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Editorial

Philosophical Encounters across the Divide

I dealt in the editorial of the last issue with the history of analytic philosophy, and the complexity of its formation into a school, and the reliability of the name it took, but I did not mention its rival, European philosophy. The latter has been called 'Continental Philosophy', and for half a century there was a debate about the split of analytic - continental philosophy, but since writing that I came across a book which argued that *There Is No such Thing as 'Continental' Philosophy*. The claim is that this epithet is bogus, there is neither a reality to the term, nor there are philosophers behind this title. It is empty, despite its use to refer to a number of European philosophies and philosophers. This might come as a shock, but that was the title of Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte's short and densely argued book. It is not a usual title, but perhaps Vanhoutte seriously intended it 'to incite, to induce, to stimulate those who read to react'.

Before proceeding with the argument of Vanhoutte's book, I wish to point out that Christoph Schuringa in his book *A Social History of Analytic Philosophy* - see the editorial of issue 219 of *The Wednesday* - dedicates Chapter 6 to a discussion of the analytic - continental controversy in which he declares that 'The very idea of "continental philosophy" is an analytic philosopher's fiction'. He says that in a way it does not exist, but in another way it does, because the analytic philosophers have made it so. They 'lump together phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, structuralism, deconstruction ... diverse, but some of them (deconstruction in particular) challenge the very idea of *philosophy* itself in a way that does not even occur to analytic philosophers as a possibility'.

Schuringa then cites a number of controversial encounters between philosophers of the two schools, according to the labels they were given, such as A.J. Ayer's attack on European philosophers from Hegel to Heidegger and Sartre. According to Ayer, in his talk at the first UNESCO philosophy conference, the divide in contemporary philosophy is between two camps, the 'pontiffs' and the 'journeymen'. The pontiffs challenge the claim of scientists to 'give a complete and definite account of "ultimate" reality'. The 'journeymen are 'technicians' and 'deal piecemeal with a special set of problems' and they deny that there is such an 'ultimate' reality. They consider it a 'fiction'. This is a clever description of the situation of some of the European philosophers as pontiffs, such as the German Idealists in their talk of the Absolute or Heidegger in his talk of the forgetfulness of the question of Being. The journeymen fit well the method of analytic philosophy or empiricism in general. Ayer's comment on Heidegger is very offensive. Heidegger, in his opinion, creates philosophically a 'country from which the ordinary process of logic, or indeed reasoning of any kind, appear to have been banished'. That is because Heidegger relies on the concept of moods, such as anguish.

This is not the only encounter. There is also the clash between Gilbert Ryle and Merleau-Ponty. It has been reported that Ryle responded to a question of Merleau-Ponty: 'Is our programme not the same?' 'I hope not'. But this, as Schuringa explains was a myth. It was not whether phenomenology and analytic philosophy are the same, but whether Ryle's programme is the same as Russell. But Ryle was not completely in the clear. He apparently insulted European philosophers by accusing them that they do not know anything about science, while the Cambridge philosophers live in the proximity of scientists and interact with them. Schuringer rightly comments that Ryle's target was Husserl. However, as it happened Husserl's background was in mathematics, and Ryle's charge could be easily refuted.

Finally, there was the case of Derrida and his several encounters with analytic philosophers in England and America. The most famous of these encounters is the refusal of the University of Cambridge to grant him an honorary doctorate, and the letter that was signed by a number of English and American philosophers published in the press to stress their objection to Derrida's receiving such an award. The main charge is that 'Derrida's work does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigour'. This accusation seems directed at more than Derrida. It is a generalisation about most European philosophers. Schuringa refers to an interview with the analytic philosopher Kit Fine. Fine was asked what he thought of 'non-analytic philosophy', in other words European philosophy. He replied, 'The main thing that I dislike about it is that it is fraudulent'. This is again the charge of lack of 'clarity and rigour'. However, anyone who engages with European philosophy will find it interesting and opens his mind to more fundamental questions regarding being, life, culture and society.

There are more recent philosophical encounters in Vanhoutte's book, and more discussion on the vacuity of the name 'continental philosophy' that I will leave to the next issue.

The Editor



Logical Necessity

In ordinary speech, to assert that something is necessary may mean many things. Something may be practically necessary - for example, it may be necessary to have a key to open a locked door. Or something may be legally necessary, though not necessary in practice - for example, it may be legally necessary to have a valid ticket to board a train, even though you might get away with it in practice. Logical necessity is a more restrictive notion - so restrictive indeed, that it may at first be difficult to appreciate its value.

