

FIGURING THE SUBLIME IN ENGLISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE 1640–1730

Caroline van Eck

The architects of the Anglican churches built after the Civil War took great pains to avoid any suggestion of idolatry, both as a reaction against the excesses of High Anglicanism in the uses of art in church ritual under the rule of Charles I, who was accused of being a crypto-Catholic, and as a way of preventing new waves of iconoclasm. This raised another problem: how to avoid that these new churches would lack religious dignity and would simply become barns for the congregation, as the extremist wing of Puritans had wanted them to be during the Civil War? How to choose between what Sir Christopher Wren called ‘an Auditory’ on the one hand, and the larger churches built ‘for the *Romanists*, [for whom] it is enough if they hear the Murmur of the Mass’?¹ How, in other words, could an Anglican architect, working after the idolatry of the Stuart Kings before the Civil War, and the iconoclasm and destruction of churches that occurred during Puritan rule, design churches that would comply with the rejection of images but at the same time convey the divine presence? How, that is, create a building that would possess religious efficacy without falling in the traps of idolatry or the danger of iconoclasm?

The sublime and awful appearance of churches

English architects may not have produced any treatises comparable to those of Alberti, Serlio or Palladio in the period before 1715, but they, their patrons and the general public, did write a great deal about one particular issue: the design of Anglican churches.² Both the Anglican hierarchy

¹ Sir Christopher Wren, “Letter on Building Churches” (1711), reprinted in Soo L. (ed.), *Wren’s “Tracts” on Architecture and Other Writings* (Cambridge – New York: 1998) 115.

² See Eck C. van (ed.), *British Architectural Theory 1540–1750: An anthology of texts* (Aldershot: 2003), in particular Part III, where some of the texts mentioned here, including *De Templis*, the memoranda by Vanbrugh and Wren, and the minutes of the Commission overseeing the building of fifty City churches are reprinted.

and the Stuart rulers, who were also head of the church, were anxious to develop a formal vocabulary that would break away with Mediaeval traditions, but not too much, because they were reluctant to part from the English tradition, and claimed the Anglican church was in fact much more faithful to original Christianity than the Church of Rome. At the same time Anglican churches should not look too much like contemporary church design in Italy or France, for obvious reasons. As a result much was written on this issue, not in the least to legitimize stylistic and liturgical choices. All the very extensive minutes of the meetings of the Commission overseeing the building of Fifty new city churches, installed in 1711, survive for instance, but already in 1638 a very detailed, anonymous treatise *De Templis*, on church architecture, was published and widely read. Much of the discussions by the Commission limited themselves studiously to practical details, but a few statements about the religious character of these buildings stand out. In church design, Sir John Vanburgh, one of the architects involved in the 1711 campaign, advised, 'the necessary dispositions in the usefull part of the Fabrick, shou'd be made consistent with the utmost Grace that Architecture can produce, for the Beauty of it.' Pediments were the only ornament allowed by the Committee. Charles Wheatly's *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*,³ published in 1710 and the most widely used manual on liturgy and the furnishing of churches, admitted that the early Christian churches at Tyre and Constantinople were 'incomparably sumptuous and magnificent', and allowed the use of expensive materials, columns and pediments, but plainly stated that 'No Images were worship'd'; quoting Origen on idolatry, he added that

the Images, that were to be dedicated to God, were not to be carv'd by the hands of artists, but to be form'd and fashion'd in us by the word of God; viz. the virtues of justice and temperance, of wisdom and piety, &c. that conform us to the image of his only Son. "These (says he) are the only statues form'd in our minds; and by which alone we are persuaded 'tis fit to do honour to him, who is the *Image of the invisible God*, the prototype and archetypal pattern of all such images.

The churches should not have too many windows but be suitably dark, because as Vanbrugh put it, windows

³ Wheatly C., *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England* (London: 1710) § 4.

likewise take off very much, both from the Appearance & reality of strength in the Fabrick; giving it more the Air of a Gay Lanthorn to be set on the Top of a Temple, than the Reverend look of a Temple it self [...]

And finally breaking with this tendency only to tell architects what not to do, Vanbrugh added: '[a temple] shou'd ever have the most Solemn and Awfull Appearance both without and within, that is possible'.

