

ENIGMA AS MORAL REQUIREMENT IN THE WAKE OF LEDOUX'S WORK: AUTONOMY AND EXPRESSION IN ARCHITECTURE

ALBERTO RUBIO-GARRIDO

Architecture's alleged capacity to meet ever new cultural and social challenges raises the dilemma between considering architecture a modern art—that is, an autonomous art—or a vehicle for the realization of social good. The nature of the dilemma and its potential resolution in favor of the preservation of architecture's artistic autonomy are this paper's two leading concerns. To pursue them we first need to get clearer what renders art 'autonomous'.

As a concept, autonomy defies easy definition. It acquired multiple meanings in the history of ideas and frequently appeared under various guises, especially throughout the nineteenth century. Purity, the absolute, perfection, freedom, self-determination, *l'art pour l'art*, futility, and more: such notions were, and continue to be, understood by reference to art's struggle for autonomy. Yet our understanding of that struggle, indeed of art's autonomy, remains contested.¹

On the face of it, 'autonomy' designates a thing's (or someone's) independence when *determining its own laws*. Such laws, we shall see, can range over the ontological, the ethical, and even the aesthetic. Autonomy expresses the fundamental modern principle of something's giving itself its own laws and setting its own ends.

If this minimal gloss is correct, its application to architecture requires clarification and defense

“ PURITY, THE
ABSOLUTE,
PERFECTION, [...]
CONTINUE TO BE
UNDERSTOOD BY
REFERENCE TO
ART'S STRUGGLE
FOR AUTONOMY. ”

right away. Architecture as, or insofar as it is, a particular art faces external constraints and limits on its autonomy; limits it cannot evade. Perhaps the most noticeable limitation arises from architecture's having to fulfill a function. Insofar as the *product* of architecture has to satisfy this prerequisite, that product's aesthetic form is already to some degree pre-determined. Recognition of this fact hardly necessitates subscription to the claim that form 'follows' (is conclusively and solely determined by) function. Yet that 'fact' may explain why functionalism (in this strong sense) remains autonomism's *bête noire* in architecture.

There are further (and just as obvious) limitations to architecture's autonomy. Let me mention two. Firstly, architecture incorporates advances from other disciplines. Often, those disciplines and their advances have not previously responded to aesthetic motivation: why should they do so now? Secondly, architecture is a public art and as such resists being understood as the expression of individual will or as an isolated element alien to its socio-historical context.

Such limitations notwithstanding, an architectural theory and practice was established during the twentieth century with a determined effort to reach autonomous architecture, or something very much like it, as its cornerstone. This 'effort' began with Emil Kaufmann's 1933 founding manifesto *From Ledoux to Le Corbusier: Origin and Development of Autonomous Architecture*.² Since then, others have deepened and multiplied, if hardly clarified, the meaning(s) of 'autonomous architecture'. Indeed, the degree of consensus among later authors, authors as diverse as Johnson, Rossi, Eisenman, Hays, and Aureli (one could easily mention more), terminates at their *referring* to the same concept and laying claim to the same sources. That the semantic stability of the term *autonomy* might be an issue, it seems, is never contemplated.

In order to clarify this situation and move the debate beyond a collision of idiolects,³ the present study postulates the need to recover the genuine sense of the concept of autonomy in its philosophical sources—and to (re-)introduce that concept to artistic and historical discussions of architecture only thereafter. To that end, the paper proceeds as follows. Sections 1 and 2 recover the Kantian concept of autonomy and explain its implications in architecture: among these implications, a 'requirement of expression' is shown to reign supreme by the end of section 2. Both sections discuss how this concept and its implications measure up against what Kaufmann considered to be the two main features of autonomy in architecture.

Section 3 enlists Schiller's interpretation of Kant's autonomy to take into account the effective risks of autonomy in (and for) architecture. Section 4 draws on Adorno's oeuvre to present an alternative to both Schiller and Kant. Section V deploys that 'alternative' to demonstrate

autonomy as one of the greatest (and definitely ongoing) challenges modern architecture has faced since the Enlightenment.

Before we begin, a word of caution. Recognizing clear geo-historical differentiation, Kaufmann regarded ‘the Enlightenment’ as ideologically quite unified, certainly in relation to architecture. This paper follows suit (largely for the sake of argument) but acknowledges that more recent studies rightly urge us to regard the Enlightenment as considerably more pluralistic—especially in its relation to ‘the revolutionary’, a relation that strongly exercised Kaufmann.⁴ Regardless of whether or not there is one Enlightenment or multiple Enlightenments, my minimal reliance on the fate of this argument should leave the essence of what is proposed here intact.

1. KAUFMANN WITH KANT, ONE: AUTONOMY AS SELF-DETERMINATION

Autonomy occupies a central position and gains new points of emphasis and relevance in philosophy from Kant’s time onward.⁵ Indeed, Kant himself places the concept of autonomy at the very center of his practical philosophy. He claims that human reason is an autonomous source of principles of conduct, both in its value determinations and its active decisions. Thus, human autonomy is both the highest value and the condition for all other values, with ‘autonomy of the will’ understood as the supreme principle of morality.⁶ In fact, Kant never spoke about the autonomy of art.

