the art of building - the proper subject of theoretical speculation in this discourse - from the mere building - considered a menial activity unworthy of theoretical pursuit. Alberti, for instance, emphasizing that the principle of delight "is by much the most noble of all and very necessary besides," reasoned that, "the having satisfied necessity is a very small matter, and the having provided for conveniency affords no manner of pleasure, where you are shocked by the deformity of the work." Therefore, to prevent the shock of *deformity* - the shock that invariably stands to reason the necessity of *beauty* in the theoretical discourse of architecture - he concludes: "your whole care, diligence and expense, ... should all tend to this, that whatever you build may be not only useful and convenient, but also ... delightful to the sight."[7]

Ruskin went so far as suggesting that "Architecture concerns itself only with those characters of an edifice which are above and beyond its common use," i.e., above and beyond the particular.[8] Le Corbusier were to express a similar, though a less radical sentiment when he wrote that, "When a thing responds to a need, it is not beautiful; ... Architecture has another meaning and other ends to pursue than showing construction and responding to needs."[9]

The "aim of architecture" as Corbu put it, or rather the aim that is architecture insofar as this aim, this other "meaning" or "end" distinguishes architecture from mere building, is an absolute on whose definition virtually all the theoreticians of the field appear to concur. It is, in the abstract, an absolute state of formal or compositional saturation to which addition is superfluous and subtraction detrimental. John Ruskin

summed up a unanimous sentiment in this discourse when he concluded that the "end" in every work of architecture is "a perfect creature capable of nothing less than it has, and needing nothing more."[10]

The self proclaimed "end" of theoretical edification is, therefore, nothing short of a creature imbued with the authority to resist modification. The beautiful by definition is not susceptible to alteration. It is absolute and universal. The theoretical edification succeeds in its "aim," when and if there is no room left for the particular and the arbitrary. Whatever can be changed or altered is simply not beautiful. It is also, by definition, not architecture. The simplicity of this "end" hides the complexities of its critical consequences. I shall try to point to some of these consequences later. For now we should note that the aversion to change is directly related to the aversion to culture. The self proclaimed "end" of theoretical edification leaves no room for culture. To this "end," culture is in the least counterproductive or worse destructive given its particular nature. Therefore, any attempt to enumerate the relationship between architecture and culture is likely to fall short of its goal, or else fall prey to the banality of commodity, unless it methodically questions the grip of the Vitruvian triad over theoretical reflections on architecture. So long as beauty is the projected "end," and aesthetics is the "most noble of all" evaluative criteria, culture cannot be assigned a place in matters of formation and composition.

This is not to imply that culture is without a place in matters of formation, but that there is resistance to the overt recognition of its role for reasons that I shall discuss later. It is important to note that neither the projection of beauty as the ultimate "aim" of architecture, nor the use of aesthetics as a critical tool for delimitation of practice to a specific mode of design, are in any way universal. Both are peculiar to Western architectural discourse as they are not to be found - not by the same

definition, at any rate - in other discursive traditions. Two prominent examples are the Indian and the Chinese traditions. The criteria used for restricting and regulating architectural practice in these other examples differ markedly from those in the West. They appear to condone or proscribe specific modes of design not based on aesthetic merit, i.e., beautiful or ugly, perfect or imperfect, but, at the risk of simplification, based on humane consequences, i.e., auspicious or inauspicious for the inhabitants, conducive to good fortune or bad, beneficial to health or not, etc.[11] What both the Eastern and the Western traditions achieve in the end is a restricted and regulated practice. Their approaches are, however, particular to each and should not be confused with the other.

Although there appears to be a common consensus in the Western discursive tradition over what constitutes the "aim" of architecture, there is, of course, no consensus over its literal form. The path to perfection, as I noted earlier, has had virtually as many twists and turns as there have been theoreticians in the field. The origin of this path and the place of its meandering, on the other hand, has not been a source of dispute. There is a common consensus in the field that to reach perfection one must turn to and imitate nature.

