

The Ethical Function of Architecture

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1

As Joseph Rykwert has shown so convincingly, architectural theory cannot dispense with dreams or stories about an ideal architecture. Thoughts of the Heavenly Jerusalem once gave expression to such an ideal. So did Laugier's reconstruction of the primitive hut. And so do speculations on Adam's house in paradise.¹

Another such dream finds voice in Heidegger's often-invoked, suggestive, yet questionable description of a Black Forest farmhouse.

The nature of building is letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the raising of places by the joining of their spaces. Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build. Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and sky, divinities and mortals enter in simple oneness into things ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountainslope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbed and the "tree of the dead"—for that is what they call a coffin there: the Totenbaum—and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time. A craft which, itself sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and frames as things, built the farmhouse.²

Heidegger chooses an example removed from our world. To be sure, many such farmhouses have survived and continue to shape the popular image of landscapes like Germany's Black Forest (fig. 53). These relics invite us to measure our way of life by one not yet shaped by technology. Heidegger himself emphasizes the temporal distance that separates us from the farmhouse, underscoring it with his own archaizing style. This twofold distance may lead us to dismiss Heidegger as a modern day Luddite.

The quoted passage is part of the conclusion of "Building Dwelling Thinking," a lecture first delivered on Sunday morning, August 5, 1951, to an audience composed mostly of architects; it was part of a still war-shadowed *Darmstädter Gespräch*, which that year focused on the theme "Man and Space." The lecture begins by stating what would seem to

Black Forest farmhouse. Credit: Foto Marburg/

53 | Art Resource, N.Y.



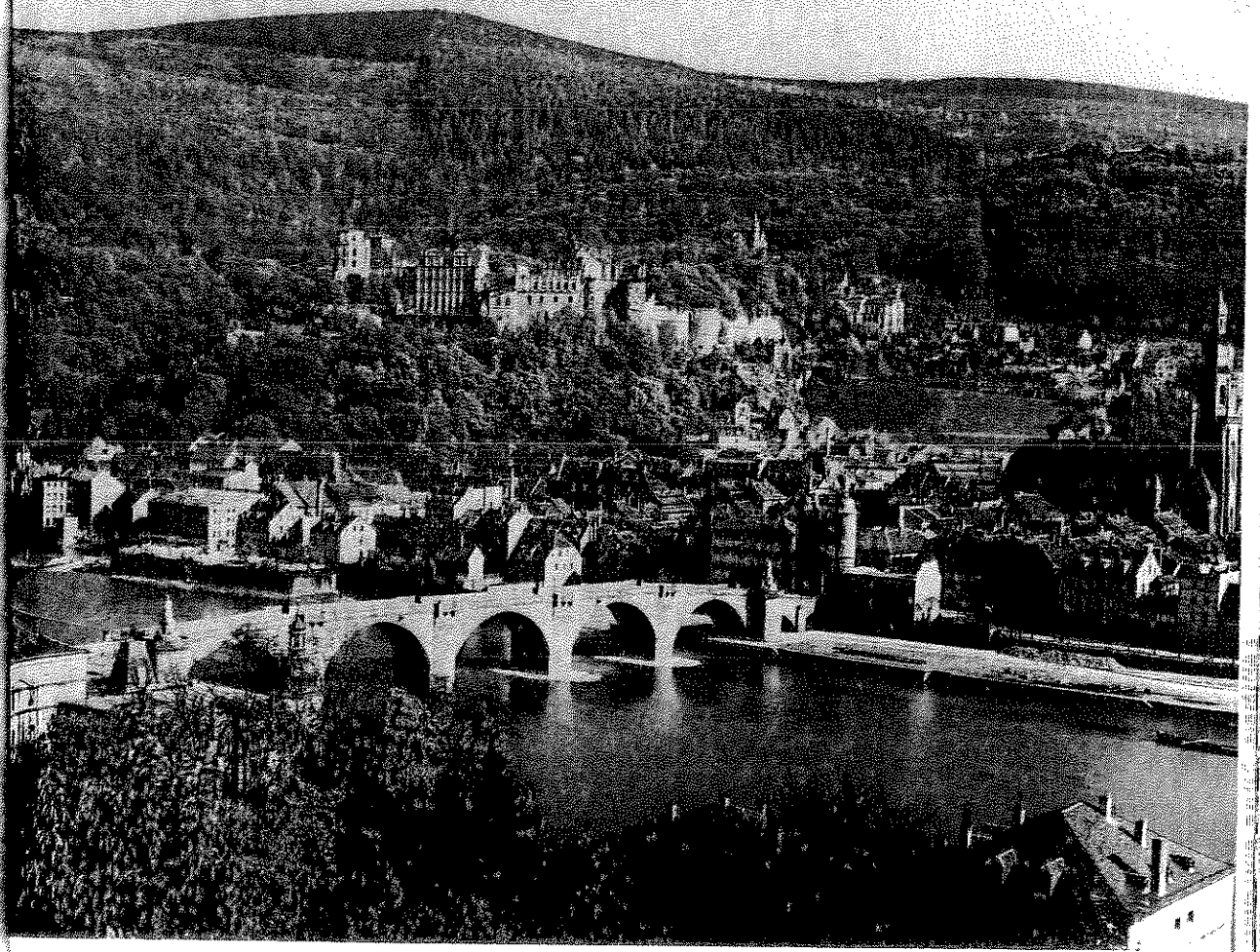
be obvious: the nature of building is letting dwell. To be sure, Heidegger reminds us, "not every building is a dwelling" (p. 146); in the lecture he mentions a number of such "buildings," including bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations, highways and dams, factories and market halls. In their different ways they all serve our way of life, but we would not call them dwellings. To work in a factory, to shop in a store is not to dwell; we do not reside there.

