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Philosophy of Architecture

Lecture Notes

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Philosophy of
Architecture

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1. *Ut Architectura Philosophia?*

Questioning the Relationship of Architecture and Philosophy

1

For many years I taught a course called *The Philosophy of Architecture*, for the last time 8 years ago. That I taught this course at all was the result of conversations with Kent Bloomer, who suggested, many years ago, that the undergraduate major could use such a course. Before then I had been teaching a course called *The Philosophy of Modern Art. The Meaning of Modern Art*, published in 1968 was the result of that course.¹ That book was quite successful, appearing also in Japanese, Korean, and Czech translations. After all these years it is still in print. But with its appearance I lost some of my interest in that course, and so I was quite ready to respond to Kent Bloomer's invitation, especially so since my interest in architecture goes back to my childhood. That course, too, finally resulted in a Book, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*.² It, too, has been successful, and has been translated into Chinese and Czech and is currently being translated into Greek and Farsi. But, again, with the appearance of the book I lost some of my interest in the course.

My decision to return to this material once more in what will be my last year of teaching reflects the fact that I have kept thinking and lecturing about what I wrote in that book. Not that I have changed my position in any fundamental way, despite a stream of mostly positive, but sometimes also critical responses. But circumstances have changed; the world has changed. More especially, the way we today relate to space has changed and continues to change. Our understanding of space has changed. And since architecture may be understood as the art of bounding space that suggests that our understanding of architecture, too, should have changed.

¹ Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

² Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

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Two developments seem to me to be particularly significant in this connection. 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. The place where we happen to be, where we happen to have been born, seems to matter less and less. We are open today to the world, to the universe, and to imaginary, virtual spaces as never before. This revolution has also 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 means inevitably also our way of building. Consider Santiago Calatrava's World Trade Center Transportation Hub in New York City (2003-2016).³ The facility represents one striking response to the disaster of 9/11. It officially opened in March and connects PATH trains to New Jersey, New York City subway lines, and ferry service. By then it had cost almost twice the originally projected 2 billion, when it still awaited the shopping center that opened on August 16.

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

These developments invite a rethinking, a taking stock of what I had worked out in the years since I last taught the *Philosophy of Architecture*. So I have decided to teach that course one last time, but now in a somewhat different key.

³ With few exceptions, the buildings and works of art referred to in these lectures are readily available on the internet.

2

But just what do the two, philosophy and architecture, really have to do with one another? To be sure, philosophers are able to write just about anything. But does philosophy really have much to contribute to architecture? And what, if anything, does architecture have to contribute to philosophy? For centuries both would seem to have gotten along quite well without having to concern itself much about the other discipline. Did they miss out on something important? Today, to be sure, the situation seems to have changed: the architectural metaphors that for centuries have played an important role in philosophical discourse have received a great deal of attention, especially from those committed to deconstruction, the word itself an architectural metaphor, embraced not just by philosophers and literary critics, but also the name of an architectural practice that has challenged what we had come to expect from architecture. In extreme cases this has led to a curious blurring of what would seem to separate so obviously the philosopher from the architect: I am thinking of the philosopher Derrida's collaboration with Bernard Tschumi in the *Parc de la Villette*. Tschumi won the competition for the park in 1982. His follies are an important part of the design. But what do they mean? Their very point would seem to be to prevent us from arriving at a single coherent meaning. You are set free to interpret and use such a folly in whatever way you please. Architecture here is meant, not to place you, as just about all traditional architecture aims to do, but to set you free, to let you play.

I am thinking also of Peter Eisenman, who collaborated with Derrida at La Villette, although the project never materialized, after being way over budget; it did, however result in a collaborative publication: *Chora L. Works*. That collaboration only underscores the question: what does philosophy have to contribute to architecture? Quite a few architects today do seem to feel a need to wrap their architecture in quasi-philosophical theory. All too often such theorizing strikes one as a strangely cerebral kind of quasi-architectural ornament. But just how is the bond between architecture and philosophy to be understood? Hence the title of this introductory lecture with its question mark: *Ut architectura philosophia?* “As is architecture, so is philosophy”?

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By posing the question in Latin, I make 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 famously called into question by Gotthold Ephraim 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 also call into question, and indeed even more decisively, any attempt to obscure what so obviously would seem to separate the architect who bounds space, working with matter, from the philosopher who, bounds logical space working with concepts.

To be sure, as mentioned, philosophers have liked to invoke architectural metaphors, have liked to speak of laying foundations, of raising conceptual edifices, of the architectonics of some philosophical system. Descartes and Kant especially come to mind. But are such metaphors not at bottom dispensable? It would seem that someone who insists on a more intimate relationship between philosophy and architecture would have to have a rather strange understanding of the task of philosophy.

But the persistence of architectural and more generally of spatial metaphors in philosophical discourse demands more thoughtful consideration. To repeat the question: What is the bond that ties philosophy and architecture together and allows such metaphors to be illuminating? Is there something that philosophy has to learn from architecture? And is there something that architecture can learn from philosophy? In this introductory lecture I want to begin to address these three questions.

3

Let me begin with the first: What is the bond that ties philosophy and architecture together and gives architectural metaphors such a prominent place in philosophical discourse? We are given a pointer by Martin Heidegger, who in *Building Dwelling Thinking* calls 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:

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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 *Nachgeebur*, the *Nachgebauer*, the near-dweller, he who dwells nearby. The verbs, *huri*, *büren*, *beuren*, *beuron*, all signify dwelling, the abode, the place of dwelling,⁴

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 sense, it also says how far the nature of dwelling reaches. That is, *bauen*, *buan*, *bhu*, *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.⁵

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.

Agriculture and architecture are both understood here as modes of building. The German word for farmer is *Bauer*, i.e. one who builds.

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 Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 146-147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

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 philosophy’s architectural metaphors to make some sense?” Both 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.⁶ 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, another architectural metaphor.

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

⁶ 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 pp. 133–151.

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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.”⁷

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 allow us to 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, to which I shall return.

4

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

Consider once more the meaning of “building.” To build is to bound space. How is the space that the architect bounds 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, however we think it, 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 still 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 of space not an attempt to domesticate what resists domestication? The meaning of space remains elusive. I want

⁷ André Leroi -Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, Paris 1964, vol. 2., pp. 139-140, as quoted in Joseph Rykwert, *On Adams’s House in Paradise* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972). p. 21. Cf. the cave drawing of a paleolithic dwelling in the *Grotte de la Mouthe, Salle de la Hutte*).

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to claim that every human attempt to master space leads us inevitably into an antinomy, places us between some finite structure and the infinite, in this image figured by the architecture of the lines, on the one hand, and the empty paper, on the other. 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, for open space, and a desire to be firmly placed. But more about this later.

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 the cosmos as finite and as having a beginning, as our astronomers and physicists would once again have us do when they invite us think of the origin of the universe in the big bang, 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? To oversimplify: windows and doors, both literally and metaphorically, provide a key to successful dwellings.

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 our 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

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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?

5

With this let me turn to my second 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?' once again in a more personal way by speaking briefly of the way art and architecture has come to be important to my work in philosophy.

My interest in both is far older than my interest in philosophy. As a child I liked to draw, paint, and build. My 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 all but unlivable, to the Franconian Königshofen. On the outskirts is a little known, but quite lovely pilgrimage church in the village of Ipthausen, consecrated to the Birth of Mary (1746-1754). 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

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presenting the earth, it establishes the world, with the 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 nevertheless it seemed to beckon me to a better world. Four years later a teacher in the school I attended in Munich 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)⁸ and placed an image of that church on its back cover.

The very fact that I felt a need to write such a book 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 those who bother to read the book 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,⁹ I wanted to exhibit what I experienced as the profundity of an architecture and an art 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,

⁸ Available at

http://www.tucottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/D_A_T_A/Architektur/20.Jhdt/HarriesKars ten/the-bavarian-rococo-church.htm

⁹ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: Chicago U. Press, 1988).

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tones, words, the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial — *out of profundity*.”¹⁰

2. 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 modern culture, on its legitimacy and its limits, a topic that continues to concern me. 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. What did I mean? The rediscovery of meaning in matter, in the simplest things mattered to me. This led me to phenomenology, let me appreciate Nietzsche’s praise of the superficiality of the Greeks.

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. I shall examine this aesthetic approach in some detail in the following lectures. As I show in the *Ethical Function of Architecture*, that approach leads inevitably to an understanding of works of architecture as decorated sheds in the broadest sense, as functional buildings to which an aesthetic component has been added. There is inevitably tension between the two.

4. Can the aesthetic approach do justice to the requirements of dwelling? Be this as it may, it nevertheless presents itself as a potent figure for the spiritual situation of the 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

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, p. 38.

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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 that point should be generalized.

6

Let me conclude briefly with the third question I raised in the beginning: 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 architects more responsible by inviting them to question assumptions that stand in the way of such responsibility. 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, by taken for granted assumptions.

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, some forward — challenging, testing — others 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, given increasing environmental pressures, is so desperately needed if we are to preserve a livable environment.

2. The Aesthetic Approach

1

In my first lecture I raised the question: what does philosophy have to contribute to architecture? I suggested that one way in which philosophy may make architecture more responsible is by questioning certain assumptions that stand in the way of such responsibility. In the *Ethical Function of Architecture* I thus sought to challenge the aesthetic approach to art and architecture that, despite vigorous opposition, has presided over and continues to shape much theory and practice. But just how do I understand that approach?

Let me begin with repeating what I take to be a platitude: building serves dwelling. From this platitude follows: anyone who build bears responsibility for how we are to dwell. Building is not only a function of how we happen to dwell, but also helps shape the way in which we are going to dwell in the future. And here it is important not to forget the “we.” That “we” includes not only those who are going to inhabit or use the building, but also those who have to live with it. Even the most modest structure changes our environment in some way. Others will have to live with it, not just now, but in the future. Here the Carpenter House in Decatur, Georgia that according to the magazine *Dwell* the architect William Carpenter built “to sit unobtrusively among its 1920s neighbors.”¹¹ I leave it to you to judge how well the architect met the stated intention. But be this as it may, an architect should not just listen to his and his client’s wishes and consider what financial resources, building codes, and site allow. The architect needs to look to the future, not just to past and present. And once more I want to underscore the plural “we”: even when there is a single client with idiosyncratic wishes, even when what gets built is just a modest shed, whatever gets built changes our environment in some, perhaps very small way, and will thus, in varying degrees, affect other lives. With this any discussion of the builder’s, and more especially the architect’s responsibility has to begin.

¹¹ *Dwell*, February 2016, p. 86.

But while one may well grant the importance of such responsibility, one may yet wonder whether by placing so much emphasis on what may seem obvious, we are not in danger of losing sight of what is the architect's special responsibility, what makes him more than just a mere builder: the aesthetic integrity of his work. William Gass thus praised the way one of Peter Eisenman's houses seems to be oblivious to what I just termed the architect's responsibility. "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."¹² The house in question, Peter Eisenman's House VI in Cornwall, Connecticut, completed in 1975, his second built work, is a house built first of all as a work of art that self-consciously violated expectations of what would make a livable house and constantly reminded the inhabitants of this fact. They are said to have enjoyed living in a work of art, despite the inconvenience this entailed. But this house is not just a work of art, but a special work of art in that it is concept driven. It is meant to be experienced as the precipitate of an intellectual process, a play with a cubic grid.

But let me return to Gass's comment: The architect's trust and obligation is said by him to be concern for "the nature and beauty of building." And the "nature and beauty of building" is opposed by Gass to what "concerns me and mine," i.e. opposed to the requirements of everyday dwelling. This is to claim that the primary responsibility of the architect is of an aesthetic rather than of a practical or a moral sort. His task, as opposed to that of a mere builder, is to bound space in such a way that the result is something beautiful. Only a building that succeeds as an aesthetic object on this view deserves to be called a work of architecture. To embrace such a position is to embrace what I call the aesthetic approach.

But just this aesthetic approach, I want to claim, the approach presupposed by William Gass when he celebrates Eisenman's House VI, is one obstacle standing in the way of what I have called responsible building and, by extension, to the responsible training of architects. But this claim can be questioned and certainly needs to be

¹² William Gass, "House VI," *Progressive Architecture*, 58, June 1977, p. 64.

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unpacked a bit further. To repeat the question: just what do I mean by the "aesthetic approach"? What makes a building succeed as an aesthetic object?

2

Philosophical speculation about architecture has a long history. One could go back to the Greeks and Romans, begin for example with Vitruvius' speculations concerning the origin of building. Such speculations, as we shall see, remain indispensable. But ever since the middle of the eighteenth century the philosophy of architecture has generally been pursued as part of the philosophy of art, the philosophy of art again tends to be identified with aesthetics: thus the widespread tendency to consider the "philosophy of architecture" a branch of aesthetics.

Not that the philosophy of architecture began that way. The first philosopher to devote a lengthy treatise to architecture was Christian Wolff, his *Anfangsgründe der Baukunst, Principles of Architecture*, part of his encyclopedic *Anfangsgründe aller Mathematischen Wissenschaften*,¹³ *Principles of All Mathematical Sciences*, first published in 1710, and republished numerous times in the course of the 18th century. Note that architecture here is taken to be first of all a science, not an art. The book is a characteristic product of the Enlightenment. Embracing a mathematical method drawn from Descartes and Leibniz, Wolff was confident that he could provide architecture with fundamental principles that would raise what had long been a mere craft to the level of a science. Wolff's *Principles of Architecture* is an eminently practical work, addressed first of all to students of architecture, teaching them in great detail how to make what enlightened thinkers of the day, who had come to reject what they took to be the excesses of the Baroque, considered a good building. Wolff, too, takes for granted that a work of architecture should be beautiful, i.e. experienced as a perfect whole in which nothing is felt to be redundant or missing. This is said to presuppose an understanding of what the building is meant to be. A palace should not look like a barn. Wolff thus links the

¹³ Christian Wolff, *Der Anfangs-Gründe Aller Mathematischen Wissenschaften Erster Theil* (Halle: Renger, 1710), pp. 271-467.

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experience of the perfection of a building to understanding the intentions of the client. It is the client's intentions, not those of the architect, that are decisive and it is with reference to them that everything in a perfect work of architecture should be experienced as necessary. What matters first of all is thus the use to which the building is to be put. Wolff also suggests that our experience of the perfection of a building cannot be divorced from our understanding of how long it is meant to last. And in expected fashion he insists that in carrying out his work the architect rely on readily grasped proportions. Wolff's eminently sensible suggestions are readily put into practice. His *Anfangsgründe der Baukunst* invites a lean classicism.

Wolff understands architecture as a craft lifted by mathematics to the status of a science. He does not give it a place next to such arts as painting and sculpture. It was Jean Le Rond d'Alembert who in 1751, in the "Discours Préliminaire" of the *Encyclopédie*, reoriented the understanding of architecture by placing it alongside the other arts, all of them understood as fundamentally modes of painting, using different means to imitate beautiful nature, architecture doing so more abstractly than her sister arts, relying on concatenations of different bodies.¹⁴ D'Alembert recognizes that among these arts architecture is unique in that it is born of necessity. Luxury is said to have made architecture into an art by embellishing what answers to our most basic needs, progressing from huts to palaces, where beautiful architecture is likened to a mask placed over what is born of necessity.¹⁵

The metaphor of the mask raises questions. A mask requires a bearer. Works of architecture, so understood, are buildings that wear a beautiful mask. This brought to my mind Frank Gehry, who describes his Fisher Center at Bard College (2003)¹⁶ with the following revealing words: "The front façade of the building can be interpreted as a

¹⁴ Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *L'Encyclopédie/1re édition/Discours préliminaire*, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* Texte établi par Diderot et d'Alembert, 1751, p. xliii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xvii

¹⁶ See fishercenter.bard.edu/about/

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theatrical mask that covers the raw face of the performance space. Its abstract forms prepare the visitor to be receptive to experiencing the performances that occur within.” This, I want to suggest, captures the way architecture must to be understood, given the aesthetic approach, where we should note that architecture came to be understood as one of the arts just when aesthetics emerged as a philosophical discipline in the 18th century.

If often used that way, "aesthetics" should not be understood as just a synonym for "philosophy of art": when we today understand the philosophy of art first of all as aesthetics, we are the heirs of a quite specific approach to art that, even though it has a long prehistory going back to the Renaissance and indeed to antiquity, triumphed only in the 18th century, that is to say in the age of the Enlightenment, over an older approach that assigned art a religious, social, or ethical function. The birth of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline belongs with that triumph. We owe the birth of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline to the Wolff student Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, whose *Aesthetica* appeared in 1750, preceded by his dissertation, *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* of 1735, translated as *Reflections on Poetry*. What we can call “aesthetic beauty” Baumgarten defined as “sensible perfection.” The beautiful, this claims, addresses our senses, not just our understanding; “perfection” suggests that what we experience is so organized that nothing seems to be missing and nothing superfluous: beauty implies integrity, wholeness. Insistence on the autonomy and the distinctive character of aesthetic pleasure has helped to define aesthetics ever since the 18th century. Applied to art this means that it is the spectator’s point of view, not that of the maker of the work of art that is now privileged.

The definition of architecture given by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* provides the philosophy of architecture so understood with an obvious point of departure: “Architecture is the art of exhibiting concepts of things that are possible only through art, things whose form does not have nature as its determining basis but instead has a chosen purpose, and of doing so in order to carry out that aim and yet also with aesthetic purposiveness. In architecture the main concern is what use is to be made of the

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artistic object, and this use is a condition to which the aesthetic ideas are confined.”¹⁷ A good example is the Gropius House in Lincoln, Mass. (1938), now a National Historic Landmark — Gropius built it for his family in Lincoln, not long after he had arrived at Harvard. Put somewhat more concisely: works of architecture are useful buildings that succeed also as aesthetic objects. That characterizes well what I want to call the aesthetic approach to architecture. And does it not capture the way we do tend to think about architecture?

Roger Scruton's *The Aesthetics of Architecture* has given us perhaps the most persuasive articulation of the aesthetic approach to architecture.¹⁸ According to Scruton, the aesthetics of architecture "aims to capture the essence, not the accidents, of architectural beauty"— where beauty is understood as the object of a distinctive kind of pleasure. The question is whether a philosophy of architecture that thus focuses on beauty will be able to do justice to architecture.

Insistence on the autonomy of aesthetic delight, on the self-sufficiency of aesthetic experience, has to deny art, and more especially architecture, what Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel considered its highest function — I speak of its ethical function. This highest function is, according to Hegel, to be a privileged way of expressing humanity's deepest interests. The rise of the aesthetic approach in the 18th century is very much in keeping with Hegel's much discussed claim, made in the early 19th century, that for us moderns art in its highest sense — where Hegel is thinking especially of Greek art and the art of the Middle Ages — is a thing of the past.

This suggests that by insisting on the autonomy of aesthetic experience aesthetics also has tended to both elevate and at the same time marginalize such experience. More than the other arts, architecture, involved as it is with the whole of life, resists such

¹⁷ See Edward Winters, *Aesthetics and Architecture*, Edward Winters, *Aesthetics and Architecture* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), p. 1.

¹⁸ See also my reviews of Richard Hill, *Designs and their Consequences. Architecture and Aesthetics* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London: 1999), CAA Reviews, 2000 (<http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/hill.html>) and Edward Winters, *Aesthetics and Architecture* ((2007), *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*, 2008.02.15

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marginalization. This helps to explain why from the very beginning aesthetics should have treated architecture as a stepchild. Kant already noted that architecture has difficulty rising to the purity found in the other arts, for, he observes, "the suitability of a product for a certain use is the essential thing in an *architectural work*."¹⁹ But only a concern for beauty, he insisted, elevates a mere building into a work of art.

Committed to this aesthetic approach, Nikolaus Pevsner thus begins his *An Outline of European Architecture* with this seemingly self-evident observation: "A bicycle shed is a building, Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture."²⁰ A work of architecture "is designed with a view to aesthetic appeal." This is to say: work of architecture = building + aesthetic component — a decorated shed in the widest sense. I shall have to take a closer look at the term "decorated shed," which I owe to Venturi, in my next lecture. Here I am using it in what is, compared to Venturi's, an extended, broader sense. Eisenman's House VI is a decorated shed only in this extended sense.

Pevsner would have us understand works of architecture as buildings "designed with a view to aesthetic appeal." On this "aesthetic approach" works of architecture are buildings intended to appeal also as aesthetic objects. But what an "aesthetic object" is demands more discussion. What constitutes "aesthetic appeal"?

3

Objects with aesthetic appeal have traditionally been called beautiful. We call flowers beautiful; or certain landscapes; or persons. But we could not say that they are "designed with a view to aesthetic appeal"; they may be beautiful, but they are not works of art. As Kant, exemplifying the aesthetic approach, suggests, works of art are created to be beautiful. A concern for beauty has indeed presided over the progress of much western art, especially so since the 18th century. To be sure, such emphasis on beauty was soon called into question, first by critics and artists who broadened the scope of the

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), par. 51, p. 166.

²⁰ Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 23.

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aesthetically appealing by opposing the beautiful to the sublime, then by critics and artists who, like Marcel Duchamp, broadened the scope of the aesthetic still further by pursuing the interesting, turning their back on both the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful, the sublime, and the interesting can thus be considered different modes of the aesthetic.

Still, the pursuit of the beautiful as an ideally self-sufficient, absorbing presence has a certain precedence and can be said to have presided over the progress of art ever since the eighteenth century. In painting that progress can be said to have both culminated and to reached some sort of end some time in the 1960's. Both culmination and end find expression in the words the painter Frank Stella used to describe his artistic goals. Consider, e.g., his *Gran Cairo*, dating from 1962 and his description of what he intended:

I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the old values in painting, the humanistic values that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It really is an object. Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough in this finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever he's doing. He is making a thing. All that should be taken for granted. If the painting were lean enough, accurate enough, or right enough, you would just be able to look at it. All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all that I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without confusion. ... What you see is what you see.²¹

I would like to underscore a number of points:

1. Stella would have his painting so absorb our attention that we feel no need to look beyond it for meaning. It thus should not present itself to us as a representation that

²¹ "Questions to Stella and Judd," Interview with Bruce Glaser, edited by Lucy R. Lippard, *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 157 - 158.

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has its measure in the absent represented; nor as a sign that receives its meaning from the absent signified; nor as a symbol gesturing towards absent significance; nor as an allegory figuring absent meaning. Its presence should not be haunted by absence. What Archibald MacLeish said of the poem holds of it, too: it should not mean, but be.

2. The painting should be such that it allows us to "see the whole idea without confusion." It should not leave us wondering whether we may be missing something. Nothing in it should strike us as superfluous; nor should we experience it as just a fragment of an absent whole. The painting should present itself as a self-sufficient whole.

3. Such wholeness demands of the observer that he leave the painting alone, that he keep his distance from it. Such distanced beholding is different from the way we usually relate to things; think of care that seeks to help; of desire that wants to possess; of aversion that would avoid; of hate that calls for destruction. First of all we are interested in what we encounter and interest does not leave things or persons alone. Aesthetic beholding lets the beheld be what it is.

4. To the painting's self-justifying presence corresponds the self-sufficiency of our experience of it. Paintings are not useful in any obvious sense; they are not good for anything. But just their uselessness endows them with an appeal denied to anything that answers to our interest. This uselessness allows us to exist in the present, for all interest is directed towards the future. Thus it lets us be present to ourselves in a way denied by our usual engagement in the world. To the plenitude of the aesthetic object corresponds the plenitude of aesthetic experience.

What Stella says of his art can thus be generalized and read as a first description of the aesthetic object. Not that I needed Stella to arrive at this characterization. I could have drawn it from the founder of aesthetics Baumgarten, for example. We thus obtain the following fourfold characterization:

1. The aesthetic object should not mean, but be.
2. The aesthetic object should present itself as a whole.
3. The aesthetic object demands aesthetic distance.
4. The aesthetic object promises to put us at one with ourselves.

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Even this first characterization invites us to question any attempt to understand works of architecture as aesthetic objects. Buildings and their elements have to carry meanings if they are to function: houses should look like houses, doors like doors, works of architecture should mean, not just be. Nor do buildings readily present themselves in their totality: we always experience them from a particular point of view, from in front or from behind, from inside or outside; thus we never see more than a partial appearance of an absent whole. Nor is aesthetic distance easily reconciled with the way we use buildings: we do not leave buildings alone, but enter and leave them, change and transform them depending on our needs. Such use is difficult to reconcile with the plenitude that was said to characterize aesthetic experience. Should we not rather design buildings in such a way that they become complete only when inhabited? I am struck by the way photographs of architecture often prefer to show spaces without people. But do we not do violence to works of architecture when we compare them to paintings or sculptures understood as self-sufficient aesthetic objects? Could it be that a certain incompleteness is a mark of good architecture? That it should be somewhat like a score that wants to be performed and leaves a sort of room for improvisation.

4

But how adequate is the characterization of the aesthetic object I have offered so far? Is it more than an overly simplistic caricature? I shall come back to such questions. So far I have not attempted to present more than a simple model. Bracketing for the time being the question of its adequacy, this model should at least be clear. Also clear should be the tension between what this model of the aesthetic approach demands and the requirements of dwelling and building. Works of architecture resist consideration as aesthetic objects in the described sense.

But my model also raises the question of the extent to which works of art such as paintings or sculptures are adequately understood as aesthetic objects. The aesthetic object, so understood, remains true to its essence only when it presents itself as art for art's sake. But can that be granted? Think of a medieval altarpiece. And if, as I have

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claimed, the aesthetic approach is presupposed by aesthetics, must a self-critical philosophy of art not question this presupposition, i.e. question aesthetics?

Architecture, as I pointed out, has difficulty rising to the aesthetic purity that can be found in the other arts. As Kant insists, architecture cannot turn a cold shoulder to the world, it has to be both beautiful and practical; indeed, considerations of utility will almost always take precedence over a concern for beauty. But to the extent that this is the case, beauty in architecture can appear only as an addition to what necessity dictates. This it to say also that, so understood, the architect inevitably has to compromise his artistic vision. Frank Gehry is one prominent architect who has come to embrace and even celebrate this necessity.

That more than other artists, architects are forced to betray their aesthetic ideals has thus been noted by the philosopher Paul Weiss, who taught here at Yale for many years. When Paul Rudolph was Dean he had a significant impact on our architecture school.²² Architecture, he remarked, has to exist

within a context defined by unskilled labor and such practical activities as excavation, engineering, and plumbing. It must conform to building codes written with little concern for artistic needs. No other art is so hemmed in by men, tasks, and conditions relating to non-aesthetic matters.²³

Writing very much in the orbit of aesthetic modernism, Weiss defined architecture as “the art of creating space through the construction of boundaries in common-sense space.”²⁴ Like William Gass, he thought it important that the architect’s creativity not be fettered by “judges, critics, clients, and problems relating to engineering, city planning, and scales.” And so he called on architecture schools to encourage students “to experiment

²² Cf. “On the Responsibility of the Architect: A Discussion including Philip Johnson, Pietro Belluschi, Louis Kahn, Paul Weiss and Vincent Scully,” *Perspecta* 2, Vol. 2 (1953), pp. 45-57.

²³ Paul Weiss, *Nine Basic Arts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p. p. 68.

²⁴ Paul Weiss, *Nine Basic Arts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p. 69.

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with the building of all sorts of space, in all sorts of ways, with all sorts of material. They should have periods in which they do not care that their work may not interest a client or that no one may ever build it or that it may not fit in with prevailing styles. Not until they take seriously the need to explore the possibilities of bounding spaces in multiple ways will they become alert to architecture as an art, as respectable, revelatory, creative, and at least as difficult as any other.”²⁵ But while such thinking has led to the creation of countless striking aesthetic objects, their often undeniable beauty may resist inhabitation and contribute little to the creation of a successful built environment. Eisenman’s House VI is a good example. Way over budget the house took three years to build, had to be reconstructed in 1987, and proved quite impractical so that supplies that do not fit in the kitchen have their place in a separate barn. But its poetry cannot be denied. Like all aesthetic objects, such works invite admiration simply for what they are. But if we demand that architecture provide both physical and spiritual shelter, the creation of such aesthetic objects fails to meet the architect’s special responsibility. Instead of shelter it offers distractions. A different kind of beauty is needed.

Weiss, and of course not only he, would have challenged this, as shown by his suggestion concerning how architectural education might be improved. If non-aesthetic considerations inevitably hem in architecture, we should also expect them to have limited the way architects are trained. Weiss thus concludes his discussion of architecture with a questionable historical observation and a bit of advice:

It would not be amiss, though, to remark that the history of architecture does not seem to have had many great turning points. There seem to be few great adventurers among the architects, perhaps because they are so overwhelmed by judges, critics, clients, and problems relating to engineering, city planning, and scales. What architecture badly needs today are laboratories where students are not only trained and disciplined,

²⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

as they now are, but also encouraged to experiment with the building of all sorts of space, in all sorts of ways, with all sorts of material²⁶

5

Once this inevitable subjection is acknowledged, the hope that architecture might become an art as aesthetically respectable as the others must be rejected. Given the aesthetic approach, architecture will never manage to become as respectable as painting or sculpture. If beauty demands aesthetic purity, the beauty of architecture would appear inescapably compromised. Buildings have to be more than objects for aesthetic contemplation. The architect has to take into account the uses to which a building will be put, while those using it will not be able to keep their distance from it. Compared to her sister arts architecture will then have to be considered deficient and impure: a not quite respectable art.

All of this would be of little consequence were it only a matter of some philosophers and architectural theorists arguing among themselves about the essence of architecture. But, as we shall see, the rise of aesthetics and of the aesthetic approach in the 18th century are only aspects of a more deeply rooted change in sensibility that in the name of reason has divorced pragmatic and aesthetic considerations and has placed the architect uneasily between the two: on the one hand, the uses of architecture are emphasized; on the other, architecture is supposed to be beautiful. Unfortunately, the hopes of functionalists notwithstanding, there is not only no assurance that an economic and efficient solution to practical problems will also be aesthetically pleasing, but given the aesthetics of purity, there is no chance that modern architecture's marriage of art and engineering will be free of tension and compromise. On the aesthetic approach the beauty of a building has to appear as something added on to what necessity dictates, as decoration in a broad sense. The tensions that result from this mingling of pragmatic and aesthetic concerns all but rule out aesthetic completeness.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

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It is thus hardly surprising that with the rise of the aesthetic approach in the 18th century, architecture should have entered a period of uncertainty and crisis from which it has still not emerged. To be sure, already then there were attempts to raise architecture to the status of a purer art. The prophetic designs of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux offer striking examples. Not surprisingly, Ledoux's most daring designs remained on paper. With good reason Philip Johnson, following Emil Kaufmann, declared this the beginning of modern architecture.²⁷

But the example points to the problem of architecture so understood: An architect who understands himself as first of all an artist, may well be tempted to say of himself: "Just because I am an architect, I refuse to build." Lebbeus Woods, at whose designs I shall look in considerable detail later on in this course, was such an architect. His artistic vision has led him to create fantasies, difficult or impossible to realize. Reality demands compromises; vision must be tempered with attention to what can get built.

As long as architectural theory remains ruled by the aesthetic approach, it has to understand the work of architecture as Kant did, as essentially a functional building with an added aesthetic component, i.e. as a decorated shed in the broadest sense of the word. That the problem of architecture should have become intertwined with the problem of decoration is thus hardly surprising.

²⁷ "Philip Johnson, "House at New Canaan, Connecticut", in David Whitney, Jeffrey Kipnis, ed., *Philip Johnson: the Glass House* (Pantheon Books, 1993), pp. 9-15, reprinted from *The Architectural Review*, September 1950, pp. 152-59.

3. The Decorated Shed

1

In my last lecture I introduced the notion of the decorated shed, which I borrowed from Venturi, using it, however in an extended sense.²⁸ What do I mean by “decorated shed”? Otto Wagner’s *Majolikahaus* (1898), provides an obvious example.

A shed is a structure raised to meet a certain need; like a tool, it has a function. But from the very beginning human beings have demanded more of their dwellings and tools — and indeed of their own bodies: the urge to decorate is as old as humanity. How are we to understand this urge? Human beings have thus always demanded more of their buildings than that they provide shelter, storage space, or a functional frame for certain activities: they have demanded that they please in their appearance, in the way they present themselves to the senses, i.e. that they also give also pleasure as aesthetic objects. That there is tension in this twofold demand was, as I pointed out, noted already by Kant, who recognized the difficulty architecture has rising to the purity found in such arts as sculpture or painting, for, as he observes, “what is essential in a *work of architecture* is the product’s adequacy for a certain use,”²⁹ while only a concern for beauty, he thought, elevates a mere building into a work of architecture. Something analogous can be said of countless other things, e.g. of ceramics or of gardens.

Such an understanding of the work of architecture as a decorated shed is indeed called for by that aesthetic approach, which, as I discussed in the preceding lecture, demands of the artwork that it be so organized that ideally nothing is felt to be missing or superfluous, i.e. demands of it what 18th century theorists liked to call “sensible perfection.” The perfection that the aesthetic approach demands of the artwork means that nothing is to be added to it, nothing to be taken away. By its very perfection, such an aesthetic object can stand in no essential relationship to its context. Like framed

²⁸ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977

²⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, par. 51. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 192.

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paintings, aesthetic objects, so understood, are spiritually mobile, even if they happen to be firmly fixed to a place. Their perfection also entails that the aesthetic observer should keep his distance from such a work, leave what he observes just as it is, that he should contemplate its aesthetic plenitude, absorbed in its presence.

That there tension in an understanding of works of architecture as functional buildings that should be appreciated also as aesthetic objects in this sense should by now require no further discussion: their very perfection threatens to render aesthetic objects uninhabitable. It is thus hardly surprising that with the rise of the aesthetic approach in the 18th century, architecture, caught increasingly between the conflicting claims of the engineer and the artist, should have entered a period of uncertainty and crisis from which it has not yet emerged. That uncertainty finds one expression in the question: where do schools of architecture belong: with technical universities or with art academies? The aesthetic approach has to lead to an understanding of the work of architecture as a compromise between essentially unrelated concerns, a compromise that threatens to violate the demands of both beauty and utility. The 19th century tended to entrust the training of architects first of all to technical universities. Today's architecture world has tended to separate the engineer from the architect-artist more completely, allowing the latter to claim his place besides the sculptor and the painter, leaving the task of actually realizing the design to the engineer. With this the architect's task tends to reduce to the creation of aesthetic objects that of course also have to meet whatever programmatic requirements are pre-given, where details concerning how to meet these requirements can often be entrusted to specialists such as engineers or computer experts. Frank Gehry describes the Fisher Center at Bard College well with these revealing words — I cited them already last time: “The front façade of the building can be interpreted as a theatrical mask that covers the raw face of the performance space. Its abstract forms prepare the visitor to be receptive to experiencing the performances that occur within.” Buried beneath the decorative wrapping is a quite ordinary shed, obedient to other than aesthetic considerations.

In creating such works of architecture, the more pragmatic architects, concerned to stay within the limits of the available budget, are likely to think first of all of contour

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and applied decoration, content to give the body of the building a pleasing shape and to clothe it in an aesthetically pleasing exterior — consider e.g. Cesar Pelli's Wells Fargo Center in Minneapolis, completed in 1988 and recognized in 2000 by the United States Environmental Protection Agency as one of the 100 most energy efficient buildings. But the artistically more ambitious architect would transform the building as a whole into a kind of mega-sculpture, allowing the sculptural dress to bend and shape, perhaps smother the architecture beneath, as illustrated once more by the Fisher Center. In both cases the aesthetic component presents itself as a welcome, yet from the point of view of function, dispensable addendum, where the question, just why should such an addendum be welcomed, sometimes at enormous extra cost, demands an answer.

As the examples I mentioned show, I am using “decorated shed” in a rather broad sense that not only includes buildings, such as the *Majolikahaus*, to which decoration of one sort or another was added only after it was essentially complete — the decorated sheds of the nineteenth century provide obvious examples — but all buildings that add an aesthetic component to structures that, as far as their function is concerned, have no need for that component. Gehry's Fisher Center is obviously a decorated shed in that sense. But what about Eisenman's House VI? One may be tempted to say, yes. It is after all a house and as such has a definite function, and it is also an aesthetic object. But it is difficult to understand the aesthetic object here as an addendum to the house. It just about drowns the house. In its appearance the aesthetic object has priority. That can be said also of Gehry's Fisher Center. But in the case of Gehry, he himself points out that what appears first of all is a mask. That demands that we distinguish between the bearer of the mask and the mask. In the case of the Eisenman house it was aesthetic concerns, the play with planes, that ruled the design process from the very beginning. The house had to accommodate itself to the aesthetic object, and obviously had difficulty doing so. Faced with such architecture it is difficult to speak of decoration. We can no longer distinguish the bearer of the mask from the mask.

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Decoration, as I am using the term here, is understood to stand in an essentially external relationship to the function of the structure that bears it.³⁰ I thus want to distinguish, somewhat artificially, I admit, given the way these terms are often used interchangeably, “decoration” from “ornament,” the former understood as an aesthetic addendum standing in no essential relationship to the decorated building, the latter understood as standing in such a relationship.

Given the aesthetic approach, as I have sketched it, the beauty of a work of architecture has to appear as something added on to what necessity dictates, as decoration in this broad sense. In this expanded sense, someone who wants to give a high rise the look of a turning torso, as Santiago Calatrava did in Malmö, Sweden, with his much acclaimed Twisting or Turning Torso, completed in 2005, which in 2015 won the 10 Year Award from the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, also decorates some shed, even though here the aesthetic component is not simply added on to an essentially complete building, but is allowed to shape and distort the entire structure, i.e, makes it into what Venturi called a “duck.” And the same must be said of the Dancing House in Prague (1992-1996), nicknamed Fred and Ginger, given the look of a dancing couple or perhaps a ruin.³¹ In 1996 it was awarded by Time magazine its Design of the year award. Frank Gehry collaborated here with the Czech architect V. Milunić. The original idea was to create a building that would symbolize the transition of the country from a static communist regime to a dynamic democracy. The end product was obviously a duck that ill fits its context. But it is no doubt interesting and has become a Prague landmark.

I realize that this particular building invites more thoughtful responses. I am thinking especially of the response it received from one Josef Pesch, who understands this modestly scaled office building, which rose where a stray American bomb had torn a hole into the otherwise remarkably intact fabric of this historical city, as not just another, particularly interesting, expression of playful post-modernism, but as an appropriate

³⁰ *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997). See especially pp. 50-68.

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reminder of one of the darkest periods of European, indeed of world history. Pesch thus invites us to see the empty dome, crowning the right half of the building, as referring to the similarly empty dome of the Hiroshima A-bomb monument, to experience the not only playful, but disturbingly deconstructive, ruinous look of the building an appropriate response to a past that left much more than buildings in ruins. How is poetry possible after Auschwitz? Theodor Adorno asked. Faced with this building, Josef Pesch invites us to ask: how is architecture possible after Hiroshima?

I admit that this building offers an occasion for such pathos-laden thoughts; also as an occasion for very different thoughts. I wonder thus about the appropriateness of building a modest office building as a pathos-laden monument, a monument that I at least experience not so much as a monument to a past shadowed by Auschwitz and Hiroshima, as to these particular architects' creativity, which found in site and program a welcome occasion to exercise his playfulness. The playfulness of the building in this site brought to my mind Adorno's subsequent revision of his remark about the supposed impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz. Adorno knew of course that, as it stands, that remark cannot be defended: "The proposition, after Auschwitz it is no longer possible to write a poem, is not valid without qualifications: but this is certain: that after Auschwitz, because it was possible and remains possible for further than we can see, no art that is serene or cheerful (*heiter*) can be imagined. Objectively it will degenerate into cynicism, no matter how it borrows the goodness of human understanding."³²

As I said, I find it difficult to experience the Dancing House in this pathos-laden way. I see it as an expression of the architects' playfulness that does not seem to fit its context. In the language of Venturi and his associates, I experience the building as a "duck" rather than a "decorated shed."

³² Theodor W. Adorno, "Ist die Kunst heiter?" *Noten zur Literatur*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch, 1981), pp. 603-604. Cf. Josef Pesch "Frank Gehry's 'Ginger and Fred' in Prague: Playfully Postmodern or Seriously Post-Apocalyptic?" *Kunst und Kultur* 4.5 (Juni/Juli/August 1997): pp. 14-17. English translation by Pesch available on the internet: lava.ds.arch.tue.nl/GAILery/PraHA/tgehry.html

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But what are “ducks” so understood? “Ducks” are buildings where “the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form. This kind of building-becoming-sculpture we call duck in honor of the duck-shaped drive-in, in God's Own Junkyard by Peter Blake.” Decorated sheds in Venturi’s sense are buildings “where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them.”³³ But the distinction presupposes that both ducks and decorated sheds are to be understood in terms of systems of space and structure serving the program, i.e. as functional sheds, which in the case of “ducks” are distorted by the aesthetic addendum, while in the case of “decorated sheds” are only dressed up or clothed by it. That is to say, both are “decorated sheds” in my broader sense.

2

Venturi suggested that the architecture appropriate to our age is an architecture of decorated sheds. As a descriptive term this seems to me pretty much on target, so much so indeed that there seems to me to be good reason to call our age the age of the decorated shed. That reformulation calls for explanation: what do I have in mind when I call our modern epoch “the age of the decorated shed”? The characterization is meant to be first of all descriptive: the architecture most in keeping with the spirit of our age is, as an architecture of decorated sheds. Despite the modernist rhetoric that form should follow function, something deep in us would seem to resist the look of pure functionality in the built environment and demands more. And can something analogous not also be said of our art? Do we not need art and culture to decorate a life that seems impoverished without such embellishment?

But if my characterization is meant to be descriptive, it is also meant to be critical: the turn to decoration that is so characteristic of the age has, as I will also try to show, lost sight of the most important tasks architecture faces today, even as both the practice

³³ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas*, revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977). p. 163.

and the theory of architecture for the most part fail to recognize this.

Let me return to my conception of the decorated shed. Crucial here is that the aesthetic component and the building, understood as a kind of machine that should meet certain programmatic requirements, stand in no essential relationship. This has to give the work that gets actually built a look of arbitrariness: why should an apartment building look like a twisted torso, or a dancing couple, or a ruin? In my second lecture I introduced the aesthetic category of the interesting. And no doubt: such buildings are interesting: they have proven this by generating a great deal of interest, as the public response demonstrates. But should we not demand more of architecture than that it be interesting?³⁴

And despite the seemingly so obvious correctness of Pevsner's claim that Lincoln Cathedral is a building that also succeeds as a work of architecture because of its added aesthetic component, is it adequately understood as a decorated shed? What distinguishes it from more ordinary buildings is not just the addition of an aesthetic component, but that component here has a re-presentational³⁵ function: it lets us experience what we see precisely as a cathedral, i.e. as more than just a building large enough to allow a multitude to assemble and that for whatever reason was deemed important enough to expend the resources necessary to transform it into a remarkable aesthetic object. The cathedral, as a whole and with all its countless details, speaks to us of what it means to be a church, more especially a cathedral. Re-presenting itself as a cathedral, it speaks to us also of what those who built it thought to matter in their lives, speaks to us, e.g., of death, genuine community, and of the promise of everlasting happiness. Into the ground of everyday buildings serving everyday needs it inserts a figure of utopia. Once the cathedral thus gathered individuals into a community by

³⁴ On the interesting in architecture, see Karsten Harries, "The Search for the Interesting," *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 49-60 and "Modernity's Bad Conscience," *AA Files*, no. 10, Autumn 1985, pp. 53-60.

³⁵ On "representation" and "re-presentation," see Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, pp. 118-133,

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speaking of what was then thought to matter most. In that sense it is an obvious example of what Hegel considered the highest function of art. That highest function is served only when the aesthetic stands in the service of the ethical, broadly understood. But, as I showed in my first lecture, just such service is elided by the aesthetic approach that has presided over the appreciation and production of art at least since the 18th century:³⁶ That approach tends towards an understanding of art as being for art's sake, of Lincoln cathedral as a functional shed that also succeeds as an aesthetic object.

But can we really claim that there is a profound difference between a work of architecture, such as Lincoln Cathedral, and a modern high rise building, say Cesar Pelli's Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, for 6 or so years the tallest building in the world? Do these Twin Towers not very much evoke thoughts of a modern cathedral, a cathedral raised, to be sure, not to God, but to the power of capital, to the economic vigor of this society? Both the enormous height, and the aesthetic sensibility that gave these glass, steel, and concrete commercial office towers their distinctive shape, capture our attention, invite us to look at what we see in the image of the sacred architecture of the past, as an up to date version of some twin-towered cathedral that once had the power to gather some city into a genuine community by providing it with its spiritual center. Why should modern architecture not be able to do the same? Did Gropius not call on architects in his Bauhaus manifesto to furnish us with a modern cathedral? And do the Petronas Towers not meet that task?

But lacking is the faith that built the cathedrals. The power of capital cannot be put in the place of the now absent God, for money has an essentially instrumental function. It is abused when its pursuit is made into an end. To be sure, the great architecture of the past, especially the sacred architecture of past centuries, remains available to architects who want to give their buildings an air of special importance, not

³⁶ I say "at least," because, although the aesthetic approach becomes dominant in Europe only in the 18th century, it is of course much older, aesthetic considerations helping to shape both the appreciation and the production, not only of art, but also of objects of use from the very beginning. But only in the early modern period does the end of art come to be located first of all in a purely aesthetic delight.

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just as a storehouse of significant forms, but also as a repository of meanings that even if no longer alive, yet retain at least traces of their former aura. Evoking a twin-towered cathedral façade, the Petronas Towers follow a by now time-honored convention of raising whatever buildings are deemed important in the image of Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals — think of the many buildings such as court houses, museums, banks, and memorials, that have been built in the 19th and 20th centuries in the image of temples. And here at Yale, to give some other examples, libraries, a gymnasium, and even a power plant, were built quite literally in the image of the cathedrals of the past. But such evocations of bygone meanings are themselves little more than aesthetic gestures that lack the power to restore these meanings to genuine life. In the end there is no very deep difference between an approach that builds a modern apartment tower in a way that invokes the great architecture of the past and, say, Calatrava's Turning Torso in Malmö, which looks of course in a very different direction, i.e. to quite recent minimal sculpture. In either case the question presents itself: does the aesthetic object created by the architect and whatever meanings it communicates, stand in an essential relationship to what the function of the building demands? To experience a building as a decorated shed, is to experience the aesthetic addendum, whatever form it takes, however laden with meanings it may be, as contingent and therefore, from a purely aesthetic point of view, defective.

3

I have tried to explain what I mean by the expression “decorated shed.”³⁷ What then let's me call our modern epoch “the age of the decorated shed”? What I have in mind is more than the obvious fact that most of the important buildings rising today all over the world, many of them designed by the same small number of star architects, all of whom have developed a truly global practice, invite the label “decorated sheds.” Too often they strike us as clones of the same original. Consider in this connection what Jean

³⁷ For a fuller explanation, see Karsten Harries. *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 2-81.

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Baudrillard had to say about the Twin Towers as they stood in New York before 9/11: “These two towers resemble two perforated bands. Today we’d probably say they’re clones of each other, that they’ve already been cloned. Did they anticipate our present? Does that mean that architecture is not part of reality but part of the fiction of a society, an anticipatory illusion? Or does architecture simply translate what is already there?”³⁸ That was of course some years ago. Today we are invited think about what has happened and what has taken their place: what fiction does the new world trade center serve, what reality does it translate?

Characteristic of all such buildings is that they seem essentially mobile. This look of mobility is indeed to be expected, given an understanding of works of architecture as aesthetic objects: such objects are, as I pointed out, spiritually mobile. Such buildings no longer seem to belong to a particular place; they seem ready to travel. To return once more to Calatrava’s Turning Torso: does it really belong to the Swedish Malmö, where it happens to stand? That the question must be answered in the negative is suggested by the fact that Turning Torso towers were once supposed to rise in the American Las Vegas and in the Turkish Istanbul. And there is no reason why this should have been the end, why there should not be yet another Turning Torso in Shanghai or Mexico City. And it was it be expected that other architects would follow suit, as they did in Toronto and Dubai. But when I invite you to look at our age as the age of the decorated shed, I am thinking of something more essential than just the fact that “decorated shed” describes what works of architecture have to become in an age that understands works of art first of all as aesthetic objects, to be appreciated as such: our modern world itself invites understanding in the image of a decorated shed. By “world” I understand here, not the totality of what there is, but the spiritual situation or framework that is presupposed by the way those attuned to our global, post-industrial culture think and act, relate to things

³⁸ Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, trans. Robert Bononno. Foreword K. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 4.

and to persons. In this sense — and I am aware that my description is a caricature, but an illuminating caricature I trust — we can be said to live in the age of the decorated shed.

In choosing this expression I am thinking also of an essay by Martin Heidegger, who characterized our age as “the age of the world picture.”³⁹ In that essay Heidegger was concerned with the threat the world picture that rules the modern world poses to our humanity. The aesthetic approach, as will become clearer in the following, may be understood as a response, but as an inadequate response to this threat, inadequate because that response betrays the promise of art: understanding art first of all only in aesthetic terms, it denies architecture its essential ethical function. Tending to reduce all art to decoration in the broadest sense, not just of our buildings, but of our lives, the age of the decorated shed threatens our humanity. Needed is a different art and architecture. I shall address that need in the final lectures.

4

Since my own understanding of the task of art in “the age of the decorated shed” developed in what has been a life-long dialogue with what Heidegger has to say about art and “the age of the world picture,” it is to his essay that I would now like to turn at least briefly. Just what does Heidegger have in mind when he calls the modern age “the age of the world picture”? How illuminating is the metaphor of the “picture” on which Heidegger here relies? But before I address that question in the following lecture, I would like to sketch briefly Heidegger’s fivefold characterization of this age of the world picture:

1. Our age is said to have its foundation in metaphysics.

What must seem at first a rather farfetched claim — perhaps an example of a philosopher overestimating the significance of his own discipline — becomes a bit more plausible when we consider the second characterization:

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 75-113.

2. Today metaphysics finds its most visible expression in technology.

Metaphysics seeks to understand the essence of reality in order to master it. Descartes provides a key example. His metaphysics of nature was intended to provide science with a foundation that would allow it to progress and render us ever more decisively the masters and possessors of nature. Science, so understood, inevitably leads to technology. In modern technology metaphysics can be said to have triumphed. It is the significance of this triumph that we need to consider. The death of art in what Hegel called its highest sense is a consequence of this triumph. Heidegger, too, links this death to the rise of what I have called the aesthetic approach. This is how we must understand Heidegger's third characterization.

3. An aesthetic understanding of the work of art corresponds to this triumph.

If our age is indeed an age of science and technology, we should expect this to find expression in our buildings. But the very fact that we continue to value art shows that such an approach is felt to be deficient. Instrumental reason cannot satisfy our demands for meaning. That inability calls for an aesthetic supplement: technological thinking and the interest in decoration belong together. Precisely because science and technology cannot know anything of values — I shall have to return to this claim — human beings are led to look to art and culture to find there something to compensate them for what a commitment to scientific objectivity and instrumental reason threatens to deny them. Nietzsche's saying in *The Will to Power* comes to mind, that we have art so that we would not perish over the truth.⁴⁰ And does the same not hold for what we call "culture"? Do art and culture not have today an essentially decorative function? This leads me to Heidegger's fourth characterization.

4. Culture becomes the custodian of what are taken to be the highest values.

Once that custodian was religion. But the evolution of our modern world has meant the progressive privatization of religion. The separation of church and state is a function of such privatization. Thus privatized, religion ceases to function as an effective custodian

⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtziger Jahre," *Werke*, 3 vols., ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1966), vol. 3, p. 832.

of the common sense or the values that are needed to hold a society together. Where then do we moderns find our highest values? An obvious answer is provided by our cultural inheritance. But that inheritance speaks with many different voices. How these are sorted out is becoming increasingly an individual matter. But if so, how can culture take the place of religion? This leads me to Heidegger's fifth and final characterization:

5. Inseparably bound up with modern world picture is an understanding of reality that no longer has a place for God, gods, or the divine. As will become clearer in the course of these lectures, I don't consider Heidegger's fivefold characterization of the age an altogether adequate description: in everyone's experience there is hopefully much that does not fit what is here being claimed. What Heidegger here offers us is no more than a simple model that focuses on certain key aspects of the world we live in, but leaves out other important features. Or, we can say, what he offers us is a caricature. But if so, we must add, like any good caricature, it captures something essential and in this case deeply disturbing. What makes this caricature so disturbing is precisely the violence that what Heidegger describes as the age of the world-picture does to what we consider our humanity, presided over by our highest values. But this caricature would not be found disturbing by us if we did not recognize that it captured something essential and all too familiar about our world.

4. Architecture in the Age of the World Picture

1

I concluded the last lecture with a reference to Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture." Heidegger included that lecture in a collection of essays to which he gave the title *Holzwege*, which could be translated as "Wood Paths" or "Paths that Lead Nowhere." He first gave this lecture in 1938. At that time he had given it the somewhat different title "The Foundation of the Modern World Picture by Metaphysics." That original title invites us to compare the modern world picture with others, possessing presumably different foundations. The original title thus suggests that every age has its own world picture. And can we not ask for the world picture of the Middle Ages or of the Greeks?⁴¹ World picture here means something like world-view. The revised title, however, claims something else, claims that the very attempt to understand the world as a picture helps to define our age, hinting at a connection between such an attempt and metaphysics. This suggests that while we moderns may inquire into the world picture of the Middle Ages, the medievals would not have done so. They did not experience their world as a picture. Just what is at stake?

The word "picture" offers a first answer: we can look at pictures, stand before them, but we cannot enter or leave them, cannot live or dwell in them. In that way they are obviously different from work of architecture. Pictures may include representations of persons. In this sense Leon Battista Alberti could say that pictures allow us to live even after our death. But it is of course not really we who live in such pictures. What we find in them is only a representation, a simulacrum. We cannot live in pictures. Pictures are not at all like buildings, even if they may of course represent them. They cannot be

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 75-113. Trans. William Lovitt, "The Age of the World Picture," *The question of Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 115-154.

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entered. What I said before of aesthetic objects holds especially of pictures: they are essentially uninhabitable. That much is obvious.

This suggests what is at stake in the phrase: "The Age of the World Picture." To the extent that we understand the world as a picture, we stand before it, but have lost our place in it. In such a world we can no longer be said to dwell; in such a world we all tend to become displaced persons. But to say that we stand before our modern world as we stand before a picture is to use a metaphor that calls for further discussion. What is suggested is that there is a sense in which we have lost our place in the modern world. But what sense does this make?

There is a sense in which such a displacement is demanded by science, which presupposes a self-elevation that transforms the embodied self into a disembodied thinker and observer. The medieval mystic Meister Eckhart appeals to such self-elevation when he writes, "Yesterday as I sat yonder I said something that sounds incredible: 'Jerusalem is as near to my soul as this place is.' Indeed a point a thousand miles beyond Jerusalem is as near to my soul as my body is, and I am as sure of this as I am of being human."⁴² We should have no difficulty following his thought: In imagination and thought we can transcend ourselves as beings bound by our bodies to a particular place and time. The commitment to objectivity that rules science is based on just such a self-elevation. There is indeed a sense in which to a scholar studying Israel Jerusalem is as close as whatever place he happens to find himself in. The transformation of the embodied self into a disembodied thinking substance, into an ideal observer or a Cartesian *res cogitans*, lies at the very origin of philosophy, of metaphysics, and that is to say also at the origin of science. The scientist wants to see, wants to understand what is as it is, bracketing for the sake of such objectivity himself and his place in the world. This desire to just see and understand caused already Thales to tumble into his well. Absent-mindedness

⁴² *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, ed. and trans. Josef Quint, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936-1976), "Adolescens, tibi dico: surge!" vol. 2, p. 305. Meister Eckhart, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 134. Cf. Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge<Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), especially pp. 160-183.

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characterizes the very origin of philosophy and science. It is but the other side of that disinterested objectivity that we demand of all who lay claim to the pursuit of truth. A Cartesian *res cogitans* or thinking substance has no need for a house. And human beings who understand themselves first of all as such thinking subjects, who just happen to find themselves in some particular body, in a particular place and time, will not allow such particularities to circumscribe their freedom, but will consider all of this material to be fashioned into a successful life. In their essence they will be mobile. Such persons will of course still require physical shelter and buildings that meet that need, but they will hardly expect architecture to meet their spiritual needs. They will be content with a mobile home.

But let me return to the term “pictures.” We tend to think of pictures as representations. They refer to what they represent. Buildings, on the other hand, usually do not represent anything. We live and work in them. Houses thus offer both physical and spiritual shelter. Consider in this connection how Heidegger’s essay would lead to very different expectations had he called it instead “The Age of the World Building.” To understand the world in the image of a building, perhaps a house, invites thoughts of God as an architect, who created this world for us to enjoy and dwell in — think of the cosmos of the *Timaeus* or of the cosmos of the Christian Middle Ages: a divine architecture that placed human beings near the center. The world is understood here as a work fashioned by some higher spirit, as a well ordered whole in which human beings have their proper place. The task of the architect might then be to imitate, to the best of his ability, this divine model. He would thus help us find our place in the world. His work, however, would not be a picture.

Not every representation is a picture. A stage set may represent some square without therefore becoming a picture. Could Heidegger have called his essay equally well “The Age of the World Theater”? That title would have led me to expect an essay on the world of the Baroque. The Baroque did find in the theater a key metaphor to describe its understanding of the world into which individuals were born, in which they struggled and eventually died. We should keep in mind that “theater” is a contrast term. In this respect it is like the word “dream,” which demands the contrast with the way

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those, who are awake, experience reality. The word “dream” loses its meaning when so totalized that everything is said to be a dream. That is why we cannot carry out the Cartesian thought experiment that would make all that we experience but a dream. The same goes for the word “theater.” We cannot say that all reality is but theater. Once the theater becomes all-embracing it ceases to be theater. The Baroque “world-theater” presupposes thus the conviction that there is another higher world that we shall enter and witness when with our death we step off that stage on which we are now actors. The Baroque theater sought to represent this world-theater in which we play our parts. Such representation had a double function: 1) By transforming the world-theater into spectacle, it established a distance between the individual and that theater, a distance that allowed him to enjoy this spectacle as a spectator, allowed him to forget, at least for a time, that he was also an actor in this play; 2) by representing the theater of the world as theater, it invited thoughts of that true reality, which was thought to lie beyond death. The Baroque theater is thus ruled by the uneasy conjunction of an at bottom still medieval conviction that art should open us to what transcends and illuminates our life-world and an already modern understanding of art as an aesthetic object that in time lifts the burden of time, at least for a time.