The term "nature" has had both a passive and an active sense in this discourse. It refers both to a body of objects - be they all beautiful or not - and to an active process of formation - the formation of beautiful bodies. It is in this latter sense that various authors have proposed the imitation of nature as the ultimate "aim" of architecture. The imitation at issue, in other words, is not the imitation of natural forms - this is generally considered to be a contemptible activity for architects - but the imitation of nature as "the greatest artist at all manner of composition."[12] The greatest artist whose work, nevertheless, is said to be regulated by a set of self-imposed rules and principles that collectively warrant the perfection of

every composition. A set of constant, though secret laws that every author in turn seeks to unravel and reveal.

If it is to nature and not culture that a majority of architectural theoreticians turn for guidance, if nature is the figure of the absolute and the universal that they seek to shelter within their theoretical edifices at the expense of culture, i.e., the figure of the arbitrary and the particular, it is because at stake is the exclusionary privilege of the beautiful, or what amounts to the same, the authority of the theoretical edifice to restrict and regulate in the name of the beautiful. At stake is the power of exclusion that is imperative to the delimitation of practice in the field. It is the authority, for instance, that allows Viollet-le-Duc "to repudiate, as starting from a false principle, every order of art which, in subservience to mere traditions, thus allows itself to deviate from the truth in its expressions," i.e., every order of art other than the one he advocates.[13] Without the exclusionary authority of the absolute, there can be no repudiation. The condition of the exercise of this authority is the grounding of the beautiful in nature as opposed to culture, insofar as the former designates the universal and the latter the particular. Once grounded in nature, the beautiful is rendered as much an ideal to be attained as a critical tool for the restriction and regulation of practice in the field.

An architecture that turns to the particular and arbitrary rules of culture for guidance, dispossesses itself of the authority to exclude. Boullée explains this stance best when he tells us that if "you admire" a building "that is based on pure fantasy and owes nothing whatsoever to nature, ... your admiration is therefore the result of a particular point of view and you should not be surprised to hear it criticized, for the so-called beauty that you find in it has no connection with nature, which is the source of all true beauty."[14] Whereas an architecture based on a

particular point of view is subject to criticism, the architecture based on nature is not. Whereas a cultural architecture engenders infinite critical debate, the Natural architecture ends it. It speaks conclusively. Its proclamations are not subject to debate or alteration.

Since the self-proclaimed point of theoretical speculation is not to engender more speculation but to end it, since the point is a theory to end all theorizing, it is evident why culture is not assigned a place inside the theoretical edifices of architecture. Although this may, in part, explain the exclusion of culture from the theoretical discourse of architecture, it does not explain the rampant aversion to it. I mentioned earlier that the theoreticians of the field devote as much, if not more time and effort to the condemnation and deprecation of what they consider to be particular and arbitrary in architecture as they do to the enumeration of what they consider to be universal and absolute. A case in point is Laugier who, having identified the column as the original and natural form of support in architecture, finds it necessary to identify and condemn every other form of support, e.g., wall, pier, pilaster, etc., as imitative and unnatural.

What I wish to focus on in the remainder of this paper is the strategic motives and the exclusionary logic of Laugier's "An Essay On Architecture" as exemplified by his opposition of the Column to the pilaster as discovery to invention, originality to substitution, and nature to culture. Column in this case epitomizes the universal and the absolute, or all that is beautiful and perfect in architecture, whereas the deprecated pilaster is emblematic of the particular and the arbitrary, or all that is "destructive" to a *Natural Architecture*.

I have chosen Laugier's text for closer scrutiny primarily because of his meticulous and comprehensive attention to the question of culture. I do not presume that the particulars of Laugier's arguments are applicable to

the other texts I have mentioned thus far. I do believe, however, that the strategic motives and the critical methodology of this text are similar to the others and may therefore serve to facilitate the investigation of the particular arguments presented by the others in their defense, nevertheless, of a Natural Architecture.

