

INTERNATIONAL LEXICON OF AESTHETICS

Spring 2024 Edition, ISSN 2611-5166, ISBN 9791222313085, DOI 10.7413/18258630143

PHILOSOPHY OF ARCHITECTURE

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(First published May 31, 2024)

It. *Filosofia dell'architettura*; Fr. *Philosophie de l'architecture*; Germ. *Philosophie der Architektur*; Span. *Filosofía de la arquitectura*.

FRAMEWORK

In the Western tradition, the topic of the relationship between architecture and philosophy has been effective since Greek thought. As has recently been pointed out by the collaborative work between Mario Cucinella Architects and Artemide®, the work of architecture must proceed *katà métron*, “according to measure”, meaning by this expression a correct articulation that gives each element its proper position and, at the same time, establishes between the various elements a correct system of relationships. The first feature of the nexus between architecture and philosophy is thus logical-formal and directly calls into question the concept of *composition*. Socrates’ statement in Valéry’s dialogue dedicated to Eupalinos, the first architect, explicitly says, in this regard, “[...] no geometry without the word. Without it, figures are accidents, and neither make manifest nor serve the power of the mind. By it, the movements which beget figures are reduced to acts, and these acts being clearly designated by words, each figure is a proposition that can be combined with others”. A direct relationship between *logos* and architectural order emerges clearly here, which we find, unchanged, at different stages in the development of the history of philosophy. Kantian *Architectonic* is undoubtedly an eminent moment of this tendency, since it is to be understood as the “art of systems”, i.e., in direct relation to the “transcendental doctrine of method”.

Again, Valéry is a persuasive starting point to highlight the other side of the relationship between architecture and philosophy, which calls into question music. So Eupalinos to Phaedrus: “And when, first of us two and without special intents, you spoke of music with reference to my temple, you were visited by a divine analogy”. In this case, the balance of constructive logic proper to architecture is enhanced by establishing a parallel with musical composition, making explicit an analogy that, present since Pythagoreanism, characterizes the entire arc of Western philosophy. Perhaps the most salient moment belonging to this trajectory is Goethe’s famous note, also echoed by Schopenhauer, according to which “architecture would be frozen music”, although Burckhardt does not fail to note that a similar expression

already recurs in Leon Battista Alberti when, speaking of the facade of the Tempio Malatestiano, he said “tutta quella musica”, “all that music”.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In more recent times the subject of architecture has taken on the significance of an extremely more specific assessment. Beyond the structural but general nexus between logically organized thought and architectural construction, there have been numerous attempts to recognize the action of specific philosophical concepts in the practice of this or that architect. Architecture has thus no longer been identified as, analogically, a form of the ‘philosophical’, but by breaking out of the constraint of separate disciplinary domains, philosophy on the one hand and architecture on the other, the zone of indiscernibility has been emphasized where architectural practice acts by giving rise autonomously, that is, *iuxta propria principia*, to something that is in itself a bearer of philosophical premises and consequences.

What characterizes this first stage of the twentieth-century confrontation and intersection between architecture and philosophy, however, is the fact that it is not a fundamental reflection, which is therefore concerned with identifying the philosophical repercussions of architectural conception and practice in general, in the manner in which, exemplarily, cinema was considered by Gilles Deleuze. Instead, the relationship between architecture and philosophy initially presents itself in the mode of focusing on a particular architectural practice, corresponding to the work of an individual architect. Sometimes this takes on the contours of a dialogue between an individual architect and his reference thinker.

Before proceeding to an analytical reporting of the main among these interchanges, however, it should be mentioned that they stand critically in continuity with what, from an aesthetic point of view, could be called the Romantic paradigm. It is in fact with Romanticism and with what has been marked as the “birth of poetics” that the artistic object is thematized from its intrinsic conceptual value, determining, as a direct consequence, an enlargement of the conceptual dimension which, in its dialectical movement, penetrating every sphere of the real – and being able from each of these spheres to be traced back to philosophy – can be found everywhere. As Vattimo (2008, 47-48) punctually points out, with Romanticism “[...] programmatic enunciation has prevailed over the production of works, to the point that not so much the poetics serve to better understand and evaluate the works, but rather the works are nothing more than provisional examples of the enunciation itself, illustrations and exemplifications of ‘programs’ that first and foremost as such want to be worth being recognized”.