I suggested that the Baroque especially invites characterization as the age of the world-theater. I do not have time here to show how the metaphor of the theater then affected all aspects of life: we still speak of theaters of war, of anatomical theaters. These are essentially Baroque metaphors.⁴³ And if the theater then affected all of life, it certainly affected all the arts, especially architecture: the theater as we tend to think of it a building type that developed in the Baroque and has pretty much preserved its baroque character: a pictorial stage with its wings separated from the auditorium with its galleries and boxes.

⁴³ See Karsten Harries, “World-Picture and World-Theater: Wonder, Vision, Knowledge,” *Collection, Laboratory, Theater. Scenes of Knowledge in the 17th Century*, ed. Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte, Jan Lazardzig (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 507-525.

But especially we should think of religious architecture: countless churches were then built in the image of a theater, where “theater” here refers first of all to a building in which actors perform for an audience. But “theater” may of course also refer to the performance. The celebration of the mass is a theatrical performance.

2

When we speak of the theater of the Baroque, we should keep in mind that the Baroque theater is the product of a profound transformation of the theater. To put it simply: in the Baroque the theater, and not just the theater, but also architecture, comes increasingly under the hegemony of the picture. Understood as the age of the world-theater the Baroque period may indeed be understood as transitional, having its place between the medieval age of the world-building and the modern age of the world-picture.

But we should be more precise. The Baroque theater and also its architecture come not just under the hegemony of the picture, but under the hegemony of the picture ruled by what came to be called *perspectiva artificialis*. Leon Battista Alberti’s *On Painting*⁴⁴ helped inaugurate the rule of the picture so understood by teaching painters how to use a mathematical form of representation to create convincing simulacra of what appears as it appears, given a particular point of view. Such painting represents not the objects themselves, but inevitably perspective-bound appearances. These appearances have their measure in the perceiving eye. Here it is important to keep in mind the artificiality of such representation, the violence it does to the way we actually experience things. To put geometry in the service of his construction, Alberti thus assumes monocular vision and a flat earth. Given these assumptions, it is easy to come up with a proof of the correctness of Alberti’s construction. Important here is this: for the sake of achieving a certain mastery of appearances, the perspectival art of Alberti subjects what it presents to a human measure that has itself been subjected to the demand for ease of representation. Artful pictorial illusion invites us to mistake it for reality and to forget its

⁴⁴ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. and intro. John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale, 1956)

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merely artificial being. Artifice substitutes simulacra for reality, as the artist usurps the place of God, substituting for God's creation his own. It is thus easy to understand the philosopher Jacques Maritain when he understands the single step that carries us in some museum from the rooms that hold the medieval primitives to those where we admire the masters of the Renaissance as a step that places us “on the floor of a theater.”⁴⁵ We are stepping across the threshold that separates anthropocentric modernity from the theocentric Middle Ages. And like Heidegger, Maritain, too, links modernity to the hegemony of the picture, for his “theater” is a theater ruled by Albertian perspective, that is to say by the picture so understood. It is a theater where the picture is allowed to triumph over what the theater once was.

That Alberti himself had already crossed the threshold that separates modernity from the Middle Ages, is shown by his rejection of the use of gold in painting. To understand what is at issue here we should consider the significance of the gold background that was introduced into Western painting just before 1000. Perhaps the only artistic innovation of comparable importance in the West was the stained glass window: together they furnished medieval art with two critical metaphors — “critical” in the sense that they allow us to approach the essence of this art. The gold background has metaphorical power, hints at eternal blessedness, as it invites us to look through representations drawn from the mundane to their timeless spiritual significance. It invites us to look at what we see from a “spiritual perspective.”⁴⁶ The same can be said of stained glass.

Alberti's perspective also invites us to look through the material painting. Ideally the picture surface should appear as if transparent, a window through which we can see whatever the painter has chosen to represent. But this is very much bound by a human perspective, which has its center in the observer: what we see is appearance for us, is simulacrum, illusion. In this sense art can be said to open windows in the theater of the

⁴⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism, and the Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner, 1962), p. 52.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Ohly, *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), pp. 15, 35-37.

world, windows, not, however, to a higher spiritual reality, but to illusions, to beautiful fictions that promise to compensate us for what reality denies us. The spiritual perspective of medieval art sought to open windows in the theater of the world to what was then believed to be true reality. Alberti's art is incompatible with this spiritual perspective. The turn to perspective here means a loss of transcendence, an embrace of illusion, of fiction.

3

I have suggested that Alberti's *On Painting* (1435) helped to inaugurate what Heidegger calls the "Age of the World Picture." In his essay, to be sure, Heidegger was not thinking of Alberti. The person who is said by him to have inaugurated our "Age of the World Picture" is Descartes. But Cartesian method, I would like to suggest is anticipated by Albertian perspective and involves an analogous loss of transcendence. Consider the way that, for the sake of achieving a certain mastery of appearances, the perspectival art of Alberti subjects what is represented to a human measure that has itself been subjected to the demand for ease of representation. That latter demand is a presupposition of Alberti's embrace of mathematics. Similarly Cartesian method, for the sake of rendering us the masters and possessors of nature, subjects nature to a mathematical measure that has itself been subjected to the demand for ease of comprehension. As the Albertian picture assumes an eye placed before and thus outside it, the Cartesian world-picture assumes an "I" placed before and thus outside it. The Cartesian *res cogitans* has thus no place in the world whose essence Descartes determines as *res extensa*. The subject has fallen, had to fall out of the world so understood, had to fall out of space. Science cannot know anything of such a thinking substance. All it can do is study brain processes and the like. It can attempt to model human beings with robots possessing complicated computer brains; (but such robots remain human artifacts, machines, simulacra. That is to say, science as such knows nothing of persons deserving respect. So understood, persons have no place in the scientific world-picture, and to the extent that science rules our modern world, in our modern world. As Wittgenstein says in his *Tractatus* of the subject:

5.631 ... If I wrote a book 'the world as I found it,' I should also have therein to report my body and say which members obey my will and which do not etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could *not* be made.

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world.⁴⁷

What matters to me here is neither Alberti nor Descartes, neither Heidegger nor Wittgenstein, but a picture of the world that has to deny the human subject a place in that world. And that world picture is a presupposition of our science, more precisely, of its demand for objectivity. And to the extent that this science shapes our building, it is a presupposition of our architecture. It is of course easy to insist that this world picture should not be confused with our life-world. But the correctness of this observation should not lead us to forget the extent to which our life-world is ever more decisively being transformed by technology. That transformation threatens to split the human being into object and subject, into human material, available to technological organization just like any other material, and into a subject that has to consider all material, including its own body and psyche as mere material to be shaped or played with as we see fit and our power permits. Such a subject has to feel homeless in her or his body. And we have to ask ourselves: what content remains to such a subject? To the extent that our modern world has to transform us in the image of the Cartesian subject it will make us ever more free, ever less bound to particular places, but that means also ever more mobile, rootless, and ghostly.

Does such a subject still need architecture in the traditional sense? Was one function of such architecture not to grant a sense of place that we have come to recognize to be at odds with freedom? And does such a subject still need a world that will assign it its place and keep freedom responsible. Where in Heidegger's world picture is there

⁴⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 151.

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room for what will bind freedom? But thus unbound, freedom faces a mute, meaningless world. As, in their very different ways, both Wittgenstein and Heidegger recognize, the culmination of metaphysics in science and technology threatens to banish from the world all that might bind freedom, keep it responsible, and give weight and substance to our lives.

4

I claimed that Alberti helped to inaugurate the age of the world picture, that his perspectival method foreshadowed that of Descartes. Having said this, it is important to note that there are decisive differences between the picture Alberti had in mind and Heidegger's Cartesian world-picture. The former is a painting, a work of art; it seeks to represent the appearance of just some small part of the world; and it seeks to represent it in such a way that a whole is created that by its perfection, its apparent self-sufficiency, enralls us in a way that for a time lets us forget the real world. The artwork allows us a vacation from reality. It provides for innocent pleasures that let us forget the cares and concerns that bind us to reality. In this respect Alberti's *On Painting* can be said to have anticipated the self-sufficiency of the artwork that the aesthetic approach to art came to insist on. So understood art turns its back on reality and on truth. It settles for beautiful fictions.

But Heidegger's world-picture does not turn its back on reality. Quite the opposite: it aims at a representation of the world that would include everything that deserves to be called real. For that very reason, it invites us to mistake this picture of the world for the world itself. In the language of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: this world-picture seeks to represent the world as it really is, "world" understood here as "everything that is the case," (1) or as "the totality of facts" (1.1). And it is not art, but science that promises a perspicuous and adequate picture of these facts. Newton provides Wittgenstein with an example.

6.341 Newtonian mechanics, for example, brings the description of the universe to a unified form. Let us imagine a white surface with irregular black spots. We now say: Whatever kind of picture these make I can

always get as near as I like to its description, if I cover the surface with a sufficiently fine square network and now say of every square that it is white or black. In this way I shall have brought the description of the surface to a unified form. This form is arbitrary, because I could have applied with equal success a net with a triangular or a hexagonal mesh. It can happen that the description would have been simpler with the aid of a triangular mesh; that is to say, we might have described the surface more accurately with a triangular, and coarser, than with a finer square mesh. Or vice versa, and so on. To the different networks correspond different systems of describing the world. Mechanics determine a form of description by saying: All propositions in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a number of given propositions — the mechanical axioms. It thus provides the bricks for the building of the edifice of science, and says: Whatever building thou wouldst erect, thou shalt construct it in some manner with these bricks and these alone.

Our ability to comprehend things clearly and distinctly is here made the measure of reality. And it is therefore not surprising that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein elides that rift between reality and its scientific representation, to which his own metaphor of science as offering us a picture of the world calls our attention, when he identifies the world with the facts in logical space (1.13), instead of being content with another, more modest formulation: the scientific world-picture represents the facts in logical space (cf. 2.11). The same elision of reality haunts what Heidegger calls the “Age of the World Picture.” “When we think of a ‘picture’ we think first of all of a representation of something. Accordingly the world-picture would be, so to speak, a picture of what is in its entirety. But ‘world-picture’ says more. We mean by this term the world itself, what is in its entirety, as it measures and binds us.”⁴⁸ To the world so understood we, too, belong, for it is said to include all that is.

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), p. 89.

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It is hardly surprising therefore that Wittgenstein should have abandoned the pictorial metaphor to liken the scientist to an architect. The shift is related to the shift in Heidegger's thinking from talk about the age of "The World Picture" to his later characterization of the modern age as the age of the *Gestell*, a quasi-architectural metaphor — the German suggests something like a supporting framework or scaffolding. Note the similarity of this *Gestell* to the veil through which Dürer would have the painter look at what he represents. The *Gestell* might be considered its three-dimensional counterpart.

Wittgenstein's scientist is a builder who uses for his building-blocks thoughts or propositions. His architecture is accordingly invisible. And is such invisibility not demanded of any representation of reality as it really is? Colors, indeed all secondary qualities, characterize appearances, not the reality that appears. To ask what color is an electron is to ask the wrong sort of question. Instead of a pictorialization of reality, we can now speak of its objectification.

That such objectification has to transform that reality in which we find ourselves first of all and most of the time is evident: our first access to reality is always bound to particular perspectives, mediated by our bodies, colored by our concerns and interests. But as soon as we understand a perspective as such, in thought at least we are already beyond the limits it would impose. Such reflection on perspective and point of view leads inevitably to the idea of a subject that, free of all perspectives, sees things as they really are. This idea has to lead to an understanding of the reality that gives itself to our eyes, and more generally to our senses, as the mere appearance of an objective reality that no eye can see, no sense can sense, that only a rational thinking can reconstruct.

I suggested that Heidegger's world-picture has to transform itself into something like a world-building. But this is not to say that it is therefore like the medieval cosmos. This building is in no way like a house in which we can feel at home. That this should be so has its deepest foundation in the pursuit of truth that governs such world-building. Truth demands objectivity. And objectivity demands that we not allow our understanding to be clouded by our inevitably personal desires and interests. It wants just the facts. With good reason Wittgenstein can therefore say: "In the world everything is as

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it is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value — and if there were, it would be of no value” (6.41). If there is something that deserves to be called a value, it will not be found in the world so understood. To find it we have to step outside that world.

Earlier I called attention to Heidegger’s claim that the age of the world picture has its foundation in metaphysics. Metaphysics claims to comprehend the being of all that is. But we cannot comprehend what is fleeting. Metaphysics thus tends to think being against time. And we cannot comprehend what cannot be analyzed into simple elements and pictured by joining these elements. In this sense we really understand something only to the extent that we can make it. This is why Descartes promises a practical philosophy that will allow us to understand nature as distinctly as a craftsman understands what he is able to make. Understanding here means know-how. No surprise therefore that Heidegger should claim that metaphysics culminates in technology. And this culmination has to carry the self-displacement that is a presupposition of metaphysics back into our life-world; no surprise then either that that world, too, should be experienced ever more decisively as a world in which neither gods nor values are to be found. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger know that the modern world-picture has no room for whatever it is that can make life meaningful. That must be sought outside that world, outside “all happening and being so,” which cannot help but be, as Wittgenstein put it, “accidental” (6.41).

But is this not to say that what makes life meaningful must be sought outside reality so understood? And does not the work of art, which explores the surface of things or present us with beautiful fictions in which everything presents itself as being just as it should be, furnish us with just such an outside? Some such view is suggested by Kant’s definition of the beautiful as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction.⁴⁹ All

⁴⁹ We should note, however, that Kant himself, notwithstanding this definition of beauty, which quite a number of theorists of modern art have appropriated, had a very different understanding of art and its task. See especially *Critique of Judgment*, pars. 17, 43, 44, 45.

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interest, Kant claims, binds us to reality. To call the aesthetic experience disinterested is to say that it turns its back on reality. The aesthetic observer loses himself to beautiful appearance. Art offers him a refuge from reality as understood by science. That is why Heidegger can claim that the aesthetic approach to art helps to characterize the age of the world picture. Art so understood presents itself as the decoration of the Heideggerian *Gestell*. The age of the world picture becomes the age of the decorated shed.

5. Space, Place, and the Antinomy of Building

1

In the first lecture I made reference to Lessing's distinction between arts of space and arts of time. It offers a seemingly obvious key to a classification of the different arts: in their different ways painting, sculpture, and architecture are all arts of space, poetry and music arts of time; dance and theatre would seem to straddle the division.

Paul Weiss's definition of architecture, which I quoted already in the second lecture, keeps within this general framework. Architecture is said to be the "the art of creating space through the construction of boundaries in common-sense space."⁵⁰ It is difficult to disagree with that definition. Common-sense space would seem to refer to the way we find ourselves in the world first of all and most of the time, always already situated in specific places. Common-sense space is not at all the homogeneous space of Euclid or Descartes. Space is experienced first of all as heterogeneous, in terms of places that have more or less sharply defined boundaries. We find ourselves in this room, this building, this city, here on earth, under the sky. In our experience place would seem to be prior to space. That understanding is captured by Aristotle's understanding of the cosmos as a bounded whole that assigns us humans our place. Modernity, by contrast, has tended to subordinate place to space.⁵¹

Weiss speaks of a larger tensed space that architecture bounds. All that I just mentioned, this room, this building, this city, earth and sky may be thought of as tensing that space, where we should not forget the importance of climate. To be sure, technology has made the role of place and climate much less of a factor in architectural design. Skyscrapers today thus look pretty much the same all the world over. In more traditional architecture building speaks much more immediately of place and climate.

⁵⁰ Paul Weiss, *Nine Basic Arts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p. 69.

⁵¹ See Ed Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley: U. of California, 1998), Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience, A Philosophical Topography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2007), Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspectiv*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

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But let me return to Weiss's definition: Architecture is "the art of creating space through the construction of boundaries in common-sense space." Bounding space, it creates new places. Not that all such bounding of space is building. We continually bound space mentally as we experience it. And we inevitably have bound space in different ways. That is to say, we experience space as always already bounded places: this corner, this room, this street. Obviously, such bounding is not yet building. As Weiss remarks, "Whoever accepts a clearing as a possible dwelling bounds it off from the rest of the world. But he who makes a dwelling not only bounds it off, but produces roof, walls, windows, door, flooring, each of which is a newly created, tensed spatial object within a larger tensed space."⁵² Building is thus a material bounding and thus a material mastering of space. Bounding space, the architect wrests place from space. Building answers to the human need to feel firmly placed. But, as we shall see, this need is countered by another need that resists firm placement. As Robert Frost put it: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." That something in us also demands recognition. Freedom counters the need for place with a desire for open space. Here we touch on an antinomy that haunts our dwell and our building. In this lecture I want to develop that antinomy.

Weiss's definition of building as the creation of a "tensed spatial object within a larger tensed space" seems obvious enough. But it does not distinguish a work of architecture from ordinary building. Thus it fails to do justice to architecture as an art, and it is not mere building, but architecture understood as an art that concerns Weiss. Consider once more our architecture school — I mentioned already that for some years Weiss was quite a presence in Yale's architecture school, so when the present building went up. In his book he thanks Paul Rudolph.

Rudolph Hall is clearly a work of architecture. I pointed out in an earlier lecture that what, according to Pevsner, distinguishes a work of architecture from a mere building is the addition of an aesthetic component. Weiss might have agreed, but he would have wanted to be more specific.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

According to Weiss the task of the artist — he is here thinking of all the arts — is to deal with space, time, and becoming in independence of the manner in which they function in daily life or in known substances. Only by exploring them in their own terms, apart from the limitations to which common-sense experience or different substances subject them, can he grasp what existence is in fact. If he portrays familiar things in his works it is only to enable him and others to locate themselves better in that deeper, more ominous, challenging world which man has a need to master.⁵³

This suggests that constructing boundaries in common-sense space the architect also transforms and at the same time distances himself from that pre-given common-sense space, frees us for an appreciation of space that is “deeper, more ominous, challenging” than everyday space. It is that space that we need to master, a space buried beneath or in common-sense space.

2

But how are we to understand this deeper, more ominous, challenging space that art needs to master? More specifically, how are we to understand the space that is bounded by the architect’s work? Is it the space of ordinary experience? Presumably not: Weiss here speaks of something deeper, a space presupposed by all ordinary experience. Are we to think then of the boundless space of geometry or natural science? Something of the sort is suggested by the architects Walter Pichler and Hans Hollein in their manifesto: “Absolute Architecture: "Architecture is a spiritual order, realized through building. Architecture — an idea built into infinite space, manifesting man's spiritual energy and power, the material form and expression of his destiny, of his life. From its origins until today the essence and meaning of architecture have not changed. To build is a basic human need. It is first manifested not in the setting up of protective roofs, but in the creation of sacred structures, in the indication of focal points of human

⁵³ Paul Weiss, *The World of Art* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961), p. 78.

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activity — the beginning of the city. All building is religious."⁵⁴ "Religion" here means no more than a faith in the human spirit and its ability to challenge the terror of space. Think of the pyramids.

This suggests that more fundamental than the need for physical shelter is the need for spiritual shelter. And that need has its foundation in the dread with which thoughts of infinite space fill us, a need that the Copernican revolution has made only more acute for us moderns. To quote Nietzsche, "Since Copernicus, man seems to have got himself on an inclined plane — now he is slipping faster and faster away from the center into — what? into nothingness? into a *penetrating* sense of his own nothingness?"⁵⁵ As science has opened our life-world to the universe, this earth has become ever less homelike, more and more like a ship lost in an endless ocean, embarked on a journey with no clear goal. This earth, which once, because of its central position in a finite cosmos, was thought to provide human beings with a privileged place, has come to be understood as just another among countless stars. This places a special burden on the modern architect.

The space relevant to architecture as understood by Weiss or by Pichler and Hollein is thus not the space of lived, everyday experience, in which we always already find ourselves placed in some way or another, but the infinite space of geometry. Into that space architecture casts its geometric figures: As Pichler and Hollein put it: "Architecture dominates space. Dominates it by shooting up into the heights; it hollows out the earth, projects and soars far above the ground, spreads in all directions. Dominates it through mass and through emptiness. Dominates space through space. This architecture is not a matter of beauty. If we desire beauty at all, it is not so much the beauty of form, of proportion, as a sensual beauty of elemental force."⁵⁶ The strength of

⁵⁴ Walter Pichler / Hans Hollein, "Absolute architecture," *Programs and manifestoes*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975) p. 181.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, III, 25, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, Berlin, and New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 5, p. 404. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 155.

⁵⁶ Hans Hollein, pp. 181 - 182.

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architecture is here sought in the way it forcefully asserts itself against infinite space and time. "Architecture is purposeless. What we build will find its utilization. / Form, does not follow function. Form, does not arise out of its own accord. It is the great decision of man to make a building as a cube, a pyramid, or a sphere."⁵⁷ That fits Eisenman's House VI very well. But only an architecture oblivious to function can claim to be "absolute" in this sense and thus pure.

3

Like Kant, Weiss, too, recognizes that, to demand such purity of architecture is to do violence to the architect's special task. If, as artist, the architect is asked by Weiss to deal with space "on its own terms," i.e. with space as space, Weiss yet defines architecture, as we saw, as "the art of creating space though the boundaries in common sense space." There is tension in this determination, tension that distinguishes architecture from the other arts, as Weiss recognizes:

To share in a story or a dance one must turn away from (though still presupposing) the forces dominating the world of common sense. We can enter the painter's space or the sculptor's space if we can push back the space of every day. We enter the architect's created space on similar conditions, but the space of his work is also common-sensical. We truly enter his space only if while attending to his created space, we also maintain a grip on daily space.⁵⁸

Weiss, as I noted, speaks of tensed space. To build is to create a "tensed spatial object within a larger tensed space." We call "tensed" something that has been made tight, taught, or rigid. A tensed space is thus a space that has been structured in some way. Establishing boundaries, a building thus tenses space in a specific ways.

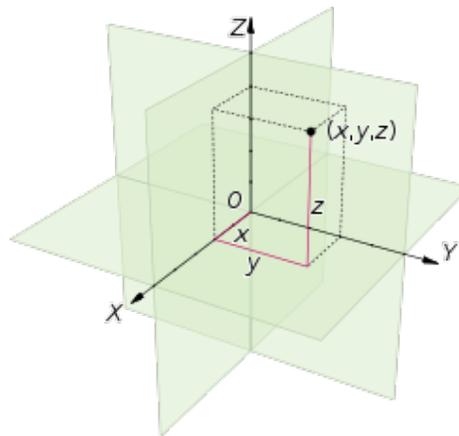
But it is difficult to think space as totally unstructured. "Infinite space," like "infinite," is an elusive concept, figured by the painter Kasimir Malevich by the white

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵⁸ Weiss, *Nine Basic Arts*, p.

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canvas. But space cannot be thought of as a totally unstructured openness. As I suggested in an earlier lecture, whenever we attempt to think space we rely on some construct or other. Think once more of infinite Euclidean space with its three dimensions. In this image it is explained by a clearly bounded and readily understood construction.



You should of course not identify this particular finite construction with infinite Euclidean space. It just aids us in thinking it. But even that infinite space with its three dimensions that it invites us to think is a construct. Consider the phrase: “space as construct.” That formulation suggests the need to consider space also in some other way, as more immediately apprehended. With Kant we may thus want to speak of space as a pure intuition presupposed by all construction, and yet this space eludes comprehension. Indeed, in just what sense can space be constructed at all? Kant points to the way the things that make up our world establish a certain order. This is here and has a particular shape, that is over there and has a different shape. Geometry can help us to determine the form of that order. Think of a line, of a point O on that line, of a second line perpendicular to the first through point O , of a third line, again through, but now perpendicular to both. Have I not invited you to construct three-dimensional Euclidean space? I can now place things in that space. But, to repeat, does not every such construction of space, and it need not be Euclidean, already presuppose an intuition of space? Kant speaks of a pure intuition, a “*reine Anschauung*” —“pure perception” would perhaps be a better translation. But “pure perception” is itself a metaphor, a construction

that threatens to obscure what is to be thought: for every perceiving or looking already presupposes space. What is perceived and the perceiving subject are separated by a distance. The adjective *rein*, pure, is to guard against eliding what distinguishes the intuition of space from our ordinary intuitions. “I term all representations pure (in the transcendental sense) in which there is nothing that belongs to sensation”.⁵⁹ But like the word *Anschauung*, *Vorstellung*, translated somewhat misleadingly as “representation,” presupposes an experience of particular things in space. Kant’s understanding of space as a *reine Anschauung* or *Vorstellung* is therefore itself not pure, but another kind of construction of space that attempts to domesticate what resists domestication.

4

But must we not domesticate space to render it comprehensible? To feel spiritually at home in it? Every cosmology can be considered a domestication of space. The word domesticate derives from the Latin *domus*, house. To domesticate something is to bring it into the orbit of the house. In this sense the world is constructed and space domesticated by the demiurge in Plato’s *Timaeus*. The Aristotelian cosmos represents an analogous domestication of space. So does the homelike cosmos of the Middle Ages with the world as its center. Following Plato and Aristotle, the cosmos is thought here as a world building, a though that leads inevitably to the conception of God as the paradigmatic architect. But every such construction is haunted by a space that is presupposed, but refuses to be domesticated.

And our freedom keeps pulling us towards that space. Barriers want to be broken, walls to be torn down, shut doors, as many fairy tales tell us, beckon us to open them. Kant’s first antinomy, to which I now want to return, gives expression to the tension between space and place. Its thesis claims that “The world has a beginning in time, and is also limited as regards space,” the antithesis that “The world has no beginning, and no limits in space; it is infinite as regards both time and space.” The argument for the thesis rests on the claim that to really comprehend something we have to think it as a whole,

⁵⁹ A 20/B 34

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and that is to say as enclosed within limits. The comprehensibility of the world demands its constructability and that means its finitude, demands an understanding of the world as rather like a building: as cosmos. The finite Aristotelian cosmos responded to that demand. But to think the world as such a constructed whole is not only to think the things that make up that whole as being in some sort of space, but also that whole as related to some incomprehensible space beyond. The thought of a limit of the world is the thought of a barrier that thought in its freedom inevitably leaps across. But that leap would be no leap at all were there not something on the other side of that barrier. Neither a finite or an infinite world is intelligible and for that reason Kant insisted that nature is at bottom incomprehensible. What science grasps is only an appearance of nature as it is in itself, an appearance ruled by science's claim to truth. At bottom this antinomy is as old as Zeno's paradoxes and Plato's *Timaeus* and it continues to haunt, as I pointed out before, the most recent cosmological speculations.

The antinomy can be given an ethical expression: in human beings a desire for sheltering place is in inescapable tension with a desire for ever more open space. That tension has found striking expression in Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In that book he makes an assertion that invites also responses from the architectural community: "The only certainty is: the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all." One, if perhaps not the most obvious, way in which that opposition shows up in architectural discourse is in contrasting visions of a future shaped, on one hand, by dreams of freedom, of dancing, of flying, a future thought perhaps in the image of Lebbeus Woods' architectural fantasies in *Aerial Paris*, and, on the other, in very different visions of a future that would allow us to come home, to experience ourselves once again as firmly placed members of a genuine, ongoing community, a future, say, thought in the image of old Prague and its specific *genius loci*. If one vision dreams of open space, of a freedom not bound by the body to particular places, the other dreams of homecoming to some particular place. The opposition of *Fernweh*, the longing for what is distant and far away, and *Heimweh*, the longing for home, of centrifugal and centripetal longings, is constitutive of human being: in all of us a longing to journey, literally and metaphorically, beyond what is all too comfortable and

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familiar challenges and is challenged by nostalgia, a longing to finally settle down and call some place home.

Phenomenologists such as Edward Casey⁶⁰ or Jeff Malpas,⁶¹ following Aristotle, have insisted on a certain priority of place over space. They can point to the way our being is essentially a being-in-the world. To be in the world is to be placed, placed by our body, here and now, at this time, on this earth and under this sky. Such placement brings with it a certain orientation, up and down, right and left, front and back carry meanings not captured by the x, y, and z axes of Euclidean space. There is a sense in which our body provides us with a natural, if moving, center, with its set of coordinates.

And it is not only our body that places us. We can also speak of our spiritual situation. A specific history has provided every one of us with an orientation that orders our possibilities. But the orientation provided by our bodies and histories is challenged ever more insistently by our essential mobility, where I am thinking not only of the possibility of literally moving from this place to another, but of a spiritual mobility that knows no limits. Such mobility is inseparable from our freedom, which resists firm placement. Freedom demands open space. To repeat: the problem of space inevitably becomes entangled with the problem of freedom.

But the linkage between the promise of freedom and open space is shadowed by a sense of being adrift, lost in space. Freedom must be bound by reason, if it is not to degenerate into arbitrariness. Similarly we must be able to wrest place from space, must be able to build, if there is to be an authentic dwelling and if our pursuit of truth can claim objectivity. It is in this need that both architecture and the architectural metaphors of philosophy have their origin.

That origin is however cast in an ambiguous light when in the Book of *Genesis* Cain is said to have built the first city, a description that invites comparison with the story of that other archetypical architect: Daedalus, the creator of the Cretan labyrinth. Both,

⁶⁰ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999).

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Cain and Daedalus are murderers, made such by a concern with self that lets them suspend their place in their communities and condemns them to become fugitives and wanderers on the earth. Cain thus potentiates Adam's fall and the resultant loss of place.

There is no freedom where there is not some uncertainty about place and way. The loss of paradise opened up space in a way that forced Adam and Eve to toil to meet their needs. Human construction attempts to remedy what was lost with the fall, where we should note that with Cain and his descendants artifice is said to have led not only to the invention of tools and weapons, i.e. to a proto-technology, but also to music-making, to art — and of course to architecture. In their different ways both art and technology promise to make up for the lost paradise. But the Bible shadows that promise when it speaks of the self-destruction of the race of Cain in the seventh generation.

Together with the Biblical description of Cain as builder of the first city, the story of the building of the tower of Babel offers itself as a metaphor for a suspicion or a discontent that has shadowed architectural construction from the very beginning. Recast in a distinctly modern form, that discontent remains very much alive today, as suggested by the word “deconstruction” and the suspicion of “construction” that it expresses. Or think of “anarchitecture,” a term coined by Robin Evans and appropriated by the anarchists Gordon Matta Clark and Lebbeus Woods. I shall return to them in a later lecture. Such suspicion of architecture can seize on the phrase “space as construct” to suggest that all such constructed spaces are built on sand and sooner or later will fall into ruin. If Robert Frost could write that there something in us that would tear down walls. there is also something in us that delights in ruins.

Were there more time, I would like to say more about ruins. Here I only observe that in the ruin time opens up building that would place us to the space that will not be domesticated. The modern fascination with ruins is of a piece with Georges Bataille's struggle against architecture, to which I shall have to return. Dreams of freedom and dreams of opening up all constructed architectures to the infinite buried in every construction belong together, as demonstrated by the rhetoric of the sublime. A Gnosticism returns here that suspects in all architecture, including the architecture of the world, including also the systems built by scientists and philosophers, a prison.

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Such dreams of freedom, of ruins as liberating spaces, are, however, shadowed in turn by the specter of nihilism. Freedom may not be sacrificed to the sheltering power of center and place. And yet freedom must be bound by responsibility if it is not to destroy itself: completely open space leaves us nothing to respond to. The antinomy of space reappears as the antinomy of freedom.

6. Three Pictures and Three Dreams

1

Why did we travel to the moon?⁶² Was the trouble worth the effort? Is a sufficient answer to point to the desire to know just in order to know that according to Aristotle helps to define our human being, a desire in which he locates the origin of all philosophy and science? Or to point to a curiosity that again and again seeks to open closed doors and calls us to leave home, to explore distant seas, to journey into the unknown? Is it the freedom of thought that demands open space and invites us to leave behind whatever places nature and society have assigned to us, to go beyond the perspectives and prejudices bound up with such placement? Must reason by its very nature give birth to what in German is called *Fernweh*, that longing for faraway places that pulls us away from home and calls every establishment that would assign us our place into question?

According to Kierkegaard's aesthete, it was boredom that caused Adam and Eve to lose paradise.⁶³ But boredom is negated by the interesting and the interesting in turn awakens the desire to know and incites curiosity. Again and again this desire will let us lose some paradise or other. Nothing other than the freedom of thought lies buried in the snake's promise, "you shall be like God." As the *animal rationale*, the animal that possesses reason, the human being is the animal that has fallen out of nature and now restlessly seeks its proper place, never quite content with its lot. This restlessness lets us dream of a home that would finally allow us to be really at home. But paradise never existed.

In a lecture he gave in 1951 at the 2. Darmstädter Gespräch with the title "The Myth of Man Behind Technology" — this was the same symposium at which Martin Heidegger lectured on "Building Dwelling Thinking" — the Spanish philosopher Ortega

⁶² Raising this question, I follow Hans Blumenberg's *Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).

⁶³ Søren Kierkegaard, S. (1989). *Either/Or*, Part I, ed. and trans. Hong H. V. και E. H., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 286.

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y Gasset compared this discontent “with a love without the beloved,” with a “pain that we feel in limbs that we never possessed.”⁶⁴ Heidegger was of a different mind: he would have the architects that attended this symposium learn from an 18th century Black Forest farmhouse what kind of building once allowed for an authentic dwelling — as if before the Enlightenment human beings had really been at home in their world, content with themselves and their world. But was this what Heidegger really wanted to say? — I shall have to return to that essay. Ortega y Gasset, at any rate, 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.”⁶⁵ 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 compare 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, which wants to 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, who responded to his talk with repeated laughter and applause] 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.”⁶⁶

A few of the architects listening to Ortega may have thought, as he spoke, of Cain, who, as I told you last time, according to *Genesis* built the first city and to whose race we are said in the Bible to owe the invention of technology and the arts. It was the loss of paradise that let Cain turn to building a city and his race to technology to seek

⁶⁴ Ortega y Gasset, J., (1952), “Der Mythos des Menschen hinter der Technik,” in *Darmstädter Gespräch: Mensch und Raum* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt.Ortega y Gasset, 1952), p. 116

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

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there *Ersatz* for what had been lost. Ortega's thought goes in a similar direction when he speaks of limbs that we never had and yet miss. Wings and airplanes come to mind, as does our communications technology.

First of all and still most of the time our body binds us to a particular place. In his lecture, heavy with nostalgia, Heidegger had spoken of the importance of a rooted existence. But human beings are not trees, firmly anchored in some soil. As it says in an old folksong: thoughts are free! This freedom of thought has from the very beginning desired to overcome distance, to trade place for open space. We demand mobility, demand wheels, sails, wings: freer access to things than our body and our senses allow us. We want to understand things as they really are, not subject to the limits imposed by particular perspectives. Freedom and curiosity, *Fernweh* and the claim to truth are inseparably bound together.

A presupposition of every search for truth is the commitment to objectivity; objectivity again demands a bracketing of and going beyond all interests and limitations imposed by some particular point of view. Was Plato not right to teach that to gain access to the land of truth we have to ascend from the cave of our life-world into the light? But this ascent, to which we owe all progress, enlightenment, and our science, is shadowed by an ever growing discontent, for it has denied our modern life-world the aura of home. With the bracketing of all subjective interests and perspectives the world, as known by science, has to turn into an essentially meaningless collection of facts, indifferent to us and our desires.

With this we touch the shadow side of that never satisfied curiosity that Ortega understood as "the highest thing the human being possesses." Not surprising therefore that Ortega's *Fernweh* should have been countered by that *Heimweh* or nostalgia that in that Darmstadt symposium found a voice in Heidegger's contribution and its emblem in his place-establishing Black Forest farmhouse. This change from *Fernweh* to *Heimweh* is easy enough to understand: the indifference of the world threatens a loss of humanity. To the self-elevation, the self-transcendence of the earthbound subject, which is a presupposition of science and technology, corresponds necessarily a self-diminution, as Nietzsche so clearly saw. Consider in this connection his ambiguous praise of

Copernicus in *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*. Together with the Pole Boscovitch — Nietzsche means the Ragusan Jesuit Joseph Roger Boscovich — Copernicus is celebrated as the “greatest and most successful opponent of visual appearance (*Augenschein*).”⁶⁷ What led Copernicus to this victory are considerations that remain a presupposition of our science. The visual appearance of the world that is presupposed by our world picture is devalued as mere appearance: doesn’t reality present itself to us here in perspectival appearances, inescapably bound and refracted by particular points of view. A presupposition of the world discovered by our science is the devaluation of the world presented to us by our senses. Nietzsche speaks of “*the greatest triumph over the senses that has been achieved on earth up to now.*”⁶⁸

But is this victory not also a defeat of our humanity? The shadow-side of this victory is that self-diminution of man, which according to Nietzsche since Copernicus has undergone an “unstoppable progress.” Thus we read in the *Genealogy of Morals*: “Since Copernicus man seems to have stumbled unto an inclined plane — ever faster he rolls away from the center—where? Into nothing? Into the ‘*piercing* awareness of his own nothingness.”⁶⁹

The progress of science, and especially the progress of astronomy, which let the earth become a spaceship drifting aimlessly in the immensity of the universe, lets us experience this earth ever less as being like a firmly built and well-furnished house in which everything has its proper assigned place. Already in Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* we meet with this changed understanding: consideration of the countless worlds that make up the universe “annihilates as it were my importance as *an animal creature* that has to return the matter, that formed it, to the planet, after it was equipped for a short time (one does not know how) with vital force.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5. (Munich, Berlin and New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and de Gruyter), 1986, p. 26)

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral, Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 404

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. (Riga: Hartknoch. 1788), p.

Underscoring this insight into the abandonment of human beings by a world that has grown immense, Schopenhauer begins with it the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*:

In infinite space countless shining spheres, around every one of them rotate perhaps a dozen illuminated smaller ones, hot within, covered with a solidified, cold rind, on which a moldy covering has produced living and knowing beings: – that is the empirical truth, the real, the world.⁷¹

The young Nietzsche appropriated this Schopenhauer quote and placed it in slightly changed form at the beginning of “On Truth and Lie in a Extra-Moral Sense.” And can this “empirical truth” be challenged? The world that our science uncovers does not care for us. These heavens do not proclaim the glory of God. Our science does not and cannot know anything of values, God or freedom. For these there is no room in the logical space it presupposes. As already Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi knew, every attempt to fully comprehend all that is has to lead to nihilism, where such nihilism need not lead to typically modern attempts to regain the lost center despite all this — where I am thinking especially of attempts to have art reoccupy the place left vacant by the death of God; but also of that second religiosity, as Oswald Spengler called it, which today attempts to push itself into the place vacated by a religion that science would seem to have relegated to a never to be recovered past.

Our modern life-world, shaped as it is by science and technology, is thus anything but *gemütlich* or comfortable. To be sure, our building and dwelling speaks of an enormous gain in mobility and that is to say also in freedom; but at same time it communicates a difficult to bear sense of being adrift. What Milan Kundera called the unbearable lightness of being gives birth to a desire for weightiness, for a sense of gravity. Ortega’s grand dream of a technological orthopedics is thus shadowed by

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⁷¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), vol. 2., p. 3.

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Heidegger's dream of some farmhouse in the Black Forest or by the *genius loci* of some still medieval town, such as perhaps his native Meßkirch.

Words such as *Gemütlichkeit* and *genius loci* are perhaps already sufficient to turn some who have read their Lyotard or Deleuze to dismiss what I have to say here as the words of a theoretical dinosaur. Is there anything that Heidegger's Black Forest farmhouse still has to teach us? Does talk of some *genius loci* not attempt to resurrect something that has been left behind by the progress of reason. But the desire for home and for an art and architecture that answer to this desire is not dismissed so easily, as demonstrated by the widespread tendency to seek comfort in kitsch productions that nostalgically evoke some supposedly more wholesome past. The opposing pull of *Fernweh* and *Heimweh* in all of us resists resolution; I want to say: should not be resolved, should be preserved.

2

I spoke of the way *Fernweh* and *Heimweh* pull every one of us in opposed directions. If our building or our dwelling or our thinking is to do justice to our essence it also must do justice to this struggle within us. In this connection windows and doors in which interior and exterior meet demand special consideration. To illustrate this here three pictures.



The first is Caspar David Friedrich's *Frau am Fenster* (1822) in Berlin's *Alte Nationalgalerie*. The woman, presumably the painter's young wife, one of those figures seen from the back that are so typical of Friedrich and seem to look out of their world into the infinite. But we must be more specific. Here the woman looks out of the window unto the Elbe, looks into the open. A few light clouds move across the sky. The masts of the boats invite thoughts of possible journeys, of a freer life. Dark interior and bright exterior are sharply opposed. The open exterior, promising freedom and life, underscores the suffocating quality of the severe space. Here the window is not an opening that allows passage into the open. We feel confined. To be sure, with the

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woman we look through the window. But the picture allows us to see only a small segment of the world beyond. Is the woman dreaming, like a bird in a cage, of a freedom that the windows thin cross seems to deny her? This picture does not invite us to think of architecture as providing comforting shelter, but in the image of a prison. The basic mood of this picture is a *Fernweh* that remains without satisfaction.



The second picture is Edward Hopper's *Western Motel* (1957) in the *Yale University Art Gallery*. The motel room in which we see the sitting woman, belongs to the same limitless space of which the large window shows us an arbitrary excerpt. This room permits no being-at-home. The walls of this room are unable to effectively bound this space. Space seems to flow through this room, to deny it all sheltering power. Such a room does not permit a genuine dwelling. As the suitcase and the car visible through the window show, this woman is on her way somewhere.

But travel here is not at all enticing. Being underway is rather a fate, perhaps a curse. No trace here of *Fernweh*. The disengaged gaze of the woman fits the portrayed space. The basic mood is here a feeling of abandonment, of not belonging anywhere, of having no home.

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The third picture is Adolf Menzels *Balkonzimmer* (1845), once again in Berlin's *Alte Nationalgalerie*. Focus of this picture is the opened double door, draped with light white curtains, opening the room to the invisible balcony. We almost feel the draft of summer air that carries the bright exterior into the room, bounded by sunlit floor, ceiling, and walls, the door beckoning us outside, very different from the mirror, which casts us back into the room with its furniture, where the lightless lamps that accompany it only underscore the flood of light streaming into the room. The mirror is part of the furniture of this room. Together with the decorative moulding that frames the ceiling and the furniture it helps to furnish the room. In such well-furnished rooms things have their proper places. Here one could feel at home. But the raft of wind playing with the curtains



beckons us outside. The double-door opens the room to a beyond that knows no limits. But the curtains veil this beyond, protect the interior, provide it with a permeable

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boundary. Separating and at the same time joining interior and exterior this balcony-door is the gate through which the light enters that enlivens this room and allows it to become a metaphor of a truly humane dwelling. Centrifugal and a centripetal desire here join *Fernweh* and *Heimweh* in a play that makes it difficult to speak any longer of *Weh*, i.e. woe. The basic mood here is a bourgeois contentment with the world that does not exclude a certain tension.

3

Bachelard thought that we all dream of a house that promises physical and spiritual shelter, of a home that at times seems to call us in fleeting memories and which yet never existed even if in some 18th century farmhouse we may perhaps discover its metaphor. The counterpart of Bachelard's oneiric house is the oneiric city, thought by Heidegger in the image of his native Meßkirch, with shady oriels, fountains, and images of the Virgin decorating the corners of houses. In countless variations this dream will not let go of us and again and again has helped shape our building and dwelling.

Examples are easy to find, also in America. Here just one: If one considers only financial success, one of the most successful painters in America was the recently deceased self-styled "Painter of Light" Thomas Kinkade. In his paintings he likes to presents us with houses that conjure up a happy past when all was still right with the world, somewhat in the manner of countless cheap postcards, such as Christmas greetings. But not only that: A developer working with Thomas Kinkade promised to allow such dreams to become reality and thus to fulfill the dream of authentic dwelling.

We have the saying: "There's no place like home." Literally understood, however the words say something else: there is no such place! Home so understood is a fantasy. And must we not agree with Ortega? Would the return to a home that would really grant us peace and rest not contradict our essentially restless essence, would it not mean death in life? In our world we are never at home as such pictures promise. What is here shortchanged is our freedom. *Heimweh* here threatens to suffocate all *Fernweh* and with it our humanity.

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To be sure, freedom is often difficult to bear. This leads to dreams of a weighty architecture that assigns us our place so effectively that it crushes freedom. The kitsch artist and architect Adolf Hitler thus once promised to liberate such dreamers from the burden of their freedom: “Providence has destined me to become the greatest liberator of humanity. I liberate human beings from the coercion of a spirit that has become its own end, from the dirty and demeaning self-tortures of a chimera called conscience and morality and from the demands of a freedom and a personal autonomy that only a very few can ever meet.”⁷² Architecture would create an environment that would help establish an ethos. As the aesthetic practice of more than one school of art or architecture of those days can show us, this was no isolated or idle promise. The Bauhaus dreamed a version of that dream, although it dreamed of a very different ethos; and Heidegger, too once dreamed it, he too, like National Socialism, which he had embraced in 1933, invoking the Greek paradigm, as did the Nazis.

Faced with such architecture that would assign human beings their place, it is understandable that from the very beginning a certain ill will against architecture should have followed it like a shadow. Doesn't the Bible tell us that it was Cain who built the first city? And isn't the Tower of Babel the first work of architecture mentioned there? Just in our age, which let deconstruction become an academic fashion, a fashion that quickly spread from philosophy to the humanities, and somewhat surprisingly also to architecture, we meet with this ill will over and over.

Consider for example the cover of Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*.⁷³ It shows one of the most admired masterpieces of architecture, the cathedral of Reims in flames, victim of a failed German offensive in World War One. But the destructive power of the flames, given the book's title, is, it would seem, not mourned here or condemned. The picture is not meant to call attention

⁷² Hermann Rauschning, “Gespräche mit Hitler,” Cited in Wulf, J. (ed.) *Die Bildenden Künste im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation*, (Hamburg: Rowohlt. 1966), p. 2)

⁷³ Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge /Mass. and London, 1989).

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to the inhumanity of war: quite the opposite. The flames are here the expression of a sublime freedom that refuses to recognize the authority of any pre-given order, be it moral, religious, or architectonic. The desire for freedom feeds the ill will against architecture.

Architecture is here thought to imprison us and thus to deserve being destroyed. Bataille was of course not the first or the only one to have attacked architecture. Consider, for example the exhibition "Deconstructivist Architecture," curated by Mark Wigley und Philipp Johnson. (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, so e.g. in the work of Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, and CoOp Himmelblau, the architects celebrated by that exhibition.

Paradise had no need for building. In this garden Adam and Eve were already at home. And does genuine dwelling not demand a house that should as much as possible resemble such a garden? As Heidegger's Black Forest house seems to protest against Ortega's orthopedics, so dreams of paradise have long protested against architecture.

But if the fall, and that means the awakening of our freedom and our reason, has let us fall out of nature, does that same reason not promise us Ersatz for what we dream of and supposedly lost, yet never possessed? Prefiguring Ortega, Bacon and Descartes thus dreamed already of a science and a technology that would allow us to realize the promise of that paradise to which the cherubim's flaming sword is supposed to deny us access. The garden city movement represented a version of the same dream. Initiated in 1898 by Sir Ebenezer Howard, it argued for an approach to urban planning that remains very much alive.

Dreams of paradise have given rise to the hope that relying on their reason human beings should be able to realize their promise. Kinkade addressed that hope in one way, the Nazis in a another, the garden city movement in yet another way. But is the dream of paradise perhaps a dream we ought to resist? Does the hope to realize paradise here on

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earth perhaps ask too much? Is our reason able to furnish, not just the body, but also the soul with adequate shelter?

That painters such as Hans Baldung Grien or Albrecht Altdorfer liked to place the birth of Christ not in some barn but in some fantastic ruin invites thought. Is a ruin, architecture caught up in a process of decay or deconstruction, not a more fitting setting for the birth of the Redeemer, who is to rob time of its sting and to deny hell its victory, than any architecture that reason could construct? The conviction that reason alone is not sufficient to provide for genuine dwelling has survived that death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche. Something deep in us remains dissatisfied by both the spiritual and the built architectures which our reason has furnished us and welcomes thoughts of architecture in a state of disintegration. Such discontent feels drawn to ruins that let us experience the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of nature, of space and of time.

I have spoken of the tension in us between *Fernweh* and *Heimweh*. Should that tension be resolved? We are dealing here with that opposition that finds expression in the different dreams communicated by the paintings by Friedrich and Hopper that I showed you. One side of us demands freedom and dreams of journeys into the unknown, the other dreams of home and of being sheltered. One seeks the sublime, the other the beautiful. But building needs to embody that rift if it is to allow for a genuinely human dwelling. That generates the dream of a dwelling that does justice to both *Fernweh* and *Heimweh*. The painting by Menzel does better justice to that dream.

In the following lectures I shall continue to explore these three dreams.

7. Tales of the Origin of Building

1

Whenever a discipline becomes uncertain of its way there is a tendency to inquire into its essence or origin. Especially since the 18th century such uncertainty has pervaded the architectural community. The question came thus to be raised: in what style should we build? Is one style superior to another? Should we follow the medievals or the ancients? Does the Gothic cathedral provide us with a better model than the Greek temple? That question became especially pressing in the 19th century.⁷⁴ Can one answer that question by appealing to some supposed essence of architecture? But where do we find that essence?

An obvious approach to that question is to inquire into the origin of architecture? Here perhaps the most famous image of the primitive hut, taken from the second edition of Laugier's *Essay on Architecture*, published in 1755, a characteristic example to Enlightenment thinking on architecture to which I shall have to return.⁷⁵



⁷⁴ See Heinrich Hübsch, *In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?*, (Karlsruhe, Müllersche Hofbuchhandlung, 1828).

⁷⁵ Marc-Antoine Laugier, *An Essay on Architecture*, tr. Wolfgang Herrmann (Santa Monica: Hennessey and Ingalls, 2009).

Such inquiry into the origin of architecture is of course much older than the 18th century. And since the first substantial and most famous treatise on architecture that has come down to us remains Vitruvius's *The Ten Books of Architecture*,⁷⁶ it seems only fitting to take at least a brief look at his account of the origin of architecture.

When one tries to give an account of the origin of something, say of the state, or in our case of architecture, it is natural to inquire into human nature, into what it means to be a human being, and to try to found in this one's account of the origin of the state or in this case of architecture. Think of social contract theory.

Vitruvius, too, proceeds this way. He, too, begins by imagining human beings in a state of nature, in which they were in many ways rather like other animals. And this is indeed something the theory of architecture must not overlook: we remain animals, who get born and have to die, require food and shelter. But something happens to awaken these proto-humans from their animal state:

1. The men of old were born like the wild beasts, in woods, caves, and groves, and lived on savage fare. As time went on, the thickly crowded trees in a certain place, tossed by storms and winds, and rubbing their branches against one another, caught fire, and so the inhabitants of the place were put to flight, being terrified by the furious flame. After it subsided, they drew near, and observing that they were very comfortable standing before the warm fire, they put on logs and, while thus keeping it alive, brought up other people to it, showing them by signs how much comfort they got from it. In that gathering of men, at a time when utterance of sound was purely individual, from daily habits they fixed upon articulate words just as these had happened to come; then, from indicating by name things in common use, the result was that in this

⁷⁶ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, tr. Morris Hicky Morgan (Cambridge: Harvard, 1926).

chance way they began to talk, and thus originated conversation with one another.⁷⁷

When Vitruvius likens his first builders to wild beasts, he also insists on what makes them different.

2. Therefore it was the discovery of fire that originally gave rise to the coming together of men, to the deliberative assembly, and to social intercourse. And so, as they kept coming together in greater numbers into one place, finding themselves naturally gifted beyond the other animals in not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendour of the starry firmament, and also in being able to do with ease whatever they chose with their hands and fingers, they began in that first assembly to construct shelters. Some made them of green boughs, others dug caves on mountain sides, and some, in imitation of the nests of swallows and the way they built, made places of refuge out of mud and twigs. Next, by observing the shelters of others and adding new details to their own inventions, they constructed better and better kinds of huts as time went on.

3. And since they were of an imitative and teachable nature, they would daily point out to each other the results of their building, boasting of the novelties in it; and thus, with their natural gifts sharpened by emulation, their standards improved daily. At first they set up forked stakes connected by twigs and covered these walls with mud. Others made walls of lumps of dried mud, covering them with reeds and leaves to keep out the rain and the heat. Finding that such roofs could not stand the rain during the storms of winter, they built them with peaks daubed with mud, the roofs sloping and projecting so as to carry off the rain water.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Book II, ch. 1, 1, p. 38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. 1, 2, p. 38.

This, to be sure, can hardly surprise us; but I do find it surprising that what Vitruvius mentions in the first place when he distinguishes his proto-human from animals is not their extraordinary ability to use their hands and fingers, nor their capacity to imitate, learn from, and improve on what they observe, not their reason, but their "not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendor of the starry firmament." The human being is the animal that looks up to the sky.

How are we to understand this remark, which links human posture to the firmament? It brings to mind the often-told tale of Thales, the first philosopher, who, looking up at the stars, fell into a well, to be ridiculed by that pretty Thracian servant girl for whom he did not have any eyes. What did the stars matter to Thales? What do they matter to us earthlings? What does the sight of a splendor that the ancients thought essentially inaccessible, a permanent order open only to eye and the spirit, beyond human reach, what does this vision of cosmic permanence, this image of eternity, have to do with the origin of building?

I want to underscore the verticality of human being in Vitruvius's account. To be sure, in sleep or death we return to earth-bound horizontality. Such horizontality, however, does not define our being: unlike the other animals, 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."⁷⁹ The human body's verticality is linked to and signifies spirit which links us to a timeless beyond. The horizontal position on the other hand suggests sleep and death. Human beings are like the animals; as such they partake of the horizontal, but what makes them human is the vertical. In this sense they can be likened to a cross in which the vertical triumphs over the horizontal. There is thus what we can call a natural language of verticals and horizontals. They carry different meanings. That natural language has its foundation in the human body.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

The triumph of vertical over horizontal is also figured by the Christian cross. You see such crosses on many Alpine peaks, inviting us to think of the cross on which Christ died and to think of the hike up the mountain in the image of the journey up to Golgatha. That the cross should signify the victory of life over death is supported by the natural language of vertical and horizontal.

2

I have suggested that the verticality of the human being also possesses a temporal significance: when Vitruvius links humans with the upward gaze, he understands them as beings able to rise and look up out of the horizontal temporal condition that circumscribes the lives of the other animals to the seemingly ageless order of the firmament. He thus understands human beings as subjected to time and to death by their earth-bound bodies, yet led by their ability to look up to the firmament; its timeless order lets them dream of immortality.

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 human building to carry something of this promise into this death-shadowed world?

Or did Vitruvius associate "the splendor of the starry firmament" with the light- and life-granting sun, this 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, even as he invites us to understand human dwelling as an intersection of animal horizontality and divine verticality. And part of this divine verticality is the ability to raise oneself above what happens to be our place on earth, to look around, to imagine and dream of other possibilities; in other words, part of this divine verticality is our freedom.

3

In the introduction to Book II, Vitruvius disclaims originality for his account of the origin of building, acknowledging, without naming, his debt to "those writers who have devoted treatises to the origins of civilization and the investigation of inventions."⁸⁰ The most important of these would appear to have been Cicero's teacher, the Stoic Posidonius. Vitruvius's description of the human being as the being who looks up to the firmament is at any rate quite in keeping with the Greek understanding of the human being as *zoon logon echon*, which becomes the Latin *animal rationale*. Possessing reason, they are not bound to their particular places, as are the *prona animalia*. Standing up and gazing at the firmament, admiring its order, they rise above their natural subjection to the power of place. In the *Phaedrus* Plato thus attributes wings to the soul, which are to carry it to its true eternal home where the gods dwell. Related is the Biblical understanding of human beings as beings who, created in the image of God, look up to God. The reformer Calvin thus suggests that reason, intelligence, prudence, and judgment are given to us not just so that we might govern our lives on earth, but that we might transcend these lives even unto God and eternal blessedness, while his fellow reformer Zwingli links our humanity to our ability to look up to God and His divine, timeless word.⁸¹ The human animal transcends and measures himself by a timeless logos. Every attempt to speak the truth is witness to such self-transcendence, for when I claim truth for what I have to say I claim more than that this is how I now happen to see some matter: the truth I claim is in principle open to all. And even if the truth should ever elude us human knowers, even if Simonides should prove right and truth belong to God alone, the mere attempt to speak the truth is sufficient to show that we are not bound by the body and the accident of its spatial and temporal location, that we do indeed look up to and measure ourselves by a timeless logos, figured by the firmament. Building, too, should

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 37,

⁸¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 48-49.

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be informed by such a 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.

A good example of Vitruvian architecture is provided by the Maison Carrée in Nîmes (4-7 AD), with which Jefferson had already fallen in love, before he actually visited it in 1787, and on which he modelled his Virginia capitol in Richmond begun in 1785, before the final plans by Jefferson and Clerisseau were received from France; it was finished in 1788. He hoped it would help to instill Republican virtue in his newly born nation, not aware that the Maison Carrée was built on order of the Emperor Augustus to honor his prematurely deceased grandsons.

4

But let me return to the Biblical understanding of human being as created in the image of God. It is of course accompanied by a warning: Adam fell. The snake's promise suggests that human verticality carries with it the danger that, by claiming a higher place, a permanence and plenitude denied to them, human beings, like the proud, spherical proto-humans of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, only lose their proper perfection and place and instead of rising beyond their mortal condition become less than they were. Gazing at the stars, Thales thus fell into a well, while Icarus, lured by the splendor of the sun, flew high above the earth only to fall and perish by that very splendor he pursued.

With such warnings in mind, let me return to Vitruvius. Were the souls of his first builders comforted by the firmament, as their bodies were comforted by the warmth of the fire that at first frightened them? But what promise does such cosmic order, such deathless beauty hold for us embodied and therefore ephemeral mortals? Will we not inevitably run out of time, even though sun, moon, and stars will continue to rise and set, long after we are gone? Can we take comfort from such repetition, from the sun's daily and annual course, from the ever repeating cycles of nature, from the return of the seasons, from sunrise and sunset, ebb and tide? Does such unending repetition not only serve to make conspicuous what separates our existence, stretched out between birth and

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death, from the endless circling of a world that seems indifferent to our desires? This difficult to bear gap that separates our life-time from world-time seems to condemn our dwelling on earth to insignificance? Does gazing "upon the splendor of the starry firmament" help us to accept ourselves as we are: embodied, vulnerable, and mortal? Will it not rather make it more difficult for us to take pleasure in whatever reminds us of the passing of time? Take pleasure in the gifts of the earth? Take pleasure in ourselves?

