

UT ARCHITECTURA PHILOSOPHIA? QUESTIONING THE RELATIONSHIP OF ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

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This conference has been organized by the *International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture*. Our topic is “The Human in Architecture and Philosophy.” It raises the question: just what is the relationship between philosophy and architecture? What do they have to contribute to each other? What does architecture have to contribute to philosophy? And what does philosophy have to contribute to architecture? I shall return to both questions. That both are concerned with the human, with the ways human beings relate or should relate to each other and to the world that environs them seems obvious enough. In that sense both would seem to have an ethical significance. And both would seem to engage in work of construction, work that presupposes some sort of space, the space of everyday life in the case of architecture, a spiritual or logical space in the case of philosophy. Philosophers have thus frequently invoked architectural metaphors, have liked to speak of laying foundations, of raising conceptual edifices, of the architectonics of some philosophical system. Think of Descartes, who likened himself to an architect, his philosophy to a chapel raised on firm foundations. But what work do such metaphors really do? Are they not at bottom dispensable?

Yet especially in recent years it has once again become fashionable to think the philosopher in the image of the architect, if now often in a critical

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key, to think of him as a would-be builder, someone who seeks to edify. The very word “edify” should make us think: once it meant simply to raise a dwelling or structure, later it came to mean “to improve morally or spiritually” — Kierkegaard thus wrote edifying discourses — but today it tends to carry a negative connotation: philosophers should not attempt to be edifying.

That shift in meaning invites attention. The word “edify” thus invites us to think about recent attacks on both traditional architecture and system-building philosophy: What, for example are we to make of invocations of Georges Bataille’s stance against architecture, where architecture, both material and spiritual, stands for an order that by assigning us our place threatens to imprison us and should be destroyed, even if such destruction threatens chaos? The kind of thinking that here makes the prison the paradigmatic work of architecture, a kind of lens through which to look at all architecture, is of the sort that lets Dostoevsky’s Man from the Underground call twice-two-makes-four a piece of impudence and celebrate twice-two-makes-five as the ultimate refuge of a freedom that, resisting placement, dreams of labyrinth and chaos. Was Nietzsche perhaps right to claim that “If we willed and dared an architecture according to the kind of souls we possess (for that we are too cowardly!) the labyrinth would have to be our model”?¹ Consider, for example, the influential exhibition *Deconstructivist Architecture*, curated by Mark Wigley und Philip Johnson in 1988. The catalogue spoke of the emergence of a new sensibility, fascinated by possibilities of contaminating, disrupting, violating, subverting architecture. That sensibility led to an architecture that self-consciously calls traditional architecture into question, that is to say, an anti-architecture, which in today’s architecture world, both in theory and practice, has played a significant role in the work of Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, and Coop Himmelb(l)au, the architects celebrated by that exhibition. Although perhaps claiming something like an ethical significance, such attacks on architecture as traditionally understood are also attacks on ethics in its usual sense, which does seek to edify, i.e. to raise a spiritual architecture that would help human beings find their proper place. Freedom resists such placement. But should every spiritual architecture that would thus place us be challenged?

What, for example, are we to make of the vogue enjoyed by the word “deconstruction” and all it stands for, the word itself an architectural metaphor of sorts, embraced not just by philosophers and literary critics, but also the name of an architectural practice that challenged what one had

come to expect from architecture, a practice that in extreme cases has led to attempts to blur what would seem to separate so obviously the philosopher from the architect: I am thinking especially, but not only, of Derrida's collaboration with Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman, a collaboration that threatened to make of deconstructive discourse a strangely cerebral kind of architectural ornament.

But does architecture, taken in its usual sense, really belong with ethics in that it, too, has by its very nature an ethical function, seeking to help orient individuals by providing more than just physical shelter, by interpreting their place in the world, especially in the community, the polis? Or is just this understanding of architecture as having as a central task the representation of a community's shared values or divinities something that we moderns, who in so many ways have left behind the ancient polis, should resist as incompatible with the world we live in, with the values that inform it, first of all with the value placed on the individual and on freedom? That was the charge Mark Lilla directed against my *The Ethical Function of Architecture*: "It never seems to occur to Harries that modern society is not re-presented in modern architecture for the simple reason that it is un-representable. That, indeed, was the point, or at least the result of the revolution in modern politics."²² This criticism claims that the ethical function of architecture, as I presented it in that book, lies behind those who are truly of this modern age. And if such an ethical, and this means inevitably also a political function, was indeed, as Hegel thought, once part of the very essence of architecture in what he took to be its highest sense, must we who are truly of today not resist all such architecture, which, when attempts are made to realize it in this modern age, invites disaster: think of the architecture of totalitarian governments, say of the architecture of Ludwig Troost, who had been charged by Hitler to

