

ON TRUTH, IN THEORY

Representation And The Crisis Of Signification In Theoretical Discourse On Architecture

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I.

For the better part of the past three decades, the Modern movement has been the subject of a vigorous critical reexamination in the field of architecture. Central to this reexamination has been the Modernist stance on architectural signification. The Movement's rejection of representational expressions has been severely criticized by various reform-minded critics who place the rejection at the root of a crisis in contemporary architectural signification. This crisis, in turn, is said to call for, if not mandate, immediate reform in the field.

To date, the most comprehensive critique of the Modernist stance on architectural signification appears in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's "Learning From Las Vegas." I will not take issue with either the validity of the criticism leveled against the Modernist stance on representation or the contemporary critique of Modernism *per se*. On their path from crisis to reform, the critics of Modernism are not alone. They are in the company of the proponents of virtually every other reform movement in architecture since the Renaissance. At the outset of the critical discourse of each movement we find the call to reform justified in terms of an inherited crisis in architectural signification. I wish to analyze in this work the critical reasoning behind the pronouncement of a "crisis" in architectural signification at the outset of the critical inquiries of the contemporary reform movement and those that came before it. I wish to trace the implicit similarity between what each of these reform movements identifies as a "crisis" and what each proposes as the solution. I will also trace the ways in which these successive pronouncements of crises in signification relate to a pervasive apprehension in the field for representation. I hope to demonstrate that the incessant re-evaluation and the ultimate devaluation of representation in the critical discourse of architecture constitute so many attempts at coming to terms with the inevitability of representation, which is consistently deemed at odds with an ideal *truth* in/of signification.

II.

To illustrate “the discrepancies between substance and image in Modern architecture’s technological machismo and the costliness of its frequently empty gestures” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 150) as well as the “confusions and ironies” that have resulted from “this unpleasantly complex and contradictory situation” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 148) the authors of “Learning From Las Vegas” present us with a comparative analysis of two buildings: one the Crawford Manor by Paul Rudolph (fig. 1), as an example of the ill-fated Modernist approach, the other Venturi & Roch's Guild House (fig. 2), as an example of an alternative contemporary approach. Both are housing projects for the elderly built in the mid-60's, the latter in Philadelphia, the former in New Haven.

The authors delimit their comparative analysis to three issues: Construction techniques, construction material, and the articulation of the facade. The construction technique and materials of both buildings are “ordinary and conventional” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 90), but the two buildings express these facts very differently.¹ The structure and the construction materials of the Guild House are “ordinary and conventional and look it” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 90). In Crawford Manor they appear “more advanced technologically and more progressive spatially,” i.e.,



Fig. 1- Crawford Manor, Paul Rudolph, New Haven, 1962-66



Fig. 2- Guild House, Venturi and Rauch, Cope and Lippincott, Associates, Philadelphia, 1960-63

they are “ordinary and conventional but do not look it” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 90-91). The analysis extends in the same vein to the exterior facade of both buildings. For instance, the windows of the Guild House, we are told, “Look like, as well as are windows” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 91) (fig. 3). In Crawford Manor the windows appear as “modulated” voids set between and in contrast to the solid structural elements, marking the transition of interior and exterior spaces (fig. 4). They *are*, in other words, windows, “But do not look it” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 91).

On the exterior facade of the Guild House, the authors tell us, no attempt is made to convey the interior spatial arrangement of the building. The facade is divided, contrary to the six equal stories of the interior, into three unequal stories.² On the whole, the compartment is said to suggest the proportions of a Renaissance Palazzo, while the projecting frontal piece suggests a “giant Order” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 92).

The facade of the Guild House with its historic allusions to Renaissance palazzos and classical Orders - contrary to the internal arrangement of the building - may appear, therefore, to be doing exactly what the Crawford Manor is elsewhere criticized and disdained for doing, i.e., to “look” and not be or conversely, to be and not “look”



Fig. 3- Crawford Manor, Paul Rudolph, New Heaven, 1962-66



Fig. 4- Guild House, Venturi and Rauch, Cope and Lippincott, Associates, Philadelphia, 1960-63

it. However, the historic allusions of the facade of the Guild House are owed to “appliqué” ornamental features, e.g., string courses, ornamental grills, etc., that are, the authors contend, quite “explicit” as external adornment. They *are* ornamental, extraneous, and “look it.” Although the Guild House is neither a Renaissance Palazzo nor a giant Order, its historic allusions do not purport to be anything but allusions in substance as well as image. It is in this “explicit” confession to representational allusion, in this venerated correspondence of “image” to “substance,” that all the critical difference is said to lie.