It is in this light that should be understood Lohmann’s (2015) work on the relationship between Fichte and Schinkel, aimed at identifying the role that the idealistic concept of self-consciousness plays in Schinkel’s work, according to Fichte’s interpretation. Along the same lines, and still in the idealistic sphere, but this time focused on Hegel’s work, are the contributions of Berendzen 2008 and Ledha 2012, motivated by the fact that, for the reasons previously stated, architecture occupies a prominent role in the *Aesthetics*.

Having defined this framework of interest, it is possible to give a concise account of the most important examples where the relationship between philosophy and architecture has come to light as the interaction between individual authors and specific architectural works:

- Heidegger/Scharoun. Their meeting, and the ensuing exchange, followed the famous *Darmstädter Gespräch* held in 1951, where Heidegger presented *Bauen Wohnen Denken*, his main contribution to a philosophical understanding of the concept of "place" (*Ort*), interpreted as that "in-between" (*Zwischenraum*) that also interests Hans Scharoun's practice, aimed at defining, internally to the articulation of a building, the dynamics of an open space that is variously traversable and relationally open, without therefore being subject to a conception of place as a spatially rigid and determined entity (see Barison (2011)).
- Derrida/Tschumi/Eisenman. Derrida's understanding of architecture is defined addressing the work of two architects, Bernard Tschumi (Derrida 1986) and Peter Eisenman (Derrida 2008). The key point of this confrontation is built all around the friction between deconstructionism and architecture as a constructive practice. How can architecture introject the deconstructive attitude that intends to evade the positional attitude that aims to impose presence on the real in a metaphysically violent way?
- Jean Nouvel/Jean Baudrillard. Their dialogue (Baudrillard and Nouvel 2000) focuses on some specific issues: the singular object in architecture, the relationship between real and virtual, the concept of metamorphosis, and the architecture of disappearance.
- Sollers/Portzamparc. Their debate (de Portzamparc and Sollers 2003) takes into consideration in a peculiar way the relationship between writing and architecture: in what sense is architecture a text, what is the relationship between the grapheme of the written page and the graphic sign of the architectural project?
- Philosophers/Architects. In more recent times there have also been attempts to associate the conceptual categories defined by some philosophers with specific architectural works: Pourdy (2011) interprets Libeskind with Hegel; Damish and Williams (2002) resort to Kant to analyze Ledoux; Amato and Ferrara (2009) interpret the work of Oscar Niemeyer philosophically.

In the context of scholarly discourse, it seems relevant to observe that, as preliminarily outlined, the prevailing methodologies distinctly overlook recognizing the domain of architecture as an independent realm of intellectual exploration, endowed with the capacity to engender unique conceptual frameworks devoid of reliance on the philosophical canon. We can therefore summarize the fundamental features of their method as follows:

- These approaches generally restrict their examination to the nexus between an individual philosopher and an architect.
- Their major endeavor is to pinpoint occurrences within specific architectural accomplishments where the application of philosophical principles, exemplified by Derrida's deconstructivism or Heidegger's ontology of spatiality, is manifest.

- They do not systematically engage in a critical interrogation of the foundational nexus between philosophical discourse and architectural practice as autonomous disciplines.

CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The interplay between philosophy and architectural theory is a significant focal point within the realm of contemporary philosophical discourse, whose novelty can be appreciated all the more if understood in its diversity compared to what has been described so far. A notable example of this new attitude is the acclaimed series *Thinkers for Architects*, initiated by Routledge in 2007, which aims to familiarize the architectural community with individual philosophers' work. Nevertheless, this series and similar publications propose a still generic connection between philosophy and architecture, suggesting that architects may simply adopt 'ready-made' concepts from various philosophers as needed. This perspective is echoed across several scholarly works: Illies and Ray (2014, 121-144) explore how architectural practices can exemplify philosophical stances; Mitrović (2011) investigates philosophical inquiries pertinent to architectural theory.