transform Munich's Königsplatz into a worthy setting of a new national cult. The buildings that provided this cult with a stage were then widely celebrated as an enormous success, applauded by the party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg as "the first attempt to realize the ancient Greek ideal" and praised by the architectural critic Wilhelm Lotz for showing for the first time in the modern age that "a deeper meaning can dwell in a city-square" as long as it has its origin in a spiritual principle and not in a desire for aesthetic variety in the built-environment or in a merely decorative intention. We should note the rejection of an architecture that would be no more than an aesthetic dressing up of functional buildings. The transformation of the Königsplatz was supposed to have shown that it was still possible to create an architecture that emerges from inner principles of dedication and value instead of being derived from external contingencies of use.³ Did architecture here not achieve that repetition of the Greek in the modern of which Nietzsche and also Heidegger in *The Origin of the World of Art* dreamed? It is more than an historical accident that Heidegger first gave this lecture on November 13, 1935, just four days before Hitler was to give in Munich a powerful demonstration of what such a repetition of the Greek in the modern might mean in the 20th century.⁴ This unhappy conjunction needs to be confronted by anyone who, drawing on Heidegger, wants to claim, as I do, an ethical function for architecture. Has Walter Benjamin not taught us to associate such an aestheticized politics with fascism—and with kitsch and bad faith, with *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*?

Countering Mark Lilla's claim that modern society is not re-presented in modern architecture because it is un-representable, I want to insist that buildings cannot but re-present the ethos presiding over their construction. But that ethos all too often invites critique. Despite a stream of mostly positive, but sometimes also critical responses, I have not seen a need to change my position in any fundamental way. But circumstances have changed; the world has changed, demanding a reconsideration of aspects of some of the central issues that I neglected. More especially, the way we today relate to space has changed and continues to change. Two developments here seem to me to be particularly significant.

One is the way an ever developing technology, and today especially the digital revolution, have opened up our everyday existence in ways that will continue to change our lives in ways we cannot quite foresee. We are open today to the world, to the universe, and to imaginary, virtual spaces as never before. This revolution has transformed the way architects do their work, but, and even more importantly, it has changed our sense of

distance, place, and space, and inseparable from it, our way of life, our sense of freedom, and that is to say also our way of dwelling, which should have consequences for our way of building.

The other, in a sense opposite, but perhaps even more important way in which our world is changing has to do with the way the inevitably limited resources provided by this small planet have to collide with a still increasing humanity and its ever increasing demands for a higher standard of living. Not just air and water, even space is becoming an ever scarcer, and all too often contested resource. Much that gets built today wastes space in ways that I find irresponsible.

These developments call for a reconsideration of what I had worked out in *The Ethical Function of Architecture*.

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Let me return to the suggestion that the philosopher and the architect are both builders, to be sure, using very different media. Just how is the bond between architecture and philosophy to be understood? Hence the title of my lecture with its question mark: *Ut architectura philosophia?* The Latin obviously makes reference to the Horatian *Ut pictura poesis*, “as is painting so is poetry.” Poetry here is said to be like painting in that it, too, represents reality. Painting, to be sure, addresses itself to the eye, relying on visible figures, poetry to the ear, relying on words. The Horatian dictum was thus famously called into question by Lessing in his *Laocoon*. Lessing insisted on the gulf that separates eye and ear, percept and concept, arts of space and arts of time. And should the kind of considerations advanced by Lessing not call into question even more decisively any attempt to obscure what so obviously would seem to separate

the architect who deals with matter from the philosopher who works with concepts, a distinction self-consciously blurred by some recent writing on architecture? Should they not call into question, to give just one example, a work such as Mark Wigley's *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt?*⁵ To be sure, philosophers like Kant or Descartes have liked to invoke architectural metaphors, have liked to speak of laying foundations, of raising conceptual edifices, of the architectonics of some philosophical system. But, to repeat the question, are such metaphors not at bottom dispensable? Or is there indeed a deeper bond between the two that awaits adequate exploration?

The organizers of this symposium, we are told, were inspired, by two observations and two questions:

- 1) Many architects, contemporary and historical, claim to focus on the needs of human beings. The resulting architecture, however, often does not meet the needs and desires of the people who live there. For whom should architecture actually build?
- 2) Architecture, traditionally, has played a negligible role in our philosophical understanding of human beings (as also for our sociological, psychological, and other anthropological analyses). Although it has always been generally acknowledged that human beings need built dwelling places, more careful analysis of this need is surely necessary. What does it say about human beings that they depend upon the buildings they construct for their own habitation?

The first observation points out that architecture often fails to meet the needs of those whom it supposedly serves. It is impossible to disagree with that observation. But it raises the obvious question: just what are these needs and why should architecture so often have failed to meet them? A first, albeit all too reductive answer, is implied by an observation made by Adolf Loos, who, many years ago standing before an Alpine lake-side villa, thought that an architect who designs such a building ought to feel ashamed. Confronted by today's macmansions, I share his sentiment:

Everything breathes beauty and peace. What's this then? A false note disturbs this peace. Like an unnecessary screech: among the peasants' houses, which were not made by them but by god, there is a villa. The work of a good architect, or a bad one? I don't know. I only know that peace, rest, and beauty have fled.

