From Ruskin to Aalto;
Prophets with a Message?

A thesis submitted as part of practice led research for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University, July 2017.

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Declaration of Originality.

I hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and phrases attributable to other authors.

Christopher James Robertson  
To my father and the memory of his father.

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The reason for this thesis has its origins in my own arts practice. It has been profoundly shaped following a revelation of the presence of God while undertaking a Masters Degree in furniture design, at the Royal College of Art, London 1984-86. The experience came with an overwhelming paradigm-shift. Particular to my initial experience was a profound visual - a mystical revelation of nature as the work of the hands of God.

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Abstract.

This thesis and its associated works critically explore the shift in philosophical views on nature from ‘created’ to ‘machine’ and their use as analogies for design and architecture from the mid 19th century to the early 20th century. I trace both a penetrating description of a ‘created’ cosmology for architecture and design expounded by John Ruskin at the very point of point of its decline with the rise of scientific materialism/reductionism as a replacement cosmology that gains traction following Darwin’s theory of evolution. The thesis looks at the intermediate tension between the two cosmologies outworked by architects and designers of the period as they engage/disengage the shift with a focus on the early modernist Finnish architect Alvar Aalto to show what we might learn for the present.

The theoretical/conceptual approach for the work firstly establishes the two philosophical concepts and their characteristics (what they and their outcomes look like), and secondly how we might learn from them to understand and engage Colquhoun’s problematic ‘closed system’ of the present. Colquhoun describes contemporary attempts by architects to engage the ‘forms’ of the ‘other’ as ‘inescapably modern’, Koestler describes the wider philosophical dilemma in 1969 as ‘rebellion in a vacuum.’

I show that there are meaningful and significant connections to be made between two key historical figures John Ruskin and Alvar Aalto as yet unexplored. Also the manner in which architectural historians have overlooked the connections, and the difficulty they have in understanding Aalto, (for that matter Ruskin also) with multiple, contradictory even confused explanations. By embracing an epistemology appropriate to both men’s beliefs facilitates a more robust understanding of them and their message for the contemporary condition, myself included. The studio component of the research offers an informed and challenging discourse. It is coupled with an exploration and approach in the developments of artifacts and their relationships within a shared epistemology/ontology.
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Conclusion.

Introduction.

As a Christian and artist, my beliefs/experience condition my practice. For the most part I have remained silent about the nature, meanings and complexities of it as I negotiate within the current modernist and largely secular paradigm. Without being able to articulate it in detail, I had come to consider myself as having a 19th Century ontology and epistemology of arts practice, as it was the most recent exposition of a Christian created view of nature as an ontology that affected the wider society.¹

¹ Alan Colquhoun, *Modernity and the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge M.A: The MIT Press, 1989. p.vii. Colquhoun in his reference to a created view of nature uses the general term of ‘vitalistic.’ Whilst there were a range of variables in their beliefs it would be false to suggest that Pugin, Ruskin, Morris and many of the English
After 23 years of working through multiple challenges, the inquisitive purchase of Catherine McDermott’s book, *Design: The Key Concepts* (2007) at Arnolfini’s bookshop in Bristol piqued my interest. It was with genuine, though informal, questions that McDermott raises over the nature of 19th century design practice, its use of nature analogies, and the implication of their loss into contemporary arts practice that provided me with confidence to embark on this research.

Whilst a Christian creation tradition and its use of nature analogies laid a foundation of modern design, what was built upon that foundation was largely expounded with a philosophical, machine view with its own analogies for nature. Given the profound nature of the seismic shift, what is puzzling is that apart from the occasional, lone voice, there appears little desire to begin to engage with the consequences and the ramifications through time to the present. Rather the focus has been on the literal machine, industrialization, technology, progress, socialization, economy, ecology and contemporary ideation and its consequences as a natural, evolving phenomena.

Before his untimely death, the influential British art critic and theorist Peter Fuller (1947-1990) was an exceptional voice and in fairness to the architectural historian and essayist Alan Colquhoun, in his critique of Modernism in *Modernity and the Classical Tradition* (1989), also highlights the condition of the philosophical change in examining the present, though less inclined to look further. He writes:

> Yet all the theories of ‘deconstruction’ that purport to show that philosophy is dead are presented within the format of philosophy itself; they do not accept passively the relativism they appear to be celebrating. It is this apparent paradox that leads both to the provisional acceptance of contemporary pluralism in architecture and to a deep concern over the absence of any coherent discourse.

Free Architecture exponents were anything other than Christian, at least in their formative works.

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3 Richard Slaughter, ‘Welcome to the Anthropocene.’ *Futures*, no. 44. 2012.

4 Ibid. p. xi.
The questions explored in this thesis are fourfold:

(1) What are the histories of a Christian created view of nature and a philosophical machine view of nature - what do they look like?

(2) How does a Christian created view of nature and its analogies have such impact for change and significance in the 19th Century?

(3) How far can we trace a Christian created view of nature into modernism, are there examples or are we looking at demonstrably, mutually exclusive ontologies?

(4) In light of the research, what understandings are there to be found to inform my own and wider contemporary practice?

As a key 19th century writer, John Ruskin is an obvious choice as an expounder of a Christian created view of nature and use of nature analogies. Examples of practitioners that took a Christian created view and/or its analogies into modernism first pointed to Scandinavia. A fortuitous, concurrent reading of Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) and the Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto (1998) (practice 1922-1976) shows similarities in their writings, though I found little evidence of architectural historians connecting them both. Light came in the form of an unpublished Masters thesis; Gillian Mawby, ‘The Lamp of Obedience: John Ruskin, Alvar Aalto, and a ‘proper sense’ of Freedom’ (2001). It included a personal letter from Aalto’s friend, confidant and biographer Goran Schildt saying; ‘Aalto knew Ruskin well, his big love of Venice was in part inspired by him.’

For the structure of the thesis, Chapter 1 establishes the historical and philosophical context that is inclusive of Ruskin and Aalto’s period and highlights it’s implications for the present. Chapter 2 has a focus on Ruskin, Chapter 3 on Aalto and Chapter 4 on my own works. Throughout these three chapters I engage a triangulated, dialectic approach to weave a synthesis of three protagonists. In short, I reflect upon my practice and the ideas that underpin it, in a three-way conversation.

Peter Fuller personally experiences a diametric change to his philosophical position to argue for Ruskin’s legacy, a legacy that I believe Aalto shares. In his book *Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace* (1998) Fuller writes that Ruskin was:

... the inspiration of a continuing, if neglected, romantic tradition. Far from being ‘escapist’, this tradition has expressed imaginative, spiritual and

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5 Following a question, Dr Robert Bell suggested that I look to Scandinavia.
aesthetic insights which modernity disregarded. Today those insights are coming into their own; as we struggle to find our way out from under the rubble and ruins of modernity, Ruskin’s critical enterprise seems to acquire a renewed relevance. He was in effect the first post-modernist - and his thinking about art runs deeper than many of those who came later. Perhaps that unity between scientific, spiritual and aesthetic life, which Ruskin longed for, is again becoming possible...He provides clues not only to the spiritual and aesthetic dilemmas of his time, but also for our own.

The title of the thesis, ‘From Ruskin to Aalto; prophets with a message’ asks a legitimate question, what does an understanding of any connections between both men and their messages have to say to my own understanding of my position and practice in the contemporary context?
Chapter 1.

‘The result of our historical enquiries thus depends on the philosophical views that we have been holding before we even begin to look at the evidence. The philosophical question must therefore come first.’ (C.S. Lewis Miracles. 1947. p.12.)

![Mill Beach, Durras.](image)

Establishing the historical context is key to begin to appreciate Ruskin and Aalto’s ontological and epistemological positions to invite a re-reading of their work. Though not directly attempting to address the problem of worldviews, Tournikiots (2012), in observing the written histories of the Modernist Movement in architecture writes; ‘One way or another, the history of modern architecture is written backwards, taking its beginning in the present and
projecting a theory of architecture on to the past. What appears to be the beginning of the narrative is a representation of the end.  

Drawing attention to C.S. Lewis’s quote above, it is also essential to consider the premise and nature of each worldview under examination to move from argument to appreciation. Argument is only fruitful when the premise is agreed upon, and when dealing with worldviews, as this thesis does, appreciation begins to facilitate the evaluation of wisdom and meanings found in each of their writings and practices.

Both Ruskin and Aalto sit within a period that experienced profound change, both ontological and epistemological, covering 1840’s to the 1970’s. This Chapter through an elaboration of key, philosophical foundations will provide some context to their approaches, and in turn inform a reading of my own and wider contemporary arts practice. The threads that interlace both men in the period are a Judeo/Christian created view of science and nature, the picturesque, romanticism, classicism, Darwinism, modernism, science as reason, industrialization and the rise of consumerism, individualism and a machine view of the world. An examination brings some insight to the changing milieu in question. It is where we begin to find both Ruskin and Aalto that helps us to read and appreciate them in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

Defining a ‘creatural view’.

I have chosen the words ‘creatural’ and ‘creatural view’ to describe and define the Judeo/Christian philosophical worldview, of ‘Nature as created’ as an analogy for design, what it and its characteristics might look like in a modernist context. As an ontology and epistemology it can be differentiated not only with classicism as Ruskin does for architecture, but also to a philosophical ‘machine view’, and its use of a machine analogy for nature, ‘Nature as mechanism’ for design that emerges and gains traction towards the latter half of 19th century. As a typical expression and experience of this changing of worldviews, the early modernist architect and philosopher, Berlage writes:

As our new concept manifests itself, what spiritual idea shall serve its foundation? Who can answer this? Christianity is dead, and only the

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preliminary stirrings can be felt of a new world concept based on the consequences of scientific progress.⁹

In the transitioning from a ‘creational view’, to a ‘machine view’, as Berlage speaks of, it is very difficult to pin down an individual’s beliefs; they are just as likely to harbour contradictions that are never fully resolved. That would include by some degree Aalto, and to the study of his peers such as Le Corbusier, Lloyd Wright, Gropius and clearly Berlage himself. A philosophical machine view becomes so dominant intellectually in Aalto’s time it would be difficult for anyone to openly expound a creatural view, and at the same time be accepted part of the mainstream. If there are attempts to subvert, however subtle, a binary view of belief and science, then this begins to define Aalto’s position. We see this very early in his career in his introduction to his 1925 lecture, ‘Abbé Coignard’s Sermon.”¹⁰

To define and describe a creatural view, I have partially borrowed Erich Auerbach’s use of the term ‘creational’ from his book Mimesis, though he uses the word with a different purpose, describing a similar concept but in literature. Providentially it dovetails with Ruskin’s description of man as ‘creature’ overlapping the original meaning of the word both in history and content. My use of the word ‘creational’ is a mixture of the original meaning of the word and as a means of describing the particular Judeo/Christian tradition, a continuity that penetrates through history as Auerbach describes it, and I will argue that is how Ruskin reads it also.

The Collins English Dictionary defines creatural as ‘something that has been created, whether animate or inanimate’, it traces the origin of the word back to the 13th Century.¹¹

Auerbach’s creatural.

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¹⁰ Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 56.
Erich Auerbach coins his own version of the word ‘creatural’ in his book *Mimesis*, first published in 1946 to describe a specifically Christian perspective in the history of literature.⁷ In a footnote to his translation of the *Mimesis* text from German to English, Trask translates Kreatürliches as a ‘... neologism of the 1920’s to describe the suffering to which man is subject as a mortal creature’ identifying it as a central focus in the Christian tradition post the crucifixion of Christ.⁸ Auerbach’s use had an additional meaning, for his ‘creatural realism’ was a term he used to acknowledge the crucifixion account as embodying a mixture of styles that clearly distinguishes it from the classical literature that preceded it. It is a deeply significant change as Classicism is strictly, stylistically exclusive. It has further implications for Auerbach in that it shares similarities with the ancient Hebraic writings. Both texts he discovers show a more realistic representation of reality, both for their deeply psychological portrayal of the subject and their lack of stylistic inhibiting treatment.⁹

In his search for a historical precedent to Modern realism Auerbach found that:

‘... from the Middle Ages on through the Renaissance a serious realism existed. It had been possible in literature as well as the visual arts to represent the most everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context. The doctrine of levels of style had no absolute validity. However different medieval and modern realism may be, they were at one in this same basic attitude. And it had long been clear to me how this medieval conception of art had evolved, and when and how the first break with the classical theory had come about. It was the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles.’¹⁰

Auerbach’s use of the term ‘creatural’ appears to relate to the original meaning of the word, for he could, in effect, have used any word for his neologism.

Ruskin’s Creature.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 55.
Ruskin consistently uses the word ‘creature’ to expound his concept of man. It is man as created and relational to the Creator, secured in the profound values of significance that embody the relationship. It is central to his arguments about man, design and workmanship. In expounding a creatural view, Ruskin’s writing firstly can be seen to bring an end to the dominance of Neoclassicism and its demands on the artist for subservience and idealism. Secondly, it speaks to the rise of scientific materialism and its apotheosis: industrialisation. Both are, for Ruskin, one and the same in their treatment and view of man. He is similarly identifying and arguing for the realism in the Christian tradition of the visual arts as seen in the medieval period.

Ruskin’s position is neither combative nor defensive; it is authoritative. His text, ‘You must either make a tool of the creature or a man of him. You cannot make both,’ embodies his belief in the very nature and identity of created man verses man as tool or machine. He writes:

*Understand this clearly: You can teach a man to draw a straight line and cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; and to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind; but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, to consider if he cannot find any better in his own head, he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong; ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being. But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool.*

Ruskin’s concept of man is real and immediate, his idea of the artist/workman as a valued individual whilst relating him to the whole, equally addresses the intended purpose of work in relational terms psychologically, sociologically, and spiritually. In contrast to a growing mechanistic view he writes:

*We have seen that all great art is the work of the whole living creature, body and soul, and chiefly the soul. But it is not only the work of the whole creature, it likewise addresses the whole creature.*

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16 Note: If we use both Boyle’s argument and subsequently Thomson’s use, materialism is an ancient Greek, Epicurean idea and is not new. It is classical.  
Colquhoun connecting Ruskin and Auerbach.

In his collection of outstanding essays entitled *Modernity and the Classical Tradition* (1989), Alan Colquhoun looks at Auerbach’s comparison of Classical and Creatural (my term) only to suggest that a closer examination of a Christian visual system may provide some understanding of its place and influence in history. In writing the essays, Colquhoun is addressing the present, the closed philosophical system of modernism and the contradictions within it; what he calls the ‘inescapably modern.’\(^{19}\) In looking at the problems with Modernism he appears to go back to its roots in search for an understanding. Colquhoun has Ruskin in mind in looking at Auerbach’s comparisons, but he is surprisingly dismissive.

Colquhoun limits his reading of Auerbach’s analysis to a linguistic and structural comparison; a classical verses vernacular. Whilst Auerbach looks at their comparative outcomes for realism, Colquhoun ignores this, instead he acknowledges the Christian Gothic architecture as essentially ‘paratactic’ in construction, the laying side-by-side in composition verses classicism as hypotactic, the subordination of one part in the composition to another. He also notes Classicism’s use of symmetry versus the Gothic as asymmetrical, and that Gothic was itself based on antique architecture.\(^{20}\) Colquhoun fails to grasp Auerbach’s observation, that the early Christian literature is inclusive in the broader sense, that it adapts, that it is non-idealistic in contrast to Classicism, hence its realism and also its freedom.

\(^{19}\) Ibid. Introduction.

\(^{20}\) Ibid. p. 28.
Both Le Corbusier and Aalto were exposed to the writings of Ruskin and we see a contrast in their work, for example in Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye when we compare it with Aalto’s Villa Mairea, both built in rural settings. Aalto, as Ruskin advocates, develops his architecture in relation to landscape in keeping with it, and man as a psychological and spiritual being is at its centre. Man is not the analogy for it. Le Corbusier, though he initially draws upon Ruskin, reverts back to Platonic ideals.21

Using Auerbach’s words from his analysis of Homer’s *Odyssey* we could describe Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye as ‘at the forefront of the picture,’ ‘image of perfection’, ‘perfectly described’, ‘no background’, ‘delight in the physical


Fig. 3. Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye (1928-31) Poissy, France.

11
existence’, ‘not psychological.’ In contrast, Auerbach describes the creatural literature as ‘deeply psychological’, ‘obscure’, ‘fraught with background’ and ‘orientated towards truth’, - that is, in the representation of reality.22

Fig. 4. Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea (1938-39) Noormarkku Finland.

Remarkably Aalto himself makes a comparable observation 20 years earlier where he compares Homers *Iliad* with the Finnish poetry epic *Kalevala*:

..the Finnish epic almost seems to weave a tapestry in which every part belongs to a constantly active nature, whereas the *Iliad* explains what needs explaining, but does not touch nature.23

Colquhoun looks upon Ruskin’s writing on architecture as an attempt to reverse the status of the classical and non-classical so as ‘to establish medieval art as superior to classical art.’ Colquhoun appears unaware of Auerbach’s argument for ‘difference.’ If we look at the heart of Ruskin’s criticism of Classicism versus Gothic, we have two different sets of values. The heart of Ruskin’s writing on architecture was not about style, of valuing one style above another, but deontological, about what and how values themselves are worked out in the architecture, values expounded for deep, relational outcomes.

Reading a creatural view.

A ‘creatural view’ can be read as continuous in the Christian tradition, with a consistency in its characteristics. Parallels can be found between Ruskin’s writing on the medieval Christian artists and builders and the influence of the Christian ‘creatural realism’ in literature as Auerbach reads it. Auerbach traces his creatural realism from the writing of the gospels, particularly manifest in the medieval period through to the end of the 16th Century. He writes of it being displaced by ‘advocates of a rigorous imitation of antique literature.’ In *The Country and the City* (1973) Williams elegantly critiques the Renaissance adaption of classical modes in literature. He writes ‘that step by step, these living tensions are excised, until there is nothing countervailing, and selected images stand as themselves; not as a living but in an enameled world.’ It was this rigorous imitation in the visual arts that Ruskin and other romantics were effective in pulling down in the 19th century, re-establishing a ‘creatural view.’ No sooner had they succeeded, they were to encounter an ascending machine view.

\[\text{that the } \textit{Iliad} \text{ could be accommodated within the Finnish language but not the } \textit{Kalevala} \text{ within the Greek language.}\]

\[24 \text{ Auerbach, } \textit{Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature}. \text{ pps. } 554, 555.\]

\[25 \text{ Ibid. p. } 554.\]

\[26 \text{ Raymond Williams, } \textit{The Country and the City}. \text{ New York: Oxford University Press, } 1973. \text{ p. } 18.\]
Values.

Both Ruskin and Aalto argued for architecture as a moral discipline. In an early, fortuitous, and concurrent reading of Ruskin and Aalto, this was the first connection between them that piqued my interest. In his introduction to The Seven Lamps of Architecture, Saint writes that ‘Ruskin ranks as the foremost English speaking philosopher of architecture, its great moralist, idealist and conscience’.27 For Aalto, following two generations later, architecture was a 'predominately moral matter.'28

What makes Aalto such a valuable example to study post Ruskin is the consistency in his philosophical approach throughout his career in a period of unqualified change.29 For both Ruskin and Aalto, their deontological approach, understanding and application of values, determines their practices and outlook, it is the rudder for their boats in changing currents.

Writing on architecture in the 1850’s, Ruskin argued for a genuine Christian architecture with a focus on Christian morals and values. In doing so he chose to use, though not exclusively, the example of Medieval Christian Gothic as a contrast to the then current appropriation of a mix of foreign styles and their values that had been generated by numerous factors, including increased levels of travel and trade over the previous 200 years.30 This mixture of styles was dominated by neoclassicism and was to be a particular focus of criticism by Ruskin. The pressure of rampant industrialization, which in itself brought with it new opportunities in materials, processes and technology, nevertheless compounded the problem. Ruskin’s hope was to expound an alternate to the pluralistic engagement of style and values in what was known as the ‘The battle

of styles’ that raged throughout the 19th Century.\textsuperscript{31} Ruskin’s choice, his endorsement of Medieval Gothic as a model for architecture appears paradoxical; for it also includes a mixture of styles as Colquhoun has noted. However, it was the values that were demonstrated in the Gothic that caught Ruskin’s attention, hence his exegesis to be found in \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture} (1849) and subsequently \textit{The Stones of Venice} (1851-53).\textsuperscript{32}

Saint notes that it was August Pugin who laid the foundation and posed the questions for Ruskin’s studies and later William Morris’s working out of them.\textsuperscript{33} Ruskin’s use of morals as ‘truth’, when viewed by analogy, as door, frame and structure, is pivotal to his argument and our understanding his work. A door detached from a frame from which it hinges, no longer serves the role of a door. When tested, appears problematic and illusionary; it is form without substance. In \textit{The Seven Lamps} Ruskin attempts to give us a fixed point of reference, as in a door hinged from a frame and structure, and entry into an interior of beauty that transcends culture and time. By looking back, Ruskin is making connections to a way forward, as the ensuing influence of his work demonstrates. Ruskin’s ideas were not about a trans-historical style, as he is often read, but values as Truth, hence trans-historical. This is affirmed in his definition of the purposes in writing \textit{The Stones of Venice} as quoted by Jan Morris (1981), and inadvertently by Berlage when he decries Ruskin as a mere ‘philosopher,’ a student, not a teacher of style.\textsuperscript{34} \textsuperscript{35}

The English Free Architecture movement that grew out of the work of Ruskin is noted for its focus on constituents other than style. In the same way Aalto, though influenced by ‘international style’, is not preoccupied with style itself. Rather Aalto engages the development of his architectural works through a clear and consistent set of values that delivers unique outcomes. That is at the heart of the paradox of Aalto that Goldhagen attempts to resolve in her article, ‘Ultraviolet: Aalto’s Embodied Rationalism’ (2008). As Goldhagen elaborates; though a leading modernist Aalto defies modernist convention.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{33} Ruskin, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture. Introduction by Andrew Saint}. p. xiii.


Whilst Ruskin is writing *The Seven Lamps*, the ideas of scientific rationalism/materialism begin to gain significant traction more broadly. We begin to find a complexity in the slippery battle for the very nature of values, the nature of morals and how Ruskin is subsequently read. In their effort to assert their claim for hegemony, particularly post-1860 following Darwin’s publication of *On the Origin of Species*, scientific materialism welcomes this unhinging of values from a theological system, initially believing that values could be found in nature. As Ruskin was championing Judeo/Christian values for architecture, the foundation for those values suffered long-term repudiation in the wider society. Ruskin’s timing, looking back, evidences the prophetic nature of his work. In his use of Christian values, Ruskin understood them to be continuous: past, present and future.

Morals/values in a scientific materialism worldview.

Richard Slaughter in *Welcome to the Anthropocene* (2012) is not alone in raising the values question in dealing with big contemporary problems. It is my own context, particularly when dealing with the development and commercialization of design and its consequences that I engage in Chapter 4. What is most frustrating, given the contemporary condition, is the lack of understanding of the nature of values as Ruskin understood and engaged them. Aalto writes of his own frustration in 1939 of ‘nihilist attitudes to values that is at the root of the present, chaotic situation.’ It is worth listening to various voices speaking on values in the modern period, even if they do not attempt to provide answers to their own questions or condition. It is a question and condition that could only be described as stagnant.

Speaking at a Nobel sponsored symposium in 1969, over a century after the publication of *The Seven Lamps*, Monod and others address the work of Wolfgang Kohler using the title of Kohler’s book *The place of value in a world of facts* (1938). The speakers at the symposium grapple with the nature of values in a scientific materialism worldview. Among those invited to speak, Monod argues that whilst science can provide no answers to the problem of meaning or values, he says that ‘Science in its development has gradually attacked and dissolved to the core the very foundations of the various value systems which, from

prehistoric times has served as the ethical framework for human societies. For Monod there is an irony in what he observes, that it is these very ‘value systems’ that are ‘at the root of the discovery of the scientific method.’ Nevertheless he argues for the need to develop a ‘radically new foundation’ proposing one by common agreement or consensus. He observes:

The most significant, the most profound, the most disturbing (and to many the most frightening) consequence of the development of science lies not in the industrial and technical revolution, but in the agonizing reappraisal, which Science forces upon Man, of his deepest rooted concepts of himself and his relationship to the universe.

Chigas, another speaker at the same symposium, views the consequence of scientific rationalism and materialistic philosophies associated with it, as being ‘anthropophagic’ or cannibalistic. He points to a gradual changing in human thought from the end of the 15th Century from a ‘theological’ to an ‘anthropocentric’ one, where man becomes its center – its ‘Existant’.

In contrast, a fellow speaker Hayashi, presented a functionalist view of values, speaking about ‘discontinuous value systems’ under pressure from ‘social tensions’ as a result of ever changing ‘desires and functions.’ Hayashi talks about two kinds of ‘desires’, ‘individual’, and ‘non-individual’, and two types of functions, ‘fundamental’ and ‘elastic.’ He identifies non-individualistic desires and fundamental functions as generally working well together, whilst individualistic desires have the potential to generate frictions in fundamental functions. He argues for the need for elasticity to relieve social tensions in the future.

Writing on technology and change between the 19th and 20th Century Rieger (2005) notes that ‘technological change appeared literally to substantiate change and to lend physical expressions to, ‘progress’ and ‘decay.’ This helps us to understand Hayashi’s perspective; the idea of linking values to environmental change.

[41] Ibid. p. 19
[42] Ibid. p. 19.
[43] Ibid. p. 75.
[45] Ibid.
change and ideas of history, Rieger writes, ‘in order to create the new, the old or traditional had to be displaced and often destroyed.’

In the linking of technology and new value systems Hayashi brings together capitalism, industrial production and consumerism. Colquhoun links a functional view of values to the period of the industrial revolution beginning in the 17th Century. He writes: it was a ‘Theory of functionalism which attributed transcendental value to function itself.’ The idea that values change and develop with historical time is by now so ingrained into common wisdom that it is difficult to imagine a different point of view.

Linking values with function, capitalism and commercialization within design itself is also noted by Heskett and the English contemporary writer on the arts Peter Dormer. Heskett, in his perceptive book Industrial Design (1980), asserts that contemporary values for design are driven by commercialization. This is something he shares with Dormer, though Dormer claims that values are negotiated between designers and manufacturers.

Chigas describes values as no longer having any link to a value system but as now played out through science in a game of chance. He laments over the environmental problems of scientific materialism in the late sixties, and identifies it with the contemporary philosophical state of man:

‘Man has been downgraded and become an instrument of his sensorial experiences, his language, and his reason, no longer being his own master. He, who was The Being, became the Existant. A quotation from Michael Foucault illustrates this tendency: “in our days, one cannot think but on the vacuum left by the disappearance of Man. This vacuum does not mean an absence, it does not determine a void that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the development of a space where it is at last possible to think anew.”

