A NEW INTERPRETATIVE TAXONOMY FOR WORKS OF ARCHITECTURE

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I. RECENT INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE

A core aim of architectural interpretation is to elucidate, explain, make sense of, and help others understand the existing built-environment, proposed works of architecture, architectural theories, and other elements of architectural discourse. Indeed, there are numerous aspects of architectural works, theories and discourse about which we may render interpretations. The field of architectural interpretation broadly construed includes, *inter alia*, the literature of philosophical aesthetics, the writings of design professionals, architectural thinkers and educators, the views of architectural critics, and the voices of the general public.

In this essay, I aim to introduce readers to a new philosophically grounded approach I have developed for organizing interpretive positions within architectural discourse. The interpretive taxonomy I advocate relies on some philosophical insights from the American philosopher Michael Krausz. I will concentrate my efforts on presenting an overview of the taxonomy, and focus on its importance to the philosophy of architecture. To illustrate various elements of the framework, I mention particular works, and discuss specific views, but the focus here is not on a detailed examination of specific works, nor do I offer a robust rejection or endorsement of any particular view. Before I get into the framework's specifics, let me try to establish the breadth of the problem, by offering three examples where interpretive practice would benefit from a more rigorous understanding

of the space of interpretation.

Whether a new work of architecture ought to "fit in" with extant works is an enduring problem in architectural theory and practice. Frequently, architectural works are criticized on the grounds that they do not belong. Many famous, and now respected, works have been criticized for this supposed failure.

The contextualist argument relies on the claim that the existing context deserves our respect, and we ought to show deference to current norms and practices in our decision-making about how to, or even whether to, alter it. The argument, however, also makes a deeper supposition, namely, that the context is comprised of self-evident facts and meanings. Yet, understanding what is "already there" is often more than simply a straight-forward documentation of a few observable facts; it is a matter of active engagement and interpretative practice. So, the background views of the interpreter as to whether the context is "fixed" play a relevant role. The way we construe the boundaries of a given context, and determine which aspects of it are salient for our understanding is also a matter of interpretative practice. When we encounter a familiar work of architecture we do not feel compelled to interpret it; we simply take it for granted. An alien or anomalous work that does not comport with our current understanding challenges us, and we are inclined to try and make sense of it. Indeed, the views of the interpreter may be affected in the process. The anomalous thing may prompt some of us to recontextualize a few of our existing beliefs as we attempt to make sense of the world and the anomaly. Others prefer instead to reject the anomaly and adhere to their cherished certainties. Commonplace interpretive practices regarding context fail to account for its malleability, and the dialectic nature of interpretive practice.

The rebuilding efforts on New York's World Trade Center site following the events of 9/11 illustrate a second type of interpretive problem. Significant disagreement exists in answer to the question, What does 9/11 represent? Answers that have been offered include, but are not limited to: 1) the unprovoked attack marks the turning point from the Cold War to the "War on Terror;" 2) it is a pointless act perpetrated by psychopaths who simply want to kill vast numbers of innocent people as a demonstration of their cruelty; 3) Islamic fundamentalists seek to end Western imperialism by any means possible—no matter how violent; and, 4) the attack is a misguided hatred of global democracy and global freedom. For our purposes, the precise answer does not matter all that much, since it is not the real focus here. No matter what specific answers

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are offered, the question itself calls our attention to a broader philosophical concern, namely, is there a single right interpretation of these events or not? Furthermore, it is clear that the meaning of the underlying events, no matter how we construe them, significantly affect our interpretation of the architectural work that is supposed to denote, memorialize, exemplify, or express them. In these sorts of cases, our background knowledge, beliefs, and values play a significant role in the interpretive process. These background views often include beliefs about what role architecture ought to play, if any, in responding to important social, political, and historical events.

To further complicate attempts to interpret the meaning of and best response to 9/11, the

Byzantine array of stakeholders has been the source of a number of complicated political, economic, aesthetic, and interpretive disagreements over whose interests the work ought to advance, and whose stake ought to take precedence. When the results of the international design competition sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation were unveiled in Fall 2002, the popular response was unprecedented. Unlike most of the other entries, Daniel Libeskind's proposal resonated loudly with prominent architectural critics and the public. Ada Louise Huxtable emerged as an early advocate of Libeskind's proposal and remained an unwavering supporter of the priorities expressed in his design. Conversely, Herbert Muschamp, architecture critic for the New York Times, dismissed the rich symbolism employed in the design as jingoistic. John Silber, professor emeritus of philosophy and law, and former president of Boston University, scathingly criticized the proposal calling it "an exotic and enticing jumble of novelties" that expresses "hubris and a penchant for absurdity." [1] Still other observers felt strongly that the only correct response to the tragedy was to rebuild exactly as before. How could such divergent interpretations all be, in some sense, correct or at least admissible?