*Before god there are neither good nor bad architects. In towns, in the realms of Beelzebub, there may be fine distinctions, as there are even in kinds of crime. And I therefore ask: why is it that every architect, whether he is good or bad, harms the lake-side?*⁶

Hyperbolically, invoking God and the devil, the atheist Loos here suggests that it is architecture itself that is the problem. His idealized peasant builder is thought as so in tune with his environment that his buildings have somewhat the same necessity as the shelters animals construct to protect themselves from an often hostile environment. This allows Loos to claim that his peasant houses were made, not by his peasants, but by God. They answer to and belong to their environment. Such houses do not strike us as the work of some particular builder. Satisfying the needs they were meant to serve as best they could, they do not mean to be works of art. Precisely that gives them their look of inevitability. With the work of the architect the city is said to invade the countryside, to destroy the harmony visible in the peasant houses, a harmony today equally visible, Loos thought, in the work of the engineer, who, understanding his task, the available means, and the forces of nature, is not concerned to create an aesthetic object.

Loos' remark suggests that we should draw a distinction between the kind of building that raised houses such as those built by his peasants and the work of the engineer, on the one hand, and the work of an architect, on the other. It is of course possible to use the word architecture, as I have done so far in this lecture, in so broad a sense that it names simply the craft of building, where building would cover a vast range of different structures and approaches. The title of this conference would seem to do so. But the distinction between mere building and architecture does seem to have an obvious sense. However we finally may want to draw it, we have no difficulty making sense of the distinction Loos makes in the quoted passage. His peasants, like his engineers, are attuned to the order of nature and thus in harmony with something that transcends them. Their buildings reflect this. With the work of the architect, be he good or

bad, other concerns enter. The city is said by Loos to invade nature, to violate it, where the city would seem to be understood by him here as a place of artificial, unnecessary needs. At issue is the way human beings relate to their environment. Architecture, Loos suggests hyperbolically, answers to unnatural needs. We are reminded of the way the Book of Genesis opposes the shepherd Abel to the city building Cain. A suspicion of architecture has indeed attended reflections about architecture from the very beginning, inevitably tied to thoughts of a mode of dwelling that had gone astray. Think of the Tower of Babel. Behind and buried in Loos's distinction between architecture and building lies the collision of a theocentric and an anthropocentric conception of proper human dwelling, which understood metaphorically, survives the death of God.

Related would seem to be the distinction that in that *Darmstädter Gespräch* in which Heidegger delivered his lecture "Building Dwelling Thinking" found expression in the collision of Heidegger's remarks, which bade the assembled architects learn from a Black Forest farmhouse of the 18th century what kind of building once allowed for an authentic dwelling, with those made by Ortega y Gasset. Were those who built Heidegger's farmhouse really at home in their world, content with themselves and their world? Was this what Heidegger wanted to say? Ortega, at any rate, speaking at the same symposium, did not want to hear of such contentment; and so he called our discontent "the highest thing the human being possesses, precisely because it is a discontent, because man wants to possess things that he never had."⁷ And does this always wanting more, this striving for what is higher, not determine our essence? Is it not bound up with our reason, which has to assign to everything real a place in the logical space of the possible and thus lets us ever again compare what happens to be our life-world with other possible worlds, whose temptations and promises seem to render the world to which we have become accustomed sadly deficient? Again and again human beings have demanded more. Our technology has its origin in such discontent. Such discontent bids us create a new world "because, as it is, our world does not fit us, because it has made us sick. This new world of technology is like a gigantic orthopedic apparatus, that you [and here Ortega was addressing his audience, the architects present] want to create, and all this technology has this wonderful, but—as is the case with everything human — dramatic movement and quality, to be a fabulous, great orthopedic device"⁸ Is this then how architecture should be understood, as a gigantic orthopedic device?

I called the distinction between building and architecture helpful and

obvious. But how architecture is to be understood here remains in question. Just what is the need that architecture, as opposed to mere building, addresses? Consider the way Nikolaus Pevsner begins his *An Outline of European Architecture* with this seemingly unproblematic observation: “A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture.” Pevsner interprets this distinction for us when he suggests that works of architecture differ from functional buildings in that they are “designed with a view to aesthetic appeal.” Most works of architecture are of course also functional buildings. Accepting Pevsner’s distinction we can say: Work of architecture = functional building + aesthetic component. On this view it would seem to be an aesthetic concern that raises the architect above the mere builder, that makes him an artist. Works of architecture, so understood, are buildings built to be not just useful, but to have an aesthetic appeal.