Harvey quoting Marx’s Grundrisse, points to the rise of capitalism and states: ‘For the first time nature becomes purely an object for mankind, purely a matter of

47 Ibid. p. 11.
48 Colquhoun, Modernity and the Classical Tradition. p. x.
49 Ibid. p. 3.
utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate to human needs ... Harvey also identifies modernism and its writings as ‘an experience of progress through modernization, emphasizing the temporality, the process of becoming rather than being,’ identifying a critical ontological change.55

Kashiwagi comments on design post the economic crisis of 1985 ‘... economic logic becomes a universal value ranking scale.’56 He acknowledges values other than those that are economic, but says they have become colonized and thus compromised by the economic. Dormer notes that ‘Advertisers help to make the values that shape consumerism.’ He goes on to say that:

All design involves the expression of values, whether overtly or covertly ... Our late twentieth century relationship with consumerism is, however, equivocal. For, while we recognize the success and the pleasures made possible by the culture of consumerism, the current spiral of excess cannot continue without national and pan-national frameworks to govern the manufacture of things we consume.57

To show how confusing an understanding of values have become, Dormer goes on to say that an alternative set of values be introduced, to govern existing values in design and manufacture.

According to Alexander (2001) when speaking of the post-modern condition of the late 20th Century, in a pluralistic world values become a ‘matter of opinion and not intrinsic to the nature of the world at all.’58 Alexander shares Kohler’s view, where Kohler (1938) describes values as phenomenological, or examinable by ‘the phenomenological method,’ what might be called the ‘qualitative analysis

55 Ibid. p. 204. See also Banham, Reyner. Theory and Design in the First Machine Age. London: Architectural Press, 1962. pps. 122,136. These ideas are directly stated in the Futurist manifesto almost word for word. Banham writes that the ideas of 1914 ‘more and more’ become the ‘inalienable common ground of mainstream development in modern architecture.’
57 Dormer, The Meanings of Modern Design: Towards the Twenty-First Century. pps. 10-11.
of experience.'\textsuperscript{59} He appears to be attempting to reverse engineer a system of morals.

Kohler also places morals and values in the realm of the metaphysical, or one open to ‘metaphysical interpretation.’\textsuperscript{60} He wrote his work \textit{The Place of Value in a World of Facts} in 1938 examining the nature of morals and values from his position as a psychologist. He labored to bring together science and the human condition. It was around questions over the failure of science following decades that a belief in scientific rationalism could deliver all answers. Science in Germany in the 1930’s was experiencing a backlash over failures to address the human condition. In hindsight Kohler’s concern was valid if we reflect on the later rise of Nazism.

Within the Judeo/Christian system that Ruskin argues from, morals are metaphysical in origin and they are to be metaphysically worked out.\textsuperscript{61} It is with irony then that Manod writes, ‘To Man, Ethics and values do not belong; he belongs to them’ suggesting their immutability.\textsuperscript{62} Ruskin expresses a freedom in a loving, open relationship with God expressed in his Aphorism 1 of the \textit{Seven Lamps of Architecture}, ‘We may always know what is right;’ unless aided by ‘Revelation’ ‘not always what is possible.’\textsuperscript{63} This is a profound reading of values and their application by Ruskin.

Aalto does not provide us with such a direct, systematic reading of values. Yet his very early article ‘Motifs From Past Ages’ (1922) gives us a non-Darwinian reading with his claim of the ‘authority of the ancients,’ (Finnish forefathers) as the principle critic of contemporary architecture.\textsuperscript{64} Gillian Mawby’s description of ‘Aalto’s idiosyncratic, Finnish brand of anarchic morality, a potpourri of Goethe, Kropotkin, Nietzsche and indigenous ‘forest wisdom,’ reflects the difficulty and complexity in reading Aalto.\textsuperscript{65} It is not an easy claim to dispute, just


\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. p. 3.

\textsuperscript{61} Ruskin, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture, Introduction by Andrew Saint}. p.6. See also Ch.2 the Lamp of Truth.

\textsuperscript{62} Nobel, \textit{The Place of Value in a World of Facts: Proceedings/Edited by Arne Tiselius and Sam Nilsson}. p. 20.

\textsuperscript{63} Ruskin, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture; Introduction by Andrew Saint}. pps. 1-7.

\textsuperscript{64} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 33. \textit{Arkitehti}, No. 2, 1922.

as it is a claim without proper justification. Aalto is deeper and more complex than Mawby allows; he is in a difficult place, intellectually, given his milieu. Values for Aalto are trans-historical seen from within his own society, a society that is described as culturally Lutheran.  

Facts and the machine.

Both Ruskin and Aalto refuse both scientific materialism and a philosophical machine analogy for nature and man. Mawby writes that Aalto’s biographer and ‘gatekeeper’ Schildt believed that ‘Aalto was not entirely beguiled by ...... Darwinian ideology.’ Mawby does not quote Schildt with her claim rather she appears to interpret him.67 Mawby stumbles on Schildt’s own difficulty in reading Aalto. Though Schildt attempts to present us with understanding of Aalto, he formally admits to us the somewhat ‘alien’ and ‘illusory’ nature of his worldview.68 Schildt’s difficulty is in part explained by his attempts to fit Aalto into his own teleology and he is not alone in this.

In his book, The Watch on the Heath: science and religion before Darwin (2005), Thomson gives us a clear definition of a materialism/machine philosophy by quoting the early scientist Robert Boyle. In describing a machine philosophy, Boyle was defending Descartes in the 1680’s from accusations of materialism, and ultimately as the father of modern, materialism philosophy.69 Boyle uses the classical idea of three causes, the first cause; ‘God’, the second cause he refers to as ‘Corporeal’ (nature and its relative autonomy) and the third cause; ‘Purpose.’ Within classical philosophy the first and third causes (what Boyle refers to as ‘ends’) are interdependent to the ‘Corporeal’ (nature).70 By removing the ‘ends’ we are left with the ‘Corporeal’, nature, the machine, the mechanism, and hence a materialism philosophy. Boyle lays the origins of a machine or materialism philosophy with the Epicureans (Epicurus. Samos, 341 BCE – Athens, 270 BCE) ... who ‘banished the Consideration of the Ends of things; because the world being, according to them, made by Chance, no Ends of Things can be suppos’d to have

68 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. See p. 157 for Aalto's ambiguous reading for a Creator.
70 Ibid., Boyle, Dissertation about the Final Causes of Natural Things. London. 1688.
been intended.’71 Thomson uses the term ‘Epicurean’ to historically locate a scientific materialism view.

Commentators are divided in their understanding of Descartes, that division can be partly understood by the binary paradigm they bring to their study of him. We can use Kaisers (1991) description of the Christian creation tradition to illustrate the paradigm he worked within. Using the analogy of a body with two arms, one arm was nature and its relative autonomy from a supernatural understanding. The other arm was a supernatural understanding; both were ultimately connected as a body.

The relative, though profound autonomy of nature as one arm in the Christian creation tradition, embraced science, agriculture, medicine and the arts, with the purpose for the healing and restoration of the human race as a public ministry.72 Descartes himself was encouraged by Cardinal de Berulle to apply his method to the problems of medicine and mechanics – ‘the one would contribute to the restoration and conservation of health, and other diminution and relief of the labors of mankind.’73 The two arms of the natural and supernatural were formalized in the 12th Century to form the scholastic tradition of ‘potentia Dei ordinata and potentia Dei absoluta.’ Kaiser describes ‘Potentia ordinata’ as the ‘power of God as expressed in the ordinary course of nature and history.’ ‘Potentia absoluta was the freedom which God exercised in establishing that course and which he retained to alter it on occasions (e.g., in miracles or at eschaton).’74 The two arms of a body create a natural tension that has a long, theological history in the Church and it is on this ground that Descartes negotiates.

The prophet Jeremiah is unequivocal in his description as to the nature of God and his relationship with the natural world, Jeremiah 10:12 (KJV):  

He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.

It is clear from the Christian creation tradition that Gods intended purpose for man is to observe and take note of the natural world, and to look to God for understanding and a revelation of facts as a ministry to the society.75 It is a

71 Ibid. p. ix.
73 Ibid. pps. 165, 166.
74 Ibid. p. 131.
potentia Dei ordinata experience that Ruskin speaks of, an experience I recognize for myself, and a like-experience for Aalto.

The necessary tension between the natural and the supernatural in the Christian tradition presents a contradiction, even dualistic to binary ideas. Gregory writes that Descartes’ dualism; his identifying mind and body as different substances does not qualify him as a materialist, and his acceptance of his body existing independent of mind excludes him as an Idealist. Assuming that Boyle was correct, then the mind and body would be interdependent in the manner in which they worked together, which Descartes acknowledged. The Gospels distinguish soul and body in Jesus’ words, in Mark 8:36 ‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ This indicates that the soul lives beyond the life of the body, but it is interdependent to the body where there is life. Given that Jesus distinguished heart, mind, soul and body in Luke 10:27 (KJV), it brings both a reading of them as interdependent whilst making up the life of the whole. In a present reading of quantum physics, ideas of dualism and binary are seriously challenged by the real world.

Given Descartes’ place in a general reading of history, nature was excised from a Christian, creation tradition post his writings, to form the binary idea, dividing science and belief. This facilitates two antithetical journeys and two supposedly antithetical paradigms. The first visual signs of these two paradigms impacting design occurs in Ruskin’s time, comparing the work and thought of William Morris and his contemporary, Christopher Dresser (both born in 1834).

It is simplistic to describe Dresser as subscribing to scientific materialism, for he like so many, is in a place of transition. It is clear he engages its ideas but with many contradictions. Dresser variously draws upon the works of Owen Jones’s Grammar of Ornament (1856), August W. N. Pugin, Goethe, and the writings of William Paley. According to Whiteway (2004) Ruskin comments on Dresser’s work and the ‘scientific’ ‘stylization’ of his botanical illustrations, as he moves from naturalism to ‘anti-naturalism’ which Ruskin terms the ‘South Kensington method.’ He writes that Ruskin satirized Dressers botanical diagrams in

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78 Ibid. Mark 8:36.
80 Ibid. p. 51. Ruskin, The Two Paths. 1859. The first of these lectures given on 13 January 1858 at South Kensington.
Modern Painters 5 (1860) as attributed to ‘a clerk of works’. Yet Leng in a convincing article Ruskin’s Rewriting of Darwin (2008) views the satirical drawings as clearly aimed at Darwin.\(^{81}\) Leng also claims that Ruskin understood that Darwin’s Origin of Species (1859) was a threat to his own aesthetics and cultural authority.\(^{82}\) Jervis writes that Dresser himself conducted an anti-Ruskin polemic in The Art of Decorative Design (1862).\(^{83}\)

The openly pluralistic nature of Dresser’s work would certainly arouse Ruskin’s attention. Whoever they were aimed at, Ruskin’s ‘clerk of works’ comment on Dresser’s botanical drawings could only refer to a mechanical, plumbing diagram. It was Dresser’s linking of science, art and industrial production that differentiates him from William Morris, particularly his view of science.

For all his questioning, Descartes is human, his achievements and failures are equally considerable. Thomson suggests a reassessment of his wider works to gain a better understanding of him.\(^{84}\) Chappell (1992) writes that it was not the answers that Descartes gave to his own questions that make him the father of modern philosophy but ‘the questions themselves which are heavily studied more than any other philosopher of the modern period.’\(^{85}\) Ruskin may have been reading the outcomes; Thomson notes that Ruskin was ‘disgusted’ with Descartes.\(^{86}\)

In Mind in Science Gregory explores mind as it were somehow linked to the spiritual, or at least through perception and how it challenges our ideas of matter. He writes that science in its focus on facts ‘aims at truth’ and produces ‘statements’ but is liable to be exposed as ‘myth’ as new understandings are revealed.\(^{87}\) Though Gregory defends a scientific rational view, he is under no illusion as to its limitations and the true nature of ‘facts’. Whilst admitting the importance of the machine analogy to science, Gregory questions whether a better analogy might be found, or alternately there may be no analogies that are sufficiently useful to explain either ’Matter or Mind.’\(^{88}\)

\(^{82}\) Ibid. p. 67.
\(^{83}\) Whiteway, Shock of the Old: Christopher Dresser’s Design Revolution. p. 199.
\(^{85}\) Chappell, ed., René Descartes/Edited with Introductions by Vere Chappell. p. xi.
\(^{87}\) Gregory, Mind in Science: A History of Explanations in Psychology and Physics. p. 35.
\(^{88}\) Ibid. p. 480.
Of particular interest is Ruskin’s silence (I am unaware of any comments he made) on William Paley’s ‘A Natural Theology’ (1802) and his use of a machine analogy to argue for a Creator. Paley’s argument is seductive, for whilst it was used to argue for a Creator, it was equally and legitimately drawn upon by both Darwin, for his evolutionary mechanism for The Origin of Species, and those who subsequently expounded on his ideas. Is Ruskin’s silence on Paley’s argument a refusal to engage in natural theology and a machine analogy? Leng claims that both Ruskin and Darwin ‘were immersed in the tradition of natural theology.’

Ruskin in Readings in Fores Clavigera (letters from 1871-1884) briefly addresses a machine view and distinguishes between what he calls ‘true science’ and ‘modern Science.’ In this rather cryptic text, he comments on a lecture at the Natural History Museum fully aware of Darwinian, scientific materialist claims on man. He confesses it is of the ‘smallest consequence,’ for ‘The real fact is, that, seen with human eyes, there is nothing else but man.’ In addressing the materialism of modern science, he sees the irony and contradiction in the postulation of man and nature as machine, where man (machine) positions himself as above those of his own kind as ‘Regulator of minor machinery’, whilst having a ‘series of forces’/’major machinery’, ‘regulating’ his own. It appears that Ruskin believes man cannot escape his own nature and his own viewing position; pretend that he may, ‘seen with human eyes there is nothing else but man’.

*The lecturer said, ‘the object of his lectures would be entirely accomplished if he could convince his hearers that there was no such thing as a flower.*

*Now, in that sentence you have the most perfect and admirable summary given you of the general temper and purposes of modern science. It gives lectures on Botany, of which the object is to show that there is no such thing as a flower; on Humanity, to show that there is no such thing as a Man; and on Theology, to show there is no such thing as a God. No such thing as a Man, but only a Mechanism; no such thing as a God, but only a series of forces. The two faiths are essentially one: if you feel yourself to be only a machine, constructed to be a Regulator of minor machinery, you will put your statue of such science on your Holborn Viaduct, and necessarily recognize only major machinery as regulating you.*

Ruskin finishes the letter distinguishing the two sciences:

*And all true science — which my Savoyard guide rightly scorned me when he thought I had not, — all true science is “savoir vivre.” But all your modern science is the contrary of that. It is ”savoir mourir.”*

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91 Ibid. p. 178.
The type of science one practices for Ruskin, from a spiritual point of view, is a choice of ‘life’ or ‘death’. In Ruskin’s creatural view, his belief and science, his ‘true science’ brings forth ‘life,’ where ‘modern science’ he denotes as a philosophical concept that resigns man to spiritual death.

Even as an analogy, one may understand Ruskin’s abhorrence at nature being described as a ‘machine’ in industrial, Victorian England, he calls it ‘barbaric’.92

Ideas of Nature as design.

In response to recent environmental imperatives, theorists such as Ingold (2008) have advocated ecological approaches to perception that may offer different outcomes and relationships when applied to design.93 Plant and animal morphologies, geology, biospheres and landscapes, even the universe, have by its sheer complexity the power to inspire. We have extraordinary diversity, beauty, vitality, inherent intelligences, and functions, both on a micro and a macro scale used to inform cultures and societies. As an example of metaphorical embodiment of nature, Coyne (1999) writes of the empiricist’s vista as ‘the mind as a mirror of nature’.94 Whilst this vista projects the potentially wonderful nature of the human mind, it suggests an empirical, an intellectual, and paradoxically a dismembered view leaving one feeling quite cold. Finding a place for the body in nature with a view more at home is the psychologist, Gibson (1979) in attempting to rescue nature from a ‘power over’ proposes an ecological view of landscape as ‘The furniture of the earth’.95 Whilst this may appeal to subject matter in Chapter 4, Gibson’s view in contemporary culture could easily present as consumerist with use, fashion and disposal. Ingold offers a contrast using Charles Darwin’s metaphoric description of competitive nature and survival as ‘the face of nature as a surface riven by innumerable wedges, packed close together and driven inward by incessant blows’.96 Darwin here

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employs a simple machine, the wedge for his analogy of nature, he also uses an apparel analogy, a covering of twisted disorder ‘plants and bushes clothing an entangled bank’. \(^{97}\) Ruskin also uses an apparel analogy for the leaves of the earth in his *Modern Painters* 5 with his ‘Earth-Veil’ to ‘Dress and to keep it’ (the earth); this is a tender, relational analogy of a bride, suggesting protection, delicacy, intricacy, nurture, relationship and beauty. \(^{98}\) Darwin’s analogies for nature are more about his ideas of function rather than relationship.

Ingold compares Darwin’s ‘wedges’ to Henri Bergson’s (1911) ‘eddy.’ \(^{99}\) He writes, Bergson ‘argued that every living being is cast like an eddy in the current of life. Yet, so well does it feign immobility that we are readily deceived into treating each as a thing rather than as a progress, forgetting that its very permanence of its form is only the outline of a movement.’ \(^{100}\) For Bergson, ‘turbulence’ as living complexity is an inherent part of nature. He appears to use a ‘turbulence’ analogy to disrupt the simplistic ‘straight line’ of rationalism. It is possible that Aalto connects with Bergson’s ‘eddy’ and the outline of movement; we know he reads Bergson. \(^{101}\) It may go some way in explaining Aalto’s ‘line’ explored in Chapter 4, even if it only corresponds to Aalto’s original ideas, as he finds various references to affirm them. \(^{102}\) Ingold observes that the language of Darwin rather than Bergson has prevailed. \(^{103}\)

In 1972 Aalto provides an assessment of man’s general relationship to nature reflecting on his own formative childhood, living and working within the forests of rural Finland. Rather than being in Schildt’s words ‘a cancer in a living body’ Aalto’s personal experience shapes his ideas showing that we should treat our ‘surroundings’ in a ‘responsible’, ‘positive’ and ‘tactful’ way ‘fostering life.’ \(^{104}\) Aalto’s perspective is embodied; nature is to be nurtured. He writes ‘We can instead seek a balance with our environment and concentrate on healing the scars we have caused.’


\(^{99}\) Ingold, 'Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World.' p. 1084

\(^{100}\) Ibid.


\(^{103}\) Ingold, 'Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World. p. 1805.

\(^{104}\) Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*. p. 274.
Forty writes, ‘The distinction between the world created by man, ‘culture,’ and the world in which man exists, ‘nature,’ has been perhaps the single most important mental category ever conceived, and there can be few disciplines in whose formation it has not been fundamental.’\textsuperscript{105} For Aalto and Ruskin given their individual use of analogies, the two have powerful, mutual correspondences. In relationship, Aalto uses the word ‘synthesis’ as a means of engagement and outcome.\textsuperscript{106} In a creatural view, a non-binary view, culture and nature are interdependent and deeply relational.

Forty describes a number of historical views on the relationship of architecture and nature. We find competing and subverting relationships like architecture as a ‘rival of nature,’ ‘imitated nature,’ it ‘improved upon nature’, ‘uses nature’s

\textsuperscript{106} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 49.
laws,’ and ‘replicated the skillfulness of nature. ‘Architecture is nature’, ‘architecture is like nature,’ and ‘completing what imperfect nature is not able to do.’ Compared with architecture ‘nature as feeble and niggardly,’ ‘nature is incapable of pleasing without the assistance of art.’ Typically we find hierarchical and exclusive views like ‘nature as freedom’ and ‘architecture has no model in nature,’ ‘art to negate nature,’ ‘technology the substitute for nature,’ and ‘Goethe’s, art as second nature.’

It takes some work to untangle the complexity of ideas on nature that preceded modernism and discern their influence on it. Ideas on nature are deeply rooted in history that change over time, often contrary to the original. Oliver (2003) writes that the ancient Greeks:

‘..... regarded the world of nature as permeated by a mind and they conceived this mind in all its manifestations, whether regulating the human world or the universe. The world of nature is a world of motion and is therefore alive, but it is also a world of controlled motion; thus, it is a world that has not only a soul but intelligence as well. They called this world the cosmos.’

The Greeks came to look on the cosmos (well ordered whole) as an ‘organism.’ Oliver (2003) observes that the idea of the earth ‘moving’ led the Greeks to ascribe it with animate status. Oliver here is linking the idea of motion, moving and machine, and the subsequent development of the analogy - first the ‘universe as a clock’ in the middle ages and ‘God as clockmaker’, then second, evolving through the work of Descartes coupled with the earlier Epicurean ideas to include man/nature/universe as a machine. Thus there is a contrary mix of ‘organic,’ ‘inanimate, ‘animate,’ ‘machine’ and ‘cosmos.’

The ideas of the ancient Greeks can be compared with the earlier beliefs of the ancient Hebrews, the Hebrews writing of a Creator of a regular and moving universe: ‘And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.’ The Hebraic text acknowledges the heavens for what we might describe as a ‘calendar’ or ‘time chart.’ The Hebraic text speaks of the animate and inanimate, the earth, and the ‘living’ and ‘moving creatures,’ flora and fauna according to type, all being created by God. From the Greeks we have

109 Ibid.
the idea that all is animate as ‘everything’ moves (including the earth), but the Hebraic account does not attribute the animate to that which we now understand as inanimate. The ‘created’ is described as an expression of the mind of God, not permeated by a mind (as animate) in Greek thinking.\footnote{Ibid, Job, 38:1 – 41:34.} This may be semantic as both ultimately express ideas of divine embodiment. Aalto does not attribute animate to the inanimate, so he does not hold a Greek view as suggested by Schildt.\footnote{Juhani Pallasmaa and Tomoko. Sato, eds. Alvar Aalto: Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban. London: Black Dog/Barbican Art Gallery. 2007. p. 44.} Ruskin’s well-known love for the mountains is for their powerful, metaphoric representation of the character of God as faithful and unchanging, as a fortress, refuge and defense.\footnote{John Ruskin, Praeterita. Everyman’s Library. 1885–1889. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2005. pps. 150, 255, 282, 404, 421, 452. Pieced together these accounts give some insight into Ruskin’s love of the mountains.} It is an analogy that is well established in scripture and not to be lost on Ruskin’s circumstance.\footnote{The Holy Bible Authorized King James Version. Exodus.15:17, Psalm 30:7, Psalm 48:1, Isaiah 2:2, Jeremiah 50:6 provide a context for a metaphoric reading.}

Fig. 6. Ruskin’s view from his study and final home, Brantwood, Coniston.
A creational epistemology for arts practice.

A description of an epistemology of artistic practice within a creational view is found in the ancient Hebraic writing. By assertion this particular text predates writings of the ancient Greeks. Exodus Chapters 25 and 35 are pertinent.

There are a number of ways of knowing in the Judeo/Christian tradition, a good portion are revelational and spiritual, be they dreams, visions, pictures, hearing the voice of God audibly or in the Spirit, and seeing things in the Spirit. Sensing in ones heart, an instruction or inside knowledge is a more common experience, it can be likened to intuition but is spiritually discerned. Of course we have intuition itself, where we simply ‘know’ but cannot identify the source. As a paradigm, a creational view is outside so-called rational experience. I write briefly about my own experience in Chapter 4, what we know of Ruskin’s experience in Chapter 2, and Aalto’s in Chapter 3. There are overlaps in each of our experiences. The Exodus account describes something that each of us encounters in an artistic activity in some way or another.

The book of Exodus records the first account of God placing His Spirit on a person or persons, and is described as a ‘filling’ together with a description as to the specific nature and the characteristics of the ‘filling’ (as a liquid poured into a container, but it is Spirit). The text clearly and importantly expresses something of the nature and person of God as Creator - characteristics he shares with man. An ‘infilling’ is usually the reserve for prophets or seers but this account describes it for an artist. A contextual reading of the scriptures separates a ‘gifting’ from an ‘infilling.’ The operation of the Spirit of God in the New Testament has clear differences to the Hebraic texts given the changes in the relationship offered in the New Testament. Referencing the King James translation, these texts in Exodus offer an appreciation of a creational epistemology and it’s outworking for an artist, though this epistemological reading does not appear to be specific to artistic practice.

In Exodus 35:30-35 KJV we read:

See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. And he hath put in his heart that he may
teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.

As noted earlier, this description gives us something of an idea of the nature of God himself that he shares with man, certainly that was the experience I had reading the text for the first time following a profound encounter with Him. I found it deeply encouraging, meaningful and purposeful.

The text also includes something of the wider nature of artistic practice in a creatural view, as well as an epistemology and its interface with current secular ideas of cognition and artistic practice. It can be read as a complex multi-level exposition, not altogether as a spiritually exclusive one. Given the apostle Paul’s description of the pervading nature of God in Col. 1:15 - 17 (KJV), it can be contrasted with scriptures that record man’s powerful identity of separateness. This separateness colours our own comprehension of what we experience and ideas of free will. Individual gifts, what we do with them and how they are used, like the nature of the human heart, are a deep matter. Any relationship we have with God is a personal journey and experience that one can read individually for Ruskin, Aalto and myself.

In his Introductory to the Seven Lamps, Ruskin speaks of asking God for a revelation of the particulars to do with his own work and life, for wisdom and instruction, leaving no doubt in the context that he expects an answer as part of his relationship with God. Looking at the Exodus text above, Strong’s Concordance translates the Hebrew ‘Workmanship’ as ‘deputyship’ – ministry or employment unto God as ‘never servile.’ Ruskin understands this; it underlies his ideas about the servile nature of the craftsman under classicism and the division of labor in the industrialized workforce that later develop into ideas of Taylorism and Fordism. In the Exodus text we also see the expression ‘Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart.’ Strong’s translates the word ‘heart’ from the Hebrew word ‘leb, used figuratively for the feelings, the will, even the intellect; likewise for the center of everything.’

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117 Ibid. Ref. 3820
Goldhagen in her article Ultraviolet: Alvar Aalto’s Embodied Rationalism, (2008) essentially looks at Aalto’s epistemology, differentiating it from what she describes as the ‘multifarious rationalisms’ of his contemporaries.\(^\text{118}\) She refers to recent research into cognition as both ‘rational’, ‘irrational’ and ‘intersensory.’\(^\text{119}\) Whilst making a claim for Aalto as a proto-phenomenologist, Goldhagen chooses to disregard his very early statement prior to his so-called ‘rationalist period’ where he writes; ‘The fact is that in evaluating the world of forms around us from the point of view of beauty, the well developed heart is a far better instrument than the educated mind.’\(^\text{120}\) Aalto goes on to link ‘beauty’, ‘religion’ and the ‘heart’ together as an intuitive activity of ‘man’s aesthetic life.’\(^\text{121}\) Aalto’s epistemology, expressed at this time has characteristics found in a creatural view.

