Chapter 17

Towards a Metaxological Ethics of Architecture

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Our current architectural practices are damaging to the spontaneous environment. Heavy reliance on highly processed and new materials tends toward a wasteful use of energy, a waste compounded by the shipping of these materials over great distances through the use of fossil-fuel transportation. The architect Christopher Day reports that 50 per cent of all waste stems from building construction.[1] Extensive employment of materials composed of toxic substances (such as paints, plastics or adhesives) harms both the environment and humans. Volumes have been written on the constructed environment's negative impact on the spontaneous environment, an impact I suspect that many people simply sense even without recourse to scientific literature. A movement, generally termed 'green architecture', has unsurprisingly sprung up within architecture to address this impact, and attempts to build in what it calls an environmentally responsible manner. I am concerned in this essay with broadening the ontological horizon of this movement so that it may provide a more satisfactory ethics.

I take some guidance from the Canadian architect Jorge-Dietram Ostrowski, who has correctly sensed that a term like 'green architecture' is not quite sufficient, because it still takes itself as architectural. To him, architecture means concern with 'arches and aesthetics', and not the environment.[2] Architecture, in his reading, is a practice concerned with efficient means alone. For this reason he proposes a new term, 'ecotecture', embracing the ethical interaction between the constructed environment and the spontaneous environment, and between the constructed environment and the human being that green architecture advocates, but which also shifts the connotation of the concept appreciably away from technology. I accept Ostrowski's distinction; concern with arches will never ethically improve the constructed environment. But I go on to ask: is Ostrowski's own project anything more than a concern with arches, that is, with technology? I ask this, not to call into question his project, nor to tell him how to build. I simply wish to investigate whether his and similar positions can escape unscathed the equivocities that the univocally technological approach generates.

To this end, I begin with a discussion of Ostrowski's concept of ecotecture, showing it to be a technological approach, and I suggest that, were it to be ontologically grounded, it would be a meaningful expression of architectural concern for the spontaneous environment and the human person. Leaving a

discussion of this ontological ground to the final section of the essay, I then show that the technological approach of Ostrowski's ecotecture trades in problems and solutions, and therefore in mastery. This leads to a discussion of anthropocentrism, which has a weak and a strong sense. The strong sense is that of technological mastery, and the weak sense is trivial but unavoidable: whatever humans do is, insofar as humans do it, anthropocentric. This, however, wins us the position that architecture is not always anthropocentric in the strong sense. Modern architecture functions as my example of strong anthropocentrism, and Greek and medieval architecture for weak anthropocentrism. I then term weakly anthropocentric architecture ecstatic architecture, that is, architecture which leads humanity out from mere concern with itself. This in turn leads to a possibility of a well-grounded concern with the spontaneous environment. Following William Desmond, I inscribe this concern within a metaxological framework, wherein humanity and the spontaneous environment are intimately related without being sublated by each other, or by a third. I end by claiming that ecotecture must embrace this metaxological community in order to distinguish itself fully from what it considers to be mere architecture: that is, concern with technique alone.

The Ecotecture of Ostrowski

Ostrowski begins by offering us his 'Ecotecture Equation': 'Building + Lifestyle + Site + Transportation = Environmental Success', an equation also mirrored in his prose with the grammatical structures of predication and conjunction replacing the mathematical symbols: 'Ecotecture design is grounded on natural dynamics, healthy materials, biological principles, human ergonomics, cultural respect and compassionate understanding for the planet and all living creatures.'[3] This equation attempts to bear the theoretical weight of the paper, since it is the 'key to the entire exercise'.[4] Thus we should approach Ostrowski's criteria for ecotecture with close attention. And the first thing we should ask is, why these categories?

In other words, what links Ostrowski's concerns together, and what makes them specifically ecotectural? Most architecture embodies these considerations in one way or another, and hence one could suspect that perhaps Ostrowski's vision of architecture is a straw man. What contemporary architecture, for instance, would claim to be unergonomic? But, for the sake of argument, let us accept architecture as not sharing in Ostrowski's list of criteria. In this case, the specificity of the ecotecturality lies, one must imagine, in its being the explicit programme of an architecture which is self-consciously concerned with the environment, with the *oikos*. And when we look to his article, we find a further list of activities undertaken and materials used in order to build his house; his proof-of-concept for ecotecture is a detailed checklist of very ontic (and hence ultimately arbitrary) considerations that suggests, inter alia, recycling old refrigerator fans and the specific thickness of glass for energy conservation. But whether ecotecture must be a purely technical and inductive pursuit is precisely the question. For, if

ecotecture is a technical pursuit, then how does it differ from architecture, except as a neologism?

This list attempts to flesh out the distinction between ecotecture and architecture. But no list could ever fully do justice to the unending chain of relations which constitutes the environment, whether spontaneous or constructed. Simply put, the introduction of technological patches potentially generates a non-ending row of equivocities. When I build with 'environmentally friendly' materials, I have no guarantee that, technically speaking, I remain environmentally friendly. What if I use asbestos insulation, at one point the cutting edge? What if I buy energy-efficient windows shipped from overseas? Does my heating efficiency offset the embodied energy these windows pick up from their shipping? The frailty of ontic, or ad hoc, ecology can be comical: in the USA, Representative Joe Knollenberg (R-Michigan) has authored federal legislation (H.R. 623) designed to repeal the Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 1992, which requires toilets to use a maximum of 1.6 gallons of water, largely because his constituents are fed up with flushing their toilets twice. What is missing here is an ontological understanding of the matter at stake. And, without an ontological understanding, we constantly run the risk that we are acting within the wrong paradigm, one in which humanity is seen as intruding upon nature. Thus, rather than criticize Ostrowski, I wish to offer an ontological ground to his efforts, so that the holism at which his project aims may be fulfilled.

