

Inconspicuous Architecture

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The profession of architecture is currently the subject of heavy and very public criticism.¹ Criticism has focussed both on the quality of the environments that have been created by architects and on the apparent defensiveness of the profession in the face of public opinion. The buildings so criticised² are "Frankenstein monsters, devoid of character, alien and largely unloved ... very few people are pleased with the situation."³

These and other criticisms can be seen as indicative of a more general malaise that is afflicting the professions. The competence of professional practitioners, their accountability and the relevance of the professions are all being brought into question. The community appears *not* to be well served by whatever it is that underlies professionalism. On the one hand the professional is understood as able to take all matters into account and decide and arbitrate independently of personal involvement, much as the scientist is often portrayed. In the case of the architect there is also the overlay of the professional as creative artist whose judgements are to be taken as authoritative by virtue of the professional's access to inner creative energies and sensitivity to the nature of place and space. These two notions of professionalism do not sit comfortably together, and individually they each appear seriously flawed.

As centres for the promotion, transferral and development of pro-

fessional competence, universities are similarly under challenge. It seems they are not measuring up to their self-appointed task as harbingers and promoters of theory, and the builders of knowledge bases from which practice can proceed. In the same way that the professions have not delivered in sorting out the world's problems, blame can be levelled at the universities in not delivering what they promised—the requisite theory. The recent lowering of the prestige of universities gives an indication of this. The malaise in architecture, to which this paper is addressed, may therefore be taken as typical of a more general range of problems that has at its core the false expectations of a misguided epistemology.⁴

The architectural profession has set itself up for the kind of criticism advanced against it. This has occurred in several ways. Having promoted itself as influential in matters pertaining to the built environment the profession is *not* now in a position to sidestep the criticisms and blame developers, corporations, bureaucrats, politicians, property consultants, engineers or planners. Secondly, it is well known that the architectural sciences (acoustics, lighting, energy etc) where they have been successful have not compensated for the creation of generally flawed environments. In fact it can be argued that in many cases the architectural sciences have contributed substantially to the creation of these unsatisfactory environments. Third,

Heidegger's ontology points to the primacy of human experience in our understanding of the world. Our primary mode of being is the undifferentiated realm of the available. Here there is no subject-object distinction. Things are simply there, inconspicuous and available. Other understandings of the world in terms of meaningful objects, theories and sense data are derivative. Much discontent about contemporary architecture can be attributed to the isolation of the design of buildings from the world of the available—a legacy of the ontology of Descartes. The view is presented here that the community is best served by an architecture of the available ("inconspicuous" architecture). This is architecture in which the idea of the decontextualised object, the work of art or the fixed spectacle is subservient to that of buildings as equipment, accommodation or part of a background. A re-orientation from a Cartesian to a Heideggerian ontology has important consequences for the practice of architecture and for architectural education.

it is apparent that the preoccupations of architectural theorists, where they are considered at all by the majority of building users, are regarded as confusing and irrelevant. These preoccupations do not seem to impinge on the creation or assessment of pleasant environments for people. The histories of 20th century architecture are Hegelian.⁵ They are stories of grand movements and hero architects. The debate on architecture is defined by certain architects and theoreticians in terms that mean little to building users.⁶ These terms also serve to confuse and frustrate the ordinary practitioner who feels unable to participate in the forging of new paradigms.

A fourth way in which the architectural profession has been a party to its own demise is the quest for eternal principles, the ability to generate opinions founded on eternal verities. There are the well-known aphorisms that accompany the grand movements ("less is more," "less is a bore," etc), and there are the rules and generalisations, usually about things that are either totally wrong or all right: retaining old facades on new buildings, mimicking the styles of neighbouring buildings, providing an interesting skyline, using local materials. Less glorious than the parading of eternal principals is the often laborious task of working out each case in its own context. By defining the debate in their own rarefied terms, architects as a group have effectively excluded themselves from the concerns of the community and the arena of relevant action—the specific case in the particular context.

These difficulties are well known and have been brought to the attention of the community by various commentators. However, there appears to be a gravitational attraction to certain conceptions of architecture that is difficult to resist. The thesis of this article is that these conceptions of architecture are the result of a particular and deep seated commitment. This commitment is to the scientific ontology of Descartes. It will be shown that many of the difficulties experienced within current architectural practice can be attributed to the Cartesian ontology. There is a way out. The clue lies in the nature of the mismatch itself between the professional ideal and experience. The re-

sponse proposed here is to follow the lead set within certain developments in philosophy and seek to return to *experience* as a basis for reconstructing a view of the place of architecture in the community.