\(^{118}\) Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet: Alvar Aalto’s Embodied Rationalism.' p. 39
\(^{119}\) Ibid. p. 42.
\(^{120}\) Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 56
\(^{121}\) Ibid. p. 56.
Chapter 2.

‘Arnobius of Sicca (north Africa) ..... argued that accusations that Christians had disrupted the world were unfounded. Natural events were still in accord with the ‘laws established in the beginning’ and the ‘fabric of this machine and mass [of the universe], by which we are all covered and which we are held enclosed’ remained intact even after the advent of Christianity.’ (Early 300AD)


Fig. 7. Murano, Venice, Italy.

Ruskin.

If we take a teleological view to Ruskin we miss the subtle complexities to be found in learning from him. Whilst we may recognize Ruskin’s responses to Industrialization and the Spiritual, being able to appreciate his creatural worldview and the challenges he experiences, brings deeper meanings and understandings. Ruskin became aware of his own weaknesses in his reading of history – his own Protestant teleology fails him but he learns from the experience. What can be found in an appreciation of Ruskin’s writing on art and
architecture by looking at his ontology and epistemology are his surprising attempts to bring an inclusive ‘whole of life’ or a ‘all of life view’ into the Spiritual. Fuller (1988) begins to recognize this; he also encourages a re-examination of Ruskin’s work, influence and its applications for the present.\footnote{122} This Chapter attempts to do this whilst keeping Aalto and my own practice in view.

Ruskin’s legacy verses the Ruskinian tradition.

Appreciating Ruskin is paramount in being able to appraise, rather than seeking to master an understanding of him. His legacy for architecture and design is that which he personally documented and can be distinguished from the tradition – the transmission of evolving ideas/understandings others have attributed to him. Ruskin’s works on architecture, \textit{The Poetry of Architecture} (1837-38), \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture} (1849) and \textit{The Stones of Venice} (1851-1853) were written early in his career and show the development of his thinking that is inclusive of architecture and design. Discerning the tradition and the legacy provides a means where we might situate Aalto to explore any correspondences that may be found between them, for if Aalto knew Ruskin well, how will he read him given the various even contradictory readings of Ruskin? Such an examination may also begin to answer the nagging question of how a connection between Ruskin and Aalto has largely been overlooked in research to date.

In the introduction to his book \textit{‘Victorian Taste’} (1950) Steegman provides us with a typical reading of the ‘tradition’ of Ruskin in addressing his work as ‘doctrine’:

\begin{quote}
A great deal of that doctrine remains valid, and very precious, now that we can see it in perspective. But we are still left with the conviction that much of Ruskin’s preaching was both confusing and dangerous for those who first listened to it.\footnote{123}
\end{quote}

Steegman’s reading of Ruskin as ‘doctrine’ and ‘preaching’ has the feel of an observer’s personal worldview. Steegman does not explain his ‘conviction’, but we see that Ruskin’s work holds a complexity and a freedom, for those coming out of classicism with its rules and regulations could barely cope with. Hence

Scott, in defending classicism with its ‘academic’ approach claims that Ruskin enfranchised the public who had no ‘effective experience either in the creation or in the patronage of architecture.’

For artists, in the broadest use of the term, and commentators, it is difficult to begin to unpack Ruskin, as Jordan in Victorian Architecture (1966) perceptively writes:

All Ruskin is in his work. One must take him whole or not at all. And that is precisely what neither the Victorians nor we have ever done. The Nineteenth century devoured his glowing and purple prose, and then – in his name - committed every kind of architectural vandalism. The twentieth century has ignored his teaching which – with its vast Biblical illusion – it would not have understood anyway, has attributed to him opinions he never held, as well as buildings he never built – for he was not an architect.

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Fig. 8 John Ruskin. Coast Scene near Dumbar (1847).

Writing in *Days of Reading* Marcel Proust gives a delightful reading of Ruskin’s position, he writes; ‘And because so many contrary things have been said about Ruskin, the conclusion is that he was contradictory.’

Similarly Saint provides us with a cognizant summary of the inspiration and purposes of Ruskin’s writing in the ‘Seven Lamps of Architecture:

……... whether architectural style - in particular, Gothic architecture could not act as a tool for moral and spiritual renewal in modern society. This in turn raised a historical issue. What was it about the Gothic style which gave it such potency in medieval times and so enduring an effect down the centuries? Without a full response to the second question, encompassing psychology, history, architecture and theology, it scarcely seemed possible to answer the first. …..Throughout the text, Ruskin doubts that architecture, Gothic or otherwise, can have the reforming influence which the 1840’s (and architects long after that date) hoped from it. But he is prepared to have a go.’

There is a consistency and simplicity in the underlying themes in Ruskin’s writing on Architecture though they appear broad on first reading. Jan Morris (1981) quotes Ruskin himself defining the ‘principal purposes’ of *The Stones of Venice* in his later life as:

….. most importantly, the book showed ‘how the rise and fall of the Venetian builders art depended on the moral temper of the state’. Secondly, it examined ‘the relation of the life of the workman to his work in medieval times, and necessary relation to it at all times’ Thirdly, it traced ‘the formation of the Venetian Gothic from the earliest Romanesque types until it perished in the revival … of the classical principles in the 16th century’. Fourthly, it contained ‘an analysis of the best structures of stone and brick building, on a simple and natural scale.’

The difficulty in reading texts such as *The Seven Lamps* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) are the complexity they present to the modern reader with his mind, body and spirit paradigms. Sandwiched between Classicism and Materialism, we find Ruskin expounding a creatural view. Both *The Seven Lamps* and *The Stones of Venice* are strongly deontological in nature, providing both the necessary structure to address but also find meaning given the profound shift that is taking place in Victorian society.

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A polarized love/hate view clearly marks various attempts to historically understand and represent Ruskin. Hilton (1985) describes his writings as ‘fecund’ and ‘without exception personal.’ As a form of polemic it includes the rich use of poetic devices such as literary contrast and juxtaposition. His language is also richly metaphoric, a characteristic of the biblical literature Ruskin was deeply familiar with, as Jordan has acknowledged. Indeed, Ruskin refers repeatedly to the primacy of the scriptures in *Praeterita*, his final work, as the basis of his literary education.

Ruskin similarly offers the reader a deeply personal experience of what he is alluding to, as Hilton points out; Ruskin is always on a journey literally and metaphorically. He holds his mother’s aspiration for her son as a clergyman and

130 Gillian Mawby, ‘*The Lamp of Obedience: John Ruskin, Alvar Aalto, and a ’Proper Sense’ of Freedom*.’ Lancaster University. 2001. p. 10. Mawby writes; It was criticized for the theological polemic of the Seven Lamps of architecture, and for the lack of polarization in his argument’.
his father's wish for a poet.\textsuperscript{132} It should not be surprising that Ruskin writes in a personal letter of 1858 that his 'business concerns human souls,'\textsuperscript{133} Within these aspirations Ruskin’s genius expresses itself as traveler and expounder - he frequently stops to set a table, to serve the beauty of particulars before us that he might lavish on us its riches. Proust writes:

\textit{The delightful game he played with his inexhaustible riches was forever to be drawing new treasures out from the wonderful jewel-cases of his memory: one day the precious rose window at Amiens, another day the golden lacework of the porch at Abbeville, and to wed these to the dazzling gems of Italy.}\textsuperscript{134}

Brought into the light \textit{The Poetry of Architecture, The Seven Lamps of Architecture} and \textit{The Stones of Venice} are an attempt to address the whole needs and purposes of man and his environment embodied within architecture and design. His final words in the Poetry of Architecture written at the age of nineteen speak of the pattern and spirit of Ruskin’s thinking that sustained him throughout his life:

\textit{Throughout, we have endeavored to direct attention to the spirit, rather than to the letter, of all law, and to exhibit the beauty of that principle which is embodied in the line with which we have headed this concluding paper; of being satisfied with national and natural forms, and not endeavoring to introduce the imaginations, or imitate the customs, of foreign nations, or of former times. All imitation has its origin in vanity, and is the bane of architecture.}\textsuperscript{135}

Whilst this statement appears to be contradictory given Ruskin’s later championing of Gothic, he worked by historical example to illustrate his ideas for architecture, as Jordan has noted earlier, Ruskin was ‘not an architect.’ The activity of architecture at this point of time was imitation and foreign imitation was the norm. Gothic and every other example Ruskin studied and alluded to, is for a reading of its values, its spirituality and theology, its sociological nature, its workmanship and design, not as a style. As a foreign observer Hermann Muthesius in his influential account of \textit{The English House (1911-18)} acknowledges this, giving Pugin, Ruskin and Morris credit for their use of

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. p. 165. Whilst Ruskin speaks specifically about his father here, his mother shared the hope of his life serving the Protestant faith.

\textsuperscript{133} Hilton, \textit{John Ruskin: The Early Years 1819-1859.} p. 270. JR-Anna Blunden, 20\textsuperscript{th} Oct. 1858, \textit{Sublime and Instructive}, pps. 98-100.


medieval Gothic as a ‘powerful vehicle for reform.’ Yet imitation and poor imitation was often the result of those that read Ruskin’s work. Jan Morris (1981) describes Ruskin’s response to the Gothic practiced in his day as ‘meat that someone else has chewed.’

Fig. 10  John Ruskin. Loggia of the Ducal Palace. (1849-1850).

Returning to Steegman’s claim of Ruskin’s ‘confused thinking,’ it raises the question, who is confused, Ruskin or Steegman himself? Looking at Ruskin’s pedagogical approach Hilton notes from Ruskin’s first writings he ‘was immediately recognized as a significant didactic writer.’ Ruskin has all the appearances of being dogmatic, as if that were his aim. But given his aphorisms in the Seven Lamps for example, they contain truth’s whilst he is certain to find exceptions which appears to frustrate many, remembering that he is challenging the previous dominant paradigm of classicism and its idealism, its claims to universals, its highly structured, academic approach.

Ruskin’s literary approach, though poetic, has similarities with that of the moral and spiritual teaching of Jesus, he used parables to describe a personal journey of revelation for the individual. This approach led Jesus to exclaim of the truths that He presented ‘that God has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes’ (Matt.11:25, Luke 10:21 KJV). Auerbach in *Mimesis* (1946) quotes these verses, commenting on them and the general nature of the divine writings and early Christian writers as ‘ethico-theological’ and not ‘aesthetico-stylistic’—this is a critical observation. He writes, ‘It speaks *humili sermone* to the simple and pure in spirit. It situates the sublime event within their everyday lives, so that it is spontaneously present to them.’ If Auerbach’s reading is correct then it is characteristic of a ‘creational view’, a profound reading within the everyday that is also found in Ruskin’s approach. It gives us some understanding of his manner of writing and its content. It is contrary to the aesthetico-stylistic, an intellectual approach that many looked to him for, that individuals such as Scott defend. Whiteley (1998) in his introduction to Fuller’s essay on Ruskin explores Ruskin’s differentiation between ‘aesthesis’ and ‘theoria’ (original italics). For Ruskin (theoria) ‘was the operation of the faculty by which ideas of beauty were morally perceived and appreciated.’ Not only does it help us to understand Ruskin’s writing, the characteristic nature of it and his writings about classicism but also, as Fuller acknowledges, as fundamental to Ruskin’s ‘teachings’ for the present. Ruskin’s approach is less the construct and more the situational and experiential negotiated within a theological and ontological framework. In his article that references Ruskin, Aalto also challenges the intellectual, a stylistic, for both a moral and a child-like approach to the discerning his beauty in man’s ‘aesthetic life’ as ‘a matter of the heart’.

138 Hilton, John Ruskin: The Early Years 1819-1859. p. x.
140 Ibid. p. 156.
Geoffrey Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914) was written largely as a counter to Ruskin. He attacks Ruskin with what he calls his ‘ethical fallacy,’ yet as Fuller writes, the greatest art of the 19th century was ‘enmeshed with spiritual beliefs and values,’ with a ‘claim’ of ‘deep tendrils in the life of a community.’ It is unfortunate critics of Ruskin quote Scott’s ‘moral fallacy’ in their assessment of Ruskin, but fail to identify the obvious fallacy in Scott’s fallacies, made plain by his exclusion of classicism and its intellectualism from such a title. What is of particular interest from Scott’s argument is his broader and inclusive understanding of Ruskin’s influence into the 20th century though deriding him as the author of a ‘democratic architecture.’ Writing almost 100 years later in 2007 the Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, reiterates Scott’s description of Ruskin’s ‘democratic architecture.’ In making a direct connection between Ruskin and Aalto, Ban is both affirming Ruskin’s legacy and Aalto’s place in it.

Ruskin’s approach, drawing on his spiritual roots, is less an appeal to the intellect with rutted lines of reason and its constructs, but an appeal to the heart, its capacity to discern a greater dimension of human experience and Divine wisdom. Given Ruskin’s early writing on art and architecture, he is unashamed to compound science, the rational, emotional and spiritual life of the individual. This is characteristic, if deliberately ambiguous in Aalto’s early writing.

Whilst Whitely does not address Ruskin’s legacy, merely the legacy of the tradition for what its worth, he does identify the tradition of Ruskin to the present as that of ‘moralism’ saying:

…… *its strength is that it is a tradition which can give rise to architecture which critically and visually relates to the society that produces it: architecture which can have relevance, authenticity and, therefore, an authority which is more than bogus or nostalgic.*

Whitely does not examine the success and failure of the ‘tradition’, success as it acknowledges the principle of values as applied in a society and architecture, but failure in acknowledging the very confused nature of values and their

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146 Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words.* pps. 49, 56.
engagement progressively from Ruskin's time to the present. It is here that Fullers insight has traction.

In his essay ‘Falsehood in a Ciceronian dialect?: The Ruskinian’ tradition, Modernism, and the rise of the classical tradition in contemporary architecture’ (1992) Whitely speaks of a Ruskinian tradition in architecture through the early modern, modern and post-modern periods. He traces a line through the works of Le Corbusier as key early modernist and the most influential figure in modern architecture itself. Whilst Le Corbusier has been the person that historians and theorists have generally identified and focused upon, it is as Goldhagen reiterates, that the writers of Modernist history Gideon, Banham and Pevsner have irrevocably positioned him in the direct lineage back to the English Free Architecture movement, the Arts and Crafts, Morris, and Ruskin. It is through this lens that most analysis is carried out. Ruskin is named here, but both Banham and Pevsner chose to exclude Ruskin, stopping at Morris.

It is not difficult to see why Le Corbusier has been identified as a key figure linked back to Ruskin as he left ample documented evidence to explore. Whiteley covers that ground well in his essay, but it is based on a trail of available evidence and in turn becomes part of the Ruskinian tradition, though Le Corbusier's own interest in Ruskin is 'rid' as time progresses.

Given a rereading, Le Corbusier can be described as a key figure in the tradition of Ruskin, but does not remain true to Ruskin’s legacy. Recent writing by Mawby, Ban and Goldhagen support this, arguing for Aalto as the more appropriate figure. Ban in his essay (2007) writes that:

Aalto's philosophy draws upon the democratic architecture called for by Ruskin and William Morris in the 19th century, and his freedom of style was balanced by a closer examination of the particular operation of each project. I hope to show that, contrary to Giedion's assessment, his work was the most appropriate and down-to-earth of his contemporaries and has a true claim to be the orthodoxy.

Ban's recognition of Ruskin is restricted to a reading of outcomes and not for epistemological or ontological positions. Still his recognition of a link is important.

Ban is writing as a contemporary architect identifying Ruskin’s legacy, (legacy because he is to a greater extent reassessing Ruskin from the given histories) as the author of a ‘freedom of style’, a ‘democratic architecture’, and a concern with ‘the particular operation of each project’ that embodies the ideas of the English picturesque. Ban’s ‘freedom of style’ is virtually a ‘freedom from style’; it fits within Auerbach’s assessment as a characteristic of a creatural view and a marked feature of Ruskin’s understanding ‘we don’t need another style.’

Mawby concedes the difficulty in making a case for ‘the direct impact of Ruskin on Aalto’s views.’ Nevertheless we share a personal discovery, both whilst concurrently reading Ruskin and Aalto. Mayby writes: ‘there exists between them a continuity of thought traceable from the precept of The Nature of Gothic.’ Mawby identifies a ‘continuum’ in Ruskin and Aalto’s work, that they shared a vision for society as ‘pertinent today as it was in the Victorian era.’

Goldhagen in her article Ultraviolet: Alvar Aalto’s Embodied Rationalism (2008) does not link Ruskin with Aalto but challenges the histories on Aalto and provides an important reading with which to reconsider him in relation to his peers - what sets him apart. Goldhagen argues for a proto-phenomenological position for Aalto that is contradicted by Aalto himself. It is in the article he mentions Ruskin, describing it as a mode of looking after-the-fact a post hoc justification, the discipline of historians and ‘curators.’ Nevertheless, Goldhagen eloquently and perceptively creates a space where the fundamental ideas of Ruskin comfortably fit and can be explored in Aalto’s practice. Scott (1914) in his reading of Ruskin credits him for his ‘psychological reference to architecture’ and conversely discredits him for architecture, justified by the way it makes ‘men feel.’ Scott’s acknowledgement of Ruskin’s psychological reading is observant both for the time and how we find a reading in Aalto’s recognition of man as a ‘psychological’ being and his relationship with his architectural environment. We can contrast this with the influential Futurists of the 1920’s and 30’s who removed the individual from their ‘scientific’ architecture.

152 Ibid. p. 5.
153 Ibid. p. 9.
154 Goldhagen, ‘Ultraviolet: Alvar Aalto’s Embodied Rationalism.’ p. 44.
156 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 90.
If the legacy of Ruskin is his parrying of scientific materialism, these early works on architecture and design show both a deep discernment of his milieu and are prophetic; or are they? In his article of (2008), Leng contends that Ruskin’s Modern Painters Volume 5 (1860) and his use of the phrase ‘the origin of wood’ is a ‘coded’ and ‘polemic’ rewriting of Darwin’s The Origin of Species (1859). Though Leng and others demonstrate the means and extent of Ruskin’s later critique of Darwinism they do not begin to draw out the underlying rationalist/materialist philosophy and its implications that Ruskin preempts in his early works. Leng quotes Smith (2006):

*The contemporary who best understood and most strenuously resisted the implications of Darwin’s work for visual culture and aesthetics was John Ruskin.*

Further Leng writes that Ruskin ‘extensively engaged with the paradigm shift caused by Darwin’s theory of natural selection – and its tangled matrix of natural theological, social, political, economic, aesthetic, and more broadly cultural implications.’

Darwin’s theory of natural selection and Darwinism do not appear to come as a surprise to Ruskin. The Seven Lamps and The Stones of Venice expound his own epistemology and ontology as a contrast to the paradigm that gives birth to Darwinism. In doing so Ruskin has armed himself, fending off classicism. Or did he genuinely see what is coming? Ruskin, by his exposition of a creatural view, has covered both bases. While Leng acknowledges the immediacy of Ruskin’s response he does not engage in the wider and deeper nature of Ruskin’s argument:

Knowing that the last Modern Painters is a cryptic rewriting of The Origin dramatically enhances Ruskin’s reputation for possessing an uncannily sagacious awareness, and grasp, of the magnitude of the most momentous issues in contemporary culture.

The four chapters in Modern Painters 5 (1860) that Leng describes were written immediately after the publication of The Origin of Species (1859). The implication for Ruskin of the publication of The Origin, are painfully significant and challenging, yet he holds his nerve. The subtly of his honesty is lost on Leng, inaccurately reporting Ruskin’s so called ‘loss of faith.’ A reading of Praeterita

160 Ibid. p. 65.
161 Ibid. p. 65.
162 Ibid. p. 73.
(1885-1889), Ruskin’s last work, contradicts it.\textsuperscript{163} It is clear from his reference to the longest Psalm in the Bible, which he memorizes as a child, the 119\textsuperscript{th} Psalm; ‘has become of all the most precious to me, in its overflowing and glorious passion of love for the Law of God.’ A reading of the Psalm is instructive.

Ruskin’s context.

A reading of the immediate context that situates Ruskin and his ideas must include August Welby Pugin. The work of Rosemary Hill in her book, \textit{God’s Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain} (2009) provides new scholarship that situates Ruskin more accurately in relationship to Pugin. Mawby quotes Pevsner, writing that Ruskin ‘owes a debt’ to Pugin that Ruskin does not fully acknowledge.\textsuperscript{164} Pevsner gives Pugin credit for the influence and hence the lineage to Morris, this can be seen in the comparison of Pugin’s Marie Grange house (1839-41) and Morris and Webb’s Red House (1859-60). The parallels are more of a practical nature than philosophical and the correspondences between the particulars found in each of the buildings is worth a careful study to show that Morris drew as much upon Pugin as he did Ruskin. It was Pugin who sought to revive the skills of mediaeval crafts to recreate his Gothic architecture. It is more accurate to say that Ruskin developed Pugin’s ideas, where as Morris was influenced by the practical nature of them (whilst being a student of Ruskin).

The two significant streams of ideas that converge in Pugin and Ruskin’s milieu have similar identities, the English development of the picturesque and with it Romanticism. These ideas are naturally joined with the growing interest in historic Gothic and English vernacular architecture as a result of everyman’s grand our of the British Isles. The Romanticist movement originated in Germany and arrived in England through a number of avenues, first in literature, then in the visual arts. For the visual arts it was the influence of the German school of the Nazarenes and their appreciation of the ‘primitive’ medieval painters. All streams are responses to the dominance of classicism over the previous two centuries; all uphold particular characteristics of a creatural view as discussed in chapter 1. The Nazarene painters in their search for their Christian heritage, focused on art - pre-Raphael and coupled it with a desire for Christian spiritual renewal based on a pre-Renaissance model of faith. The German Nazarene painters become ‘wildly popular in England,’ stirred on by the patronage of

\textsuperscript{163} Ruskin, \textit{Praeterita}. p. 37.

\textsuperscript{164} Mawby, 'The Lamp of Obedience: John Ruskin, Alvar Aalto, and a 'Proper Sense' of Freedom." p. 21.
It is easy to overlook the significance and ultimately the impact of the study of the pre-Renaissance painters at this time, their art was previously considered of inferior value, even crude. As an alternative to the dominance of classicism, the art becomes highly influential, it is part of Aalto’s reference material from the 1920’s. All three streams, first Pugin, then Ruskin, Morris and his contemporaries through to the English Free Architecture movement eventually combine in some form to flow back into Europe particularly through the Wiener Werkstaette, the Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus. It is from these institutions that much the modern movement springs in the beginning of 20th century to influence the Western world.

Both Pugin and Ruskin were firstly familiar with the picturesque before taking an interest in Gothic architecture, and given the correspondences between the ideas they are able to coalesce them whilst maintaining their discrete identities. The ideas of the picturesque were first applied to the English garden, as Scott writes in his lamentation on the fall of the neoclassical garden:

*Eighteenth century philosophers, seated in porticoes still impeccably Greek, were enabled comfortably to venerate nature - or, if not nature, at least her symbol - as they watched their ancestral but unromantic gardens give place to a 'prospect' of little holes and hills.*

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**Romanticism - its influence.**

Jordan in *Victorian Architecture* (1966) provides us with a sobering attempt to document and understand the complex fabric that was Victorian architecture and Ruskin’s context. More than anything he presents us with a sense of the complex, the contrary and unsettled nature of it. In his chapter on the Romantic Movement he traces first its origins and then its impact into ‘almost every sphere’ of society. He writes:

*In the nineteenth century the romantic movement although still, as always, a rebel against aristocracy and academic traditions, was, far more, a rebel*

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166 Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words.* p. 49.
against cruelty, squalor and ugliness of the whole urban and industrial system.\textsuperscript{169}

Jordan calls the Romantic Movement the ‘divine discontent of the artist’ and quotes Heine defining Romanticism as ‘a reawakening of the Middle Ages ... a passion flower blooming from the blood of Christ.’\textsuperscript{170}

The ‘divine discontent’ clearly alludes to a sense of a reawakening of the artist to faith, but as history shows faith without Truth is a dangerous pursuit. Jordan describes it as a time where the artist had a choice, to flee to his dreams or to protest against ‘THE SYSTEM.’ ‘In the event he did both.’ ‘That divine discontent of the artist is escape to the strange and distant.’

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Le Corbusier. Chapelle Notre-Dame du Haut (1953-1955). Exterior.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{169} Jordan, \textit{Victorian Architecture}. p. 43.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid. p. 44.
Jordan traces the influence of Romanticism on architecture from ‘Beckford’s sham abbey at Fonthill (1796-1818) to Le Corbusier’s pilgrim church at Ronchamp in France’ (1953-55). Aalto is read as a Romantic more so for his commitment to the body of ideas that separate him from his rationalist contemporaries. His work can also be read as a sociological protest, a protest many of his contemporaries also engage, but with differing if not contradictory values.

As it is largely associated with the Judeo/Christian message, whether the Judeo-Christian message is Romantic largely depends on definition and practice. The Romanticism we see in the 19th century and earlier appears by-and-large a corrupted view of a relationship with God and the person of God himself. Writing in 1947 C.S. Lewis distinguishes between a Judeo/Christian and a Pantheistic view of God and the corruption when the two are mixed, however subtle.

Formal religious exercises appeal to Pugin, they appear part of his attraction and conversion to Catholicism. He attempts to re-create the spiritual life of the Middle Ages and resurrect what was in reality, personal lives living in relationship with God and with one another. A reading of Vasari (1550) and his various accounts of the personal lives of the artists of the Middle Ages illustrate this, particularly his study of Fra Angelico. Without the intimacy of relationship with God and the rich revelatory life it brings, a spiritual life can be nothing more than religious intellectualism, dogma and theatre. Relating my own experience, the turning point for me to a relationship with God was an acknowledgement of Isaiah 55:8 (KJV). ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.’ It is a text that continually questions my relationship and intimacy with God. Intimacy with God has a profound effect on all that I think and do, also the quality of spiritual life I experience.

Ruskin complains of the corruption to the Christian message, from Goethe to his experience of his own contemporaries, the ‘Maurician’ ‘free-thinking’ and the Belgrave street sect he visits, who forbidding thinking at all. Ruskin was forced to renegotiate the sectarian Christian teaching imparted to him by his mother in the Protestant tradition, and his writing on this throughout all his work is critical.

