

# Towards a Heideggerian Way of Building: An Examination of Two Works by E. Fay Jones

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## INTRODUCTION

Conventional models of technology in architecture regard it as a secondary or background issue: structures, environmental control systems, and technical detailing are often narrowly interpreted to accommodate a building's functional requirements. However, technology has the potential to be of vital importance in the thought and expression of any work. This paper investigates a view of technology that aims to increase the awareness of technology's abilities and roles in architecture. This more inclusive heuristic recognizes technology as capable of being an active part of the philosophical dimensions within a building and therefore able to provide meaning beyond function.

This investigation first examines the architecture of Jones followed by an examination of certain Heideggerian concepts. From this foundation Jones' architecture may be used to both interpret and be interpreted by concepts of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. This simultaneous interpretation of technology and philosophy interrelates the two to reveal a greater understanding of each. The result provides a model of an inclusive heuristic for technology.

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF E. FAY JONES: AN ANALYSIS OF TWO CHAPELS

E. Fay Jones has achieved world-wide recognition for the work of his firm, E. Fay Jones and Maurice Jennings Architects, based in Fayetteville, Arkansas. He typically speaks of three principles which form the basis of his work: the relation of building to site, that is, connecting the building to its setting; the relation of part to whole, or connecting the details of the built form with the overall composition; and the nature of materials, expressing the properties or characteristics of the material within the building. These three principles are based on the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture, yet their universal character has allowed Jones to explore and exemplify them in a manner particular to his context and interpretation. Jones extends these principles by the use of historical precedents. These ideas are present in both Thorncrown Chapel near Eureka

Springs, Arkansas and the Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel in Bella Vista, Arkansas.

The relation of building to site is exemplified in the striking structures, the low parallel rock walls, and the relationship of the exterior to the interior in both chapels. Thorncrown's slender wood members reach upward and across, constituting a truss that is repeated with precision and creating a rich weaving of structure and space. The trusses may be interpreted as mimicking the oak trees that surround them, becoming an orchestrated abstraction of the woods



Fig. 1. Cooper's steel trusses take on the appearance of the surrounding tall pines.

with their branch-like quality. Cooper's structure is similarly related to its surroundings with its steel trusses reaching upward in a curving form.

These members soar upward and away from the forest floor like the adjacent pines, while Thorncrowne's structure remains low overhead. Each chapel's structure interprets the building to site principle in a manner particular to its setting. The two low rock walls that run the length of each building are also part of this connection between the building and site. These walls house the environmental control system as well as provide a structural base for the trusses. Native stone is used to construct the walls, complete with lichen still attached and small openings in the mortar to allow the flow of conditioned air. These rock formations may be seen to mimic the rock ledges on the hillside, related to the site by becoming a human-made abstraction of these natural outcroppings. Finally, the connection between the inside and the outside of the chapels is made by an almost invisible glass division between interior and exterior. The relationship between building and site is strong through this visual connection. It is as if the woods become the boundary of each structure, merging the inside and outside as one united place.

Jones' principle of part to whole is also found in both Thorncrowne and Cooper. This principle occurs in the details as they echo the larger work, while reciprocally hints of the larger work are found in the details. For example, a single truss may be seen as a representative of the totality as it recurs the length of the building, allowing this piece to inform one about the entire work. The trusses would not achieve the power they do without this repetition. Angles in Thorncrowne and curves in Cooper are echoed in various scales, continuing to interconnect the buildings. Even details such as the door handles and light fixtures are related to their respective trusses. It is a single vocabulary working at many scales, connecting each building within itself.

The principle of the nature of materials expresses the characteristics of the construction components. The nature of materials principle guides the wood in Thorncrowne, the steel in Cooper, and the rock walls and glass expanses in both. Thorncrowne's trusses reveal how wood operates as a structural component. As a material that works well in both tension and compression, wood becomes an obvious candidate to be used in columns and trusses. The resulting structure brings forth the abilities of wood and illustrates the support of the building through the wood members. Cooper's trusses exemplify steel's ability to operate in both tension and compression as well, yet employs spans between trusses that are one and a half times larger than the spans found in Thorncrowne. This speaks of steel's strength. Another aspect is steel's ability to curve, and the expression of this property is the most noted difference between the two chapels. The rock walls of both chapels express their nature in two ways: rock works best in compression to become an obvious base material for the structure, while also serving to absorb heat from the winter sun and feel cool to one's touch in the summer. This ability to absorb and release heat is reflected



Fig. 2. Thorncrowne's transparent enclosure connects inside to outside.

in their purpose of housing the environmental control system. Glass is the only other major material used in the chapels. Its nature may be seen as an invisible barrier. In an effort to achieve a connection between the interior and exterior, the glass expresses a transparency by not introducing mullions or obvious frames. The chapels take on the appearance of open air pavilions, not interrupting the space of the chapel and woods.