On the exterior facade of the Crawford Manor, in contrast, there are no overt ornamental features. The expression is limited “to strident articulations of the pure architectural elements of space, structure, and program.” These are said to convey “implicit” and at that “abstract meanings” that though purportedly in reference to the functional “substance” of the building, actually contradict it. For instance, the vertical shafts “connote structural piers (they are not structural), ... harboring servant spaces and mechanical systems (actually kitchens), terminating in the silhouettes of exhaust

systems (suitable to industrial laboratories)” and not housing for the elderly, etc. (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 93).

The same criticism is said to hold true for virtually all of Modern architecture whose formal expressions are “technological and functional” in nature, though when the “functional elements work symbolically, they usually do not work functionally” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 137). Additional examples of this type of “contradiction - or at least the lack of correspondence - between image and substance” in which Modern architecture is said to abound, are such follies as “the use of flowing space for private functions, industrial clerestories for suburban high schools, exposed ducts that collect dust and conduct sound,” etc. (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 137).

At the root of the crisis of signification in Modern architecture, at the root of all the “confusions and ironies” that have resulted from its “unpleasantly complex and contradictory” expressions, lies a gap between “image” and “substance.” It is in turn the closure of this gap that the authors appear to seek in search of a solution to the crisis at hand. However, the authors tell us that their criticism of the Crawford Manor and “the architecture it represents” is not concerned with “honesty in architecture or a lack of correspondence between substance and image, *per se*” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 101). They criticize Modern architects not only for “denying in theory what they were doing in practice,” not only because “they said one thing and did another,” but above all because:

By limiting itself to strident articulation of the pure architectural elements of space, structure, and program, Modern architecture’s expression has become a dry expressionism, empty and boring - and in the end irresponsible. Ironically the Modern architecture of today, while rejecting explicit symbolism and frivolous appliqué ornament, has distorted the whole building into one big ornament. In substituting “articulation” for decoration, it has become a duck (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 103).

The “duck” is in reference to buildings with a singular, *self-referential* message as opposed to the “decorated shed,” e.g., the Guild House, with its multiple layers of *representational* messages and historic allusions. The former denotes nothing beyond what it is, the latter’s expression is always in excess of what it is. It is not, however, because Modern buildings are “ducks” that the authors criticize them but because “the

content of the unacknowledged symbolism of current Modern architecture is silly. We have been designing dead ducks” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 162). What the authors criticize is, in other words, Modernism’s delimitation of expression to self-referential signs whose statements are inevitably “dry, empty, and boring” when they are “functional,” i.e., “limited to strident articulation of the pure architectural elements of space, structure, and program,” or else “silly, meaningless, and irrelevant” when they are “technological,” i.e., limited to the celebration of “the ‘modern’ technology of the Industrial Revolution” - “nineteenth-century style” - and not the “current electronic technology” (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 115/151). What the authors criticize is the misconception of Modern architects “that Firmness and Commodity equal Delight,” whereas in the end it results in nothing but the production of “dead forms, irrelevant, or irresponsible” expressions and “empty” or “meaningless” signs (Venturi and Scott Brown 1972: 134).

Although the broader critical issues are, on the one hand, an “unacknowledged” recourse to representation in Modern architecture - giant ducks - and on the other and most crucial, the “content” of this representation - giant *dead* ducks - the critical criterion is the same as that applied to Crawford Manor. The self-absorbed and as such empty and dead expressions of Modern architecture are “meaningless and irrelevant” because “this is not the time and ours is not the environment for heroic communication through pure architecture.” The irresponsible images of Modernism contradict or at least do not correspond to the substance of life as it is lived today. Needless to say that it is living forms, relevant expressions, and meaningful signs that the authors seek in their quest to bridge the gap between image and substance or else form and content in the “electronic” age.