We take it for granted that all of these critics are interpreting the same work of architecture. This commonplace assumption, however, overlooks deeper philosophical questions about the nature of the thing they are interpreting. For instance, it is a commonplace argument nowadays that complex things (such as a work of architecture) license a plethora of interpretations, and our contemporary society is prepared to regard so many things as indeterminate anyhow. Additionally, it is commonly accepted that in a pluralist society diverse and divergent interpretations ought to be encouraged, and tolerance ought to be embraced. Many argue that non-judgmental acceptance of a plurality of viewpoints is the ideal we should strive for in a democratic society. But, as the controversies surrounding the various interpretations of the Freedom Tower design and the 9/11 Memorial illustrate, it seems counter-intuitive to think we are genuinely obligated to countenance every interpretation offered. Is there a non-arbitrary basis for admitting some interpretations while excluding others? If so, how would this impact interpretive practice?

The question of how to properly construe the relationship between the three-dimensional form of an architectural work and its meaning, a staple of debate within architectural discourse, illustrates a third type of interpretive problem. A celebrated debate in 1989 between Leon Krier and Peter Eisenman on the theme of "Reconstruction versus Deconstruction"[2]

forms a case in point. At the time, the stylistic skirmishes over historicism and the "next wave," of which this debate was a part, garnered a great deal of attention, and pre-occupied many of us in the architectural community. It came as no surprise at the time that, stylistically, Krier and Eisenman were far apart with Eisenman claiming that history had few relevant precedents for contemporary conditions while Krier argued that all the necessary precedents already existed prior to modern times. The enduring gulf between them is rooted in their divergent views about what a work of architecture is, how we understand it aesthetically, the role architectural discourse is supposed to play within culture, and how best to interpret what a work of architecture means. The underlying philosophical differences between Eisenman, the paradigmatic spokesperson for autonomy and Krier, the traditionalist, could hardly have been greater.

While the urgency of this particular debate seems to have waned, the deep, unresolved disagreement about what properly constitutes a work of architecture, and how we are to interpret or explain it remains worthy of our philosophical attention. In my view, both historicism and deconstructivism are examples of interpretive practices that rest on a few philosophical mistakes. Historicism is built on the premise that an object's determinacy secures only one right interpretation of it while deconstructivism, an example of critical pluralism, holds an object's indeterminacy licenses an open-ended plurality of interpretations. (The critical pluralist argues that: 1) there can be more than one good way to construe the initial object; 2) divergent interpretations are always admissible; 3) differing interpretive aims provide differing criteria as to what constitutes a valid interpretation; and, 4) disagreements among qualified interpreters can be reasonable yet they may not be reconcilable. What makes critical pluralism attractive, according to its advocates is the intuition that taken together several

judgments may be inconsistent, yet each judgment could be individually true. Since the identity of the thing being interpreted is not stable, it is not susceptible to fixed interpretation. Thus, critical pluralism gives us a polite way to have our strenuous disagreements, and robust truth at the same time.) These sorts of claims: that what a work of architecture *is* necessarily entail how many interpretations of it we ought to hold admissible, while widely accepted, are mistaken; the entailment is not necessary.

As I think these examples illustrate, what we have in each situation, ultimately, is a stand-off. We need a better way to talk about interpretive practices within our discipline to transcend their intractability. Architectural practitioners, theorists, critics, educators, and philosophers of architecture need new interpretive tools.

II. A KRAUSZIAN-STYLE TAXONOMY

In this enterprise of developing new tools we need a philosophically grounded approach to architectural interpretation that: 1) promotes interpretive tolerance, whereby architecture may be interpreted in a number of ways, without fostering unrestricted license; 2) serves as a superior framework to others prevalent in contemporary architectural interpretation, notably critical pluralism; and, 3) is not based on the false assumption that an object's ontology necessarily entails the number of interpretations we find admissible.

One candidate for introducing a new basis for architectural interpretation can be found in the two-tiered framework advocated by Michael Krausz. This framework differentiates the interpretation from the thing being interpreted, called the object of interpretation. I prefer the term interpretandum, because this makes clear that what is being interpreted could be a real object, an abstract object, a sense perceptible phenomenon, a theory, or a social practice, but is not necessarily a material thing. One of Krausz's major contributions to the philosophy of interpretation is his insight about the logical non-entailment between our ontological theory of the interpretandum and the number of interpretations we hold as admissible of it. This thesis is called the detachability thesis. I offer the following formulation:

D: Our ideal interpretive stance with respect to the number of admissible interpretations of a given common object is logically detachable from specific ontological theories.

