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THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ARCHITECTURE: BEAUTY, JUSTICE AND THE CALL OF CARE

ABSTRACT

In contemporary architectural practice, it seems impossible to establish common consensus regarding the merits or definition of architectural beauty. Moreover, the ancient links between “the just” and “the beautiful” have been severed. This article argues that the dissociation between beauty and justice may well be rooted in the unquestioning way in which we habitually fall back on established aesthetic tropes when considering the notion of architectural beauty. In response, it challenges the value and appropriateness of such aesthetic assertions by recalling Martin Heidegger’s formulation of human life as an event of emplaced care, and human contemplation as a form of “inceptual thinking”. This article then briefly discusses the relationship between this kind of inceptual beauty and the notion of justice, as put forward by John Rawls. Interwoven with these philosophical positions, the text refers to the historical development of church architecture as interpretive device.

1. INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly, when it comes to the question of beauty in architecture, I believe that I knew an important part of the answer, even before I started studying architecture. In the past, prospective students who wanted to study architecture at the University of the Free State



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had to pass an admission interview. The panel members knew that I came from Upington, a remote part of South Africa, so they started with an easy question: "What does an architect do?". Confidently, I stated: "Architects design beautiful buildings". I had no idea that I was living in times when architects were deeply suspicious of the notion of beauty. Of course, the follow-up question was asked with a sardonic smile: "And what, Mr Auret, is a beautiful building?". I do not know where the following answer came from, but I replied: "If I was walking through a city, the beautiful building is the one that would make me follow the same route tomorrow, so that I might walk past it again." The panel members were very impressed. I had no idea why, but their approval made me remember the answer. I now realise that it manages to capture something essential about the nature of architectural beauty.

Contemporary architects are wary of beauty. Instead, we usually value qualities such as "spatial sophistication", "technical finesse" and "honest expression". Non-architects would probably like to tell such architects to get over themselves. After all, it should be obvious that the profession has a long and dignified history of striving towards beauty. In Western architecture, this striving towards beauty is arguably most evident in the development of church architecture.

Despite the common use of house churches (Alikin 2009:45-53) by the first Christians, the traditional view is that the first built structures dedicated to Christian gathering were located in catacombs, underground burial spaces.¹ These spaces were unrefined, with most of the ornamentation applied in an unsophisticated way or in the form of symbols. It was a humble arrangement, with materials used in their natural state, scarcely illuminated (in some instances) by light from above. However, after Constantine made Christianity the empire's religion, the architectural problem had to be solved in a more formal way. Essentially, the Christians chose to modify an existing building type, the Roman basilica. The Romans used such buildings primarily as law courts.

Why did Christians at the time opt for this kind of building? The current format does not allow for a comprehensive discussion of the matter, but the aspects motivating the decisions made by Christian leaders can be condensed to the following: in purely pragmatic terms, basilicas provided

1 It should be pointed out that there is disagreement among scholars regarding the use of these spaces for Christian gatherings (Bodel 2008; Smith 2014). In particular, Smith (2014: 17) pointed out that "the interpretation of the catacombs and their images has tended to be a disjointed and provincial business. Work on the sites has been carried out across several disciplines, with little conversation across disciplinary lines and relatively few attempts at synthetic readings".

a large open space for the congregation that could easily be enlarged or adapted, but there were also symbolic and political aspects. Basilicas were longitudinal spaces, admitted filtered light from above and had a semi-circular apse at the one end reserved for the judge and other officials. Therefore, in one building typology, there was the potential, first, to create a path motif – quite literally the faithful could be urged to walk along the straight and narrow accompanied by bursts of light – *and* secondly, to displace human judges with a more eternal order in the apse (Figures 1 and 2).

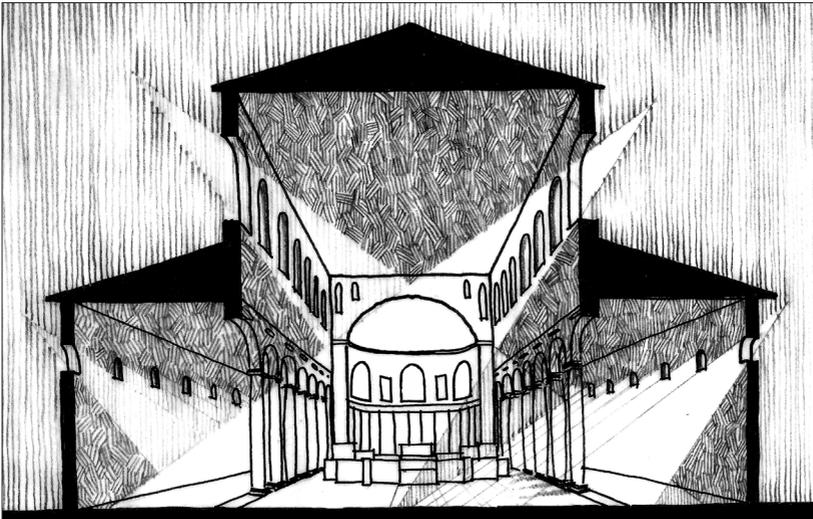


Figure 1: Section through typical Early-Christian church based on the basilica type. Note clerestory windows and apse on eastern extreme (Auret).

