Rediscovering the essence in a classical order through analysis and deconstruction

Contradicting study through the methods of John Ruskin and Jacques Derrida

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to expose a classical Vitruvian archetype and subject it to the logic of deconstruction. The process engages two opposing camps and mindsets, and, through analysis, reaches a point that allows the reader to make assessments on how the archetype fulfills the perceived objectives of its time and how it can be assessed through a more contemporary methodology.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employs two methodologies in the analysis of an architectural model that became a reference point in the evolution of Western Architecture. A traditional approach similar to Ruskin’s Victorian-style analysis and criticism builds the study’s foundations. That is followed by the method of deconstructivism, challenging the traditional thought, resurfacing of the duality of every attribute assigned to the initial datum. Initially, the study brings to the proscenium the nature of this classical order as a sui generis archetype, defining the engendered properties that describe it. That is followed by an inverse process as applied by the twentieth-century deconstructivist movement.

Findings – The paper finds the dichotomy of perception of a classical architectural archetype based upon the methods applied.

Practical implications – Recognition of a dichotomy of perception of a classical architectural archetype becomes overture toward a number of well-defined archetypes based on what could be considered Cartesian non-complex architectural archetypes.

Originality/value – This paper offers a Gestalt-based reflection on the nature of the Doric order.

Keywords Greece, Architectural theory, Classicism, Deconstructivism, Doric

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The Doric order, a robust yet elegant archetype, is the one of the three main orders associated with strength, as opposed to wisdom attributed to the ionic, and beauty attributed to the Corinthian. The precision in its detail can challenge the delicacy of the Corinthian and the later Roman composite versions. It encompasses a series of characteristics that pertain to the geometric forms, the location, the orientation and the relation to natural and manmade elements in the vicinity. This study is an attempt to bring to surface these characteristics, and then to examine to what degree these characteristics succeed in defining this archetype.

Defining the Doric order

There exists neither geometric or mathematical formula, nor a set combination of formulae that like a matrix of equations can be applied to define a perfect Doric temple. Referring to the cornerstones of treatises in Architecture from Vitruvius’ Ten Books of Architecture, to De Re Aedificatoria by Leon Battista Alberti, an applicable comprehensive formula is not made available. It is apparent that the definition of an edifice that conforms to the Doric order is that of an archetype. It is not perfectly tangible. A typical example, to use as a reference to determine the classification of an architectural object or place, would be as fallacious as the perfect human form drawn by Leonardo Da Vinci. It may be evidenced that the deconstructivist theory is applied at this stage already, but this is not the purpose at this point yet (Derrida, 1987).
There is no perfect Doric temple that seamlessly fits a set of norms of neither a perfect Gothic cathedral nor a perfect Byzantine church, although authors like Ruskin give extensive descriptions of how the absence of geometric perfection and formality can become criteria to qualify a good Gothic edifice (Ruskin, 1960). Even par excellence examples, such as the Parthenon or the Notre Dame, had elements or characteristics foreign to their orders. The Parthenon carried an ionic frieze and probably four ionic columns in the rear chamber, and the front of the Notre Dame of Paris is essentially symmetrical, which, according to John Ruskin’s definition, would be considered a bad example of Gothic (Carpenter, 1970). Within its austerity, the Doric formulae allow some flexibility. An example is the peristyle arrangement of the columns along the $X \times 2X + 1$ formula, which is attributed to the Golden Ratio, and a majority of temples being hexastyle with thirteen columns on the side, but occasionally varies to $X \times 2X$ (Webb, 1996). This already allows the configuration of a hexastyle and an octastyle formation, but a heptastyle—although possible—cannot be applied because a central column would be cacophony to the processional character and the direct relation of the cult statue to the exterior. One of the most well-executed temples, the one of Aphaea in the isle of Aegina, encompassing almost all the rules, built with the finest precision, fails the $X \times 2X + 1$ formula, and the result is a hexastyle temple with 12 columns on the side instead of 13 (Plate 1).

Besides the fact that a number of rules are established, such as the geometry of the column capitals, the proportions of the columns height to width, the locations of Triglyphs and Metopes, these rules are not imperative to identify an edifice as Doric. In fact, there are other nuances such as the location of an edifice within its environment (Scully, 1962) or the dedication of a temple to a deity, which are just as important as the above-mentioned physical characteristics, e.g. a temple dedicated to Athena would better follow the Doric order as it would better match the character of that deity. Of the many parameters that contribute toward the definition of a Doric edifice, some may even be restrictive to others or setting conditions that could lead to physically near impossible true adherence to rules. As an example, one can refer to the opisthodomus of the Parthenon where, using the proportions elaborated by A. Choisy, the lower drums of the columns would be enormous in size and impossible to quarry and transport.