In addition to being guided by these three principles, both Thorncrowne and Cooper owe much to historical precedent. Both are reminiscent of Gothic cathedrals, identifying this heritage through characteristics such as verticality, structure and light, and use of the sparest means possible. However, both are also new interpretations of this. The chapels employ structures that operate in both tension and compression, unlike Gothic's stone that was only capable of compression. The precedent has been reinterpreted through the nature of materials. In addition, Thorncrowne's respect of the nature of wood keeps the elements straight instead of taking on the shape of a Gothic arch. This same individual translation occurs in the facades of the two buildings. Thorncrowne reveals its straight wood trusses within its entry elevation to become an abstraction of its precedents; Cooper offers an endpiece that accommodates a large entry arch, a circular opening reminiscent of a rose window, and steel trusses that curve to bring a more literal translation of the Gothic past.

## PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: TOWARDS A HEIDEGGERIAN VIEW

Martin Heidegger's publication of *Being and Time* in 1927 has been a significant influence on twentieth century thinking because of its combination of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Greek thought. For the purposes of this investigation, I will examine a few of the concepts that shed light on Heidegger's view of a person, her world, and its technology. Specifically, the concepts of Being-in-the-World, *techne* as the Greek root of both technology and art, and art's setting up of a world and setting forth of the earth will be explored.

Heidegger forwards a typical, everyday individual as a Being-in-the-World. Being-in-the-World is a "unitary phenomenon," that is, a person that is never separate from his world (nor can this world be separate from this individual) rather than a subject distanced from surrounding objects.<sup>1</sup> A person is defined and identified by his history and context as "world" includes all places, meanings, and relationships involved in a person's existence. Being-in-the-World is the totality of one's thoughts and actions that always operate within a context, simultaneously physical, conceptual, and temporal. Heidegger's Being-in-the-World becomes an important concept for architects as it connects an individual to the built environment. Constructed spaces are seen as a context that one is always already involved in, providing the place for thoughts and actions. Part of Being-in-the-World's built environment is technology, interwoven into the complex network of relations through the history of structures, environmental control systems, and technical detailing.

In his essays "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger relates technology and art as both find their roots in the Greek word *techne*. *Techne* indicates a revealing, that is, an opening up or bringing forth of something. It is an event described as "a mode of knowing" related to the Greek word *aletheia*, or revealing. *Aletheia* is the Greek root of truth, which was changed by Plato into correct viewing, or conformity. Heidegger sees Plato's translation as a misunderstanding, and revives truth as revealing instead of correctness.<sup>2</sup> Through the Greek roots *techne* and *aletheia*, art and technology are connected with truth as an act of revealing.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger describes art as "the creative preserving of truth in the work. Art is then the becoming and happening of truth."<sup>3</sup> Truth, as revealing, is preserved in the work of art through its ability to disclose something about the world, becoming a way of knowing something about ourselves. Art preserves revealing within itself, taking place in what Heidegger refers to as the conflict between a setting up of a world and a setting forth of the earth.

The setting up of a world is the recognition of traditions and meanings. It brings forth an understanding of relations rather than just an identification. A work of art is a setting up as it may be understood to inform or prompt the remembrance of something that is meaningful. A world is what the

art work sets up. The world is a network that surrounds an individual in her environment, helping anchor oneself with methods, routines, and rituals. The world of interrelations and thoughts of a person, set up through the relationships one has experienced in the past both communally and individually, are brought forth in the art.

The setting forth of the earth is a containment and sheltering within the physical work. It is the retaining of something even when it is revealed, that is, the work does not change because it is disclosed. A work of art is a setting forth as it may be understood to retain and shelter itself within its material entity. In other words, an analysis or interpretation does not destroy the physical work. The earth is concealed in the art work. The earth has a material quality that is familiar and expected. The earth's recognized materiality, through a provision of setting and source of materials, is found in the art.

World and earth are never separated because of their dependence on one another to reveal themselves. Without the earth—that is, without things such as tools or buildings—the world could not exist as a network of relations would not have any person or thing to connect. Without the world—that is, these relationships—the earth would not exist as the things in one's surroundings would have no connection to one another or to any individual. World and earth must coexist to be recognized, each in conflict against the other. This conflict occurs in that the setting up of the world works against the setting forth of the earth. The struggle between the setting up of a world and the setting forth of the earth is art's event of revealing.