II.

Laugier erects his theoretical edifice on the grounds that, "Good and bad produce two indelible qualities the essence of which neither length of time or prolonged habit can change or destroy."[15] The good, the beautiful, or the perfect, Laugier tells us, is governed by "fixed rules." The bad, the ugly, or the imperfect is the outcome of the application of "arbitrary rules" based on "flights of fancy" and "capricious whim." Whereas the good "grips and lifts up the soul into ecstasy," the bad would have the soul "disgusted, shocked, and repelled."

Laugier augments this fundamental principle with another. "All art and all sciences," he states, "have a definite objective, but not every road can be equally good to reach it. There is only one that leads directly to that end and it is this unique road which one must know. In all things there is only one way of doing it well."[16]

Needless to say that the definite objective of architecture for Laugier is the good. The only road that reaches it is the road that leads us away from "accepted practice, public opinion, or custom" to the source of all "the fixed and unchanging principles of architecture." It is "the same in architecture as in all other arts," Laugier tells us: "its principles are founded on simple nature and nature's process clearly indicates its rules."[17] Culture, on the other hand, is nature's competitor; the nemesis that leads one astray.

Assuming that custom is the source of all that is "bad, arbitrary, and capricious" in architecture, Laugier asks us to "look at man in his primitive state without any aid or guidance other than his natural instincts," i.e., without either custom or opinion whose "force and sway" can have him err in judgment, or any arbitrary model or road that could lead him astray.[18] This man, living before the advent of culture, has nothing other than what is given him by nature. These include a "taste for true beauty" and due to "the careless neglect of nature," the need for "a dwelling that protects" him from the elements. To satisfy this need, the primitive man erects a hut consisting of four posts "arranged in a square," with four other branches laid on top of them, followed by "another row of branches which, inclining towards each other, meet at their highest point."[19]

This "little rustic hut," Laugier tells us, is a "rough sketch which nature offers us."[20] "All the splendors of architecture ever conceived" have been based on this rough sketch that embodies all the fixed and unchanging principles of perfection in architecture. "It is by approaching the simplicity of this first model," Laugier argues, "that fundamental mistakes are avoided and true perfection is achieved."

Having drawn a rough sketch of the ideal, the good, or the beautiful, Laugier quickly turns it into a critical tool for delimitation of practice. He tells us:

> ... Never has a principle been more fertile in effect. From now on it is easy to distinguish between the parts that are essential to the composition of an architectural Order and those which have been introduced by necessity or have been added by caprice. The parts that are essential are the cause of beauty, the parts introduced by necessity cause every license, the parts added by caprice cause every fault. This calls for an explanation; I shall try to be as clear as possible.

> Let us never lose sight of our little rustic hut. I can only see columns, a ceiling or entablature and a pointed roof forming at both ends what is called a pediment. So far there is no vault, still less an arch, no pedestals, no attic, not even a door or a window. I therefore come to this conclusion: in an architectural Order only the column, the entablature and the pediment may form an essential part of its composition. If each of these parts is suitably placed and suitably formed, nothing else need be added to make the work perfect.[21]

Laugier's motive for this enumeration is to identify the "perfect creature," as Ruskin put it, that is "capable of nothing less than it has, and needing nothing more." It is the absolute with recourse to which the difference between good and bad, and right and wrong in architecture can readily be deciphered. What for Laugier constitute the perfect, the beautiful, and the good in architecture are the essential parts of an architectural Order - the column, the entablature and the pediment. If these are, he argues, "suitably placed and suitably formed," if they are applied in such a way "that they not only adorn but actually constitute the building," i.e., in such a way that "the existence of the building" depends "so completely on the union of these parts that not a single one could be taken away without the whole building collapsing," then addition will indeed become superfluous and subtraction detrimental. We will then have at hand a perfect creature and a potent critical tool for separating the universal from the particular, the absolute from the arbitrary, and the natural from the cultural.