Or does it call us, like Plato's *Phaedrus*, to a transfigured, winged dwelling, and to a similarly transfigured spiritual architecture that, unburdened by gravity, answers to the vertical dimension of our being? Call us to a spherical architecture perhaps? I shall return to this suggestion in the next lecture.

5

I suggested in the beginning of this lecture that when one tries to give an account of the origin of something, say of the state or in our case of architecture, it seems only natural to inquire into human nature, into what it means to be a human being, and to try to find in this one's account of the state or of architecture. We saw Vitruvius, proceed in this way. But by now we have been taught to be suspicious of appeals to "nature" or "essence." All too often they endow what is merely conventional with a false aura. Does Vitruvius capture the essence of human nature?

Let me sharpen this question by turning to another much later account of the building of the primitive hut, obviously indebted to that given by Vitruvius, to the already mentioned account given by Marc-Antoine Laugier. Both Vitruvius and Laugier give us an account of the origin of building. Both speculate on the appearance of the primitive hut. But their description of the state of nature is different in at least one significant respect. Vitruvius begins with a community. Laugier, and here he shows himself a typical thinker of the Enlightenment, begins with one individual. But is human being not essentially a being-with-others? That dimension has been elided by Laugier.

There is also another difference: Laugier is interested first of all in architecture as opposed to mere building. The question he addresses is: what is it that distinguishes

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architecture from mere building? Laugier invites us to reflect on that problematic distinction.

Every work of architecture is of course, as we said, also a building. But what lifts the former beyond a mere building is on Laugier's view its power of representation, where Laugier has in mind a double representation: representing a Greek temple, architecture represents at the same time the primitive hut: an ideal building, an imaginative construct, supported, so Laugier thought, by reason and nature. Representing the primitive hut, works of architecture recall us to the essence or origin, to the arche of building. And that means also: works of architecture recall us to the essence of dwelling.

To speak of the essence of building, architecture makes conspicuous the usually taken for granted and hardly noticed elements of building. The Greek temple that furnishes Laugier with his paradigm is supposed to have accomplished this by translating wooden vertical supports into columns of stone, the supported horizontal members into entablatures, the inclined members that carry the roof into pediments. Such translation re-presents the translated element, rendering conspicuous its essence.

Recall Nikolaus Pevsner's claim that what distinguishes a work of architecture from a mere building is the addition of features that give it an aesthetic appeal. What transforms a building into such an aesthetic object has often been tied to its beautiful form, which lets us experience as everything we see as being just as it should be. The work of architecture has thus often been understood, with Pevsner, as a building intended to succeed also as such an aesthetic object. A work of architecture is a building that whatever other needs it may meet, such as e.g. the need for shelter, succeeds also as an aesthetic object. Laugier invites us to think that aesthetic appeal in a particular way.

Sometimes something commonplace is transfigured into an aesthetic object simply by being brought into a new environment. Such displacement re-presents what is displaced in a way that invites us to linger, to look again. Beauty, too, possesses such representational power. It makes us look again. Modern artists have exploited this power of re-presentation. Think of one of Duchamp's ready-mades. Or of one of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. What moves us is first of all is not so much what the painting represents, but the way paint and canvas have been re-presented. We can speak here of a

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realism of materials. Such realism has its counterpart in buildings that do not just use up steel and glass, concrete and stone, brick and wood, but re-present them in a way that makes them speak, where what they "say" will depend on the connotations carried by what is thus re-presented. Wood speaks differently than brushed stainless steel or brick, which again can speak to us in countless different ways.

Consider once more a Greek temple's translation of wooden posts into columns of marble, which is at the same time a re-presentation of the stone that lets it speak to us with its own voice, so very different from the voice of dark granite or red brick. Representing a post, the column also re-presents itself as a post, as a building element whose function it is to support the lintel's heavy horizontal, now transformed into an entablature. That this particular configuration of vertical and horizontal speaks to us presupposes the natural language of space. As the re-presentation of building architecture re-presents and thereby makes conspicuous and lets us attend to that speech. Good architecture lets all buildings speak more loudly.

6

What Laugier took to be the authority of reason and nature owed all too much to the prejudices of his own day, to his historical situation — the second edition of his *Essay*, from which our illustration of the primitive hut was taken, was published in 1755 — i.e. to the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment. But if our being-in-the-world is inevitably historical, it is not equally historical in all its aspects: we have to recognize the many different strands or themes that make up our world, some of quite recent origin, others as old as humanity as we know it. If there is a sense in which Greek temple and Gothic cathedral belong to worlds that have perished, this is not to say that the temple's form, the balance of verticals and horizontals or a cathedral's diaphanous walls speak to us only of what has perished.

What should architecture speak of? Laugier suggests that it should recall us to the arche of building: architecture speaks as arche-tecture. As such it recalls an essential dwelling, recalls human beings to their essential humanity. So understood architecture has not so much an aesthetic, as an ethical function. "Ethical" derives from "ethos." By a

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person's ethos we mean his character, nature, or disposition. Similarly we speak of a community's ethos to refer to the spirit that presides over its activities. "Ethos" here names the way human beings exist in the world: their way of dwelling. The ethical function of architecture names its task to help articulate and support a shared ethos. Sigfried Giedion in *Space, Time, and Architecture* claimed such an ethical function for today's architecture, when he called for an architecture that would speak to us of a way of life valid for our period.⁸²

I agree with this claim. The question is of course: what way of life is valid for our period? We heirs of a whole series of Copernican decenterings and deconstructions have been taught to be on guard before appeals to some shared ethos. Today such appeals are inescapably shadowed by the specters of Stalin and Hitler and of their architecture. I shall have to return to this point.

But to anticipate, is it not precisely the absence of an effective common sense that opens doors to the artificially constructed and imposed common sense that defines totalitarianism and a totalitarian architecture? Needed is a very different architecture, an architecture that, preserving inevitable tensions, balances the rights of the community with those of the individual, the seductive magic of place with the promise of open space, the need for roots with the claims of freedom. Laugier's primitive hut and Heidegger's very different and yet related 18th century farmhouse are constructs that must be questioned. What they point to lies behind us. Different is and should be our sense of community, different our relationship to nature, to space and to time. Science and technology have transformed our way of being in the world, our mode of dwelling, our understanding of space and place.

Not that we can or should simply affirm this process: for that it has shown us too many questionable and increasingly frightening sides. But neither should we simply reject it in a vain attempt to return to the security of pre-modern, supposedly more primordial modes of dwelling. We have to recognize the legitimacy of technology and at

⁸² Sigfried Giedion in *Space, Time, and Architecture* ((Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. xxxiii.

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the same time put it in its place. And so should our architecture. If their building is to remain responsible, architects, too, have to confront the question: how are we to dwell on this seemingly ever smaller earth with its dwindling resources in the future?

8. Sphere and Cross: Lessons of the Pantheon

1

Last time I discussed two of the most often cited accounts of the origin of architecture. I would like to begin this lecture by returning to the first, that of Vitruvius and ask, what might a work of architecture look like that took the Vitruvian understanding of the human being as the animal that looks up to the sky seriously. Recall: unlike the *prona animalia*, the prone animals, the human being is able to stand up and gaze at the firmament, to admire its timeless order. Were we just animals we might be satisfied with shelters similar to the nests of birds or the burrows of foxes or groundhogs. But buildings built in the mage of such shelters do not do justice to the verticality of human being. What would an architecture look like that responds to human verticality?

One work of architecture that suggests itself is the Roman Pantheon, which dates from about the same time, although its building history is complicated. The present Pantheon was preceded by two earlier Pantheon buildings, the first of which was commissioned by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (ca. 25 BC), honored as the founder of the building by the inscription. That first building was destroyed by fire and rebuilt by the Emperor Domitian. That building, too, was badly damaged when it was struck by lightning in 110 AD. The Pantheon, as it exists today, was probably begun in the reign of the Emperor Trajan (98-117 A) and finished in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian, ca, 125 AD.

With its one great eye that opens its body to the starry firmament, it invites interpretation as an attempt to raise the Vitruvian insight into the verticality of human being to the level of great architecture. Like Vitruvius' human being, this interior looks up to heaven.

Not that the builders of the Pantheon neglected the horizontal whose significance Vitruvius so clearly recognized. Present in the spine that joins the rotunda's entrance to its apse, such horizontality must have been far more assertive when the journey to and into the interior still led through a propylon, followed by a long colonnaded court, up five

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steps to the portico and into the domed cylinder, where its forward thrust was quieted by the calm verticality of the round interior. First the horizontal dominates: there is a space that is essentially a path. It beckons us to climb the steps and enter the domed space. It is a scheme that has been repeated in countless churches.

But to return to the Pantheon. Here is how the art historian Mac Donald describes its dome: "The seamless circles around and above the great interior described both the cosmos and Roman rule. The role of giving the Pantheon life was assigned to the sun, the master planet.... Because of its form the Pantheon is an activated, light-drenched place, expanding and revolving, visibly connected with the heavens through its cyclopic eye."⁸³ There is something reassuring about this sun-like eye, which helps to establish a vertical axis, given the cosmic significance of the dome, an *axis mundi* that seems to proclaim that our journey has ended, that we have arrived at the world's center. We want to rest in this space, in this ageless, domed ring, which promises security and peace

It is part of the sublimity of this space that its center should be inaccessible to us. Hardly a space in which embodied mortals feel easily at home, this is a sacred space that does not seem to want to open itself to the human world beyond: here verticality and geometric order triumph over horizontality and the often chaotic everyday in a way that fails to do justice to the requirements of human dwelling — not a criticism, to be sure, of a building meant first of all to celebrate the imperial power of Rome and its gods. The world in which we get born, work, love, and die, is left behind, shut out by this space, animated by the light entering from above and transfigured by the time-defying power of the sphere inscribed into this space.

More than the building itself, it is precisely the Pantheon's spherical soul, so indifferent to our frail flesh, that offers itself as a sublime symbol to those wanting to celebrate the boundless freedom and immortality of the human spirit, capable of a self-elevation that leaves the body and thus the whole human being far behind. It is therefore only to be expected that spherical buildings in the image of the Pantheon should have

⁸³ William L. Macdonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire. An Introductory Study*, revised edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 120-121.

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become an object of special concern for the architects of the Enlightenment, in this age when faith in the incarnation and bodily resurrection was increasingly being called into question and an abstract immortality had to substitute for the concrete immortality promised to the Christian. As Sergio Villari observes, Enlightenment "architects seemed almost obsessed by the sphere's solemn and cathartic form. Every one of them planned at least one building in such a form: during little more than a decade, from 1785 to the last years of the century, more than ten such spherical buildings may be counted.

Neoclassical architects believed they saw in the sphere, an ancient symbol of eternity and perfection, the ineffable presence of the sublime."⁸⁴ Jefferson, too, came under its spell. I shall have to return to this architecture in a later lecture. Here just the suggestion that what these architects of the Enlightenment sought to provide was not physical shelter, but an architecture that answered a spiritual need, a need that was once met by religion, which had promised an answer to the terror of time. The Enlightenment could no longer accept that answer. How then was it to meet that terror? And how was architecture to help us deal with it? The Pantheon provided a pointer.

The answer is indeed hinted at already by Vitruvius, when in his discussion of what elevates his primitive builders above the other animals he mentions first of all their upright posture, which allows them to lift up their eyes and to "gaze upon the splendor of the starry firmament." The very word "firmament" promises a timeless order not subject to the ravages of time. To build in the image of that order is to endow our work with at least a semblance of eternity.

The Pantheon suggests that architecture meets the terror of time first of all by wresting from an unstable, uncertain environment a more stable order, by transforming chaos into a rational cosmos. Architecture here spiritualizes the environment, by remaking what is sensible and changeable in the image of a higher, timeless reality.

⁸⁴ Sergio Villari, *JNL Durand (1760-1834 : Art and Science of Architecture)* (Rizzoli, 1991), p. 17.

2

We can speak of a perennial Platonism that surfaces again and again in the course of the history of art and architecture. Beauty is here understood in opposition to time.

In the *Symposium* Plato grounds that understanding in a particular understanding of human being. Beauty is there defined as the object of eros. Human beings, according to Plato, are fundamentally erotic beings because they exist in time, are born only to grow older and die, and yet belong to and desire being, eternity. Or, we can say, human beings are possessed by eros because they have fallen from their eternal true home into time and now dream of homecoming. Eros is nothing other than this desire for being, to transcend becoming and thus to return home. On its lower levels eros tries to achieve this by making sure that something of the individual will survive him in time, children, for example in whose memory we may continue to live, or fame, or works of art, or works of architecture. The higher mysteries of eros lead beyond time, to the eternal forms.

Whenever we see something beautiful, according to Plato, we are reminded of the fact that we belong to being rather than to becoming. That is where we should seek our true home. Time has no power over what is most essentially human, over the spirit. Given this Platonic aesthetics, the language of beauty is essentially a language of the spirit, and for Plato this means first of all the language of geometry. Particularly revealing is this passage from the *Philebus*:

I do not mean by beauty of form such beauty as that of animals or pictures, which the many would suppose to be my meaning; but says the argument, understand me to mean straight lines and circles, and the plane or solid figures, which are formed by turning lathes and rulers and measures of angles — for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful, like other things, but they are eternally or absolutely beautiful, and they have peculiar pleasures, quite unlike the pleasures of scratching. And there are colors, which are of the same character, and have similar pleasures; now do you understand my meaning?⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Plato, *Philebus*, 51 c - d, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

The passage deserves careful attention. First of all Plato draws our attention to two kinds of beauty Plato considers deficient:

- 1) the beauty of animals
- 2) the beauty of pictures

The first refers to the pleasure we take in the vitality of an animal. The second refers to the pleasure we take in representations of what is perceived. In both cases beauty is too much involved with the world to promise deliverance from the terror of time. Such beauty is contrasted with the beauty of simple inorganic forms, beauty that is created not by the body, but by the spirit. Indeed, in creating such beauty the body is likely to prove a hindrance: try to draw a straight line or a perfect circle. Soon you will look for aids, for ruler and compass, and the making of cylinders and spheres will call for more complicated machines — Plato speaks of turning lathes.

3

We get here a hint why this perennial Platonism should so easily have allied itself with a machine aesthetic. The machine technology of the twentieth century has indeed allowed us to envision beauties Plato could not have dreamed of. But the main point remains the same: the Platonic idealization of the beauty of geometric forms leads easily to a machine aesthetic. The machine-made object, the machine-made look, is given the nod precisely because it bears the imprint of the human spirit. As Theo van Doesburg explains: "Every machine is a spiritualization of an organism The machine is, par excellence, a phenomenon of spiritual discipline The new artistic sensibility of the twentieth century has not only felt the beauty of the machine, but has also taken cognizance of its unlimited expressive possibilities for the arts."⁸⁶ Craft and the hand have no place in the art that is being envisioned.

The pursuit of the plenitude of being expresses itself not just in a choice of particular forms, but also, as Plato points out, in a choice of particular colors. Primary colors have a timeless quality, compared with broken greens and browns, which hint at

⁸⁶ Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 32 – 33.

the changing earth. Similarly certain building materials, such as wood or brick, stand in a different relationship to time than stainless steel, vinyl siding or formica. There is a sense in which the machine-made environment, created by human beings, looks human, as the natural environment does not.

4

But isn't such a machine-made environment just the opposite, inhuman rather than human precisely because by one-sidedly answering to the spirit, it excludes or reduces traces of the hand, the body? Both this challenge and the position challenged are easily defended; both presuppose different conceptions of human existence. If the machine-made environment is experienced as more human than the natural environment, this presupposes that human being has been identified with the "spirit." If, on the other hand, such an environment is dismissed as inhuman, this presupposes that the human being has been understood more concretely as essentially an embodied self, which cannot hope to find refuge from the terror of time in abstract realms of the spirit without losing itself.

Perhaps I have said enough to explain the Enlightenment's love affair with the sphere. Consider once more Boullée's project for a Cenotaph for Newton. \Given such a design, it is not surprising that in the very beginning of his essay on architecture Boullée should chide Vitruvius, who is accused of having been familiar only with "the technical side of architecture."⁸⁷ Indeed, had Vitruvius made more of that remark which has his primitive builders look up to the sphere of the firmament, he might have recognized the poetry that according to Boullée alone lifts building to the level of art and makes it architecture. Refusing to define architecture as the art of building, Boullée insists instead that it is first of all a product of the mind, and mind seeks order and perfection. His indebtedness to the Pantheon is evident. In the sphere he, too, finds the natural image of perfection: "It combines strict symmetry with the most perfect regularity and the greatest possible variety; its form is developed to the fullest extent and is the simplest that exists;

⁸⁷ Étienne Louis Boullée, *Architecture, essai sur l'art*, trans Helen Rosenau, *Boullée and Visionary Architecture* (New York, 1976). p. 88.

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its shape is outlined by the most agreeable contour and, finally, the light effects that it produces are so beautifully graduated that they could not possibly be softer, more agreeable, or more varied. These unique advantages, which the sphere derives from nature, have an immeasurable hold over our senses."⁸⁸ "Nature" here has nothing to do with mud and excrement. This is a "denaturalized nature," the kind of nature figured by the firmament. It is this nature Boullée would have the architect study. In its image he would have him build.

The paradigm of such architecture, the Roman Pantheon, to be sure, while it may have a spherical soul, has a body that very much belongs to the earth. Its hemispherical dome rests firmly on a cylinder of the same radius, recalling a long tradition of round earth-bound grave monuments that includes the chambered neolithic tomb in Newgrange, Ireland and the so-called "Tomb of Agamemnon" in Mycenae (1250 BC). All of these are much less accomplished works of architecture. The Pantheon spiritualizes this tradition, transfigures it by virtue of the power of geometry even as it asserts more strongly the power of the vertical against that of the horizontal.

But precisely this transfiguration threatens to make us strangers in this divine space: we would have to be able to fly to place ourselves at its center. The clarity of the geometrical idea, appropriate to a representation of cosmic order, here threatens to triumph over a fuller humanity. This, to repeat, is no criticism: this is, after all, not a house in which embodied mortals are to find shelter, but a temple for all the gods, and that is to say, for no god in particular, in keeping with the cosmopolitan and at bottom secular, proto-modern religiosity of Hadrian's Rome.

Still, the living body seems to have little place inside the Pantheon, and it is hardly surprising that its most immediate successors, too, should have been houses for the dead, such as the mausolea of the Roman emperors Diocletian and Maxentius. A more distant and more barbaric descendant is the tomb of the Gothic king Theoderic in Ravenna (520 AD). But, as Vitruvius knew so well, first of all architecture should be linked, not to eternity and death, but to life, should allow mortals to find shelter.

⁸⁸ Boullée, 88.

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In conclusion let me therefore return one last time to the upright posture of Vitruvius's first builders that raises them above the ground they share with the other animals. Contemplating the firmament, they must not only have been challenged by its ageless perfection, but also been put in their place. Unlike the immortal gods, these images of a transfigured humanity, mortals can maintain their verticality only with effort: their bodies belong to the earth, to which they return in sleep and in death. Full self-affirmation demands an affirmation of this twofold belonging that is never without tension. Such tension is difficult to bear and again and again tempts us with dreams of a more perfect dwelling, of buildings in the image of the sphere.

But to affirm ourselves as the mortals we are, we have to affirm not only that vertical dimension of our being that links us to a timeless logos, but also that horizontal dimension that binds us to the earth and into time. To build houses fit for mortals we must resist the temptations of the sublime. We must look both up to the spherical firmament and what it figures, but also ahead and down, must learn to make room for vertical and horizontal, for the cross.

As old as the terror of passing time is the love of geometry: hence the perennial fascination with the Roman Pantheon and even more with its spherical soul, its sublime circles. This domed ring of stone promises security, rest, eternal peace.

And yet this is not an altogether happy-making space. Built in the image of the firmament, which the ancients thought a perfect sphere, a realm that knew neither death nor decay, connected to this realm by its cyclopic eye, this interior does not open itself to the human world or to the landscape. To be sure, we are reassured by the light-granting oculus, by the vertical axis thus established, a would-be axis mundi, which seems to proclaim that we have arrived at the center. This oculus literalizes the Platonic definition of time as the moving image of eternity, allowing the changing times of the day and the year to animate this interior, attuning this built cosmos to the cosmos.

My wife and I learned to experience the calming power of a similar if, of course, much smaller oculus in a small concrete pavilion for work and sleep that we built on the island of Vieques near Puerto Rico. A light Buckminster Fuller type dome had stood on



that site, its pure geometry no match for Hurricane Hugo, which many year ago lifted it off its base and set it literally afloat, sent it sailing downhill, as if it were a frisbee, leaving us a clean swept tile floor, still standing on it an unscratched bathtub and a toilet. On that foundation we raised our pavilion, now of heavy concrete, grey and substantial, like the rocks scattered on that hilltop. It was our architect, Edward F. Knowles, who convinced us to open this modest interior to the sky. I had at first wanted a folded tent-like ceiling, its facets to be animated by an ever-changing indirect light. But now, like the Pantheon, this space functions conspicuously as a sun-, moon-, and star-dial, mediating life-time and world-time. I find it reassuring to wake up at night and glimpse some part of Scorpio or Orion overhead, even a shooting star, to follow the moon tracing the passing hours on floor and walls.

And yet, were there just this oculus, this small decagon would be a disturbing, suffocating space. The vertical thus established demands the horizontal. The space demands to be opened, not just to the sky and its changing light, but to the surrounding landscape, especially to the East. In the morning especially one welcomes the quickly

intensifying light poured in by the rising sun, reflected by the now orange-red, cement-



tile

floor, painting the grey walls a soft pink, filling this space, which becomes a chalice ready to receive, not just the gift of light, but also of life, noisily announcing itself as cocks begin to crow, dogs begin to bark, a car rumbles on the road below, distant humans begin to work. This active light activates the whole building, makes it more substantial.

What is it that gives a building substance in time? Perhaps our modest little pavillion hints at an answer: the presencing of time. What matters is not so much that heavy reinforced concrete now replaced wood vulnerable to termites, but rather how the building marks and allows itself to be marked by time. To re-present this process, so very much part of the life of this landscape, we chose not to paint the concrete, to leave it, both inside and outside, with all its blemishes, spots and stains, leave it to change as the building begins to age, celebrating the way buildings, too, have a mysterious life of their own. They, too, stand in a temporal context, gain strength and substance from re-presenting it. We therefore welcomed the way the simple plan preserves something and reminds us of the dome swept away by the storm — in fact we still call our pavilion "the dome": the building's prehistory helps to render it somehow more substantial.

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What matters is the way it embraces the landscape, the way it seems to have found its place on this hard to work earth, among the grey rocks, between two mango trees; the way the roof collects the water of quickly passing showers, sending it on to the cistern; the way the interior opens out to the landscape, to the time of this landscape, marked by the sun, rising and setting, by the repeating rhythm of light and dark, by the rhythms of growth and decay, of birth and death. Such buildings teach us not to take ourselves too seriously.

9. The Two Faces of Nostalgia

1

Our built environment testifies to the power of nostalgia. Just about every neighborhood furnishes countless examples, invoking perhaps an England that has long perished or the American past. Here a “Dreamhouse” that is being offered to the consumer by the “Dream Home Source,” a 2772 square foot home in the New England Style. But you may prefer a different style, e.g. a slightly larger house in the English Cottage style. Apparently the firm has helped more than a million Americans to build their dream houses. No doubt, you have seen such houses wherever you live. We like to dress up our houses with finery borrowed from the past, inviting thoughts of a more firmly rooted dwelling. And this is hardly a new development. Consider the decorated sheds of the 19th century with their borrowed ornaments. Often such buildings invite the kitsch label, as they gesture towards a past that cannot be resurrected. Recall the immensely popular architectural visions of the recently deceased Thomas Kinkade, the self-styled “Painter of Light.” But what is wrong with buildings that so self-consciously seek to edify, unafraid to rely on recipes drawn from pretty pictures of a transfigured past, buildings that invites us to forget the ugliness of the world we have created and in which we have to make our way? Why not welcome such remembering, which is inevitably also a forgetting?

2

Often quite innocent, given too much weight, nostalgia can prevent us from responsibly meeting the challenges of the future. The Enlightenment thus understood nostalgia first of all as something to be overcome, as a disease, an aberration, incompatible with humanity’s truly coming of age. Better to forget and to venture into the unknown. As the poet Friedrich Hölderlin put it: “Kolonie liebt und tapfer Vergessen

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der Geist,” “the spirit loves colony and brave forgetting.”⁸⁹ Hölderlin touches here not only on the importance, but also on the difficulty of forgetting. Only such difficulty lets the poet call such forgetting “brave.” We find it difficult to let go of the past; is it not the past that provides us with needed orientation and an idea of home? In the poet’s saying nostalgia and a desire to forget mingle. A presupposition of the founding of a colony is that what once was home left those venturing into the unknown dissatisfied. Think of the countless millions who left home to make a new life for themselves in this country. The founders of this country wanted a different life. And yet the home that left them dissatisfied continued to claim them. And so, again and again, colonies have sought to translate the image of home into the new environment, enacting a contest between nostalgia and the need to forget. Consider once more Jefferson’s Richmond capitol. Nostalgia shows us thus two faces, one oriented to the past, the other to the future; one seeks to return home, the other is content to let home remain a beautiful memory that points the way towards a better future.

Like “aesthetics,” “nostalgia” is a word whose birth we can locate with precision. It, too, belongs to the Enlightenment. As Helmut Illbruck points out in his *Nostalgia: Origins and Ends of an Unenlightened Disease*,⁹⁰ the term was first coined by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss medical student in Basel in his dissertation of 1688 and described by him in great and often amusing detail. Hofer coined the term, joining *nostos* meaning a journey back home, and *algia*, meaning pain, to name what in the vernacular was called *Heimweh*, and which he had come to understand as a potentially deadly, wasting disease that, he thought, had not been properly recognized by the medical profession and that in extreme cases may admit no remedy other than a return to the homeland.⁹¹ Nostalgia is thus Hofer’s quite literal translation of the word *Heimweh*. Like Hofer’s neologism, it

⁸⁹ From a late version of the final stanza of "Brod und Wein". Cited in Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 53 (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1984), p. 157.

⁹⁰ Helmut Illbruck, *Nostalgia: Origins and Ends of an Unenlightened Disease* (Evanston: Northwestern U. Press, 2012).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

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has two components: *Heim* and *Weh*. *Weh* means pain, but in the word *Heim* the word *Heimat* also resonates. *Heimat* suggests not just one's geographic home, but also one's spiritual home. In the Middle Ages it was used by theologians exclusively to refer to our spiritual home, i.e. to a home that could not be found on this earth, but belonged to the beyond, i.e., it referred to paradise. Gradually the term came to be used to refer to one's earthly home, but the religious connotation never completely disappeared.

Hofer was Swiss and so were his subjects. And the Swiss were indeed especially associated with this ailment, a significant fact, because the Swiss, ever since the Middle Ages, were the most sought after mercenaries of the time. Especially the French kings depended on their services, and nostalgia was a frequent cause of desertion. Hofer noted in his revised dissertation that an outbreak of nostalgia was often linked to a playing of the *Kühe-Reyen*, a "certain rustic cantilena, to which the Swiss drive the herds to pasture in the Alps."⁹² Rousseau tells us that the playing of the tune had to be forbidden by royal decree, testifying to the power of music to move our hearts.⁹³ Given that it presented a very real problem, it is not surprising that various theories were proposed suggesting different causes and remedies.

The story changes in the late 18th and 19th centuries, when nostalgia is no longer considered primarily a medical problem, but comes to figure in both poetry and philosophy, a sense of spiritual homelessness that makes of home a figure of utopia or paradise. In the spirit of the Enlightenment Kant thus understands nostalgia negatively, as originating in a troubled imagination that seeks to recover what cannot be recovered. According to Kant, it is thus not so much a particular place that the nostalgic really longs for as lost youth, transfigured in memory and associated with "the simple pleasures of life."⁹⁴ When the nostalgic finally returns home, he is disappointed, blames perhaps the changes that have taken place, but he is cured. Kant understood enlightenment as the coming of age of humanity. Part of such coming of age is the recognition that human

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.87.

⁹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie*, B86/A85.

flourishing does not require roots in some particular place. The nostalgic does not want to grow up.

But Kant does find it worth noting that nostalgia afflicts more those who grew up in regions, such as Switzerland, that, while poor in money, were socially still more firmly knitted together. The nostalgic has not yet made *patria ubi bene* his motto. So understood nostalgia implies legitimate critique of an increasingly money centered modernity.

Schopenhauer followed Kant in this understanding of nostalgia as a necessarily vain longing to return home. But pessimist that he was, he thought such longing an all too justified expression of our unhappiness with our human situation.

First of all such unhappiness will be focused on the present. And here the thought naturally offers itself that it is not, as Schopenhauer thought, the human condition as such that is to blame, where a Christian might say, the condition of fallen humanity, but rather, as Marx thought, the way that a particular historical situation had distorted reality. Frederic Jameson thus observes: "It is scarcely surprising that out of the alienating structures of nineteenth and twentieth century capitalism we should look back with a (not necessarily unrevolutionary) nostalgia at such moments in which life, and form, are still relatively whole, and which seem at the same time to afford a glimpse into the nature of some future nonalienated existence as well."⁹⁵ In keeping with his time, Marx was thinking here first of all of Greece. Attempting to explain the timeless appeal of this art, Marx appeals to the joy we experience when we observe children: "A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naiveté, and must he not try to reproduce its truth at a higher stage?"⁹⁶ In the tradition of Winckelmann, Schiller, and Hegel, Marx too suggests that art will never again be as beautiful as it was in ancient Greece; also that humanity will never again unfold itself

⁹⁵ Henri Arvon, *Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Helen Lane, intro. Frederic Jameson (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. xvii.

⁹⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973), "Introduction," p. 111.

quite so beautifully. Is human progress bought at the price of beauty? At the price of feeling truly at home in the world? Is homelessness the modern condition?

Schopenhauer, to be sure, would have us challenge the claim that there ever was or ever can be the kind of non-alienated existence of which romantic nostalgia dreams. Was the Enlightenment's high estimation of Greek art not itself grounded in a particular historical situation that constructed a Greece that answered to what it longed for? A secular version of paradise? And is the childhood we nostalgically recall not another such construction, present to us not so much in what we might call the historical indicative, as in the aesthetic or perhaps mythic subjunctive.

I noted a certain ambivalence in Kant's discussion of nostalgia. On one hand it is criticized for refusing to confront present reality. The nostalgic instead finds refuge in a never to be recovered past. But Kant also suggests that the nostalgic recalls a way of life that in certain ways contrasts favorably with the money-centered environment in which he now finds himself.

Schopenhauer finds reality as such unsatisfactory. That gives a certain legitimacy to the nostalgic's turn away from reality. But Schopenhauer, too, is critical of nostalgia that would have us return to a past that lies irrecoverably behind us. He thus had little patience with the then growing vogue in favor of Gothic architecture, which had come to be associated with an age of faith. To be sure, he was well aware of how Gothic architecture might be justified along the lines he himself had sketched in his remarks on architecture. Architecture here gives expression to the victory of the vertical over the horizontal, in keeping with the Christian cross and the victory of life over death for which it stands. But, Schopenhauer insisted, thoughts of such a victory did violence to the human condition. We are essentially mortals, bound the earth. Before admitting Gothic architecture as an equally valid paradigm we should remind ourselves that "the conflict between rigidity and gravity, so openly and naively displayed by ancient architecture, is an actual and true one established by nature. On the other hand, the entire subjugation of gravity by rigidity remains a mere pretense, a fiction testified by illusion."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 417-418.

3

Nostalgia offers us a key, not just to countless Neo-Gothic churches, but to much 19th and 20th century religion and art. Consider the art of the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites. Much of this invites the kitsch label. But while rejecting such art as kitsch, has modernism really left nostalgia behind?

The opposite is suggested by Lyotard. In "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern,"⁹⁸ Lyotard presents us with account of postmodernism that situates it within modernism. Artistic modernism, Lyotard claims, moves within the orbit of the sublime: "the aesthetic of the sublime is where modern art (including literature) find its impetus, and where the logic of the avant-garde finds its axioms" (p. 10). What distinguishes the postmodern from the modern appropriations of the sublime is that the former is said by Lyotard to have shed modernist nostalgia. Nostalgia is thus made constitutive of modernism.

What does Lyotard have in mind? What does modernist nostalgia long for? According to Lyotard, it, too, longs for lost reality. "Modernity, whenever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the lack of reality in reality — a discovery linked to the invention of other realities."⁹⁹ The decorated sheds of the 19th century represent the kind of architecture modernism reacted against. To modernists they seemed hollow, theatrical, seemed to lack reality. Modernists criticized such architecture much in the way Schopenhauer had criticized Neo-Gothic architecture for its dishonesty.

Lyotard's formulation presupposes that in an important sense reality is felt by the modernist to have been lost. But how could it have been lost? First of all and most of the time we do not doubt our body's reality, the reality of those we live with, of the things we encounter. How then are we to understand reality's "lack of reality," said by

⁹⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern," in *The Postmodern Explained*, Minneapolis, 1993.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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Liotard to be the background condition of modern art, of modernism's demand for authenticity, for a new honesty in art and architecture. Adolf Loos gives expression to this demand with his attack in ornament. Consider the Looshaus (1909). We are in Vienna and the Viennese, including the emperor, were horrified. The house without eyebrows they called it, referring to the plain windows.

So how then are we to understand reality's "lack of reality"? Lyotard hints at the answer when he claims that modern art longs for "the all and the one, for a reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, for a transparent and communicable experience" (p. 16), longs for the incarnation of what can be thought and dreamed of in what can be seen and experienced, an incarnation so complete it would absorb us in a way that would leave no room for questions such as: What is this work about? What does it mean? Absorption and presence have become key words in discussions of modernist painting. The building should not mean, but be. The spirit of the new age was supposed to find expression in its architecture. And so it did. Lyotard might have commented that, like the historicist architecture that is so decisively rejected, modernism, too, is heavy with nostalgia.

Much here recalls Schopenhauer. Modern art, the turn to the aesthetic, appears here as an expression of modernity's unhappy consciousness, unhappy precisely because never quite at home in the world, with things, which it projects against a background of a dream of plenitude, a dream that makes our messy world seem arbitrary and contingent. Full presence is supposed to defeat arbitrariness and contingency. Nostalgia for lost plenitude, lost presence, is on this view the dominant mood of modern art. Frank Stella thus dreamed of an art so lean, accurate, and right that it would allow us just to look at it.¹⁰⁰ This would allow the observer to become a pure eye, would let us experience the artwork as a presence no longer haunted by unfulfilled possibilities, by absent meaning. The painting will of course never be lean enough; it still means, even if it means only to

¹⁰⁰ "Questions to Stella and Judd," Interview with Bruce Glaser, edited by Lucy R. Lippard, *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 157-158.

present itself as simply being. Thus we experience the painting as a presentation of a finally unrepresentable presence. To use Lyotard's language: the artwork seeks to show "that there is something we can conceive of which we can neither see nor show" (p. 11). Just this, according to Lyotard, "is at stake in modern painting" and it is to characterize this vain pursuit of presentations of a reality that remain unrepresentable, the supposedly futile pursuit of the incarnation of meaning in matter long associated with the term beauty, that Lyotard invokes the category of the sublime. Here his characterization of the aesthetics of sublime painting: "As painting, it will evidently 'present' something, but negatively. It will therefore avoid figuration or representation; it will be 'blank' [blanche] like one of Malevich's squares; it will make one see only by prohibiting one from seeing; it will give pleasure only by giving pain" (p. 11). Modernist sensibility refuses representation and figuration because it senses in all that art might represent a lack of reality, an arbitrariness, an absence of what might make things weighty enough to be worthy of the artist's celebrating representation.

But what has been called a lack of reality, Lyotard insists, need not be understood as a lack at all. It may be considered an opportunity. This change in mood characterizes postmodernism, as Lyotard understands it. Postmodern art is modern art that has shed modernist nostalgia for plenitude and weightiness, for absorption and presence, for God and reality.

If it is true that modernity unfolds in the retreat of the real and according to the sublime relationship of the presentable with the conceivable, we can (to use a musical idiom) distinguish two essential modes in this relationship. The accent can fall on the inadequacy of the faculty of presentation, on the nostalgia for presence experienced by the human subject and the obscure and futile will that animates it in spite of everything"¹⁰¹

But such nostalgia can also be shed:

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p., 13.

Or else the accent can fall on the power of the faculty to conceive, on what one might call its 'inhumanity' (a quality Apollinaire insists on in modern artists), since it is of no concern to the understanding whether or not the human sensibility or imagination accords with what it conceives —and on the extension of being and jubilation that come from inventing new rules of the game, whether pictorial, artistic, or something else."¹⁰²

Within modern art Lyotard thus distinguishes two strands, one ruled by *melancholia*, melancholy, the other committed to *novatio*, innovation. Thus he opposes the German expressionists to Braque and Picasso, Malevich to the later Lissitzky, de Chirico to Duchamp. And thus we may want to oppose Stella to Rauschenberg, or Anselm Kiefer to Gerhard Richter.

Opposition to all that defines postmodern art, which is said by Lyotard to have rid itself of that nostalgia for the lost center that governs modernism, nostalgia that still dreams of Mediterranean landscapes, of temples and Roman fountains, of laurel, roses, and oranges, of ruins haunted by the now absent gods. Turning its back on such nostalgia, postmodern art is glad to play, eager to explore whatever is new and unexpected, celebrating a freedom that refuses to recognize whatever boundaries are supposed to hold it as an increase in being and joy.

4

Nostalgia here is criticized. But it can also be defended. Nostalgia, as I suggested in the beginning, possesses two faces. One demands that we return home; it would go back in history, turn back the clock. The other is forward looking, is content to dream of home, to hope that something of the promise of that dream will be realized. The dream or hope may be sufficient to restore the nostalgic to health. In this connection we should think once more of those nostalgics who were cured before they actually returned home. The thought of the possibility of coming home was sufficient to restore them to health. What mattered here was not being at home, but the mere hope that such a return was

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

possible. That is not altogether unrelated to Kant's understanding of the highest good. Kant's highest good is an idea of reason to which nothing in reality corresponds. Morality and happiness here go hand in hand. But this idea, if Kant is right, is a postulate required by morality. And it finds expression in a transfigurations of reality that lift it out of historical into something like mythical time. The home the nostalgic dreams of has this quality. Every attempt to seize it, to actually return home must inevitably fail. But the dream of home can also cast a light over present reality that fills us with hope for a better future.

10. Kitsch and Politics

1

I began the preceding lectures with a brief discussion of the architectural visions of the recently deceased Thomas Kinkade, the self-styled “Painter of Light,” which, as I pointed out earlier, were translated into housing developments. As Dan Byrne, CEO of The Thomas Kinkade Company, put it: “The Thomas Kinkade brand stands for the values associated with home and hearth, peace, joy, faith, family and friends. Partnering with HST in the creation of homes inspired by the artwork of Thomas Kinkade delivers on what collectors tell us inspires them most about Thom's work — that they wish they could step into the world created in the painting. The Thomas Kinkade Company is pleased to align itself with such a visionary home builder.”¹⁰³ The home builder promises to deliver what before was only a dream. What was only a picture, heavy with nostalgia, is to become reality. And what is wrong with buildings that so self-consciously seek to edify, unafraid to rely on recipes drawn from pretty pictures of a transfigured past, buildings that invites us to forget the ugliness of the world we have created and in which we have to make our way? Why not welcome such remembering, which is inevitably also a forgetting?

The changing fortunes of the word “edify” are instructive: once it meant simply to raise a dwelling or structure. Religious and moral thinkers appropriated the word — were they not raising spiritual edifices in which human beings might discover their spiritual home — Kierkegaard wrote *Edifying Discourses*. The term thus came to mean, “to improve morally or spiritually” by offering guidance and giving faith. Why then did this word come to acquire an increasingly negative connotation, as suggested by such synonyms as “preach,” “indoctrinate”? Today “edifying art” suggests kitsch, suggests, as Schopenhauer put it, attempts to embalm what has lost genuine life as if it were still alive.

¹⁰³ Press Release. Source: The Thomas Kinkade Company. New Housing Community in Columbia, MO Features Thomas Kinkade Homes. <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20060814005221/en/Housing-Community-Columbia-MO-Features-Thomas-Kinkade>. Accessed Sept. 24, 2013

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This, as I pointed out, was how Schopenhauer experienced the Neo-Gothic churches rising in his day: as in bad taste, because born of bad faith: “In the interest of good taste, I am bound to wish that great wealth be devoted to what is objectively, i.e. actually, good and right, to what in itself is beautiful, not to that whose value rests merely on the association of ideas. Now when I see how this unbelieving age so diligently finishes the Gothic churches left uncompleted by the believing Middle Ages, it seems to me as if it were desired to embalm a Christianity that has expired.”¹⁰⁴ And does this not provide us with a definition of religious kitsch: aesthetic production in bad taste, because born of bad faith, supported only by an association of ideas, but no longer rooted in the experiences of the sacred that once gave the greatest art its meaning? Consider Kinkade’s *Sunrise*. Here is what the artist wrote about the painting: “As we were approaching the year 2000, I felt compelled as an artist to celebrate not the passing of the old millennium, but the beginning of the new millennium. I truly believe that this next millennium will come to be characterized as the “Millennium of Light” and I pray my Sunrise painting will be symbolic of a new dawning of God’s grace and love in the years ahead.” Despite such invocation of a new millennium, this is art by recipe, borrowing from Caspar David Friedrich’s *Tetschen Altar Piece* (1807)

But in the absence of genuine experiences of the sacred, what alternative can we point to? Is bad faith not perhaps better than no faith at all, edifying Kitsch better than modernist irony or abjection? Is it not part of our human condition that we should dream ever again of some lost and perhaps never to be recovered home? And can such beautiful dreams not cast a light into our world, compensate us for its deficiencies, perhaps even move us and that world slightly closer to what we dream of? In a world that makes it difficult for us to call it home, where too many demonstrate a cold heart, must one not welcome a bit of kitschy sentimentality, even when all too often it lacks the energy or the will or the means to transform reality? The romantic nostalgia of a Schiller, a Hölderlin, or a Nietzsche for a Greece that never quite was as they imagined, or of a Schinkel for an

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 418.

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idealized Middle Ages fills many of us with a nostalgic longing for an age still innocent enough to make such nostalgia possible: today many have become nostalgic for nostalgia.

Consider the current vogue for the kitsch of the fifties. And have we not learned to love the Wagnerian kitsch of the 19th century? Neuschwanstein, opened to the public immediately after the death of the Bavarian king Ludwig II, has become perhaps Germany's most popular tourist attraction, serving as the inspiration for the Sleeping Beauty Castle at Disneyland (1955) and for its successors, including a recent version in Hong Kong.

An analogous point can be made about painting. Many of us have learned to appreciate the art of Norman Rockwell. Today he has his own museum (1993), appropriately by the architect of Yale's New Colleges, Robert Stern. And similarly we have come to appreciate paintings like the Birth of Venus (1879) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, meant to compete with the famous Venus by Botticelli. And we have come to appreciate the age they to which they belong. What our fathers or grandfathers, still filled with modernist fervor and conviction, were able to condemn wholeheartedly as inauthentic, sentimental, or false may well suggest to us, despite, or rather because of its operatic theatricality, an innocence we have lost. Who, concerned about the uncertain future of Europe, haunted by memories of holocaust and war, will not look back with tenderness and nostalgia at the Vienna which found in Hans Makart its emblematic painter, look back nostalgically at what Hermann Broch called the *Backhendzeit*, the age of the Vienna fried chicken, at a Vienna that convinced modernists experienced as the capital of decadence? Is bad faith not better than no faith at all? And if our age is indeed, as Hermann Broch, who gave us perhaps the best analysis of kitsch, thought, the age of the value vacuum, why call bad faith bad? What better faith is there?

2

Most of us do not think of what we call kitsch as deserving the attention demanded by such obvious problems as the environmental crisis, mass starvation, war, genocide, disease, if we think of it as a problem at all — think of garden gnomes. What harm is done, when someone, instead of finding relief from the depressing world

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situation by listening to Beethoven, escapes to some trashy soap opera? To be sure, we may, with Kant, deplore the aesthete who allows the pursuit of self-enjoyment to trump duty to his fellow human beings. But have we not also learned to live with and accept such failure as human, all too human. And does it really matter whether our aesthete escapes to the most demanding work of art or settles for kitsch? Is not the price of all aesthetic enjoyment a certain irresponsibility, an escape from reality? How then are we to justify the fervor of so many condemnations of kitsch, such as those of Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg? As long as kitsch offers no more than a momentary escape from reality it seems no more blameworthy than other such escapes.

But Kitsch is not so innocent when it invests reality with an aura of significance that has no foundation in reality. This recognition led Nietzsche later to condemn his own *Birth of Tragedy*, which demanded just such an investment, when it claimed that only when represented as an aesthetic phenomenon does our existence appear justified. Nietzsche looked to Wagner's music drama as a modern version of Greek tragedy to provide what he demanded. That demand presupposes that both religion and reason have failed us. And does that twofold failure not still determine our spiritual situation? To be sure, our science and technology have shown us that the Cartesian promise that the progress of reason would render us the masters and possessors of nature was anything but idle. But the Enlightenment's, and still Hegel's, conviction that reason would not only grant us mastery over nature, but also reveal to us what truly matters and thus allow us to feel spiritually at home in the world has been shattered, both by the history of the past two centuries and by critical reflection on the claims of reason. Did Nietzsche not have good reason to claim that we have art so that we would not perish over the truth, that the only justification of life is finally aesthetic? And if so, does this not demand that aestheticizing of reality, of religion, morality, and politics that defines the kitsch personality? Could it be that, given our spiritual situation, we need illusion, need kitsch, be it high or low, Wagner or Kinkade, to defend ourselves against a world in which greed, terror, and money again and again trump whatever remains of Enlightenment faith in reason and culture.

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The attempt to aestheticize reality has to lead kitsch to descend into life. The translation of Kinkade's paintings of homes oozing with faith, joy, and happiness into actual buildings, that I mentioned before, is a rather harmless if quite characteristic example. Far more disturbing is the descent of Kitsch into the political arena. That such a blurring poses an incomparably greater danger than art that turns its back on reality to find solace in simulacra is shown by Menno Meyjes' film *Max*, which imagines the transformation of the young Hitler, in the film still a struggling artist, a dreamer responding to a Germany left shattered by World War One with kitschy images of the Germany he dreamed of, into a politician. We see in that film how kitsch can render those who allow it to rule their lives irresponsible, prevented by the aesthetic phenomenon that appears to justify their lives, from responding to the humanity of their fellow human beings. Walter Benjamin has taught us to associate such an aestheticized politics with fascism — and with kitsch and bad faith. But this does not answer the question: how are we to distinguish good from bad faith?

3

I claimed that the attempt to aestheticize reality lets Kitsch descend into life. Nietzsche called for such an aestheticizing of reality in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" invites a similar descent. Looking back to the Greeks, Heidegger, too, dreamed, like so many of his contemporaries, of a world-establishing art able to reveal to human beings what needs to be done and thus able to gather them, even in this modern age, once more into a genuine community. Heidegger claims that it is in the very nature of great art to be an origin, a beginning: "Whenever art happens — that is whenever there is a beginning — a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again. History means here not the sequence in time of events of

whatever sort, however important. History is the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment."¹⁰⁵

Heidegger first gave the lecture on "The Origin of the Work of Art" on November 13, 1935, to an audience of primarily art historians in Freiburg. Just four days before Hitler had given a powerful demonstration of what such a thrust might mean in the 20th century in Munich. Robert Jan van Pelt has given us an eloquent description of the events of November 9 and of the way architecture served the ceremonies of that day, which centered on a procession, at its center the Blood Flag, a flag that in 1923 had fallen into the blood of one of the putschists killed in that failed coup and which by then had been elevated into a sacred relic. In Munich that flag became the center of the carefully staged event, which mimicked a sacred ceremony. Such ceremonies require an architectural frame. Hitler understood very well the political potential of art, especially of film — and of architecture, and so he commissioned the architect Ludwig Troost to transform the city into a worthy setting of the new national cult. The route that the Nazis had walked in 1923 became the spine of the urban redevelopment of Munich. It consisted of two parts with three nodes. At the beginning was the first sacred place, the Beer Hall, where the annual procession was to start exactly at 11.00 AM. From there the route to the Feldherrnhalle was marked with 240 pylons, each honoring one of the 240 men who had died in the struggle against the German state and the enemies of the people between November 9, 1923 and January 30, 1933. The Feldherrnhalle was a second sacred place. There a monument was erected in honor of the sixteen principal martyrs of the movement. Until that point the elements referred literally to the historic events of 1923. However, the march had gone further in a spiritual sense, leading to the new Germany that had been instituted January 30, 1933. Thus the processional road was extended from the Feldherrnhalle until it reached the splendid neoclassical Königsplatz at the other side of the old city. This square, the termination of the cultic route and the third

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). Trans. by Albert Hofstadter, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 77.

sacred place, was to represent the Third Reich. At the point where the processional road, the Briennerstrasse, renamed to honor Adolf Hitler, met the Königsplatz, two “Doric” Temples of Honor were erected, open to the sky. Each was to contain eight coffins. Flanking them were monumental party buildings, revealing the essential unity between the sacrifice of the sixteen in 1923, which formed the basis of the political constitution of the Nazi movement, and the instruments through which the Führer absorbed the nation in the constitution of the movement and his own person. As the architectural historian Robert Jan van Pelt remark

The buildings were an instant success. The party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg applauded them as “the first attempt to realize the ancient Greek ideal.” The architectural critic Wilhelm Lotz praised the transformation of the Königsplatz because it showed for the first time in the modern age that “a deeper meaning can dwell in a city-square” as long as its origin is a spiritual principle and not a desire for aesthetic variety in the built-up area of a merely decorative intention. The Königsplatz had shown that it is still possible to create an architecture that emerges from inner principles of dedication and value instead of being derived from external contingencies of use.¹⁰⁶

A reader of Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art” would have had little difficulty understanding such praise. Had Hegel’s dire pronouncements about the future of art and architecture not been refuted, and not by philosophy, but by architecture, by just that art the progress of spirit, according to Hegel, was supposed to have most decisively left behind? In retrospect it is easy to understand why an architectural theorist like van Pelt would have felt just the opposite: that his own convictions about the ethical function of architecture had been proven untenable by what Heidegger had theorized and what Hitler and his architects had achieved.

¹⁰⁶ 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), pp. 328-329.

Heidegger's vision of National Socialism certainly applies to architecture. A comparison of the different domains of ancient Athens and the foci of architectural activity in the Third Reich offers a premonition of this awful truth; an effort to match the Attic theatre with its Nazi counterpart transforms presentiment into unambiguous certitude. This conclusion wreaked havoc with my own project and led to repudiation and capitulation. In short the attempt to rediscover architectural principles in an age of historicism led to the ineluctable conclusion that Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) had realized the program of renewal proposed in the odd chapters of this book [written by van Pelt].¹⁰⁷

Was van Pelt justified in drawing this conclusion? Did Hitler in fact realize the program suggested and called for in Heidegger's essay? Or is there something incompatible between what Heidegger has to say and what was carried out in Munich and elsewhere? Does the architecture of Troost and Speer realize what in "The Origin of the Work of Art" is a vague presentiment? Does this art achieve that repetition of the Greek in the modern of which Heidegger no doubt dreamed, as did Nietzsche before him, and as did, in their different ways, the authors of *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism*?

It is not difficult to come up with a negative answer. Does van Pelt not himself give us the key to discriminating the genuine from the counterfeit?

The Nazi transformation of Munich into the necropolis of Germany assimilated the ideology of the Athenian cemetery and the Holy Sepulcher into the Nazi movement. Unlike the earlier examples, however, the German necropolis was only a sham. When Pericles reminded his fellow citizens of the city they had inherited from their fathers, and when the monks of Centula preached the resurrection of Christ, they had a reasonable or moral certainty that their pronouncements agreed with what their audience recognized as common sense. Their speeches did not contradict the way people in classical Athens or Carolingian Europe lived

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

their daily lives. Considering the available evidence as fully and impartially as possible would lead a person from classical Athens to the ideals of the polis and a monk from Centula to the idea that Christ's death constituted a cosmic victory. Yet any German who watched the shamanic Munich rituals had to suspend reason. Only when submerged within the carefully manipulated atmosphere of collective hysteria did the proclamations make sense. However, this sense had no relationship with the proper common sense approach to the stela, which might restore a relationship to the past in our cities.¹⁰⁸

But even if this way of appealing to “the proper common sense” to draw a distinction between the genuine and the counterfeit might seem to help us resist the gloomy lesson van Pelt drew from Heidegger's entanglement with the Nazis, Heidegger's essay calls all such appeals to common sense into question. “The Origin of the World of Art” presupposes that for us what once may have been a firmly established common sense has begun to unravel. Such unraveling leads to demands for either a return to the good old common sense of the past or for a new beginning. Heidegger's essay bends these two demands together: it calls for a new beginning, but this is presented at the same time as a creative repetition of the Greek origin of our Western tradition. Van Pelt's appeal to common sense presupposes a repudiation of Heidegger's claim that art is a beginning, an origin, that with genuine art a thrust enters history. For what is truly original can, by definition, not be justified in terms of some already established common sense — a platitude in discussions of genius.

One conclusion one might want to draw is that originality, while it may be a virtue in art, is certainly not a virtue in politics, because by definition it has to challenge that common sense that is a presupposition of community. And if we should want to grant the importance of originality in art, we may have good reason to insist, with the aesthetic approach, on the separation of the spheres of art and politics, resist that embrace

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.

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of politics and art that provides a key to National Socialism. But is architecture an art that allows us to preserve that separation?

But van Pelt's appeal to common sense raises also a different sort of question: is common sense not itself something historically established? The common sense of Periclean Athens was not that of Carolingian Centula: what separated them was the rise and triumph of Christianity, which shaped the world of the Middle Ages. But every establishment presupposes an establishing. How would van Pelt have us understand the establishing of Christianity? Imagine how a secular, educated Roman would have responded to those who claimed that Christ's death on the cross constituted a cosmic victory and longed themselves for martyrdom. Could they not have used arguments against these early Christians rather like that advocated by van Pelt against the Nazis and their so-called martyrs? Measured by the common sense of such a secular Roman, what these Christians were willing to die for must have seemed nonsense and he would have been incredulous to hear one of his fellows predict that some day this nonsense would come to be accepted as a new common sense.

Heidegger was speaking of world-establishing art, quite aware that, given the common sense of our modern age, the very idea of art as a beginning in his sense had to be dismissed as nonsense. Van Pelt has given us a reason to accept that verdict, based on what remains the ruling common sense, even if this common sense is fraying. But his discussion also raises the question: what is the function of art when there is no longer a robust common sense; when what was once a seemingly well-established firmament of values is disintegrating, when appeals to ideals, and with it talk of heroes and sacrifice has come to have a hollow ring?

Van Pelt points to what distinguishes what is genuine from what is sham, when he suggests that the Nazi ideologues reoccupied places that they borrowed both from the Greek and the Christian tradition, when they "assimilated the ideology of the Athenian cemetery and the Holy Sepulcher." Especially important here is the rhetoric of martyrdom, of blood-witnesses, of sacred blood, of self-sacrifice for the sake of the flag that would reward the martyr with eternal life. It is a rhetoric no one raised in a Christian tradition would have had trouble understanding. Such rhetoric can be likened to a

venerable vessel into which the Nazis now proposed to pour new wine, only they had no wine, they had in fact nothing substantial to pour into this vessel.

In Periclean Athens the necropolis, the Agora and the Acropolis anchored the reality of urban life in the consciousness of the people. In Germany architecture and urban design became tools of deception, a carefully designed stage for rituals handed down by the Ministry of Propaganda. In Athens the architecture disclosed a world where people could be free from the rage of the Furies; in Germany the architecture aided a cynical leadership to the calculatedly aroused outbursts of collective hysteria. And as all had become a theatre, and as everyone had been assigned roles as actors, no one felt guilty in 1945 when the proscenium crumbled, the backdrop burned and the performance came to its untimely end. Invoking the Heraclitean topos that all the world is a stage, and men merely players, the good citizens took off their masks.¹⁰⁹

4

Van Pelt's account brings to mind the story of the golden calf, a story of Moses delaying to come down from the mountain to mediate between God and the people of Israel, and the people who, unwilling to accept the delay, demand of Aaron that he provide them with a simulacrum of the absent divinity:

“Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” And Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said: These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you out of the land

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

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of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said: “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.”

(Exodus 32, 1-5 RSV)

Something finite is put in the place of sacred transcendence. Here we have the replacement operation that is a defining characteristic of what has come to be called kitsch.

11. Cain and Tubal-cain

1

Last time I introduced you to the concept of kitsch. With my understanding of kitsch I followed the interpretation given by the Austrian novelist and thinker Hermann Broch, who found a refuge from the Nazis in the United States, spending the last years of his life here at Yale, where he gave his lecture on kitsch to some Yale students in 1950.¹¹⁰ Broch spoke of the kitsch personality, which, faced with what is all too often ugly and disgusting, demands a more beautiful world. As I have suggested, ever since the 19th century there has been a growing sense that industry and technology coupled with a rapidly increasing population have been robbing the world of its former beauty. But is there not still enough of that beauty around, in the art and architecture of the past, for example, or in landscapes that have not yet quite caught up with modernity, such as the world figured by Heidegger's Black Forest peasants, to allow us to make up for what the modern world lacked by drawing on this more beautiful past?

Broch located the origin of kitsch in the Enlightenment and its exaltation of reason and individual freedom. Should human beings not, relying on their own reason and creativity, be able to meet the challenge of a nature increasingly bereft of meaning, transforming it in the image of an ideal they themselves had created?