The community response to architecture, the vagaries of day-to-day architectural practice, and the myriad events within the complex of relationships between client, user, authorities, consultants and architects constitute *experience*. There is clearly a serious mismatch between this experience and what is *supposed* to be—the theories, the grand rhetoric and the expectations attached to notions of professionalism. There are several responses to this mismatch. It is possible to hanker continuously after an ideal—to assert that our experience ought to accord with our theories. The theories are normative, and tell us how the world ought to be. A second response is to sustain a cynicism that divorces theory from practice. This involves a kind of double dealing. There is the public face of architectural practice and education and there is the hidden realm in which practitioners "muddle along" through the mire of day-to-day experience. Thirdly, there is a return to the experience and a rethinking of the place of architecture in the light of that experience. It is the latter approach that is advocated and pursued here. In particular, the philosophies of Martin Heidegger⁸ (particularly as recently and lucidly explicated by Hubert Dreyfus⁹) and Hans-Georg Gadamer¹⁰ will be brought to service in invigorating the architectural debate.

Echoing Husserl and Heidegger, Dreyfus remarks that "we must begin with everyday involved phenomena."¹¹ A concern with theory and practice is replaced by *experience* and *reflection* on that experience. This is a recognition that scholarship does not require the development of theories against which we measure our experience.¹² So, heartfelt misgivings by the community about the environments created by architects have to be considered as the result of legitimate experiences, no matter how inadequately they may be expressed in terms of the theories defined by the profession. Shared wants and desires expressed by a community in which there is dialogue displaces the pri-

macy of theory and carefully articulated explanations. The argument to be presented here is that a return to experience generates a philosophical position that makes sense of architecture as an "ordinary," involving and *available* enterprise.

The Rival Ontologies of Descartes and Heidegger

One of the major contributions of the current shift in philosophical thinking (attributable to the slow permeation of ideas put forward by Husserl¹³, pragmatists such as Dewey¹⁴ and reformed positivists such as Wittgenstein¹⁵) can be seen as a return from the legacy of Descartes of esoteric theories removed from human experience. The phenomenology of Husserl advocated a return to the way things appear. More recently, and from a scientific background, Lakoff and Johnson have provided a vivid account of the primacy of experience, particularly bodily-based experience, in how we understand all aspects of human thought, including language, the claims of science to objectivity, and the abstract constructs of logic and mathematics.¹⁶ Accounts of the primacy of experience in biological science are also provided by Maturana and Varela.¹⁷

The experiential account must be contrasted with the Cartesian view. According to the Cartesian ontology¹⁸ we can intellectualise an understanding of the world and our place in it in a hierarchical manner. Following the Cartesian method we begin with the simple, the incontrovertible, and build up a complex picture. Of course the picture may not have originally been derived following this method, but we use the method to reconstruct the picture. The Cartesian ontology begins with the notion that things exist "out there" and we are observing them. Objects exist as comprised of energy and matter. These impinge on the senses. Combinations of atoms result in objects with properties and behaviours. Then follow functions and meanings. So the world and its objects are understood in terms of complex combinations of features. According to Heidegger the Cartesian ontology tells us that "substances become accessible in their 'attributes.'"¹⁹ Every substance has some distinctive

property from which its essence can be "read off."

From this simple understanding have arisen various ontological themes. According to the prominent cognitivist view the mind contains symbolic representations of features.²⁰ For the materialist the story extends to the constitution of the mind. Feelings, emotions and consciousness become epiphenomena of extremely large and complex material systems.²¹ It is considered that the Cartesian ontology can be mapped onto computer programs. The atoms of existence become information units in a data base. Programs and knowledge bases are the means of making inferences to higher level representations. Meanings are derived by inference.