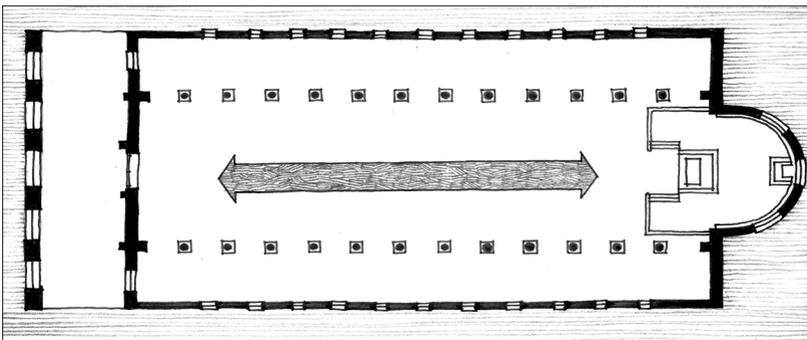


Figure 2: Plan of typical Early-Christian church based on the basilica type (Auret).

The basilica plan has endured through the ages. It was developed in two primary ways (Figure 3). First, a transept was added perpendicular to the main axis to form a Latin cross, in which there was a primary and secondary axis. Secondly, influences from the east, especially from Constantinople, promoted the idea of a more centralised arrangement – the idea of a congregation united in a centralised space – resulting in the Greek cross churches where all the arms of the cross have the same length.²

Obviously, there are many hybrids, but the linearity of the Latin cross plan and the centralisation implied by the Greek cross plan became the two dominant approaches. They have been constantly re-interpreted in terms of broader concerns: the brooding luminosity of the Romanesque and the structural daring of the Gothic; the certainties and mathematical precision of the Renaissance; the doubt and distrust brought about by the Reformation during the Mannerist period; the propaganda and experiential riches offered by the Baroque Counter-Reformation; the whimsical lightness and romantic light quality of the Bavarian Rococo in contrast to the more sombre clarity demanded by reformist ideals, or the exuberant Arts and Crafts counter-reaction to industrialisation.

This brief overview might make it seem as if the idea that each age must find its own way towards beauty is being promoted. But why is our age so sceptical of all previous attempts? Some might argue that we live in a pluralist reality, and that it would, therefore, be intolerant to assert one form of beauty at the cost of another. This is partly true, and it is with a vague sense of loss that the vast majority of modern architects accept the unattainability of beauty in our time. But what if our disassociation from beauty is merely the culmination of a persistent misunderstanding of the nature of beauty?

In order to test the veracity of this possibility, the next section explores an alternative way of thinking about beauty implied in the writings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) critique of aesthetics.³

2 The notion of centralised sacred spaces in Christian architecture also draws heavily on the traditional layout of the *martyria*, funerary structures built around the grave of a Christian martyr (Kilde 2008:35).

3 In-text references to Heidegger's work has been approached in the following way. References to *Being and Time* are based on the pagination used in the original German edition (which have been included in subsequent editions and translations), since there are two widely available English translations. In all other cases, where the original pagination of Heidegger's writings was included in a new edition, I cite the original pagination followed by the pagination of the particular translation being used. In order to stay faithful to the chronological development of Heidegger's thought, the "dates" used as in-text references in this article refer to the year in which Heidegger completed manuscripts or delivered lecture courses.

Significantly, Heidegger's understanding of beauty was grounded in his interpretation of the way in which human beings exist in the world. After mining the implications of this shift in approach, Heidegger's alternative to aesthetic thinking is presented and developed as a more appropriate and revelatory way to approach creative endeavours. Thereafter, these core philosophical insights are used to propose a different way to strive towards architectural beauty and comment on the potential of relying on this kind of architectural beauty to inspire just architectural practice.

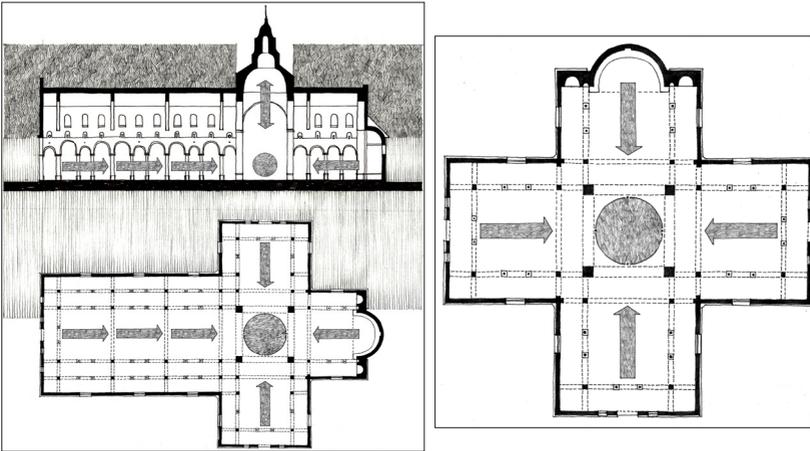


Figure 3: Generic examples of the Latin cross (left) and the Greek cross (right) plans (Auret).