We must consider ecotecture (and architecture) ontologically, rather than technologically, because architecture is not just a question of piling bricks upon each other, any more than ecotecture is merely in line with Ostrowski's suggestion of efficiently combining heating with cooking (an ancient idea, by the way). Architecture has always had an effect on the human in its totality: for instance, people spontaneously lower their voices when they enter churches, museums, courts of law and unfamiliar places. Tradition or respect does not explain this; from where did the tradition or respect arise? The explanation lies in the fact that architecture is a meaningful and/or practical delimitation and articulation of space. As either meaningful or practical or both, it springs from the mind of the human, and reflects, even if silently, a world view. Ultimately the world view itself is a reflection of a particular grasp of ontology. To *be in* is first to *be*. Hence we order ourselves toward the world in accordance with our conception of existence, through ontology (loosely defined). Since Descartes the regnant ontology has been technological, wherein *on* (being) has been replaced by *techne* (making). However we should not be too quick and lay all the blame at Descartes's feet; he himself warns us, 'It seems strange to me that so many people should investigate with such diligence the virtues of plants, the motions of the stars, the transmutations of metals, and the objects of similar disciplines, while hardly anyone gives a thought to good sense – to universal wisdom.'[5]

But since Descartes did, as we shall see, define the modern conception of the subject in such a decisive and influential fashion, I will treat him here unfairly as a trope for the modern malaise. Descartes's subject is the isolated and independent subject *par excellence*.

Technology: Problems and Solutions

If we continue to apply technological solutions to the questions which our architectural 'intervention' into nature poses, we shall consider these questions not as questions per se, but as problems. As problems, we have something which can be solved, at least in principle. Solving is a mastery, an *owning*, as it were, because in solving we triumph. The history of architecture and engineering is full of examples of this mere mastery: forests and landscape levelled to attain materials, swamps filled in to straighten roads and to create more land, larger and larger landfills created to meet the refuse needs of a vastly expanded industrial, productive and consumptive base, and so on. We see problems as something external to us, and the proof of this is simply that we can solve them: in solving them they go away. But what is integral can never go away; to treat the questions which architecture raises as problems is to externalize our relation with the spontaneous environment. Thus when architecture shows us that we must have an ethical concern with the environment, whether spontaneous or constructed, we must approach this as a question, or rather as a mystery,[6] and not as a problem.

Of course the working-out of the question may have a technical expression, but this expression may not be taken in abstraction, because in abstraction it is emptied of much of its content. For instance, a question could be, 'How is this building going to cut down on its use of non-renewable energy?' In abstraction, by only considering the technical aspect, I *could* solve this by turning to solar energy (notice the contingency of 'could'). Then the problem goes away. But the question should still remain. A historical example will help here: when Feuerbach suggested that the Holy Family was merely the alienation of the terrestrial family, Marx took him to task for not asking what it is about the human family that allows for such an alienation.[7] This is the approach I am here suggesting: not explanation, but rather reflection. We ought not to alienate the situation through a technological projection, but instead analyse it and hopefully remove the need for the projection. I should ask: why do I need energy in the first place? Do I need that TV, that radio, that computer and other such things? And even if I do, can I not apply my own energy in a better manner, perhaps in a charitable fashion, or by being active within my community? Religious people have always seen in possessions a distraction from the divine. Perhaps in our postmodern age we should rekindle this understanding of distraction. I do not mean to rename the divine as Gaia or humanity or something else, but simply to point out that often technical fixes obscure the deeper issue. Another example will help: the failed-engineer-turned-bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann wanted to convey as many bodies as quickly as possible through his extermination chambers. He set himself a *quota*. Focusing on the technical fix allowed him to ignore the real issue: why was he gassing and burning people? Or why was he treating persons as units? This is an extreme example, but it shows clearly that to solve a problem is to put us at a remove from the mystery, and to absolve ourselves from complicity in it.

Technical solutions tend simply to reiterate a mistaken view, the view that created the present predicament in which we find ourselves. I trust nobody would

argue against our industrial paradigm's having caused a fair amount of damage to our planet, and to ourselves. Whether it is possible to industrialize without harmfully affecting nature is not my concern here. But it is a large mistake to turn to technology to redress this damage. Instead we need a fundamentally changed view of our relation with the spontaneous environment, one in which we do not set ourselves over and above nature as *homo technicus*, but rather one within which we recognize our co-dependency with nature. 'Because it is holistic,' says Peter Buchanan, 'green architecture is concerned with synthesis. It neither ignores nor externalizes any factors or problems.'[8] And this is not to say that our ingenuity is a negligible aspect of humanity. As Buchanan goes on to say, 'This does not contradict the rational so much as reveal dimensions that it tends to overlook, especially … the relationship between nature and human nature.'[9] I am arguing that human rationality, represented here by technology, may not take centre stage. We must become more open and less hubristic.