It is this mechanism that de-couples ontological theories from interpretive ideals. Each enterprise is logically independent of the other;

neither logically entails the other. Thus, it is this thesis about the logical non-entailment between specific ontological theories of interpretanda and the number of interpretations we hold about them that sets up the overall framework of possible interpretive positions that I advocate. Next, I offer overviews of two ontologies useful for architectural interpretation, followed by a discussion of the two interpretive ideals that comprise this taxonomy.

II.I: REALISM/CONSTRUCTIVISM

One difficulty with the literature of architectural theory and professional practice is that typically design professionals, architectural educators, and theorists do not have philosophically articulated ontological views. This makes it difficult to discern the full extent of their interpretive position. Although I discuss various ontological views about what an architectural object is, for the purpose of articulating various interpretive positions, I do not endeavor to resolve in this essay whether there is a correct ontology for works of architecture, and if so, what it ought to be.

The gulf between realists and constructivists derives, at least in part, from the distinction between object-as-such and object-as-represented. The realist may not be able to say precisely how things are, but insists that there is a way that they in fact are. The realist holds that realism can be defended even if access to the way the world is cannot be (fully) obtained. Constructivists hold that this is a distinction without a difference, and that the object-as-such collapses into object-as-represented. Since the object-as-such does no interpretive work, then according to the constructivist, it ought to be dropped. For the constructivist, objects are never simply "given," and no fact of the matter exists that grounds either the interpretation or the thing being interpreted. So, it is in this way that all attempts to segregate objects-as-such from objects-

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as-represented fail according to the constructivist. Any interpretive framework that presupposes that interpretanda are constituted as matters of fact is already predisposed to realist ontology; frameworks denying this are predisposed to constructivism. Such presumptions would be detrimental to the larger project of showing how an object of interpretation is constituted within interpretive practices, and that the ontology of an interpretandum does not necessitate the number of interpretations we ought to find admissible.

For the aesthetic realist, aesthetic properties are reified; there are real properties in the work and these ought to ground our judgments about it. Aesthetic realism does not demand that for any given artwork only a single aesthetic description is admissible; more than one description may be admitted. The realist view of what constitutes a work of architecture is that a work is necessarily a "brick and mortar" building possessing aesthetic properties, and standing before us. The claim that the difference between a building and an architectural work ought to be grounded in the possession of aesthetic properties is well entrenched. When the British architectural historian Sir Nikolaus Pevsner famously remarked, "A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture,"[3] he likely meant that aesthetic properties make the difference. The ontic locus of aesthetic quality is in the work. By implication, then, aesthetic judgments are seen as stating truths that occur in virtue of some mind-independent state of affairs. Realists hold that a substantial notion of truth is a valuable resource in ridding ourselves of interpretations we find inadmissible. Preference is a measure of how an interpretation comports with descriptive truth. Thus, under architectural realism elucidation aims at explicating actual or emergent properties in the work itself – it is an object-centered ontological enterprise.

The constructivist would find these claims unsupportable. According to the constructivist, a work of art is primarily a mental object; its physical presence is primarily a device for transmitting meaning from one mind to another. Advocates hold that aesthetic perception is theory laden and thus we ought to drop any talk in aesthetics of an un-interpreted world. The architectural constructivist holds that the design is the work of architecture, and a building is just a "brick and mortar" instantiation of that work. Under the constructivist's approach a work of architecture can be construed to exist in multiple media; a floor plan drawing, a perspective rendering, and a 3-D computer model could simultaneously constitute the same design, and hence the same work of architecture. In a recent interview, the writer and architect Iman Ansari poses a question to Eisenman that

probes the difference between the [architectural] object and the idea of the [architectural] object. Eisenman responds, "'Real architecture' only exists in drawings. The 'real building' exists outside the drawing. The difference here is that 'architecture' and 'building' are not the same."[4]

It is important to note that this distinction between 'architecture' and 'building' is possible even where no actual brick and mortar construction exists that can be pointed to as the finished work. Thus, under architectural constructivism elucidation characteristically aims at clarity of consciousness— at epistemic rather than ontological clarity. It is an interpretation-centered epistemic enterprise.

In Section 3, I will expand on these ontologies as a way of further illustrating the structure of this taxonomy. The next major component of the framework is comprised of the interpretive ideals of singularism and multiplism, to which we now turn.