2. HEIDEGGER'S CRITIQUE OF AESTHETICS

Heidegger believed that the Western understanding of art had been overwhelmed by the assumptions harboured in the term "aesthetics". Essentially, Heidegger (1936:77) argued in the *Epilogue* of his famous essay, *The origin of the work of art*, that "[a]esthetics takes the work of art as an object". Understood in this way, aesthetics represents a "way of looking" under the sway of the ineptual differentiation between Being and becoming – a pure ideal and its representations – which has reduced the world and its content to "objects" standing against our own "subjectivity".

We might ask whether this is such a terrible thing. We have gained a lot by considering objects from a rational Cartesian perspective, but in his lecture series *Introduction to metaphysics*, Heidegger (1935) argued that this world view was underpinned by an insidious perniciousness. In a

step-by-step manner, Heidegger (1935:73/100) expounded how “the most familiar restriction of Being through an Other”, namely the differentiation between Being and becoming, gave rise to other “restrictions” (such as the distinction between “Being and seeming”, “Being and thinking”, and “Being and the ought”), which eventually both “limited” Being (Heidegger 1935:155/218), by turning it into an ideal – a form of “constant presence” (Heidegger 1935:154/216) – and led to the “later interpretation of the being as object” in that beings are made to “stand against all comprehending and asserting” (Heidegger 1935:147/206). Once the object was placed in front of the thinking subject, the worth and persuasiveness of the work may be judged and calculated against the ideal. In terms of works of art, not only is the work demoted to being an object, but the thinking of the subject is made into acts of calculation and, eventually, categorisation (Heidegger 1935:142/199-200). In turn, the subject’s capacity to speak about the thing is reduced to “assertion” and the notion of truth is reduced to the idea of correspondence or “correctness” (Heidegger 1935:144/201-202). Ultimately, Heidegger (1935:149-152/210-214) argued that, by differentiating between Being and becoming, subject and object, people have been turned into judges with feet of clay, informed by false certainties about how things “ought” to be.

Instead of considering the way in which human beings ought to be, Heidegger asked us to consider the poetic depths of how we always already are. No longer content with being a rational observer, Heidegger (1927:7-9) proposed that we consider ourselves as *Dasein*, usually translated as “being-there”, a term denoting “the site of the understanding of being”. In Afrikaans, one could speak about *daarwees*, but maybe *daar[bewus]syn* manages to capture the emplaced revelatory “thereness” of human consciousness best.

In contrast to the detachment demanded by rational observation, Heidegger (1927:53) proposed that beings such as *Dasein* exist as “being-in-the-world”. The term is really all about the hyphens; it proclaims that people are simultaneously separated from, *and* intimately immersed in the world and all its messy relational reciprocities as a “unified phenomenon” (Heidegger 1927:53). Moreover, our hyphenated betweenness *happens to us* as beings of emplaced care.

Heidegger (1927:12) believed that “care” or *Sorge* saturates the being of *Dasein*. As he explained it:

Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being.

His interpretation of *Sorge* is ontological – care is not a particular kind of attitude, as in architects should care more. Instead, care always already holds sway over our existence, due to our finitude, in other words, due to the fact that our time as living beings is limited and that we are aware of the fact that our time is limited. We are mortal beings of care. In fact, the authenticity⁴ of our temporal everyday existence cannot help but exist in-between birth and death (Heidegger 1927:233).

Thus, our temporal betweenness in the world is established, but people also inhabit another fundamental betweenness. In spatial terms, mortals live in a concrete world between earth and sky.⁵ Heidegger argued that people, rather than existing in abstract limitless space that can be calculated as a construct of x, y and z axis, live concretely emplaced lives. In one of his last works *Art and space*, Heidegger (1969:307-308) argued that the making of space has, as its ultimate goal, the “freeing of places” that may accomplish the “sheltering of things in their region”. *Dasein’s* lived situation cannot be restricted to *either* space or time. In *Country path conversations*, Heidegger (1945:114/74) described the interwoven “regioning”⁶ of these “lived between” as an “abiding expanse”. Profoundly, mortals live time as lingering care and space as expansive place. Instead of sustaining the aesthetic differentiation between subject and object, what would art be like if we tried to make sense of it as mortal beings of emplaced care?