So, in a ‘transcendental’ sense, autonomy in art belongs to a broader project of humans’ autonomy from both natural and social determinations. In Kant, autonomy implies the spontaneity of its powers given some formal exigencies, and it should be able to establish the laws governing the legitimation of their feasibility, scope, and limits. Therefore, if we can distinguish a specific kind, more or less independent, of autonomous power in the field of art, the first type of autonomy should be regarded as fundamentally linked to the *autonomous function of the power of judgment* as a faculty of the

“THAT THE
SEMANTIC
STABILITY OF THE
TERM AUTONOMY
MIGHT BE AN ISSUE,
IT SEEMS, IS
NEVER AN ISSUE.
CONTEMPLATED.”

soul distinct from reason and understanding.⁷ This Kantian transcendental order is primarily determined by the subject who transcends; and who, in his experience of reality, allows the object to transcend insofar as it is conceived as that subject's representation. The work of art should not be considered as an entity sufficient unto itself but as a representation connected with the individual subject. Pursuing Kant's line of thought to its conclusion in the artistic field, autonomy turns out to be at first sight a power with no clear regulatory impact on either artistic or political practice.

In *From Ledoux*, Kaufmann interpreted autonomy with explicit reference to Kant,⁸ and defined it as a form of self-determination that brooks no sociocultural constraint. Crucially, Kaufmann claimed that such autonomy is manifested in a pure abstraction of creative mechanisms in architecture. In that regard Kaufmann's interpretation of the 'transcendental' version of autonomy in architecture might be accused of opening the way for isolating architecture from society. A typical case of this isolation might be, for instance, Kaufmann's description of Ledoux's project *Retour de Chasse*:

*At first glance, the [Ledoux's] Hunting Lodge [...] seems to be Baroque in its general layout. But on closer view we note significant changes. The composition lacks in binding power. Although the building masses seem to be grouped in a manner very similar to Baroque disposition, and, although the main house rules over the outlying buildings, each block is independent from the other, and from its natural setting.*⁹

In other baroque buildings types, such as a monastery or a palace—where differentiated volumes like the church, the cloister, or dependencies should be articulated—some correspondence between the parts was established, although they could be detached. On the contrary, for Kaufmann, Ledoux imposes in his projects a 'repetition' criterion: as we can see, the pavilion structure is repeated in the three volumes without any alteration, despite the additional volume overlapped onto the central pavilion. Supported by a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of Kant, Kaufmann emphasizes the exemplary nature of the *Retour de Chasse* (Figures 1 and 2) as an illustration of the transitional figure that Ledoux represents between pre-revolutionary and revolutionary architecture. From Ledoux, free association of independent elements (against Baroque unity) would become the ultimate compositional mechanism. This is what Kaufmann called the *pavilion system* or later the *new individualism*¹⁰: a configuration where compositional mechanisms such as 'repetition', 'antithesis', and 'multiple response' dominate.¹¹ In other terms, it is an abstract and supposedly autonomous mechanism insofar as for Kaufmann these compositional

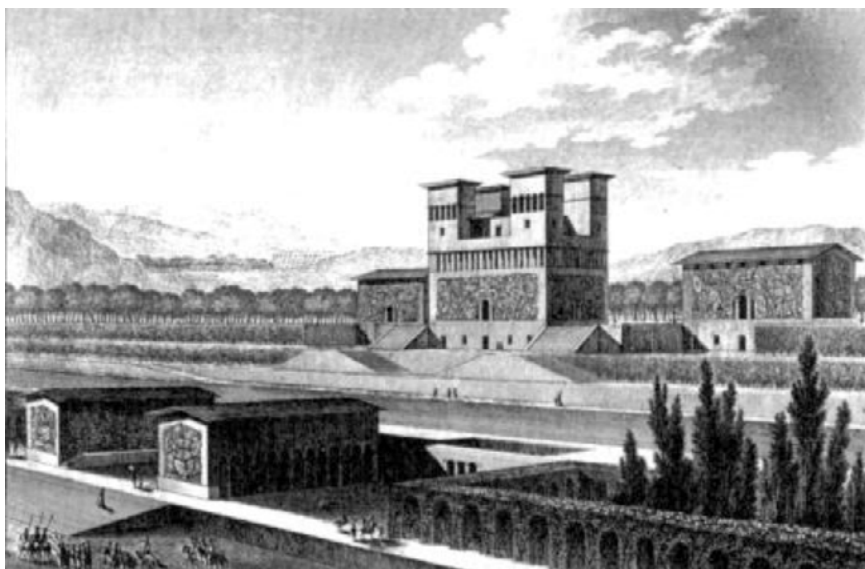


FIGURE 1: RETOUR DE CHASSE-PERSPECTIVE VIEW. ELEVATION D'UN RETOUR DE CHASSE, SHEET 111 FROM LEDOUX, L'ARCHITECTURE. VUE PERSPECTIVE D'UN RETOUR DE CHASSE, SHEET 110 FROM CLAUDE NICOLAS LEDOUX, L'ARCHITECTURE CONSIDÉRÉE SOUS LE RAPPORT DE L'ART, DES MOEURS ET DE LA LÉGISLATION (PARIS: H. L. PERRONNEAU, 1804).



FIGURE 2: RETOUR DE CHASSE-ELEVATION. VUE PERSPECTIVE D'UN RETOUR DE CHASSE, SHEET 110 FROM CLAUDE NICOLAS LEDOUX, L'ARCHITECTURE CONSIDÉRÉE SOUS LE RAPPORT DE L'ART, DES MOEURS ET DE LA LÉGISLATION (PARIS: H. L. PERRONNEAU, 1804).

mechanisms emerged in architecture from an internal logic beyond sociocultural constraints.