II.II: SINGULARISM & MULTIPLISM

Krausz distinguishes and explicates two interpretive ideals. One he calls singularism; the other he calls multiplism. Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, offers a helpful summary, "An ideal is a critical stance that identifies the range of admissible interpretations of a given object prior to the conduct of interpretive inquiry."[5] As Krausz uses the term in his interpretive philosophy "idealization" is best construed as something like the "desiderata of interpretive practice." Thus, an "ideal" refers to a value or belief about interpretive practice that is worthy of being optimized and promoted – it is a norm of practice. (In private conversation Krausz has stated that he does not intend "ideally" to be read in any Platonic way.)

Singularism is the view that there is a one-to-one relation between the thing being interpreted and an interpretation, and several admissible

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interpretations are conjoinable into a single "unified" interpretation.[6] I offer the following formulation of the singularist thesis:

> *S: ANY given object of interpretation necessarily answers to one and only one ideally admissible interpretation.*

The singularist holds that incompatible interpretations cannot be jointly defended, and incomplete knowledge about competing interpretations ought not act as a barrier to embracing the ideal of a single comprehensive interpretation. For the singularist, under ideal conditions there just is one and only one right interpretation.[7] Although the singularist advocates the pursuit of a single right interpretation it should be noted, however, that the singularist need not advocate infallibilism. The possibility exists, even for the singularist, that any given interpretation could be replaced with a better one. In this formulation the singularist understands the admissibility of a given interpretation in bivalent truth-functional terms.

For any given object, when distinct interpretations are present, the singularist would argue that the true ones are conjoinable into a single coherent interpretation. Logically, a conjunction is true just in case each of its conjuncts is true. So given a number of interpretations, the adherent of singularism first determines which are true and which false, and then proceeds to work out how the true ones are conjoinable. Contemporary architectural interpreters, particularly those committed to critical pluralism, are unlikely to hold a strict view of S. Yet, I hold that a thickened description approach, where a "unified" singular view of the work emerges, qualifies as singularism. Later, I will argue in more detail why I think Zaha Hadid holds this view.

Multiplism is the view that a one-many relation holds between the thing being interpreted and interpretations of it. I offer the following formulation of the multiplist thesis:

> *M: SOME objects of interpretation MAY answer to more than one ideally admissible interpretation.*

This thesis claims that multiple non-convergent interpretations are ideally admissible and ought not be conjoined into a single "unified" interpretation. The multiplist is committed to the view that sometimes there just is no such singularity, and holds that more than one interpretation could legitimately be held at the same time. Though multiplism recognizes that while several interpretations may be possible, not all of them should be considered equally admissible; further it is not the case that all admissible interpretations are equally preferable. This allows the multiplist to embrace certain singularist cases, but not vice versa. The multiplist could acknowledge that there are cases where a one-to-one relation

between an interpretandum and an interpretation could occur without committing to the truth of S. In this formulation the multiplist understands admissibility in multivalent terms, in Krausz's words as, "reasonableness, appropriateness, aptness or the like."[8] For the multiplist, affirming one interpretation as admissible does not necessarily exclude others as inadmissible. Even though multiplism does not adopt a bivalent mode of determining admissibility, principled distinctions among competing interpretations remain possible. Thus not every would-be interpretation is admissible. So, the architectural multiplist is keen to point out that rational inquiry about works of architecture does not mandate a bivalent "true-false" assessment of an interpretation.

III. INTERPRETIVE POSITIONS

With this understanding of ontological theories and interpretive ideals we are better equipped to understand the import of the four main interpretive positions that a Krauszian-style taxonomy affords. Two of these positions are orthodox; two are heterodox. The orthodox view is that constructivists promote a multiplicity of interpretations while realists promote a single right interpretation. In my view, it is precisely their individual entrenched commitments to their respective orthodox views that deeply mired Eisenman and Krier during their rancorous 1989 debate. I offer Leon Krier, the American philosopher Michael Mitias, and the British philosopher Roger Scruton as characterizing the real-singularist position, and those of Nelson Goodman and Peter Eisenman as characterizing the constructive-multiplist view. I would argue that in addition to being divided by their ontological commitments, these advocates embrace differing interpretive ideals that further divide them.