The churches built in the decades around 1700 complied with this careful brand of Anglicanism: they lack statues and pictures, as the interiors of Wren's City (Fig. 1) churches show, conspicuous by their absence of any pictorial representation of the main doctrines of Christianity; the city churches by Hawksmoor look solemn and awful indeed, with their overbearing rustication and abstract ornament without any clear Christian reference (Fig. 2); their Michelangeloesque play with the laws of tectonics (Fig. 3), and their use of Hellenistic Baroque elements to articulate and decorate the interior, as shown by the use of ressauts in the interior of Christ Church (Fig. 4).

As I have argued elsewhere, the principles underlying these designs, with their abruptness, lack of gradual change, oversizing of subordinate elements and upsetting of the viewers's expectations are very similar to the principles of composition outlined by Longinus in his treatise on the sublime, a work that had been edited and translated into English at least four times before the 1690s, and which was present in many of the libraries of the architects and patrons involved in building the City churches.⁴ To give but one example: Longinus defined composition as the union of conflicting or contradictory elements. Here is his analysis of a description of Odysseus' shipwreck in the *Iliad*.

Moreover, by forcing into an abnormal union prepositions not usually compounded he [Homer] has tortured his language into conformity with the impending disaster, magnificently figured the disaster by the compression of his language, and almost stamped on the diction the precise form of the danger. [...] What they [Homer, Sappho and Demosthenes] have done is to clean up, as it were, the very best of the main points, and to fit them together, allowing nothing affected or undignified or pedantic to intervene. These things ruin the whole, by introducing, as it were, gaps and crevices into masses which are built together, walled in by their mutual relationships.⁵

⁴ Eck C. van, "Longinus' Essay on the Sublime and the 'Most Solemn and Awfull Appearance' of Hawksmoor's Churches", *Georgian Group Journal* 15 (2006) 1–6.

⁵ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, translated by W.H. Fyfe, revised by D. Russell (Cambridge (Mass.) – London: 1995) X, 203–5.



Fig. 1. Sir Christopher Wren, St Stephen Walbrook, London 1672–80, interior. The altar is a 20th-century addition.



Fig. 2. Nicholas Hawksmoor, St Mary Woolnoth, London 1716–27.



Fig. 3. Nicholas Hawksmoor, St George Bloomsbury, London 1716–31, North side. Photograph: Sophie Ploeg.



Fig. 4. Nicholas Hawksmoor, Christ Church Spitalfields, London, 1714–27, interior. Photograph: author.

This immediately recalls the abrupt transitions and 'conflicting unions' of Hawksmoor's St Alphege (Fig. 5), the abrupt articulation of the spire of Christ Church (Fig. 6) or the careful ordering of discontinuous façades in St Anne Limehouse (Fig. 7).

These English translations also introduced a new aesthetic concept: the sublime. Before the English translations of Longinus the sublime aesthetic was not part of the English architectural vocabulary. Vanbrugh's plea for solemn and awful appearances in church design may be heir to a tradition of appreciating Gothic for its sombre, imposing grandeur, but it had not been used in the context of classical church design before Longinus was reintroduced into Britain. His treatise inspired an aesthetic unlike that of Alberti or Palladio, who had stressed harmony, simplicity, clarity and perspicuity. Longinus, and in his wake Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor, appreciated the intricate, the difficult, the dark and the awful. Architecture, as Sir Christopher Wren would put it, 'aims at eternity'.⁶ It should impress the beholder and inspire awe.

The poetics of the sublime and the politics of representation

This English interest in the sublime was not simply a matter of following the French fashion for the sublime, to which Boileau's version of 1674 had contributed so much, because editions and translations had begun to appear on English soil at least as early as 1638. Instead, I would suggest, the interest in a sublime aesthetics of religious architecture was very much formed in two intellectual, religious and political constellations, in which the sublime played a central role: in the political culture of the Civil War and Cromwell's rule; and in the search for an architectural language to figure the divine and host worship that would be primitive both in the sense of reflecting the practices of the earliest Christians, and in the sense that it would approach the original, divinely inspired language God had given to mankind and which was lost when the Tower of Babel was built, to which I will return in section four of this essay.

Two issues were conspicuous in public debate during this period: High Anglican idolatry versus Puritan iconoclasm, and political leadership, more in particular the character of Cromwell's rule and the trial and

⁶ Sir Christopher Wren, "Tract I", in Soo L. (ed.), *Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings* (Cambridge – New York: 1998) 153.



Fig. 5. Nicholas Hawksmoor, St Alphege Greenwich, 1712–18. Photograph: Wikipedia Commons.



