

Environmental integralism: New prospects for the ontology, the aesthetics, and the ethics of architectural works

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Abstract: This contribution aims to explore a particular ontological approach to architectural works called ‘environmental integralism’, according to which the architectural work is not exhausted by the building, but includes at least part of the environment in which the building is located. Social context is also relevant in order to assess its functional and aesthetic values. Not only that, environmental integralism may be understood as a form of paving the way for developing an ethical approach to architecture. In this sense, this article tries to focus on the social and environmental role in architectural appreciation. This should be understood as showing how ontological debates may have an influence on aesthetic as well as on ethical considerations.

Keywords: metaphysics; descriptivism/revisionism; architectural work; ontology of architecture; aesthetic experience; contextualism.

1. *The ontological problem in context*

Within the Philosophy of Architecture, a field that has been traditionally neglected, critical discussion has focused more on aesthetics than on ontology or even ethics. My aim is to show that there is a close connection between the ontology question about the nature of architectural works and our aesthetic judgments and, further, their ethical value, so that they cannot come apart. If we look at Scruton’s (1979) classical approach to the aesthetics of architecture, we see how ontological questions have been dismissed in favor of other questions, such as aesthetic judgment and aesthetic value of architectural works, the relation between architecture and design, the language and style of architectural works, and whether architectural works can be thought to represent or have a meaning. Scruton (1979, Chap. 3) also examines whether architecture has an essence, a question that must obviously count as a metaphysical one, but by saying so, he just means to explore what makes a given work an *architectural*

work of art, capable of being the object of aesthetic judgment. The doctrines he examines on the nature of architecture (i.e., functionalism, spatialism, and the *Kunstgeschichte* school) are, in his view, insufficient, reductionist, and ultimately inadequate to describe the aesthetic experience of architecture. Departing from such premises, Scruton undertakes a positive approach to the aesthetic experience of architecture linked to the notion of imagination. The problem with the traditional theories that he examines is that these aim to arrive at abstract principles that determine the essence of architecture “before giving a proper description of the experience which it qualifies.” He concludes that “if we are to think of the analysis of the object as casting light on the nature of appreciation, then we must consider the object only under its widest possible description.” (Scruton 1979: 70). This thought could be considered as illustrative of how metaphysical research about architectural works may influence our analysis of such an experience. Instead, this leads Scruton not to investigate the ontology of architectural works, but to consider what general features of architectural objects are central to our aesthetic judgment. This requires examination of the great variety of our experiences of architecture rather than ontological research about forms of existence of architectural objects. Analogously, Chiodo (2011), a more recent contribution to the aesthetics of architecture, emphasizes the role different concepts (e.g., order, space, time, nature, utility, ornamentation) play in our judgment of aesthetic properties of architectural works, rather than their ontological nature.

All this confronts us with the issue of what should have a priority in the philosophical study of architecture: ontology or aesthetics. One might think both are orthogonal to each other. In my view, it may be useful to contrast this issue, which has not received much attention in the philosophy of architecture, with a similar discussion in the field of philosophy of music.

In a well-known article, Ridley (2003: 203) contended that “a serious philosophical engagement with music is orthogonal to, and may well in fact be impeded by, the pursuit of ontological issues, and, in particular, that any attempt to specify the conditions of a work’s identity must, from the perspective of musical aesthetics, be absolutely worthless.” In view of this, musical ontology would be unnecessary for the consideration of aesthetic problems related to music. One way of understanding Ridley’s reflections is to see them this way: the analysis of which kind of objects musical works are¹ has no consequences for the philosophical study of musical experience and practice or for their aesthetic dimension. Different arguments have been elaborated

¹ It might be considered whether musical works exist at all, given that one possibility is some form of eliminationism. See, for example, Rudner (1950) and Cameron (2008).

in favor of the same or similar ideas. For example, Young (2014) has maintained that ontology of music is worthless for study of aesthetics of music, as ontological research is founded in *a priori* judgments, whereas aesthetic judgments are empirical. And Kraut has argued that ontology of music is a dubious enterprise, as such questions are already answered, in a reasonable interpretation, “by critics, historians, musicologists, and consumers of art” (Kraut 2012: 707). One reason why Ridley and others think that ontology is of no relevance for aesthetic consideration of artworks (in this case, musical works) is that when we attend to a work in order to make an aesthetic judgment, we do not seem to be engaged in a metaphysical investigation about the nature or the identity of the work we are considering. It seems we simply enjoy it or have an aesthetic experience of it.