The detachability thesis, D, suggests that the heterodox interpretive positions of constructive-

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singularism and realist-multiplism might be fruitful ones to hold. I offer two British architects, Zaha Hadid and Richard Rogers, both modernists, as examples of constructive-singularism and realist-multiplism, respectively. While both of them embrace the stylistic virtues of architectural modernism, and on the surface this would seem to unite them, their ontological commitments and their differing stance about how many interpretations are ideally admissible creates an interpretive gulf between them. Hadid's commitment to modernism amounts to singularism, insofar as she holds that the proper role of architecture is singularly fulfilled to the extent every project strives to be culture-altering and an opportunity to invade "new territories."[9] Rogers' considerably more conciliatory view that architecture ought to be capable of adapting to emerging social and technological circumstances, and be aesthetically resilient enough to endure alteration amounts to multiplism. While the views of Hadid and Rogers characterize the heterodox interpretive positions, their views may not be exhaustive of their respective positions. As with the orthodox positions, the views of these interpreters ought to be seen as instances of the positions they occupy within the taxonomy, and not fully constitutive of the entire position.

Under Mitias' realist-singular account, a work of architecture emerges, that is it comes into being, in the aesthetic experience of a building. Our experience of the building as the physical structure of an architectural work is the proper starting point for aesthetic inquiry. He rejects the claim that external factors such as background knowledge of cultural practices and knowledge of symbol systems are inherent to the work's features qua object. According to Mitias, in his essay, "Expression in Architecture," buildings possess and express their properties:

> *A building possesses its aesthetic properties. Those properties are not…added, or introduced, to the work from the outside, regardless of the nature of this external source. They originate from the building.[10]*

Yet these aesthetic properties are not ready made realities, rather they exist as potentialities in the work. Aesthetic perception is needed to discover properties in the work "not given to ordinary perception."[11] In this way aesthetic properties are emergent in the aesthetic experience of a work. He writes:

> *This means that a building becomes art, i.e. acquires its aesthetic identity as a work of art, only during an event of aesthetic perception, and outside this perception its status is similar to the status of ordinary objects.[12]*

In a subsequent essay, "The Aesthetic Experience of the Architectural Work," he clarifies his view that aesthetic qualities are not feelings

evoked in the observer when aesthetic attention is brought to bear on the object, rather the quality is inherent in the object itself.[13] His commitment to a realist ontology forces the conclusion that what distinguishes a building from a work of architecture is the existence of potential aesthetic properties in the latter but not in the former. Similar to Pevsner's view, aesthetic properties are the ontic difference-makers between 'architecture' and 'building.'

Mitias embraces the view that there is only one set of non-contradictory properties that can be said to emerge from a given artwork. The claim that aesthetic qualities inhere but not as ready-made realties, that is, as actual properties given to sense perception, but as potentialities in the work implies a certain singularism insofar as Mitias does not think that it is possible for several non-convergent aesthetic potentialities to emerge from the same building. The singularist is keen to point out that it cannot be the case that p & ~p are inherent in the same work. Mitias certainly does not want to countenance the idea that contradictory qualities could emerge from the same work for two different interpreters. If two people hold contradictory views, then someone must be wrong. Taken together Mitias' claims of aesthetic realism are supposed to compel his conclusion that a single right interpretation of a work is the goal of inquiry.

In his essay, "How Buildings Mean," Nelson Goodman claims that architecture is a building that symbolically functions, that is, a work of architecture performs a referential function that a mere building does not. Although modernist works of architecture typically do not denote anything outside themselves, at least not in the manner of classical architecture, neither are they devoid of meaning, contrary to the claims of realists such as Krier. Under Goodman's account the work qua object has features that allow it to point both outside itself and to itself. A given work of architecture has meaning in virtue of its

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capacity to simultaneously embody, and make explicit reference to, the properties it possesses. Thus, a building's meaning is rooted in what it exemplifies. One example he cites is Gerrit Reitveld's Schroeder House (1924), Utrecht, where the work references its own structural features of columns, beams and walls.

One advantage of Goodman's constructivist account is that the difference between a building and a work of architecture does not require any distinction between ordinary and aesthetic perception. Furthermore, his view that referential functioning, at least in part, ought to ground the divide that separates a building from a work of architecture has an additional advantage for the constructivist, because this approach does not require an ontological resolution of aesthetic properties. It only requires human understanding of symbol systems.