Loos suggests that it is precisely this aesthetic concern that gets in the way of good building. And since philosophers have tended to discuss architecture as one of the arts and the philosophy of art has evolved as aesthetics, philosophy would seem to have contributed to bad building. Consider the way the novelist and philosopher William Gass praises Peter Eisenman’s House VI because it presents itself to us as a convincing aesthetic object that pays no heed to practicality: “Thank God, I thought. This house has no concern for me and mine, over which it has no rights, but displays in every aspect and angle and fall of light the concern for the nature and beauty of building that is the architect’s trust and obligation.”⁹ Presupposed is that the architect’s primary task is that of creating a beautiful object, as opposed to the mere builder who is concerned with more practical matters.

But this opposition of architecture to building raises a host of questions: what needs does building,

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so understood, address? There are some obvious answers such as the need to provide protection from an often hostile development or a suitable frame for certain activities. But do these needs exclude the beauty of a building? What need does beauty address? And just how is beauty, and more especially the beauty of a building to be understood? In opposition to the requirements of everyday dwelling? The distinction between building and architecture begins to blur.

This returns us to the first question posed by the organizers of this symposium: for whom does the architect build? What need does or should he address?

3

Even a brief look at some familiar accounts of the origin of building, such as those of Vitruvius, Hegel or Corbusier, is sufficient to make us question those who would claim that the needs that our building serves are so obvious that there is as little need for philosophical reflection as there is in the case of the need for clothing.

One aspect of the Vitruvian account of the origin of architecture especially deserves our attention: when Vitruvius likens his first builders in their need for shelter to wild beasts, he also insists on what makes them different and he mentions first their “not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendor of the starry firmament.”¹⁰ How are we to understand this remark, which links human verticality to the firmament? What does the sight of a splendor that the ancients thought essentially inaccessible, a permanent order open only to eye and spirit, beyond human reach, what does this vision of cosmic permanence have to do with the origin of building?

I want to underscore Vitruvius’ emphasis on the verticality of human being. To be sure, in sleep or death we return to earth-bound horizontality. But unlike the other animals, he points out, we are not obliged by our bodies “to walk with faces to the ground.” But if the human animal is thus free to look up to the firmament, such freedom is more than a gift of the upright body: “Nature had not only endowed the human race with senses like the rest of the animals, but had also equipped their minds with the powers of thought and understanding, thus putting all other animals under their sway.”¹¹ The human body’s verticality signifies spirit. And such verticality possesses a spatial and a temporal significance: Their upward

gaze lets human beings raise themselves beyond the here and now, allows them to look up out of their horizontal temporal condition, that circumscribes the lives of the other animals, to the seemingly ageless order of the firmament.

Did the sublime spectacle of the starry sky, which the ancients thought to be a perfect sphere, awaken the spirit sleeping in Vitruvius's proto-humans, somewhat as the snake's promise, "you will be like God," opened the eyes of Adam and Eve? Did it awaken them at the same time to their own subjection to time, to their mortality, even as it allowed them to glimpse in the heaven's unchanging order possibilities of a more perfect, more spiritual dwelling? Is the task of human building to carry something of this promise into this death-shadowed world? Or did Vitruvius also associate "the splendor of the starry firmament" with the light- and life-granting sun, the hearth of the cosmos, being represented by the warmth-giving hearth of his primitive home? This much at any rate seems clear: by linking the origin of the first house to the awe-inspiring sight of the inaccessible unchanging order of the sky, Vitruvius places human building between animal shelter and the divinely ordered cosmos. The human being looks up to and measures himself here by a timeless logos, figured by the firmament. Building, too, should be informed by this logos; and so we find Vitruvius insisting on symmetry and harmony, prefigured both by the divinely ordered cosmos and the similarly ordered body of the well shaped human being.

Hegel's understanding of the origin of architecture points in what is essentially the same direction:

It is architecture that pioneers the way for the adequate realization of the God, and in this its service bestows hard toil upon existing nature, in order to disentangle it from the jungle of finitude and the abortiveness of

chance. By this means it levels a space for the God, gives form to his external surroundings, and builds him his temple as a fit place for concentration of spirit, and for its direction to the mind's absolute objects. It raises an enclosure round the assembly of those gathered together, as a defense against the threatening of the storm, against rain, the hurricane, and wild beasts, and reveals the will to assemble, although externally, yet in conformance with the principles of art.¹²

Hegel's builders, too, impose a spiritual, and that means for Hegel a truly human order on a recalcitrant material; human beings assert and celebrate their humanity in the face of an initially indifferent environment, when they level the ground, break the stone, raise walls and columns. They defend themselves against nature, not only or even primarily against physical threats, but against its contingency. In this struggle they rely on and exhibit the power of the universal. That is why architecture for Hegel is in its very essence not the work of isolated individuals, but of the spirit, and that means of the community: the spirit breaks down the walls that separate individuals. Genuine architecture establishes community.

