

# Larry Shiner

---

## Functional beauty : the metaphysics of beauty and specific functions in architecture

---

Sztuka i Filozofia 35, 78-99

---

2009

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Larry Shiner

### Functional Beauty: The Metaphysics of Beauty and Specific Functions in Architecture

In this paper I want to develop a position in the philosophy of architecture that might be called “moderate functionalism,” and owes something to both Nick Zangwill’s “moderate formalism” and Noël Carroll’s “moderate moralism.” I began to develop some of these ideas on function as a way of understanding attempts in the studio crafts to gain “art status” by abandoning functionality, then more recently as a way of understanding controversies over spectacular art museum designs that seem to subordinate the function of showing art to the aesthetics of the architecture.<sup>1</sup> Many of the iconic art museums created between the opening of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao in 1997 and the opening of Daniel Libeskind’s 2006 Denver Art Museum addition, have given rise to critical complaints such as: “flash and bravura win out over contemplation ... and architecture triumphs over art.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with the “crafts-as-art” issue in *The Invention of Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2001) 274–278 and in “The Fate of Craft,” in *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*, ed. Sandra Alföldy (Halifax, N.S.: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2007), 33–46. On function in architecture see “Architecture vs. Art: The Aesthetics of Art Museum Design,” published in the on-line journal *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 5, 2007 at [www.contempaesthetics.org](http://www.contempaesthetics.org). There I try to sort out the way the issue affects six different types of art museum and address the theoretical issues through some informal analogies. An earlier version of this paper with a different focus was presented to the 2008 meeting of the Nordic Society for Aesthetics in Uppsala, Sweden under the title “Temptation to Self-Indulgence: Aesthetics and Function in Recent Art Museum Design.” I am grateful to Ewa Bogusz-Boltuc for the invitation to prepare this version which pays tribute to the work of Nick Zangwill.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolai Ouroussoff, *New York Times*, October 13, 2005. Complaints of this kind actually combine two objections that ought to be distinguished. One is the lesser worry that spectacular architecture will outshine the art, the other, the more serious worry that strange curves, odd angles, and enormous heights may actually interfere with our attention to the art. I am grateful to David Goldblatt for first pointing out the importance of this distinction. On the architecture vs. art controversy in general see Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes* (London: Verso, 2002), 37; Hans Belting, “Place of Reflection or Place of Sensation?,” in *The Discursive Museum*, ed. Peter Noever (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001), 72–82; and Vittorio Magnango Lampugnani, “Insight versus Entertainment: Untimely Meditations on the

Confronted with such a clash between architecture as art and architecture *for* art many people would say: “Why not have both?” Indeed, our natural inclination seems to be that aesthetics and function should to be united in any work of architecture. Yet, there are also many who would be prepared to praise an outstanding work of architecture whether or not it effectively served the art within.<sup>3</sup> Can either of these two intuitions be philosophically justified? Can they be reconciled? To answer these questions we need to deal with the more general underlying issue of whether aesthetics and function in architecture are simply independent of each other or stand in a relation of mutual implication. I have found no contemporary discussion of this issue in philosophy and theory of architecture that is completely satisfactory. I will survey some of those accounts, especially recent proposals for a theory of “functional beauty,” and then offer my own attempt to show the way in which aesthetics and function are mutually implicated in architecture, illustrating my position with the case of iconic art museums. Drawing in part on a framework proposed by Zangwill, I will first argue that function plays a necessary role in the artistic creation of all architectural works; then I will offer a description of the way in which function should also play a necessary role in the aesthetic appreciation of architectural works.

Before canvassing some of the current views on aesthetics and function in architecture, I need to address the multiplicity of meanings “function” has taken on in architectural theory and philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Although “function” has been a central motif in architectural writing since the early twentieth century, writers from Vitruvius to Batteux, used the term “utility.”<sup>5</sup> Today, “utility,” seems to imply a narrower, means-end relationship, whereas “function” suggests the role something plays within a larger system, as implied by some of its uses in biology or anthropology. But within architectural theory itself the meanings of “function” have become legion. For example, early modernists sometimes interpreted Louis Sullivan’s phrase “form follows function” to refer to the “structural” function (a building’s form should reflect its technical means of construction) and at other times to mean “practical” function (a building’s form should reflect its specific purposes or utility). In addition to the ideas of structural function and practical function, however, philosophers and architectural theorists have also written of architecture’s social function, its ethical function, its

---

Architecture of Twentieth-century Art Museums,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 245–262.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Filler, *Makers of Modern Architecture* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007), 278.

<sup>4</sup> For a good overview see Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 174–195.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Guyer has traced the important discussion on beauty and utility among the founders of modern aesthetics in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 110–128.

symbolic function, even its aesthetic function.<sup>6</sup> Thus, aesthetic theories of art such as Nick Zangwill's or Gary Iseminger's suggest the possibility of rephrasing the issue of the place of function in art museum architecture, as about the relation between two *kinds* of function, aesthetic function and practical function. To borrow Zangwill's terms, a museum design may intend to serve the building's aesthetic function as a work of art by making aesthetic properties depend not only on nonaesthetic properties such as shape, space, light, texture, color, but also on such nonaesthetic properties as practical, environmental, and symbolic functions. Rather than speaking of "aesthetic function" and "practical function," of course, architectural theorists and critics have usually talked of "form vs. function," and I will sometimes follow that shorthand, although usually meaning by function "practical function." There are, of course, also important relationships between aesthetic properties and the social, environmental, ethical, or symbolic functions of art museums, but this paper focuses on the practical functions of art museums, in particular the function of displaying art.

I will begin my review of theoretical positions on the relation of aesthetic function and practical functions by considering some expressions of the intuition that outstanding architectural form may justify overlooking functional faults. Those who have defended this perspective have usually treated aesthetic functions and practical functions as simply parallel to each other. Schopenhauer forcefully expressed the separatist position: "the great merit of the architect is achieving purely aesthetic ends ... in spite of other ends foreign to them."<sup>7</sup> Another way of explicating the separation of aesthetics and function employs the widely used conceptual polarity: architecture vs. building.<sup>8</sup> One of its most cited formulations is by the

---

<sup>6</sup> As Larry L. Ligo has shown, most architecture critics in the period between World War I and 1950 conceived of function as "structural articulation, meaning either the articulation of materials and techniques or the revelation of the floor plan. After mid-century, there was a shift among critics to thinking of function in broader terms as practical, expressive, social, symbolic and aesthetic. *The Concept of Function in Twentieth-Century Architectural Criticism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984). The social, symbolic, ethical and aesthetic functions dominate the three main book length philosophical treatments of architecture published over the last few decades: Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), Edward Winters, *Aesthetics and Architecture* (London: Continuum Books, 2007). Naturally, the literature on the aesthetic function of art is relevant to the present topic. In addition to the works of Nick Zangwill discussed in the main body of the article, I should mention Gary Iseminger's *The Aesthetic Function of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) which contains an interesting chapter on the distinction between what he calls "artifactual function" and "systematic function" which parallels that between the differing uses of "utility" and "function" mentioned above.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I (New York: Dover, 1969), 217.