Ridley’s argument against the alleged priority of music ontology over the aesthetics of music could be adapted to argue against the ontology of architecture and its priority over the aesthetics of architecture. Such adapted version goes as follows:

- P1. In our actual aesthetic encounters with architectural works, our primary concern is with aesthetic dimensions of the work itself.
- P2. To judge the aesthetic dimensions of architectural works is of no help in considering the kinds of problems at issue in the ontology of architecture. Hence, study of the ontology of architecture is worthless, at least if we want to focus on aesthetic issues.

At first glance, P1 may seem true, though the way in which we can recognize P1 as true is pointless against ontology. This paper reflects on the fact that, in some cases, ontological consideration of architectural works may influence our aesthetic and ethical judgments about architecture. As will be discussed later, there are reasons to think that P2 is false, and for the same reason.² To investigate the nature of the architectural object may have consequences for the way we judge it, even in ethical dimensions of architecture. Eventually, C is not well established – neither for architecture nor for music.

In the case of music, Young’s rejection of ontology is based on a false dichotomy between ontology as a merely *a priori* task and aesthetics as equipped with empirical knowledge. Neither is ontology completely *a priori* nor is aesthetics

² People might think that Ridley’s and Young’s arguments against the relevance of musical ontology for the consideration of the aesthetic dimension of musical works are transferable to the case of architecture. But one of my aims in this paper is to show to what extent this is not the case. My point will be that it makes a difference what kind of object we are considering to be an architectural work for our aesthetic judgments, and the other way round, aesthetic and ethical aspects are relevant for ontological matters. This is the idea of a reflective equilibrium, as will be argued in section 2.2.

just an empirical enterprise. As Kania (2008) has argued, a misjudgment in relation to the nature of a musical object may lead to a putative evaluative error, mainly because we misrepresent the object, or simply are wrong about what object we have to evaluate and in which sense it should affect us. The same goes in the case of architecture. Of course, this is compatible, as in Kania's case, with a descriptive account of the ontology of architecture. In the first place, we must consider which kinds of objects can be considered "architectural" and then examine how we can understand and classify the nature of such objects. With music, this becomes clear by the following example: we consider a jazz piece more as a kind of concrete particular given that what is interesting to us is the performance and improvisation rather than the melody as a multiply instantiable abstract object. The ontological description is relevant for how we should evaluate the piece. It is also true that aspects of a piece of classical music we evaluate from the aesthetic point of view may depend on whether we take into account the work itself (as a type) or a performance of it. Bartel, for example, argues for a performance-based ontology in music. His reason is that focusing on musical works as the center of our concerns may have undesirable consequences for our understanding and evaluation of musical performances (Bartel 2011: 395).

In the case of architecture, we find a parallel in the distinction between the planned work (for example, the plan of the building) and the built work (the building itself). We can make aesthetic judgments of both that rely on partially identical features, but also on completely different ones. In fact, the built work has features not present (even in abstract manner) in the planned work (for example, the spatial context in which the built work lies). I maintain that ontological consideration of the architectural work may have important consequences for our evaluation of it. If we are convinced that architectural works (at least paradigmatic examples) are material concrete objects and, moreover, that these objects are not to be considered in isolation, but together with their social context and spatial surroundings, a new approach emerges that brings together aesthetic as well as ethical dimensions of architecture. Too often in architecture, ethical and even aesthetic aspects are neglected and this is so, at least in part, because a traditional way of understanding architectural works has been as isolated objects, objects unto themselves. Therefore, my complaint is not only against the abstractists (i.e., those who think that paradigmatic architectural works should be understood as abstract objects), but also and above all against all those who hold that buildings end at their façades or are strictly circumscribed by their individual limits. In fact, I defend a pluralist ontology for architectural objects, because some architectural objects, such as unbuilt structures or type designs, are clearly abstract. Other, more paradig-

matic, architectural objects have to be understood more as material concrete objects. And, in my view, it is better to understand them not as isolated entities, but as together with their spatial and social context.

The structure of the rest of the paper is as follows. In section 2, I present some ontological views on architectural works and show how a new approach, “environmental integralism”, can do better for linking the nature of architecture to its ethical and aesthetic aspects. In section 3, I focus on the jump from aesthetics to ethics. My aim is to show that the ontology of the work of architecture may influence the way in which we make aesthetic judgments about it and how we socially interact with it.

2. *The ontology of architectural works*

Architectural works are the only works of art in which we can live, though not all architectural works are such that we can live in them. In the context of this paper, I primarily have in mind buildings as opposed to unbuilt structures. In the first instance, I propose that they are concrete, material objects – *artifacts* – (hence, spatiotemporal), just as pictures, sculptures, or photographs. But, as in the case of sculptures or photographs, their aesthetic properties partially depend on abstract relations that may be instantiated in different ways (not all of them perhaps relevant for the aesthetic value of architecture as an art). But let us momentarily leave aside the aesthetic evaluation of architecture and focus on the nature of architectural objects.