And not so very different is Corbusier's account of the origin of architecture:

Primitive man has brought his chariot to a stop: he decides that here shall be his native soil. He chooses a glade, he cuts down the trees which are too close; he levels the earth around; he opens up the road which will carry him to the river or to those of his tribe whom he has just left. [...] The road is as straight as he can manage with his implements, his arms and his time. The pegs of his tent describe a square, hexagon, or octagon. The palisade forms a rectangle whose four angles are equal. The door of this hut is on the axis of the enclosure—and the gate of the enclosure faces exactly the door of the hut. [...] You may see, in some archeological work, the representation of this hut, the representation of this sanctuary: it is the plan of a house, or the plan of a temple. It is the same spirit one finds again in the Pompeian house. It is the spirit indeed of the Temple of Luxor.

There is no such thing as primitive man; there are primitive resources. The idea is constant, in full sway from the beginning.¹³

A look at the history of architecture supports that impression. From the very beginning the requirements of human dwelling resist their reduction to the need for physical shelter or functional frames for certain activities. Not only the body, the spirit, too, needs shelter, shelter especially from the terror of time.

But let me turn to the second observation made by the organizers of this symposium and to the question it raises. Architecture, it asserts, has played no very significant part in our philosophical understanding of human beings. We can grant that. And yet the prevalence of architectural metaphors in philosophical discourse invites reflection: What is the bond that ties philosophy and architecture together and allows such metaphors to make some sense? An answer is suggested by Martin Heidegger's already mentioned essay "Building Dwelling Thinking", which calls our attention to the obvious fact that building serves dwelling, but then in characteristic fashion turns to etymology to unearth beneath the familiar everyday sense of "dwelling" a deeper meaning that is said to have been lost to us:

The real meaning of the verb, namely to dwell, has been lost to us. But a covert trace of it has been preserved in the German word Nachbar, neighbor. The neighbor is in Old English the neahgebur, neah near, and gebur, dweller. The Nachbar is the Nachgebur, the Nachbarbauer, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby. The verbs, buri, büren, beuren, beuron, all signify dwelling, the abode, the place of dwelling.¹⁴

In its origin, Heidegger claims, building means dwelling. To really dwell is to be at home in the world. Such dwelling presupposes that we experience the world not, as science would have us do, as the totality of mute facts that just happen to be as they are, but as a meaningful order. But is the transformation of mute alien material into a home not the essence of building? And is it perhaps also the essence of thinking?

To show how dwelling is to be thought in its original sense Heidegger adds:

Where the word bauen still speaks in its original

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sense, it also says how far the nature of dwelling reaches. That is, bauen, buan, bbu, beo are our word bin in the versions: ich bin, I am, du bist, you are, the imperative form bis, be. What then does ich bin mean? The word bauen, to which it belongs answers: ich bin, du bist mean: I dwell, you dwell.¹⁵

Heidegger sums up his discussion with three propositions:

1. Building is really dwelling.
2. Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth.
3. Building as dwelling unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things [German Ackerbau] and the building that erects building.

If we accept Heidegger's claim that "Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth" this suggests that we can add as a fourth proposition:

4. Building as dwelling unfolds also into the architectures that thought erects, more especially the thought of philosophers.

This then would yield a first answer to the question: What is the bond that ties philosophy and architecture together and allows such metaphors to make some sense? Both can be said unfold in their distinctive ways the essence of building. That brings to mind Kant's famous statement that our reason is by its very nature architectonic, seeking to assign to everything its proper place in some conceptual edifice.¹⁶ Heidegger would seem to think this in more encompassing fashion, extending it to our being-in-the-world, which always already has assigned to all we encounter its place in a linguistic edifice. Heidegger thus calls language the house of Being.

These remarks hint at a deep connection between architecture and language. The French prehistorian André-Leroi Gourhan speaks to this connection:

the earliest surviving buildings are contemporary with the appearance of the first rhythmic marks. [...] [although] the foundation of moral and physical comfort in man is the altogether animal perception of the perimeter of security, the enclosed refuge, or of the socialization of rhythms: [so] that there is no point in seeking for a scission between animal and human to explain our attachment to social rhythms and inhabited space [...] [yet] the little that is known [of pre-Homo sapiens habitations] is enough to show that a profound change occurred about the time which corresponds to the development of the control sections of the brain in strains relating to Homo sapiens. [...] Such archeological evidence [as there is] would seem to justify the assumption, that from the higher paleolithic period onwards there was an attempt to control the whole spatio-temporal phenomenon

by symbolic means, of which language was the chief. They imply a real 'taking charge' of space and time through the mediation of symbols: a domestication of them in a strict sense, since it involves, within the house and about the house, a controllable space and time.¹⁷

This suggests that we might want to define building in its most fundamental sense as “a taking charge of space and time through the mediation of symbols.” So understood building would include both, the raising of structures that provide both physical and psychological shelter and the use of language to control and feel at home in the world around us. That language and architecture are linked in their origin is hinted at by the story of the Tower of Babel.

