

FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY, ARCHITECTURE, AND MORALITY: A BEAUTIFUL *KONZENTRATIONSLAGER?*

BY ANDREA SAUCHELLI

*Some works of architecture have remarkable aesthetic value. According to certain philosophers, part of this value derives from the appearance of such constructions to fulfil the function for which they were built. I argue that one way of understanding the connection between function and aesthetic value resides in the concept of functional beauty. I analyse a number of recent accounts of this notion, then offer a better way of understanding it. I then focus my attention on the relation between aesthetic and moral values and claim that, if the notion of functional beauty makes any sense at all, then we have a *pro tanto* case for holding that moral defects in works of architecture can have aesthetic merits.*

Recent debates on the connection between aesthetics and morality have focused mainly on cases taken from the representational arts, such as literature, painting, or cinema.¹ In this paper, I adopt a different perspective on the issue and focus instead on architecture. In particular, I ask and provide an answer to the following question: can a building have aesthetic value partly *in virtue* of its fulfilling or appearing to fulfil to an observer, at a specific time, an immoral function?

Architecture, intended as an art, is peculiar because functional considerations are frequently taken as internal to the artistic evaluation of buildings. Thus, for instance, there is a tendency in architectural criticism to classify buildings that do not fulfil their proper function

¹ Recent examples include R. Stecker, 'The Interaction of Ethical and Aesthetic Value', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 45 (2005), pp. 138–50; B. Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford UP, 2007); E. Schellekens, *Aesthetics and Morality* (London: Continuum, 2007); and J. Bermudez and S. Gardner (eds.), *Art and Morality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). An exception to this trend is Y. Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford UP, 2007); in which the author discusses examples taken from everyday artefacts and environmental aesthetics.

as *architectural* failures, that is, as failures also from an artistic point of view.² However, the idea that functional/practical concerns in architecture and aesthetic/artistic values can somehow influence each other has not yet been explored extensively in the literature on the philosophy of architecture.

The key notion that can provide a conceptual connection between functional and aesthetic values is functional beauty. In the first section of this paper, I will introduce this concept, paying particular attention to how recent philosophers have formulated it. I will then clarify the connection between the notion of functional beauty and architecture, and then specify how functional and aesthetic values influence each other. In the second section, I will clarify various senses in which a building can be the object of moral evaluation and discuss the relationship between aesthetics, morality, and the arts. In the last section, I will argue that if the notion of functional beauty makes any sense at all, then there are good reasons for maintaining that, in certain cases, some immoral characteristics that a building has can be related positively to its aesthetic value. In the final paragraphs, I will discuss various examples of alleged immoral works of architecture and argue that the connection between functional beauty and morality is not systematic. I will also show that the perceived degree of moral condemnation of buildings that possess immoral characteristics influences the positive and negative aesthetic evaluations of these buildings.

I. FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY AND ARCHITECTURE

The aesthetic and the functional (or practical) modes of appreciating buildings (or works of art in general) need not be seen as incompatible. According to an increasing number of philosophers, functional/practical considerations can be reconciled with and play an active role in the attributions of aesthetic value. Formalist aestheticians may balk at the

² See, among other recent contributions, L. Mumford, 'Function and Expression in Architecture', *Architectural Record*, 110 (1951), pp. 106–12; R. Arnheim, 'From Function to Expression', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 23 (1964), pp. 29–41; G. Graham, 'Art and Architecture', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 29 (1989), pp. 248–57; *Philosophy of the Arts*, 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1997/2000), pp. 137–54; A. Carlson, 'Existence, Location, and Function: The Appreciation of Architecture', in M. Mitiás (ed.) *Philosophy of Architecture* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1994), pp. 141–64; R. Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, (Princeton UP, 1979/1980), pp. 38–43; H. Conway and R. Roenisch, *Understanding Architecture*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1994/2005), pp. 55–81; and L. M. Roth, *Understanding Architecture*, 2nd Edition (Westview Press, 1993/2006), pp. 8–17.

thought of such a marriage between aesthetics and practical values and say that the aesthetic value of an object ought to be judged solely in terms of the quality of the shapes, lines, colours, and so on, that can be perceived in it.³ It is not even necessary to adhere to such a rigid version of formalism to have doubts about the idea of judging the beauty of an object in relation to its practical, non-aesthetic function. After all, it is rather intuitive to think that aesthetic judgements depend solely on what can be perceived in an object and are independent from its function or any knowledge of its purpose. Given these possible sceptical reactions, we need to provide some reasons to connect beauty and (practical, strictly non-aesthetic) function. It is interesting to note that accounts of how function and beauty can be related have been proposed since the inception of philosophy.⁴ Xenophon's Socrates, for instance, allegedly maintained that a dung basket, if fit for its function, can be beautiful whilst a golden shield, if too cumbersome to be carried in battle, can be considered ugly.⁵ More recently, Stephen Davies, Larry Shiner, Glenn Parsons, Allen Carlson, and others, proposed the reconciliation between aesthetical and practical values.⁶ I will now present their theories and advance a further clarification as to how practical considerations can influence the aesthetic value of an object.

According to Parsons and Carlson, aestheticians who argue against the understanding of art as involving only the appreciation of the formal properties of a work have pointed out that aesthetic judgements are frequently influenced by some kind of background knowledge about the appreciated object. For instance, according to Kendall Walton, the categories relative to which we evaluate a work influence aesthetic

³ See N. Zangwill, 'Formalism', in S. Davies and alia, *A Companion to Aesthetics*, 2nd Edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 290–3; and his *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Oxford UP, 2001) for a moderate version of formalism. Functional considerations as such are not incompatible with artistic formalism to the extent that we understand works of art as artefacts having an *aesthetic* function. See N. Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation* (Oxford UP, 2007), pp. 97–126. In what follows, I will specify when the concept of 'function' is meant to include also this aesthetic function.

