

CALL FOR PAPERS

San Rocco 13: Pure Beauty

San Rocco is interested in gathering together the widest possible variety of contributions. *San Rocco* believes that architecture is a collective knowledge, and that collective knowledge is the product of a multitude. External contributions to *San Rocco* might take different forms. Essays, illustrations, designs, comic strips and even novels are all equally suitable for publication in *San Rocco*. In principle, there are no limits – either minimum or maximum – imposed on the length of contributions. Minor contributions (a few lines of text, a small drawing, a photo, a postcard) are by no means uninteresting to *San Rocco*. For each issue, *San Rocco* will put out a “call for papers” comprised of an editorial note and of a list of cases, each followed by a short comment. As such, the “call for papers” is a preview of the magazine. The “call for papers” defines the field of interest of a given issue and produces a context in which to situate contributions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

A External contributors can either accept the proposed interpretative point of view or react with new interpretations of the case studies. **B** Additional cases might be suggested by external contributors, following the approach defined in the “call for papers”. New cases might be accepted, depending on their evaluation by the editorial board. **C** Proposed contributions will be evaluated on the basis of a 500-word abstract containing information about the proposed submission’s content and length, as well as a list of the number and type of photographs, illustrations and/or drawings it includes. The abstract must be submitted as a PDF file that begins with the author’s name and the title of the proposal and includes reproductions of all images intended for publication. The PDF should be named using this format: SUR-NAME_TITLE.PDF. The editorial team of *San Rocco* will not review abstracts that fail to follow these guidelines. **D** Contributions to *San Rocco* must be written in English. *San Rocco* does not translate texts. **E** All texts (including footnotes, image credits, etc.) should be submitted digitally in .rtf format and edited according to the Oxford Style Manual. **F** All illustrations and drawings should be submitted digitally (in .tif or .eps format). Please include a numbered list of all illustrations and provide the following information for each: illustration source, name of photographer or artist, name of copyright holder, or “no copyright”, and caption, if needed. **G** *San Rocco* does not buy intellectual property rights for the material appearing in the magazine. *San Rocco* suggests that external contributors publish their work under Creative Commons licences. **H** Contributors whose work is selected for publication in *San Rocco* will be informed and will then start collaborating with *San Rocco*’s editorial board in order to complete the preparation of the issue. Proposals for contributions to *San Rocco* 13 must be submitted electronically to mail@sanrocco.info by 12 April 2016.

“We have . . . judgments of, or pleasure in, the beautiful: ‘this pleasure accompanies the ordinary apprehension [Auffassung; not perception] of an object by the imagination . . . by means of a procedure of the judgment which it must also exercise on behalf of the commonest experience.’ . . . This judgment is based on ‘that common and sound intellect [gemeiner und gesunder Verstand] which we have to presuppose in everyone.’ How does this ‘common sense’ distinguish itself from the other senses, which we also have in common but which nevertheless do not guarantee agreement of sensations? . . . The term ‘common sense’ meant a sense like our other senses – the same for everyone in his very privacy. By using the Latin term, Kant indicates that here he means something different: an extra sense – like an extra mental capability (German: *Menschenverstand*) – that fits us into a community. The ‘common understanding of men . . . tis the very least to be expected from anyone claiming the name of man.’ It is the capability by which men are distinguished from animals and from gods. It is the very humanity of man that is manifest in this sense . . . ‘The only general symptom of insanity is the loss of the *sensus communis* and the logical stubbornness in insisting on one’s own sense (*sensus privatus*), which [in an insane person] is substituted for it . . . Under the *sensus communis* we must include the idea of a sense common to all, i.e., of a faculty of judgment which, in its reflection, takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought, in order, as it were, to compare its judgment with the collective reason of humanity . . . This is done by comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgment of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man, by abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment . . .”

Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 70–71

“Tints happily broken and blended, and irregular masses of light and shadow harmoniously melted into each other, are, in themselves, as before observed, more grateful to the eye, than any single tints, upon the same principle that harmonious combinations of tones or

flavours are more grateful to the ear or the palate, than any single tones or flavours can be. They are therefore more properly beautiful, according to the strictest meaning of the word beauty, when applied to that which is pleasing to the sense only; and not, as it usually is, to that, which is alike pleasing to the senses, the intellect and the imagination; according to which comprehensive signification of the word, many objects, that we call picturesque, certainly are not beautiful; since they may be void of symmetry, neatness, cleanness, &c.; all which are necessary to constitute that kind of beauty, which addresses itself to the understanding and the fancy.”

Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne-Mews Gate and J. White-Fleet-Street, 1805), p. 148

Nobody talks about beauty. Nobody dares. (Or, at least, not in architecture; if you are in the soap business, then it’s another story.)

If you mention beauty – meaning a universally evident beauty – people stare at you like some sort of dinosaur that forgot to acknowledge its own extinction. Actually, they also fear that just before you acknowledge it, you could still eat them.

If you do dare to mention beauty, then some well-intentioned idiot says “beauty is subjective”, as if this indisputable truth (given that beauty *is*, of course, subjective) would implicitly mean that nothing subjective *and* shared (or universal, or common, or whatever you’d like to call it) could possibly exist; as if subjects could never agree, or could never admit their shared nature and recognize themselves in what, in the end, is nothing more than this: the sudden appearance of something that we all like, something to which we would all like to surrender ourselves (i.e., the sudden appearance of beauty).

So, yes: beauty is subjective. But this is no reason to stop worrying about beauty.

It seems difficult to talk about architecture without mentioning beauty. The modern idea of doing without beauty does not really seem to have worked out very well. Just randomly scan dezeen.com: Why make a “circular bridge on a Uruguayan lagoon”? Why make a “huge

horseshoe-shaped market hall”? And why make a “rusted steel staircase based on the form of a single-surface Möbius strip”? What are all these buildings trying to achieve? Are they trying really hard to look efficient? Environmentally friendly? Progressive? Why all this effort? Is this just a nonsensical race towards the bizarre? Or is it, in fact, just a misunderstood search for *beauty*? And why don't we want to call this thing by its name? (And wouldn't this quest be at least slightly more successful if it had been explicit about its goal from the beginning?)

Modern architecture murdered beauty, erasing it from the very core of the architectural discourse. In a few cases, the purge of beauty was an attempt to substitute the indirect politicalness of beauty with direct political action (although this remark probably only applies to Hannes Meyer's work and that of a few others). In the vast majority of cases, however, the expunging of beauty was just the consequence of a computational/liberal paradigm according to which anything that cannot be immediately calculated should simply be made to disappear. So beauty was suddenly dead, dead as a *dead dog*.

Efficiency became the new paradigm, and its logic relentlessly mined the possibility of thinking of beauty as the ultimate goal of architectural production. The minutiae of the difficult dialectic of beauty were soon lost in a rude new common sense. Given the obsession with measuring the effectiveness of any given building's performance, the pre-modern ineffability of the investigation of beauty became obscene, as did its embarrassing permalink with the sphere of the *sacer*. And in the space left vacant by the absence of a proper discourse on beauty, a lesser one soon developed. This space was soon occupied by “the picturesque”, a minor beauty entirely dedicated to the reveries of the individual. In fact, while beauty was abstract, logical and impersonal, the picturesque was sensual, psychological and personal. While beauty imposed itself on the subject (in the name of a Common that preceded all of the individuals belonging to it), the picturesque merely reawakened previous sensations experienced by the subject, without any interest in something shared or universal. (In the

end, if you did not eat the cookies as a child, then you can never rediscover their taste later in life.)

Beauty was political. Beauty was violent and optimistic. Beauty wanted to change the world. As such, beauty had a theory. The picturesque, on the contrary, was nostalgic and consolatory. The picturesque wanted the world to stay as it was. Thus, the picturesque had a hermeneutics.

If the production of beauty is an explicit goal of architecture, then aren't we in need of a proper theory of beauty?

Good old Immanuel Kant might help a bit here, specifically his analysis of the beautiful in his *Critique of Judgment*. Employing an apparent oxymoron, Kant refers to the beautiful as the result of a “subjective universal” judgement. The judgement is subjective; it is not tied to any absolute or determinate concept. However, the judgement is made in the belief that other people ought to agree with it, even though it is known that many will not. The force of this “ought” comes from a reference to a *sensus communis* – a common sense, a common *form of life*.

