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EMBODIMENT AND PRIVATE LANGUAGES: THE PROPER TASK OF AN ARTICULATE ARCHITECTURE

This paper examines what is entailed for architects who seek to create a "homely" environment. That may have been architects' aim in domestic design for many years, but more recently critics have referred to the work of perception psychologists and claimed that neuro-aesthetics could provide a scientific justification for those earlier intuitions, such as we find in the work and writings of the Arts and Crafts architect M. H. Baillie Scott. He maintained that people "see" certain kinds of space as cosy and that the task of the architect is to respond to that. I suggest a connection to the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who noted that when we say "I see what you mean", we agree to play a "language game" – in which the conventions are understood so they cannot be private. Architects have often described how buildings convey meanings with a linguistic analogy and, in exercising their art, style can also be understood as a kind of game, as the work of Baillie Scott's more famous contemporary Edwin Lutyens illustrates. The game of style, however, as association and formal manipulation, is a reductive understanding of the process of design, which is more to do with "play" in a deeper psychological sense. What kind of game an architect chooses to play is at root, an ethical decision. Wittgenstein, himself the architect of two houses, had a scrupulous sense of what could be truthfully 'said', believing the deepest truths could only be 'shown'. Eventually architects' work shows where they stand.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an abbreviated version of a lecture originally delivered at the University of Bamberg. It focuses on case studies that I think throw light on what I see as a fundamental issue for architects: how to reconcile their duties to their clients' needs (particularly in relation to comfort) with the duties they could be said to owe to architecture as an art. I will be using the design of the individual house as the focus for investigation.

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II. HOMELINESS AND EMBODIMENT

A distinction is frequently made between a house (the fabric in which people dwell) and a home (the place to which we feel we belong). If an architect is making a house for someone (rather than for a developer, or a third party, for whom it might be principally an investment), the client will have an expectation that their architect will fashion it in such a way that she will be able to feel 'at home' in it. Of course, there may be other ambitions: the rich and powerful may want above all a symbol of their status when homeliness can take second place. But let us suppose that is the principal requirement. What are the rules or conventions, or recipes, to which an architect can refer? A much-discussed approach is phenomenological. Architectural writers such as Juhani Pallasmaa have impressed on young architectural students the importance of the handling of light, texture, colour, smell, and acoustics in our experience of architecture.[1] This is nothing new, since an earlier generation were brought up on Steen Eiler Rasmussen's lovely little book *Experiencing Architecture*, which movingly describes the many senses involved in architectural experience. But Pallasmaa and his contemporaries prefer to draw upon a rich philosophical tradition and tend to refer principally to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. If the problem of 'Being' is the principal existential question, and 'Being' entails 'dwelling', and if, in order to 'dwell' on the earth, we need to build, then no wonder that architecture, and in particular the design of a house, becomes a truly important activity.

Architects can have no quarrel with that perception. Indeed, had they sought to articulate their position, I think most would regard their role as fundamental in this way, whether or not they had read any phenomenology. But only recently are the natural sciences catching up with architects' intuitions, or the rather more specialized hypotheses of the phenomenological tradition. Harry Malgrave's book *Architecture and Embodiment* provides a useful summary of the arrival of neuro-aesthetics in the early years of this century and he goes on to claim that:

> The biological realisation that we are, at our core, dynamic sensorimotor beings embedded in our environments and intersubjective relations has [...] led to the need for more expansive phenomenological models of consciousness and perception.[2]

My colleague in Jesus College, Simone Schnall, an experimental psychologist, is cautiously in agreement. She refers to the notion of 'affordance' coined by James Gibson in 1979:

> Certain actions are 'afforded' by certain objects, whereas others are not: A chair affords sitting on it, but normally does not afford walking on it. However, affordances are not fixed, but depend on specific circumstances. One can easily imagine situations where a chair will not afford sitting, for example, if it is a miniature model in a doll's house. Similarly, one can imagine situations in which a chair will afford walking on it, for example when a series of chairs forms a walkable trail out of a flooded house. A critical

[1] J. PALLASMAA, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Sense*, Wiley, Hoboken 2012.

[2] H.F. MALLGRAVE, *Architecture and Embodiment. The Implications of the New Sciences and Humanities for Design*, Routledge, London/NewYork 2013.

