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Loren Sean Stewart

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the

Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this thesis.

Megan Craig – Thesis Advisor
Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Edward S. Casey – Chairperson of Defense
Distinguished Professor of Philosophy

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

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When we think of factors that play a part in who we understand ourselves to be, we often cite the influence of our family, socio-economic status, nationality, ethnicity and our genetic endowments. Indeed, these factors are crucial in the negotiation of our self-understanding, but there is an important factor that has been left out of this list – the architecture we inhabit. One of the distinguishing characteristics of art is that it speaks to us. Architecture is an art form, an art form that dominates the human landscape. But architecture does not dominate the human landscape because we are all art lovers. Its pervasive presence is due to the fact that architecture is useful, it is a use-object as well as an aesthetic object. Works of architecture are complex entities that are intertwined with our lives in multifarious ways. The primary ontological thesis that supports my claim that architecture influences our self-understanding is the notion that the self and its

environment form an ontological unity. Since architecture is a rich source of meaning and also constitutes a large part of our immediate environment, architecture affects us in many ways. Support for my claims are drawn from the works of Mikel Dufrenne, Martin Heidegger, as well as my own phenomenological investigations into the human experience of architecture.

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We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.

– Winston Churchill

Introduction

Art speaks. That is, works of art communicate with their audience. It is a commonplace to say that artists, regardless of their medium, communicate by means of their work. But do all mediums speak in the same manner, with the same voice? Certainly not. Most of the plastic arts, like painting and sculpture, whisper. We have to pay close attention to hear their voice. Theater, prose and poetry speak slightly louder, perhaps because they borrow human voices and language. Music probably speaks with the loudest and clearest voice of all. The line of communication between music and audience is mysteriously direct. Music physically and affectively moves even the most untrained listener. It is our experience with all of these mediums that attests to the fact that, in some sense, they all speak to us; these artistic mediums are means of communication. Of course, some works seem easier to understand than others, but all have a voice.

In this paper, I argue that although architecture has a meek voice, one that we often ignore as we go about our daily routines, its voice is perhaps the most influential of

all the arts. Architecture whispers to us, but its whisper is quite influential – *the communications of architecture play a large role in establishing the context within which we negotiate our self-understanding*. This Modernist belief in the power of architecture is aptly expressed in the following passage from Le Corbusier:

> The Architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit; by forms and shapes he affects our senses to an acute degree and provokes plastic emotions; by the relationships which he creates he wakes profound echoes in us, he gives us the measure of an order which we feel to be in accordance with that of our world, he determines the various movements of our heart and of our understanding; it is then that we experience the sense of beauty.[1]

Architecture does influence our sense of self, and Le Corbusier was right to believe that changing a society's architecture will change the self-understanding of its citizens. In the first section of this essay, then, I illustrate the influence that architecture has on one's sense of self by means of phenomenological description, that is, a kind of description that focuses on experience without relying on pre-established theoretical constructs.[2] I use two architectural examples – the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse – to support my claim.

The second section of this essay is the prolegomenon to an explanation of *how* architecture is able to exert such influence over us. A fundamental assumption of my investigation is that art speaks; it is by speaking to us that art is able to exert its influence. But how does art speak? Speaking is an act and, as such, requires agency. How can one

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[1] Le Corbusier (1971), 59.

[2] Of course, we always approach experience with the conceptual apparatus that is embedded in the language that we use. Phenomenology admits this and a diligent phenomenologist tries to be aware of her own conceptual biases, always being on guard in order to keep their corrupting influence to a minimum.

justify the bizarre claim that a class of objects, aesthetic objects, has even a modicum of agency? The fact that they are *objects* seems to rule them out as agents/subjects; the term *subject* is reserved for beings endowed with agency. I agree with Mikel Dufrenne's claim that aesthetic objects, unlike ordinary objects, have an unusual ontological status, they are neither strictly objects nor strictly subjects, they are *quasi-subjects*. Thus, in the second section of the present essay, drawing on the work of Dufrenne, I outline what quasi-subjectivity entails and how this special ontological status is the basis of the ability of art to communicate.

The third section of my paper addresses another aspect of works of architecture – their status as utilitarian objects, or use-objects. Drawing from the work of Martin Heidegger, I elucidate the nature of use-objects, the space use-objects occupy, as well as the special function of architecture as a use-object. The primary function of architecture as a use-object is to open up a space, a meaningful context, in which shared social practices can take place. Because it is both an aesthetic object and a use-object, architecture seems to have a unique, hybrid ontological status.

In the fourth and final section of my essay I address some difficulties that arise from some ontological distinctions made by both Dufrenne and Heidegger. The writings of both of these thinkers suggest that it is possible for a single entity to have two radically different kinds of being. In order to make sense of this paradoxical claim, I make the case for two ontological theses – the *rich world thesis* and the *descriptive levels thesis*.

Using these two theses, I make sense of seemingly contradictory claims in the texts of Dufrenne and Heidegger while also clarifying the hybrid ontological status of architecture. Lastly, clarifying the being of architecture also shows us how architecture is able to influence our self-understanding.

§1.1 The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine

The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, a New York architectural monument of Gothic style, is remarkable for its ability to affect those who enter. The elaborately crafted arched doorway, which is the main entrance of this building, is lined with religious iconography, images of Jesus, St. John, as well as 32 other biblical characters who welcome those who enter. These figures and symbols make history tangible and sensuous, they are history manifested in stone. Upon entering the church, one is witness of a religious legacy, a legacy of which everyone who enters the church becomes a part.

The fact that St. John the Divine is the largest cathedral in the world is irrelevant to a phenomenology of architecture. What is important is the sheer magnitude and weight that overwhelms the perception of those who witness this church. This building dwarfs its inhabitants. The complexity of the facade, the height of the Gothic spires, and the vast interior make the occupants of the church feel insignificant. In St. John the Divine, one literally is a part of something bigger than the individual. Not only in structure, but also due to the sense of history that is evident in the aesthetic of the church, St. John the Divine is larger than the individual and the present.

The acoustics of the church further emphasize an awareness of size and the insignificance of the individual. When the church is empty, the shuffle of feet, a whisper,

or a cough echos in the vast interior, effectively translating sound into size. The clarity of the acoustics and the echo produced by the enormous interior humble the occupants of the church. People tend to whisper rather than use their voice, movements are kept to a minimum, all activity is kept in check by a kind of self-consciousness that is produced by the design of the church. It feels as though a conscience inhabits the church and its occupants; a kind of self-reflection seems to be part of the church itself. The church constrains, and in a sense *controls*, the activities of its occupants. The church, in effect, tells us how to act within its walls.

From what has been sketched above, the most salient ways in which St. John the Divine influences the self is in its humbling and constraining affects. St. John the Divine humbles the individual in two ways. First, an awareness of a long and rich history is immediately perceived by the spectator when confronted with this architectural work. This historical feeling, based on a narrative that goes back to the time of the Old Testament, makes the spectator feel insignificant in the face of this mythic history and eschatology. On the one hand, the length of this narrative dwarfs the individual life-span. On the other hand, it is an eschatological history, a preordained historical narrative of which each individual is only a small part. Second, the physical enormity of the cathedral makes the spectator feel physically small and insignificant – but the size of the cathedral does more than this. In effect, through a kind of alchemy, stone and the space that is built from it become a kind of shared conscience. Everyone who enters the church

is silenced by the echos produced by the vast interior; everyone becomes hyper-aware of themselves; everyone becomes susceptible to a meditative state. It is as though God, the supreme judge, infiltrates the psyches of the church's occupants and inspires self-reflection and self-judgment. The occupants are induced to restrain their movements and are overcome by self-censorship. Even the atheist is influenced by architecture like that of St. John the Divine. The occupants of this cathedral are immediately aware that they are either sinners, children of God, or, in the case of the atheist, outsiders and unbelievers; one's identity is formed in relation to the architecture of this church.