⁴ G. Parsons and A. Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford UP, 2008), pp. 1–30; and the monumental W. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics, Volume I* (London: Continuum, [1970/1974] 2005). See also P. Guyer, 'Beauty and Utility in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 35 (2002), pp. 439–53.

⁵ See W. Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, pp. 109–10. There are many other examples of functional beauty through the history of aesthetics, from Roman philosophers and Renaissance architects to Kant and his notion of dependent (or adherent) beauty.

⁶ S. Davies, 'Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks and Functional Beauty', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56 (2006), pp. 224–41; G. Parsons and A. Carlson, *Functional Beauty*; L. Shiner, 'On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 69 (2011), pp. 31–41.

judgements.⁷ More specifically, Walton suggests that (1) aesthetic properties are emergent on non-aesthetic ones;⁸ and (2) the aesthetic properties of an object *w* do not emerge only from those non-aesthetic properties which can be perceived in an experience of *w*. The pool of non-aesthetic properties on which *w*'s aesthetic features may emerge include, according to Walton, considerations of which features are standard, variable, or contra-standard relative to certain categories. In particular,

...a feature of a work is standard for a particular person on a particular occasion when, and only when, it is standard relative to some category in which he perceives it, and is not contra-standard relative to any category in which he perceives it. A feature is variable for a person on an occasion just when it is variable relative to all of the categories in which he perceives it. And a feature is contra-standard for a person on an occasion just when it is contra-standard relative to any of the categories in which he perceives it.⁹

The concept of 'category' is broad and includes considerations of such matters as genre, style, and form. Examples of categories of art include Modernist architecture, Renaissance religious art, and Expressionist painting.¹⁰ Elaborating on this account, Parsons and Carlson claim that considerations of function can be another possible cognitive factor involved in aesthetic judgements, that is, another category under which a work can be perceived as belonging. In particular, they suggest that by conceptualising buildings under their proper *functional* categories, we can also perceive, along with their aesthetic properties, their functional beauty.¹¹ More specifically, Parsons and Carlson argue that if we conceptualise a building as belonging to a functional category, then if we perceive its non-aesthetic features as well-suited to this function, it can be seen as 'looking fit'; such looking fit may be said to be a kind of functional beauty. For instance, a museum may be conceptualised as belonging to the functional category 'an institution that provides a congenial environment for the appreciation and discussion of works of art'; if we perceive the

⁷ See K. Walton, 'Categories of Art', *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970), pp. 334–67.

⁸ See F. Sibley 'Aesthetic Concepts', *Philosophical Review*, 68 (1959); 'Aesthetic and Non-aesthetic', *The Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965); both reprinted in J. Benson, B. Redfern and J. Roxbee Cox (eds.), *Approach to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

⁹ Walton, *Categories of Art*, at p. 342.

¹⁰ For an assessment of Walton's theory, see B. Laetz, 'Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art': A Critical Commentary', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50 (2010), pp. 287–306; and Nick Zangwill, 'In Defence of Moderate Aesthetic Formalism', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 50 (2000), pp. 476–93.

¹¹ See Parsons and Carlson, *Functional Beauty*; and G. Parsons, 'Fact and Function in Architectural Criticism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 69 (2011), pp. 21–9. Parsons and Carlson's account is broader and is not limited to architecture; in fact, they extend their account to everyday objects, the appreciation of nature, etc.

museum's non-aesthetic features as well-suited to this function, it can be seen as 'looking fit'.¹² Parsons and Carlson also maintain that the perception of this kind of beauty ('looking fit') is possible when the non-aesthetic properties of the building at issue are perceived in great number and are standard for its (supposed) functional category and if, at the same time, the building is not perceived as having any contra-standard feature (relatively to its functional category). The property of looking fit is just one way of specifying the idea that a building is functionally beautiful. Parsons and Carlson also maintain that there are other kinds of functional beauty, among which are the following: (1) 'visual tension' and (2) 'simplicity, gracefulness, or elegance'. We perceive the former when a building, despite its having contra-standard features relative to its (supposed) functional category, is still capable of performing its function. This, in turn, may trigger the perception of pleasing dissonance in what we see. A building that displays 'elegance', the last type of functional beauty under discussion, has no contra-standard or variable features relative to its (supposed) functional category. It only has essential standard ones. Some examples may help clarify these distinctions. The famous castle *Krak des Chevaliers* in Syria certainly looks to have all the possible standard features we may associate with the function of being a castle, that is, it looks as though it is intended to be a defensive keep. Knowing its function and seeing its majestic walls, this castle can be perceived as 'looking fit'. Mies Van der Rohe's *Seagram Building* is a different case. It is often regarded as elegant, because it displays only those features that are essential to functioning as a tall office building. The many deconsecrated churches utilised as nightclubs around Europe, such as the notorious *Cavalli Club* in Florence, can provide examples of visual tension: once we know the new function of the building ('provide fun to the client and money to the owners'), the outside appearance of a church may be perceived as contra-standard to this kind of function (as its exterior was designed to command and elicit a very different behaviour among the people inside it). This account is quite elegant and can accommodate a good number of cases. However, considering that standard, variable, or contra-standard categories are involved, worries may be raised about the possibility of determining the form that a proper function is supposed to embody in order to trigger an experience. In particular, it is not clear that Parsons and

¹² I will not discuss their general analysis of the concept of 'proper function' for buildings or artefacts. I will assume that it is somehow possible, even though it might be difficult to individuate and attribute one or more functions to various kinds of constructions in all cases. See Carlson and Parsons, *Functional Beauty*, pp. 62–89, and L. Shiner, 'On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 69 (2011), pp. 31–41.