Since we do meet problems in architecture, we must solve them. But these problem sets shift: earlier the question of how to place a dome on a square base fired up the architectural imagination, and later the objective of reducing the bulk of their buildings drove architects. Now the spontaneous environment has arisen as the great concern. But just as the dome and bulk are particular, and thus arbitrary, considerations, so too is the question concerning the spontaneous environment, in its present form. The similarity among these three is shown by the technical answers to these questions: pendentives for domes, flying buttresses and later I-beams and ferro-concrete to reduce bulk, and now, it seems, R-17 windows for energy conservation. In fact, a whole industry has sprung up around the needs of ecotecture.

But architecture usually swallows up any arbitrariness. It either finds the reason behind a seemingly arbitrary concern and integrates it into something approaching essentiality (for instance, glazed windows), or allows it a brief flourishing, and then consigns it to the fate of passing trends (such as the Neoclassical/Romantic ruins garden, or the Gothic triforium). The contradictions inherent in abstract positions collapse around themselves as readily as an arch that has but one abstract *voussoir*. Martin Pawley, for instance, seems to take great joy in relating how fleeting an impact the OPEC energy crisis of the early 1970s had on architecture, even though at one point the resultant conservationist architecture was the *cause célèbre*.[10] If the spontaneous environment is a valid concern for architecture, it must also be a necessary concern. We must then search for the ground of the necessity of this concern.

Strong and Weak Anthropomorphism

I propose that this concern is found in the conception of human *being*. This proposition does not necessarily lead to a strong anthropocentric position, which Warwick Fox defines as being informative or substantial anthropocentrism, a viewpoint which allows no escape from concern with the human being.[11] Strong

anthropocentrism sees humanity as at the centre, whereas weak anthropocentrism sees humanity as in the midst. Strong anthropocentrism is an attempt either to univocalize nature in our image, or to condemn nature to an equivocal status in which it is other (*in sich*), but its meaning becomes human (*für uns*). Instead we must embrace what Desmond calls the metaxological community: being which is not understood in a reduction either in the direction of the one or the many; neither in the direction of the subject nor the community; and neither in the direction of humanity nor of spontaneous nature. The metaxological is a plural and open dialectical *inter*mediation which preserves all the terms of its mediation, thus it avoids Hegel's tendency to overwhelm idiotic singularity with an all-encompassing rational universality. As the *logos* (discourse) of the *metaxu* (between), the metaxological guards against the strong sense of anthropocentrism, as Warwick Fox defines anthropocentrism[12] by maintaining that we are in the midst and not at the centre.

Yet the ethics of the constructed environment does have a much more anthropocentric element than does the ethics of the spontaneous environment. That this is so may hardly seem to need saying. While it has become contentious to claim that the spontaneous environment exists to serve humanity (which instrumental environmental ethical theories in general hold), it is manifestly true that the *constructed* environment exists to serve humanity. The constructed environment is special, in that it is a human construction, for humanity. Architecture is profoundly anthropocentric in its goal to house humanity, and to give humanity space for its various expressions (commerce, worship, play, entertainment, education, and so on). This necessarily anthropocentric moment of architecture often overwhelms it, and results in buildings, and ideologies, which do nothing but reflect humanity back to itself in the starkest possible relief. This is the architecture of strong anthropocentrism.

Strongly Anthropocentric Architecture and Modernity

Before I discuss a metaxological view of being and ethics, I wish first to develop a picture of the types of architecture which must drive us to abandon our present instrumentalist point of view through their strongly anthropocentric, and paradoxically anti-humanistic, vision. Milan's Central Station, Toronto's CN Tower, Le Corbusier's unbuilt but influential 'Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants': these examples all embody anthropomorphic hubris – in fact, they scream it; their disproportionate size alone stifles human being, and they fall neatly in line with Albert Speer's later characterizing of his own architecture as the architecture of domination and submission.[13] But hubris is not necessarily the hallmark of anthropocentric architecture (nor is size a hallmark of hubris – see Boullée's sublime designs); usually the anthropocentric is much more subtle. I wish to focus on this subtle version first.

We find perhaps the most insidious vision of anthropocentrism in North American suburbia. Here we come across Descartes's ontology in its most

domestic form. The vernacular architecture of suburban North America is, of course, the single family home, offset from the pavement and street by a longish driveway, and plonked down right in the middle of the lot, so as to guarantee maximum distance between front doors of neighbours. Its fenced-off lot contains further barricades disguised as greenery, which has been selected and planted with the help of that modern agricultural scientist, the landscape designer. This tiny castle is moated only by a general lack of knowledge of who populates, with the help of the bank, the neighbouring kingdom. Neighbours are less than merely accidental in suburbia; they are thoroughly interchangeable. This explains the phenomenon of Neighbourhood Watch, which has replaced neighbourly concern. Neighbourhood Watch is often coordinated by the police, and is instructed to report suspicious activity – say, an unfamiliar car parked in front of a vacationing family's house – and to pass on warnings gathered by the police. The interchangeability of neighbours also explains the garage sale: nobody knows to whom they should give that old pair of rollerskates or that unused fondue set, because suburbanites often do not know who many of their neighbours are. The solution is to turn one's front driveway into a modern *agora* and invoke Hermes. Most social interaction in the suburb is, of course, carried out by the children, suburbia often being seen as where one moves once one wants children, and where one stays until one is ready to move into a condominium. Hence the age bracket of the suburb is fairly homogenous; almost nobody dies of old age living in suburbia. Though perhaps this description is exaggerated, its central point is not: the suburban home is not part of a community, but is rather a node where the orbits of the inhabiting monadic family cross.