This brought the act of revelation into every single human mind and thereby saddled it with the responsibility of faith, a responsibility that the Church had previously borne. The mind settled the account and became presumptuous and boastful.

It became presumptuous because it had been assigned this cosmic and divine task, and it became boastful because it was well aware that it had been given too much credit, that it had been loaded with a

¹¹⁰ Hermann Broch, "Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches," *Essays*, vol. 1, *Dichten und Erkennen* (Zurich: Rhein, 1955), pp. 295-309. English translation, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch, in Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch. The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1969), pp. 49-67.

responsibility that exceeded its resources. This is the origin of Romanticism; here is the origin of, on the one hand, the exaltation of the man who is full of artistic (and spiritual) energy and who tries to elevate the wretched daily round of life on earth to an absolute or pseudo-absolute sphere, and, on the other, the terror of the man who senses the risk involved.¹¹¹

Romanticism, so understood, is tossed back and forth between godlike exaltation and fear and trembling, between a sense that reason had opened up a path to the absolute and a nihilism that had left human beings adrift in a meaningless world. In the first volume of his *Either/Or* Kierkegaard offers us a penetrating analysis of that situation.¹¹² Once it was established religion, the inherited faith, that had allowed the individual to experience the world as a meaningful whole, as a cosmos. But the faith that supported such certainty could not survive the Enlightenment's liberation of humanity. The other side of such liberation is the experience of what Kundera, who admired Broch, was to call the unbearable lightness of being. A new faith was demanded to answer the demise of the old faith.

But where was such faith to be found? Could reason furnish what was required? In this connection Broch speaks of

The religion of reason that the French revolution tried to establish when, having dethroned God, it saw the need of basing its virtue on something absolute, and accordingly had to invent its "Goddess of Reason." But as things proceed rationally in the kingdom of reason, this "Goddess of Reason" was soon forgotten.¹¹³

Reason soon turned against itself and demonstrated its inability to furnish the kind of certainty demanded. But could not beauty take reason's place and found a new religion?

111 *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

112 See Karsten Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Either/Or* (Berlin and New York: DeGruyter, March 2010).

113 Dorfles, p. 59.

This divine beauty is the fundamental symbol of all the symbolist schools and is at the root of their aspiration to set up a new religion of beauty (which one can detect both in the Pre-Raphaelites and in Mallarmé or George. Without damaging the greatness of Mallarmé or the important artistic work of George, or even the admittedly considerably lesser value of the Pre-Raphaelites, we can safely say that the goddess of beauty in art is the goddess Kitsch.¹¹⁴

Let me focus on Broch's claim that "the goddess of beauty is the goddess Kitsch."

Broch himself raises a question:

One can raise the objection that every artistic act generates beauty. This is true, just as it is true that every cognitive act generates truth. But has there ever been a human eye capable of contemplating "the beauty" or "the truth"? ... A scientist who puts no more than his own love of truth into his research will not get very far; he needs rather an absolute dedication to the object of his research, he needs logic and intuition; and if luck (which plays a rather more important part than the idea of truth in such cases) is in his favor, truth will appear all by itself when his work or experiments come to an end. The same is true of the artist. He, too, has to subject himself unconditionally to the object; his capacity to listen to the secret voice of the object (independently of the fact that it presents itself as an interior or exterior object), to seek out the laws that it obeys — think of Dürer's experiments with perspective, or Rembrandt's experiments with light — does not depend on the artist's love of beauty.¹¹⁵

We may well feel that science and art have been brought by Broch into too close a relationship. Broch considers both explorations of reality. "Art is made up of intuitions about reality, and is superior to Kitsch solely thanks to these intuitions."¹¹⁶ But "reality"

114 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

116 *Ibid.*

would not seem to mean quite the same thing in the two cases. The reality of the modern scientist is, as we have seen, an already objectified reality. Such objectification is the condition of his infinite pursuit, a pursuit that remains open to reality because the scientist knows that the reality he seeks to understand transcends whatever truths he has been able to wrest from it. The scientist is not tempted to make truth as such his goal.

The reality that calls the artist to create new expressions calls him beyond the objectified reality explored by science. Broch could have agreed with Heidegger's statement: "Beauty is one way in which truth occurs as unconcealedness."¹¹⁷ Also with his claim that such occurrence requires an openness to what transcends all our attempts at mastery, an openness to what Heidegger called the earth. Kitsch does not know such openness. What blocks it is precisely the insistence that the artist make beauty the end of his striving. Kitsch, as Broch understands it, is not interested in exploring and revealing an ever elusive reality. It is content with the established and accepted, with which it plays and on which it draws to compensate us for the ugliness of reality. Within the value system of art an other is thus constituted, identical with it, except that second system has closed itself off from that infinite reality that provided the former with its necessary elusive ground. Instead of unending attempts to express what finally resists all expression, we meet thus in kitsch with a re-appropriation of the results of past struggles. Does the art of the past not show us what beauty is? Emphasis shifts from the producing to the product, from the future to the past, from the infinite to the finite. What has come to be established and accepted now assumes an authority that lends itself to the formulation of rules and recipes. "Reducing the infinity of God to the finitude of the visible, the faith of the mere moralist is dragged down from the sphere of the ethical into that of the aesthetic, the infinite demand of faith is debased into an aesthetic demand."¹¹⁸

"Aesthetic demand" here means a demand to produce a certain appearance in accord with well-known rules, the sort of effect that that precisely because it answers to

¹¹⁷ "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 56.

¹¹⁸ Broch, "Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst," *Essays*, vol. 1, *Dichten und Erkennen* (Zurich: Rhein, 1955), p. 341.

quite definite, established expectations, invites the formulation of definite rules and their pedantic observance. “Aesthetic demand” and rationalism thus belong together. The rationalist will want to specify what must be done in order to bring about a certain effect, and it does not matter here whether the goal is erotic titillation, a religious state of mind, or patriotic fervor, to be met by porno-kitsch, religious kitsch, or patriotic kitsch respectively. Reality understood as a product of past interpretation comes to cover up reality as the ground of all interpretation. kitsch so understood has its moral equivalent in pedantry: only a pedant believes that being moral reduces to following a set of rules.¹¹⁹

2

Both science and art threaten to re-place reality with a second, man-made reality. Both invite us to understand the creator of this second reality as a second God. Science seeks to understand reality in order to master it. This, however, is an infinite task: never will our desire for mastery be satisfied. Because of this the progress of science and of technology knows no limits. By their very nature, both always remain related to a reality still to be mastered, a reality to which they have to remain open if there is to be further progress. Their covering up of reality is therefore never complete.

Aestheticizing art is more successful in covering up reality, even, perhaps especially when it draws its themes from reality. For reality is now only material for the artist that, transformed by art, loses its independence. What matters is no longer reality, which, for a time at least, can be left behind, forgotten, but the quality of the reality the artist has created. And what is wrong with taking from time to time a vacation from reality? With settling, at least for a short time, for beautiful fictions? Aren't these innocent pleasures?

I have been speaking mostly about paintings. What about architecture? What I had to say last time about kitsch and politics should provide a pointer. Far more problematic than the kitsch exemplified by some painting by Kinkadee or Bouguereau is

¹¹⁹ On pedantry, see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), vol.1, p. 60.

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the attempt to aestheticize reality itself, to transform life and the world in which we live into a work of art, especially dangerous when that attempt uses technology as a means to achieve its ends. That was what National Socialism attempted to do.

The Nazi settlement *Alt Rehse* can serve as an example. It may seem innocent enough. But the embrace of a bygone vernacular, not so different from Heidegger's celebration of his Black Forest farmhouse, becomes less innocent when we learn that this village was the site of the Nazi Institute of Genetics and of the Leadership School of German Medicine, where doctors and nurses studied what the Nazis called "racial science" and eugenics. An aesthetic vision of racial purity here embraced reality in a way that had to turn against much in the modern world, against what this vision had to exclude as an alien other, incompatible with the desired purity and indifferent to the inhumanity that this exclusion invited.

A gulf separates those Nazis responsive for the buildings in Alt-Rehse from those who wanted to translate what they called the visionary art of Kinkade into beautiful communities. And yet there are some disturbing commonalities. Consider the Thomas Kinkade community in Vallejo, California, a gated community that promises safety and a community of like-minded and reasonably well to do people. Here too the ugly outside world with its poverty and crime is shut out. And how different is the Kinkade village in Vallejo from countless other gated communities that are sprouting up today all over the world, to shield those wealthy enough to afford such houses from a reality that is becoming more and more unpleasant and on which they yet depend. And what we are dealing with is of course by no means just an American development. Security concerns are even more pronounced in many other parts of the world. The gated community is by now a world-wide phenomenon. The reasons for this are all too obvious.

One may want to consider the gated community as just a modern return to a much older pattern. In the middle ages most cities were firmly walled, gated communities. The Enlightenment felt less and less of a need for such gated communities. So in countless cases, especially in larger cities, one did away with the city walls and replaced them with often tree-lined broad avenues or parks. A good example is provided by Vienna's Ringstrasse. Remember Robert Frost's "something there is that doesn't love a

wall,” and that something is that freedom embraced by the Enlightenment, which Kant understood as the age in which humanity had finally come of age. And this is the age that gave birth to the United States. Consider once more Jefferson as an architect. But more and more we seem to be turning our back to the Enlightenment. If there is something that doesn't love a wall, there is also something that loves a wall.

3

I concluded my last lecture with the story of the golden calf. Let me conclude this lecture with another such story, a story developing themes from the book of *Genesis* that I heard the rabbi Friedrich Weinreb tell a group of us that gathered in Zurich every six months, now many years ago. Weinreb spoke of Adam; he spoke of Cain, said in *Genesis* to have built the first city; and he spoke of his inventive descendants; he spoke of Lamech, said to have sung the first song, and of his two wives, Ada, who was to bear him children, and Zillah, who, in order to preserve her beauty, was supposed to remain childless and yet bore him a son, Tubal-cain, said to have been the first to work iron and copper into tools and weapons. Tubal-cain is said to have accompanied the blind Lamech, when he went hunting, telling him where the game was hiding. One day, glimpsing some horned creature, the son told his blind father where to direct his arrow. The horned quarry turned out to be their ancestor Cain, who had thus been marked by God. And the blind Lamech, aware of the prophecy that Abel's murder was to be avenged in the seventh generation, beside himself in his grief, inadvertently killed Tubal-cain, who had directed the fateful arrow. Thus the race of Cain completed itself in the seventh generation.

But what does this story have to do with the topic of this lecture? I will not attempt to offer an interpretation of the Biblical tale. I am not a scholar of the stories that surround the book of *Genesis* and it even seems inappropriate to attempt to force such narratives unto the Procrustes bed of univocal explanation. But I do want to respond to something in the story that continues to speak to me. That my response misses what once mattered to those who first told it is all but certain, for what I heard into this story is the problem at the center of these remarks, a problem very much posed by our modern world.

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— But does it not belong to the essence of such stories that again and again they furnish metaphors that invite us to decipher promise or threat, blessing or curse of our own situation?

It should not surprise you by now that I should have wanted to link Cain, who, like Daedalus, is condemned for his murder to become a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth and precisely because of this builds the first city, becoming thus the first architect, to artifice that would remedy what was lost with the fall, relying on human ingenuity, where we should note that with Cain and his descendants artifice leads not only to technology, but to music-making —both, in their different ways, promising to compensate us for the lost paradise. As the preceding should have suggested, I agree with those who argue that science and technology, and the understanding of reality they presuppose and invite, rather than capitalism, provide us with the Ariadne's thread that lets us understand modernity as threatening to distort a reality that we must preserve or recover if our lives are to have meaning. That need, I have suggested, explains the continuing need for art and architecture. They should recall us to a reality more fundamental than the reality known to science.

And yet, does Lamech's singing of the first song not suggest that art and architecture belong to those products of artifice shadowed by Cain's murder of his brother Abel? Architecture, too, would seem to have two faces.

Cain, as I pointed out, is mentioned in *Genesis* as the builder of the first city. As such he figures the attempt to remedy the neediness of fallen humanity with artifice. The tools- and weapons-forging Tubal-cain can be thought of as potentiating and completing the work Cain had begun.

But what is such a comparison to teach us? Does it not merely put into metaphorical language what seems evident enough? Part of our spiritual situation is a self-assertion that has given birth to science and technology. But such self-assertion is shadowed by a restless discontent with the world we have created. There is widespread suspicion that we have lost way and direction and are drifting, carried into a new millennium by a technology that seems ever less an instrument firmly in our control, threatening a destruction of self that in the end threatens also the self-destruction of the

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technological world. The still growing power that technology and science have given us not only opens up undreamed of possibilities, but also presents ever more intractable problems and questions.

As the tale of Cain hints, from its very beginning technology has been shadowed by the suspicion that it is somehow cursed, supported by an exaggerated self-assertion that must end in self-destruction. Such concerns caused me to perk up my ears when I heard Weinreb tell the story of the barren Zillah, who, pretty as a picture, in order to preserve her beauty, was supposed to remain childless. The beauty that Lamech, this singer of the first song treasured in her, appears threatened by child bearing. We are not surprised to learn that Zillah in the end did embrace Lamech and bore him Tubal-cain. More difficult to understand is why this embrace should have led to the destruction of the race of Cain in its origin: helping his blind father to aim his arrow at some horned creature, Tubal-cain became responsible for the death of the horned Cain.

Zillah I understood as figure of an aesthetic beauty whose very perfection places it in opposition to time-bound reality. But such opposition cannot be maintained for long. And it is precisely this breakdown, the embrace of Lamech and a beauty supposed to remain barren that leads to a potentiation of the evil destiny that shadowed the race of the field-tilling, city-building Cain from the very beginning.

But how do technology and that beauty Zillah was to preserve belong together? As I pointed out, part of the modern understanding of the aesthetic has been an insistence on the distance supposed to separate the aesthetic realm from reality. Insistence on such distance, however, is inevitably shadowed by discontent with just this distance, which would have the artist be content with beautiful illusion, mere fictions: should art not be more than that? Should it not return to reality and thus regain something of the world-building, common-sense-establishing power once possessed by myth? That was the hope of Nietzsche and of Heidegger. In a different key it was also the hope of Hitler. Should art not embrace reality so that it might have consequences in the real world, in this sense bear offspring? And is this not especially true today when a fast growing computer and video technology present artists and politicians with ever new challenges? Instead of turning their back on that technology, should artists not embrace it? And should

architecture not here take the lead? Part of our modern world is the seductive if dangerous dream of an embrace of the technological world by beauty: dream of a return of myth in the age of technology: myth of the twentieth century.

4

To be sure, many of us not only dream now and then of some pre-technological mode of existence, but take steps to escape for a time to such a way of life. Most of us know better than to allow such dreams and escapes to rule our lives. And can technology not offer us a new home, an altogether new kind of rootedness? Think of the many young people today who have grown up with the computer.

But the progress of technology has to bring with it a loss of roots. The better human beings succeed in asserting themselves as the masters and possessors of nature, the less they will be able to experience nature as a power that assigns them their place. And the same can be said of our bodies. Are we not on the threshold of asserting ourselves as masters and possessors of our own nature? Has modern medicine not given us the means that make remaking ourselves much more than just an idle dream? But where are we to find the measure to guide such remaking?

In such questioning our technological civilization's discontent with itself finds voice. A suspicion that we have lost our way and direction shadows our technological age. Many thus would oppose to the objectifying reason that rules in science the power of the poetic imagination that communicates itself in stories and images and is supposed to give us access to long buried, but vital dimensions of reality. But can we still take the imagination that seriously? To be sure, we must take care not to allow technology to circumscribe our lives, have to learn how to limit its rule. But we must also take care that such attempts do not let us trade the only reality we know for a merely imagined reality. Does the power that we have allowed the reason that rules our science and technology not also mean the impotence of a thinking that seeks refuge in images and stories? If we are to effectively challenge objectifying, calculating reason, we first have to recognize the ground of its legitimacy. Only then can we attempt to determine the boundaries of the realm in which it rightly rules and perhaps open up a space beyond that realm that may

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allow narratives and pictures to regain something of their lost power. But too often the embrace of reality by art in the modern age, especially in the form of architecture, has proven a nightmare.

But is it not possible to conceive an aestheticizing of this technological world that will allow human beings to feel truly at home in it? To be sure, we should not necessarily expect poets, musicians, or philosophers to bring about such a transformation of reality. Architects, politicians, or media moguls are better candidates. To return once more to a famous example — and once again it is not the example that matters here, but the type it represents — Gropius founded the Bauhaus in order to return to architecture its ethical function. Once again building was to be edifying. Feininger's woodcut on the title page of the Bauhaus's first program shows thus a Gothic cathedral in modern cubist forms. Once again art would embrace and transfigure reality, shape the space and time of everyday experience in such a way that individuals are recalled from the dispersal into which they are led by the modern world to an order in which they would be able to recognize once again their place and vocation. "Structures created by practical requirements and necessity do not satisfy the longing for a world of beauty built anew from the bottom up, for the rebirth of that spiritual unity which ascended to the miracle of the Gothic cathedrals."¹²⁰ This vision of a no longer just aesthetic, but community building unity recalls the expectations that once bound Nietzsche to Wagner. In both cases what was hoped for remained unrealized — I want so say, fortunately could not be realized. For should it have become reality, such a work would have to assign individuals their place in such a way that they would themselves become parts of an aesthetic whole and thus receive their meaning at the price their autonomy and freedom. What makes this vision a nightmare is the power of a technology that suggests possibilities of manipulating human material that would make it impossible to still speak of autonomous subjects.

¹²⁰ [Walter] Gropius, [Bruno] Taut, and [Adolf] Behne. "New Ideas on Architecture." In *Programmes and Manifestoes in 20th Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), p. 31.

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Today we can imagine someone who finds in the new communications technology a far more encompassing and effective medium than Gropius ever found in architecture. In such an art technology and aesthetics would truly embrace to give birth to a nightmare society. Here the attempt to aestheticize the life-world lets our artist become a politician. Heidegger, taking his cues from Plato and Aristotle, once understood the state as a work of art and sought the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism in the attempt to repeat the art-work of the Greek polis in a form in keeping with this age of technology. Here, too, the artist become statesman is to master reality in such a way that it will once again present itself as an order in which each individual can find his proper place. Once again chaos is to become cosmos.

To be fair to Heidegger, we would have to distinguish the reality he so fatally misunderstood when he embraced National Socialism and became rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933 from what he read into that reality, would have to consider carefully the distinction Heidegger draws between aestheticizing art and what he takes to be true art. We would have to return to the question whether our modern understanding of reality and the aestheticizing of art do not belong together. Aestheticizing art, as we have seen, cannot lay claim to truth. What could truth still mean? But should such an art succeed, as Wagner, Nietzsche, and perhaps Heidegger dreamed, as Benjamin feared, in overcoming the distance that separates the aesthetic realm from reality, would reality thus embraced by art not have to lose its very reality, become unreal, become its own simulacrum? Hitler has made it impossible for us to dismiss this nightmare a just a bad dream.

12. The Ill Will Against Architecture

1

The title of this lecture demands an explanation: It speaks of an ill will against architecture. But do we not all dream of a comfortable home? Isn't it the task of architecture to help us so transform this world that it better answers our various needs? And is this not also true of the conceptual architectures that language and reason build for us? Kant thus took our reason to be, by its very nature, architectonic.

How then are we to understand then the seemingly unnatural ill will against architecture as it has come to be that figures so prominently in the current architectural scene? What are we to make of this attraction of the fragile, this play with tears and ruptures? Consider Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. In this particular instance we may well feel that the jagged vocabulary was an appropriate response to the task of building a Jewish museum in Berlin, given the holocaust and the kind of museum architecture Hitler had endorsed. But this does not explain what it was that has allowed deconstruction to become an academic fashion, a fashion that, as I mentioned, has spread from philosophy to the humanities and to art and finally to architecture. Of special significance here was the Museum of Modern Art's 1988 exhibition "Deconstructivist Architecture," which I mentioned in an earlier lecture. It was curated by Mark Wigley and by Philipp Johnson,¹²¹ the latter the first Pritzker Prize winner, who only a few years before had designed New York City's iconic AT&T Building, which with its Chippendale top became a sort of flagship for postmodern skyscrapers. Much earlier, in 1932 Johnson, together with Henry Russell Hitchcock, had introduced America to modern architecture with a show at the MOMA on the International Style. On the cover you see Mies van der Rohe's *Tugendhat House*. Soon Johnson was to become infatuated with Hitler, laboring hard in the Thirties to introduce National Socialism to the United

¹²¹ Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art/Little Brown and Company, 1988).

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States. World War II changed all that. In 1988 he joined Mark Wigley in a celebration of postmodern architecture. The catalogue — I cited these words before — spoke of "the emergence of a new sensibility" fascinated by possibilities of contaminating, disrupting, violating, subverting architecture. That sensibility has indeed 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, so e.g. in the work of the architects celebrated in that exhibition: Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, and CoOp Himmelblau.

Different as they are, all of these architects have provided us paradigmatic examples of what has been called deconstruction in architecture. The word suggests a kind of anti-architecture. Terms such as 'deconstruction' or 'anti-architecture' are of course a bit misleading. All of the examples that invite the deconstructive label remain of course works of architecture. The expression "anti-architecture" fits thus only given certain expectations of what architecture should be, presupposing a way of building that technological advances, including computer aided-design, may seem have left behind, allowing for much more imaginative creations, allowing architects to move their work closer to sculpture. Gehry and Hadid offer many good examples. As these examples demonstrate: buildings have become possible today that not long ago would have been utopian fantasies. New technologies, especially the digital revolution, have enormously expanded the freedom of the designer.

But while this is obviously the case, and while technological progress has made possible the look of this architecture, it certainly does not explain that look. We are not dealing here simply with the consequences of technological progress. The catalogue had good reason to speak of a sensibility fascinated with possibilities of contaminating, disrupting, violating, subverting architecture. How are we to understand such fascination?

You will have noted that despite all the technology, the buildings often seem improvised, unfinished, about to fall, or suggest ruins. Consider, e.g., Frank Gehry's MIT Stata Center. Function would not seem to have been a primary concern. Quite a

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number of the buildings that got built have thus proven not altogether functional, as suggested by the law suit generated by the Stata Center or by the discussions swirling around Peter Eisenman's Wexner Center at Ohio State University. Both have, to be sure, generated a great deal of interest and received much praise as aesthetic objects. They are remarkable ducks in Venturi's sense, works of sculpture turned into architecture. But to point this out is not yet to address the special look of such buildings, which may gesture towards ruins, fluid organic forms (Zaha Hadid's Cultural Center in Baku, Azerbaijan), spaceships (Zaha Hadid's Moscow Spaceship House). No dreams of homecoming! Architecture here self-consciously turns its back on an architecture promising shelter.

Again the question: why should such an architecture have generated so much interest today? In the case of Libeskind's Jewish Museum or Eisenman's Berlin memorial the reference to the Holocaust provide a rationale. It invites one to transfer the philosopher Adorno's challenge: can there be poetry after Auschwitz? to architecture. What sort of architecture? But does this reference to the holocaust have much to do with most of the examples I mentioned?

2

Is deconstruction in architecture perhaps a fashion that will soon be a thing of the past, if it has not already become that? Consider once more Gehry's Stata Center. What is the attraction of such experiments, especially today? But to say "especially today" is to say also: not just today! Despite the Museum of Modern Art catalogue's talk of "the emergence of a new sensibility," the suspicion of architecture and the love of ruins are nothing new. From the very beginning architecture, as I have pointed out, has been attended by suspicion. Such suspicion is linked to the conviction that human reason and artifice alone cannot furnish us with the spiritual shelter we demand of home.

The ill will against architecture would indeed seem to be just about as old as architecture itself. The Bible thus places building in an ambiguous light. Last time I referred to Cain, who, condemned to be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth," is said to have built the first city. But the Heavenly Jerusalem, too, is a city. A city is here presented as humanity's goal. But the architect of this heavenly city is God; this city is

not of the fallen world in which we have to make our way. We should note that the Bible places our present defective mode of dwelling between a garden and a city, haunted by dreams both of paradise and of the Heavenly Jerusalem, both beckoning us, who have to live in the city of Cain, with the promise of a garden city.

3

If Cain is said to have built the first city, the Tower of Babel is the first work of architecture discussed in the Bible. Once again we sense something like an ill will against architecture. When we look at Brueghel's representation of this tower, hanging in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, we are struck by the contrast between the still unfinished work, already piercing the clouds, literally a skyscraper, and countless much more modest structures in the picture, first of all the houses that make up the surrounding city, but also farmhouses, city walls, and bridges; and the fragile shelters that, somewhat like swallow nests, cling to the tower itself, presumably put up by the workers to satisfy their need for shelter while work on the tower is proceeding. The contrast established in this picture between the monumental architecture of the never to be finished tower and these much more modest buildings must have been quite familiar to Brueghel's contemporaries: in one medieval city after another they could have met with the same contrast, where more than once, as in this picture, the magnitude of the work undertaken, almost always a church, prevented its completion.

Brueghel's painting invites the by now familiar distinction between two kinds of building: between mere buildings and works of architecture. And it calls the latter into question. It is, as I have suggested, a familiar distinction: the history of building has long turned around two poles, one marked first of all by the house, the other by temple or church, one comparatively private, the other comparatively public, one comparatively profane, the other comparatively sacred. And it is the latter pole that we think of first of all when we think of architecture.¹²² Brueghel's painting raises the question: what kind

¹²² For an extended treatment of this distinction, see Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), pp. 270-282.

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of building allows for a genuinely human dwelling. Does our architecture meet that requirement?

4

From the very beginning, I have suggested, architecture has been shadowed by a protest directed against it as somehow catering to unnatural needs. It is not only the Bible that casts that shadow. Recall d'Alembert who in 1751 remarked in the *Encyclopédie* that architecture is not born of necessity, but of luxury. “That was a happy age,” writes the Roman Seneca, “before the days of architecture, before the days of builders.”¹²³ Presupposed here are thoughts of a way of living more in tune with nature and its rhythms. This pronouncement echoes in much modern theorizing that dreams of more natural ways of dwelling, dreams of some version of a return to paradise.

Paradise, as we know, notwithstanding the provocative title of Joseph Rykwert's book, *On Adam's House in Paradise*, had no need for a house: in this garden Adam and Eve were already at home. Only the fall, this awakening of our freedom, which is also the awakening of reason, and that is to say the awakening of genuine humanity, cost us human beings this home. That is why fallen humanity seeks to remedy its now needy state by building, providing itself with both physical and spiritual shelter.

But is architecture able to compensate us for what has been lost, to provide us not just with physical, but with spiritual shelter, with a genuine home? Bacon and Descartes, these founders of our modern world, dreamed that reason, making full use of science and technology, would allow us to return to paradise, transformed now into the ideal city. This remained the dream of the Enlightenment and it is this dream that has shaped and in ever different ways continues to shape our modern world. Is there a reasonable alternative?

¹²³ Cited in Bernard Rudofsky, *The Prodigious Builders: notes towards a natural history of architecture with special regard to those species that are traditionally neglected or downright ignored* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p.9.

Or do we ask too much here of reason? In keeping with the lesson of the Babylonian Tower that no human willing will be able to build us our true home, painters like Hieronymus Bosch, Hans Baldung Grien or Albrecht Altdorfer placed thus the Nativity, as I pointed out, in some fantastic ruin architecture. This transformation of the Biblical stable into a ruin invites reflection. Is a ruin not a more fitting place for the birth of the redeemer, who is to transform our present fallen state, denying time its sting, the devil his victory, than any architecture that reason is able to raise?

5

The fascination with ruins migrated in western painting from the religious sphere into representations of landscapes. Take Jacob van Ruisdael's *Jewish Cemetery*. Goethe praised the painting in his "Ruisdael as Poet." As Goethe points out, time here appears to triumph over all human labor can establish. In their ruined condition, the grave monuments point to something "more than past": they have become monuments of monuments, monuments raised to the second power. Precariously the ruin in the background — the painting joins a Jewish cemetery near Amsterdam to a Christian monastery ruin and a brook — asserts the vertical; but it, too, seems near collapse, a free-standing wall especially seems ready to fall. In the back we see mourners, busying themselves with less splendid monuments — "as if the past, "Goethe writes," could leave us nothing but mortality."¹²⁴ Goethe concludes his discussion by turning to the brook in the foreground, which, no longer tamed by human labor, is now seeking its own way through what was once presumably a tidy cemetery, through the graves, into a desolate wilderness; and to the light, breaking through the clouds, illuminating a dead tree, symbol of the unending life of nature, which joins life and death, indifferent to human self-assertion. The transcendent power of nature is revealed by the vanity of the attempt by human beings to establish their own lasting order and thereby to rescue themselves from

¹²⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Ruysdael als Dichter," in *Schriften zur Kunst* III, vol. 35 of *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläums-Ausgabe* (Stuttgart and Berlin, Cotta, n. d.), p. 7.

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the terror of time. Even memory cannot conquer time: the once splendid graves now lie neglected, those buried in them forgotten.

Especially thought provoking is an architect's decision to actually build a ruin or to give buildings a ruinous look. The built ruin invites consideration as an example of deconstructivist architecture. An early German example is the Magdalenenklause (in the park of Nymphenburg (1725-28) with its faux tears and falling off plaster. The fact that it was just the 18th century, this age of the Enlightenment, of faith in reason, which loved such built ruins invites reflection: Presupposed is once again a conviction that human artifice is unable to provide human beings with the kind of shelter they really need. The princes of the Baroque retreated to such ruins to repent of their too worldly existence, to open themselves to that saving power that alone could rob death of its sting.

To be sure, today we are more likely to think of 18th and 19th century ruins as tied to an interest in the picturesque and rightly so: the artificial ruins of the English landscape park were indeed intimately linked to the emergence of the picturesque as an aesthetic category. That there should be such a link between the artificial ruin and picturesque architecture is hardly surprising in that in their different ways both are architecture calling architecture into question, the picturesque by inviting us to appreciate architecture as part of a picture. The appeal of picturesque ruins hints at something in us that welcomes the death of architecture. That remains the case. A notable modern example is provided by the *Best Supermarket* in Houston (1975) with its façade brick pile.

In this connection the remarkable decision by painters like Hubert Robert or Caspar David Friedrich to depict not just ruins, but then still intact buildings, such as the great gallery of the Louvre or churches in Greifswald and Meissen, as ruins deserves to be mentioned.¹²⁵ Hitler loved the art of both painters and he appreciated the foresight that made his architect Albert Speer sketch the grand architecture of his Thousand Year Empire in a ruined state, presumably not suspecting that history would so quickly catch up with such dreams of destruction.

¹²⁵ Hans Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1959), 77.

The artificial ruin betrays a crisis in the confidence that architecture is able to provide us with adequate spiritual shelter. Such suspicion betrays a deeper distrust of the Cartesian dream that reason will render us the masters and possessors of nature and lead us to an ever happier future, a fascinated fear that, instead of being mastered, nature sooner or later will master whatever human artifice is able to produce.

The love of ruins is thus closely linked to an interest in the sublime, which demands works that show that what our finite reason is able to construct in a state of disintegration, works that seem to open themselves to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of the infinite. Ruins are such places. In this connection consider the sculptor Robert Morris' fascination with ruins is of interest:

Approached with no reverence or historical awe, ruins are frequently exceptional spaces of unusual complexity, which offer unique relations between access and barrier, the open. Such are not to be found in structures that have escaped the twin entropic assaults of nature and the vandal. It is unfortunate that all great ruins have been so desecrated by the photograph, so reduced to banal image, and thereby so fraught with sentimentalizing historical awe. But whether the gigantic voids of the Baths of Caracalla or the tight chambers and varying levels of Mesa Verde, such places occupy a zone which is neither strictly a collection of objects nor an architectural space.¹²⁶

The return of once firm buildings to space and time undoes the domestication of space that would seem to be the task of architecture. The terror of time and space now is awakened rather than banished. And something in us welcomes this terror, which is inseparable from our experience of the numinous.

6

It was such distrust of an architecture ruled by an architectonic reason that let the

¹²⁶ Robert Morris, "The Present Tense of Space," *Art in America*, January/February 1978, 76.

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Viennese painter, and then architect, Hundertwasser call for its destruction. Here a few words from an exhibition pamphlet, directed against the "90-degree angles of Vienna": "In 1920 the pavement and the walls of the houses had to be constructed smooth, but in 1957 this is an insanity I cannot understand. The air raids of 1943 were a perfect automatic lesson in form; straight lines and their vacuous structures ought to have been blown to pieces, and so they were. Following this a transautomatism ought normally to have occurred... But we are building cubes, cubes! Where is our conscience?"¹²⁷ In this admittedly rhetorically overblown and playful affirmation of the destruction of architecture by the bombs of World War II the ill will against architecture, especially the arid functional architecture of post-war Europe is evident. Hundertwasser wanted to call us back to a more natural life. And so we read in the "Mould manifesto against rationalism in architecture" that he read 1958 in the abbey of Seckau: "When rust settles on a razor blade, when mould forms on a wall, when moss grows in the corner of the room and rounds off the geometric angle, we ought to be pleased that with the microbes and fungi life is moving into the house, and more consciously than ever before, we become witnesses of architectonic changes from which we have a great deal to learn."¹²⁸ Has our reason not estranged us from ourselves as beings essentially belonging to nature? Here the ill will against architecture turns against rationalism. A longing for home, for a more natural mode of dwelling, feeds it that finds in tears and ruptures, rust and mould traces of the lost paradise.

7

Something of the appeal of ruins has indeed resurfaced, though transformed, in contemporary architecture's deconstructive impulse and in anarchitecture. I shall return to anarchitecture in my next lecture. As we shall see, with Robin Evans, Gordon Matta-

¹²⁷ Hundertwasser, "Mould manifesto against Rationalism in Architecture," in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1975), p. 157.

¹²⁸ Hundertwasser, "Mould Manifesto against Rationalism in Architecture," pp. 159-60.

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Clark, and Lebbeus Woods the word is very much the expression of individuals both fascinated and appalled by the environment our artifice has created and is still creating, ever more unsustainable, ever more on the verge of slipping out of our control.

Anarchitecture thus places itself not just in opposition to what Rudofsky called pedigreed architecture or to what today simulates such pedigreed architecture, but even more to the oppressive cultural reality such simulacra symbolize, to the different ways in which buildings imprison us: today's McMansions no less than housing projects in the image of Corbusier's "Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants," Las Vegas no less than Celebration, Florida. Anarchitecture, too, dreams of a not yet known openness and freedom. An-architecture thus means Anti-architecture, means cuts, ruptures, insertions, and intrusions into the body of architecture that challenge its often all but overlooked rule over our lives, inviting more thoughtful consideration of architecture and its ruling ethos. Anarchitecture invites us to fantasize about very different environments, very different ways of life. The fact that Gordon Matta-Clark, on the occasion of the dedication of the Twin Towers in 1973, should have called for their erasure, unable to even suspect that terror would all too soon realize what was meant only as a thought-provoking comment, today invites weightier and more difficult reflections concerning the future of architecture. 9/11 has made words such as "deconstruction" or "anarchitecture" more difficult to use.

13. The Burning Cathedral

1

As I showed in the preceding lecture, from the very beginning a certain ill will against architecture has followed it like a shadow. Doesn't the Bible tell us that it was Cain who built the first city? And isn't the Tower of Babel the first work of architecture mentioned there? And in the past few decades, which let deconstruction become an academic fashion, a fashion that quickly spread from philosophy to the humanities, and somewhat surprisingly also to architecture, we meet with this ill will over and over.

Consider once more the cover of Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture*, showing Reims cathedral in flames, following a failed German offensive in World War One. It is an odd choice of image. The burning cathedral invites thoughts of the inhumanity, the destructiveness of war. And that is indeed how the young Bataille responded to the burning of the cathedral. But the title, in keeping with the thinking of the mature Bataille, invites different thoughts, thoughts along the line of Hundertwasser, who appears to have welcomed the destruction wrought by the air raids of World War Two: buildings with their straight lines and right angles got what they deserved. Here, too, the flames would seem to be welcomed as a protest against buildings that proclaim the authority of some pre-given order, be it religious, moral, or architectonic. The desire for freedom feeds the ill will against architecture.

Architecture is here thought to imprison us and thus to deserve being destroyed, even if such destruction threaten chaos and bestiality. The prison becomes the paradigmatic work of architecture. "It is obvious," so Bataille, "that monuments inspire social good behavior in societies and often real fear. The storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of affairs: it is hard to explain this mass movement other than through the people's animosity (animus) against the monuments that are its real masters."¹²⁹ But granted that monumental architecture has often invited good behavior

¹²⁹ Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge/Mass. and London, 1989), pp. ix-x

and at times may have induced real fear: does this mean that it therefore deserves to be abolished? Is our world burdened by a surfeit of good behavior? Should we, for the sake of still more freedom, return to the labyrinth in search of the minotaur? Such conviction betrays an ill will that is directed also against the self.

As Bataille recognized so clearly, the ill will against an allegedly domineering architecture is intimately related to an ill will against reason. Freedom here refuses to be bound by reason, as Kant demanded. "And this," Hollier observes, "is precisely what, in Bataille's view, the mythical figure of Acepheus was intended to show: the only way for man to escape the architectural chain gang is to escape his form, to lose his head. This self-storming of one's own form requires, in fact, an infinitely more underhanded strategy than one of simple destruction or escape. The image of Acepheus thus should be seen as a figure of dissemblance, the negative image of an antimemorial madness involved in the dismemberment of 'meaning.' The painter André Masson drew this figure and Bataille wrote an aphorism to go with it: 'Man will escape his head as a convict escapes his prison.'"¹³⁰

What such an escape from one's own form might look like was recently demonstrated for us by the French concept artist who calls herself Saint Orlan. I referred to her before. This godless saint wanted to remake herself. Thanks to plastic surgery and psychoanalysis the possibility of becoming another today has indeed become more than just an idle dream. Is not our body, too, material to satisfy natural and unnatural desires? Ortega called technology an orthopedic apparatus. Thus the artifice of Daedalus, Greek archetype of the architect, is supposed to have allowed the Cretan queen Pasiphae to satisfy her desire to make love to a bull. Saint Orlan appears driven by a still more obviously unnatural desire: here it is the dream to be like God, author of herself. And thus this saint declares God to be her enemy.

But what is this for an 'I' that here tries to enlist science and technology in an attempt to become another person? Must this I not lose all content? And with this, must

130 *Ibid.*, p. xii.

it not lose measure and direction? What would be an autonomus subject comes to be a plaything of all too timely fashions.

2

Bataille was of course not the only one to have attacked architecture. But his renewed popularity should make us think. How are we to understand the receptivity to his thought especially on the part of architects?

Last time I called your attention to the exhibition "Deconstructivist Architecture," curated by Mark Wigley und Philipp Johnson in 1988, which spoke of the emergence of a new sensibility, fascinated by possibilities of contaminating, disrupting, violating, subverting architecture. The work of the recently deceased architect turned anarchitect Lebbeus Woods offers a particularly striking example of this new sensibility.¹³¹ Woods turned his back on the presumably promising career that his association with Eero Saarinen had opened up — although he never finished his architecture degree, he worked as a field representative on the Saarinen's Ford Foundation — to make "anarchitecture" his own, appropriating a term first used by the English architect Robin Evans in an article, "Towards Anarchitecture," an article he published in 1970." Evans basic position is made clear enough in that article:

Positive interference is any change in the ambient universe that allows an expansion of possible actions but does not produce any restriction of existing possible actions.

Negative interference is the converse of positive interference. It involves changes that restrict possible actions

...

It would be sheer delusion to put forward the idea that all positive interference is acceptable, and all negative interference unacceptable.

¹³¹ See Karsten Harries, "Journeys into the Wilderness of Artifice," Lebbeus Woods, Tracy Myers, Karsten Harries, *Lebbeus Woods: Experimental Architecture* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art. 2004).

Most of the deliberate and conscious formulated rules by which we live our lives are of a deliberately negative nature. They are defensible only by virtue of the belief that “freedom” and “order” go hand-in-hand. It is not necessary to structure human patterns of action to obtain anti-entropy of the overall social system.

The aptness of the computer systems to the task of ordering materials is a function of their complexity and speed of operation. It is the liberator of some of entropic man’s most distinctive characteristics: non-predictability and deviation. A good argument could be made for the Third Reich as man’s greater anti-entropic achievement.

Many opt for ordering people so they don’t make a mess, on the grounds of conceptual simplicity, but it seems to me that it should (at least in our capacity as streamlined homo faber) be opting for ordering physical support-systems to minimize or eliminate mess, on the grounds of literal humanity. Most relevant purpose might be to cause a shift of emphasis away from the canonical creed of functions and needs. The utilitarian basis of architectural functionalism has tended to simplify notions of purpose, and has given us only the ankle-cartilage of what is a much more complex affair.

The architectural see-saw is between form and function, meaning and purpose, symbol and utility, commodity and delight — up one side and down the other. It is a compelling game but we must be ready to ignore it when necessary. Keeping the game simple at the expense of its coordination with reality is a species of sell-out. The world is not a giant

artwork any more than it is a mammoth boiler house. It is, to use a cliché, a stage ... a stage for action, not our action but their action.¹³²

I first came across the term “anarchitecture” in connection with Gordon Matta-Clark’s cutting of an abandoned building and with the group of artists he had gathered around himself in 1973 in New York. Here it is not thoughts of an all too often violated nature that feeds the ill will against architecture, but thoughts of a freedom denied to us by our too regimented life-world.

As the example of St. Orlan shows, the scope of freedom has been greatly enlarged by the long unthought possibilities technology has opened up. Has it not become possible to create an environment that answers to our ever changing needs and desires in ways denied to us by the all too ordered environment that is our inheritance. The utopias that promise such possibilities have to reject the call for a place-bound architecture that accepts without protest the primacy of nature or of the embodied, gravity-burdened self and its life-world as unbearably retrograde, all too ready to content itself with lifeless imitations of the place-establishing architecture of a not to be recovered past. And thus Lebbeus Woods gave this project of deconstructing, subverting, violating architecture his own, very personal twist. He, too, discovered in decaying or ruined neighborhoods, in the “critical edges of urban life” and a culture “maintained at the expense of creativity,” occasions provoking “new ways of moving or resting in space, new and always transforming relationships between both people and things.”¹³³

Woods’ extraordinary draftsmanship has allowed him to create decorative sheets that are aesthetically pleasing in a way that invites comparison with certain 18th century engravings that show ornament infiltrating and subverting architecture. A striking example is furnished by Johann Esaias Nilson’s *New Coffee House*.

¹³² Robin Evans, “Towards Anarchitecture,” 1970, www.fen-om.com/theory/theory8.pdf

¹³³ Lebbeus Woods, *Radical, Reconstruction* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), p. 13.



Johann Esaias Nilson, *New Coffee House* (1756)

I shall return to this engraving in a minute. For the time being only the question: are the parasitic insertions into the urban landscapes of Zagreb and Berlin proposed by Lebbeus Woods’ “Free-Zone” projects not similarly ornamental, notwithstanding their subversive, political intent with its promise of an anarchic utopian realm of spontaneity and play, both supposed to characterize aesthetic experience? But if many of Woods’ designs bring to mind “ornament” more than “architecture,” this is ornament on technological steroids, ornament that does not serve the ornament bearer, but attacks, invades, and subverts it.

Ornament has rarely been taken as seriously as the major arts: painting, sculpture, or architecture. And by calling the art of Lebbeus Woods ornamental I may seem to praise it for what is its undeniably decorative quality, but by the same token to dismiss its ethical and political function, its thoughtfulness, not lost on architects such as Frank Gehry, or Daniel Libeskind, or Zaha Hadid. But to dismiss the contribution Woods’ often ruinous townscapes and his proposed interventions in our ever less habitable cities make towards confronting our increasingly technological environment is not my intention. I want rather to call attention to the way ornament has often stood in a relationship to architecture that parallels that of antithesis to the thesis of what I want to call the antinomy of building and so it, too, invites to be characterized as anarchitecture. I want to underscore the subversive function that ornament has so often possessed — strikingly so already in the 18th century.

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The architects of the Enlightenment and those who had appointed themselves the guardians of its spiritual architecture were very much aware of the subversive, and that means also the ethical and political power of rococo ornament. Consider once more the capriccio by the Augsburg engraver Johann Esaias Nilson (1756), showing a coffee house, a then newly fashionable institution, considered at the time by many a danger to both health and morality, the subject also of Bach's *Coffee Cantata*. But more important than the coffee house shown, catering to what was considered a frivolous pastime, with smoking and amorous dalliance just around the corner, is the organic rocaille ornament, which grows out of the frame, invading the picture, wrapping itself around the house like ivy, almost suffocating it in its embrace; and this ornament subverts not only the architecture in the picture, but proper perspective, which ever since Alberti was supposed to furnish the architecture of every properly executed picture. This engraving, too, represents anarchitecture.

Such subversion offers indeed a key to the culture of the rococo, which, in love with ornament, also created architectural productions that invite the label anarchitecture.



Dominikus Zimmermann, Wies (1744-1754), choir

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The outrage felt by representatives of the Enlightenment, which hoped to replace the house religion had built, a house that had fallen into ruin, with a house built by reason, is easy to understand: the seemingly so innocent play of ornament figures the anarchic play of fantasy and nature: Dionysian powers threaten what reason builds with destruction. The artist's or the architect's capricious imagination here overturns the rules of proper pictorial representation as it overturns the rules of what was considered proper building, which here suffers shipwreck on the reef of ornament. But something in us welcomes this shipwreck. To be sure, despite their comparable capriciousness, an abyss separates the fantastic environments conjured up by Lebbeus Woods from the ornamental engravings or architectural fantasies of the rococo. At bottom the latter would all have us journey to Cythera, the island of love, a journey celebrated by Watteau. No more than paradise is this happy island in need of architecture. The divinity that presides over this journey is, not the architect-God of the Old Testament, but Venus. The spirit of gravity has been banished.

Not that visions of Cythera do full justice to the realm ruled by Venus. In that realm, too, birth and death, beauty and decay are closely joined: *inter faeces et urinam nascimur*. It is this dark underside of the seemingly so light-hearted rococo that Enlightenment critics committed to the rule of reason were quick to respond to, deploring not only how the architecture of reason that should assign fantasy its proper place has here been overturned, but how this turn manifested itself as a turn to the abject and monstrous. The ornamental engravings of the rococo invite thus discussion as a light-hearted, playful anticipations of the turn to the abject taken by so much recent art, which has covered Venus with excrement.

3

The art of Lebbeus Woods does not invite thoughts of journeying to Cythera. Nor is the wilderness it explores that of abject nature. Nature indeed does not figure much in his anarchitectural fantasies. Woods invites us to journey into a wilderness that is very much our own creation, a wilderness that created by the architecture Descartes promised with his method, but now, outstripping our control, threatens it from within, as

technology, which should be an instrument, has grown to a point of complexity where the artificial turns into a second nature, destroying the first, complex like the first, so complex that our attempts to possess it fail. The possibility of endless innovation seduces us. Artifice gives birth to new desires, to ever new contraptions to satisfy our longings. Electronic advances invite fantasies of communities of individuals no longer bound by the body's placement in time and space, no longer bound by gravity, of individuals free to reinvent themselves, to play with themselves, finally free to disregard the places governments, gods, or nature once assigned to human beings. No New Jerusalem here, no paradise, no journey to Cythera. In its place a fantasy that is no longer bound by reason or nature, no longer bound by any external authority, gives birth to visions of cyber-Babel as freedom's true sublime home.

Lebbeus Woods proudly claims a place in this tradition of sublime enmity to gravity: "I therefore declare myself against gravity, because I am for animation and movement. And I choose to declare war on gravity and proclaim it an enemy who, though possessed of a certain nobility, arrogantly claims control over my existence. I reject gravity's arrogance and claims, and assert a counterclaim — I am a free spirit, autonomous and self-determining, a being and an architect of antigravity."¹³⁴ His visions of Aerial Paris, futuristic constructions floating like sails above the city, tenuously tethered to the Eiffel Tower, speak of such freedom. They also make us wonder how we are to imagine the inhabitants of this aerial city.

Woods was of course not the only one to have made such claims. In his declaration of war on gravity a desire finds expression known already to the Enlightenment. Thus Ledoux shows himself with his spherical house to be an enemy of gravity. The enthusiastic embrace of the sphere by the architects of the Enlightenment belongs with the enthusiasm that greeted the first balloons, which promised a godlike freedom from the tyranny of place, promised to fly across boundaries and whatever false

¹³⁴ Lebbeus Woods, "Aerial Paris," *ANARCHITECTURE: Architecture is a Political Act*, *Architectural Monographs*, No. 22 (London, 1992), 64.

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walls separated human beings. I shall have to return to Ledoux and balloons in a later lecture.

When, asked to contribute to a catalogue of an exhibition of Lebbeus Woods architectural fantasies a sentence from the beginning of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* kept going through my head: "The only certainty is: the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all." That novel invites us to counter dreams of freedom, of dancing, even of flying, embodied in the painter Sabine, with dreams of being weighed down, e.g. by someone we love. The work of Lebbeus Woods invites us similarly to counter dreams of flying, of escaping the rule of gravity, with dreams of experiencing the weight of persons and things, to meditate on the mysterious and ambiguous opposition of lightness and weight that helps to define human being, dwelling, and building. Such meditations raise questions that should weigh on any architect.

Like Kundera's painter Sabine, who, in search of some unintelligible truth beneath the comfortably familiar, likes to explore the cracks in what seems to be well-built, Woods was suspicious of buildings that, by wresting place from space, promise to provide us with physical and more importantly spiritual shelter. Again and again such suspicion has found expression in attempts to infiltrate and subvert architecture as we have come to expect it. I was thus not at all surprised to learn from the curator Tracy Myers that what struck Lebbeus Woods about the architecture of the Carnegie Museum was the quite traditional space he was given to work with was its "hierarchical spatial organization and its commanding vocabulary." As I suggested, today this is hardly an unexpected response to architecture: have we not been taught to associate the great architecture of the past with the heavy voice of those in authority: priests, kings, burghers, capitalists, and policemen? And not unexpected either, given the way new technologies have opened up possibilities of creating environments ever more responsive to our shifting needs and desires, possibilities that seem to render pleas for an architecture that accepts the primacy of our body-based, gravity-burdened life-world retrograde and suspect because such architecture is too ready to trade freedom for simulacra of the place-establishing architecture of the past.

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In response to the spaces he was asked to work with, Lebbeus Woods sought to infiltrate them, to re-shape them into something in which people would not quite know how to behave. He devised an insertion of laminated foam panels at varying angles (acute to obtuse) to some of the gallery walls; these panels furnished the surfaces on which large-scale reproductions of drawings were affixed. The infiltration was accomplished by bent metal rods that connect the panels to the existing walls and emerge in different places elsewhere in the galleries. Woods's sketches give a good idea of his design intentions: this architect “builds” to call into question what we have come to expect of buildings, raising profound questions about just what constitutes a fully human dwelling.

Those familiar with projects by Lebbeus Woods would not have been surprised by his response to the pre-given space. But why this urge to subvert architecture, to deconstruct it, to create disorienting, disconcerting spaces, to escape from architecture to some wilderness or other? Has architecture become more confining, heavier than it used to be? Or have we become lighter, more spiritual, less willing to sit still in some firmly placed chair, to settle down? Have new technologies not opened up possibilities and raised desires hardly thought of even a few decades ago? And must this not be celebrated as part of the progress of freedom? But it is difficult to embrace the fantastic architectures created by Lebbeus Woods as heralds of a freer and therefore more fully human mode of existence: not only has the “commodity” that Geoffrey Scott, following Vitruvius, requires of architecture been obtrusively left behind; artifice here threatens to suffocate us; space here seems to lack the air we need to breathe. And yet, the other side of such fear is fascination. How are we to understand the once again seductive appeal of the labyrinth, transposed into a new technological key?

4

Lebbeus Woods, as I pointed out, called himself an anarchitect. The privative “an” in “anarchitecture” suggests building that challenges architecture as we have come to expect it. “Architect” means master-builder in Greek. The architect is someone whose mastery of his art entitles him to be first among those who build, to supervise their work.

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“Architecture” refers first of all to the art of building, secondly to some structure raised in accord with the rules of that art. Figuratively it refers to anything raised on firm foundations and well constructed. Philosophers, as I pointed out in the very first lecture, especially have liked to invoke architectural metaphors and no one more so than Descartes, who compared his method to that of architects and his philosophy to a chapel. The science and technology that have shaped our modern world presuppose the spiritual architecture Descartes helped construct. And it is this architecture, even more than buildings raised in the image of the Cartesian grid-work, that is presupposed, celebrated, and called into question by the architectural fantasies of Lebbeus Woods. In them, reason-based order metamorphoses into a post-technological wilderness, a metamorphosis that answers to something in us that suspects in every grid-work a cage.

The privative “an” in “anarchitecture,” I pointed out, suggests building that challenges architecture as we have come to expect it. Bernard Rudofsky might thus have called his *Architecture Without Architects* (1964), this “frankly polemical” celebration of old-world vernacular building, *Anarchitecture*. But with Gordon Matta-Clark and Lebbeus Woods the word speaks with a more oppositional voice: anarchitecture here is not a product of anonymous builders supported by the collective wisdom of generations, in tune with nature. Striking is indeed the almost complete absence of nature from Woods’ architectural fantasies: “I do not propose a return to nature, much less a return to primitivism, but an alignment of modern technology, including that of architecture, with cycles of change and the great powers both active and latent in the world.”¹³⁵ His is a world shaped by artifice. But this is not the artifice of those master builders who produced what Rudofsky called pedigreed architecture or of those who today simulate such pedigreed architecture. Quite the opposite: artifice here challenges the oppressive cultural reality such simulacra symbolize, the different ways in which buildings threaten to imprison us: today’s McMansions no less than ghetto tenements. Lebbeus Woods looks elsewhere: to the “critical edges of urban life” and of a culture “maintained at the expense of creativity.” Here he discovers occasions provoking “new ways of moving or

¹³⁵ Lebbeus Woods, *Epicyclarium* (1984), p. 42.

resting in space, new and always transforming relationships between both people and things.”¹³⁶ In his Paris installation “The Fall” Woods thus allows the unpredictable to rule artifice in a way that invites thoughts of a second nature .

In the preceding lecture I spoke of the appeal of ruins. Artificial ruins, too, are a kind of anarchitecture, calling into question an architecture that would defeat the terror of time with images of permanence. Something of the appeal of ruins, I want to suggest, has resurfaced, transformed, in contemporary architecture's deconstructive impulse. The ruinous look of so many of Lebbeus Woods' designs speaks of a related fascination with an existence and an environment less governed by the ill will against time than our place-establishing architecture.

¹³⁶ Lebbeus Woods, *Radical, Reconstruction* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), p. 13.

14. Fantastic Architectures and the Spiritual Significance of Perspective

1

Last time we looked at the architectural fantasies of Lebbeus Woods. The creation of such fantastic architectures has a long history that has a great deal to tell us about the hopes and fears that have helped shape the practice of architecture. In this lecture I would like to take a closer look at some aspects of this history.¹³⁷

“Fantastic Architectures” — there is some tension in that expression. “Architecture” refers first of all to the art of building, secondly to some structure raised in accord with the rules of that art. Figuratively it refers to anything raised on firm foundations and is well constructed. “Fantasy” on the other hand suggests the imagination, which ruled by desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, gives birth to fanciful apparitions, fictions, and dream-visions, all creations that do not rest on solid ground. To join architecture and fantasy seems thus a bit like trying to square the circle, where we should keep in mind that for centuries squaring the circle figured the attempt to comprehend the infinite essence of God. Similarly, fantastic, utopian architectures have long figured a state of happiness where reason and desire, order and freedom, spirit and body would all receive their due. “Utopia,” this imaginary land of nowhere, created by Thomas More, was meant to represent the best possible republic. Utopia here appears as “eutopia,” understood by as an imaginary realm where reason coexists with freedom and happiness. But utopia does not carry only positive connotations: “eutopia” is shadowed by “dystopia,” versions of paradise, Jerusalem, or the City of God by versions of the labyrinth, Babel, or hell, in which lurk minotaur or the devil.

¹³⁷ See Karsten Harries, “Les Architectures Fantàstiques I La Transcendència Espiritual de La Perspectiva,” *La Ciutat Que Mai No Existí. Architectures fantàstiques en l’art occidental*, Catàleg (Centre de cultura contemporània de Barcelona; Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, de l’exposició del mateix títol presentada al CCCB del 23 d’octubre de 2003 al 1 de febrer de 2004, pp. 28 – 37. English original “Fantastic Architectures and the Spiritual Significance of Perspective,” pp. 149-153.

2

Among the best examples of fantastic architecture are works by the Dutch architect and artist Hans Vredeman de Vries (1526-1606). His creations demonstrate not just the artist's mastery of architecture and perspective, but also speak to both the promise and the hidden terror that such mastery holds. In his *Lazarus Before the Palace of a Rich Man* in the Rijksmuseum the inhumanity of the rich and their splendid architecture is contrasted with the suffering of the poor Lazarus. Recall d'Alembert's claim that it was luxury that created all architecture. But what really fascinated de Vries would seem to have been the architecture. What does this architecture have to tell us? I shall have to return to this question.

But first another question: why single out a painter whose creations would seem of interest today mainly to a few specialists? And why an artist of this period, i.e. the 16th century? The second question has a ready answer: When I think of architectural fantasies in painting it is first of all works from this period that come to mind, a period when our modern world begins to take shape, as exemplified by Descartes, 70 years younger than de Vries. In many of these works we meet with an alliance between the art of perspective and fantastic architecture so self-conscious and insistent that it has to raise questions concerning such architecture, perspective, and the link between the two.

This also suggests a first answer to the first question: why single out Hans Vredeman de Vries? Almost obsessively his paintings demonstrate his concern with perspective.

But could the same not be said of many other paintings, such as works by Desiderio Monsú, or, to name a modern artist, by M. C. Escher? What makes de Vries special? A first answer is that the Dutch master preceded the others and helped to establish the architectural fantasy as a distinct genre.¹³⁸ But what lets me single him out here is something else: the way he can help us to a better understanding of the spiritual significance of both perspective and the architectural fantasy.

¹³⁸ Cf. Hans Jantzen, *Das niederländische Architekturbild* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1910).