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implication of cognition in the service of action is that specific actions happen in specific contexts.[3]

Based on this notion, Simone Schnall goes on to say:

> [...] studies on the perception of physical space suggest that people perceive the world around them as a function of how they would act in that world. [...] Such findings are consistent with recent approaches on embodied cognition, which are based on the premise that cognitive processes follow from interactions of the person in the physical environment. As a consequence, distinctions of modular processes of cognition, perception and action become difficult to maintain; all these aspects of physical and psychological functioning are closely intertwined. Further, bodily metaphors might not only reflect perceptual experience of space but might indeed feed back into those physical experiences themselves.[4]

Mallgrave traces the historical sources of empathetic theory, through Vischer, Wölfflin, Lipps, Schmarsow and others. But now that the idea of embodiment is no longer a philosophical abstraction and (he says) generally agreed to be a biological reality, he is optimistic that architecture can be steered back to its traditional issues of «rhythm, materiality, scale, texture, space, craftsmanship, and metaphor».[5] These are proper concerns, indeed inevitable ones, because of our biological conditioning, he argues. Architecture is a multi-sensory art with its origins in play (of which I will speak more later); we experience the environment as embodied individuals, and well-fashioned architecture has the capacity to abstract us from our commonplace existence; moreover, architecture is not just private, but essentially a communicative discipline – «perhaps pre-eminently, a social art».[6]

Of course, being at home in the world would not necessarily require us to occupy a house because we can situate ourselves in the world by other means. Joseph Rykwert described how the Roman could feel connected to the empire wherever a camp or city was constructed, with its *cardo* and *decumanus*.[7] And following Mircea Eliade's meditations on the *axis mundi*, architects have developed theories of existential place-making.[8] In literature, Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* outlined an aboriginal understanding of space that has little to do with enclosure or the

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[3] S. SCHNALL, *Embodiment in Affective Space: Social Influences on Spatial Perception*, in A. MAAS, T. SCHUBERT (eds.), *Spatial dimensions of social thought*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2011, pp. 131-154. She refers to J.J. GIBSON, *The ecological approach to visual perception*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston 1979.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 150.

[5] MALLGRAVE, *Architecture and Embodiment*, cit., p. 64.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 200.

[7] J. RYKWERT, *The Idea of a Town, The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World*, Faber& Faber, London 2011.

[8] Cf. M. ELIADE, *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*, Harvest Books, Eugene 1959. And, for instance, C. NORBERG-SCHULTZ, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, Praeger, Westport 1971.

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definition of rooms. Nevertheless, as soon as dwellings are constructed, spatial definition becomes unavoidable, even if it is established by the intersection of planes that (in the famous case of Mies van der Rohe's project for a brick villa) assume an infinite spatial connectivity. And ever since the Dutch invented homeliness in the seventeenth century, its expression in Europe has been remarkably consistent.[9]

III. BAILLIE SCOTT – A HOMELY EXAMPLE

It is time to turn to my first example of an architect who self-consciously strives to create 'homely' rooms, and I have chosen Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott (1865-1945). Baillie Scott was an English Free School architect who was famous in his day as the winner of the 1901 *Haus eines Kunstfreunds* competition, the unsuccessful entry to which by Charles Rennie Mackintosh is justly celebrated. In practice, on the Isle of Man, then Bedford, and finally in London, he produced numerous houses in a long career. In 1906 he published a book entitled *Houses and Gardens*, in which he set out not only to illustrate his own work, in order to attract new commissions, but also to describe what he was doing. He was an admirer of William Morris – chapters 3 and 4 of the book are prefaced with quotations from *A Dream of John Bull* – and his principles echo Morris's social ideals:

> Real beauty of work, it cannot be too often insisted, can only be produced by designers and workmen who are engaged primarily in their work for its own sake. If it is done with money-making as a leading motive, it must necessarily become debased.[10]

Aesthetically, Baillie Scott says he is concerned to avoid four temptations: the home that is so grand that it like a museum; the "bourgeois villa", or a small house that pretends to be a mansion; the merely utilitarian house; and, finally, the artistically self-conscious home that suffered from:

> that curious affectation which has led to the reproduction of the farmhouse kitchen, with dishes and domestic utensils displayed instead of vases and knickknacks... where such a room is a sort of artistic toy [...].

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[9] This is the claim advanced in W. RYBCZYNSKI, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, Viking Penguin, New York 1986. Phenomenologists are fond of pointing out that Descartes, in his project to redefine philosophy in strictly rational terms, nevertheless began by describing how he set about the task in a stove-warmed room. In his First Meditation he wrote « [...] I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown [...]», J. COTTINGHAM (ed.), *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986.

[10] M.H. BAILLIE SCOTT, *Houses and Gardens*, George Newnes, London 1906, p. 11.