<sup>8</sup> Ruskin opens *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* with the assertion that it is "very necessary, in the outset . . . to distinguish carefully between Architecture and Building," arguing that what makes something architecture and one of the fine arts is precisely those parts of it that are unnecessary or useless. John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: Dover, 1989),

historian, Nicholas Pevsner: "A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is architecture ... the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetic appeal."<sup>9</sup> If one defines architecture in such a way that "aesthetic appeal" is sufficient, there would obviously be no basis, in principle, to criticize functionally inadequate designs as *architecturally* deficient. A functionally inadequate design could still be considered an aesthetically excellent work of architecture since its function would be seen as belonging to it only qua building. The architecture vs. building polarity is clearly an evaluative continuum pretending to be a categorical disjunction. Lincoln Cathedral may be considered architecture primarily because of its artistic properties, but as a church it remains a functional building. Conversely, the lowliest bicycle shed possess some aesthetic properties. If the architecture vs. building contrast is used merely as a way of delimiting the subject matter of architectural history and criticism, it may be a convenient distinction, but in order for it to become a dichotomy justifying a purely aesthetic approach to architecture, one would have to prop it up with a set of formalist assumptions.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the belief that form and function in architecture are sufficiently independent to be judged separately usually goes hand in hand with strong formalist approaches.

The other ordinary intuition with which we began – the idea that form and function ought to be somehow united in works of architecture – is sometimes formulated as an ideal of perfect integration (Frank Lloyd Wright's "form and function are one"), but more often as the desirability of some kind of concord for which metaphors like form "following," "fitting," "expressing," or "complimenting" function have been used.<sup>11</sup> There is also the position of extreme "functionalism," which unites form and function by way of the total subordination of aesthetic considerations to functional ones.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, that decidedly minority view has cast a shadow

---

8–9. Le Corbusier uses a different version of it in *Vers Une Architecture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995 [1923]), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Nicolas Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1963) 15. No doubt, there are other criteria that could be invoked in making the comparison of building and architecture, such as monumentality or symbolism. Pevsner admits utility only grudgingly, insisting that "functional soundness" has not always been considered "indispensable for aesthetic enjoyment." Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, op. cit. 17.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the way distinctions are often turned into dichotomies see Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 9–14.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright's dictum can be found in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, ed. Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1960), 33. A good statement of the concord view is Gordon Graham's "Ideally form and function in architecture must complement each other..." Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 150.

<sup>12</sup> I do not bother in this essay to beat the dead horse of "functionalism" as often ascribed to various Modernist architects, partly because several of them were more concerned with "structural functionalism" than with the issue of practical function that is my main concern, and

over the discussion of function in architecture so that even the position that form should be consonant with function is often rejected, claiming that the relationship of function to aesthetic form is impossible to clarify. Gordon Graham, Roger Scruton, and Edward Winter, for example, have all declared that utility or function is a necessary condition of something being architecture, yet each of them in differing degrees has also rejected the idea that a building's *specific* functions are crucial to its aesthetic appreciation.<sup>13</sup> For Graham the idea of form expressing specific functions is likely to result in such absurdities as trying to figure out how a gothic pile like St. Pancras Station in London "expresses" train travel.<sup>14</sup> Scruton and Winter not only say that there is no way to clarify the notion of form following or fitting practical functions, but that it wouldn't make any difference if there were, since functions change over time.<sup>15</sup> For Scruton what remains most important in the appreciation of architecture is "to find meaning in appearance itself," so that "aesthetic considerations ... must take precedence over all other factors."<sup>16</sup> Each of these three authors ends up with some version of a separatist position in which function in the most general sense is admitted to be essential to architecture, but the possibility of particular functions entering into aesthetic judgment is either denied or left in limbo. But their failure to find a place for practical functions in the aesthetic evaluation of architecture at least sharpens the issue by identifying a crucial desideratum for any adequate theory of the relation between aesthetic and practical function: such a theory must be able to show how the aesthetic properties of a work of architecture must in part necessarily emerge from or depend upon its practical functions.

Two recent attempts to meet this desideratum have both named their approach "Functional Beauty." Stephen Davies describes his idea of

---

partly because few of them denied the important place of aesthetic properties in design. Many of the things people justly find at fault in the urban work of International Style modernism stem from its combining a commitment to structuralist functionalism with a particular kind of "machine aesthetic" and with a patronizing disregard for the actual experience of those who had to live and work in those buildings.

<sup>13</sup> Many other philosophers and theorists who have accepted architecture as one of the fine arts have named function as its differentiating feature. See *Architecture and Civilization*, ed. Michael Mitias (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 1999). Among those who view architecture as one of the fine arts, the second most frequently cited distinguishing feature after function is architecture's attachment to a specific site.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Graham, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, op. cit., 150.

<sup>15</sup> The most Scruton will say is that "buildings have uses, and should not be understood as though they did not." Scruton, *Aesthetics of Architecture*, op. cit., 40. For Winter's view see *ibidem*, 148. None of these objections, by the way, keep Graham, Winter, or Scruton from discussing the way architecture expresses various *symbolic* functions such as the metaphorical "character" we imaginatively project onto buildings, qualities like grandeur, elegance, or sobriety (obviously these could also be considered aesthetic properties). Graham, at least, sees such characteristics as linked to the general purposes of building. Graham, op. cit., 151.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Classical Vernacular: Architectural Principles in an Age of Nihilism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), xvii.

“judgments of functional beauty” as nothing less than a “new model of aesthetic judgment.”<sup>17</sup> Claiming that the vast majority of the world’s art has been made to serve some function, Davies proposes taking utilitarian objects rather than works of Western high art the paradigm for aesthetic judgment. After vigorously rejecting Kant’s dependent beauty approach, Davies defines a functionally beautiful object as one that possesses “aesthetic properties that contribute positively to its performing its intended principal functions.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, a beautiful chair “is one having features that make it graceful ... and at the same time ... supportive of the back,” so that if the chair should fail to support us “we then should revise the judgment that the chair is beautiful as a chair.”<sup>19</sup> When it comes to works in the Western high art tradition, however, Davies shifts from the idea of practical function to the idea of aesthetic function. In this way, he accommodates things like abstract paintings since, on his account, they do have a function, namely, “the function of being pleasing when contemplated for their own sake.”<sup>20</sup>

At first glance Davies’ “functional beauty” model of aesthetic judgment might seem to offer a useful articulation how the satisfaction of specific practical functions might affect our aesthetic evaluation of works such as iconic art museum architecture.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, this is not the case. Given Davies’ view of the function of high art, insofar as an art museum is a work of architectural *art*, its aesthetic properties should be judged as an objects of contemplation; but insofar as it is a *museum*, its aesthetic properties should be judged by whether they enhance its function of serving the art. Thus, as currently formulated, Davies’ “functional beauty” approach simply leaves aesthetic functions and practical functions side by side.<sup>22</sup>

Glenn Parsons and Allan Carlson have offered a similar but more comprehensive program in their book, *Functional Beauty*.<sup>23</sup> And, unlike

---

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Davies, “Aesthetic Judgments, Artworks and Functional Beauty,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56, No. 223 (April, 2006), 224–241.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>19</sup> Davies’ essay actually contains a secondary account of functional beauty that he does not seem to notice differs from the main account I have just summarized. In his main account, which we could call the “functional dependence” account, aesthetic properties are judged by how well they serve practical functions. But there is a passage in Davies essay where he describes the relation of aesthetic properties and function as “one of mutual influence and dependence” rather than a relation in which the aesthetic properties must always enhance primary functions. *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>21</sup> I should note that Davies never specifically discusses architecture, and that he does not think architecture is one of the fine arts. In fact in an earlier essay he specifically used functionality as an argument against considering architecture to be an artform. See his “Is Architecture Art?” in *Philosophy and Architecture*, ed. Michael Mitias (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 1994), pp. 31–47.