Just this equation of "dwelling" and "residing" is called into question by Heidegger's suggestion that even many residential buildings, "well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun" though they may be, hold no "guarantee that dwelling occurs in them" (p. 146). Of course not, we may want to agree: no more than a hammer can guarantee that it will be used as a hammer can a house guarantee that people will actually reside in it. But such easy agreement would miss Heidegger's point: he is distinguishing genuine dwelling from mere residing, from merely inhabiting a structure or finding shelter. To dwell is to feel at home. Building allows for dwelling by granting a sense of place. The builders of Heidegger's farmhouse did so by placing it on its hillside, orienting the part of the house in which the farmer and his family ate, cooked, rested, and slept toward the valley, leaving the farmhouse's larger back half to cows, horses, and goats.

All this seems obvious enough and hardly worth saying, even as we may wonder in what sense such building and dwelling are compatible with life in a modern metropolis.³ And yet Heidegger warns us not to settle for what is so readily taken for granted: "As long as this is all we have in mind, we take dwelling and building as two separate activities, an idea that has something correct in it. Yet at the same time by the means-end schema we block our view of the essential relations. For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling—to build is in itself already to dwell" (p. 146). Certainly: the farmhouse serves a quite specific kind of dwelling, fitted to a particular landscape. The climate helped dictate that animals and humans share the same roof, while comfort demanded the separation of their quarters, joined only by a narrow walkway. One could thus discuss the farmhouse as a machine for living, although "tool" might seem to fit better. But, Heidegger insists, talk of building serving dwelling fails to consider "the real meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely, to dwell" (p. 146). To support his claim that building and dwelling are inseparably joined, Heidegger appeals to Old English and High German: the now lost, but nevertheless real meaning, of *bauen*, "to build," is said to be "to dwell," and "to dwell" in turn originally meant "to be." Dwelling thus names "the basic character of human being" (p. 148),⁴ understood not primarily as a being cast into boundless space but as a being at home in the world. "The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken" (p. 157). Such primordial dwelling grounds all building that grants a sense of place.