And using this principle as a starting point, wouldn't it be possible to imagine a few, schematic first elements of a theory of beauty for contemporary architecture?

For instance:

- a.) Beauty is both an explicit problem (in theory) and an explicit goal (in design).
- b.) There is no chance of producing beauty unless it is explicitly desired; or, beauty does not *happen*: beauty is a *project*; or, even better, beauty *only happens if it is a project* (given that, of course, the project of beauty is not sufficient to make beauty happen).
- c.) Beauty indeed *happens*; it is an event.
- d.) Beauty is the rediscovery of a pre-logical, pre-linguistic commonality that is achieved through logical, critical, political work.
- e.) Beauty must be *pure beauty*; it cannot do without the crazy pretension of being evident to everybody (*offered* to everybody).
- f.) *Pure beauty* is based on the refusal of an idea of a lesser beauty, of a minor, harmless beauty, a quasi-beauty that is to pure beauty as a lapdog is to a lover.

▪ Beauty and the Classic ▪

There seems to be a privileged relationship between beauty and the classic. Is what is classic simply what is *explicitly searching for beauty*? What would be a definition of classic that would imply this explicit search for beauty without making any reference to a “privileged tradition”? How might we imagine a non-Eurocentric classicism?

▪ VIII. The Bell

(Andrei Tarkovsky, *Andrei Rublev*, 1966) ▪

The bellmaker dies, survived only by his young son. The son tells the Grand Prince that he is the only one who knows his father’s secret way of casting the bell, so the boy is put in charge of the project. The production involves more than a hundred men, who often dispute the boy’s decisions. As the furnaces are stoked and the molten metal is poured into the mould, the boy asks God for help. If the bell fails to ring, the Grand Prince will have all of the workers beheaded. At the critical moment, the bell rings perfectly. The father had never shared his secret for casting a bell with his son.

▪ Bramantino’s Frog ▪

There is no reason for the frog – no excuse, no explanation, no secret. Just a frog, and a big one.

▪ The Case for Valerio Olgiati ▪

Olgiati’s oeuvre has been a consistent plea for returning beauty to the core of the architectural discourse. Olgiati is not ashamed of his search for beauty – and he is also reasonably successful in producing beauty in his buildings. But maybe Olgiati should tell us where all of this ought to lead. (There are certain points at which one *needs* a theory.) Lists of favourite cheeses, favourite wines and favourite cars are probably not enough.

▪ Dust ▪

In the 20th century a specific kind of beauty emerged from the dust. Anticlassical but not at all picturesque, this beauty can be traced as far back as Man Ray’s *Élevage de Poussière*. Schwitters, Kiefer, Roth and Baltz, among many others, are the adepts of this dusty beauty,

somehow primordial, somehow post-apocalyptic. Although Isozaki may have tried to pursue something similar, thus far architecture has hardly exploited this field.

▪ Before Marketing Took the Reins (Our Little Nostalgic Moment) ▪

Car design may have reached an all-time low. A Russian-dolls approach to brand identity that tried to provide every car manufacturer with an unmistakable line-up of models transferred decision-making power from the designers to the market experts. At the same time, the shift in importance from the older markets of Europe, the U.S. and Japan to the quickly developing new ones – with their allegedly different tastes – helped turn car design into a caricature of the profession it once was. We look back with astonished respect at the avant-garde car design of the 1970s and its consistent search for beauty through abstraction. It was a time when concept cars were more than just testing grounds used to judge the public’s reaction. Bertone, Giugiaro, Pininfarina, Towns – where are you now?

▪ High-tech ▪

Thirty years after the peak of High-tech Architecture, it might now be the time to investigate its sleek, chrome-addicted, mystical beauty – the Lloyd’s building, for instance.

▪ Beauty in Space ▪

The very idea that beauty can appear in space is a postulate of Italian Renaissance *painting*, not of Italian Renaissance *architecture*. Italian Renaissance architecture is just a consequence of this idea – that is, the idea of a painter: Giotto di Bondone.