Modern architecture also emphasizes the isolation of the subject in a metaphoric fashion. It does so by emphasizing the break from the past; the past is something over and done with. As Descartes empties himself of his past in order to discover his being, so modern architecture takes the form of manifestos, movements and protests against the past. The past was dirty, exclaims Le Corbusier in his *Towards a New Architecture*, let us build a hygienic society with clean buildings![14] Loos prefigured this call in his 'Ornament und Verbrechen':

> You see, this points out the greatness of our time: that it is not in the position to issue in new ornaments. We have overcome the ornament; we are through wrestling with our ornamentlessness. You see, the time is near; the fulfilment awaits us. Soon the city streets will gleam like white walls, like Zion, the holy city, the capital city of heaven! Then shall fulfilment arrive.[15]

White is the colour of purity, of cleanliness, the modern colour, and the opposite of the clerical black: hence the scientist's white robe. The only utility of ornaments seems to be dust collection; Buchanan reports that the fourth largest industry in Sweden is cleaning buildings.[16] The modern expression of the uniqueness of the subject, then, is the *sui generis* nature of its project; independent of the past, it gives us new forms and new interpretations of the functions of buildings, which are offered as modern. Hence, even when the moderns silently borrow an ancient

form, say the Greek *pilotis*, they reinscribe it into the modern dialect of reduction to function: the columnation is basically reduced to a perimeter of poles. This is done successfully, I think, in Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, or Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building, but unsuccessfully in Le Corbusier's later Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles. Or, rather than to speak of reinscription, perhaps it is better to say that the modernized ancient fragment is limited to its functional nature. This is an especially pregnant example, as the *pilotis* describes the dividing line between mundane and sacred space in the Greek temple.

Martin Pawley's recent book, *Terminal Architecture*, brings such functionalization to its logical conclusion. Pawley radicalizes Loos to the extent that *any* aesthetic appreciation of a building is misguided if not simply wrong. Loos thought that ornamentation was wrong in that it allows a building to lie, as it were, to dissimulate itself and pretend to be what it is not. Let the materials speak for themselves, Loos said. Eschewing his theoretical call for white walls, his few buildings were stunningly beautiful through judicious choice of materials, but lacking any ornamentation (the Viennese have since 'corrected' Loos's buildings). Pawley thinks that the proscription on ornaments must be extended to any 'art-historical appreciation' of architecture.[17] Architecture, for Pawley, is no aesthetic endeavour, and has no reason to be; anything beyond mere functionality is a waste of resources. Hence one of the few praises you will ever hear sung to superstores and automated factories – both examples of what he calls 'big-shed architecture' – you will find in Pawley. For this modern architecture is seen as 'Terminal 2' architecture, that is, where people, or products, or information, or whatever, intertwine and are processed.[18] Again these are nodes wherein orbits intersect. This architecture concerns itself with the most efficient way of accommodating as many intersecting orbits as is cost-effective, and with the concomitant exchange of goods, services or information. We even see this in suburban architecture, the more so now that 'home theatres' and the Internet allow the monadic family direct access to the information of the entertainment and infotainment corporations. Modern architecture, Pawley says, 'presented our century with a culture of buildings that identified them as instruments instead of monuments'.[19]

And here in Pawley we see modern architecture explicitly as the technical fix to determinate problems. Of course, this approach did not originate in Pawley, who is rather one of its most recent troubadours. For instance, Le Corbusier's unbuilt 'Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants' approaches mass housing from this perspective of the 'problem'. Problem: how to house efficiently a large number of people? Answer: by building four huge tower blocks on a massive pediment. Problem: how to keep the unsightliness and noise of mass transit at bay? Answer: under the pediment, multi-layer highways channel traffic out of sight. Problem: how to soften the soulless nature of a large mass of concrete? Answer: verdure is supplied on top of the pediment by a massive planting of grass and trees. Yet each of these solutions leads to more problems which, in fact, remain unsolved in his plan.

First, the uniform nature of the apartment blocks housing three million people is dehumanizing alone; notice that Le Corbusier refers to them in their functional

nature: they are inhabitants, and are thus defined in terms of their functional relation to the architecture. Second, this hiding of the highways obscures a deeper fact: the apartment block complex is basically an island, and its inhabitants are thus enslaved to this highway for any escape from the concrete and the controlled landscape. Although one could make this claim about any city, a quick inspection of Le Corbusier's plan shows that this city has none of the variety and interest of a normal, more organic, city. Third, the break that the greenery provides from the constructed environment is only present in the summer and spring, and its lack of any wildness would definitely provide a poor substitute for spontaneous nature.[20] This thoroughly constructed environment does not so much interact with the spontaneous environment as obliterate it, or at least mask it completely.

That modernity would go in this direction is more astounding than is usually thought. As William Desmond points out in *Philosophy and Its Others*, Modernity, as the New Time (*Neuzeit*), 'was to be a renewal, renaissance of our naturalness, in distinction to Medieval supernaturalism. But the modern self does not find itself as at home with nature as expected, and tries to secure its own being by technological will-to-power over its otherness' (PO, 275).