CHRIS SEDDON

Logical Contingency

The following assertions may or may not be true, but at least they describe situations which can be investigated:

- Bachelors are untidy.
- Marmite: either you like it or you hate it.
- Three of my cats are in the garden, but two are not.

Such assertions are classified as logically contingent.

Logical Necessity

By contrast, the following assertions, properly understood, cannot be false. They do not describe a situation which can be investigated:

- Bachelors are unmarried.
- Marmite: either you like it or you don't.
- 3 + 2 = 5

Such assertions are classified as logically necessary.

Necessary and Contingent Expressions

Language depends on interpretation. For example, does the first assertion mean that literally all bachelors are untidy, or does it just mean that they tend on the whole to be more untidy than spinsters or married couples? And what counts as untidy anyway? Does being a bachelor just mean being a man who has never married, or does it include so-called Bachelors of Arts? In the assertion about Marmite does not liking something mean forming an unfavourable opinion, or does it just mean not forming a favourable opinion?

One common-sense way of understanding logical necessity is to view it as a description of certain expressions. The difference between logically contingent expressions and logically

necessary expressions is that, while both rely on interpretation, only contingent expressions require further investigation.

Once we have understood the vocabulary and grammar used in the logically contingent examples in the way intended, we know what kind of situation would verify them - or what kind of action would bring them about. We can survey or educate a significant sample of bachelors against some measure of tidiness. We can count or relocate my cats. We can survey or influence people's views on Marmite.

In contrast, once we have understood the vocabulary and grammar used in the logically necessary examples in the way intended, we do not need to investigate further. There is nothing further to verify or do. There is no sense in surveying a sample of bachelors to see how many are unmarried, because being unmarried was one of the criteria for inclusion in the sample in the first place. Children can play with beads or count on their fingers to help them acquire arithmetical concepts, but they are not investigating whether two plus three equals five, and there is nothing we can do to ensure or prevent two plus three equalling five. Similarly, the last example really has nothing to do with Marmite - it really just requires us to understand the meaning of the basic logical terms either/or and not.

That an *expression* is ***logically necessary*** means that its truth depends only on the meaning of the terms and grammar of the language.

That an *expression* is ***logically contingent*** means that its truth depends not only on the meaning of the terms and grammar but also on some other factors.

Analytic and Synthetic Expressions

The fourth example, 'Bachelors are unmarried' is a special case of a logically necessary expression, in that it takes the form of a subject 'Bachelors' and a predicate 'unmarried'. This example is logically necessary because if we understand the meaning of the subject in this context, we will already know that the predicate applies, because bachelors means men who have never been married. Thus, we can conclude that bachelors are unmarried, simply from understanding the meaning of the terms and the grammar of the language.

On the contrary, 'Bachelors are untidy' is a special case of a logically contingent expression. It too takes the form of a subject and a predicate. In this case though, the predicate 'untidy' does not form part of the definition of the subject 'bachelors'. It may happen to be the case that all bachelors are untidy, but having understood the expression, we would need to investigate further to see if it is actually true.

Kant wrote in his *Introduction to the Critique of Pure Reason A6–7 / B10–11* as translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood:

> Either the predicate (B) belongs to the subject (A) as something that is (covertly) contained in this concept (A); or (B) lies entirely outside the concept (A), though to be sure it stands in connection with it. In the first case I call the judgment analytic, in the second synthetic.
>
> Analytic judgments (affirmative ones) are therefore those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is thought through identity, while those in which this connection is thought without identity are to be called synthetic judgments. The former could also be called explicative, the latter amplective [or amplifying]...

It seems for example that in some sense, the predicate of being unmarried is 'contained in' the subject of being a bachelor, whereas the predicate of being untidy is not. It is not so clear that Kant's classification applies to the examples about Marmite or cats. Perhaps in some sense the predicate *being an alternative to not being liked* is contained in the subject *being liked*, whereas the predicate *being an alternative to being hated* is not. Perhaps in some sense the predicate of being five is contained in the subject of being two plus three, but the example about my cats does not seem to be a predication at all.

Language and Ideas

Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments appears to have a more limited application than the distinction between logically necessary and contingent expressions. It does have the advantage, however, of being independent of the psychological factor of the interpretation of

linguistic vocabulary. It applies to predications in general, regardless of the language used to express them.

Language is a way of expressing beliefs and desires using vocabulary - which links words to ideas - and grammar - which links ways of combining words to ways of combining ideas.