2

The bridge that spans the Neckar in Heidelberg establishes such a sense of place (fig. 54): "The place is not already there before the bridge is. Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them proves

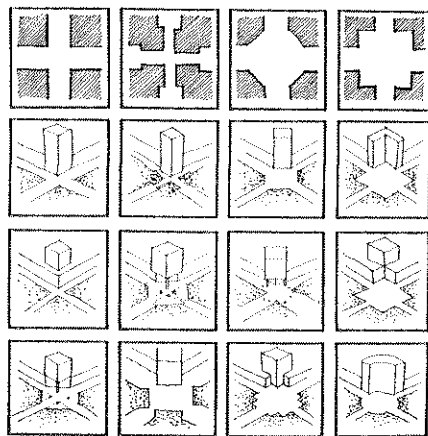


54 | View of Heidelberg with bridge. Credit: Foto
Marburg/Art Resource, N.Y.

to be a place, and does so *because of the bridge*. Thus the bridge does not first come to a place to stand in it; rather, a place comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge" (p. 154).⁵ Establishing a distinctive place, the bridge joins and opens up other places and spaces: the river, the river banks, the city. Place-establishing work first reveals space. Instead of thinking of place in terms of space, Heidegger inverts that order. "What the word for space, *Raum*, *Rum*, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum* means a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peira*" (p. 157). So understood, space is first of all both cleared and bounded. Such clearing and bounding are presupposed by our experience of things, which are inevitably placed in one way or other: the fork on the table, the car on the road, Venus in the evening sky. Inseparable from our encounter with things is the experience of different places and therefore spaces: table, road, evening sky. "That for which room is made is always granted and hence is joined, that is, gathered, by virtue of a place, that is, by such a thing as the bridge. Accordingly, spaces receive their being from places and not from 'space'" (p. 157).

Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger had insisted that our everyday experience of space is intimately linked to the activities we are engaged in. First of all and most of the time the body, especially the moving body, mediates our experience of space: the street is to be walked down, the mountain to be climbed, the bridged to be crossed. To be sure, we can locate the bridge by measuring how far it is from other things: "Thus nearness and remoteness between men and things can become mere distance, mere intervals of intervening space" (p. 155). But just as this is an abstracted understanding of distance, so the understanding of space as the three-dimensional manifold derives from a richer understanding of space—think of the different ways in which we experience rooms, buildings, neighborhoods, cities, landscapes. We have to agree with Heidegger: first of all and most of the time our experience of space is an experience of spaces, mediated by our encounter with things and their places. So experienced, space is regional: this room is a region with boundaries that mark it off from other regions; so is a house, a neighborhood, or a city. Building helps establish regions, and architecture helps re-present them: some dominant structure, a square, perhaps with a fountain, or just a street corner continues to be an effective way of gathering a multiplicity of buildings into a neighborhood, a multiplicity of neighborhoods into a city⁶ (fig. 55).

Regions assign to persons and things their proper places; were it not for this, we would be disoriented, could not consider certain things out of place. In the case of a room, the region in question is bounded by floor, ceiling, and walls, but regions need not be bounded in that fashion: a forest clearing is a region, and so is a valley. Regions are nested within regions: the room in the house, the house in its neighborhood, the neighborhood in the city, and so on. The region of all regions is the world, understood now not as the totality of all things but as the context of contexts that assigns everything its place. Aristotelian space, which assigns to the four elements and thus to all things their proper places, is closer to this everyday understanding of space as regional than the space of geometry or the space presupposed by modern science. The space we inhabit is not the homogeneous space of Euclid. We live in a heterogeneous space. Furthermore, that heterogeneity is inevitably



55 | Representations of street corners. Credit: Enrique Larrañaga.

charged with meaning. Take a shopping plaza on a hot summer day, or a meadow used as a soccer field.

It is above all in terms of the activities we are engaged in that we understand proximity and distance. As humanist architecture recognized, the human body furnishes something like a natural measure of space. Bound up with that measure is the qualitative difference of the directions of the space we inhabit. Up and down, front and back, right and left, for example, carry different meanings, as becomes clear as soon as we begin to reflect on the metaphorical use of these terms: "I am down," "he is sinister looking," "she went behind my back." If building is the construction of boundaries in space, this space cannot be understood as a homogeneous given. World space has always already been separated into different regions, of which sky and earth are perhaps the most basic. This allows Heidegger to say that human being is essentially a dwelling on the earth and under the sky. And if dwelling expresses the relationship between humans and world space, that space is always already charged with meanings: space is not mute. Space speaks to us, and only because it speaks do buildings speak to us.