Modernity was born itself, at least in part, from a reaction to the medieval focus on the other world; as a decidedly this-sided project, modernity was to relate us to nature, and not to the supernatural. But instead of reconnecting us with nature, it placed us in opposition to it, so that nature becomes an 'other'. As an other, humanity is in confrontation with nature. Descartes is famed, for instance, for calling us to be masters and possessors of nature, and for claiming that animals were mere automatons. Why did modernity go in this direction? This is too complicated a question for such an essay as this, but Descartes's subject points us toward the answer. The self is seen as something abstracted from that which is not the self. In other words, the self is isolated, as I showed above. If I am only myself, then I am not you; I am also not that tree, nor this building, or the like. In a move typical of modernity, the separated individual finds its separation projected onto the species. Hence humanity is separate from nature. Since humanity is taken to be autonomous and nature taken to be law-governed, it only follows that free humanity takes possession of law-bound nature, and the best way to do so is to take possession of the laws of nature. Hence the atomic subject of Descartes discovers the power of the atom and builds the atomic bomb. Has this remove from the supernatural got us any closer to nature than, say, the tribes which Frazer describes as trying to enrich the generative power of their land through the addition of their own semen?[21] These acts of imitative magic, though supernatural from the point of view of modern science, certainly illustrate a mind which is connected closely with nature. The mind which holds that there is a relation between human sexuality and natural regeneration certainly does not set itself over and against nature.

Modernity's tendency toward isolation simply reiterates Descartes's discrete subject, the *cogito*, pure self-identity. That is, the individual is found only when the mind is emptied of all externality; in this scheme, to follow a Hegelian critique, thinking is identical to negation or doubt; that which I doubt is not me, and *that* I actually do doubt, well, that *is* me: *cogito ergo sum*, which is better expressed as

dubito ergo sum, according to Feuerbach.[22] I *am* my doubting, my negating of that which I am not. But this has a corollary: if I am found in abstracting all content away, and if that means that all that is left is that I doubt, that I think, then all I am is my thinking, but this thinking has no content beyond its not being anything else. It is empty, contentless, purely formal, or simply pure.

Hence the Cartesian self, in being simply itself, is indeterminate, abstract and empty. This, rather surprisingly, allows for a shift from the autonomous individual to the unit of society. Everyone is an individual. Even though the individual is defined as not being anyone else, this means that everyone is not anyone else. Everyone then has the same constitution as everyone else, and thus there are no real differences between people. Everybody is isolated because everyone is isomorphic, but this isolation is what they all have in common, a conclusion readily embraced by our modern ontology of production. Here we see equivocity invoked by univocity.

The works of the High Moderns (such as Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier) also highlight this latter sense of the individual. Instead of merely strengthening the modern subject as an isolated subject, they also sublate this isolated subject into a more universal subject, commensurate with the new forms of production. Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* is explicit about wanting to bring the world of architecture to the same level as the world of industry; in fact, the world of industry is to provide the new language for architecture. For this reason he designed his intriguing Citrohan House, the name consciously evoking the Citroën, whose 1922 model gave the house its shape.[23] For this reason, he compares the Parthenon with the form of a car. And for this reason too, Gropius wrote that the aerial viewpoint was the principal point of view of modernity, an idea he extended into a joke by forming his Bauhaus building vaguely into the shape of a propeller, for the benefit of test pilots from the neighbouring Junker's aircraft factory, who could see it from the air.[24] Charles Jencks's definition of modern architecture well captures this technological and generic bent: 'Thus we might define Modern architecture as the *universal, international style stemming from the facts of new constructional means, adequate to a new industrial society, and having as its goal the transformation of society, both in its taste and social make-up*.'[25]

The factory, the production line, the staff of an office or business – these become the new paradigm of the subject wherein the subject is seen as an instance of personnel. Hence the factory shift, or the office cubicle.[26] This conclusion is guaranteed by the abstract definition of self which Descartes promulgated: I=I, the ultimate isomorphism.[27]

Why do I seem here to be reiterating a fairly common and cynical view of modernity? Because the hubris of modernity seems constantly to pull us back into its orbit. And we see this quite clearly in the suggestion of Ostrowski that technology is to redress our overtaxing of nature. But we landed ourselves in our present ecological malaise precisely through technology, or better, through our hubristic belief that the human situation relies on technology alone. I question whether it is sufficient to claim that we now have *better* and *less invasive*

technology. This belief is the self-affirmation of the strongest possible anthropocentrism, and reeks unbearably of hubris.

Ecstatic Architecture

While architecture is per se anthropological in its construction and aims, it does not follow that it must stem from strongly anthropocentric views. We are not the first age to realize this. If we put aside any thought of religion as human projection (whether Euhemeristic, Humean, Feuerbachian, Freudian or the like), we can accept that the Greeks saw their temples as excised space; space outside of the human, and thus outside of the profane. This is Heidegger's reading of the Greek temple, to be sure, and it is intimately tied to his influential ontology of elusive being. Regardless of whether or not his ontology is fruitful, I believe that his reading of the Greek temple is instructive, since it points us toward an ecstatic architecture. The temple is sacred – cut off, excised – from the human world by the presence of the god;[28] the god fills the space of the constructed walls with a non-human content. In this sense, the temple is not at all constructed according to an anthropocentric programmeme: it is to let the god *be*, and not to reflect the human back to itself directly. (But perhaps indirectly, as it shows humanity has the ability to let itself come into contact with that which is other, without subsuming it to itself.) To this extent, Vitruvius tells us that temples to Jupiter, a sky god, were to have openings in the ceiling, while Venus was to be housed within the delicate Corinthian order.[29]

The example of the Greek temple is, however, problematic, since Vitruvius tells us that the columns are representations of men and women (Doric and Ionic, respectively) and that the orders of the buildings in general are thought of as expressing the respective genders of their columnations.[30] Nevertheless I maintain that these anthropomorphic forms are sublated by the presence of the god enclosed within it.