<sup>22</sup> Although Davies’ “mutual dependence” version of his proposal might do better at integrating the aesthetic function and practical function, it could not help us in explicating our other intuition, namely, that some works of architecture are so satisfying aesthetically that we may forgive their functional faults.

<sup>23</sup> Glenn Parsons and Allen Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

Davies, they not only take architecture as a central case, but set out to answer the objections of Scruton and others by reformulating them as: the Problem of Indeterminacy (how can we identify the “proper” function of a building or artifact?) and the Problem of Translation (how can our perceptual response to a building or artifact be affected by knowledge of its function?). Their answer to the indeterminacy question rejects intentionalist solutions for a definition of proper function taken from “selected effects” theories in evolutionary biology (the existence of a trait due to natural selection). Drawing an analogy between the natural history of reproduction and the reproduction of artifacts, they define proper function as the function of an artifact in the past that led it to satisfy a need in the marketplace so that it continues to be manufactured.<sup>24</sup> Although they admit that there is still some vagueness to this definition (how many artifacts need to be manufactured and for how long?), their “key point” is that their specific effects/marketplace definition rescues proper function from “the messy realm of human intentions.”<sup>25</sup>

Their solution to the Problem of Translation draws on Kendall Walton’s “categories of art” (standard, variable, contra-standard) to argue that differences in the knowledge of how objects function lead us to see them in a different way and to perceive different aesthetic qualities in them. In the case of the traditional idea of an object “looking fit” for its function, for example, there must be no contra-standard features and many variable ones that reference its proper function, e.g., the aesthetically pleasing formal features of a passenger car would be displeasing in a hearse. Aesthetic qualities like simplicity or grace are explained by the fact that such objects show only standard features associated with function such as the streamlined look of modernism, perhaps the “most familiar kind of Functional Beauty.”<sup>26</sup>

Does Parsons’ and Carlson’s selected effects idea of “proper function” combined with Walton’s categories in fact give an adequate philosophical account of the mutual dependence of aesthetic function and practical function in architecture? Although the selected effects/marketplace approach works fairly well for simple artifacts like screwdrivers or shovels, it is too blunt an instrument for adjudicating the importance of multifunctional artifacts like major works of architecture. “Proper function” is hard enough to pin down in the case of sofa beds, washer/dryer combinations, and iPods, let alone in the case of architectural building types like civic centers and art museums. Art museums often involve not only a variety of practical functions (conservation, exhibition, education, research), but also social, environmental, and symbolic functions, all of which must be integrated

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 77. At the same time they believe their idea of proper function also establishes the “core idea” that proper function belongs “to the object itself” rather than being “imposed” by use or context (83).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 98.



with the design's aesthetic concerns. Similar problems beset Parson's and Carlson's solution to the Problem of Translation. Although their adaptation of Walton's categories of art is helpful for understanding simple artifacts, it is probably impossible to determine "standard" forms with respect to complex multifunctional objects like buildings. Certainly, given the astonishingly diverse technical and formal innovations in architecture over the past sixty years, it is no longer clear what the "standard" form of an apartment building, office, bank, or library is as a building type, let alone the "standard" form of an art museum, concert hall, or civic center. My point is not that relativism is inescapable, but that multifunctional architectural works require a suppler analysis than the concepts of "proper" and "standard" can provide. Finally, there is the problem that, like Davies, Parsons and Carlson do not discuss the fact that many works of architecture and design are intended to be works of art, something that adds yet another layer of complexity.

Having found that none of the contemporary accounts that we have examined seem able to provide an adequate alternative to the separatist and formalist positions, I propose the following account consisting of two main arguments. First, I will argue that through the architect's intentions in the design process functions become embodied in architectural forms and I support this claim in part by calling on Nick Zangwill's way of reframing of Kant's idea of dependent beauty. But even if that argument were accepted, one would still face the question of *how* actual aesthetic judgments can include practical function and remain genuinely aesthetic. To answer that question I return to Kant's idea of "dependent beauty" as recently reconceived in the work of Rachel Zuckert.

My first argument against the separatist position is that by blocking out the *specific* ways an art museum's architecture serves the art within the separatist and formalist approaches overlook the necessary role of function within the architect's intention to give a building a particular *form* as a work of art. Although not every building is intended to be a work of art meant for aesthetic appreciation – that is the kernel of truth in the architecture vs. building topos – most art museums are certainly so intended and in any case those are the architectural works in question here.<sup>27</sup> In *Aesthetic Creation*, Zangwill has recently put forward a thesis about the nature of art that can provide a useful framework for the argument from intention that I want to make. In keeping with his well know dependence view of aesthetic properties, Zangwill argues that something is a work of art "because someone had an insight that certain aesthetic properties would depend on certain nonaesthetic properties; and because of this, the thing was intentionally endowed with some of those aesthetic properties

---

<sup>27</sup> Robert Stecker comes closest to resolving the conceptual issue of how to conceive of architecture as an artform by a useful distinction between architecture as *artform* and architecture as *medium*. "Reflections on Architecture: Buildings as Environments, as Aesthetic Objects and as Artworks," in *Architecture and Civilization*, op. cit., 81–93.

in virtues of the nonaesthetic properties."<sup>28</sup> It is crucial for Zangwill that this dependence is an exceptionally tight one in which the aesthetic properties and nonaesthetic properties are mutually implicated, e.g. the artist does not just want "to produce *elegance* but *elegance that depends on or is realized in certain nonaesthetic properties*."<sup>29</sup> If this were all there were to Zangwill's position, it could support either the separatist position or a mutual implication position, depending of which nonaesthetic properties are considered relevant to artistic creation. The strength of Zangwill's approach, for dealing with the issue of aesthetic and function in architecture is that while his version of "moderate formalism" recognizes the existence of *formal* aesthetic properties, it also recognizes the existence of *nonformal* aesthetic properties. In *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, he argues that formal aesthetic properties are "narrowly" dependent on directly perceivable sensory and physical properties (abstract painting or absolute music), whereas nonformal aesthetic properties are "broadly" dependent on such things as practical or social functions, e.g. the way a work of art "embodies (realizes, expresses, articulates) some historically given nonaesthetic functions" (architecture, representational painting, or functional music).<sup>30</sup> In arts like architecture or representational painting nonformal aesthetic properties and nonaesthetic functions are "interwoven" or "intermingled." In those cases, he continues, a kind of "double functionality" results and "the aesthetic function emerges from the nonaesthetic function so that a new overall aesthetic function of the work is realized."<sup>31</sup> As Zangwill notes, this is the sort of contrast Kant had in mind when he spoke of free and dependent beauty, only Zangwill transfers the contrast from a point about two types of judgment into a point about two types of aesthetic properties.<sup>32</sup>

