

## *Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin's 'Functionalism': A Reappraisal\**

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### Abstract

During the last five decades, Pugin's 'functionalism' has become a commonplace of scholarship which is constantly reproduced without further analysis or critical examination. This supposed 'functionalism' of Pugin's architectural theory is used as the basic argument for the construction of genealogies connecting the ideas of the protagonist of the Gothic Revival in the nineteenth century with the ideology of the Modern Movement in the twentieth. Nikolaus Pevsner is a classic example of this line of reasoning. Pugin is thus presented as a 'source of modern architecture and design'.

In the present essay I argue that statements such as the above may harbour possible misunderstandings of the complex nuances within the history of architectural ideas, often disregarding the cultural environment and conceptual context from which they spring. Based on a systematic reading of Pugin's two major treatises, namely *Contrasts* (1836) and *True Principles* (1841), I will try to show that Pevsner's interpretation is not very well founded, simplifying the real content of a sophisticated theory. Pugin never mentions the word 'function' to denote the use of a building; instead he speaks of its 'purpose', 'propriety', 'arrangement', 'destination' and 'meaning'.

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Consequently, his ‘rationalism’ seems to transcend the materialistic ‘functionalism’ of certain aspects of Modernism and encompass many social, cultural, ethical and aesthetic ‘roles’ of architecture. The aim of the present paper is to argue that the term ‘functionalism’ is probably inadequate to comprehend the different layers of meaning inherent in Pugin’s thought and to propose a reappraisal and a new interpretation of their possible theoretical sources.

*“In some respects, I am willing to grant, great and important inventions have been brought to perfection: but, it must be remembered, that these are purely of a mechanical nature; and I do not hesitate to say, that as works of this description progressed, works of art and productions of mental vigour have declined in a far greater ratio...Let us look around, and see whether the Architecture of this country is not entirely ruled by whim and caprice. Does locality, destination, or character of a building, form the basis of a design? No; surely not.”*

A.W.N. Pugin, *Contrasts*<sup>1</sup>

## Is Pugin a ‘Functionalist’?

The above timely indictment of the Industrial Age was written by A.W.N. Pugin, in 1836, in the conclusion to a book called *Contrasts*. Pugin, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau before him, juxtaposes the technical advancement of Western civilization with a corresponding lack of culture, or ‘mental vigour’. His ‘anti-utilitarian vocabulary’ is obvious, and Pugin’s scholars did not fail to notice it.<sup>2</sup> Yet there seems to exist a certain misunderstanding within Pugin scholarship. The same man who demands a new philosophy of architectural design based on the concept of ‘character’ and ‘destination’ is frequently termed a ‘functionalist’.

‘Functionalism’ is a word that immediately brings to mind twentieth-century Modernism, the dictum “form follows function” and a mechanistic rationalism of a “machine for living in”. Was Pugin a ‘functionalist’ in those terms? In the present paper I would like to argue that the word ‘functionalism’ is inadequate to describe the complexities and nuances of Pugin’s thought. My aim is to propose a different intellectual background and atmosphere for a better understanding of Pugin’s ideas in relation to the *role* and the destination of buildings. I will argue that his “*millenarian sense of urgency*”,<sup>3</sup> his religious bias,<sup>4</sup> and his attempt to create a “*Utopia of the spirit, the Church, and the arts*”<sup>5</sup> are quite foreign to any functionalist, utilitarian criteria. If he was a ‘rationalist’,<sup>6</sup> as Peter Collins suggests, his version of it surely transcends the materialistic functionalism of certain aspects of the Modern Movement: Pugin’s view of architecture is immersed in cultural, ethical and religious roles and ideas that have nothing or very little to do with practical solutions to questions of ‘function’, utility and mechanical efficiency.

## Pugin's 'Functionalism': The Construction of a Myth

Nevertheless, during the last six decades or so, Pugin's 'functionalism' has become a commonplace and an established view of scholarship that is taken for granted. With a surprising stability, the theme keeps recurring in almost all of Pugin's scholars. The interesting fact about such a persistence is its constant reproduction without further analysis or critical examination. I would like to furnish a brief genealogical report of this line of reasoning, in order to prove my assertions.