▪ Abstract Landscape ▪

Landscape architecture is a creation of the picturesque. And so far landscape architecture has been loyal to its roots. To this point there has been no attempt to imagine a contemporary landscape architecture (or a contemporary landscape urbanism, for that matter) outside of the tradition of the picturesque. Would this be possible?

Kill the father!

▪ The Neo-picturesque ▪

The politically correct urbanism of the neo-liberal era came from a place where the Smithsons without moralism merged with Rossi without ideology. This aggressively inoffensive idea of the city proceeded to conquer Europe with an endless provision of *sensiblerie*. Here a little tear for a rabbit that has broken its paw, there a little song for those abandoned slippers next to the broom. Always very polite. No claim, no statement. Everything in tones of beige or mustard. Always contextual, no matter what the context actually was.

▪ Early Lewerentz Is So Much Better than Late Lewerentz ▪

Forget all those sombre bricks: the good Lewerentz is the one who made the Resurrection Chapel.

▪ Rembrandts, Tractors ▪

It is said that in the early years of the USSR, the new government wanted to sell off large parts of the tsarist art collections in order to buy more useful things: "We do not need Rembrandts; we need tractors!" Instead of eliminating aesthetic values, this type of "economy" makes room for a new hyper-aestheticization of the political. A new beauty appears, one that is fanatical and immoral, apocalyptic and punk.

In architecture, the most obvious case of this is the work of Hannes Meyer, possibly the most talented architect of his generation and one who radically set aside his own skills in order to submit entirely to ideology. Yet somehow, through this ideology, his talent resurfaces, but purified in a fanatical sacrifice: the Basel cemetery, the Society of Nations, the Peterschule, the Palace of the Soviets . . .

▪ This Is Not a Building ▪

Santa Maria dei Miracoli (1481-89) is a tiny church in Venice. The building is so small that it is not clear whether it is a church, a model, a tabernacle. Maybe it is just a box (a box for votive offerings, long since removed). The church is entirely covered in marble, both inside and outside, thus making it incredibly precious. It is hard to understand the church as architecture, and yet at the same time the specific beauty of Santa

Maria dei Miracoli is that of something which, in the end, is in fact a building and clearly produces a piece of the city. But how exactly is Santa Maria dei Miracoli architecture?

▪ The Al-Shaheed Monument ▪

The Al-Shaheed Monument, also known as the Martyr's Memorial, is a monument in Baghdad dedicated to the Iraqi soldiers who died in the war between Iran and Iraq. Inaugurated in 1983, the monument was designed by Saman Kamal and Ismail Fatah Al Turk. Saddam Hussein somehow paid for this thing, which may be the gentlest, least machismo-charged war memorial ever made – slightly postmodern Niemeyer, oversized Noguchi, over-oversized early Kapoor, the same idea as Francesco di Giorgio's in drawing UA 335v (mirroring/not entirely mirroring the apses), pure as water lilies in a shower gel commercial.

▪ Atmosphere ▪

No atmosphere in Giotto. Only protest and altercation in Masaccio. Zero atmosphere in Mantegna. No fog in the dark blue of Giotto's skies and no fog in the light blue of Piero's skies. No fog in Mantegna (and he lived in Mantua). Never, no atmosphere. No psychology; only public duties, only logic, only politics. All neat and sharp and clean like a car at a car dealership. All sour and bright like oranges received from a lady who does not love you. No consolation. No atmosphere.

“Ehrenvoll ist es für mich, oh Cäsar, dass du mein Werk zum öffentlichen Gut erhebst, allein, ich darf behaupten, dass ich es nicht nur für den Leser, sondern zuerst für mich geschrieben habe, dass dies seine innerste Notwendigkeit war, und dass es mein Werk ist, über das ich nach meiner Notwendigkeit, wie sie mir von den Cöttern bestimmt wird, verfügen muss und verfügen darf.”

“Darf ich meinerseits Ägypten freigeben? darf ich Germanien von Truppen entblößen? darf ich den Partnern wieder die Grenze ausliefern? darf ich Roms Frieden wieder preisgeben? darf ich dies? nein, ich darf es nicht, und selbst wenn ich den Befehl der Cötter hiezu erhalte, ich dürfte ihn nicht befolgen, obwohl es mein Friede ist und ich ihn erfochten habe, und es mein Werk ist . . .”