Fig. 6. Nicholas Hawksmoor, Christ Church Spitalfields, London 1714–27, exterior.
Photograph: Steve Cadman.



Fig. 7. Nicholas Hawksmoor, St Anne Limehouse, London 1714–25. Photograph: Steve Cadman.

execution of Charles I. Both issues were often discussed in sublime terms, by royalists and supporters of Parliament or Cromwell alike, as David Norbrook has recently shown.⁷

An anonymous treatise called ‘Chaos’, published in 1659, for instance gave the foundation of a republic a Longinian sublimity, even alluding to the famous ‘Let there be light’ passage from *Genesis* that Longinus had so famously quoted:

As Light was the first thing in the Creation, and so properly called the work of the first day; so for her first days work [the republic] propounds for the Balancing of Interests, and reducing each piece to its proper place [...] so if any one piece seem to be wrested out of place, the weight and frame of the whole prevents it.⁸

Here we find the same view of a whole, whether it be a building or a compound sentence as a kind of precarious balancing act between conflicting

⁷ Norbrook D., *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge – New York: 1999).

⁸ An., *Chaos* (1659) 2–4, quoted by Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 400.

parts as in Longinus' passage on the conflicting unity in Homer quoted above. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* the war in heaven waged between the forces of Satan and the heavenly hosts is first compared to the battles fought at the end of the Roman Republic, and thereby the dissolution of the republic is associated with the dissolution of the entire cosmos.

[...] two broad suns their shields
 Blazed opposite [...] from each hand with speed retired
 where erst was thickest fight, the angelic throng,
 And left large fields, unsafe within the wind
 Of such commotion, such as to set forth
 Great things by small, if nature's concord broke,
 Among the constellations war were sprung,
 Two planets rushing from aspect malign
 Of fiercest opposition in mid sky,
 Should combat, and their jarring spheres confound. (PL VI. 305–15)

Marchamont Nedham, another supporter of Parliament, pleaded for a symbolic reordering of time and place, proposing that books were no longer dated from the Christian year, but from the first year of liberty, as would be done in France in 1789 – about as sublime a gesture as you can make. He did so in 1650, the same year in which the statues of King James I and Charles I were to be thrown down from the new west end portico of St Paul's Cathedral (Fig. 8). Thomas Cromwell, the leader of the Commonwealth, was also described in terms that come very close to the Longinian sublime. In the *First Anniversary Ode* by Andrew Marvell Cromwell is compared to the sun, a simile traditionally reserved for kings:

Cromwell alone with greater Vigour runs,
 (Sun-like) the stages of succeeding Suns:
 And still the Day which he doth next restore
 Is the just Wonder of the Day before (7–10)

In such passages a system of metaphors and similes is constructed, which present Cromwell as the sublime architect of a new state; in a transformation of the traditional metaphor of the cornerstone for royal upholders of divine order, he becomes the dynamic mover and shaker of a new order. His fall from a horse is transformed into an event overturning the natural course of things:

Thou, Cromwell, falling, not a stupid tree,
 Or rock so savage, but it mourned for thee:
 And all about was heard a panic groan,
 As if that Nature's self was overthrown.
 It seemed the earth did from the centre tear;
 It seemed the sun was fall'n out of the sphere (202–6)

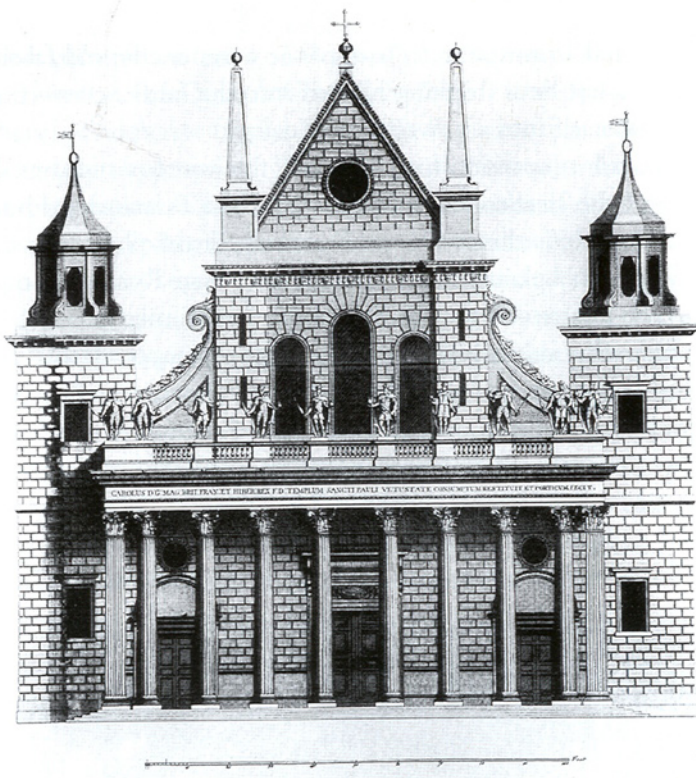


Fig. 8. Inigo Jones, St Paul's Cathedral. West front, 1634–42.