If it is only the column, the entablature, and the pediment that Laugier considers the essential parts of a perfect architecture, as opposed to the wall, the pier, the pilaster, the arch, the dome, and every other form of support that he condemns as "bizarre" cultural inventions without any real necessity, it is because architecture for Laugier is a "mode of

expression (*manniere*) which is based on clear principles and is carried out with the help of unchanging Precepts."[22]   In all things, he has argued, there is only one of way of doing it right.   The only natural, true, and original "way" to express structure, Laugier argues, is the column, the entablature, and the pediment, because "nature has not two different ways of bringing about an effect. The effect is more or less satisfying according to how strictly one adheres to the unique way that leads to it."[23]   The natural form of support is column, the "inherent shape" of the roof is "triangular;" all other forms constitute so many unnatural, untrue, and imperfect expressions.[24]   Therefore, Laugier tells us: "Let us keep to the simple and natural; it is the only road to beauty."[25]   However, Laugier does not leave the matter at that. He finds it necessary to identify and proscribe, one by one, "all deviations" from "the rough sketch that nature offers us" as "so many faults."   The reason is best illustrated in his vehement condemnation of the pilaster.

III.

It is a fault, Laugier tells us:

... When instead of round columns pilasters are used. Pilasters are only a poor representation of columns.   Their corners indicate a constraint of art and deviate noticeably from the simplicity of nature; their sharp and awkward edges hurt the eye, their surfaces, not being rounded, make the whole Order seem flat.   They are not adaptable to that diminution which makes columns so attractive.   Pilasters are never necessary; whenever they are used, columns could be applied just as advantageously. They must, therefore, be regarded as a bizarre innovation, in no way founded on nature or authorized by any need, which can only have been adopted out of ignorance and is still tolerated only by habit.   The fashion for pilasters has triumphed everywhere: alas, where are they not to be found? Yet to realize

how distasteful they are, one only needs to think of the grand effect which columns always make, an effect that is unfailingly destroyed by pilasters.[26]

The pilaster is a "distasteful, bizarre innovation" that is "in no way founded on nature" and only "adopted out of ignorance" to make, though "never necessary," a "poor representation of columns." The pilaster is also: "a very inaccurate representation," a "frivolous ornament," an "abuse," and last but not least, a "disagreeable substitution." The pilaster must, therefore, be suppressed and suppressed "free-standing" or "engaged" because of its distasteful "effect."

Given Laugier's fierce condemnation of the pilaster, we may well assume that its distasteful "effect" has a grave consequence. Yet, what danger could the pilaster pose to this most solid theoretical edifice of columns, entablatures and pediments that would have Laugier so vehemently oppose its existence?

To "realize how distasteful" the pilaster is, Laugier asks us to "think of the grand effect which columns always make" and pilasters so "unfailingly" destroy. What, we may ask, is "the grand effect which columns always make," and how does the pilaster unfailingly destroy it?

Though "in no way founded on nature," the pilaster, like the column, is a "representation." The pilaster, however, unlike the column, is a "poor, inaccurate, and faulty" representation and at that a representation of the column, a representation of the natural presentation of support. This is to say that there are, as far as Laugier is concerned, two different kinds of representation as there were two different kinds of invention: one founded on nature - a discovery - the other on the "capricious whim" of the ignorant - an invention. One is accurate, good, and true - natural - the other inaccurate, poor, and faulty - unnatural. Whereas the round

column is a natural representation, the pilaster is, Laugier argues, an unnatural representation because it is "square" and "nature makes nothing square." It may, therefore, appear that the distinction between a natural and a cultural representation is based on the form of the representer or the signifier.