For many this ontology, and its variants, are self evident, beyond dispute and of little intellectual interest. The Cartesian ontology pervades scientifically-oriented societies. It is regarded as hardly worthy of study. But on reflection this ontology can be seen to be bedevilling in various ways.²² As a simple example, the failures of information processing theory and artificial intelligence to account for the rich panoply of human experience provide evidence for the inadequacies of this ontology. The complex seems not to be derivable from the simple. The whole does not emerge from a consideration of the parts. In spite of the elegance of the reductive approach meanings seem to evade the process. If it worked artificial intelligence would then have been at least partly realised. "AI research has called the Cartesian cognitivist's bluff."²³

What of the success of science, the greatest accomplishment arising from the Cartesian ontology? Science can be seen as a particularly fragile and rarefied enterprise in that every attempt is made to suspend the involvement of experience and to turn it into observation.²⁴ Even in science the rules of the subject-object game are under revision, and are possibly at their limits, particularly in the realm of quantum physics, and certainly in the area of understanding human behaviour.

Rather than employ science and the Cartesian ontology to provide a framework for understanding experience, the question is turned around

by Heidegger. Why it is that for our culture certain aspects of human experience (particularly the pursuit of science) persuade us that we are dealing with an objective reality, immutable principles, the essential and irrefutable argument?²⁵ For Heidegger the quest for objective reality, particularly according fundamental status to the idea of the thinking subject attending to the world of objects, represents a kind of "falling."²⁶ It is a legitimate state to be in, but represents a transition from the "primordial" to the derivative.

In countering the Cartesian ontology Heidegger posits an "experientialist"²⁷ account. Of course experience does not exist in a vacuum. Living and relating experience will always be a matter of consensus, discussion and persuasion. The reflection feeds back into the experience. The test for a set of philosophical propositions will always be: is this how it appears? Philosophical propositions will always be subject to change in the light of new reflections.²⁸

It is possible to gain an initial understanding of Heidegger's ontology in terms of levels of experience.²⁹ According to Heidegger our *primary* experience of the world is undifferentiated. We are absorbed. As we engage in our activities things are available. We are unaware: "... we often experience ourselves as active yet are not aware of what we are trying to do."³⁰ Our thoughts are not directed to some end. There are no goals: "... at times one is actually surprised when the task is accomplished, as when one's thoughts are interrupted by one's arrival at the office."³¹ How is it that we are able to cope in this way? Clearly, this coping is "shaped by a vast amount of previous dealings,"³² past experience.

The well known example of this experience of the available is our use of an item of equipment such as a hammer.³³ The most primordial experience we have of a hammer is through its "readiness-to-hand." Readiness-to-hand is not grasped theoretically or by looking at and contemplating the hammer, but by unselfconsciously using it. In this experience the hammer is undifferentiated from ourselves and our world. Similarly, in the mundane activity of walking to the office, we are

unconcerned about the contact between the soles of our feet and the pavement. In the same way the facade of the building in which we work may make no demands upon our attention as we engage in the day to day task of entering the building. In so far as equipment is part of anything we may understand it as part of the "background" to our daily activity. Our own experience of ourselves is similarly that of simply "being-in-the-world."

The spatial terminology of "part" and "in" can be misleading, and Heidegger is at pains to indicate the precise sense in which such terms are used. The "in" of "being in" is not a spatial "in." It is rather the "in" of involvement, or of being *in* love.³⁴ The radical aspect of this ontology is that for our day-to-day existence there is no distinction between the thinking subject and the world of objects. The experience of our most primordial state of being is one of undifferentiated involvement. Clearly this observation about human experience is radically at variance with Descartes' ontology that begins with the thinking subject and the incontrovertible primacy of the distinction between subject and object. It is also at variance with Husserl's phenomenological philosophy which asserts the primacy of intentional (goal-directed and purposeful) states within a subject.³⁵

Built upon the experience of the available and at the next level in the ontology is the experience of the meaningful.³⁶ Put more negatively this is the realm of the unavailable, that which we encounter in the event of breakdown of the available. The meaningful is there when we call attention to something.³⁷ We formulate things that are the objects of intentions—when the head drops off the hammer, our feet hurt, the entrance door will not open, or the light catches the facade in an unexpected manner. At this level of experience the hammer is a hammer. It has value, it is heavy, beautiful, practical, cumbersome, blunt and old. It is not a meaningless atomic entity that must be "read off." The hammer *is* immediately. Its identity is tied up with its involvement in an "interconnectedness of equipment" as in the total equipment of the workshop. The idea of projection comes in here. There are certain

expectations about what a hammer is and does. This is not a psychological projection. According to Heidegger we do not "throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it."³⁸ The hammer is understood in terms of a totality of involvement. The identification of something as something is an interpretive act, a theme taken up and expanded at length by Gadamer.³⁹ According to Dreyfus this experience of the meaningful involves the "subject with mental content on a nonmental background."⁴⁰