Whether historic or contextual allusions in the form of “appliqué ornaments” constitute a relevant or responsible stance and whether lack of correspondence between image and substance constitutes a critical criterion I shall not address at this time. What I wish to pursue instead is the use of the same critical criterion, the same critical reasoning and to an extent even the same critical vocabulary in defense of Modern architecture nearly a half century earlier. A case in point is Le Corbusier’s argumentations in defense of Modernism in “Towards a New Architecture”:

A great epoch has begun.
There exists a new spirit.

There exists a mass of work conceived in the new spirit; it is to be met with particularly in industrial production.

Architecture is stifled by custom.

The “styles” are a lie.

Style is a unity of principles animating all the work of an epoch, the result of a state of mind which has its own special character.

Our own epoch is determining, day by day, its own style.

Our eyes, unhappily, are unable yet to discern it (Le Corbusier, 1923/1960: 9).

Le Corbusier contends later in the text that the architectural forms of the age of “styles” remain “the intolerable witnesses to a dead spirit,” the “old clothes of a past age” (Le Corbusier, 1923/1960: 85-88). He could as well have said the irrelevant or irresponsible expressions of a past age and the meaningless or empty forms of a dead spirit.³ Nevertheless, even though the agendas differ, the critical reasoning, if not the vocabulary, is identical. Here as well it is the critical absence of meaning in architecture that is at issue. Here as well, at the root of the crisis of signification in architecture is a discrepancy between substance and image: the substance of life in a great new epoch and the “intolerable” architectural images of a “dead spirit.” The desire to eradicate this discrepancy is what Corbu in turn dramatizes as “architecture or revolution,” i.e., either new architectural clothes for the “spirit” of the great epoch or else societal revolt against the discrepancy.

In spite of the similarity of their critical reasoning, Le Corbusier and the contemporary critics differ in their proposed solutions. Whereas Le Corbusier seeks the remedy to the malaise of old and dead architectural signs in the addition of Firmness to Commodity in search of Delight, the other authors seek to redeem the lost meaning of the architectural sign, at the risk of simplification, by learning from Las Vegas.

Neither of these two seemingly opposed solutions to the crisis of architectural signification are entirely unique to the history of critical discourse on architecture. The Modernist solution is similar, if not fundamentally identical, to that proposed by the reform-minded theoreticians of the Enlightenment, e.g., Laugier, Boullée, and for that matter, despite formal differences, the Gothic Revivalist, Pugin. These otherwise distinct points of view converge in their definition of the *living* or else the *true* sign as opposed to the *dead*, the *empty* or the *false* sign. What this group of theoreticians considers a solution to the crisis of signification in architecture is a sign or expression whose form is *determined* by its signified content, i.e., a self-referential sign or an in-

formed sign. The solution this group offers is a sign that expresses nothing but itself, nothing but what is present, i.e., a “duck” in contemporary terms.

Those critical of the Modernist stance as “irresponsible” and “irrelevant” offer, on the other hand, much the same solution offered by the theoreticians of the Romantic age, e.g., Ruskin, or the Renaissance, e.g., Alberti. The point of convergence for these otherwise diverse points of view is architecture defined as a mode of representation. This group of theoreticians views the architectural form not only as a means to the procurement of firmness and commodity but also, linked inextricably to the question of aesthetic delight and beauty, as a means to the representation of the very ideas or meanings deemed absent in the architectural expressions of the former group. These ideas or meanings, these intelligible mathematical verities whose “true seat is in the mind” as Alberti viewed them (Alberti 1452/1966: 195), these “divine and not human attributes” as Ruskin saw them (Ruskin 1843: 77), these edicts of history and culture as a more contemporary view would have them, are not viewed as inherent to the architectural form but only re-presented by them.