And in an anonymous poem on Cromwell's death the ultimate sublime topos is used: that of sublime unrepresentability

Th'earth ne're was seen at once, nor can a minde
Larger then that, & more unconfinde⁹

But it was not just founding the republic, or the character of its Protector, that was represented in terms of sublimity; even the execution of King Charles was described as the height of the sublime. In Marvell's *First Anniversary Ode* Cromwell is first presented as a new Amphion, where Charles had often been called a 'normal' Amphion, for instance in Edmund Waller's poem praising his restoration of St Paul's Cathedral of 1631:

⁹ Quoted by Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 387.

So when Amphion did the lute comand,
Which the god gave him, with his gentle hand,
The rougher stones, unto his measures hewed,
danced up in order from the quarries rude;
This took a lower, that an higher place,
As he the treble altered, or the bass (51–56)

In the *Horatian Ode*, also devoted to Cromwell, the latter is compared first to a cunning merciless hunter of royal prey; next the execution of the King is presented as a sublime moment of theatricality, presenting in one scene both the death of Cromwell's quarry and the unpitying exultation of the onlookers:

... twining subtle fears with hope,
He wove a net of such scope,
That Charles himself might chase
To Carisbrook's narrow case:
That thence the royal actor born
The tragic scaffold might adorn:
While round the armèd bands
Did clap their bloody hands. (50–56)

John Hall (1626–56), a Cambridge-educated pamphlet writer for Cromwell who was the first English translator of Longinus,¹⁰ also saw the execution of Charles as a sublime act. It allowed for a restored sense of vision that before had been dazzled by the false splendour of royalty, and by upsetting what seemed divine right, restored the natural order in one act of sublime violence. John Milton even compared, in a passage full of echoes from Longinus' description of composition quoted above, writing an epic with killing a king:

[...] just as the epic poet, if he is scrupulous and disinclined to break the rules, undertakes to extol, not the whole life of the hero whom he proposes to celebrate in his verse, but usually one event of his life... so let it suffice me too, as my duty or my excuse, to have celebrated at least one heroic achievement of my countrymen (*Areopagitica* 685).

To describe the political and religious convulsions authors often used architectural metaphors. The royalist poet Edmund Waller had described Charles' building activities for Saint Paul's, commissioning Inigo Jones to add a new portico clearly based on the Pantheon, to Amphion's

¹⁰ Hall John, *Peri hupsous, Or, Dionysius Longinus on the Height of Eloquence. Rendered out of the Originall by J.H.* (London, s.n.: 1652).

harmonious architecture. But in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, an epic about the wars between Caesar, Pompey and Marc Anthony that ended the Roman Republic, which was widely read and imitated during the 17th century, republican, primitive sublimity in architecture is contrasted with imperial monumentality. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* the archangel Raphael describes the cosmos; no longer as a mathematically ordered harmonious whole, supremely accessible to human rationality, but as a *concordia discors* that strains the boundaries of representation. Incidentally he also downplays any sense of monarchy as part of a divinely ordained natural order:

And for the heaven's wide circuit, let it speak
the maker's high magnificence, who built
So spacious, and his line stretched out so far;
That man may know he dwells not in his own;
An edifice too large for him to fill,
Lodged in a small partition, and the rest
Ordn'd for uses to his Lord best known.
The swiftness of those circles attribute,
Though numberless, to his omnipotence,
That to corporeal substances could add
Speed almost spiritual; me thou think'st not slow,
Who since the morning hour set out from heaven
Where God resides, and ere midday arrived
In Eden, distance inexpressible
By numbers that have name. (*Paradise Lost* VIII, 100–113)

In a complete reversal of the classical aesthetic favoring clarity, transparency and regularity, the architecture of the cosmos is now sublime because it is incomprehensible. But it is still described in architectural terms. Even the inner self has become sublimely unfathomable. In *Vox Pacifica* the Parleментарian poet George Wither put it thus:

(*looking inwardly*) I saw distentions
So boundlesse, in their *Width*, their *Depth*, and *Height*

They look like the depths of the ocean or mountain valleys:

A *Place* (if *Place* we call it may)
Within the Concave of whose wondrous *Orb*,
The Eye of *Contemplation* may survey
Sights, which no *Bounds*, or *Shaddows*, do disturb.¹¹

¹¹ *Vox Pacifica* p. 13, quoted in Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 143.