3

Vasari said of Uccello that his immoderate devotion to perspective threatened to drain all life from his art, preventing him from becoming a better painter. Must something similar not be said of de Vries? The fact that so often he did not himself paint the figures that inhabit his architectures, that human beings appear here as staffage or ornament added to what is essential, the architecture, is telling. In *Palace Architecture with Strollers* in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, for example, the figures are by the young van Ravesteyn. And it is unclear to what extent Hans's son Paul was responsible for the execution of his father's architectural inventions.¹³⁹ Apparently the latter's inventiveness was considered more important than the translation of his designs into paint. It is not surprising that today the fame of this architect, painter, and prolific engraver¹⁴⁰ should rest less on his paintings than on his many publications, often intended as text-books, methodical guides to ornamentation, garden-architecture, perspective, architectural representation, but fantastic in ways that threaten to obscure the original intention. Method here frees the imagination.

The desire for methods and guides characterizes the age. Descartes is an obvious example. In the *Rules* Descartes thus presents his method as an Ariadne's thread that will lead us out of the labyrinth of the world. Key here is an understanding of the logic of perspective that will prevent us from falling victim to its distortions.¹⁴¹ As we shall see, there is an intimate connection between the methods of Descartes and de Vries. But with the artist perspective becomes an Ariadne's thread leading us not so much out of, but into the labyrinth. Mastery of perspective here opens up a space that loosens the fetters placed on the imagination, suggests possibilities of overturning nature and its order. De

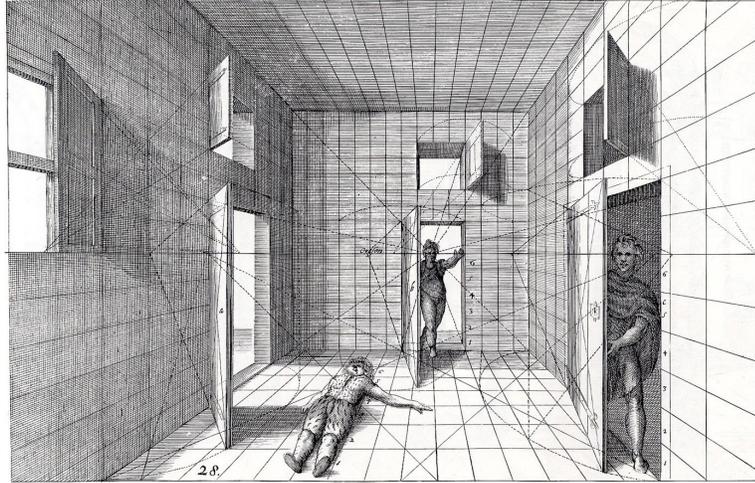
¹³⁹ See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The School of Prague. Painting at the Court of Rudolf II* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 287-288, 25.1 and 25.2.

¹⁴⁰ See Hans Mielke, *Hans Vredeman de Vries, Verzeichnis der Stichwerke und Beschreibung seines Stils*, dissertation, Berlin 1967.

¹⁴¹ See Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 104-124.

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Vries helps to remind us that the labyrinth, work of the Cain-like Daedalus, whose artifice allowed Pasiphae to satisfy her unnatural desire for a bull, haunts the spiritual architecture Descartes hoped to raise.



Perspective Study with Dead Man

We know that Descartes' promise of a method that would render us the masters and possessors of nature was not empty. But if that method promised to replace the dirty, haphazard cities of the age with splendid urban environments ruled by reason, something in us wants to escape the Cartesian gridwork that has helped shape our modern world. That is one thing architectural fantasies can teach us, especially some of the more recent work. As Nietzsche observes in *Dawn*: "If we desired and dared an architecture in keeping with the make-up our own souls (we lack the necessary courage!), the labyrinth would have to be our model."¹⁴² "Needed," writes Nietzsche, "is an Ariadne's thread leading into the labyrinth."¹⁴³ Labyrinth and architectural fantasy belong together. De Vries did in fact design garden labyrinths, including labyrinths of love.

The best known of de Vries' many publications is his *Perspective* (1604, 1605), yet another demonstration of the power of perspective in the tradition of Alberti, Dürer,

¹⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe*, 169; *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, Berlin, and New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 3, p. 152.

¹⁴³ Draft version of *Ecce Homo*, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 14, p. 497.

and Serlio. But at the same time this is a book full of fantastic inventions. As far as the method is concerned, de Vries was anything but an innovator. In this respect he has nothing of substance to add to what we find already in Alberti's *On Painting*. De Vries, too, invites the painter to construct a linear scaffolding that is the perspectival projection of a three-dimensional Euclidean grid-work, in which the objects to be represented are placed. His engravings show the underlying geometric construction that rules the representation of a particular architecture. And the fantastic architectures in his paintings, too, are haunted by a purely geometric, spiritual architecture that, though invisible, is its soul. This invisible architecture in turn presupposes the infinite space of the just emerging new science.

How well do such representations of space *more geometrico* capture the space of our life-world? Not very well! There is first of all the assumption of monocular vision; secondly of a stationary eye; thirdly of a flat earth. That this artificial perspective does violence to the natural perspective that rules the way we actually experience things is something of which Leonardo and Kepler were well aware. Such violence was a price gladly paid for the almost magical spatial illusions this new art was able to produce. But we should not lose sight of the problematic status of an art willing to sacrifice the life-world to its idealized, rationalized representation, to trade the embodied living self for a disembodied eye, a trade that is profoundly related to the way the new science inaugurated by Galileo and Descartes was willing to replace the life-world with its idealized representation, a representation which transformed nature into a mathematical manifold and the human being into a spiritualized, disembodied *res cogitans*. Cartesian method has its precursor in Albertian perspective. It finds expression in the work of architects fascinated by the power of the grid, such as Oswald Mathias Ungers, for some years the influential chair of the Cornell department of architecture. In a more aggressively utopian way it shaped the designs of *Superstudio*, an Italian group that emerged in the 1960's.

4

Geometric method and fantasy join in de Vries' painted architectures in a way that lets us look at many of them as surreal constructions, where such surreality is bound to the very rigor of the employed method. Consider once more this painting de Vries painted for Emperor Rudolf II, now in the Vienna collection: the eye is drawn through an orthogonal tunnel towards the vanishing point, before allowing it to explore the airy



Palace Architecture with Strollers, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien

architecture on the left. Striking is the way de Vries' palace architectures rely on columns rather than walls, inviting us to reflect on just what is involved when preference is given to one or the other: this is not architecture meant to shelter us from the weather or enemies. The division of inside and outside is obscured. This is an architecture for carefree strolling, for music-making, for erotic play: a festal architecture for persons free of the burdens of life, an architecture that banishes Nietzsche's spirit of gravity.

But it is not just the airiness of this architecture that communicates a sense of play and freedom, inviting the eye to seek out seductive diagonals and to imagine spaces beyond what is visible in the painting. The openness of the represented column architecture only underscores the more fundamental way in which the subjection of architectural representation to the rule of perspective opens up whatever architecture is

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represented to the infinite space of Euclidean geometry, gives it a lightness that is difficult to reconcile with our earth-bound existence. Remember poor Lazarus.

All constructions that obey this rule are haunted by the infinite, and the more insistently so, the more self-consciously an artist displays his mastery of perspective. The painting seems to touch the infinite with its vanishing point, which has its counterpart in the fiction of an unmoving eye, suspended in that infinite space which so intoxicated de Vries' contemporary Giordano Bruno, who, like de Vries, also showed up at the court of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. For Bruno that space bore the promise of an altogether new freedom, which would leave behind, not just the geocentric cosmos of Ptolemy and the heliocentric cosmos of Copernicus, but call into question all thoughts of centers that would bind human beings and things to their proper places. This freedom wants to open up all architectures, built on just thought, that would imprison the human spirit, be they the work of despotic regimes or of religions, that sought to bind the spirit with their dogmas. Thoughts of the infinite gave wings to spirit, promised pleasures one hardly dared imagine. — It also led to architectural fantasies that are dreams of freedom.

Such freedom is also promised by the then emerging new science, which presupposes a similar willingness to trade the home-like, earth-centered cosmos of the ancients and medievals for the infinite universe of the moderns, the embodied self, firmly rooted in the here and now, for a free, thinking subject, free to use the earth, free to use the body that once bound it, as instruments of natural and unnatural pleasures: *Daedalus redivivus*.

By opening architecture to infinite space, the architectural fantasy in the spirit of de Vries invites dreams of a freer existence. The architectural fantasies of de Vries would leave the all too earth-bound architecture of his time behind, an anti-architecture really, a creation of the imagination born of a profound suspicion that building that first of all promises shelter from the elements will prove to be a prison. Modern artists and architects were to pursue the same dream.

5

Bachelard claims that for every one of us there exists “an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory, that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past.”¹⁴⁴ But Bachelard dreams of a house in the image of animal shelters: the house as a kind of nest in which we are warm and protected from an often hostile world, not at all like a glass box.

Philipp Johnson’s Glass House does not at all invite the metaphor of a nest. It is open to nature in a way that may invite thoughts of Adam and Eve in paradise, who did not need to be concerned about privacy. But such openness also makes us feel exposed. One longs for more ambiguous, more mysterious, more private spaces. The very openness of this glass box precludes the kind of mystery that haunts the architectural fantasies of de Vries. This house is a bit too much like the kind of shelters we find in many state parks, places where we may spend a few hours with friends or family, barbecue some hamburgers, and then leave.

The architectural fantasies of de Vries point in a somewhat different direction. They invite dreams of disorienting labyrinths, invite exploration of some unknown beyond that lies also within our psyche, a realm that would answer both to our demand for freedom and to our demand for love and pleasure.

The age of de Vries especially was fascinated by such thoughts. But they are shadowed by thoughts of human vulnerability and mortality. The terror of time darkens our dreams of building, threatens to turn dreams of festive architectures into nightmares: hell, presented as a burning city; Troy in flames; palaces burning, under attack; buildings falling apart. But, as Bataille can teach us, there is also something in us that wants to see architecture in ruins.

The proximity of so many of the architectural fantasies of de Vries to perspectival stage designs, on the one hand, and to Piranesi’s *Carceri*, on the other, hints at both the seductive appeal and the terror that haunts them. There is a deep connection between the

¹⁴⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1958), p. 15.

way Baroque architectural fantasies and representations of ruins both open architecture to the infinite in a way that threatens to reduce our ephemeral, earth-bound existence to insignificance. That the experience of this threat is not without its special pleasure is recognized by the aesthetic category of the sublime, which Kant has taught us to understand as an image of our freedom. Think once more of the appeal of ruins. What fascinates here is the return of what was firmly built to nature and that means also an opening to space. Something deep in us refuses to accept space domesticated by reason, welcomes assaults on architecture as a liberation. The terror, or rather the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of nature, of space and of time, is awakened rather than banished.

6

Many architectural fantasies are dreams of freedom. Such fantasies are often also dreams of geometric order. Thus they are dreams of the reconciliation of freedom and order, of true autonomy, which means a binding of freedom, not by some external authority, but by our own reason. In such built environments we should feel truly at home. Unfortunately they rarely deliver what they promise. Consider Ledoux's ideal city of Chaux or the utopian community of New Harmony as envisioned by Robert Owen. But as already in Ledoux's ideal city, order here trumps freedom and renders the dream of a reconciliation of freedom and order fragile. Freedom and desire rebel again and again against the rule of reason. Kant sought in such rebellion the root of evil. But this label does not silence its appeal, which finds expression in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*: "Twice-two-makes-four is, in my humble opinion, nothing but a piece of impudence. Twice-two-makes-four is a farcical, dressed-up fellow who stands across your path with arms akimbo and spit at you. Mind you, I quite agree that twice-two-makes-four is a most excellent thing; but if we are to give everything its due, then twice-two-makes-five is sometimes a most charming little thing, too."¹⁴⁵ In twice-two-makes-five a freedom that tolerates no authority that would bind it finds a final refuge.

¹⁴⁵ *The Best Short Stories of Dostoevsky*, trans. D. Magarshack (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 139.

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Twice-two-makes-four, Cartesian method, and the rule of perspective belong together. So do twice-two-makes-five, ruins, and architectural fantasies that delight in impossible perspectives, subverting the rule of the grid-work that would rule architectural representation. In the history of fantastic architecture such subversion becomes image in the architectural capriccio, which also likes to return building to nature. Let me return once more to Johann Esaias Nilson's *Neues Caffehaus* (1756), which I showed you last time. It can be understood as a playful variation on William Hogarth's *False Perspective*, the latter meant as a satiric frontispiece for a book on perspective, but transformed by Nilson into delightfully subversive play. Works by Escher enact such a subversion in a much more self-conscious manner. Such subversion was to become almost a cliché with magic realists such as Giorgio de Chirico.

7

Perhaps it has become clearer why in the beginning of this lecture I singled out Hans Vredeman de Vries. The way so many of his architectural fantasies rely on a highly artificial geometric method raises questions about such a wedding of reason and fantasy; questions about the artificiality of a dwelling ruled by a reason that leaves behind the embodied human being, about a desire for freedom that would have us fly, fly in the end even beyond reason; questions also about how such freedom relates to eros. Important here is the way the rule of perspective anticipates and figures Cartesian method, which holds the key to our scientific world picture, figured by a grid-work or *Gestell*, to use Heidegger's term, that knows neither boundary nor center. To be sure, we must not confuse that world-picture with the world in which we actually live, love, and die. But we also need to be aware of the way science and technology continue to transform our life-world ever more decisively in the image of Heidegger's *Gestell*. There is a sense in which, in the image of Daedalus, we have indeed become freer, more mobile, ever less bound by supposedly natural givens, have learned to construct environments and machines able to satisfy natural and unnatural desires. Even our own bodies have become material that we are free to manipulate as we please. But what now is to bind freedom?

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We are conflicted beings: one side of us demands shelter, the other freedom; one dreams of homecoming, the other of journeys into the unknown; one seeks out beauty, the other the sublime. Amphibians that we are, we also dream of what would heal such division. Fantastic architectures allow us to sort out these dreams, to address their promise, but also the dangers connected with attempting to realize that promise.

15. Dreams of Flying

1

I have suggested that by opening architecture and the places it establishes to infinite space architectural fantasies like those by de Vries invite dreams of a freer, more open architecture, dreams of an architecture that would leave the power and promise of place and its constraints behind, that would, as Lebbeus Woods desired, leave gravity behind, an anti-architecture really, a creation of the imagination, born of a profound suspicion that building that first of all promises shelter will in the end prove to be a prison. Modern artists and architects were to pursue this dream of an architecture that would do greater justice to the human desire for freedom, where technology has given the architect means to realize such dreams in ways long thought impossible. The computer has given such dreamers a powerful new tool to realize their dreams in virtual space. Computer and architecture are natural allies. Something there is, deep in all of us, that, to quote Robert Frost once more, doesn't love a wall, that wants it down. This helps to explain the fascination of an architect like Le Corbusier with airplanes. I shall return to it shortly. It also helps to explain Lebbeus Woods's interest in exploring a gravity defying architecture that suggests space ships.

In this connection the enthusiasm that greeted the first balloon flights in the 1780's, on the eve of the French revolution, deserves our special attention. I would like to suggest that it is of a piece with the simultaneous enthusiastic embrace of the sphere by architects of the Enlightenment. That revolution, the first balloon flight, and Ledoux's spherical house belong together. What supports and finds expression in all three is a dream of freedom.

The brothers Joseph Michel and Jacques Étienne Montgolfier staged the first balloon flight on June 4, 1783 in front of a group of assorted dignitaries. It covered 2 kilometers, lasted 10 minutes, and rose to a height of about a mile, but was unmanned, indeed did not carry anything. On September 19 of that year a basket attached to a balloon carried a sheep, a duck and a rooster to test the reaction of animals to such a flight, which this time took place at the royal palace of Versailles. A larger balloon, with

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one of the brothers, Étienne, and another enthusiast, a chemistry and physics teacher named Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier, was tested in tethered flights later in 1783 on October 15, 17, and 19. It was de Rozier, who on 21 November 1783 made the first manned free flight in history, accompanied by the Marquis d'Arlandes. It lasted 25 minutes and covered 12 kilometers, rising to a height of 3000 feet. How much the idea was in the air is shown by the fact that less than two weeks later the French physicist Jacques Charles (1746-1823) and Nicolas Robert (1758-1820) made the first untethered ascension with a gas hydrogen balloon on December 1, 1783. Their technology won out over the hot air balloon. Half of Paris came to watch. De Rozier, by the way died, when he attempted to cross the English Channel and his balloon, relying on a mixture of hot air and hydrogen, exploded, on 15 June 1785. He and his companion, Pierre Romain, became thus the first known victims of an air crash.¹⁴⁶

As the crowds that came to watch demonstrate, the first flights attracted enormous interest and attention. Balloons promised human beings the power of flight and thus an altogether new freedom and changed relationship to space: finally humans would be able to raise themselves above the earth, to fly like birds, like Icarus, fly across whatever boundaries and false walls separated human beings. The balloon promised a godlike freedom from the tyranny of place.¹⁴⁷

Here is what the philosopher and social historian Helmut Reinicke wrote of the first balloons: heralds of a freer, more genuinely humane, because truly cosmopolitan world, "these balls of air are the first invention linked to the concept of world revolution. The balloon rises into the sky, — as a sign that reason on earth is extending its sway. Such a revolution (we are still in the year 1786!) has this subjective aspect that human beings want to find themselves, want to give themselves a human countenance." This

¹⁴⁶ Michael R. Lynn, *The Sublime Invention: A Cultural History of Balloons in Europe from 1783-1820*. Ph.D (1997) Research Projects I-Q (by author <http://www.history.emory.edu/BEIK/I-Q.htm> mlynn@agnesscott.edu)

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of the connection between the balloon, French revolution, and hopes for a liberated humanity see Helmut Reinicke, *Aufstieg und Revolution. Über die Beförderung irdischer Freiheitsneigungen durch Ballonfahrt und Luftschwimmkunst* (Berlin: Transit, 1988).

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raises the question: just what does it mean for human beings to truly find themselves, “To give themselves a human countenance”? This in turn presupposes an understanding of what makes us truly human. Here the assumption is that what we are is determined by freedom. Dreams of freedom preside over the progress of humanity. The balloon is thus an expression of human self-assertion, of emancipation, both presumption — human beings cannot fly like angels — and liberation. And, as so often, liberating technologies very quickly were put in the service of destruction. Benjamin Franklin recognized the military potential of the balloon, as soon as it first rose into the sky. And on June 2, 1794 Marie-Joseph Coutelle, a French officer, rose in the balloon *Entreprenant* to conduct the first aerial surveillance. The results proved decisive in helping the French win the battle of Fleurus against the Austrians. He was put in command of the French army’s first balloon unit.

2

I have already suggested that Ledoux's spherical shelter, dating from just about the same time, belongs with Montgolfier's first balloon flight, this widely celebrated symbol of the spirit's victory over humanity's gravity-burdened, earth-bound existence. Both are characteristic expressions of the Enlightenment. Striking is how, as in so much fantastic architecture, the vision of the architect is here allowed to outstrip the capabilities of the builder. This did not prevent Ledoux’s spherical house from becoming an influential paradigm: born of modernist self-assertion, the ideal of a gravity-defying architecture was to inspire much modernist architecture.

But before I turn to modernist versions of this dream, I want to spend a bit more time on Ledoux’s quite impractical, spherical structure. What must have fascinated Ledoux about the sphere first of all must have been the force of this simple geometric form, which has no clear up and down, which, for that very reason, wants to move, if on a plane to roll, if in three dimensional space, to fly.

Why single out the sphere? Why does just this form become the emblem of a new architecture. I have already given a first answer to this question. Decisive about Ledoux's projected spherical house is its simple geometry. But a cube would not have

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served Ledoux equally well. Nor would a pyramid or a cylinder. What separates the sphere from these is the way that it does not sit firmly on the ground. A sphere wants to roll. That is also true of Ledoux's shelter. Important then is the resolute way in which it seems to disregard the constraints imposed by gravity. The sphere here signifies a spiritual revolution that would free human beings from the tyranny of place. Such freedom demands mobility. We moderns are the uneasy heirs of that revolution, where the computer has provided us with a tool to explore virtual space and architecture in ways that leave gravity behind.

In this connection a design by another French architect of that period is of interest and deserves our attention: Vaudoyer's appropriately named *House of a Cosmopolite* is another prophetic design that helps mark the epochal threshold that separates the modern age from the Baroque age that preceded it, which was much more convinced that the station into which one was born not only as a matter of fact helped determine, but should determine one's place in life. Some were born as kings, some as peasants. Vaudoyer's house is a house neither for kings nor for peasants. This is a house for someone at home everywhere and therefore nowhere, a sphere that refuses to even touch the earth. Some disembodied, eternal spirit might feel at home in such a house. But this is hardly a home for mortals. Vaudoyer's design dates from 1785. This means that it follows Montgolfier's first balloon flight by just two years. In the 20th century a storage tank quite unintentionally, no doubt, came close to realizing what Vaudoyer envisioned.

I pointed out that the sphere presents itself as a natural symbol of the spirit's victory over humanity's earth- and gravity-burdened, death-bound existence. It thus also offers itself as a symbol of the victory of spirit over death. But it also can be a symbol of changing fortune. In 1777 the poet Goethe thus designed a striking monument to good fortune, placing a sphere, representing our changing shifting desires, on a cube, repenting virtue.

Ledoux would seem to have had the former meaning in mind, the victory of spirit over death, when he conceived his Cemetery at Chaux in the image of the Roman Pantheon. In his design, too, Ledoux accentuates the power of the sphere, embedded in an earthbound slab, providing an enlightened age with a striking image of immortality.

But this is an abstract, spiritual immortality, not the concrete immortality faith in the resurrection promised to the Christian.

Related is Boullée's project for a *Cenotaph for Newton*. Boullée is right to invoke the sublime: "Sublime spirit! Vast and profound genius! Divine being! Newton! Accept the homage of my poor talents!"¹⁴⁸ The architect goes on to oppose his little self to Newton's vast genius, vast enough to fly above the earth and to embrace the vast space of cosmos. The human spirit embraces even infinite space. Our thoughts are free. No prison can hold them. That was the text of an originally German folk song made popular by Pete Seeger in the sixties. The freedom of thought and the infinity of space belong together, a theme familiar from the history of the sublime.

But back to Boullée's Newton. From this spirit's sublime flight is said to issue a light that illuminates our modern world, that allows the architect, too, to fly, to transcend himself, to reach up to the infinity of human reason, reach up so high indeed that, just as Newton embraces even the infinite cosmos with his spirit, Boullée now dares to envelop even Newton's genius with his sphere, symbol of the comprehended cosmos: as Newton's genius embraced the universe, so Boullée's sphere encloses the starry sky within. But the monument is more than a monument to Newton: it is a monument to the human spirit, which awakened by Newton's genius, recognizes itself capable of comprehending and thus of enfolding even the infinite universe.

Newton's Cenotaph provides a key to the Enlightenment's understanding of the healing power of the sublime: what at first presents itself as a threatening abyss, the terror of endless time and infinite space, which threaten to reduce to insignificance the limited life span given to each human being, becomes a source of delight once the human being recognizes the soul's power of flight, its freedom, its ability to fly, recognizes that as beings of reason, we human beings transcend ourselves as beings of nature. Our spirit allows us to fly.

¹⁴⁸ Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Boullée and Visionary Architecture*, trans. H. Rosenau (New York 1976), p. 107.

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To be sure, conservative critics must have understood the first balloons as the work of a modern Daedalus. Remember what his artifice wrought. It led Icarus, who, lured by the splendor of the sun, flew high above the earth, to fall and perish by that very splendor he pursued: *cadet impostor dum super astra vehit*, as the Icarus emblem of Alciatus warns us. And so perished Pilâtre de Rozier, who had joined Étienne Montgolfier in the first balloon flight.

If the first balloon flights had to recall both Daedalus and Icarus, Boullée's Newton monument also gestures towards the Tower of Babel. Like that tower, Boullée's monument, too, would found a community, not a national community to be sure, not a community bound to a particular region, fettered by parochial prejudice, but the community of free human beings who recognize that they are joined by reason, a reason that flies over all that separates France and England, flies over all the regional communities that normally divide human beings, even as they provide them with sufficient shelter not to be crushed by their mortality. That makes Boullée's Newton Cenotaph a monument that would inaugurate a new age that would make parochial wars a thing of the past and truly liberate human beings. But the monument was of course never built. It remained just another fantastic architecture. And just as the balloon was soon misused for military purposes, that age which was supposed to bring us a new freedom and make war a thing of the past, has brought us to a point where the self-destruction of humanity has become a very real possibility.

One aspect of Boullée's design deserves our special attention, bringing us down to earth: vast as Boullée's sphere is meant to be, the magic of the starry sky within is unmasked as just a remarkable piece of theater by the silence of the empty paper background. Boullée's dome is in fact much more a representation of the firmament of ancient cosmology, of the closed world of the ancients, than of the infinite universe of the moderns. The sphere encloses only an artistic representation of the night sky and invites thoughts that Newton, too, might have replaced nature with a human artifact, might have taken the measure only of a human representation of nature. How does the scientific representation of nature relate to nature itself? Does it capture its essence? Such thoughts return us to *the mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of the infinite and thus to the

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mystery of death, the terror of infinite space and time, here, as in so much modern art, figured by the blank paper, which is the other side of the so absorbing mystery of our individuality. The sublime and a concern with self belong together.

Striking is how often Boullée uses the word "I." There is indeed a close relationship between the experience of the sublime and a preoccupation with self, as Burke already noted when he linked the pleasure we take in the sublime to the passions which belong to self-preservation, as opposed to the pleasure we take in the beautiful, which he linked to the passions that let us seek the community of our fellow human beings, especially of the other sex. Note the analogy: beauty is to community as sublimity is to individuality. Beauty establishes community. The sublime leaves the observer alone. To be sure, as beings of reason, we are member of the community of all rational beings, but this community remains altogether abstract. I pointed out that the precursor of the sphere-obsessed architecture of the French revolution, the Pantheon, has also often been called sublime. I also pointed out that this is hardly a building to live in. Sublimity in architecture and the requirements of dwelling do not easily go together. A spherical home like Ledoux's Shelter for the Agricultural Guards seems in fact almost a contradiction terms. Something analogous can be said of the fantastic architectures constructed by Lebbeus Woods.

3

I spoke of the enthusiasm that greeted the first balloon flights, which I linked to the French revolution and to Ledoux's spherical shelter. What finds expression in all three is, I suggested, a dream of freedom. The architectural historian Emil Kaufmann has pointed out that the architecture of the French revolution prefigured architectural modernism, that Ledoux prefigured Le Corbusier. And there is of course also a sense in which the French revolution, where we should not forget the terror to which it led and that was very much part of it, prefigured the revolutions of the twentieth century, where we should not forget the much greater terror to which they led. And there is an obvious sense in which the balloon prefigured the airplane.

"The airplane indicts," is the subtitle of a book that had the simple title *Aircraft*, a collection of photographs, which Le Corbusier published in 1935.¹⁴⁹ I find it significant that on its cover a circle was chosen to enclose the new vision. Here Le Corbusier's explanation of that vision:

Being indissolubly connected in all the fibres of my being with the essential human affairs which architecture regulates; having waged for a long time, without fear of hatred or ambush, a loyal crusade of material liberation by the all-powerful influence of architecture, it is as an architect and town-planner-and therefore as a man essentially occupied with the welfare of his species — that I let myself be carried off on the wings of an airplane, make use of the bird's-eye view, of the view from the air, to which end I directed the pilot to steer over cities. And, justly stirred, advised moreover by my friend the poet Pierre Guéguen, to whom I showed the draft of this book, I have added my own title "The airplane indicts."

If in the late 18th century there was a profound affinity between balloon and avant-garde architecture, in the 20th century, too, we meet with a profound connection between modernist architecture and the promise of flight. But let me return once more to the sphere. I pointed out that the sphere seems mobile in its very essence: it wants to float, fly, or at least roll. The simple geometry of the spherical buildings designed by the architects of the Enlightenment gives them the look of wanting to defy gravity. The flight of the spirit, we can say, here leaves the body behind. It is not surprising that in a design like Ledoux's *House for the Agricultural Guards* the architect's vision thus quite literally outstrips the capabilities of the builder. Here already we have a paradigmatic expression of modernist self-assertion. The ideal of a spiritual, earth- and body-defying

¹⁴⁹ Le, Corbusier, *Aircraft*, (London: The Studio Publications (collection *The New Vision*), New-York, 1935.

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architecture was to inspire much subsequent architecture. How many modern buildings look as if they could be stood on their heads, ready to roll, to move, even to fly?

Inseparable from architectural modernism is the return of the old Gnostic dream of leaving behind the all too material prison that is our body, which binds us to and in the end will return to the earth, of flying, like Icarus, upward, towards the sun and beyond, into that infinite openness demanded by our godlike freedom. That Gnostic dream welcomes infinite space, figured in modernist painting by the blank, white canvas.

Consider one of Malevich's suprematist compositions, his *Airplane*, which floats geometric shapes on a white background that figures the infinite void. These rectangles invite consideration as the building elements of a truly modern architecture. Malevich thought of his suprematist compositions as giving expression to a new state of mind, the state of mind appropriate to a liberated humanity. His fellow Russian Valdimir Tatlin's meant to liberate humanity from the tyranny of place with his Letatlin, a kind of air-bicycle. Tatlin's Letatlin and his monument to the Second International belong together. And that monument has to invite thoughts of the Tower of Babel.

16. A House for "The Man Without a Shadow"

1

In the preceding two lectures I connected architectural fantasies with dreams of flying, which found a first answer in the balloons that rose into the sky for the first time at the time of the French revolution, a more definitive answer in the airplanes that were to transform so decisively both travel and the way wars were fought. In the last few decades such dreams have led to a space technology that has allowed human beings to fulfill that old fantasy of traveling to the moon. We should ask ourselves: how, if at all, has this progress transformed our sense of space? What, if any consequences has it had for the way we build and dream about dwelling and building? And how does this achievement compare to the way the computer, which has opened up long undreamed of virtual spaces, transformed our sense of space? What consequences has it had for the way we build?

Let me begin this lecture with an event that continues to inform the way I think about architecture and the environment. There are days that are difficult to forget. 9/11/2001 was such a day. So was 7/20/1969, the day when the first images of the first moon-landing were televised. I was in Maine. We awakened the children so that they would not miss this historic event; unfortunately they were too sleepy to show much interest. Only our five-year old son kept staring at our then still black and white television screen; finally he said: "look at all those green people." We sent him back to bed. What we saw was not nearly as interesting. Indeed the whole show proved a disappointment. Comparisons of what had just happened to the discovery of America were no more than wishful thinking. What Armstrong and Aldrin had to tell us was not nearly as exciting as the stories brought home by a Columbus. Or even by explorers of the dark continent in the nineteenth century. To be sure, one could not but be impressed by what science and technology had accomplished. We certainly had beaten the Russians in the space race. It was thus easy to celebrate the event as another American triumph. But what our astronauts found out there was only mute matter. As a result of the moon landings, space lost yet another part of the aura with which it has so long been invested

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— think of Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: Space Odyssey*, released just a year before the first moon landing. As that film showed once again, that aura had been supported, from the very beginning, by two seemingly contradictory desires: On the one hand, by a desire for the sublime, by a longing for the excitement of encountering something totally other than our all too familiar, often so confining world: something numinous, a sublime *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that would answer to a freedom that refused to be bound to the earth; on the other hand, by a desire for the beautiful, by a longing to encounter even out there intelligence much like our own so that, instead of feeling lost in space, we could once more feel at home in this now so greatly enlarged cosmos, where it is of interest that towards the end of the film the hero is transported into an environment that recalls an 18th century interior, carrying us back to the Age of the Enlightenment.

Speculations about intelligent life, first on the moon, then on some planet, and if not there, at least somewhere in this celestial desert, have attended the progress of astronomy. They were already very much part of Enlightenment thought and seem warranted by the conviction that out of the cosmic soup had to emerge life and intelligence, that from the very beginning matter was bound to give birth to spirit. To be sure, the distances are growing and with every astronomical and astronomical advance the suspicion that we are, certainly for all practical purposes, alone in the cosmos becomes ever more inescapable. Even if there were intelligent beings somewhere out there, curious, or perhaps compassionate, or stupid enough, to want to engage us in conversation, given cosmic distances it has become unlikely that we would ever have the time necessary to communicate with those unknown aliens we both dread and long for and to whom on August 20, 1977 we sent a valentine of sorts in the form of a golden record, crammed with representative music, information about life here on earth, including greetings in sixty languages, carried by the space probe Voyager 2 into the unknown, complete with record player, needle, and easy to decipher instructions. In 1989 it passed Neptune. There has been no answer. We remain alone.

Such sublime, but dismal thoughts invite renewed appreciation of the beauty of the earth. It seems to be more than a mere coincidence that in 1962, when John Glenn became the first American to circle the earth, Rachel Carson should have launched the

environmentalist movement in this country with the publication of *Silent Spring*. Quite a number of years ago Al Gore suggested that we send a satellite into space to beam back images of the earth, invoking Socrates who, according to Gore, 2500 years ago said that "Man must rise above the earth to the top of the atmosphere and beyond, for only thus will he understand the earth in which he lives."¹⁵⁰ He might have cited the conclusion of Blumenberg's *The Genesis of the Copernican World*: "Only as the experience of a re-turn will it be accepted that for us human beings there is no alternative to the earth, just as there are no alternatives of reason to human reason."¹⁵¹ Out of such acceptance can grow a new responsibility. Out of such responsibility can grow a new understanding of the task of architecture, I should perhaps say, a greener understanding. I shall have to return to this hope.

2

Let me shift gears. Imagine an architecture studio where students are asked to build some fantastic architecture. This is of course much too general. So let us make the assignment more specific: the task is to build a house for "The Man Without a Shadow."

This raises the obvious question: who is this man? Well, first of all, he is the protagonist of a novella by the romantic poet Adelbert von Chamisso, bearing the title *The Strange Story of Peter Schlemihl*; the text is available on the internet.¹⁵² That story begins with a garden party at the newly built villa of a nouveau-riche Englishman named Thomas John. Given what I said earlier about the fantastic architecture of Jan Vredeman de Vries we should not be surprised to learn that this rather questionable gentleman lives in a house with many columns.

¹⁵⁰ *New York Times*, March 14, 1998, p. A7.

¹⁵¹ Hans Blumenberg, *Die Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979, p. 794.

¹⁵² Adelbert von Chamisso, *The Shadowless Man, or, The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl* (London: E. Lumley, 1845)
<https://archive.org/details/shadowlessmanorw03cham>

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This Thomas John considers people who do not possess at least a million “a poor wretch,” scum or scoundrel would be a better translation of the German *Schuft*. At that party our hero meets a strange little man with a wonderful gift of creating things out of thin air, who wants to buy his shadow in exchange for a never empty wallet. In other words, he promises to compensate our hero for the loss of what lets him belong to the earth with all that money can buy. It invites the question: what is the connection between money and the loss of one’s shadow? I invite you to translate the story into our time! You will not be surprised to learn that the little man’s promise should have persuaded Peter Schemihl. What good is a shadow?

It does not take our hero long to learn how difficult it is to be without a shadow. Despite his now enormous wealth, a normal life with other persons becomes quite impossible. He is afraid to venture outside, and this should be understood both literally and figuratively, for fear that people might notice that he is lacking a shadow. Small wonder then that he should lose the girl he loves. To make love we need a body that casts a shadow. Soon he regrets the trade, but when he meets up with the little man once more and the latter offers to return him his shadow, if only he would leave him his soul, he refuses the trade. Our hero never does get back his shadow, but at least he saves his soul.

The little grey man, as you will have suspected, is of course the devil. Later the devil shows himself to our hero in the guise of a philosopher, described as a kind of architect, creator of an architecture without shadows.

Now this skillful rhetorician seemed to me to expend great skill in rearing a firmly-constructed edifice, towering aloft on its own self-supported basis, but resting on, and upheld by, some internal principle of necessity. I regretted in it the total absence of what I desired to find; and thus it seemed a mere work of art, serving only by its elegance and exquisite finish to captivate the eye. Nevertheless, I listened with pleasure to this eloquently gifted man, who diverted my attention from my own sorrows to the speaker; and he would have secured my entire acquiescence if he had appealed to my heart as well as to my judgment.

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The spiritual, seemingly floating architecture raised by the devil appearing in the guide of a philosopher-architect is here likened to a work of art that has its foundation in itself, offers us an escape from our suffering, but does not rest on the earth. Its beauty delights. But such delight leaves us at bottom unmoved, for it engages only the understanding, not the soul.

Accepting the loss of his shadow, Peter Schlemihl learns to accept that he will always be the outsider. But as if to compensate him for his loss of shadow and his consequent permanent outsider status, he comes into the possession of a pair of seven league boots. We should note how the loss of a shadow is here linked to a transformation of our sense of space. You may want to think of the way airplane, television and computer have transformed our sense of space, have allowed us to be in touch with the world, but without actually touching anyone. No one who has loved will think this a fair trade. Our poor hero has missed his chance. And so he spends the rest of his life, living, like the hermits of long ago, in a cave in Egypt, but being the modern he is, not in religious meditation, but, putting his magical boots to good use, as a natural scientist, exploring the earth. Were we to rewrite the tale for this beginning of the 21st century we may well imagine the cave he calls his home as an evenly-lit, windowless room, where persons and things cast no shadows, but filled with computers that on their screens offer simulacra of the world without.

Who then is this Peter Schlemihl. Shadows have long been understood as signs of full corporeality. Ghosts are said to cast no shadows. Do we cast a shadow when we sit before our computers? There is something ghostlike about human beings without shadows. And there is something ghostlike about objects without their shadow. Think of seeing things in a fog. Everything become strangely immaterial.

Edward Bullough understood this experience as marked by that psychological distance and its bracketing of the everyday and its temporality that have been discussed ever since Kant as a defining characteristic of the aesthetic experience. The phenomenon was given authoritative expression in his "Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle." Bullough gives the example of the way we experience the world in a fog at sea, where everything seen seems strangely distant, even when close, everything heard

strangely close, even when distant. The fog lets us become oblivious of our everyday cares and see things “objectively,’ as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasize the ‘objective’ features of the experience, and by interpreting even our ‘subjective’ affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.” The thing is strangely transfigured, “seemingly possessed by human affections.” So transfigured the phenomenon acquires a flavor of “concentrated poignancy and delight,” as if illuminated by “the passing ray of a brighter light.”¹⁵³ Inseparable from such a transfiguration of the object is its derealization.

Our shadows let us mortals belong to the earth. The devil would rob us of our shadows, liberate us from what binds us to the earth. But to cast a shadow a body has of course to stand in light, which in our story, as so often, also figures the divine light. The promise of the devil is thus a promise of a free existence that no longer is in need of external illumination, because no longer bound by matter and place. Human artifice will do. Reason will provide our existence with a sufficient foundation. To translate the tale one more into our age: the light of the computer screen, the devil tells us, is light enough.

But to return to Chamisso’s tale: keep in mind that the devil appears to Peter Schlemihl in the form of a system building philosopher, where Chamisso's description lets one think of Descartes or perhaps even more of Spinoza, who constructed his philosophical edifice, *The Ethics, more geometrico*, in the geometric manner. This geometric style answers to the understanding, to the human being in so far as he is a *res cogitans*. But as a *res cogitans*, a thinking substance, the human being casts no shadow.

What kind of a house then would we want to build for such a man without a shadow? It would seem natural to want to build it *more geometrico*, and ideally of a material so pure, so fine that it, too would cast no shadow. The true home of a *res cogitans* cannot be of that world where things cast shadows. The man without a shadow in the story, to be sure, remains embodied, and yet strangely distant from that body, a distance that finds expression in his lack of shadow. What has distanced him from his

¹⁵³ Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 5 (1912), pp. 87-117,

body is that he has allowed that pure understanding personified by the devil to determine what matters. And the devil here appears as someone who thinks in terms of what can be measured by money; and he thinks *more geometrico*. That devil delights in an architecture of pure Platonic forms, an architecture that threatens to render us, too, unbearably light and ghostlike. The devil loves geometry. And he loves a light so diffuse that entering a space we cast no shadows. Does he also love computers?

3

As pointed out, in the twentieth century such Platonic love of pure geometric forms has surfaced again and again. Consider Le Corbusier and Ozenfant's programmatic essay *Purism*. Just listen: "Nothing is worthwhile which is not general, nothing is worthwhile which is not transmittable. We have attempted to establish an aesthetic that is rational and therefore human."¹⁵⁴ The statement deserves careful consideration: "Nothing is worthwhile which is not general": taken literally that means that the particular is dismissed as worthless; whatever it is that so often lets us invest particular things with a special aura, perhaps the aura of a fetish, is here dismissed; but note that this also would seem to include the individual in his or her particularity. The implication would seem to be that whatever is unique and particular is worthless: that would include that special aura that lets us recognize a person as a person.

We should also take note of the emphasis on transmittability. Transmittability is a form of mobility. What is transmittable is not bound to a particular place. What is worthwhile in art here is equated with what is general and can be understood by everyone; with what can be wrapped into concepts, into words and therefore communicated. This denies importance to what Heidegger called the thingliness of things, which resists being put into words. Such celebration of the universal presupposes that there is a universal language of art, where geometry provides the ready model. In an

¹⁵⁴ Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism," *Modern Artists on Art*, ed. Robert L. Herbert (Engelwood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 60.

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earlier lecture I spoke of perennial Platonism. What is human is equated with what is rational. All the different arts are asked to become pure in that sense: poetry, music, painting, and of course architecture.

Reason provides here the measure of purity. Purification means geometrization. In this sense artists such as Oskar Schlemmer can be said to have purified the human body, where such purification has its architectural analogue. In this connection you may want to take a look at Apollinaire's *Aesthetic Meditations*,¹⁵⁵ a kind of Cubist Manifesto, where Apollinaire suggests that the artist in his striving for "purity, unity, and truth" has finally subjugated nature. In striving for purity the artist is said to "humanize art" and "to make man divine." That suggests that the devil's promise, that we shall be like God, has here been fulfilled. The question is whether such fulfillment really means the subjugation of nature and should not be understood rather as a turning away from nature. In its place the artist creates an artificial world in the image of his or her own spirit.

As the images I showed you suggest, the demand for purity, so understood, makes it difficult to do justice to the whole human being, where spirit is inescapably bound to a body. Just this bond purism would break. Presupposed is a conviction that the spirit is the source of all that is worthwhile. But the spirit so understood is at home in a realm of concepts.

4

It was a version of that dream of purity that let van Doesburg demand of architecture "a floating aspect (in so far as this is possible from a constructional standpoint — this is the problem for the engineer!) which operates, as it were, in opposition to natural gravity." The "as it were" is telling: such opposition can be no more than an appearance, as van Doesburg points out. "No matter how it is combined, matter is always subject to gravity. It makes no essential difference whether architecture employs

¹⁵⁵ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres Cubistes, Méditations Esthétiques* (Eugène Figuière Éditeurs, Collection "Tous les Arts": Paris, 1913

load and support, tension and compression construction, or no construction at all."¹⁵⁶ The painter here has an advantage: in his counter-constructions van Doesburg thus floats planar surfaces in an indefinite space, recalling Malevich's slightly earlier Suprematist compositions, which similarly float geometric shapes on a white background that figures the infinite void. When he did so, Malevich, too, dreamed of freedom, a dream that was also at the same time a dream of a new collectivity that would take the place of the old individualism. For a time at least Malevich thought of himself as serving the Bolshevik revolution of helping to establish a much less self-centered humanity. How close such dreams are to turning into nightmares is evident when Malevich declares in the UNOVIS Almanac that, like the religious fanatic, "the modern saint must annihilate himself in the face of the 'collective,' in the face of that 'image' which perfects itself in the name of unity, in the name of coming-together."¹⁵⁷ Malevich took such loss of self to be compatible with true freedom and sought to place the flatness of modernist painting in the service of liberation so understood. "I think that freedom can be attained only after our ideas about the organization of solids have been completely smashed... Nature's perfection lies in the absolute blind freedom of units within it — units which are at the same time absolutely independent... I have come out into the white. Follow me, comrade aviators. Swim into the abyss."¹⁵⁸ Today this dream of flying and swimming has become hopelessly entangled with the horrifying reality of Russia at the time, the with the ruthlessness of War Communism's attempt to "destroy or short-circuit the transition between capitalism and those forms of socialized production and exchange that could possibly replace it."¹⁵⁹ As we know, that attempt has failed.

There is something unsatisfactory about pursuing such dreams only as a painter. The dream demands to be realized in the world. Painting demands its transformation into

¹⁵⁶ van Doesburg in Hans Ludwig C. Jaffe, *De Stijl 1917-1931*, (New York: Abrams, 1971), p. 206.

¹⁵⁷ T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 226.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

architecture. Van Doesburg can serve as an example. Did the new technology not lead the way towards such realization? "Through modern technique material is transformed, *denaturalized*. The forms which thereby arise lack the rustic character of antique forms. Upon this denaturalization or, better, *transnaturalization*, the style of our age is largely based."¹⁶⁰ In structures like Rietveld's *Schroeder House* such hopes for a truly modern, denaturalized architecture that would answer to human beings that had finally learned to master the earth and in the process become themselves denaturalized begin to find their realization. Today we have carried this process much further.

At first glance such designs may seem to have little to do with the spheres of such Enlightenment architects as Ledoux, Boullée, and Vaudoyer, which we considered earlier. The sphere is a simple geometric solid, while van Doesburg will have nothing to do with such solidity: "The new architecture is *anti-cubic*; that is to say, it does not attempt to fit all the functional space cells together in a closed cube, but projects functional space cells (as well as overhanging surfaces, balconies, etc.) centrifugally from the center of the cube outwards. Thus height, breadth, and depth plus time gain an entirely new plastic expression."¹⁶¹ And yet, there is a deep kinship: The *Schroeder House*, too, emphasizes simple geometric forms, defies gravity, invites an inversion of up and down. That such a spiritual architecture should want to liberate itself from the need for enclosure is to be expected. The general approach is readily illustrated in the work of Mies van der Rohe. Take the Farnsworth House: striking is the way the living space seems suspended between two floating planes. Visually the house possesses a mobility not altogether unlike that of a trailer. Such separation of building and ground is indeed a key characteristic of much modern architecture. The Farnsworth House is a spiritually mobile home.

There is a connection between such pure beauty and the way things and persons have tended to lose their shadows in so much modern art. That flatness celebrated by

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p, 206.

¹⁶¹ *Programs and manifestoes*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), p. 79.

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Greenberg does indeed mean that in such paintings there can be no illumination that allows things to cast shadows. Colored squares may glow, but they are not a light that casts shadows.

Related is the lightness of so much recent architecture. In the spirit of Ledoux and Boullée, the architect Hans Hollein thus demands an absolute architecture understood as "a spiritual order, realized through building... an idea built into infinite space, manifesting man's spiritual energy and power." Ideas have no weight, cast no shadows. Like the space of Vredeman de Vries' architectural fantasies, the space relevant to architecture is here taken to be not the space of lived experience: that space, in which alone we can love and live, has been left behind. In its place we have the infinite space of geometry. Into that space architecture casts its geometric figures. The beauty of architecture lies now first of all in the way it forcefully asserts itself against infinite space and time. Architecture here strives to become a pure expression of the human spirit, ideally unconstrained by gravity or matter.

5

But let me return to our story. I asked: if you were to build a "*A House for 'The Man Without a Shadow'*" what kind of a house would you build? I suggested a house in the image of his cave perhaps, but I added that today we would want to furnish this cave with the most recent electronic equipment. But why a cave? Why not rather a satellite circling the earth, a space station. That would remove him from people and yet allow him to survey the earth and the sky. When Chamisso wrote his story there were of course no space stations. But there was already something like a fictional space station, the floating island of Laputa in the third book of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Should we then build a home for our man without a shadow in the image of Laputa? Is it then to Laputa we should look for his home? I shall begin with that question next time.

17. Lessons of Laputa

1

In my last lecture I turned to Chamisso's *The Strange Story of Peter Schlemihl*. I asked what kind of building would do justice to this kind of dwelling. I concluded that lecture by suggesting that he might be happy in a satellite circling the earth, a space station. That would remove him from people and yet allow him to survey the earth and the sky. I also pointed out that when Chamisso wrote his story there were of course no space stations. But there was already something like a fictional space station, the floating island of Laputa in the third book of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, first published in 1726, another product of the Enlightenment, which here calls itself into question. Should we then build a home for our man without a shadow in the image of Laputa?

Swift's description of this floating island and its inhabitants provides us, I would like to suggest, with a prophetic caricature of our own world, including its art and architecture. It is impossible to conceive of such an air-born island except as the work of prodigious engineers. It presupposes a technology that far outstripped all that was then possible, in this respect not altogether unlike Ledoux's spherical house. And such a technology would have required in turn an extraordinarily advanced science. Laputa then represents a society whose ethos is ruled by science and technology, and ruled by them in a way that has caused it to lose quite literally touch with the earth, and that is to say also, that has caused the members of that society to lose touch with their bodies, to become in a sense weightless. They thus invite comparison with Chamisso's man without shadow to whom I introduced you last time.

But let me return to the story. Gulliver, you may recall, first glimpses this island when, after a hair-raising encounter with some pirates, he finds himself marooned on a rocky island. Suddenly he sees a huge shadow moving across the ground:

I turned back, and perceived a vast opaque body between me and the Sun, moving forwards towards the Island: it seemed to be about two Miles high, and hid the Sun six or seven Minutes. ... I took my Pocket-

Perspective and could plainly discover numbers of People moving up and down the sides of it, which appeared to be sloping. ... the Reader can hardly conceive my Astonishment to behold an Island in the Air, inhabited by Men, who were able (as it should seem) to raise or sink, or put it into a progressive motion as they pleased.¹⁶²

Not only is the flying island, which allows its inhabitants to leave this messy earth beneath them, the work of prodigious engineers, but, as already with the first balloons, the power of flight is quickly put to military use: we learn that the Laputans are able to destroy whatever humans below might dare challenge their hegemony by raining destruction on them from above. Shock and awe would cow them into submission — another way in which the early 18th century here anticipated what was still to come.

2

But back to our story! Eventually Gulliver succeeds in communicating to the inhabitants of this floating island his plight and they lower a seat to raise him up rather in the way Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds* is raised up in a basket from which he contemplates celestial matters and converses with the clouds, the presiding spirits of his school, surrounded by students engaged in all sorts of ridiculous pursuits, where Aristophanes singles out astronomy and geometry. Swift no doubt also had Aristophanes in mind when he wrote this third part of *Gulliver's Travels*. Both Aristophanes, with his description of Socrates's *Thoughtery*,² and Swift with his description of the island of Laputa, poke fun at a philosophy and a science that by raising itself above the world has lost touch with it.

Aristophanes' comedy suffers from the way it presents Socrates as little more than a buffoon. Plato was to be much kinder to Aristophanes when he caricatured him in the *Symposium*. But the image the conservative Aristophanes sketches of Socrates does raise

¹⁶² Jonathan Swift, *Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World*, illustrated by Charles Edmund Brock (New York: Macmillan, 1894), p. 186-188.

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some serious questions, questions that Nietzsche was later to repeat in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Indeed we find in this comedy already an anticipation of the charges that were later to be raised against Socrates by the Athenians: Aristophanes' Socrates does not believe in Zeus, or for that matter in any gods. He is godless. And that lack of belief is said to have its foundation in the way, with his faith in the power of reason, Socrates allows his spirit to soar, to mingle with the clouds. This lets him think up new maxims that threaten the very foundation that had supported Athenian society. In the *Clouds* already this leads to the charge that Socrates is a corrupter of the young. The play ends with the burning of Socrates' Thoughtery, described as a small and dingy building, by the enraged Strepsiades, whose son learned all too well what Socrates had to teach.

Towards the beginning of the play there is a suggestion that Socrates, with his head in the clouds, had outdone even Thales, as I have already pointed out, not only the first philosopher, but the first absent-minded philosopher, whose carelessness lets him fall into a well, to be mocked by a pretty Thracian servant girl, for whom he might have had eyes. The flight of thought means inevitably also a kind of absent-mindedness.

Here I should perhaps note that when Peter Schlemihl tried to explain how he came to lose his shadow, he says it was because of a kind of carelessness. And indeed, he did not take adequate care of the whole human being. Nor did Socrates. Nor did Descartes. When human beings understand themselves as first of all thinking substances, they leave behind or perhaps better below them those caring beings we mortals are first of all and most of the time. The men of Laputa, too, understand themselves first of all as such thinking substances. Most of the time they are quite oblivious of their bodies.

It is not surprising therefore that on arriving on the floating island Gulliver should find himself surrounded by rather strange looking people:

Their heads were all reclined either to the right or to the left; one of their Eyes turned inward, and the other directly up to the Zenith. Their outward Garments were adorned with the figures of Suns, Moons, and Stars; interwoven with those of Fiddles, Flutes, Harps, Trumpets, Guittars,

Harpsichords, more and many Instruments of Musick, unknown to us in *Europe*.¹⁶³

Note that the normal posture, which allows us to look ahead and also left and right, has here been left behind. That posture does justice to our being on earth, to our having to watch out where we are going. Like Socrates and his students in the *Clouds*, like Thales, the Laputans are oriented towards heaven rather than the earth. With one eye they are thus turned upward, to the zenith. But we should not forget their other eye, which is turned inward. Laputa is a society of introverts.

This invites an application to architecture: to a person who looks ahead, corresponds a building turned to the outside with its doors and windows. To Swift's description of the posture of the Laputans corresponds a different kind of architecture, one not extroverted but introverted, opening itself to the zenith with a giant eye. What kind of architecture corresponds to such a description? By now the answer should be obvious: the Roman Pantheon, whose one great eye opens its body to the starry firmament, and whose seamless circles make the great interior an image of cosmic order. I have already mentioned the importance of the fact that the center of this space should be inaccessible to us. This is a space that does not seem to want to open itself to the human world: here verticality and geometric order triumph over horizontality and the often chaotic everyday in a way that fails to do justice to the requirements of human dwelling.

We can thus distinguish an extroverted from an introverted architecture. Compare in this respect the Parthenon to the Pantheon. The former is extroverted. What matters is first of all the exterior, how it presents itself to the community. The dark interior is less significant. The Pantheon is, comparatively speaking, introverted. That represents an important shift, not just in architecture but in the underlying spirituality. What matters in the Pantheon is first of all the interior. Christian architecture was to follow that model

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p., 190.

3

But let me return to Swift's description of the appearance of the Laputans: "Their outward garments were adorned with the figures of suns, moons, and stars; interwoven with those of fiddles, flutes, harps, and trumpets, guitars, harpsichords and many instruments of music unknown to us in Europe." Like the Pythagoreans, the Laputans are great astronomers and great musicians. They are infatuated with the harmonies of the cosmos and with music. With them music is the first of the arts. That ranking is of interest. Once again Swift is ahead of his time: this ranking came to be widely accepted only in the Europe of the 19th century. Kant still considered music a somewhat questionable art. Only two decades later Schopenhauer was to place it above all the other arts. By then such a ranking no longer seemed questionable.

I pointed out that the Laputans join an extraordinary preoccupation with what is above, with the cosmos, to an equally extraordinary introversion. That finds expression in their bearing and in their style of dress. As Descartes shows us, pure theory and the turn to the self, belong together. It is precisely this inward turn, to which corresponds Descartes retreat into a dingy little stove-heated room which allowed his spirit to soar until reality itself threatens to lose its reality, as doubt takes hold of the philosopher. Such introversion means inevitably a loss of community. And so it is hardly surprising that the Laputans should have had trouble communicating with one another.

I observed here and there many in the habits of Servants, with a blown Bladder fastened like a Flayl to the end of a short Stick, which they carried in their Hands. In each Bladder was a small quantity of dried Pease or little Pebbles (as I was afterwards inform'd). With these Bladders they now and then flapped the Mouths and Ears of those who stood near them, of which practice I could not then conceive the meaning; it seems, the Minds of these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the Discourses of others, without being

rouzed by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing.¹⁶⁴

The thinker's freedom of thought is bought at the price of a certain absence from himself as an embodied self, existing as part of a community of such selves. In this respect the Laputans are not unlike the man without a shadow.

This *Flapper* is likewise employed diligently to attend his Master in his Walks, and upon occasion to give him a soft Flap on his Eyes; because he is always so wrapped up in cogitation, that he is in manifest danger of falling down every Precipice, and bouncing his Head against every Post, and in the Streets, of justling others or being justled himself into the Kennel.¹⁶⁵

Think of people preoccupied with their cell-phones and quite oblivious of those around them.

4

Later Gulliver is joined for dinner by four courtiers, to discover to his astonishment that a shoulder of mutton had been cut into an equilateral triangle, a piece of beef into a rhomboid, and a pudding into a cycloid. And as food is subjected to the rule of geometry, so is clothing, and so is building. A love of geometry defined the being of the Laputans. We can assume that they would have loved Cubist paintings. The analogy that links these four, taste in food, taste in clothing, taste in painting, and taste in building, was to be exploited later by Adolf Loos. All are expressions of the same ruling ethos.

That the Laputans should want to dress themselves in the image of the heavens stands to reason. This then is a logocentric society that seeks to subject whatever its members encounter to their logos.

Their Ideas are perpetually conversant in lines and figures. If they would, for example, praise the beauty of a woman, or any other animal, they

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.190.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 192.

describe it by Rhombs, Circles, Parallelograms, Ellipses, and other Geometrical Terms, or by words of Art drawn from Musick, needless here to repeat.¹⁶⁶

As this quote shows, these logocentrists are misogynists. Women are included among animals. That the Laputans should neglect their wives is to be expected.

One can infer that the art of such a literally rootless people, each person lost in himself, would have to be geometric and abstract. In art, too, the Laputans were modernists before their time.

And that their building would have a similar look is also to be expected. In their architecture pure geometric forms can be expected to have ruled, for in all their production there is, as we have seen, an excess of geometric order. And so it is hardly surprising that the houses of the Laputans are said to be generally ill built, because overly intellectual, and not sufficiently attentive to the constraints placed on architectural fantasies by the earth on which we have to live, e.g. by the weather. Given their general contempt for all that is material, that belongs to the earth, their infatuation with ideas, it is only to be expected that they should pay scant attention to the little things that matter in everyday living, such as where dust will collect or how something will wear. A modern example is provided by the Seeley G. Mudd Chemistry Building at Vassar, built in 1984 at a cost of \$7.2 million, replacing the old chemistry building. Despite favorable reviews there were obvious problems with it. The open ducts were of the time, but little thought was given to how to take care of the dust that would inevitably collect on them. The building did not wear well and in the spring of this year it was replaced by an open green space. In too many modern designs an abstract aesthetic imagination gets the better of more mundane considerations. The Laputans, too, do not reckon with time, with how things will wear, as they should.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 198.