As every general, diffused and vague idea, it started off reluctantly, perhaps, as Michael Bright points out, in the work of Henry-Russell Hitchcock titled *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain*, dating from 1954.<sup>7</sup> Three years later, in 1957, Edward Robert de Zurko published a book called *Origins of Functional Theory*, where he unambiguously states:

Basically, Pugin's theory was what we of today would call functionalist... Fitness of form for function is the point he makes most insistently.<sup>8</sup>

And although Phoebe Stanton, the foremost Pugin scholar of this early period, is very cautious and heedful in drawing such far-ranging historical comparisons, she nevertheless shows a similar tendency to reconstruct within Pugin's Gothic Revivalism a pure nucleus of design principles that were ahead of their time.<sup>9</sup> And this tendency is further developed in her study, simply titled *Pugin*,<sup>10</sup> not accidentally appearing in a series of books called *Pioneers of Modern Architecture*. The book was prefaced by Nikolaus Pevsner. Pevsner was very keen on constructing genealogies connecting nineteenth-century ideas with the ideologies of the Modern Movement in the twentieth century. Perhaps Stanton, mildly presenting Pugin as an unnoticed precursor of Modern principles and theories of art and design, felt the influence of Pevsner's ground-breaking study called, expressively, *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design*, published three years earlier. Surprisingly enough, Pugin was the first such source mentioned by Pevsner. He writes:

The plea for functionalism is the first of our sources. Augustus WelbyNorthmore Pugin, born in 1812, the English son of a French father, wrote on the first page of his most important book: '*There should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety...The smallest detail should...serve a purpose, and construction itself should vary with the material employed*'.<sup>11</sup>

Using a passage from Pugin's *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, Pevsner settles the issue for good: Pugin is a precursor of twentieth-century functionalism. The thrust and authoritative style of Pevsner's writing left no doubt whatsoever as to the truth of his assertion. No one seemed to notice, for example, that Pugin's passage from his book never mentioned the word 'function', the very word that makes the term 'functionalism' so powerful, effective and pervasive. Instead, Pugin speaks of convenience,

propriety and purpose. Another seemingly minor but important detail matters here: Pevsner omitted some small but crucial phrases from Pugin's citation. Pugin originally wrote:

In pure architecture the smallest detail should *have a meaning* or serve a purpose.<sup>12</sup>

Pevsner did not like the term 'pure architecture', and the phrase '*have a meaning*', and eliminated both of them from his citation. Was it accidental? Surely not. 'Meaning' obviously could not fit well with a Modern functionalist agenda, as Pevsner understood it. Despite those conceptual nuances, Pevsner's assertion was powerful and bold. And it was established as the standard interpretation of Pugin's cast of mind. John Wilton-Ely writes in 1977, echoing Pevsner's argument:

...the criteria laid down in the *Contrasts* and in his later work, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* of 1841, also anticipated much of the concern for functional planning, structural expression, and the nature of materials at the heart of Modern Movement theory.<sup>13</sup>

As Rosemary Hill has pointed out, "...*the role of function and the nature of honesty in architecture*" were "...*those points most often cited by Pugin's supposed defenders*".<sup>14</sup> And, I would add, not only by his defenders. David Watkin, for example, in his very negative consideration of Pugin's thought, published as part of his book named *Morality and Architecture*, contends that "...*here, indeed, was pure function raised to the level of religious truth*".<sup>15</sup> Michael Bright agrees with Pevsner, De Zurko and Watkin:

Pugin is very much a pragmatist, or functionalist, in his views on architecture.<sup>16</sup>

Chris Brooks, five years later, in 1984, takes the argument even further, claiming that:

Few twentieth-century architects would disagree with the functionalist philosophy of True Principles.<sup>17</sup>

Roderick O'Donnell seems to agree as well:

The paternity of the twentieth-century Modern Movement can be traced back to Pugin and to True Principles.<sup>18</sup>

And this is so because, according to O'Donnell, Pugin developed a 'functionalist' and 'rationalist' critique, which required that the construction and the materials of a building be revealed.<sup>19</sup> Even very attentive and meticulous scholars like Hanno-Walter Kruft, in his important *History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present* succumb to the myth of Pugin's 'functionalism'.<sup>20</sup>