Beyond such issues of physical geometric nature of the edifice, there are parameters related to geographical location, solar orientation, proximity to physical elements such as water, hills, mountains or even geographical relations of temples with global coordinates that would generate a perfect geometrical shape on the map (Scully, 1962). These parameters make the task of design and building of a “perfect” Doric building an anticipated impossibility. Could a

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Plate 1.
Watercolor rendering of the Temple of Aphaea in Aegina
building that merely carries Doric shafts and capitals qualify as Doric? Or perhaps a simplistic mathematical formula such as stated above, or the arrangements of Triglyphs and Metopes above the columns and in front of the flexural structural elements that they hide behind them suffice (Figure 6)? It is a well-balanced set of relations of these distinguishable features together with the location and orientation within the site that integrate the built entities in a distinct manner that call for the definition of the Doric. The omission of one of the physical features may not disqualify a design from being Doric, and it should be accepted by the reader that there can be a degree of redundancy, although some features can be more important than others, granted that one can refer to examples such as the temple of Empedocles which can challenge the rules to margins (Plate 2). Furthermore, there is a fluidity of values and understanding of heritage that is dependent upon the variances in methodologies of evaluation, and the spirit of the times. Farahani et al. (2015), claim that heritage is a series of socially constructed interpretations of the past. It can be extended to consider that history, is constructed the same way and the interpretation of data varies according to the social values of the time.

As earlier mentioned, a balanced set of relations is what is most important in analyzing the true nature of the order. It can be viewed through the following list of inner core characteristics that are to be addressed individually:

- the openness;
- the supremacy;
- the integrability;
- the civility;
- the austerity; and
- the singularity.

It is useful to examine each one of the above-mentioned properties, and analyze it and its applicability when examples are observed.

**Openness**

The notion of openness refers to one of the most notable characteristics of the Greek temple (Scully, 1962). There is a virtual demarcation line which delimits the exterior and the interior of the temple but which cannot determine the exact point of entrance to the edifice. The interior may correspond to the intercolumniation of the peristyle, the Stoas or the Pronaos. There is a
composition of linked spaces: one being part of another without defined boundary, and one part visually leading the user to another right to the very core of the edifice where the cult statue would be located. It is a sequential order that leads the user from the exterior to the interior allowing the direct visual connection of the cult statue in the core of the temple to the altar outside, in front of the temple where the rituals would take place (Pausanias, 1988; Crahay, 1991).

Beyond that physical aspect of this attribute, the observer experiences a different type of openness. This notion of openness is not unrelated to the factors of the climatic conditions and the landscape. Thus, there is an association of this openness to the proper exteriority and concept of space (Martienssen, 1958). Part of this leads to the third factor of integrability. There are concrete characteristics that clearly distinguish the Greek example from others such as the Indian temple, which resembles an elaborately sculpted rock with one clear entrance and one pathway, or the Muslim mosque which incorporates an open interior courtyard and is closed to the outside. Yet, the Doric can be compared to a type of architecture that intends to expand toward the outside with its structure, the way the Greek temple is encircled by the peristyle. The case selected is that of the Gothic cathedral (Plate 2).

The Gothic attempts to be as open and as light a structure as possible, minimizing the mass of the walls and opening it for clerestory windows and large roses sculpted on the front, having an essentially skeletal form (Pugin, 1841). It does not provide the same ambiance of conviviality and warmth. Instead, it can bring about sentiments of awe and vulnerability. The towers are tall, pointing toward the inaccessible. The figurative art of the facade is often motionless and expressionless, provoking sentiments of culpability to the user. There usually are three doorways in the front. The actual entries are the side doors while the central door will not be open to the faithful to enter. They do not have the moral right to directly access the house of God from the central axis. It is only used as an exit after the mass because of the large number of people exiting. In comparison, the figurative art of the Doric is characterized by its dynamic motion and the intention is not to provoke culpability but rather admiration and respect. The way to reach the central part of the Temple is the perfectly symmetrical central axis. From that axis, there is an open view toward the exterior and it is typical that most temples are Hexastyle so as to provide visual access through the central intercolumniation. This is based on the relation of the ancient Greeks to their Gods. Gods were Greek, and they were part of the culture (Scefold, 1967). Unlike other religions where the direct visual dialogue between the disciples and the faithful was impossible, to the ancient Greeks that was the norm. The oblique angle would have been less direct and insincere to address the divine (Plommer, 1950, 1956).