It is important to note that beliefs and desires are not merely expressed in language, but can also be exhibited in behaviour - or hypothesised to explain behaviour. In this way beliefs and desires are independent of language.

In the same way, abstract or concrete ideas can be exhibited in behaviour, even though they may not be expressed in words. For example, you might infer from someone's behaviour that they have a desire to catch the bus into town, and a belief that this is where it stops. In adopting such an explanation of their behaviour, you also infer that they have the idea of a bus, and the ideas of catching a bus, waiting at a bus stop, going to town, and so on. Thus, although some abstract or complex ideas may only be expressed in language, ideas in general are independent of language.

The same idea may be expressed using different linguistic expressions, or none at all. In different languages or interpretations, the same linguistic expression may express different ideas.

Logically contingent expressions can express things which people may believe to be the case, or desire to be the case, but it does not seem that logically necessary expressions can. Someone's behaviour may betray a belief that all bachelors are untidy, or a belief about what the expression 'Bachelors are unmarried' means, but a 'belief' that all bachelors are unmarried is an empty kind of belief since it cannot be investigated, and the 'desire' for all bachelors to be unmarried is an empty kind of desire since it cannot be achieved,

Perhaps this kind of emptiness has prompted people to regard tautological and mathematical formulae as meaningless, but there is a difference between logically necessary expressions such as the examples above, and genuinely meaningless expressions such as:

- Bachelors are corwhumphly
- Marmite: like don't it either you or you
- 3 + = 5 ! 2

This suggests a way of defining logically necessary ideas independently of logically necessary expressions.

Kant's classification of analytic and synthetic predications has the advantage of being independent of linguistic vocabulary, which links words to ideas, but it is still dependent on linguistic grammar, which links ways of combining words to ways of combining ideas. This not only restricts the classification to predications only, but it fails to provide an account of what a predication is, and of what we might mean by one concept being 'contained' in another.

This suggests the usefulness of defining logically necessary ideas independently of logically necessary expressions.

Necessary and Contingent Ideas

The ideas expressed by the examples of logically necessary expressions above are empty, in the sense that if one were to add them to the end of a sentence, preceded by a conjunction such as 'and furthermore...', the sentence would be longer, but its meaning would be completely unaffected. For example, if one were to add to:

Tom is a bachelor ...

the phrase:

... and bachelors are unmarried

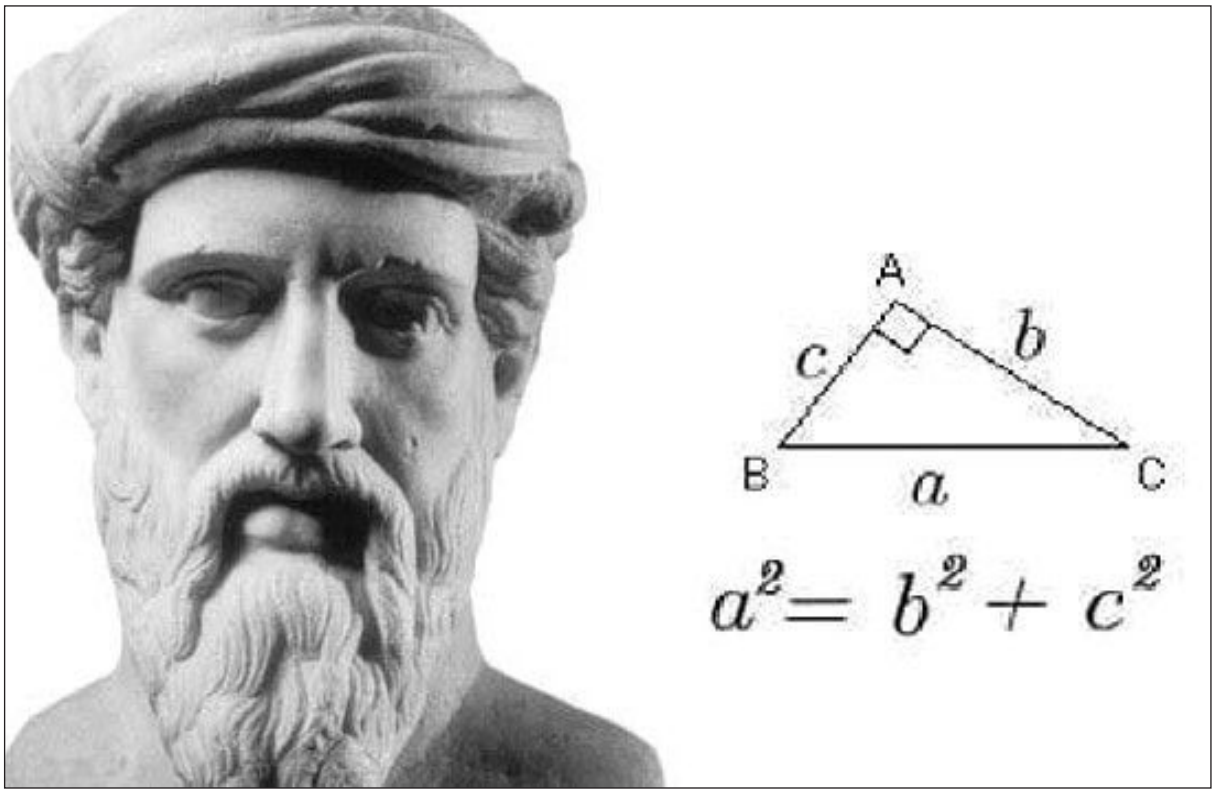
the additional phrase might act as a timely reminder of what is meant by the word 'bachelor', but, although it might help the linguistically challenged listener to understand what the opening words meant, it does not add anything to what is actually meant.