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In his search for an authentic house, homeliness is a key concept. In discussing staircases, for example, he notes that:

> [...] in stepping down into a room from a higher level, from which one looks down on the interior, an impression is gained which differs materially from the normal, and whatever quality of homely comfort an interior may possess will be much accentuated when approached from a higher level.

Steps up into a room, on the other hand, convey a quality of dignity, but «what is gained in dignity is lost in homeliness».[11]

In the light of our everyday experience, we can understand what Baillie Scott means. I illustrate here a house in Cambridge from the 1920's, currently occupied, as it happens, by the Wittgenstein scholar Michael Nedo. The summer window bay and winter fireplace of this modest cottage do indeed suggest 'here I could sit', or 'this would be a good place to conduct a conversation'. How do we explain this perception, though? Here the philosopher-architect Ludwig Wittgenstein can perhaps assist us.[12] Wittgenstein's criticism of the 'picture' theory of meaning is well-known. In relation to seeing, he objects to the construction of an 'inner object': it cannot account for how we 'see-as' – when it dawns on us that the 'duck' can be seen as a 'rabbit' – for example. A description in terms of measurable shape and colour is quite inadequate (so a kind of phenomenology rightly supplements the observations of critics like Rasmussen). Crucially, meaning, in 'continuing aspect perception' depends upon context: we take for granted the relation of an object to other objects in its milieu, whether Dutch still lives or engineering projections, because when we regard a picture as the object is represents, we do not treat it as an object in its own right – as a material object consisting merely of an arrangement of lines or colour-patches. To reproduce the 'rabbitness' of the rabbit does not involve replicating form, but understanding what it *is*: people who cannot do that are 'aspect-blind'. Wittgenstein himself makes clear that the importance for him of the theory of aspect-blindness is the light it throws on experiencing the meaning of a word: «continuous meaning perception» in relation to words is analogous to «continuing aspect perception», since words are «ready-to-hand» for us, and similarly dependent on context.[13] In appropriating Wittgensteinian thinking to describe architectural form we are therefore turning his simile into a different kind of perception, but in view of his later unpublished writings I think he would forgive us. Embodied understanding of places – 'this is somewhere I would feel at home' – involves us in contextual understanding, much as we understand a word within what we might call an 'embodied language game'.

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[11] *Ibidem* pp. 35-36.

[12] In the following, I have drawn on the interpretation offered by Stephen Mulhall of the importance of Wittgenstein's theory of aspect perception to his thinking in general: S. MULHALL, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects*, Routledge, London/New York 1990.

[13] L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. G.E.M ANSCOMBE [et al.], Blackwell, Oxford 1958, 214.

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But the linguistic analogy is of course pervasive in the description of architecture, and 'game' is a word that is often used, but in a rather different sense - to describe architectural style.

IV. THE GAME OF FORM AND STYLE

Baillie Scott was reasonably successful in his career (though falling out of fashion in his later years) but does not figure in the history books as prominently as his contemporary Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944). In 1901 Lutyens designed a house for his mother-in-law, the Dowager Lady Lytton, at Knebworth in Hertfordshire. It is, at first glance, an Arts and Crafts cottage. Lawrence Weaver described it in 1921 as such:

> The building owes its beauty largely to the skill with which it has been gabled. There is a welcoming charm to the entrance front [...]. The south-east front with its loggias is a conception of unusual grace.[14]

But he acknowledges that in that design there is something else going on: «an experiment that few would have dared to make, and fewer brought to satisfactory achievement». The building is a sophisticated example of the formal games at which Lutyens was particularly adept, as I shall try to explain.

First, we can note the complex geometry that underlies an apparently simple house. The approach is diagonal, passing a small symmetrical lodge on the same alignment as the house, and suddenly revealing the three-gabled cottage-like elevation before sliding onwards to the garage. The rear of the house is symmetrical as well, but the symmetry is slipped towards the south-west. This is only the start of a formal game that goes on to involve a series of symmetrical interior volumes always entered at corners or edges. On closer inspection, there is another level of game – a number of references to classical precedents that serve to dignify this dower house. The axial entrance has a 'flying' keystone and leads to a porch where the main front door is to the right: the door straight ahead leads to 'servants' quarters. The rusticated reveals here, and at the corners of the house, hint that something more substantial is embedded within the vernacular shell. Around the west flank, all is calmly rustic, but on the south-east façade, the loggias Weaver admired have been pulled aside to reveal a miniature classical temple, albeit sporting an Ionic order that has lost its full entablature: the 'experiment' to which Weaver alludes. Internally, the central staircase arrives at a surprisingly well-lit landing, achieved by means of Lutyens' favorite device of steep roofs concealing valleys and roof-lights. Though he was famous for his wit and light-hearted manner socially, Lutyens was perfectly aware of what he was about in a house such as this. In a much-quoted letter to his friend Herbert Baker in 1903, Edwin Lutyens, wrote: «That time-worn Doric order – a lovely thing – I have the cheek to adopt it».[15] In

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[14] L. WEAVER, *Lutyens Houses and Gardens, Country Life*, George Newnes, London 1921, p. 57.

