

# **Philosophy of history expressed through architecture**

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August 2018

# Philosophy of history expressed through architecture

*It so happens that human life on all its aspects, wide and narrow, is so intimately connected with architecture, that with a certain amount of observation we can usually reconstruct a bygone society from the remains of its public monuments. From the relics of household stuff, we can imagine its owners in their habitat as they lived.*

Honore' de Balzac, *The Quest of the Absolute*

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# Introduction | Abstract

The prevailing attitude sees historical knowledge as being part of the realm of texts, discourses, ideologies, and metaphors- all part of language. While indeed history is mostly communicated through generations via written or oral means, in this paper I would like to explore how the philosophical expression of history (its *historicity*) also exists in its non-linguistic manifestation, most saliently, through our built environment.

Starting with Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of *manifestations of life* I will explore the notion of expressivity and lived experience and agree with Dilthey's contention that any text will always need an interpretation of that lived experience, thus will be always marred by the lived experience of those interpreting it at their present moment. However, I will deviate from Dilthey to explore how non-linguistic manifestations of life, such as the built environment, are a more objective expression of the philosophy of history because it can itself be re-experienced in the present time, without the need of interpretation. My claim is that the built structures that surround us and form our urban reality are the products of specific philosophically driven historical processes and as such are a material expression of our historicity. Historical knowledge gained through artistic manifestations of life have the capacity to express our *historicity* in a deeper, more complex and multifaceted way than historical texts because they involve *experience*, and as such they require a full-body commitment that encompasses all our senses, not only intellectual interpretations of language.

In the first part of the paper I will introduce Dilthey's framework and some of the terms that will be relevant to the unfolding of the claim that our historicity is intertwined with the material manifestations of it, as exemplified by built architecture. In the second part I will build arguments and provide some examples to support the claim, and in last part I will consider some objections and aim to address them.

# I. Historical Expressivity

## 1.1 Historical knowledge

Wilhelm Dilthey was particularly interested in the role that history played in our understanding of the present. Beyond the mere recounting or even the interpretation of events, for this neo-Kantian author of the 18th century, history has the capacity to liberate us- to set us free- because it “*lifts us from the burden of present*”<sup>1</sup>. History gives us a larger and different perspective on our life so that we can realize that not everything is the way it appears to be for us in the present. For Dilthey, humanity cannot understand itself through reflection or introspection, but through history. He wants to emphasize that man’s understanding is dependent on past worldviews, interpretations, and a shared world, so that there is a temporality to historical knowledge.<sup>2</sup> For him, human beings are historical beings, intertwined with the history of past lives and cultures. However, if this is the case, then those who write history are already writing it from a given philosophical point of view, imbued with the biases and philosophy of that particular historical moment:

*history can tell him...never in objective concepts but always only in the living experience which springs up out of the depths of his own being.*<sup>3</sup>

Dilthey’s ambitious project involves delving into the question of *how is historical knowledge even possible?* To tackle a possible answer, he makes a distinction between two forms of knowledge: knowledge of natural science and knowledge of humanities. For him, historical knowledge cannot be reduced to empirical knowledge of the past, rather, what makes historical knowledge possible is knowledge of humanities which are linked to certain categories that *express* humanity. In this paper, I am interested in broadening the notion of how this humanity can be expressed, by first exploring Dilthey’s categories of historical expressivity, and then proposing another realm that he leaves largely unexplored: that of the built environment -the architecture that has housed humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. p271

<sup>2</sup> “There is an intrinsic temporality to all understanding” Dilthey being quoted by Richard Palmer in *Hermeneutics*. p117

<sup>3</sup> Richard Palmer in *Hermeneutics*, p. 116

## 1.2 Manifestations of Life

Wilhelm Dilthey is interested in exploring how the understanding of other persons and their *manifestations of life* can contribute to historical knowledge. Manifestations of life are not deliberate attempts to make something express something explicitly but rather that despite their not being a purposeful intent to communicate or project a specific meaning, it nonetheless makes it understandable. In Dilthey's words, these are manifestations that "without any intent to express spirit nevertheless make it understandable."<sup>4</sup>