We do not have this same problem in Abbot Suger's conception of St-Denis in Paris, since Gothic orders are non-gendered. Panofsky's influential translation of Suger's works informs us that Suger's drive toward curtain-like and diaphanous walls was an attempt to overcome the human (and all too Norman) drive toward security, in the direction of letting light be.[31] This architecture of light finds its apotheosis in Paris's Sainte Chapelle. Light here symbolizes God, and the architecture of light was to allow contemplation of the beauty of the divine and thus to be lost in the divinity; it was an attempt at a profoundly ecstatic architecture – ecstatic in the sense that it attempts to lead the human being out of itself and into something larger and more inclusive. Again this is hardly anthropocentric in the strong sense.

These buildings *are* anthropocentric in the weak sense, that they were built by humans and are for the worship of God by humans, or that they are human monuments to the gods. But the substance of these buildings is non-human; or they are not anthropocentric in the strong sense, wherein we focus on the latter half of

the word: they are not centred around humanity, but around a more inclusive presence, regardless of either the object of reverence or the contentious ontological status of this presence. They are historical and constructed expressions of humanity's desire to transcend itself. These buildings also reflect a concept of the individual, not trapped in an abstract view of its discrete particularity, but intertwined within a larger community. Neither the Greek temple nor St-Denis was conceived as a private chapel, reflecting the importance of a discrete self communing with itself. Neither was conceived according to the same concept of the subject to which the monadic dwellings, which *infest* our suburbs like so many caterpillars, subscribe – *cocooning* indeed![32]

I have indicated above that ecstatic architecture does not directly reflect a concept of humanity back to itself: it is not the photographic negative to the plate of humanity. As ecstatic, it leads humanity out of itself. But I also indicated that it reflects humanity indirectly, by showing that humanity can also let entities be what they are; that humanity does not with necessity make an idol of itself in everything that it sees or makes. This indicates a very specific concept of humanity: the human as metaxological.

Metaxological Being

'If the land belongs to you,' asks Desmond, 'but you do not belong to the land, can you make a real home there, an abode?'(PO, 277). Desmond thus implicitly asks us to avoid the Conservationist position. Conservationism is basically a technological position of what Desmond calls the instrumentalist mind. This is made explicit by ecologists such as Warwick Fox, who convincingly shows that conservationism employs a 'mini-max' strategy in which we minimize our intervention into nature but still maximize the results of our intervention;[33] this is still the instrumentalist mind at work. Regardless of its intentions, such a position still sees the earth as something external and *merely* exploitable, something with no intrinsic value; such a position sees the earth as some*thing*, a thing among other things.

Conservationism is a futural approach which is intended to ensure a constant supply of exploitable resources. Some conceptions of green architecture fit into this mould; the title of Robert and Brenda Vale's *Green Architecture: Design for a Sustainable Future* alone points this out. But Desmond calls us to a 'posthumous mindfulness' (PO, 278), which is a metaphysical therapy intended to help us recognize the inherent goodness of being beyond the subjectivistic and instrumentalist standpoints. That is, if I imagine myself to be dead, I have stripped my thought of any relation to my needs or wants, and can then think about the inherent goodness of being, independent of subjective and instrumentalist desires. This does not remove the concrete subject from the picture. I am still consciously thinking the goodness of being; I have not removed myself to the view from nowhere and become a worldless I, which is Thomas Nagel's thoroughly modern position.[34] By thinking myself dead, I merely think myself as dead to my desires.

I can then be open to what being extends in its indeterminate plenitude and goodness, without subsuming it to my own desires.

But suppose we transfer this posthumous mind to the question of the inherent value of both the spontaneous and the constructed environment, and think the inherent goodness in them? Then we could investigate their status without those nostalgic or conservationist viewpoints which taint much of our relation with the environment. For, finally, we would be addressing the environment, not as our object, but as something of inherent value. And also we would not be in opposition to it, for the briefest contemplation would reveal that we both spring from, and give shape to, the environment. This reveals itself as a metaxological relationship in which neither term is subsumed in the other, but in which both terms exist in intimate relation.

This may sound like Hegel who, for instance, shows with great dexterity that there is no me without you, no positive without negative, no parent without child, and so on. However each of these is subsumed into a larger whole, which is eventually swallowed up by the Idea. The metaxological is not in search of this larger rational totality; instead of rational logic it offers idiot wisdom (*idios*, intimate). This is the wisdom to see that, though beings are intimately related and give themselves to each other, this giving is not a swallowing or determining. But at the same time it is the recognition of a prior unity. These givings are part of a larger giving, one which gives freedom in freedom, which gives absolution from the total determination of the source, a source which gives from its infinitely overdetermined, and thus indeterminable, being. This is the wisdom that rejoices in the idea *that* there is being, *that* the mind was given at all. *That* being is, that is the excess; it is the non-answer to Heidegger's unanswerable question, borrowed verbatim from Leibniz, of why there is being rather than nothing; in place of an answer only: *that*. The *that* is excessive precisely because it exceeds our ability to think it; it is the *nihil* in *creatio ex nihilo*.