**Supremacy**

The supremacy of the character of the Doric building comes mainly through its imposing proportions and forms. The massive proportions of the Doric can easily be noted, when compared to the contemporary ionic or the other contemporary architectural styles of nearby cultures (Choisy, 1991). Yet, the notion of massiveness/volume and the preponderant imposing character are not prerequisites for one another. The subject observed is the proportions of the elements *vis a vis* the function they serve. The stability of the structure was not the only consideration (Coulton, 1985). The issue is better related to the image that the observer would perceive. The design is primarily aimed to express through forms and effects like the column Entasis the solidity of construction, but also to be expressive of the forces acting on the structure (Plates 3 and Figure 4).

In an analysis of that type of structure, the observer can evidence that the way the forces are distributed within that element does in fact suggest this curving form at this point. On the top of the column, there is a ruse depicting through the forms the concentration and funnelling of the forces through the Echinus and the Abacus. Beyond the configuration of the column, the optical refinements play a major role on this effect. The optical refinements
applied on the Stylobate and the Stereobate’s curvature give the impression of a tight base grasping of the ground and the Doric temple forcibly anchored to the soil reclaiming its location (Figure 1). Similarly, the leaning columns on the four points of the temple further enhance this effect of muscular dynamism. Through its development and the influences from abroad, the early wood structure of the Greek temple form experienced an effect of fossilization. The developed form could be associated with either an open pavilion, or a unified sculptural form according to which order one refers to (Scully, 1962). While the ionic and the Corinthian would evoke a pavilion with thin delicate columns surrounding the cella, the Doric, heavier and more powerful, evokes the form of an open sculpted unit where the peripteral arrangement is an integrated extension of the inner core.

The abstract side of this attribute is associated to the Doric culture. Warriors, the Dorians, had less appreciation for superficial ornamentation that had no functional or important symbolic significance (Petit and Laronde, 1991; Mossé, 1991). The calm natural harmony was too weak for them. A lean, clear imagery was preferable, and their art was based on the robust beauty and dynamism of simple lines divested of excessive adornments.
Integrability
The architecture of the sanctuary was applied by its insertion within its context because the function of the Doric temple was more external than internal. The archaic function of the temple became that of a shell, protecting the cult statue. Yet, the diachronic function of the Greek temple was that of the presence of the deity in religious ceremonies that would take place in the open. Therefore, there is this duality of functions: one being the shell that protects the cult statue, and, simultaneously, the presence of the deity within the space. Thus, the temple had to be an open structure and the personality of the divinity should be apparent outside, relating itself to the exterior activity. From an Aristotelian Point of view, the “Topos” of the sanctuary with its orientation was predefined. Within a context of multiple elements, the architect was inspired by a formula that would charge the masses, energizing the environment in what was a potentially neutral space. Whilst not detached from its environment, the enclosed space of the sanctuary was ground for a game of forces generated by the different solids within a neutral framework (Plate 6).

The organic construction of the complex induced a predominance of the masses with respect to the voids and thus allowed the masses to inscribe themselves to the further distant context, generating relationships with natural elements like hilltops, ridges, the sea or another sacred site. It is important to note that had there been a grid pattern applied, like the one attributed to Hippodamus that greatly fascinated Aristotle, the game of forces would have been inverted toward the interior of the sanctuary amongst the temples and all the other edifices, totally disregarding and detaching it from its environment. This is one of the reasons for which the examples of Magna Graecia are not so well applicable to what is studied. It was common for the relation of the sanctuary to its context to be clearly manifested. Generally, the limits of a sanctuary are defined by the environmental elements such as ridges, rivers, etc., similarly to the Hippodamian system of Urbanism (Vernant, 1990).