171 Ibid. pps. 43-45.
174 Ruskin, Praeterita. pps. 434-436.
in understanding his issues with faith.

Hilton writes on Ruskin’s relational life (it is largely private) with prayers of ‘resolution’, prayers of ‘adoration’ and prayers of ‘petition.’ He quotes Ruskin from notes in 1852:

_It seems to me that from a God of Light and Truth, His creatures have a right to expect plain and clear revelation touching all that concerns their immortal interests. And this is the great question with me – whether indeed the Revelation be clear, and men are blind … or whether there be not some strange darkness in the nature of revelation itself._

Besides the text being an expression of his relationship with God, it is also one of his epistemology. Ruskin may have been thinking of the writings of the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 13:12; ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.’ In Modern Painters 5, Ruskin may be confusing a ‘glass, darkly’ with ‘A mirror dark, distorted, broken’, yet he acknowledges that ‘… for only to a nature capable of truth, desirous of it, distinguishing it, feeding upon it, revelation is possible.’

In my own experience revelation is an essential part of the relationship, but as Ruskin finds, it is often mysterious as it is at times clear. Commonly there is a subtle substitution in the desire for revelation over God’s first desire for intimacy; it is corrupt leading to blindness. Equally the freedom to imagine, to sense and to postulate, all within a theological and relational framework, unless it is subject to God and scripture is fraught with deception as history shows. God is ultimately gracious and his gifts to men, Romans 11:29 declares are irrevocable. There is a profound freedom, yet accountability.

In his Thesis, _Education, Creativity and the Economy of Passions: New Forms of Educational Capitalism_ (2009) Peters writes that ‘creativity’ is a concept that comes down to us in one dominant form and is Romantic to the core. He describes Romanticism as a shift from the ‘objective to the subjective’ and under writers from Rousseau, Kant and Goethe in Germany to Coleridge and

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176 Ibid. p. 168.
177 _The Holy Bible Authorized King James Version_. Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co.
178 John Ruskin. ‘_Modern Painters Volume 5 (of 5)._’ Place Published: Project Guttenberg, 2013. pps. 74-75.
179 _The Holy Bible Authorized King James Version_.
Wordsworth in Britain, imagination is elevated as supreme faculty subordinating Enlightenment’s supremacy of Reason. He describes imagination for the Romantics as the ‘source of the ultimate creative power that emulates Nature and God’ and helps us to ‘create reality and to ‘read’ it, uniting feeling and reason.’181

Given Peter’s definition, Ruskin was no Romantic. If he is true to his statement in his Introductory to The Seven Lamps, Ruskin advocates a relational and a revelatory approach to God in the everyday. ‘Nothing is too small’ to ask of God; his reason and imagination are subject to his Creator.182 This is not the ‘imagination’ that Peters describes. Still the Gospels themselves and general characteristics found in a creatural view are, as we have seen in Auerbach’s analysis in Chapter 1, expressing realism whilst combining a profound view within the everyday.

Ruskin, Romanticism and the Picturesque.

Forty in Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture (2000) looks at the origins of the idea that works of architecture ‘could be read’, as if they were works of literature, a historical narrative, or an equivalent to literature.183 It is a practice that we see Ruskin engage, particularly with The Stones of Venice. The idea originated according to Forty with Quartremère de Quincy in 1803.184 Forty quotes de Quincy:

*In the most literal sense, the public records of the people; this function of being historians, which religion and government imposed upon them, this educational faculty with which they were invested, without doubt made it a sacred obligation to render eternal these monuments which were, not in a metaphorical sense, the


181 Ibid. p. 47.
depositories of the customs, beliefs, exploits, glory and ultimately of the philosophical and political history and the nation.\textsuperscript{185}

Forty cannot trace a direct influence from de Quincy to Victor Hugo, who following in 1831 put forward the idea that until the printed book ‘Gothic architecture had been the most complete and permanent record of human thought and history.’\textsuperscript{186}

Forty goes on to quote Hugo concerning the period up to and including Gothic ‘whoever then was born a poet became an architect.’ He argues that coupled with this idea, the nature of the language itself was determined to be vernacular, that it was ‘comprehensible to those that encountered them.’ These ideas according to Forty underlined Hugo’s description of Notre Dame and both ‘Ruskin and Morris elaborated on it.’\textsuperscript{187} Aalto also reads Hugo and raises the hope that given the state of literature of his time, architecture has the possibility of reclaiming that role.\textsuperscript{188} It is a theme in Aalto’s writing that goes back to 1921 in his \textit{Painters and Mason’s} article, expressing that people needed beautiful buildings ‘as symbols of their spiritual aspirations and to fulfill their longing for beauty ...’. Painting and sculpture were fused in architecture; even music for Aalto was ‘like part of the arched vaults of a Gothic cathedral.’\textsuperscript{189}

It was the German Romantics of von Herder, Fichte, Goethe who according to Forty, believed that ‘language constituted the purest and most vital expression of the collective being of a people.’\textsuperscript{190} Forty writes that in 1770 Herder argues for language as a ‘divine gift’ coupled with the ‘human capacity for reflection.’ ‘It was the intelligence of the soul itself, an intelligence necessary to man as man.’\textsuperscript{191} It was this idea according to Forty that language became a ‘medium that communicates the entire collective being of all those to whom that language belongs’, and ‘It was this model of language that was to have such a lasting impact upon architecture.’ If we apply this to Ruskin the ‘poet’ and as a writer on architecture, his first book \textit{The Poetry of Architecture} and the subsequent prose texts that follow, ultimately provides him with an all-embracing model. However for Ruskin it is less an attempt to legitimatize an architectural vernacular, than to make plain its inherent relationships with place, environment and meaning.\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid. p. 5
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. p. 72
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid. p. 72.
\textsuperscript{188} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 245.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid. p. 31.
\textsuperscript{190} Forty, \textit{Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture}. p. 75.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid. p. 76, J. G. von Herder, \textit{A Treatise upon the Origin’s of Language}. 1770. \textit{Part II} p. 30.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid. p. 76.
The English architectural picturesque, in its pursuit of relationships between place, environment and everyday life was engaged by Pugin and Ruskin. It also became central to Aalto's ideas on architecture and its relationship with nature and landscape, as Finnish architects travelling abroad returned with a strong identification with the English version of the picturesque, the history of which is examined in Chapter 3. In contrast, Finland keeps faith with the English version of the picturesque for architecture in the early 20th century, where we see a flip in Europe with the re-integration of classical ideas of the picturesque.

Banham (1962) describes the architectural picturesque in classical theory as a very different but parallel idea:

*And picturesque is to be understood in its strict sense, not the eroded picture-postcard sense. It is to be understood from a succession of pictures (tableaux) seen by the visitor approaching the Parthenon, and as a deliberate, not an accidental, mode of procedure.*

The form that Ruskin and Pugin engaged was a theory of landscape initiated in the late 18th century by the Rev. William Gilpin, an artist and writer. As Hill notes of Gilpin, Richard Knight and Uvedale Price who became the theorists:

*The picturesque developed in their hands into the aesthetic branch of Romanticism. It was a theory of art that put the personal and the particular above the powerful and the public.*

For architecture it was developed in partnership with John Nash and Price from about 1790 with the Castle House in Aberystwyth, Wales. Nash in proposing a typical classical villa for Price:

*Price objected that he wanted a building that reflected his own ideas. It was to face in several directions, its plan not dictated by symmetry but by the various views, 'the rooms turned to particular points'. He also wanted the house close to the sea, showing Nash 'the effect of the broken foreground and its varied line, and how by that means the foreground was connected with the rocks in the second ground.'*

As a consequence of the war in Europe after 1782 a Continental tour was deemed unsafe. Hill writes that the wealthy, the cultivated and the less wealthy

but enterprising, began to turn their eyes and sketchbooks towards local scenery and sights." An appreciation of the picturesque was part of the ‘tour’ of the historical monuments and landscape of England. For Ruskin and his parents a tour was an almost annual event at least from 1824. Never far from a rural landscape Ruskin was five at the time that his family moved from London to semi-rural Herne Hill. In their first year at Herne Hill they traveled to the Lake District, one of the earliest memories that Ruskin could recall, making his formative period barely an urban one. The Ruskin family later extended their tours to the Continent when it became safe to do so.

In 1833 at the age of 14, the Ruskins planned a trip to the Continent based on the route taken by the English painter Samuel Prout. Prout is acknowledged as a master of watercolour studies of architecture and it was he who most influenced Ruskin's painting style and ultimately his engagement with architecture and its' theory.

The Paradox of Ruskin.

There is a paradox in Ruskin's writing on architecture, I believe due to his position as a theorist and not as an architect, whilst also considering that he is an outstanding thinker, draughtsman and painter. Haslam quotes Peter Fuller as believing that 'Ruskin at his best was one of the finest draughtsman of his age, perhaps any age.'

Fuller's comments are surprising. It is difficult to fully comprehend the scope and value of Ruskin's work apart from a specialized interest, which in turn severely blinkers the greater comprehension. In relation to his studies on architecture Ruskin had no vision for how his own insight; that which he observed, might be wholly represented by a practitioner. That is the gift of practitioners.

Ruskin's appreciation of architecture is broad, always finding exemplars in the particulars as his first work on architecture *The Poetry of Architecture* demonstrates. It is not Ruskin's purpose to propose a style, even accurate to say that he has a vision for an inventive, contemporary English Christian

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architecture. He can only draw from the past to show outstanding examples in their context, built by previous generations. Ruskin did have a profound longing to see something for the future as he alludes to, but the expectations placed on him are out of keeping with his purpose as he saw it. In essence Ruskin laid down a foundation that was complex, it clearly created opportunities for new works in building by those that followed him. If we use an analogy, the very foundation of a building is the most despised but the most necessary, and remarkably that foundation is still relevant.

Fig. 12. John Ruskin, *In the Pass of Killiecrankie* (1857).
Ruskin and his ‘all of life’ view as a Christian.

One of the most interesting and obscured aspects of Ruskin’s worldview is his ‘all of life’ view as a believer. By this one understands that his Christian, sacred worldview is inclusive of all areas of life; they are not separate. If we group the administrative and cultural functions of a society we could loosely place them into seven dominions such as government, health, education, media/arts, church, business, science/technology. They are interdependent in a creatural worldview.\(^200\) The idea of a distinction between church and state is not relevant; there is a relationship not on an institutional level but on an individual one. That is Ruskin’s point of entry and perspective, how he engaged his society.\(^201\) In *Praeterita* Ruskin describes a symbolic picture he has of an all of life view. He writes of a visit in 1835 to the Rouen Cathedral made memorable by the ‘perfect harmony of art (of a local kind), religion and present, human life.’\(^202\) The ‘faithful old town gathered itself, and nestled under their buttresses like a brood beneath the mothers wings’. Remarkably in critiquing and defining ‘culture,’ Aalto writes: the ‘deepest culture specifically belongs to everyday life’. He also uses the medieval cathedral, closely surrounded by a cluster of ‘insignificant houses’ as ‘a symbol of the unfathomable unity of life.’ He laments the removal of those houses from the surrounding cathedrals as a ‘loss of power.’\(^203\) For Aalto ‘Culture’ is interdependent in a society as he also holds an ‘all of life’ view. Alfred Roth, a Swiss contemporary of Aalto speaks with insight where he describes the uniqueness of Aalto’s architecture as not ‘detached from normal life. Aalto’s building’s manifested *all of life* and made him a master’ (italics mine).\(^204\)


\(^{203}\) Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words.* p. 16

Looking at Ruskin's 'all of life' view, it is worth relating my own experience to compare and highlight his ontology. At conversion in 1985, I personally held a secularized view of belief that separated the church from society and culture. As such I incorrectly believed that the gifts I had as an artist were purely secular. The Church at that time had by-and-large given into secular views with an independent view of itself and society and reductionist gospel. I must confess the partitioning was not altogether an idea held by the spiritual teachers as they sought to correct this perspective. This partitioning was clearly not God’s idea.
made plain by a profound encounter soon after my conversion I describe in Chapter 4. Following this encounter, I began to see an, ‘all of life’ God – discovering his deep interest in all areas of my life. The arts, I discovered as a creative activity, holds a unique position given God’s own creative abilities.205

The idea that the arts were historically subservient to the institutional church, due to its wealth, can be contrasted with individual artists in history that served God and the Church with their gifts. Vasari’s (1550) various accounts of artists highlight this for the medieval and early renaissance period. His description of Fra Angelico is relevant, Vasari finds a dilemma in Fra Angelico practicing as a monk and an artist. Notwithstanding, Vasari writes ‘although it is possible to serve God in all walks of life, nonetheless it appears to some men that they can gain salvation in monasteries better than the world.’206

Given his time and upbringing Ruskin searched to find a faith demonstrating the non-partitioned life he sought for himself, making it his work to discover those for whom it had been most profoundly so. This is the basis for his chapter ‘The Grand Chartreuse’ in Praeterita (1885-1889). Ruskin is clear in describing the roots of his faith in a Puritan and Protestant upbringing, ‘receiving religion’ from Bunyan and Ambrose of which he says that ‘I had again and again proof enough of its truth.’ In spite of that he writes; ‘But my ordained business, and mental gifts were outside of those limits.’207 It is a ‘limit’ of a partitioned and institutionalized life Ruskin could not reconcile himself, as he confesses his ‘ordained business.’

Bullen quotes Victor Hugo writing ‘everywhere the priest and never the man’ as indicative of the ‘ecclesiastical elitism’ of Romanesque style that preceded Gothic. If we reverse Hugo’s terms we could describe Gothic as everywhere the man and never the priest.208 Both Ruskin and Hugo ‘held similar views on Gothic and the ‘interdependent nature’ of Gothic society.’209 We may then ask the question, would Ruskin’s ‘ordained business and mental gifts’ fit within the ‘limits’ of Gothic Christianity? Gothic ‘interdependent’ Christianity has much in common with the early, New Testament Church. Contemporary theological study and practice are seeking to reclaim the nature of the early church, largely around the New Testament teaching of ‘the priesthood of all believers.’210 One can only

205 See the account of Exodus Ch. 35:30 – 36 to Ch 39.
206 Vasari, Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects. p. 403.
207 Ibid. p. 436.
209 Ibid. p. 65.
Imagine that such a Church would embrace Ruskin’s ‘ordained business,’ as I am hopeful in time that it will embrace my own.

This particular aspect of Ruskin’s searching must change the way we view him, what he has to say to us today, and how the Church might embrace appropriate reform. Ruskin’s engagement of the arts with the ‘all of life’ view challenges attempts to alternately partition his beliefs, personal life and work. Any understanding of his work provides a fuller reading of his own spiritual life, fractured and difficult as it may be.

Hilton acknowledges Ruskin’s observation of faith and life in the Swiss mountains, he describes it as ‘Ruskin’s vision of an ideal future England.’ Ruskin writes:

> But on me, the deeper impression was of a continuous and serene hold of their happy faith on the life alike of Sunday and Monday, and through every hour and circumstance of youth and age; which yet abides in all the mountain Catholic districts of Savoy, the Waldstetten, and the Tyrol, to their perpetual honour and peace; and this without controversy, or malice towards the holders of other beliefs.

Significantly it is also the place that he writes ‘The first sight of the Alps had been to me as a direct revelation of the benevolent will in creation.’ It is also the place Ruskin planned to make his home, rather than in England. Ruskin’s faith becomes non-sectarian; a no mans land to the institutional. It is here that he appears to become detached from the Church – the institutional one. He has contact with the Oxford Movement and their attempts to cross denominational lines to bring the church together, but is not drawn into it. Where Pugin ‘converts’ from Evangelical and charismatic Christianity to the Catholic Church to find what he is looking for, he appears to be beholden to the idea that even Ruskin struggles with. For Ruskin, Luther’s Reformation had been a ‘terrible blow’ to the arts that ‘adorn and soften life.’ Ruskin’s shift from a sectarian to a non-sectarian position is a place where I personally find myself. Ruskin is searching for the true inheritance in his faith verses the traditions of men. He writes in his last work:

> Bearing with me from that last sight in Rome many thoughts that ripened

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212 Ibid. p. 427.
213 Ibid. p. 255. Ibid. p. xv.
215 Ibid. p. 123, Gillespie Graham to John Stewart, Grantully Papers SRO/GD 121/Box101/Vol.XX, 182.
slowly afterwards, chiefly convincing me how guilty and meanly dead the Protestant mind was to the whole meaning and end of medieval Church splendour; and how meanly and guiltily dead the existing Catholic mind was, to the course by which to reach the Italian soul, instead of it's eyes.216

Finley in his book Natures Covenant (1992) gives a sensitive treatment of Ruskin’s faith, the prejudicial, early sectarian, though changing nature of it and its relationship to the content of Ruskin’s early writing. He points out that the ‘religious prejudice’ tone of his work can be separated out from his material concerns.217 Finley argues for the value of the spiritual, material and moral, they are not dependent on Ruskin’s own early sectarian divisions, indicating that there is a deeply practical, exegetical study and application in Ruskin’s work. This is born out in his influence on many early, leading modernist architects, a study of which is not altogether found in a purely modern, secular academic study of his writing.

Ruskin and Aalto.

Looking at both Ruskin’s and Aalto’s work we see various correspondences, correspondences that may bring light to Ruskin’s ideas. Proving a direct link between the two is not necessary, the correspondences are enough that I may learn from them, what both men had to say not only in words and deed but more importantly in how they knew and why that was important in understanding their work. Continuity was at the heart of both men’s aspirations signifying something much deeper, as Roth’s remark on Aalto, ‘the character of beauty.’218

If we find Aalto meeting Ruskin in Venice there are numerous claims, such as that by Muschamp, Ray and Schildt, that Aalto’s Jyvaskyla Workers Club (1924/25) references the Doges Palace in Venice.219 No one asks the question as to why Aalto appears to be referencing the Doges Palace. Aalto is completing the Jyvaskyla Workers Club as he prepares himself to travel to Italy and Venice for

216 Ruskin, Praeterita. p. 258.
218 Lahti, Ex Intimo. p. 143.
the first time. One has to work hard to find a likeness between the two buildings. Still Aalto appears to use the top and bottom sections of the Palace. There is no reference to the Gothic in Aalto’s windows; the pilasters on the balcony and square framed windows are more classical - Palladian as Ray points out. There is a lack of symmetry in Aalto’s design for a neo-classical work; also there is a question as to the colouring. If it is the original colour as the recent restoration might suggest then the combination of white stone and rose-coloured marble of the palace brings a hue of pink that is repeated in Aalto’s use. The mass of the top façade, round medallions placed below the windows in place of the round windows above the gothic arches, are seen in the Ducal Palace. There are the small square windows to be found on the right of the front façade of the Ducal palace that are also similar in relationship to the mass that is found in Aalto’s right hand side elevation to his Jyvaskyla Workers Club. Weston quotes Aalto from an article of 1923 admiring Ragnar Östberg’s ‘Venetian magnificence’, his Stockholm City Hall, suggesting another source of influence for the Workers Club.220

Fig. 14. John Ruskin, detail exterior of the Doges Palace, Venice (1852).

Fig. 15. Alvar Aalto, Jyvaskyla Workers Club (1924-25).

Fig. 16. Doges Palace, Venice.
Relating my own experience, travelling from the aesthetically impoverished built environment in Perth, Western Australia in the mid 1970’s and landing in Europe, Venice was overwhelmingly and powerfully beautiful. Leaning over the bridge the Ponte degli Scalzi, adjacent to the station, I found myself in tears with a sense of aloneness for the beauty I found there, compounded by a deep loss for the present. Following his first visit to Italy Aalto speaks of pain in his Hill Top Town article, ‘Beauty always causes pain. If you have but once been permitted to enjoy it, you will suffer forever from the ugliness that surrounds us everyday.’\textsuperscript{221} The trip for me was the beginning of a journey, firstly with undergraduate studies, then post-graduate studies in London in 1984. Following graduation in London 1986, a return to Italy came with an invitation from the reputed company, Cassina of Meda/Milan to spend time at their research centre.

Both Ruskin and Aalto as part of their own profound, aesthetic encounters were forced to reconcile their experience of beauty and make a place for it in their own circumstance and time. That involved a personal ‘making of a way’, a reclaiming of what was lost. The loss is the profound capacity of man to design and build works of beauty that appears to have little dependency on economics, technology, education or privilege.

The ‘making of a way’ is a personal journey as both Ruskin and Aalto express in very different ways to my own. Where Ruskin and Aalto differ is in their gift as seers. Though they both have a feeling for the past, present and for the future, Aalto is the one to carry it forward. Ruskin can only describe the very nature of it, the human capacity to engage in the nature of beauty, and the human condition that enables him to do so, thus making Ruskin’s façade 1879-80 at Brantwood poignant. Ruskin and Aalto made many return journeys to Venice, and while Aalto seeks to learn from his Italian experience for his own work, Schildt’s derides him for his ‘utopian illusions’ of a Finnish Renaissance. Schildt fails to grasp Aalto’s premise and purpose, Aalto’s reference to the past is largely ontological not ideological. It is the state of ‘being’ that Aalto experiences in the work of the ‘ancients’ inducing an ‘infection.’ Schildt does condition his remarks on Aalto with ‘a young man’s needs of an ethical goal to fight for.’\textsuperscript{222} Schildt’s ‘ethical goal’ for Aalto places him alongside Ruskin. Schildt recalls that in Aalto’s last days as he lay in his hospital bed, there is a suggestion that he go to the ‘incomparable Venice to recuperate.’\textsuperscript{223}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{221} Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 49.  
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid. p. 9. Schildt, Alvar Aalto: His Life. pps. 224, 225.  
\end{footnotesize}
Fig. 17. John Ruskin, Façade 1879-80. Brantwood, Ruskin’s final home at Coniston, England.
Chapter 3.

‘We today - who have hymned and exulted the suggestive powers of the machine as inspiration and fixed our sensations and plastic emotions in pioneer plastic works – we see the first outlines of the new machine aesthetic stretched out on the glowing horizon....the first plastic expressions vouchsafe by a mechanical cosmogony.’

Enrico Prampolin


Fig. 18. Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea, front entrance.

Aalto.

In tracing a creatural view into early modernist architecture and design, one finds characteristics of it, ontologically and epistemologically, in the architectural writing and works of Alvar Aalto. The immediate and important question it
raises, do we find a contradiction? Given that teleological readings of Aalto's work have always been problematic, a careful look at Aalto's worldview facilitates a more sensitive reading of his ideas and work.\footnote{224}

In 1925, just four years after graduating in architecture, Alvar Aalto delivered a lecture at the Gala evening of the Jyväskylä Student Union. His title for the lecture was \textit{Abbé Coignard's Sermon} and it is with this lecture that he makes his singular reference to Ruskin as a dot point, ‘architecture – the natural art (Ruskin),’ confirming that he has an exposure to Ruskin early in his career.\footnote{225}

If Schildt is correct in writing that ‘Aalto did know Ruskin well, his big love for Venice was in part inspired by Ruskin’ then Aalto makes a re-connection to Ruskin, however small, with regular holidays in Venice.\footnote{226} The \textit{Abbé Coignard's Sermon} lecture was given within months of the Aalto’s returning from a six-week honeymoon that included his first visit to Venice (Schildt himself holidays with Aalto in Venice on at least one occasion).\footnote{227} There are many ideas in the lecture that relate to Ruskin with rich narratives making the text particularly valuable to the thesis.

For the lecture Aalto clearly explores a differing view to scientific materialism and he is apologetic in doing so. He is content to join ‘Don Quixote’ if history were to prove him wrong. Digging deeper the lecture provides an insight into Aalto’s formative ideas that were not to fully emerge in his architecture for another 10 years. In his introduction to the text, Schildt points out that the incomplete notes that Aalto made for the lecture are:

\begin{quote}
\textit{..... one of his most interesting and controversial texts, as it clearly expresses a very fundamental and personal aspect of his outlook on life.}\footnote{228}
\end{quote}

Schildt does not explain why he considers it ‘controversial’ we are left to thresh and winnow the text for ourselves.\footnote{229} It is rare that Schildt is at a loss in attempting to explain Aalto, where Aalto, characteristically as we shall see, feeds us both husk and seed. It is in all likelihood that Schildt does not perceive or

\footnote{224} Note: Though Alvar Aalto shared his early practice with his first wife, Aino Marsio-Aalto, the thesis relies heavily on the personal writings of Alvar as little personal written material attributed to Aino can be found.
\footnote{228} Ibid. p. 56.
\footnote{229} Ibid. p. 56.
share Aalto’s epistemology or ontology. Given the authority accorded to Schildt as ‘gatekeeper’ his writings on Aalto are not easily challenged and require careful diligence to negotiate. 230

The fact that Aalto subtly presents a differing view to scientific materialism no one appears to seriously engage, partly due to the nature of the paradox involved as historians like Schildt attempt to assert Aalto’s leading modernist status. Aalto’s differing signals are not fully understood resulting in confusion. He is left with the stigma of ‘irrational’, ‘expressionist’ and ‘idiosyncratic.’ 231 This is a position with consequences that Aalto defends in his own inimitable way. 232

Whilst Ruskin despaired at the degradation brought about by the literal machine and industrialization for architecture and design, Aalto sought to mediate or ‘mitigate’ it. 233 Neither Aalto or Ruskin identified their foe as a particular philosophical identity; both identify it as an ontological and epistemological one. Epistemological as both offer differing ways of knowing and ontological as both express differing experiences of being to a purely rationalist ontology. If Ruskin is parrying scientific materialism then Aalto is party to the cause.

The Abbé Coignard address is most significant as it expresses Aalto’s formative views and self-awareness. The text and the references are far richer than first appear and I believe that Schildt, though he notes the discord the text creates among historians and theorists, fails to fully read its significance himself. Schildt, as Aalto’s biographer, does not draw attention to a reading of Ruskin in his commentary of the text and his later admission to Mawby that ‘Aalto knew Ruskin well’, fails to disclose any intimate knowledge, if he possessed it. What knowledge he did have, died with him; Mawby never followed it up. Harry Charrington, in a personal conversation, believes that Schildt’s understanding of Aalto’s engagement of Ruskin appears ‘abstract.’ 234 This text and the article ‘The Hilltop Town’ published a year earlier in 1924, are I believe central texts that identify Aalto’s core philosophical position he develops in a rich, layering by various associations throughout his career. 235

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233 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 16.
235 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 49.
Aalto as example and exemplar.

The choice of Aalto as artist, architect, writer and designer pursuing a creatural view, or the characteristics of it into modernism, has made for a rich dialectic engagement between him, Ruskin and myself. As it is my purpose to examine how a creatural view (other than my own) might look going into modernism (if there was such a case), finding one would provide grounds to assess and explore my own position and contemporary context. The example of Aalto of whose writings and architecture I was not familiar, could not have been more exemplary. As I examined Aalto I encountered numerous historians and theorists that characteristically took their observations with a teleological view, puzzled as to the contradictions they met. The contradiction is stark; as an early modernist Aalto does not fit the mould of a machine view in a modernist context. This begs the improbable and question for many as to why the shoe does and does not fit?

Whilst there are a number of admissions or claims, such as those by Shigeru Ban connecting Aalto to the English architectural version of the Picturesque and English Free Architecture movement with Ruskin and Morris, one has to ask the question why these claims have not been explored? Aside from the question of Ruskin's influence on Aalto, the correspondences in their work are at times quite beautiful, even if found to be just correspondences.