2.1. The nature of architectural objects: different approaches

As Fisher (2015, 3.1.) notes, “the outputs of architecture are not limited to built structures but include as well models, sketches, and plans”, so that it is difficult to think that there may be a unique ontology for all kinds of architectural objects. In the present contribution, I concentrate more on buildings but what I say about buildings will equally serve for other kinds of constructions and designs – such as monuments, memorials, gardens, or urban squares – that count as architectural works as well. As far as buildings are concerned, perhaps the most natural option, according to common intuition, is to maintain that they are material, concrete artifacts.³ The thesis that I subscribe to here has this implication, although I maintain that the architec-

³ Hence, spatiotemporally particular entities. Other examples, as those mentioned above, include memorials, monuments, gardens, or squares, all of which are also spatiotemporal particulars. As I suggest later in the article, they are kinds of continuants, as they can be transformed, restored, renewed, or changed in some of their parts, and still be the same architectural objects.

tural object is better individuated broadly and not narrowly, hence cannot be reduced to the boundaries of a single material object, i.e., the building itself. It should include instead its surroundings. Strictly speaking, and as Bacchini (2018: 2) puts it, a narrow view of the architectural work considers that “the spatial boundaries of the architectural work coincide with (or, come close to) those of an imaginary material object mereologically constituted by all and only those items that were (or should be) materially erected, modified, transported and placed, or merely left unchanged by the construction company as an effect of the architect’s instructions”. A broad view of the architectural object holds that this is not sufficient as a characterization of the object that matters for architectural consideration. The proper architectural object should be of a greater area or size.

The first things we may admire in architecture are the proportions and similar relations between lines and other elements of a design in the building plan, a concrete entity. But, those are abstract relations that can be instantiated in multiples copies of the plan or in built structures that follow that plan. These things (considered as types) are certainly abstract. It could be argued that these entities cannot be Platonic objects, because they exhibit a temporal dimension and depend on the conceptions, ideas, or imaginings (of concrete entities) as depend on their architects and designers. They are mind-dependent, and hence can only be artifactual, abstract artifacts (per Thomasson 1999).⁴

Nevertheless, what I contend to be the paradigmatic architectural objects are the concrete built structures rather than *any* abstract object, whether the plan-type or the built structure-type, as can be materially realized in different buildings and in different places. This is so because these abstract entities can only serve their purposes, at least what we may consider to be their paradigmatic or main intended function,⁵ to the extent that they are *materially erected*.⁶ A memorial, a monument can only serve its ultimate purpose

⁴ Fisher (2015, 3.1.) refers to a traditional concretist complaint against the abstractist, according to which “abstracta are not created whereas architectural objects are”. To this concretist complaint, we could argue that they could be considered as abstract *artifacts*, as Thomasson (1999) thinks about fictional characters, novels, and other cultural products, all of which are abstract but created.

⁵ See footnote 8 on the notion of “paradigmatic” function.

⁶ I don’t want to beg the question here against the abstractist. I am not saying that unbuilt monuments and memorials are not meaningful. They are. They can also be appreciated, but in order to fulfill what is usually understood to be their paradigmatic or main intended function (e.g., in the case of a bridge to pass through it, in the case of a garden to walk through it, etc.), they need to be materialized. I take this to be not a claim of the meaninglessness of unbuilt architecture. My point is neither that there is just one paradigmatic function that all architectural works should fulfill and that they can fulfill this function only when realized as concrete entities. I remain a pluralist about the

if really built. A garden or a square only fulfill their function if people can walk around or cross them. A bridge fulfills its main function if we can pass through it. And a block of flats serves their purposes only if people can live in it. It is not my aim to deny that unbuilt architecture has a meaning or that it cannot be equally admired. The point is the rather uncontroversial claim that architectural works usually have intended functions that can only be properly accomplished when we speak of materialized entities. Furthermore, and perhaps more controversially, at least some of their properties are properly admired when we pay attention to the material entity. That is, there are properties that we can only appreciate if they are correspondingly instantiated in the material building. As Robinson (2012) has maintained, buildings (or monuments, etc.) may elicit emotions given their material qualities and their spatiotemporal dimension. The fact that I must move and turn around the building in order to admire it, the fact that, given its size, I can see myself overwhelmed by it, or the fact that I can feel comfortable in a building, among other things, seem to be reasons for considering these objects as concrete particulars, material objects.⁷ We must also take into account that the very material of which the building is made (whether of glass, stone, wood, or any other material) is also crucial to the aesthetic appreciation of the work. If van der Rohe's Farnsworth House had been made of wood instead of steel and floor-to-ceiling glass, it would have turned out a very different object and our aesthetic judgements would have been different, too. Bicknell (2014: 437), for her part, has suggested that "[i]f abstract designs are the true objects of appreciation, then actual buildings are superfluous or at best deserve our consideration only because they provide one form of access to their designs." From this, however, we cannot conclude that abstract designs cannot be equally admired or be the object of appreciation. We can appreciate both the design in a plan (as a type) and the material concrete object, which is the