Dilthey considers manifestations of life to emerge in a series of "classes": the first of these classes is *concepts* and thought-formations. He holds that such thought formations, being tied to science can be detached from their particular context and exist independently of the time or the people involved in forming it. He believes that this class of manifestations of life are held by the principle of identity, whereby the judgment is the same for the person who formulates it as for the person who understands it. The second class is *actions*; that emerge not from a wish to communicate anything in particular, but there is a relationship between an action, what it expresses of the human spirit and the assumptions these actions allow us to make. In this case, there is the interpretation of these actions which will always be imbued with the preconceptions and baggage of the era in which they are being interpreted. Thus, the state of mind of the people involved in such actions must be known and considered when interpreting the significance of the action itself. Given that we may have deliberated before acting, the action itself cannot tell us that much about the inner life that gave rise to the action, so the deed expresses only part of the being. It is the third class, *expressions* of lived experience that gives us more insight into the "psychic life" because it emerges from "depths not illuminated by consciousness." However, these expressions can also be

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<sup>4</sup> For Dilthey, *spirit* or mind is not an abstract intellectual principle or disembodied behavioral experience but refers to the individual's life in its concrete cultural-historical context. *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. p.226

deceptive because they require interpretation which is determined at that moment and is therefore conditioned by that moment. Interestingly, Dilthey gives us a hint as to when this deception of interpretation can be avoided:

*But when in a great work a spiritual content is liberated from its creator, whether it be a poet, artist, or writer, we enter a realm where deception ends.*<sup>5</sup>

For Dilthey a great work of art is also a “truthful” work of art, that does not want to say anything about its author; it exists independently of the knowing or the doing of the artist. Reliable understanding of such work:

*arises in the confines between knowing and doing a sphere in which life discloses itself at a depth inaccessible to observation, reflection, and theory.*<sup>6</sup>

Dilthey’s concept of manifestations of life, while intended to be applied to language<sup>7</sup> is quite relevant to architecture, because without wanting to express or communicate something explicitly, it nonetheless does so, and can tell us quite a bit about the beliefs and attitudes of the era in which it was built.

Architecture<sup>8</sup> could also be interpreted as a piece of writing, by trying to explore its meaning, understanding the era in which it was built and parsing the motivations of the authors. However, it can also be simply *experienced* (re-experienced) independently of its meaning and intended messages; it choreographs human movement and in so doing restricts or enables certain things to happen within. In other words, it exists independently of the author while still expressing quite a bit of its original intentionality, through the *experience* of it. Architecture need not be read linguistically, despite the wish of many to do so, it’s spatial and material expression is in itself an *objective* manifestation of life.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. p228

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> He also references music throughout his texts, and often applied this to music as well.

<sup>8</sup> Here, and in the rest of the paper, I will be using the word “architecture” in its narrow sense, referring to built architecture

<sup>9</sup> In part two I will further explore the interpretation of architecture as a language

### 1.3 Experience and time: music & architecture

Dilthey mostly emphasizes language as the art where “*the life of mind and spirit finds its complete and exhaustive expression*”<sup>10</sup> while also being intimately tied to personal contact and interpretation, or what he calls *exegesis*. Written records of human existence, which are the basis for philology (as the art of writing) and hermeneutics (as its science) are interpreted with hopes of making objective comprehension possible while necessarily connected with criticism and interpretation. While Dilthey does privilege language as the expression of human experience, he also gives us a glimpse into the significance of other non-linguistic expression.

*Every square planted with trees, every room in which chairs are arranged, is understandable to us from childhood because human tendencies to set goals, produce order, and define values in common have assigned a place to every square and every object in the room.*<sup>11</sup>

From the suggestive quote, we get a glimpse into Dilthey’s thoughts on the significance of built space. It appears he is alluding to the fact that we can gain knowledge of the built environment without being specifically instructed on how to understand it, because it is part of our historicity. It is *understandable to us from childhood* because every arrangement of furniture in a space or of a plant in a garden is already imbued with the history of it being done before guided by our *tendencies to set goals*. Dilthey does give a special place to the arts (in particular to music), claiming that it too can be the expression of lived experience. Additionally, *expression* in the context of music is given a special meaning:

*“(it) designates an imaginative process in which lived experience illuminates the historically evolved world of tones in which all the ways of being expressive have been connected in the historical continuity of the tradition.”*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. p237

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p229

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p242

For Dilthey historical knowledge is built out of our lived experience and we extract a sense of meaning from the temporal flow. Much like in a musical melody which is experienced in time as an unfolding of the musical notes, history and lived experience is also an unfolding of events in time. In this sense, history is always in the process of becoming, where new events actually have the capacity to shed light on past events. Many have made an analogy between history and a story, a narrative<sup>13</sup>, where we can only understand the meaning of the story when we arrive to the end of it. Thus, historical accounts have a provisional character because we can never get to the end of them: history keeps going even after the events have taken place. In other words, the meaning of a historical event can never be fully comprehended until we reach the end of that event. Dilthey also makes an analogy between the parts-to-whole relationship between the musical notes and a melody; it is not until the notes come together that the music becomes intelligible. For Dilthey music has the capacity to give expression of human experience.

I want to argue that similarly, architecture is the material manifestation human experience. Much like music, it is experienced in time, even though its temporality is different; we can no longer hold onto the linearity of the unfolding of the original time of a historical event. When we experience the built environment, which may be an expression of a particular historical moment, there is a new temporality which responds to a present condition but is somehow tainted with the past, in a way that it obliges us to look forward to the future. History, music and architecture all require us to hold on to what has passed but also to project something into the future. There is an imaginative dimension to the expression of history, and I argue that architecture can be seen as a material *expression* of our humanity.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, American philosopher Arthur C. Danto in “



## II. Architectural Historicity

*The historical world is always there, and the individual does not merely contemplate it from without but is intertwined with it.*<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Descartes, Dilthey believes that historical knowledge doesn't come from reflecting into oneself but rather understanding our cultural condition as intertwined with history. It is this conviction that I find so interesting in relation to cultural expressions of life beyond language. If we are so intertwined with history, indeed all our cultural actions and *manifestations of life* are imbued with historicity, but how are these manifestations interpreted in different historical time periods? And how do these interpretations imply a certain level of subjectivity, as Dilthey claims occurs with the interpretation of historical texts?

In this part I will focus on the case of architecture to try to shed some light onto the difference between expression of history and representation of history, and the role that language plays in this distinction.

### 2.1 The language of architecture

The fascination with language that has dominated the last thirty years of the twentieth century is epitomized by an architecture that has aimed to rescue symbols and signs from architectural history. But referring to history is very different from expressing history, and this is an important distinction I will aim to make. The turn to symbols that *represent* historical architectural motifs has significantly shaped architectural theory and practice of the second half of the twentieth century and is very eloquently embodied in the work of Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi. In their influential publications<sup>15</sup> and through their research of the city the authors championed the

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<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. p297

<sup>15</sup> *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, by Robert Venturi, and *Learning from Las Vegas* by Denise Scott Brown, Robert Venturi and Steven Izenour. This book was actually the result of a research project undertaken by the co-authors and their students from Yale in 1968, where they aimed to put forth an unbiased analysis of this unique American city. Through their

idea of architecture as having a communicative *linguistic* dimension of its own, contrasting architecture which *represents* with that which *expresses*.<sup>16</sup> The authors famously categorize architecture under two main headings: “the duck” on one hand and the “decorated shed” on the other. The first case is inspired by a duck-shaped building that aims to communicate something by using what they initially call “symbolic form”, and then proceed to call *expressionistic* architecture.<sup>17</sup> The second claims to be a banal box-like construction, a shed, where decoration can be applied to it, independently from the box itself: “the decorated shed”. To elucidate their point they compare the *image* of two buildings, one by Paul Rudolph, and the other by the authors themselves, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi.<sup>18</sup> They criticize Rudolph’s work as being “a duck” because of its lack of ornamentation and use of expression to convey the complexities of its building technique. They use it as exemplary of all that they believe to be wrong of the modern architecture of the time, which they see as “impoverished” because of its rejection of the long history of iconography in architecture. They describe their use of architectural elements as being superior because reliant on what has come before them, recognizing the history from which it emerges. They do not aim to do anything new with architectural elements; they just have them represent themselves and refer to their historical lineage in order to communicate their historicity. This distinction being made however begs the question, if a building is communicating, what is it saying?