All these quotes are not amassed here to suggest that there is a direct line of influence from Marvell, Milton or Wither to Vanbrugh and Wren, not in the least because it would be difficult to explain why the royalist City commission and its architects would opt for such a Puritan and Parliamentary aesthetic. But the passages just quoted do illustrate the nature and the function of these, quite frequent, uses of the sublime to talk about politics, the cosmos, or the execution of kings. They show how widespread the rhetoric of the sublime, in the sense of a sublime style, had become by the 1650s in England. Even if England at that time hardly could boast its own theories of art or architecture, David Norbrook has made clear that the sublime provided a very powerful mode of thought, or one could even say architecture of metaphors, to discuss both actions, objects and works of art that in some manner broke generally accepted moulds. In that sense the sublime provided a poetics to represent the unrepresentable, and thereby a model for Restoration architects who had to convey some sense of the divine without being able to use figurative art.

Sir William Dugdale's History of Saint Paul's Cathedral

How the sublime could function within an architectonic context to figure what the mind cannot encompass may be illustrated by one of the first monographs devoted to one building, Sir William Dugdale's *History of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, from its Foundation*, first published in 1658. Dugdale (1605–86) was a royalist and Garter Principal to the King, who from the early 1640s foresaw what would happen to England's churches if the Puritan iconoclasts got their way: 'the Profanation of all Places of God's Publick Worship, Destruction of Monuments in Churches, and Defacing whatsoever was beautiful and ornamental therein.'¹² God would be turned out of churches into barns, and from barns into the open fields. The book is therefore partly a legitimization of church building, drawing on the Bible and the Church Fathers, partly a visual record of the graves and inscriptions destroyed by the Puritans, partly a building history, and a documentation of titles, deeds and donations as well. It was illustrated by the Czech engraver Wenceslas Hollar, and draws implicitly on the sublime

¹² Dugdale William, *The History of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, from its Foundation* (London, Maynard: 1716²) ix.

in very interesting ways.¹³ Thus Dugdale quotes a passage of sublime, in the Longinian sense, rhetoric by Bishop Hooker who announces the fury of the iconoclasts as an *Umwertung aller Werte*:

He hath by some Enchantment so deeply bewitch'd Religion itself, as to make it in the end an Earnest Solicitor and an eloquent Persuader of sacrilege, urging confidently that the very best service, which Rulers of Power can do to Christ, is without any more Ceremony, to sweep all, and to have the Church as bare, as in the Day it was first born.¹⁴

But the sublime resides above all in Hollar's etchings of the interior. These do not show all the statues, altars, votive gifts etc that would have adorned the interior until the 1640s, but vast empty spaces that are represented in such a way that the mind cannot really comprehend them: in the great etching of the nave for instance, the rows of pillars on the left and right are depicted not as parallel rows occupying the same space at both sides, but lopsided, under an angle, so that the row on the right seems to pull the eye of the viewer into a vast, dark, unfathomable space (Fig. 9). It brings to mind Kant's remark about the sublimity of Saint Peter's in Rome: the visitor underestimates its vastness; only once you have entered and start walking down the nave does its vastness begin to unfold itself. Hollar and Dugdale stress the sublime character of the nave in the captions to these etchings, where they call the church a stupendous basilica. In the etching of the depleted choir, they quote and paraphrase from Vergil's description of the sack of Troy in *Aeneid* I.399, and the profoundly wrenching effect this has on the mind (Fig. 10); and most intriguingly of all, in another interior view they quote Lucretius 'tantum potuit suadere religio' – such is the persuasive power of religion – but do not finish the quote – malorum: to do evil.

The sublime and the primitive

There was another context as well in which the sublime functioned as a way to figure the sacred in architecture: the *ambiente* of the Barberini at Palazzo Barberini in 17th-century Rome. The Barberini not only boasted

¹³ On the collaboration between Dugdale and Hollar see Roberts M., *Dugdale and Hollar. History Illustrated* (Newark – London: 2002); on the images and their captions see Pennington R., *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Work of Wenceslaus Hollar* (Cambridge: 1982).