[15] Quoted in J. SUMMERSON, *The Classical Language of Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1963, p. 19.

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describing the formal discipline it imposes, he continued:

> It means hard labour, hard thinking, over every line in all three dimensions and in every joint; and no stone can be allowed to slide.... You alter one feature (which you have to, always), then every other feature has to sympathise and undergo some care and invention. Therefore it is no mean game, nor is it a game you can play lightheartedly.[16]

A consequence of such formal sophistication, however, is that the house is not very comfortable: to achieve Lutyens' desired proportions, window cills are high; the dining room windows come right to the edge of the internal walls, and there are certainly no cosy recesses and alcoves to be enjoyed. Perhaps we should more correctly say: is more difficult to 'see it as' cosy. In playing the game of form and style (both abstractly, by the manipulation of axes, and associationally, by the way in which he uses classical quotation), Lutyens stands to forfeit aspects of the sets of embodied meanings that Baillie Scott was trying to summon up. The postmodernist American architect Robert Venturi rediscovered the 'game' in the 1960's, so that his famous house for his mother can be compared with Lutyens' house for his mother-in-law: the plan is compressed and contorted, and the front elevation displays symbolic mouldings and a split pediment.

V. GAMES IN ARCHITECTURE

Among the most articulate critics of reductive early twentieth-century city planning was the Dutch architect Aldo Van Eyck. In order to counter the orthodoxy of modernism, with its concentration on abstract notions of space, encapsulated in the title of the book that codified its principles, Sigfried Giedion's *Space Time and Architecture*,[17] Aldo van Eyck coined his aphorism: «Space in the image of man is place. Time in the image of man is occasion».

Robert McCarter provides the following useful summary of Van Eyck's criticism of modernism, from 1947 onwards:

> Van Eyck criticized the betrayal by midcentury modernism of its own legacy in all the arts; the now widely recognized failings of modern urban design; the destruction of historic centers so as to make them accessible by automobile; the failure to make new buildings that were appropriately accommodating to their contexts; the incapacity of the contemporary profession to engage the history of building culture; the failure of architects to take into consideration the social and domestic habits of those for whom they built; the escalating destruction of the natural environment; and the abandonment of the architecture

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[16] *Ibidem*.

[17] S. GIEDION, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1954. The aphorism becoming the title of Giedion's book was Originally published in *Architects' Year Book*, no. 10, 1962, and re-printed in V. LIGTELIJIN, *Aldo van Eyck Works*, Birkhäuser, Basel, Boston, Berlin, 1999.

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profession's fundamental ethical responsibility "to avoid the mean and meaningless", working "in a way that achieves something useful for people, just as the doctor or the baker on the corner does".[18]

Van Eyck developed his spatial, or place-making ideas, from a study of the villages of an African tribe, the Dogon of Mali (or South Sudan as it was known), which he visited in a series of trips from 1947 to 1952 with colleagues of the anthropologist Marcel Griaule (1896 – 1956).[19] Griaule had studied African culture since 1928, but from 1935 until his death he concentrated on the Dogon. In 1946, he interviewed a Dogon cosmologist, Ogotomêlli, the results of which were published in French in 1948 as *Dieu d'eau*, and translated into English as *Conversations with Ogotomêlli* in 1965. His findings have since been questioned, and some have claimed that Griaule imposed his own interpretations to a large extent.[20] But the accuracy or otherwise of Griaule's reading is irrelevant here: the point is that it provided the basis for Van Eyck's creative understanding of 'place'. Fundamental to that was an appreciation of the importance of ambiguity. Rich and memorable spaces are ambiguously interpretable. To take a common example, consider an arcade. It is part of a building, and yet it is part of the space of the street, or square, or courtyard that it adjoins. Van Eyck learnt the importance of threshold from the Dogon, and his buildings were constructed from numerous transition spaces. This spatial ambiguity is distinguishable from the formal ambiguities that Robert Venturi was interested in, although Van Eyck even accused him of eaves-dropping on one of his lectures and stealing the idea.[21]

Aldo Van Eyck's Amsterdam orphanage (1955-60) is full of examples of these in-between spaces. Despite its location on an unpromising site, beneath a flightpath at the edge of a featureless field, Van Eyck saw it as an opportunity to explore his spatial theories, and it became their paradigmatic demonstration. The building is composed as a 'carpet' plan of part single-storey and part two-storey buildings; both major volumes and smaller spaces sit beneath shallow domes with a variety of roof-lights, so that from an aerial view, despite its repetitive square bays it appears to be an 'organic' village. The orphans, who ranged in age from infants to young teenagers, lived in houses to the west of the plan, and were taught in classrooms arranged in echelon along the eastern edge. A route (or internal 'street'), usually side-lit from courtyards, connects

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[18] R. McCarter, *Aldo van Eyck*, Yale University Press, New Heaven 2015, p. 193.