In Goodman's view of meaning, exemplification plays an important cognitive role with respect to works of art, because it affords epistemic access to features we might not otherwise attend to. As this line of reasoning demonstrates, it is not incoherent to talk of an internal locus for meaning, particularly for non-representational works, but focusing on the notion of a locus tends to reify meaning and distract us from Goodman's central point that the value of a work of art is its role in furthering our understanding, and that meaning is a correlate of that understanding. As Catherine Elgin has remarked of Goodman's views, "Understanding works of art is not a matter of passive absorption, but of active intellectual engagement with symbols whose syntactic and semantic features are often elusive."[14]

His endorsement of a multiplist ideal is explicit and unmistakable, "A work of art typically means in varied and contrasting and shifting ways and is open to many equally good and enlightening interpretations."[15] The multiplicity of interpretations Goodman is prepared to accept appears to be rooted in his commitment to constructivism. Goodman makes an important point about his view of the nature of architecture and interpretation. He writes "More than any other art, architecture makes us aware that interpretation cannot be so easily distinguished from the work."[16] His path to multiplism is evident insofar as what we think the work is due to our interpretations of it – our interpretations thus construct the work.

Can a constructivist object to Mitias' ontology yet concur with S? I hold that this is a reasonable result and I offer the Iraqi-born British Architect Zaha Hadid as an example of a constructive-singularist. She is a constructivist due to her thorough-going reliance on the centrality

of "constructed" symbol systems in her work. No determinate meaning exists to be discovered, so she claims. She is a staunch advocate of aesthetic modernism and, in her view, this is the singular lens through which works of architecture ought to be interpreted.[17] Her unyielding commitment to a purified aesthetic modernism and her advocacy of the aesthetic implications of modernity is clear:

> *We can no longer fulfill our obligations as architects if we carry on as cake decorators. Our role is far greater than that. We, the authors of architecture, have to take on the task of reinvestigating Modernity ... there is only one way and that is to go forward along the path paved by the experiments of the early Modernists.[18]*

In claiming that Hadid's commitment to aesthetic modernism grounds her singularism, I am not making the larger claim that all adherents of modernism are necessarily advocates of singularism. Nor am I making the claim that modernism is somehow the aesthetic equivalent of singularism. In Hadid's case her singularism is rooted in her commitment to modernism, yet this commitment in itself does not entail that only singular interpretations emerge from modernity. I classify her as a singularist, largely because I think that a thickened description of her work renders a single interpretation of it the best approach. The thickened description argument for S relies on the distinction between "thin" concepts and "thick" concepts. Thick concepts are those where less variation is tolerated among instances. So, in the process of building up numerous descriptions of the thing under inquiry we narrow the range of admissible variations of it, and thus come to see it as "unified."

Stylistically, Hadid stands in stark contrast to the British philosopher Roger Scruton. In his book *The Classical Vernacular* Scruton argues that generations of architects educated in a modernist outlook that rebuked traditional ornament, traditional

materials, and the orders of classical Greek and Roman architecture have created aesthetically disappointing and nihilistic works that disregard the civic nature of architecture.[19] In short, he argues that classicism is more aesthetically correct than modernism. He is forthright in his disdain for modernism, "its language is uncouth, unredeemed by detail, utterly indifferent to its surroundings, or to the person who is obliged to pass by the building."[20] We need to see that his aesthetic commitment to classicism need not be tied to his interpretive commitment to singularism. A multiplist, for example, could hold the views expressed by Scruton that modernism is not aesthetically satisfying, but reject his claims about the sole "true" function of architecture. Clearly Hadid and Scruton disagree about the aesthetics of modernism. Even though both are singularists they are divided by their ontology.

In contrast to these two singularists, the British architect Richard Rogers stands as an example of a realist-multiplist. He is a realist insofar as he is committed to the view that the thing being interpreted, the "brick and mortar" building, is constituted independent of what interpreters think. Rogers holds that technology, scientific research, and an emphasis on function should serve as the basis for contemporary architecture. However, he also holds that architecture ought to be capable of adapting to changing social and technological needs. He is a multiplist due to his deep reliance on an "open ended" architectural object that is in principle flexible enough to admit numerous interpretations. He writes:

> *Though a building must be complete at any one stage, it is our belief that in order to allow for growth and change it should be functionally and therefore visually open-ended. This indeterminate form must offer legible architectural clues for the interpretation of future users. The dichotomy between the complete and the open nature of the building is a determinant of the aesthetic language.[21]*

Yet we need to be careful not to argue that an underlying indeterminacy of the work is what necessitates his being a multiplist. Contrary to the deconstructivist position, this line of reasoning would undermine M1, rather than bolster it. Instead, it is important to show that in principle a common object is countable yet it admits of more than one interpretation. That Rogers holds this outcome to be both possible and desirable is evident in the following passage:

> *The building form, plan, section and elevation should be capable of responding to changing needs. This free and changing performance will then become part of the expression of the architecture of the building, the street and the city. Program, ideology and form will then play an integrated and legible role within a changing but ordered framework. The fewer the building constraints for the*

users, the greater the success; the greater the success the more the need for revision and then programmatic indeterminance will become an expression of the architecture.[22]