Let us remove this from its metaphysical setting and apply it to the environment. If we think of nature in terms of idiot wisdom, nature ceases to be other, and becomes instead a source that gives from out of an indeterminable plenitude. The instrumentalist framework is synonymous with 'ontological nihilism' (BB, 508ff.), a nihilism which is particularly silent. This is not the nihilism that preaches the death of values, morals, society or God; nor is it the political nihilism of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*; nor is it the caricature of nihilism of the Coen brothers' *Big Lebowsky*. This is a nihilism which is simply blind to any intrinsic value in being; whatever value there may be is super-added by humanity (ibid.). This nihilism sees humanity as the creator of *all* value, and is thus thoroughly instrumentalist. The wonder directed at the thereness of being, which is not subsumable to concepts, is thus simply ignored. As such, nature is taken as a valueless aggregate of forces and materials present in order to be given extrinsic value by humanity, instead of being a system of inherent order (BB, 510). By atomizing both ourselves and nature, we lose the *ordo naturalis*, and with it the idea of final causality, covering this completely with an expanded efficient causality.

Conclusion: Ecotecture Must Follow a Metaxological Ontology

To address the questions posed by the relation of the constructed environment with the spontaneous environment through technology, through efficient causality, is to miss the very point of the questions. Such 'green architecture', even if we call it 'ecotecture', misses its vocation by issuing checklists. Toilets that use no water and convert human waste into *useful* fertilizer are laudable inventions indeed, but to turn to them as a response to the ecological crisis is a short-sighted appeal to technology. It does not change our fundamental approach to nature, merely its scope. It is by no means obvious that the scope of our intervention needs changing. However it is obvious that the explicit understanding of our relationship with the spontaneous environment needs changing. Loos realized this when he admonished architects: 'think not about the roof, but rather about the rain and the snow'.[35] In this perspective the roof becomes part of the environment. Hence this change must be a complete repudiation of the concept of intervention.

As long as we are concerned with *syntagmata* such as 'environmental impact' and 'intervention', we remain within a framework which alienates us from nature: we become one of two poles, and nature the other. However metaxology calls us to understand our relation with nature as co-dependent, but also to understand that neither humanity nor nature is exhausted in this co-dependence, precisely because neither can come under exhaustive determination. To recognize this is to recognize that we are not apart *from* nature, but neither merely a part *of* nature. Just as a child does not intervene in its family, humanity does not intervene in nature. But when we see the environment as inherently valueless, our relation *is seen* as one of intervention. And, as if burlesquing *esse est percipi*, it then becomes intervention. This is the position of the hubristic technological human being.

If ecotecture is to be a sufficiently important force in architectural reform, it must reflect our metaxological being. It must call us to dwell amidst, and give us buildings which embody this call. It must answer Loos's imperative: 'wohnen lernen!'[36] It must use technology, but not be technological. The technology it uses must not be aimed at fixing our relationship with nature, but must instead be a reflection of our relation with nature, which too has its efficient aspect. And since our relation with nature is not external but intimate, our technology must not treat nature merely as a means. If the environment is inherently good, then it must *also* be treated as an end in itself. To treat the earth as a means to an end is not necessarily wrong; we rightly treat people as means to various ends every day, for example as students treat their teachers as a means.

The technologist position, however, treats the being of the earth as a means; the metaxological recognizes that in the between things must get done, but that the meaning of things does not lie in their acquiescence to this goal. Ecotecture can only distance itself from architecture by forswearing the overwhelming technological approach of what it considers architecture. Ecotecture is not about numbers. It is about dwelling amidst, about dwelling metaxologically.

Notes

1 Christopher Day, 'Ethical Building in the Everyday Environment: a Multilayer Approach to Building and Place Design', in Warwick Fox (ed.), *Ethics and the Built Environment*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp.127–38 (p.127). See also Robert and Brenda Vale, *Green Architecture: Design for a Sustainable Future*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991; and Peter Buchanan (1990), 'Green Architecture', *The Architectural Review*, **123**, pp.37–8. These works all contain ready catalogues of such damage to the spontaneous environment.

2 Jorg-Dietram Ostrowski, 'Ecotecture: the Language for Ecological Homes', *Environmental Design + Construction*, 25 January 2001 (<http://www.edcmag.com/edc/cda/articleinformation/coverstory/bnpcoverstoryitem/0,4118,19439,00.html.>). Latest access, 16 March 2003. Also in print: Jorg-Dietram Ostrowski (1998), 'Ecotecture: the Language for Ecological Homes', *Environmental Design and Construction*, September/October, pp.20–30. Only the Internet version accessed.

3 Ostrowski, op. cit.

4 Ostrowski, op. cit.

5 René Descartes, 'Rules for the Direction of Mind', in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (eds and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols, Cambridge: CUP, 1985, vol. 1, pp.7–78 (rule 1).

6 Gabriel Marcel, 'On the Ontological Mystery', in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Manya Harari, New York: Citadel Press, 1991, pp.9–46. A problem is a question which we take as external, and a mystery is a question which involves us intimately: 'A mystery is a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem' (p.19).