This is precisely the question that philosopher Karsten Harries is interested in asking:

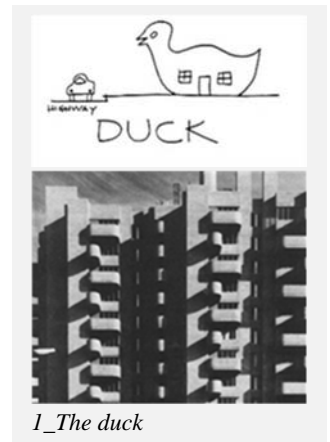
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research of Las Vegas they detected the proliferation of icons and symbols seen as exemplary of the communicative dimension of architecture.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, they preface their discussion by claiming that: “When architects talk or write, they philosophize almost solely to justify their own work” and this is precisely what they openly admit their writing aims to do: to justify their built work.

<sup>17</sup> Scott Brown, Venturi and Izenour *Learning from Las Vegas*, p.87

<sup>18</sup> The Crawford Manor by Paul Rudolph and the Guild House by Denise Scott Brown and Venturi, are both high rise apartments for the elderly built in the mid-sixties. The authors claim they are comparing the “image” of the buildings, not the buildings themselves.



1\_The duck



2 The decorated shed

“What do buildings like the Parthenon or Le Corbusier’s *La Tourette* communicate – what do they say?”<sup>19</sup> Harries is particularly interested in the communicative capacity of architecture and its relation to history, and claims that if something doesn’t communicate anything then it doesn’t have any *meaning*, which would reduce us to nihilism. The alternative he sees to nihilism is “to listen to the language of things”.<sup>20</sup> For him, there is meaning in architecture through its capacity to communicate something intentionally via *representation*. So, what do “expressive” buildings communicate if their explicit aim is not a semantic one? Recalling Dilthey, he claimed that things might be communicated without the explicit wish to transmit something- it is simply *expressed* and *experienced*. Even more importantly Dilthey emphasized how “true art” expresses itself without a specific intent to do so. Thus, we seem to be confronted with two ways buildings communicate, intentionally through representation that requires interpretation, and unintentionally through expression, that requires experiencing the present.

## 2.2 Representational and expressive dimensions

There are many buildings that don’t necessarily communicate the way that Harries hopes, as the example of the “duck” and “decorated shed” has illustrated. Some buildings are designed with the very intent to question ingrained assumptions about the past, and aim instead to be expressions of their present, becoming more vivid expressions of the time in which they were built. To illustrate this difference, it is productive to pick out two building that are similar in type (a single-family home) but very different in terms of what they aim to communicate and their relationship to history: Le Corbusier’s *Villa Savoye*, and Scott Brown and Venturi’s house they designed for his mother.

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<sup>19</sup> Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture. The Language-Problem*. p.86

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.133

Vanna Venturi's house is the embodiment of a semantic and representational approach to architecture advocated by the authors. It is emblematic of an architecture which needs to be "read"; it is like a semantic game for architects and critics who can read into the details in order to realize the architects' gestural messages through continual references and playful associations with historic architecture and conventional architectural elements:



3\_Vanna Venturi House, 1962

*the outside form – as represented by the parapeted wall and the gable roof which enclose the complexities and distortions – is simple and consistent: it represents this houses's public scale. The front, in its conventional combinations of door, chimney and gable, creates an almost symbolic image of a house<sup>21</sup>*

This kind of architecture aimed to break away from modernism that was perceived to be devoid of historical and referential content. Thus, it used representation to play semantic games with architectural language; reviving elements of past architectural traditions and enhancing the use of convention through representation. In order to appreciate this kind of architectural construct one had to be *educated* and instructed specifically on how to read such work. One had to understand the subtext of the "complexity and contradiction" present in a house that was, in the words of the architects: complex and simple, big and little, open and closed. Architectural space was at the service of an interpretative game that relied mostly on historical references and representation. But one could ask: what is this kind of approach towards history actually telling us about *its* own historical moment?

