



NOT-I/THOU

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Abstract

Not-I/Thou: The Other Subject of Art & Architecture *is to be a highly focused exhibition/folio of works by perhaps 12 artists (preferably little-known or obscure), with precise commentaries denoting the discord between the autonomous object (the artwork or architectural object per se) and the larger field of reference (worlds); inference (associative magic), and insurrection (against power and privilege) – or, the Immemorial. Engaging the age-old “theological apparatuses” of the artwork, the folio is intended to upend the current fascination with personality, celebrity, and fashion to reach the timeless horizon of the subject of Art and Architecture as the subject other than the subject of Art and Architecture proper. Word as image, and image as word, is the central paradox given to this discord – an elective, yet universal condition that also makes certain art and architectural works heedlessly existential-metaphysical (and, therefore, “theological”).*

The texts for the project will revisit and update both Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson, but notably engage contemporary and pre-modern theories of the image as index of “worlds” – or, worlds within worlds. Foremost in this regard, the book/folio will privilege what has come to be known as “Franciscan ontology” – a complex best denoted in the recent works of Giorgio Agamben and best valorized in proportion to criticism of the same by Alain Badiou and Antonio Negri. Art directly influenced by the early Franciscan tradition will be examined as well, including Cimabue, Giotto, and El Greco.

This paper, as part of the essay “White Paper: Gray Areas and Black Zones,” is a preliminary investigation of the conceptual architecture for the overall, ongoing exhibition/book project.

Not-I/Thou: Agent Intellect and the Immemorial

And this is the purpose of all of the sciences, that in all of them faith is strengthened, God is honored, character is formed, and consolations are derived consisting in the union of the spouse with her Beloved: a union that takes place through love, to the attainment of which the whole purpose of sacred Scripture, and consequently, every illumination descending from above, is directed – a union without which all knowledge is empty.¹ – St. Bonaventure

To bury false disciplines (to discipline the Imaginary) do we need another Verdun, which Capitalism would only be so happy to supply? Or is it possible to restore the immemorial coordinates of knowledge (and scholarship) by turning to the Holy Trinity of conceptual thought proper – that elegant, spare, wintry tableau that haunts all artistic production? Through T.S. Eliot’s bleak visions, operating in apparent reverse, we might “reach” Bonaventure’s reduction of art to theology – theology, not religion; and theology as Truth, not dogma. This communitarian spirit of intellectual austerities is the transitional state between gray areas (instrumental reason) and black zones (revelation). If it passes through subjective night, as Jacques Maritain suggests, it does so in service to the impersonal agencies of that anterior sky in which stars (and constellations, new and old) appear (and re-appear) out of no-where. “La vita nuova,” perhaps – but also a strange diminution in the analogical, for/toward the anagogical. Therefore, the strange, wintry, and wonderful – or, “a union without which all knowledge is empty.”

The problem of Agent Intellect, or its controversy, has never gone away – with its origins in Aristotle’s *De anima* and its subsequent elaborations and disputations reaching from Averroes and Avicenna to St. Thomas Aquinas. The issue of



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whether Agent Intellect is independent of human agency (or transcendent to all intellectual activity) suggests that this possible impersonal agency is the ultimate ghost in the machinery of thought. The universalizing tendencies of such a power (or source of power) are exceptionally elastic and, ultimately, indeterminate. If it belongs to mankind, as Avicenna thought, and not to individual subjects per se (not embedded within the intellectual capacities of souls), the penultimate question/issue becomes, What or *where* is such a power?² Perhaps more critically, *How* is such a power to be accessed?