Carlson's account of functional beauty can shed light on how the form of a building can be connected and related to a function in a way in which the perception of, for example, 'being standard' can, in turn, ground the judgement that the building looks fit. What is missing is a more precise account of how a standard (or contra standard or variable) feature is perceived.¹³

Larry Shiner proposed an alternative approach to functional beauty that does not rely on the distinction between standard, contra-standard, and variable features.¹⁴ His moderate functionalism, which can be articulated in two stages, argues for the following: (1) practical achievement can influence aesthetical evaluation; and (2) practical considerations are not infeasible: functional aspects play an important and internal role in aesthetic judgments of architectural works but are by no means the only relevant criteria for an overall aesthetic evaluation. With regard to the first point, Shiner's account relies on Rachel Zuckert's interpretation of Kant's notion of dependent beauty.¹⁵ According to Shiner, an aesthetic judgement involves paying attention to all the perceivable empirical features of an object in one's encounter with it. In turn, these characteristics are internally unified in the interaction of imagination and understanding.¹⁶ In the judgement of dependent beauty, the imagination of the representation of the sensible forms of an object is integrated also by concepts. According to Shiner, we can include considerations of the object's function among these concepts as well. These functional or practical considerations do not merely play a negative role, that is, they do not act simply as necessary conditions for positive aesthetic judgements. In contrast to other interpretations of the Kantian notion of dependent beauty, Shiner and Zuckert argue that considerations of purpose do not limit or restrict the free play of imagination and that functional conceptualisations are an integral part of the process of judging aesthetically.¹⁷ As long as the concept of function is involved in a relevant experience, practical considerations can figure as an integral part of aesthetic judgements based

¹³ See S. Davies, 'Functional Beauty Examined', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 40 (2010), pp. 315–32; for an extensive discussion of Parsons and Carlson's account.

¹⁴ L. Shiner, 'On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, (2011), pp. 31–41.

¹⁵ See I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, P. Guyer (ed.) (Cambridge UP, 1790/2000); and R. Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology* (Cambridge UP, 2007). I will not here assess whether the proposed interpretation is adequate. However, note that Paul Guyer suggested that various possible interpretations of Kant's idea of dependent beauty can be supported by some textual evidence. See P. Guyer, *Values of Beauty* (Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 129–40.

¹⁶ Shiner, 'On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture', at p. 36.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, at p. 36.

on such an experience. Unfortunately, Shiner does not explain how this perception of function in an experience of a building is possible or which configuration of details is indicative of a practical success. The second part of Shiner's account is based on the intuition that there are cases in which the value of a building's formal properties may overcome its limited functional inadequacies in the *overall* aesthetic judgement. In particular, he claims that we are prone to forgive certain practical failures of specific visionary buildings due to their astonishing forms and judge them as aesthetically beautiful overall. However, forgiveness is not without limits. A moderate functionalist, as Shiner calls himself, can recognise the formal or sensuous value of a building but form a negative overall aesthetic judgement on it when such a construction is functionally inadequate to an intolerable degree. In fact, the failure of an architectural work to embody its expected function can outweigh its other positive formal features. Nevertheless, according to moderate functionalists, function is just one of the features that may be taken into account when a building is judged as a work of architecture or when it is judged aesthetically.

Both Shiner's and Parsons & Carlson's accounts are interesting and both vindicate important intuitions of contemporary architectural criticism. However, neither is without problems. In addition to the previously mentioned difficulties, Shiner argues that Parsons and Carlson's account is not convincing because it relies on the idea that there is, for each possible type of architectural work, a set of standard features that may be used as criteria when determining whether each building is functionally beautiful. Yet, Shiner argues that for certain types of building, it is simply impossible nowadays to determine which forms are standard relative to a functional kind.¹⁸ The problem seems not to be simply epistemological, and thus related to our difficulties in recognising the standard (contra-standard and variable) features of a type of building in our architectural experience; but also connected to the current design practice, which no longer allows for the constitution of perception of what can be considered as standard features of building-types. If this is the case, then it is not clear how reference to functional categories of building can influence our aesthetic perceptions in the way required by Parsons and Carlson. Shiner's theory, in turn, does not seem to provide a complete account of the connection between function and aesthetic perception. We are told that functional considerations play an internal role in aesthetic judgements and experiences. However, the theory does not provide an answer to Scruton's problem of translation, that is, the need for an account of how

¹⁸ Shiner, *On Aesthetics and Function in Architecture*, at p. 35.

the idea of function can somehow be embodied into the perceptual form of an object.¹⁹

In response to the foregoing, I will propose an account of how judgments of functional beauty can be structured and explained. First of all, we need not postulate that we have to perceive or read the function of a building as if it were written on its façade. In some cases, the shape of a building does suggest its function. For example, there are buildings shaped like hamburgers, toilets, or safes. In these cases, the shapes are meant to suggest the purpose for which these buildings have been built, for example, to provide fast food or to produce a certain kind of good. However, it is clear that we cannot apply such a model of understanding to all cases.