Contrary to the assertion that "nature makes nothing square," Laugier on occasion presents us with natural things made "square." To cite just one example, the posts of the "little rustic hut" were arranged in a "square." Even though the square does not fall outside the realm of natural production, the pilaster is, nonetheless, unnatural because it is square. The reasoning is based on the foundation that "nature has not two different ways of bringing about an effect," and "in all things there is only one way of doing it well." The "one way" in this instance is the *round* way. Vertical support *naturally* translates into a round form as evidenced by the round posts of the "little rustic hut." Consequently, the square pilaster is unnatural, though not because the square is unnatural, but because the natural or the original way, the *one* way nature brings about this particular "effect" in origin is by way of a round form.

Laugier's determination of the accuracy or inaccuracy of a representation is, therefore, based not on its form per se, but on the form's causal or else arbitrary link to "purpose." The "free-standing columns which carry an entablature," Laugier tells us, "never leave one in doubt about the truth of the architectural display they present."[27] This is the "grand effect which columns," and only columns, can "always make." This is also "the effect that is unfailingly destroyed by pilasters." The "grand effect" at issue is an aesthetic effect that is experienced when and if there is no doubt about the "truth" of the "architectural display." The beauty of the beautiful, Laugier tells us, "strikes everybody because it is natural, because it is true."[28] The *truth* of an "architectural display" is the

condition of its aesthetic "effect." The condition of determination of the truth of representation or truth as representation is, in turn, the presence of a causal link or bond between what displays and what is displayed, between the representing form and the represented purpose, between what the sign says and what it does. This condition is, can only be, fulfilled in the realm of the absolute designated by the name nature: the realm where the form of expression is always determined by the expressed "purpose" *naturally*, i.e., such that the presence of form always gives the assurance of the presence of "purpose."

The natural bond between form and "purpose" is what the pilaster destroys. The form of this "distasteful" architectural "display" is determined not by the expressed "purpose" as dictated by the laws of *nature*, but by the capricious "whim" of the ignorant. The displacement of form and the destruction of the bond, Laugier tells us, is a "distasteful" and "bizarre innovation" that is "in no way founded on nature" because within the bounds of nature each representation is always a positive entity whose "purpose" naturally dictates its form. The representational function of the natural architectural sign is determined, commenced, and always governed by its literal "purpose." It is, however, the possibility of identifying such a clear and simple boundary between the natural and the cultural, the good and the bad, the true and the false that as yet remains to be determined. Laugier tells us that:

> ... It is only through an abuse that the pilaster has taken the place of the column of which it is a very inaccurate representation. The pilaster has only been invented to save the expense of columns and yet retain their general idea, but an imitation as faulty as that is no consolation for the absence of such a beautiful original. Wherever one applies pilaster there should be columns and wherever one can not apply columns, there should be no Order at all.[29]

Though "only through an abuse," the pilaster can, nevertheless, take the "place" of the column. Though "distasteful" and "disagreeable," this "inaccurate representation" can act as a *substitute* for the "original" in its "absence." This must indeed be "no consolation" for in the "absence" of the "essential" column the "whole building" should collapse. However, what is threatened with collapse as a result of this "substitution" is the theoretical edifice.

The pilaster, as Laugier has categorized it, is a "superfluous" addition whose "use" is not authorized by any "need." This "superfluous" addition, regardless of any crisis of taste, can be, and has been substituted for the "essential." To *take the place of* the natural representation, this inaccurate cultural representation must be fundamentally similar to what it substitutes. There must be a shared characteristic in the representational function of these two representations that enables one to take the place of the other. Similarity between the "superfluous" and the "essential," the faulty and the perfect, is the very condition of the possibility of "substitution." The *impossibility* of such a similarity in "essence," however, has been the very solid ground upon which the foundations of this theoretical edifice rest. Hence the reason the pilaster that is at once superfluous and "essential," presents Laugier nothing but *distaste* or a crisis of *natural taste* - the taste for "true beauty." Laugier's "inborn aversion" to the pilaster is justified because pilaster's *abusive* power of "substitution," its similarity to what it should have nothing in common, places in question all the *natural* privileges of the column and, for that matter, the "true beauty" of all other "natural" representations.[30] If Laugier finds the pilaster "disagreeable" and "distasteful," it is not because it destroys "the grand effect which columns always make," but Laugier's assertion to the contrary not withstanding, because it does not. Whereas

the building should collapse in the absence of the "essential," the substitute does not allow it.