## TOWARDS A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY OF BUILDING: AN INTERPRETATION

Remarkable correlations emerge when certain principles of E. Fay Jones' architecture are compared to certain ideas of Martin Heidegger's philosophy, resulting in a deeper interpretation of the two chapels. Specifically, the principles of relating the building to site and relating the part to whole may be interpreted as reflective of an interweaving of the works with a context. Simultaneously, a temporal interweaving may also be seen as historical precedents are used in the works. However, the architecture may be interpreted as extending beyond a simple contextual and temporal unity, as the chapels may be seen to reveal. The revealing of art can be found as both works make us aware of the surrounding woods and Gothic past. The presence of the chapels lets one see, as if for the first time, this context and history. This revealing occurs through the chapels' technology. The structures, environmental control systems, and technical detailing reveal the presence of technological things or entities, but they are present in such a way as to also reveal a world. Jones' principle of the nature of materials communicates these technological entities in a way that reveals one's surroundings and context. The chapels' bringing forth of context and histories is accomplished through the bringing forth of the structures, environ-

mental control systems, and technical detailing. By examining each of these aspects the parallels emerge and expand the understanding of certain Heideggerian concepts and certain Jonesian principles through one another. Together these works are able to explain one another in a more extensive way than they may be explained by themselves.

Both chapels achieve a unity through the principles of building to site and part to whole as each chapel is a single unified totality within itself and its environment. Such an interweaving of architecture and context may be understood to merge the principles of relating building to site and part to whole into a single goal of a contextual, relational unity. Jones' principles may be explained through the contextual dimension of Heidegger's Being-in-the-World. Reciprocally, this unity provides an accessible and comprehensible exemplification of this Heideggerian concept.

Just as Jones' chapels may be interpreted as containing a contextual unity, they may also be seen as having a temporal unity. The temporal connections of both Thorncrown and Cooper Chapels are seen in the allusions to Gothic forms and structural rules, yet the properties of wood and steel allow a new translation. The chapels and their histories become interwoven to express a unity through time. The temporal connections of each work may be understood as inherited yet chosen, making tangible the temporal dimension of Heidegger's Being-in-the-World. In turn, the temporal element of Heidegger's concept explains Jones' use of historical precedents.

Yet more is happening in these chapels than a simple unification. Heidegger's view of art allows examination of Thorncrown and Cooper Chapels to uncover how the chapels may be seen as more than mere buildings. Their presence becomes art because of the ability of the chapels to reveal. Rather than simply reflecting their history and surroundings, the chapels let us see something anew. As works of art, Thorncrown and Cooper may be compared to Van Gogh's painting of the peasant shoes or the Roman fountain in Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." Here he describes Van Gogh's painting and the Roman fountain, stating, "The more simply and authentically the shoes are engrossed in their nature, the more plainly and purely the fountain is engrossed in its nature, the more directly and engagingly do all beings attain to a greater degree of being along with them."<sup>4</sup> The Arkansas chapels may be seen as works of art in this sense, achieving more than the phenomenon of a building because of their revealing of histories, traditions, meanings, and context. The power of the architecture to cause this contemplation and to see these connections happens as Heidegger's art is a setting up of a world and setting forth of the earth.

The chapels set up a world by consciously bringing forth both one's traditions and meanings associated with worship or meditation and one's relationship to nature. Thorncrown and Cooper may be seen as presenting these traditions and meanings through the use of the Gothic historical precedent and the idea of a chapel; however, the reinterpretation of this

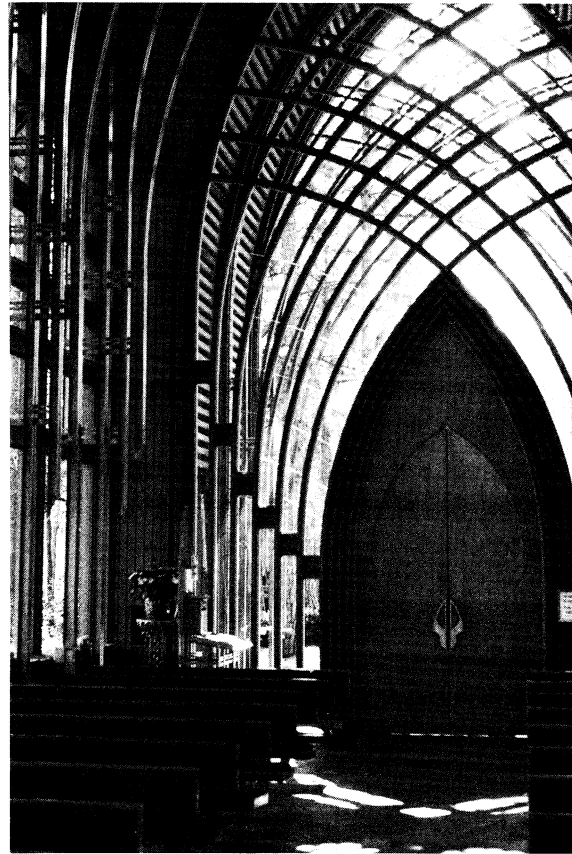


Fig. 3. Cooper reinterprets a Gothic Chapel in steel and glass.

precedent is not one that is unnoticed. The reinterpretation calls the chapels to one's attention, re-presenting one's world of reverence and worship.