Zangwill's reformulation of Kant's idea of dependent beauty in terms of aesthetic properties is helpful in articulating where separatist and formalist approaches go wrong when they treat works of architectural art as if their being "designed with a view to aesthetic appeal" means they possess only formal aesthetic properties. The separatist treats the act of designing a building as if the architect only takes into consideration such nonaesthetic physical and sensory properties as shape, space, light, materials, etc. But such an assumption about artistic creation fails to give sufficient weight to the fact that architects' formal artistic choices also take functions into consideration in the process of design so that functional concerns become *embodied* in the very architectural forms on which formalist critics focus their attention. No doubt, we can post facto distinguish formal and nonformal aesthetic properties, but in the process of design the two are

---

<sup>28</sup> Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 61.

<sup>31</sup> Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation*, op. cit., 118.

<sup>32</sup> Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, op. cit., 61.

intermingled, resulting in the overall aesthetic properties of the completed work, something close to certain ideas of “organic form.”<sup>33</sup>

This interpenetration of form and function in design is true even for those architects such as Frank Gehry, who happen to consider architecture a species of large scale sculpture, and certainly seek to create architectural works of art designed for their aesthetic appeal. Consider Gehry’s justly celebrated Disney concert hall in Los Angeles, whose curving titanium exterior is similar to that of his Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. When he designed the interior of the Disney concert hall, Gehry did not just carve out a visually satisfying form, dramatic as it is, but hired acoustical engineers to guide him in shaping it to provide the best possible sound environment.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, at the Guggenheim Bilbao museum, Gehry designed more conventional looking galleries for modernist paintings and more sculptural looking galleries to accommodate installation and performance works. Thus, although practical functions may begin as *external* to a work, once architects have taken them into account in designing a building, their choices, as influenced by their regard for function, become *internal* to the building as a work of art, analogous to the way the external subject matter of a representational painting becomes part of the internal content of the completed painting.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously, such an account of artistic intentions does not “explain” the spontaneity of the creative work that brings together the many different types of physical, sensuous, and functional nonaesthetic properties into the satisfying unity of an artistic intention to create a particular overall aesthetic effect. It is also obvious that architects vary in the degree to which they seriously consider the functional needs or desires of their art museum clients, just as art museum boards on their part vary in the extent to which their desire for an aesthetically spectacular building by a “star” architect may conflict with their desire to have various museum functions satisfied. Even so, a formalist critic who ignores functions in judging a work of architectural art will be in danger of misjudging it by treating it solely in terms of its purely formal aesthetic properties. For example, if a critic were to judge Gehry’s Bilbao museum from a formalist perspective, for example, the critic might have to fault the more traditional looking galleries as out of keeping with the sculptural forms of the rest of the museum, and blame Gehry for failing to unify his design’s sculptural form. But the work

---

<sup>33</sup> Zangwill suggests that this is the sort of thing that G. E. Moore had in mind in speaking of “organic form.” *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, op. cit., 62. Although Frank Lloyd Wright’s idea of “organic architecture” was rather amorphous, he certainly saw the architect as an artist who integrated practical, environmental, and symbolic functions with more specifically formal ones of space, light and materials.

<sup>34</sup> *Frank Gehry, Architect*, ed. J. Fiona Ragheb (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2001), 192–193. I am grateful to Gary Iseminger for first calling my attention to the general analogy between museums and concert halls with respect to function.

<sup>35</sup> This is an old distinction similar to A. C. Bradley’s contrast of “subject matter” and “content.” See H. Gene Blocker’s use of Bradley’s point in his discussion of “organic form.” H. Gene Blocker, *Philosophy of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1979), 187–190.

of architecture so conceived would not be the actual work as created by the architect, but an abstraction from the architect's larger achievement of interweaving many physical and sensuous properties not only with each other and with technical structural requirements but also with a variety of functional aims. A more appropriate judgment of the form of a work of architecture, therefore, would not focus on its formal properties in the abstract, but on the way in which formal design qualities should be shaped by and integrated with the intention to serve various functions.<sup>36</sup>

Formalist critics as well as "functional beauty" advocates might object at this point that I am burdening our aesthetic response with the necessity of trying to find out the psychological intentions of individual architects. But artistic choices and intentions can often be inferred from the properties of the work itself without the need for biographical information; the knowledge of the building type and of the kinds of art it was designed to contain is often a reasonable basis for inference. Another problem for inferred intentions, of course, is the possibility that certain aesthetic embodiments of function were intended but the design itself or the way it was carried out in construction did not in fact achieve the desired aesthetic effects.<sup>37</sup> Obviously, inferences concerning intentions to integrate formal aesthetic properties and nonformal aesthetic properties will be debatable since they are interpretations, but they are not groundless interpretations leading to the relativism feared by Parsons and Carlson.

But formalist critics and "functional beauty" advocates could still make two other objections to the argument from artistic choice. First, they could point out that many important art museums have been installed in former warehouses, factories, railway stations, and power plants, in which cases it would be absurd to claim that we infer architectural choices from the way the buildings are designed. Second, whether gallery spaces are in an older building turned into a museum or in a newly designed building, the apparent fit between any given architectural space and the art it contains may not be attributable to the architect, but to the museum's curators who choose which art works to install in a given space, what color to paint the walls, where to focus artificial lighting, etc. In reply to the first objection I would point out that nearly all the warehouses, power plants and other buildings adapted for use as art museums, have been significantly modified by architects commissioned precisely to make them suited to showing art.

---

<sup>36</sup> I have injected the "should" here to mark the normative dimension of architectural design. See Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation*, op. cit., pp. 102–104 on the normative dimension of aesthetic functionalism. I also owe my way of describing the appropriate critical perspective in part to Yuriko Saito's discussion of design in *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27. Of course, a "paper" or "digital" architect does have the luxury of considering only formal matters, but even such an architect would still face various formal choices and problems to solve and our aesthetic judgment of the completed drawings would be based in part on the design's success in solving them.

<sup>37</sup> For Zangwill's useful discussion of the problem of artistic failure see his *Artistic Creation*, op. cit., 40–42 and 104–107.