2. KANT AGAINST KAUFMANN, TWO: EXPRESSION AS A BOND WITH SOCIETY

Architecture, however, holds an inner corrective mechanism against Kaufmann's thesis. And, in fact, this resistance of architecture to 'self-determination' was explicitly referred to in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

Firstly, it is not true that Kant proposes a theory of art as disengaged from the social, as Kaufmann suggests, in its own interest.¹² More precisely, for Kant, the underlying content of artistic experience is the relationship between fundamental ideas of metaphysics and morality—above all, the foundational notion that the will can be freely determined by the principle of morality.¹³ In addition, as Kant put it in his 'Analytic of the Beautiful', in the case of architecture a building's suitability to its purpose is a preliminary condition to any subjective aesthetic judgment. Consequently, it is impossible to aesthetically appraise or 'judge' architecture without the intervention of reason to evaluate its suitability for purpose, which reveals an inherent and inevitable restriction of architecture's autonomy. That is why Kant illustrated his conception of 'adherent beauty' with architectural examples:

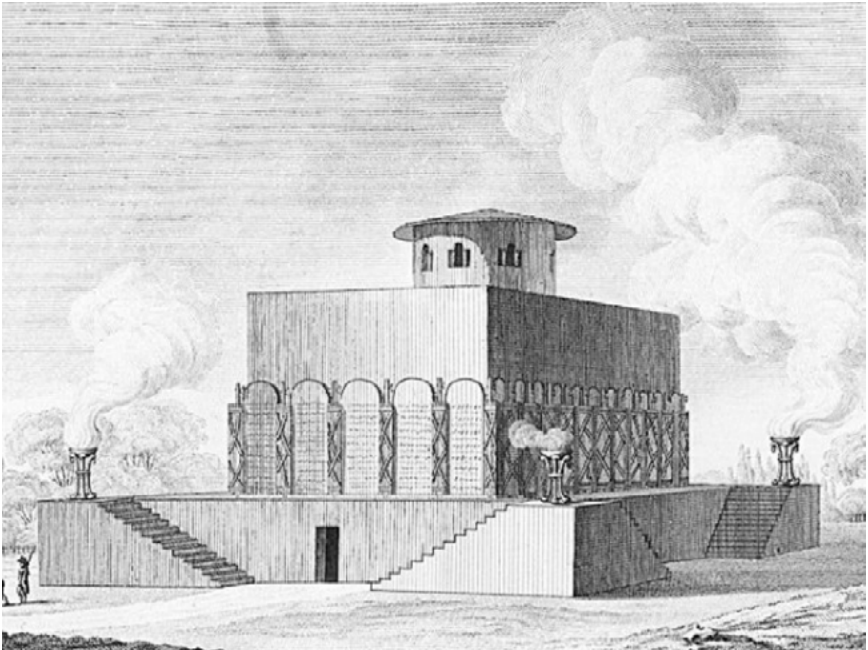


FIGURE 3: PACIFÈRE.PACIFÈRE, SHEET 40 FROM LEDOUX, L'ARCHITECTURE.

The beauty [...] of a building (such as a church, a palace, an arsenal, or a summer-house) presupposes a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, and is thus merely adherent beauty [...]. One would be able to add much to a building that would be pleasing in the intuition of it if only it were not supposed to be a church.¹⁴

Hence, the expression of ‘aesthetic ideas’—as representations of the imagination that give cause for the free interplay of the powers of the soul—should be restricted to (or, at the very least, by) morally significant ideas as in any form of art. However, in architecture, these ‘aesthetic ideas’ must be compatible with the orientation of architecture towards an objective end.¹⁵ Since what might be called the ‘Kantian revolution’ in aesthetics of architecture, the combination of beauty and purpose remains influenced by the expression of moral ideas, taking the aesthetics of architecture beyond Classicist theories. With Kant, architecture’s primary task is no longer to imitate past perfections (as Classicist theories adduced) but its social comprehensibility, which is ultimately the measure of its inseparable bond with society. By ‘aesthetic idea’ Kant means:

that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.—One readily sees that it is the counter-part (pendant) of an idea of reason, which is, conversely, a concept to which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate.¹⁶

If Boffrand and Blondel¹⁷ epitomized the vanguard of this shift, Ledoux constitutes a paradigmatic and especially elucidative case for the crudeness of tensions present in his work. And yet, when referring to Ledoux’s ‘revolution’ in architecture, did Kaufmann use a correct interpretation of Kant’s major claims isolated above? Did Kaufmann correctly assume (which is central here) Kant’s implied imperative of ‘comprehensibility’ in

“FOR KANT, THE UNDERLYING CONTENT OF ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN [...] METAPHYSICS AND MORALITY”

architecture, a cornerstone of Kant's transcendental order applied to this discipline? Let us see what Kaufmann stated about (what one could call) 'the requirement of expression' in Ledoux's work with another example, the *Pacifère*:

*The massive walls of Pacifère and Panaréteón do not even allow a guess at the disposition of the interior. The ideal of geometry has got the better of the Baroque principle of animation [...]. The exterior of the Baroque château clearly expresses the differentiation between the lordly grand salon, the private apartments, and the mezzanine of the servants. The blocks of the revolution are mute. As soon as the architects will renounce the petty devices of "Narrative" architecture, the purposes of their structures will no longer be reflected in the outside.*¹⁸