§1.2 The Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse

Like the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, the entrance of the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse is adorned with mythic images. When facing the entrance of this enormous modernist work, to the left is an image of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai to deliver the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. A power greater than the individual, the community, even the nation, is invoked here as a symbol of the transcendent nature of the justice system. To the left of the entrance is an image of Lady Justice. Armed with scales and a sword in her hands, wearing a blindfold, she symbolizes the desire for a fair hearing, the potential for retribution, and the impartiality of the justice system.

The power of the justice system is manifest in more than just the mythic symbols that adorn its exterior. Immediately upon entering, one encounters ropes that form lines

to X-ray machines; law enforcement officers are stationed all around the lobby; cameras record everyone who enters and exits the building. The lobby is a space that is highly controlled and the potential for deadly force is exuded by this fortified lobby. The design of the building allows for a tightly controlled, easily monitored and efficiently protected entrance.

The building itself is an eleven story structure with a limestone exterior. Its box-like geometrical design facilitates a highly organized interior, each part of the court system tucked into its respective place. Every floor of the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse is exactly the same; the majority of the floor is taken up by a courtroom, with offices located to the rear. This repetition of layout, coupled with the strict geometrical design of the building, is a clear manifestation of rationality and, in turn, impartiality.

The mythology surrounding this building, its secure and controlled interior, and its mathematical design all present the spectator with a distinct cluster of affects. The mythology of law and justice that one perceives upon entering the building cows the perceiver. This psychic domination is reinforced by the potential of physical domination that is present in the entrance to the building. The geometrical design of the building reinforces the ideal of impartiality that the legal system strives for. Anyone in the jurisdiction of the courthouse is subject to its – at least theoretical – disinterested judgment. Those who work in the court identify themselves as part of this system of regulation, sometimes even as exempt from its laws. People who come into the

courthouse as jurors, defendants or plaintiffs are aware of the power the legal system has over them; their status as citizens who are subject to the law comes to the fore. Just as in the case of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse dominates those who enter it. One's identity is shaped and reinforced by the presence of this work of public architecture.

In both cases outlined above, the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse, I have shown that works of architecture say something to us. In addition, I outline how a work of architecture can influence who we understand ourselves to be. In the next two sections, I will lay the theoretical foundations for these two claims. In section two, I explain how architecture – and all works of art – are able to 'speak' at all. Next, in section three, I explain how architecture is able to influence our self-understanding by becoming incorporated into our very being.

§2.1 How Can an Object Speak? Mikel Dufrenne on Quasi-Subjectivity

Mikel Dufrenne's *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* is the most systematic study of aesthetics from a phenomenological standpoint to date. Although Dufrenne's work is filled with many novel and penetrating insights, in this section, I focus on elucidating only one concept that Dufrenne sets forth - the notion that the aesthetic object is a 'quasi-subject'. The notion of quasi-subjectivity is the crux of a phenomenological analysis of how art – and in the present case, architecture in particular – is able to 'speak' to us. Dufrenne convincingly demonstrates that the aesthetic object is a unique entity that cannot be captured by two of the most pervasive philosophical dualisms - the real/ideal and the subject/object dualisms. By the end of this section, it will be clear *how* it is possible for architecture to speak to us. How architecture's 'speech' is able to influence our self-understanding is discussed in section four.

§2.2 The Aesthetic Object and the Work of Art

In *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Perception*, Dufrenne defines the aesthetic object in relation to the work of art as well as in relation to aesthetic perception. According to Dufrenne, the work of art is a thing present in the world and the aesthetic object is the work of art aesthetically perceived.[3] This distinction seems to be in accord with the traditional metaphysical dualism of the real and the ideal. Put briefly, real entities exist independently of consciousness whereas ideal entities exist only in

[3] Dufrenne (1973), lii.

consciousness. Applying this dualism to the two entities under discussion, it seems that the work of art is *real* - it is an entity that exists in the concrete world. The aesthetic object, however, seems to be *ideal* - it exists only in the consciousness of the perceiver. Traditionally conceived, the metaphysical status of these objects seems to be rather straightforward. But Dufrenne's ontology is not nearly that simple.

Although it is tempting to apply the real/ideal dualism to the work of art and the aesthetic object, Dufrenne warns us against this mistake. In his introduction, he warns the reader not to "interpose between them the difference between an ideal and a real thing."[4] As tempting as it is, we must not succumb to the belief that the aesthetic object is ideal. Neither will the solution be found by attempting to prove that the aesthetic object is real. I would like to put forward the unusual thesis that, for Dufrenne, the aesthetic object has the being of an activity or a behavior. By characterizing the aesthetic object in this way, Dufrenne circumvents the real/ideal dichotomy.

The work of art is easier to conceptualize than the aesthetic object. Examples of the former are a musical score, a painted canvas and the materiality of an architectural work. The aesthetic object is easy to indicate, but it tends to be misconstrued as an ideal entity. The aesthetic object becomes manifest when a musical score is performed and then attentively perceived by an audience; it becomes manifest in the *event*. Similarly, the aesthetic object relative to a painting or a building becomes manifest when these works of art are perceived by a serious observer. As much as we try to think outside the real/ideal dualism, we are tempted to apply it to the examples just given. After all, the

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[4] Ibid, li.

aesthetic object as I have just described it - namely, the perceived music or the perceived painting - seems to be an entity that exists only in our consciousness of it.

An analogy will prove useful in clarifying both the relationship between the perceiver and the aesthetic object as well as the metaphysical status of this activity. Take the activity of cutting an apple, for example. Three elements are needed here. First, we need the material to be cut, the apple. Next, we need something to cut with, like a knife. The third element is the act of cutting, which presupposes the first two. In this analogy, the apple is analogous to the perceiver, the knife is analogous to the work of art, and the aesthetic object is analogous the activity of cutting. Just as an apple is cut by a knife, "our body submits to" the work of art (which is on its way to manifesting the aesthetic object) and is "inhabited by the sensuous."[5] The aesthetic object is the relational activity of perceiver and work just as cutting is the relational activity of knife and apple.

With this analogy in mind, one begins to understand a remark that is repeated throughout Dufrenne's text that the aesthetic object is "the act common to the sensing being and to what is sensed."[6] Just as cutting is an act common to the apple and the knife, the aesthetic object is an act common to both the perceiver and the work of art. With this statement, Dufrenne demonstrates that the aesthetic object has the being of an activity. Endowed with this kind of being, the aesthetic object is neither real nor ideal.

Although the analogy above is useful in gaining a preliminary understanding of the metaphysical status of the aesthetic object, my apple example and the aesthetic object

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[5] Ibid, 57.