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Let me return to Heidegger's claim that human being is essentially a dwelling. If for us humans to be is to dwell, it would seem that to build anything we must already dwell in some fashion. But does all dwelling not presuppose in turn something like a building? We seem to be moving in a circle.

Something analogous would seem to hold of the creation of language—think of the story of Adam's naming of the animals. Paradise must have presented itself to Adam already as rather like a divinely created garden in which everything had its proper place. Dwelling, understood in this fundamental sense, would thus seem to imply something like an experience of the world as an order that assigns us as mortals our place on earth, beneath the sky, presided over, Heidegger suggests in “Building Dwelling Thinking,” by what there he calls the divinities, where we must wonder whether our modern world still allows us to make sense of Heidegger's divinities.

Consider once more the meaning of “building.” To build is to bound space. How is this space to be thought? *Genesis* begins by having God create the heavens and the earth by bounding the formless. Plato’s *Timaeus* offers a similar account. To build is to wrest place from space. That seems uncontroversial. And to think such building is inevitably also to think space as in some sense pre-given and formless. But how are we to think that pre-given and formless space? When we attempt to do so, do we not inevitably give it some structure? Think of Euclidean space and its three dimensions. Is all such thinking not an attempt to domesticate what resists domestication? The meaning of space remains elusive. I want to claim that every human attempt to master space leads us into an antinomy, places us between some finite structure and the infinite. That antinomy, I want to suggest, also haunts our dwelling as it haunts our building and our thinking as the tension between a desire for freedom and a desire to be firmly placed.

My introduction of the term “antinomy” calls for comment. When a philosopher thinks of antinomies he is likely to think first of all of the four antinomies Kant stated and discussed in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. And I, too, am thinking here of Kant’s antinomies, especially of the first, which concerns the difficulty we face when we attempt to represent our universe as a cosmos, as a well-constructed, bounded whole, as a building in that sense. Kant shows that we are unable to understand this cosmos as finite and as having a beginning, as our astronomers and physicists would once again have us do, only to get entangled once more in some version of Kant’s antinomy. But Kant also showed that we cannot understand it as infinite. The infinite transcends our comprehension. And yet we are in some fashion in touch with the infinite whenever we are open to some thing in its finally incomprehensible materiality. Not only infinite space, but every particular thing in its ineffable particularity, transcends whatever our reason is able to construct. As mystics such as Meister Eckhart or Angelus Silesius knew, an infinity is buried in every thing. I want to confront Heidegger’s metaphor of language as the house of Being with a question: is Being really at home in that house? Architecture raises an analogous question: are buildings without windows and doors that allow access to a reality beyond not prisons? This suggests: openings such as windows and doors provide a key to successful architecture.

In using the word “antinomy” I was also thinking of Kant’s third antinomy, which concerns freedom. Like nature, freedom, too, familiar as it is to all of us, eludes comprehension: we are thus unable to think what we seem to be so familiar with and call “freedom” as either free

from or as governed by the laws of nature. In the attempt to think freedom our reason once again suffers shipwreck on the reef of the infinite. No more than space and time will freedom be mastered conceptually. Once again reason is forced to recognize its limits. But are these limits not also limits that building must respect if it is not to do violence to the demands of freedom and thus of human dwelling?

Kant's four antinomies were supposed to prove the necessity of understanding every thing in two very different senses: as an appearance dependent on our human understanding and the architecture it imposes and as a thing in itself, transcending that architecture. The antinomies thus tear open a depth dimension passed over in our everyday dealings with things, open windows and doors in the architecture raised by our architectonic understanding. But why is the opening of such windows and doors, if it can even be understood as such, of existential import?

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With this let me turn to the question: What does architecture have to contribute to philosophy? At first blush the answer would seem to have to be, despite philosophy's reliance on architectural metaphors: very little, at least given common ideas of what philosophy is. Most philosophers don't feel a need to concern themselves with architecture.

I do feel such a need. So let me approach the question "what does architecture have to contribute to philosophy?" in a more personal way by speaking briefly of the way art and architecture has been important to my work in philosophy.

My interest in both art and architecture is far older than my interest in philosophy. As a child I liked to draw, paint, and build. A self-conscious

interest in architecture goes back to my first encounter with a rather modest rococo church: when I was seven my mother moved with us children from Berlin, which the constant air raids had made rather unpleasant, to the Franconian Königshofen, some 25 kilometers northeast of Bamberg. On the outskirts is a little known, but quite lovely pilgrimage church in the village of Ipthausen, consecrated to the Birth of Mary (1746-54). The landscape, the town, but especially this church spoke to me of a way of life very different from what I had been used to. Today I would say that mine was not so much an aesthetic response, but an ethical response, ethical in that broad sense in which Heidegger attributes to the Greek temple an ethical function when he claims that presenting the world, it establishes the earth, with that difference that I knew even then that the world opened up by this church was one from which I was excluded, that much as I loved it, this was not my world. But it seemed to beckon me to a better world. Four years later a teacher in Munich's Maxgymnasium took me to the Benedictine monastery church of Andechs. The visit to that church, too, had a crucial importance. I pay tribute to that teacher in the preface to my book *The Bavarian Rococo Church* (1983) and placed an image of that church on its back cover.