In *The origin of the work of art*, Heidegger (1936:74) explored art as “the setting-into-work of truth”. Principally, the persuasiveness of this definition rests on the way in which one defines the notion of truth. Heidegger proposed that the key lay in reconsidering the ancient Greek notion of *aletheia*. He (1935:78/107) argued that people “thoughtlessly translate” *aletheia* as truth, which is understood to mean “correctness” (Heidegger 1935:142, 199). In contrast, Heidegger (1935:78/107) proposed that the

4 In this instance, the term “authenticity” is used in a way that echoes its Afrikaans equivalent of *lewensegtheid*, which (when literally translated) implies “true-to-lifeness”. The implication being that everydayness cannot be “true to life”, if it is not understood as a fundamental “betweenness”. In terms of lived human temporality, this refers to the timespan between birth and death.

5 This fundamental reality informed the groundbreaking work of the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) (2000:221) and his understanding of architecture as an “art of place” that could interpret the “experience of living” in built form and organised space. In recent years, the work of the Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas has indirectly corroborated Norberg-Schulz’s place-centred architectural interpretation of Heidegger’s philosophy in books such as *Heidegger’s topology: Being, place, world* (2006).

6 The term “regioning” is a neologism used by Bret Davis to capture the dynamic appropriative nature of the relationship between being of care and region of concern, which Heidegger (1945:73) implied with the German term “*das Gegen*”.

word should be translated as “unconcealment”, which would bring to light the ever-present interaction between hiddenness (*lethē*) and revelation (*aletheia*) embodied in the original term. The forces of *lethē* and *aletheia* are locked in a perduring struggle, but a being of care may “unite” or “stay” them in, what Heidegger (1936:62) called, a “rift”. In the rift, by setting-into-work (equated to the ancient Greek idea of making as an act of *poiesis*), *Dasein* participates as the creative “sheltering” of the withdrawing and emergence of the truth of the happening of Being (Heidegger 1938:306-309/387-392). This revelatory struggle-rich nature of art endows it with revolutionary capacity.

In the realm of the revolutionary, beauty transcends aesthetics by becoming a deeply engaged poetic act. However, Heidegger’s is a strange revolution. It demands not that mortals impose some kind of understanding, but that they *notice* that which is. In this sense, the notion of the “genius” creating beauty in isolation is superseded by the capacity to truly notice the situation as a regioning of concern, and let it be in captivating ways. As the philosopher and Heidegger scholar, Thomson (2019: online) put it:

For art to accomplish [its] revolutionary task ... the artist must be able to see something beginning to take shape where others see nothing at all. All great creators must be able to discern the inchoate contours of something previously unseen and, as if thus playing midwife to being, help draw it into the light of the world.

It is vital to notice that the creative agent is not “mother”, but “midwife”. The revolutionary capacity Heidegger ascribes to art is different to the revolutions of the *avant-garde*, who have often tried to motivate citizens by shocking them out of complacency. Will shock tactics ever inspire a desire for justice? At heart, “shock tactics” is simply another form of the subject-object schism, where a genius imposes the “correctness” of a moment of insight on an otherwise indifferent world.

Admittedly, when Heidegger (1946:116) described the “usefulness” of poets, he acceded that they are more “venturesome” than other individuals, but the truly astounding claim is that Heidegger, drawing on a poem by the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), proposed that the venturesome poet (and presumably other creatives such as artists and architects) are merely “more daring by a breath” (Rilke, cited in Heidegger 1946:37). On the one hand, this is a leap almost too daring to even make sense of, since it is more daring than any kind of life we have known thus far – it is “more daring than Life itself” (Heidegger 1946:137). On the other hand, it implies that the insight given by true beauty – beauty derived from emplaced care – is that others may consider the beautiful thing and, because

it is so near to where they are already, wonder whether they had not always already “known” what said work is revealing. In fact, Heidegger (1936:74) believed that the more we venture into the “undisclosed abundance of the unfamiliar and the extraordinary”, the more we are returned to the “familiar and ordinary”. To unearth what is nearest is, after all, often the hardest thing to achieve. As Heidegger (1927:43) remarked: “What is ontically nearest and familiar is ontologically the farthest, unrecognized and constantly overlooked in its ontological significance”.

Far from marginalising the role of the creative participant, Heidegger is pointing towards the immense difficulty of letting that which is *be* in a new way; a life filled with revolutionary acts that always already leaves the door half-open for works to unite individuals in a sense of shared captivity. A work may be disclosively revolutionary, while swaying people in similar ways. In this sense, the art of care always already ventures beyond *what is*, in order to open the new. Because this venture entails a letting-be of our relationship with *what is*, it need not shock us, but merely aims to bring forth the richness and unspoken possibilities latent in our emplaced care. In a very deep sense, this is the responsibility of the concerned practitioner:

The inchoate contours of that which is not yet a thing need to be drawn out in an original way in order to release the possibilities inherent in the tradition and so create or renew humanity’s ontological inheritance for the future. In other words, artistic creation requires the exercise of an active receptivity we might call *ontological response-ability*, that is, an ability to respond to the inchoate ways in which being offers itself to intelligibility (Thomson 2019: online).