Adding the same phrase to any other sentence would be strange, because it would not be a relevant linguistic reminder, but likewise it would not change the meaning of the original sentence:

Jane is a musician ... and bachelors are unmarried

means nothing more nor less than:

Jane is a musician



Pythagoras

That an *idea* is ***logically necessary*** means that its conjunction with any other idea is identical with that other idea.

That an *idea* is ***logically contingent*** means that it is a proposition that is not logically necessary.

The definition of logically necessary ideas above relies on the idea of a conjunction, which in this context means not just any grammatical conjunction, but specifically the logical conjunction and, as in the examples above. The latter definition depends on the idea of a proposition, which is defined below.

Mathematics

This line of reasoning suggests that mathematical formulae such as:

- 3 + 2 = 5

are empty, in the sense that conjoining them with and to any other idea does not change that idea. This fits mathematical practice in that such reminders are included in proofs of valid inferences, and also explains the role of empty ideas in mathematics - the interest is not in the logically necessarily idea expressed by a certain combination of ideas, but in the fact that a certain combination of ideas is indeed empty, and the insight that provides into the nature of those ideas.

For example, it is not obvious that the combination of ideas that comprises Pythagoras' theorem does indeed express a logically necessary idea. Various proofs help not only to confirm that they do, but also help to understand those ideas better. This is comparable to a child 'discovering' that 3 + 2 = 5, except that in the child's case they are learning more about the idea of addition, and perhaps more about numbers and equality, whereas Pythagoras' theorem gives us an opportunity to learn more about angles and polygons. Unlike logically contingent ideas, this is purely a discovery about ideas. And unlike logically contingent ideas, we can make inferences between combinations of ideas that are instances of a valid theorem, without further justification, for example, by inferring from the example about cats that I have five cats.

In fact, mathematics and logic can plausibly be regarded as the study of those ideas which in combination can only express logically necessary ideas. Such a study is interesting in its own right but is also invaluable when such ideas are combined with other ideas to express logically contingent ideas, since it provides greater clarity about the ideas themselves - that is, which ideas are actually being used - as well as the mathematical certainty of inferences or other instances of valid mathematical theorems.



Kant

Definitions

Defining the abstract ideas which form the foundation of this account is most effectively done using artificial language, but the following English definitions are offered as an introduction:

That an *idea* is ***logical*** with respect to a form of combination means that it is either logically necessary, or its combination with any other logical idea is a logical idea.[1]

That an *idea* is ***logically necessary*** means that its conjunction with any other idea is identical to that other idea.

That an *idea* is ***logically contingent*** means that it is a proposition that is not logically necessary.

The ***conjunction*** of any number of *ideas* is the negation of their negations.[2,3]

The ***logical negation*** of any number of *ideas* means that none of them is true.[4]

That any number of *ideas* are ***identical*** means that for any context, its operation on any of the ideas is equivalent.[5]

That any number of *ideas* are ***equivalent*** means that either all are true or none is.

The ***disjunction*** of any number of *ideas* is the negation of their negation.[6]

That an *idea* is a ***proposition*** means that it is identical to the negation of another idea.