5

Somewhat surprisingly, while shut up in their separate private worlds, the Laputans have yet an extraordinary interest in public affairs and passionately dispute every inch of a party opinion even though it has little relevance to their lives. In this respect, too, they resemble us. The Laputans would have loved television and the ways it brings public affairs close to each one of us. And they would have made great pundits on today's talk shows: our pundits, too, are all too often unable to listen and I think our television stations should consider hiring flappers to hit some of these pundits on their ears when they interrupt and don't listen, preoccupied, as they are with their own thoughts.

I should also mention that Gulliver speculates about the etymology of Laputa. According to one etymology, which he finds too contrived, it means high governor, suggesting dreams of mastery. He then offers a learned conjecture of his own, which would have Laputa derive from "*quasi lap outed: lap* signifying properly the dancing of the sunbeams in the sea, and *outed* a wing:" This etymology suggests dreams of flying. The true etymology he tells us he could never learn. We are told, however, that the language of the Laputans sounds rather like Italian. In Spanish *La puta* is the harlot, raising the question why this floating abode of logocentrists who have distanced themselves from their bodies should bear just that name. Recall that in the Bible Babylon is called a harlot. Laputa figures the modern Babylon.

6

But instead of saying that the inhabitants of Laputa have lost touch with their bodies, should we not rather say that they have transcended them? And is such self-transcendence not a presupposition of genuine freedom and scientific objectivity? And we should not over-emphasize the extent to which the Laputans have lost touch with reality. As already pointed out, the creation of their floating island presupposes an extraordinarily advanced science and technology. And science and technology translate into very real power. Not that it is such power that the Laputans are most interested in. Their love of geometric forms is pure: they love such forms for their own sake. With

them they feel spiritually at home. And so it is easy to imagine such logocentrists happy in Ledoux's spherical shelter, despite the impracticality of that design. They would have supported Boullée, when he challenged Vitruvius and declared "that the first principles of architecture are to be discerned in symmetrical solids, such as cubes, pyramids, and, most of all spheres, which are, the only perfect architectural shapes which can be devised."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 24. See also Joseph Rykwert, "The Nefarious Influence on Modern Architecture of the neo-Classical Architects Boullée and Durand," *The Necessity of Artifice* (New York: Rizzoli, 1982), pp. 60 - 65.

18. Dreams of Cities

1

Many of us dream of genuine community and of architectural environments that answer to the promise of that dream. We may associate such dreams with places that recall our childhood, with townscapes that speak of a world that has passed. Heidegger thus dreamed of his native Meßkirch. Some of you may have similarly experienced the special aura of built environments that invite talk of a *genius loci*. I spent part of my childhood in just such a town and in dreams and daydreams I sometimes return to it —



Königshofen, Marktplatz

only sometimes: at other times my dreams are of very different places.



Vieques, Dome

And the fact that today I live in a very different sort of home says quite a lot.

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And yet, something draws many of us to such old world communities; here we find a counter-image to the kind of urban environment we are familiar with and are likely to live in, where the contrast between the harmonious, but too well bounded, perhaps even suffocating appearance of a traditional city, where a dominant church often provided the easily recognized center, and the fragmented, much more open look of its modern counterpart invites reflection, as does the fact that from the very beginning modern life should have been shadowed by nostalgic longings for a kind of integration and organic community denied to us by much that we value most about the world we live in: a freedom made possible only by technological advances. Such nostalgia easily leads to dreams of a fusion of the achievements of modernity and the kind of cohesion and not just physical, but spiritual shelter, we associate with traditional cities. And does the idea of a dominant building that can provide an architectural ensemble with an organizing center not provide an important clue? Think of what Gehry's Guggenheim Museum did to the city of Bilbao.

2

In *The Ethical Function of Architecture* I suggested that we may liken the history of building to an evolving ellipse, its foci marked first of all by building and architecture, by house and temple. In the Western tradition this bipolarity has found one theoretical expression in speculations concerning the appearance of the primitive hut, addressing our need for physical shelter, on the one hand, of the temple in Jerusalem, addressing our need for spiritual shelter, on the other. One had needy humanity for its author, the other God. Every church was once thought to have been prefigured by this temple, which looked back to paradise, forward to the Heavenly City of the Book of Revelations.

For much of the history of Western architecture temple or church have thus been the leading architectural tasks, although increasingly not only the sacred, but also the secular, demanded architectural representation: in the West city hall, palace, and then a host of other building tasks gradually came to rival the church in significance, until finally such proliferation of significant building tasks, which came to include not only houses and apartment buildings, but increasingly also such utilitarian structures as

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railroad stations and airports, factories, and office buildings, called the very idea of "the leading architectural task" into question. Does the distinction between buildings and works of architecture, while no doubt applicable to traditional architecture, still cast much light on building today? Is not any building worthy an architect's attention? Compare, e.g. a modern apartment house, such as Corbusier's *Habité* in Marseilles (1947-1952) with his Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp (1954). To be sure they serve very different functions. But we would not want to oppose one of these as a mere building to the other as a work of architecture. That very opposition seems to belong to a world that has passed. Are houses and apartment buildings not at least as likely to be included in any list of architectural masterpieces of the past hundred years as churches? Think of Frank Lloyd Wright. How important is it to hang on to urban figure-ground relationships and to the kind of legibility they confer? Does democracy not demand a different, more homogeneous kind of urban environment?

Hegel insisted that architecture "on the side of its highest vocation"¹⁶⁸ lies irrevocably behind us moderns, where Hegel, too, linked what has been lost to the sacred and its integrating power. Hegel, however, insists, that this loss is not to be mourned, but to be welcomed as a corollary of humanity's coming of age, inseparably bound up with the kind of individual autonomy on which we moderns have come to insist. To be sure, many, including many architects, have refused to accept the finality of that loss. Heidegger was by no means the only to look to art, and more especially to architecture, to establish a world and that means to fashion a new sense of community, and here again, like so many others, he found his model in the Greek polis. With some justice the architectural theorist Volker Welter could even speak of a Metaphysical Imperative informing Urban Design in the early 20th century.¹⁶⁹ Note that this imperative focuses on

¹⁶⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1937), vol. 12, p. 30. Trans. F. P. B. Osmaston, "Selections from The Philosophy of Fine Arts," *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 391.

¹⁶⁹ Volker M. Welker, "On Temples and Cities — The Metaphysical Imperative in Urban Design around 1900," a lecture given on March 26, 1999 at Yale University. The

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some building able to gather an urban conglomerate into a whole, as the Tower of Babel was supposed to do, and as churches did in countless medieval cities. This raises the question: just what, if anything, do we, at the beginning of the third millennium, still have to learn from that imperative?

That there is tension between much that we value today, including especially our freedom, our spiritual and physical mobility, and the look of a traditional city must be granted. Just think of the way the car has affected the look of our cities. And how will the electronic revolution change our experience of space and distance and therefore the way we shall live and build fifty or a hundred years from now? Many of us experience a well-preserved traditional city, presided over by temple or cathedral, as a kind of museum. No doubt, there are and will be more and more cities, and more populous cities than ever before. Yet these are likely to be increasingly ill defined conglomerates of eminently replaceable buildings, joined by shared support systems. What will such "cities" still have in common with cities like Athens with its Acropolis, with Florence with its Duomo, with Venice gathered together by the Piazza San Marco. Is it even desirable that the traditional city, so understood, have a future? The anti-architectural, but not therefore necessarily anti-urban rhetoric of so much post-modern theorizing invites reflection, suggesting perhaps, not just a strained relationship, but the pending divorce of architecture and the traditional city. Just what is it about the traditional city that should be preserved?

What concerns Volker Welter are not the functional and pragmatic aspects of city planning. Like Heidegger, he too is interested in a less reductive approach, in something other, as he puts it, something "above and beyond the physical surroundings" — he calls it "metaphysical." He reminds us of the way the history of modern town planning and urban design has been haunted by thoughts of an ideal city, which is said by Welter, quoting Helen Rosenau's *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution*, to represent "a religious vision, or a secular view, in which social consciousness of the need of the

following observations have their origin in my response to that lecture. See also Volker M. Welter, *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

population is allied with a harmonious conception of artistic unity."¹⁷⁰ A robust sense of community is here tied to what Welter calls "artistic unity." As they were supposed to in a classical work of art, ideal content and artistic expression here are joined, where the question poses itself whether the kind of unity that has so often been demanded of such works of art as paintings or sculptures should be demanded of works of architecture, more especially of cities. What should put us on guard here is the way in which the very integrity of such perfect works of art, in which every part strikes us as being just as it should be, makes such works, in their very essence, uninhabitable. In just what sense should a house, let alone a city, be like a work of art?

But let me return to that ideal city that especially at the turn of the century haunted so many architects and theorists of architecture. To achieve such an ideal city, we are told, requires "a guiding ideal, religious or otherwise, which comprises an awareness of the necessary betterment of the situation of a city's population, and an aesthetic, most likely an architectural concept, which reflects, expresses, or embodies the social consciousness underpinning the ideal city." The building of such a city require then something like a shared sense concerning what matters, held together by a guiding ideal of what constitutes the good life. This is indeed a familiar dream, if difficult to square both with the shape of the society we live in and with the appearance of our cities, whose centers no longer seem able to hold them together.

It is easy to come up with examples of quite a number of such projected ideal cities, beginning with Whitwell's design for Owen's *New Harmony*, an ideal city based on Charles Fourier's socialist vision. Let me review just a few key ideas that keep returning in such discussions:

1. First of all there is the thought that the ideal city should be a whole, a thought that invites more discussion of just what sort of whole. Machines and works of art are very different sorts of whole. It was presumably the latter the Austrian architect Joseph

¹⁷⁰ Helen Rosenau, *The Ideal City in its Architectural Evolution* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 4-5. Patrick Geddes, *The Returning Gods*, 1914, p. 1.

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Maria Olbrich had in mind when he proclaimed that to build anything less than "a city, a whole city" would be pointless; when he demanded that everything in that city is to be "governed by the same spirit," including streets and gardens, palaces and the cottages, tables and armchairs, lamps and spoons, all expressions of the same sensibility. The kind of unity that Olbrich had in mind is not so much the unity of a single, strongly integrated work of art, as the unity of an artistic style — think of some Gothic or Renaissance city. The lament so widespread around the turn of the century, concerning the death of the great styles of the past belongs here. Closely related are condemnations of the decadence of the modern age, a decadence that was thought to find its depressing expression in the fragmented look of our cities. In Darmstadt Olbrich was given a chance to begin to realize some of his ideas in the years just preceding World War One. *Art nouveau* was to be the style appropriate to the modern world. Also called to Darmstadt was Peter Behrens, who subsequently moved from art nouveau to a more decidedly modern style and as artistic consultant to the German industrial giant AEG had a chance to realize his ideas concerning stylistic unity on an extraordinary scale, from teacans to his monumental turbine factory. Behrens was enormously influential. Among his students and assistants from 1907 to 1912 were Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius.

3

But often the architects Welter cites were thinking not so much of stylistic unity as of what we can call artistic unity, the unity that a work of art is supposed to possess in which everything is just as it should be. The city is to be thought in the image of the unity that traditionally has been demanded of the work of art. But how is the unity of the work of art to be understood here? There is no simple answer. In the late eighteenth century we meet thus with a gradual shift in taste away from a more traditional beauty that relied on hierarchical organization, to a beauty that relied on a balance of more or less equal elements. David's *Oath of the Horatii* can serve as an example. That this shift in taste from patterns of subordination to patterns of coordination possesses not only an aesthetic, but also a political significance I can here only suggest. We can also trace this

shift in architecture. I mention this here to suggest that when Morris or Muthesius are said by Welter to cast the net of artistic unity ever wider in an attempt to reform all aspects of life and society it is important just how such unity is understood.

One question this raises is how the work of art is thought here. And many of the theorists discussed thought the city, not just in the image of the successful work of art, but more specifically, in the image of the work of art as thought by pre-Kantian aesthetics, as a perfect whole presided over by some organizing element. Baumgarten comes to mind, who claimed that the artist, as a second god, should strive to create another world, world understood here as a self-justifying whole. Translated into urban terms this suggests a city presided over by some dominating building, most often temple or church, whose place as the leading building task may be reoccupied by, say, "a house of labor," a theatre, or a national monument. That such a city would have to have a clearly identifiable center, built in the image of the Acropolis or a medieval cathedral is to be expected. Here would be a place where, as Welter says of Olbrich's *Ernst Ludwig House* at Darmstadt's Mathildenhöhe, "where the sense and the self-perception of the community as an ideal community was actually forged." Such a forging of community invites questioning. That it responds to a widely lamented sense of a loss of community can be granted. "The design of secular temples and cult buildings" is indeed, as Welter points out, "a standard phenomenon in nineteenth-century architectural history." And of course not only of 19th century. This raises two questions:

1. Do we need such strongly centered cities?
2. And if so, is there a building type or are there building types that offer themselves today as worthy if reoccupying the place of temple or church?

4

It seems reasonable to suppose that if some building type is to deserve the place once occupied by temple or church, it must be understood to serve an idea that deserves to reoccupy the place once occupied by the gods or God. This then would have to be a city, to speak with the Scottish town-planner Patrick-Geddes, dominated by a spiritual

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idea, celebrated with an appropriate ritual, a city like ancient, Athens, "with Acropolis and Temples, Academe and Forum, Stadium and Theatre."¹⁷¹

From the transference of the conception of the art-work as a perfect, whole, sufficient unto itself, to the city, it follows that such an ideal city should have no significant outside. Ideally such a city would become the organizing center of its world. The architect and architectural historian Lethaby thus proposed to so transform London that its architecture would be the fitting embodiment of the idea of this city as the order and unity-bestowing heart of the British Empire, at its center the sacred way of the transfigured *Strand*. In the early 19th century King Ludwig I of Bavaria sought to give the city of Munich its center in the *Ludwigstrasse*. In both these cases the organizing center is not a building, but a street, a spine if sorts. More traditional is the way Patrick Geddes planned to develop all of Palestine "into a single Region-City with the future Hebrew University in Jerusalem as its metaphysical center." What we need to question here is, if I may put it this way, the ontological status of what is called here a "metaphysical center." Is it more than a human product born of need and nostalgia for some perceived lost plenitude. Such production invites the category of kitsch, where essential to kitsch, as I understand it and pointed out in a preceding lecture, is the reoccupation of the place that once belonged to something experienced as divine with something that is no more than an all too human artifact. Think once more of Hitler and his architectural dreams, including the dream to transform Berlin into the capital of his Third Reich.

There are of course no ideal cities. And urban environments that come close to deserving description as "perfect architecturally and artistically unified environments" are not necessarily cities that we would like to live in: their very aesthetic perfection, I have suggested, tends to make them stifling. More promising, it would seem, is therefore Professor Welter's second way in which dreams of the ideal city find expression "in a metaphysical city center such as a single building, an ensemble of buildings or a symbolic space." Let me return to Patrick Geddes, for whom a city was a geographical, a

¹⁷¹ Patrick Geddes, *The Returning Gods*, 1914, p. 1

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historical and a spiritual entity, where the last was for Geddes its most important aspect. One might agree with this without therefore giving the same importance to the idea that a city must have a metaphysical center, granted that cities like Edinburgh and Athens, like medieval cities, invite such talk. So does Washington, D. C.. "This center," we heard, "not only expresses a set of ideas dominating an ideal city, but, and far more important, allegedly initiates the realisation of these ideas. Potentially, the metaphysical center can guarantee the community's perfect character before, above and beyond any environmental improvement." Such a metaphysical center was said to safeguard "the ideal character of the ideal city" by addressing "the souls of city and inhabitants" — not mere material considerations. Lethaby invites us to reflect on the power of architecture to form a civilization. A civilized life is said to require a disciplined town.¹⁷²

The community building function of art and especially of architecture is recognized. Often indebted to Nietzsche and Wagner, such ideas, as I have suggested, were quite characteristic of the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. In different ways, they are still with us today. They explain the desire for buildings that would provide a city with an identity establishing center. An example is provided by Michael Graves' Portland Building (1982). Such buildings may be understood as a response to a loss of community that was perceived to be inseparable from the liberal conception of the state as a soul-less artifact, constructed by selfish, atomic individuals as a remedy to the consequences of their own selfishness. Does the progressive privatization, not just of religion, but of morality, not have its foundation in the value we have placed on the individual and his or her freedom? And must a loss of community and a growing sense of disorientation not follow in their wake? That liberal democracy should have been shadowed by dreams of a reorientation that would once again allow us to feel at home in the world, by dreams of an architecture that would restore to us what we have lost, is therefore only to be expected. And given a growing conviction that religions were

¹⁷² William Richard Lethaby, 'Architecture as Form in Civilization', in W.R. Lethaby, *Form in Civilization. Collected Papers on Art and Labour* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 1-13, p. 5.

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themselves products of the human spirit, why not look once again to human creativity to establish a new ideal and to art to express it so convincingly that, once again, it would bind scattered individuals together in some genuine community.

Let me add to the examples already given the example of Gropius, addressing the students of the Weimar Bauhaus, confronted by all that the end of World War One had left in ruins, inviting them to understand themselves as part of a new elite, from which would grow a new belief, "a universally great, enduring, spiritual-religious idea" that would find its expression in an architecture worthy to take its place besides the great cathedrals. Here, too, the architect is asked not just to build, but to edify, to help create a new common sense. He is to shape space and time for future generations in a way that would recall individuals from that dispersal and atomization into which they are led by the modern world to an order in which they can once again recognize their place and vocation. Projecting the "miracle of the Gothic cathedrals," as he called it, into the future, Gropius dreamed of an architecture that once again will be "the crystalline expression of man's noblest thoughts, his ardor, his humanity, his faith, his religion!"

But we overburden architecture disastrously when we thus expect from it such edification. Disastrously, because we do not make here sufficient room for freedom. Totalitarian tendencies inevitably shadow talk of an edifying architecture or the artistic creation of a new common sense. We may well wonder whether architects like Paul Ludwig Troost and Albert Speer or, for that matter, Karl Ehn, the architect that built Vienna's Karl Marx Hof (1927-30), did not in fact come closer to realizing the dream of a new cathedral than did the Bauhaus. The example of Nazi architecture today shadows all discussions that would assign to architecture the task of restoring to us a new sense of community? It also shadows my talk of an ethical function for architecture.

Must we moderns not reject all such dreams? Is it not a reasonable pragmatism, not art or architecture, that today alone can assign us our place and that should decide the shape of the city of the future? Was Hegel not right when he claimed that architecture in what, admittedly, was once its highest sense, lies behind us moderns? If freedom demands that the individual liberate him- or herself from the accidents of what happens to be the case, also of what he or she may happen to be, must our real home then not be a

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spiritual home to which the sensible, and that means also art and especially architecture, cannot do justice? From this point of view, our physical dwellings should have a look and feel of mobility, replaceability. And our cities should be made up of such spiritually mobile buildings. Does the attempt to assign an ethical community-building function to art, and especially to architecture, not represent a cultural regression? Should we then not perhaps understand the decay of architecture in what Hegel called its highest sense, and with it the decay of the sort of city celebrated by so many architects and writers, as just one more sign that mankind is finally coming of age?

5

And yet, while affirming the legitimacy of reason's emancipatory promise, while acknowledging the very real mastery of nature reason has brought us, acknowledging that it would be irresponsible to turn our backs on the Enlightenment, we yet also must question a one-sided emphasis on reason and freedom. To do justice to the whole human being we have to recognize all that binds us to the earth, even as our spirit invites us treat this earth as material to be used by us as we are able and see fit. To the liberated subject, the ineliminable transcendence of reality announces itself first of all as the concrete, sensuous, arbitrary, contingent. The place that as a matter of fact I occupy, to reason has to appear as a place that I just happen to occupy. The sex which as a matter of fact determines who I am to reason appears as a contingent fact that does not touch my essence. This goes for all my physical characteristics, also for my desires, my particular background, my history. Reason lets me see the factual as the merely contingent. But if my biological and historical make-up are understood as merely contingent facts, who is this "I"? When I take away all my supposedly accidental, contingent properties, what remains? In the end such a self has to become itself empty and abstract, a mere ghost of a self, without a shadow, a freedom unclaimed and indifferent to and therefore lost in the world. Such a ghostly self would indeed have no use for architecture.

But just at this point the need for a fuller self-affirmation and that means also the need for architecture reappears. In this connection the architecture of Bruno Taut seems to me to deserve our attention., especially the public housing projects he realized in

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Berlin in first three decades of the 20th century, such as the *Tuschkastensiedlung*, built just before the beginning of World War (1912f), today a UNESCO World Heritage site, and two later *Siedlungen*, *Onkel Toms Hütte* (1926), und the *Hufeisensiedlung*, (1925-1933), it, too, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Far more immediately and more fully than any other art, architecture can and should re-present the essential strife between spirit and matter, mirroring the essential strife within the human being as the *animal rationale*. The modern world, to the extent that it is ruled by the Cartesian project to render the human being the master and possessor of nature, would be rid of such strife, not recognizing that values claim us only as long as, even as they are acknowledged, endorsed, and pruned by reason, yet retain their roots in what more immediately claims us, in nature. Art, and more especially architecture is needed to recall the human being to the whole self: to the *animal* and to the *ratio*, to nature and spirit. It is needed also to recall us to the community and to the individual, to all the tensions that are constitutive of our being. But because such tensions weigh on us, architecture today has to chart a difficult course between, on the one hand, a proud self-assertion that calls into question all that would bind freedom, and, on the other, a need for spiritual shelter, all too ready to be liberated from a freedom that has become too heavy a burden to bear. That is to say, it has to chart a course between, on the one hand, those who, suspicious of all who claim something like an ethical or political function for architecture, would leave it only its functional, pragmatic, and aesthetic aspects, and, on the other, those who demand of architecture that it forge a new sense of community, even in the absence of a living common sense. In this sense we can say that architecture, and more especially city-planning, like art, today faces the task of charting a course between, on the one hand, nihilism, on the other kitsch.

19. The Tower of Babel and Jacob's Ladder

1

I the preceding lecture I discussed a number of attempts to gather a city into a whole, to fashion it into something like a work of art by means of some dominant work of architecture that would provide it with an integrating center. The Biblical paradigm of such an attempt is the raising of the Tower of Babel. I showed you that tower a number of times. I would like to begin this lecture by taking a closer look at Brueghel's representation of the Tower of Babel, hanging in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna. What strikes us immediately is the contrast between the still unfinished tower, already piercing the clouds, literally a skyscraper, and countless much more modest structures in the picture: first of all the houses that make up the surrounding city, but also farmhouses, city walls, and bridges; and the fragile shelters that, somewhat like swallow nests, cling to the tower itself, presumably put up by the workers to satisfy their need for shelter while work on the tower is proceeding. Note the contrast between nest-like houses and an architecture that communicates its failure to provide human beings a refuge from the terror of time.

The contrast established in this picture between the monumental architecture of the never to be finished tower and these much more modest buildings must have been quite familiar to Brueghel's contemporaries, especially to those living in a city like Rome, which Brueghel visited in 1552-53. Brueghel himself is said I have been inspired by the remains of the Roman Colosseum, in its ruined state for Christian visitors of the Holy City a symbol of the vanity to rely on human ingenuity to create a lasting community. When Brueghel visited it, the ruin was presumably in a less well kept state than today. Here an etching by Hieronymus Cock, dating from 1551, made thus shortly before Brueghel visited Rome; and an image by Piranesi. More suggestive, however, is Piranesi's view of the Theater of Marcellus. We meet with the same contrast between serviceable dwellings, providing the living with shelter, and an architecture built on a very different scale, and testifying to much greater ambitions, but now in a state of ruin.

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But we do not have to turn to such examples. The contrast between more modest buildings and more monumental architecture was very much part of the look of the medieval city. In many such cities we still meet with the same contrast between some monumental work of architecture, say a church or city walls, and more modest buildings. And there are of course modern counterparts of such self-consciously monumental architecture. To pick two from New Haven: Paul Rudolph's Temple Street Parking Garage (1961) and Kevin Roche's Coliseum (1965-1972): The latter, unlike its Roman namesake, was not allowed to turn into a ruin, but ignominiously razed to the ground in 2007.

But let me return to the Brueghel. Not only here did the magnitude of the work undertaken prevent its completion. The painting thus not only returns us to the by now familiar distinction between two kinds of building: between mere buildings and works of architecture, but it calls architecture into question.

Pevsner, as we saw, suggested that what distinguishes architecture from mere building is an aesthetic concern, a concern for what we can call the beauty of a building. But an aesthetic concern was not what led to the building of the Tower of Babel, at least if we follow the Biblical account:

.. they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth," And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of man had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing they propose to do will be impossible for them. Come let us go down and confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off from building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (*Gen.* 1, 4 - 9)

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The tower's builders wanted "to make a name" for themselves so that they would "not be scattered about the face of the earth." Building here serves a community's desire to hold itself together and to make a name of itself. The building becomes a kind of logo for the city. And think of all the cities of which that can be said. What, for example, do you think of first when you think of Sydney? Or of Paris? Or of Bilbao? The work of architecture here is understood as the product of a communal act of self-assertion. So understood architecture has not so much an aesthetic, as a political and an ethical function.

Crucial in all these cases is the way architecture relates or fails to relate, responds or fails to respond, to the ground provided by the existing buildings and the land. Note especially the shift in scale. If the architect's intent is to create an aesthetic monument, a certain disregard of the pre-given context is to be expected. Such a disregard may in fact enhance the work of architecture's monumental power. To the extent that the architect understands himself as someone whose task it is to transform buildings into ideally self-sufficient, self-assertive aesthetic objects, he must tear the ever evolving fabric of the city. Some architectural theorists have insisted on just this. Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre thus insist, invoking the authority of Aristotle, that the work of architecture, like every work of art, "is a world within the world, 'complete,' 'integral,' 'whole,' a world where there is no contradiction."¹⁷³ Given this conception of the work of architecture as another world, all "*outside conditions*" must be considered "significant obstacles." By its very nature, the aesthetic approach to architecture is opposed to every contextualism. "In ancient Greece, temples" thus "turned a cold shoulder to every structure that happened to be next to them, even if this other structure was another temple."¹⁷⁴

I do not want to raise here the question of the adequacy of this characterization. Vincent Scully, for example, has provided us with a very different understanding of

¹⁷³ Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, *Classical Architecture. The Poetics of Order* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1986), p. 9.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

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Greek temple architecture.¹⁷⁵ But the basic point must be affirmed and could be illustrated with modern examples: to the extent that a particular being is approached as ideally a self-sufficient aesthetic object, works of architecture will turn a cold shoulder, not only to their neighbors, but to the world that would constrain it with its demands and necessities. To be sure, the world may not be forgotten. As in Brueghel's painting, it provides the inevitable, pre-given point of departure, the ground needed to support the figures provided by the architect.

The building of the Tower of Babel, I suggested, can be understood as an act of communal self-assertion. With such works a community presents to itself the ethos presiding over it. That ethos, it would seem, cannot be established by architecture, but it can be reinforced by architecture, by being represented. Consider once more the Washington Mall and the adjacent architecture that is part of it, including architectural representations of the three branches of government, also of the persons who helped establish the ethos of this country, and of the wars and sacrifices made to preserve it.

But the Tower of Babel did not help to preserve the community that raised it. The building of this enormous tower, and this invites further reflection, did not lead to the desired preservation, but to the destruction of community, as if to say that architecture is unable to gather a multitude into a genuine community. In this sense Brueghel's Tower casts its shadow also over my claim of an ethical function for architecture. But let us listen once more to the Biblical account: "the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off from building the city." The story of the fall repeats itself: pride once again robs human beings of their home. There is the suggestion that we cannot fashion ourselves into a genuine, lasting community by raising such a work, no matter how gigantic, a suggestion that community and home are in a sense a gift, the gift of God in this case, who provides a community with a shared center of meaning, able to gather a multitude into a genuine community.

¹⁷⁵ Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods. Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised ed. (New York: Praeger, 1969).

2

Brueghel's painting of Babel's tower warns us that such assertive architecture, far from gathering a multitude into a genuine community, scatters and isolates them. But how can architecture establish a communal ethos? I have already suggested that what gathers individuals into genuine community can only be a shared sense of what matters.

Let me turn to another passage from *Genesis*, one that once was read as part of the consecration rite of every church and served to establish the traditional symbolism of the church as house of God and gate of Heaven.

And he, (Jacob) came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he set it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached the heaven: and behold, the angels of the Lord were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac: the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you. Then Jacob awoke and said: "*Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*" (*Gen. 28, 11-17, RSV*)

We should note these main points: a particular landscape is experienced as filled with the presence of the divine: it is the house of the Lord; God dwells in that particular landscape. In this place, this Bethel, heaven and earth are experienced as somehow linked: it is not only the dwelling place of God but opens up to a higher reality: it is the gate of heaven. The ladder of the dream symbolizes that linkage. That linkage, and this is what matters most in this context, is tied to a trust that extends beyond the individual to

his offspring, extends into an indefinite future. In this particular place the world is experienced as in tune not just with Jacob, but with coming generations.

Jacob responds to this experience by marking the place: he takes the stone on which he slept, turns it into a pillar, transforming the horizontal slab into a vertical post. Later churches reenact that archetypal act: every church once was thought to represent Bethel. On the façade of the abbey church of Bath that understanding finds a very literal expression.

What I want to underscore is that space is experienced here not as homogeneous. There are special places, places that makes us feel closer to what matters. All religions know such sacred places. Often they are associated with some miraculous event. In the Americas the most famous of these place is Guadalupe, today the most visited catholic pilgrimage site in the world. The building of the cathedral was preceded by a number of miracles said to have taken place in December 1531, when the Virgin appeared four times to a simple Mexican peasant on a hill near Mexico City, requesting that a church be built in just this place in her honor. It took quite some time to convince a skeptical church that there had indeed been a miracle. It is a story that has repeated itself again and again all over the world: first reports of a miracle; skeptical church authorities, and a popular response that led church authorities to give in.

What matters to me here is the power of place, the *genius loci*. Our modern way of life has made it difficult for us to make much sense of a *genius loci*, of sacred places. To be sure, most of us will find some places more meaningful than others. For all of us there are special places. Many of these are associated with works of architecture. But would we want to invoke the category of the sacred.

3

Let me address this in a rather personal way. I do not consider myself religious. I certainly feel no need to belong to an organized religion. Religions are for me different attempts to articulate what matters and to give it a place in the life of a community. And I certainly have experienced the power of place that plays such an important part in different religions and in their architecture. Let me give just one example. Whenever my

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wife and I fly to Munich, we like to begin our stay with a visit to a small church. The contrast between the modern airport and the little church we visit shortly after arriving is striking. Although the trip to Oppolding takes at most an hour, the airport and the world to which it belongs seem suddenly far away. In a way I find difficult to explain, visiting the church lets us feel content, makes us somehow more hopeful, and given the world we live in it seems important to hold on to hope.



Oppolding, St. John the Baptist

The small church, dating from 1765, is surrounded by just a few farmhouses. An experience of the spirit of the place, the *genius loci*, is very much part of the experience of the church with its pulpit. The relationship of our experience of beauty to place and



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space deserves further discussion. According to Walter Benjamin the appreciation of the aura of some artifact depends on an appreciation of its embeddeness in its historical context, of its place in the ongoing story of humanity. That is certainly true of my experience of this modest little church. To really appreciate its special aura, we need not only to experience it in its geographical place, but also have to have a sense of its historical place. Such awareness establishes a sense of distance, but also a sense of homecoming. To be sure, we are separated from the world that built this church by the Enlightenment. And yet, that temporal distance loses some of its significance when we allow ourselves to become absorbed by the church and its pulpit and by what they have to tell us. To do so, we must understand its language, its spiritual significance.

What makes this church special is its extraordinary pulpit. The pulpit is a capriccio in stucco, bound neither by the rules of representation, nor by those of architecture, hardly bound, it would seem, even by the serving function that would seem to be part of the very essence of ornament. What here is ornament? What ornament-bearer? The pulpit suggests a musical composition in three movements: first the steep stairs, their ornamental railing introduced by a rising, shallow inverse C-curve capped by a hook or handle that promises the priest support as he begins his ascent, accompanied by the once interrupted, tripartite melody of the hand-rail, releasing him into the pulpit proper. No longer ascending, the hand-rail now gains the horizontal, first curving upward into a small hook, then falling back, its movement interrupted by rocaille forms spilling out of the pulpit, meeting a more vigorous rocaille rising from below, opening a gap in the heavy molding at the pulpit's base, the place of the molding here taken by a flower. The pulpit's "architecture" seems too weak to contain the play of rocaille, which animates, bends, and breaks through moldings and railings, asserting the vertical, preparing for the pulpit's climax: the canopy which here has become a single rocaille that surges upward, crests, encircling the dove of the holy spirit, and disintegrates, returning to earth in two angel's heads and a garland of flowers. One thinks of water, baptismal water — an appropriate association given that the church is consecrated to St. John the Baptist — but also of pentecostal fire, appropriate to a pulpit. Ornament here appears on

the verge of transforming itself into a piece of abstract sculpture, a characteristic feature of the last phase of rococo ornamentation.

We are looking at a pulpit. What is a pulpit? A platform serving the proclamation of God's Word. a small stage on which a member of the clergy stands in order to read the Gospel lesson and deliver a sermon. It is thus a place where the Holy Spirit should descend, where the miracle of Bethel should repeat itself. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church the Holy Spirit, “reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance, but the Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who ‘has spoken through the prophets’ makes us hear the Father's Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome him in faith.”¹⁷⁶ The Catechism also lists the various symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Bible: Perhaps the most obvious one to recognize in this pulpit is the dove. “When Christ comes up from the water of his baptism, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes down upon him and remains with him.” (Matthew 3:16)

In this pulpit, I want to suggest, ornament possesses a spiritual significance: it enacts the descent of the divine logos into the mundane and temporal, if you wish, the wedding of heaven and earth. The joyous character of this wedding is symbolized by the roses you see in this pulpit. And that would seem to be the fundamental mood of this pulpit, as more generally of the Bavarian rococo: joy. Joy triumphs over death, the joy of Easter and the hope connected with it.

4

The Tower of Babel and Jacob's pillar represent rival approaches to architecture, one self-assertive, the other responsive to what is experienced as sacred, where the experience of the sacred is an experience of a transcendent reality, of something that is not the product of human freedom, that claims individuals in such a way that it places

¹⁷⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Catechism of the Catholic Church for the United States of America*. (Washington, D.C.: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), p. 197.

them into an ongoing community. But again the question: what does talk of the sacred, what does the story of Jacob's ladder still mean to us? Does it not lie so thoroughly behind us that all attempts to return to it must seem anachronistic?

Heidegger is one thinker who rejects such a conclusion, although he turns not to the Bible, but to the Greeks. Consider his much cited but deeply ambiguous description of a Greek temple in "The Origin of the Work of Art."

A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god and lets it stand out in the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is itself an extension and delimitation of the precinct as a holy precinct. The temple and its precinct, however, do not fade into the indefinite. It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline, acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from and in this expanse does the nation first return to itself for the fulfillment of its vocation.¹⁷⁷

It is difficult to offer a literal reading of this passage. Already the very beginning causes the reader to stumble: "A building, a Greek temple portrays nothing." How are we to understand "a Greek temple"? Into what region does Heidegger's "a Greek temple" direct us. Many have wondered which temple Heidegger is talking about? But can it really matter whether he was thinking of a particular temple, say the so-called Poseidon Temple in Paestum? As soon as you substitute some particular temple for what the text leaves indefinite, what Heidegger has to say threatens to become incoherent. If

¹⁷⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 1977), pp. 27-28; trans. by Albert Hofstadter, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 41-42.

such a temple were indeed to establish “the world of this historical people,” each temple for the first time, such establishment would have a revolutionary significance and would cause the Greek world to fall apart, only to found it anew. So understood a Greek temple would indeed turn a cold shoulder to its pre-given environment, as Tzonis and Lefavire claim, would be *apolis*, as Heidegger, at about the same time, claimed disturbingly for all genuine creators, including not only poets, but also political leaders, who he wrote must be: “without city and place, lonely, uncanny, without expedients in the midst of all that is, without law and limit, without structure and order, because as creators, they themselves must lay the foundation for all this.”¹⁷⁸ Should we understand the temple’s architect, too, as such a lonely creator? If so, Heidegger’s temple threatens to turn into a version of the Tower of Babel, Heidegger’s Greece into a precursor of Hitler’s Germany.¹⁷⁹ But the text rules out such a literalization. Heidegger’s temple cannot be found on some map. Like the Tower of Babel or Jacob’s pillar, it has its place in an ideal space. As an ideal type it challenges the way we build.

But what sense can we make of what Heidegger calls the presencing of the god in the temple. What is Poseidon to us? What are Athena and Venus to us? Are they more than poetic fictions? But if we do want to call them fictions, such fictions are responsive to powers that preside over our lives, powers that are part of our nature, in this sense experienced by us as in some sense given. Think once more of the Mall in Washington. I want to suggest that every robust common sense depends on such experiences, where it is not necessary to speak of the presencing of gods.

And once this is granted, it should not seem surprising that Heidegger should link the presencing of the god to the establishment of a world.

The temple is said to establish a particular region as a holy precinct, presided over by a god. But upon entering this precinct and in this sense leaving the world of the

¹⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik. Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 40. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983, p. 162.

¹⁷⁹ See Robert Jan van Pelt, “Apocalyptic Abjection,” in Robert Jan van Pelt and Carroll Williams, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp.

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everyday, that dimension is not simply left outside and behind. The temple illuminates the everyday. It is this that lets Heidegger say that the temple reveals to the community their world. "World" here does not name the totality of facts, but a meaningful order that assigns to things and persons their proper places. Think of the world of a baseball player, or the world of the Middle Ages. "World" is understood here as a space of meanings.

But the temple does not just establish a world. Such establishment is responsive to a reality experienced as transcending the individual's freedom. Unlike Brueghel's tower, the temple is thus more than a product of prideful self-assertion: Heidegger points to how this "more" is to be understood when the temple is said to present the earth.

The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air.
The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its
own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Trees and grass first enter
into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are.
[The temple] clears and illuminates also that on which and in which man
bases his dwelling. We call this ground the earth.¹⁸⁰

Establishing a world, the temple also responds to and interprets the earth, where Heidegger understands "earth" as the ground of our being. We belong to the earth because we have a body. The earth claims and speaks to us through our body. It speaks of life and death, of desire and fulfillment, of pain and of joy. Architecture should be a celebration, a praise of the earth.

But again: what does Heidegger's Greek temple mean to us today? Does it not lie even more thoroughly behind us than the Gothic cathedral? Am I showing you more than just perhaps some pretty views?

With his epilogue to *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger himself places a question mark behind his discussion. He there quotes Hegel's famous propositions that art "no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for itself. In all these relationships art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

vocation, something past."¹⁸¹ Today, Hegel suggests, the great architecture of the past belongs in a museum, if not literally, then figuratively.¹⁸² Art has lost the significance it had in ancient Greece or medieval Europe. There is a sense in which the modern world with its sense of reality, no longer has room for architecture "on the side of its highest vocation." And why has it lost that place:

To quote Hegel once more:

The type peculiar to art-production and its products fails any longer to satisfy man's highest need. We are beyond the stage of reverence for works of art as divine and objects deserving our worship. The impression they make on us is of a more reflective kind, and the emotions which they arouse require a higher test and a further verification. Thought and reflection have taken their flight above fine art.¹⁸³

Descartes gave expression to this modern understanding of reality when he made our ability to comprehend the measure of reality; but what we can comprehend we can also master. Hence Descartes's promise that his method would render human beings the masters and possessors of nature, a nature which is increasingly looked at as just a source of raw materials, a collection of facts that are meaningless until endowed with meaning by the human subject. Meaning comes to be understood as grounded in subjective freedom.

Such an understanding can make no sense of what Heidegger calls the earth, which Heidegger would have us understand as the ground of all meaning.

But what I have just called the modern understanding of reality is a caricature. It cannot even accommodate our experience of another person. Here we have an

181 *Ibid.*, p. 80. For the original see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner, vols. XII - XIV. The propositions cited by Heidegger from vol. XII, pp. 31 and 32.

182 For a more extended discussion of Hegel's understanding of the death of art see Karsten Harries, "Hegel on the Future of Art," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1974, pp. 677-696.

183 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. Michael Inwood (London: Penguin Books, 193), p. 12.

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immediate experience of meaning incarnated in matter, claiming us in a way that demands respect. And is it only human beings that we experience as such incarnations of meaning in matter?

What matters here isn't Hegel. Any critique of Hegel would itself be pointless, were it not for the fact that Hegel has given us a profound analysis of aspects of our modern world that do indeed imply the death of architecture in what both Hegel and Heidegger would consider its highest sense.

I want to conclude this lecture by reiterating how important it is to keep in mind that the human being is an embodied, and as such also a caring, desiring self. What discloses itself to such a self is therefore never just an assemblage of mute facts, but an inevitably always already meaningful configuration of objects of desire or things to be avoided. To be in the world is to be claimed in countless different ways by persons and things. To be open to what presents itself to us is therefore inevitably to be affected, moved, claimed. Without this affective base all our talk of values and divinities is ultimately groundless: idle talk. The reduction of nature into a collection of mute facts inevitably elides this base and with it elides the ground on which architecture inevitably stands and which it should praise and celebrate.

20. Stone is More Stone than it Used to Be

1

Some years ago architects and theorists of architecture spoke of a supposedly changed attitude to materials: architecture was said to have "left behind it the period when forms and their meanings were emphasized at the expense of materials." Now "we are supposed to live in a time when the meanings of forms have been forgotten and materials and their visual qualities are stressed."¹⁸⁴

Such talk about a "new emphasis on materials" and "their visual qualities" raises questions, especially when these are placed in opposition to the meanings of forms, which are said to have been forgotten. How are we to understand such forgetfulness? And suppose that there has indeed been such a forgetting: must this be accepted as part of our situation, a situation we cannot change, or should it be challenged and perhaps overcome? And what about what is called here a "new emphasis on materials"? Just what is at issue? — As we shall see, much more is at issue than just materials.

I would like to underscore the asserted opposition between "forms and their meanings" and "materials and their visual qualities," an opposition that relies on the familiar distinction between form and matter, familiar especially from discussions of works of art, including works of architecture. Some such distinction would seem to be inseparable from the very idea of making something, be it a tool, a building, or a sculpture.¹⁸⁵ Guided by some end, the maker gives matter a form. And is it not clear that meaning belongs with form more than with matter? Must the origin of meaning not be sought in the form-giving mind rather than with nature, in the creator rather than in whatever materials he uses? If so, the turn to matter would seem to be a turn away from meaning.

¹⁸⁴ Flyer for the 7th International Alvar Aalto Symposium, 1997.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 27.

But why turn away from meaning unless such meaning has itself been called into question? The turn to materials could thus be understood as a reaction to a world that daily bombards us with messages clamoring for our attention, to the point where such clamor reduces to white noise and threatens to drown reality beneath a flood of signs, letting us long for the solace of matter uncontaminated by such chatter as a last refuge of authenticity. Is this how we are to understand the meaning of such a turn away from meaning?

But must, or should, matter be thought in opposition to meaning? Is material not inevitably charged with meaning, calling into question the opposition of meaning to matter? But just how we are to think the material's being charged with meaning? Is this charge — like form, perhaps itself dependent on form — not also something the material owes to the artist, to the way he worked it? Or does meaning in some sense already belong to the material, perhaps sleep in it, before being awakened by the artist? Such metaphors lead to a more fundamental question, a question about meaning: is meaning adequately understood as a creation or construction of the human subject? Could it be that every such construction depends in some still to be specified way on an always already meaningful, pre-given material? Could it be that all genuine meaning must be discovered rather than created or manufactured? But perhaps the very opposition of form to matter must be questioned if we are to do justice to meaning. Perhaps meaning resides essentially between form and matter.

There would seem to be something obviously right about the claim that meaning depends on the human subject. Even if we discover meaning in some inanimate found object, is "discover" here really the right word, is meaning not inevitably something we have brought to or read into the object in question? To be sure, talk about the meaning of materials, say black granite, has an obvious sense. But is it not human beings who have endowed such materials with their meaning? Certainly, there is something about the properties of materials that invites such endowment. Still, must we not grant that matter, before being taken up by human beings, before being animated by certain interests, associations and expectations, lies outside all meaning and is mute? What could it mean

to call such material, even before sculptor or architect goes to work, "charged with meaning"?

Turning to such questions, I return to a problem I addressed at some length in *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, where I speak of a "realism of materials," of art that explores the meanings of different materials, as buildings do when they do not just use up steel and glass, concrete and stone, brick and wood, but re-present them in such a way that they are rendered more visible.¹⁸⁶ Consider the way Louis Kahn used wood and concrete in the *British Art Center*. The turn to materials here cannot be understood as a turn away from meaning; such art or architecture reveals rather that meaning resides in these materials. I do indeed want to claim that, instead of turning away from meaning, the exploration of materials can be understood as a return to the ground of meaning.

Such talk of a realism of materials looks back to my first book, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (1968), which, challenging the aesthetic approach that then still ruled modern art — an approach represented at the time by a painter like Frank Stella — concluded with a call for a "new realism," a realism open to the countless meanings of the messy world in which we find ourselves. To characterize the former, let me return to a quote by Stella that I read you once before: "My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It really is an object. All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all that I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without confusion... What you see is what you see."¹⁸⁷ So understood the work of art is not meant to point beyond itself, to say something. It is neither sign nor riddle. The presence of the material, visible object is here opposed to meaning: the painting should not mean, but be. For the sake of heightened presence the painter turns away from meaning. Here, too, one could speak of a new materialism, but if so a materialism that distances itself from a concern for meaning.

¹⁸⁶ Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1997), p. 121-123.

¹⁸⁷ Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 158.

There is indeed an obvious sense in which meaning veils material presence. Think of a printed word on a page, say in some newspaper you are reading. Caught up in some story you are hardly aware of words as material things. Their successful functioning in a process of communication has to veil their material presence, render them almost transparent. We see right through this word material as we grasp its meaning. To be sure, such material can be re-presented by the camera or by an artist, blown up, taken out its expected context, as for example in some work by Bruce Nauman: thus re-presented once meaningful words become insistently present word-things, where their presence now turns the tables and veils meaning. What presents itself initially as a readily understood expression grows into an increasingly strange, mute presence.

To be sure, we expect meaning. The silence will not hold, will be covered up with endless chatter. Encountering such a work in a gallery, the visitor cannot help but endow it with meaning by placing it in the context of modern art's increasingly critical confrontation with abstract art and its attempt to endow the mystery of presence with something resembling the aura of the sacred: how can some postmodern critic, raised on a diet of Benjamin and Baudrillard, still take seriously celebrations of presence? Nauman, at any rate, denies his work such an aura, seeks to unmask the widespread willingness to find meaning in the mute presence of some almost blank canvas, a willingness that ever since Malevich has rewarded many an initiate into the mysteries of modern art with his own quasi-mystical *Aha-Erlebnis*. The **AH HA** on the Naumann canvas calls such experience into question, pointing not only backward, but forward to a very different kind of *Aha-Erlebnis*: "Aha!" I can easily imagine some self-satisfied visitor saying, patting himself on the back: "just as I expected: the emperor has no clothing." Understood as a critical comment on abstraction, the work thus deserves its place besides John Baldassari's *A Two-Dimensional Surface Without Any Articulation is a Dead Experience* and with good reason Mark Rosenthal included both in the exhibition

Critiques of Pure Abstraction.¹⁸⁸ But what interests me here is something else: the way Baldassari's articulation of this surface fails to bring the work to life. To be sure, the black marks break the silence of the white canvas, say something. And yet, despite the easily grasped, all too obvious meaning of the message, its representation also distances us from this meaning; we become entangled in these black marks, which become like whirlpools draining from the work all meaning, leaving us with what the work itself declares to be a dead experience. Material here does not present itself as charged with meaning at all. Instead of "Ah Ha!" we are likely to say "Ho Hum."

I have contrasted Stella's modernist celebration of the material presencing of the art object with postmodern critiques of such a fetishizing of presence, where there is a sense in which such critique does mean a return to meaning, but a return that leaves meaning and material quite disconnected. That lack of connection not only leaves us with material unilluminated by meaning, but, as I hope to show, in the end threatens to drain meaning, too, of its meaning, rendering meaning meaningless.

I have given these examples of art that opens up a rift between meaning and material to suggest that a different kind of articulation is needed if a work of art is to live — indeed if meaning is to live: meaning must become so entangled with the material, the material must present itself as so charged with meaning, that it becomes impossible to separate the two. This, at any rate, is how I would like to understand what has been called a "new emphasis on materials," where I know very well how much argues against such an emphasis: nothing less than what we may call our modern understanding of nature and matter, an understanding that has to render matter mute.

2

To develop what I have called our modern understanding of nature and matter, let me turn to a section of Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* that, while it considers the

¹⁸⁸ See catalogue for *Critiques of Pure Abstraction*. A traveling exhibition organized by the Independent Curators Incorporated, New York, 1995-1997, Mark Rosenthal, Guest Curator.

architecture of Nietzsche's day, the second half of the nineteenth century, remains relevant today. The section bears the thought provoking title: "Stone is more stone than it used to be."¹⁸⁹

Was stone once less stone than it is today? What might this mean? Presumably there was something in or about previous architecture that veiled the stoniness of stone. And Nietzsche leaves the reader in no doubt concerning what it was that thus veiled stone: the stoniness of stone was veiled by meaning. Stone once spoke, signified something beyond itself. Think once more of a printed word on some page! This aura of significance, Nietzsche claims, has been lost. "On the whole we no longer understand architecture, at least not in the way we understand music." No longer do we understand the symbolism of architectural forms. "The meanings of forms have been forgotten and materials and their visual qualities are stressed." In Nietzsche's words, "We have outgrown the symbolism of lines and figures, just as we have been weaned from the sound effects of rhetoric, and have not drunk this kind of mother's milk of education from the first moment of our lives. Originally everything on a Greek or Christian building had a meaning, with an eye to a higher order of things: this aura of an inexhaustible significance surrounded the building like a magical veil." Beauty in such architecture remained linked with, but subordinate to a higher meaning: "Beauty entered the system only incidentally, without diminishing in any significant way the fundamental sensation of the uncanny sublime of what the proximity of the divine and magic had consecrated; beauty *softened* at most the *terror* — but this terror was everywhere the presupposition" — the text here looks forward to Rilke's First Duino Elegy, which calls beauty nothing but the beginning of the terrible, *nichts als des schrecklichen Anfang*. "What is the beauty of a building to us today? The same as the beautiful face of a woman without spirit: something mask-like."¹⁹⁰ Beauty, Nietzsche claims, used to appear as the veil of the numinous, linked with, but subordinate to higher meaning: a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Our modern understanding of beauty as pleasing presence has severed that

¹⁸⁹ *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, I, 218; CM 2, 178.

¹⁹⁰ *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*; CM 2, 178 - 179.

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link. And analogously the use of materials in the great architecture of the past was linked with, but subordinate to the same higher meaning. Once again modern architecture has severed that link. And these two developments Nietzsche would have us think as related. The greater stoniness of stone and the mask-like character of beauty in modern architecture belong together. But how are we to understand that linkage?

Let me begin with beauty. What we moderns call beauty in architecture, Nietzsche claims, lacks spirit. Such lack of spirit is indeed but the other side of an understanding of the beautiful as an ideally self-sufficient aesthetic presence that invites the observer's absorbed surrender. Insistence on the self-sufficiency of the aesthetic object, a self-sufficiency that finds expression in the slogan "art for art's sake," had to render beauty autonomous. But to the extent that the work or architecture serves the world, it must keep its distance from the aesthetic object. Not that the artist in the architect may not still aim at buildings that also succeed as aesthetic objects. But the more successful he is in this, the more completely will the aesthetic object mask the building.

The architecture of Nietzsche's day — *Human All Too Human* appeared in 1878 — offers ready illustrations of what Nietzsche considered its mask-like beauty and countless modernist critics of the historicizing architecture of the nineteenth century were to echo this sentiment.

But have things really changed? How many works of architecture invite us to understand their beauty as something added on to buildings that lack spirit. Consider e.g. Frank Gehry's Frederick R. Weisman Museum in Minneapolis (1991-93), a kind of warm-up for the Bilbao Guggenheim. It was in the Weisman museum that I happened to see the "Critiques of Pure Abstraction" show that included the works by Naumann, and Baldessari I showed you. I would not deny this museum's distinctive beauty; but like so many of Gehry's buildings, almost self-consciously this architecture invites Nietzsche's metaphor of the mask, a metaphor that invites us to attend to the loose fit between ornament and ornament bearer, between beauty and the structure that supports it. Beauty here does not transfigure the stone, does not charge it with meaning: at most it masks it. And whenever such a building drops its mask, whenever the make-up gives way, the

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material in question presents itself all the more insistently as the mute material it is.

Once again: mask-like beauty and greater stoniness here belong together.

That beauty in architecture need not be in this sense skin deep, that there need not be such a loose fit between ornament and ornament bearer is one thing the architecture of the past can teach us. Works like some Romanesque portal let us experience even today at least a trace of what Nietzsche calls "the fundamental sensation of the uncanny sublime, of what the proximity of the divine and magic had consecrated." If all too fleetingly, we are still touched here by what lets the atheist Nietzsche, too, speak of "the proximity of the divine." To be sure, our modern world, a world shaped by science and technology, would seem to have no place for divinity. As we have divorced meaning and material, so we have divorced meaning and divinity, linking meaning instead to humanity. If talk of a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* still makes any sense to us at all, this *mysterium*, Nietzsche suggests, is likely to be sought by us moderns not without, in the world, in nature, but within, in the depth of our labyrinthine souls. It is for this reason, Nietzsche suggests, that music speaks to us introverted moderns so much more strongly than architecture, a music that belongs with the fearful yet seductive darkness of the labyrinth into which we descend when we descend into ourselves.

"Stone is more stone than it used to be": this is to say, stone presents itself to us moderns ever more as just that, as stone, more generally as mute material waiting to receive its meaning from the human subject, e.g. the builder or the form giving artist. And when that form gives way, as it does when a building falls into disrepair, becomes a ruin, the materiality of the material, the mute stoniness of stone will present itself once again as an opaque presence .

Once matter and meaning were thought to be more intimately linked: thus stones were thought to speak to human beings even before they were used as material, just as stones. In the Middle Ages, for example, understanding the natural language of stones was thought to be an important part of knowing how to read the book of nature. Medieval lapidaries were not so much scientific studies of different stones and their properties as allegorical dictionaries, guides to the spiritual meaning of the world and of

human existence.¹⁹¹ To us, to be sure, such lapidaries are little more than relics of a past that would seem to lie so thoroughly behind us that we cannot expect from it pointers for the future; we no longer understand nature as a veiled divine communication, no longer find in it, as Alan of Lille put it long ago in his hymn to the rose, "the truthful sign of our life, death, condition, and destiny."¹⁹² If rose and dove, pearl and gold presented themselves as meaningful signs to the medieval Christian, we are separated from such a view not just by the fact that we no longer find ourselves part of a community united by this faith or, for that matter, by a comparable faith, but more importantly by our understanding of matter as in itself devoid of meaning. Meaning belongs with spirit, rather than with matter! The medievals, to be sure, would also have granted this. Such an understanding of meaning is indeed presupposed by their understanding of nature as a book with God as its author. But spirit here meant first of all the divine spirit. Meaning thus was given its origin in spirit that transcended the human spirit and because it did could provide it with a measure. The meaning of materials was linked to such transcendence.

And does the meaning of meaning not demand such a link? If meaning had its foundation in human freedom, nihilism could be cured just by an act of will. But meaning cannot be willed, cannot be made or invented; it must be discovered. This is why we find the suspicion that meaning should be no more than an artificial construct so disturbing. Indeed, all meaning that presents itself to us as freely created must seem weightless, arbitrary, and precisely because of this cannot convince and illuminate our lives. The computer holds no answer to the problem of meaning. The source of meaning will not be found in cyberspace. Meaning must be rooted in transcendence, that is to say, must be grounded in what transcends freedom.

¹⁹¹ J. B. Pitra lists 25 such works in his *Spicilegium Solesmense*. See Friedrich Ohly, "Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter," *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), pp. 8, 23, 30.

¹⁹² Alanus de Insulis, "Rhythmus alter, quo graphice natura hominis fluxa et caduca depingitur," *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris:Migne, 1855), 210:579.

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Today we no longer turn to lapidaries to decipher the hidden meaning of stones. No longer are meaning and matter thus linked. The very idea of a hermeneutics of nature must seem unscientific to us, impossible to reconcile with the understanding of reality that is presupposed by our science and technology: matter is mute.

But is it? Is there not still a sense in which stones, and more generally materials, "speak" to us, however such speech and its significance are to be understood? Have stones lost their voice altogether? I would indeed claim, although this claim still lacks support, that without hearing such voices our lives become hollow and meaningless, that to live meaningful lives we have to leave behind an understanding of meaning that finds it in the human spirit, have to root meaning in transcendence, and that one task of art, and especially of architecture is to allow us to take that step by so presenting materials that we once again hear these voices, open ourselves to the countless ways in which material is always already charged with meaning.

What sense can we moderns still make of such material transcendence? Is not the only spirit that has manifested itself to us the human spirit and is it not here, if anywhere, that transcendence and what binds freedom must be discovered? That is to say: in reason?