In sum, what historically appears to spur critical, reform-minded discourse on architecture is, on the one hand, a ceaseless desire for true and meaningful expressions, and on the other, an overwhelming disdain for any discrepancy between meaning and form or substance and image in architectural signification. Each succeeding generation, including our own, inherits from this incessant search not only a single measure for evaluating the architectural sign - irrevocably, dead or alive, true or false, full or empty - but also the apparent obligation to eradicate any discrepancy between form and meaning or image and substance in architectural signification. The only point of contention on the question of signification appears to be whether the solution to the crisis of signification lies in representation or self-referential presentation. Each position has enjoyed prominence for a time, only to be displaced by the other in time; with no apparent resolution afforded the repetition. The current interest in representation as a solution to the crisis of self-referential presentation in Modern architecture is only the latest attempt in a long line of similar attempts, each unaware of its own history. If the history of this discourse has an abject lesson, it is that this solution is likely to be identified as the root cause of a crisis in signification by the next generation as it was by the last.

III.

The overwhelming preoccupation of architectural theoreticians with true and meaningful signs is not altogether peculiar if we consider that the question of signification in theoretical discourse on architecture is directly linked to the question of aesthetic expression. John Ruskin summed up a unanimous sentiment in this discourse when he wrote that, "Nothing can be beautiful which is not true" (Ruskin 1843: 25). Truth in signification, which is invariably defined in terms of the transparency of image to substance, has been and to an extent remains the first and the foremost condition for all aesthetic expressions.

Although there is general agreement over the assertion that "Nothing can be beautiful which is not true," the theoreticians of the field part ways over the validity of reversing the agreed upon formula, i.e., over whether anything can be true and not beautiful. Much of the debate over representation between the two groups I mentioned earlier is directly related to the question of whether or not representational expressions can be true, and therefore the conveyer of aesthetic ideas. The group that deprecates and urges the exclusion of representation from practice as a false and potentially deceptive mode of expression finds representation incapable of conveying aesthetic ideas. The other deems it otherwise only insofar as representation can withstand the test of truth. The point of contention between the two is perhaps best summarized by Ruskin in a critique of the Neo-Classical stance on representation, truth, and beauty, as advanced, for instance, by Marc-Antoine Laugier or Etienne-Louis Boullée. Ruskin writes:

To assert that the beautiful is the true, appears, at first, like asserting that propositions are matter, and matter propositions. But giving the best and the most rational interpretation we can, and supposing the holders of this strange position to mean only that things are beautiful which appear what they indeed are, and ugly which appear what they are not, we find them instantly contradicted by each and every conclusion of experience. A stone looks as truly a stone as a rose looks a rose, and yet it is not so beautiful; a cloud may look more like a castle than a cloud, and be the more beautiful on that account. I am at a loss to know how any so untenable a position could ever have been advanced; but it may, perhaps, have arisen from some confusion of the beauty of art with the beauty of nature, and from an illogical expansion of

the very certain truth, that nothing is beautiful in art, which, professing to be an imitation, or a statement, is not as such in some sort true (Ruskin 1848: 29).

The dispute between Ruskin and his immediate predecessors, which is in many ways similar to the dispute between our contemporary critics and their immediate predecessors, is neither over the equation of beauty and truth, nor over the possibility of making a clear distinction between truth and falsehood. The dispute is only over whether truth is inclusive of representational expressions or not. Unlike his predecessors, and for that matter his Modernist successors, Ruskin takes an inclusive stance on the *representative* or the *imitative* sign in so long as it is “in some sort true.” He explains the condition of the inclusion with yet another distinction. This time, a distinction in “essence” between what is and what is not a true representation. Ruskin tells us that, “It is very necessary, to mark clearly wherein consists the essence of fallacy as distinguished from supposition” (Ruskin 1849: 37). He deems the distinction “very necessary,” because “fallacy” and “supposition” or else the false and the true representation are, in “essence,” similar. As opposed to “presence or reality,” to those things “which appear what they indeed are,” both the true and the false representation summon the conception of “things absent or impossible” (Ruskin 1849: 37). Both “appear” to be “what they are not” (Ruskin 1849: 37). There is, however, a vital difference between the two. The difference, Ruskin tells us, is in “confession” to “actual absence or impossibility at the moment of apparent presence or reality” (Ruskin 1849: 38). The true representation confesses to be a representation. The false does not. Hence the vital difference. If we recall, it was this difference that justified the “explicit” appliqué ornaments of the Guild House, and doomed the “heroic” expressions of the Crawford Manor. The former were said to be extraneous and “look it,” whereas the structural connotations of the latter *looked* it but they were not “it.”