¹⁴ Dugdale, *The History of Saint Paul's Cathedral* 147.



Fig. 9. Wenceslas Hollar, Interior View of Old St Paul's London. Illustration for Sir Paul Dugdale, *History of Old St Paul's from its Foundation*, London 1658. Photo: private collection.

a pope – Urbanus VIII – and several cardinals, they were also collectors of classical and contemporary art, founded a library, hosted academies and sponsored scholars, in particular the historiography of the early Church and its buildings, which was still in its infancy at the time. One of these was Leone Allacci (1586–1669), a Greek Catholic polymath from Chios who arrived in Rome in 1564 to study, became librarian to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, subsequently with Cassiano dal Pozzo an art buyer for the Barberini collection of classical sculpture, and ended his career as Vatican librarian. In a pioneering article of 1989 about the role



Fig. 10. Wenceslas Hollar, View of Interior of Old Saint Paul's looking towards the East, from Sir Paul Dugdale, *History of Old St Paul's from its Foundation*, London 1658. Photograph: private collection.

of early Christian archaeology in Hawksmoor's church designs Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey has shown that Allacci's books and letters about the seven wonders of the world and early Christian temples were a formative influence on the Anglican divines who inspired Hawksmoor's design of Anglican churches that would recall 'ye purest times of Christianity'.¹⁵ But what is less well known, is that Allacci also produced a translation of long passages from Longinus. These are part of a treatise on sacred oratory, *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo*, published in Rome in 1635 and dedicated to the Apostolic protonotary Iohannes Slingeland.¹⁶

The book opens with a discussion of the original, unique language God gave man in Paradise, which lost its universality with the construction of the Tower of Babel to be replaced by the infinity of languages and dialects that now obstruct universal understanding among human beings. These languages are the images of inner speech, or rather, the *rationis imago*, the image of the original, divine word or ratio. In sublime eloquence, where the orator comes close to original language, there is very little distance between inner and outer speech, because there to conceive a thought and to utter it are fused. The highly figural language of sublime speech therefore comes closest to primitive speech.¹⁷

In a move that recalls Wheatly's rejection, quoted above, of tangible and visible works of art in favour of the inner image directly instilled in the heart of the believer by God, Allacci from the opening pages of his treatise places his discussion of sublime sacred oratory in the context of figuration, in the sense of giving outward shape to one's inner thoughts. It is through the highly charged sublime style Pindar for instance used, with its use of abrupt and dense metaphor that the orator can attract the minds of his audience, direct their will away or towards whatever he chooses.¹⁸ With his praise of the silent eloquence of heroic actions Allacci

¹⁵ De la Ruffinière du Prey P., "Hawksmoor's 'Basilica after the Primitive Christians': Architecture and Theology", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 48 (1989) 38–52. See also his more recent study, *Hawksmoor's London Churches* (Chicago – London: 2000), which extends and further documents the argument of his earlier article by reconstructing in great detail the connections between Italian and English students of early Christian churches, Anglican discussions of church architecture and Hawksmoor's designs.

¹⁶ On Allacci see Fumaroli M., "Crépuscule de l'enthousiasme au XVII^e siècle", in *III^e Congrès International d'Etudes Néolatines (Tours 1976)* (Paris: 1980) XI, 1279–1305, idem, "Rhétorique d'école et rhétorique adulte: la réception européenne du *Traité du Sublime* au XVI^e et XVII^e siècles", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 1 (1986) 36–51, and Nau C., *Le temps du sublime* (Rennes: 2005) 32 ff.

¹⁷ Allacci Leone, *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo* (Rome, Mascardi: 1635) 11–12.

¹⁸ Allacci, *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo* 23: 'quod diceret Pindarus *akron aoton* intelligamus, cuius ope Orator hominum caetus dicendo tenet, mentes allicit, volun-

opens the way to a sublime eloquence of the visual arts, where he had been preceded by the French rhetoric teacher Father de Cresolles, who had stressed the effectiveness of the *orator tacens* and eloquent silence in his *Vacationes Autumnales* of 1620, a widely read rhetoric handbook in which he as well had quoted large passages from Longinus. The examples Cresolles had given include silence as a strategy used by orators, but also the silent exempla of the martyrs and saints. Their actions and attitudes demonstrate God's word to the viewer.

