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CONCLUSION

An initial fascination with the architecture of Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh and a discomfort with existing interpretations of that architecture were the main motives for this investigation. The manifestly unusual characteristics of their work are recognized by many if not all, but hard to understand. Within the currently common approach, Hawksmoor’s and Vanbrugh’s buildings have been categorized within the stylistic period of the Baroque, and analysed within the paradigm of Vitruvian architecture. The consequence of this is that the plans, the classical order, the proportions and decoration are studied and categorized carefully. Hawksmoor’s and Vanbrugh’s architecture failed to fit within these paradigms completely, but historians are reluctant to dismiss it altogether. As a result, Blenheim Palace and Hawksmoor’s London city churches figure in many architectural handbooks, but are only connected to other contemporary works of art by the thin and fragile threads of Vitruvianism and style characteristics.

An approach that attempts to connect these buildings to other disciplines may help us construct an alternative approach to Vanbrugh’s and Hawksmoor’s architecture. This approach considers the building itself not only as an independent work of art, but also as a work of art which has strong links with the society it was designed in and for, and with the artist and its intended audience. Building on the work of Winckelmann and Hegel, this approach was originally suggested and developed by Michael Baxandall. For the research and knowledge about Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh, the tendency to interdisciplinarity has resulted in interesting and detailed studies such as Charles Saumarez Smith’s about the realization of Castle Howard and David Cast’s article on ‘seeing’ Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor. Recently, the publication of Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey’s
book on Hawksmoor’s London churches has revealed many important sources that lie outside the traditional corpus of architectural history source material. His work shows how far outside this traditional corpus we can go and therefore suggests how large the potential corpus could be.

Rhetoric is the theory that systematized and formulated the way a work of art can interact with its audience. With the help of rhetorical concepts, such as ‘style’, ‘composition’, figures of speech and vividness I have tried to design a new way of interpreting the architecture of Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh. This interpretation corresponded with themes in the art- and architectural theory of their time, such as the sublime and the Picturesque. Studying their writings proved how important they considered the relationship between a work of art as a building and its audience. It also proved how much they considered architecture to be a form of persuasive communication. They used and indirectly recommended rhetorical tools in the design or analysis of architecture. Even though Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh did not literally refer to rhetoric as a guiding theory in their approach to architecture, their writings, their buildings and the literature surrounding their buildings and persons suggest a strong presence of rhetorical strategies. Hence, it was illuminating to approach their architecture with these strategies in mind.

Hawksmoor’s London city churches can, thanks to Du Prey’s publication on the subject, be studied in the context of a much larger body of contemporary literature than ever before. The group of divines who commissioned this project were all highly interested in, or published on the history of the Christian church and focused on the early Christian Church of third and fourth century AD. Their writings showed an interest in how a church should function, and how a church should ‘work’ on the visitor. These ideas can also be detected in Hawksmoor’s designs. Hawksmoor studied ancient architecture in his own time and would have learned a lot from his tutor and lifelong friend Sir Christopher Wren. Hawksmoor’s choices of the architectural elements of his churches are easier to
understand and less anachronistic, now that we are aware of the circumstances of the Commission. His seemingly random use of Gothic and classical elements can be considered as innovative. His designs came from a deep involvement with contemporary issues on the state of the Anglican Church, the interest in antiquarian research, combined with the associationalism of contemporary art theory. I believe that it will be more fruitful to follow these lines of enquiry, instead of solely focusing on the Vitruvian elements of his designs and his design method. My interpretation of some of the issues pertaining to his London churches, such as the orientation and Hawksmoor’s use of screening, is an initial exploration following these lines of enquiry.

I have attempted to show that Sir John Vanbrugh was probably very much concerned with the associationalist characteristics of his architectural designs. As a very early exponent of the Picturesque movement, he built the three-dimensional equivalents of Joseph Addison’s art theory. His understanding of the emotional and intellectual effects of visual input corresponds to a similar attention in rhetorical theory. As a playwright Vanbrugh was familiar with rhetoric and the problem of how to address an audience in a persuasive and lifelike way, his architecture can be placed in an intellectual and artistic context where the relationship between work of art and onlooker was studied intensively. The various translations and paraphrases of Longinus, who described rhetorical strategies to attain the most persuasive of all ‘styles’, the sublime, formed a fertile ground for Vanbrugh’s designs. Just like Hawksmoor he used a mix of architectural elements from different historic periods in his architecture. This choice was based on the associational qualities of those elements. But Vanbrugh went very far in the application of historically evocative elements and had a clear love for the romantic medieval past. His choices of style elements are rhetorical choices, as the use of architectural elements from the past was for Vanbrugh a consciously added factor to his designs, a factor that shaped and defined his buildings.
The tendency to consider architecture as communicative or even as persuasive communication in Vanbrugh’s and Hawksmoor’s architecture can be traced back to earlier seventeenth-century English architectural theory. Sir Henry Wotton’s treatise already stressed in 1624 the power of architecture as a communicative device, which should not be underestimated. His treatise is immensely important in any understanding of English architecture in the seventeenth century, because it not only offered an adaptation of continental classicism to English visual culture, but also because he described the classical orders as ‘characters’. Wotton’s treatise is concerned with the nature of architecture as a persuasive art, and not with the practical requirements of architecture. As such architecture was, according to Wotton, concerned with its public, the visitors and the owners and therefore it was communicative. Rhetorical themes feature throughout his treatise and may very well have shaped the way future architects such as Wren, Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh approached their work.