

# WHY ARCHITECTURE PHILOSOPHY?

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Architectural writing that engages philosophy has been around for decades. Philosophical writing with reference to architecture has been around for centuries. But almost none of it has sustained a conversation. It is as though each outing might be the last. Nothing seems to build—one thought upon another. Too often, when those from the architectural side of the fence reference philosophy in their work, it appears they are doing so ornamentally—to render the work with the appearance of higher order wisdom derived from analytic or continental or environmental or Eastern philosophy, yet without enduring the painstaking work of having done so. Too often, when those from the philosophical side of the fence reference architecture, their stylistic or ideological prejudices are all too apparent, and their understanding of the workings of the world of architectural production are too naïve to be persuasive. And yet—the built environment is too important a force in the world for philosophers to neglect in their work of questioning, criticizing and systematizing who we are, what we know, what is important, and all the rest of the fields of inquiry under their roof. And by the same token, philosophy is too important a practice for architects to ignore their efforts to understand the world they account for. The deficiencies have themselves created a need and desire for a field of inquiry that incorporates the expertise of both architecture and philosophy. Sustaining the inquiry and securing the field, is achieved with a journal.

Until a budding discipline has a journal to call its own, it cannot mature because it has no regular

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home within which to find its center, explore its boundaries, quantify progress, and evaluate contributions. There is no way of knowing whether an area of inquiry has already been dealt with by others, whether it may prove fertile, and standards for inquiry are left entirely undefined. These criteria are currently lacking in writing at the junction of architecture and philosophy. The purpose of *Architecture Philosophy*, therefore, is to provide the platform to allow the field's self-identification process to begin, establish the field's standards, and identify the most pertinent topics.

The initial issues will explore the boundaries of writing on architecture philosophy and, in the process, begin to show what the key questions, positions, and disagreements amongst architecture philosophers are. Often times, this diversity is apparent in their formal disciplinary training, whether of post-structuralist architecture or analytic philosophy or otherwise. As editors, we are not interested in homogenizing the thinking represented in the nascent field, but rather in engendering genuine debate. At times the voices will be disparate, resonating as a cacophony of debate, but there are already apparent moments of commonality. The prospect of meaningful agreement creates a worthwhile pursuit.

The desired tone of the essays is to aim for accessibility, but at a level that can presume familiarity with the basics of philosophy and with the main currents in recent architectural thought. The method of research sought is of highly rationalized and evidenced arguments, in which poetics are inadequate, authoritarian claims indefensible, and ungrounded abstractions immobile. Most of the writing presented in this inaugural issue is drawn from essays presented at the 2012 ISPA conference—Ethics and Aesthetics in Architecture—held at Newcastle University.<sup>1</sup> The original call for papers is here:

*The subject of aesthetics is often taken as dealing with questions of mere beauty, where the word 'aesthetic' is colloquially interchangeable with beauty and liking. Someone might, for instance, explain their liking the look of a particular object on the basis of its 'aesthetics'. Interestingly, even within the specialized architecture discourse, the aesthetic is largely discussed on the basis of an object's appearance. Yet, the aesthetic is not limited and should not be limited merely to the way things look. Any philosophically informed aesthetician will contest this limited view, saying something along the lines of 'the aesthetic is everything'. The aim of this conference is therefore in part to address this discursive limitation in architecture and related subjects by broadening the aesthetic discourse beyond questions relating to purely visual phenomena in order to include those derived from all facets of human experience. In taking on the aesthetic in a manner that pushes its considerations beyond the realm of mere beauty, questions of ethics*

*often arise. Indeed Wittgenstein famously asserted that, “ethics and aesthetics are one and the same”.<sup>2</sup> Questions as to why, for instance a building’s form takes the shape it does, not only raises the more conventional aesthetic questions but also questions about what purpose or meaning the building serves beyond purely visual stimulation. Does the form for instance relate somehow to a social ideal or economic ideal? And if so, is this ideal something that its inhabitants subscribe to or are even aware of? In an effort to draw thinkers’ attention to the ethical role architecture plays as well as the ethical function architects play, the second part of this conference call addresses this often overlooked dimension of architecture.<sup>3</sup>*

The intent in raising such questions is not merely to broaden architects’ discourse to meaningfully include ethical considerations, but also equally as much to broaden the philosophical discourse which has done little to investigate the very same philosophical questions architects do. The hope with bringing the two disciplines together is to propel the broader discourse beyond the limitations of a purely visual understanding of architecture and its aesthetics.

The essays in this inaugural issue move beyond those limitations by drawing on a diverse range of approaches. David Leatherbarrow’s “Sharing Sense” employs aesthetic readings of architecture to illuminate ethical problems. Paul Guyer’s “Pluralism and Monism” traces a strand in the philosophical genealogy from Kant to Ruskin, establishing what the cognitivist approach to understanding architecture is and how this position is situated firmly within both ethics and aesthetics. Emmanuel Petit’s essay “Architecture of Ethics” looks at the ethical journey of the architect Stanley Tigerman through his architectural practice in Chicago. Rafeal De Clercq’s essay “Building Plans as Natural Symbols” investigates how the architectural plan may be interpreted and understood in terms of symbology. Nathaniel Coleman’s “Is Beauty Still Relevant?” is a

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fine-grained analysis of an aspect of ancient Greek aesthetics applied to contemporary artistic problems, which seeks to examine whether and how ethics and aesthetics can be understood in tandem. Rick Fox's "A New Interpretative Taxonomy" is a textbook example of epistemic inquiry, which delineates common positions within popular architecture discourse: the singularist, constructivist, and contextualist.

To further explore the journal's limits we include an interview with Andrew Ballantyne, who has made many of first successful forays into the interdisciplinary territory of architecture and philosophy, as well as an interview with Chicago-based architect Stanley Tigerman, and a book review. In later issues, we hope to encourage more dialogue with our readers in the form of responses to published essays, book reviews, roundtables, etc. Occasional themed issues are also anticipated. The society's international events will continue to supply the journal with papers, but we also maintain an open submission. Submission details and guidelines can be found at [isparchitecture.com](http://isparchitecture.com) or in the back of this issue.

## ENDNOTES

1. "Ethics and Aesthetics Conference Website." International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture, 13 Dec. 2010. Web. 30 May 2014. <[ispaconference.wordpress.com](http://ispaconference.wordpress.com)>.
2. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.421.
3. Fahey, Carolyn. "2012 Conference: Call for Papers." International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture, 13 Dec. 2010. Web. 30 Jan. 2014. <[isparchitecture.com](http://isparchitecture.com)>.