This occurs as both Thorncrown and Cooper are familiar to a person because of their chapel-like characteristics, yet they are simultaneously unfamiliar. Thorncrown and Cooper are both chapels that present new experiences, such as a chapel made of minimal materials or in an unexpected setting. This unfamiliarity allows one to see the chapels in a manner that prompts one to re-visit the ideas of a place of reverence and worship. They may be seen to re-present to an individual the traditions and meanings of prayer and community, bringing forth one's network and security of relations.

Both Thorncrown and Cooper may also be seen to reinterpret the woods in which they are found. This reinterpretation may be seen as a re-presenting of the trees and rock, bringing forth one's experience and knowledge of a forest. One becomes attentive to the color of the surrounding tree trunks, the angles and curves of the branches, and the play of light through them, through their abstraction and re-presentation as structure.

One sees anew the rock outcroppings through their re-presentation as walls. The glass expanses shock one into an attention to the surroundings. This re-presenting of the world is possible because of the unfamiliarity of the presentation, re-awakening one to the world of nature.



Fig. 4. Thorncrown re-presents the structure of a grove of oaks.

Thorncrown and Cooper may be interpreted as setting forth an earth. This setting forth is a withdrawal as neither Thorncrown nor Cooper loses itself in the bringing forth of the traditions and meanings of worship and nature. The chapels allow one to see and become familiar with this world, yet they do not give up anything in this unconcealing. The chapels' setting forth is recognized in their material quality, as the wood, steel, stone, and glass they are made of may never relinquish the potential to reveal. Both chapels may be interpreted as buildings that always contain an unending source of meanings, continually sheltering a world to be revealed.

This world and earth of the chapels may never be separated because of their dependence on one another. The more one is able to read into the chapels and come to know the intricacies and richness of their networks and relations, the more one becomes aware of what is contained within these physical entities. One may continually open up the world of worship, meditation, and nature, yet simultaneously the everyday earth of wood, steel, and stone will hold back this opening up, never fully giving away what is contained.

This conflict of world and earth within the chapels indicates their ability to be understood as works of art rather than mere buildings. A building without such conflict may be interpreted as a piece of equipment, disappearing into use. However, this art does not disappear. It becomes something

seen, standing out because of how it reveals. One takes notice of it, drawn into its disclosing. The more one attends to these chapels, the more one opens up their revealings. Such a revealing moves one from the everyday world to an awakening of one's understandings. In this re-presentation one opens up to ways of seeing or interpreting, working "to transform our accustomed ties to the world and to earth."<sup>5</sup> Thorncrown and Cooper call attention to their presence, transforming the common environments of chapels and forests into something that is unfamiliar and re-awakening one to the world.

As works of art, the chapels have been seen as revealing their surroundings of forests and Gothic history. Yet the chapels are composed of technology, that is, structure, environmental control systems, and technical detailing. The art may be shown to occur through this technology. It is the chapels' technology that reveals. Their structures, environmental control systems, and technical detailing operate not only as technological entities but also as art's world and earth. The chapels' technology becomes a work of art. The structures, environmental control systems, and technical detailing of the chapels may be interpreted both as a technological entity and as a revealing that is a preserving of a world and earth. Technology occurs in the chapels in a way that brings forth their "working" as art.

The chapels as technological entities preserve a world. That is, in Jones' chapels it is a technology that brings forth art, revealing the world around and awakening one to see anew both histories and contexts. It is this technology that prompts us to see, as if for the first time, the materials in and around the chapels, the historic and natural forms of the structure, the chapels as gathering spaces, and the thought involved in the construction. It is a revealing that makes present a technological entity—in this case the "pieces of equipment" in the chapels—and transforms our accustomed ties. Technology becomes art through this double revealing.

## CONCLUSIONS

Through the correlations that may be shown between the architecture of Jones and certain concepts of Heidegger's thought, a greater understanding of each emerges. The interpretation provides a more inclusive heuristic showing an issue that is commonly considered secondary to be a significant contributor to the philosophical meaning of a building. Technology is capable of more than function. In the case of Jones' chapels, technology may be seen to bring forth art.

Jones and Heidegger offer the understanding that structures, environmental control systems, and technical detailing may do more than provide a supportive role for a building or draw from its past and setting: technology has the potential to renew our attention to our history and context and remind us of our connections to them. Architecture and its technology may be seen as not limited to the project at hand, but extend into an interpretation of the past and surroundings. In this light, architecture and its technology may be seen to provide an understanding of time and place.

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**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962). p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.