And, although the redesign often attempts to preserve as much as possible of a cherished monument, it often leads to extensive modifications, especially of the interior. As a result, the case of adaptive reuse actually supports my point about inferred considerations of function, since most of the architects who are commissioned for this work are asked to focus on making interior spaces function effectively for showing art, rather than on simply creating new architectural forms to be appreciated for their own sake. The exigency of respecting the existing building becomes yet another factor affecting the nonformal aesthetic properties embodied in the new design. As for the second objection, concerning the important role of curators, it is certainly true that a curator may make poor use of an architectural space excellently designed for art, or may rescue a space poorly designed for art. In most cases, however, it is not difficult to sort out the architectural choices from the curatorial ones.<sup>38</sup> One reviewer of Libeskind's Denver addition, for example, entitled his review "It Works Despite Libeskind's Best Efforts," explaining that the curators had done a heroic job of making several of the odd shaped galleries function adequately, despite Libeskind's apparently minimal attention to exhibition functions in his design.<sup>39</sup>

But the most important objection that strong formalist critics would have to my claim that we should pay attention to the way functions become embodied in artistic forms is the argument that what I have described as the inference of artistic intentions is merely an empirical fact about some observers, not a necessary condition of aesthetic perception itself. Genuine aesthetic judgments, they would say, simply *are* judgments about formal, sensory and expressive properties and the ability to make such judgments is precisely the ability to separate immediate responses to aesthetic properties from responses to artistic properties like choice and intention or to non-artistic properties like morality and function. It would seem, therefore, that if we are to justify the inclusion of embodied function in aesthetic judgments concerning architecture we must either make aesthetic judgments only one part of a more general artistic judgment or re-define the nature of aesthetic experience and judgment in a way that overcomes the limitations of traditional autonomist views. But the strategy of making aesthetic response only one part of an overall artistic judgment would still leave aesthetics and function judged separately before they were combined. What we really want to know is whether functional achievements or defects in a work of architectural art can enter into the process of aesthetic judging itself. Can a functional defect become an aesthetic defect? For that we need a different

---

<sup>38</sup> For an excellent discussion of the way curatorial choices affect our experience of art in a museum setting see Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005) and Suzanne Macleod, *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> David Littlejohn, "It Works Despite Libeskind's Best Efforts," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 15, 2007. Although Littlejohn praises the heroic efforts of the curators, he laments "the apparently brutal indifference of Daniel Libeskind to the work of any artist but himself."

concept of the aesthetic than one that automatically excludes morality and purpose. That leads me back to Kant's idea of dependent beauty, this time not as a point about aesthetic properties, but as a point about aesthetic judgments.<sup>40</sup>

There are many well known problems with the Kant's idea of dependent beauty judgments, beginning with the fact that Kant speaks of both judgments and objects as free or dependent.<sup>41</sup> His examples of freely beautiful objects include flowers, arabesques, and absolute music whereas dependent beauties include such things as representational paintings, music set to words, and architecture. As for the kinds of judgments appropriate to each kind of beauty, a judgment of free beauty is a spontaneous attending to the form of the object as it is entertained in a harmonious free play of the imagination and understanding. A judgment of dependent beauty, on the other hand, "presupposes ... the concept of the purpose that determines what the thing is to be."<sup>42</sup> One of Kant's examples of a judgment of dependent beauty actually concerns architecture, specifically our response to a church. "Much that could be liked directly in intuition could be added to a building," says Kant, "if only the building were not to be a church."<sup>43</sup> When Kant concludes that such judgments of dependent beauty are not "pure" aesthetic judgments, some have asked how they could be aesthetic judgments at all, given

---

<sup>40</sup> Of course there are by now innumerable alternatives to formalist autonomy, not only from pragmatist and phenomenological accounts, but a variety of analytic based ones such as Noël Carroll's deflationary and disjunctive account of aesthetic experience that eliminates the "for itself" clause. "Aesthetic Experience: A Question of Content," in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 69–97.

<sup>41</sup> There is a large literature on this topic. In addition to the works cited in the course of my discussion below, I have also profited from older works such as Donald Crawford's *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974) or Eva Schaper, *Studies in Kant's Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), as well as more recent studies such as Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), James Kirwan, *The Aesthetic in Kant: A Critique* (London: Continuum, 2004), Robert Stecker, "Free Beauty, Dependent Beauty, and Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21:1 Spring (1987): 89–99, Philip Mallaband, "Understanding Kant's Distinction Between Free and Dependent Beauty," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 52:226 (2002): 66–81, and Denis Dutton, "Kant and the Conditions of Artistic Beauty," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 34 (1994): 226–141.

<sup>42</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 77. Since I am less interested in the details of Kant exegesis than in deriving a workable notion of aesthetic judgment that is open to more than formal properties, I have not included Kant's phrase "and hence a concept of its perfection" which would involve lengthy explanations of the role of the concept of "perfection" in Kant's critique of Leibnizian inspired aesthetics. Although, the Guyer/Matthews translation is preferable to Pluhar at many points, and its use of "adherent" rather than "dependent" has sound reasons behind it, I have stayed with the more traditional terminology of free vs. dependent beauty. See *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 114.

<sup>43</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, op. cit., 77.

the strictures he earlier places on the role of concepts and purpose.<sup>44</sup> But Kant seems in this passage to loosen his notion of subsumption under a concept, which is his criterion for a “determinative” judgment as opposed to an aesthetic one. He says that in a judgment of dependent beauty the concept of a purpose does not determine, but merely restricts the freedom of the imagination.<sup>45</sup> Thus, to use Kant’s example of a church, the purpose of a church as a place of worship limits what architectural forms can please us aesthetically, but does not determine in advance any particular form that would satisfy or impede the needs of worship.

Some scholars have interpreted Kant’s notion of a restriction or constraint here as external and purely negative, that is, we first take note of an object’s purpose as an example of its kind and, having found it suitable to its purpose, we then judge it formally as free beauty.<sup>46</sup> Others have interpreted judgments of dependent beauty as an additive combination of a judgment based on intellectual pleasure in the satisfaction of purpose joined to a judgment based on a felt pleasure in form.<sup>47</sup> On either of these accounts, knowing that a building is of a certain type leads us to expect that it will minimally fulfill the functions of that type, and if it does so, we may go on to enjoy its formal features. But when a building serves its functions too poorly we may find our imagination impeded in its attempt to freely enjoy the building’s forms.<sup>48</sup> Both the constraint and the combination views of judgments of dependent beauty do make function relevant to aesthetic judgment, but, by suggesting a two stage approach, both remain relatively close to the separatist position we are trying to overcome. This is one of the main reasons Davies, Parsons and Carlson explicitly reject Kant’s dependent beauty approach to understanding functional beauty.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Among the many observations on this conflict see especially Ruth Lorand, “Free and Dependent Beauty,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 29:1 (1989), 32–40.

<sup>45</sup> Kant speaks of the imagination’s freedom as “restricted” (eingeschränkt) not as “determined” by purpose, thus allowing room for a genuinely aesthetic response to a building’s dependent beauty. See Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 219.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Guyer has offered cogent interpretations of the “constraint” emphasis, first in *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, op. cit., p. 219 and later in *Values of Beauty*, op. cit., 120–128, 131–132..

