

The Claim of Architecture: a new Wittgensteinian Reading 2011

C Fahey

Abstract

There is a small body of literature on Wittgenstein's house – the Palais Stonborough or Kundmannngasse – which has attempted to establish a link of some kind with the philosopher's writing and an understanding of architecture. However, this literature has generally misapplied Wittgenstein's philosophy. In order to locate a more convincing account, this dissertation offers an original reading indebted to the contemporary interpretation of Wittgenstein known as the "new Wittgenstein". Emphasising and valuing grammatical investigation of language, its use and its adequacy describing the world, this reading undermines metaphysical or dualist accounts of the world, as well as universals characteristic of essentialist accounts. With regards to architecture discourse, this reading yields a critique of theory-use in the architecture discourse since Modernity, through its valuation of everyday language-use over metaphysical constructions. Reading architecture through this new Wittgensteinian lens circumvents the restrictive post-Enlightenment dualists' paradigm that underlies metaphysical construction, and instead provides a holistic view of architecture.

Moving away from metaphysical or essentialist claims on architecture, the normative ontology is opposed to this reading. The normative ontology requires that architecture physically exist in building form, where essentialist or metaphysical appeals outside of ordinary language-use are useful in order to account for the status of building as architecture. The new Wittgenstein views the everyday ordinary discourse describing a building or building practice as determining its status as architecture, seeing no need for external appeals to theory, theses and doctrines. It views the status as known within the relevant discourse, and so these appeals are in effect redundant. Taking the status of architecture as both independent of the physical reality of the building but dependent upon interpretative descriptions of these realities demands a unique ontology. The ontology described is unique to the discourse since Modernity, but is rather ordinary in that it relocates the ordinary position of architecture within everyday discourse.

This reading of architecture thus provides a link between Wittgenstein's philosophical teachings and his engagement with architecture. Rather than looking to other philosophical accounts or toward constructing a theory, thesis or doctrine accounting for this connection, this dissertation faithfully reads architecture through a new Wittgensteinian lens. Therefore, this account serves as a novel contribution to the literature dealing with Wittgenstein's relationship to architecture. The account contributes to the philosophical discourse relating to Wittgenstein, the architecture discourse relating to the Palais Stenborough, the relationship between theory and practice in architecture, as well as the ontology of architecture.