Notably, Aquinas disputed the Aristotelian views of Averroes and Avicenna (“Latin Averroism”) and placed Agent Intellect firmly within the bounds of the human soul, differing with other Medieval theologians in the process, yet primarily in terms of the relation between Agent Intellect and Possible Intellect – the latter being what within the province of the present critique is referred to as “gray areas.”³ More important, however, is what occurs when one follows the argument backward to the early Franciscan School, prior to Aquinas, when, in effect, the major schoolmen said “Yes” to utterly contradictory statements concerning what exactly Agent Intellect was once it was situated inside of human cognition proper.⁴ For example, “In John of La Rochelle’s view we can call the agent intellect both God and angel, and part of the soul with respect to different objects of cognition. God is the agent intellect for our knowledge of things higher than the soul, the angel is the agent intellect (in the sense of revelation or instruction) for our knowledge of things on the same level as the soul and, finally, the agent is a light innate in the soul for our knowledge of things that lie within the soul or below it.”⁵ Thus Bonaventure and many Franciscans to follow maintained a dual vigil for knowledge: “The reason for the double-meaning of the agent intellect lies in the Franciscans’ characteristic and well-known attitude towards theology and philosophy. They tried to reconcile principles of Aristotelian philosophy with the Augustinian fundament of theology. With respect to noetics this means that they had to unify the Aristotelian theory of abstraction and the doctrine of the agent intellect, which Aristotle had already compared to light, with the Augustinian theory of illumination and the division of the human intellect into two faces, the higher, which is illuminated from God, and the lower, which is not illuminated.”⁶ Thus gray areas and black zones, and all of the attendant problems of locating the place and means whereby the Imaginary (Possible Intellect) may be disciplined/illuminated.⁷

Certainly this dual vision of Agent Intellect (both in its disputatious aspects and in the Franciscan doubling or tripling of its agency proper) suggests that the true issue is not whether it subsists as impersonal agency in the natural world (as a cosmological principle, for example) but, instead, whether it inhabits human intellectual activity and the products of the same. For the ambivalence seems less about whether Agent Intellect is outside of (or transcendent to) all human subjective states, as its other, than whether human agency without Agent Intellect has any merit whatsoever; and, in terms of disciplinarity, the question would be as to whether the production of forms of knowledge transcends mere utility and/or supports degraded forms of experience of this larger economy that, on the one hand, *is* cosmological and, on the other hand, *is* transcendental. In the latter case, all of the various problems of privileging a universal intelligence collide with worldly endeavors that may, indeed, be productive of virtual prison-houses. In the first instance, language is always the First Instance for suspect motives and/or ideological sleights of hand. In the former case, when Agent Intellect is cosmological, the multiple disciplines of natural science and philosophy (or natural philosophy) take on exceptional importance to the critique of disciplines that purportedly rely on this vision of universal, non-ideological intelligence. In this latter case, there are as many problems as possible virtues, insofar as since the divorce of theology and natural science the orphaned middle ground has most often been moral philosophy. One very obvious analogue for the potential fusion of these discordant worldviews is to incorporate the intelligence embedded in natural systems directly and without mediation into human systems, which need not to be at odds with that larger universal economy. Yet the inordinate nightmare of entropy follows upon every attempt to build synthetic systems that absorb and/or privilege natural systems and the technocratic bias of contemporary discourse betrays, repeatedly, any accord between competing visions, provoking the endless recourse to Apocalypse.

This Medieval debate is interesting *today* if only because *then* the problem was the differing worldviews of the Augustinians and the Thomists. In terms of historical merit, the debate has lasted well into the twenty-first century primarily because there was no unitary, Medieval “scholastic” worldview, despite attempts to claim such – and the debates at the University of Paris’ Faculty of Arts⁸ in the thirteenth century concerned not so much the production of canon or dogma but the relationship of philosophy to theology (notwithstanding the various attempts by the authorities to shut down debate, plus warnings to theologians not to become philosophers). Indeed, it would seem that the chief argument between Bonaventure and Aquinas had to do with whether these two forms of knowledge (what we would today call disciplines) were different, and whether they *should* be different. Aquinas seems to have solidified the separation, perhaps unwittingly, while the Augustinians and the Franciscans were arguing for the preservation of philosophy (and metaphysics) *as* theology – and a proper study of whether this truly meant philosophy *as* subordinate to theology, or not, would resolve many of the petty arguments that persist in terms of what constitutes knowledge and