I have tried to show how persistent this idea is.<sup>21</sup> But is it true? Or is it a misinterpretation, a misunderstanding of Pugin's thoughts? One common fault in the interpretation of written texts of the past is

the projection of present meanings, concepts and ideas of the scholar to its object of study: this practice is called *anachronism*. A similar fault is to misinterpret the purposes and intentions of the writer, confounding them with one's own: both usually happen when there is a lack of understanding of the whole spirit and intellectual atmosphere out of which a text emerges, through the isolation of a few written passages and phrases out of their general context.

I argue that those common faults have occurred more than once in the interpretation of Pugin's texts. Let us take a more attentive look at *Contrasts* and *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*", arguably his most famous and important books (written in 1836 and 1841, respectively), in order to check the possible misunderstandings that led to the construction of the myth of Pugin's 'functionalism'. Can this myth be supported by a closer examination of his writings?

## Contrasts: Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste<sup>22</sup>

*Contrasts* is Pugin's first major articulation of arguments in favour of the Gothic Revival in England. As Margaret Belcher has shown, even during his own times, *Contrasts* was falsely interpreted as a historical essay on mediaeval architecture. Seen in this light, it contained numerous faults, inaccuracies and hasty observations. But this line of argument misses the real point, the intention and true nature of the work. Belcher rightly argues:

There is a case to be made for regarding *Contrasts* as an imaginative production: not one relying on facts, not one proceeding by rational analysis, not one to be read literally. The aim is to persuade, not to inform.<sup>23</sup>

According to Belcher's interpretation, Pugin was a "...writer dealing in the intangibles of the imagination" and his vision of the Middle Ages, its society and its architecture is "...a representation of an ideal".<sup>24</sup> In other words, the "contrasts" Pugin develops, both in word and image, between the "noble edifices of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries" and the buildings of nineteenth-century England, are not meant to constitute a historical essay but are an exercise in persuasion, a social criticism and a religious crusade. And Pugin was its prophet.

His aim is to juxtapose the materialism of the industrial society, its utilitarian, individualistic, mechanistic and economic drives, with the social unity, the devotion, the cohesion and the spirituality of the Middle Ages, or of his ideal of how the Middle Ages were.<sup>25</sup> In Pugin's text, which is a polemical manifesto, his idealized vision of the Middle Ages has an intimate relation to his views about how architecture

should be designed and built. To state my argument clearly, if we miss the connection between architecture, religion, morality and society, we simply lose the overall spirit of Pugin's text.<sup>26</sup> For Pugin, the quality of architectural creation goes hand in hand with the quality of societal values and relations, namely with the quality of psychical morals and feelings. Explaining why the present architecture is at a low ebb and how the excellence of the Middle Ages can be restored, he writes:

I feel thoroughly convinced, that it is only by similar glorious feelings that similar glorious results can be obtained.<sup>27</sup>

It is not therefore accidental that the title of the first chapter of the work is 'On the Feelings which Produced the Great Edifices of the Middle Ages'. In other words, great architecture is the visible outcome of inner feelings, of "religious ideas", of faith, zeal, devotion, noble motives, and excellence.<sup>28</sup> According to Pugin, the 'Modern' architecture of his day is in a degraded state, without unity and full of incongruities because the unity of *feeling* and the devotion to religious ideas, customs and rites have gone. This is the general context of Pugin's argument. So when we read, on the first page of *Contrasts* the famous phrase:

It will be readily admitted that the great test of Architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended, and that the style of a building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected<sup>29</sup>

We have to be very careful not to isolate this thought from its overall context and think that it proves an endorsement of a certain 'functionalism' *avant la lettre*. Pugin here actually says that a design should fit to its *purpose*.<sup>30</sup> But what does Pugin *mean* by the 'purpose' of a building? Pugin, interestingly, does not mention any *user* but instead refers to a *spectator who perceives* this 'purpose'. The primary relationship between this man and the building is visual: the 'attentive observer' is *looking at* the building. When he looks at the edifices of the Middle Ages, Pugin writes:

Here every portion of the sacred fabric bespeaks its origin; the very plan of the edifice is the emblem of human redemption...well does the fabric bespeak its destined purpose: the eye is carried up and lost in the height of the vaulting and the intricacy of the ailes...– all alike conspire *to fill the mind* with veneration for the place and to make it feel the sublimity of Christian worship.<sup>31</sup>

Through this passage, the first paragraph can be read and seen in the correct light, within the overall context of Pugin's thought and intentions. The primary 'purpose' of an architectural edifice is not to fulfil a material function: its aim is to speak to the observer, to communicate a message regarding the symbolic meaning of a religious and moral universe and, finally, to create a feeling, an emotion within the mind. In other words, Pugin understands the word 'purpose' in relation to a correct articulation of the various

parts ('portions') of a building in order to "*excite wonder and admiration*"<sup>32</sup> and to influence the ideas of the spectator. For example, the 'purpose' of a Christian church is to create a feeling for the greatness of Christianity; as Pugin writes:

...such *effects* as these can only be produced on the mind by buildings, the composition of which has emanated from men who were thoroughly imbued [sic] with devotion...<sup>33</sup>

Feeling instigates and creates feeling. I argue that this ideology is very far from a 'functionalist' point of view. Indeed, it is almost the opposite. It is concerned with *effect* on the eye, in order to reach the mind. That is why Pugin is interested so much in the concept of 'ornament'. Ornament is a symbolic language, a vehicle for the architect to express feelings and excite appropriate visual and mental effects, a way of communicating an appropriate 'character'.<sup>34</sup> Pugin uses the words 'embellishment', 'beautification' and 'enrichment' to describe the above process.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere he speaks of 'appearances', which announce the devotion to a higher cause, instead of merely thinking in terms of 'interest' and 'expediency'.<sup>36</sup> Pugin conceives the relationship between the final meaning and purpose of the building's visual language and its ornament as 'propriety'. And he juxtaposes 'propriety' to 'economy' as a far better way of designing meaningful and appropriate architecture.<sup>37</sup> 'Propriety' is achieved through the right 'features'<sup>38</sup> of a visual vocabulary,<sup>39</sup> which produce 'effects':<sup>40</sup> Pugin connects them with the concept of 'decorum'.<sup>41</sup> One consequence of those effects is to arouse "*historical recollections*".<sup>42</sup> Pugin adopts his theory about the absolute necessity of meaningful, 'characteristic features' within architecture, contrasting it again and again with 'modern' mechanical arrangements, facilities, contrivances, ease, comfort and 'usages'.<sup>43</sup> Can there be any clearer indication that his theory of architecture is not 'functionalist'? His difference from Modern functionalism is exactly his refusal to equate 'function' with economy, practical necessities and absence of ornament: for Pugin, it is the "*imposing and characteristic features*"<sup>44</sup> that make up the architectural quality and real purpose of an architectural design. The philosophy of architecture put forward in *Contrasts* can really help us interpret his next major work, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, and decide whether Pevsner's interpretation of Pugin as a functionalist really possesses a solid foundation.

## The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture: Set Forth in Two Lectures Delivered at St Marie's, Oscott

Let us read again Pugin's first rule of design, which, according to Pevsner, is a source of Modern functionalism. Pugin writes in the first paragraph of "*The True Principles...*":

...there should be no *features* about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety.<sup>45</sup>

If we pay attention, we immediately become aware of the continuity in Pugin's thought between the philosophy of design formulated in *Contrasts* and the *True Principles*. Pugin, again, is not talking about functional arrangements of spatial uses, but about "features": "...*there should be no features about a building...*". In other words, he refers to those – previously mentioned – "characteristic features" that articulate the meaningful language of a building, its ornament and character. We could argue that *True Principles* is basically a treatise on the right application of ornament. This point is often forgotten by those who interpret Pugin's thought as a 'functionalist' one. That is why the concept of propriety is mentioned again. Propriety ensures the correspondence between the symbolic role of the building and its ornament.<sup>46</sup>

In pure architecture the smallest detail should *have a meaning* or serve a purpose.<sup>47</sup>