[19] Van Eyck discovered the work of Griaule and his colleagues in a 1933 special issue of Minotaur. He visited the Dogon with Paul Parin and Fritz Norgenthaler and subsequently published articles with them (McCarter, *Aldo van Eyck*, cit. p. 19).

[20] See W.E.A. van Beek, *A Field Evaluation of the work of Marcel Griaule*, in «Current Anthropology», vol. 32(2), 1991, pp. 139-166. But from the discussion that follows it is clear, that several distinguished anthropologists, including Mary Douglas, disagree.

[21] This is unlikely. From a reading (amongst other texts) of William Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity, Venturi argued for the importance of the dual-readings of forms (particularly façade motifs), as a way of avoiding the banal "either-or" of modernist aesthetics. See R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Little Brown & Co, New York 1977.

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all the parts together. Van Eyck published a diagram, which indicated the sequence of partly defined spaces one would encounter before reaching the two 'front doors', which are located towards the centre of the plan. In the detailed events of the building, Van Eyck drew upon his experience of designing more than two hundred playgrounds for the city of Amsterdam, on which he was engaged between 1947 and 1978, and where he had employed simple geometrical forms to stimulate play. The aesthetic drew from contemporary art (he was a friend of abstract painters), but the concept of play, and its importance for culture in general was deeply embedded in Dutch culture. The influence of Johan Huizinga's 1938 *Homo Ludens* was pervasive: he claimed that the concept of play lay behind the law, agonistic activity such as war, poetry and myth, knowledge, philosophy and in fact the whole of civilization: in sum people become who they are in relation to others in society by a creative reaction that originates in imaginative play.[22] It is especially evident in rituals:

> Primitive society performs its sacred rites, its sacrifices, consecrations and mysteries, all of which serve to guarantee the well-being of the world, in a spirit of pure play truly understood. Now in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play.[23]

But Huizinga was much more cautious when it came to the 'plastic arts', which would include architecture:

> However much the plastic artist may be possessed by his creative impulse he has to work like a craftsman, serious and intent, always testing and correcting himself. His inspiration may be free and vehement when he "conceives", but in its execution it is always subjected to the skill and proficiency of the forming hand. If therefore the play-element is to all appearances lacking in the execution of a work of plastic art, in the contemplation and enjoyment of it there is no scope for it whatever. For where there is no visible action there can be no play.[24]

Van Eyck's practice, both in his Amsterdam playgrounds, and in his Orphanage building, suggests Huizinga is incorrect here. In fact, it is clear from children's behaviour that the fact that there is 'no visible action' does not prevent imaginative interpretation. Children have a capacity to see inanimate objects 'as' something else, to discern the potential for play if the forms encourage it. Van Eyck, and his protégé Herman Hertzberger, thought that their primary task was to (invent and then) create forms that provoked that kind of behaviour. Hertzberger summarized the ambition as follows:

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[22] J. HUIZINGA, *Homo Ludens; A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Routledge, London/New York 1949. Van Eyck certainly knew about Huizinga, through his father. Herman Hertzberger acknowledged that he was inspired directly by Huizinga. I am indebted to Robert McCarter for confirming this to me in correspondence on 1 March 2016.

[23] J. HUIZINGA, *Homo Ludens*, cit., p. 9.

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 172.

Everything we design must be a catalyst to stimulate individual people to play the variety of roles through which their own identity will be enlarged. The aim of architecture is to achieve a condition where everyone's feeling of identity is maximised [...]. It is a question of right dimensions, the right placing [...]. Designing is nothing more than finding out what person and object want to be; form then makes itself. There is really no need for invention – you must just listen carefully.[25]

The appeal here is to the 'embodied language game' – it is not about style, as association or formal manipulation, though of course Hertzberger's and Van Eyck's buildings have to be realized within a stylistic paradigm.