[6] Ibid, 225; cf. xlviii & 48.

are not completely analogous. On the one hand, cutting is a relational activity; one relata, the knife, acts on the other relata, the apple. The aesthetic object, on the other hand, is a *mutual* relational activity. Both relata act on each other. The aesthetic perceiver devotes her attention to the aesthetic object while the aesthetic object "demands" this attention from the perceiver.[7] But how can this entity demand at all? A demand is an activity of a subject. This is why Dufrenne insists that the aesthetic object is a "quasi-subject" or the proxy of a subjectivity.[8] To understand how the aesthetic object is a quasi-subject, let us turn to a characteristic that is common to both the aesthetic object and human subjects, having a world.

§2.3 Signifying Object, Aesthetic Object, and World

Before delving into an analysis of the aesthetic object and its world, I will begin with a discussion of an entity that is most likely to be confused with an aesthetic object - a signifying object. A signifying object is an object that indicates something exterior to itself. Dufrenne uses a scientific text as an example of a signifying object. This kind of text is used for pragmatic purposes "to dispense knowledge."[9] A signifying object does not carry with it an internal truth, rather it seeks its standard of truth in the external world. It fails its role if it does not describe a truth external to itself. Another example of a signifying object is an unartistic photograph of a house, such as one used by real-estate agents. A photograph like this merely represents something; in this case, a particular

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[7] Ibid, 166.

[8] Ibid, 146, 411.

[9] Ibid, 114.

house. Its sole virtue is to be a faithful representation of something external to itself. It has no depth or meaning immanent to it; that is, it does not communicate an affect of, say, comfort or longing that an artistic photograph or painting might express.[10]

Unlike the signifying object, the primary function of the aesthetic object does not involve indicating something external to itself. With the aesthetic object, "what is signified is immanent in what does the signifying."[11] That is, the aesthetic object has a meaning that is internal to itself. How is the aesthetic object a bearer of internal meaning? What is the ontological ground of this immanent meaning? These two questions can only be answered through an analysis of the notion of 'world'.

The notion of world, as used by Dufrenne, is best characterized as a meaningful context or atmosphere that defines and is defined by a subjectivity. In effect, the notion of world dissolves the strict boundaries of traditional notions of subjectivity. For example, in terms of an ontology of world, an architect is an architect because of her self-interpretation (or identification) as an architect, her engagement with the tools and practices of her respective art, as well as her involvement in the 'architectural scene' or the 'art world'. Here we see that the subject and her world are interdependent, even unitary. The architect exists as an architect because of the 'world of architecture' and its practices, but the 'world of architecture' and its practices exist only because there are architects. Thus, the notion of world expands the notion of subjectivity to include the

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[10] Of course, it is possible for a real-estate agent's photographs to be aesthetic objects, but this is usually not the case. Most real-estate photography is merely representational and lacks artistic composition.

[11] Ibid, 123.

subject's environment - the 'outside' is incorporated into the 'inside'. Or, reversing this line of analysis, by locating the source of identity in interaction with the environment, the notion of world makes what is traditionally thought to be internal to the subject external – the 'inside' is incorporated into the 'outside'.

One can see the traditional dichotomy of inside and outside break down further by looking at the phenomenon of mood; what is commonly thought to reside inside our subjectivity, i.e., mood, is evident on the 'outside'. This phenomenon has been captured by the colloquial expression, "She has a ____(jolly, haughty, etc.) air about her." This 'air', or rather, a person's mood, is radiated in gesture, tone of voice, and bodily posturing but is not reducible to any one of these aspects. Environments are able to have 'moods' as well, lending an 'internal' quality to what is traditionally conceived of as 'external'. The intertwining of subject and its surroundings make it possible for architectural and social spaces to have an affective quality. or mood. Most of us are familiar with the experience of entering a room and immediately becoming aware of an unspoken tension pervading the environment. Similarly, most everyone is familiar with entering into a welcoming environment, such as visiting family on a holiday. Finally, as outlined in section one, upon entering the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, one is confronted with the humbling feeling that occurs in the face of something greater than oneself. In the phenomenological description of mood, the 'inside'/'outside' dichotomy no longer makes sense.

Additionally, the phenomenology of mood shows us that affective qualities are communicated or *expressed* through means other than language and grammar. Expression therefore, needs to be distinguished from analytic language. The latter is a rational instrument comprised of fairly unambiguous signs. The proposition, "I am angry" is an example of analytic language. An example of expression is the tumultuous quality communicated in the opening motif of Rachmaninov's second piano sonata or the expression of impartiality, objectivity and nobility expressed by Lady Justice at the entrance to the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse. Expression captures lived experience by means of style. Style and expression communicate a world pervaded by one or several affective qualities. Expression is the opening up of one subjectivity to another. This opening is facilitated by what Dufrenne calls *feeling* rather than by means of conceptual analysis.[12] In contrast, analytic language conceptually indicates a state of affairs. In this case, information is communicated severed from the lived experience which is its source. Lived experience is generalized and indicated by abstract concepts which are then communicated. The transparency of analytic language is won at the cost of losing the specificity of the lived experience which is its source.

I am now in a position to explain how it is that the aesthetic object has a meaning that is internal to itself. Just as a person exudes a world, so too does the aesthetic object. Unlike the signifying object, the aesthetic object does not need to indicate anything external to itself because it has a world of its own. The meaning of the aesthetic object is internal to itself. Take an unartistic portrait of an university chancellor. This portrait is

[12] Ibid, 198.

merely a representation of a particular man. It reveals no depth, communicates no world, it merely indicates something external to itself. In other words, it is a signifying object. Now let us turn to an example of an aesthetic object, such as St. John the Divine. History is expressed by its Gothic style and stone construction. The narrative of Jesus Christ which is chiseled into its facade expresses selflessness for the sake of others and forgiveness in the face of cruelty. The massiveness of the church seems to be an expression of the power of God, it seems as though human beings are incapable of constructing such a huge and beautiful building. This building expresses a humbleness in the face of divinity.

St. John the Divine does not indicate anything outside of itself. It expresses a world, a religious world, and its meaning is wholly immanent to this world. This building expresses lived experience in ways that cannot be fully captured or exhausted by analytic language. A parallel phenomenon is found in the fact that one can never fully communicate what a friend is like to someone who has not met this person. The fullness of a personality resists being captured in analytic language; no matter how detailed the description, there is always much that escapes what has been said. Both the aesthetic object and a subjectivity have a world and this is a crucial clue in examining the relationship between the aesthetic object and subjectivity.

§2.4 The Aesthetic Object as a Quasi-Subject

Thus far, I have established that the aesthetic object shares three characteristics with subjectivity. The first characteristic common to both is the capacity to act. Although it is obvious that subjects act in many ways - locomotion, wishing, willing, judging, understanding, speaking, expressing, etc - it is not obvious in what way aesthetic objects are capable of action. In my discussion of the distinction between the work of art and the aesthetic object, I have shown that the aesthetic object acts on the perceiver; the aesthetic object demands a faithful perception of itself. Prima facie, this claim seems rather odd. How exactly does the aesthetic object demand our perception of it? Although the claim may seem odd, phenomenological evidence for this claim is found in aesthetic experience. Even the most novice art experiencer is familiar with the manner in which art - whether it be music, painting, sculpture, drama, or architecture - 'calls for' the spectator's attention. Aesthetic experience attests to the fact that art 'arrests' our attention, it 'pulls' our senses toward itself, in the manner that music 'carries' us along with the melody. For Dufrenne, these examples show that we do not act on the art as much as it acts on us. It is best to describe the spectator's action in relation to the aesthetic object as *letting* the aesthetic object act on us or *accepting* the demands of the aesthetic object.