A better view would seem to be that when experiencing a building as a work of architecture, knowing its proper function(s) may *direct* our attention towards certain non-aesthetic features and generate expectations that can be seen by rational agents as compatible (or not) with its (real or imagined) proper function and conducive (or not) to a successful use of that building. In other words, if the notion of functional beauty makes any sense, and if it can be applied to architecture, our knowledge of the function of a building triggers a series of expectations that are related to our knowledge of how a certain function may be fulfilled by what we see in an architectural experience. The knowledge of a particular kind of function F is connected to various features that are taken as crucial for the successful fulfilling of F . These features do not have to be perceived as *standard* for F in relation to any model, because a function can be multiply realised by a combination of different non-aesthetic features. Once we identify which features are meant to allow the performance of the expected function F , our set of expectations can be either satisfied or not by such features. We can perceive functional beauty (in any of the possible kinds individuated by Parsons and Carlson, i.e., looking fit, visual tension and elegance) as a feature that emerges from practical conditions by considering how practical needs were meant to be realised in the design of the building. If the expectations triggered by our knowledge of the purpose of a building are perceived as being satisfied, the building may be perceived as looking fit. We may perceive visual tension in case our expectations are partially satisfied (by the fact that the building in question is perceived as fulfilling its function) and, at the same time, when the architectural composition fails to meet expectations regarding how certain

¹⁹ This problem is common to functional analysis of architecture. See Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, p. 40. See Parsons and Carlson, *Functional Beauty*, pp. 45–9 for their formulation of the problem.

elements should be arranged, given the expected function. In this last case, the architectural experience may be enriched by a peculiar kind of intellectual pleasure; more specifically, the pleasure that can be related to the activity of our understanding when we grasp that a (functional) problem has been solved in an unexpected way. We may perceive elegance when the arrangement of the elements of the building are perceived as matching our expectations and as contributing to the fulfilment of its function in a clever and ingenious way. In addition, in a perception of elegance, we do not perceive any unnecessary element in the architectural composition. I emphasise here the importance of ingenuity and economic efficiency in the perception of elegance because it seems to me that Parsons and Carlson's account, with its exclusive emphasis on the paucity of unnecessary elements, may consequently confuse plainness with elegance. It seems to me that the perception of elegance in architecture is often triggered by an appreciation for the way in which a problem is solved. For instance, an ingenious solution to a structural need may draw our attention to the simplicity of the elements employed.²⁰

There is a crucial distinction to be made at this point. Aesthetic judgments of beauty, of whatever kind, that are related to certain functional elements can be grounded on at least two different kinds of perception: (1) a perception of beauty based on the form, shape, and other formal qualities of the functional elements; or (2) a perception of beauty grounded on the recognition of the arrangement of the elements that are combined to provide the expected practical function. My suggestion is that functional beauty emerges from the latter kind of perception. Stephen Davies argues that functional beauty emerges instead when the aesthetic properties of the functional object contribute to its primary function. More specifically, Davies argues that, for a utilitarian object *u*, 'a functionally beautiful *u*'s aesthetically valuable properties must enhance its fulfilling its primary function, even though it may not be a good *u* in virtue of other practical failings'.²¹ This means that a beautiful chair is beautiful as a utilitarian object if it has features that make it graceful, stylish, elegant, modern, and these aesthetic features make the chair more comfortable to sit on.²² A chair, according to Davies, can be functionally beautiful in virtue of the way in which its aesthetic properties suit its primary function (or are perceived to contribute to its function(s)).²³

²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing this point to my attention.

²¹ Davies, 'Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks and Functional Beauty', at p. 237.

²² *ibid.*, at p. 237.

²³ *ibid.*, at p. 237.

However, unlike Davies, I do not think that, for architecture at least, judgements of functional beauty should be grounded only on the contribution of the *aesthetic* properties of a building to its purpose. On the contrary, a judgement that a building possesses functional beauty can be grounded simply on the appreciation of those elements that are not necessarily individually beautiful but are functional when combined. Consider the Great Wall of China, the original function of which was to protect the borders of the empire and to allow the transportation of goods. An observer of the time could have judged this construction to be functionally beautiful in virtue of its particularly clever design and the disposition of its components. Yet such a judgment of functional beauty does not have to be grounded on the beauty of each individual brick.

It is important to note that this account and Davies' are not in opposition to one another. Rather, the two accounts may be taken as distinguishing two different concepts: (1) a sense of functional beauty where beauty is literally functional in that the aesthetic properties of an object improve or influence its capacity to allow a certain function (Davies's account); and (2) a sense of functional beauty wherein beauty emerges when we perceive a particularly meritorious arrangement of elements interacting in specific ways with our expectations and that is directed at a function. The first concept is related to the recognition of a practical function of aesthetic elements (beauty that is functional), while the second concept (emergent/functional beauty), though it is still based on the recognition of a practical function, rests on the interaction in perception of the arrangement of the non-aesthetic features of the architectural work with our expectations.

In the second sense of functional beauty, the elements of the composition do not need to be beautiful in order to ground a judgement of functional beauty. This second sense may also be compared fruitfully to the perception of unity in a successful composition. The sensation of being in front of a work of intellectual and aesthetic value can be derived from the recognition of the unity of the composition and its purpose, that is, the recognition of the correctness and harmony of the design combined with the successful execution of certain actions inside the building. If the elements that are selected as realisers of the recognised function of a building are (perceived as) apt to fulfil their role in an ingenious and brilliant way, then they can give rise to a sort of delight that can be classified as aesthetic, as this pleasure, among other things, goes beyond the actual fulfilment of that function (if we take disinterestedness as a feature of the

aesthetic).²⁴ Elements that are arranged in a way that shows an ingenious unity towards their purpose do not have to be exotic or revolutionary to be functionally beautiful. For example, the arrangement can allow agents to perform certain functions in a simple and not troublesome way. It is also important to notice that aptness to function is something *perceived* or considered as such by an observer at a specific time. The building should be apt to its function at least in the mind of the perceiver, not in relation to pre-established categories.