3

"Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build." But if "the nature of building is letting dwell," must we not also hold on to the converse, that dwelling presupposes building? While the particular dwelling made possible by the Black Forest farmhouse can be said to presuppose that more primordial dwelling that is nothing other than the human way of existing, must the latter not presuppose in turn a more primordial building? How are we to understand this "building"? A first answer was suggested in the preceding section: if "dwelling" names "the relationship between man and space," this primordial "building" must mean space, but space understood as placing persons and things. The traditional analogy between human building and divine creation comes to mind: God has often been described as the archetypal architect, who fashioned the world as a perfectly ordered whole, the fit

dwelling place for human beings (see fig. 59). I have already touched on the medieval understanding of the church as a representation of the cosmos. This is of course hardly unique: again and again we meet with an understanding of buildings as more or less explicit repetitions of the cosmogonic act. Mircea Eliade thus appeals to construction rites to suggest that in primitive societies the building of every house is

an imitation, hence reactualization of the cosmogony. A "new era" opens up with the building of every house. Every construction is an absolute beginning; that is, tends to restore the initial instant, the plenitude of a present that contains no trace of history. Of course, the construction rituals found in our day are in great part survivals, and it is difficult to determine to what extent they are accompanied by an experience in the consciousness of the persons who observe them. But this rationalist objection is negligible. What is important here is that man has felt the need to reproduce the cosmogony in his constructions, whatever be their nature—that this reproduction made him contemporary with the mythical moment of the beginning of the world and that he felt the need of returning to that moment as often as possible in order to regenerate himself. . . . even if the experiences aroused . . . are no longer anything but profane—a construction is a new organization of the world and of life. All that is needed is a modern man with a sensibility less closed to the miracle of life; and the experience of renewal would revive for him when he built a house or entered it for the first time.⁷

The primordial building that provides human building with its ground and measure would then be the cosmos. But "cosmos" names precisely the world into which we have been cast, experienced as a meaningful order. Heidegger makes such an experience constitutive of human being: "It is not that there are men, and over and above them space; for when I say a 'man,' and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name 'man' I already name the stay within the fourfold among things" (p. 156).

With the introduction of "the fourfold" Heidegger takes a step that threatens to leave both the modern world and all phenomenological evidence behind. It is one thing to say that human being is essentially being-in-the-world, in this sense also a being in space; it is quite another to claim that such being-in-the-world is essentially a dwelling, understood now as a "staying within the fourfold" of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, a preserving of "the fourfold in its essential being, its presencing" (p. 150). How can Heidegger claim both: that human being is essentially dwelling and that dwelling is a staying within the fourfold? "How then may we find, among the wayfarers of the metropolis, one who knows how to build because he knows how to dwell? What modern home is able to express the preservation of the *Geviert*, the Fourfold?"⁸ Something like the distance that separates us from the Black Forest farmhouse also would seem to separate us from Heidegger's fourfold. If genuine dwelling must indeed be understood as a staying within the fourfold, would this not mean that we moderns are no longer able to dwell in Heidegger's sense? And, if being human should indeed mean "staying within the fourfold among things," then we have lost our humanity. But what justifies such talk? Had Heidegger's *Being and Time* not placed authenticity in opposition to being at home in the world? Why privilege dwelling understood as "staying within the fourfold"? Such questioning returns us to Heidegger's puzzling formulation.

Three of the terms would appear to pose little difficulty, although they do raise questions:

1. By "earth" Heidegger means the ground that supports us, both literally and in the sense that it sustains us with its gifts of food and water: "Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into place and animal" (p. 149). Human being is essentially on the earth, and it remains so, despite space flights and dreams of colonizing other planets.