This assumption of muteness in the *Pacifère* (Figure 3) is far from a minor premise in Kaufmann's proposal, as we shall see immediately, although it clearly contrasts with what Ledoux himself wrote about the *Pacifère*:

*if the artists wished to follow the symbolic system that characterizes their production, they would acquire as much glory as the poets; they would elevate the ideas of those who consult them, and there would not be a stone in their works which would not speak to the eyes of persons passing by.*¹⁹

Kaufmann justifies this symbolism in Ledoux (evident too in *Maison des directeurs de la Loue* or *Maison des Cercles*) by relying on two hypotheses: it should be understood as surrender to the rising Romanticism or—even worse—as the persistence of Baroque criteria. The new trend that can already be identified in Ledoux is the paucity of the discretion, in contrast to the Baroque culture or Romanticism, which led him to "show his feelings openly and often in excess". For Kaufmann, then, expression in architecture is linked to both pre- and post-revolutionary narrative to the extent that "the purposes of their structure" (or construction) are reflected on the



FIGURE 4: PALAIS DU GOUVERNEUR ET DE LA PRISON. EXTRACTED FROM VUES PERSPECTIVES DU PALAIS DU GOUVERNEUR ET DE LA PRISON, SHEET 189 FROM CLAUDE NICOLAS LEDOUX, ARCHITECTURE DE C.-N. LEDOUX: COLLECTION QUI RASSEMBLE TOUS LES GENRES DE BÂTIMENTS EMPLOYÉS DANS L'ORDRE SOCIAL, ED. DANIEL RAMÉE (LENOIR ÉDITEUR, 5, QUAI MALAQUAIS, PARIS, 1847).

outside. Or, in other terms, the identity between the internal narrative of this architecture with its outer appearance becomes the communicative value of that architecture, as opposed to examples from (in Kaufmann's nomenclature) the revolutionary period, a period whose buildings in his view "are mute." Evidently buildings' muteness collides with Ledoux's main purpose in developing a 'symbolic architecture', in which "there would be no stone in their works [artists' whose works follow the symbolic system] which would not speak to the eyes of persons passing by."

3. THE EMPIRE OF THE SYMBOL

Apart from the fact that Kaufmann is demonstrably mistaken in refusing to attribute expressive content to Ledoux's architecture, Kant's 'aesthetic ideas' theory seems insufficient to take account of this particular interpretation of autonomy in Ledoux's work. In point of fact, with Kant it is possible to explain the imperative of expression in architecture, but what is to be expressed remains indeterminate in his philosophy.²⁰

This communicative motivation of art was recovered in the second sense of autonomy formulated by Schiller, which indirectly explains the drifting of the concept of autonomy in its reception in architecture. This second conceptualization counteracts the perception of human fragmentation that characterizes modernity. For Schiller, autonomy in art would be the precondition for establishing a new utopian alternative to an ailing society.²¹ This premise—distinct from what Kaufmann terms 'the revolutionary' and its ideas—focuses all its efforts on the transformation of the material conditions of society and inaugurates the critical aesthetic device based on a negative relationship between art and society. In this way, art is provided with both diagnostic and proactive capabilities based on Schiller's concept of 'heautonomy'.²²

Similarly, Enlightenment critical rationality is transferred to architecture through a commitment to improving society. In France, such authors as

“THE PRISON IN
AIX-EN-PROVENCE
[...] CLEARLY
TRANSMITS
THREAT AND
RUTHLESSNESS.”

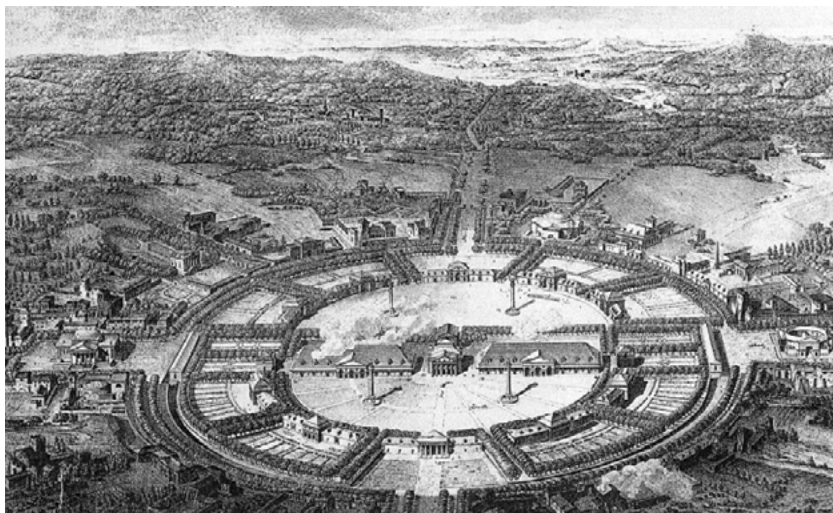


FIGURE 5: VUE PERSPECTIVE DE LA VILLE DE CHAUX, SHEET 15 FROM LEDOUX, L'ARCHITECTURE.