In this section, I have presented a number of ways in which the notion of functional beauty can be understood and applied to works of architecture. Analysis has shown that even though more work is still required to make this concept completely tenable, we have a *pro tanto* case for thinking that a judgement of beauty, of whichever kind, can be grounded on functional considerations. In the next section, I will clarify the sense in which works of architecture can be immoral.

II. MORALITY, ARCHITECTURE, AND THE ARTS

When considering the relation between architecture and morality, we may wonder how a building can possibly have a moral character or be the object of a moral evaluation.²⁵ After all, a building is just an object; it does not have mental states and is not a rational agent.²⁶ As a result, it may seem that moral judgements on buildings are based on a category mistake; in particular, attributing morality or responsibility to objects that cannot have any. However, at the same time, there are senses in which judging buildings morally, in certain qualified ways, seems reasonable and is used in common practice.

²⁴ In relation to this point, see David Hume's discussion in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*. In particular, Hume claims that imagination can be involved in the evaluations of a functional kind of beauty. More specifically, we may use our imagination to sympathise with the hypothetical user of a construction that does not belong to us or that does not bring any benefit to us. See D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, D.F. Norton and M.J. Norton (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1739/40] 2000), at p. 235 and 373. See Guyer, *Beauty and Utility in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*, pp. 116–7 for discussion.

²⁵ The literature on this topic is vast and it would be impossible to report all of them here. Recent important contributions include K. Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (The MIT Press, 1998); and D. Watkins, *Morality and Architecture Revised* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); B. Wasserman and P.J. Sullivan and G. Palermo, *Ethics and the Practice of Architecture* (Oxford: Wiley, 2000); W. Fox, 'Architecture Ethics', in J. Olsen et alia (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Technology* (Oxford: Wiley, 2009), pp. 387–91.

²⁶ Christine Korsgaard, for instance, argued that agency requires, at least, rationality. A building does not have a mind, so, strictly speaking, it cannot be rational. It can be an expression of rationality, in the sense of being well-designed, but, in itself, it does not decide what to do. See C. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution* (Oxford UP, 2009).

An account of how moral attributes can be ascribed to works of art, despite their being inanimate objects and despite the abstract nature of certain forms of art, has been recently proposed by Berys Gaut. In particular, Gaut applied Guy Sircello's account of attributions of expressive properties to works of art to the case of moral judgements.²⁷

Instead of employing the metaphor-based account proposed by Nelson Goodman (according to which an expressive property of a work of art must involve a core of reference within a symbolic system; and that the work must metaphorically possess the expressed property), Sircello held that it would be better to rephrase our ascriptions of expressive properties to works of art in terms of what the artist does through it.²⁸ Sircello calls what an artist does in her work the *artistic act*. In his view, instead of saying that Giorgio De Chirico's *Ariadne* (1913) expresses melancholy, it would be better say that De Chirico expresses melancholy through (or in) his painting. Instead of saying that what is represented in the painting, i.e. a leaning sculpture in a sunny, metaphysical space, is melancholic, it would be better say that the artist represents the content of the painting in a melancholic way. The general idea is that we would have a better understanding of the ascription of mental qualities to a work of art if we see these ascriptions as judgements about the action performed by the artist through her work. The artistic act that is performed through the work should not be understood as prior to the work or as the cause of some of the work's features. Sircello, in fact, suggests that the description of an artistic act is, in a way, also a description of the features of the related artwork; this shows how the artistic act and the artwork are internally related.

According to Gaut, we can apply this model to our moral judgements about works of art. In the case of architecture, we can re-describe moral judgements on buildings as evaluations of what is done through the work by the architect and all those who have taken part in the realisation of the construction and maintenance and can be meaningfully considered as responsible for it. This account can be expanded to include, as moral ascriptions to buildings, those acts performed by people that use, commissioned, or designed the building, in brief, all those who can be taken as responsible for the building's function(s). In fact, buildings are collective works; hence, the responsibility for them cannot simply be ascribed to a single person. In order to accommodate this idea, we can say that the

²⁷ See B. Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford UP, 2007); and his 'The Ethical Criticism of Art', in J. Levinson (ed.) *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essay at the Intersection* (Cambridge UP, 1998), pp.182–203; and G. Sircello, *Mind and Art* (Princeton UP, 1972), pp. 16–46.

²⁸ See N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976); 'How Buildings Mean', *Critical Inquiry*, 11 (1985); for Goodman's theory of expression in terms of metaphorical exemplification.

artistic act that is performed through the building can have more than one agent.²⁹ In addition to this, we may also want to include as agents who are responsible for performing acts through a building those people who were neither directly involved in the construction of the building nor responsible for the original design but were involved in the choice of adapting a building to a new function at a subsequent time.

According to this model of understanding moral judgements on buildings, the ethical appraisal of a work of architecture is thus not directed towards an inanimate object, but rather towards those acts performed by people through the building, whether they were responsible for the original project or for its actual use. In this case, it is not the building itself that is morally reprehensible; it is the people who use/commissioned/designed or even constructed it (if not forced to do so). This means that in each moral ascription involving a building, we must specify which agent is related to the specific act performed through the work in question. For example, the architect may have voluntarily designed a structurally unstable building or a building that is meant to segregate certain racial groups. In addition, a building can be evaluated as immoral in virtue of the morally wicked acts that brought about its construction (such as the use of slaves or forced labour). A building can have a morally dubious character in all these various cases, and such a morally dubious character is always related to the moral agents and the link they have with the construction. With regard to the scope of this paper, the sense of immorality that interests us is limited to considerations of function and, in what follows, I will assume that an immoral function is a sufficient condition for a work of architecture to be considered immoral.