Clear is that any such understanding of reason as the source of meaning has to drive a wedge between meaning and matter, will tend to reduce matter to mere material. "Stone," then, "is more stone than it used to be," precisely because understood first of all as material to be used and used up as its properties permit, meaningless, just stone, until endowed with meaning by the human subject. And Nietzsche seems right again when, much like Hegel, although with far more profound reservations, he links this greater stoniness of stone to a movement of introversion that seeks the foundation of meaning ever more resolutely not without, in nature, in the things of nature, but within, in the human spirit. If part of nature, as spirit the human being has also fallen out of nature, is placed as spirit in opposition to nature, even his own nature, confronting it ever more as material to shape as he will. In something as simple as a child throwing stones into the water and enjoying the rings formed Hegel thus finds evidence of this drive to human self-assertion in the face of an initially meaningless given. Upon external objects the

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human being thus imposes his own order, does this, in Hegel's words, so that, "as a free agent," he may "divest the external world of its stubborn alienation from himself."¹⁹³ History is understood by Hegel as the progress of such appropriation. Art, and especially architecture, are part of this human effort to make the natural and sensible our own, to rob it of its character of being a mute, alien other, and thus to transform it into a dwelling place fit for us human beings. In the same spirit Le Corbusier once tied the origin of architecture to a transformation of nature in the image of geometry. So understood, architecture invites a distinction between form giving spirit and opaque matter, and meaning belongs with the former. So understood, what I have called the realism of materials is something that the progress of architecture will and should ever more decisively leave behind. It attempts to endow materials with an aura that does not really belong to them.

¹⁹³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Selections from The Philosophy of Fine Arts," trans. F. P. B. Osmaston in Albert Hofstadter, Richard Kuhns, eds. *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, (Chicago" Chicago U. Press, 1976), p. 401.

21. Stone is Less Stone than it Used to Be

1

I cited Nietzsche's word "Stone is more stone than it used to be" as if it stated a fact so obvious that it hardly needed further discussion. But does a look at our built environment really support Nietzsche on this score? Consider once more Gehry's Weisman museum, which I used to illustrate Nietzsche's talk of the mask-like beauty of our architecture. Awareness of this mask as a mask, I suggested, invites us to attend to the loose fit between ornament and ornament bearer, in this case between the ornamental façade of stainless steel and the brick shed that supports it.

But what about this shed? Is brick here really more brick than it used to be? This is hardly an example of how, according to Heidegger, great architecture "does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the Open of the work's world. The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness or heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the lighting and darkening of color." Does brick here come forth as brick? Is it not used rather in a way that almost causes it to disappear, reduced to skin, veneer, cladding? And is this not quite characteristic of the way brick tends to get used today?

We need of course not settle for brick. We may choose stone instead, which used as veneer loses much of the heaviness of stone. Regardless of their real weight, brick and stone so used have the lightness of decals that could be peeled off the body of the architecture should this become necessary. Although indeed brick, although indeed stone, do not brick and stone so used mimic themselves, becoming their own simulacra in a way that has to devalue and mute their distinctive voice? Of materials so used we can now say what Nietzsche says of the beauty of our architecture: they, too, have become something mask-like, lacking in spirit, lightweight. Compare with this the way we experience brick in some old industrial building, say the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia.

Schopenhauer insisted that our pleasure in a building would be much diminished if we learned that what we had assumed to be stone was only wood, "just because this alters and shifts the relation between rigidity and gravity, and thus the significance and necessity of all the parts; for those natural forces reveal themselves much more feebly in a wooden building... If we were told clearly that the building, the sight of which pleased us, consisted of entirely different materials of very unequal weight and consistency, but not distinguishable by the eye, the whole building would be a poem in an unknown language."¹⁹⁴ We would no longer understand it. But is Schopenhauer really right to say that we no longer understand the architecture? In one sense we understand the language of, say, Yale's about to be completed colleges, designed by Robert Stern, very well. It is indeed quite familiar, relating as it does to the language of the Gothic Revival colleges James Gamble Rogers built for Yale. Stern delivered what was expected. But part of this understanding is an awareness of its quite literal superficiality. There is a sense in which our understanding invites comparison with our general understanding of brick or stone veneer. The architecture pretends to be something that is not, it is, we might we might say, a simulacrum.

Schopenhauer's suggestion that such a building would be like a poem in an unknown language presupposes that architecture can speak to us, and should speak to us in a language that we can understand. But the language of buildings like the new colleges, he suggests, is one that we in the aesthetically relevant sense do not really understand. But presupposed is an understanding of the essence of architecture that would seem to belong with a way of building that technological progress has left behind. Still, Schopenhauer's understanding of architecture does raise an issue that deserves our attention: did Schopenhauer have a point when he rejects such architecture?

¹⁹⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. I, par. 48, p. 215

2

What is Schopenhauer's understanding of architecture? Schopenhauer, too, would have us distinguish between a work of architecture and a functional building. A work of architecture is a functional building that succeeds also as a work of art:

Now if we consider architecture merely as a fine art and apart from its provision for useful purposes, in which it serves the will and not pure knowledge, and thus is no longer art in our sense, we can assign to it no purpose other than that of bringing to clearer perceptiveness some of those Ideas that are the lowest grades of the will's objectivity. Such Ideas are gravity, cohesion, rigidity, hardness, those universal qualities of stone, those first, simplest, and dullest visibilities of the will, the fundamental bass-notes of nature; and along with these light, which is in many respects their opposite. Even at this low stage of the will's objectivity, we see its inner nature revealing itself in discord; for, properly speaking, the conflict between gravity and rigidity is the sole aesthetic material of architecture; its problem is to make this conflict appear with perfect distinctness in many different ways.¹⁹⁵

Schopenhauer located the very essence of architecture as an art in this conflict:

its sole and constant theme is *support and load*. Its fundamental law is that no load may be without sufficient support, and no support without a suitable load; consequently, that the relation of these two may be the exactly appropriate one. The purest execution of this theme is column and entablature; hence the order of columns has become, so to speak, the thorough-bass of the whole of architecture. In column and entablature, support and load are *completely separated*; and in this way the reciprocal effect of the two and their relation to each other becomes apparent. For

¹⁹⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. I, par. 48, p. 214

even every plain and simple wall certainly contains support and load, but there the two are still amalgamated.¹⁹⁶

Once again the Greek temple is held up as paradigm of architectural purity and once again it is easy to criticize this view by showing how very much in keeping it is with the taste and conventions of the day. Schopenhauer was a conservative, and not just in politics. As I pointed out before, he had little patience with the then growing vogue in favor of Gothic architecture. To be sure, he was well aware of how Gothic architecture might be justified along the lines he has sketched. It, too, exhibits the conflict between support and load. But other considerations figure more importantly in our appreciation: "Our pleasure in Gothic works certainly rests for the most part on the association of ideas and historical reminiscences, and hence on a feeling foreign to art. All that I have said of the really aesthetic aim, about the meaning and theme of architecture, loses its validity in the case of these works."¹⁹⁷ Before admitting Gothic architecture as an equally valid paradigm, Schopenhauer insists, we should remind ourselves that "the conflict between rigidity and gravity, so openly and naively displayed by ancient architecture, is an actual and true one established by nature. On the other hand, the entire subjugation of gravity by rigidity remains a mere pretense, a fiction testified by illusion."¹⁹⁸ Schopenhauer knew that such "pretense" was able to communicate to countless believers a sense of security, of safety from the vicissitudes of the temporal and earthbound: "Death, where is thy sting?" Gothic verticality seemed to shout. But Schopenhauer is unable to take seriously the vertical's apparent victory over the horizontal in Gothic architecture. Consider once more his dismissal of attempts to complete churches left unfinished by the Middle Ages.

Now when I see how this unbelieving age so diligently finishes the Gothic churches left uncompleted by the believing Middle Ages, it seems to me as if it were desired to embalm a Christianity that has expired.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. II, p. 417.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 417-418.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

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Despite all self-assertion, human beings are vulnerable and mortal, and full self-affirmation requires the recognition of the limits set to our self-assertion. Gothic architecture is governed by what Schopenhauer rejects as a false ethos. He would have architecture be more open to our tragic condition, figured by the contrast between the heaviness of entablatures and the assertiveness of supporting columns, between verticals and horizontals, by the Greek temple. After the Greeks architecture is taken to have known no genuine development. On this point Schopenhauer agrees with Hegel.

But if this makes Schopenhauer seem backward looking, one could also emphasize the way he points ahead to modern art and architecture. Consider Piet Mondrian's insistence that:

The laws which in the culture of art have become more and more determinate are the great hidden laws of nature, which art establishes in its own fashion. It is necessary to stress the fact that these laws are more or less hidden from the superficial aspect of nature...

First and foremost there is the fundamental law of dynamic equilibrium. The first aim in painting should be universal expression. What is needed in a picture to realize this is an equivalence of vertical and horizontal expressions. This I feel today I did not accomplish in such early works as my 1911 "Tree" paintings. In those the vertical emphasis predominated. A "gothic" expression was the result.²⁰⁰

No doubt, some may prefer the "gothic" look of Mondrian's tree paintings to the cooler "classical" look of a mature Mondrian. I am less interested here in such disagreement than in what it presupposes: an understanding of the language of verticals and horizontals. Only when this language is understood, does it make sense to be concerned about "an equivalence of vertical and horizontal expressions" or about attempts to have one triumph over the other.

²⁰⁰ Piet Mondrian, "Statement, ca. 1943," *Theories of Modern Art*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 362.

Note in this connection also Schopenhauer's suspicion of ornament, not so different from that of Christian Wolff:

Ornamental work on capitals, etc., belongs to sculpture and not to architecture, and is merely tolerated as an additional embellishment, which might be dispensed with.²⁰¹

Schopenhauer does not yet tie ornament to crime, as Adolf Loos was going to do. For him it is the inessential, easily dispensed with.

Similarly, Schopenhauer pleads for a certain honesty in architecture, where the contrast with the architecture of the rococo with its plaster vaults is obvious.

From what has been said, it is absolutely necessary for an understanding and aesthetic enjoyment of a work of architecture to have direct knowledge through perception of its matter as regards its weight, rigidity, and cohesion. Our pleasure in such a work would suddenly be greatly diminished by the disclosure that the building material used was pumice-stone, for then it would strike us as a kind of sham building. We should be affected in almost the same way if we were told that it was only of wood, when we had assumed it to be stone, just because this alters and shifts the relation between rigidity and gravity, and thus the significance and necessity of all the parts; for those natural forces reveal themselves much more feebly in a wooden building. Therefore, no architectural work as fine art can really be made of timber, however many forms this may assume; this can be explained simply and solely by our theory.²⁰²

Schopenhauer also strikes us as modern in his insistence on function and simplicity of form. He speaks of the beauty of ancient earthenware, which he contrasts with the artificiality of much recent work:

²⁰¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. I, p. 215.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

On the other hand, it is just that naive simplicity in the presentation and attainment of the end in view, corresponding to the spirit in which nature creates and fashions, which imparts to ancient earthenware vessels such beauty and grace of form that we are always astonished at them afresh. This is because it contrasts so nobly in original taste with our modern vessels which bear the stamp of vulgarity, it matters not whether they are formed from porcelain or from coarse potter's clay. When looking at the vessels and implements of the ancients we feel that, if nature had wanted to produce such things, she would have done so in these forms. Therefore, as we see that the beauty of architecture arises from the undisguised presentation of the ends, and from their attainment in the shortest and most natural way, my theory here comes into direct contradiction with Kant's. His theory places the essence of everything beautiful beauty in an apparent appropriateness without purpose.²⁰³

Function in Schopenhauer goes along with beauty.

In the much earlier first volume of the *World as Will and Representation*, to be sure, there seems to be more of a tension between function and beauty; here he appears closer to Kant:

Unlike the works of the other fine arts, those of architecture are very rarely executed for purely aesthetic purposes. On the contrary, they are subordinated to other, practical ends that are foreign to art itself. Thus the great merit of the architect consists in his achieving and attaining purely aesthetic ends, in spite of their subordination to other ends foreign to them. This he does by skillfully adapting them in many different ways to the arbitrary ends in each case, and by correctly judging what aesthetically architectural beauty is consistent and compatible with a temple, a palace, a prison, and so on. The more a harsh climate increases

²⁰³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. II, p. 416.

those demands of necessity and utility, definitely determines them, and inevitably prescribes them, the less scope is there for the beautiful in architecture. In the mild climate of India, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, where the demands of necessity were fewer and less definite, was able to pursue its aesthetic ends with the greatest freedom. Under a northern sky these are greatly curtailed for architecture here, where the requirements were coffered, pointed roofs, and towers, it could unfold its beauty only within very narrow limits, and had to make amends all the more by making use of embellishments borrowed from sculpture, as can be seen in Gothic architecture.²⁰⁴

And yet, it is not at all surprising that Schopenhauer should arrive in the second volume at a formulation that seems to recognize little tension between function and form. For if architecture is to be beautiful it has to do justice to the essence of matter, i.e. it has to find itself in a pre-established harmony with the demands of engineering.

3

Architecture, Schopenhauer insists, “affects us not only mathematically, but dynamically, and what speaks to us through it is not mere form and symmetry, but rather those fundamental forces of nature.”²⁰⁵ Architecture speaks to us as architecture, Schopenhauer suggest, only as a concentrated expression of these forces. How would your experience of the temple change were you to learn that it was made of mock rock? If Schopenhauer is right, these forces speak to us only as long as we assume the building to be indeed of the material we take it to be made of. As soon as we learn that we were mistaken, the same brick or stone ceases to speak to us, although in Schopenhauer's example nothing that presents itself to the eye has changed in any very significant way, which suggests that what matters is not so much what really is the case, as what is

²⁰⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. I, p. 215

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

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believed to be the case. Our appreciation of a building changes profoundly when we experience it as a simulacrum and as a result it ceases to speak to us as architecture used to speak, speaks to us instead as simulacrum. But as we become less and less willing or able to distinguish between original and simulacrum, all material threaten to lose its voice or special aura.

Let me return to Gehry Weisman Museum, with which I began: Is stone here not less stone than it used to be?

Consider the museum's façade! Metal certainly here is made to glitter and shimmer, so much so that the reflecting quality of stainless steel almost triumphs over its materiality, rendering the architecture strangely weightless, almost immaterial. Is stainless steel here presented as stainless steel? If so then as an artificial material, at some distance from brick and stone, from their weight and substance, material that yields more readily to the play of the architect's sculptural imagination. Although Gehry's crystalline forms are not the spheres or regular polyhedra celebrated by Plato, they yet bring to mind the *Philebus* passage cited before, which opposes the spiritual beauty of "surfaces and solids, which a lathe, or a carpenter's rule and square, produces" to the lesser beauty produced by the hand. In the creation of such spiritual beauty the body is likely to prove an obstacle. Such beauty demands the machine. And it also demands materials less resistant to the spirit's demands, materials themselves born of and answering to the spirit, materials that are themselves artifacts.

Moving is the contrast between this sharply folded, gleaming, artificial cliff, and its all too material counterpart below, the still crumbling rather drab bluff rising from and shaped by the flowing Mississippi. In this dialogue between bluff and façade, the architecture has the leading part. Especially in the evening, when the setting sun lights up Gehry's reflecting cliff architecture into a blinding glare, the bluff all but disappears. And yet it remains, a quiet presence, rising from the ever flowing water wearing at it, as it has done and presumably will continue to do for countless years. In its both fragile and lasting materiality the bluff speaks to us, reminds us of our own fragility. As the word "stainless" hints, Gehry's crystalline façade seems to be resistant to such a wearing away. And yet just this architecture makes me wonder, how will it wear, and this in several

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senses. To be sure, its immaculate appearance makes the question seem almost inappropriate. This architecture declares that it wants to have little to do with time or the dull heaviness of earth and stone, with materiality so understood, and I can almost hear the architect reply to my ruminations with a question: why do buildings have to last? We don't build cars or computers to last very long. To such a question I would reply in turn, aware that this can provide no more than a pointer, that full self-affirmation demands that we affirm ourselves as subject to time, anxious about death, and precisely because of this in need of buildings that, if they are to shelter the entire human being, have to embrace death, and that is to say, embrace both earth and time, embrace it in such a way that we build, not only for us, but also for those, who will be when we are no longer. Perhaps one thing Gehry's gleaming cliff has to tell us is to be more attentive to what the crumbling bluff below and the river have to say.

This contrast between artifice and nature is re-presented once more by the way the museum's opposite side faces, now not the river, but the university it serves. The façade's stainless steel elements are here barely visible. Striking is the contrast between the all but mute brick rectangle that in rather small letters bears the name of the museum and the grey wall below. Still further down was, when I first visited the museum, a miniature field, which with its dark earth and the planted corn (when I saw it long harvested and yellowed, the yellow stalks answered by the yellow letters of the word CULTIVATE above, prominently displayed, almost as if it were the title of a poem) movingly contrasted with the artifice of the museum. Gehry had apparently nothing to do with this miniscule cornfield, which perhaps made reference to the importance of corn to the state of Minnesota, an importance that found its architectural monument in the impressive silos that are such a striking part of the architectural landscape of this city. It also reminds us of what it is to cultivate, to work the soil: no matter how much agriculture today owes to technology — think of farm machinery, genetic engineering, fertilizer — cultivation still means working the earth, putting seeds into the ground, caring for the growing crop in the hope that soil and weather will grant a good harvest, a harvest that remains, despite all technology can contribute, a gift.

The way the museum then presented itself to me offered me something like a ladder ascending from the dark earth below to the gleaming metal and sky above. The juxtaposition of the two inscriptions, the name of the museum and the word CULTIVATE invited one to think the museum building in relation to cultivation, to think building as itself a form of cultivation, the builder in the image of the farmer.

4

Heidegger, as I discussed in our first session, has reminded us that the German word "bauen" means both "cultivate" and "build," and that originally "bauen" meant nothing other than dwelling.²⁰⁶ To dwell in that sense we have to cultivate the earth; and to serve such dwelling, building, too, needs to do more than just use the earth and all that Heidegger associates with that term, must so re-present it that we become aware of it "as that which is by nature undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up."²⁰⁷

With his talk of the earth Heidegger gestures towards something inseparable from our sense of the reality of things, recognizes that things are real to the extent that they transcend the reach of human artifice, of our words or concepts. Let me explain: the definition of a circle gives us the rule for its construction; so understood the circle lacks reality. A circle fashioned of wood, stone, or metal, to be sure, has reality, but precisely because the material cannot be considered just an ideal construct. To be open to the reality of some thing is to be open to what transcends the linguistic or conceptual spaces in which things yet must find their place if they are to be understood and comprehended. Our experience of the materiality of materials depends on an openness to what we can call their "material transcendence," a term that points in the same direction as the Kantian "thing-in-itself," which can present itself to us only as appearance, but whatever thus appears is experienced as not created by our understanding, but as given. Inseparable from our experience of the reality of things is a sense of this gift, an awareness that our

²⁰⁶ Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 146.

²⁰⁷ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 47.

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understanding is finite, and that means also that the reach of human artifice, however vast, is nonetheless limited. Speaking that refuses to recognize this limitation must degenerate into idle talk; so must speaking that either is unable or refuses to distinguish between reality and simulacra. And what about architecture that obscures that distinction?

Language opens human beings to reality. Yet language conceals even as it reveals. Where this essential concealment is forgotten, language cannot but replace reality with a false, a dematerialized reality, a dematerialization our electronic media have made part of everyday experience: forgetting of the earth and the ascendancy of the simulacrum belong together. But this is precisely why just we, who live in an age that has seen our mastery of the given progress to a point where giant malls offer us a new earth and a new sky, both born of artifice, where a Baudrillard can wonder whether what is called reality is not something invented by the media, why we cannot dispense with an art and an architecture that does not just rely on words, but by its handling of materials presents the earth. To be sure, in countless ways our encounters with things and persons are so mediated by language, images, representations that at times the very distinction between reality and artifice is called into question. But the house artifice has built is not a prison; the world we live in should not be confused with a giant mall. That Mall has an outside. And the house artifice has built has windows. Re-presenting materials in such a way that we experience the gift of reality may be understood as a way of opening these windows.

22. Kant's Nightingale

1

I countered Nietzsche's claim "Stone is More Stone than it Used to Be" with the contrary claim: "Stone is Less Stone than it Used to Be." The first claim has the support of an understanding of the being of nature and matter that is a presupposition of our science and that an ever-developing technology has carried into our life world. Such an understanding has to reduce the world to a collection of facts that are just what they are, behave just as they do, facts that know no higher meaning, that are in this sense mute and, being themselves without meaning, may be used by us as we see fit. The greater stoniness of stone today has its foundation in a self-assertion of the human subject that would render itself, as Descartes promised, the master and possessor of nature, that found the source of all meaning in human freedom and reason and would force reality, including human reality, say gender distinctions, as best it can to submit to whatever freedom demands. Reality here manifests itself as whatever impedes our efforts, in the heaviness of stone, the effort it takes to leap, to fly, to travel into space, the facticity of the body as it manifests itself, say, in hunger or exhaustion or a toothache strong enough to disentangle the real from all simulacra.

But if such natural givens must be recognized for what they are if we are to find our way in the world, both literally and cognitively, in themselves they are thought to have no meaning. Reality here reduces to mute facts that do not care one bit about human beings and their fate; we render nature habitable only by subjecting it to the human spirit as best we can.

The contrary claim: "Stone is Less Stone than it Used to Be?" bears witness to the fact that Descartes's expectation that the new science would render human beings the masters and possessor of nature was more than just an idle promise. Today artifice threatens to embrace reality so completely that at moments it seems to all but vanish in the embrace, pushed to the peripheries of our postmodern culture, where we may still

meet with vestiges of what Jean Baudrillard calls "the desert of the real itself."²⁰⁸

Baudrillard conjures up a world where image is no longer "the reflection a profound reality," no longer "masks and denatures a profound reality," no longer even "masks the absence of a profound reality," but instead "has no relation to any reality whatsoever" and "is its own pure simulacrum."²⁰⁹ Half fascinated, half appalled, Baudrillard envisions a world that seems to announce its coming in phenomena like in a suburb of Shanghai that mimics an English town or in giant malls that offer their own earth and sky.

I shall not bother here to demonstrate that the thought of an image "that has no relation to any reality whatsoever: that is its own pure simulacrum" is finally as incoherent as the Cartesian thought experiment of a dream standing in no relation to waking reality. Nor shall I bother to show that the world in which most of us most of the time actually live, love, suffer, and die, remains quite distant from such postmodern phantasies. But let me accept Baudrillard's dismal prophecy as at least an illuminating caricature and ask: what makes this caricature so disturbing? How are we to understand the nostalgia for a reality uncontaminated by simulacra, nostalgia that when I visited the Mall of America, showed itself again and again, in stores and restaurants that by their look, especially their choice of materials, are meant to evoke a very different time and place. Just how are we to understand the nostalgia that here is exploited and to which such simulacra respond?

One might think that the creation of such new and totally artificial worlds answers to the ageless dream of a land in which there is no need to work, suffer, and die, a world that caters to all our needs and desires in such a way that we no longer need to make it our own. As in a new Land of Cockaigne, we are offered whatever our hearts might desire. Why then do the worlds created by our mega-malls, with their own sky and earth, water and trees, these figures of some future world that would no longer have an outside

²⁰⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1994), p. 1.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

at all, that really would be what Baudrillard takes our world already to be, a world of simulacra, why do such artificial environments depress me?

2

In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant considers how it would affect us to learn that what we thought the call of a nightingale was in fact a mere simulacrum, produced by a boy an innkeeper had hired some beautiful summer evening to heighten the enjoyment of his guests. The assumption is that what is heard remains indistinguishable and from a purely aesthetic point of view, Kant suggests, there should be no reason to rank one above the other. Nevertheless, once we learn of the deception, what we hear loses its aura; we hear the same melody without the former interest and pleasure, which shows that more is involved in our appreciation of the beauties of nature than just the appreciation of beautiful forms. What matters to Kant is that these forms are experienced as products of nature. Something in nature seems to answer to our intellect and its demands, something spirit-like seems to answer to our own spirit, and Kant here does not hesitate to invoke the old understanding of nature as a text.²¹⁰ Nature is experienced not as a mute other, but as full of meaning.

But what sense can we today make of such an understanding of nature that would incarnate meaning in matter? And more questions are raised by Kant's claim that "an immediate interest in the beauty of nature ... is always the mark of a good soul," that the appreciation of the beauty of nature is "akin to the moral feeling."²¹¹ How are we to understand such kinship?

What links the two is a recognition of something like the incarnation of mind in matter, and such incarnation makes such matter meaningful. That such incarnation is a presupposition of moral feeling should require little comment: morality presupposes that others present themselves to me as persons deserving respect. Looking at the other I

²¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), par. 42, p. 143,

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 143.

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must experience more than just a perhaps beautiful face. That face must present itself to me as matter animated by mind. Learning that what I took to be a person was just some simulacrum would take away the aura that alone lets me recognize the other as a person, like myself, lets me recognize that I am not alone.

But even if we grant that the recognition of persons presupposes an experience that is more than just a registration of mute facts, presupposes an openness to meaning of which I am not the author, what justifies Kant's claim that recognition of beauty in nature, too, presupposes an openness to meaning of which I am not the author, lets me recognize that I am at home in nature? I do not have time here to show that Kant was forced to recognize that even science's pursuit of truth presupposes something like faith in the intelligibility of nature. Something quasi-spiritual must present itself in nature if the laws of science are to be more than arbitrary constructs. That science gives us real power means that the self-assertion that lets human beings oppose themselves to nature as its masters and possessors presupposes a recognition of order, significant patterns, likenesses in nature. All concept formation presupposes such perceptions of meaning in material, meaning which is not disclosed, but discovered. Meaning is made possible only by such perceptions. But this is to say that the origin of meaning does not lie in the subject, nor in mute facts such a subject faces, but in what lies between and always already joins subject and object: in our being caught up in a world of always already meaningful things, things that in different ways always already claim and speak to us.

I have tried to show that matter need not be thought in opposition to meaning, that it should be thought rather as always already charged with meaning, charged with meanings even before the architect goes to work. And if the architect's work is not to look insubstantial it must respond to these meanings, meanings that are bound up with what earlier I called material transcendence. What puts us in touch with material transcendence, this transcendence within the visible, within the sensible, is first of all our body. Here it is important to keep in mind that the embodied self is also a caring, desiring self. What discloses itself to such a self is never just an assemblage of mute facts, but rather an inevitably meaningful configuration of things to be desired or avoided. To be in the world is to be claimed in countless different ways by persons and

things. What I call material transcendence may thus not be reduced to the mute presence of things. To be open to it is inevitably to be affected, moved, claimed. Material transcendence thus also refers to that incarnation of meaning in matter to which we must be open if our thinking, speaking, and building is to matter. To be open to material transcendence is to be open to the special aura of things.

3

The word “aura” brings to mind Walter Benjamin. In this age of their mechanical reproduction, Benjamin claims, works of art and architecture have to lose the aura they once possessed.²¹² That recalls Hegel’s claim that today art in its highest sense belongs to a never to be recovered past. And like Hegel, who proclaims the death of art in its highest sense even as he invites us to affirm that death as a necessary consequence of humanity’s coming of age, Benjamin, too, proclaims the loss of the aura works of art once possessed, even as he invites us to affirm that loss as a necessary byproduct of the progress of technology, progress that he recognizes to be essential to the progress of humanity: does technology, promising to render us the masters and possessors, not just of nature without, but of our own nature, not also promise true autonomy and happiness to all? This to be sure presupposes, as Benjamin reminds us, that a society is “mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ,”²¹³ instead of allowing technology to become an instrument used by those in power to reduce human beings to human material. Such maturity cannot simply be assumed. When Benjamin wrote these words in 1935 Fascism seemed about to triumph in Europe, not only embracing technology, but exploiting art and its aura to transfigure technology into a modern idol.

As his work in its entirety shows, Benjamin, too, found it difficult to let go of what in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” he seems so ready to relegate to a never to be recovered past. In that essay this is hinted at by an example he

²¹² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 217-251.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

offers, where it is significant that it is taken not from art but from nature: “If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch.”²¹⁴ The experience is familiar. The material object is experienced here as possessing a special significance, a special resonance and depth.

Is it this special significance that the word “aura” is meant to capture. The Greek “aura” meant “breath” or “breeze,” the Latin a gentle wind or current of air; “aura” thus came to name the subtle emanation of some substance, for example the special odor of a rose. In this sense an artificial rose can be said to lack the aura of the original. In all these case “aura” names a perhaps elusive, but definitely physical phenomenon that can in principle be measured. Aura here has a material basis. That basis became more elusive, was spiritualized, when aura came to be understood in the 19th century as a “subtle emanation around living beings.” In that sense one might speak of the special aura issuing from a charismatic person or from someone we love. And is there not a similarity between the aura of the beloved and the aura of that distant mountain range? Does the latter not also hint at a happiness that cannot be captured in words?

What Benjamin here has in mind would not appear to be a material phenomenon: this at least is suggested by his definition of aura “as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.”²¹⁵ The chosen examples shift our attention away from smell and touch, senses that are more immediately involved with matter, to the more spiritual eye. Sight, to be sure, presupposes distance: whatever is seen is seen at a distance and in principle that distance can be measured. Benjamin’s invocation of a “unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be,” forces us to link the phenomenon of aura as he here understands it, not to a physical, but to a psychical distance. As Benjamin points out in his elaboration of this thought in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939): “To perceive the aura of an object we look at is to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.” An important footnote adds this explanation: “This

²¹⁴ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” pp. 222-223.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

endowment is a wellspring of poetry. Wherever a human being, an animal, or an inanimate object thus endowed by the poet lifts up its eyes, it draws him into the distance. The gaze of nature thus awakened dreams and pulls the poet after its dreams.”

If, as his loving description of the distant mountain range and many similar passages show, Benjamin knew all too well the seductive call of the aura that seems to issue from works of art, from nature, and from persons, he also had good reason to be suspicious of the spiritual, quasi-religious significance “aura” so readily suggests. Had not Marx called religion “the opium of the people”: “at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering, . . . the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.”²¹⁶ And since human suffering and oppression remain, even as that death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche would seem to deny those truly of this modern age the consolation religion once was able to provide, cannot the artwork and its aura offer at least some compensation for what had been lost by offering a substitute, if only illusory transcendence? Especially in 1935 the state of the world made an escape into the aesthetic seem irresponsible to Benjamin. What was needed, he insisted, was not the consolation offered by beautiful illusion that willingly turns its back on ugly reality, but active intervention that will change the world for the better.

4

Benjamin was a modernist in his resistance to the cult of beauty and the celebration of the aura of a work of art. "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception (the perceiver being the advanced or conscious proletarian) whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' (that is, its Marxist communal egalitarian sense) has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction"²¹⁷ The quote expands on and at the same time demands

²¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, February, 1844.

²¹⁷ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 223.

reconsideration of aura as an aesthetic phenomenon. Key here is Benjamin's emphasis on the unique materiality of the auratic object, which is said to be challenged by the proletarian's "Marxist communal egalitarian sense." Benjamin here links aura to originality, where "The presence of the original" is said to be "the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity. "Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish this, as does the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century. The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical — and, of course, not only technical reproducibility."²¹⁸

The way Benjamin links aura to a particular piece of matter invites further consideration. So understood, aura is destroyed by reproduction, where thinking of such essentially reproducible art-works as woodcuts and engravings — to which Benjamin himself calls the reader's attention in his essay — we may well wonder whether so understood the concern for authenticity does not lose sight of the art character of art and distances Benjamin's understanding of aura from aura as understood by the aesthetic approach. For a defining characteristic of the aesthetic approach to art, captured by the rhetoric of "beautiful illusion" (*schöner Schein*), would seem to be precisely the dissociation of the aura of the aesthetic object from its materiality, from what Heidegger calls its thingliness.

But must we not grant at least this much: whatever else works of art may be, they are also things. And is this not what Benjamin himself insists on when he opposes to what he takes to be the backward looking auratic understanding of art to the forward looking political understanding that he associates with Marxism, where he too recognized the importance of Dada in destroying the matter-bound aura of the art work. Marcel Duchamp thus declared that he "wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting," that he "was interested in making painting serve [his] purposes, and in getting away from the physicality of painting. For me Courbet had introduced the physical emphasis in the nineteenth century. I was interested in ideas, not merely in visual

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 220.

products.”²¹⁹ The politicization of art advocated by Benjamin is not so very different, although he had no doubt very different purposes in mind than the self-absorbed Duchamp.

Much recent concept art could be cited in support of what Benjamin has to say about the shift from an auratic to a political art. To be sure, there will always be some material thing that mediates the aesthetic experience, but that experience will leave the mediating thing behind and render it quite unimportant, no more than an occasion to engage the thoughtful observer. And what case can be made for the importance of some unique piece of matter? Kant already had called the importance of the thingly character of the work of art into question: for him the aesthetic object is in an important sense not a thing at all. And is he not supported in an obvious way by such arts as music or poetry? When we speak of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, are we speaking of a thing? If so, how is “thing” understood here? Can it be weighed or located in time and space? That can be said of some particular score and every performance takes place in space and time — but we would not want to identify either with the Fifth Symphony, which will continue to be when these are long gone. And appreciating some work of art in a good reproduction, are we not appreciating the work of art?

To be sure, paintings are things. But does a pure aesthetic experience not surpass the material object and leave it behind, absorbed in the beauty of its optical appearance? The material thing, it would seem, is here like a gate that grants access to the beautiful forms that are the object of a purely aesthetic and that means for Kant a spiritual understanding. A distinction between material thing and aesthetic object is demanded by Kant’s understanding of the disinterested character of aesthetic experience. Given such an aesthetic understanding of art, the technical reproducibility of works of art should pose no threat to their art character. It only threatens those who would fetishize the thing in the work of art. What is at stake?

²¹⁹ Marcel Duchamp, “Painting . . . at the Service of the Mind,” in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 393-394.

Benjamin recognizes that his matter-based concept of aura casts light not so much on the aesthetic approach to art as on an older understanding that placed art at the service of ritual: “We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual — first the magical, then the religious kind.”²²⁰ And that older understanding, even if not in keeping with the spirit of the times, yet retains its hold on us. Benjamin thus finds it “significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function.”²²¹

5

Benjamin would have objected to what he might have called a fetishizing of matter incompatible with the spirit of modern materialism. And thus he links the aura of the authentic work of art not so much to the unique, material thing it is, as to the way it is “imbedded in the fabric of tradition.”²²² History and memory are given greater importance than nature. Reproduction is said to tear the artwork out of its historical context and thus to destroy its aura. This claim invites a broader application: in the age of mechanical reproduction, must not nature, too, and finally even human nature lose that special aura that distinguishes the original from its simulacrum? And if so, what are the implications of the loss of aura for ethics? This is perhaps the central question raised in this lecture.

Benjamin’s loving description of the true collector — he knew what he was talking about, having been just such a collector himself — offers a pointer to just how much is at stake in the refusal to let go of the artwork’s aura: human happiness.

O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure! Of no one has less been expected, and no one has a greater sense of well-being than the man who has been able to carry on his disreputable existence in the mask of Spitzweg’s “Bookworm.” For inside him there are spirits, or at least little

²²⁰ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 223.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

²²² Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 223.

genii, which have seen to it that for the collector — and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be — ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.²²³

We may well ask: but what does it matter that I own this particular material object, this surviving exemplar of some rare edition, rather than some readily available and perhaps much more informative critical edition of the same text? Why should I care about the book's provenance, its previous owners?

Benjamin's portrait of the collector underscores the way aura grants to things an almost human presence.

Habent sua fata libelli: these words may have been intended as a general statement about books. So books like *The Divine Comedy*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, and *The Origin of the Species* have their fates. A collector, however, interprets this Latin saying differently. For him, not only books but also copies of books have their fates. And in this sense, the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with him, with his own collection. I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth.²²⁴

The acquisition of a book is here described in a way that suggests a marriage. It is like, not just meeting, but choosing to live with another person, to make that person part of our lives, to live in them. The simile suggests that the aura some book or work of art possesses for the true collector is not unlike the aura that any person possesses whom we encounter and cherish as such. The true collector invests what he collects with his own humanity, experiences it as if it were a person. That helps to explain its aura and his bliss.

²²³ Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Book Collecting," *Illuminations*, p. 67.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

It is indeed the person in the work of art, Benjamin suggests, that provides a last refuge to what remains of the cult value once possessed by works of art:

In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty.²²⁵

And is there not a sense in which it is the human countenance of a painting, even of an abstract painting, say by Jackson Pollock, which, while offering us no more than traces, nevertheless is experienced as a kind of self-portrait that here, too, offers what once was the cult value of painting a last refuge? We get here a hint that the cult value of certain objects is tied to the way they place us in an ongoing human context. The loss of aura means spiritual homelessness. The age of mechanical reproduction threatens the triumph of nihilism.

As his discussion of the collector suggests, the paradigm behind all experiences of aura is for Benjamin the experience of another person: “Looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met (which, in the case of thought processes can apply equally to the look of the mind and to a glance [pure and simpler), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent.”²²⁶ There is to be sure a profound difference between experiencing the gaze of the other and experiencing the aura of a writer or a composer in one of his or her creations. When I experience the other person the experience of his or her distinctive aura is the experience of an incarnation of spirit and matter so complete that there is that no distance between the two. The mystery of aura is the mystery of such incarnation,

²²⁵ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 226.

²²⁶ Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” p. 188.

which is fully realized when two lovers look into each other's eyes: "The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return."²²⁷ But something of the sort is present in every experience of aura: to experience the aura of something is to experience it as if it were another person, capable of speech. Benjamin no doubt would have us underscore the "as if": "Experience of the aura thus rests on the transportation of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man."²²⁸ On this interpretation it is the human subject who invests an essentially mute nature with something like spirit of soul. But must we who are truly of this modern world not recognize that such an investment is at bottom a self-deception? Today a child may still experience rocks and toys as animate, endowed with the power of speech; and fairy tales preserve traces of an older magical experience of the aura of all things. But is a presupposition of our science and technology not a reason that has to render nature mute and meaningless? Such a reason cannot make sense of the phenomenon of aura except as a projection of meaning into matter that as such lacks meaning. And are human beings not part of nature? The question returns us to Nietzsche's pronouncement in *The Birth of Tragedy* that only as an aesthetic phenomenon can human existence be satisfied. If this is accepted, the distinction, so important to Benjamin, between the Fascist aestheticization of politics and the Marxist politicization of art has to collapse for all politics then rests on an aesthetic foundation. What allows us, or Benjamin, in this age of the technical reproducibility, not just of works of art, but increasingly of just about everything, to hold on to a fundamental distinction between the aura of human beings and the aura of works of art and natural objects? Are not even human beings today in danger of losing that special aura that distinguishes persons from their simulacra? Think of artificial hearts! Of cloning!

The awareness that what we have before is not really rock, but only simulates one, threatens to reduce what presents itself to our eyes to a mere spectacle. It threatens to transform the experience into one that does not involve our whole being and that, because

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

of the privilege here given to the eye at the expense of our embodied self with all its cares and interests, robs what is experienced of its weight. Mock rock loses the aura of the real. But such loss inevitably diminishes our sense of our own reality. And the same is true of an environment of simulacra. To the de-realization of things corresponds the de-realization of the subject. Openness to the reality of the real lets the self return to itself. Is it not this that lets us long for wilderness?

6

Let me return in concluding this lecture to Kant's example of the song of a nightingale imitated by a boy some innkeeper had hired to please his guests. The assumption here is that what is heard remains indistinguishable from the song of the real nightingale. From a purely aesthetic point of view, it would seem, there should be no reason to rank one above the other. We might even prefer the simulacrum, which demonstrates the skill of the performer. Nevertheless, Kant suggests, once we learn of the deception, what we hear loses its aura; we hear the same melody, but without the former interest and pleasure, which shows that more is involved in our appreciation of beautiful nature than just the appreciation of beautiful forms. What matters to Kant is that these forms are experienced by us as products of nature, as not born of artifice.

But just what is it that gives the real nightingale of the real flower its special aura? How are we to understand this sense that what we are experiencing is not something artificial, that it is not a product of our own spirit that here seems to speak to us, but spirit incarnated in nature? Whatever it is, it must be a bit like feeling the heaviness of the stone. It weighs on us, touches us.

Beauty alone, Kant's example of the two nightingales teaches us, is not enough: representations or reproductions of beautiful nature do not preserve the aura of the original. That is the lesson of Kant's nightingale: the beauty of nature, including human nature, lets us feel at home in the world as the beauty of mere art is unable to do. The beauty of art must remain grounded in the beauty of nature. The experience of the beauty of the environment promises a genuine homecoming.

But has Benjamin not taught us to recognize the self-deception that supports such an experience? What sense can we still make of talk of spirit dwelling in nature? A religious person might have an answer. But how are we to understand such talk? What links the two is that both involve something like a recognition of an incarnation of spirit in matter. To be sure, as Kant emphasizes, science can know nothing of such an incarnation. And yet such incarnation is a presupposition of any ethics. Morality presupposes that we experience others as persons deserving respect. But are we human beings not part of nature?

23. Material Transcendence

1

In the past lectures I have invoked a number of times what I call “material transcendence.” It does indeed play a crucial part in the argument for a more substantial architecture I have been trying to construct. But just what do I mean by that term? The expression invites question: there seems to be tension between “material,” on one hand, “transcendence,” on the other. To be sure, there are material objects that in an obvious way speak of transcendence. Consider some Romanesque portal, such as the Prior’s Door of Ely Cathedral (1170). Given an image such as this the term makes some sense. What we see does invite thoughts of Christ, here seen enthroned in majesty and supported by archangels, raising his right hand in blessing, holding in his left hand the Book with the Seven Seals in which all good and evil deeds are recorded. In an obvious way what is here represented is thought to transcend the world in which have to live and die. But “transcendence” here names something that transcends the material. Transcendence here cannot be attributed to matter. By the way the sculptor worked his material he made it speak of the sacred. But again: what does the material that he transformed have to do with transcendence: Does the stone the sculptor used invite talk of transcendence? What sense does it make to speak here of “material transcendence”?

Whenever the word “transcendence” gets used we should ask ourselves just what is being transcended. The word comes from the Latin *transcendere*, which means to climb over something, some obstacle for example, say a mountain ridge. Transcending you reach some beyond. But beyond what? First of all, the place where we find ourselves first of all and most of the time: this earth, subject to time, and thus to death and decay. For the ancients and the medievals, that is for those who created the *Prior’s Door*, beyond our world in which there is death and decay, there was a higher realm that could not be touched, although it could be seen, the superlunar, celestial realm, the realm of the sun and the stars, a realm, they thought not subject to death and decay, but still visible and subject to time. But if that realm could still be reached by the eye, if not touched, the creators of the *Prior’s Door* believed in a realm higher still, an invisible

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realm accessible only to the intellect. Plato already posited the reality of such a realm, the invisible realm of the forms, a realm no longer subject to time at all, but eternal, though accessible to human reason. But does not even our human reason have its limits? Is there not a reality even higher than what reason can grasp, a transcendent realm to which our concepts cannot do justice? And is it not such transcendence that belongs to the Biblical God, who is said to be infinite? We get thus a ladder of transcendence that leads us out of the temporal and finite to the eternal and infinite. But nothing here invites talk of material transcendence.

But must transcendence be thought in opposition to temporal reality, to materiality? Must it be thought in opposition to the body and to spirit? Should a Christian not insist on just the opposite: insist that the link of matter to transcendence is essential to Christianity? I can leave this question open. But what I do want to insist on is this: to the extent that spirit and the eternal are privileged at the expense of the body and the temporal, it will be impossible to arrive at a full self-affirmation. Openness to a different sort of transcendence — to what I call material transcendence — is a condition of a full self-affirmation. With Heidegger we may want to say, preservation of the earth is a necessary condition of authentic dwelling. My expression “material transcendence” and Heidegger’s “earth” point in the same direction.

2

I am aware that the very expression “material transcendence” may suggest opposition to Biblical religion. Think of Moses smashing the golden calf. Here let me read you what an early Christian thinker, Asterius of Amasia (c. 350 – c. 410 AD), has to say about religious art":

Do not make a picture of Christ; the humiliation of the Incarnation to which He submitted of his own free will and for our sake was sufficient

for Him to endure — rather let us carry around in our soul the incorporeal world.²²⁹

There is no need here to rehearse the history of Christian iconoclasm. That the marriage of art and Christian faith should have been an uneasy one from the very beginning is to be expected, given Christianity's emphasis on the spirit, on the one invisible God, who suffered no other gods. The *Lady's Chapel* adjoining the Cathedral at Ely is but one of many examples: The Reformation here did thorough work destroying what was one of the great achievements of medieval sculpture.

And yet, this invisible God not only is said to have created the world, a first descent of the divine into the visible, but to have incarnated Himself and thus to have closed the gap between spirit and body: the miracle of Christmas. Must we understand the Incarnation with Asterius of Amasia as a humiliation? Should Christians not understand it rather as a necessity, founded in the very being of God, demanded by both body and soul, sensuousness and spirit? And if so, should we not join those who appealed to the Incarnation to defend art, this human incarnation of spirit in matter?

But modernity has difficulty accepting the Incarnation, which confronts us with the paradox that Mary should be God's mother, daughter, and bride, just as modernity has difficulty granting more than an aesthetic significance to art. Even Christians today tend to relegate the Incarnation to a past that lies behind us. Christianity has become the religion of the no longer present, the dead God, the religion of a spiritual and increasingly empty transcendence.

We have inherited Christianity's suspicion of religious art. If most of are no longer iconoclasts, this is because we have difficulty taking the religious function of art that seriously. Hegel forcefully makes this point:

... there is a profounder grasp of truth, in which the form is no longer on such easy and friendly terms with the sensuous material as to be adequately accepted and expressed by that medium. Of such a type is the

²²⁹ Cited in Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, trans. Stanley Godman, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, n. d.), p. 138.

Christian conception of truth; and above all it is the prevailing spirit of the modern world, or, more strictly, of our religion and our intellectual culture, which have passed beyond the point at which art is the highest mode under which the absolute is brought home to human consciousness. The type peculiar to art production and its products fails any longer to satisfy man's highest need. We are beyond the stage of reverence for works of art as divine and objects deserving our worship. The impressions they produce is one of a more reflective kind, and the emotions which they arouse require a higher test and a further verification. Thought and reflection have taken their flight above fine art.²³⁰

Today's performance and concept art could be cited as proof that art in what Hegel considers its "true sense" has come or is coming to an end, where by such art Hegel means art that "has established itself in a sphere which it shares with religion and philosophy, becoming thereby merely one mode and form through which the Divine, the profoundest interest of mankind, and spiritual truths of the widest range, are brought home to consciousness and expressed."²³¹ "Thought and reflection have" indeed "taken their flight above fine art." Given that flight it is difficult to take seriously iconoclast controversies.

The question remains whether a religion that thus leaves art and sensuousness behind must not also leave the whole human being behind. And must such a religion then not also leave religion behind? And we do not have to be religious to raise such a question. Does the same not also hold for humanity: when we leave art and sensuousness behind, do we not also leave the whole human being behind?

²³⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner, vol. XII, pp. 30 - 31. Trans. by F. P. B. Osmaston in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty. Selected Readings from Plato to Heidegger*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 390 - 391.

²³¹ *Jubiläumsausgabe*, XII, 27; trans. p. 388.

3

Let me return to the word “transcendence”: earlier I suggested that when the Biblical God is called infinite this claims that he must be sought beyond whatever the finite human intellect can grasp. Transcendence here refers to what is thought to transcend the reach of our concepts and words, is thought to elude the embrace of our reason. But in that sense, not only God, but every material object deserves to be called transcendent: Try do describe any particular! Your description will never come to a point where it is totally adequate to the thing. There will always be more to be said. Every particular is infinite. In this sense every particular invites talk of material transcendence.

And in that sense we human beings transcend ourselves precisely by virtue of being not just disembodied spirit, but embodied, temporal beings, transcend ourselves in pain and in pleasure, where, as Nietzsche recognized, the body should not be placed in opposition to soul. With Nietzsche's Zarathustra I would rather say that the self, which Zarathustra calls both "body" and "a great reason, " transcends the spirit, "your little reason."²³²

Self-transcendence may of course and indeed must also be understood in a very different sense. Think of the power of the human spirit to transcend the here and now, the limits imposed on it by the body and the senses, which inevitably tie us to a particular point of view and thus to a particular perspective, a power that allows us to travel in thought to the most distant stars. The spirit cannot be assigned a place as readily as can the body.

This sense of self transcendence is presupposed by much mysticism, for example by the mysticism of Meister Eckhart. I read you the following passage once before — it deserves repeating. “Yesterday as I sat yonder I said something that sounds incredible: ‘Jerusalem is as near to my soul as my body is,’ and I am as sure of this as I am of being human, and it is easy to understand for learned priests.”²³³ Eckhart here calls our

²³² *The Portable Nietzsche*, p. 146.

²³³ *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, ed. and trans. Josef Quint, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936-1976), "Adolescens, tibi dico: surge!" vol. 2, p. 305. Meister Eckhart, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 134.

attention to our power of self-transcendence. And I recognize the seductive appeal of the abyss opened up within the self by such a movement of self-transcendence: an infinite abyss that is readily identified with the Godhead. As all definite content is recognized to be profoundly incompatible with divine transcendence, it comes to be thought of as "the wild that has no name."²³⁴ But God, once he has become so indefinite, threatens to evaporate altogether. God becomes indistinguishable from an infinite, empty transcendence, as theism and atheism become indistinguishable. This evolution of an ever more radical self-transcendence culminates in the experience of a radical freedom, a freedom that, acknowledging no measure, threatens to degenerate into caprice.

This development is essentially also a movement of introversion. The individual is cast back into him- or herself. In medieval mysticism we have one root of a very modern subjectivism. Already in the fourteenth century we find a conception of freedom as radical as anything the existentialists were going to come up with much later. Here I only want to suggest that pushed to such extremes self-transcendence has to leave behind the sacred. Modern self-transcendence does indeed invite a movement of introversion that invites, to speak with Kierkegaard, to a "teleological suspension of the ethical." Freedom leaves ethics behind. But this is a temptation I think we should resist.

4

I have suggested that we can distinguish a material from a formal self-transcendence. In the latter case what actually presents itself to my senses is transcended, as the spirit turns first to the absent, then to the merely possible, and finally to the infinite. I speak here of formal transcendence to suggest that what the spirit here turns to lacks content.

In the former case what is transcended is precisely that linguistic or conceptual space in which things must find their place if they are to be understood and

²³⁴ Heinrich Seuse, *Das Buch der Wahrheit, Daz buechli der warheit*, ed. Loris Sturlese and Rüdiger Blumrich, intro. Loris Sturlese, trans. Rüdiger Blumrich, *Mittelhochdeutsch-Deutsch* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1993), pp. 56-57.

comprehended. As I pointed out, "material transcendence" points thus in the same direction as Heidegger's "earth" or as the Kantian "thing-in-itself," which is present to us only as appearance, more precisely in the experience of the givenness of appearance, in the experience of the thing as a gift. Inseparable from our experience of things is a sense of this gift, an awareness that our understanding is finite, and that means also that the reach of our words and human artifice is limited. Everything real is infinitely complex and thus can never be fully translated into words. It is, to use a Kantian expression, "inexponible." The rift between thing and word, between reality and language cannot be closed. Not that this is a defect of language; quite the opposite, it is the very point of language to transcend the particular by means of the universal.

Language opens human beings to reality. Heidegger's thus calls language the house of being. Whatever presents itself to us, whatever has being for us, must have its place in that house. Yet, as Heidegger also emphasized, language conceals even as it reveals. Where this essential concealment is forgotten, language cannot but replace reality with a false, merely linguistic reality — and that holds also for religious reality. This is why religion cannot dispense with art, especially with art that does not rely on words, such as architecture. To be sure, human being is essentially a dwelling in language. But the house of language is not a prison. Art may be understood as a way of opening the windows of that house, and that goes also for poetry, which should not be understood as a speaking that is privileged in that it offers particularly effective descriptions of things, but rather as a speaking that re-presents the essence of language in such a way that it becomes conspicuous, and that means a speaking that opens up the rift between language and reality that is essential to language.²³⁵

As I pointed out last time, what puts us in touch with material transcendence, this transcendence within the visible, within the sensible, is first of all the body. Here it is important to keep in mind that the embodied self is also a caring, desiring self. What it

²³⁵ Karsten Harries, "Poetry as Response. Heidegger's Step Beyond Aestheticism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 16, *Philosophy and the Arts* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. 73 - 88.

discloses is not just an assemblage of mute facts, but an inevitably meaningful configuration of objects of desire or things to be avoided. Material transcendence may thus not be reduced to the mute presence of things. To be open to it is inevitably to be affected, moved, claimed. Material transcendence thus refers to the affective base without which all our talk of values and divinities is ultimately groundless: idle talk.

5

So understood material transcendence seems to me a necessary, but not sufficient condition for what may be called "sacred transcendence."²³⁶ What material transcendence lacks is precisely that "unique power of integration" that the philosopher Louis Dupré takes to be a defining attribute of the sacred. Sacred transcendence is material transcendence experienced as possessing an integrating power. But how are we to understand that power? What do I have in mind?

Recall the story of Jacob's ladder! Jacob comes to some place to rest. This particular place is experienced as filled with the presence of the divine. A vertical descends, so to speak, unto the horizontal earth and makes this place special, somewhat as love singles out a particular person and makes that person special. As Kierkegaard knew so well, the analogy between faith and love is indeed inescapable.

But let me return to the story of Jacob's ladder. Suddenly there is a privileged place. Objectively speaking, to be sure, there is nothing extraordinary about the place where Jacob lay down to sleep. What makes the place special is something subjective, the dream Jacob had in just this particular place, which let him experience it as the house of God and the gate of heaven. Jacob, to be sure, would have us dismiss this characterization of his experience as merely subjective. He felt that what he experienced in this place was nothing less than the presence of God. And might someone in love not give a similar reply? An outsider might point out with some justice that there is nothing very extraordinary about the beloved person, that what makes the beloved special to the

²³⁶ See Louis Dupré, "The Sacred as a Particular Category of Transcendence," *Transcendent Selfhood*, pp. 19 - 22.

lover is once again something merely subjective, although the lover might reply that what he experienced, if perhaps not the presence of God, is yet the presence of some divine power. A Greek might have invoked Aphrodite.

But does not truth demand that we assume an utterly disinterested and emotionally detached point of view, a position of unaffected neutrality from which only ‘the facts’ are visible? Such a point of view is illuminated only by the cold light of reason. Thus all that gives our life meaning is destroyed by science in its pursuit of truth. As Nietzsche tells us in *The Gay Science*, “a world of truth, or rather, a ‘scientific’ interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore still be one of the *most stupid* of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning.”²³⁷ Truth, so understood, leaves no place for anything we might associate with meaning or value. These present an obstacle to pursuing truth. “The objective man is indeed a mirror: he is accustomed to submit before whatever wants to be known, without any other pleasure than that found in knowing and ‘mirroring’...whatever still remains in him of a ‘person’ strikes him as accidental, often arbitrary, still more often disturbing.”²³⁸ With this observation Nietzsche is close to Kierkegaard:

The way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something. The way to the objective truth goes away from the subject, and while the subject and subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and that is precisely its objective validity, because the interest, just like the decision, is objectivity.²³⁹

²³⁷ *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1974, sec. 373.

²³⁸ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 207.

²³⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, vol. 1, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 193.

Truth demands an objective point of view, one that is neutral, a view from nowhere, belonging to no one person—which nonetheless demands the assent of every person. Yet to speak from the point of view of every person is to lose sight of *persons* and confront a mute and indifferent world, a world in which things no longer speak of their place in the world. To live a meaningful life we have to turn from objective to subjective truth. And what is subjective truth?

For an answer I turn once more to Kierkegaard. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard writes that “Truth is subjectivity.” Truth is understood here as “An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most personal inwardness” — where Kierkegaard was thinking once again of both love and faith. This he calls “the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.” He can call the highest truth because only such a subjective truth can provide life with the necessary focus and orientation. But such a subjective truth cannot be willed. We lack the power to invent what will give meaning to our life. We must be touched by something that transcends our freedom and reason, as Jacob was touched in that place called Bethel. Or think again of falling in love.

Jacob, as I pointed out before, responds to his dream experience by rising and by raising the stone that had served him for a pillow from a horizontal into a vertical position. Jacob's pillar, I pointed out, is the archetype of the church and a paradigm, not just of sacred architecture, but of sacred art, of art understood as a re-presentation of material that even before taken up by some artist, “speaks,” a re-presentation that understands itself as a response to divinity, to some higher, integrating power. And versions of the story were repeated in countless pilgrimage places all over the world. I mentioned the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Here another pilgrimage church, Vierzehnheiligen, through which I led a group of architects and philosophers this past summer.

Again there is a specific place and a miraculous event. On September 24, 1445 a young shepherd saw a crying child in a field that belonged to the nearby Cistercian monastery. When he bent down to pick up the child, it smiled and disappeared. A short

time later, the child reappeared in the very same spot. This time, two candles were burning next to it. The shepherd's parents were skeptical. In June 1446, the shepherd saw the child a third time, bearing a red cross on its chest and accompanied by fourteen other children. The child said: "We are the fourteen helpers and wish to erect a chapel here, where we can rest. If you will be our servant, we will be yours!" Two burning candles descended to the spot. Miraculous healings soon began. A cross was raised in that place within a year; the following year a chapel was built and consecrated to the Virgin and the fourteen saints. Soon a larger church was built. In the 17th and 18th century the pilgrimage became so popular that the decision was made to build a still more splendid church. Today the number of pilgrims has declined, although many still seek the help of fourteen saints.

Hegel suggests that ours is an age when "great art, together with its nature, has departed from among men,"²⁴⁰ had to depart, because the now ruling sense of reality makes our finite understanding the measure of reality and thus has to obscure what Heidegger calls the "earth" and what I have called "material transcendence." Much art today struggles to keep human beings open to this elusive dimension, without claiming the integrative power needed to establish a world in Heidegger's sense. Without such openness, without the experience of a positive transcendence, religious discourse has to degenerate into idle talk. To keep itself thus open religion must turn to art. Religion needs art to preserve a sense of the sacred and thus to preserve itself. But it is not only religion that requires such openness. As the analogy of faith and love hints, it is a requirement of human dwelling.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, "Epilogue, p. 79.

24. The Need for an Environmental Aesthetics

1

I concluded the last lecture by reiterating my claim that the understanding of reality that rules our science and technology and that has so decisively shaped the world we live in has no room for value or meaning. By making objectifying reason the measure of reality, we have to obscure what Heidegger calls the "earth" and what I have called "material transcendence." To keep human beings open to this elusive dimension remains the task of architecture and art. But that claim presupposes an understanding of both art and architecture that is in tension with much that aesthetics has had to say about both. What we need, I want to claim is a different aesthetics, an environmental aesthetics.