At the same time, the sublime is linked to primitive speech, in the sense of the language God originally gave to mankind. Allacci published his book at the moment Urbanus VIII had started his campaign for christian *renovatio*, and both his investigations of early Christian church architecture and his treatise on oratory can be connected with the papal effort.¹⁹ They share a way of looking at Christian art, whether it be church architecture or oratory, which favours ways of expression that go very much against recent artistic developments: one of the problems that troubled 17th-century students of early Christian art was their lack of artistic or aesthetic appeal when measured against Renaissance standards. Allacci was closely involved with the antiquarian investigations of the Barberini circles, such as Cassiano dal Pozzo's project to list and describe all that remained of Roman antiquity in his *Museum Chartaceum*, which continued Raphael and Pirro Ligorio's antiquarian efforts, or the excavations of primitive Christian remains as published by Antonio Bosio in *Roma sotteranea* in 1632, which resulted in an inventory of all iconographical and epigraphical traces of early Christianity.

Clélia Nau has argued that this archaeological project, this dream of reconstructing the ruins of pagan and early Christian Rome, closely resembles Longinus' desire to preserve the fragments he knew of Homer or Sappho and restore if not their works into their pristine grandeur, than at least their sublimity of style.

tates impellit, quo velit, unde autem velit, deducit'. The passage shows a striking similarity to a passage in Lione Pascoli's 'Vita di Andrea Pozzo', in his *Vite de' Pittori Scultori ed Architetti Moderni* (Rome, s.n.: 1736) 192: 'Piu prodigiosa però di tutti mi pare la prospettiva, la quale ingannando a suo piacere la vista ci tira a vedere qual che non è, e fa cadere su' nostri sensi cioche poscia veduto, o da piu vicino, o da piu diverso punto non trova'. And cf. Pascoli's remark on rhetoric: 'All'energia dell'eloquenza che si gloria di trarre il cuore dell'uomo ovunque vole, e di muovere lo al suo arbitrio all'ira, al diletto, allo sdegno, e all'amore.'

¹⁹ On Urbanus' efforts at *renovatio* see Fumaroli M., *L'Age de l'éloquence* (Genève: 2002 [1980]) 204–11.

The same might be argued for Hawksmoor's attempts to bring back to life the architecture of the primitive Christians. Pierre du Prey and Vaughan Hart have shown how Hawksmoor used what knowledge was then available about early Christian architecture through the travel accounts of Wheeler and others to develop ground plans and interiors that would resemble the churches of these early believers; they have also shown how Hawksmoor combined elements of historical architecture. The spire of St George Bloomsbury for instance incorporates elements taken from the mausoleum at Halicarnassus and the temple of Bacchus at Baalbec that are crowned by a sacrificial altar topped by a statue of George I (Fig. 11). But we might go even further, and argue that two of the most striking aspects of Hawksmoor's churches, their radical subversion or lack of traditional formal elements, and their very conspicuous use of Roman religious vessels, such as the sacrificial altars on the roof of St Alphege (Fig. 5), may in fact be interpreted in terms of Allacci's view of the sublime as a return to primitive, sublime speech in their refusal of the historical tradition of church architecture and their subversion of the rules of classical architecture to create stone figurations devoid of iconographical content that border on the abstract. The door frames at St George's Bloomsbury completely overturn the traditional structural role of the keystone (Fig. 3). The huge, abstracted version of rustication covering the entrance wall of St Mary Woolnoth, might almost be called a thematization, and in that sense figuration, of the idea of a wall with an entrance (Fig. 2). St Alphege in Greenwich combines a very stark Doric façade with very conspicuous sacrificial vessels on its roof, thus fusing the idea of primitivism with that of sacrifice (Fig. 5). When seen from a distance the façade of Christ Church Spitalfields appears flat; only when one approaches it and mounts the steps does one realize the depth of the portico (Fig. 6); similarly, the ressauts in the interior appear not to protrude significantly, but when one starts to enter the nave, they step forward and change the impression the space creates completely, from a rectangular to a square (Fig. 4). Here an element of Roman architecture used originally to carry a statue (as in a triumphal arch) is used to shape and transform the way the viewer experiences architectural space.

All these details have in common that they break away from traditional use: they are used to create a 17th-century view of primitive Christian architecture, and do away with iconographical content, but all act very strongly on the viewer, whose normal expectations are subverted or deceived to create an experience of the "solemn and awfull" character of the religion celebrated in these churches.