Take the complex of Auschwitz in 1943, in particular the gas chambers in Auschwitz I, the original camp. There cannot be any doubt that such buildings were immoral due to at least (1) their function ('the systematic extermination of Jews'); and (2) the way in which they were used by the guards.

From the point of view of the atheist, or the enlightened theist *à la* Voltaire, a great part of what is considered great architecture in the Western tradition is immoral. For instance, the atheist may argue that one proper function of the *Papal Basilica of Saint Peter* in Rome is to promote, through its uncontroversial beauty, a morally dubious theocracy. Promoting a demagogical and morally dubious theocracy is surely immoral (bear in mind that the aesthetic evaluation is directed towards whoever is responsible for the building to have and continuously perform this function). Examples of immoral works of art related to religion are obviously not found in the Christian world alone. The Mosque

²⁹ See the accounts proposed by R. Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View* (Oxford UP, 2007); M. Bratman, *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge UP, 1999); or M. Gilbert, *Sociality and Responsibility* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

of Uqba or the destroyed Templo Mayor (the second temple built by the Aztecs between 1375 and 1427 with its sacrificial stone) can be equally seen as buildings with morally questionable functions. Now, functionally beautiful buildings, such as the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome, may have morally dubious purposes. How then is this related to their overall aesthetic value?

III. FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY AND IMMORAL ARCHITECTURE

The relationship between art, aesthetics, and morality has been discussed in the Western tradition since at least Plato.³⁰ Despite the long history of the debate, it is difficult, as seen in the contemporary literature, even to find a common classification of the viable theoretical options. Among the various mappings of the recent debate, Alessandro Giovannelli's seems the most promising,³¹ despite the fact that he does not properly distinguish between aesthetic and artistic values.³² In what follows, I will elaborate on his classification while keeping in mind this distinction.³³

³⁰ The literature on this topic is vast. Among the recent accounts of the relationship between Plato and the arts, see J. Moravcsik and P. Temko (eds.), *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982); C. Janaway, *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts* (Oxford UP, 1995); 'Plato and the Arts', in H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 388–400.

³¹ A. Giovannelli, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art: A New Mapping of the Territory', *Philosophia*, 35 (2007), pp. 117–27.

³² See G. Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989) and D. Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), at p. 26 for discussions of this distinction. For a first approximation, aesthetic properties are given in a perceptual encounter with an object and depend on a combination of its formal features in conjunction with other cognitive aspects, whereas artistic value is not directly or intrinsically connected with aesthetic considerations. For instance, an artistic property can be related to the particular role played by the work in the context of the *artworld*. See A. Danto, 'The Artworld', *Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (1964), pp. 571–84; for an early statement of this notion. The distinction between artistic and aesthetic properties is not intended to suggest that artistic properties do not influence aesthetic properties, or vice versa. See F. Sibley, 'Arts or the Aesthetic – Which comes first?', in J. Benson, B. Redfern, and J.R. Cox (eds), *Approach to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.135–41 for a discussion of the relationship between art and aesthetics.

³³ Both Daniel Jacobson and Giovannelli disagree with Noel Carroll's and Berys Gaut's introductions to the debate. See K.L. Walton, 'Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 68 (1994), pp. 27–50; N. Carroll, 'Moderate Moralism', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 36 (1996), pp. 223–38; 'Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research', *Ethics*, 110 (2000), pp. 350–87; B. Gaut, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art', in J. Levinson (ed.) *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. 182–203; *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford UP, 2007); M. Kieran, 'Art and Morality', in J. Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford UP, 2003); D. Jacobson, 'Ethical Criticism and the Vice of Moderation', in M. Kieran (ed.) *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 342–55.

According to Giovannelli, the theory known as radical autonomism should be understood as the view according to which (1) works of art can be morally evaluated; and (2) the moral value of such works does not have consequences for their artistic value. If we retain the distinction between aesthetic and artistic qualities, we can distinguish three other versions of radical autonomism: one related to the artistic value of a work of art, one related to its aesthetic value, and one related to both. In particular, we can distinguish (1) a theory according to which moral defects or merits do not influence the aesthetic value of a work of art while remaining neutral on these defects' or merits' bearing on artistic value; (2) a theory according to which moral defects or merits are not relevant for the artistic value of a work while remaining neutral on the relation of these defects or merits with aesthetic value; and (3) a theory according to which moral defects or merits do not have any aesthetic or artistic relevance.

Obviously, a clear assessment of these views will depend on how art and aesthetics are conceived. Keeping in mind the possibility of distinguishing between the artistic and the aesthetic value of a work of art, we can also distinguish various versions of moderate autonomism, among which are the following: (1) a theory according to which the moral merits or defects of a work bears, on occasion, and unsystematically, on the artistic value of a work; and (2) a theory according to which the moral merits or defects of a work of art may influence its aesthetic value. Other possible combinations include moderate moralism, which can be specified as (1) a theory according to which moral and aesthetic values are related and this connection is systematically in relation to the kind or genre to which the artwork belongs; and (2) a theory according to which moral value and artistic value are connected systematically to the kind of object at issue.³⁴ Similar positions can be specified for the radical moralist, according to which the aesthetic or the artistic values are always connected to moral considerations.³⁵ In principle, we may also combine these views relative to whether we are evaluating aesthetic or artistic value: for instance, we may assume a moderate moralist stance towards the artistic value of a building while being radical moralists with respect to its aesthetic value.