Laugier, Boffrand, and Blondel put criticism into action by adopting a firm attitude to intervene in artistic practices in order to promote certain social orientations. As Schiller made evident, this renewal should go hand-in-hand with the symbolic role of art through the identification of beauty and truth.²³ Thus, a great deal of revolutionary efforts revolved around the elaboration of a discourse based in self-determination that could transmit an emancipatory message. The link between proportions and feelings or Blondel's theory of *caractère* responds to the need to establish an identity between the created objects and creation as an autonomous action. Indeed, Ledoux establishes a symbolic expression inside the process of constitution of the form, with the particularity, unlike his contemporaries, that he moved towards a utopian creation of a new social order, like, for instance, in the prison in Aix-en-Provence (Figure 4), which clearly transmits threat and ruthlessness.

The symbol in architecture thus acquires a role, which depends on the work's functional orientation, beyond its former decorative or formal repertoire. In other words, an explicit function replaces the implicit one of symbolism in previous periods. In this regard, we can draw at least two major implications.

Firstly, the attempt to create a utopia through figuration plunges the process into a deep paradox. On the one hand, the acknowledgment of the inadequacy of resources for the fulfillment of an ideally conceived future stimulates the utopia. But on the other hand, as in Ledoux's architecture, the wish to present materially such an unattainable future at that very historical moment associates the ideal world with reality, and thus acquires

an absolute character that ultimately overrides all alternatives. These aspirations of universalism in Ledoux's architecture are evident in the projects where future becomes a chimera (Figure 5). On the one hand then, this brand new expression of a utopia through architecture provides hope for a promised land, while on the other, assumes its unattainability.

Secondly, precisely because of the legitimization of this universal value of architecture, nature acquires a redemptive character, though not in sense of Rousseau—whereby the immersion in the natural cycle would immunize humans against their inner corruption—but in the Kantian sense of autonomy. Therefore, the return to a mechanism of mimesis with regard to natural processes collides with the intent to break with tradition, launching a new type of determination.

As a result of this process, the symbol in architecture was presented in a markedly closed nature, where the signifier (figuration) is identified with the signified (utopia), confirming the Enlightenment's mechanism of particularizing abstract universals. Thus addressed, the attempt of reconciliation with society and nature reveals its ultimate reversal process of mythologization, bringing both society and nature back to the realm of what humanity can dominate and manipulate. This reactive movement can be seen in Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand or Louis-Ambroise Dubut's postulates, whose work once captivated Kaufmann. The naïve emancipatory impulse became mere ideology on which to support a no longer renovating program.

The truth is that, specifically in architecture, the two necessary correctives that Schiller puts forward to protect Kant's principle of autonomy from the functional orientation of art—that is, 'immunity' and 'indifference'²⁴—may not be present in a practice that is inseparable from society and its needs. Without these correctives, architecture acquires a hegemonic overtone in its messianic positioning, something evident in Ledoux's

“[T]HE SYMBOL IN ARCHITECTURE THUS ACQUIRES A ROLE [...] BEYOND ITS FORMER DECORATIVE OR FORMAL REPERTOIRE.”

architecture. As an internal corrective to the tendency to isolation of autonomous art, Kant showed what in Schiller summons the threat of the mystifying absoluteness, aggravated by the heteronomous nature of architecture, which brings closer (and even equates) morals and aesthetics, expression and utopia. Hence, Adorno's critique of Schiller,²⁵ perhaps precipitated in the exclusively aesthetic level, becomes extremely relevant in the case of architecture.

4. ENIGMA AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT

For Adorno, all references to the exteriority of art—such as its legitimacy through commitment to society or its compressibility—must be articulated from its immanence as an object. That is why he insists on the need for autonomy “as imprisonment of aesthetics to the realm of aesthetics.” This is, in fact, a requirement to make negative dialectics in art feasible. As opposed to sovereign aesthetics (Schiller's proposal), he states that negativity beyond aesthetics is powerless against social conditions. The work of art must be autonomous to fulfill its function as social criticism. The autonomy of art must account for the status of aesthetics demanding its own rules without compromising its mission of transgressing its own limits, which would constrain its sovereignty. It is not only art that must meet the requirement of autonomy, but the work of art itself should also follow general discourse: “By crystallising in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful’, it criticizes society by merely existing.”²⁶

Derived from this *antinomy of the autonomy* in art with a critical purpose, one of the first renunciations that art—and architecture insofar it is a form of art—must accept is communication in its heteronomous sense. Adorno harshly criticized the alleged social role of art as communicability; namely, the thesis that art becomes social as soon as it provides an accessible meaning.²⁷ In this there is an evident risk, Adorno claimed, for communicative art to grow ideological. Art cannot claim both its sovereignty in society and its autonomy. It must present itself as criticizing society by evidencing society's contradictions. Its mere existence constitutes a critique of society by standing against the prevailing codes, instrumentalization being chief among them. Art should be art in itself and it should not depend on alien instances of legitimation to be autonomous. In turn, art must be autonomous to preserve in itself a remnant of its social nature.

In short, Adorno considered autonomy and emancipation as two counteracting dialectical poles. And in this sense, he claimed the independence of all reality, which Kant had cast doubt on by placing art in a pre-rational place. Yet, at the same time Adorno vindicated the truthful content of the work of art, externalizing autonomy in the object: the work of art, then, opens a space of denial as long as it can be presented

as another self, something outside historical constraints, providing an alternative in this regard. His aim is to prevent autonomy from becoming an accomplice of instrumental rationality, as indeed is the case in Ledoux insofar as he sets a new utopia crystallized in his projects under the premises of “welfare” or “progress.”