Although Ruskin and by extension our contemporary critics do not delimit truth in signification to the presence of the “thing” represented, but instead to an act of confession, their inclusive stance on representation is, nevertheless, adamantly exclusive of false representations. In other words, even when the critical discourse of architecture assumes an inclusive stance on representation, a certain type of it remains impermissible and unacceptable. Ruskin, for one, attributes his contempt for this type of representation to the fact that the false is not only a “contemptible, violation of truth” (Ruskin 1849: 38) but also “in itself revolting and degrading” (Ruskin 1843: 48),

in itself “a corruption which we have to guard against” (Ruskin 1849: 43) in all facets of architectural signification.

I now turn to why Ruskin, in specific, and the discursive tradition that he exemplifies, in general, find the “false” bearing the mark of violation, revulsion, and degradation - be this “false” inclusive of all representational expressions or only the non-confessional type, the type marked by a discrepancy or gap between substance and image. I hope to point out the paradoxes and the inconsistencies that permeate the desire for the correspondence of image to substance in signification and translate into an oscillation between representation and self-referential presentation in a never-ending quest for the ideal expression. I limit my analysis here to Ruskin’s discourse on the subject, in part, because of his comprehensive discussion of the issues at hand and in part because of the similarity and the relevance of the debate then to the current debate on signification.

IV.

A false representation, Ruskin tells us, “May be generally defined as the inducing the supposition of some form or material which does not actually exist” (Ruskin 1849: 48). Cases in point are the “introduction of members” - for instance structural members - “which should have, or profess to have a duty and have none” (Ruskin 1849: 42), or the painting of surfaces to represent some material other than the existing one, for instance, the painting of wood with the deceitful intent of making it appear as marble. Ruskin’s evaluative criterion is similar, if not identical, to the criterion applied by the authors of “learning from Las Vegas” to the evaluation of Modern Architecture, e.g., Mies van der Rohe’s use of ornamental I-beams that, as Ruskin would have put it, “Profess to have a duty and have none.” The decisive criterion for both authors is, at the risk of repetition, to be and not “look it,” or conversely to “look” and not be it. At issue for both is a discrepancy between substance and image. What we must now ask is what constitutes the condition of its possibility, i.e., “inducing the supposition of some form or material which does not actually exist” (Ruskin 1849: 48)?

What makes representation or re-presentation possible is, Ruskin tells us, “any fact of nature,” that is, any fact of “form,” any fact of “color,” material and the like (Ruskin 1843: 68). These facts that on the whole constitute the “real presence” of a thing in

nature are individually and collectively reproducible, imitable, and repeatable. Form as one such repeatable “fact,” Ruskin tells us:

... is form, *bona fide* and actual, whether in marble or in flesh - not an imitation or resemblance of form, but real form. The chalk outline of the bough of a tree on paper, is not an imitation; it looks like chalk and paper - not like wood, and that which it suggests to the mind is not properly said to be *like* the form of a bough, it is the form of a bough (Ruskin 1843: 19).

Form in particular and “facts” in general are *bona fide*, actual, and real regardless of whether they appear in marble - an “apparent presence” - or in flesh - a “real presence.” However, Ruskin insists that this indifference should not lead to any “confusion of the beauty of art with the beauty of nature.” Although, for instance, the chalk outline of the bough of a tree on paper is the form of a bough, nevertheless, this form belongs in “reality” to the tree *naturally*. Although this form may be divorced from the tree that originally gives it as “fact” or rather its “fact,” and though its representation is no less actual, real, and for that matter aesthetically appealing, nevertheless, the re-presented form is not the form of what is “present,” but the form of what is “absent or impossible.” In “reality” facts constitute what is, in “ideality” what is not. Hence, the “point,” as Ruskin defines it, where either “reality” as *self-presentation* or ideality as *re-presentation* “begins or ends” (Ruskin 1849: 48).