Finally, what about the role of play in relation to generating or refining architectural design? Specifically in relation to architecture, Huizinga seems to acknowledge that there is an issue to be debated in relation to reception, but regards the idea that play would be involved in design as absurd:

A theory designed to explain the origin of plastic art in terms of an innate "play-instinct" (Spieltrieb) was propounded long ago by Schiller. It seems preposterous to ascribe the cave-paintings of Altamira, for instance, to mere doodling - which is what it amounts to if they are ascribed to the "play-instinct". As to architecture the hypothesis is flatly absurd, because there the aesthetic impulse is far from being the dominant one, as the constructions of bees and beavers clearly prove. ... the picture immediately changes when we turn from the making of works of art to the manner in which they are received in the social milieu. Here we can see at once that, as a subject of competition, plastic skill ranks as high as almost any other human faculty.[26]

Here again Huizinga seems to me to be unwilling to take the implications of his idea to their logical conclusion. Consider the sketches of an architect like Van Eyck investigating the ways in which his forms could behave. Or the example of the Finnish master, Alvar Aalto, who credited his compatriot Yrjo Hirn (1870–1952) with his own understanding of the general importance of play:

Whether it is due to Yrjo Hirn's influence or not, through the force of his personality, a conception or an instinctive feeling has taken root in me, that we, in the midst of our hard-working, calculating, utilitarian era, must regard play as of decisive importance when we build

[25] H. HERTZBERGER, *Place, Choice, and Identity*, in J. DONAT (ed.), *World Architecture 4*, Studio Vista, London 1967. Hertzberger is describing how he designed a student hostel. His later Central Beheer office building is the most extreme example of this approach.

[26] HUIZINGA, *Homo Ludens*, cit., p. 174. Huizinga is surely right in relation to the cultic origin of objects – for a discussion of that origin, that then goes on to explore how objects can substitute for other things, in children's play, and thereafter be understood as art, see E. GOMBRICH, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, in E. GOMBRICH, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and other Essays on the Theory of Art*, Phaidon Press, New York 1963.

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communities for people – large children. This thought occurs in one form or another, I suppose, to every architect with a sense of responsibility.[27]

But not only must the architect allow for play, because adults are nothing other than 'large children', he suggests that the act of architectural invention must itself involve a kind of play.

But is 'play' always a modifier to rational decisions about structure and materials? To judge from another of Aalto's essays, it can be involved at the very start of the design process.[28] Architecture, in its reception, its generation, and its development, seems to have a lot to do with play.

VI. WITTGENSTEIN'S HOUSES

I return now to Ludwig Wittgenstein, a philosopher of undoubted importance in twentieth century thought.[29]

Wittgenstein's philosophical work is often described as a journey between his two books, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*, which was prepared for publication but not published in his lifetime. The shift is described in many places, but quite succinctly in Ray Monk's biography, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, the Duty of Genius,* where he mentions, among other factors, the contribution the Italian economist Piero Sraffa might have made during a number of conversations over tea in Trinity College.[30] But, as I shall describe later, it might even have been the experience of designing a house in Vienna for his sister that persuaded Wittgenstein that aspects of his earlier work were untenable.

The most famous sentence in the *Tractatus* is the final one: «Of that of which we cannot speak, thereof we must keep silent». Of course, that statement relates to the very specific linguistic arguments that are conducted within the book. Nevertheless, it has been interpreted metaphorically, and contextualized. Architects and others have noticed the connection of this

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[27] A. AALTO, *Experimental House*, Muuratsalo, in G. SCHILDT (ed.), *Sketches*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1985. Originally published in *Arkkitehti-Arckitekton*, 1953. As the cultic origin of art receded in a secular society, and its unique 'aura' was diluted (in the sense employed by Walter Benjamin, whose famous essay is available in a handy paperback: W. BENJAMIN, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Penguin, London 2008), 'play' becomes a substitute. In the Bauhaus, Paul Klee's Thinking Eye famously invites artists to 'take a line for a walk', and Laslo Moholy-Nage (a close friend of Alvar Aalto) was intensely interested in the concept of play.

[28] A. AALTO, *The Trout and the Mountain Stream*, in «Domus», 1947. This notion of a 'poetic' origin of architectural ideas mirrors the critique by those from the continental tradition of analytical philosophy: it confuses 'understanding' with interpretation.

[29] M. MCGINN, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, Routledge, London 1997, p. 8.

[30] R. MONK, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, Vintage Publishing, London 1991, p. 487.

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position to that of his Viennese contemporary Karl Kraus, and of course Adolf Loos,[31] and the critique they mounted of the prevailing *fin de siècle* Secessionist taste. For the design a house in 1926 on *Kundmanngasse*, Vienna, for his sister Margarete (also known as Gretl), Wittgenstein seems to have been compelled to address the problem of muteness. He was helped by his friend Paul Engelmann, one of the pupils of Adolf Loos.