In the realm of architectural discourse, a notably promising avenue of inquiry has emerged in recent times, endorsing the view of architectural practice as an independent intellectual endeavor. This perspective underscores the philosophical significance of architecture, attributed to its capacity for independent thought and its potent role in crafting and transforming reality with novelty and efficacy. The establishment of the International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture (ISPA) in 2009, along with the publication of the *Architekturdenken* series by Transcript, illustrates a clear commitment to this approach. Unlike the Routledge's series *Thinkers for Architects*, *Architekturdenken* focuses not on the application of philosophical theories to architecture, but rather on the inherent philosophical insights that emerge directly from architectural creativity. This shift towards recognizing architecture's intrinsic philosophical value was remarkably championed by Benjamin (1990), who articulated a vision of philosophy that emanates from architects themselves, as opposed to a philosophy tailored for architects or a mere philosophical analysis of architectural work. In line with this perspective also Chiodo (2011) understands architectural entities through classic aesthetic principles, concentrating on ten broad formal ideas (order, nature, form, utility, ornament, space, time, autonomy, heteronomy, and civilization). Below is a summary of the main contributions of this kind:

- Benjamin (2000) posits a novel interplay between the notion of architectural functionality and repetition: he suggests that the essence of architectural undertakings lies in the recurrent implementation of a singular function across various structural elements, as exemplified in the works of Eisenman and Reiser + Umemoto.

- Jarzombek (2009) expands upon a discourse by Peter Eisenman, contemplating the inherent conceptual nature of architecture by examining the interconnection between historical narratives and the textualization of space.

- Kremer (2011) advocates for the establishment of a unified conceptual framework – referred to as *architectural ontology* in his later work – aimed at bridging the disciplinary divide between architecture and philosophy.
- De Bruyn and Reuter (2014) delve into the distinctiveness of architectural expression through the lens of network theories and rhizomatic structures, drawing inspiration from the ideas proposed by Deleuze and Guattari.
- Through the works of Gleiter and Schwarte (2015), there is an endeavor to establish a cohesive architectural-philosophical discourse that substantiates and clarifies architecture's pivotal role as the principal cultural mechanism by which humans forge an environment suited to their needs, distinct from the natural world.
- Goetz (2018) draws on Damisch to introduce the concept of *displacement*, thereby conceptualizing architecture as a spatial physics that actively constructs and shapes the world through its engagement with space.
- The concept of atmosphere as it is articulated by Böhme (2013) and Schmitz (2020) precisely in reference to architecture, where the extent of a jointly subjective and objective space is thought to lead to an environmental extension of the phenomenological Lifeworld (the consequences regarding the effect of this perspective on the perception of architectural environment have been seminaly explored by Griffero 2010).

If there is therefore a general trend detectable following the debate that, since the Romantic beginning, has developed around the philosophy of architecture, this consists in progressively distancing from a reflection in which philosophy holds the theoretical priority, thanks to its conceptual pre-eminence, over the architectural fact. Especially in recent decades, after which for years, as we have seen, the philosophical debate on architecture had concentrated on specific case studies, usually taking into consideration the work of a single architect, a turning point is to be detected: architecture becomes, from an object of conceptual study, an expression practice simultaneously material and conceptual which, since it is capable of giving shape to the world, is also necessarily – and autonomously – responsible for the structures it implements. The project is thus theory, but since it is a project oriented towards giving rise to a concrete existence, one can go so far as to say that the project is equally the place in which theory and practice cease to be able to distinguish themselves and where, therefore, philosophy finds in architecture that 'outside' which allows it to overcome any residue of abstraction. Architecture hence proves itself to be radically philosophical because it imposes on philosophy the concreteness of overcoming any abstract separation between thought and the world.

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HOW TO QUOTE THIS ENTRY

M. Barison, *Philosophy of Architecture*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Spring 2024 Edition, URL = <https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/archive/2024/spring/philosophyofarchitecture.pdf>, DOI: 10.7413/18258630143.

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M. Barison, *Philosophy of Architecture*, "International Lexicon of Aesthetics", Vol. 7, Milano, Mimesis, 2025.