At the next level in Heidegger's ontology we encounter the world of detached theoretical understanding.⁴¹ This is where we stand before something in a detached manner, engaging in theoretical reflection. It is also the realm of the object in science, the object of observation and experimentation. Objects are seen as isolated, and as collections of properties. The context of these objects is artificial, the realm of scientific rules and laws. Things are recontextualised from the everyday to a rarefied and deterministic realm—formal models and scientific theories. Objects are defined in relation to specific purposes. In science and technology this is usually for the purpose of subjugating them to a particular kind of control. So the hammer is seen in terms of properties such as weight and size, our feet on the pavement are seen in terms of physiological and pathological processes, and the building facade is seen in terms of area, light reflectance, colour, construction principles and rules of composition and proportion.

The next level in Heidegger's ontology is that of bare facts, sense data, the most rarefied and abstract understanding possible.⁴² This is the realm of the self-sufficient subject engaged in pure contemplation or perhaps undirected curiosity. It is the most illusive and fragile encounter with the world. It requires appropriating without purpose or prejudice the essential materialness of an object world. The nearest one can come to capturing such an encounter is the CAD data base, but even here the encounter is purpose driven. It is this final derivative and uncontextualised level of being that is the basis of the Cartesian (traditional) ontology to

which Heidegger directs his objections. Dreyfus makes this clear.

Such disinterested attention and the isolated entities it reveals gives rise to traditional ontology—a constantly renewed but unsuccessful attempt to account for everything in terms of some type of ultimate substances on the side of both subject and object. Thus we get the phenomenon mistakenly characterised by traditional philosophy of mind as an isolated, self-contained subject confronting an isolated, self-contained, object ...⁴³

These four levels of the *available*, the *meaningful*, *detached theoretical reflection* and *bare facts* are the important components of Heidegger's ontology to which we wish to draw attention here. The details are less important for our purposes than the notion that this philosophy involves us in a fundamental "reversal" of the understanding provided through the Cartesian ontology.

Of course this ontology is prone to serious misunderstandings. An extremely superficial reading of Heidegger's ontology may tempt us to see it as a commentary on human psychology and perception. So in our experience of the *available* we find that as our attention is directed to one thing we find that we cannot attend to the other—perhaps a limitation on our information processing capabilities. As we become familiar with our environment we attend to it less consciously. According to this misreading certainty still rests in the notion of a world out there, an objective reality. We are primarily beings blessed with consciousness and intelligence able to engage in perceptions and actions. One of the points of Heidegger's ontology is that availability precedes scientific explanations of human experience, to which psychological explanations belong.⁴⁴ To avoid this psychological trap and for other reasons Heidegger is at pains to meticulously define terms and to create special terms that do not carry with them the overload of the Cartesian ontology.

Lest we think that the Heideggerian ontology simply presents an alternative way of looking at things that can be comfortably

meshed with a Cartesian world view, it is worth reflecting on the incommensurability of the styles of philosophical discourse provided by each.⁴⁵ In beginning with the phenomenon, and acknowledging our involvement in the world as primary, we embark on a new adventure of intellectual discovery. When taken seriously Heidegger's ontology changes the rules of the intellectual game. It subjugates theory. It changes the framework within which many of the questions that have engaged philosophers for the past four hundred years have been raised. Both directly and indirectly it also changes our perceptions of architecture and architectural practice.

The Architecture of the Object

It is possible to identify how contemporary conceptions of architecture and design have been informed by the Cartesian ontology. The major effect is indirect and rests on the entrenched view of the primacy of the subject-object divide. The great gulf between subject and object has generated two cultures. This can be traced to the Enlightenment. The burgeoning of science and objectivity, the notion of the world of nature out there able to be known and understood, did not serve primarily to rationalise the world but to divide it.⁴⁶ Science was allowed its domain, but the rest of human experience left out of this endeavour (emotions, feelings and the poetic) was appropriated by the culture of the Romantic. From this latter culture arose the great tradition of the individual, the creative genius, and the philosophical tradition of Kant and Hegel and eventually Husserl with his "science" of the subjective. In architecture the two cultures are commonly manifested as two schools of thought, education and even practice. There is architectural science, the design methods movement, design science and their progeny on the one hand and the culture of the "art object" on the other. According to the extreme scientific view architecture is or can be a science, designing can be understood in terms of logic, rules, algorithms and computational models. The extreme Romantic view is that designing is a private and subjective enterprise. Each culture has engen-