Civility
There is a delicate balance of the civil and the harmonic aesthetic applied on the Doric. Where there are the Gothic with its naturalistic thorny forms of the flora of the North and the flamboyant shapes that embellish the chiseled stone surfaces, the Baroque with the great ostentation of the modification of scale, the heavily ornamented classical ionic or the ornamentally vegetal Corinthian capital, the Doric is more civil by its simplicity and its ability to abstract avoiding excessive splendor (Lyttelton, 1974; Martin, 1980; Ruskin, 1960). This characteristic is manifested on the temple itself. However, there is an extension beyond that. A well-executed composition of the Doric would require that the environment would be distant from the habitat or commercial activity, and particularly characterized by its serenity (Plate 4 and Figure 2(b)). It can be understood as a well-executed design based on
what could translate to a Cartesian logic (long before the time of René Descartes) that would be tranquilly situated within the agitated amorphous natural landscape. A Doric temple acts as a modulator, harmonizing the earthly with the celestial, redistributing the energy of the amorphous through its location and its clear and well-proportioned precise forms. Through its orientation, the calm lines, with the conveniently perceivable form, it integrates and balances the tumultuous dynamics of the surrounding nature, magnetizing the user's attention from the dramatic formations of mountaintops and engaging its imposing form to occlude the dynamic flow of the sea (Stais, 1920).

**Austerity**

For the fifth property, the austerity, refers to the imperative rules that are applied to the Doric edifice. The sculpture could never surpass the limits of the pediment like what happens on the Cathedral of Chartres. The liberty that the builders and the architects of other periods, styles or orders had was inconceivable to the architect or the builder of the Doric. The sculpture had to be confined within its appropriate limits of the pediment and the metopes.

The precision and the refined details more than any other factor underline the strictness of the rules. The exact voluntarily irregular angles were executed with astonishing perfection on every piece of marble as each part was unique and essential to the unity of the whole like a machine where precision and perfection are imperative for its function (Figure 3) (D'Odige, 1908).

This orderliness and strictness gives a simplified straightforward result that evinces the clarity of the mind of the architect and the higher realm of the social conditions. The building, clearly and strictly formed, reflects the Greek vision of wholeness and cohesion, and adapts to the philosophical positions of Plato. While it visually connects itself to the environment, it is by itself an autonomous entity with no additions or annexes allowed to spoil the formula.

**Singularity**

Besides the contributions of preceding and concurrent civilizations, rarely, a current as original as the Doric has been encountered. Beyond the multiple influences it received before and during its formation, the result was a new archetype that is not directly associated to any other. Even before the development of cultural ties between Greece and Egypt, there were many examples of chiseled masonry in Greece. The Greek builder greatly benefited from the Egyptian example at the level of technique. The form of the Doric should be regarded as the fossilization and progressive development of the archaic wood structure archetype, with analogous modifications manifesting the qualities of the material. The extant forms were developed, adapted to the new medium, and matured to the Doric and the other orders. The influence of the neighboring civilizations, at an initial stage, would be applied to the technical aspect until the Greek mason would develop and adjust his technique for the local limestone and marble. The final formation

**Figure 2.** Reconstruction of the sanctuary of Apollon in Delphi and existing conditions of site
was neither an imitation nor a renaissance of the archaic distant pass of the Mycenaean period either (Horman-Wedeking, 1968). There was however an ancestral connection between the character of that order and the culture that developed it, which lead to the genesis of the new archetype. Unlike the ionic that adopted and integrated influences from the East, the abstraction of the forms of the Doric reveals no precedence or influences and came out as unparalleled to others (Figures 2(a) and (b)).

Those six components formulate the internal characteristics which express the nature of the Doric, beyond the dimensions and the material forms. They define and distinguish it from the other orders at a level surpassing the tangible and superficial. Some may be shared but not all six as a totality. They are attributed in conjunction to pertinent historic and sociocultural data.

Deconstructing the order
The goal, and challenge, is to engage two opposing camps through the application of a late twentieth century process on a Vitruvian archetype, knowing that during that late twentieth century anti-Vitruvian movements were fashionable (Salama, 2007). The objective is neither to re-create a classical order through the deconstructivist methods nor re-interpret it through creation of alternative design principles. Instead, it is to allow deconstruction to be viewed purely in theoretical terms, distant from the fashionable design movement of the late twentieth century (Salingaros, 2008); bring to the proscenium qualities of an historic archetype as they can be seen through a non-traditional lens; and to allow the reader to assess the outcome.

An obstacle arises from the particularly vague/fluid quality of the term “deconstruction” (Benedikt, 1991; Benjamin and Norris, 1988; Derrida, 1985). There are different understandings of this term, and even Derrida’s letter to professor Izutsu does not give a clear definition (Derrida, 1985, p. 85). On the contrary, the use of many other terms to describe it – being essentially identical but given different meaning – lead to greater confusion.

One can start with the use of the word “analysis” and compare it to a structured composition that is to be undone, decomposed, desedimented. As mentioned in Derrida’s letter, to analyze signifies to re-undo. In modern terms, it insinuates a continuation of the process with observation and study of the parts (Derrida, 1985, p. 85). Objectively and grammatically, the term analysis stops at the point where the object in question is disintegrated into parts. So where is the
difference between “analysed” and undone, decomposed, desedimented (Derrida, 1985, p. 85)?