The ***predication*** of any number of *predicates* and a *subject* means that for every idea, if the operation of the subject on that idea is true then the operation of the predicates on the idea is also true.[7]

The ***implication*** of any number of *consequents* by any number of *antecedents* means that either the consequents are all true or some of the antecedents are not.[8]

[1] It is conjectured that all logical ideas can be defined in terms of logical negation, given a suitable generalised operational form of combination. This is beyond the scope of this article but is the basis of this and the definitions, all of which are of ideas which are in this sense logical. The term ideas has no special connotation, and is chosen merely to indicate that there is no particular property which they share.

[2] Conjunction is the logical term for *and*.

[3] Within a generalised operational form of combination, operators with multiple operands such as conjunction, disjunction, and negation may also have declarations and thus apply to all instances of any variable they declare - of which the declared type (if any) is true. Thus conjunction also expresses *all*, disjunction expresses *some*, negation expresses *none*, and so on.

[4] Logical negation is the logical term for *not*.

[5] I have couched these definitions in English, but strictly speaking to understand them requires applying a generalised operational form of combination that is consistently complete, in the sense that for any consistent definition there is some idea which satisfies it. A definition in this sense is an identity as defined above, with variable arguments declared in a conjunction contained within a disjunction declaring the defined term.

[6] Disjunction is the logical term for *or*.

[7] Predication can also take other forms, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article.

[8] Implication of antecedent and consequent uses the logical terms for *if ... then ..*

Attention

Outside In

As light rebounds into the eye,
Pictures paint themselves inside
In a chamber deep within
What is outside enters in -
A thin shadow of what's seen.
But what a world that opens out
To this faculty of sight –
Through the loophole of the mind
Another world of another kind,
Yet Mind, the medium in between,
Mindfully interpolates;
Yet seems it beyond mind's grasp
Until an intuition lands
That outside-inside are really one,
And with that the synthesis is done.

William Bishop



The Balcony, the In-Between and the Common Good

What is in a balcony? What is its effect on the environment and people? The article below provides a deep understanding of this architectural feature, and illustrates it with the case of the Maltese balcony.

DR. ALAN XUEREB

It sounds like a simple question. A balcony is an architectural element: a platform attached to a building, somewhere to stand, sit or look outside. Yet Bernardo Zacka's What's in a Balcony? The In-Between as Public Good (In *Political Theory and Architecture*, edited by Duncan Bell and Bernardo Zacka. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020) invites us to see something more profound. The balcony occupies a peculiar position between private and public. It belongs to the home, yet reaches towards the street; it permits withdrawal without complete separation; it allows the inhabitant to encounter the public world while remaining within the domestic one. The balcony is therefore an in-between.

This apparently modest architectural space opens onto a much larger philosophical question: how does architecture mediate the relationship between the individual and the community? For Malta, the question is particularly revealing. The *gallarija* is one of the most recognisable features of Maltese architecture. We tend to regard it as an aesthetic emblem of Malta. But perhaps we should also regard it as an expression of a particular ethos of dwelling. Here Heidegger, Karsten Harries and political philosophy can meet.

From Building to Dwelling

In *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Martin Heidegger challenges us to think beyond building as merely the production of physical structures. Building is intimately connected with dwelling. Human beings do not simply occupy buildings as objects; they inhabit them. Through them, they experience and encounter the world. Architecture therefore participates in our being-in-the-world.

A balcony illustrates this beautifully. Consider the difference between looking through a window and stepping onto a balcony. Behind the window, the world remains separated from us by glass. On the balcony, we cross a threshold. We encounter the air, temperature, sounds and smells of the street. We see neighbours and passers-by; we notice changing light and weather. Nothing extraordinary necessarily happens. Yet this is precisely the point. Architecture affects us through countless ordinary experiences. It shapes our everyday attunement to the world without necessarily demanding our conscious attention.

The balcony does not compel us to speak to our neighbours or create community by itself. Rather, it makes certain forms of experience and encounter possible. This is where Heideggerian phenomenology can become political philosophy.

Ethos and Architecture

Karsten Harries helps us take the argument further. Architecture has an ethical function because it embodies and expresses an ethos: a culturally formed understanding of how human beings ought to inhabit the world together. Architecture, in this sense, is never entirely neutral.

The relationship between culture and architecture is not, however, one-directional. We build according to inherited habits, values and patterns of life, but the buildings we create subsequently become the environment within which those patterns are experienced by others. There is therefore a kind of circular movement: ethos shapes architecture; architecture shapes dwelling; dwelling shapes experience; experience can reinforce or transform ethos.