<sup>47</sup> Representative examples are Henry Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 140–142 and Christopher Janaway, “Kant’s Aesthetics and the Empty Cognitive Stock,” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 47 (1997), 459–76.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty*, op. cit., 126.

<sup>49</sup> Davies presents his “functional beauty” proposal as a replacement for Kant’s “dependent beauty” which he believes results in a “schizoid” separation of practical and aesthetic properties and is too internally flawed to be satisfactorily reconstructed. “Functional Beauty,” 234–236. Parsons and Carlson actually make Kant guilty of ending the earlier eighteenth century tradition of valuing functional beauty by making dependent beauty simply a matter of an “external” constraint on certain types of aesthetic judgment. In short, Kant is portrayed as a separatist for whom beauty is merely “compatible” with function. *Functional Beauty*, 22–24.

What we need is an account of judgments of dependent beauty that can show how function can be a more integral part of the process of aesthetic judging. Of the several reconstruction's of Kant's idea of dependent beauty that argue for a more intimate involvement, I find most convincing that of Rachel Zuckert in *Kant on Beauty and Biology*.<sup>50</sup> For Zuckert, aesthetic judgment in general "comprises attention to *all* the empirical, sensibly apprehended properties of an object" as these are "*reciprocally, internally unified*" in the play of imagination and understanding.<sup>51</sup> In a judgment of free beauty this unification of our experience is based on the object's form, but in a judgment of dependent beauty, concepts such as those of aesthetic ideas or of the object's purpose are "'incorporated' into an (overarching) representation ... of the object's purposive form."<sup>52</sup> Thus, on Zuckert's interpretation, "when we appreciate an object as a church, the properties that make it a member of its kind are taken to be aesthetically relevant ... *within* aesthetic judging."<sup>53</sup> In Zuckert's account of dependent beauty, then, an object's conceptual contents or its practical purposes do not merely constrain free judgment from the outside, or get combined with free judgments in an additive way, but are positively integrated into a distinctive process of aesthetic judging.

Of course, by incorporating ideas of content or purpose into the play of imagination and understanding, such judgments are rendered "impure," as compared to a play of the imagination based only upon formal properties. Moreover, unlike judgments of free beauty judgments of dependent beauty lay no claim to universality.<sup>54</sup> But the point of having a concept such as dependent beauty is precisely to make room for a distinctive kind of aesthetic judgment that permits the inclusion of features like artistic intention or practical function. Such judgments are still genuinely aesthetic in the sense that they are neither judgments of mere agreeableness nor are they determinative judgments that subsume instances under a concept. Functionality, therefore, can be incorporated into a genuine aesthetic judgment of architecture, so long as function is experienced, in Zuckert's words, "as itself to be in play with the object's [many] other sensible properties."<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Another valuable treatment from which I have profited, is Robert Wicks, "Dependent Beauty as the Appreciation of Teleological Style," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997), 387–400. There is an interesting exchange on Wick's article between Wicks and Paul Guyer in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57:3 (1999), 357–363.

<sup>51</sup> Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty*, op. cit., 205. Italics mine.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>54</sup> As Zuckert puts it, "judgments of dependent beauty may make only a hypothetical claim on others: if one shares my concept of this object's kind, then one ought to find this object (dependently) beautiful." *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.



Whether or not Zuckert's particular reconstruction of the concept of dependent beauty is accepted as the most convincing interpretation of Kant, it offers us a useful way of philosophically articulating our ordinary intuition that form and function should be joined in aesthetic judgments of architecture. Paul Guyer has persuasively argued that all three of the major interpretations of dependent beauty – the constraint view, the combination view, and the internal view – can find some textual support in Kant and that, moreover, all three reflect various ways form and function are actually related in our ordinary experience.<sup>56</sup> In the case of architecture, however, the advantage of the "internal" view of dependent beauty judgments over the other two is that it shows how function can positively enter into the process of aesthetic judging itself.

It seems to me that this "internal" interpretation of Kant's idea of judgments of dependent beauty is particularly appropriate to appreciating the overall aesthetic impression that results from the integration of formal and nonformal aesthetic properties as Zangwill describes them. As he says of representational painting, "people ... make judgments of beauty, elegance and delicacy about both abstract patterns and representations," so I would also say of architecture that people make judgments of beauty, elegance and power about both abstract patterns of space and of functions.<sup>57</sup> But they do more than that; the judgments they make in the case of both representational paintings and architecture are not simply about both formal and nonformal aesthetic properties as if they were simply lying side by side, but about the "new overall aesthetic function" that is realized though the way formal and nonformal aesthetic functions and nonaesthetic functions "are interwoven or intermingled in the work."<sup>58</sup>

In *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, however, Zangwill raises the worry that in the case of architecture attempts to incorporate the *specific* functions of building types into aesthetic judgments may find no logical stopping point.<sup>59</sup> How, he asks, do we determine *which* functions are relevant in each case without getting into an endless process of ever narrower specification, for example, from judging a building as a church, to judging it as a catholic or protestant church, to judging it as a certain type of protestant church, and so on? One possible solution Zangwill suggests is that we avoid ascribing beauty or aesthetic excellence to a building as a specific type, but "only

---

<sup>56</sup> Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty*, op. cit., 129–140. As Guyer has points out, a similar phenomenon related to our expectations regarding the functions of different building types. Thus, we normally expect a work of architecture to meet at least minimally the functions of its building type and if it does so are not likely to have our aesthetic estimate of its other properties affected, but when it is exceptionally dysfunctional, our overall aesthetic response is negatively affected. Guyer's observation shows how either the "constraint or the "combination" interpretation of dependent beauty could also be used to justify the incorporation of function into judgments of architecture. *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>57</sup> Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation*, op. cit., 118.

<sup>59</sup> Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, op. cit., 61.

see it as having the broad function of being some building or other.”<sup>60</sup> But that solution would land us back with Scruton and Winter in the denial that the *specific* functions of a building matter to our aesthetic judgments. Consequently, there would be no basis for saying that an art museum design that failed its function of showing the art to best advantage was aesthetically defective as a work of architecture.

I believe Zangwill’s worry is excessive. The disadvantage of a regress to the individual case is more than made up for by the advantage of a more integrative account of dependent beauty judgments which allows us, as Zuckert remarks, to take “many more properties into account” than those that render an object simply “a good member of its kind.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, I would argue that we should not judge the integration of form and function in architectural works like art museums in a way that treats them merely as exemplars of a general building type, but always move to the appropriate level of specificity. The kinds of architectural forms that would satisfy the function of a great historical museum like the Prado in Madrid would obviously be different from the forms appropriate to the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki.<sup>62</sup> It may be that relevance in aesthetic judgments of dependent beauty may finally have to be decided at the level of the individual work of architectural art and that even there the critic will have to adjudicate an exceedingly complex interaction of many factors.<sup>63</sup> Obviously, most of us who visit the Prado or the Kiasma museums are not professional critics with the advantage and burden of extensive knowledge, yet most of us, if we are going there to see the art works will be aware of how the museum design fits its function of showing its particular kind of art. But even if we are architecture tourists and decide to visit the Kiasma Museum because we have heard of the unusual architectural forms Steven Holl has created, we cannot easily avert our attention from the way Holl has addressed the purposes of the museum through his design.