dered particular styles of architectural education, research and even practice. Both the rationalistic and the Romantic are bolstered by the Cartesian orientation—the primacy of the divide between subject and object. The Hegelian style of rhetoric that predominates architectural criticism, debate and practice in some quarters and alluded to above belongs firmly within the Romantic tradition. So too does the tradition that identifies the architect as creator and endorses the centrality of the architect in shaping the environment—the history of architecture as the story of great architects.⁴⁷

In dissolving the primacy of the subject-object distinction, the Heideggerian ontology inevitably leads to a breakdown of these two cultures and their influence on the debates on design and architecture. Elsewhere we present the case for an appraisal of these cultures in terms of the metaphors they provide for understanding design, and the extent to which they enable or disable design activity and design discourse.⁴⁸

More immediately we can consider the primacy given to the object in architecture engendered by the Cartesian ontology. There is not a single conception of the architectural object from within the Cartesian ontology but many. Firstly there is the scientific view. There is the notion of a building as a system of services, circulation routes, structural elements, fabric and functional units. The most prominent and now generally discredited conception within this view is of the building as an object of function, devoid of meaning—by several accounts the thrust of functionalism.⁴⁹ Then there are the linguistic views of the building as text, either as part of a structured system of signs as in semiotics or as text understood grammatically. In the former case buildings have static meanings striking resonances with deeply embedded individual or collective psychological structures. For the grammarians a building is a syntactic object embodying systems of grammatical rules—rules of composition. In the case of building as text it is sometimes important to be given the code for understanding the building. An example is Robert Venturi's explanation of how the facade of his extension to

the National Gallery in London is to be "read." According to the architect the facade presents a transition from the formal to the informal as one's eye moves across the facade from the old building to the distant corner of the new.⁵⁰ As a text, and attempting to follow the techniques of Derridean literary theorists, a building may offer a "deconstructed reading."⁵¹

Secondly, there are the overtly Romantic conceptions of the building. There is the "essential building." This is not the materially essential building of the functionalist but the spiritually and poetically essential building, a view popularised by Norberg-Shultz.⁵² The appropriation of the *genius loci* requires a sensitivity to place. Then there is the widely prevalent view of the building as art object, very often to be appreciated in secondary form from the fixed viewpoint, isolated and framed, as in a photograph. Then there is the building as spectacle—the building presented as though every encounter with it is to be a first encounter, every movement through it an experience with the encounter stage managed and directed by the architect. Central to these conceptions is the building as material object, from which all other experiences are derived.

The building as "art object" appears to dominate architectural culture and architectural education. The building as art object is evident as it is singled out from its context for appreciation, where it is depicted pictorially, it is "framed," and where its appreciation and evaluation are conducted as if the building exists in isolation. Gadamer indicates how this is evident in the case of architecture appreciated through the eyes of modern tourism. The idea of buildings as art objects "turns travelling into armchair browsing through picture books"⁵³ or slide shows. The work loses its place in the world in which it belongs.

Both Gadamer and Dewey denounce the "aesthetic differentiation" of art objects in opposition to the rest of experience. According to Dewey, such differentiation is based simply on the acceptance of certain existing social conditions.⁵⁴ What we now designate as art objects were once a part of everyday life. In classical and Medieval culture "the arts of the

drama, music, painting, and architecture thus exemplified had no particular connection with theatres, galleries, museums. They were part of the significant life of an organized community."⁵⁵

The isolation of the products of design as objects of art poses severe difficulties. It results in the elevation of certain design products into a realm of critical discourse that is thought to be the preserve of the expert and the connoisseur. In the case of building design there is the danger that the complaints of the users may be regarded as less interesting than the concerns of the professional critics who have a fluent grasp of stylistic and historical issues. In the case of buildings and industrial design, the magazine culture that promotes the idea of design artefacts as art objects leads to an emphasis on formal and pictorial qualities at the expense of social context, use, life cycle and environmental considerations. In designing "art objects" the physical product is all important, whereas the products of design actually include ways of life, values and means of human interaction. The sense in which an artefact assumes an autonomy as creating its own environment is easily ignored when it is isolated as an art object.