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what constitutes science. Subsequent skirmishes generally further developed the schism, while around 1900 the argument returned in terms of the historiography of the Medieval world system and the various forms of high scholasticism that dealt with the issue of the created (eternal) world, best described as the focus of the sciences, and the uncreated (ideal) world, the realm of ideas and the source for knowledge per se (inclusive of all of the associated questions and non-answers attributed to not-knowledge, or revelation, always more or less left unaddressed due to the failure of language to properly reflect what was, after all, subjective, inter-subjective, and onto-subjective, pre-conscious experience). If Bonaventure and the Franciscans could say “Yes” (or “All of the Above”) to whether Agent Intellect subsided within human cognition, outside of it (in angelic beings, in the cosmos, etc.), or with a transcendent (absent) God, it is more than apparent that they were attempting to preserve the sacred province of affective thought as such – or thought undivided (precluding the production of two contradictory, and historically antithetical realms).⁹

Several differences of opinion between Bonaventure and Aquinas in the controversy concerning Agent Intellect are instructive in terms of the critique underway here of disciplines and the biases given most especially to singular disciplines that rely on so-called objective knowledge (or natural reason). For, as it has been said, in times of crisis Augustine almost always makes a re-appearance.¹⁰

Thus, the Augustinianism of Bonaventure (and the term *Augustinianism* was only coined during the controversies of the thirteenth century) is the key. According to Étienne Gilson, Bonaventure was safeguarding certain traditional, patristic principles against creeping Aristotelianism. The main issue was what might be called the cosmological worldview that almost always signals the Medieval mindset anyway. The Agent Intellect controversy was part and parcel of a larger set of disagreements that only were resolved by the separation of Philosophy and Theology. “By founding his doctrine on the self-consciousness of the soul, Bonaventure clung to the Augustinian tradition while grounding his Christian philosophy in the experience of his interior life.”¹¹ The struggle between Bonaventure and Aquinas (and they were, after all, colleagues) was quite simply about what constitutes the highest form of knowing anything. While they both reverted to revelation, they also both did so in different ways. “Bonaventure, Gilson stated, did not formulate his theology according to the norms of Aristotelean science. Following rather the Augustinian tradition, he recorded his personal experience of the Christian life without expressing it in an objective, or scientific, manner. [...] Bonaventure modelled his theology after the ideal of Augustinian wisdom; so he developed a theological wisdom which was inseparable from his own experience.”¹² Accordingly, Bonaventure’s and Aquinas’ worlds collide in the manner in which the outer, objective world and the inner, subjective world are dealt with. The role of intellect is central – Augustinians reserved knowledge (truth) for the internal tableau of direct illumination from the divine, not Aristotelian abstraction as such, an operation of the intellect. Bonaventure resisted permitting illumination (revelation) to be a guarantor of natural reason (Aristotelian abstraction); and, again, it required a certain acceptance of paradoxes, or the rejection of attempting to rationalize or reconcile discordant principles that effectively underscored that knowledge is not unitary.¹³ The path taken by Aquinas and Duns Scotus was the path not taken by Bonaventure.¹⁴ “Bonaventure withheld from the human intellect a power which would be sufficient for knowing truth with certitude.”¹⁵ According to Gilson, Bonaventure was safeguarding a particular worldview (an interior vista) “to protect a Christian understanding of creation, divine providence, illumination and moral guidance.”¹⁶ The Platonism is palpable; and the intermediary world of ideas is the key. If both Bonaventure and Aquinas more or less grappled with Aristotle’s natural philosophy in different ways, and if each retained that which Aristotle rejected (the Platonic theory of divine ideas), the matter then returns (and rests) in where and how ideas are accessed; the result is a battleground between immutable, universal truths and contingent knowledge or the mere administration of things. It is possible, then, to see the entire scholastic operation sliding downhill and the mere description and administration (manipulation) of things and people becoming the entire point.¹⁷ Furthermore, it is possible to detect in the shadows the instantiation of new models of power and control, with the ascendance of Thomism unnecessarily burdened with the incipient power struggles within the Church between secular and sacred concerns. Thomism could be seen in such a light as a threshold crossed historically, never to be re-crossed other than personally (or existentially) – a metaphysical Rubicon. Augustinianism (as the antithesis), in turn, shelters a certain generous latitude within thought that privileges subjectivity (always the enemy and victim of power). Bonaventure and the early Franciscans surely had one eye on each world, worried on the one hand and appalled on the other – the worry and horror switching places depending upon “point of view,” a kind of equilibrium between the two finally coming to expression with Blaise Pascal and his famous evocation of two infinities, with that same wager on transcendence becoming further hypostasized in Immanuel Kant’s Categorical Imperative.¹⁸