Der Vergleich hinkte, denn die Siege waren das gemeinsame Werk des Cäsars und des gesamten römischen Volkes und Heeres, während ein Gedicht die Tat eines Einsamen ist. Doch wie immer dem auch sei, ob der Vergleich widerspruchsvoll war oder nicht, das blosse Dasein des Cäsars hob allen Widerspruch auf.

“Dein Werk wird an seiner Staatstauglichkeit gemessen, das meine an der künstlerischen Vollkommenheit.”

Die künstlerische Vollkommenheit, das holde Muss des Schaffens, das keine Wahl lässt und über alles Menschliche und Irdische hinausreicht!

“Ich sehe keinen Unterschied; auch das Kunstwerk hat dem Nutzen der Allgemeinheit und damit dem Staate zu dienen, und der Staat selber ist Kunstwerk in der Hand desjenigen, der ihn zu bauen hat.”

Eine gewisse belästigte Müdigkeit war dem Cäsar anzumerken; die Erwägungen über das Kunstwerk waren ihm nicht wichtig, und es war etwas unklug darauf zu beharren: “Mag der Staat auch als Kunstwerk gelten, so ist es eines, das in Bewegung bleibt und immer weitere Vervollkommnung gestattet, während die Dichtung, ist sie einmal abgeschlossen, etwas in sich Ruhendes ist, so dass also der Schaffende seine Hand nicht von der Arbeit lassen darf, ehe sie nicht Vollkommenheit erreicht hat; er muss abändern, er muss das Unzulängliche ausmerzen, so ist es ihm befohlen, und er muss es tun, selbst auf die Gefahr hin, dass das ganze

Werk darob zugrunde geht. Es gibt nur einen einzigen Massstab, und der ist das Ziel des Werkes; nur am Ziel des Werkes kann ermessen werden, was bleiben darf und was vernichtungswürdig ist, wahrlich, auf dieses Ziel allein kommt es an, nicht auf das getane Werk, und der Künstler . . .”

Ungeduldig schnitt der Augustus die Rede ab: “Niemand wird dem Künstler abstreiten, dass er Unzulängliches verbessern oder dem gesamtes Werk unzulänglich ist . . .”

“Es ist unzulänglich.”

[. . .]

Die Götter wollten nicht, dass er die Verse fertigstelle, sie wollten nicht, dass er der Verse Unstimmigkeit behebe, denn alles Menschenwerk muss aus Dämmerung und aus Blindheit entstehen, also in Unstimmigkeit verbleiben; dies ist der Cötter Ratschluss. Und trotzdem, nun wusste er es: nicht nur Fluch, sondern auch Gnade ist in dieser Unstimmigkeit gegeben, nicht nur des Menschen Unzulänglichkeit, sondern auch seine Cottesnähe, nicht nur die Unfertigkeit der menschlichen Seele, sondern auch ihre Grösse, nicht nur die Blindheit des aus Blindheit geborenen Menschenwerkes, sondern auch seine Ahnungskraft, ohne deren blinde Schau es ja überhaupt nicht geschaffen worden wäre, da es – und in jedem Werk steckt der Keim hiezu – über sich selbst und den, der es geschaffen hat, weit hinausreichend, den Schaffende zum Schöpfer macht: denn all die All-Unstimmigkeit des Geschehens setzt erst ein, wenn der Mensch im All wirksam wird – weder im Geschehen des Cottes noch in dem des Tieres gibt es Unstimmigkeit –, erst in der Unstimmigkeit enthüllt sich die fruchtbare Herrlichkeit des menschlichen Loses, das ein Hinausgreifen über sich selber ist: zwischen der Stummheit des Tieres und der des Cottes steht das menschliche Wort, harrend, dass es selber in Verzückerung erschweige, überstrahlt vom Auge, dessen Blindheit verzückt sehend geworden ist: verzückte Blindheit, die Nicht-Vergeblichkeit.

Hermann Broch, *Der Tod des Vergils* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), pp. 292–93 and 407–8

Next page:
***Young Frankenstein*,**
directed by Mel Brooks,
1974