The approach I am recommending treats aesthetic judgment as including attention to the way in which formal, sensuous, and expressive properties have been integrated with practical function and other features in the work itself and the ease with which they can also be integrated in the operation of the imagination. Whether this takes the exact form of Kant’s problematic account of the harmonious play of the faculties, is not a necessary part of

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>61</sup> Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty*, op. cit., 207.

<sup>62</sup> I have explored a typology of art museum according to function in my on-line article “Architecture vs. Art: The Aesthetics of Art Museum Design,” mentioned in note 3. Kendall Walton, “Categories of Art,” *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 334–67).

<sup>63</sup> This will no doubt inject a strong element of relativity into such judgments, but that is not the complete relativism that Parsons and Carlson fear since, as Hume said of the “standard of taste,” we are only required to show that not all judgments are equal. This position, by the way, is also the one finally taken by Parsons and Carlson at the end of their chapter on the Problem of Indeterminacy. *Functional Beauty*, op. cit., 88.

my commitments.<sup>64</sup> I would interpret the dependent beauty framework as minimally requiring that critical judgments be qualified by the principle: “when all relevant aspects are given due weight.” Given the multiple functions of many of today’s art museums, enabling the thoughtful display of art works is only one of several practical and other functions (social, environmental, symbolic) that architects and critics must address. Yet, if we are to call something an *art* museum, surely whatever proportion of a museum building is given over to the display of art, that part should be designed in a way that supports viewers’ attention to the kinds of works that particular museum contains. My conclusion, therefore, is a very limited one: *even though there may be blameless differences in the way people weigh relevant aspects in the process of the aesthetic judgment of a work of architecture, one thing they cannot justifiably do: they cannot give the specific practical functions of a building zero weight in an overall aesthetic judgment.*<sup>65</sup>

Notoriously, Kant himself, at the very end of his discussion of dependent beauty seems to pull the rug out from under not only such an “internal” view of the effect of practical function on aesthetic judgment, but even from under the “constraint” and “combination” views. Kant says that a person may, either through ignorance of an object’s purpose or, by deliberately abstracting from purpose, judge such a work of dependent beauty as if it were a “free beauty.”<sup>66</sup> Certainly, Kant is right to point out that when we are ignorant of a building’s purpose – as we often are when we visit a strange

---

<sup>64</sup> Zangwill, Guyer and others have noted that there are problems with the exact operation of the free play of imagination and understanding in achieving the harmony of these faculties, but I do not think my point about the necessity of taking specific functions into account in the process of judgment requires Kant’s particular formulation. Nick Zangwill, *Metaphysics of Beauty*, op. cit., 204–205. Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, op. cit., 222–225. But see Zuckert’s exposition of the harmony of the faculties in *Kant on Beauty and Biology*, op. cit., 279–320.

<sup>65</sup> There are perhaps some qualifications to even this limited conclusion. One might argue that my claim does not extend to follies or to paper and digital architecture. The case of follies might be seen as a borderline case for the definition of architecture since their practical function is so close to their aesthetic function, namely to provide delectation and diversion for the eye and mind, but that also puts them close to the functions of other recreational and entertainment arts and, in any case, makes them part of the set of issues surrounding landscape architecture and gardens. With “paper” or “digital” architecture – designs which are not even intended to be built – we have another kind of limit case which I am not sure does real damage to my conclusion. One of the attractions of engaging in such drawing is that one is excused from worry about clients and their needs or desires to have various functions satisfied. Of course, such drawings may lead to exceptionally creative designs for actual buildings although their makers are often content to enjoy the creation of pure fantasy worlds, impossible to build without costs exceeding what any but a mad genius out of science fiction might propose.

<sup>66</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, op. cit., 78. Of course, some other person, Kant goes on, “looking only to the object’s purpose” and regarding its beauty “as only an accessory” would “censure the first person for having wrong taste.” Yet each of them, Kant continues, “is judging correctly in his own way, one by what he has before his senses, the other by what he has in his thought.”

city or country – we are likely to respond to a striking work of architecture purely as form. But Kant’s other claim, that even when we know what the function is, we may deliberately abstract from it, while also empirically true, has disturbing implications. That claim could be seen as endorsing the separation of form and function, allowing a critic to totally disregard the function of a work of architecture without blame, whereas I have argued that the idea of dependent beauty implies, at the least, that a critic cannot blamelessly exclude function altogether.

Although there are ways to construe Kant’s statement as not undermining the idea of dependent beauty, his statement does articulate a version of the *other* ordinary intuition we have about works of architecture that I mentioned at the beginning of my paper and to which we must now turn our attention.<sup>67</sup> I said there, that alongside our intuition that aesthetics and function should be united in architecture, we seem to have an equally natural intuition that some buildings are so aesthetically powerful we may enjoy their appearance without regard to their functions.

For the philosophy of architecture, I can think of no more interesting witness to this kind of intuition than Ludwig Wittgenstein. In Vienna in 1926, Wittgenstein designed a very modern looking house for his sister but later expressed disappointed with it because he felt it lacked what he called “*primordial life, wild life.*”<sup>68</sup> On another occasion he wrote that just as “every purposive movement of the human body” is not “a *gesture*,” so “every functional building” is not “architecture.”<sup>69</sup> In these two comments Wittgenstein seems to raise the separatist architecture vs. building topos to a higher level than even Pevsner’s “aesthetic appeal,” suggesting that true works of architecture may evoke an almost ecstatic response.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the critic, Andrew Ballantyne, has tried to get at this phenomenon by translating the building vs. architecture continuum into one between “ordinary” and “visionary” architecture, for which he uses the metaphors of the “nest” and the “pillar of fire.”

At one end of the scale we have the nest, a modest and comforting place to ... feel at home; at the other we have the extravagant pyre which consumes vast resources, and fills us with awe.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> For ways of reconciling Kant’s comment at the end of his discussion of dependent beauty with what precedes it, see Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty*, op. cit., pp.207–208. See also Guyer’s discussion of the problem of the extent of the power of abstraction in Kant. Guyer’s *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, op. cit., 220–225.

<sup>68</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 38e. For a comprehensive and insightful discussion of Wittgenstein’s house and his views on architecture in relation to his philosophy as a whole see Roger Paden, *Mysticism and Architecture: Wittgenstein and the Meanings of the Palais Stonborough* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, op. cit., 42e.

<sup>70</sup> See Roger Paden, *Mysticism and Architecture*, op. cit., chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Ballantyne, “Commentary: The Nest and the Pillar of Fire,” in *What is Architecture?*, ed. Andrew Ballantyne (London: Routledge, 2002), 5–49; ref. on 15.