These arguments are generally well understood. Both Dewey and Gadamer take the argument a step further however. The notion of the art object tends to alienate aesthetic experience from every day experience. According to Dewey, aesthetic experience can be described in terms of "appreciative, perceiving and enjoying."⁵⁶ It applies to both "production" and "consumption." Aesthetic experience "is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience."⁵⁷ The aesthetic experience is as evident in the tasks of dismantling a carburetor, solving a mathematical problem, titrating chemicals, or attending a sporting event as it is in admiring Chartres cathedral or painting in water colours. However, the notion of the art object tends to dictate the appropriate context in which aesthetic experience is to be discussed and against which it should be measured. The appreciation of art

becomes the archetype of aesthetic experience.

Because of the sterility of the culture that attends the isolated art object, there therefore develops a secondary and supposedly lesser culture of genuine but subversive aesthetic enjoyment. This is the realm of the popular. "The arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be the arts: for instance, the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip, and, too frequently, newspaper accounts of love nests, murders, and exploits of bandits."⁵⁸ The desire of both Dewey and Gadamer is to restore art to the mainstream of human experience. What is required is an understanding of buildings as part of the "flow of the circumspective,"⁵⁹ the fabric of the culture, architecture as part of the environment. What is also required is a subjugation of architectural individualism—the building standing out, the fragmentation of the environment, the architectural statement. The architecture of the object is the architecture of the tourist. It is a spectacle, readily appropriated at a glance and through the view finder of a camera.

A building is never primarily a work of art. Its purpose, through which it belongs in the context of life, cannot be separated from itself without its losing some of its reality. If it has become merely an object of the aesthetic consciousness, then it has merely a shadowy reality and lives a distorted life only in the form of an object of interest to tourists, or the subject of a photograph.⁶⁰

The Architecture of the Available

By way of contrast a Heideggerian ontology of buildings begins with the available. A building is part of a day-to-day encounter, part of the background of living. Our primordial experience is of availability. For most people for most of the time buildings are simply there. They are equipment rather than text. They do not denote anything, or connote anything. They are part of an equipmental whole; part of the background of living and working. The idea of comfort is readily appropriated in the context of

available architecture. "Inconspicuous" or "available" architecture is that with which we are comfortable. Something with which we are comfortable is culturally and environmentally appropriate. The building fits within a historical context. There is not some detached criterion of comfort immune from our involvement and the involvement of context. We can be comfortable in a tent on a lake side or in an air conditioned skyscraper.

How do we design for the available? This is clearly not a matter of matching forms to needs. The complex web of what it is that contributes to our comfort has developed together with the forms of buildings. Comfort is largely a matter of expectations being met. What determines our expectations? This is our collective experience as building users. Designing for the available is a participatory enterprise. It requires an understanding of cultural practices, including construction practices. Designing for the available requires an understanding of design as intersubjective and dialogical. In his late and somewhat obscure essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*⁶¹ Heidegger points to the primacy of *dwelling* before *building* (as verbs). As a metaphor for being-in-the-world, "dwelling" most readily captures the sense in which we are involved in the available. Through this involvement we are in a position to shape the environment.

Secondarily there is the building as meaningful. This is the encounter with buildings as having value, as being pleasing, ugly, comfortable, and defective. It is only from a background of availability and coping that we are able to appropriate buildings and their aspects as meaningful. "Heidegger is clear that things are always already understood, although we only subsequently see them explicitly *as* something."⁶²

How this encounter is operative requires an understanding of interpretation. According to Heidegger all understanding begins from a background that is taken for granted, there is some kind of specific perspective from which the interpretation is to be undertaken, and there is an expectation of what is to be found out. This expectation is already decided either

with finality or with reservations. Gadamer's account of hermeneutics comes in here.⁶³

In coming to understand or appreciate a familiar building facade struck by sunlight in a particular way, there is not some blank object undergoing interpretation, but a meshing of several concerns. There is the whole of which the meaningful object is a part: the composition of sun, sky and building; the sequence of encounters that has led to this particular encounter; the spatial orientation of the viewer; the viewer's mood and state of health; the viewer's current preoccupations; the memories and evocations—in other words the viewer's ever-shifting horizon, grounded in experience. This is the "thing" of Heidegger's *Building Dwelling Thinking*.⁶⁴ The facade as a "thing" is a gathering of concerns within a background of involving experience. This precedes its isolation as an object divorced from ourselves.