It is important to mention that this task must still be approached “decisively” (Heidegger 1938:16/17-18), in other words, resolutely, but that the scope of *Dasein*’s resolute stance has also been extended. Beyond being called to persistently disclose truth, *Dasein*, as “stewards of ... the stillness of the passing by of the last god” (Heidegger 1938:16/17-18), is now also (even more fundamentally) called to await in an open manner, listen for, and let Being be. Awaiting, listening and letting-be are antidotes for the modern “illusion [of] complete mastery”, efforts at establishing “controllability” and the wilfulness of “assertion” (Heidegger 1938:388-391/493-498). Fundamentally, recognising the richness of our poetic capacity to make *as a response to that which is*, serves as the ground for architectural response-ability. While art is revolutionary, its responsibility lies in keeping other beings of care in mind, in also doing their region of concern justice, for if it cannot draw people into a shared sense of captivity, how will it contribute to human belonging? Creating

works as the sheltering of emplaced mortal care is diametrically opposed to the assertions flowing from the subject-object differentiation sustained in aesthetics.

The heroic modernist architecture of the 1920s was all about assertion. Their manifestoes asserted how people ought to live. The most famous example might be Le Corbusier's plan to demolish the historic centre of Paris and replace it with a series of high-rise apartment blocks. Of course, Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin did not happen to Paris, and it would be an amusing oddity if it was not so widely imitated in other cities.

Already in the 1940s, the first historian of the modern movement, Sigfried Giedion (1958:32), tentatively pointed out that there was "something lacking" in the Modern Movement. Giedion proposed that architects had to reconsider their assumptions and "start from zero" (Giedion, cited in Norberg-Schulz 1985:233). Echoing this notion, the American architect, Louis Kahn, later suggested that architects engage with "Volume Zero" (Kahn, cited in Norberg-Schulz 1987:54).

Kahn had an enormous impact on South African architecture. In the late 1950s, a number of talented South African architects undertook a "Pennsylvanian pilgrimage" to study under his guidance. Maybe we can most clearly see the results of their engagement with "volume zero" in Roelof Uytendogaardt's design of a church in Welkom (Figure 4).

The Welkom-Wes Dutch Reformed Church is sparsely decorated; natural or "unfinished" materials are used, and light floods down from above as the main animator of the space (Figures 5 and 6). In other words, the space can be interpreted as a return to the beginning of church design, to the catacombs. This tendency is also evident in the Bloemfontein Dutch Reformed Student Church (Kopanong).⁷ As an architect, I greatly admire these attempts, but congregations have found it hard to relate to the perceived austerity of these spaces. In Welkom, people refer to the church as "the bomb shelter" (Figure 7) and I have lost count of the times I had to tell members of the student congregation that it is a terrible idea to paint the immaculate off-shutter concrete finish of the balconies.

7 It should be noted that both of these "modern" churches were designed to be modified versions of the Greek cross plan.

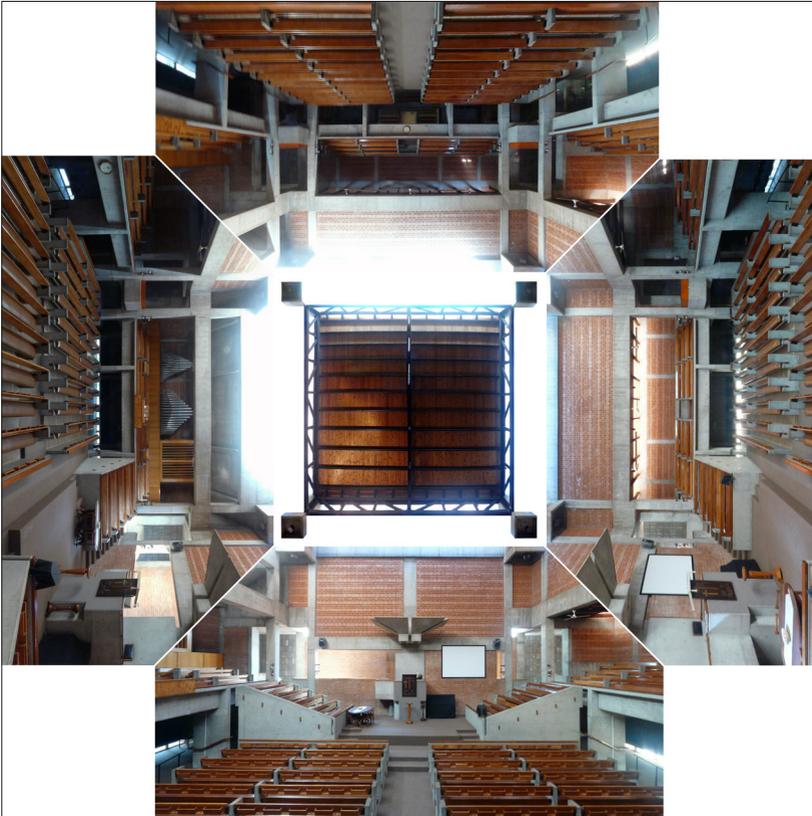


Figure 4: An exploded view of the four interior elevations of the Welkom-Wes Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), designed by Roelof Uytenbogaardt and completed in 1964 (Auret).