¹ Conclusion to St. Bonaventure, *Reduction of the Arts to Theology (De reductione artium ad theologiam)*. See St. Bonaventure, *St. Bonaventure’s De reductione artium ad theologiam: A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation*, ed. and trans. Emma Thérèse Healy, 2nd ed. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, Saint Bonaventure University, 1955); cited in Armand A. Maurer,

- CSB, *Medieval Philosophy*, Revised edition (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1962), pp. 139-40. See also, St. Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck, 5 vols. (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960-1970): I. Mystical Opuscula; II. the Breviloquium; III. Opuscula; IV. Defense of the Mendicants; V. Collations on the Six Days.
- ² See Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, I, 5, ed. Simone van Riet (Louvain: Peeters; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972); cited in Tomáš Nejeschleba, "Thomas Aquinas and the Early Franciscan School on the Agent Intellect," pp. 67-78, *Verbum VI/1* (2004): p. 69. See also, Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). "For many 13th century theologians [...], although the agent intellect was transcendent, the immanent part of human soul was not only passive potency but it became itself actual as an individual entity when illuminated by the agent intellect. The immortality of the human intellect would automatically follow from its being an incorporeal substance." Nejeschleba, "Thomas Aquinas and the Early Franciscan School on the Agent Intellect": p. 70. According to Averroes: "The agent intellect is the last of the celestial Intelligences and moves the lunar sphere; the material intellect receives intelligible forms abstracted by the agent intellect. These intellects are not united to individual man by their substances, but only by their activity." *Ibid.*; with reference to Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 23-27. The resemblance of this last instantiation to the concept of demiurge is unmistakable.
- ³ See Nejeschleba, "Thomas Aquinas and the Early Franciscan School on the Agent Intellect": p. 71. Anselm of Canterbury, for example, considered the Agent Intellect co-equivalent to angelic intelligences.
- ⁴ See *ibid.*: pp. 75-76. The key figures here are Alexander of Hales and John of La Rochelle, the latter a teacher of Bonaventure. La Rochelle: "When he asks 'whether the agent intellect is separate from the substance of the soul, or is a *differentia* of the soul, and if it is separated, whether it is a created Intelligence (which is an angel) or uncreated (which is God)' he answers all these questions in the affirmative." *Ibid.*: pp. 75-76.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*: p. 76.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*: p. 77.
- ⁷ Thus the Condemnation of 1277 proceeds as follows: "Condemned thesis 118 says: 'that the agent intellect is a separate substance higher than the possible intellect, and that with respect to the substance, potency and operation it is separated from the body, and that it is not a form of human body.' It is obvious that the condemnation of this proposition is in accord with the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Furthermore, what is actually being condemned here is the doctrine, partially held by the Franciscan friars, who are traditionally considered as initiators of the Condemnation." *Ibid.*: p. 78; with reference to Roland Hissette, ed., *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 Mars 1277*, Philosophes Médiévaux, XXII (Louvain: Publications Universitaires; Paris: Vander-Oyez, 1977), p. 193; "Quod intellectus agens est quaedam substantia separata superior ad intellectum possibilem; et quod secundum substantiam, potentiam et operationem est separatus a corpore, nec est forma corporis hominis." For a review of *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 Mars 1277*, by A.S. McGrade, see *Speculum* 55, no. 1 (January 1980): pp. 131-33. The review notes the effect the condemnations had especially with regards to later natural philosophy, because "many cosmological assertions are scattered through the condemned propositions." *Ibid.*: p. 131.
- ⁸ It goes without saying that the Arts in the Middle Ages were the noetic arts or sciences – the arts of knowledge ("mnemonics"). It is also necessary to point out that Augustinianism and Scholasticism are terms applied retrospectively to two so-called schools of thought in the Medieval arguments regarding the difference between Philosophy and Theology. In terms of the development of modern disciplines, which might be said to have emerged from nineteenth-century positivism, the difference between system and philosophy is critical. System is a methodology whereas philosophy is irreducibly a worldview (*Weltanschauung*).