In what follows, I will take the expression '*architectural* value' to refer to the *artistic* value of a building. I will also presuppose that the eventual

³⁴ I have omitted to report all the possible combinations of aesthetic and artistic value because these are not directly relevant to my main point.

³⁵ See Giovannelli, 'The Ethical Criticism of Art', at p. 122 for the original classification.

value of the *functional* beauty of a building contributes to its aesthetic value. Given this clarification, the position I want to defend is the following: to a certain degree, buildings can be aesthetically more valuable in virtue of the fact that they appear to fulfil their immoral function to an observer at a specific time, which is a moral defect if the appearance is well grounded. In addition, I think that the connection between immorality and aesthetic value does not seem to be systematic or related to any particular kind of building: immoral buildings come from different functional categories. Of course, ‘torture gardens’ are more likely to be addressed (im)morally, but the whole set of possible architectural categories is so vast and the set of possible ways in which a construction can be immoral is so varied that any systematic connection between the two is unlikely to be found.

My reasoning runs as follows:

- 1 The notion of functional beauty in architecture has intuitive and theoretical appeal: as was shown in the first section, it makes sense to attribute aesthetic value to a building in virtue of its functional merit or, more precisely, in virtue of its appearance to an observer at a certain time to fulfil a function;
- 2 There are cases of immoral buildings wherein their immorality depends on their function;
- 3 There are cases in which an immoral building is functionally beautiful relative to its specific immoral function (and its appearance to fulfil such an immoral function to an observer at a specific time);
- 4 Consequently, there are cases in which an immoral building is more aesthetically valuable in virtue of its immoral function. More generally, the aesthetic value of a building may be influenced by considerations related to its function, which can be either moral or immoral. In particular, the appearance of fulfilling an immoral function can also be an aesthetic merit.

To clarify this last point, a building’s aesthetic value can be influenced by considerations about the appearance of its fulfilling a function. The function can be moral or immoral (that is, the acts performed by people through the building can be either moral or immoral). From the fact that a building has moral defects in relation to its function, it does not follow that this constitutes an aesthetic defect as such. At least, our practices do not suggest so (i.e., the enlightened atheist case). On the contrary, the appearance of fulfilling a function is a criterion for assessing part of the aesthetic merit of a work of architecture, in particular, its functional beauty. As we have seen, appearing as apt to fulfil a function may

constitute an aesthetic merit, so, in particular, appearing to fulfil immoral functions can be an aesthetic merit

However, this is not the end of the story:

- 1 There are cases in which the immoral function of a building is perceived as so hideous or callous that a specific appreciator cannot engage aesthetically with the work in question. In other words, if the work has a function that is perceived as being extremely callous or hideous, this feature may prohibit the appreciation of the ingeniousness of the embodiment of such a function in the building, preventing the perception of functional beauty. Two cases need to be separated: on the one hand, the prohibition can derive from a personal bias (or idiosyncrasy) on the part of the viewer and should thus be resisted; on the other hand, the prohibition could derive from a fault in the work. It is the second of these cases that is discussed;
- 2 Therefore, there are cases in which buildings are judged as functionally beautiful in virtue of their immoral function and cases in which they are not.

From the point of view of the militant atheist, the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter is an immoral building: one of its proper functions is to promote an ideological and deeply wrong worldview that has caused, causes, and will cause harm to the moral education of people exposed to it. However, it is conceivable that the atheist may come to admire and appreciate the ingeniousness and suitability of the way in which the Basilica has been designed to fulfil, among various things, this immoral purpose. Despite her disagreement with Catholicism, it is possible for the atheist to appreciate not only the formal features of the Basilica as such, but also its functional beauty. Note that this description is compatible with the various accounts of functional beauty that were discussed above. For instance, the atheist may appreciate the way in which the aesthetic properties of the Basilica have been employed to satisfy the function of ‘advertising’ Catholicism (Stephen Davies’s understanding of functional beauty). If we adopt Parsons and Carlson’s account, we can say that the Church looks particularly fit for its functional category, given its grandeur, which is meant to arouse awe in the observer (and confirm pre-existing faith or even achieve a conversion). In other words, the Basilica seems to have all the standard features that can reasonably be taken as characteristic of an instrument of political propaganda and thus looks fit for this purpose.

However, as specified in (5), there is much more to be said. There are cases in which the immoral function of a construction is perceived as being so morally repugnant, hideous, or evil that it is hardly possible for

people who belong to a certain epoch or social group to engage with it positively. The case of Nazi extermination camps is an example: even though it can be argued that these camps served their purpose efficiently, or that they were ingeniously devised and thus possess all the standard features expected from an extermination camp, it seems that an aesthetic appraisal of their aptness for their terrible function is excluded. I take this as signalling that the connection between the immoral function of a construction and its aesthetic value is not systematic and is determined by factors that are not conceptual in character, such as the psychology and the educational system of the people involved.