Figure 5: Reflected indirect light animating the off-shutter concrete structure and face brick wall inside the Welkom-Wes DRC (Auret).



Figure 6: A panoramic view showing the stark material palette of the Welkom-Wes DRC (Auret).



Figure 7: Exterior view of the Welkom-Wes DRC (Auret).

What has gone wrong? Modern architects have returned to the ground zero of Christianity, and *still* something was lacking? From a Heideggerian perspective, we could argue that these architects had not gone far enough. It does not suffice to reconsider the appearance and conventions embodied in “volume zero”. The real challenge lies in questioning that which substantiated the zero; an approach Heidegger (1938:242-243/191) called inceptual thinking:

[Inceptual] thinking no longer possesses the advantages of a “system” ... In place of systematics and deduction, there now stands historical preparedness for the truth of being. Such preparedness above all requires that this truth itself already create, out of its scarcely resonating essence, the basic traits of its site (Da-sein). The human subject must be transformed into the builder and steward of that site.

This is a way of thinking that only a being of care can accomplish, for care does not prescribe how people ought to be, but merely (and momentarily) sustains that sense of awareness that may help architects await, listen for and let be, by means of architecture, the way mortal beings always already *are*. The burden of care is that *Dasein* should remember the way it is, in order to think as a response to that which substantiated the inception of that which is. All *poiesis* sprouting from this kind of awareness will take the form of a response rather than an imposition or an assertion; a form of *poiesis* that is fundamentally response-able. The resulting works can be considered *appropriate* in that they are grounded

both in the way in which mortals always already are, and in the way in which the emplaced regioning of the situation always already happens. Moreover, they will be *revelatory*, since they are “delivered” with the help of *Dasein*’s unique personal awareness living as a being of emplaced care. This way of thinking might sound very obscure; but, consider the different ways in which Jensen and Skodvin Architects mined the “scarcely resonating essence” (Heidegger 1938:242-243/191) of their emplaced care in Mortensrud Church in Oslo (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Exterior view of the Mortensrud Church, designed by Jensen & Skodvin Architects in Oslo, Norway (Auret).

3. ARCHITECTURAL BEAUTY

In the design of the Mortensrud Church, the architects inceptually reconsidered traditional, historical and typical approaches. Traditionally, the heaviest and roughest parts of buildings rested on the earth, with the lighter and more refined workmanship on the upper levels, but in the Mortensrud Church, loosely stacked stones are elevated (Figure 9). The

gaps between the irregular stones take the place of clerestory windows and allow a glowing, filtered light to take hold of the sanctuary.



Figure 9: Interior view of the Mortensrud Church, designed by Jensen & Skodvin Architects in Oslo, Norway (Auret).

Historically, churches were used to assert order over nature, but, in this instance, the rhythmic repetition of the columns along the straight and narrow path give way to the natural rocky outcrops of the site, which have been allowed to poke through the floor (Figure 10). In this church, the columns were made to deviate from their prescribed paths to avoid crushing the existing stones or landforms. Instead of imposing their “rightful places”, they respond humbly and respectfully by giving way to the reality of the given.