The form of a building thus tells us something about the people who built it and the way they understood their relationship with one another and their surroundings. This is why the difference between architectural traditions matters. An English bay window, for example, projects the interior towards the street, creating a space of increased light and outlook while remaining essentially an extension of the domestic interior. The traditional Maltese *gallarija*, by contrast, creates a more pronounced threshold between home and street. Its enclosed



Gallarija

wooden structure provides shelter while opening the inhabitant towards the life outside.

Neither form has one predetermined function, and neither should be reduced to a stereotype of national character. Yet their different forms embody different historical responses to climate, privacy, sociability, domestic life and the street. Architectural form can therefore embody cultural ways of dwelling.

The Maltese *Gallarija*

The traditional Maltese *gallarija* is almost a perfect architectural expression of the in-between. It belongs to the home while opening towards the street. It allows the inhabitant to see without necessarily entering public space, to remain private without becoming completely isolated, and to participate in the life of the neighbourhood without formally becoming part of it. One can sit inside it and observe the street. One can hear the life of the neighbourhood, acknowledge a neighbour, feel the breeze or watch the changing light, all while remaining at home.

The *gallarija* is therefore more than ornament. It is a mediating space between dwelling and community. And here the relationship between ethos and architecture becomes particularly important. The *gallarija* was not simply an arbitrary aesthetic choice. It emerged from a culture, climate, building tradition and pattern of social life. Yet once established, it also helped sustain a particular relationship between domestic and communal life. Architecture expresses culture, but it can also become one of the means through which culture is reproduced.

From Dwelling to the Common Good

Human beings do not experience community only through constitutions, institutions and laws. We experience it through ordinary places: streets, squares, doorways, houses and neighbourhoods. The built environment forms part of the background against which communal life unfolds. This is where architecture enters political philosophy.

The common good is not simply the sum of individual preferences. It concerns the conditions through which human beings can participate in forms of flourishing together. Architecture cannot create the common good by itself, but it can contribute to - or undermine - some of its conditions. A city may be functional while

still being impoverished as a place of dwelling. The question is therefore not merely whether buildings provide shelter or satisfy planning requirements. It is also whether they provide environments in which people can experience belonging, encounter others and inhabit a meaningful place.

The balcony represents a small architectural response to a large human problem: How can we remain ourselves without becoming isolated from others? It permits withdrawal without complete withdrawal from the world.

Perhaps the common good itself requires something analogous: neither the disappearance of individuality into the collective nor the complete isolation of the individual, but forms of mediation between the two.

Turpification and the Maiming of Dwelling

This brings me to turpification. I use the term to mean more than uglification. It describes the degradation of the built environment when development disregards proportion, place, human scale and the relationship between old and new. But the preceding argument allows us to understand turpification more deeply. Turpification can be the maiming of the possibilities of dwelling.

Suppose a traditional façade provides balconies that mediate between domestic interior and street. Suppose that relationship is progressively damaged by insensitive extensions, inappropriate enclosures, excessive building mass, incompatible materials or development that treats the façade merely as a surface onto which private interests can be attached. Something more than beauty is lost. A particular mode of dwelling is diminished.

The relationship between inhabitant and street changes. The relationship between inside and outside changes. The experience of the neighbourhood changes. The loss is therefore not merely aesthetic. It is phenomenological - and ultimately cultural.

If architecture expresses ethos, then the destruction of meaningful architectural relationships can also weaken the cultural patterns of dwelling that those relationships embodied. We should not exaggerate the claim. An ugly building does not automatically produce alienated people, just as beautiful architecture does not automatically produce virtuous citizens. Architecture does not determine human behaviour. But architecture conditions possibilities. And when those possibilities are repeatedly diminished across a city, the cumulative effect matters.

From Dwelling to (D)well-being

This is where my concept of (D)well-being becomes relevant. The parenthesis is deliberate. It points towards the relationship between dwelling and well-being: the slow, often unnoticed influence of the built environment upon our sense of belonging, orientation, meaning and relationship with place.

Architecture does not simply surround us. We inhabit it. The places in which we live become part of our experience of ourselves and others. They can give us opportunities for encounter, retreat, contemplation and belonging - or they can progressively remove them. This suggests a broader cycle:

Ethos shapes architecture. Architecture shapes dwelling. Dwelling shapes human experience. Human experience contributes to the ethos of the next generation.

The political significance of architecture therefore lies partly in its capacity to shape the conditions under which human beings dwell together. The *gallarija* makes this visible on a very small scale.

What is in a Balcony?

Perhaps the answer is more than we initially imagine. There is a threshold between private and public life. There is a possibility of encounter. There is a particular way of experiencing place. There is a small architectural space in which one can remain at home while still being open to the world.