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, p.118

Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye can be placed in sharp contrast to the house for Venturi's mother, and in many ways it is the type of work that Scott-Brown/ Venturi were rebelling against. Although both are homes, and built only thirty years apart, they communicate radically different things. Le Corbusier's project does not "look like" –or represent- a house in a traditional



sense; it does not present itself with recognizable historical references, precisely because its design aimed to surpass historical connotations and convention. Le Corbusier was very much invested in the project of going beyond history. This brings us back to Dilthey and the question of history. Unlike Hegel, for Dilthey the drive of history is not relegated to the world of ideas, it is a more complex drive which is deeply intertwined with cultural manifestations of life. In his description of "the driving force in history", Dilthey seems to recognize the cultural need to surpass history:

*the driving force in history is always something unsatisfactory in a cultural situation. Thus the urge to go beyond it arises.*<sup>22</sup>

Le Corbusier was indeed in a very particular cultural situation and had the need to surpass the implied historicity of the architecture that was being built at the time. He wished to be recognized in his own right and to liberate himself from the ways of the past in order to produce something completely new. He was nonetheless responding to history, just not through mimicry. It is therefore much harder to "read" or interpret Villa Savoye as a home and yet it communicates very vividly the philosophy of its time<sup>23</sup>. It cannot be comprehended at a glance and understood, it needs to be *experienced*, to be explored in its multiple scales: as an object on the landscape, framing the landscape, as a "machine for living"<sup>24</sup> by the intimate exploration of its spaces through the experience of navigating its interior. It is hard to comprehend at a single glance. One could argue

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<sup>22</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. P.290

<sup>23</sup> For instance, the emergence of the car with the raised volume to allow for parking, fascination with industry with pure forms of machinic parts.

<sup>24</sup> Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*. In Le Corbusier's much sloganed words: "A house is a machine for living" (Une maison est une machine-à-habiter)

that in this intelligibility also lies its sense of historicity, and the capacity that non-representational architecture has to innovate and question the history of built architecture, while simultaneously being expressions of their own historical time. Villa Savoye no longer *represents* a house, rather it *expresses* a mode of living. It is tied to the time in which it was built and, as such, is a vivid expression of its own historical time.

### **2.3 Social historicity**

The notion of *representation* used in architectural terminology and as made explicit by Scott Brown and Venturi's writing, is much like Dilthey's notion of *interpretation*. It refers to the use of architectural elements that refer to something external to themselves and that need to be interpreted by an educated viewer who can decipher what certain motifs are supposed to communicate. It relies on conventional models of what a certain typology is supposed to look like and as a result on what it is supposed to communicate: a pitched roof communicates "home" or "homeliness", for example. While these formal and material choices might be used to receive an expected legibility or satisfy the demands of a client, they limit the potential that architecture has to question the status quo and uncover novel ways of responding to changing ways of living and of being an expression of its time, in a sense, being worthy of its own historicity. Indeed, how can we know anything about the time in which the architecture was built, if it refers back to historical architecture that has long passed? It seems that relying on historical motifs is antithetical to a built environment that is expressive of its own time. Architecture that expresses its own historicity does not rely on bygone historical conventions; it focuses on what it can *do* and what it can express about its own time while still informed by the cultural context in which it emerges. This kind of architecture gives us insight into the social and cultural dimensions of human experience and as such, an objective understanding of its philosophy of history. As Deleuzians would say: it is worthy

of its time.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, and to continue the Deleuzian reference, Dilthey's way of looking at history has an imaginative dimension: history is always in the process of making itself, always in the process of *becoming*. Unless we arrive at the end of history<sup>26</sup> we cannot ever have the full grasp of the meaning of things. This is where I think other modes of historical expression can provide insight into the philosophy of the time.

