USE-VALUE IN ARCHITECTURE: RECONCEPTUALIZING BUILDINGS' FUNCTIONS

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The present issue owes its contributions to an international symposium held by the *International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture*, the society behind *Architecture Philosophy*. Hosted over the summer of 2015 at the Wittgenstein House in Vienna, symposium speakers were able to literally demonstrate claims by pointing to the structure around them. The setting stimulated difficult conversations about Wittgenstein, architecture, and architecture's Modernism. Entitled "Use-Value in Architecture: Reconceptualizing Buildings' Functions," the symposium raised a host of questions related to the notion of function in architecture's Modernist discourse and called upon Wittgenstein's notion of meaning as use to aid in its resolution:

> Given the wealth of new ways of conceptualizing building, its practice, and its meanings, this call for papers prompts authors to reconceptualize the notion of buildings' functions in terms of use, particularly as is described in Wittgenstein's use theory.

> By engaging one of philosophy's richest and most formidable postmodern thinkers—Ludwig Wittgenstein—the discourse surrounding function can move away from architecture's Modernist paradigm that has largely defined how we think about and deal with questions relating to function. Wittgenstein—who remains largely undealt with by the architectural discourse, but whose work has nevertheless had ample development from

> **" THE DISCOURSE SURROUNDING FUNCTION CAN MOVE AWAY FROM THE MODERNIST'S PARADIGM "**

within the philosophical discourse—provides genuine contributions to the understanding of use and meaning. Specifically, the Wittgensteinian notion of meaning as use moves the discussion away from mechanical or systematic notions grounded in scientific inquiry, and instead focuses analysis on the particular context or language-game within which a building partakes. Thus, the hope is to utilize Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of meaning to achieve radically alternative analyses of building's use, thereby allowing for productive re-engagement with one of architecture's most fundamentally philosophical questions.[1]

The symposium's call simultaneously prompted thinkers to revisit questions relating to Wittgenstein's philosophical significance within the architecture discourse.

This special issue seeks to reinvigorate the discourse surrounding the Wittgenstein House, not so much with the interest of canonizing the house, but rather as a means of developing a working method for understanding the relationship between philosophy and architecture. The motivating factor—not coincidentally the primary purpose of this journal and its society also—is a foundational question to understanding what architecture is, what its history is, and what it could, or rather, should be.

Wittgenstein himself participated in the design of a mansion, known widely as the Wittgenstein House, making him one of the few famous philosophers to have directly engaged in architectural design. Heidegger is also well known for having written on architecture, in his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" but is not known for having engaged the design or construction processes so foundational to understanding architecture. In Wittgenstein's case, it was not well-known that he had had any run-in with architecture until after Bernhard Leitner's 1973 publication of *The Wittgenstein House*. Previously, and to this day, Wittgenstein is best known as a philosopher who made substantive contributions to philosophy of language—ordinary language philosophy especially. When Leitner published his text, the architecture discipline momentarily turned its divided attention to the house at a time when the architecture was inundated with post-structuralist theories. Architects were intrigued by the possibility that a single person's work could bridge between the disciplines of architecture and of philosophy and set out to understand how one's person work could embody both. Yet, the methods these thinkers used to analyze the house were in keeping with post-structuralist methods, and the results were tantalizing acrobatic arguments at odds with Wittgenstein's own philosophical

methods. Little traction was gained by the post-structuralist attempts and since then few, with the exception of Roger Paden's *Mysticism and Architecture* and Nana Last's *Wittgenstein's House*, have attempted to re-conceive this terrain.[2]

Starting off the issue, Jochen Schuff's paper clears the field, so to speak, of the existing literature. The matter-of-fact survey separates theoretical interpolation from what Wittgenstein said. To do so otherwise, I would argue, is to proceed in a decidedly un-Wittgensteinian manner. His strict reading looks to David Macarthur's recently published piece in *Architecture Theory Review*, as having repeated many of the past attempt's missteps.[3] As readers will see later in the issue, August Sarnitz's paper draws a similar conclusion to that of Schuff albeit using original source material and recently translated empirical information on the house and the Austrian cultural context.

Taking a staunch position, Schuff seems to believe that everything written on the topic of Wittgenstein's philosophy of architecture falls into the terrain of un-Wittgensteinian extrapolation, and therefore should be discounted. It seems that much of what has been produced in philosophical discourse on Wittgenstein's philosophy would then also fall into this category, but it is unclear whether Schuff would agree to such a parallel criticism of philosophy. Schuff does appear to shift into a moderate position with regards to what can be said of Wittgenstein's and architecture in the second half of his paper, wherein he does indulge in a few analyses of the significance of Wittgenstein's remarks when considering architecture. The shift later in the paper suggests perhaps that his initial staunch position is more moderate. For me, although Wittgenstein is not himself a philosopher of architecture, that does not rule out the

" THE MATTER OF FACT SURVEY SEPARATES THEORETICAL INTERPOLATION FROM WHAT WITTGENSTEIN SAID "

possibility that there is something of philosophical significance on architecture Wittgenstein has said.