nature of architectural works. There can be different kinds of architectural works, some of which are abstract, some of which are concrete, and all these different kinds can surely have several functions as well. But, in most cases, when we think of entities like monuments, bridges, or buildings, it seems that, for all these objects, there is a paradigmatic function that can only be fulfilled when we consider them as concrete entities. I shall seek to reinforce my arguments in favor of concretism below.

⁷ Obviously, the mere fact that the objects in question with which we interact in those ways turn out to be concrete particulars is hardly surprising. I don't take this to be an argument for concretism. There are many kinds of architectural objects. Some of them are abstract (unbuilt structures, plans considered as types, etc.). But other architectural objects are clearly concrete. Most importantly, some paradigmatic properties and functions of architectural works (some of them also relevant for aesthetic appraisal) vs non-architectural works of art are such that, in order to be fully appreciated, they must be instantiated. In being instantiated, these properties acquire a new dimension and new and important aspects come into existence that are crucial for the full appreciation of the object.

building, but what we appreciate in them are different things. In the case of the type, what we admire are general qualities of the design; the direct object of our aesthetic appreciation are properties that can be instantiated in several plans and instantiated in different material buildings. In the case of the building itself – as a built, concrete structure – what constitutes the object of appreciation are the properties as instantiated together with other features that are present only in the building as a material object. And one of these features is the spatial environment where the building has been erected, which obviously is not represented in the plan, at least not completely.

What we have so far is a plurality of architectural objects, each deserving a specific analysis that may reveal their appropriate ontological condition. A pluralist ontology is surely the most adequate to make sense of the different kinds of abstract objects and their particular nature (see, for this intuition, Fisher 2015, 3.1.). Some of them can be understood as abstract artifacts (as the plan-type and structure-type, both being multiply instantiable in different material objects and in different places). Others are nothing but material concrete entities (such as built structures that we see and may live in). But we have also temporally dated token events, such as particular examples of buildings, as Lopes (2007) has proposed for the case of the Grand Shrine in Ise, Japan. The kind of ontology we need will depend on the case and on what our relations are to the object. But, in general, most familiar cases should be treated as material concrete entities conceived as continuants, as they can be transformed, restored, renewed, or changed in some of their parts, and still be the same architectural objects. The history of a building is completely contingent, depending on changes that it endures, intentionally or not, through time, as a result of intentional remodeling, restoration, or transformation or as a mere effect of decay. As a consequence, we may want to focus on a temporal part of the object in question for different purposes, including aesthetic consideration. Consider, for example, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which, like many Christian churches, is a stylistic patchwork made of very different elements added over time. In our aesthetic appreciation, we can focus on the building as a whole and continuant; or we can concentrate on some temporal part of it, the Romanesque or the Baroque part, for instance. Though the different parts are obviously related to each other, it is perfectly possible to consider the whole church or some of its parts, and the whole and each of its parts have their own specificities and deserve differential aesthetic judgment. One may, for example, admire the work as a whole or at least some of its parts, and nevertheless detest some of the other parts.

Before we pass to the next section, where I explore such an “environ-

mental integralist” ontological approach to architectural works, I want to say something about the intentional dimension of the architectural work, as relevant to my defense of environmental integralism. One of the first approaches to architectural works in a general ontology of art is Roman Ingarden’s (1962/1989). As Thomasson (2020, 3.2.) has pointed out, the part on architectural works in his book is “the most interesting [...], for it suggests how Ingarden’s examination of works of art may be broadened out to form the framework for a general theory of social and cultural objects and their relations to the more basic physical objects posited by the natural sciences.” According to Ingarden, the architectural work enters into consideration not as a merely real, material object, but “as something that somehow extends beyond the building’s reality” (Ingarden, 1962/1989: 256). It is not only that we can confer on a building, or a monument, a kind of meaning, so that they can be a symbol of, for example, concepts, ideas, and institutions, or represent some personality; it is also that we may confer on them the fulfilling of a function. There may exist a purpose for having erected them. And the function they have (if any) – which varies from case to case – together with what they represent (if anything), is what we usually take into account to evaluate a building. To know that a given building or a monument had formerly the function of exalting a dictatorial regime or even, as in the case of the Nazi camps, of exterminating parts of the population, is probably going to condition our judgment of it. In the next section, I claim that spatial context should also be taken into account in aesthetic and ethical appraisal of the architectural work. This also shows the influence ontology may have on our aesthetic experience, as the latter partially depends on how we ought to classify the work in question – which depends on the ontological category to which the architectural work belongs. As in the case of music, the ontological category of the piece of music is reasonably going to influence our aesthetic experience of the piece (Kania 2008).