In this sense, the cornerstone of Adorno’s argumentation lies in the location of a space of freedom that simultaneously accounts for art’s renunciation of any external commitment *and* for its integration with reality. In an Adornian sense, the lack of functionality in art, alienated and insular, endows it with an internal consistency that, in its autonomy, manifests itself to reality as *something impossible to be instrumentalized*. Art has to pursue the restructuring of life without imposing any structures on that life. It intervenes as a reflection of society, projecting what is denied on who denies it, returning unacknowledged internal contradictions to the source of these contradictions. In this regard, with the theoretical support provided by Adorno, the enigma as an epistemological content—opposed to the truth understood as *adaequatio*—acquires an internal moral status which dissolves the *aporia* faced by aesthetic modernity and opens the way for the possibility of an autonomy in architecture without compromising architecture’s inherent nature.

What explains this ‘inherent nature’? And what is its relation to the enigmatic? I will answer these questions in reverse order, effectively delegating treatment of the first question to section 5.

Adorno refers to the epistemological status of the enigma in art in many passages of his *Aesthetic Theory*, due both to its importance and its complexity. For instance:

[T]he need of artworks for interpretation, their need for the production of their truth content is the stigma of their constitutive deficiency. Artworks do not achieve what is objectively sought in them. The zone of indeterminacy between the unreachable and what has been realized constitutes their enigma. They have truth content and they do not have it.²⁸

“ADORNO’S
CRITIQUE OF
SCHILLER [...]
BECOMES
EXTREMELY
RELEVANT IN
THE CASE OF
ARCHITECTURE.”

Art has its own truth content, but it does not pass through empirical verification, nor through realization of the concept in Hegelian sense, as both represent an identity theory. There is a truth of art that lies in the formal constitution of the work; that is, an autonomous truth. A recent study by Ferris, entitled “Politics and the Enigma of Art,” explains the passage’s likely intent as follows:

[P]recisely because art does not affirm any meaning claimed on its behalf, it remains, in a word Adorno emphasizes, an enigma [...]. This tendency of art to express its uncertainty by asserting a function that would seem to carry all the certainty of self-evidence becomes the sign of art’s inability to recognize its own inmost tendencies.²⁹

Ferris highlights how Adorno’s stance of *art as enigma*³⁰ effectively resists Kant’s obligation for comprehensibility. This, however, does not leave Adorno—or a philosophy of architecture built on his foundations—bereft of communicative potential:

In the end, all roads lead to this enigma in Adorno. Why artworks have and do not have a truth content is because the enigmatic character of art, as Adorno defines it, requires that artworks ‘say something and in the same breath conceal it’. Their truth content is a saying that does not say what it says, but does say that it says. The content of the artwork is consequently tied to its form by this enigma. As a result, the enigmatic is what constitutes form as constitutive of art. What this means is that, if form is how art is mediated as art, form cannot represent an object. This is because art, for Adorno, resists objectification in its very concept. As a result, whatever content art has must be a content that takes away such an object even as it affirms it. This is the task of the enigmatic.³¹

As we can see here, understood aright, Adorno does not challenge so much as modify Kant’s obligation for art to be ‘comprehensible’: he alters the demands of *what* art needs to communicate, and how it does so, to enter meaningful relations with society without lapsing into an identity theory (for Adorno, the source of modern instrumentalization). And this, in turn, explains how we can endorse, as my argument urges we should, an analogous demand for art to be enigmatic (in Adorno’s sense) *also in architecture*. That Ledoux halfway meets Kant’s obligation in just this way was precisely argued above. Where this leaves architecture and autonomy more widely remains to be seen. To this we turn next.

5. AUTONOMY AND MODERNITY IN ARCHITECTURE: LEDOUX VERSUS ADORNO

Clearly, for Adorno the very possibility of *art as enigma* did not arrive in literary and musical composition until the avant-garde with Beckett and Schönberg. In fact, for Adorno a pure and rigorous concept of art should be just music³² and, in that sense, (especially) architecture assumes an inner limitation as a specific art: its dependence on function determines in some degree a dialectic between form and matter.³³ Yet it

is also true that Adorno never explicitly refused to include architecture among modern arts. Moreover, in his analysis of functionalism he assumes that architecture and art in general share the same challenges, quoting Scharoun's *Philharmonie* as an example of architecture's capacity to overcome such challenges.³⁴

Adorno's insistence on the radical defense of the autonomy of art—a defense that motivates inquiry into the enigmatic in the first place—aspires to be an antidote against the specific totalitarian movements (whether from fascism or from the culture industry) that prevailed throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Persisting in the separation of spheres and avoiding absolutism is part of Adorno's resistance against regression. This was under the premise of taking the unavoidability of modernity in its emancipatory impulse without thereby obviating the danger of radical isolation.

Thus interpreted, the avant-gardes evince in their inner struggles the tension between the real and the loss of human identity. From within modernity and in their deepening in the criticism of modernity, the various avant-gardes provide the scale of the insufficiency of their internal project of emancipation. This liberating surge, even in a negative sense, is perhaps the most indelible contribution of the avant-gardes, to such an extent that not even the mannerisms of the 1960s and the attempts to overcome postmodernism have managed to unseat it. The successive crises of modernity merely confirm the relevance of modernity, to the extent that it appears as an unavoidable project.³⁵ Even today—and probably more than ever—the recognition of dissatisfaction with what currently exists prevails to the extent that the project of modernity has not been reversed.