Such a reading, however, fails to capture all that matters here: already in "The Origin of the World of Art" Heidegger had insisted that earth

shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into a destruction. This destruction may herald itself under the appearance of mastery and of progress in the form of technical-scientific objectivation of nature, but this mastery remains an impotence of will. The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosed, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up.⁹

"Earth" names here what I would call "material transcendence." What such transcendence transcends is precisely every linguistic or conceptual space in which things must find their place if they are to be disclosed and explained. What invites talk of "material transcendence" is that, even if constituted by our language or concepts and as such appearance, what thus appears is not created by our understanding but given. 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, of all our determinations and calculations, is limited. The rift between thing and word, between earth and world, where "world" names not the totality of facts but a space of intelligibility, cannot be closed. Nor can it be eliminated: "The earth cannot dispense with the Open of the world if it is itself to appear as earth in the liberated surge of its self-seclusion. The world again, cannot soar out of the earth's sight if, as the governing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on a resolute foundation."¹⁰

What prevents the world from "soaring out of the earth's sight," what opens human beings to material transcendence, this transcendence within the sensible, is above all the body—and here it is important to keep in mind that the embodied self is a caring, desiring self. To be in the presence of the earth is inevitably to be affected, moved, claimed. Earth thus also refers to the elusive affective ground without which all talk of essences, meaning, values, or divinities is ultimately groundless, merely idle talk.

More problematic than this understanding of the earth as the ever elusive, yet indispensable supporting ground of human existence is Heidegger's suggestion, a suggestion that invites appropriation by deep ecologists, that dwelling requires a special respect for our ineliminable dependence on the earth and its gifts, requires "saving" the earth: "To save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation" ("Building Dwelling Thinking," p. 150). That we often fail to save the earth in this sense requires no comment. Genuine dwelling is here opposed to the way we ordinarily deal with persons

and things. And if such dwelling is equated with being human, being human here can only name an ideal at a distance from our usual mode of being, calling us perhaps beyond it.

2. By "sky," too, Heidegger means first of all pretty much what we usually mean by the word: "The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year's seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and the blue depth of the ether" (p. 149). Again, such a reading fails to capture what matters: human beings not only look up to the sky, but such looking up has long provided natural metaphors for the way human beings are never imprisoned in the here and now but are always "beyond" themselves, ahead of themselves in expectation, behind themselves in memory, beyond time altogether when contemplating eternity. Such power of self-transcendence is part of the meaning of "spirit." The second term of the fourfold thus not only means the familiar sky but opens that meaning to what may be called the ineliminable spiritual or ecstatic dimension of human being.

But once again Heidegger questions the way we live first of all and most of the time when he insists that dwelling requires an openness to the sky as sky. Those who dwell "leave to the sun and the moon their journey, to the stars their courses, to the seasons their blessings and inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor day into a harassed unrest" (p. 150). The challenge to our modern way of life is evident, inviting us to question not just this way of life but also the assumptions behind Heidegger's words: would he have us live in a pretechnological world? The distance that separates us from Heidegger's farmhouse turns out to be a version of the distance that separates the fourfold from the technological world. What special lesson do this house type and the way of dwelling it presupposes hold for us today? What not choose some more familiar building, say a house in some American suburb, with its television sets, VCRs, telephones, radios, and lightbulbs? Surely we could say of it, too, that it was built by "a craft which, itself sprung from dwelling, still uses tools and frames as things"—although, uncomfortable with such stilted talk, we may just want to say that the suburban home, too, both makes possible and presupposes an established and often taken for granted way of life. What separates such language from Heidegger's invites us to reflect on the distance that separates our modern dwelling from the dwelling that built the farmhouse. Is it also the distance that separates us moderns from genuine building?

3. Heidegger's "mortals" are of course we human beings. To speak of "morals" is to emphasize the precariousness and finitude of our existence. Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger had linked authenticity to a resolute appropriation and affirmation of our essential mortality, and with good reason: as long as we remain unable to make our peace with the fact that we grow older and sooner or later must die, remain unable to make our peace with the passage of time, we also will be unable to make our peace with all that binds us to time—with our bodies, for example, with our sexuality, and with the setting of the sun, with the coming of winter, and with the earth, which so often withholds its gifts. The inability to save the earth and to receive the sky appears linked to the difficulty we have accepting ourselves as the mortals we are.