2.2. Environmental integralism

At this point, I discuss arguments for what I call “environmental integralism” – the view according to which the architectural work is not exhausted by the building, but includes at least part of the environment in which the building is located. Furthermore, according to this thesis, social context is also relevant in order to assess its functional and its aesthetic values. Though I consider other reasons to sustain the thesis – extrinsic to appreciation of architectural works as they depend on social and ethical considerations – my first and main argument for environmental integralism is inspired by what we see as architecture’s paradigmatic function and appreciate in the first in-

stance: the built structure as a material, concrete object, considered with its surroundings. Architecture involves the process of creation and design of type structures (abstract artifacts) by traditional methods or computer programs. But this is not the paradigmatic and final product, the one we all expect. The final product is the material thing. And it seems that the material thing is not an isolated entity, but always is put in a context. Of course, we may concern ourselves with a built structure as an isolated object, but in the end we will have to consider also the surroundings, neighboring buildings, or natural landscape in which it is placed. In fact, this comes to the mind of the architect from the very moment the project begins, since she has to take into account where the new building is to be erected.⁸ Furthermore, it is clear that the building is going to have a social function, even if only for housing part of a population. So, even before we consider aesthetic appreciation as an argument for environmental integralism, there is an argument for the thesis according to which the paradigmatic architectural object is the material, concrete object; first perhaps considered in isolation, but at some point also with its surroundings and social context. The idea is that, to serve their proper function (which may be housing people, though there may be many others) and to be able to take into account implications of the building for the community, architectural works have to be considered as material concrete objects. Let us call this the “functional argument”. So, I understand environmental integralism as committed first to concretism (i.e., the thesis that the primary architecture objects are concrete, material objects), and, second, to a form of contextualism that takes the urban or natural environment as the main context (together with the social) in which the object is to be appreciated. A similar view is taken by Carlson (2000: 12), who considers function as well as location and the very existence of the work the right “paths” to appreciation of architectural works (Carlson also seems committed to concretism for similar reasons). Function and location are thus of great importance for the aesthetic and ethical consideration of the architectural object.

According to environmental integralism, the architectural work is, we have said, not exhausted by the building, but includes at least part of the environment in which the building is located. Social context is also relevant to assessing its functional and aesthetic values. Furthermore, environmental integralism may be understood as paving the way for an ethical approach to architecture by focusing on the social and environmental role in architectural

⁸ Of course, it may be noted that site-specific architecture is just a *kind* of architecture, and that not all architectural works are site-specific. Also, although it may be a *desideratum* that the architect take the environment into account, the reality is usually different. I agree with these two considerations, but my thesis is more prescriptive than descriptive.

appreciation. This shows how ontological debates may influence our ethical, as well as aesthetic, considerations. Environmental integralism is committed to concretism in as much as it maintains that paradigmatic examples of architectural works are material concrete objects. But it cannot be reduced to this, as environmental integralism claims that the architectural work, to satisfy its aesthetic and social functions and also to do justice to environmental and ethical challenges, must be considered in conjunction with the spatial and social context. By “social context”, I mean all issues related to the social benefit a building may bring and all consequences for the community that social interaction with that building may produce.

Let us pursue the issue of contextualism further. The term “contextualism” usually refers to the idea that not isolated buildings, but collections of them (or of their abstract counterparts) instead, constitute the relevant architectural objects, and that, in the end, “architectural aesthetics cannot be pursued entirely separately from the aesthetics of cities or towns” (Fisher 2015, 3.2.). Strictly speaking, contextualism is committed to neither concretism nor to abstractism. By contrast, an environmental integralist is more sympathetic to the idea that architectural works are concrete material entities. An environmental integralist claims, for example, that not only urban surroundings become relevant when appreciating a work, she also claims that the landscape (natural or otherwise) is important to evaluating that work. The built surroundings as well as the landscape are equally relevant for aesthetic appreciation. Environmental integralism is more precise than contextualism, which in comparison is too general a thesis. Contextualists just say that context is important, but environmental integralists want to specify that it is the spatial surrounding as well as the social context what counts. Contextualists in architecture usually are understood as claiming that the design of a building should simply respond to the characteristics of the surroundings in which it is built. Environmental integralists make the radical point that the architectural work should be holistically evaluated as a single object and that the aesthetic dimension should be considered in connection with the ethical and social dimension. It takes into account not only the physical or spatial surroundings, but also the set of social and cultural functions and intentions that are associated to the work. Finally, it also points to the environmental impact of the construction and the use of the building as something that is going to be crucial for its assessment.