Fig. 11. Nicholas Hawksmoor, St George Bloomsbury, consecrated 1731, view of the spire (photograph: Wikipedia Commons).

Conclusion

The sublime functioned in various ways in Anglican architecture of the decades around 1700. It provided the aesthetic vocabulary of the dark, intricate, solemn and awful that is the very opposite of the Renaissance aesthetics of Alberti or Palladio. The version of the sublime developed in the *ambiente* of the Barberini by Allacci forged a link between sublime eloquence, both spoken and silent, and divine, original language, which combined with the antiquarian investigations of the same circle contributed to a vision of architectural history in which the primitive is favoured over the Renaissance version of architecture *all'antica*. These ideas may very well have reached Hawksmoor through his learned Anglican patrons, who by means of intermediaries such as Emanuel Schelstrate were aware of Christian Barberini archaeology of the 1630s.

At the same time, a series of editions and translations of Longinus was published on English soil from the 1630s, and initially, as in the case of John Hall, sprang from a desire to revive religious oratory and the powers of free, republican speech. These systems of metaphors were developed in religious and above all political contexts to represent the unrepresentable: killing the king, abolishing the religion of Rome, or founding a new republic from the very foundations.

The sublime thus provided a series of metaphors, one might almost say a poetics, to represent the divine by architectural means. In Anglican architecture around 1700, this could no longer be represented, suggested or conveyed by means of statues or sculptures or even inscriptions. The façades of the churches by Hawksmoor or Wren are empty, abstract, classical aniconic compositions; the interiors are devoid of crucifixes, statues or paintings. Confronted with the task to convey some sense of the divine presence, or sacred character of churches, architects turned to the aesthetics, or rather system of metaphors provided by the sublime from the 1630s onwards. Because these metaphors of the sublime became so frequent, and all shared some architectonic feature, just as architecture is an important source of metaphor in Longinus, they provided after the Restoration a means, a poetics of representing the divine in an abstract way, by highlighting architecture's vastness, precarious composition, and its capacity to direct, unsettle or transform the visitor's experience. Even today, the visitor to Saint Paul's is told that the best way to grasp the infinity of God is to look at the vast spaces Wren created.

Bibliography

- ALLACCI, L., *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo* (Rome: 1635).
- DE LA RUFFINIÈRE DU PREY P., "Hawksmoor's 'Basilica after the Primitive Christians': Architecture and Theology", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 48 (1989), 38–52.
- , *Hawksmoor's London Churches* (Chicago and London: 2000).
- DUGDALE, W., *The History of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, from its Foundation* (London: 1716²).
- FUMAROLI, M. "Crépuscule de l'enthousiasme au XVII^e siècle", in *III^e Congrès International d'Etudes Néolatines* (Tours 1976), Paris 1980, vol. XI, pp. 1279–1305.
- , *L'Age de l'éloquence* (Genève: 2002 [1980]).
- , "Rhétorique d'école et rhétorique adulte: la réception européenne du *Traité du Sublime* au XVI^e et XVII^e siècles", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 1 (1986), 36–51.
- HALL J., *Peri hupsous, Or, Dionysius Longinus on the Height of Eloquence. Rendered out of the Originall by J.H.* (London: 1652).
- LONGINUS, *On the Sublime*, translated by W.H. Fyfe, revised by D. Russell (Cambridge, Mass. and London: 1995).
- NAU, C., *Le temps du sublime* (Rennes: 2005).
- NORBROOK, D., *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge and New York: 1999).
- PASCOLI L., 'Vita di Andrea Pozzo', in idem, *Vite de' Pittori Scultori ed Architetti Moderni* (Rome: 1736).
- PENNINGTON R., *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Etched Work of Wenceslaus Hollar* (Cambridge: 1982).
- ROBERTS M., *Dugdale and Hollar. History Illustrated* (Newark and London 2002).
- WREN, C., "Letter on Building Churches" (1711), reprinted in Soo L. (ed.), *Wren's "Tracts" on Architecture and Other Writings* (Cambridge and New York: 1998).
- VAN ECK C.A. (ed.), *British Architectural Theory 1540–1750: An anthology of texts* (Aldershot: 2003).
- , "Longinus' Essay on the Sublime and the 'Most Solemn and Awfull Appearance' of Hawksmoor's Churches", *Georgian Group Journal* 15 (2006), 1–6.
- WHEATLY C., *A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England* (London: 1710).