There is more of a difference amongst the terms in Italics. Analyzed is much closer to decomposed where the components of an object are disintegrated from one uniform unit to several individual materialistically homogenous and pure materials. De-sedimentation is much simpler because in this scenario, the original object is not a homogenous unit but a compiled series of layers of different substances that are interconnected. Other similar words are used to define different meanings, like “difference,” which became an English word with an accent!

The grammatological play of Jacques Derrida becomes complicated as he attempts to generate a new strategy of interpreting sciences and philosophy. In fact, the term “dialysis” would be more pertinent and applicable than the neologism of difference. However, the word analysis is chosen because of its connotation of “observation” to be followed, whereas dialysis may suggest a damaging process with no evaluative outcomes anticipated.

The approach is the following: a grammatical analysis of the terms of those six internal qualities attributed to the Doric order in the previous section will constitute the foundation. This will be followed by a systematic questioning of their pre-eminence and an advocacy of the exact opposite qualities. This questioning will continue to the point where the “foreground” will be competing with the “background” leading to a fragile balance between the two and halt at the point where the reader will be tottering on the question of which side governs. It has to be assumed that there is a flaw in every one of the six aforementioned components and this is what will be targeted in order to counterbalance the initial hypotheses. That is set in parallel to the argument that reality is neither the one nor the other, but they are one and the same manifested through the dynamic, as opposed to the static, concept of shape-idea (Hooper, 2010).

It can be assumed that the dynamism of this concept relies upon the values of the zeitgeist. The sequence in which these terms will be studied will be the same as in the previous section.

The openness of the Doric temple may be the easiest quality to deconstruct and counterbalance. It is here where the original form of the Greek temple will be brought up again. The temple was an enclosed chamber with a semi-circular end and an entrance on the opposite side. It protected the cult statue it housed, and this is why some scholars like Scully considered its function similar to the protective shell. There is a duality of that form. At a point where all the sacred trees that would encircle the “shell” are fossilized and eventually become part of the structure, the inner core of the temple only slightly changes its form (Popham et al., 1980). The archaic Adyton where mystic cult activity would take place is non-existent in the Doric order, while the Opisthodomus is added on the back side, replacing the Adyton and reorienting the temple to a confusing condition of two front sides. The visual access to the main Naos is only via the main entrance, just like before the incorporation of the peristyle. Thus, it can be argued that the definition of the open character is achieved by the additional features that expand to an exoskeleton structure, whilst the enclosed space that houses and protects the statue remains as it used to be in the archaic temple – an enclosed shell.

An interesting aspect of this openness/enclosure is the axiality and the symmetry applied to the Doric with respect to the function of a religious shrine. It is true that the cult statue is visually accessible to the exterior. This is happening only on the central axis of symmetry though. The use of an even number of columns on the front and the back is therefore imperative. Tristyle, pentastyle or heptastyle were not a design option because that open axis would have been broken, removing the proximity of the divine to the cult (Figure 3).

Beyond this, there is the question of the parallelism of the Doric to the sculpted entity on one hand and, on the other hand, to the Ionic and the rest, to the open pavilions, as presented by Vincent Scully. Undoubtedly, the formation of the Doric is much more integrated as every part has its own Topos on the building. What we have on the Doric is neither a solid unit, nor an assembly of loose components, and, above all, it is not a porous entity. While every element claims its identity, it would be impossible to exist or to be formed even had it not had its function and its Topos within the framework of that particular type of building. By taking one
column of the Doric order, one can observe that its qualities and its form reflect its function of receiving the load of the lintels and supporting all that marble on top of it. Addressing the corner columns as an example (Figure 1), the inclination toward one side would be inexplicable, had this column been placed as a vertical element in the middle of a large square, like the Obelisque of the piazza de San Pietro or the place de la Concorde. The capital with the flushing Echinus and the effect of Entasis on the shaft would also not be intelligible. The load of thin air flowing on top of this structural element does not need all this bulging at mid-height of the shaft to portray a solid material’s reaction as of Hooke’s law (Figure 4). Therefore, it can be concluded that this column formation rightfully belongs to that type of edifice.