The pilaster, Laugier tells us, is a "disagreeable substitute" for a "beautiful original." The pilaster can only be a substitute for the essential, indeed become an "essential part of the Order," if the original is itself, in a manner, a substitute. To take the place of the original - the building withstanding - there must necessarily be more than one way of "bringing about an effect," though perhaps not aesthetically insofar as Laugier is concerned, but certainly functionally. The condition of such a possibility is absence of any positive or natural bond between form and purpose. Capricious whim could only substitute the square for the round if there was no natural "expression" to begin with, i.e., if the "architectural display" at issue had no "inherent shape."[31] Lost to the absence of an "inherent shape" as the condition of substitution is "the grand effect which columns always make." If the "architectural display" has no "inherent shape," the sign displaying it can never provide the needed assurance of truth. If the "effect" has no *natural* cause, the presence of form or shape cannot, simply and naturally, give Laugier assurance of the presence of "purpose," as the presence of "purpose" does not guarantee him the presence of the "inherent shape" because of the possibility of substitution. The "truth of the architectural display" presented must always remain in doubt, for the ability of the sign to display is, must necessarily be, irrespective of the presence or absence of the displayed "purpose."

The possibility of representation in spite of the presence or absence of the signified "purpose," is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Laugier's discussion of the pediment. The pediment, Laugier tells us, "represents the gable of the roof and, therefore, can never be anywhere

except across the width of a building. Its inherent shape is triangular and its place must always be above the entablature."[32] Therefore, it is fault:

> ... To erect the pediment on the long side of a building. Since the pediment represents the gable of a roof, it must be placed so as to conform to the thing it represents; the gable, however, is always set across the width and never along the length of a building. If only our architects would think a little about this reasoning, which is simplicity itself, it would not occur to them to place in center of a long facade sham pediments which do not signify anything. They believe the facade is made more attractive by thus interrupting uniformity but they should know that in all arts it is a sin against the rules to use superfluous things.[33]

A natural representation is essential and true insofar as it "conforms to the thing it represents." The same representation, on the other hand, is "superfluous," in fact a "sham," when it does not conform. If, however, truth is a question of conformity, inconformity - representation in the absence of "the thing" represented - though certainly "a sin against the rules of taste" is a choice that is not an aberration, a deviation from, or "a sin against" the rule of representation, but the rule of representation itself. The condition of inconformity, and for that matter and more important, of conformity is absence of an "inherent shape." The sign can only lie, or what amounts to the same, it can only conform, if its representing "shape" is not determined, inherently and naturally, by what it represents. Sham pediments can only be erected, if the representative function of the sign has nothing to do with the "purpose" it may or may not serve.

The condition of lie or substitution - the absence of an "inherent shape" - has already introduced a certain disagreeable choice, a certain distasteful arbitrariness of decision into the game of representation. In the absence of natural determination, the shape of the representer is necessarily the choice of one among a number of possibilities that include

not only, for instance, the round or the square, but a number of others, each of which Laugier would like to exclude in the name of natural law and of "inherent shape" for the "love of truth" and of "true beauty."

> No doubt one must, if possible, make variation, but without departing from the laws of nature. Otherwise who will prevent an artist, intent on even more variation, from replacing round columns with oval ones or prism-shaped ones or with pillars having five, six or eight faces? By which principle would it be possible to forbid him these extravagances (*bizzarreries*)?[34]

By which principle indeed, if not the natural principle of "inherent shape?" Yet, the principles of substitution and lie, always render this natural principle powerless to forbid such "extravagances." Hence, the desire to prevent, to suppress, and to efface the other(s) that may otherwise speak of the absence of a given: a preventive principle or an "inherent shape."