Modernity leads to a perpetual attempt to establish a solid foundation despite the intimate awareness of its futility. This is the case of the avant-garde and it was also at the heart of Ledoux's work. With the dissolution of the classical categories, architecture had to face the new dialectics between

“THE
IMPOSSIBILITY
OF AUTONOMY IN
ARCHITECTURE
TRANSFORMS
ITS PROJECT INTO
A PARADIGM OF
MODERNITY.”

rational and sensitive, ideal and real, without any solid anchors. And it is precisely to the extent that architecture cannot abandon its commitment to social needs, given its internal heteronomy, that it turns out to be prefigurative for the rest of the arts: in the movement toward the self-absorption of art that modernity brings with it, architecture paradoxically becomes a different social self. Internalizing the antinomy of Adorno's autonomy in architecture, the impossibility of autonomy in architecture transforms its project of autonomy into a paradigm of modernity, which thus becomes exemplary for the other arts.

The radical shift represented by the avant-gardes and, in particular, its problematization of the autonomy of art, soon revealed the reverse commitment in architecture, which could be paradigmatically illustrated in Ledoux's work. Today, the avant-garde's vindictive nature is perceived in a heteronomous sense: its integration into the canons of dominant logic invigorated its immunity and expanded its domain. Adorno retrieves this internal tearing of modernity and incorporates it into art through its negativity. Any attempt of positivity, either from social commitment or the defense of the ideal of progress, would precisely encourage the false expectation of its realization. Reconciliation is only possible by experiencing the impossibility of envisaging the way forward. Adorno channeled the aspirations of the Enlightenment towards confrontation with the world, and in that sense, art becomes indispensable.

It is precisely because autonomy belongs to this modern movement that it holds the very paradox of modernity: the foundation of concepts, possibilities, promises, etc., encompasses the threat of their loss. Along with the idea of an autonomous architecture, the possibility of a struggle for emancipation and freedom vanishes, as so does the possibility of its total dissolution, as architecture may not find the way to become immediately social. Alienated from its original social function and provided with a critical role against society due to its autonomy, a sense of free humanity feeds architecture, while, by its own autonomy, architecture has to deny society the access to that refuge of humanity. Or, as Adorno would say, as an autonomous art, architecture has to negate society for the sake of a promise of a different society. But, as an intrinsically heteronomous art (as a functional art), architecture must serve society.³⁶

In this sense, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's work may be seen to presage the antinomies of autonomy which architecture would face during the avant-garde: the paradox that architecture imposes on its social milieu a hegemonic order which ultimately leads it to abandon its social commitment. Although only intuitively, we can say that the situation of architecture during the nineteenth century with regard to the revolutionary period finds its parallel in its present situation since the avant-gardes. To find again its role in society, architecture should regain its social commitment with a

new problematization of its autonomy in response to the actual changing paradigms (as could be the consolidation of globalization: there is nothing outside modernity, the collapse of the Keynesian ideal, the problem of political representation, etc.).

The capacity of architecture to meet new challenges involves the dilemma of whether architecture can actually still be considered a modern art—that is, an autonomous art—or whether, on the contrary, we should assume its pre-modern nature and embrace unproblematically the reconciling essentialist paradigms or even the explicitly reactionary ones, as the diatribe between Kaufmann and Sedlmayr illustrated.³⁷ Since the Enlightenment, architecture has simultaneously experienced its period of greatest prominence in society and the intimate conviction that it can no longer change anything. Modernity bequeathed to architecture an uncertainty which remains unresolved. This uncertainty is likely to contain some modern values as long as it remains indefinite and calls us back to this kind of radical question. We either accept this, or accept that architecture is essentially a pre-modern art.

76

ENDNOTES

1. The *Historical Dictionary of Philosophy* opens its entry on “Autonomie” with a warning of sorts, entitling its opening section “The Problematic History of the Concept.” See Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel, eds., ‘Autonomie’, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel: Schönbach, 2007), 431-479.

2. See Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur* (Vienna: R. Passer, 1933). No English translation of this book exists, but fragments thereof surface in English translations of Walter Benjamin’s (nearly contemporaneous) *Arcades Project*. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

3. A ‘collision’ well documented in the papers by Coleman, Owen, and others presented at the International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture conference in 2014, and now published in *Architecture Philosophy*. See Nathaniel Coleman, “The Myth of Autonomy,” *Architecture Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (2015): 157-178 and Graham Owen, “Whatever Happened to Semi-Autonomy,” *Architecture Philosophy* 2, no 1. (2015).

4. Cf. Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5. See Ernst Feil, “Autonomie-Heteronomie,” in *Antithetik neuzeitlicher Vernunft: “Autonomie-Heteronomie” und “rational-irrational”* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).

6. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant formulates the moral law with the help of the concept of autonomy (the so called *Formula of Autonomy*): “the idea of the will of every rational being as a will giving

universal law” (G 4:431; cf. G 4:432) or “Not to choose otherwise than so that the maxims of one’s choice are at the same time comprehended with it in the same volition as universal law” (G 4:440; cf. G 4:432, 434, 438). See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

7. I follow here the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant and, more precisely, Paul Guyer’s edition of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

8. Early in his monograph, Kaufmann draws a parallel between the autonomous morality established by Kant and the autonomous architecture he wants to defend in (that is, with respect to the work of) Ledoux. See Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux*, 12.