The social and philosophical aspects of the immoral functions that works of architecture are taken to perform are key elements that influence judgements of immorality and that occasionally impede our aesthetic involvement with such works.³⁶ For instance, the (deserved) high degree of moral condemnation of Nazi camps has generated a sense of revulsion towards such places and such revulsion apparently excluded the camps from aesthetical evaluations of a functional sort.³⁷ On the contrary, the aesthetic appreciation of Saint Peter's Basilica by the atheist is taken as a sign of good education and aesthetic refinement on her part: the atheist is capable of leaving aside certain moral and religious beliefs in order to appreciate both the 'free' and the functional beauty of religious buildings.³⁸ There are, of course, borderline cases, such as the aforementioned Aztec temples where brutal human sacrifices were performed. In these cases, the level of perceived moral condemnation is not as high as that in the Nazi camps. Hence, at least in my case, I do not feel the same resistance in engaging with the buildings in question

³⁶ The case is similar, but distinct, to the phenomenon (if there is such a thing) of imaginative resistance caused by moral concerns. Roughly, there are occurrences of imaginative resistance caused by moral concerns when a subject finds it problematic to engage in some sort of imaginative activity due to the moral character of what she is supposed to imagine. See B. Weatherston, 'Morality, Fiction, and Possibility', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 4 (2004) in which the author distinguishes various possible cases of resistance; R. Moran, 'The Expression of Feeling in Imagination', *Philosophical Review*, 103 (1994), pp. 75–106; K. Walton, 'On the (So-Called) Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance', in S. Nichols (ed.), *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction* (Oxford UP, 2006); and T.S. Gendler, 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000), pp. 55–81.

³⁷ I will leave aside the possible objection that the actual function of such constructions has changed, so that they should be evaluated under different functional categories. We can either imagine that aesthetic judgements about them are made at a time in which they were still serving their original purpose or, alternatively, we may apply the same reasoning to other examples of efficient extermination camps that are currently extant.

³⁸ This does not mean that all atheists react in the same way. The point is simply meant to suggest that many appreciators of art in Western society are capable of a satisfying (even if not complete) aesthetic appraisal of works of great religious art as such while holding, at the same time, a secular or naturalistic attitude towards them.

aesthetically. This, of course, does not mean that I do not condemn such practices from a moral point of view; what is different is the perceived moral hideousness of certain places, which, in turn, is an aspect that has been culturally transmitted. The degrees of cultural pressure and perceived moral condemnation are part of the key elements that determine the unsystematic aspect of the relation between works of art and morality.³⁹

A possible objection to my argument is that it does not show that the aesthetic merit of a building is grounded on its *immorality*, but rather that it is grounded on the function of such a work of architecture, whatever this function may be. If this were correct, I would not have shown a particular connection between aesthetic value and immorality. In reply to this objection, while I have maintained that there is, in general, a connection between aesthetic value and morality, I have also argued that judgements of functional beauty can be grounded in various ways on the (recognised) proper functions of the buildings in question. If an aesthetic judgement of functional beauty is grounded on the perception or appearance that a building is apt to an immoral function, this amounts to saying that an immoral aspect of a building is related to its aesthetic merits. In relation to this point, the critic may then think that my argument begs the question because the previous discussion of functional beauty takes for granted that there is a connection between immoral (or moral) functions and aesthetical merits. In particular, it may be claimed that I have not shown that there is a particular connection between an immoral function and the notion of functional beauty. Without such a demonstration of the possibility of a connection between immoral function and functional beauty, there is nothing to stop a radical moralist from maintaining that the immorality of a function would not allow any judgement of functional beauty. However, my example of the enlightened atheist seems to show the contrary. In particular, it seems possible to appreciate the appearance of the fulfilling of an immoral function (and being aware of such immorality) and attribute to the building an aesthetic value in virtue of this experience. I have conceded to the radical moralist that there are cases in which the recognition of the immorality of a construction switches-off our aesthetic interest in a building or even grounds negative aesthetic judgements

³⁹ An assessment of the relation between moral judgements and the psychological and sociological features of the perceived morality cannot be addressed adequately here. This field of enquiry seems to belong to that hybrid territory in which ethics, philosophy of mind, and psychology meet. See, for instance, J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (Oxford UP, 2005) and W. Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.), *Moral Psychology*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008) for recent contributions.

about it (in virtue of the absence of pleasure which is sometimes taken as the ground for judgements of beauty). However, this point, combined with my previous observations, shows only that the connection between aesthetic merits and morality is not systematic; rather, it is influenced by cultural or individual mental dispositions. Parsons and Carlson seem to adopt a radical autonomist stance towards the aesthetic value of buildings (at least regarding their functional beauty) and morality. In particular, they claim that the concept of functional beauty is morally neutral and that even odious artefacts can be functionally beautiful.⁴⁰ However, they do not advance any argument in favour of this view, and their discussion is focused on political issues, such as whether the concept of functional beauty is open to left-wing thinkers. Leaving aside this particular preoccupation, I have shown that there are clear counterexamples to this radical autonomist position.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this last section are to be understood conditionally: if the notion of functional beauty can be understood as a genuine kind of beauty and if judgements of functional beauty can be considered as genuine aesthetic judgements, then we have a *pro tanto* case in favour of the view according to which works of art, in our case works of architecture, obtain part of their aesthetic value from their immoral function. As I have argued, the connection between aesthetics and morality does not seem to be systematic due to (1) the varieties of connections between kinds of buildings and immoral functions and (2) the socially determined and variable level of moral repugnancy that influences our capacities to engage aesthetically with a building. An important premise of my reasoning is that the notion of functional beauty makes sense. In the first section, I have shown that this is indeed the case.⁴¹

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

⁴⁰ See Parsons and Carlson, *Functional Beauty*, pp. 149–54.

⁴¹ I would like to thank Paisley Livingston, Rafael De Clercq and the anonymous referees of this journal for comments and suggestions. This work was supported by Hankuk University of Foreign Studies Research Fund of 2011.