Laugier reminds us again, had we needed a reminder, that nature is the figure of restriction and regulation without whose authority no extravagance can be forbidden. It is the figure that allows one set of formal choices, among many, to be set aside and venerated, not in the name of ulterior - cultural, social, or political - motives, but of truth, not arbitrarily, but according to immutable laws. If this universalization of the particular appears to mandate the deprecation and suppression of the other(s), it is because each is a relentless reminder of the particular and the arbitrary nature of the universal and the absolute. It is because each removes the foundation from underneath the theoretical edifice, as it speaks of a fundamental identity between the universal and the particular, the absolute and the arbitrary. It is this fundamental identity that the theoretical edifice tries to overcome with recourse to the authority of nature, on the one hand, and a certain self-deprecation, on the other.

Laugier's "inborn aversion" to the particular and the arbitrary is not so much an aversion to culture, portrayed as an unnecessary and distasteful substitute for nature, as it is an aversion to culture's lack of authority to forbid the other(s) as extravagances. It is in place of this lack that Laugier substitutes the authoritative figure of nature. In other words, all assertions to the contrary not withstanding, it is not culture that is a dangerous substitute for nature, rather it is the figure of nature that provides culture the measure of authority it lacks, i.e., the authority to deny its own arbitrariness. If the strategic logic of this discourse sees to the perpetual deprecation of culture, it is only to maintain the myth of nature as the source of the absolute and the universal. If culture allows itself to be deprecated as the figure of the arbitrary and the particular, it is to give itself the authority to exert an even greater hold on architecture. The various theoretical edifices of this discourse, we may conclude, are construed not so much to exclude culture as to allow culture to pass itself as nature.

Notes

1   Leone Battista Alberti, Ten Books on Architecture, 1755 Leoni Edition, Transatlantic Arts Inc., 1966, pp.112 & 113

2   Ibid.

3   Marc-Antoine Laugier, An Essay on Architecture, translated by Wolfgang and Annie Hermman, Hennesey & Ingalls Inc., Los Angeles, 1977, p.107

4   Ibid., p.22

5   John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, London, 1849, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1977, p.10

6   Henry Wotton, The Elements of Architecture, London, 1624, Da Capo Press, New York, 1970

7   Leone Battista Alberti, Ten Books on Architecture, 1755 Leoni Edition, Transatlantic Arts Inc., 1966, pp.112-113

8   John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, London, 1849, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1977, p.16

9   Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, Translated by Frederick Etchells, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960, pp.102-103

10 John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, London, 1851-53, p.400

11 See: Nirmal Kumar Bose, Canons of Orissan architecture, Cosmo, New Delhi, 1982
    Bruno Dagens, Mayamata: An Indian Treatise on Housing Architecture and Iconography, Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Scientific Research, New Delhi, 1985
    Stephen Skinner, The living earth manual of feng-shui , Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1982

12 Leone Battista Alberti, Ten Books on Architecture, 1755 Leoni Edition, Transatlantic Arts Inc., 1966, p.195

13 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le Duc, Lectures on Architecture, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1987, vol. 1, p.451

14 Etienne-Louis Boullée, Architecture, Essay on Art, in Boullée & Visionary Architecture, Helen Rosenau, Harmony Books, New York, 1976, p.84

15 Marc-Antoine Laugier, An Essay on Architecture, translated by Wolfgang and Annie Hermman, Hennesey & Ingalls Inc., Los Angeles, 1977, p.22

16 Ibid. p.3

17 Ibid. p.11

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. pp.11-12

20 Ibid. p.13

21 Ibid. pp.12-13

22 Ibid. p.3

23 Ibid. p.63

24 Ibid. P.25

25 Ibid. p.19

26 Ibid. p.16

27 Ibid. p.153

28 Ibid. p.24

29 Ibid. p.152

30 Ibid. p.18

31 Ibid. p.25

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid. p.26

34 Ibid. p.17