9. Emil Kaufmann, “Three Revolutionary Architects, Boullée, Ledoux, and Lequeu,” in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 42, no. 3 (1952): 525.

10. The evolution of these terms is clearly explained in Detlef Mertins, “System and Freedom: Sigfried Giedion, Emil Kaufmann, and the Constitution of Architectural Modernity,” in *Modernity and Ideology*, 212-231. Despite this, it is possible to identify even in Kaufmann’s later works the same interpretation of autonomy as a formal configuration (which section I identified as central).

11. As Kaufmann states in *Architecture in the Age of Reason: Baroque and Postbaroque in England, Italy, and France*. See Emil Kaufmann, *Architecture in the Age of Reason: Baroque and Postbaroque in England, Italy, and France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

12. Recall from section I that Kaufmann uses Kant’s concept of autonomy in order to justify a new architecture, that of abstract mechanisms that operate autonomously, regardless of any sociocultural constraint. In that sense, this interpretation of the transcendental version of autonomy might have been accused of paving the way for the isolation of architecture from society.

13. See Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60-227 and Paul Guyer, “The Harmony of the Faculties Revisited,” in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77-109.

14. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §16, 114-115.

15. Function and form in a successful architecture intensify each other more than being just added. See Paul Guyer, “Free and Adherent Beauty: A Modest Proposal,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, no. 4 (2002): 357-366.

16. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §49, 192.

17. Throughout this paper, I intend the ‘younger’ of the two Blondels,

Jacques-François (1705-1774).

18. Kaufmann, “Three Revolutionary Architects,” 520.

19. Claude Nicolas Ledoux, *L’architecture considérée sous le rapport de l’art, des moeurs et de la législation* (Paris: H. L. Perronneau, 1804), 115. The original French reads: “si les artistes vouloient suivre le système symbolique qui caractérise chaque production, ils acquéreroient autant de gloire que les poètes; ils élèveroient les idées de ceux qui les consultent, et il n’y auroit pas une pierre qui, dans leurs ouvrages, ne parlât aux yeux des passants.”

20. This is the main thesis of Paul Guyer, “Kant and the Philosophy of Architecture,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69, no. 1 (2011): 7-19.

21. Friedrich Schiller, *Kallias, oder, Über die Schönheit: Fragment aus dem Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Koerner; Über Anmut und Würde* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam., 1971), letters V-VI.

22. Against what he stated in *Kallias*, in *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller disclaims nature as a source of artistic impulse in order to link autonomy of art with a utopian reconciliation. In order to establish an “ästhetischen Staat,” Schiller undertakes a project of objectification of the concept of beauty and finds its ontological foundation—and the foundation of aesthetical autonomy—in appearance and play. See Friedrich Schiller, *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004).

23. See Luigi Pareyson, *Etica ed estetica in Schiller* (Milan: Mursia, 1983), 60-70.

24. See Schiller, *Letters*, letters 9 and 26.

25. Adorno rejects *tout court* Schiller’s impulse towards the transcendence of art beyond its aesthetic realm. The identification of an area of freedom in art, thus legitimizing its existence through commitment to society counterfeits a totality unreachable from its singular rationality.

The idea of freedom, akin to aesthetic autonomy, was shaped by domination, which it universalized. This holds true as well for artworks. The more they freed themselves from external goals, the more completely they determined themselves as their own masters. Because, however, artworks always turn one side toward society, the domination they internalized also radiated externally.

See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone, 1997), 17-18.

26. *Ibid.*, 229.

27. See the example of Van Gogh’s paintings as the end of identity between narrative content and meaning in artworks. For more details, see the sections entitled “Enigmaticalness, Truth Content, Metaphysics” and “Coherence and Meaning,” in Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*. *Ibid.*, 118-162.

28. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 128.

29. David S. Ferris, “Politics and the Enigma of Art: The Meaning of Modernism for Adorno,” *Modernist Cultures* 1.2 (2005): 192-208: here 195.

30. Adorno's German term is 'Rätsel' and designates for instance the type of riddle the Sphinx used in its attempt to snare Odysseus. The meaning and intent of her riddles are, to the discerning eye, both opaque and visible.
31. Ferris, "Politics," 204. The quotation within the quotation is to Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 120.
32. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), §143.
33. This is why, for instance, Hilde Heynen has argued that Adorno ultimately regarded architecture to be unsuitable for entry into modernity and modern art. See Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 198-200.
34. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 44.
35. In this sense, Kaufmann's most significant contribution may be the hypothesis of continuity between the Enlightenment and modern architecture, thus taking a broad sense of modernity. See Kaufmann, *Architecture in the Age of Reason*. Most pressingly, Ledoux raises the issue of how we date the entry point of modernity in architecture itself, but I leave this matter for elsewhere. For discussion, see not only Kaufmann's works cited earlier, but also Joseph Rykwert, *The First Moderns: The Architects of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983).
36. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Functionalism Today", *Oppositions* 17 (1979): 31-41.
37. See Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte: Die bildende Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts als Symptom und Symbol der Zeit* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1951) for or Sedlmayr's assessment of Kaufmann's *From Ledoux*. Sedlmayr located precisely in the French Revolution's visionary architecture the origin of the lack of rootedness and authenticity in modern architecture. Following his analysis, architecture had reached its autonomous status with Loos and Le Corbusier at the cost of losing its sense of responsibility with the culture and society, and reduced to an empty ideal geometric formal suit.