The second characteristic that is common to the aesthetic object and subjectivity is that both have a world. Just as there is an 'air' or an 'atmosphere' surrounding a person

that is expressed in gesture, tone, and posturing, so the aesthetic object radiates a world by means of its composition and style. To illustrate the notion that each subjectivity has a world, Dufrenne uses the example of a mother's smile. This example shows that "the smile of the mother indicates to her child that there is an agreeable world - agreeable precisely because someone smiled there."[13] In a similar manner, aesthetic objects, like Edvard Munch's "The Storm," radiate a world. With a woman in white holding her face, ostracized by a group of other women, "The Storm" radiates a tense, ominous, paranoid and lonely world. The drab colors and blurred figuration in contrast to a well lit house in the background provoke the viewer to question the relationship between what is happening in the house and the figures in the foreground. There is tension between the house, the group of people, and the lonely woman; a tension that pervades the world of this painting. These two examples provide phenomenological support for the claim that both subjectivities and aesthetic objects have a world.

The capacity to express affective qualities is the third characteristic common to the aesthetic object and subjectivity. Affective qualities are expressed by means of an entity's world. This is illustrated in the three examples mentioned above (St. John the Divine, the mother example and "The Storm"). Since both the aesthetic object and subjectivities have a world, both express affective qualities. The examples used above, the world of St. John the Divine is godly, the mother's world is agreeable, Munch's world is ominous. Both kinds of entities, the mother (a subject) and the aesthetic objects (St. John the Divine and Munch's painting) express affective qualities.

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[13] Ibid, 149.

Both aesthetic objects and subjectivities are capable of expression, but they are not sources of expression in the same manner. Subjectivities, along with their worlds, are the origin of all expression. The aesthetic object is capable of expression only because it is the "analog" or "proxy" of a subjectivity.[14] It is precisely because the aesthetic object is such an analog that it is able to share in the three characteristics of subjectivity I have enumerated above. The aesthetic object belongs to the world of the artist; it is a glimpse of the the artist's world made concrete. The world of the aesthetic object, and of human beings, "is that which style expresses."[15] The style of the aesthetic object is the ground of its world, and this style has its source in the artist. Although the artist is the ultimate source of expression, the aesthetic object is a source of expression as well. The crucial difference is that the aesthetic object is a source that is one step removed from the true origin of expression, subjectivity.

The aesthetic object is not a subjectivity proper. It is the radiance of a subjectivity made concrete. In this way, the aesthetic object possesses a *world* as an overflow of the creator's world. It is capable of *expression* because it expresses in lieu of the creator's presence. Expression, as a kind of communication, seeks an audience; thus, the aesthetic object *demands* to be perceived. The aesthetic object is not itself a subject; it is the intentionality of an artist made concrete. Intentionality is a characteristic of subjects, not objects, and thus, the aesthetic object is a quasi-subject.

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[14] Ibid, 411.

[15] Ibid, 168.

§2.5 The Aesthetic Object and Traditional Dualisms

Thus far, I have shown that the being of the aesthetic object cannot be captured by the traditional dichotomy between the real and the ideal. To say the aesthetic object exists independently of consciousness or that it exists only in consciousness does not capture the essence of this unique being. The aesthetic object has the being of an activity, or a behavior; traditional metaphysical categories are insufficient for an adequate conceptualization of the vitality and activity that comprise the essence of this entity. But the real/ideal dualism is not the only traditional dichotomy that fails to characterize the aesthetic object.

Dufrenne argues that the aesthetic object is a quasi-subject. It is not a subject proper, but neither is it merely an object in the traditional sense. An object is incapable of acting in the manner in which the aesthetic object acts. Of these two entities, only the latter acts; that is, the aesthetic object is capable of expression. One might argue that objects are in some sense capable of action, as when a hot ember burns other material. The difference between the action of a hot ember, heating, and the action of the aesthetic object, expression, is the element of subjectivity found in the action of the aesthetic object. Unlike the action of heating, expression is an intentional action. Intentionality is unique to subjects and this is why Dufrenne states that "there can be expression only of a subjectivity."[16] But the aesthetic object is not a subject proper; it refuses to be captured by this traditional philosophical notion. The subject/object dualism fails us here and

[16] Ibid, 177.

Dufrenne is forced to theorize outside of these traditional terms by claiming for the aesthetic object the status of quasi-subjectivity.

Works of architecture are complex entities and quasi-subjectivity is but one characteristic of these ontologically rich beings. As an aesthetic object and quasi-subject, architecture speaks to us, communicating its affective qualities as we explicitly engage with them as works of art. This kind of aesthetic communion is attained by sustained, explicit, intentional effort. But works of architecture are use-objects as well as aesthetic objects. As use-objects, we engage with architecture on a level that usually remains unthematic, below the level of explicit awareness. These two levels of engagement – explicit communion with aesthetic objects and non-explicit engagement with use-objects – are the two primary avenues of architectural influence. I now turn to the work of Martin Heidegger to help illuminate the nature of use-objects and our engagement with them.

§3.1 Heidegger On Objects of Theory

In Martin Heidegger's early magnum opus, *Being and Time*[17], he carefully analyzes use-objects in his attempt to bring to light the notion of world and the conditions for its possibility.[18] In his analysis, Heidegger distinguishes two kinds of entities that are found within the world – (1) entities that are the objects of theoretical inquiry and (2) objects that humans engage with as they go about their everyday lives. My inquiry into architectural influence is primarily concerned with the second kind of entity, but for the sake of clarity I outline both in what follows. Both kinds of entities have their own way of being, have a proper mode of access, and humans have a specific kind of knowledge of each. All three of these aspects will be delineated in the analyses below.

Heidegger calls the being of objects of theoretical inquiry *present-at-hand*.[19] Present-at-hand entities are self-sufficient substances with attributes that have quantifiable spatial relationships with one another. As quantifiable and measurable, these entities are the objects of the physical sciences. For example, a pen approached as a thing to be measured, quantified or chemically analyzed (rather than approached as a use-object) is present-at-hand. Works of architecture show themselves as present-at-hand

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[17] Heidegger (1988).

[18] Dufrenne is greatly indebted to Heidegger for this discovery. Dufrenne's formulation of world is a faithful rearticulation of Heidegger's account. See §2.3 above.

[19] Heidegger (1988), 67-71.

beings when we engage them as objects of engineering or sets of materials to be organized according to structural laws.

As objects of the physical sciences, the proper mode of access for this kind of entity is that of detached looking - a relationship that Heidegger calls "tarrying-alongside."[20] This kind of bare perceptual cognition is completely divorced from use and manipulation. Heidegger captures this point by alluding to the etymology of the word 'theory'. The word 'theory' has its roots in the Greek verb that means 'to look' and the noun that signifies 'spectator'.[21] The theoretical attitude is proper to present-at-hand entities, as it is from this attitude that we quantify to world.

Just as the theoretical attitude is our way of approach that we take when dealing with present-at-hand beings, theoretical knowledge is the kind of knowledge proper to these entities. Theoretical knowledge is, by its very nature, the result of disengaged contemplation. The object of contemplation is thought by a subject who is at a cognitive distance from the object itself – the thinker reflects on the object rather than engaging with it as a part of the lived environment. The object is contemplated in terms of its substance and attributes which are translated into a propositional structure. The relationships among propositions that are discovered can be written up and discussed without the aid of the entity which is the subject of the report. In short, the knowledge that is proper to present-at-hand entities is disengaged, propositional (i.e theoretical) knowledge. In terms of architecture, the blueprints of a building and our discussion of

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[20] Ibid, 88.