Similar would be the observation on the pediment of the Parthenon in the British museum (Plate 5 and Figure 3). The assembly of the figures is in perfect harmony set within the Classical order.
triangularly formed boundaries of the pediment. In any other type of frame, it is just not appropriate to fit because it was made particularly for that specific form and scale. If one figure were taken away from the ensemble, it could possibly be viewed as an individual unit. However, its absence to the rest of the ensemble would break that balance of the composition. The topic of the autonomy vs dependency of the individual elements that are part of the composition of the Doric is, in fact, impossible to determine. But where this leads to is that while the Doric is a sculpted unit in comparison to the other classical orders, it is not exactly one single unit. It should rather be viewed as an assembly of parts that were constructed to function together, and its openness and enclosure coexist and generate this play of meanings. Through this logic, the porous property as contemplated by Vincent Scully for the classical orders is not applicable because this would insinuate that the edifice is in fact a single unit, rejecting the quality of integrated formation of entities. Furthermore, the openness is such that containing and retaining extraneous material, like the physical action of a sponge, to the human level is impossible. The openings are too large and, under any circumstances, very few to visually depict or suggest any effect similar to capillarity or adhesion.

Contrary to the first property, the supremacy is a significantly more challenging aspect to address in a deconstructive agenda. One needs to bring in mind the treatises of Michelis, who defines five major categories of archetypes. Amongst those, he considers the Parthenon to belong to the category of the “beautiful” buildings, whereas examples such as the Pyramids of Egypt belong in the category of “large” buildings (Fereos, 1967). There are numerous definitions for terms such as “big” or “beautiful” but this specific example of this theory is quite sound. Volume gives different senses of importance. Instead, the Doric temple would never be that large in scale, and could not even remotely approach the scale of the pyramids because of structural reasons. This relation should be examined as a condition that lies between the definitions of volume and “imposing character.” If the material conditions for a specific type of structure do not allow it to become larger, can it still be as imposing?

It may be optimum to address this argument by the following: is volume the exclusive factor of the imposing character? Some parameters as to what gives this imposing character to this archetype have been addressed in the first part. Although size is not an exclusive factor, it is very important for that quality, and the Doric needs to rely within the limits of what defines it. The fossilized tree form structures from which the column forms derive are those that define the fundamental characteristics of the order (Bötticher, 2010) (Figure 5).

Given the fact that the religious activity would take place outside, the temple had to assume an external character. It had to relate to different natural elements by its location and its orientation. Addressing the integrability and austerity, it is necessary to question if the user could actually comprehend these conditions and would the location and orientation really have an impact on the religious ceremony and to the layman attending? Religious ceremonies would involve sacrifices dedications, feasts and a series of activities that would trigger the human senses. From a contemporary standpoint, it is difficult to associate these rituals to the visual, acoustic, tactile or even olfactory perception of the space as it was in antiquity. Those ceremonies of the Greek antiquity are impossible to perceive with today’s quotidian standards. An example was the proposal by scientists in the late twentieth century for the atmospheric pollution of the Attic basin. The proposal was to consider the removal of the whole hill of Hymettus in Athens, in order to provide the conditions for wind to pass through and allow currents to recycle the air. Besides the fact that the energy that this would take would essentially render the project either impossible or unworthy, there is an ironic factor to it. Hymettus is a hill to which the Parthenon is visually connected. The position and orientation of the Parthenon, or to use the Aristotelian definition of “Topos” again, is to a great extent defined by that hill. In his book Deconstructing the Kimbell, Benedikt claims that ordinary people cannot understand sophisticated architecture, and questions himself as well as the reader whether anyone can read the buildings of the Park de la Villette as a composition with
the buildings. The Greek sanctuary is incorporating a parallel approach. Where the grid used for the layout of Park de la Villette is invisible, are the distant natural elements that were considered for the layout of the sanctuary any more evident? But the question becomes more acerbic. It would not matter if modern scientists from an unrelated culture cannot read that connection. What needs to be questioned is whether the local culture at the time, those people who built it and used it, could see and experience that connection. The author is ready to suggest that they probably could. For the ancients, the religious rituals were much more important than they are to the modern secular humans. The classical Greek planning was not a concept that came to surface like a new architectural or fashion style developed and being in vogue for a decade, like most ephemeral contemporary movements (Vernant, 1990). In addition to that, it should also be considered that the whole semiotic language of the ancient Greeks would not necessarily conform to the norms of the modern international layperson.
Although the basic values of the contemporary western society are mainly based on the Greco/Roman culture, the religion of the modern is dissociated to that of the ancients where nature was playing a very significant role in the religious rituals. Therefore, the connection to those elements was imperative. Presumably, the purpose was the conveyance of the relationship of the buildings to the natural elements (Plate 6).