Deceit is as yet nowhere to be seen and that is because “it is not until after a certain number of ideas of truth have been collected together,” not until “certain number” of the “facts” of a thing - the number “we are usually cognizant of in its real presence” - have been brought together in a re-presentation of it, “that we arrive at an idea of imitation” or “deception” (Ruskin 1843: 22). It might at first sight appear, Ruskin contends, that the multiplicity of facts in such a representation makes it superior to the representation of a single fact. This is not so. The moment, he writes:

... Ideas of truth are grouped together, so as to give rise to an idea of imitation, they change their very nature - lose their essence as ideas of truth - and are corrupted and degraded, so as to share in the treachery of what they have produced. Hence, finally, ideas of truth are the foundation, and ideas of imitation the destruction, of all art (Ruskin 1843: 24).

We must now add destruction as a consequence of deceit to a list that already includes revulsion, degradation, and corruption. The reason for condemnation remains

the same in each instance. Deceit is all the preceding because it constitutes too much of a good thing - too many facts or too many truths. As strange as this reasoning may seem, it rests, to be sure, on a foundation. The soundness of this foundation is what we must now submit to test.

Representation as repetition of “facts” is pleasing, noble, and true so long as the number of “facts” re-presented are less than the number “we are usually cognizant of” in the “real presence” of the “thing” represented (Ruskin 1843: 22). It is pleasing, noble, and true so long as the line separating “real presence” from “apparent presence” appears distinct, so long as Ruskin is able to set the two apart, the one as “reality,” the other as “ideality.” When the number of facts re-presented equal the number of facts “we are usually cognizant of” in the “real presence” of the thing represented, at that moment the re-presented facts “change their very nature, ... lose their essence” and become “corrupted and degraded” in a *treacherous* re-production whose appearance marks the disappearance of the desired line between “reality” and “representation.” Hence the condemnation of deceit though not simply because of what it is - too much or too many - but also because of what it does to that which it represents: “real presence.” Of this destructive “effect,” Ruskin, discussing the “utterly base and inadmissible” practice of “painting of surfaces to represent some other material,” writes:

I have made it a rule in the present work not to blame specifically; but I may, perhaps, be permitted, while I express my sincere admiration of the very noble entrance and general architecture of the British Museum, to express also my regret that the noble granite foundation of the staircase should be mocked at its landing by an imitation, the more blameable because tolerably successful. The only effect of it is to cast suspicion upon the true stones below, and upon every bit of granite afterwards encountered (Ruskin 1849: 51).

The more successful, that is, truth-full or fact-full, an imitation, the more blamable it is because it casts suspicion on the “real presence” of the imitated. This is the destructive “effect” - revolting, corrupting, and degrading. To a “successful” imitation Ruskin loses, as he puts it, the “sense of it,” though, we should note, not the “sense” of the “ideality” of the ideal, but the “sense” of the “reality” of the “real.” What he loses to a successful *mock* is “real presence,” that is, the ability to determine it, to mark it, limit it or delimit it as distinct from “apparent presence.” What Ruskin loses to this “effect” is that “presence” in the “real” that is assumed “absent or impossible” in the

ideal and thus a secure foundation for distinction between the two. What he loses is the presence of stone as the condition of signification, representation, or expression of “real presence.” What he loses is the desired dependence in “real presence” of appearance on being or image on substance. If, however, the “real” stone could become suspect in the company of its mock, if its stone appearance could be taken for an imitation in such company, then this appearance must necessarily have nothing to do with the “real presence” of stone or else suspicion would not be possible.

What this destructive “effect” indicates, what in effect is the condition of its possibility and at that the possibility of repetition, imitation, or re-presentation, is the independence of representation from the presence or absence of the signified referent in “reality” as in “ideality.” What it indicates is that “real presence” itself constitutes a *representation*, that “real presence” is already in the position of “apparent presence,” that only as such can it be suspected, corrupted, or degraded, that the “sense of” its “real presence” was never given, always already lost to the representation of what is as what appears..