The very fact that I felt a need to write such a book, which has now also appeared in a German version,¹⁸ suggests a certain impatience with academic philosophy. I personally do not see a break between this book and my more obviously philosophical work, much of which has centered on Heidegger. It touches on many, perhaps all the themes that matter to me as a philosopher, but it does so in a way that pleases me more, that seems to me much more concrete, more likely to get readers to really understand what concerns me, to touch them, than my more purely philosophical essays. Let me mention just a few of these themes:

1. As opposed to those who, like the art historian Michael Fried, oppose authenticity to theatricality, I wanted to exhibit what I experienced as the profundity of an architecture that ever since the Enlightenment has often been dismissed as theatrical and superficial, as not really authentic. The artistic culture of the Rococo taught me to question the presupposed notion of authenticity and with it the Enlightenment faith in reason and to appreciate the profundity of superficiality, of interest in the visible, sensible world, for which Nietzsche praised the Greeks: "to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial — *out of profundity*."¹⁹

My book on the Bavarian Rococo Church is also a reflection on

the threshold that joins and separates the Rococo from the Enlightenment, and that is to say from modernity. There is thus a sense in which this book is also a reflection on our own spiritual culture, on its legitimacy and its limits, a topic that continues to concern me.

2. A reviewer called that book a preamble after the fact of my *The Meaning of Modern Art* (1968). In a sense he was right. That earlier book called for a step beyond modern art, and not just modern art, but beyond what that modern art presupposed. I spoke there of the need for a new realism. In philosophy, too, there seems to me a need for such a realism. That drew me to phenomenology.



3. With this call for a new realism I meant to challenge the hold of the aesthetic approach to art and architecture that has presided over both theory and practice. As I show in *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, that approach invites an understanding of works of architecture as decorated sheds in the broadest sense, as functional buildings to which an aesthetic component has been added. But as I have suggested in this lecture: What distinguishes architecture from building is not adequately understood as the addition of an aesthetic component. That calls for further reflection on the requirements of dwelling, and more especially,

FIGURE 1. PILGRIMAGE CHURCH
MARIÄ GEBURT, IPTHAUSEN

on what these requirements are in today's world, marked by the digital revolution and the threatening environmental crisis.

4. But inadequate as it is to the requirements of dwelling, the decorated shed nevertheless presents itself as a potent figure for the spiritual situation of this age, which tends to cover up the spiritual poverty that is the price of our objectification of reality, with an often borrowed aesthetic veneer. In that sense, to call ours the age of the decorated shed is to offer more than just an illuminating caricature.

5. As Heidegger points out, building serves dwelling, as it is born of dwelling. To understand the essence of architecture we have to enter that circle. But we cannot enter it successfully as long as we remain on the level of abstract speculation and mere words. Our words must have their ground in concrete experiences. We have to return to the things themselves, and that means here first of all to buildings. But the point should be generalized.

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Let me conclude with the question: What does philosophy have to contribute to architecture? It is not the philosopher's task to tell architects what to do. But perhaps philosophy can help make architecture more responsible by questioning certain assumptions that stand in the way of such responsibility.

Wittgenstein claimed that philosophical problems have the form,

"I do not know my way about."²⁰ Of course, not all problems having this form are therefore already philosophical. To lose one's way in a strange city is not sufficient to make one a philosopher. Nor is failure to understand a new piece of equipment. Say my computer misbehaves and I don't know what to do; I don't know my way about. Such a loss of way does not present us with a philosophical problem. But why not? I would suggest that it fails to do so because in such cases our disorientation is only superficial. Thus in the first case I might study a map; in the second I might ask an expert for help. The problem here poses itself against a background of established and accepted ways of doing things to which we can turn to help us decide what is to be done. Genuinely philosophical problems have no such background. They are born of a more profound uncertainty. Philosophical reflection flourishes thus where traditions disintegrate and as a result human beings are forced to question the place assigned them by

nature, society, and history, and searching for firmer ground demand that this place be more securely established. In that sense all genuine philosophy is at bottom ethical reflection. That also holds for the philosophical reflection on architecture.

If this is accepted, philosophy comes to an end either when it believes to have gained firm ground and to have laid a secure foundation or when it despairs of responsibly addressing the questions that haunt it. There is thus a sense in which science and skepticism may be said to bound philosophy. Today science presents philosophy with a challenge that resembles the challenge that in the 19th century photography presented to representational painting.