[21] Ibid, 99.

these plans have a propositional structure. We have propositional, that is, theoretical, knowledge of a work of architecture when we engage with it in this way. Theoretical knowledge is also the result of regarding architecture as a the geometrical organization of scientifically analyzable material.

To summarize, present-at-hand entities are quantifiable beings; they are accessed by means of detached looking; and our knowledge of them is propositional.

§3.2 Heidegger On Use-Objects

Use-objects, entities that Heidegger calls *equipment*, are the beings that are closest to us as we go about our everyday tasks.[22] The term 'equipment' includes things like doors, pens, sidewalks and dishes. They are the entities that are bound up in the achievements of our tasks. Soap, dishes and sponges are equipment for washing dishes. Hammers, nails and measuring tapes are equipment for carpentry. Both of these groups of equipment facilitate, and are ontologically founded upon, the activities of human life. There is a circular relationship between our practices and the equipment we use – our tasks shape what kind of equipment we use (as well as produce) and the equipment that is accessible to us shape our tasks.

Architecture is a kind of equipment that is often overlooked as we go about our tasks. In fact, Heidegger overlooks this all-pervasive kind of equipment in his analysis in *Being and Time*. Admittedly, architecture is easy to overlook in an analysis of equipment because it is often the context in which equipment is used. A plumber needs his workshop, an architect her drafting room, even though these spaces are not as

[22] Ibid, 97.

conspicuous as the other tools of their trade. In addition to providing a context for the use of equipment, architecture facilitates this use by directing our movements through the spaces we inhabit.

Heidegger calls the being of equipment *readiness-to-hand*. As opposed to the self-sufficiency of present-at-hand entities, equipment cannot exist in isolation from other equipment. Pens are ontologically intertwined with ink, paper, the practice of writing, and language. As Heidegger points out, "there 'is' no such thing as an equipment."[23] Rather, a "totality of equipment" is prior to individual equipment.[24] Paper, ink, and the equipment used to make pens are ontologically interrelated. Further, these interrelated equipment are bound up in the practices of human beings – the publishing business, practices of journaling, bookkeeping, etc. Heidegger argues that equipment "always is in terms of its belonging to other equipment."[25] Each tool we use refers to other tools, including the architectural space in which they are used. Equipmental clusters are the basic unit, not individual items of equipment. In other words, a totality of equipment is the condition for the possibility of individual items of equipment.

As outlined above, unlike present-at-hand entities, entities that are ready-to-hand exist in relation to other ready-to-hand entities. Heidegger names the structure of the relationship between items of equipment the 'in-order-to' structure and he calls the

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

content of this relationship *assignment* or *reference*.[26] Equipment is used 'in-order-to' accomplish tasks. For example, hammers are used 'in-order-to' fasten nails. There is an assignment, or referential relationship, between hammers, hammering, and nails. This referential network is the ontological basis of the intertwinement of equipmental clusters (e.g. soap, sponges and dishes). Here one begins to see more clearly how the totality of equipment is ontologically prior to individual items of equipment. Hammers, nails, and drywall as an equipmental group are ontologically prior to the individual items. Hammers with neither nails nor material to fasten into place are unintelligible and ontologically impossible.

The assignments of equipment are the clue for understanding how one attains both access to and knowledge of ready-to-hand entities. Heidegger calls the "sight" that is appropriate to ready-to-hand entities *circumspection*.[27] Unlike the consciously explicit detached looking that provides access to entities present-at-hand, circumspection operates at a pre-theoretical level. Circumspection guides our dealings with equipment so that we are able to accomplish the task with which we are occupied without bringing the details of our activities into reflective consciousness. The various assignments belonging to equipment in our environment are the objects of circumspection. When engaging equipment, circumspection is the 'sight' that guides us through the in-order-to structures that are appropriate for our work. For example, a bike messenger riding through busy San Francisco traffic is able to manipulate his bike and respond to traffic signs without

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid, 98.

being explicitly aware of the details of what he is doing while he is doing it. In fact, the messenger may be consciously thinking of something entirely different from what he is doing while he is manipulating the equipment in his environment. Of course, in retrospect, the biker may be able to recount everything he did while riding, but, in the moment, he was not consciously reflecting on his actions. It is by means of circumspection that the bike messenger is able to use the equipment in his environment without being explicitly aware of what he is doing. Similarly, when walking through a building that one is familiar with, one does not think about the path that one takes to get to our destination. Most of the time, one focuses on the *destination*, the *goal*, not the path to get there. The destination is arrived at without having to call to consciousness which doors to go through and what hallways to walk.

Circumspection is our way of accessing ready-to-hand entities, but it remains unclear what kind of knowledge is appropriate to these entities. To clarify this issue one must recall that the being of a ready-to-hand entity is determined by its respective assignment. Heidegger notes that by merely looking "at the 'outward appearance' of Things [sic] in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand."[28] That is, detached looking and theoretical knowledge, the way in which we access and come to know present-at-hand entities, are unable to access the assignments of equipment. Assignments are not properties of a substance that are accessible to a detached, unengaged, theoretical knower. Thus, theoretical knowledge is incommensurate with equipment. Detached looking is an inappropriate means of

[28] Ibid.

accessing equipment just as propositional knowledge cannot come to terms with the being of ready-to-hand entities. Heidegger tells us that the "less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment."[29] The way we are able to obtain knowledge of an item of equipment is by accessing its use. Circumspective manipulation is the mode of accessing the ready-to-hand, and bodily, engaged 'know-how' is the kind of knowledge appropriate to equipment.

At this point in my analysis the question naturally arises, 'If our knowledge of ready-to-hand entities takes place at a pre-theoretical level, then how are we able to discuss the in-order-to structure in theoretical terms?' It is true that our relationship with equipment is one of nonreflective bodily engagement, but it does not follow that we cannot thematize this relationship. To render the assignments of equipment phenomenologically explicit Heidegger examines three kinds of cases in which assignments are disrupted.[30] When an item of equipment is (1) broken, (2) missing, or (3) inappropriate for the task at hand (and thus obstructs our ability to engage in our task), the referential structure of the environment becomes explicit. For example, when the hammer I am using breaks I become aware of all the things that I am prevented from doing. My broken hammer makes explicit the fact that I cannot hammer in the nails with which I fasten the wood in order construct the house that I am working on all for the sake

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid, 102-104.

of being the carpenter that I understand myself to be.[31] I do not see this referential structure when my hammer is working. Rather, I am absorbed in my work, unaware of the equipment itself and the referential structure to which the equipment belongs. When slabs of marble are missing from the floor of City Hall, the floor and its role in facilitating my mobility are made explicit by this disruption. As Heidegger notes, it is only "when an assignment has been disturbed… [that] the assignment becomes explicit."[32]

§3.3 Signs, Circumspection & Directedness

In addition to the three break-down cases mentioned above, signs are another phenomenological clue for rendering explicit the referential structure of equipment. Signs are a specific kind of equipment and, as equipment, signs are part of a referential structure. But unlike the in-order-to structure of other kinds of equipment, signs have a peculiar form of reference. Signs have the specific equipmental character of "showing or indicating"[33] and they provide us with at least the following four indications:[34]

(1) Signs show the *context* in which one finds oneself.