Whether it is important to claim or show influence versus connection is potentially a tendentious point. The suggestion that Ruskin and Aalto swam in their own pools with similar ideas cut off from one another is less helpful, even fanciful, if one can show formative connections. In the same way what connections do I personally have or share with Ruskin that inform my own practice? Before reading Ruskin, my knowledge of the history and the work of the practitioners of the English Arts and Crafts Movement in particular would make this connection valid. But on reading Ruskin, I personally find his writings around what I define as a 'creatural view' to be acutely relevant. I begin to understand both the precedent and the source in the Judeo/Christian tradition and its epistemology and ontology; it is something we clearly share outside of time and culture. Whether the epistemology and ontology is something Ruskin and I fully share with Aalto is a more difficult question. Neither Ruskin or Aalto or myself are disposed to a philosophical machine view of nature or man, even if we may not fully agree on the philosophical/theological reasons. For Aalto to resist, even to consistently defy a philosophical machine view in relation to his
peers gives very specific meaning to his thought and work and makes him a most intriguing and courtly prophet.

If one can show that Aalto genuinely exhibits the characteristics of a creatural view then he becomes the means of tracing a creatural view of nature and man into the ‘Modern Movement’ in architecture, which raises the question does he naturally sit within it in the ‘adaptive’ manner Ruskin describes as characteristic of the creatural tradition, or does he represent something ‘other’ than the Modern Movement itself? That he has generally been excluded in the early histories and recent attempts at re-describing him with terms like proto-phenomenologist and phenomenologist would suggest the former. In Ban’s almost throwaway line that ‘Aalto has a true claim to be the orthodoxy’ of ‘the democratic architecture called for by Ruskin and Morris’, then we see Aalto’s work has a more profound meaning if we accept the philosophical roots of it.236

Ultimately Aalto’s link with Ruskin is as a forerunner and seer, which does not make Ruskin a blind prophet, one that simply has a baton to pass on. Whilst I developed sympathies with Antonio Gaudi (1852-1926) in my master’s work, for he too exhibits a creatural view that is sublime, Aalto is more pragmatic as he truly works within a modernist context.237

Appreciating Aalto.

In seeking to appreciate Aalto and the complexities of his ideas the most reassuring characteristics of them, like his architecture, is that they are accretive and adaptive, rarely redundant and built on a foundation. His ideas, though diverse and appearing contradictory are malleable to Aalto’s cause. He redefines, reshapes, crafts and personalizes them given his epistemology and his ontology. Like Ruskin’s description of the Christian builders in 'The Nature of Gothic', Aalto’s work and ideas are ‘vital’ and not ‘formal,’ vital in the sense of them being dynamic.238 If we take a formal approach we can neither appreciate Aalto or his work, this means continually asking ‘what does he mean’ given the context of his writings and work rather than bringing a formal meaning to them.239 Aalto’s use

of later terms ‘functionalism’, ‘rationalism’, ‘humanism’ and ‘materialism’ are examples; they are stumbling stones to a formal approach. Tellingly Quantril (1983) describes Aalto as ‘one of the most complex figures ever to work in the sphere of the creative arts.’

Aalto’s hubris and his ‘comedy and tragedy’.

Aalto’s hubris and his deliberate covert expositions heighten the difficulty in reading him; it is paralyzing until a deeper and careful contextual reading of his words, work and life is undertaken. On a closer study, his hubris appears as a foil for something deeper and tender to him. Though he is prepared to identify issues of the heart, he increasingly embeds them in a cover of the theatrical, the mythical, his ‘comedy and tragedy,’ the humor and the suffering, the ‘shallowness and unexpected depth,’ the funny and serious side of Aalto as actor/performer, man and architect. Aalto as architect was no jester so we can appreciate this actor/performer and raconteur as a counter to the deeply sensitive nature of Aalto as artist and architect. This foil/cover appears to be fundamental to his success, in the need for both the artistic and social demands of such a private/public practice. Schildt writes that ‘this great actor did not wish to reveal himself.’ He also describes Aalto as ‘wily’ as he characteristically held back from disclosing his position, particularly in relation to accepted architectural theory.

It takes time to winnow the husk from the seed in Aalto’s writing, the husk playing the role in protecting the seed. Louna Lahti’s interview with Aalto’s son Hamilkar in 1992 is especially revealing. Hamilkar later worked with his father as a structural engineer so he has an insight to the professional side of his father as well. It is worth quoting Lahti’s question and Hamilkar Aalto’s response in full:

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interview with Aalto’s son, Hamilkar, who in turn worked with his father, gives an elegant description of his fathers approach.
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243 Note: A study of both Aalto and his earlier colleague Eric Bryggman show similar artistic sensitivities that bring them together, but very different personality gifting that ultimately affect the outcomes of their practices.


(Lahti) I felt that he had a very sophisticated, somewhat absurd, sense of humor.

Hamilkar A: Yes, he had his own way of putting things and certain people never quite understood that. He always implied more, and very few people grasped that. Many felt insulted, those critical mandarins failed to understand. There was both comedy and tragedy in him. It always made up the whole.246

A relation and employee, Ulla-Leena is quoted as saying: ‘Everything about Alvar was instructive. He never involved himself in things that had no significance. Although he spoke sometimes in jest it was always significant.’247 Among his contemporaries Aalto was spoken of as being callous, where as the leading Finnish composer Joonas Kokkonen found him ‘very sensitive’ ‘when their friendship matured.’248

Schildt questions whether Aalto’s ‘hubris aroused an angry nemesis’ given scathing attacks on Aalto and his work toward the end of his life.249 There is irony in Aalto’s hubristic use of biblical themes; he chose to name his boat Nemo propheta in patria, ‘No man is a prophet in his own land.’250

Aalto’s beliefs.

Aalto’s hubris around his Christian heritage and his personal beliefs has drawn tepid engagement from writers and historians. Aalto’s beliefs are only important if we have a need to appreciate his worldview, and give context to his ideas. Menin and Samuels do challenge Schildt’s strong opinion on Aalto’s beliefs with his emphasis on a ‘Voltarian rationalism and a Goethian inclination that pervaded his parents home,’251 Voltaire defended the right to believe whilst having issues with the dysfunction, abuse of power and corruption within the church. This does not make him immune to hypocrisy. Goethe, whilst he had a reverence for the Gospels, was prepared to take license with his thought and

247 Ibid. p. 18.
248 Ibid. pps. 65, 76.
work that did not pass Ruskin’s attention.  Both Goethe and Voltaire were to varying degrees a law unto themselves, but none of these men including Rousseau appear to be atheists. What makes this scenario all the more ironic is how well it would fit within France’s Abbé Coignard’s Sermon and his description of the human nature of people in that city. It begs the question, what would Aalto think of it, the comedy and tragedy?

Schildt writes on Aalto’s beliefs in his epilogue to In His Own Words:

His approach was rooted in a Western humanism that was introduced by Homer, carried on by Plato received key impulses from Christine doctrine and reached full fruition in the works of Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe. Aalto saw the individual as the measure of everything, and the Cosmos, which we nowadays tend to call nature, as the universal order in which we must find our place.

Schildt attempts to be inclusive here and fails to represent the particular found in Aalto’s ‘own words.’

Menin and Samuels have reason to question Schildt as they genuinely try piecing the puzzle. Together they write that Schildt fails to make the appropriate distinction between ‘conservative Christian dogmas’ and one ‘the more spiritual experiences that are at the heart of religion, inherent in the Latin word religio, meaning ‘reliance’ or ‘connection.’ Their observation is validated by Aalto’s own words found in ‘Our Old and New Churches’ and ‘Finnish Church Art’, articles of 1921 and 1925 respectively.

Aalto gives us a description in 1921 as a regular church attendee in the satirical magazine Kerberos. In it he writes of his experience of beauty, both of Engels dome in the church he attends and in the dynamic arrangement of the womens’ coloured gowns as they gather at the altar. Aalto intercedes in prayer for an order in the composition with an answer to his prayer. This whole experience for

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252 Stephen Wildman, 13 - April - 2010. 2010. Professor Wildman provided the following reference on Goethe, of ‘Wilhelm Meister’ and ‘Faust’ he says that they had ‘an evil influence in European literature.’ (Frondes Agrestes, 1875).
253 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 286.
255 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. pps. 35-38. Itälehti, December 14, 1921, Käsiteollisuus, No. 3, 1925.
256 Schildt, Alvar Aalto; His Life. p. 154.
him is one of ‘seeing the beautiful in everything.’\textsuperscript{257} Weston as one of the more sensitive researchers on Aalto writes; ‘the passage says as much about Aalto’s attitude to architecture as anything he ever wrote.’\textsuperscript{258}

Aalto uses numerous biblical references and analogies in his writings, even given his hubristic use of them; the ‘miracle of turning water into wine;’ ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ and ‘No prophet is honored in his own country.’ We read of his Architecture as ‘salvation’ and the origins of that in Abbé Coignards sermon. Aalto uses a ‘trinity’ analogy and we find references to Fra Angelico’s painting of the annunciation with the subsequent naming of his daughter after the painting. We have also his early references and acknowledgement of the beauty of Christian art.\textsuperscript{259} Aalto’s article of 1925 on church architecture suggests a style of worship and spiritual focus.\textsuperscript{260}

Lahti (2001) appears particularly fascinated with the question around Aalto’s beliefs as though it were not resolved for her in the literature to date. She plied three, separate interviewee’s with questions over Aalto’s beliefs, including Aalto’s son Hamilkar.\textsuperscript{261} His reply, ‘He wasn’t religious but he wasn’t entirely unreligious either. He knew quite a lot and understood people to whom religion was important.’\textsuperscript{262}

An insight into Aalto’s disposition for spiritual revelation is found in the interviews of Aalto’s colleagues conducted by Lahti. It appears that Helvi Pettersson experienced dreams with prophetic insight into details of Aalto’s architectural problems.\textsuperscript{263} Helvi’s husband, Lars Pettersson - a professor of art history, notes that the insight ‘made a deep impression’ on Aalto, he would ring Helvi ‘quite often’ for an opinion. There is no indication as to the source of Helvi’s revelation but Aalto clearly looks to her and could be as Lars recalls ‘very persistent.’

Ruskin and Aalto share the representation of beauty in Christian art. As we have seen Proust elucidates on Ruskin’s ‘religion of beauty’, we can place it alongside

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\textsuperscript{259} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto; His Life}. p. 207.
\textsuperscript{260} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. pps. 37, 38. Käsiteollisuus, No. 3, 1925.
\textsuperscript{261} Lahti, \textit{Ex Intimo}. pps. 16, 42, 110.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid. p. 16.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid. pps. 61-62.
\end{flushleft}
Aalto’s ‘religious beauty in life’ verses ‘brutal mechanicalness.’ From my own experience, both of God and a revelation of the creation it is one of profound beauty, affirming a shared epistemology.

Aalto and Lindgren.

If Aalto knows Ruskin well as Schildt claims in the private letter to Mawby, there is little direct evidence in Aalto’s writings to substantiate it apart from the single reference. Charrington suggested to me that Aalto comes to know Ruskin through his university professor Armas Lindgren. This is supported by Aalto’s early reference to Ruskin soon after graduating. In his memorial address on Lindgren’s death in 1929, Aalto pays a clear respect and affection for him, describing it as a privileged, ‘enlightening and positive’ time, adding Lindgren was a ‘teacher of humanity.’

In her book Armas Lindgren 1874-1929 (1988) Riitta Nikula offers a short but lucid insight into Lindgren and a means to make connections between Lindgren and Aalto, and in turn back to Ruskin. Nikula follows Lindgren’s own study trip on his graduation in 1897 as ‘uncustomary,’ as he chooses to pursue an architecture clearly opposed to the classical tradition for a ‘more modernly’ study with a particular interest in England and Scotland. This was unusual. Finnish architects travelling abroad were not generally given to visiting the United Kingdom; this may be in part explained by their lack of English language skills. Hence Nikula writes of their ‘German orientation.’ Lindgren with his early and excellent grades in his study of English enables him; as Nikula notes, to subscribe and read English architectural journals along with House and Garden.

265 Charrington. Meeting late October. 2010. University of Bath, UK.
267 Ibid. p. 148.
268 Ibid. p. 148.
Nikula leaves us in no doubt that Lindgren was a follower of Ruskin and Morris, writing:

_The philosophy of art postulated by Ruskin and Morris had created the basis for Lindgren’s work at an early stage, and this never changed throughout his life. Each architectonic task, whether it be volume or space, surface sculpting or colouration, aimed at a complete work of art. There were no difference in merit between tasks. Their social and topographical difference, were but a challenge to the architect to find the right ‘key’. _269

Nikula’s repeated emphasis on Lindgren’s the ‘complete work of art’ echoes in Aalto’s own words of 1921 as he finishes his studies. He writes, ‘It seems to me that at the moment we are striving towards a whole’, the focus becoming an exemplar in Aalto’s practice. _270_ In an article of 1922 Aalto’s writing shows a remarkable consistency with Lindgren:

_When we visit a medieval church, look at an old manor-house, or contemplate a hundred year old vernacular building, we find that there is something that reaches out to us, a mood. It may be caused partly by handcrafted surfaces, by the artistic purity of the building materials, by the simple lines that harmonise with the landscape; partly it is created by the fine, worn surface and the hundred year old patina of the materials._

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269 Ibid. p. 148.
Nikula observes that Lindgren 'loved Italy most for the milieu it had developed over its long history. Its great monuments were not so important to him, even less so the theoretical aspects of its architectural history. Lindgren sought nothing orthodox in the old, on the contrary, his was a love of patina and mystery.'\textsuperscript{271} We find that both Lingren and Aalto are not absorbed by architectural theory. They share instead a love for the particular and the whole, Ruskin a possible source of it.\textsuperscript{272} Nikula observes that 'the German ideas bore no

\textsuperscript{271} Nikula, \textit{Armas Lindgren 1874-1929}. p. 149.
\textsuperscript{272} Lahti, \textit{Ex Intimo}. p. 54. Schildt explains that Aalto whilst having a historical knowledge was not interested or motivated by theory, an observation well supported by those that worked with him. See: Schildt, \textit{Mature Years}, p. 120.
attraction’ to Lindgren, ‘not even later on’ continuing in faithfulness to the ideas of Ruskin and Morris.273

Lindgren’s own teaching methods, those greatly appreciated by Aalto appear to have sympathy with the English system, Lindgren travelled to England when appointed director of the School of Applied Arts in 1902.274 Nikula writes of his experience of the English system ‘admiring it’s freedom from unnecessary courses and curricula. Trust was placed in the independence of students and emphasis on drawing as the foundation of all artistic work.’275

Lindgren had a wider interest in Ruskin that included a personal fascination for The Middle Ages and a commitment to the preservation and conservation of buildings of antiquity.276 Ruskin’s legacy as Lindgren experienced it first hand in England was:

There gathered around Ruskin a group of artists, the Pre-Raphaelites, and soon the movement spread to even wider circles. Largely because it was not restricted to the three main fields of art, architecture, painting and sculpture, but embraced with burning passion and enthusiasm the 'applied arts', crafts, home arts. The most commonplace of things, the simplest of household articles, were through their form and decoration to express the search for truth, simplicity and stability, the watch word for the movement - all false splendor and easy elegance were to be avoided. Art gives even the most ordinary craftwork a new interest, prevents spiritual degeneration and makes life worth living.277

Nikula writes of the middle ages and its impact on Lindgren was ‘its whole atmosphere and the many details affecting it, its synthesis of architecture and art, each building’s individuality and the importance of the society that built it produced in the end for him a deeply understood, an all embracing work of art.’278

Schildt writes only that Lindgren’s influence on Aalto was through lectures on the Italian Renaissance with an ‘admiration for Brunelleschi, Alberti, Palladio and Venetian architecture’ and ‘contact with the organic way of thinking of Art

275 Ibid. p. 148, Tecknikern 287/December 1902. p. 225
276 Ibid. p. 149.
278 Ibid. p. 173.
Nouveau architects and the best traditions of National Romanticism.” What makes Schildt the perceived authority on Aalto was his unique position as friend, his discipline as a historian, and after Aalto’s death the first to have unfettered access to Aalto’s archives. He also was able to access Aalto’s peers, still alive.

Weston (1995) in his carefully researched book on Aalto finds ‘little to be known’ about Aalto’s education claiming that at its foundation was a ‘rigorous Beaux Arts influenced curriculum.’ What is frustrating are the terms gothic, classicism and the renaissance around the description of Aalto’s education and his references, they appear to be rolled into one. Whilst neither Lindgren or Aalto appear interested in theory and their knowledge of historic architecture is practical, it goes some way to explain their engagement and reference to historical works that are adaptive to their own values and ideas. Nikula’s research on Lindgren was published after Schildt’s work on Aalto’s teachers. In personal correspondence, Nikula notes the difficulty she experiences in researching her book on Lindgren. Personal records of Lindgren’s were destroyed in a house fire of 1926 and university records in the bombing of the university library in 1944.

We get a glimpse of Ruskin from another of Aalto’s teachers, Usko Nyström. Charrington and Nava (2011) quote Nyström’s reference to Ruskin’s ‘perfection of imperfection’; ‘If perfection were the goal of our work, then the machine would often perform better and faster [but] thanks to the simple turn of the potters wheel the trace of the hand shows as infinite, horizontal waves. A hand thrown vase is a living, individual being where the idea and will of the maker becomes visible.’ Charrington and Nava Title their book Alvar Aalto: ‘the mark of the hand’ to describe the individual and personal nature of Aalto’s work, whilst it also brings a connection in the text they quote: ‘...the hand shows as infinite, horizontal waves.’ The connection being that ‘Aalto’, in Finnish, means ‘wave.’

279 Schildt, Alvar Aalto; His Life. pps. 123-124.
280 Weston, Alvar Aalto. p. 8
281 Riita Nikula, 29-11-2016. Personal correspondence.
Goethe, Ruskin and Aalto.

Authors such as Samuels and Menin refer to Goethe as a source of Aalto’s ideas on architecture, yet like Ruskin there is little direct reference to support this from Aalto’s writing.\textsuperscript{283} Certainly a reading of Goethe’s writings on architecture and art brings rich correspondences with Aalto, many remain surprisingly unexplored whilst raising questions as to what Ruskin himself read of Goethe and his knowledge of his writings on architecture.

Ruskin shares Goethe’s interests on literature, art and architecture, Gothic architecture, geology, a love of the mountains, studies in clouds, poetry and literature. Goethe’s poetic interpretations of his German Gothic bring rich nature, tree and mountain analogies that we see in Ruskin especially, but also in Aalto.\textsuperscript{284} Ruskin, Goethe and Aalto share a strong disinclination to a machine analogy and scientific materialism, they were keen in their engagement of science. Miller writes in his preface to a reissue of Goethe’s \textit{Metamorphosis of Plants} (1790) that Goethe brings ‘together scientific and poetic sensibilities’ suggesting a combination of the ‘romantic and scientific.’\textsuperscript{285} We know that Ruskin does read Goethe’s \textit{Metamorphosis of Plants} as he comments on his ‘all is leaf’ idea, whilst he also reads ‘Wilhelm Meister’ and ‘Faust’ of which he is critical, saying that they had ‘an evil influence in European literature.’\textsuperscript{286}

What Miller does point out is Goethe’s ‘distinctive empiricism’, echoing ‘Spinosa’s holistic vision of reality in his conviction that ‘spirit and matter, soul and body, thought and extension…. are the necessary twin ingredients of the universe, and will forever be.’\textsuperscript{287} Miller notes that Goethe ‘was also an insightful student of the history of philosophy of science and wrote many short essays on what he saw the pitfalls and promise of modern scientific practice.’\textsuperscript{288} Ruskin and Aalto share Goethe’s idea that ‘Every art demands the whole man, and the

\textsuperscript{286} Wildman. Professor Wildman provided the reference to Ruskin on Goethe. (Frondes Agrestes, 1875.)
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid. p. xvi.
highest stage of art complete humanity.'

Origins of the English Picturesque in Finland.

The co-ohabitant of the English free architecture movement was, as has been discussed, the English architectural version of the picturesque. Though numerous writers identify the English picturesque in Aalto’s practice they do not explore its source or operation and overlook a key understanding.

Landscape, environment, locus, is an essential member of the ‘whole.’ It is easy to neglect this interdependency in Aalto’s architecture through to his furniture and lighting, yet fundamental to the comprehension of his work. From the beginning, urban planning and architecture are integral as demonstrated in his formative writings particularly following his first trip to Italy in 1924. Schildt in his introduction to the article ‘Painters and Masons’ writes that ‘the idea of a building as a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total work of art in which every detail is subordinate to the overall architecture … was a dream, inherited from his Art Nouveau predecessors.’

Aalto’s ‘whole’ is inclusive of the English ideas of the Picturesque. It has a history in Finland much earlier than Art Nouveau that may explain Aalto’s deep connection to it. The English garden itself has a long history in Finland. A contemporary example for Aalto was Hvitträsk, the important buildings and grounds of the earlier generation of architects and mentors to Aalto, Gisellius, Lindgren and Saarinen.

289 Gage, ed., Goethe on Art. p. 15.
291 Ibid. p. 31.
Fig. 20. Hvitträsk, by Gisellius, Lindgren and Saarinen (1902) in the English Arts and Crafts tradition with garden.

Timo Tuomi’s essay in *Matkalla - En Route* (1999) provides us with a history of the earlier sources of the Picturesque and its relationship to urban planning and architecture from the middle of the 19th century. From Tuomi’s research, Germany and central Europe are an early and indirect source for the English Picturesque, both theoretically and practically with contemporary and medieval examples to study.292 There are detailed accounts of two Finnish travelling architects in 1783/84, Hisinger and Råbergh describing the influence of the English garden in Europe and their own interest in it.293 Both return to Finland to build gardens, Hisinger worked a beautiful and famous garden at Fagervik in the basic elements of the English park. By 1900 Gustaf Nyström oversaw the introduction of planning as part of the architectural course. Aware of its ultimate

293 Ibid. p. 42-49.
significance for a whole, Tuomi describes Nyström’s introduction of the course of study ‘Urban Plans in relation to art’ as ‘prophetic.”

Aalto and the English Picturesque.

We see a shift in Aalto’s work on Viipuri Library (1927-35) the period of this pivotal work completely overlaps the Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1928-32). Apart from the prize-winning design for the library a further three sets of drawings are made.

Fig. 21. Alvar Aalto, Viipuri Library (1927-35).

294 Ibid. p. 80. Polytekniska skolans i Finland program för läseåret 1900-1901, 28.
Within this redrawning process, which includes the re-sitting of the library by the city authorities, there is a profound maturation in Aalto’s practice. We see not only his move to the engagement, a so-called rationalist idiom developed by Le Corbusier and his European counterparts, but also his use of nature/landscape metaphors.

Fig. 22. Viipuri Library, approach from within the park.

Aalto conceives his roof lights, using natural light to illuminate the reading hall with his ‘many suns’, and a mountain metaphor for the visualizing the form/structure of the building.\textsuperscript{296} Nature, and landscape as a metaphor for architecture, both with rich social and cultural meanings move from earlier thinking and writing into a reality. We see the ideas in his writing in his formative period but his practice adhered primary to Neo-classical form as Schildt points out till 1927.\textsuperscript{297}

\textsuperscript{296} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 108. \textit{The Trout and the Stream}. Domus/Arkkitehti, 1948. pps. 7-10.

\textsuperscript{297} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto; His Life}. p. 229.
Fig's. 23, 24. Viipuri Library’s ‘many suns.’ The skylights appear much larger in reality with a beautiful, shifting lucent presence.
Fig. 25. Canopy ceiling of the lecture hall with canopy of foliage, outside - inside – outside.

Aalto's use of the articulated ceiling, though original, has contemporary origins as shown in a comparative example of Nil's Eriksson's Göteborg Konserthus (1935) of the same period. It is also evident in Aalto's earlier timber clad bandstand of 1922 and interestingly it is also found in a restaurant interior of 1934, wrongly attributed to Aalto by Schild. With the library Aalto has simply extended the articulated rear wall to cover the ceiling to perform the same function. Gideon was not alone in deeming the ceiling 'irrational.' It is the rich relationships between inside and outside that Aalto creates with roots in function that make the ceiling in this case something of beauty.

Fig. 26. Alvar Aalto, drawing for acoustic ceiling Viipuri Library.

Fig. 27. Rear wall to Nil’s Eriksson’s Göteborg Konserthus (1935).
Fig. 28. Rear wall to Aalto’s Viipuri Library lecture hall (1935).

Fig. 29. Viipuri library main doors with the feel of Russian constructivist also relates to encircling trees and branches.
The name Otto-I Meurman surfaces when reading on the development of the Viipuri Library design. His name appears in a footnote where he is described as 'a friend of Alvar Aalto,' and in another text as a 'defender.' Meurman was the town-planning architect in Viipuri from 1918-1937 covering the library’s genesis to its completion. From the essay *Ennobling Beauty* by Pekka Suhonen (1980) we find an architect/planner also steeped in the ideas of the Picturesque graduating a decade earlier than Aalto. We discover that Meurman and Aalto share a love of the Picturesque, 'arrangement of buildings,' 'buildings bound to the soil' the relationship of 'buildings trees and vistas' and villages rooted in the soil.

Fig. 30. Alvar Aalto, Viipuri Library front entrance after completion 1936.

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301 Ibid. p. 39.  
According to Jaakko Suihkonen, Aalto had told him it was Mörrri's (Meurman's) decision to allow the library to be built in the park. Aalto finally positions the library amongst and up against the existing park trees, as seen in photographs at the time.

![Alvar Aalto, Viipuri Library (1936) aerial view at the time of completion.](image)

The library building has numerous railings/trellises built into the façade for climbing plants, an idea that has been identified by Quantrill as was used by Aalto's mentors Lindgren, Gesellius and Saarinen in their National Museum of 1902. Meurman worked for Saarinen as an assistant at Hvitträsk from 1914-1915. Photographs of Hvitträsk in the 1910's show most of its lower facades are covered with creepers, it takes us back to the form and ideas of Morris's influential Red House of 1859-1860. There is nothing to suggest Meurman's influence on Aalto, still Meurman's synergy on the positioning of the building, its site, is a gift to Aalto's development.

Aalto's positioning of the Viipuri building within an existing canopy of trees was not isolated; the un-built Jyvaskyla University Library proposal of 1968 would

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303 Harry Charrington, ed. *Alvar Aalto the Mark of the Hand*. p. 173
304 Quanrill, *Alvar Aalto; a Critical Study*. p. 17. See also;
have been 'barely visible.'\textsuperscript{306} Sadly, in the recent restoration of the Viipuri Library, as shown in Fig. 32 the trees closest to the building have been removed and now lacks the relationship Aalto gave it to site, though the library still maintains a beautiful grounded quality.