Rogers points to an important set of difficult cases, namely, those objects of interpretation that change over time. These sorts of cases present difficulty not because they threaten our interpretive ideals; both singularism and multiplism remain unaffected. The singularist, for example, would argue that the one-to-one relation still holds over time, because at any given time the single right interpretation is grounded in the state of the object at that particular time. The multiplist would agree that an object's changed status could, though not necessarily would, ground different interpretations than those rendered earlier, but not because multiplism is false. These cases are difficult, precisely because where something is physically altered, the question emerges, Do we have a new interpretanda or not? What would constitute a priori limits to alteration, such that the interpretanda remains "fixed," is difficult to say but is the crux of the interpretive problem facing contextualists discussed at the outset.

Under a Krauszian-style interpretive account, the community of informed interpreters would be relied upon to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether or not alterations to a given work of architecture create a new object of interpretation.[23] Furthermore, this same approach to resolving interpretive disputes about individual works would apply to the larger context within which a new work is to occur. Some works of architecture change the context within which they occur, and some do not. This realization that a dialectical relation exists between our views about context, and our views about the identity of interpretanda could help move the contextualist debate forward.

As the World Trade Center site example

" HADID AND SCRUTON DISAGREE ABOUT THE AESTHETICS OF MODERNISM EVEN THOUGH BOTH ARE BOTH SINGULARISTS "

illustrates, the ways in which architecture ought to memorialize human events continues to be a significant source of interpretive disagreement. This framework makes it clear that interpretive debates often occur on many levels simultaneously. And this may be a significant source of their seeming intractability. When differences in belief about the underlying events (what it is that is being memorialized) are conflated with how admissible interpretations elucidate architectural responses to it, disagreement is bound to occur. Additionally, the framework makes it evident that one could be a either a singularist or a multiplist with respect to an underlying event, and proposed responses to it. Whether a critic could be a singularist about an underlying event, and a multiplist in regards to proposes responses (or vice-versa) is a question this approach explicitly raises.

This taxonomy also brings conceptual clarity to the Krier-Eisenman debate by providing an account of how their respective positions are both grounded in specific, yet differing, ontological commitments and differing interpretive ideals. In spite of their many differences, both Eisenman and Krier, in effect, endorse the view (though they would not have phrased it this way), that claims about what a work of architecture is necessarily entail the number of interpretations of it we ought to hold. As this taxonomy makes clear, both Eisenman and Krier have overlooked a crucial philosophical point about the relationship between their own ontological views and their interpretive ideals.

IV. RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

Several objections may be raised against this taxonomy. Here, I address a few.

Objection 1: Many contemporary works of architecture are indeterminate, and this undermines S. This is the critical pluralist's objection. I concur, that one feature many contemporary works have in common is their indeterminacy. The existence of indeterminate works, however we construe them, is a separate issue from whether indeterminacy compels the adoption of a specific interpretive ideal. Importantly, the success of both S and M depends necessarily on the notion of commonality—the proper construal of a common object. For differing interpretations of entities to meaningfully compete they must be about a common object of interpretation; they must be about the same thing. As I have already argued here, the determinacy of the object of interpretation does not necessitate singularism, nor does indeterminacy necessitate multiplism.[24] Thus, indeterminacy does not threaten S1—it remains a defensible ideal.

Objection 2: The taxonomy is incomplete; there are more than two ontologies for works of architecture. This objection is almost certainly true. There is at least a third major ontological theory – constructive-realism – in this taxonomy that I discuss elsewhere, but given its philosophical complexities I chose to forego discussion of it for two reasons: 1) the difference between internal and external constructive-realism makes it difficult to determine the relevance of constructive-realism as an architectural ontology; and, 2) no one within the field of architectural interpretation, as far as I know, has advanced anything to discuss.

Objection 3: There are lots of interpretations about architecture; not just four. True, insofar as we are talking about the number of actual interpretations; they are inestimable. But an interpretation is not an interpretive position. The focus of the taxonomy is to articulate a philosophically-grounded framework that fosters enhanced dialogue and comprehension of interpretive positions and strategies. As I have argued, the number of interpretive positions is not unlimited. My aim here is not to articulate and then adjudicate specific interpretations, but rather to enrich dialogue among disputants, build a few bridges, and get beyond the interpretive gridlock that has characterized architectural interpretation in recent decades.