7 Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *Karl Marx–Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, trans. not given, 47 vols, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, vol. 5 (1845–47), pp.3–5 (thesis 4).

8 Buchanan, 'Green architecture', p.38.

9 Ibid.

10 Martin Pawley (1990), 'Backfire: Exogenous Shock', *The Architectural Review*, **123**, 94–7 (p.97).

11 Warwick Fox, *Towards a Transparent Ecology*, Boston and London: Shambhala, 1990, pp.20ff.

12 Fox, *Towards a Transparent Ecology*, loc. cit.

13 Albert Speer, *Architecture: 1932–1942*, ed. and trans. Léon Krier, Brussels: Archives d'Architecture Moderne (1985), p.213. In fact, Speer's aesthetic seems to have survived, *mutatis mutandis*, in the North American fixation on the domed stadium. Compare the *Meisterstück* of his *Grosser Platz*, his Great Dome, with any domed stadium.

14 Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret), *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. F. Etchells, London: The Architectural Press, 1976 (rpt of 1946 edn), *passim*.

15 Adolf Loos, 'Ornament und Verbrechen', in *Trotzdem*, ed. Adolf Opel, Vienna: Georg Prachner Verlag, 1982 (rpt of 1931 edn), pp.78–88.

16 Buchanan, 'Green architecture', p.38.

17 Martin Pawley, *Terminal Architecture*, London: Reaktion Books, 1998, pp.93ff.

18 Pawley's definitions of Terminal architectures are based on an acknowledged, and to my mind acceptable, equivocation: while Terminal 2 architecture is nodal architecture, Terminal 1 architecture is architecture that has come to an end, that is, is terminated.

Terminal 1 architecture is any architecture with pretensions to being 'art-historical' (ibid. pp.7ff.).

19 Ibid., p.113.

20 See Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman, *Architecture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986. I am indebted to their discussion of this project (p.531).

21 James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edn, Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions, 1993, p.136.

22 Ludwig Feuerbach, 'Geschichte der Neueren Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza', in Werner Schuffenhauer and Wolfgang Harich (eds), *Gesammelte Werke*, 19 vols, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969–1990, vol.2, p.260.

23 Trachtenberg and Hyman, *Architecture*, p.524.

24 Ibid.

25 Charles Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?*, London: Academy Editions, 1986, p.28 (emphasis in original).

26 This is not per se a modern idea; medieval monks too had their own cubicles (*cellulae*) and shifts (*horae canonicae*). But the difference lies in the direction of the sublation: in the Middle Ages this sublation was self-understood as being in the direction of a universality, a more inclusive presence. In modernity, the sublation tends in the direction of an aggregate or sum, which is in keeping with the overwhelming stress on the economic. In this sense, it is almost better not to speak of sublation but of cancellation and replacement.

27 We are here within the movement of Hegel's dialectic of the one and the many; in formal terms, this dialectic says that that which rends asunder also unifies. We can find a succinct treatment of this dialectic in G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia: Logic. Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991, pp.97–8.

28 Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in D.F. Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, 2nd rev. edn, New York: HarperCollins, 1993, pp.143–212 (pp.167ff.).

29 Vitruvius (Marcus Vitruvius Pollio), *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan, New York: Dover, 1960 (rpt. of 1914 Harvard University Press edn), Book 1, 2:5.

30 Vitruvius, Book 4, 1: 6–7.

31 Current work on a critical edition of Suger's works strongly suggests that Panofsky's interpretation, in his, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, New York: Meridian Books, 1957, is simply wrong, and is the result of a Hegelian desire to see the material as a manifestation of the ideal. The idea that Suger was not lost in Neoplatonic emanation theology is, to put it bluntly, shocking, and actually calls for a complete rereading of the standard presentation of the development of Gothic architecture. However I would maintain that Suger's liturgical view of St-Denis still qualifies it as ecstatic architecture. See Andreas Speer, 'Art as Liturgy: Abbot Suger of St-Denis and the Question of Medieval Aesthetics', in *Roma, Magistra Mundi. Itirneraria Culturae Medievalis. Mélanges Offerts au Père L.E. Boyle à l'Occasion de son 75e Anniversaire*, Louvain-la-Neuve: Textes et Etudes du Moyen Age, 1998, pp.855–75.

32 I would add that Christopher Day's modern work deserves to be called ecstatic architecture. His core vision – community involvement, natural materials, buildings as healing the soul – certainly embodies an attempt at liberating the concentrated self without overwhelming it in collectivism. And this architecture clearly demonstrates an

ethical awareness of the environment; his ethics is all the more fruitful as it stems from a true *ethos*, the community. See his wonderful book, *Places of the Soul. Architecture and Environmental Design as a Healing Art*, 1999, London: HarperCollins.

33 Fox, *Towards a Transparent Ecology*, pp.208ff.

34 Nagel tells us, incredibly, 'an objective standpoint is created by leaving a more subjective, individual, or even just human perspective behind', as if the objective standpoint were not a human perspective in the first place. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: OUP, 1986, p.7.

35 Adolf Loos, 'Regeln für den, der in den bergen [*sic*]' baut, in *Trotzdem*, pp.120–21 (p.120). Considering it to be ornament, Loos does not follow here the German orthography of capitalized nouns.

36 See: Adolf Loos, 'Wohnen Lernen!', in *Trotzdem*, pp.165–9.