(2) Signs show that one is *already directed* toward a determinate task.

(3) Signs *guide* one current directedness.

(4) Signs show *what kind of involvement* we are involved with.

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[31] Ibid, 105, 120.

[32] Ibid, 105.

[33] Ibid, 108.

[34] Ibid, 110-111.

The following example should flesh out Heidegger's phenomenological description of signs. When I need to study a particular set of books for class the next day, before I go to sleep I set the books on my dinning table. By doing this, I have established a sign. When I wake up the next morning, I will probably do what I usually do in the morning - brew a pot of coffee, toast a bagel, grab the newspaper and go to the dinning table to peruse the headlines. By establishing a sign for myself – setting my books on the dinning table – I have used "circumspective fore-sight" to orient myself in my daily activities.[35] This is perhaps the most fundamental features of signs; they orient us in our environment and in relation to our involvements. In this example, the sign I establish for myself orients me in four ways corresponding to the four kinds of indication mentioned above.

> (1) The books indicate an academic equipmental nexus. I become oriented with regard to pencils, dictionaries, notebooks, flash-cards, etc.
>
> (2) The books show me my current directedness. I become aware of my current involvement in my morning routine.
>
> (3) The books guide my directedness. I remember that need to study for my class before I go about the rest of my daily activities.
>
> (4) The books show my involvement in a particular seminar, in graduate school and in my self interpretation as an educator in training.

The example above illustrates how a sign orients us, how a sign "addresses itself to the circumspection of our concernful dealings, and it does so in such a way that the circumspection which goes along with it, following where it points, brings into explicit

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[35] Ibid, 111.

'survey' whatever aroundness the environment may have at the time."[36] But a sign is only able to accomplish this based its second fundamental feature. Unlike other items of equipment that withdraw into inconspicuousness when they are used, signs are by their very nature conspicuous when in use. The conspicuousness of signs allows the perceptive phenomenologist to uncover the referential structure that is the underlying structure of worlds – an ontological structure Heidegger calls *worldhood*.

By analyzing the three brake-down cases and the nature of signs, we are able to gain a fuller understanding of the being of equipment and the referential structure that is its basis. Although break-down cases are an important way of accessing worldhood, it is Heidegger's phenomenology of signs that is of particular importance to a phenomenology of architecture. The first and third indications provided by signs – showing the equipmental context in which one is involved and helping guide one through one's tasks – are directly related to our engagement with architecture, when architecture is regarded primarily as equipment rather than art. The first indication provided by signs points to the role of architecture in providing a space – both existential space and physical space – for our activities. The third points to the directionality that is a fundamental aspect of architecture's spatiality.

§3.4 Architecture, Equipment & Spatiality

The spatiality of architecture and its role in providing a context for the interrelations of human beings, activities, and equipment has been addressed above, but only in a preliminary fashion. Drawing from Heidegger's *Being and Time* as well as his

[36] Ibid, 110.

famous essay "The Origin of the Work of Art"[37], I will elaborate on the following three themes: existential space, the place of equipment and, finally, the role architecture plays in the institution of existential space.

As I have pointed out above, Heidegger correctly notes that "[t]aken strictly, there 'is' no such thing as *an* equipment."[38] Clusters of equipment exist in relation to one another and in relation to the activities of human beings. For example, soap, sponges, dishes, as well as the architecture of a kitchen are all related to one another – they form an equipmental cluster that is ontologically intertwined with our shared cultural practices of eating and sanitation. To begin with, these practices (as well as the equipment related to these practices) are ontologically founded upon our self-interpretation. Dish washing is bound to whether we understand ourselves as impeccably tidy, too busy with important matters to keep a clean kitchen, or merely 'average' in our house keeping. Taken a step further, these interpretations are made within a framework of shared cultural practices and norms. Although this example shows our being, the being of equipment, and our daily activities to be a unitary phenomenon, what is most important for my present line of thought is the discovery that, considered ontologically, equipment exists in clusters rather than as self-sufficient individual entities.

Equipmental clusters are embedded in inhabited spaces. To be sure, equipment presupposes objective, measurable space in which it resides, but this is not the only kind of space we inhabit. Objective, measurable space is accessed only after penetrating

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[37] Heidegger (2001).

[38] Heidegger (1988), 97.

through existential space. To elucidate the difference between these two types of space it is helpful to begin with a discussion of two different kinds of distance, objective distance and existential distance.

Objective space is the kind of space that we understand in a commonsensical way. This kind of space is measurable in terms of physical distance, e.g. inches, feet, yards, miles, etc. For example, as I type these words on my laptop computer, the objective distance from my eyes to the screen is approximately two feet.

Existential space is the space of lived experience. An example of my experience working as a bookbuyer in a used bookstore illustrates the difference between objective space and lived space. The bookstore I work in is a four story building. I spend much of my time in two areas of the bookstore – (1) on the first floor in the area in which the cash register and book-buying counter are located as well as (2) on the third floor, shelving and alphabetizing books. I enjoy being in these areas and I take it upon myself to keep them neat and organized in a way that facilitates my work. When I am at the cash register and a customer asks me about a book in the display window (which is less than ten feet away from my station at the register), I fumble my way through the displays looking for it. I am not much concerned with this part of the store; it is foreign to me and I rarely know what is displayed there. The display windows are far from my concerns and usual activities, this area feels slightly foreign me. In fact, the display window *is* far away from me in terms of what I care about in the store. In contrast, when a customer

asks a question regarding the books on the third floor, I comfortably navigate through the winding bookshelves and stacks of books. I am personally invested in the third floor; even though it is objectively much farther than the display window right by my side; existentially (i.e. in terms of familiarity and concern) it is very close to me.

Equipmental clusters are indigenous to existential space, a kind of space opened up by our concerns and activities. Our activities first discover space, it is only after this initial discovery that are we able to step back from our activities and regard space as objective and measurable. Equipment has its *place*, a place that is determined by our activities. But the place of equipment is derived from an even more primordial existential spatiality, a kind of space that Heidegger calls a *region*.[39] A primary function of architecture to open up regions, to provide an existential space in which the various activities of human life can take place.

One of the few, perhaps the only, place that Heidegger touches on this function of architecture is in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." In this essay, Heidegger describes an unnamed Greek temple and the role it plays in Greek life. The a main function of architecture, it seems, is to provide a space in which a meaningful dimension of life can be acted out. Specifically, the temple is the source of a meaningful context in which practices such as worship, celebration, mourning, and other practices of communal cohesion are performed. I agree with Heidegger on this point but, perhaps overtaken with enthusiasm, Heidegger goes on to speak in hyperbolic tones. I quote at length to make my point:

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[39] Ibid, 136-137.

> Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of that rock's clumsy yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are.[40]

As Karsten Harries has already pointed out, the people who built the temple must have themselves seen the light of day while they were working.[41] Surely storms were violent in the eyes of these builders before the temple was erected. Yes, architecture provides a meaningful space for a community to enact its shared practices, in this way providing a condition for the possibility of such practices. But architecture does not provide the condition for the possibility of *all* things. After all, there must already being a meaningful context in which a community erects such a building in the first place. Architecture does not *create* anything, but it does *facilitate* many things.