Once more, we become aware that Pugin lays emphasis on the universe of meaning, of ideas and intangible values. Surely, *True Principles* presents a different tone from *Contrasts*: it shows a new interest in construction. But Pugin never forgets his theoretical origins: while formulating new arguments for the right application of ornament based on constructional principles or the different properties of materials, he maintains the idea that a building primarily refers to the eye and should "...*produce a fine effect of light and shade*".<sup>48</sup>

The new 'constructional' argumentation of Pugin, as it is developed in the *True Principles*, could lead to a misinterpretation of this obvious 'turn' as a proto-functionalism attitude. Apparently, his 'ornamental rationalism' may seem to be based solely on constructional and utilitarian grounds.<sup>49</sup> But if we read more attentively and patiently, we gradually realize that Pugin is very far from such an attitude: for him, what is important is the fact that every constructional element should have or has a "mystical intention". For example, in the case of the pinnacle, its true role is "...*to represent an emblem of the Resurrection*".<sup>50</sup> Besides 'utility',<sup>51</sup> the ultimate criterion for judging architectural beauty and excellence remains the same throughout Pugin's writings. It is the basic premise developed in *Contrasts*: what really matters is the meaningful quality of the 'effect' of the building on the eye and the mind of the observer.<sup>52</sup>

A good example of this attitude is revealed when Pugin treats of iron as a new material. Here, his deeper ideological core surfaces again: he believes that iron cannot be used for ornamental purposes because it is

...deficient of that play of light and shade consequent on bold relief and deep sinkings, so essential to produce a good effect.<sup>53</sup>



I am convinced that if Pugin was a true or pure functionalist in the Modern sense, as Pevsner argues, he couldn't have written phrases like the above. Does a pure functionalist show an interest in the play of light and shade and in good mental effects of a building? Probably not. That is the reason why Andrew Saint rightly argued that 'vulgar functionalism' does not express Pugin's state of mind.<sup>54</sup> Saint believes that the 'true principles' of Pugin present an inherent ambiguity.<sup>55</sup> Harry-Francis Mallgrave agrees with him. He writes about Pugin's *True Principles*:

Its two opening rules have often been hailed as the precursors of functionalist theory, but such a judgment both belies the growing complexity of the debate and oversimplifies Pugin's position.<sup>56</sup>

This complexity and ambiguity is captured by Pugin's desire to endow every structural or morphological element with a "...*mystical and appropriate meaning*".<sup>57</sup> That is why the concept of 'propriety' is crucial to the articulation of the argument developed in the *True Principles*. According to Pugin, 'propriety' is the principle of design, ensuring

...that the external and internal appearance of an edifice should be illustrative of, and in accordance with, the purpose for which it is destined.<sup>58</sup>

Here, again, no 'function' is mentioned: instead, Pugin is talking about a destination<sup>59</sup> and the *appearance* of it. Pugin develops a theory of 'decorative propriety': according to the importance, scale and destination of a building, different ornamentation should apply: each building type should have its own appropriate *character*, related to the *intentions* of the builders.<sup>60</sup> In this context, Pugin attacks the 'utilitarian functionalism' of his present age. He writes:

Churches are now built without the least regard to tradition, to mystical reasons, or even common propriety. A room full of seats at the least possible cost is the present idea of a church<sup>61</sup>

The man who writes these words could never be a functionalist in the Modern sense of a design regulated by economy of materials, absence of ornament and minimum, practical arrangement of space. According to Pugin, a building should first of all "*impress the mind with feelings of reverent awe*", using ornaments with "*mystical signification*".<sup>62</sup> Buildings and their parts are 'emblems', not 'functions': Pugin looks for "*soul-stirring*" emblems that will be able to announce, through their features, "*distinguishing characters*".<sup>63</sup> For example, he writes of the collegiate buildings of William of Wykeham:

The whole character of these buildings is at once severe, elegant, and scholastic.<sup>64</sup>

‘Character’ is a key notion for Pugin’s philosophy of architecture. It denotes the ability of architecture to produce feelings and to announce intentions and meanings to its observers: those meanings may be ways of life, social moods and inclinations, psychic dispositions or qualities.<sup>65</sup> ‘Character’ is also connected with scale and size. Pugin writes:

Without vastness of dimensions it is impossible to produce a grand and imposing effect in architecture.<sup>66</sup>

Again, the principal object of Pugin’s focus is the effect of a building and not its function. Concluding our examination of the textual sources themselves, I argue that Pugin’s thinking *cannot* be characterized as a ‘functionalist’ one: this prevalent interpretation seriously misunderstands and hides other, more important dimensions and nuances of his theoretical outlook. If Pugin is not a functionalist, what is the background of his theories? Is there a possibility for a new, alternative interpretation?