That “real presence” constitutes a representation is perhaps best described by Ruskin himself in the discussion of that one “deliberate treachery” that was the “cause of the fall of Gothic architecture throughout Europe” (Ruskin 1849: 59/62). The cause of this fall, Ruskin contends, was the sacrifice of a “great principle of truth,” i.e., the sacrifice of “the expression of the qualities of the material” used (Ruskin 1849: 63). When Gothic builders substituted line for mass as the element of decoration in the “system of intersectional moldings,” they sacrificed the expression of the “first attributes” or “facts” of their material (Ruskin 1849: 59-63). Consequently, the system of intersectional moldings or traceries lost its essence, if not its “sense” as a structure of stone, because “the whole fragility, elasticity, and weight of the material” were thus “to the eye, if not in terms, denied” (Ruskin 1843: 22) So fell, Ruskin tells us, “The great dynasty of medieval architecture all because of that one endeavor to assume the semblance of what it was not” (Ruskin 1849: 68).

It is not, therefore, only the addition of “facts” to “apparent presence,” but their subtraction from “real presence” as well that incurs a loss of “sense” or of “essence,” giving rise, Ruskin tells us, to “multitudinous forms of disease and decrepitude” (Ruskin 1849: 68). A material such as stone only appears as what it is, if its “first attributes,

facts, or qualities” - its “fragility, elasticity, weight” and others - are not “denied” or “sacrificed.” If “denied” this “expression” or rather representation, stone loses its “essence” and if given a substitute “expression” in place of the one “denied,” stone even assumes the semblance of what it is not. This could only occur, however, on one condition. A material such as stone could only be “denied” its proper “expression,” the “expression” of its “essence,” and it could only “assume” the “expression” of something other, if it had no proper, inherent, or “true” expression that was not already a *representation* of certain imitable, repeatable “facts” or “attributes” whose representation or “expression” the “real presence” of stone did not govern, arrest, or guarantee. This material could only be “denied” expression or made to “assume” one, if there was no positive link between what it was and what it expressed or appeared as to begin with; no positive link between “its real presence” and what “we are usually cognizant of” in its “real presence.” The condition of the possibility of denial and substitution, including the possibility of “apparent presence” defined as imitation or representation, is the impossibility of “real presence” defined by Ruskin as things “which appear what they indeed are.” If things could “appear what they indeed are,” if what they “are” could indeed appear as such, they could never be imitated, repeated, or made to “assume the semblance of” what they are not. In order to be imitated, the original must necessarily have an imitable appearance that appears as such irrespective of what it indeed is, irrespective of what is assumed present in the “real” and absent in the ideal. To appear and re-appear, the imitated original must itself be a *representation*, if, of course, by representation we are to understand appearance despite or in spite of what is. Yet, if there is no original that is not already a representation and that as the condition of the possibility of re-representation - “real or apparent, true or false” - then there is no beginning to be identified as “real presence” and no end to mark the limits of two opposite domains, no “point” where reality or ideality, truth or deception “begins or ends.” Representation covers the entire field, placing “real” and “apparent presence” in the same position. From this vantage point, deceit can no longer, if ever, designate a form of “disease, decrepitude, corruption, or degradation” that has not already befallen truth as the condition of the possibility of its appearance and the impossibility of its determination as a thing which “shows itself for what it is.”

Although the desired reality here appears to be marked by the very qualities that are assumed peculiar only to the “apparent” - true and false - this is not to imply that

there is no difference between, for instance, real stone and what is a representation of stone but that this difference does not constitute a hierarchy in representation, that it marks neither a beginning nor an end, neither a “point” identifiable as such where reality begins and ideality ceases, nor a “point” where truth begins and deception ceases. It is only to imply that this difference is also an indifference, that each, real or ideal, true or false, is a form of representation and as such incapable of assuming or being assigned a different position in a hierarchic structure constructed on the bases of the presence or absence of a positive or causal relationship between the representer and the represented and as such also on confession to what is or is absent because the “true” appearance of the “real” is no more guided or determined by what is and as such no more capable of a different confession to what is than the deceptive or the true appearance of the “apparent” alike. It is only to imply that to graft this difference into a hierarchic structure and thereby identify the “point” where ideality begins and reality ceases, Ruskin must necessarily resort to an exclusionary frame or frame-up: the exclusionary frame of confession, of less “facts” and of no deception.