This leads to the question on the austerity of the Doric. The architect did not necessarily intend to convey that relation only to the humans. The visual effect of the austerity to human standards is clearly evident and very successfully executed. On a much larger scale, the precision with which three different temples hundreds of miles distant from one another, forming a perfectly equilateral triangle shall not be visually conceivable to the mortal. It does however carry a symbolic function which may be applicable in rituals and therefore this integration is applicable not to the realms of the profane but to the divine and spiritual.

The civility of the Doric, as a refined and non-ostentatious non-naturalistic type of architecture, may be debatable to the cultural values of the reader. By contemporary standards,
in a most heterogeneous/inhomogeneous society where everything is adapted and designated according to interests, one can easily redefine what is civil and what is not. In fact, the very description of a type of art/architecture that avoids splendor and pursues an imagery based on the robust beauty and dynamism of clear intelligible lines can be debatable. If the Dorians were warriors, civility could be a contradictory value to their culture. So are robustness, simplicity and the absence of ornamentation essential elements to a civil outlook, or are they to the exact opposite? In a distant manner, this associates with the conditions under which Rousseau describes the “Noble savages” or, even better, the paradox of the combination of the terms, noble and savage, describing the same thing. The Dorians were warriors historically, but by the sixth century, which is the period of stone-built sacred edifices, they were distant from the times of the Dorian invasion of the Greek land. Their heritage remained and it is reflected in the great difference between their developed architectural order and the other orders. Making reference to the positions of Adolf Loos, the Dorians would have been developed to the values of more modern than contemporary society. Loos claimed that ornament should be removed from the quotidian. Dorians, if not removing it, minimized it on their most sacred buildings. Loos’ essay insinuates that ornaments are for savages (Plate 7).

This could even tempt us to study the Doric with modern-day values. The most notable of the paradoxes comes with the building of the Parthenon. Athens, the only city of Central Southern Greece that never fell to the Dorian tribe but remained Achaean/Ionian, built the most notable Doric edifice, while Sparta, the capital of Lacaedemonia, did not have any such monument.

The austerity is the most controversial of the characteristics. The austere character of the Doric order is evident. What can be questioned is on what grounds this austerity is applicable. Characteristics such as “Supremacy” and “singularity” on an archetype that will be short of austerity would result in a comic composition, inappropriate for the divinities of the Greek Pantheon. The rules followed for the composition of a Doric building were not divine but rules
established by humans and they were developed and perfected through time and through observation and constant improvement. Although the representation of the forces acting upon the structural elements is advanced and well-studied, the Greek architects were very conservative in the development of that order as it incorporated so many rules that were difficult to break. As rules, they had nothing to do with the divine and should not be regarded as such. They were established technical norms that reached a point where perfection would progress and be applied on the details. Any radical movement to a larger scale would have been devastating to the details such as the formation of the Echinus of the capital or the minute yet visually important deformations of the Stylobate that complete a composition and represent a specific character that matches that of the divinity that the temple houses. The robust and austere character of a divinity, such as that of Athena or Zeus, could not be appropriately represented through the freedom of the delicate forms of the Corinthian order whilst other deities such as Apollon had the charismatic advantage of being attributed all three orders through the development of the order (Dinsmoor, 1975; Lyttelton, 1974). To deconstruct this aspect of Austerity, one has to ask the question: whether those rules that were developed by mortals to represent the divine could be technically correct. A verdict would be ambiguous. The rules were technically correct by the moment they were established. The optical refinements that were applied to such a great detail do provide a visual result (Smith, 1988). It is not necessarily for the layperson to notice them. A layperson would not. However, these refinements can be visually identified especially at specific angles. Then, the rules were not correct because there were flaws in the technique. It is fair enough to say that vision is not emitted from the human eyes and reflected back to them as the ancient Greeks used to believe. If there was a wrong idea about the vision of people, the whole technique is wrong at its foundation. Whether the results are successful or not does not happen to be the only issue. The optical refinements are the most detailed component of the Doric. There were other formulae that had to be followed so that a building would have been successful, like the treatment of the Triglyphs of the corner in synergy with the corner column (Bowen, 1950). The Romans gave up on the Doric because they were unsuccessful applying that specific formula. Their experiment was simplistic instead of a resolved complex formula. The Roman example is so unsuccessful that it should be categorized as something different. Within the topic of austerity, a very important parameter is that of the appropriateness as expressed through the architecture. In the ionic style, even on the sacred rock of the Acropolis, the absence of formulae is abundantly evidenced. The temple of Erechthos incorporates additions of porticoes, and, although large enough, it has no peristyle (Plate 8).
This could never be applied to a Doric building where everything belonged to its own place. The sculpture would remain within the frames of the Metopes and of the pediment. The building is symmetrical, and every element precisely cut to fit within the area within which it belongs. On that particularity of the Doric, the rules to the Divine can be attributed again.