The Maltese gallarija is therefore not merely an icon of Maltese architectural heritage. It is a reminder that architecture mediates between the individual and the community - and that this mediation is partly shaped by the ethos of the culture that produces it.

This is why turpification matters. When we destroy or impoverish the architectural conditions through which people dwell, we do more than make our surroundings uglier. We risk maiming the very possibilities through which human beings encounter place, neighbour and community. Perhaps, then, the question is not simply what is in a balcony? It is: What does a balcony make possible between us? And perhaps that is a question not only for architects, but for anyone concerned with the common good.

You Sang: ‘Life is as brief as a sigh’

(Dedicated to that Argentinian master of tango Carlos Gardel)

You sang: ‘Life is as brief as a sigh’.
I feel emanation float from the favella
Where I lived in the past, the long ago.
But now my forehead is covered by snow.
But do I really at my heart’s core
Want to return to the world I knew before
That far-off favella under the stars,
With the lighthouse beam sweeping the sea
And the man with the accordion on his knee?

Yes, I so much feel: ‘life is as brief as a sigh’.
Do I really want to return to my past?
Is my longing really so true and so deep?
Is it not better to sleep dreamless sleep?

Edward Greenwood



The Stranger

**A third one is seldom needed when two people meet again
through one of those rare coincidences
that life almost never repeats.**

**Yet he entered the compartment, sat down by the window,
and looked outside as though the passing world
belonged to him alone.**

**The train kept its own time,
as life does.**

**Without the third one
the man and the woman would have had much to say,
although no one knew whether the stranger by the window
was even listening.**

**Beyond the glass reddish poplars drifted by,
the turf-grey of alder bushes,
mirroring irreversibility.**

**The white flowering of blackthorn hedgerows
brightened the fields.
New seedlings rose from the dark earth.
Field paths wound gently across the hills,
leading towards heightened places,
towards a loveliness
resting in the silent growth of the land.**

**From time to time, patches of dark forest
crossed the window like sudden fears
in the face of chance.**

**Inside the compartment
time seemed unwilling to move.
Without the stranger they would have spoken.
Years of silence might have dissolved
into a single afternoon.**

**Instead, his silence entered before his words.
It settled quietly between them
until every sentence became hesitant,
and every thought returned to itself.**

Only years later did the question remain.

**Why did no one remember his face?
Was he young or old? Fair-haired or dark?
Or had he entered without ever belonging
to the journey at all?**



There was something about him,
both familiar and strangely foreboding,
as though he carried the remembrance
of all that cannot be recovered.

The stranger, too, looked into the rushing spring;
into the flowering hedgerows, the new seedlings,
the winding paths, the fields disappearing
towards the horizon.

He seemed to watch in silence
not the landscape itself, but time
passing through it.

“Forty years ago today
it would have been his birthday,”
The man said at last, lifting his eyes
from the work he had carried with him.
And looked at her.

“Yes,” she answered softly,
because the third one was there.

Evening gathered against the window
Wisps of mist rose from the fields,
announcing the approaching night.

Their reflections grew fainter and fainter
until they themselves seemed little more
than passing shadows.

Perhaps another word might still have been
spoken.
Perhaps the long separation might have found its
answer.

But silence had already chosen
its place between them.

When the train reached its destination,
they rose, lifted their bags,
and stepped onto the platform.

Only two people
left the compartment.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Songs without Words: Felix Mendelssohn reflects

People usually complain that music is so ambiguous, and what they are supposed to think when they hear it is so unclear, while words are understood by everyone. But for me it is exactly the opposite . . . what the music I love expresses to me are thoughts not too indefinite for words, but rather too definite.

Even if, in one or other of them, I had a particular word or words in mind, I would not tell anyone, because the same word means different things to different people. Only the songs say the same thing, arouse the same feeling, in everyone – a feeling that can't be expressed in words.

Though everything else may appear shallow and repulsive, even the smallest task in music is so absorbing, and carries us so far away from town, country, earth, and all worldly things, that it is truly a blessed gift of God.

Felix Mendelssohn

My music had that panto-donkey bray,
As Shakespeare did, no doubt, with his good ear
For what was sure to have the groundlings cheer
And boost the fortunes of another play.
But that was sound-effects, a handy way
Of maybe getting some of them to hear
What's going on in Puck's celestial sphere
While bumpkins pass their fairy-hoodwinked day.
Those donkey-honks are fine for the odd bit
Of *ut pictura musica*, but fall
Far short of any soundscape I'd admit
As music in the truest sense, or call
'Great music' in the sense of being fit
To place with Bach, the greatest of them all.