One could think that environmental integralism is a form of descriptivist ontology. Kania (2008) distinguishes between descriptivism, according to which musical ontology should describe better our practices and our intuitions about musical works, and revisionism, according to which we *a priori*

impose a certain respectable ontological category on musical works. To impose for philosophical reasons a certain category, in nominalist or Platonist senses, without taking into account our real musical practices and intuitions, is to adhere to an ontological revisionism. To my mind, a better position is a third one, in line with the reflective equilibrium idea advanced by Goodman (1955) and defended in music ontology by Davies (2004; 2017), Kraut (2014) and, more recently, Giombini (2019). An adequate ontology for fictional characters, for example, depends on the way that ontology solves particular semantic problems related to sentences containing terms for fictional characters but also on our practices and intuitions as related to those statements.⁹ Following the idea of reflective equilibrium, ontological accounts of architectural works should accommodate widespread intuitions about buildings or monuments, whereas, in some cases, ontology also could be used to revise our intuitions whenever such accounts reveal themselves, for good reasons, as the most plausible or desirable. As Giombini maintains, “involving a process of adjustment and revision of intuitions, reflective equilibrium may help descriptivists address the instability of intuitions as ontological evidence.” (Giombini 2019: 70).

Let me insist on the fact that environmental integralism is to be only partially understood as a descriptive thesis, that is, as claiming what kind of objects architectural works are, because it is also a prescriptive thesis, in the sense that it contends that architectural works, in order to be considered as sufficiently good or acceptable, should appropriately respond to the spatial and social context. It tells what kind of architecture we should promote and value. As we said above, one could argue that site-specific architecture is just a particular kind of architecture and that for not all architectural works the context or the environment is important. One could even mention the immense amount of cases in which buildings have been built without taking into account the surroundings in which they were placed and without giving any relevance to their environmental and social impact. An environmental integralist could reply that this might well be the case, but at the same time she will point to the fact that those are examples of bad architecture.

Now let me go deeper into the reasons for adopting environmental integralism as a thesis regarding architectural ontology. Our intuition that architectural objects might be narrowly individuated as individual buildings alone might be defeated by, or give over to, a stronger idea: that we take the environment into account. This idea is grounded in two principles, the first

⁹ For example, an artifactualist abstractism, like the one defended by Thomasson (1999), may be the most plausible option if it allows for plausible answers to other philosophical problems.

of which, following Davies (2009: 169) and adapted to the case of architecture, proposes that:

- I If W and W^* are architectural objects and W and W^* have different properties that bear on their proper appreciation, W and W^* should be individuated differently.

Integralists take this principle to suggest that, given that our appreciation of a building or a monument can be completely different if the building or the monument is moved to or realized in quite another context, that building or monument should count as a different work in one context and in the other. The natural or urban surroundings of a building or monument play a part in the individuation of the architectural work. Imagine what would be left of Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater* (1935) if we took it apart stone by stone and transferred it to a completely different environment, placing it in the middle of a city with completely different houses and buildings. Our appreciation of Wright's masterwork would be entirely different. It is true, however, that this is much clearer of some kinds of building than of others. The full appreciation of other kinds of buildings does not depend on their surroundings in such a way that if we rebuilt those buildings in a completely different place, the buildings not only would remain the same, but would also be appreciated in the same way by their visitors. Here, I invoke a second principle:

- II If W is to be considered an architectural work, W must feature the most important functional properties that it is worth considering from a social and ethical perspective in relation to W .

This is a holistic principle of individuation based on social and ethical considerations. Architectural works elicit emotions and provoke moral judgments just as fictional narratives (novels, tales, etc.) and films do (Currie 1995; 1998; Carroll 1990; 1998; Gaut 1998). We can even speak of moral perception of buildings that may lead to positive or negative moral judgments. By perceiving and recognizing relevant intrinsic and extrinsic features of a building (its function, situation, and relation to the population inside and outside the building, and to the natural environment), we may positively or negatively appreciate the building's social and moral aspects.