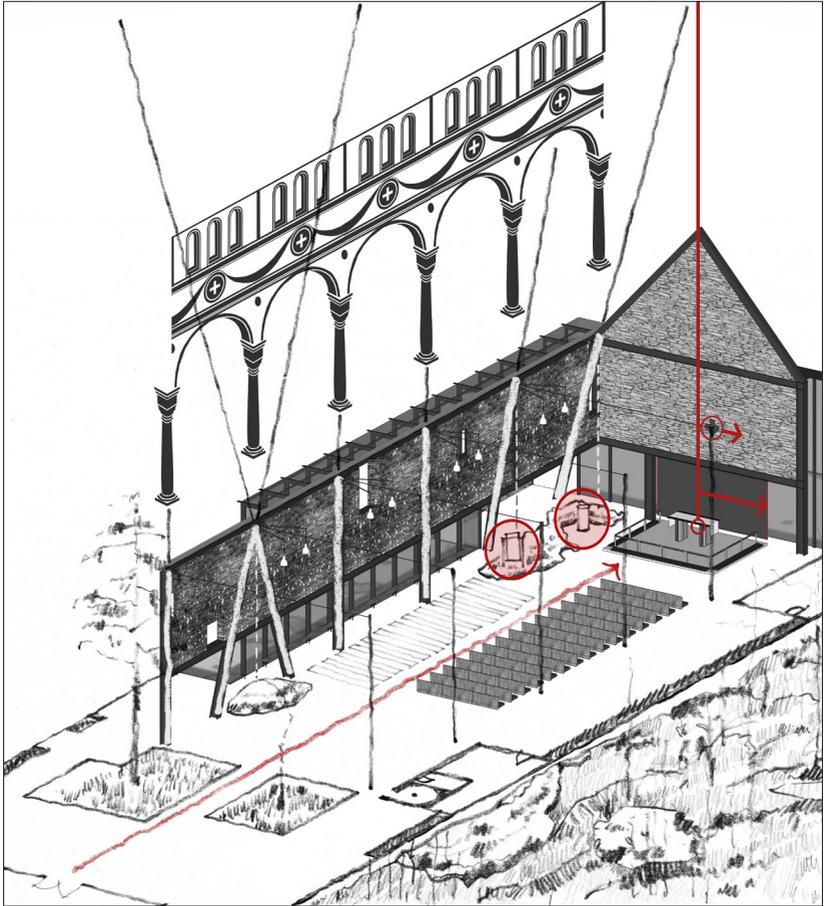


Figure 10: An axonometric drawing of the interior of Mortensrud Church contrasted with a generic classicist colonnade. The pulpit and baptismal font are circled in red. An attempt has also been made to indicate how the apse and the liturgical space have been shifted from the traditional axis (Auret).

Typically, the longitudinal axis extended rhythmically towards a point of symmetry. But even this has been subverted, for the apse and the liturgical space were shifted off-centre. While this seems to undermine the dignity of the space, it actually results in a much richer ensemble when seen in relation to the baptismal font and the actual pulpit, which has fittingly been placed directly on the rock itself. In addition, three iconic stones were

incorporated in the design of the apse (Figure 11): one from Jerusalem, one from the Berlin wall, and one from Robben Island.



Figure 11: The apse or altarpiece of the Mortensrud Church, Oslo, Norway (Auret).

In the apse, in the walls, in the floor and the column spacing, ineptual thinking has called the mortal crowd to silent awaiting preparedness, so that they may hear the stones gather their strength and finally, elatedly, cry out to the heavens (Figures 12 and 13). Gone are the false certainties and hollow mastery of aesthetic assertion. In this case, the concrete place and the building (Figure 14), as a setting-into-work of mortal care, are entwined in dialogue with a substantiating event of the inception of the Christian faith.⁸ Gone is the modern technological urge to master and order that which *is* as a “challenging-forth” (Heidegger 1953:332). Instead, at Mortensrud, mortals have made a work that creatively gathers emplaced care as “the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful” (Heidegger 1953:339).

8 Luke 19:40.



Figure 12: Elevated stacked stone wall acting as a light filter to the interior and the exterior glass wall providing thermal isolation (Auret).



Figure 13: The “dematerialised” interior of the church with a stacked stone wall diffusing the light entering the space (Auret).



Figure 14: The exterior of Mortensrud Church enmeshed in its rocky surroundings (Auret).

4. BEAUTY, JUSTICE AND THE CALL OF CARE

If finding architectural beauty in our age depends on once more becoming aware of the way people exist as mortal beings of emplaced care, then could we formulate a similar argument for justice? After all, as the American essayist Elaine Scarry (2010) pointed out, there is a deep etymological relation between beauty and justice contained in the notion of “fairness”. She even argued that “beauty presses us to a greater concern for justice”.

When considering the notion of justice, Scarry and many other thinkers embark from the highly influential position of the American moral and political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002). Famously, Rawls approached the notion of a just or fair society by proposing a thought experiment. Rawls (1999:10) proposed that, if we are to envision a fair society, we need

to imagine that those who engage in social cooperation choose together, in one joint act, the principles which are to assign basic rights and duties and to determine the division of social benefits.

How would people choose said principles? Rawls (1999:11) proposed that the only way to draw near such a situation would be to assume an “original position of equality” behind a so-called “veil of ignorance”. Essentially, he urged people to imagine the kind of world they would want to be born into if they did not know the financial prospects of their parents, their ethnicity, country of birth, skills, weaknesses, mental capacity, beliefs, government or even their birth order. Rawls (1999:11) described this hypothetical condition in the following way:

Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favor his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain. For given the circumstances of the original position, the symmetry of everyone’s relations to each other, this initial situation is fair between individuals as moral persons, that is, as rational beings with their own ends and capable, I shall assume, of a sense of justice.