As mentioned above, architecture opens up a particular kind of existential space, what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* a *region*.[42] A region is a meaningful context in which particular kinds of practices can take place. In Heidegger's temple example, the temple provides a space for holiness to be, as well as the practices (i.e. worship, celebration, mourning, etc.) that are associated with the holy. The temple is a center of

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[40] Heidegger (2001), 41.

[41] Karsten Harries (1998), 279.

[42] Heidegger (1988), 136.

activity and a center of meaning. The region that the temple provides can then be separated out into equipmental places – there is a place for the alter and ceremonies, there is perhaps a place for cooking, a place for the public to worship and bring gifts, etc. Here one sees that places are established only *after* a region is opened up by a work of architecture.

Throughout my discussion of Heidegger and his relevance in an analysis of how architecture influences how we understand ourselves I have focused on one goal: architecture is a kind of equipment, one that has the function of creating meaningful spaces for human practices. My analyses of equipment, break-down cases of equipment, and signs show that the meaningful context in which we live has its own kind of spatiality and directionality. These latter two features are existential, that is, related to human life as it is lived rather than how it seems when reflected upon in the abstract. I have argued that architecture is both a work of art and a use-object, making my case on both fronts. But a final ontological puzzle remains – how can architecture be both a work of art and a use-object? The first is contemplated and studied in detail, the second is used and becomes inconspicuous in its use. I have stated that architecture has a hybrid ontological status, and I now turn my efforts to fleshing out what this entails. The answer to this puzzle can be found by wrestling with some interpretive problems found in the works of Dufrenne and Heidegger.

§4.1 Ontological Hybridity, Levels of Description & the Rich World Thesis

Both thinkers whose work I have been drawing from, Mikel Dufrenne and Martin Heidegger, make ontological distinctions that are difficult to make sense of. Dufrenne discusses the work of art and the aesthetic object. The work of art is the material (or sound in the case of music) that is the condition for the possibility of the aesthetic object. The aesthetic object makes its appearance only when the spectator engages the work of art in an appropriate manner. When a painting is regarded as a human creation, as the expression of a life, as a source of meaning, and not merely as material that is mounted on the wall, the aesthetic object emerges. Dufrenne makes a distinction between two distinct beings – the work of art and the aesthetic object – but these objects coincide; when I look at the painting on the wall, is it not a single entity? Of course, Dufrenne would tell us that the aesthetic object lies dormant in the work of art. But what does it mean to 'lie dormant' or 'exist in potential'? In a way, the work of art and the aesthetic object constitute a single hybrid entity. Heidegger presents us with a similar problem. A close look at how Heidegger formulates the relationship between presence-at-hand (i.e. the being of objects of theory/science) and readiness-to-hand (i.e. the being of use-objects) reveals a paradox:

> "To lay bare what is just present-at-hand and no more, cognition must first penetrate *beyond* what is ready-to-hand in our concern. *Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorically*. Yet only by reason of something present-at-hand, 'is there' anything ready-to-hand. Does it follow, however, granting this thesis for the nonce, that readiness-to-hand is ontologically founded upon presence-at-hand?"[43]

Heidegger leaves this question for the reader to answer, never returning to it himself.

One solution to these puzzles is to assume that the ontological status of an entity – as aesthetic object, use-object, or object of theory – is the result of projections that have their source in the subject. According to this theory, we find affective qualities in works of art because we will to perceive them as artworks and project affective qualities onto them. We use a hammer to fasten nails because we project a use-value onto the hammer. According to this solution, meaning is found in the subject and then projected onto the world and objects in a willful manner; a thing becomes a use object because I want it to be so, a object becomes aesthetic when I want to project my own affects onto it.

Of course, this theory cannot be true. Both Dufrenne and Heidegger have convincingly shown that subjects and their world are so mutually defining that, ontologically, they are actually one being. This is the meaning of the phenomenological term *being-in-the-world*.[44] The theory above disregards this truth and assumes the traditional categories of an isolated subject that lives at a distance from isolated, self-sufficient objects. Since the ontological underpinnings of the above theory are erroneous, so is the theory that is based upon it.

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[43] Ibid, 101.

[44] Ibid, 78-90.

The puzzles that I have posed can be solved by means of two related ontological theses – the *rich world thesis* and the *descriptive levels thesis*.[45] The descriptive levels thesis maintains that our engagement with entities is inherently limited. That is, we engage with objects in terms of our purposes and, since we cannot do and intend everything at once, we engage with entities in a restricted manner. When we are in the process of moving from one home to another, we engage with a painting as a piece of material with a determinate size, weight, etc that has to be packaged and relocated. At this time, the painting shows itself to us as present-at-hand; this is one of its levels of description. Of course, after we move and set up the painting in our new home, then we can engage with it as an aesthetic object; this is another of its levels of description. This example can be generalized; *every being has many levels of description*.

But is the painting a piece of material in my first example and an aesthetic object in the second? That is, does the object change in some way? Do entities transform as my intentions shift? No, the painting is a piece of material that can be studied scientifically *as well as* an aesthetic object (when it is regarded aesthetically). It is both of these things and perhaps much more. The painting has many levels of description and it *is* all of them *all* the time. This is the claim of the rich world thesis – *the world is so rich with meaning that we can never exhaust its possibilities*. A clay pitcher is an object used to hold water, it is a material that can be studied scientifically, it has a form that has aesthetic value. It is all these things, but we usually do not engage the pitcher on all these levels at once.

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[45] Both the rich world thesis and the descriptive level thesis are the result of conversations with University of California, Berkeley Ph.D. candidate Rick Canedo.

Our finitude is the reason why some levels of description recede into the background as others remain in the foreground. The richness of the world is the source of mystery and wonder, it is the reason why science keeps marching forward and has yet to capture all aspects of reality, it is the source of our endless ethical and political struggles, and it is the source of art. As soon as we feel as though one aspect of reality has been exhausted, a newly noticed level of description problematizes our achievements.

Taken together, the rich world thesis and the descriptive levels thesis provide the tools for understanding architecture's hybrid ontological status. Like all entities, perhaps even more so, architecture is to communicate meaning. In fact, one of its defining characteristics is to be rich with meaning; it is an aesthetic object, a quasi-subject, the reified intentionality of its creator, an entity that communicates affective qualities. When one is taken aback by the aesthetic nature of a work of architecture, the latter shows itself as an aesthetic object. When one navigates their way through a building to take care of their tasks, architecture shows itself as a use-object.[46] Finally, if one examines a work of architecture in terms of its materiality or engineering design, it shows itself as present-at-hand; an object to be measured, examined, and studied theoretically. These are just a few of the obvious levels of description that comprise our interactions with architecture. What is important to note is that architecture never changes or transforms in anyway. What changes is our manner of engaging architecture. Architecture is everything I just mentioned – aesthetic object, use-object, and object of theoretical inquiry – it is rich with

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[46] Of course, when architecture shows itself as a use-object, in a manner of speaking, it disappears to explicit thought. When we engage with use-objects, the object recedes into the background and, if we are *explicitly* thinking about anything at all, our purposes/work is what is in the foreground of consciousness.

meaning. What accounts for different levels of description is the fact that we, as finite beings, cannot engage every aspect of architecture at once.

§4.2 Architecture and the Self

A theme that has been repeated in the analyses above is the notion that the self, our subjectivity, does not exist in isolation from the environment; our selves and the meaningful context that we inhabit are reciprocally related. This relationship is so essential that the self and its context are an ontological unity; this is the meaning of Heidegger's notion that human being is being-in-the-world. Although I have repeatedly separated notions of 'self' from 'environment'/'context'/'world' in my discussions above, this separation is only possible in analytic discourse and does not indicate a real ontological distinction applicable to human beings as they are 'in-themselves'. Once the notion of being-in-the-world is assumed, our everyday environment is revealed as significant to our very being.