Finally, the appreciation principle (I) and the holistic principle (II) should be combined with what I have called the functional argument. The functional argument justifies, on the one hand, a concretist approach to ontology of architecture (even in the context of a pluralist general view that allows for

different ontological categories, depending on the kind of architectural object), and on the other, a contextualist approach which gives context a crucial role to play, mainly because of the building's social function. It is not that principles (I) and (II) are our only arguments for environmental integralism; the functional argument is also important. Next, I examine some implications of this view, consider some objections to it, and entertain architectural examples for and against the view.

But, before we move to section 3, I remind the reader of the “functional argument”. Recall that, to fulfill its usual function, aim or purpose, a building needs to be considered as a material concrete entity. A merely designed or imagined hospital cannot host patients, a merely designed or imagined hotel cannot house visitors, and people who want to eat out cannot do so in a merely conceived or projected restaurant. All these kinds of architecture can only satisfy their function if they are materialized, if they pass from the design to reality. This is one aspect of the functional argument. Another aspect, which I take to be important to the ethical dimension of architecture, is the *social* function of a building. This includes social implications for a given community in terms of health, welfare, or even cultural benefit. Environmental integralism takes all this as crucial to architectural matters. This latter part of the functional argument is consonant with my holistic principle (II). The functional argument, as combined with principles (I) and (II), provides a set of reasons to take architectural works primarily as concrete material objects and view the spatial and social context as essential to the aesthetic and ethical consideration of the architectural work.

3. *The road from ontology to aesthetics and ethics*

What can we learn from environmental integralism? An important argument in its favor is its consequences for aesthetics and ethics. It is an approach to ontology with important implications for both aesthetic and moral appreciation, though it is independent from *a priori* positions in aesthetics or moral philosophy. First, I argued that, as corresponds with what is generally considered to be the paradigmatic function of architecture,¹⁰ the architectural object *par excellence* is a material, concrete object with a given social function. This is the functional argument. Then I considered two principles that lead to and reinforce the same thesis. Environmental integralism is a

¹⁰ By “paradigmatic” functions of architecture I mean all those functions that society generally attributes to buildings (a block of flats is for people to live in, a hospital for patients to be cared for, a garden for walking through, a museum for housing artworks, etc.). All these functions clearly imply considering the building as a material concrete object.

particular form of contextualism. Contextualism, as it is well known, is a tendency that reacts both against the functionalist view of architecture that has been predominant in architecture at least during part of the past century and against an indiscriminate attitude against the environment that follows from the architectural policies of the contemporary capitalist era.¹¹ Integralism is consonant with the view that the environment matters, by promoting the idea that the building should be fully integrated into its urban and natural environment, not only aesthetically but also relative to what is optimal in ecological and social terms.

Unfortunately, an indiscriminate attitude against the environment has proven to be a general situation in many countries of the advanced capitalist world. To take just one example, in Spain the 1988 coastal law, with its 2013 modification, has allowed the urbanization of more than 13% of all the coastal area, thereby degrading 80% of the coastal environmental resources that contribute greatly to the country's economy.¹² The urbanization of the littoral zone during several decades has been not only an unprecedented attack on the natural environment of the Spanish coast and on all of its ecosystems, but also an aggression in aesthetic terms.

Beautiful examples of contextual architecture representing aesthetic achievements include Jørn Utzon's *Kingo Houses* (Helsingør, Denmark, 1956-58), Peter Zumthor's *Therme Vals Spa* (Vals, Switzerland, 1996), RCR Arquitectes' *Les Cols Pavilions* (Olot, Girona, Catalonia, 2005), or Tadao Ando's *Water Temple* (Awaji Island, Japan, 1989-91). These are all landmarks of contemporary architecture. But I offer as a paradigmatic example of environmental integralism the philosophy that permeates the activities of the firm Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture (see Smith *et al.* 2008; Gill 2008). As they write, "...buildings of the 21st century must move beyond performing programmatically and aesthetically – and perform efficiently, cleanly, powered by natural energy..." (Smith *et al.* 2008: 2). They use, for example, windmill complexes to harness energy from the wind and integrate the natural landscape into the building; further, they use ecological footprint analysis, which ensures that "[e]very material item or energy consumed is produced by a certain amount of land in one or more eco-systems" (5). This is combined with an analysis of how building materials are manufactured

¹¹ It is not my aim to ideologize a debate on the ontology and ethics of architecture. Architecture under state socialism also produced its own human and environmental disasters (think only of Chernobyl, the worst nuclear catastrophe in history). We probably cannot blame any economic systems as such for these accidents. But unbridled capitalism is behind many environmental crimes and frequently forgets social consequences of mass production and consumption.