Fig. 32. Alvar Aalto, Viipuri Library. Current photograph after restoration.

Why have connections between Aalto and Ruskin been overlooked?

Given the reading by key historians are with teleological, Darwinian views of history, one obvious answer is that no one is looking for an epistemological fit to

\textsuperscript{306} Harry Charrington, ed., \textit{Alvar Aalto the Mark of the Hand}. p. 211.
Ruskin, instead consumed with the problem of genuinely locating Aalto in a rationalist/materialist paradigm. Why then the lack of investigation as to the anomaly when these men are key figures in modernist history with signs linking Aalto to Ruskin? If we believe Porphyrious (1982), up to that time Aalto was not only an anomaly but also the subject of a closed understanding. He writes; ‘Received opinion has it that Aalto was so humanely simple and straight forward, so anti-intellectual and so practical a man that to embark on an analysis of his work would be misguided academic pedantry of a hair-splitting miser.’307 This gives rise in Porphyrious’s view that ‘no link has ever been felt either to be missing or to need explication.’308

Of the key texts covering the history of modernist architecture, Pevsner (1936), Giedeon (1941) and Banham (1962), both Banham and Pevsner do not mention Aalto. Banham’s Theory and Design in the First Machine Age; given that he pursues a philosophical machine view as normative, is true to his cause in excluding Aalto.

Giedeon met Aalto as early as 1929 and would have been familiar with his work but excludes him in his initial strict rationalist publication of Time, Space and Architecture (1941).309 In a reversal eight years later, Giedeon takes up many of Aalto’s ideas championing him in the second edition of the book in 1949. Pevsner provides us with what could only be described as a Darwinian, teleological reading of a philosophical machine view, from Gropius in Germany back to Morris. He unhitches Ruskin in his teleology and gives Pugin much of the credit, normally attributed to Ruskin. Pevsner writes his history of modernism from his newly adopted home in England and sees no disconnection from the Bauhaus, Gropius and back to Morris. Aalto himself signals a philosophical disconnection with Gropius at the Bauhaus in his deference to Van de Velde.310 Van de Velde preceded Gropius at the Weimar Art School, later amalgamated and renamed Bauhaus. Pevsner is not alone in making his ‘Gropius to Morris’ ‘complete circle,’ it has become the generally accepted history.311 He writes; ‘Morris laid the foundation of the modern style; with Gropius its’ character was ultimately determined.’312 If Heskitt and Banham are correct, Gropius transits to a philosophical machine view mixing it with Platonic idealism.313

308 Ibid.
310 Pevsner, Pioneers of Modern Design. p.37. Van de Velde here defends a free architecture as opposed to a canonical one.
311 Ibid. p. 39.
312 Ibid. p. 39.
Other reasons given for Aalto’s exclusion include early historical readings of Modernism as geographically specific and Aalto’s location in Finland as outside it. Neither Aalto nor his Nordic contemporaries or forebears figure in the Euro-centered mix. Still, Aalto is prominent in his attendance at CIAM meetings and exhibitions of his work outside Finland. Moreover it is possible that Aalto was not seen as a progenitor of the Modernist Movement in architecture, per se, but rather offered both a critique and a revaluation of it.\footnote{Lahti, \textit{Ex Intimo}. p. 43. See Nils-Eric Wickberg’s description of Aalto’s context.}

Making a connection between Aalto and Ruskin is not culturally popular; Charrington told me that Finns distanced themselves from an association with England. This is supported by Suominen-Kokkonen who notes that the Finns were particularly driven by aspirations to the sophistication of Europe.\footnote{Charrington. See also: Tuomi, ed., \textit{Matkalia! Soumalaiset Arkkitehdit Opintiellä, Finnish Architects’ Studies Abroad, En Route!} p. 110.} ‘The chosen travel routes by Finnish architects up until Aalto’s time upholds this observation. Armas Lindgren, Wivi Lönn and a few others were exceptions including Aalto’s friend and mentor Gustaf Strengel who worked briefly in the office of Charles Harrison Townsend in London.\footnote{Ibid. p. 111. See also: Sarje, Kimmo. ‘Gustaf Stringell and Nordic Modernism.’ (2008), \url{www.mscand.dk/index.php/nja/article/download/2790/2412} p. 94.}

Aalto himself gives us a telling insight in his article of 1926 ‘From Doorstep To Living Room’ where he writes ‘The British psyche is foreign to us and does not readily take root in our soil.’\footnote{Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 52.} Nevertheless Aalto gives the British credit for the ‘outside’ ‘inside’, a relationship between nature and building, interior and exterior. What Aalto is referring to is an element of the English version of the Picturesque. It has an early history in Finland as discussed previously, some aspects of it are naturalised by Aalto’s time. Given that it became fundamental to Aalto’s future work, he is keen to limit or qualify any associations here.

In drawing any connections in Aalto’s work with Ruskin we are faced with Aalto’s own attitude in acknowledging influences in his work, hence the difficulty in finding any record of them. As Schildt discovers when questioning Aalto about details of his practice, his response was as Schildt writes, ‘he liked to quote Nietzsche: ‘Only men of the past look back!’ He was manifestly irritated if anyone tried to sound him on details of his past life or root up the origins of his buildings. ‘It’s enough that they exist!’ was his opinion.’\footnote{Schildt did try to record conversations with Aalto following an invitation to write a ‘spiritual}
Schildt confesses that Aalto literally plays with him. \(^{319}\) It is natural to think that the raw, visual and ideational references Aalto uses are indivisible, but in Aalto’s belief and use they are clearly open to synthesis. His ‘authority of the ancients’ demonstrates his deference to the past for its wisdom and meaning, he in turn engages that authority with synthesis and invention to speak into the present.

Beauty for Aalto is at the core of his aspiration for architecture, it is phenomena he writes of falling ‘outside the light of science,’ though deeply appreciable. \(^{320}\) Aalto is speaking about the difference between reading and doing; it’s the doing he is interested in as a ‘matter of the heart’. For Aalto the study of the phenomena in architecture can only have an indirect function, the subject of ‘scientists’ ‘with a historian’s or a registrar’s ambition’. Thus we see his frustration toward architectural journalism, viewing it as post hoc justification. For Aalto it did not deal with the actual fecund process of synthesis, the complexity that takes place in the heart of the artist at the time. \(^{321}\) Aalto treats architectural journalism and attempts describe his work as largely speculative activity, even meaningless. Acknowledgement of the existence of his milieu was ‘enough,’ for Aalto, the work itself was to be read for what it was, the artistic and inventive nature of it whether it was ‘good architecture or not.’ \(^{322}\)

Schildt is careful to point out the perceived paradox of Aalto’s work, and its relation to Darwinian Modernism, that ‘Aalto was to the highest degree aware of tradition and historically orientated, but what interested him in history was the possibility of transforming it into something new.’ \(^{323}\) The perceived paradox exists as a result of the teleological readings of history in situating Aalto, making it all the more important that an honest, non-prejudicial reading of the milieu of Ruskin and Aalto be explored to better understand Aalto.

Narratives present in Aalto’s early writings.

Aalto’s reference for his *Abbé Coignard’s Sermon* is Anatole France’s novel of 1893, first published in English in 1910 under the title *The Queen Pedauque*. The

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\(^{319}\) Ibid.

\(^{320}\) Schildt, Alvar Aalto in his own words. p. 56.

\(^{321}\) Ibid.

\(^{322}\) Schildt, *Alvar Aalto; His Life*. p. 17.

\(^{323}\) Ibid. p. 15.
central character in the novel to whom Aalto was clearly endeared is Abbé Coignard. Anatole France uses his Abbé character as a means of exploring his own outlook on life. Schildt writes that the books that were dear to Aalto, he found himself personally identifying with the characters:324

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Aalto \text{ had a very personal relationship with the writers he took an interest in; their books might lie on the table for years, some of them read until they literally fell apart and to all of them he took a critical, discursive attitude.}\]325

Aalto himself writes; ‘You lived with and took a stand for the character of the books’, this gives us an insight to the theatrical, even comical nature of Aalto as elements of his characters spill over in his social conduct and expression with a layering that is complex.326 We come back to the husk and the seed of Aalto’s thinking and behavior, his effort to clothe and protect his inner, sensitive nature, even his own ‘little man,’ as there is much to suggest that the ‘little man’ starts with his own self.327

Whilst an entertaining novel, full of irony, Anatole France’s text is deeply theological, part moral, part sociological, part polity, part aesthetic, part history. If Aalto follows any of the theological discourses in the text they would provide him with a substantial background that may partially explain his biblical borrowings. France raises some very pertinent issues surrounding ideas and practices in the church in relation to the scriptures, for which he appears to have a deep and genuine interest.

From Aalto’s two early texts, The Hill Town (1924) and Abbé Coignard’s Sermon (1925), we have the ideas of ‘play’, the ‘rising town,’ the ‘city of hills’ the ‘city on the hill’, the ‘elevated city’, and the built environment in relation to landscape.328 They come together later in Aalto’s practice with his metaphor of the ‘imaginary mountain’ as a starting point for the development of his buildings.329 Not only is the ‘city on the hill’ a biblical analogy, Aalto’s development of the idea has direct

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324 Lahti, Ex Intimo. p. 16-17. Hamilkar is quoted as saying that his father liked to read books about people that were a little like himself.
325 Schildt, Alvar Aalto; His Life. p. 28.
326 Ibid. p. 78.
327 Ibid. p. 77.
328 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 49.
correspondence with Ruskin’s hill/mountain analogy/metaphor for architecture covered in Chapter 4.

Aalto’s Abbé Coignard’s Sermon lecture floats between, as he quotes a ‘Rousseauian’ idea of a childlike, ‘natural’ approach to ‘beauty’, without culture, and ‘spontaneous work’, verses a ‘calculated work.’ From the text Aalto also draws a Hobbesian idea of culture/architecture as ‘salvation’/ ‘atoning’ grace, an architecture of moral authority. Aalto quotes France:

What makes us joyful in seeing the town must be something other than its quarrelsome and ungracious inhabitants. My son, here is something that has come down from above, which atones for the imperfections of the inhabitants. God has laid down something which people do not have the intelligence to seek.330

The ‘Sermon’ lecture has complex, mixed themes not easily grasped, but as Schildt writes ‘that it clearly expresses a very fundamental and personal aspect of his outlook.’331

In the The Queen Pedauque text that Aalto references, France clearly places moral authority in the scriptures describing it as contrary to the nature of man, ‘inhuman’ and therefore ‘divine.’ France’s ‘city as a divine institution’ is both the inhabitant’s acceptance of divine moral order and the subsequent reflection of it in the built environment. We have a reading of Ruskin, his Stones of Venice.

The other themes of Aalto’s 1924 and 1925 texts are beauty as ‘joy’, the ‘joy of creation’ and the ‘joy of work.’ We have a connection here with Ruskin’s ‘beauty;’ A Joy Forever where he writes:

.... my whole Professorship would be accomplished,—and far more than that,—if only the English nation could be made to understand that the beauty which is indeed to be a joy for ever, must be a joy for all.332

Abbé Coignard’s Sermon is both paraphrased and embroidered by Aalto, the nature of the embroidery is most interesting; what Aalto says that the Abbé does

330 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 57.
331 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 56.
not say nor imply. The underlying theme of France's text is a comment on the noted French Catholic theologian of the late 1600's, M. Bossuet, whose thesis the divine right of kings to rule and the divine nature of government are well known. France draws upon the thesis to suggest his own: the *Cette ville-là est une institution divine, The city as a divine institution.* Though Aalto does not directly make a claim for architecture and the built environment as a 'divine institution', he, by all appearances treats it as one. It is part of a creatural view. Aalto's interest in Anatole France's text may have been encouraged by his friendship with Gustaf Strengel and his book *Kaupunki taidehuomana, The City as a Work of Art* (1923).333

Aalto's beliefs and how does he avoid a philosophical machine view?

Aalto raises the question of a creation verses an evolutionary view of nature.334 However as Schildt remarks, Aalto does not answer his own question but shifts it to the practice of architecture, an evolutionary verses a creation view. Aalto affirms that architecture (as a manmade extension of nature) is a creative process, not a 'biological' or evolutionary one. As discussed earlier Aalto does not hold to a Darwinian views on architecture, nor values in any sense, contrary to the Futurists and their manifestos, whose ideas according to Banham have been pursued in modern architecture to the present.335 Whilst Schildt describes Aalto's philosophy as anarchistic he clearly infers that Aalto held the view that invention in architecture is divinely inspired.336 This is affirmed in the *Abbé Coignard's Sermon* lecture.337 Schildt's anarchistic comment appears confusing, for whilst Aalto is complex and deliberately evasive, his architecture is beguilingly sensitive, simple and complex, above all cohesive. Schildt has trouble in containing Aalto, both to understand him within his own personal worldview, and to firmly place Aalto as a modernist.

Aalto's Lutheran background is particular to his nation and culture; it also reflects a certain interface with the ancient Finnish traditions. The ancient traditions do not necessarily corrupt the Christian tradition rather they may cultivate an emphasis in the tradition. This is seen in the ‘adaptive’ nature of the Christian tradition observed both by Ruskin and Auerbach. Bradley (2003)

334 Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words.* pps. 157-158. SAFA archives 1963
336 Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words.* p. 163.
337 Ibid. pps. 56-57.
writes on the Celtic influence on early and later English Christianity, especially how nature was viewed, and its subsequent spread into Europe. Bradley notes this influence passes through to the literary and poetic work of George Herbert 1593-1633. 338 Herbert we know is a spiritual father to Ruskin, indeed he describes Herbert’s writings amongst other things as ‘a standard of the purest unsectarian Christianity.’ Ruskin’s choice of Herbert provides us with deep insight to his beliefs and the development of them, his position theologically and his attitude to nature. 339 In Aalto’s case the Finnish epic and literary work, the Karelia and the Finno-Ugric traditions of the Finnish people bring a unique emphasis to Orthodox and Lutheran, Christian traditions on how nature is viewed. 340 I have briefly noted these earlier in the Chapter with Aalto’s comparison between Homer’s Iliad and the Finnish literary epic the Karelia. With both the English and Finnish traditions we see a deep feeling for nature being expressed in their Christian traditions, facilitating deeper meaning and appreciation to the work of God in His creation.

Aalto’s ‘complete’ relationship, his ‘total work’.

There is a ‘complete’ relationship between Aalto’s interests in planning, his ideas on nature and its relationship with architecture that includes the material, technical, social, cultural and spiritual. In Aalto’s ‘complete’ work, the identities in a work are living/vital in relationship, in a complexity that is conscious. Not as static parts, cogs in a mechanistic relational, functional system given the paradigm of scientific rationalism as a reductive, empirical, binary and determinative approach. Looking at the problem from a differing perspective Charrington and Nava put it succinctly from an observers view:

Concentrating on received images rather than enquiring into the wisdom displayed in the realization of the architectural work, the spectator is left with one of the enduring contradictions of modern architectural history; a failure to learn from what we admire. 341

339 Ruskin, Praeterita. pps. 304, 305.
340 Quanrill, Alvar Aalto; a Critical Study. p. 3.
341 Harry Charrington, ed., Alvar Aalto the Mark of the Hand. p. 12
Charrington and Nava’s observation goes back to the heart of Aalto’s earlier exposition of beauty that can be simply expressed as; look at how I’m looking, then look at the results of my looking. Looking at how Aalto is looking brings together ‘how with what.’ Charrington’s ‘wisdom’ speaks of an embodied experience, in a creatural view it is ‘wisdom of heart,’ a whole experience of the human condition.

In Aalto’s use of a ‘biological cells’ analogy, the cells are in ‘relationship,’ they speak to one another, they are ‘conscious of the whole.’ There is a disposition in a creatural view to appreciate and value rather than control and master. Aronofsky-Weltman (2007) quotes Sawyer (1985) on Ruskin; ‘He defines science as an exercise in wonder at nature rather than control over nature. Ruskin rejected those aspects of Victorian science and technology that were tied to aggression, to imperialism, to control, to mastery over nature, to greed that would result in bad stewardship.’

In attempting to re-address the whole, the influential theorist and architect Robert Venturi describes himself in binary terms as a ‘both/and’ architect; he says ‘I prefer,’ rather than ‘either/or.’ By implication he also describes Aalto as a ‘both/and’ architect, as this is how Quanril in his reading of Venturi describes Aalto. On the face of it, Venturi’s argument in attempting to readdress the ‘whole’ is convincing, yet in reading his book Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (1966) it does not tally.

Venturi uses a modified, binary view, a ‘both/and’ combination. It is pluralism, a simple combination of styles rather identifying his problem as the need for a whole paradigm shift. He appears to have no conception of Aalto’s ‘whole’ at all. Though both articulate and influential in his critique of modern architecture, his own architecture together with his argument appears largely pastiche. It brings us back to Colquhoun and his description of the current, circular paradigm as ‘inescapably modern.’

344 Quanrill, Alvar Aalto; a Critical Study. p. 5.
Aalto and van de Velde.

Aalto had many associations with his international colleagues, particularly as a result of his attendances at the international architecture conferences of the CIAM. One relationship of interest is with the influential Belgium architect, designer and educator Henri van de Velde. Van de Velde is known as an Art Nouveau or Jugendstil (Modern or new style) architect drawing from the teachings of Ruskin, Morris and the English Free Architecture movement.\textsuperscript{346} As a key early modernist, both as a practitioner and educator, van de Velde argues among his German colleagues for the architect as artist in the tradition of Ruskin and Morris, verses the growing idea of architecture as a science with ideas of standardization for a machine art.\textsuperscript{347} Though Aalto does not engage us with the idea of architect as artist, his approach is inclusive. He engages with standardization and does so with the possibility of non-standard, original outcomes using nature as his model.\textsuperscript{348} Van de Veld’s work shares much with the Finnish Jugendstil architects of Aalto’s former generation that inspired him. Van de Velde and other continental architects of the Jugendstil period, responding to Ruskin’s aversion to the straight line, use the ‘wave’ or wave forms to express ‘artistic volition and movement’ in a work.\textsuperscript{349} Teyssot (2013) quotes the poet Rilke commenting on van de Velde’s furniture, using the wave as a metaphor to describe it. Wellenstil (wave style) was a term also used to describe the new movement.\textsuperscript{350} Mawby draws a link between the name ‘Aalto’ as mentioned earlier in Finnish means ‘wave’ and Aalto’s use of line, his wave line.\textsuperscript{351} This Mawby couples with the name Ruskin gave to his boat ‘Jumping Jenny’ (by which Ruskin means Genevieve, ‘white wave’) though there is a deeper connection to be made.

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid. p. 37.
\textsuperscript{348} Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 165. Aalto uses the analogy of ‘cell’ and ‘organism’ to argue for a ‘rich combinatorial potential’.
\textsuperscript{349} Georges Teyssot, \textit{A Typology of Everyday Constellations}. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2013. p. 120.
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid. p. 120.
\textsuperscript{351} Mawby, ‘The Lamp of Obedience: John Ruskin, Alvar Aalto, and a ‘Proper Sense’ of Freedom.’ pps. 61, 62.
Leng argues that Ruskin’s text, the ‘Origin of Wood’ written shortly after the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* is a covert attack on it. In his preparation to write on the ‘Origin of Wood’ Ruskin notes:

...... two questions occurred in the outset, one in the section on vegetation, respecting the origin of wood; the other in the section on sea, respecting curves of waves; to neither of which, from botanist or mathematicians, any sufficient answer seemed obtainable.352

The curved line for both Ruskin and Aalto becomes both a defense against scientific materialism, and empiricism and a symbol of nature and the Divine. As complex systems, waves and turbulence still elude Ruskin’s ‘mathematicians, any sufficient answer’ hence the more recent development in science of Chaos Theory. Both Ruskin and Aalto feel safe in the refuge of complexity and the profound as Aalto writes:

In recent decades, architecture is characterized by an exaggerated worship of theory, an attitude that reflects the human predicament and insecurity. We think that in it we can find salvation from the threat of chaos.\textsuperscript{353}

Given Aalto’s line ‘unknown to mathematicians’ and his words to Gropius in 1930 concerning his mission to ‘make buildings for people into whose heads the ‘organic line’ will not fit for another 100 years’ is canny given the above context.\textsuperscript{354} Mikkola is not alone in comparing the certainty of dogma in describing Aalto’s work as relating to the ‘original tradition of anarchy, as represented by the spiritual fathers of modern architecture and crafts - Ruskin and Morris.’\textsuperscript{355}


Chapter 4.

In matters of taste my father was influential, his penchant for Epicure cheese became my own, though at the time neither of us were Epicurean.

Fig. 34. Lake Cowan. Leaf/Cutlery in cupronickel and stainless steel.

Studio works.
The objective of the studio component of the research is to design and develop a series of inventive pieces of furniture and tableware, proposals for use in a contemporary Australian domestic interior. The products are to be sensitive to nature, place and environment, suitable for high-end, low-volume industrial production that considers or engages philosophically a ‘creatural’ or a created view of nature and man, exploring what that might look like in a contemporary context. This in contrast to current machine and materialism based philosophical approaches to nature, design and production.\textsuperscript{356}

Fig. 35. Surrounding vegetation, Lake Cowan, Norseman.

\textsuperscript{356} Stuart Walker, Design for Life: Creating Meaning in a Distracted World. London: Routledge. 2017. A number of the ideas covered in this thesis were presented in a lecture by Walker at the Australian National University School of Art and Design 13/10/2016 and are the subject of his forthcoming book. Much of his work appears suppositional, and some of the ideas appear Ruskinian and deliberately unreferenced but none-the-less interesting as it relates to the thesis.
My studio research engages the ideas and works of important progenitors John Ruskin and Alvar Aalto introduced in the previous chapters in a triangulated, dialectal approach, a discourse, a conversation and synthesis in the development of these studio works. The choice of both Ruskin and Aalto is for their advocacy or use of a Christian creatural analogy for design as opposed to a machine analogy. Motivation for the research is both to understand my position and practice within the current paradigm, in what is a challenging contemporary context. For different reasons, though fortuitous, Alan Colquhoun in his excellent critique of post-modern architecture and design quietly asks the question as to whether a Christian conception of design or visual system, might be worthy of study. Colquhoun's interest is in light of contemporary problems he raises in philosophical approaches, of 'multiple paradoxes' and 'rampant pluralism'. In his musings he mentions in particular the work of the philologist Erich Auerbach and his analysis of early Christian literature as worthy of interest for a comparison in the outworking of philosophical approaches. Colquhoun notes a Christian visual system for its lack of the use of style, its realism, its ability to adapt, its focus on nature and its engagement with local traditions.

This chapter covers the philosophical, conceptual, aesthetic and technical development of these 'conversational' works as contemporary proposals addressing the outcomes of the research.

Context.

Current approaches to design and production typically involve a philosophical view that is machine based or is grounded in a machine analogy as discussed. I argue that although contemporary culture, loosely identified as post-modern, even later modern, is, as authors such as Colquhoun and Fuller argue, essentially one based on a machine/materialist analogy. Attempts to create a philosophical space apart from a machine analogy by contemporary phenomenology for example or an engagement of past stylistic models appear to fail; as Colquhoun notes they are still 'unmistakably' and 'inescapably'

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357 Note: Whilst Ruskin is clear in his exposition of a Christian creatural view, Aalto's creatural view is not clearly defined. Whilst it is part of his Lutheran upbringing and culture it is under tension, it is possibly tied up in a conglomerate of separate ideas that may ultimately be called Pantheistic. What is clear is that Aalto rejects a philosophical machine or materialist view.
359 Ibid. p. 28.
modern. The implications of Colquhoun’s observations are that current philosophical approaches produce largely circularized outcomes for practitioners without them fully understanding why it is so.

If we begin to read Aalto as having a creatural view, or at least exhibiting the characteristics of one, then we have a continuity of ideas and a manifestation of them from Ruskin into the modern period roughly covering 1830 - 1960. One would expect that if Aalto exhibits significant characteristics found in a creatural view, in contrast to his peers who pursued a machine analogy, we would expect to see clear differences in their work and writing. The most representative of Aalto’s peers would be Le Corbusier, both architects have left a legacy of an ideological divide, more importantly, is the nature of the ideological divide understood?

By engaging the works and ideas of Ruskin and Aalto in the studio research I propose to explore the path of reconciling the use of the literal machine to a creatural view, believing that as Aalto showed, a creatural view can effect the employment of the literal machine. If Colquhoun’s analysis of a Christian visual system is correct, then its flexibility, its realism, its focus on nature and engagement with local traditions, would not preclude it from engaging the literal machine. On the contrary, one would expect it to have a more measured and sensitive use of the literal machine, in contrast to the making the machine an end in itself. If we take Ruskin’s view that the use of handwork is a means to explore our very nature, as well as the natural world around us, by coupling we have the potential to engage a space that is un-machine-like with the literal use of the machine. A significant part of Ruskin’s battle with the literal machine as he saw it in the 19th century was its coupling with a philosophical machine view, and its enslavement of man in all its forms, socially, aesthetically, physically and ultimately philosophically. The question is how do we engage the literal machine with a soft touch of hand and heart? What spurned Ruskin was that he could foresee the day that everything would be made by machine or that its processes, its analogies and values would dominate its outcomes. He concludes in a footnote,

Again too much fuss and metaphysics about a perfectly simple matter; inconclusive besides, for the dishonesty of machine work would cease, as

361 Colquhoun, Modernity and the Classical Tradition. p. ix.
363 Colquhoun, Modernity and the Classical Tradition. p. 28.
soon as it became universally practiced, of which universality there seems every likelihood in these days.\textsuperscript{364}

In what appears to be a contradiction to what we understand that Ruskin saw as handwork, contemporary handwork has become to a greater extent ‘mechanized’ where objects are conceived and handmade whilst holding a philosophical machine view. Yet Ruskin himself observed this, whilst he does not identify it specifically as an ontology, he writes: ‘It indeed, possible, and even usual, for men to sink into machines themselves, so that even hand-work has all the characteristics of a mechanism; of the difference between living and dead hand-work.’\textsuperscript{365} The old arguments of handwork then appear on the face of it to no longer hold true, rather the real argument is philosophical, bound up in a world-view.\textsuperscript{366} Ironically advanced digital machining and 3D printing now provide opportunities for a complexity that has largely outgrown old paradigms of machine work. Yet given the present machine ontology can we fruitfully engage it? Handwork as Ruskin saw it was an outworking of a Christian epistemology and ontology, a creatural view of man valued as a whole being, created in the image of God. This relationship made him capable of engaging the world around him in a highly developed ‘sensibility’ with God, or to use a quote from Giorgio Vasari writing in the mid 1500’s ‘like God Himself.’\textsuperscript{367}

In response the development of the studio proposals I have identified and returned to a specific Australian landscape at Norseman, Western Australia as a reference for most of the particulars of the works. This is not a new focus, it started with my undergraduate studies, though now finding Ruskin and Aalto gifted and critical allies to further explore its potential in an academic process. Given a number of options including the fact I no longer live there, I have chosen the place for its profound formative connection and relationship, its familiarity; it is the place of my childhood, and its contrasts. The landscape exhibits similar contrasts found in Aalto’s Finland – that of forest and lake. Saito in his book on Aalto, Ten Selected Houses (2008) acknowledges the significance and impact of this for Aalto (and others) as creating ‘works that reveal the traces of the primal landscapes and formative experiences of their lives.’\textsuperscript{368} It becomes a means of outworking a profound relational experience.