Ordinary buildings or “nests” – including, I would say, most art museums – are designed, Ballantyne suggests, by architects who see themselves as problem solving professionals working with their clients to achieve a common goal of integrating functional and aesthetic values. Visionary buildings, on the other hand, are designed by architects who see themselves primarily as free artists, the kind of architects who are giving us the most spectacular displays of “avant-garde extravagance.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet, despite all this talk of “wild,” “primordial,” “visionary,” or “extravagant” architecture, with few exceptions even the most spectacular works of contemporary architectural art are still buildings that have purposes or functions. Certainly, the Guggenheim Bilbao or the Denver Museum of Art may so overwhelm us by their formal, sensory, and expressive properties, that we may be prepared to forgive their functional faults. But that is very different from declaring their specific functions to be irrelevant. Even in the case of most visionary architecture we need to apply the principle “when all relevant aspects are given due weight,” as we consider the integration of functional and formal achievements in judging overall aesthetic merit. This also applies to the special case of historical works like the Pantheon in Rome, the Taj Mahal, or Chartres Cathedral, which we often treat as monuments of architectural art than can simply be enjoyed as objects of free beauty, even though they may still be used for some purpose, even their original one.

It might help us see how a functional defect in a work of architecture can lead to an overall negative aesthetic judgment and how a similar functional defect in a different work may not result in an overall negative judgment, by briefly considering the analogous problem of the relation between moral defects and aesthetic judgment. For many formalists, moral judgments, like functional ones, have often been considered either irrelevant, or at least to operate separately from to aesthetic judgments. At the other pole, are those theorists who hold the position sometimes called “ethicism,” claiming that a moral defect in a work of art is always an aesthetic defect and should lead to a negative aesthetic evaluation.<sup>73</sup> What Noël Carroll calls “moderate moralism,” rejects both extremes, saying that an ethical defect *may* in certain circumstances become an aesthetic defect. In reading a novel, for example, a literary critic may try to follow the author’s artistic promptings which encourage a sympathetic identification with a deeply evil character, but the critic cannot. The critic cannot, Carroll says, because “there is something wrong with the structure of the artwork. It has not been designed properly on its own terms.”<sup>74</sup> As Carroll points out, this kind of negative aesthetic response to a work of art is the result of an assessment of *many* aspects of the work, not simply the handling of

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Ballantyne, “Commentary: Nest and the Pillar of Fire,” op. cit., 41.

<sup>73</sup> Noël Carroll, “Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research,” *Ethics* 110:2 (January 2000): 357–360, 374–377.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

a single feature or character. But just as it is possible to arrive at an overall negative aesthetic result in some cases, it is also possible to arrive a positive result in other cases in which a work “may, when all things are considered, contain ethical defects that are vastly outweighed by its other merits, such as formal ones.”<sup>75</sup>

I believe the reconstruction of Kant’s concept of judgments of dependent beauty that I have adopted leads to a similar weighing of functional and formal merits in reaching an overall aesthetic judgment concerning works of architecture. If I wanted a special name for this adaptation of the dependent beauty idea, I might call it “moderate functionalism” after Carroll’s “moderate moralism,” but also after Zangwill’s “moderate functionalism” which supports the incorporation of nonaesthetic functions into “overall aesthetic functions.” Obviously, the moderate functionalist does not follow the architectural “autonomist” in treating aesthetics and function separately, but does the moderate functionalist follow some “functional beauty” advocates in suggesting that the aesthetic properties of an artifact must be judged solely in terms of how well they serve its practical function. If a moderate functionalist critic reaches a negative judgment about a work of architecture that is aesthetically exciting but functionally defective, it will be because the failures of the work’s artistic choices to embody the work’s functional aims outweigh the work’s formal aesthetic qualities. Conversely, the moderate functionalist is also ready to realize that, in other instances, a work of architecture may, to borrow Carroll’s language, “when all things are considered, contain [functional] defects that are vastly outweighed by its other merits, such as formal ones.” Most architecture, of course, will fall into the category of what Ballantyne called the ordinary, but ordinary buildings are no less important or worthy of praise for their aesthetic achievement in uniting aesthetic functions and practical functions than are the occasional spectacular buildings that so fill us with astonishment that we may momentarily forget what purpose they were meant to serve.

In closing, I want to briefly consider two examples of iconic art museum architecture that have drawn rather different critical responses, although as with most particular cases opinions are not unanimous. The Guggenheim Bilbao’s wonderfully sculptural exterior and the soaring curves of its atrium are not only aesthetically compelling, but also serve both the symbolic function of proclaiming Bilbao’s resurgence and the practical function of helping that resurgence by drawing thousands of tourists. But, most important of all, its aesthetically striking galleries for art are largely appropriate to the differing kinds of art each is meant to

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 360. As Zangwill points out with respect to substantive aesthetic properties, a property that in itself is positive or at least neutral retains this character even if it has a negative effect on the overall aesthetic evaluation. Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty*, op. cit., 17–18. Similarly, a moral defect remains a moral defect and a functional defect remains a functional defect even when compensated for by some more powerful virtues.

contain.<sup>76</sup> In short, the Bilbao museum's aesthetic and symbolic virtues could be seen as more than compensating for the practical shortcomings of a few of its more dramatic galleries. In the case of Libeskind's Denver addition, on the other hand, despite a wonderfully "wild" exterior, whose iconic presence is also aesthetically engaging as well symbolically and practically good for its city, the lack of integration of form and function on the interior has negatively affected many critics' overall judgment of it. Unlike the powerful spiritual and symbolic resonances of Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin which give meaning to its daring formal properties and compensate for its functional shortcomings as an exhibition venue, the Denver Museum's functional failures are such that its symbolic, spiritual and aesthetic expressiveness does not seem strong enough to compensate for its functional flaws.<sup>77</sup>

As these cases suggest, although aesthetic judgments of the "moderate functionalism" type must incorporate function along with form and other factors into the process of aesthetic judging, there is great variability in the relative weight that may be appropriately given each factor. But in no case can an appropriate aesthetic judgment justifiably ignore specific practical functions as irrelevant in assessing the museum's total aesthetic effect. In this way, I believe, one can philosophically explain how we can affirm both our intuition of a desirable concord between form and function in architecture, and our corresponding intuition that some works are aesthetically so exceptional that we may forgive their functional faults.

---

<sup>76</sup> The enormous "boat gallery" as it was sometimes called (over 450 feet long) dwarfed everything put into for many years and was subject to considerable criticism, but it finally met a reasonable use when it was filled with a group of Richard Serra's oversize steel sculptures.

<sup>77</sup> If we look at the critical and public response to the Jewish Museum, where the jagged plan and angled windows are expressive of relationships and ideas connected to the Holocaust, the difficulties curators have had in installing exhibitions have not led to a generally negative reaction. In Berlin, Libeskind had a set of profound historical and spiritual concerns to embody whereas in Denver the museum board wanted a show piece by a "name" architect. Libeskind's claim that the sharply pointed angles of the exterior (which are repeated inside and make for such difficulty in showing and attending to the art works) are meant to reflect the jagged Rocky Mountains seems a bit disingenuous since similar motifs have characterized buildings he designed for Berlin and London.