Architecture in its built form is able to provide a glimpse into a historical era without the need to arrive to 'the end of history'. The built environment is an end of sorts, even though it goes on living, it does provide us with a frozen temporality of the original historical moment. It is like music frozen in time<sup>27</sup>. Examples of this are the many churches and public projects whose construction spanned so many years that the end result is a material expression of multiple historical periods and construction techniques. The Duomo of Florence is a vivid example of this, with construction spanning almost two hundred years, beginning in the Gothic style and culminated with the Renaissance dome designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, expressive of all the structural innovations and aesthetic breakthroughs of the time.<sup>28</sup> A more recent and still evolving example is the building of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona by Antoni Gaudi. This building's construction started in 1882 and it is still under construction today.<sup>29</sup> While the formal expression and Gaudi's overall design is maintained, the techniques of construction are so different today that they are inevitably having a repercussion on the cathedral itself, which has provoked contentious arguments between historical purists and those claiming that architecture has to be an expression of its time.

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<sup>25</sup> "Philosophy's sole aim is to become worthy of the event" Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* p.160

<sup>26</sup> we would have to get into Fukuyama for that; "*The End of History*"

<sup>27</sup> Here I am making a reference to Goethe's much quoted "*Music is liquid architecture; Architecture is frozen music.*"

<sup>28</sup> The construction of Santa Maria del Fiore began in 1296 in the Gothic style with the design of Arnolfo di Cambio, (who already was trying to surpass the Gothic style by avoiding flying buttresses) and was completed with Brunelleschi's innovative double-shelled dome in 1436

<sup>29</sup> For a full understanding of the lineage please see: <http://www.sagradafamilia.org/en/history-of-the-temple/>

# III. Non-linguistic expressivity

## 3.1 Historicity in the posthuman era

In this paper I have mostly used concepts on the philosophy of history developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, because not being as familiar with his work prior to the class, I was very inspired by the richness and suggestiveness of his writing. I was particularly interested in the notion that we are so intertwined with history that history cannot really be understood as a static thing or something that is just ‘of the past’ but as an evolving entity tied to our experience of the relationship between the past and the future. History is for Dilthey dependent on past worldviews and past interpretations, but it also has a projection into the future. Furthermore, he gives art a very important role in this projection into the future, which was actually what sparked the topic of this paper.

Nonetheless, despite all its insight and richness Dilthey’s work might also be seen as somewhat problematic for a twenty-first century reader like myself deeply involved in questioning dualistic approach to existence. Dilthey’s ontology rests on the separation between the human sciences and the natural sciences emphasizing a dualistic way of understanding the role of human in the world; exacerbating the dualistic vision of nature and culture which sets “us” against “them” of the non-human natural world. The strict demarcation between the human and natural sciences which sees nature and culture in opposition to one another can also be seen as the root of many of our environmental problems. Dilthey does see this duality as a problem, and says so explicitly, but doesn’t think that the philosophical attempts at resolving it have been fruitful:

*These philosophical systems are of no use. What we need is to grasp the inner relation of these two worlds in ourselves, how we adopt changing views on the world. Sometimes we feel ourselves to be part of nature - mysterious, instinctive,*



*earthbound; some-times ...*<sup>30</sup>

Dilthey doesn't quite finish this thought, leaving a large gap that contemporary readers must aim to fill. When Dilthey differentiates between the human and the natural he uses history as the exemplary human science and curiously, he sees the natural world in a completely different light with the natural sciences as operating at a completely different level, devoid of historicity. We have the benefit of hindsight and can now wonder why Darwin's theory of natural selection didn't affect Dilthey's thinking.<sup>31</sup>

Darwin's theory of natural selection can actually be seen as the equivalent of Dilthey notion of historicity, just from the perspective of a natural sciences. Natural selection and evolution are imbued with the idea that nature is intertwined with its past; much like Dilthey claims humans are intertwined with their history. We know that nature and humans are not occupying entirely different worlds, which points to an obvious conclusion that Dilthey and Darwin are claiming very similar things, just doing so from two different vantage points.<sup>32</sup>

While the division between the human and the natural was a much-debated topic during Dilthey's time, it is still very much contested today. It has become an even more salient concern with the expanded notion and questioning of what it means to be human, given our present condition as tightly intertwined with our technology and mediated environments. It is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the organic from the non-organic algorithms that rule our daily lives. It seems inconceivable to a contemporary reader to uphold a humanistic notion of man as the universal measure of existence, distinct from the natural world, or even distinct from the non-biological world we helped create. I would like to take Dilthey's contention of us being intertwined with history and expand it with a more Darwinian notion that holds us as intertwined with the

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<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*. P.296

<sup>31</sup> Darwin (1809-1882) and Dilthey (1833-1911) were contemporaries, but I could not find any evidence of Dilthey explicitly knowing Darwin's work.