The human landscape is dominated by architecture. Whether it is filled with huts, shacks, trailer homes, farms, single family homes, apartment buildings, movie theaters, strip malls, buildings of religious worship, sky scrapers, or museums, human life is lived amid a jungle of architecture. Like all works of art, architecture is incredibly rich with meaning and my analysis of Dufrenne's work has fleshed out how, as a quasi-subject, architecture is able to communicate affective qualities. These affective qualities are communicated to us when we engage architecture as an aesthetic object. *But is this the only time that we are affected by architecture?*

Architecture is also a use-object, or equipment, and we engage with it as such more often than we engage with it aesthetically. Taking my lead from the work of Martin Heidegger, I have provided phenomenological evidence that use-objects become inconspicuous as they are used. For example, one's pen becomes inconspicuous while one is writing. The written work is what is noticed, not the tools for writing. Applying this observation to architecture, the question arises, *does this mean that we are deaf to the communications of architecture as we go about our routines, engaging with architecture as a use-object?* If this question is answered in the affirmative, then architecture may not be very influential because it is inconspicuous to us most of the time.

The world is rich with meaning, so rich, in fact, that we, as finite beings, are only able to engage with entities in the world in a restricted manner. That is, we generally engage with entities on one level of description (e.g. either as aesthetic object or as object of scientific inquiry) at a time. But this does not mean that other levels of description cease to be. Rather, other levels of description recede into the background of our thought. The foreground/background trope is faithful to our inherently limited engagement with entities. The fact that architecture is an aesthetic object is true even when we engage with it as a use-object. Its function as use-object may be in the foreground of our attention, but its aesthetic nature is still there; only, it remains in the background of our engagements. We directly perceive all of an object's levels of description, but we only have the capacity to attend to one level at a time. As one level of description is focused upon, the other levels of description recede into the background.

The two questions I have asked above are aspects of the following objection to my project, one I refer to as *the aesthetic invisibility objection*. I claim that the communications of architecture, which are accessed when architecture is engaged with as an aesthetic object, play a large role in establishing the meaningful context within which our self-understanding is negotiated. Architectural influence is predicated on the fact that architecture is a rich source of meaning. But if most of this meaning is accessed only when architecture is engaged with aesthetically, and that architecture is primarily engaged with as a use-object, then the meanings communicated by architecture are rarely heard. According to this objection, the aesthetic dimension of architecture is, for the most part, invisible to our everyday lives. As invisible to our lives, it must have little influence on our self-understanding.

The aesthetic invisibility objection is based on an erroneous conception of our engagement with entities in the human environment. The many facets that comprise an entity – aesthetic object, use-object, quantifiable object of scientific theory – are always there, all of the time. We are faced with this rich texture of being every time we confront an entity, but only some facets, usually just one, are in the foreground of our engagement. The other levels of description are in the background of our engagement and consciousness; they are there, but remain indeterminate. It is because the full richness of an entity remains in an indeterminate state in the background of our engagement with the entity that we are able to shift our attention from one level of description to another. The

reason I can disrupt my routine of drinking my morning cup of coffee so that I may aesthetically admire the lines and shape of the mug is that the aesthetic level of description is in the background of my engagement with the mug as a use-object. The fact that the mug is an aesthetic object *is there all of the time*, that is why I am able to make this aspect of the mug determinate and admire the mug aesthetically. Of course, as I make the aesthetic dimension of the mug determinate, its status as a use-object recedes into the background, becoming indeterminate.

The notion of foreground/background as well as that of the shift from determinacy to indeterminacy among different levels of description provide the conceptual tools needed to answer the aesthetic invisibility objection. Even as we move through and walk past works of architecture, engaging with them as use-objects, these works are aesthetic objects and we perceive them as such, albeit in an indeterminate manner. The fact that a work of architecture is engaged with as a use-object is no obstacle to the reception of aesthetic communications. We do not always have explicit, determinate awareness of everything we perceive and this applies to the reception of affective, aesthetic qualities, but this does not mean they are unperceived. As Heidegger has so aptly pointed out, "indefiniteness [i.e. indeterminacy] is itself a positive phenomenon."[47] In other words, to perceive something that is indeterminate is still to perceive it. We are aware of everything that is in a state of indeterminacy in the background of our engagement with the world. This awareness is the condition for the possibility of shifting our awareness from one level of description to another. This is the lesson we learn from the mug

[47] Heidegger (1988), 25.

example above. With this in mind, it is now clear that even though we may only rarely engage with architecture as an aesthetic object, its aesthetic communications are still received.

When I use the steps of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine as a place to eat my lunch, to some degree I am aware of the sense of history, reverence and tradition that this church communicates. As I eat my lunch on the church steps, to some degree, I understand who I am *vis-à-vis* the church. I understand myself as an outsider to the religious community that gathers here for mass. But I also understand myself as an insider, an American citizen that is connected to the history that this New York City landmark communicates. The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine is part of my American heritage, and this historical and communal sense is one of which I understand myself to be a part.

When I engage with the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse as an entity that facilitates the manner in which I handle my legal affairs, to some degree I am aware of the sense of authority, efficiency and organization that is communicated by this building. These aesthetic qualities may remain in the background of my everyday engagements with the world, but they are there nonetheless. The feeling of power and authority that this building communicates has a complicated role in my self-understanding. On the one hand, I respect and am committed to the ideals of my country and my state; the feeling of power exuded by the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse is a power to protect my country's

ideals. On the other hand, I am repelled by the corrupting influences that find their way into the administration of my country. How I understand myself as an American citizen, and the degree of my patriotism, is brought to the fore every time I near this courthouse. This building plays a role in creating a meaningful context in which I negotiate how I understand myself in relation to my country.

My admittedly preliminary phenomenological sketch of how architecture influences self-understanding has reached its end. It was my intention to examine the nature and function of architecture in relation to the self. My investigation led first to the work of Mikel Dufrenne, and specifically, to his explication of the aesthetic object. Architecture, as aesthetic object, reveals a third ontological region that is neither subjective nor objective. A similar ontological region is uncovered in the works of Martin Heidegger. His discussion of equipment (or what I refer to as use objects) leads to the discovery of an ontological unity of self, objects, and world, a unity that permeates the existential sphere of human activity. This unity of self, object and world - what Heidegger refers to as being-in-the-world - includes architecture. Indeed, architecture, as both aesthetic object and use-object, plays a large role in the ontological unity of self and world in that it communicates meaning (e.g., the Brooklyn Supreme Courthouse expresses the world of American judiciary practice, the authority of the law, and a system or right and wrong). and it guides human activity and cultural practice (e.g., an ancient Greek temple guides the practices of mourning and praise, and allows a large number of

people to gather in a spirit of worship or sacrifice). Architecture communicates that which is meaningful in our worlds, and leads us through our daily practices. If self and world form an ontological unity, then architecture, as a prominent feature of the human landscape, figures heavily into the being and interpretation of each and every self. With all this in mind, the seemingly exaggerated claims made by Le Corbusier in the introduction above seem less grandiose. Le Corbusier is right, changing our architecture would change who we understand ourselves to be.

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