Whereas Adolf Loos believed that dwellings should have cozy interiors, but had 'nothing to say' in their external expression, Wittgenstein's 1926 house exercises its restraint both internally and externally. Wittgenstein noted: «All architecture immortalizes and glorifies something. Hence there can be no architecture where there is nothing to glorify».[32] And it seems that the coziness that Loos sought was not something that he could celebrate. The house makes use of the deep conventions and qualities of architecture (axial arrangement, precise proportional adjustment, fastidious standards of construction), refers in its internal planning to the conventional spatial arrangements of his parental 'Biedermeier' home, but abstains entirely from decoration. The character that results is chilly, if dignified, as Wittgenstein himself acknowledged.[33]

The 'unhomely' character of the house is deliberate: by strictly maintaining his own principle of what can or cannot be said, Wittgenstein eschews those clues to comfortable interpretation by the inhabitants. But there's also evidence of the difficulties Wittgenstein found in composing the house to his satisfaction. In a remarkable little book, first published in German in 1989, Jan Turnovsky undertook a thorough formal analysis of a particular portion of the house – its breakfast room.[34] There are numerous awkwardnesses in the house (the famous corner radiator would be an example) that indicate Wittgenstein's concern for an exactness that the very fabric of building, and the geometrical constraints entailed in trying to compose a precise work of architecture, make almost impossible to achieve. Turnovsky takes a projection planned on the south wall of the breakfast room as a locus for his discussion. It is clearly meant to resolve the difficulty that, in a wing of a building, it is geometrically impossible to make a window that is both central to its wall viewed from within the room, and central to that part of the façade when viewed from outside. Turnovsky shows that Fischer von Erlach (for example) was prepared to sacrifice interior symmetry for the sake of an orderly façade, whereas Loos (characteristically) maintained the symmetry within the room and allowed the exterior appearance to reveal the

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[31] See C.ST.J. WILSON, *The Urn and the Chamber Pot*, in *Architectural Reflections: Studies in the Philosophy and Practice of Architecture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2000.

[32] L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture & Value*, transl. by P. WINCH, Blackwell, Oxford 1977, p. 69.

[33] He felt it lacked passion: «[…] the house I built for Gretl is the product of a decidedly sensitive ear and good manners, an expression of great understanding (of a culture etc.) But primordial life, wild life, striving to erupt into the open – that is lacking». WITTGENSTEIN, *Culture & Value*, cit., p. 38. Gretl was happy with it, but their sister Hermine found it acutely uncomfortable.

[34] Republished as J. TURNOVSKY, *The Poetics of a Wall Projection*, transl. by K. KLEINMAN, AA Publications, London 2009. I am grateful to Margit van Schaik for drawing this book to my attention.

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asymmetrical result. As it happens, the wall projection that Wittgenstein appears to have contemplated (which would have been highly unsatisfactory in itself) was never constructed, so the south wall of the breakfast room, viewed from within, is asymmetrical – an effect that Wittgenstein cannot have enjoyed. Turnovsky does not say so directly, but surely implies, that discovering how impossible it was to achieve the order he sought contributed to Wittgenstein's shift from the position of the *Tractatus*. In the abstract language of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, just as much as in the classical language, as Lutyens discovered, «you alter one feature (which you have to, always), then every other feature has to sympathise and undergo some care and invention. Therefore it is no mean game, nor is it a game you can play lightheartedly».[35]

In 1913 Wittgenstein had been responsible for another house – this time for himself. In the year before the outbreak of the First World War, he rented accommodation on Skjolden, Norway, from a local postmaster, Mr. Klingenberg, and began work both on the *Tractatus* and on planning a hut for himself above the Eidsvatnet Lake nearby.[36] It had something of the character of the ready-made – a 'vernacular' building that looked entirely in keeping with its beautiful surroundings, and maybe the kind of dwelling that an unselfconscious farmer might have erected. In that respect, it accords with Adolf Loos's observation:

> The architect, like almost every urban dweller has no culture. He lacks the certainty of the farmer, who possesses culture. The urban dweller is an uprooted person. By culture I mean that balance of man's inner and outer being which alone guarantees rational thought and action.[37]

Nothing more needed to be said. The architectural language was already there – a given.