<sup>32</sup> As someone deeply influenced by Spinoza, I would claim that indeed they are saying the same thing, because nature and culture are aspects of the same thing just seen from different perspectives. Much like the mind-body, nature-culture are in Spinoza's words "the same substance".

environment that sustains us. Much like Darwin's natural selection of the species, our bodies and capacities have evolved with the needs and challenges of the world we inhabit.

This deviates from Dilthey's perspective, but his work raises certain questions about what it is to be human which I find fascinating. Indeed, there is an accruing literature on the "posthuman" condition, that sees us not as separate entities but as embedded in our environment in continuum with nature, and also with our technology.<sup>33</sup> I will not take this much further, as it would exceed the purpose of this paper, but suffice it to say that despite the approach to dualism, I would like to hold onto what I see as incredibly suggestive concepts in relation to history without holding onto the dualistic frameworks within which Dilthey is situated.

### **3.2 Why Dilthey? Concluding remarks**

In the first part of the paper (I) we saw how for Dilthey humans are historical beings, intimately intertwined with history. Our essence is in fact it embedded in the relation that we experience between past and future; in our historicity. In the second part (II) I aimed to posit that architecture occupies specific moments in history as a material expression of the philosophical vantage point of the time, but, as Dilthey suggests, it also allows us to project new possibilities into the future by aiming to surpass its history.

As a counter claim to the argument put forth in this paper, one may admit that indeed architecture can be experienced in the present, to possibly recall and bring forth the intentionality of the time in which it was first built, but the experience itself cannot ever be bound by the principal of identity. In other words, one could ask, how is the present experiencing of something that was built in the past, ever to give us a true understanding of that past? The same premises applied to the notion of interpretation of historical texts being subjective to the beliefs of the present, can hold true for the experiencing something in the present that was built with an intentionality of past

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<sup>33</sup> See Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman*

historicitities. Would imply that experience too is imbued with preconceptions of the present?

While it is true that the experienced will never be identical, indeed often they are intentionally different given that architectural spaces are programmed and re-programmed continuously into different uses, and as such offering different kinds of experiences. But the difference is that there is a fuller sensorial involvement in the experience of architecture than in the experience of texts because it is also bodily; it requires being embodied and embedded. We do not really need to use all our senses to read, write and interpret texts; we do not need to have a sense of balance or touch or smell. However, the experience of our material world requires a complex mode of interpretation which is multi-sensorial as well as intellectual.

Another question that might arise from the reading of this paper is: why Dilthey? Surely there are much better structured theories and works that deal with the Philosophy of History? Why not mention Hegel at all, for instance? These would be valid questions, and here is my humble attempt at answering them. I am less convinced with his distinction between the human and the natural sciences, but Dilthey is particularly interesting for anyone who might be interested in the capacity that other disciplines have to shape philosophical discourse. With his insight into music, and the imaginative dimension of history, his writing has completely changed my perspective on the value of history for the arts, and made me see history, and in particular the philosophy of history in a very new and exciting light. While he is not particularly organized in the structure and buildup of his arguments, I do find that his work is very rich with new ideas and insightful, and maybe the lack of complete closure of the arguments allows for other, like myself, to get excited about finding new avenues for his thoughts and developing them further- possibly even in a direction than Dilthey might not have cared for. He would, however, have supported the thought that the value of historical work, is not just to help us understand the present but also project new possibilities into the future.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

1 & 2\_ The Duck and the decorated shed. Scott-Brown, Denise. Venturi, Robert. Izenour, Steven.

*Learning from Las Vegas*. p88-89 & 94-95: p.8

3\_ Robert Venturi. House for Vanna Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*,

p.119: p.9

4\_ Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye, and image by Xavier Delory, found on designboom.com: p.10