The formation of the temple has a long history. It begins with the first hekatonpeda in conjunction to the sacred trees. Initially there would have been a sacred tree next to a temple. The findings of Lephkandi gave new evidence where and how the first peristyle was formed (Pophan et al.). The association of the vegetal form to the early column is very prominent, especially after some medieval depictions or even traced on the ionic and the Corinthian; the latter carrying a clear vegetal form (Hersey, 1988). The Doric was disassociated from that and was developed in a different way where the imagery pursued and the objectives of the design differed. The question here is whether those rules that evolved and distinguished the Doric from the rest were, in fact, valid. It needs to be addressed however that the settlers of Southern Italy would build Doric buildings, escaping the strict character (Figure 6). To the mainlanders, this was lack of prudence (sophrosyne). Such examples directly relate to the specimens contemplated by AlSayyad (2001), referring to the way environments partake in processes of cultural objectification serving as “banks” of national memory and pride to ward off the subversive effects of historical change.

Finally, the attribute of Singularity can generate another paradox. Singularity, in conjunction to integrability, could negate one another. In a broad sense, it would clearly do so. The question is: how something integrates to something else and then what distinguishes one thing from the rest? The building was integrated to the site and to the formation of the other buildings.
It distinguishes itself from the others by its different character, by its own statement within its own boundary. Like its own elements that generate a unit whilst still claiming their own position within the whole, similarly, the Doric temple acts with the rest. It will not be integrated to another building forming annexes and partitions. It will only compositionally be related to the rest as an entity by itself and yet part of the composition. Technically, the clarity of this individuality of the Doric can be viewed from different points of view. The “fossilization” of a wooden structure is what happened to its contemporary ionic too. How distant are the two? Within the framework of the Greek temple, they are very distant. In comparison to religious structures of other cultures, they are close. The ionic is not only more close to a vegetal form, in some cases, it even carried vegetal forms in the volutes like the case of the temple of Artemis in Asia Minor (Lawrence, 1983). The vegetal form of the Doric is abstracted to the point where an historic study of the archetype would be necessary to retrace the connection between the archaic sacred tree and the Doric column of the classic or Hellenistic period (Hersey, 1988).

Conclusion
Deconstructivism was a method applied for the analysis of a very particular order of the classical Greek antiquity. This philosophical approach and methodology did not exist at the time the Doric order was formed. Therefore, it would be impossible to calculate how the architect of that time would have deconstructed the principles of that archetype (Mugerauer, 1994, 1995). There could probably be schools of thought, like the sophists, who would embrace this approach as it enhances and identifies to their philosophical points of view. To Plato, this would have been incorrect because of the flaws it can lead to. The sophists would have probably found another way of presenting the same arguments and lead to a different conclusion. Internal characteristics of the Doric order were analyzed from a perspective where the opposite properties would emerge, generating a contrast and a delicate situation where, on occasion, the qualities were balanced and, on occasion, they were not. The first one of these six attributes addressed is the openness of the Doric temple. In the historic progression of the basic structure, a peristyle, an exoskeletal structure was formed outside the original shell. Vincent Scully calls that an open structure. That forms a transitional space where the interior and the exterior are merging as a covered open space to an enclosure. Yet, the core, the archaic shell that wraps around the cult statue, remains intact, allowing only the opening of the entrance to provide visual access to the heart of the building. Integrability is the sixth attribute studied. It was discussed how a paradoxical situation is generated when simultaneously a built element is integrated to the Topos, becoming a part of a system, and yet it is so distinguished from the rest by being based upon values reflecting a cultural difference that did not adopt from the rest, being part of the composition and yet establishing an unexpected diversity. Some of the six identified properties gave better grounds than others to apply the deconstructivist methodology, whilst all of them gave an adequate foundation for this contemporary philosophical approach to contemplate this duality of character that can surface through continuous questioning and analysis. The superannuated precept that one methodology or value system is more correct than another is default to the concept of deconstructivistic analysis. The nature of the Doric order can be thus considered from the deconstructivist point of view.

References


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Further reading


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