The third and derivative mode of experience is of the facade as an object of theoretical reflection. The context for the theoretical consideration of the facade is similarly grounded in a background of experiences and practices, but in this case it is the rarefied context of certain technical assumptions. These may be grammars, rules, principles, systems, construction principles that form part of the language with which we reflect on the building and on the design process. The fact that there are many ways of formulating these assumptions indicates that it is not where designing begins, but follows from the experience.

Is designing for the available the only kind of designing? Is there room for the untried? Is architecture to be only conservative? There will always be the great architectural experiments and the bold visions. What Heidegger's ontology tells us is that these are not the stock-in-trade of architecture, and it is only against the background of an available architecture that the new and the different make sense to us. Not every building needs to be a statement. The Heideggerian ontology directs us to what is most important.

Conclusion

It is a commonplace to remark that buildings should take account of their context and that many problems with our urban environments can be attributed to a failure in this regard. In comparing the prevalent Cartesian ontology with that of Heidegger it is a relatively simple matter to see how, in our current cultural climate, we gravitate towards buildings as decontextualised—the Heideggerian “falling.” Under the Cartesian ontology, first and foremost the building exists in itself. It is considered that this is how we conceive of buildings. This may involve notions of integrity. The building must be true to itself. According to Louis Kahn the designer should ask “What does the building want to be?” There is an essential building with a true character and a true nature. The limiting aspect of these metaphors is that context is seen only as an additional consideration. Only secondarily is the building seen in relationship to other buildings, the environment, cultural context, and community opinion.

According to the Heideggerian ontology it is the day-to-day experience of the available that is important and sets the stage for other considerations. It is the building as part of an equipmental whole. Primarily the building is simply there as part of our background, secondarily it exists as a meaningful object, third as an object of theoretical study and finally as sense data. This points to the practice of architecture as primarily an involving, worldly, atheoretical, reflective, and participatory activity.

How can the cause for an “inconspicuous” and “available” architecture be promoted within architectural education? Clearly the study of cultural and social contexts is an important step, as is the study of the phenomenon itself of the building as art object, and the rival ontologies through which practice operates. It is important that the current phenomenon of the primacy of the building as art object is brought to light as influencing our understanding of the architecture of other times and other cultures. It is also important to avoid projecting into those cultures our own post-Enlightenment preoccupations.

In the design studio the primacy of available architecture can be promoted through several major emphases. In the dialogue and reflection that surrounds the learning process there should be an identification of various modes of experience and their importance for the particular building being designed. The experience of the first time user or the tourist will be different to that of the habitual user. The familiarity inculcated within a house will be different to that in a museum. The appreciation of a building will be different when it is first opened than after ten years. This points to an emphasis on a polysemic architecture that fits within the wider context of history.

In all this the burden should be lifted from the designer as the professional who can work this single miracle of invention. The creation of available architecture by an individual is an impossibility. The means is through a community architecture, an architecture of participation. The notions of ownership of a design by the designer and the primacy of design as individual expression work against an architecture of the available.

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Notes

¹ Reference here is to the influential criticism advanced by HRH The Prince of Wales in various forums including the book *A Vision of Britain: A Personal View of Architecture*, Doubleday, London, 1989.

² In this article attention is focussed on buildings though the commentary also applies to other aspects of the built environment.

³ HRH The Prince of Wales, *Op. Cit.*, p.9.

⁴ See Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, New York, 1983 also Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, Trans. Peter Collier, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, 1988.

⁵ See for example Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1980, and Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973 and *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, Academic Editions, London, 1981.

⁶ It is apparent from the defence of the profession offered by Maxwell Hutchinson in *The Prince of Wales: Right or Wrong? An Architect Replies*, Faber and Faber, London, 1989, and Charles Jencks, *The Prince, the Architects and the New Wave Monarchy*, Rizzoli, New York, 1988, to the criticisms of the Prince of Wales that intellectual debate about architecture is still to be about grand movements. Even "community architecture" has, according to Hutchinson, been tried and is now dead. "Community architecture is dead. It was not simply killed; it was overkilled. It was a PR exercise masquerading as a crusade, and what died was the idea that it was new." (p.145)

⁷ "Experience" here has a wider meaning than the "sense experience" of the empiricists.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1962.