## Possible Sources of Pugin’s Cast of Mind

Most of the various attempts to explain Pugin’s architectural thinking and its possible general intellectual background or sources relate, unfortunately, to the functionalist ‘myth’. In other words, they tend to explain the cast of his mind within the dominant avowal of his supposed ‘functionalism’. Some scholars relate this premise with a certain ‘rationalism’ in Pugin’s thought,<sup>67</sup> which appears to have as a background certain eighteenth-century French thinkers. An early example of this line of reasoning is formulated by Phoebe Stanton in 1954. She writes:

It should be noted in passing that Pugin was the son of a Frenchman, that he was bilingual, and that his father, A.C. Pugin, knew well and probably taught his son the theories of Marc-Antoine Laugier and Jacques-François Blondel.<sup>68</sup>

Stanton, while she has repeated her view that Blondel exerted a possible influence on Pugin,<sup>69</sup> never developed the argument further. Pevsner picked up this suggestion and had the opinion that Pugin’s thought “...is the direct continuation of the principle of French seventeenth and eighteenth century rationalism”.<sup>70</sup> But he did not elaborate on this idea either: he simply mentioned Cordemoy, Boffrand, Blondel and Batteux as exponents of this so-called ‘rationalism’.<sup>71</sup> David Watkin simply reiterates this line of thinking, mentioning Laugier and Blondel as the possible sources for Pugin’s theories.<sup>72</sup> Andrew Saint does not deviate from this ‘rationalist’ explanation either: he merely adds more names to this tradition: Perronet, Frézier, Soufflot, Durand and Rondelet.<sup>73</sup> Finally, Hill also points out that in his second major work, namely the

*True Principles*, "...the influence of French rationalist theory...becomes significant".<sup>74</sup> But she does not develop this argument further. Are we not again faced with another Puginian myth? Many scholars formulated the hypothesis of his indebtedness to French 'rationalism' but none actually proved it. This line of argument still remains unaddressed.

Other hypotheses were also formulated regarding Pugin's thought, its intellectual background, and the nature of certain key concepts of his theory, such as 'propriety'. For example, elements of a certain 'Vitruvian' tradition have also been mentioned by Stanton and Hill, but with no further, substantial, or real explanations. More specifically, Hill thinks that Pugin's "...remarks on 'propriety' are no more than the Vitruvian conventions of the drawing school".<sup>75</sup> And Stanton argues that Pugin defined architectural excellence "...in the Vitruvian sense as fitness to and expression of purpose".<sup>76</sup> I believe that the above interpretations, namely the supposed 'rationalism' or 'Vitruvianism' of Pugin are vague and somewhat general, and do not help us understand the distinctive tone and peculiarity of Pugin's thinking regarding the relation between design, form and the role or purpose of a building. In order to unveil different layers of meaning inherent in Pugin's thought we have to move away from terms such as 'rationalism' or 'Vitruvianism', which could mean almost anything: we should be more specific.

## Towards a New Interpretation and Hypothesis

A third, more interesting line of reasoning has recently been developed. Few scholars seem to agree that Pugin's early cast of mind is forged within a distinct romantic sensibility, where the notion of the 'picturesque' plays a major role.<sup>77</sup> Hill argues that the 'topographical artists' and the Old Watercolour Society were a possible source for Pugin's style and thinking, as developed in his first major work, *Contrasts*.<sup>78</sup> Within this picturesque tradition, as Hill writes:

...his text sets out the case for Gothic architecture entirely in terms of association, of the devout 'feelings' that certain visual effects will inevitably produce.<sup>79</sup>

If that is correct, Pugin is presented as a Romantic who transferred Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight's concepts into the cause of the Gothic Revival. That is obviously one serious aspect of Pugin's intellectual background.<sup>80</sup> But is it the only one? And can we explain Pugin's thinking solely in terms of a picturesque ideology?