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\textsuperscript{365} Ibid. p. 55.
For Aalto it was virtually subarctic Finland, whereas mine is the largest temperate woodland in the world with the normally dry-bed salt lake Norseman, Western Australia. In the outworking of a creatural view of nature for design both Ruskin and Aalto engage landscape as a formative relational experience as well as a national/regional/specific loci approach to design.
Fig. 37. Aalto’s property, Island of Muuratsalo, Lake Päijänne, Finland.
Ruskin’s introductory.

In his short ‘Introductory’ to the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Ruskin establishes an important precondition to it’s understanding. He writes that the nature of architecture is a ‘political art,’ the subject of laws and as such it is a ‘moral one.’ 369 His second precondition to an understanding of the text, (which includes the first) I am personally committed to also. The frailties of my own soul, makes my work as also Ruskin’s, the lesser, or ‘smaller’ depending on the condition our hearts before God. Ruskin’s Aphorism 1 states ‘We may always know what is right but not always what is possible’. He clarifies this with the statement:

*while a man’s sense and conscience, aided by Revelation, are always enough, if earnestly directed, to enable to discover what is right, neither his sense, nor conscience, nor feeling, is ever enough, because they are not intended, to determine for him what is possible.* 370

370 Ibid.
Ruskin is clarifying the difference between legality and with it legalism and the freedom of Revelation gives within it the possibilities of legality. His use of the term ‘Revelation’ is one signifying that it is God by revelation who provides for us what is right in freedom and grace, it is not something that we can discern in our own nature. Ruskin understands the chief aim or purpose of man’s work ‘is to please God’ and this is affirmed by Colossians 3:2. According to Ruskin there are ‘two separate lines of argument: one based on the expediency or inherent value of the work, which is often small and always disputable; the other based on proofs of its relations to the higher orders of human virtue, and of its acceptableness, so far as it goes, to Him who is the origin of virtue.’ He concludes:

\[\text{We treat God with Irreverence by banishing Him from our thoughts, not by referring to His will on slight occasions. His is not the finite authority or intelligence that which cannot be troubled with small things. There is nothing so small but that we may honor God by asking of His guidance of it, or insult Him by taking it into our own hands; and what is true of the Deity is true of His Revelation.}\]

Ruskin affirms that revelation is available in a relationship with the Creator in reciprocating communication the creator is interested in the smallest of our tasks.

I personally have numerous experiences to support Ruskin’s thesis, one whilst completing a master’s degree in 1985 at the Royal College of Art in London. It was there I experienced the profound and intimate hand, the touch of God physically on the back of my own hand whilst working on a chair. The experience for me was a life-changing demonstration of God’s interest in the very details and practice of my work. Such supernatural experiences challenges our natural desire, as Ruskin goes on to say ‘to take things into our own hands,’ rather it is an encouragement to trust and look to God in all things. One would expect that the Seven Lamps itself is an outcome of Ruskin’s own confession and experience, his own personal weaknesses included.

The Seven Lamps is a concept established in the ancient Hebraic text of Zechariah 4:2 and the analogy of the seven lamps as the seven eyes of God watching on in the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in the late half of 500BC. Verse 4:6 encourages a reliance on God, His Spirit and His provision of grace to complete it; ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.’ This reaffirms Ruskin’s ‘Introductory’ and his intent for those who would read it and engage its content.

\[\text{371 Ibid. p. 5.} \]
\[\text{372 Ibid. p. 6.} \]
Studio proposals – small tables.

The first studio proposal is a series of small, low tables exploring a number of core ideas. The shared point of reference for each of the tables is eucalypt umbels, with fruit, chosen for their richness in biological variation and visual language to address the aims of the research.373

There are over 700 species of eucalypts found in Australia and they are noted for their very specific ecologies, relationships and intercourses in the landscape, where they ‘pattern’ their place, to use a biblical reference in what we might call an accretive adoration.374 Eucalypt umbels are notable for the particulars of their forms, of diverse and often contrary natures. They share a unity as fruit as metaphors with their inherent seeds for reproduction. The chosen reference site for the studio research, of Norseman, has its own unique fruiting members.375 Both Ruskin and Aalto understood the potential of a metaphorical engagement with nature. Marc Treibl quotes the Italian architect Curzio Malaparte writing in the 1940’s and his observations of Aalto as, ‘everything that he described bore an aura beyond the physical; it was a land of similes and metaphors.’376

374 The Holy Bible Authorized King James Version, Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Psalm 98:8 and Isaiah 55:12 speak metaphorically of the trees of the field ‘clapping their hands’ and the ‘mountains and the hills singing for joy.’
375 Ibid. Romans 1:20 Literally ‘speaks’ of the evidence of the nature of God as clearly seen in the creation.
A focus on fruit and its language in the Australian natural landscape provides a contrary view or reading of our environment, to one variously portrayed among other things as being unfruitful without intervention and subjugation. In his beautiful book *Eucalyptus* (1998), the novelist Murray Bail explores the landscape as various intimate members within a whole rather than parts; he does this through the complexities and vibrancy of human relationship - a courtship.\(^{377}\) In introducing his novel Bail feels compelled to describe the prevailing notion of landscape and its figuration in Australian literature as ‘dun coloured’ and sets about developing the analogy of courtship as a means of knowing, experiencing and remembering its presence.\(^{378}\) Whilst I share Bail’s perspective, our disciplines differ from literature to visual arts. My own interest in this particular analogy comes from a reading of the beautiful and ancient


\(^{378}\) Ibid. p. 2.
Hebraic text of The Song of Songs, a pattern that I had used as a model before identifying the parallel in Bail’s use in Eucalyptus.  

The Song of Songs text, alternately known as the Song of Solomon brings with it a history of allegorical reading in both the Hebraic and Christian literature. It is a description of intimacy with God, explored by authors such as the so-called mystics, medieval writer Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1103), Brother Lawrence (1605-1691), Madame Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717) to name a few. The Song of Songs text, like much of biblical language makes extensive use of nature metaphors in its exposition, an intensely poetic language. Ruskin tentatively explores ‘sensuality’ and ‘voluptuousness’ of line, he is cautious of his use of the word ‘sensuality’ prefacing its use with ‘this is a startling word.’ Nevertheless he defines it in landscape as ‘floating, and wavy in its form; deep, rich, and exquisitely soft in its colour; drowsy in its effect.’ We can use Ruskin’s description of a sensual line to describe Aalto’s use of line for it is also ‘floating and wavy’ and ‘drowsy in its effect.’ It is a sensual and a relaxing line more like the line of folds in fabric than an anatomic one.

A quote from the painter Marc Chagall in 1973 from a speech he gave at the opening of a museum dedicated to his works. He writes:

Ever since my earliest youth, I have been captivated by the Bible. I have always thought and still think that it is the greatest source of poetry of all time. Ever since then I have looked for its reflection in life and art. The bible is a resonance of nature and that is the secret I have tried to pass on.

Chagall goes on to say that; ‘For me, perfection in Art and life comes from this biblical source. Without this spirit, the mechanism of logic and construction in Art and in life will not bear fruit.’ Chagall also draws upon the Song of Song’s text with five paintings on the subject.

Teyssot (2013) quotes the philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and his feel for the precariousness in the philosophical shift as it

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Note: I personally wrote to Bail in 1998 noting the Song of Songs analogy and received an apparently rare, appreciative, hand-written letter in reply.


Ibid. p. 135.


Ibid. p. 7.
was happening. Jugendstil as a precursor to modernism Benjamin critically appraised firstly as a ‘repression’ of technology, ‘concealing’ an ‘alibi .... in natural history.”³⁸⁴ Benjamin later believed, ‘the bourgeoisie would start ‘to come to terms with the conditions ... of its dominion over nature’ by integrating technical forms in architecture.”³⁸⁵ For both Ruskin and Aalto their ‘dominion’ within their ontology differs from a materialist one as they hold to a creatural position. Though Aalto appears to repress technology with his use of nature he appreciates the freedom technology brings whilst being its master.

Fig. 40. Eucalypt umbel, model for structure.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 129. [p. 559]
In noting the particular qualities of the botanical sample I have chosen for the reference for the first prototype, in its fresh green state could be described as playful, joyful, fruiting, petite, fragile, but flexible with a particular aesthetic sensitivity. To duplicate the flexibility in the sample I have chosen the modulus of elasticity found in spring stainless steel, deploying the material to reproduce the elegant and flexible structure of the living botanical sample.

A significant number of living plants, like the chosen sample use deflection under load; the ability to flex, to spring, to accommodate stress in dynamic wind loading or impact, recovering their shape under normal conditions. It allows the use of much finer dimensions in structures. *E. Sepulcralis* (weeping mallee) is an example.386

The choice of the eucalypt bud as the reference brings in addition a model for the understructure of the tables, it provides information about locus – where it would normally be found, form, relationship of members, materiality, behavior within structure and models for connections of members and proportions. We have an opportunity to initiate a conversation with a created object in its situational environment, as realism and not as a fracture, abstract or chance, but as a relational engagement, one not philosophically or intellectually opposed or disconnected.

Materials.

In choosing the use of stainless steel for the understructure of the small tables I am faced with a dilemma in the choice of material identified for its cold, clinical and industrial feel. It raises the question of how I deal with that and it’s use in a domestic interior?

Both, Ruskin and Aalto wrestled with the appropriate use of materials, their engagements are richer than what is generally understood by the often-quoted ‘truth to materials’ for which Ruskin is well known; of being truthful to the material in the way it is worked and considered. Aalto describes steel, particularly chromed steel as ‘psychologically cold’ for use in furniture and he moves from steel to wood from what could only be described as a moral position, 386

deliberately resisting the contemporary status of steel in all its modernity. Aalto's assessment would indicate that materials offered a set of sensorial relationships that were either psychologically friendly and engaging or unfriendly and distant - even alienating. Though Aalto started with experiments in steel in 1930 in line with work of his international peers, it was short lived, quickly shifting his experimentation to wood.

Fig. 41. Interior of Aalto’s home in Turku, late 1920’s with Marcel Breuer steel tube chairs.

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387 Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 90.
An example of Aalto’s response to the use of steel in his architecture is to employ work cane as metaphoric bark, carefully wrapping the steel columns at key heights in the interior of his Villa Mairea.\textsuperscript{389} He also uses vertical sections of wood and raw saplings overlaid on the steel columns at the entrance to the villa Mairea (see Figs. 42, 44). The wood overlay is repeated on the columns at the entrance of the Maison Carré.\textsuperscript{390} In \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture} Ruskin describes the Greek use of fluting on their columns as analogous to bark.\textsuperscript{391} Aalto photographs Greek fluted columns three years before starting work on the Villa Mairea as seen in Fig. 43. Aalto’s use of timber cladding, particularly the example of the Villa Mairea could also be described as ‘bark’ of the building reflecting the character of the bark of the adjacent pine trees along with the use of matt black ceramic tiles around the base of the exterior walls.\textsuperscript{392}

\textsuperscript{389} Saito, ĀRuto No JūTaku / Aalto : 10 Selected Houses. pps. 342-349.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid. p. 45.
\textsuperscript{391} Ruskin, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture. Introduction by Andrew Saint}. p. 104.
\textsuperscript{392} Note: Whilst visiting the Villa Mairea the guide claimed that Aalto had, at some expense, used Oregon an imported American pine, on the exterior cladding
Fig. 43. Alvar Aalto, photograph of Parthenon pillars, Greece 1933.

of the Villa Mairea for its red colouring to reflect the trunks of the surrounding trees.
Aalto values steel for its structural possibilities, whilst defacing it with what modernist would call decorative elements.\textsuperscript{393} From his own descriptions Ruskin would have been sympathetic to Aalto’s treatment, as an interior element he thought steel should be covered, concealed. He proposed the use of steel in architecture essentially as a tensile element in keeping with its nature as it contrasts to traditional building materials; they are typically compressive in strength. At this point in his writing Ruskin is yet to physically see the extensive use of steel in architecture, such as the Crystal Palace in 1851, but he does have the foresight of its coming and cautions its use. Both Ruskin and Aalto recognize a psychological imperative they then identify as moral, as if they feel convicted to protect man’s sensitivity within his built environment. It is a sensitivity ignored at great cost by much of modernism. Aalto typically resolves his problem with the steel columns in a rich metaphoric life that is characteristic of Ruskin’s approach and views.

My conflict in the use of metal in furniture found some resolution using the relationship of ‘furniture as jewellery’. Drawing upon undergraduate training as a jeweler I began to explore the relational aspects of adornment found in jewelry to test metal in furniture. Metal, especially precious metals have a long history as personal adornment, worn close to the body and on the skin. In proposing the use of metal for ‘furniture as adornment’ we are then challenged to discern what is appropriate and what is not, exploring the particular relationship of jewelry as adornment, its relationship with man to use Aalto’s terms ‘physiologically and psychologically.

Whilst Aalto’s perspective is not specifically the same as Ruskin’s ‘when we build we should build forever,’ it is inclusive in its relational needs which is the core of Ruskin and Aalto’s focus that brings with it a continuity.\(^3\) It provides life for buildings and products now and into the future, a focus on being rather than becoming.\(^4\) Though first appearing as jest, on reflection we see the claims of the Futurist Marinetti to be eerily prophetic:

‘... we set up the art of the becoming, the perishable, the transitory and the expendable.’\(^5\)

The aim of both Ruskin and Aalto was to create deeply endearing and enduring relationships, and their choices in the use of materials is at the heart of it. This is in opposition particularly for Aalto of the growing set of beliefs that yesterday’s products and materials and ideas were inferior to the following days in a process of becoming propounding a cycle of style, of fashion and consumer goods.

My use of metal in the understructure of the tables is an attempt to approach the object, bringing to it a history of jewelry making and the art of personal adornment. Professor Herman Jünger, known for his contribution to 20th century contemporary jewelry, distinguishes in his translation from his native German, the difference between adornment and ornament. He describes the difference as intrinsic verses extrinsic in its relationship.\(^5\) He distinguishes between a deeply active relation as adornment with its engaging, inherent depth of beauty and its opposite, a brittle, efflorescent, insubstantial, and ultimately disconnected relationship as ornament. He identifies a deep internalization in adornment, in contrast to what might be described as a predominately ‘intellectual and social

\(^3\) Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 261.
\(^5\) Note: Jünger was speaking informally in a workshop tutorial he gave in Perth, WAIT in 1982.
engagement’ of ornament if we could use Aalto’s association from his Abbé Coignard’s Sermon address.\textsuperscript{398}

Ruskin uses both words in the same sentence with apparent different meanings, albeit subtle. He prefaces the use of the two words with ‘decoration’ and appears to describe ‘adornment’ as the act of judiciously applying ornament.\textsuperscript{399} In both cases adornment gives ‘relief without interruption’ to the ‘general effect’, that it is integral to the whole.\textsuperscript{400} Looking to nature for a model, Ruskin finds utilitarian and non-utilitarian examples for lessons in the use of both.

In using metal for furniture it is with irony that one of the most common trees growing around Norseman is \textit{E. Salubris}. It is noted for its sinewy, metallic, polished bronze bark, of a coppery appearance. In discovering and naming \textit{E. Salubris}, the German botanist Ferdinand Von Mueller found examples in the area around 1876. He identifies what he termed its ‘sanitary importance, its health-giving properties’ observing that the tree had numerous oil glands in its leaves to support his claim.\textsuperscript{401} One cannot help think that the trees unusually clean, sleek, hygienic ‘modern-ness’ of appearance might have contributed to his conviction. A reading of Teyssot (2013) from his section ‘Hygienics to Eugenics’ gives the background to these ideas. Teyssott explores the rapid development of Darwinist thinking and its influence on ideas of architecture and design.\textsuperscript{402} From the anonymity of the undiscovered (to Western eyes) to its identification and description, \textit{E. Salubris} has been given a profound touch of both incongruity and congruity.

\textsuperscript{398} Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 56.
\textsuperscript{399} Ruskin, The Poetry of Architecture; the Architecture of the Nations of Europe Considered in Its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character. pps. 163, 164.
\textsuperscript{400} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{402} Teyssot, A Typology of Everyday Constellations. pps. 58-82.
In Western, European history, there are changes in the nature of furniture as it moves from the discipline of carpentry, to joinery, to interior design and fine furniture making, to furniture design and architecture. In each phase it is transformed in it’s ideas between practitioner and material, though for the most part wood is the material of choice for domestic furniture till the early 20th century.\(^{403}\)

Whilst modeling the initial prototype of the low table, the actual process of interpretation of the botanical sample became the focus when the prototype did not match aesthetic intent. A second and closer examination of the umbel illustrated that my mode of interpretation was one that re-organized the facts, essentially treating them in a simplified, reductionist approach for manufacture whilst overlooking the true character of the sample. This identifies a conscious need for truthfulness, of questioning and playful experimentation; openness is an essential disposition at the heart of the design conception and development relationship. An artistic work, whilst somewhat mysterious in its potential complexity and execution, is self-evident in the reading and this is what Ruskin and Aalto argue for. In a self-evident reading, nothing is hidden, what one thinks and what one does is for all to see in Ruskin’s view, sustaining his argument for truthfulness in the approach to design.

Fig. 46. Eucalypt umbel.

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Whilst the natural sample is roughly quad-fold in symmetry, on closer inspection it has characteristics all of its own, very complex in measurement, shape and line if one were to describe it in precise measurements. The sample has all the qualities that Aalto elucidates when describing the aesthetic of Italian hill top towns in 1924, the divinely inspired mediation between man and nature:

*For me 'the rising town' has become a religion, a disease, a madness, call it what you will: the city of hills, that curving, living, unpredictable line which runs in dimensions unknown to mathematicians, is for me the incarnation of everything that forms a contrast between the brutal mechanicalness and religious beauty in life. It is an everyday yet wonderful form of art, and one that the modern age denies; indeed, the predominant mentality goes to great lengths to avoid it.*

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Fig. 47. Detail. 1st sample, stem and leg junction.

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406 Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*. p. 49.
The first prototype became a model for investigating and illustrating modes of perception from what might be defined as ‘Cartesian’ to ‘natural’; Cartesian, in that the structure has been simplified into regular and predictable coordinates, its made to ‘fit’ a particular method of recording/describing. As an outcome it becomes a way of looking.407 Nature appears symmetric but it is asymmetrical, or imperfectly symmetric celebrating Ruskin’s ‘perfection of imperfection.’

Choice of manufacturing processes and assembly is vital in exploring how a variety of complex outcomes might be achieved with the table. As in nature, by a careful study, each member is uniquely different to the other. A detailed observation of the particulars in each plant, geological material and the wider landscape is an essential reference for observing and translating these subtle complexities. The subsequent observation of them expanded the experimentation with the low tables from the initial focus on structural and material experimentation.

407 Loredana. Mascheroni, ‘Joris & Vico: Joris Laaman Converses with Vico Magistretti, Focusing on Two Different Worlds That Are United by Intelligence and Irony.’ Domus, no. 878. 2005. p. 86. See: Vico Magistretti’s account of ‘design as a language communicable over the telephone.’ I believe Magistretti’s account is simplistic but he is making a contrast that contains a truth.)
Fig. 49. Detail. 3$^{rd}$ sample, stem and leg junction.

Fig. 50. Detail. 4$^{th}$ sample, stem and leg junction.
Fig. 51. Detail. 5th sample, junction hand carved.

Fig. 52. Detail. 6th sample, junction.
Carefully resolving the junction in order to achieve a playful and joyful outcome, the transition between the legs and the trunk was reassessed to consider industrial production. The junction is machined in a symmetric configuration, yet each leg provides in the process of assembly an almost infinite variability in the length, angle and spatial relationship, an outcome due to the curved nature of the legs (spring stainless steel is shipped in a coil). In the process of decision-making, the complexity offered by the spatial relationships becomes an intensely human judgment. I was forced to refer to the original botanical sample to discover how it works.

In total I experimented with ten different junctions, starting with a two-piece clamp to a single-piece with internal screw to hold the legs secure. I experimented with the mass of the junction, the size of the shaft and legs, and the line of transition between the shaft and the junction. A mechanical junction is necessary, as welding such fine section degrades the temper and spring of the steel rendering it unusable. The outcome of the research is an original, variable and inventive solution with the potential for limited industrial production. The
result is reliant upon a careful and sensitive reference to the natural model, locus, materials and finishes in relationship to a ‘whole’.

Fig. 54. Low table, stainless steel, red ash.

For the tops of the tables I have explored both round and out-of-round shapes, shapes that appear round but are not. As noted earlier, they involve far more complex decision-making and discernment in the design experience and likewise in the consequent reading of the work than symmetric ‘ideal’ types – they take time whilst also exposing the manner in which we read our environment. Ruskin
uses the expression ‘raised by feeling’ rather ‘than corrected by rule.’⁴⁰⁸ There appears arbitrariness, complexity, even chaos in the decision-making, or to use Aalto’s observations, it contains ‘dimensions unknown to mathematicians,’ or a mathematical/technical analysis, though it is a relatively simple form.⁴⁰⁹ It is not an arbitrary position, or chance, it simply satisfies or connects with a deep sensibility. Aalto describes it loosely as a ‘religious beauty’, or by extension one spiritually discerned, remembering that his reference was the work of medieval artists, builders and planners that he has seen in Italy. Being able to discern or connect with that sensibility is also dependant on one’s state of heart and focus; it’s never a given. It is an ontology; a way of knowing, seeing and experiencing the world that we are looking at.

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⁴⁰⁹ Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 49.
Fig. 56.  Low table in stainless steel, ebonized eucalypt, acrylic coated RFR.

Fig. 57.  Eucalypt umbel, Lake Cowan, Norseman.
Figs. 58, 59. Prototype, small table, stainless steel, Victorian ash, acrylic coated RPR. Detail.
Fig. 60. Eucalypt umbel.

Fig. 61. Prototype, stainless, hoop pine, acrylic coated RFR.
Fig. 62. Detail. Feet.

Fig. 63. Detail. Five-leg assembly.
Sofa.

In this proposal for a sofa the reference chosen is an aerial photograph of Lake Cowan, my choice of site. The town of Norseman is located on the southern side, at the western end of the lake. The lake is in excess of 90 kilometers long, up to 25 kilometers wide and includes a number of ‘islands’ within it. The famed westerly winds create a shadow to the western side of the islands where a concentration of quartz sand, and salt-bleached organic debris collect forming a ‘halo’ particularly when seen from above. This reference is essentially geological though it has flora residing on the islands. It is from these aerial photographs that I began to model prototype forms.

Fig. 64. Google satellite image, Islands on Lake Cowan, Norseman.
Fig. 65. Google image with overlaid image of model.
Whilst Ruskin famously advocated, as noted, ‘An architect should live as little in cities as a painter. Send him to our hills, and let him study there what nature understands ....’\textsuperscript{410} No one to my knowledge has connected Aalto’s ‘imaginary mountain’ sketches as the basis for the conception of many of his buildings to Ruskin’s injunction. There are secondary geological/landscape references to be found in Aalto’s work; they appear topographical in origin but have wider references and I will engage them here, as it is appropriate to this project.

\textsuperscript{410} Ruskin, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture. Introduction by Andrew Saint}. p. 101.
Fig. 67. John Ruskin, Mount Pilatus (1854).

Fig. 68. Alvar Aalto, ‘imaginary mountain sketch’ conceptualizing the Viipuri Library.

The geological references throughout Aalto’s work are most often a mixture of profiles, flowing, eroded and fractured lines as his early reference to the medieval painter Mantegna illustrates. The same can be seen in the work of
Mantegna's contemporary, Fra Angelico, but he with a softer edge.\textsuperscript{411} They both have a mixture of cartographic, topological contouring and treatment of the landscape an approach that was familiar to both painters. Aalto writes of his experience as a child when he drew at his father's cartographic 'white table' where eccentric profiling of contour lines were a means of describing/documenting the landscape.\textsuperscript{412} We see the connection particularly to Mantegna as he directly refers to him, though Aalto was also familiar with Fra Angelico, referring to him to illustrate a different idea.\textsuperscript{413}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig69.jpg}
\caption{Mantegna; ‘Agony in the Garden’ (1458-60).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{411} Schildt, Alvar Aalto in His Own Words. p. 49.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid. p. 11.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid. p. 50
Fig. 70. Fra Angelico, Sermon on the Mount (1437-45).
Fig. 71. Fra Angelico, The Temptation of Christ (1450).
Fra Angelico also paints the landscape abstracted with contour lines, but the lines as relating to the folds in a fabric. We see an almost literal rendition of Antonio Vasari’s analogy of ‘nature as the beautiful fabric of the world.’ Both Mantegna and Fra Angelico worked in a period where fabric informs a focus in the paintings. It is a possibility that Aalto picks this up and works with it especially in his Savoy vase. In Fra Angelico’s painting ‘The Temptation of Christ’, the hills mimic the folds and drape of clothing depicted also in the picture, while the shores of the lake provide a profile so much like Aalto’s vase it would be possible to hide it in this painting. Aalto, in an impudent manner, suggests that his vase is drawn from a pair of Eskimo woman’s leather breeches. Here one imagines the imitable folds of the leather, or fabric and at another time a profile of a lake edge. Both can be seen in Fra Angelico’s painting.

A closer look around Aalto’s environment reveals numerous, repeating examples that he would have been exposed to. A section from a birch tree or the pattern on the ceiling of the Finnish Arts and Crafts building of Hvtrask all the same aesthetic sensibility, in this case of a folding, wavy line. If Aalto is true to his Abbé Coignard’s Sermon it is the joy of discovering this line that iterates as an intimate experience of discovery. The Spanish architect Miguel Fisac observed when Aalto was visiting Spain, his personal interest was not in the architecture he was shown but the ‘detail that could enrich his thematic forms: the abstract pattern formed by the rays of the sun on a curtain.’

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Fig. 72. Alvar Aalto, Savoy vase. (1936)
Fig. 73. Section through a Finnish birch tree.

Fig. 74. Image from the ceiling at Hvitrask.
The geological reference for the sofa is not a fractured and worn geology as one see’s in a Mantegna or a Fra Angelico, but a softly worn form the result of the action of water and movement, of gentle abrasion and erosion though it has the soft outline of a Fra Angelico shore.