But science itself presents itself today to us as anything but unquestionable. There is a sense in which everyone of us, I suspect, stands in an ambiguous relationship to science and its offspring, technology. On one hand we have to affirm science. Technological advances have shaped our life-world in ways that we have to affirm. On the other hand, science cannot know anything of persons or values. This is why the social sciences stand inevitably uneasily between science and what we can call folk wisdom or perhaps philosophy. A compelling account of both the legitimacy and the limits of scientific understanding and that means also of technological thinking seems to me one of the main requirements facing philosophy today. Architectural theory and practice, too, seem to me to be in need of such an account.

But such an account must be guided by some understanding of where we should be going, where today such an account must be informed by the digital revolution which cannot but shape our understanding of space and even more importantly it must be informed by the growing environmental crisis. Does philosophy offer much help here? I continue to be surprised, given all we know, that

not more is being done and I am afraid reason has not proven itself very effective in bringing about needed changes. Needed is a change of heart. But how do hearts change? Traditionally such change has been brought about not so much by philosophers, as by prophets and poets, artists, and also by architects. In his discussion of the Greek temple Heidegger recognizes thus something of the mythopoeic function of architecture.

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Plato's *Republic* gives expression to the claim of the philosopher to be in a privileged position to tell human beings what their place should be. The ethical function that art and religion once possessed, comes to be claimed by reason. Unfortunately reason has proved unequal to the assumed task. We live today in the ruins of the inherited value system. To support this claim I could point to the history of the past two centuries. I could also show that, notwithstanding the efforts of philosophers from Plato to Kant and indeed right down to the present, unprejudiced pure reason has shown itself inadequate to this task. Such change requires the aid of those able to touch us more immediately. The need for architecture's ethical function remains. What kind of architecture? Temple and cathedral lie behind us. Not only has the kind of communal dwelling their building presupposed and reaffirmed been lost, but few of us would wish it to return, for it is incompatible with one of our own ruling myths: the myth of the value of personal freedom. That myth has freed art, too, from its former servitude to religion and state. But if art has thus gained a new freedom, the price of this privatization of art has been its peripheral placement in a world ruled increasingly by economic imperatives. Art and architecture have lost much of their former ethical significance.

What then is the role of philosophy? A healthy society needs places where it tests what has come to be established and taken for granted. There has to be an openness to the future. One task of philosophy is to open windows in the edifice raised by the ruling common sense. I also have a contrary sympathy. The conservatives, too, are needed in a healthy society, those who insist on the preservation of the inherited. There is inevitable tension between voices pointing in different directions, one forward — challenging, testing — the other backward — wanting to preserve. Neither should be so immediately associated with political power that it can translate its views into political reality without being mediated by an ongoing conversation. In this conversation, and more especially in the architectural conversation, the philosopher's words should be like yeast. Perhaps in this way they can contribute in some way towards bringing about that change of heart that just today is so desperately needed.

- [1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe*, 169; *Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, Berlin, and New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 3, 152.
- [2] Mark Lilla, "Pseuds' Skyscraper," *London Review of Books*, 5 June 1997, 33.
- [3] Robert Jan van Pelt, "Apocalyptic Abjection," in Robert Jan van Pelt and Carroll William Westfall, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 328-329. 212
- [4] See Karsten Harries, "Review: Robert Jan van Pelt and Carroll William Westfall, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism*," *American Historical Review*, December 1992, 1490.
- [5] Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1993).
- [6] Adolf Loos, "Architecture," cited in Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise. The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 27.
- [7] José Ortega y Gasset, "Der Mythos des Menschen hinter der Technik" in Otto Bartning, ed.: *Mensch und Raum. 2. Darmstädter Gespräch 1951* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlags-Anstalt. 1952) 117. Translation by K. Harries.
- [8] *Ibid.*, 117.
- [9] William Gass, "House VI," *Progressive Architecture*, 58, June 1977, p. 64.
- [10] Vitruvius, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, trans. Morris Hickey Morgan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 38.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 40.
- [12] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. and intro. Michael Inwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 90-91.
- [13] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Praeger, 1960), 65-66.
- [14] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 146-147. See also the original version: Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken" in Otto Bartning (ed.): *Mensch und Raum. 2. Darmstädter Gespräch 1951*. (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlags-Anstalt 1952) 72-84.
- [15] *Ibid.*, 147.

[16] With his antinomies, to be sure, Kant showed that this striving can never be satisfied. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 474/B 502. See Paula Manchester, “Kant’s Conception of Architectonic in Its Philosophical Context,” *Kant Studien*. Volume 99, Issue 2, June, 2008 133–151.

[17] André Leroi -Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole* (Paris 1964), vol. 2., 139-140, as quoted in Joseph Rykwert, *On Adams’s House in Paradise* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 21

[18] Karsten Harries, *Die Bayerische Rokokokirche. Das Irrationale und das Sakrale* (Dorfen: Hawel Verlag, 2009),

[19] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science. With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2001).

[20] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1959) par. 123.