In that direction, I propose a new, fourth hypothesis, an alternative reading and interpretation, in order to ground Pugin's thought within the intellectual space of the history of ideas of his era. Based on the previous interpretation of his major texts, I strongly suggest that Pugin's conception of 'purpose',

‘propriety’ and ‘character’ share a common idea: his insistence on the necessity for architecture to express the ideological meaning, message, destination and role of a building, which transcend its practical function and use. In that direction, which Michael Bright calls “*the expressive theory*”,<sup>81</sup> I suggest that the intellectual milieu and atmosphere out of which some of his ideas about architectural symbolism could spring is the French tradition of the *theories of architectural character and expression*. This tradition has its roots mainly in the eighteenth century.<sup>82</sup> Peter Blundell Jones is one of the very few scholars of Pugin who has seen this possibility – without further analyzing it, however – when he wrote that the nineteenth-century advocate of the Gothic Revival:

...clearly shared an interest in the idea of “*architecture parlante*” with French architects such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux.<sup>83</sup>

Harry Francis Mallgrave has also formulated a hint towards this hypothesis, without elaborating on it. He claimed that the principles of Pugin’s mature thought “...*come out of the French academic tradition, which Pugin knew well through readings from his French father’s library*”.<sup>84</sup>

This solution is not improbable. After all, as Clive Wainwright has amply demonstrated, Pugin and his father had close intellectual and working relationships with France. Pugin travelled there many times throughout his life and was kept well informed of the various antiquarian and intellectual currents of the Continent. It is of particular importance that he was in France travelling and sketching during the 1830s, many times.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

For Pugin, a building is not meant primarily to satisfy material requirements of comfort and utilitarian demands of the body. Those are the external, superfluous, ‘mechanical’ parts of use. They concern practical ‘functions’. What he is really interested in is the building – that is, architecture – as a language that concerns the spirit. Here what becomes important are the feelings and the mental associations that the building arouses in a spectator. Pugin seems to believe that a building’s primary end, aim, vocation and mission is to create a symbolic meaning, a mental concept, an intellectual trace. The ‘purpose’ of a building is to instigate a kind of psychical development, a conceptual change, an internal transformation of the soul. It refers to the creation of mental representations that approximate the meaningful space of a building’s conceptual range and scope within the world of ideas.

Those representations concern a mystical, deeper level of symbolic articulations of collective memory, historical references, religious beliefs and social values. ‘Purpose’ and ‘propriety’ thus mainly

refer to the building as a vehicle for spiritual changes. I claim that in Pugin's thought, 'purpose' almost means 'character'.<sup>86</sup> A building's primary aim then is not to fulfil a material function but to attain and to accomplish an appropriate mental character. Appropriate in relation to the feelings, the ideas, the meanings and the emotions that its destinations should be expected to arouse in the mind and soul of its spectators. Character is thus related to 'propriety' as well. In Pugin's thought, form does not follow function. *Form follows ideas*. Form follows meaning, conceptual content. Pugin could not be a 'functionalist' in the Modern sense. Because his notion of 'purpose' transcended mere questions of utility and economy. His conception of purpose or propriety refers to architecture as a symbolic form: to the meaningful space that it communicates through its visible articulation. And this conceptual space belongs to the intellectual realm, not the material world. It is connected with honesty, religion, ethical values and the inner soul of an era, its cultural core. Architecture is a language<sup>87</sup> for the communication of the spirit. As Pugin himself wrote in the *Catholic Standard* in 1851:

I am a builder-up of men's minds and ideas, as well as of material edifices; and there is an immense work and a moral foundation yet required.<sup>88</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Augustus WelbyNorthmore Pugin, *Contrasts; Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste* (London: At St. Marie's Grange, 1836), 30.
- 2 Rosemary Hill, "Reformation to Millenium. Pugin's Contrasts in the History of English Thought," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no.1 (1999): 39.
- 3 Hill, "Reformation to Millenium," 38.
- 4 Phoebe Stanton, "The Sources of Pugin's *Contrasts*," in *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. John Summerson (Lane, London: Lane, 1968) 122.
- 5 Phoebe Stanton, *Pugin*, Preface by Nikolaus Pevsner, A Studio Book (New York: The Viking Press, 1972) 92.
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- 12 Augustus Welby Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture: Set Forth in Two Lectures Delivered at St. Marie's, Oscott* (London: John Weale, 1841), 1.
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- 14 Rosemary Hill, "Ruskin and Pugin," in *Ruskin and Architecture*, eds. Rebecca Daniels and Geoff Brandwood (Reading: Spire Books, 2003), 223.
- 15 David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture. The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 20.
- 16 Bright, "A Reconsideration," 154.
- 17 Chris Brooks, *Signs for the Times, Symbolic Realism in the Mid-Victorian World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 154.
- 18 Roderick O' Donnell, "Introduction," in *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture and An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture*, Augustus Welby Pugin (Herefordshire: Gracewing Publishing, 2003), ix.
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- 20 Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present*, trans. Ronald Taylor, Elsie Callander and Antony Wood (New York: Zwemmer and Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 328.
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- 22 For an almost exhaustive treatment of Pugin's intellectual sources during the preparation of *Contrasts* see Phoebe Stanton, "The Sources of Pugin's *Contrasts*", in *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writers and Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner*, ed. John Summerson (London: Lane, 1968), 120–139; Ashby Bland Crowder, "Pugin's *Contrasts*: Sources for its Technique," *Architectura* 13, no.1 (1983): 57–63, and, especially Rosemary Hill, "Reformation to Millenium," 26–41.

- 23 Margaret Belcher, "Pugin Writing," in *Pugin, A Gothic Passion*, Paul Atterbury and Clive Wainwright eds. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, in association with The Victoria & Albert Museum, 1994), 106.
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- 26 See the similar argument in Andrew Saint, "The Fate of Pugin's True Principles", in *Pugin, A Gothic Passion*, eds. Paul Atterbury and Clive Wainwright (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Victoria & Albert Museum 1994), 274.
- 27 Pugin, *Contrasts*, iii.
- 28 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 2–3.
- 29 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 1.
- 30 He speaks of *purpose*, not of function. Actually, he never mentions the word 'function' in relation to architecture in his text.
- 31 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 2.
- 32 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 3.
- 33 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 2.
- 34 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 4, 7, 9, 11–13, 22–23, 35.
- 35 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 3, 9, 16.
- 36 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 14, 25.
- 37 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 15.
- 38 The emphasis on the 'features' of a building can be traced also to Pugin's text "*How Shall We Build Our Churches?*". See A.W.N. Pugin, "How Shall We Build our Churches?" [Letter to *The Builder*] (1850), in *Architectural Theory, Volume I, An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1870*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 484–485.
- 39 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 16.
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- 42 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 22. On this subject see also: Augustus Welby Pugin, *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England* (London: John Weale, 1843), 18, 29, 38.
- 43 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 22–24, 27, 33.
- 44 Pugin, *Contrasts*, 32, 34.
- 45 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 1.

- 46 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 1–2.
- 47 Pugin, *The True Principles*, p. 1.
- 48 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 4.
- 49 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 19–28.
- 50 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 9.
- 51 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 11.
- 52 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 12–13, 16–18, 40.
- 53 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 29.
- 54 Andrew Saint, “The Fate of Pugin’s True Principles,” in *Pugin, A Gothic Passion*, eds. Paul Atterbury and Clive Wainwright (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with The Victoria & Albert Museum, 1994), 275.
- 55 Saint, “The Fate of Pugin’s True Principles,” 274.
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- 66 Pugin, *The True Principles*, 63.
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- 73 Saint, "The Fate of Pugin's True Principles," 277–278.
- 74 Hill, "Reformation to Millenium," 40.
- 75 Hill, "Reformation to Millenium," 40.
- 76 Stanton, *Pugin*, 26.
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- 79 Hill, "Reformation to Millenium," 36.
- 80 Watkin, *Morality and Architecture*, 21.
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