¹² For more information, see Greenpeace report (2013).

and delivered, so this process is carried out in the most efficient and sustainable manner. That all this is not at odds with ultramodern architecture is shown by the supertall skyscrapers that have made Adrian Smith famous all over the world (e.g., the Burj Khalifa in Dubai (2010) or the Jinmao Tower in Lujiazui, China (1999)). Smith and his collaborators call their view “global environmental contextualism”.

A sort of environmental integralism is common to almost all of these outstanding architectural works. This emerges as the only model to follow for urbanism and architecture if we want a sustainable future; moreover, this model has already been followed, at least partially, in some of the best works of modern architecture, such as those by the masters of Californian modernism (Richard Neutra, Rudolf Schindler, John Lautner, the Eames, and Pierre Koenig). So, environmental integralism is not strictly new. In the realm of contextualist ideas, Mitscherlich (1965) offers an important precedent that particularly emphasizes the social context of architectural works and city urbanism. In reaction to the urban and population growth in Germany after the Second World War, Mitscherlich spoke of the inhospitable nature of the new cities. Advanced industrial capitalism gave rise to crowded and oppressive urban environments with negative societal and psychological consequences. The indiscriminate tendency to build without taking into account the natural and urban environment – and related psychological and social factors – added to the loss of locality and history that characterized at least part of postwar reconstruction and city planning in Germany. Both phenomena can be taken as negations of environmental integralism.

The thesis has been more recently defended by Carlson, who claims: “The borders between architecture and the world in general and the world’s aesthetic issues and its ethical, social, political, and even economic issues are not as hard and fast as are those between, say, landscape painting and such issues. Moreover, given the central place of the question of existence in the appreciation of architecture, it seems that there should be some core idea in terms of which to answer it.” (Carlson 2000: 202). As far as the ethical dimension is concerned, Harries (1997) has referred to the “ethical function” of architecture, following a particular approach to ethical aspects of architecture. What is most important in his approach is that architecture should serve a common ethos, as it has a responsibility to community. In fact, it also has a political dimension – a view with which I agree. Earlier, Mitscherlich’s (1965) central argument depended on recognizing that architecture is an intrinsically social form of art. Of course, ethics need not be at odds with aesthetics. The ethical aspects of architecture are fully compatible with the aesthetic dimension and may even have preeminence over the aesthetic; indeed, the

ethical may influence our aesthetic appreciation. In accordance with these ideas, environmental integralism views architectural works as the products of responsible actions taken to serve social functions for the population.

I close by briefly considering two kinds of objections. The first comes from a renowned contemporary architect, Rem Koolhaas, with his well-known slogan “fuck context” (see Koolhaas *et al.* 1995). His criticism against the role of context in architecture has often been misunderstood. Koolhaas does not completely dismiss the role of context; rather, he thinks that neither context is everything, nor should aesthetics be replaced by, or subordinated to, the social context and environment. Koolhaas’ point would constitute a serious objection to environmental integralism if this latter thesis were understood as dismissing the role of aesthetic experience in our encounter with architecture, but this does not need to be the case, as environmental integralism may claim that ethics and social context are complementary to aesthetics, and not at odds with it. A second, more threatening kind of objection says that environmental integralism may be a school of architectural design, or even a philosophical stance, that is corroborated by particular examples of architecture (from Wright’s *Fallingwater* to Zumthor’s *Therme Vals Spa*) – and that could be taken as a desideratum for the future, but not as an adequate ontological approach for describing the nature of architectural works. This objection is most likely made from the perspective of a descriptivist ontology. Ontologies have (and should have) prescriptive as well as descriptive elements. Environmental integralism participates in descriptivism by pointing out facts related to aesthetic appreciation (i.e., how real people appreciate or tend to appreciate architectural works) and by emphasizing the real functions that people or institutions give to buildings and monuments. Environmental integralism *also* incorporates prescriptive elements in maintaining the importance of environmental and ethical aspects of architecture. An environmental integralist asserts that, while architects and urban planners sometimes do not take the environment and social context into account, this is what they *should* have done. When descriptive elements are combined with prescriptive ones, as realized in the combination of principles (I) and (II) with our functional argument, the environmental integralism thesis becomes more coherent and acceptable as a way of thinking that draws a sustainable future for urbanism and architecture.

4. *Conclusion*

By combining the functional argument with principles (I) and (II), I have tried to justify an ontological view of architectural works that may seem at first

glance counterintuitive. By appealing to the idea of reflective equilibrium, I have argued that an adequate balance between descriptivism and revisionism is the best option for the ontologist of architecture. In incorporating prescriptive as well as descriptive elements, this thesis is an example of the role of ontology in the appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical properties of architectural works.¹³

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