It may seem at this point that what Ruskin desires and what deceptive representations deny him is no more than a clear hold on the line separating reality from ideality in the art of architecture as in all else. Though this much Ruskin does indeed desire, there is nevertheless more. What in addition he wishes for and what true representations deny him as well, he states in the following manner:

I sometimes wish that truth should so far literally prevail as that all should be gold that glittered, or rather that nothing should glitter that was not gold. Nevertheless, nature herself does not dispense with such resemblances (Ruskin 1849: 53).

What Ruskin sometimes wishes is for truth to prevail over all that appear what they are not. What he at times wishes is not simply for things to show themselves for what they are, “real” or “apparent” but for a *literal* link or relationship between what is and what appears, between glitter and gold, *always*. What Ruskin sometimes wishes for is, therefore, no less than the impossibility of representation, the impossibility of a gap in between being and appearing that marks for him, despite what he sometimes wishes, the beginning and the end of two opposite domains, the domain of the “real” and the domain of the “apparent.”

Ruskin is, of course, neither the first nor the last theoretician in the history of

theoretical discourse on architecture to wish for the impossibility of the “apparent.” Throughout the history of this discourse “apparent presence,” as invariably measured against “real presence,” has been an undesirable or at best a less desirable possibility. One that “nature herself does not dispense with” and consequently a possibility that Ruskin and his numerous predecessors and successors are compelled to come to terms with in spite of what he and the others wish for, be this named the real, the true, the present, or the original - they amount, in a manner, to same. Since the impossibility of the “apparent” can only be wished for, numerous theoreticians, in perpetual succession, have made every effort to distinguish, separate, and disown representation as a negation, complication, or imitation of “real presence,” in the name of a potential corruptive or destructive “effect.” The one invariably attributed to a transgression of the line that is said to separate reality from ideality. This line’s perpetual elucidation points to a ceaseless task within the confines of a discourse on design that, for all its intents and purposes, is a discourse fearful of signs.

Although as the bearer of a destructive “effect,” it is with “apparent presence” that Ruskin and numerous other theoreticians in this discursive tradition take issue, what is at stake in this discourse, is not “apparent presence,” but “real presence.” It is the desired transparency of appearance to being, or what amounts to same, the desired mastery of appearance in the name of being that spurs this theoretical discourse. If representation is made to bear the full critical force of the discourse that is because in every appearance of the “apparent” the desire to transcend the gap in between being and appearing or image and substance is denied the possibility of its fulfillment. However, the denied transparency is invariably imputed to an inherited loss in representation, the pronouncement of which as a crisis constitutes the point of departure for every theoretical speculation on representation. A crisis that numerous theoreticians, one after the other, seek to surmount in the name of truth and of things that “appear what they indeed are.” If, however, there is a critical loss in the architectural expressions of any one generation - as viewed by the next - it is not the loss of truth in representation, but the loss to representation of things that “appear what they indeed are” always already. Nevertheless, inherent to the idea of a critical loss is the supposition of its prior absence and the possibility, if not the urgency, of its re-appropriation. Hence, the attempt of numerous theoretician in this discursive tradition to recoup a loss whose ceaseless attribution to representation allows each to

assume the appearance of what things indeed are as an original mode of expression against which representation is judged and thereby redeemed or condemned, cured or disowned.

NOTES

¹ Conventional frame supporting laid-up masonry walls of poured-in-place concrete in both cases, with concrete block facing in the case of the Crawford Manor and brick in the case of the Guild House.

² The base is articulated by white glazed brick marking the entrance. The Piano Nobile and the attic are separated by a white glazed brick string course and articulated by balconies with ornamental grills and vertical stripes, topped by an arched window.

³ Frank Lloyd Wright expressed his contempt for the architecture of “Styles” as “Living on the past, irreverently mutilating it in attempting to modify it - creating nothing ... taking the soul out of the thing in the process and trying to be content with the carcass, or shell or husk - or whatever it may be, that we have” (Wright 1975: 132). Viollet-le-Duc had expressed a similar sentiment some forty years earlier when he wrote that, “Our public buildings appear to be bodies destitute of a soul, the relics of a lost civilization, a language incomprehensible even to those who use it” (Viollet-le-Duc 1872/1987: 446)

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