Using the pebble in the model for the sofa brings both a relationship to the landscape recorded in the aerial photograph, whilst also offering a complexity and subtlety of shape and line in three dimensions, one that is difficult to conceive without a reference. This is born out by the fact that in documenting its subtlety on the drawing board, again it has taken careful effort and learning to see the given form. This is not a preconceived or generalized form. The stone itself was chosen for its suitability to function, its textural detail and fine but subtle colouring; it also fits with the characteristics of the aerial photograph when viewed from above. The texture and ‘fabric’ as suggested by the organic flora in the photograph is overlaid on a geological base, it is a characteristic of landscape that flora is often geologically specific creating a relationship between the two.

Ruskin carefully examines the works he appears to detest. His passion and use of polemic appear prejudicial, he was simply not indifferent to pluralism as a norm. We see in his introduction to a paragraph on pebbles and his identification of their form in history:

> Often in association with this horrible design we find, in the Greek works, one which is as beautiful as this is painful - that egg and dart molding, whose perfection, in its place and way, has never been surpassed.

> And why is this? Simply because the form of which it is chiefly composed is one not only familiar to us in the soft housing of the birds nest, but happens to be that of nearly every pebble that rolls and murmurs under the surf of the sea, on all it’s endless shores. And that with a peculiar accuracy; for the mass which bears the light in this molding is not good Greek work, as in the frieze of the Erechtheum, merely the shape of an egg. It is flattened on the upper surface, with a delicacy and keen sense of variety in the curve which is impossible too highly to praise, attaining exactly that flattened, imperfect oval, which in nine cases out of ten, will be the form of the pebble lifted at random from the rolled beach. Leave out this flatness, and the molding is vulgar instantly.416

The steel base frame in the model for the sofa was initially employed as a matter of expediency in supporting and connecting the base to the back in its development. As a mechanistic-like element it troubled me, though there is an element of surprise in its use. It provided a temporary solution and proved to be

a more effective solution than any other I explored. It bothered me as to why it worked at all – what was the connection to my environment that gave it validity? It has the kind of delineation of line at a junction found in a Mantegna or a Fra Angelico painting but equally it has the qualities of the silver, mirrored-like reflection of the mirage and its intersection between the salt lake and the rising geology. It is both a line of contrast, a line of unity and a line that isolates and floats the form from its base.

Fig. 75. Reference island on Lake Cowan with mirage.
The choice of construction method and materials for the sofa recognizes my ongoing difficulty with the use of synthetic foam. Being a dominant technology, alternatives to foam appeared to be non-viable both for the cost and the required skill being difficult to find. It’s a reminder of the conditions that faced August Pugin in his attempts to revive Medieval Gothic architecture in the early 19th century. Pugin was forced to revive the skills needed, which in turn had its impact on both Ruskin and Morris with the creation of the phenomena of the Arts and Crafts movement. Whilst not proposing to revive a craft, the advantage of using natural materials such as springs and horsehair as a construction methodology is for its durability and its non-use of environmental toxins such as those found in fire-retardant foams. As a sustainable, though apparently redundant technology, it is worth investigating to reassess the value of the material and how it can be potentially used. The horsehair is organic, a waste product with a useful life of over one hundred years covering at least two generations of users. The decision to use horsehair and springs was ultimately influenced by a client who took an interest in the model. Whilst designers and manufacturers are co-drivers in the values that operate in manufacture, the client or consumer as we see in other areas such as food production has increasing influence. Although Morris lamented the fact that the swinishly rich were his clients they did give support to his drive for better, value-based products. For Aalto ‘Cheaper is a philosophical pitfall, and a very dangerous one.’ At the same time it is a false assumption that expense equates to good design.\footnote{Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 217.} Aalto sees luxury housing as ‘moral’ if used as a ‘testing ground’ for architects.\footnote{Ibid. p. 188.} Technologies such as springs and horsehair are labor intensive and hence
expensive in the first instance, but not as a product that has continuity. It comes back to Ruskin’s argument that when we build we should build forever, and all that involves. In this example, the sofa contravenes a modernist ideas of the temporal, the becoming.

Figs. 76, 77. Zig-zag springs to form underside with detail of tie-downs.
Figs. 78, 79.  Coil spring assembly top of seat with 6-way ties.
Fig. 80.  1st layer of horsehair covered with hessian on underside.

Fig. 81.  2nd layer of horsehair showing ties, holding the hair in place.
Fig. 82. 2nd layer prior to felt and calico cover.

Fig. 83. Detail of horsehair and ties.
Fig. 84.  Seat prior to final fabric, calico over cotton felt and hair.

Fig. 85.  Steel frame for base and back.
Fig. 86, 87. Coil and zig-zag springs for lumbar support and shape.
Fig. 88. First layer of hessian over spring assembly.
Fig. 89. Sofa, with handwoven, felted wool and silk fabrics.
The fabrics to cover the sofa, their structure and colouring were specially designed and hand-woven by Jennifer Robertson, referring to the aerial photograph and the pebble as a reference. Again such referencing brings particulars, rich in subtle detail. Hand felting of both fabrics to improve their robustness and articulate their surface gave both an artistic, hand-finish. Mary Little, a noted international artist in upholstered furniture, developed the cutting patterns and applied the final fabrics influencing the finish. Not personally having the necessary skills or experience myself, her input, whilst consulting, determined the final result. Both the fabric and its application took the work from an industrial type to one with artistic outcomes and a consistency in the whole work. Such investigative activity has always the possibility of informing industrially produced works.

Creating an awareness of the potential of neglected technologies lost in a Darwinian race to produce more for less cost, more profit for less work, must be central to a designer that engages a creatural view. The experience has been beneficial, both in developing new ways of using the technology but also how the technology might be further developed. This particularly as it relates to ecology, health and the value of sacrifice whilst also cultivating the enduring nature of beauty and permanence, verses the transitory in a product. The Italian theorist and designer Clino Castelli spoke in a public lecture about the nature of ‘inertia’ and its relationship to outcome. Less the inertia required to develop and manufacture a product, the less the commitment to see it endure. He compares a cheap watch driven by a quartz mechanism with a Swiss, hand made mechanical watch. Both have the similar levels of precision and function but cost and disposability are not the same. Sacrifice is a value that will mean the difference.

It would be of some value to look for manufacturers still using springs and hair, if there are any, to explore the possibilities within a contemporary context. As a proposal and a work, the sofa has much to demonstrate as a piece of furniture in the current market. What it proves might be something I myself, or others may engage, as the work of any theorist or practitioner, like Ruskin or Aalto has shown.

The life of the sofa in a final analysis will depend upon the commitment of the owner to service it into the future. It would hopefully reflect its value to the owner out of the fullness of is function and relational opportunities.

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419 Clino Castelli. Lecture given to students at a Domus Academy workshop, RMIT. Melbourne. 1991.
Fig. 90. Sofa, 32° 00’ 51.34” S 121° 46’ 38.39” E (2009-2017) wood, stainless steel, steel springs, hair, jute, hemp, cotton wadding, hand-woven wool and silk fabrics.
Cutlery.

This proposal for cutlery looks to a historical engagement of eating utensils. A study of the European history of the art of cutlery reveals the memory imparted to the object drawing upon typologies with references, social, spiritual, material and functional concerns throughout history. It raises the question does Ruskin’s ‘Lamp of Memory’ preempt Darwinian and anti-historicist ideas of history in his aphorism 27, ‘Architecture is to be made historical and preserved as such?’ If it were true then Ruskin sees ‘stability’ and ‘perfection’ in memory animated by a ‘metaphorical or historical meaning,’ not style. Colquhoun identifies the contradictions in modernism when he says that the ‘Notion of modernity explainable only in part by historicism, yet modernity clearly rejects historicism or is anti historicist.’ Aalto shares Ruskin’s valuing of history, particularly as it relates to location and culture as having continuity. It is an honest, living, dynamic connection and relation, not about dogma, or ideals.

Fig. 91. Eucalypt leaf with salt encrustation. Lake Cowan.

Fig. 92. Eucalypt leaf with salt encrustation. Lake Cowan.

The generic terms ‘leaf shape’, ‘tapering leaf shape’, ‘leaf shape point’ are terms used in the descriptions of blades in historical works of cutlery.\textsuperscript{422}

The cutlery proposal has leaves of native flora - even litter as its source; they are ‘ordinarily seen’ series of lines to use Ruskin’s words.\textsuperscript{423} On the one hand they challenge the ideas of the new, verses the ubiquitous-yet-unseen in our natural environment. A contradiction has been wrought in our focus on the machine. Ruskin in his aphorism 15 of ‘The Lamp of Truth’ in the \textit{Seven Lamps} admits that whilst the internal form of geology has a crystalline ‘straight line’ structure, it is not ordinarily seen and therefore not considered to be beautiful in the same way as what is seen in the everyday world.\textsuperscript{424}

\textsuperscript{423} Ruskin, \textit{The Seven Lamps of Architecture. Introduction by Andrew Saint}. p. 108.
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid. p. 108.

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Fig. 93. Various typologies in sample eucalypt and hakea leaves.
Figs. 94, 95. Typologies in sample eucalypt leaves.
He writes with a qualification:

*It will evidently follow, upon our application of this test of natural resemblance, that we shall at once conclude that all perfectly beautiful forms must be composed of curves; since there is hardly any common natural form in which it is possible to discover a straight line. Nevertheless, Architecture, having necessarily to deal with straight lines essential to its purposes in many instances and to the expression of its power in others, must frequently be content with the measure of beauty which is consistent with such primal forms; and we may presume that utmost measure of beauty to have been attained when the arrangement of such lines are consistent with the most frequent natural groupings of them we can discover ....*.\footnote{Ibid. p. 108.}

In modernism the straight line becomes the line of the machine, the efficient line, the universal line. The language of the new, contemporary machine, the digital machine, is now in the form of segments of a straight line driven by algebraic equations – algorithms full of somewhat dubious curves.\footnote{Richard Coyne, *Technoromanticism*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1999. p. 261.} This is not the ‘unknown line’ to Aalto’s ‘mathematicians,’ still it is a process and tool that challenges us to potentially bend, to serve us if we can discover what his
'unknown' line is whilst it is also metaphoric. Though admitting the necessity of a straight line in architecture, it is still a violation of nature for both Ruskin and Aalto and any opportunity to explore the possibilities of nature was taken by Aalto.\textsuperscript{427} In a fascinating observation/proposal by Ruskin in his design of flat roofs he suggests that a combination of straight lines, their relationships determined by a series of imagined curves offered by the landscape might find a sensitive connection.\textsuperscript{428}

![Fig. 97. John Ruskin, Poetry of Architecture](image)

Lines found in eucalypt leaves, in this case selected individual leaves, like Aalto’s snowflakes or blossoms represents a contrary, both the idea of standardization, and the particular. Ruskin and Aalto’s playful approach is joyful with a delightful sense of discovery and flexibility.

**Material.**

Cutlery has endured a monoculture when it comes to the choice of material for its manufacture, particularly given the significant technological and manufacturing developments. It is of interest to see that stainless steel has become a universal standard. Blair identifies the dishwasher as the source of this, but it is not altogether to blame.\textsuperscript{429} Acknowledging the rich material culture of cutlery in pre-modernism, it is notable that utilitarian/functional/economic values, even laziness effectively robbed it of its material history.

\textsuperscript{427} Saito, ĀRuto No JūTaku / Saito Yutaka = Aalto: 10 Selected Houses. p. 103.

\textsuperscript{428} Ruskin, The Poetry of Architecture; the Architecture of the Nations of Europe Considered in Its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character. p. 244.

\textsuperscript{429} Strong, Masterpieces of Cutlery and the Art of Eating. p. xiii.
It is from these initial experiments with the cutlery that I felt forced to diverge, to experiment with alternatives and re-engage its history.

Aalto’s use of terms like ‘materialism’, ‘humanism’ and ‘functionalism,’ are easily slotted into a contemporary or a given historical paradigm. A careful study of Aalto’s writings on the other hand shows that he had a very personal understanding and use of the terms, even in his own context. In the book accompanying an exhibition of Aalto’s work at the Museum of Modern Art in 1998, subtitled ‘Between Humanism and Materialism’ the focus of the essays are essentially materialistic, and though they seek to address Aalto’s ideas, one is left
with a deep sense that they fall short.\footnote{Kenneth Frampton, \textit{Between Humanism and Materialism}. Note: it is a general observation of the contributing writers to the book that they do not recognize nor engage with Aalto’s own use of the terms.} From the beginning of his career Aalto is clearly no humanist or materialist in the modern sense, but that is how he is generally read in an effort to make him fit the contemporary paradigm. Presumption is a pitfall in approaching Aalto rather than being to what Aalto is saying.

Karl Fleig worked in Aalto’s office as an assistant between 1953 and 1958. He interviewed Aalto for a Swiss publication in 1970 where he digs deeper into Aalto’s induction of form from functional requirements, noting that with Aalto that there was something more going on in his process.\footnote{Schildt, \textit{Alvar Aalto in His Own Words}. p. 267.} Aalto’s response was:

\textit{Yes that's true – but whether the functional forms are right depends on what you mean by functional requirements and how deeply you analyze human life. The three forms of art, architecture, painting, and sculpture are linked to one another in that they are all manifestations of the human spirit based on material.’}

Questioned over his use of the Greek word ‘\textit{materia},’ Aalto responded; ‘that it is primary matter as substance yet the word \textit{materia} means more, for it translates purely material activity into related mental process.’ In bringing in material as a third party to the form and function debate he does not directly answer the question but is consistent in presenting a profound view of relationships. For him, materials themselves bring a unique experience in their inherent nature as material, with the invitation of a physical and psychological interface engaging the human spirit. Aalto calls it a ‘confrontation’ to resolve as though it were a deep moral and spiritual dilemma, though a liberating one.

Functional forms are not in Aalto’s view simple utilitarian outcomes they are of deep and complex reading of human life, and our engagement with our environment of materiality. Aalto is able to link architecture, drawing and sculpture through \textit{materia} as a unifying process. This is illustrated in some outstanding outcomes working from pencil and ink sketches to building, or drawing to architecture. He says that ‘The links in \textit{materia} leave open every opportunity for harmonious synthesis.’ It would be interesting here to compare writing and making, and drawing and making as it would exemplify a difference in links and non-links of \textit{materia}. From a designer and makers view the link between drawing and making is more natural than that of writing and making. Aalto’s \textit{materia} has roots in the Arts and Crafts movement; materials for Aalto are not simply fit for function. He goes on to speak of his contemporary context and challenges in the use of materials:
Every year new synthetic materials are produced in semi-industrial and industrial sectors. “Matter,” however, requires time, and not all new materials are mature enough yet for human being to make full use of them. Modern architecture does not mean the use of immature materials; the main thing is to refine materials in a more human direction.\textsuperscript{432}

From Ruskin’s writing ‘truth to materials’ could be simply interpreted as using materials in an honest way, confirming their inherent characteristics technically and aesthetically. Yet like Aalto there is another dimension to materials and that is their relational, one might say adornment aspect, and that is not out of keeping with Ruskin’s ideas.

Ruskin similarly expounds a ‘confrontation.’ It is not however a violent nor subtle attempt at control but a relational approach of hand and heart saying that men:

\ldots are continually trying to produce art by the trick or habit of fingers, without using their fancy or sensibility. This also is hopeless. Without mingling of heart-passion with handpower, no art is possible. The highest art unites both in their intensest degrees: the action of the hand at its finest, with that of the heart at it’s fullest. Hence it follows that the upmost power of art can only be given in a material capable of receiving and retaining the influence of the subtlest touch of the human hand. That hand is the most perfect agent of material power existing in the material universe; and the full subtlety can only be shown when the material it works on, or with, is entirely yielding.\textsuperscript{433}

\textsuperscript{432} Ibid. p. 269.
\textsuperscript{433} John Ruskin, \textit{On Art and Life}, 'The nature of Gothic' first published in \textit{The Stones of Venice} Vol. 2. 1853
The choice of monel metal, an alloy of copper and nickel for the final manufacture of the hollow handles of the cutlery, provides both rigidity and durability with a wall thickness of 0.7mm. The total weight of each piece brings an airy lightness with a deliberate, precise sense of handling in use. Whilst giving a softer and warmer feel than stainless, monel is responsive to colouring by heat oxidization as shown in Fig. 102. The alloy is electrolytically compatible with stainless and silver, dealing with potential corrosion problems in the dishwasher. The use of both monel and silver is an option that explores the possibility of materiality associated with patina that develops with use, a record
of relationship. It is a characteristic that both Aalto and Ruskin loved about materials, their patina, their ability to record and express life as if it were as pen on paper for a poet, or a canvas and paint for a painter. Patina and material, as a thing of beauty is a joy forever for both men, the potential for the sensorial, human touch and encounter imparted to a work.434 ‘When we build we should build forever’ is a necessary relation.

Much has been made of Aalto’s interest in patina as an anti-modern statement. Radford and Oksala in their article Alvar Aalto and the Expression of Discontinuity (2007) and George Baird in Alvar Aalto (1970) touch on this.435 Schildt disapprovingly refers to it as ‘pessimism.’436 Radford and Oksala speak of Aalto’s architecture as ‘discontinuity’ and ‘decay;’ Baird speaks about the architecture of ‘ruins’. All these concepts are not representational as surviving works of Aalto, particularly in Finland, are well loved and cared for. Baird identifies Aalto’s interest as ‘heroic’ looking back to Greece and Rome, though Ruskin’s The Stones of Venice and Aalto’s ‘ great love of Venice’ itself are closer to home. It was Ruskin’s arguments about the beauty of patina that has changed the manner in which buildings are appreciated, preserved and restored. Patina for both Ruskin and Aalto is contrary; it is about the permanence of beauty.

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The cutlery reinforces the reference to the leaf in its handling, its lightness and sense of ethereality yet purpose much like a scalpel. The bulbous return on the ends of the handles defies a sense of awkwardness and contradiction to fit well in the hand. The shapes of the handles and blades give a symbolic reference to what might be served as a meal. Names have been given to the individual shapes; sprout, tuber, legume, leaf, carne, rhizome, citrus, berry, nut, egg, fruit, bulb, squash and crustacea, though each form relates to a particular leaf and individual species of eucalypt.
Given a selection of shapes of both blade and handle one has a choice to match what is being served, to interact in a more dynamic experience of eating.

Fig. 101. Hollow tableware in monel, fine silver and stainless steel.
There is a sense of Ruskin’s ‘grotesque’ in the forms of the cutlery, something Ruskin observes as an essential element of Gothic. It was challenge to use inelegant forms given the nature of the selection of leaves I had collected. Though the grotesque and its essential part in Gothic art, he writes very little about it in the *Stones of Venice*, though he partners it with ‘wit and humor’ in his earlier work of *The Poetry of Architecture*. Bullen in Wheeler and Whiteley (1992) draws attention to the fact that Victor Hugo and Ruskin pointed to the ‘vitality and energy’ of the grotesque as an important idea in the aesthetics of European Romanticism. It was viewed as evidence of the ‘life and liberty of every workman who struck stone,’ in contrast to the ‘cold perfection of classicism.’ It is an expression of play, as I see play in the work of the Creator. It is a challenge to appreciate the beauty of the whole of creation with its varied aesthetic works.

The blades’ for the cutlery, including the fork and spoon ends are cut from spring, stainless steel sheet. Pressing or laser cutting, grinding and forming are all conventional production techniques used in the making. The junction between the handle and the blades had been a stumbling block, the proposition of the silver ferrule provides an additional materiality, the silver will patina in time though the ferrule did not satisfy my intent without knowing what my real solution was. Whilst finishing the set pieces, a spare handle was available that I proceeded to play with, it was here that I found a possibility that is simpler to manufacture, removing the ferrule, and satisfies the intent for an alternative and inventive solution to the junction. The solution works by notching into the side of the blades tang to keep the line of the handle and blade as one, whilst overlapping on the flat where it does not disrupt the line. Chemical bonding the tang into the blade is a simple process, filling the hollow handles with resin is an option without adding substantial weight to the pieces. TIG welded handles, as with conventional hollow manufacture requires hand finishing, albeit with a machine interface. It does provide a rare opportunity given the subtlety of the lines of the cutlery to bring the touch and skill of the hand that Ruskin argues for.

Fig. 102. Hollow tableware, heat oxidized monel and stainless steel.

Utilizing a visual resource of that which is most ordinary seen – eucalypt leaves, brings forth that which has both precedent historically, engages its context, yet is inventive, elegant in its use and particular. It has prospects for further development and manufacture with its conventional use of processes and techniques though challenging the way we may use and experience cutlery in a fuller, relational sense.

The cutlery proposals are developed with a sensitivity to place, history of the objects, environment, how the works might be used and the possibilities for manufacture, all developed within a continuity of values. A continuum is present in the works also, in their adaptive nature to place, materials, technology and processes for inventive and original outcomes.
Conclusion.

Fig. 103. John Ruskin. Australian Opal (19th & 20th centuries).

For me personally the legacy of Ruskin and Aalto has been critical in understanding where I fit within a paradigm of continuity; an affirmation of the essential nature of my practice and its values within a rich legacy of a creatural view, and not as some ironically suggest in the current pluralistic context as idiosyncratic.

As an example to explore of anyone taking a creatural view into modernism Alvar Aalto has been exemplary in demonstrating characteristics of what that might look like.\(^{439}\) The choice of Aalto was based on correspondences in his

\(^{439}\) Note: There are others, such as the Catalan Modernists Antonio Gaudi (1852-1926) and Josep Maria Jujol (1879-1949), important figures on the edge of early modernism. Pevsner in *Pioneers in Modern Design* (1936) strangely includes Gaudi but excludes Aalto.
ideas, writing and practice, with those expounded in the early part of 19th century by John Ruskin. The fact that the key writers of early modernist architectural history exclude Aalto from their histories, says more about their recognition of Aalto’s differing epistemology and ontology, disqualifying him given their own teleological readings. Rather than exclude Aalto as a key figure in early modernist history, the thesis reaffirms his beguiling, unique position within it. Looking at Aalto from his beginnings, given his stated epistemology of 1924/25 that has the expressed characteristics of a creatural view, brings a more cogent understanding of his thinking and work. Given Aalto’s example, the thesis brings to light a paradigm of continuity, freedom, wisdom and germaneness for the present.

The core virtue of Ruskin’s work was his ‘theoria’ verses ‘aesthesis’ approach to show how historically values had been engaged within a Judeo/Christian worldview - with outcomes, even beauty. We can compare Ruskin’s analysis with Erich Auerbach writings almost one hundred years later; he uses comparable terms, ‘ethico-theological’ verses ‘aesthetic/stylistic’. Thus armed Ruskin engages a number of arenas in an, ‘all of life view,’ bringing together art, polity, justice, health, economies, and the church. His writing is set in a society rich with the promise of the Industrial Revolution, as it brings an almost profound understanding and application of the everyday in science and technology. It is this promise that progressively becomes the source and cause of a scientific materialism worldview.

The Industrial Revolution, with its failures of dislocation, industrial disease, exploitation, deprivation and environmental pollution, was also full of promise and reward - an explosion for which Ruskin equally shared an interest. In time we have progressively experienced some reformation as Ruskin saw the need and it can be clearly argued that he had significant influence, whilst we see the erosion of the foundation of values themselves creating equally profound problems.

What we discover in Ruskin’s writings in his ‘theoria’ approach was his leaning to the Divine and the prophetic. Given his epistemology, he writes ‘We may always know what is right but (without revelation) not always what is possible.’ Using his gifting as an architect, Aalto leans to ‘intuition’ for revelation in dealing with the architectural program and its complexity. He is also aware that he has a

440 Note: Gideon excludes Aalto in his first issue of Space Time and Architecture (1941) but gave Aalto prominence 11 years later in the 2nd, revised and reprinted edition (1952).
message of continuity; he does not subscribe to the unrealism of universals or ideals.⁴⁴¹

Ruskin’s well known aphorism ‘when we build we should build forever’ is a statement about the value of work, materials, resources, environment, culture and who we are as human beings.⁴⁴² It is a legacy of Ruskin that Aalto shares. It is a commitment to future generations and can be to be contrasted with materialism, fashion, mass consumption, obsolescence and waste, with devaluing human life, of becoming rather than being, with power over nature rather than nurture, with relativistic and deterministic pluralism than meaning.

Refusing a reductive and mastery approach to design and architecture, both Ruskin and Aalto choose to embrace the complex whole and its interdependency with theoria, believing that to do so reflects the nature of our humanity, the natural and spiritual world we live in. By embracing the complex whole it introduces freedom, risk and misunderstanding, with accusations of anarchism and pluralism; which Ruskin fought, and by the complexity of his work Aalto would be falsely accused of.

As a shared legacy I believe a creatural view offers a ‘coherent discourse’ in addressing Colquhoun’s ‘deep concern’ over ‘an absence’ or using Weston’s expression for this period; ‘difficult times’.⁴⁴³ The research has been affirming with a rigorous intellectual approach, previously lacking in my practice. For both Ruskin and Aalto, what they admired came with wisdom, their understanding within a creatural view proffered insights from both their epistemological and ontological positions. The thesis has enabled me to appreciate the richness of the legacy of a creatural view, for not only to ‘inquire as to the wisdom displayed in the realization of the architectural work’ to quote Charrington and Nava as they look at Aalto, but to also enquire into the wisdom both men possessed in how they looked.⁴⁴⁴ The research offers ways forward with profoundly rich, relational opportunities and insights that I trust the studio proposals begin to touch on.

Coming back to values and their position in the thesis, notably their capacity to engage deeper purpose and meaning, the social scientist Richard Slaughter in his article Welcome to the Anthropocene (2012) attempts to provide a ‘reality check’

for the present. Though he is attempting to address ecological problems, he is looking at the wider society that is inclusive of design and mass consumption. His use of the term ‘Anthropocene Epoch’ is a catchphrase to describe the period before us as ‘a phase in history of both humankind and of the Earth when natural forces become intertwined, so that the fate of the one determines the fate of the other.’ Slaughter appears to be challenging scientific materialism as he draws attention to the false belief that science and technology hold the key to shaping the future – he calls them ‘externals.’ In looking for a solution he notes the decline of the ethico/theological approach noting the ‘lost salience’ of most of the Churches in the West. He can only suggest ‘intangibles’ – his word for values as an answer.

For Aalto and Ruskin a creatural, ethico/theological approach brings forth restraint, wisdom and correction in a time of change. It is worth quoting Fuller on Ruskin again bearing in mind Ruskin’s world-view is an ‘all of life’:

Perhaps that unity between scientific, spiritual and aesthetic life, which Ruskin longed for, is again becoming possible .... He provides clues not only to the spiritual and aesthetic dilemmas of his time, but also for our own.

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