Objection 4: The detachability thesis, D, fails. For the sake of brevity, I offer two reasons why D succeeds. First, each of the four positions is coherently adoptable. There are no internal contradictions within any of them. Second, the methodological issue of which interpretive ideal we should adopt, S or M, can occur prior to interpreting any particular object, and it simply does not hinge on how we characterize the ontology of the object we are interpreting; one issue is located at the level of practice, the other at the level of ontology.

In conclusion, the interpretive framework

I propose has numerous advantages. First, the interpretive conduct it sanctions with respect to the number of admissible interpretations does not entail an a priori commitment to a specific ontological theory, something architects do not possess as a matter of professional training, and something that few architectural theorists articulate in any careful or systematic fashion. Second, where an interpreter is committed to a particular ontology with respect to works of architecture, such commitment does not obligate them in advance to accept a specific number of admissible interpretations. Being a realist, for example, does not compel an interpreter to embrace the view that a single right interpretation exists. Last, it is useful for assisting interpreters that may be unable or unwilling to overcome differences in their interpretive positions and reach agreement about the cultural value and meaning of specific works. For all these reasons, I consider this interpretive framework to be a substantial improvement over what we have now.

ENDNOTES

1. John Silber, *Architecture of the Absurd: How "Genius" Disfigured a Practical Art.* (New York: Quantuck Lane Press, 2007), 59.

2. Peter Eisenman and Leon Krier, "Peter Eisenman versus Leon Krier: My Ideology is Better Than Yours," *Architectural Design* 59, 7-18.

3. Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2009), 10.

4. See "Q & A: Peter Eisenman", in *The Architect's Newspaper,* Vol7, Issue 5, May 29, 2013. p. 22.

5. Andreaa Deciu Ritivoi, *Introduction to Interpretation and its Objects,* ed., Andreea Deciu Ritivoi (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 8.

6. Michael Krausz, Introduction to I*s There a Single Right Interpretation?,* ed., Michael Krausz (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 1.

7. For proponents of the singularist view see David Novitz, "Against Critical Pluralism," in *Is There a Single Right Interpretation?* ed. Michael Krausz (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 101-121; and, Brandon Cooke, "Critical pluralism Unmasked," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42, 296-309.

8. Krausz, Introduction, *Is There a Single Right Interpretation?* 2.

9. Zaha Hadid, "The Eighty-Nine Degrees," in *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture,* 2nd Ed., ed., Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf (Hoboken: Wiley Academy, 2006), 280.

10. Michael H. Mitias, "Expression in Architecture," in *Philosophy and Architecture,* ed., Michael H. Mitias (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 99.

11. Mitias, "Expression," 99.

12. Mitias, "Expression," 100.

13. Michael H. Mitias, "The Aesthetic Experience of the Architectural Work," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33, 64.

14. Catherine Z. Elgin, "Relocating Aesthetics," in *The Philosophy of Nelson Goodman: Nelson Goodman's Philosophy of Art, Vol 3,* ed., Catherine Z. Elgin (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 171.

15. Nelson Goodman, "How Buildings Mean," in *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts & Sciences,* ed., Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988), 44.

16. Goodman, "How Buildings Mean," 45.

17. Hadid, "Eighty-Nine Degrees," 280.

18. Hadid, "Eighty-Nine Degrees," 280.

19. Roger Scruton, Introduction to *The Classical Vernacular: Architectural Principles in an Age of Nihilism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), xiii.

20. Scruton, *Classical Vernacular,* 16.

21. Richard Rogers, "Observations on Architecture," in *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture,* 2nd Ed., ed., Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf (Hoboken: Wiley Academy, 2006), 252.

22. Rogers, "Observations," 253.

23. What constitutes the community of informed interpreters, and who qualifies for admission into it, is an important aspect of the framework. For a more in-depth treatment see Chapter 3, Richard N. Fox, *Interpreting Architecture: A Krauszian Approach.* (Long Beach, CA: California State University Long Beach, 2009).

24. I first argued this point in Richard N. Fox, "Ambiguous Works of Architecture: A Krauszian-style Interpretive Approach to the Gehry Residence," (paper presented at the Pacific Division Meeting of the Society for the Philosophic Study of Contemporary Visual Art, San Diego, California, April 2011). In the paper I offered a critical extension of the notion of a common object of interpretation and examined what we ought to look for in construing what the common object amounts to when we examine a specific work of architecture. I argued that: (1) concerns about determinacy ought not compel us to adopt a particular interpretive ideal; and, (2) a work's ambiguity does not hinder interpreter's ability to agree on what constitutes the common object of their interpretive disagreement.