VII. ARCHITECTURE AS A MEDIATING FORM OF THOUGHT

I will attempt to summarise. The design of a building for somebody else involves an empathetic understanding of the position of that person, or those people, and asking oneself what kind of a place would be good for them. Architects necessarily hold in abeyance deep questions that arise: can we ever put ourselves in the place of another? How could we know what it is to be another? To operate at all, most designers have to leave such questions hanging in the air. And yet they are the most important question of all. Architecture itself surely mediates our position

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[35] SUMMERSON, *The Classical Language of Architecture*, cit., p. 19.

[36] The building was traditional, but Wittgenstein made idiosyncratic alterations, such as shaving off the decorative ends or the window hinges. At some point, after Wittgenstein's death in 1951, the hut was moved to Skjolden and modified. The local municipality of Luster has now purchased the site and restored it in its original location.

[37] A. LOOS, *Architektur*, [first published] in *Der Sturm*, 1910. English translation in *The Architecture of Adolf Loos: An Arts Council Exhibition*, The Arts Council, London 1985, p. 74.

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as humans with a potentially inaccessible world of reality.[38] And it does this by 'showing' us something. We remember that Wittgenstein was consistent in believing that when a sign, or string of signs, fails to express something about the world, it is not false, it is 'nonsense', and that would include most philosophical writing.[39] So ethical or metaphysical questions, the most important there are, are not in themselves nonsense – it is only trying to talk about them that is nonsense. Ethics cannot be 'said', only 'shown', and it is a moot point whether architecture 'says' anything, though the linguistic analogy is very commonly used. In making design proposals, architects perforce adopt conventions, or refer to typologies – possibly the already given, but on occasion they are forced to invent, within some convention, as Lutyens suggested. The 'architectural language' architects use should therefore be public, in some way – accessible – it should not be a private language, since it is a 'game' which requires people to buy into its conventions.[40] Van Eyck developed a language from the vocabulary of Modernism, fused with his experiences of the Dogon. The rules for the composition of the architecture remain somewhat private – compared with the inherited conventions of pre-20th century styles – but its reception can be public, because it is designed to encourage play: games in a somewhat different sense. We saw that Wittgenstein's Norwegian hut, by accepting traditional conventions, was certainly accessible, but, when he came to design the house in Vienna for his sister, he adopted a much reduced style, scrupulously avoiding anything that could not be 'said'. This, I have suggested, was the house of the *Tractatus*; but he could not build the house that would resolve the 'tension' described above, and the experience (aided by discussions with Sraffa and others) may even have stimulated the shift in position between the earlier and later work.

VIII. ETHICAL CHOICES

I cannot believe that architects are 'aspect-blind', to use Wittgenstein's term. They understand that their discipline involves an empathy with those that may be expected to use their buildings. To compose a house that can be 'seen' as cozy, however, they firstly need to privilege

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[38] Some would say this is a way of re-stating the position described in M. HEIDEGGER, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, in D. FARRELL KRELL, ed., *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings from* Being in Time *(1927) to* The Task of Thinking *(1964)*, Routledge, London/New York 1978. But, as Mulhall stresses, we do not need Heidegger's 'baroque' metaphysical structures: «We are not discovering a metaphysical truth about human essence; we are reminding ourselves of an aspect of the grammar of the concepts with which we describe human life». S. MULHALL, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects*, Routledge, London/New York 1990, p. 150.

[39] WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, cit., 6.54.

[40] The ethical imperative of accessibility is explored further in C. ILLIES, N. RAY, *An Aesthetic Deontology: accessible beauty as a fundamental obligation of architecture*, in «Architecture Philosophy», Vol. 2(1), 2016, pp. 83-102.

intuitions that are for the most part impossible to describe compared to the measurable.[41] This is not so difficult – architects are used to seeing themselves as poets, and few are as scrupulous as Wittgenstein. They then need to decide what sort of game their architecture foregrounds: is it the (relatively private) game of style and association that, played with skill and assurance, will perhaps earn themselves a place in future histories of architecture? Or will they examine, as I have suggested twentieth-century architects such as Baillie Scott, Alvar Aalto, Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger did, forms that encourage a creative play, a 'game' of form of a different kind, which is a more modest activity that «achieves something useful for people, just as the doctor or the baker on the corner does»?[42] That decision, reconciling their duties to their clients with the duty they could be said to owe to their art, is a fundamentally ethical one, with results that can only be 'shown', not spoken.[43]

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[41] For a neuro-scientific exploration of 'right brain' intuitions compared to 'left brain' measurable argumentation, see I. McGILCHRIST, *The Master and his Emissary – The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2009.

[42] McCARTER, *Aldo van Eyck*, cit., p. 193.

[43] Which is why everything written and argued above is, in Wittgenstein's terms, 'nonsense'.

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