Is it not interesting that the Rawlsian notion of justice, which has been so massively influential, is based on a stance that appears to call for the most extreme detachment between subject and object? In light of Rawls’ insistence on a “veil of ignorance”, and given Heidegger’s critique of aesthetics, it seems as if the same malignant division between subject and object is evident in this modern notion of justice. If justice is to be own to *Dasein*, why conceive of it in a situation where mortals are fundamentally not themselves? Moreover, it could be argued that the possibility of such an experiment rests on the capacity of the being of care to ecstatically reach beyond the situation. Rawls’ thought experiment only works when we assume that people are ultimately *not* ignorant or indifferent to their lot in life, but care about the existence of their own being and the being of others.

A similar line of critique has been developed by the Indian economist Amartya Sen (b. 1933). Sen (2009:54) acknowledges the links between justice and fairness (and keeps the conceptual links between beauty and justice in play). However, in contrast to the prospect of an ideal, perfectly distilled formulation of justice conceived behind the “veil of ignorance”, Sen

is concerned with the multiplicity of real-world cares, which renders the Rawlsian ideal of what Sen (2009:8) calls “transcendental institutionalism” elusive. Rawls’ thought experiment is valuable in that it renders the fairness of our societies questionable, but Sen (2009:18) reminds us that “justice cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actually live”. As such, Sen’s critique is actually functioning on an inceptual level.

In particular, Sen (2009:9) questions whether it is feasible that Rawls’ “original position” will lead to an “agreed transcendental solution”. In line with the tenets of Heideggarian care, Sen argues that even this hypothetical situation is bound to contain a plurality of competing concerns that are unbiased, impartial and reasonable in their own ways. As counter to Rawls’ thought experiment, Sen offers a different inceptual meditation. In Sen’s thought experiment, three children are quarrelling about a flute. The first is the only one able to play the flute; the second is poor and has no other toys, and the third actually made the flute. For Sen (2009:12), this illustration shows

the possible sustainability of plural and competing reasons for justice, all of which have claims to impartiality and which nevertheless differ from – and rival – each other.

In this case, a transcendental solution is impossible, since all three have reasonable claims. The story of the flute reveals the intricate way in which subjects and objects are enmeshed in a web of concerns, in order to show that the search for the “perfectly just” may already reach an impasse at its inception.

Instead of aiming at agreement on the “perfectly just”, Sen (2009:21) shifts the focus towards “the prevention of manifest injustice”. In fact, Sen (2009:21) views the intolerability of injustice as the true catalyst for change, since it does “not require the search for a consensus on what a perfectly just society would look like”. Instead of waiting for (or imposing) “a perfect set of institutions”, a thoroughly debilitating stance when faced with all the vested interests in the world, Sen (2009:25) thinks it more compelling to incrementally aim at a situation which is “a bit less unjust”. In light of the arguments presented in this article, the distinction between Rawls and Sen is grounded in the inceptual difference between listening to the existing injustices of the place (that which is) and responding appropriately (albeit incrementally), and asserting the “correctness” of an ideal form of justice (that which ought to be) derived from within the inauthenticity of the subject-object differentiation.

From this perspective, it would be possible to imagine a situation in which we may be so absorbed in creating the situation for an idealised form of justice to flourish that we overlook the injustices needed to bring that “perfect hypothetical situation” into being. Admittedly, this seems somewhat similar to Heidegger’s (1933:113) misguided attempts to “assert” what he saw as the “essence” or “spiritual mission of the German people”, following the 1933 National Socialist Revolution in Germany. The uncomfortable truth is that some of Heidegger’s most piercing insights about inceptual thinking and the aesthetic differentiation between subject and object were written during his years as a member of the Nazi Party. Heeding the call of care does not guarantee just behaviour; yet, notions of justice should not be indifferent to the reality of emplaced care. Whether considering questions of beauty or justice, the burden of care is rooted in the recollection of how *Dasein* is, and to think as a response to that which substantiated the inception of that which is.

5. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ARCHITECTURE

Works of architecture have the capacity to dignify our emplaced care, which is why “the beautiful building is the one that would make me follow the same route again tomorrow”. For the first step towards making beauty is *noticing* beauty, and then *letting* the intensity of its call shape the way we live.

This is the kind of life that may serve as wellspring for making architecture as *response* to emplaced care. Responsible works that are so deeply grateful, appropriate and devoted that, even when they venture beyond that which *is*, they do so in a manner that, instead of asserting a way of life, is capable of bringing forth the emergent-withdrawing nature of truth into the lived concreteness of the beautiful, thereby again setting the stage for a new hermeneutic circling to unfold, birthed from buildings that may call us to “follow the same route again tomorrow ...”.

I spent most of the article discussing the notion of beauty, but if beauty is to lure us to justice, then architects need to nurture an appropriate understanding of how to inceptually strive for architectural beauty. Moreover, if reacquainting ourselves with architectural beauty depends on noticing the situation as a regioning of emplaced concern, then a deep understanding of others and ourselves as beings of emplaced care is vital. Beauty may indeed call us to justice, but it calls us as mortal beings of emplaced care.

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