- ⁹ See Quinn, "Introduction," in *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure's Philosophy*. Quinn tracks the late-nineteenth century skirmishes well into the twentieth century, with various scholars, including Gilson, insisting that it is all a matter of parsing alliances between would-be philosophers and old-world theologians. Bonaventure is, therefore, often portrayed as an advocate of pre-Thomism, or Augustinianism, but he also attempted to reconcile Aristotelianism with Augustinian illuminism. See *ibid.*, p. 21. Gilson notably amplified the debate, in the 1920s, and in the process annoyed many elder statesman of the Medieval arguments, by insisting that Bonaventure subordinated philosophy to theology. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. In this sense, Aquinas ends up both furthering the schism and favoring theology over philosophy. This seems possible, in Gilson's reading, because he was an Aristotelian through and through, as had been his teacher Albertus Magnus, and theology in many respects could benefit from the schism. "Hence, according to Gilson, the philosophy of Aristotle compelled the thirteenth-century theologians to reexamine the proper relation of natural reason to Christian revelation; as a consequence, the great scholastic systems were born." *Ibid.*, p. 23. Nevertheless, Gilson's most controversial conclusions may be said to resolve around his quarantine of Bonaventure and his claims that the Franciscan harbored an irresolvable antipathy to Aristotelianism. According to Gilson "Bonaventure evaluated Aristotelean philosophy as 'one who has understood it, seen through it, and passed beyond it.'" *Ibid.*, p. 24. By 1270 the verdict was in. Bonaventure refused Thomism and Aquinas committed himself to the elaboration of an autonomous philosophy, one according to Bonaventure that exposed him to inevitable error. *Ibid.* Gilson's major work in this period is *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1924). His chief interlocutors and critics seemed to suggest that Gilson was effectively projecting his own biases onto Bonaventure. It should be noted that Bonaventure has often been presented as a mystic theologian versus a metaphysician or philosopher. Yet this would seem to be a nineteenth-century characterization that considered "old scholasticism" (pre-Thomism) as generally anti-rationalist.
- ¹⁰ This prescient statement was made by a keynote speaker (John McCumber) at the Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy Conference, "The Time(s) of our Lives," La Trobe University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, December 2011.
- ¹¹ Quinn, "Introduction," in *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure's Philosophy*, p. 25. This is Gilson's characterization.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ¹³ As a result, "to solve some problems in the natural order, [Bonaventure's] philosophy relied on a supernatural principle." *Ibid.*, p. 39. One exceptional example is the concept of the necessity of grace for all creatures to merely exist. In the case of animals,



Bonaventure simply resorted to Augustine's doctrine of seminal principles. In the case of humans, Bonaventure kicked the entire question "upstream," placing infallibility out of reach of contingent intellect. Far from hedging his bets, in the case of the status of human existence, Bonaventure simply jettisoned the need to rationalize what was, in effect, a transcendental category of experience. But he again turned to Augustine for support, this time utilizing the well-known metaphor of the double mirror that permits divine illumination to reach contingent intellect, if the latter is turned in the direction of the divine.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40. Again, this is Gilson's view of Bonaventure's concept of Philosophy being subordinate to Theology.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁷ The great scandals coming, of course, are named Giordano Bruno, Galileo, and Copernicus (plus Savonarola). For Renaissance and late-Renaissance cosmology, see Fernand Hallyn, *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*, trans. Donald M. Leslie (New York: Zone Books, 1990). First published *La structure poétique du monde: Copernic, Kepler* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987).

¹⁸ With Kant we reach another historical threshold and the development of fire walls between disciplines that are based in skepticism but more closely aligned with protecting the last frontiers of hyper-subjective experience against hyper-objective positivism.