For though the best of Shakespeare's verse might lay
Some claim to bring rapt audiences near
To crossing music's unmapped soft frontier
There's naught that language, even his, could say
Whose very saying wouldn't soon betray
Just how far short words fell and how unclear
Their import, sense or meaning must appear
Beside what music's able to convey
With perfect clarity. So when you pit
Them head-to-head the writing's on the wall:
The poets, finely though they may acquit
Themselves, must leave composers walking tall
Since notes admit no variant of the split
'Twixt sound and sense where word-cast shadows fall.



CHRIS NORRIS



Consider: words can't ever quite suffice
To make their own sense plain, or clearly spell
Their meaning out, a problem that they're well
Content with, poets, since that's just the price
They pay for each semantic chance to slice
The pie seven ways but makes a very hell
For tidy minds determined to expel
Such far-out throws of the semantic dice
From their rule-fenced domain. It's music's great,
Its most distinctive gift to mean just what
It is, just what the notes communicate,
And yet, by tonal means, to see we're not
Constrained to have that clarity dictate
We keep their nuances beyond earshot.

Composers: heed the poets and you'll spice
Things up too much, be over-prone to dwell
On ambiguities that never jell,
Make tonal sense, or hit on some device
For isolating the false paradise
Of free-associative leaps that tell
Of music's latest failures yet to quell
Those verbal analogues that so entice
The word-besotted ear. I tell you straight:
It's we composers whose eternal lot
It is, even at this far from early date
In music history, to show they blot
Their copy-books who'd still deliberate
On 'Text or Score: which really hits the spot?'.

Yes, both can be ambiguous, music too:
Think Mozart in G minor, or those late
Beethoven string quartets and the debate
As to which mood-descriptor would best do
At some point: ‘melancholy yet shot through
With rays of hope’, or ‘pretty sanguine state
Of mind though passing tremors aggravate
A restless soul (think Opus 132,
Its first and final movements). You’ll say ‘Yes,
But Felix, it’s the vagaries of sense
In verbal language that you’re keen to stress,
Not those in music, yet – don’t take offence! –
Can’t it be music’s lack of limpidness
That leaves the adjectivalists in suspense?’.

No, that’s just where your thinking goes askew,
Treats programme-notes – whose slippery words frustrate
The concert-goer who rises to the bait –
As if they might give direct access to
Those notes of music that demand their due
In listeners’ willingness to concentrate
On what, ears peeled, they’re able to locate
Within the work, not take prose-notes in lieu
Of its integral form. Such sounds express
Precisely what eludes the vain pretence
Of dreamy commentators to address
Those attributes whose total immanence
To music’s mode of being they transgress
Who think well-chosen words can recompense.

‘Songs Without Words’ I christened them, those short
Piano pieces that, I now see, made
That very point: each one the pianist played
Came with some genre-label of the sort
‘Venetian Gondola Song’ but also brought,
For those with ears to hear, the sovereign aid
Of all that I, its fashioner, conveyed

By formal means beyond that last resort,
The picture-piece. Take Bottom's gross 'Eeyore'
For what it's worth, a splendid party-trick,
At least for those whose knowledge of the score
Scarce goes beyond that dose of pure slapstick
That serves as my most popular encore,
Plus the old 'Wedding March' – both over quick!

Yet then I think: those oratorios, based
On Scriptural texts so graphic, so possessed
By visual imagery, or other best-
Known pieces like my 'Fingal's Cave', embraced
So warmly by my Scottish friends whose taste
For suchlike scenes was just as manifest
In mine (let that whole symphony attest!)
And landscape-oriented as well as paced
By songs and rhythmic traits. It's music pure
And absolute I'd most wish to defend
Against such lesser genres, yet their lure
Holds me so strongly that those works that lend
Some credit to it – chamber works for sure –
Seem scarcely able to withstand the trend.

But still I ask: why harbour such displaced
Or false anxieties, I who'd divest
Myself perversely of a gift so blest
By commoner and royalty, or who'd waste
For no good reason future triumphs graced
By those who'd happily have acquiesced
In my rejecting any such request
('Under which king, Bezonian?) as I faced
From my self-questionings. Maybe it stems,
They venture, from that ancient Jewish ban
On names or images that faith condemns
Yet I, a Christian convert, soon began
To name and image just as Bethlehem's
Iconoclast turned up to spoil the plan.





*Photo by Virginia Khuri:**Zeus God of the Sky***