But this is by no means obvious. The conjunction of "aesthetics" and "environment" is anything but self-explanatory. It raises the question: how are we to understand "aesthetics" here? The fact that aesthetics has had so little to say about the environment should give us pause. Is it just a matter of neglect of an important topic or is there something about aesthetics that renders the very idea of environmental aesthetics problematic?

To be sure, that we need to protect our environment has become a so often repeated cliché that I am just a bit uneasy about repeating it here — that hardly bears much discussion any longer. Isn't it obvious that we need to make sure that all those natural resources on which we depend for our survival will continue to be available, not just to us, but to future generations? And when we think here of natural resources we should think them in the widest possible sense so that they include what the ancients thought of as the four elements, air, water, earth and fire, where I invite you to think of their modern transformations. Even space has become an increasingly scarce resource. But if all this is indeed obvious, it is not at all clear that we need an environmental aesthetics? What, if anything, does aesthetics have to contribute to meeting the evident environmental problems we face?

A brief look at aesthetics, as it evolved ever since Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten founded this philosophical discipline in his dissertation of 1735 and gave it its name,

suggests: very little. Environmental concerns have not figured in any significant way in aesthetics. Consider, e.g., the beginning of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*:

The present course of lectures deals with 'Aesthetics'. Their subject is the wide realm of the beautiful, and more particularly, their province is Art — we may restrict it indeed to Fine Art.²⁴¹

The second sentence begins in a way that suggests that aesthetics as Hegel understands it can be concerned with the beauty of nature. An environmental aesthetics should be concerned with the beauty of the environment. This seems unproblematic. But as the sentence continues, it becomes clear that the environment, at least the natural environment, is hardly a proper subject for aesthetics, as Hegel understood it. The proper province of aesthetics is said to be Fine Art.

Hegel did not think his restriction of the discipline to Fine Art at all arbitrary, but took it to be demanded by the very nature of "aesthetics." "In dealing with natural beauty we find ourselves too open to vagueness, and too destitute of a criterion; for which reason such a review would have little interest."²⁴² The key expressions here, emphasized in Hegel's text, are "vagueness" and "too destitute of a criterion." The beauty of nature resists conceptual analysis. It is essentially elusive.

And did Hegel not have good reason to exclude the beauty of nature from his *Aesthetics*? Hegel justifies this exclusion by insisting that "the beauty of art is the beauty that is born — born again, that is — of the mind; and by as much as the mind and its products are higher than nature and its appearances, by so much the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of Nature. Indeed, if we look at it *formally*, i.e. only considering in what way it exists, not what there is in it, even a silly fancy such as may pass through a man's head is *higher* than any product of nature."²⁴³ Nature is thought here, in

²⁴¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, vols. 12 – 14 of *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner, 20 vols. (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1937), vol. 12, p. 19; *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 3.

²⁴² *Introductory Lectures.*, p. 5.

²⁴³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, vol. 12, p. 19; trans. p. 4.

characteristically modern fashion, to be mute material to be understood, appropriated, and used by us as we see fit. A crystal can be called beautiful, but the beauty of its geometric faces is really the product of our own spirit, which recognizes in their geometry something of itself. With greater justice a city, or just a ploughed field can be called beautiful, for in both cases human beings have labored to impose an order on matter. Nature has been subjected to the human spirit. Considered just in itself, Hegel insists, nature cannot be considered beautiful.

Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as ‘but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being, as a mode whose really substantial element is contained in the mind itself.’²⁴⁴

Hegel knows of course that human beings are more than just minds. They, too, are animals and as such part of and dependent on nature. But if human beings are animals and as such part of nature, they are animals that by virtue of their reason raise themselves above nature, become conscious of it, experience it, including their own nature, as not simply given, but as material to be understood, shaped, and bent to their will, instructed by their reason. Their spirit places human beings in opposition to nature, demands mastery over it. As I mentioned before, in something as simple as a child throwing stones into the water and enjoying the rings formed Hegel finds evidence of this drive. Already in such childish play human beings seek to appropriate the natural given by transforming it in their own image and this means first of all in the image of the human spirit. History is understood by Hegel as the progress of such appropriation; our modern age as the culmination of that process. Have we not come close today to realizing the Cartesian promise that our science and technology would render us the masters and possessors of nature?

²⁴⁴ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, vol. 12, p. 21; trans. p. 4

And *if* we grant Hegel that history has been ruled by the progress of spirit and freedom, do we not grant him the substance of his case? If the progress of spirit demands that the individual liberate him- or herself ever more decisively from the accidents of whatever happens to be the case, then our real home should not be sought by looking to nature, say by looking to the aura of some particular place and its *genius loci*. Must our real home not be a spiritual home to which nothing sensible can finally do justice? Our environment comes closest to meeting this demand when we experience it, not as nature, but as artifact.

The Enlightenment gave birth to the confidence that, bound ever more only by the authority of our own reason, we moderns find ourselves on the threshold of true autonomy. Our aggressive appropriation and transformation of the environment appears from this perspective as but an aspect of humanity's coming of age. We should look to science and technology for solutions to the many problems that face us, not to art. What then do we have to learn from aesthetics?

2

Anyone with an interest in developing an environmental aesthetics has to take issue with Hegel. And not just with Hegel, but with a way of thinking about beauty that is as old as Plato. In an earlier lecture I spoke of a perennial Platonism. Recall this statement from Corbusier's and Ozenfant's programmatic essay "Purism": "Nothing is worthwhile which is not general, nothing is worthwhile which is not transmittable. We have attempted to establish an aesthetic that is rational and therefore human."²⁴⁵ Consider once more that passage from the *Philebus* that I read you before, a passage that makes me think of an artist like Mondrian:

I do not mean by beauty of form such beauty as that of animals or pictures, which the many would suppose to be my meaning; but says the argument, understand me to mean straight lines and circles, and the plane or solid

²⁴⁵ Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism," *Modern Artists on Art*, ed. Robert L. Herbert (Engelwood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 60.

figures, which are formed by turning lathes and rulers and measures of angles — for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful, like other things, but they are eternally or absolutely beautiful, and they have peculiar pleasures, quite unlike the pleasures of scratching.²⁴⁶

Note once more than the beauty of animals, and the same could be said of all products of nature, is here unfavorably compared to the artificial beauty of forms produced with the help of instruments or machines.

What makes beauty so understood questionable is the fact that it demands a downgrading of the individual and of the body. Thus it threatens to do violence to the whole human being, elides rather than confronts our mortal condition. At issue here is our understanding of ourselves and how we should relate to nature, including our own nature: the problem we confront is fundamentally a problem of ethics: how should we live?

3

Let me address this question by telling you about visit I made some years ago to the North Carolina seashore, which had witnessed a remarkable building boom; dune after dune has been eaten up by densely packed postmodern condominiums, each with a lot of asphalt, often a basketball hoop, and wooden bridges leading across the sand, joining the houses to the beach. To educate ourselves my wife and I visited two of these condominiums in a place called Corolla Light. The architect, sensing possible customers, was eager to explain to us the advantages of his creation, proud of the training he had received at, I believe it was the University of Kentucky's architecture school. Working closely with developers, he had become quite rich in just a few years, an accomplishment many young architect may well envy. We wondered a bit about how these three story condominiums with their large shutterless plate glass windows would stand up to a real hurricane. He did not seem concerned: hurricanes, he told us did not hit this area very often; Cape Hatteras apparently sort of derails them. And customers liked the light, airy,

²⁴⁶ Plato, *Philebus*, 51 c - d, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

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up to date look. He could of course design houses that would be less vulnerable to high winds, but that would make them too expensive and the increase in price would scare prospective customers off. Those concerned about hurricanes would no doubt get sufficient insurance. And if things got really bad, there was always disaster relief. At any rate, the life-span of these buildings was not really his problem. He just wanted to cash in on the current building boom on the North Carolina seashore. Did he and his young wife plan to settle in one of these condominiums or build a house nearby? we asked. The answer was: of course not. They hoped to retreat to some still relatively undeveloped corner in the mountains of Virginia.

No doubt, in some sense he recognized the inhumanity of the built environment he helped create. But he was proud with how he had met the needs of his busy clients, many of them from the Raleigh-Durham area, who wanted to invest in real estate, and in order not to waste too much time on their condominium wanted it to come fully furnished, clients who loved the jacuzzi in the large bedroom, the water spout right next to a glass enclosed gas fireplace with fake logs and ashes, so well insulated that you could use it even in the summer.

Faced with building like this, I look to the growing environmental crisis for help. I am hopeful that eventually it will make the recognition that such building is irresponsible part of common sense. I am sufficiently optimistic to understand the slowly developing environmental crisis not only as threatening doom, but also as an opportunity.

The doom aspect hardly needs much comment: for some time now a still expanding humanity and our all too limited earth have been on a collision course. The recent development of the North Carolina seashore is just one example. This no doubt represents development, but it hardly is an example of what I would call sustainable development, which the World Commission on Environment and Development's Brundtland Report (1987) defined as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 43.

What has been happening to the North Carolina seashore is an example of development that cannot be sustained in the long run.

As I said, what has been happening on the North Carolina seashore is just one example of a process of unsustainable development in which not just this country, but the entire world is caught up, and to which, despite numerous challenges and prophecies of doom, it continues to remain firmly committed. Just consider the still rising population figures. To be sure, many of the most developed countries are worrying today about a population decline and even for the whole world the prognosis is no longer as gloomy as it was only a few years ago. In the third world the picture is not quite so rosy. In some countries the standard of living has actually been dropping in the last few years, which makes one wonder in how many countries medical progress or continuing improvements in agriculture end up only increasing the sum total of human misery. Just consider these figures: in 1800 world population was perhaps 1 billion, by 1930 it had doubled to 2 billion, by 1975 doubled again to 4 billion, today it is perhaps 8 billion.

Coupled with a still rising life expectancy and demands for an ever higher standard of living the conclusion seems inevitable: the road on which the world has been travelling has to lead to disaster or rather disasters, not only the expected disasters, such as mass starvation, wars for land, a deteriorating environment that will make clean water, air, and soil, not to speak of relatively unspoiled nature, let alone wilderness, increasingly scarce resources, but also to moral disaster.

4

It is this last claim I want to focus on here. How will we respond to ever more pressing environmental problems? I can envision two scenarios: one marked by an ever increasing selfishness, an ever more aggressive and desperate defense of one's own cherished standard of living, which has to mean the increasing deterioration of what we can perhaps call our moral environment, the other by a gradually diminishing selfishness, by a gradual improvement of our moral environment.

The first is all too easy to envision: a brave new world, the have's building fences around themselves to shut out the have-not's, hiring guards or armies, as the case may be.

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The growing popularity of the self-enclosed armed residential enclave, not only in the United States, can serve as a dismal prophetic emblem of a world turned into a nightmare by our way of life. In bad dreams I see the American landscape transformed into countless such armed, gated communities, spreading across the land, from sea to shining sea, although on such a country God would not have shed his grace.

Can we, privileged to live in industrially advanced societies, intelligently wish most of the world's population to emulate the way we pursue what we take to be the good life? But if not, can we ourselves in good conscience continue in that pursuit? Kant held that we are never to act otherwise than so that we could also will that our maxims should become a universal law. But if so, it seems clear that many of the maxims by which we govern our everyday life do not permit such generalization, for they are ruled rather by a selfishness that refuses to look abroad and to plan very far ahead. Much of our built environment, including the look of our cities and suburbs, presupposes such selfishness. Responsible building today should begin with environmental concerns, not consider these an afterthought.

But do we need to moralize? Is it not in our own best interest to make sure that an environment capable of sustaining the kind of life we desire for ourselves is preserved for us and for those who will come after us? The answer depends of course on how narrowly personal interest is understood. I can imagine individuals so preoccupied with themselves that they really feel: after me the deluge. If what I understand to be my personal interest is circumscribed by my life and death, then what happens to those whose lives no longer intersect with my own, those who, after my death, will have to cope with problems I may have helped to create, need not concern me. This, to be sure, would be to presuppose what I consider an unacceptably narrow understanding of personal interest and of the person. I am also convinced that such a narrowly construed self-interest finally has to rob our own life of its value. Nihilism and such self-centeredness belong together. Only a very short-sighted selfishness will refuse to recognize that we need to consider the environment as an increasingly scarce resource that by its very nature does not belong to me or to us, to Americans or Chinese, but to all. I also recognize, however, that someone sufficiently self-centered need not be convinced

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by my argument. That would require more than argument, would require a change of heart. I may judge such selfishness evil, perhaps even the root of all evil, but such a judgment presupposes that I do not understand myself as in any way a self-sufficient whole, but as part of something larger. And while I expect that most, perhaps all of you, will in some measure agree with me, I am also convinced that there is no argument strong enough to force a dissenting egoist to change his or her mind.

I said that most of you would agree with me that to live meaningful lives we must understand ourselves as parts of something larger. Was I entitled to that assertion? To test it, I offer you the following thought experiment:

Many of us love to wonder and worry about impending cosmic catastrophes, such as the ultimate fate of the sun and its consequences for our earth. There is indeed something sublime about such gloomy thoughts, which let us think of our homelessness in an uncaring universe, only to lead us back to our precious selves. Suppose the threat were not quite so far off. Some years ago there were disturbing reports of an asteroid that might hit the earth some time around 2032. To be sure the probability was supposed to be only 1 in 100. But that still seems much too great, especially when coupled with reports that a significantly smaller asteroid was responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs many millions of years ago. Were we headed for a similar fate? Fortunately recalculations of the asteroid's orbit showed that there was no danger.

But suppose such a collision were in fact imminent; suppose it did promise to put an end to humanity. Would this not have an enormous impact on the way we feel about ourselves and our fragile relations with others? To plan for the distant future would suddenly make little sense. The present would become more important. *Carpe diem!* And such certainty would also change the way we build, if indeed we retained a will to build at all: great architecture and city planning presuppose and should speak of an optimism and a care that reach into a future that architect and city planner will no longer live to see. But what sense would it make to build for a future that would never arrive? Given such conviction, our lives would inevitably become more self- and present-centered. Ecological concerns, say, worries about global warming, would lose their

point. We would all feel more lonely than before, even as we might turn more desperately to others.

To bring the point of this thought experiment into still sharper focus, indulge me in this science fiction. Imagine someone who had entered a bargain with the devil — think of Peter Schlemihl — who had promised this individual a never empty wallet, a happy long life, followed by a good death, and had asked in return that he be allowed to implant a doomsday device in our Faustian hero such that his death would be followed immediately by the destruction of all life on this earth, although his own life would, by the terms of the bargain, not be shortened at all. Suppose you had struck such a bargain with the devil? How would the knowledge that with your death all life would end, that left would be a lifeless earth, affect you? Now make it just all human life? Would you feel differently? I can imagine a Nero or a Hitler welcoming such thoughts. Would they be objectively wrong to do so? I would not hesitate to call them evil. And I find it difficult to imagine them other than desperately unhappy.

How would the certainty that with your death life on earth would also end affect you? If you understand your own death to circumscribe what matters to you, why should it make any difference at all? Would your life not remain pretty much the same? Why should it concern you how the world will look after you are gone? To most of us it would of course make an enormous difference and that it would shows that we recognize that not caring for those who will outlive us diminishes our own life. We demonstrate such recognition whenever we plan for a future after our death, for example when we take out life insurance; or when we create a work of art to give joy to those who will come after us; or when we plan a city. Most of us would not consider these irrational acts. But if we do not consider such acts irrational, this has to mean that we project ourselves beyond our individual lives, that we acknowledge that the meaning of our individual death-bound lives depends crucially on thus being able to place ourselves in an ongoing community. And if so, would we not want, or rather, feel a duty, to make sure that the environment will continue to speak to us in a way that would support such faith in the future? But the environment speaks to us most strongly in this way when we experience it as nature shaped by human work responsive to it, when it speaks to us as

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“landscape.” I use “landscape” here to mean nature transformed by human work, shaped by history and by planning for the future, quite aware of the artificiality of such usage and without investing too much in this particular word. You may well come up with a happier term, but as I am using the word here, “landscape” is opposed to “wilderness.” What allows us to understand such landscapes is an ever changing figure ground relationship: cities, villages, houses, roads, fields present themselves as more or less permanent figures in the landscape and render it legible. I want to claim that we all have a need for landscape so understood and need to preserve it. Such figuration reinforces the legibility of the environment, makes it more homelike. To be sure, to a person who, to speak with Kierkegaard, had buried himself within himself, such landscapes, such figures of ongoing community, would not matter.

5

One final comment, returning once more to the title of this lecture: What need is there for an environmental aesthetics? Needed, it would seem, is not the consolation offered by the beauties of nature; nor the consolation offered by beautiful art that turns its back on an ugly reality, but active intervention, based on solid information, that will change the world for the better. Can aesthetics, can art, make an effective contribution towards meeting that need? Do we not all know what the problems are and what needs to be done? Our task is to do it.

But if we all know what the real problems are, why is not more being done? To change the way we relate to the environment we need more than just cold reason: we need to be touched by something that transcends the reach of such reason. In the *Symposium* Plato defines beauty as the object of love. What I am suggesting here is the beauty of the earth can make us love the earth. And such love demands meaningful action.

Cold reason, I claimed, serves a narrow self-interest as readily as a concern for future generations. Our only hope is a change of heart that lets us reckon differently with time. But how do hearts change? It is here, I want to suggest, that an environmental aesthetics can make a contribution. But this would have to be an aesthetics very different

from the aesthetics inaugurated by Baumgarten, so different in fact that we may well wonder whether “aesthetics” remains even an appropriate name. This would have to be, among other things, an aesthetics that focuses on nature more than on art, that reckons differently with time, that does not follow Plato, that does not place beauty, or more broadly the aesthetic object, in opposition to time and therefore to nature. Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, I would like to suggest, provides some significant pointers, as do Friedrich Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, so obviously dependent on the former. Needed is a different way of experiencing the significance of nature that places the beauty of this earth above the beauty of art. An environmental aesthetics can help prepare for that change.

25. Running out of Space?**Architecture and The Need for a Post-Copernican Geocentrism**

1

In my very first lecture I indicated briefly what led me to teach this course one last time and to revisit material that eventually became the *Ethical Function of Architecture*. Circumstances, I suggested, have changed; the world has changed. More especially, the way we today relate to space has changed and continues to change.

Architecture may be understood as the art of creating places by bounding space. Given that definition it is to be expected that given a changed understanding of space, one should expect a changed understanding of architecture and of what constitutes architectural beauty and responsible building.

Two developments, I pointed out in the first lecture, seem to me to be particularly significant in this connection. One is the way an ever developing technology, and today especially the digital revolution, have diminished the importance of distance and with it the importance of place. These developments have opened up our everyday existence in ways that will continue to change our lives in ways we cannot quite foresee. We have become freer than ever before. The other side of such freedom is that the places where we happen to be, where we happen to have been born, seem to matter less and less. We are open today to the world, to the universe, and to imaginary, virtual spaces as never before. This revolution has also 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 means inevitably also our way of building.

Consider the *Mercedes Benz Museum* in Stuttgart, a monument to the car and all it suggests. Quite explicitly it responds to this changed understanding of space. I will have more to say about this remarkable building in a minute.

In the preceding lecture I began to address a second, in a sense opposite, but perhaps even more important way in which our world has changed. It has to do with the way the inevitably limited resources provided by this small planet have to collide with a

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still increasing humanity and our ever increasing demands for a higher standard of living. Not just air and water, but even space is becoming an ever scarcer, and all too often contested resource. Architects too often fail to consider this. Much that gets built today wastes space in ways that I find morally irresponsible. Climate change further complicates the picture. Such consideration invite a very different understanding of what constitutes architectural beauty. The Yale Forestry Building (Hopkins Architects, Centerbrook Architects), Yale's greenest building, may be taken to point to the kind of architecture I have in mind. It has received more than 15 awards for its eco-friendly construction. I hope its energy consumption will show that the awards were deserved. More significant, however, seem to me other developments, such as the solar tiles Tesla is beginning to market or the example set by the Bavarian village of Wilpoldsried, which relying on photovoltaics, biogas, wind turbines and hydropower now produces 500% more energy than it needs.²⁴⁸ Such developments could transform the way we build in a way that would make a significant contribution towards diminishing our dependence on fossil fuels and significantly slow the progress of global warming.

2

But let me consider the first approach in more detail, an approach responsive to the way technology and especially the computer has changed our understanding of and the way we deal with space. Consider once more the Mercedes Benz Museum. This is of course not a house, but a museum, and not just a museum, but one dedicated to the car, which has so decisively increased our mobility and in this sense our freedom and has shaped the environment. Celebrating the car, the museum is also a shrine to freedom. The building was begun in 2002 and finished in 2006. The competition for this museum, in which ten leading firms participated, was won by the Amsterdam firm UNStudio. The project architects were Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos.

A first thing that is striking about this architecture is that it does not attempt to

²⁴⁸ 04/05/2017 under Environment, News, Renewable Energy. inhabitat.com/german-village-produces-500-of-its-energy-from-renewable-sources/

contribute to knitting some urban fabric. The guide to the building compares it to an enormous glacial erratic block.²⁴⁹ It is a thought-provoking comparison to which I shall return. Right next to a six-lane highway and an important train track, the building draws our attention by its hulking presence as one travels towards or by it. This is not a building that means to be experienced in leisurely strolling. The scale is determined less by a human being than by the car, appropriate for a museum dedicated to the history of the Mercedes. The automobile has of course played crucial part in the diminishing of the importance of distance.

A second thing that is striking about the architecture is how difficult it is to get a clear sense of its organization by looking at its exterior. How many stories are there? Are there indeed any stories at all? One has a sense that there must be some complicated geometric form that dictated what we see. That was indeed the case. The organizational principle is that of a double helix that offers the visitor two routes, but allows for frequent crossovers between the two routes, one thematically ordered, the other allowing the visitor to follow the history of the Mercedes. The architecture is meant to suggest motion, without prescribing a clear path. The freedom of the visitor is to be respected. To quote the guide to the museum:

Such linearity is no longer considered appropriate by the architects of today, when everyday life is determined by complex determinants that cannot be predicted. An attitude that by the way we can also detect in the other arts. In literature, for example, authors experiment with structures that fragmentary and complex open up in every moment multiple relations.²⁵⁰

Self-consciously and with some justice the architects understand themselves as representing the cutting edge of architectural production.

A third thing that is striking is that one experiences the work as the product of a

²⁴⁹ Christian Holl, *Mercedes-Benz Museum, Die Neuen Architekturführer* Nr. 88 (Berlin, Stadt Wandelverlag, 2007), p. 2

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

process that in important ways seems beyond the control of the designing architect. The metaphor of the glacial erratic block is telling: although here it is not nature but technology, which here has become a kind of second nature that has produced what we see. To cite the guide one more:

That such complexity cannot be designed just by architects alone, but requires the intensive and early cooperation of experts, specialists, and engineers stands to reason. In an integrated manner of working, the team understands itself as joined in a process comparable to that of producing a new car. Not only aesthetics, but technology and construction are advanced and only their cooperation allows for the particular experience. Beyond that the construction of this unusual spatial conception was made possible only by the computer, which allowed the complex geometry to be represented, figured, and made available for its constructive translation into concrete.²⁵¹

The guide speaks of an advance in aesthetics, technology and construction. But this advance invites us to understand it as a recent chapter in the story of that Platonic aesthetics to which I have given quite a bit of space in these lectures, an aesthetics that that finds striking expression in that *Philebus* passage that I have read you twice before. Beauty is sought in objects that are produced by a process that requires the cooperation of aesthetics, technology and construction. The space that is bounded here is not that of everyday experience but the abstract space presupposed by geometry or the virtual space presupposed by computer design.

The guide to the Mercedes museum makes the point that we meet here with an attitude that we meet with also in the other arts. It mentions literature. I was reminded of Arnold Schoenberg's second string quartet. Its last movement refers to a poem by Stefan George that begins with the line "I feel air from another planet." Recall the description of the museum as an erratic block. An erratic block just happens to be where it now happens to be. It came from quite another place. The real home of this museum

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 16.

is in that virtual space to which the computer has given us unprecedented access, a space that answers to freedom and a disembodied reason.

That this particular example has a symptomatic significance has by now, I hope become clear. I could have chosen other examples, say by Zaha Hadid. But I hope the point I have been trying to make has become clear.

3

In the beginning of this lecture I spoke of two developments that have made it necessary to reconsider what I had written in the *Ethical Function of Architecture*. The first I just illustrated. It concerns the way an ever developing technology, and 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.

In the preceding lecture I began to address a second, in a sense opposite, but perhaps even more important way in which our world has changed. It has to do with the way the inevitably limited resources provided by this small planet have to collide with a still increasing humanity and our ever increasing demands for a higher standard of living. Not just air and water, but even space, I suggested, is becoming an ever scarcer, and all too often contested resource.

In 1890 the superintendent of the Census announced that the western frontier was closed. Much has been written since about the significance of this closing, about the way it has shaped American democracy, about its effect on the American psyche, about the way it meant the end of what had made America with its open frontier the envy of Europe, where land had long been in limited supply, stifling demands for freedom. Much of what is best about America is tied to this heritage of open space: its commitment to liberty, to self-reliance, to democracy. But so is much that has become not just questionable, but unsustainable: we cannot continue to use, and abuse space, the earth and its resources, as we have gotten used to doing: think of the way we continue to pollute air, water, and earth.

But in the rest of this penultimate lecture I want to focus on space, appropriate given a course called the philosophy of architecture: has not architecture been defined as

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the art of bounding space. That invites reflection concerning that space the architect bounds. In what sense has that space become a scarce resource?

Meant is, of course, not the space of astronomy or physics, nor the space of our imagination, nor the infinite space of Euclidean geometry into which architects for centuries have cast their designs, nor the virtual space that the computer invites us to bound in all sorts of imaginative ways. "Space," as I am using it here refers to the space of our life-world, space understood as environment, inescapably mediated by the way we remain bound to this earth. We all need space to live lives worth living, where expressions like "elbow room" and, in a far more ominous way, the German *Lebensraum*, hint at the way the increasing scarcity and the resulting demand for space can dehumanize an individual and a society. The way we bound space, wall things in and out, negotiate the transition from public to ever more intimate private spaces, has an inescapable ethical significance. Whoever builds is involved in such negotiations. Today's oversized McMansions present not only an aesthetic, but an ethical problem in the way they deal with space. And so do, in a very different way, countless oversized asphalted parking lots. We have gotten used to wasting space.

To be sure, at bottom we all know that space has become a precious resource. But if so, why does our response remain so half-hearted? The answer is pretty obvious: We must not forget how intimately the availability of space is connected to much that possesses genuine value, to our sense of freedom, of the rights of the individual, also to his property. It is not difficult to understand why our response to the increasing scarcity of space should have remained so half-hearted. How much of our treasured standard of living, of a way of life to which we have become accustomed, or to which we just aspire, are we, privileged to live in one of the economically most developed countries, really willing to sacrifice for the sake of the environment? Is mobility not a right? How much am I willing to sacrifice for the sake of my neighbor? How much for the sake of people living far away and pretty much unknown to me? How much for the sake of coming generations? As the last few months have once again illustrated: in difficult times economic considerations, often selfish, often disturbingly short-range, trump environmental concerns. Can this be justified?

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As I pointed out in the preceding lecture, that space has become an increasingly scarce resource is first of all a function of the earth's still rapidly increasing population, coupled with the fact that humanity has no plausible alternative to the earth, despite recent reports of the discovery of traces of water on the moon or of very distant earthlike planets. This makes it all the more important to consider the way we use and appropriate space, the way we lay claim to space, denying access to what we have bounded with our walls, fences, borders, and laws to an unwanted larger public. That we cannot continue to use space in that way should have become clear by now. Many builders and even their clients, still have to learn that. Or do both really know better, but do not want to learn it? To be sure, computer-driven design invites us to forget that space is a scarce resource. Too many buildings today, and that includes most buildings designed by our star architects, deal with space in a way that leaves me a bit depressed, even as I recognize their aesthetic quality.

No reasonable person, it seems to me, can deny the problem we are facing. But, as I pointed out last time, needed is more than reason. Insight does not necessarily lead to right action. Reason alone is as likely to serve egoism as it is to serve altruism. Needed is a change of heart. Can the beauty of the environment, both natural and built, contribute to such a change? We need to change the way we experience the environment, not just as something pre-given, to be used and abused by us as we see fit, but as a shared home. That is why I spoke of the need for an environmental aesthetics.

Consider the way we use space, the way we build, our valued physical mobility, the very real increase in freedom the automobile has brought, the ways it has shaped the environment. We need to consider not only the very real benefits, but also the burdens our treasured way of life has placed on the environment, the human price it has exacted, the decay of community, the increase in loneliness, the erosion of the earth in quite a number of different senses? And might the increase in spiritual mobility that the computer revolution has brought us not mean a decrease in the importance of physical mobility, e.g. an increased possibility of working at home? Might this not in turn help give new life to our cities? What kind of a life do we want to live? And I would suggest that, for the sake of this earth, for most of us it can and should only be an urban life.

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Most of us must live in high density urban areas in order to make possible the preservation of as much nature as possible.

We should not take for granted that what we commonly understand by "a high standard of living" translates into "a high quality of life"? How important is a sense of community? What sort of community? Is it important to our spiritual well-being that this be an ongoing community? How important are mobility and stability?

These are questions each one of us first will have to answer for him- or her-self, if a genuinely shared common sense is to develop. And, as I said last time., I suspect that our individual answers would show that at heart most of us are less selfish than we often take ourselves to be, that concern for those who come after us is part of our common sense.

But suppose I am wrong. Imagine a society of self-absorbed individuals. What kind of built environment would fit such a society? What comes to your mind? You might come up with a city in the image of New York as seen by Manfredo Tafuri, who experienced New York as a prophecy of the city of the future: "the city as a system of solitudes, as a place wherein the loss of identity is made an institution, wherein the maximum formalism of its structures gives rise to a code of behavior dominated by 'vanity' and 'comedy.'"²⁵² Tafuri introduced his discussion of New York with one of Nietzsche's remarks: "Together 100 deep solitudes form the city of Venice — this is its magic. An image for the human beings of the future."²⁵³ As Tafuri experienced New York, it presented itself to him as "already the 'new Venice'" — where rivers of cars have replaced lagoons. "The fragments of the future contained in the Serenissima of Nietzsche have already exploded into the metropolis of total indifference and therefore of the anguished consumption of multiplied signs." To be sure, those living in such urban

²⁵² Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, trans. Pellegrino d'Acierno and Robert Connolly (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), p. 290.

²⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, Frühjahr 1880, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, Berlin, and New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and de Gruyter, 1980) vol. 9, p. 38 .

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environments are still assigned roles that grant them place, identity, and a measure of security. But increasingly they experience such roles as arbitrary and readily exchanged for others, experience themselves as actors who assume this or that mask, but see no essential relationship between themselves and these masks. The city becomes a place where people meet, or rather actors meet, while the individuals remain buried within themselves, hidden behind their masks. Or could it be that in the end nothing is left to be hidden? Loss of place and community, the loss of the city in this sense and loss of personal identity go together.

Tafuri has given us a caricature. But this much can be said: human beings lose their personal identity to the extent they transform themselves into abstract subjects, possessed of a freedom that refuses all placement. And the closer we come to understanding ourselves as such pure thinking subjects, which only happen to be male or female, American or Chinese, the less we can be expected to feel a need for built environments that place individuals on the earth and under the sky and help such individuals to understand themselves as parts of an ongoing community.

Just as Hobbes has helped us understand the liberal state as a construct, an artifact created by self-centered atomic individuals, who substitute for an eroded common sense a formal structure of laws and rules that, for the sake of selfish interests, checks the excesses of selfishness, so the built environment of the future may well reduce to an artifact that substitutes for the traditional city and the communal dwelling it served a formal, functional system that allows individuals who have buried themselves within themselves to exist and coexist, without attempting to reconstitute anything resembling a *genius loci* or a sense of community. Has not the progress of freedom, which is also a progress of introversion left both behind? There is no reason why such environments should look like traditional cities. But the price is a loss of a robust sense of personal identity, a loss of self, which gives way to an increasingly abstract freedom.

4

When someone asks us who we are, we may well answer by referring to gender, age, nationality, race, class, vocation, and the like. But we may also choose to consider

all such characteristics accidental determinations that do not touch the inner core of our being, a core that can be reached only by rising above all these other determinations. Are we first of all disembodied subjects or embodied selves? Is there an absolute right or wrong here? Each one of us has to choose and take responsibility and live with this choice. But suppose we choose to identify our essential self with our freedom — what does such choice leave of the self? Must it not leave behind what can be called personal identity? To choose oneself in this way is to choose oneself abstractly. Full self-affirmation requires an affirmation of myself as inescapably placed in time and in space. Reflection may well show that this place is in no way privileged, that it is just one of infinitely many possible places. But accidental though it may be, without that place I would not be who I am. And what places me is first of all my body. Full self-affirmation demands affirmation of myself as essentially embodied and that is to say as essentially placed.

To say we are essentially placed is not to claim that we are stuck in one place as turnips are rooted in the ground. Imagination and thought open up an indefinitely open space and with it countless other places. Such openness is inseparable from our freedom. As a free, yet embodied self we find ourselves essentially between place and open space, always already placed, and yet free to move, to change places. Full self-affirmation requires an affirmation of this never quite resolved tension between place and space, between dreams of homecoming and dreams of journeying into the unknown, between the need for places that let us feel at home and open spaces that let us feel out of place, but that we experience for that very reason, to use Addison's expression, as "an image of liberty." This is to say: full self-affirmation demands an environment that preserves the tension between the beautiful and the sublime.

As my body places me, so does my past. Without my specific past, objectively the result of countless accidents, I would not be who I am. Full self-affirmation requires affirmation of that past, even though one may well want to forget the more unpleasant aspects of that past. But it also requires affirmation of an inevitably open future. The first requires an environment that preserves the past and helps me to place myself in it. The second requires that such preservation not block the challenge of the future. This

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was a challenge Yale confronted when faced with calls for a renaming of *Calhoun College*. And this was the challenge with which the *Olympia Stadium*, site of the 1936 Olympics and a striking example of National Socialist architecture, confronted the city of Berlin. Here the decision was made to both preserve and to transform it; transform it not just to meet the requirements of a modern stadium, but also to give expression to the conviction that, no matter how terrible, the past could not and should not be erased. Full self-affirmation demands an environment that neither places me so strongly that place is experienced as prison, nor leaves me so dislocated that one place seems just as good as another.

To say that the past places me is inevitably also to say that the community places me. The language I speak, the values I hold, these first of all do not belong to me; they are mine as a member of certain communities. Once again this does not mean that I am stuck with them. There is and should be tension between whatever community I am part of and something within that may bid me challenge that community, perhaps let me dream of a very different, better sort of community, and lead me to take steps towards realizing that community. But again it is important to preserve the tension and not to allow the bond that joins the individual and his dreams to the community to snap. We all are haunted by the promise of still greater freedom, a promise made ever less utopian by the progress of technology. Small wonder that dreams of the city of the future should so often have been haunted by dreams of a mobile, floating, or even air-born architecture. The other side of such dreams are nightmares of settlements inhabited only by forcibly displaced persons. Neither dream nor nightmare satisfies our continued need for community and for a built environment that grants the individual a sense of belonging to a community without denying individuality. Just because our own freedom bears within itself the possibility of profound self-alienation, we are haunted by images of well-functioning traditional cities.

Earlier I suggested that "a high standard of living" does not necessarily translate into "a high quality of life." How then are we to understand the latter? How important is it, for example, to have the confidence that coming generations will not find this earth less of a home? How important is it to see a tree sprouting its first green in spring, to

actually dig in the earth, to grow one's own tomatoes? If we are to plan responsibly for the future, we need a workable index of what constitutes the "desired" or better "desirable" quality of life. Any such definition should, I have suggested, acknowledge that space, too, has become a precious resource, acknowledge also a commitment to others and especially to future generations and such a commitment should find expression in the built environment. Any such definition should also acknowledge, that to fully affirm ourselves, we also need to affirm the earth to which we belong. Full self-affirmation demands responsibility, that is to say, demands that we keep ourselves open and able to respond to others and to the earth that is our shared home. Such a definition may not sacrifice respect for human beings to respect for the environment even as it must recognize that respect for human beings must include respect for the earth as the only place where human beings can make their proper home.

Having crossed that fabled bridge into the third millennium, we may well wonder whether in the future there will still be a need for the traditional division between city and country, or more generally, between artificial and natural environments. Would the erosion of this opposition, the progressive suburbanization and that means also homogenization of the landscape not be more in keeping with the spirit of the times? Does artifice today not embrace reality ever more completely so that at moments it seems to all but vanish in the embrace?

5

I have argued that full self-affirmation requires an affirmation of the never quite resolved tension between our need for freedom and open space and our need for place, between dreams of journeying into the unknown and dreams of homecoming. In conclusion let me briefly consider the former. In an earlier lecture I asked: Why did we travel to the moon? We are curious creatures, and curiosity calls us again and again beyond the places and the associated points of view and perspectives, calls us away from what we once called home. The loss of paradise will be repeated over and over by human curiosity. As science has opened our life-world to the universe, this earth seems to have become ever less homelike, more and more like a ship lost in an endless ocean,

embarked on a journey with no clear goal. This earth, which once, because of its central position in a finite cosmos, was thought to provide human beings with a privileged place, has come to be understood as just another among countless stars. But just as we have come to see how insignificant and ephemeral human life here on earth is, when measured by the space and time of the cosmos, we also have come to an increased awareness that for all practical purposes we are alone in the cosmos, that this earth is the only home we will ever have. As I mentioned in an earlier lecture, the fact that space exploration and the environmental movement should have developed in the very same years seems more than an accident. There is a sense in which the exploration of space, including the vain search for extraterrestrial intelligence, have led to an ever clearer recognition that we have no other home than this small, fragile, beautiful earth. Despite our freedom, we remain earth-bound mortals. Our bodies and this earth to which it belongs remain the ground of all meaning. In this sense we can speak of the need for a post-Copernican geocentrism. I shall develop this point in my final lecture.

26. The Task of Architecture in the Age of the World-Picture

1

In my last lecture I spoke of the need for a post Copernican geocentrism. That expression calls for further discussion. There is obvious tension between “post-Copernican” and “geocentrism.” Our modern world picture presupposes the Copernican revolution and the way it has changed our understanding of space and place. To call for a post-Copernican geocentrism is to acknowledge that we must acknowledge the Copernican achievement and the way it has let us see the earth differently, transformed our life-world, transformed the way we think; but we also must not allow that transformation to totally determine our life-world, or, to speak with Heidegger, our dwelling — and that is to say also our building. At issue is the significance of space and place. But if my call for a post-Copernican geocentrism is to make much sense, we have to recognize first that the Copernican revolution is part of an inheritance that we should not surrender. The question is, what sense then can we make of a new geocentrism, of what could perhaps be called a post-modern religiosity, albeit a religiosity without God. Can the earth take the place of the sacred?

2

But what exactly do I have in mind by a post Copernican geocentrism?²⁵⁴ A convenient point of departure for this final lecture is provided by the Galileo affair. In 1633 Galileo was found to entertain heretical views, incompatible with the geocentric position espoused by the Church. For the rest of his life he was condemned to house arrest. Whenever science and religion collide, the condemnation of Galileo is almost inevitably mentioned as the most obvious example of the Church abusing its authority by trying to subject science to its will, denying the freedom demanded by the pursuit of truth, that philosophical freedom on which Galileo’s predecessor, Giordano Bruno had so

²⁵⁴ See Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), pp, 242-281.

courageously and for him disastrously insisted: in 1600 Bruno was burned at the stake on the Campo de' Fiori in Rome for his heretical views.²⁵⁵ With his precursor's fate in mind, Galileo was less courageous, but more prudent. Such prudence may have been strengthened by a conviction that, no matter what victories those who would silence those who speak the truth can claim, in the end truth will win out. And indeed: was the Church not forced to accept the Copernican truth defended by Galileo? On November 10, 1979, Pope John Paul II, in a speech celebrating the centenary of Einstein's birth, admitted that Galileo had been treated unjustly by the Church, praised his religiousness, and singled out for special praise his understanding of the relationship of science and religion.²⁵⁶ Here then we would seem to have perhaps the most famous example of the futility of all attempts to stifle free and independent inquiry in the name of orthodoxy.

But was the Church really so blind? At issue here is not so much the truth of the Copernican position embraced by Galileo — as we know, heliocentrism also cannot be defended. The very idea of center of the cosmos has been called into question, had indeed been called into question 200 years before Copernicus by cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus. What is more fundamentally at issue is the meaning of the pursuit of truth as understood by Copernicus and Galileo, and, bound up with this and more importantly, the problem of the value of truth so understood, raised so insistently by Nietzsche, especially in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*.²⁵⁷ Nietzsche recognized a

²⁵⁵ Bruno pleaded for *philosophica libertas* in his valedictory oration to the professors at Wittenberg (1588). Campanella and Galileo were to reiterate that plea. See John M. Headley, *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 172-173, fn 109.

²⁵⁶ Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *The Galileo Affair. A Documentary History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 306-308. Pope John Paul II's "Mémoiration de la Naissance d'Albert Einstein," November 10, 1979, is now readily available on the internet: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1979.

²⁵⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, I, 1, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich, Berlin, and New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and de Gruyter, 1980), vol. 5, p. 15 and *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, III, 24, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 5, pp. 398-401.

deep connection between the commitment to truth presupposed by modern science and nihilism. How then can religion, how can we make our peace with science?

To quote Nietzsche — I read you this passage in an earlier lecture: "Since Copernicus, man seems to have got himself on an inclined plane — now he is slipping faster and faster away from the center into — what? into nothingness? into a penetrating sense of his own nothingness?"²⁵⁸

Our science, can know nothing of privileged places, of absolute values, of home. And if what that science teaches us to accept as truth is identified with *the* truth, then, if we are to escape from nihilism, will we not have to cover up the truth or abandon it altogether? Could the insistence on the truth so understood be an obstacle to living the good life? An obstacle to salvation or whatever might take the place of salvation, given that death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche? Nietzsche certainly did not think that the pursuit of truth as understood by science would lead us to the good life: The price of the rigorous pursuit of the facts of nature appears to be the progressive loss of whatever gives significance to human existence. "For a philosopher to say, "the good and the beautiful are one," is infamy; if he goes on to say: "also the true," one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly. We possess art lest we perish of the truth."²⁵⁹ The last leaves us with the question: just what kind of art did Nietzsche have in mind.

If the pursuit of truth as it presides over our science and nihilism should indeed be linked, it becomes easy to understand those who would take a step beyond nihilism by showing that what science takes to be truth is itself only a fiction; and it is not surprising that such sentiments should have found a welcome focus in a re-evaluation of the condemnation of Galileo. Can human beings ever claim to have seized *the* truth?

²⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, III, 25, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, 5: 404. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 155.

²⁵⁹ *The Will to Power* (abbreviated WP) 822, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, Random House: New York, 1967.

Richard Rorty's *Mirror of Nature*²⁶⁰ gives eloquent expression to such a re-evaluation: in that book Rorty asks whether today we can “find a way of saying that the considerations advanced against the Copernican theory by Cardinal Bellarmine against Galileo — the scriptural descriptions of the fabric of the heavens — were ‘illogical’ or ‘unscientific?’” Rorty argues that we have to answer this question with a “no.” He goes on to ask: “What determines that Scripture is not an excellent source of evidence for the way the heavens are set up?” He thus invites us to think Cardinal Bellarmine’s attempt to limit the scope of Copernicus’ astronomical claims as fundamentally no different from Galileo’s attempt to limit the scope of Scripture. Both Galileo and the Bible claim to describe “the way the heavens are set up.” As it turned out, the future made Galileo the victor. The establishment of science, as we tend to take it for granted, is part of that victory. But this, according to Rorty, does not justify the claim that Galileo had reason on his side.

Rorty is thus unwilling to claim that Galileo’s view won out, because it had reason on its side: According to Rorty, we simply do not know how to draw a clear line between theological and scientific discourse. We do not possess an understanding of truth sufficiently robust to allow us to draw it.

I want to make the opposite claim: we can draw such a distinction by appealing to our common sense understanding of the nature of truth. The commitment to objectivity that is a presupposition of science is inseparable from the pursuit of truth concerning the things that make up our world. To claim this, however, is not yet to claim to have answered the Nietzschean question of the value of that pursuit.

The pursuit of truth demands objectivity. And objectivity demands that we not allow our understanding to be clouded by our inevitably personal desires and interests. It wants just the facts. With good reason Wittgenstein could therefore say: “In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value — and if there were, it would be of no value” (6.41). It would be just another fact that, like all facts, could be other than it happens to be. If there is something that deserves to be called a

²⁶⁰ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 328-333.

value, it will not be found in the world of science. To find it we have to step outside that world. To help us take this step, Nietzsche insists, is one task of art, and we can add architecture.

And if value cannot be found in the scientific world-picture, the same goes for freedom; and that means also, as I have emphasized in these lectures, that there is no room for persons. Matter has become just a mute given that happens to be the way it is. This is why Nietzsche can say, stone is more stone than it used to be.²⁶¹

But is this not to say that whatever makes life meaningful must be sought outside the reality known to science? Heidegger makes this elision of what can give meaning to our lives a defining feature of our age, of what he calls the “Age of the World Picture.” Science can know nothing of persons as things worthy of our respect. In this sense we can agree with Kierkegaard that subjective truth is higher than objective truth, where we must resist the temptation to translate such subjective truth into some version of objective truth, as phenomenology too often has attempted to do. To the extent that the modern world has indeed become what Heidegger calls “the age of the world-picture” it has become a prison that denies us access to the reality of persons and things. To experience the aura of the real that gives to persons and things their proper weight we have to escape from that prison, have to open a door, or at least a window in the world building scientific understanding has raised, a window to what we may also call the truth of things, but now “truth” may no longer be understood as objective truth. The Church was thus right to deny that the truth that mattered to faith, and we can extend the point and, following Kierkegaard, say the truth that matters to existing individuals, should take second place to the truth that matters to science. But the Church was wrong to think that the truth that matters to faith be understood as objective truth. Copernicus and Galileo put the pursuit of objective truth on the right track. But just because they did, it continues to be important to do justice to the legitimacy and to consider the limits of that pursuit, to inquire into the meaning of “truth.”

²⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, I, 218, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 2, p.p. 178-179.

3

But how are we to understand this pursuit? What is truth? Most people, although perhaps no longer most philosophers, would seem to be quite untroubled by this old Pilate question, quite ready to say with Kant that the meaning of truth as it is pursued by science is correspondence with the facts, not of course with the facts as they are seen by us because of our position in time and space, the bodies we happen to have, and historically conditioned prejudices, but as a truly objective understanding, unburdened by perspectival distortions, an ideal observer, would know them to be. Kant takes this understanding of truth to be so obvious that it can be granted and presupposed without need for much discussion.²⁶² As a regulative ideal it presides over the work of science. The essence of truth is here thought to lie in correspondence, in the agreement of the judgment with its object.

To be sure, as Kant recognized, we use truth in different senses. He thus distinguished such “material (objective) truth” from a merely formal or logical truth and from a merely aesthetic or subjective truth, where our understanding agrees with what appears to the subject. Here I am concerned first of all with the meaning and value of what Kant calls material, objective truth. A commitment to such truth is a presupposition of our science and technology, and that is to say of our modern world picture.

Because it calls such truth into question, Kierkegaard’s claim, “Truth is subjectivity,” deserves further attention. Truth is understood here as “An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most personal inwardness” — Kierkegaard was thinking of love and faith. This he calls “the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.” In such attainment the individual perfects him- or herself. And did not Kant understand “truth” as “the essential and inseparable condition of all perfection of knowledge”?²⁶³ But Kant might have questioned whether Kierkegaard’s subjective truth deserves to be called a perfection of knowledge. And as the expression

²⁶² Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 58/ B 82.

²⁶³ Kant, *Logik* A 69.

“objective uncertainty” suggests, Kierkegaard, knew very well that first of all “the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related.”²⁶⁴ But Kierkegaard’s distinction between subjective and objective truth helps to bring into focus what is at issue when Nietzsche raises the question of the value of truth: “The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. Away from the subject the objective way of reflection leads to the objective truth, and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and this indifference is precisely its objective validity; for all interest, like all decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity.”²⁶⁵ How then can religion, how can we, make our peace with this commitment to objectivity and a truth that threatens to transform the world into the totality of essentially indifferent facts? Galilean science had to call the Church’s claim to a truth that saves into question. Not that the Church could have accepted Kierkegaard’s Protestant “Truth is subjectivity”: how can organized religion make its peace with a privileging of subjectivity that threatens to deny the Church its claim to truth.

In these lectures I have argued that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are right: the pursuit of objective truth inevitably does lead to nihilism. We live a meaningful life by virtue of subjective truth. What did Kierkegaard have in mind? Faith, of course — and love. Both center us and provide life with an orientation. Here I am concerned with the way faith and love establish special times and special places.

4

With this I would like to return to the story of Jacob’s ladder. In an earlier lecture I used the metaphor of an ellipse with two foci to characterize the history of human dwelling and building. One focus is marked by the hut, the other by the temple. The

²⁶⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 182, 178.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

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first is comparatively private and mundane, the second comparatively public and sacred. In the history of western architecture the latter pole has of course been occupied by the church; and the story of Jacob's ladder, as I pointed out, was once read as part of the traditional consecration rite, serving to establish the traditional symbolism of the church as house of God and gate of Heaven. That symbolism may mean little today. But as I shall try to show in what remains of this final lecture, it still can give us insight into what architecture should be.

I shall not read you the relevant text once more. But recall that here it is not prideful humanity that seeks to pierce the clouds with its towers, as did the builders of the Tower of Babel, but God himself who in this special place was felt to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, as he bridged it when he sent his angel to announce to Mary that she was to bear the Savior. This particular moment and place are experienced as possessing a special significance. Time is no longer experienced as a sequence of equivalent moments, space is no longer experienced as an aggregate of equivalent positions that can provide no orientation. A vertical intersects the mundane horizontal, establishing a special space experienced as filled with the presence of the divine: this is the house of God. But this place, this Bethel, is not only God's dwelling place, but opens up to a higher reality: it is the gate of Heaven. The ladder of the dream with its angels ascending and descending symbolizes that linkage.

Of special significance is God's promise to give the land on which Jacob is sleeping to him and his descendants. Here they will flourish. The dream invites Jacob to project himself toward a future community that he will not live to see. It is this projection into the future, the confidence that his descendants will flourish in the future that gives this moment and this place its special significance. Without such a projection, I want to claim, life is hollow.

That brings to mind the end of Goethe's Faust. Faust longs for the ecstasy of some intensely pleasurable moment; for the sake of such a moment he is willing to let the devil have his soul. But when at the end of his long life what he calls the highest moment arrives it is not what he or Mephistopheles had envisioned. The deluded Faust is

dreaming of a future that he thinks he helped create, a future community where free people will be able to work and thrive.

The last word Wisdom ever has to say:
 He only earns his Freedom and Existence, 11575
 Who's forced to win them freshly every day.
 Childhood, manhood, age's vigorous years,
 Surrounded by dangers, they'll spend here.
 I wish to gaze again on such a land,
 Free earth: where a free race, in freedom, stand. 11580
 Then, to the Moment I'd dare say:
 'Stay a while! You are so lovely!'
 Through aeons, then, never to fade away
 This path of mine through all that's earthly. –
 Anticipating, here, its deep enjoyment, 11585
 Now I savour it, that highest moment.²⁶⁶

The highest moment is tied here to faith in a future that Faust will not be part of. Again it is the faith that the present will issue in a flourishing future community that gives it its special significance.

Let me add to these two stories a third: With their opera *The Woman Without a Shadow* (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*) the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal and the composer Richard Strauss overreached themselves. Mozart and Goethe, the *Magic Flute* and Faust provided their opera with self-chosen measures that the opera, magnificent as it is, could not quite live up to. How are we to take seriously such a fairy tale celebrating a procreative eros in this modern age? What are we moderns to make of its message. The difficulty is particularly palpable in the chorus sung by the unborn children that concludes the opera, inviting comparison with the *Chorus Mysticus* that concludes Goethe's *Faust*. Addressing their father and mother the still unborn children leave them

²⁶⁶ <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/FaustIIActV.htm>

and us with the question: can there ever be a festival where they are not both invited and doing the inviting?

Hofmannsthal's opera is a celebration of marriage. But its meaning goes far beyond that. What is common to my three stories is that those peak times in our lives, call them festivals, that make life meaningful by illuminating our lives, fill us with a love and hope that projects itself into a future beyond our death-bound existence. We will not experience that future, but we must will that there be such a future if our life is to be meaningful. Today that demands care for our fragile earth. Love of this earth is the hidden center of living a meaningful life. This is how I would have you understand my talk of a post-Copernican geocentrism,

5

Let me return to the story of Jacob's ladder. Jacob responds to his dream experience by rising, i.e. by raising himself from a horizontal into a vertical position, and by raising the stone that had served him for a pillow from a horizontal into a vertical position. He then pours some oil on its top. This simple altar, also a representation of the dream ladder, became the archetype of the church and perhaps of all sacred architecture: building here is a response to the *genius loci*, to the divinity felt to be dwelling at this time in this particular place. It is this experience of a higher power touching our life in which this story seeks the origin of architecture. And countless churches have reenacted that establishment, especially with their towers, which so happily allowed the desire to serve God and an all too human pride to merge.

The point I am trying to make here was given a provocative formulation by the church architect Rudolf Schwarz in a lecture he gave at the same Darmstädter Gespräch at which Ortega and Heidegger spoke. Schwarz was one of the leading church architects of the 20th century. In 1938 he published a book on how to build a church²⁶⁷ that Mies

²⁶⁷ Rudolf Schwarz, *Vom Bau der Kirche*. Schneider, Heidelberg 1947. (1. edition, Würzburg 1938). Translated as *The Church Incarnate: The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture*, H. Regnery Co., 1958.

van der Rohe thought every architect should read, in my opinion not a bad piece of advice. In Darmstadt Schwarz spoke just before Heidegger delivered his lecture:

Many of you who like to travel and to look at works of art will not like to hear me say this: that unfortunately you do not really understand these works. But that is a fact. If you really want to understand a Baroque cathedral, you have to reenact it spiritually so to speak. Here all those beautiful books and words are of little help. You have to join in the great celebration of the community before the eternal, so that you carry yourself into this work and in this manner understand it, not only with your all too clever eye, but with body and soul.²⁶⁸

To understand a Baroque church as an aesthetic object, with our clever eye, is not really to understand it. The church building is like a score that requires to be performed "with body and soul." Such a performance is the festal celebration of the mass that the church building serves.

Schwarz denies theory an adequate understanding of works of architecture. To really understand a work of architecture means to know how to use it, where in this case proper use requires the ability to participate in the communal festival the building serves, where such participation reaffirms the individual's membership in an ongoing community and his allegiance to its presiding values. Do we still know such festivals? Perhaps quite a few of us come closest to such experiences in events like a football game. What is it to really understand, say, the Yale Bowl?

But let me continue with the cited passage:

It does not help at all to draw pretty houses. There are modern architects who are especially clever at that sort of thing, they take away whole walls and then they replace them with display windows, and the front lawn is brought right into the living room and other such pretty things. All this is

²⁶⁸ Rudolf Schwarz, "Das Anliegen der Baukunst," *Mensch und Raum*, p. 67.

good and well, but such tricks will never lead us to a house. Rather to an often highly admirable aesthetic construction of house-like character.²⁶⁹

The shift from Baroque church to house is significant, reminding us of the distance that separates us from the former; also of the two poles of my ellipse.

But do we even understand what a house is? This, too, would require knowing how to use it, i.e. knowing how to dwell. When Schwarz suggests that many "houses" designed by modern architects are better called "aesthetic constructions of a house-like character," this formulation inverts the priority of building acknowledged by an understanding of the work of architecture as a decorated shed in a way that invites comparison with what Venturi has to say about "ducks": "ducks" could be defined as aesthetic objects of a shed-like character.

But if this aesthetic approach does not get us a house, how do we get one? Schwarz's answer may strike you as even more old-fashioned than the example of a Black Forest farmhouse Heidegger was to offer the same audience the following morning.

I am terribly sorry to have to say this, but you only get a house by marrying and by devoting yourself unconditionally to that great law. That may well be much more demanding than designing a house with wonderfully large windows. But I don't think we can arrive at a house in any other way. And this should be the first step towards establishing a decent house, then a village, then a city.²⁷⁰

Such emphasis on marriage must have seemed annoyingly narrow-minded and old-fashioned even when the lecture was given. And if we generalize and take Schwarz to mean that only proper dwelling gets us a real house, this leaves us with what seems an unilluminating platitude. But Schwarz's main points deserve to be taken seriously: First of all he suggests that we should not expect too much from the architect: whether what he or she builds turns out to be a real house, a real school, a real monument, a real church

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

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will depend on how these are appropriated. All the architect can hope for is to furnish is a suitable framework, a kind of score that demands to be performed. To do so he or she must of course attempt to anticipate such appropriation, help shape it, but he cannot and should not attempt to dictate what form dwelling should take. The architect should respond to it.

Issues of dwelling are first of all not aesthetic but ethical issues. But there is tension between the shape of our modern world and the requirements of what Schwarz and Heidegger understood as proper dwelling. Such tension, however, poses problems for the architect, whose very art it threatens. Schwarz, too, ties this threat to the increasing inability or unwillingness of individuals to commit themselves to something larger than their mortal selves. But such a commitment is not only a presupposition of architecture in its highest sense, i.e. of temple and church and whatever might take their place today, but even of what Schwarz would take to be a genuine house. To existing as an individual Schwarz opposes existing as part of an ongoing community, where as a Christian builder of churches, he dreamed of a family-centered Christian socialism. Lacking his faith, I yet must acknowledge that to live a really meaningful life, in this sense to dwell, I must recognize myself as part of a larger ongoing community. But if that community is indeed to go on and flourish, I must leave the earth in such a state that allows it to flourish. Preservation of this earth is the most fundamental requirement of a meaningful life. That is how I would have you understand my demand for a post-Copernican geo-centrism.