Nevertheless, whether any kind extrapolation is permitted, how much and when such extrapolation maybe permitted, or whether Wittgenstein's remarks hold any meaningful application to architecture remains contested and will remain a heated point of debate in any discussion of Wittgenstein in architecture. Whatever one's position on the matter, Schuff's paper will be an invaluable starting point for those entering this field as he carefully surveys and delineates what Wittgenstein did say and what can arguably meaningfully be said, without transgressing into the terrain of liberal interpolation.

Perfectly juxtaposed with Schuff is August Sarnitz who argues that the Wittgenstein House demonstrates some of Wittgenstein's philosophical points using a standard approach to analyzing building. Sarnitz is unique in existing literature for not over-attributing meaning to the house, for grounding his attributions of meaning directly in building analysis, and for analyzing the Wittgenstein House in light of Wittgenstein's own thinking as opposed to that of Loos or other fin de siècle thinkers in Vienna at the time.

Sarnitz provides an analysis of the house, contextualizing it in Viennese Modernism and traditional Austrian building practice. He provides a foundation for understanding Wittgenstein's engagement with building practice, and in doing so corrects the established understanding, and provides the basis for an alternative reading of the house. Unique other accounts of the house is Sarnitz's ability to argue for both Wittgenstein's status as an architect and his originality in this position. While the standard reading of the house places it within Viennese Modernism, or amongst the likes of Loos and Wagner, the reading typically views Wittgenstein as an intellectual member of the Viennese Modernist movement. Yet, Sarnitz demonstrates Wittgenstein's intellectual opposition to many of the foundational positions of Viennese Modernism. He shows us that the Wittgenstein House demonstrates a different take on the aesthetics of utility then many of his Austrian contemporaries. As such, many existing historical attributions of the Wittgenstein House are at odds with Sarnitz's characterization.

The next paper explores what can be said of architecture in light of Wittgenstein, particularly as pertains to Wittgenstein's theory of meaning. Emre Demirel approaches the topic from within the

discipline of architecture and reaches toward a philosophical statement. Demirel discusses Wittgenstein's theory of meaning as a means of questioning the notion of tradition in architecture. His theoretical position is demonstrated by examples taken from his native Turkey, which serves not only to evidence the theoretical position taken, but further develop the position by working through notions of representation and building analysis.

Reidar Due's paper runs counter to Demirel's in the sense that his paper approaches the topic from within philosophy and reaches toward architecture. Due discusses the conceptual foundations underpinning segments of architectural theory. He looks to the Wittgensteinian concept of meaning as use in order to demonstrate the limitations of Hegelian notions of architecture, the limitations of which are for him the basis of contemporary architecture theory. He then discusses the role of ideologies in collective thought about building, so as to show the limitations of essentialist notions of architecture as well as the limitations certain "categories", as the author calls them, have on the way we think about building. Due's categories run parallel to Adrian Forty's analysis of the role of words in conceptions of architecture, yet Due argues further effectively saying that these categories or words provide the basis of conceptual formations.[4] Due focuses on the role of the historian in constructing architectural ideologies, leaving the reader to ask whether ideologies are always so construed.

" SARNITZ DEMONSTRATES WITTGENSTEIN'S INTELLECTUAL OPPOSITION TO ... VIENNESE MODERNISM "

Hilde Heynen's contribution takes a turn, looking to the disciplinary rift that has for decades, perhaps centuries, divided reflective thinkers. Heynen reviews the discourse defining text *Aesthetics of Architecture* by Roger Scruton, marking its recent new edition. The

review serves as a short position piece describing why philosophers, albeit not all, so consistently fail to engage architecture. Their methodological errors in the approach to a subject they know little appears the cause, and the seemingly lack of engagement with building the symptom. Heynen provides a reasoned analysis as to why Scruton's thinking has not resonated, in either the original or recent revised edition, with those in the architecture discipline. She argues that while Scruton provides a competently argued account of architecture, the characterization is too limited to be recognizable, perhaps intelligible, to those intimately studied in architecture's discourse and practice.

ENDNOTES

1. Fahey, Carolyn, March 1, 2015, "Use-Value in Architecture: Reconceptualizing Buildings' Functions," *International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture*, http://isparchitecture.com/events/call-for-papers/

2. See my Ph.D. dissertation for a detailed survey of literature surrounding the house and the limitations of each contribution: Carolyn Fahey, *The Claim of Architecture: a new Wittgensteinian reading* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle University, 2010).

3. David Macarthur, 'Working on Oneself in Philosophy and Architecture: A Perfectionist Reading of the Wittgenstein House', *Architecture Theory Review* 19.2 (2015).

4. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: a vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).