⁹ Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991.

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Sheed Ward, London, 1975.

¹¹ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.45.

¹² Experience is clearly "theory laden" as is observation in empirical science. There is an indication of the importance of theory in the Prince of Wales' criticism of architecture "You cannot construct pleasing sentences in English unless you have a thorough knowledge of the grammatical ground rules." HRH The Prince of Wales, *Op. Cit.*, p.80.

¹³ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: A General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson, Allen and Unwin, London, 1931.

¹⁴ See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, The Free Press, New York, 1916, and *Art as Experience*, Minton Balch, New York, 1934.

¹⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, MacMillan, New York, 1958.

¹⁶ See George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987 and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.

¹⁷ See Humberto Maturana, "Reality: The Search for Objectivity or the Quest for a Compelling Argument," *The Irish Journal of Psychology*, 1988, Vol.9, No.1, pp.25-82, and Humberto Maturana and F.G. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, Reidel, Dordrecht, 1980.

¹⁸ A detailed critique of the Cartesian position is presented by Heidegger, *op. cit.* pp.122-134

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

²⁰ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.108.

²¹ See Marvin Minsky, *The Society of Mind*, Heinemann, London, 1987 and Andy Clark, *Microcognition: Philosophy, Cognitive Science and Parallel Distributed Processing*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989. A general overview of cognitive science and artificial intelligence is provided by Margaret Boden in *Artificial Intelligence and Natural Man*, Basic Books, New York, 1987, and *The Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.

²² "This distinction between subject and object pervades all the problems of modern philosophy and even extends into the development of contemporary phenomenology." Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1982, p.124.

²³ Dreyfus, *op. cit.* p.119.

²⁴ See Maturana, *op. cit.*, pp.28-29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.28-29.

²⁶ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.225.

²⁷ The technical term is "phenomenological."

²⁸ Evidence for this is Heidegger's rejection of Husserl's phenomenology from which he drew much of his deliberations.

²⁹ ... more accurately, "modes of being." See Dreyfus, *op. cit.* p.124.

³⁰ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.94.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.93.

³² *Ibid.*, p.68.

³³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, pp.98-99.

³⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p.79, and Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.43.

³⁵ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.68 and p.71.

³⁶ Heidegger calls this the "unavailable."

³⁷ Refer to Heidegger's arguments about signs: Heidegger, *op. cit.*, pp.107-114, Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, pp.100-102.

³⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p.190.

³⁹ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p.350.

⁴⁰ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.125.

⁴¹ Heidegger calls this the "occurrent."

⁴² This is the "pure occurrent."

⁴³ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.84.

⁴⁴ Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, pp.85-87.

⁴⁵ The different responses to "continental philosophy" by the English-speaking intellectual community is a study in itself. The prevailing response is still one of suspicion.

⁴⁶ See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980.

⁴⁷ See Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society 1750-1980*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1986.

⁴⁸ See Adrian Snodgrass and Richard Coyne, "Models, metaphors and the hermeneutics of designing," *Working Paper*, Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1991, Richard Coyne and Adrian Snodgrass, "Is designing mysterious? challenging the dual knowledge the-

sis," *Design Studies*, to appear, 1991, and Coyne and Snodgrass, "Where do design ideas come from?" *Working Paper*, Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1991.

⁴⁹ See Geoffrey Broadbent, "The Deep Structures of Architecture," *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture*, Geoffrey Broadbent (ed.), Wiley, Chichester, 1980, pp.119-168.

⁵⁰ Described in audiovisual material presented at the gallery.

⁵¹ See Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin, *What is Deconstruction?* Academy Editions, London, 1988, and C. Andreas, *Deconstruction in Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1988.

⁵² Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Academy Editions, London, 1980.

⁵³ Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p.78.

⁵⁴ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, *op. cit.*, p.26.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.47.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

⁵⁹ "Practical circumspection" is one of the means by which we appropriate the world of the available. See Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p.98.

⁶⁰ Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p.139.

⁶¹ in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Albert Hofstadter, Harper and Row, New York, 1971, pp.145-161.

⁶² Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p.197.

⁶³ See Adrian Snodgrass and Richard Coyne, "Is Designing Hermeneutical?" *Working Paper*, Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1990, for an explanation of the primary role of interpretation in design.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, *op. cit.*, pp.145-161.