4. The most problematic of the four terms is the last. How are we to understand Heidegger's "divinities"? What place do they have in our modern world? Heidegger calls

them "the beckoning messengers of the godhead" (p. 150)—this is how angels have traditionally been understood and, following the poet Hölderlin, instead of speaking of "divinities" or "gods" Heidegger will also speak of "angels." But what is such talk to us? How are we to understand Heidegger's "godhead"?

Following Hölderlin, Heidegger understands godhead as the most fundamental measure of human being. Is he then simply returning to the traditional conception of human being as created in the image of God? But that God, for Heidegger as for Nietzsche, is a poetic fiction that, while it once may have assigned human beings their place and thus allowed them to dwell, today has lost its authority. God remains unknown. And yet Heidegger insists, once again citing Hölderlin, that it is precisely this unknown God who grants our dwelling its measure. What sense can we make of this? How can the unknown function as measure? Heidegger answers cryptically: "The measure consists in the way in which the God who remains unknown, is revealed as such by the sky."¹¹ God is revealed, yet remains hidden; he is revealed in the endless variety of the things that surround us, in "everything that shimmers and blossoms in the sky and thus under the sky and on earth, everything that sounds and is fragrant, rises and comes—but also everything that goes and stumbles, moans and falls silent, pales and darkens. Into this which is intimate to man, but alien to the God, the unknown imparts himself, in order to remain guarded within it as the unknown."¹² Heidegger gestures here toward the many-voiced ground of all meaning and value. To be touched by that ground in a specific way that gives direction to our lives is to receive some divinity's message; depending on the message received, we may name that divinity Aphrodite or Hera, Dionysus or Apollo. But any attempt to name the gods and God—and, in doing so, to take the measure of human being, if only to return that measure to human beings and to let them dwell—is a violation of the unknown essence of divinity, putting the namer in danger of obscuring divinity with some golden calf.

Heidegger knows that the godhead and its messengers are not present to us moderns as is the earth, that we cannot receive them as we can the sky. The divinities, he tells us, we can only await: "Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. In hope they hold up to the divinities what is un hoped for. They wait for intimations of their coming and do not mistake the signs of their absence. They do not make their gods for themselves and do not worship idols. In the depth of misfortune they wait for the weal that has been withdrawn" ("Building Dwelling Thinking," p. 150). But if we can only await the divinities and if they are yet part of the fourfold within which genuine dwelling must stay, it seems that such a dwelling must also elude us: hoped for perhaps, but something that cannot be willed. Heidegger asks us to dwell in the knowledge of the absence of the godhead's messengers, to resist the temptation to dance around some golden calf and substitute idols for angels, measures we have created for measures gained by interpreting the messages of the godhead's messengers. But how then is our dwelling to find measure and direction? His suggestion, that we wait for what has been withdrawn, hardly provides the content necessary to give guidance to our dwelling and building, and it threatens to render his essay quite useless to the architects whom he was addressing.

This much, however, has become clear: when he understands essential dwelling as "staying within the fourfold," Heidegger attempts to reappropriate the archaic view that

gives human building measure and ground in some more primordial building, in sacred order. And even if Nietzsche is right and the old God is dead, even if with this death the building in which Europeans dwelled for so many centuries lost founder and foundation, Heidegger nevertheless insists that we can learn to dwell only by learning to listen to an all-but-silent call. If we follow Heidegger, the architect's task, too, is to heed that call and to let the building designed be an inevitably precarious response.

4

But the question returns: what can such talk—perhaps suggestive but disturbingly vague, freighted with Christian and in Heidegger's case more specifically Hölderlinian associations—still mean to us?

I pointed out that Heidegger's lecture was delivered in August 1951 to an audience composed largely of architects, when in the wake of World War II Germany was suffering from a severe housing shortage and the *Wohnungsfrage*, the question of dwelling, was thought of above all in terms of the need for shelter.¹³ In this context Heidegger's pronouncements must have seemed especially strange. For according to him, the need for shelter was not at all the real problem: "However hard and bitter, however hampering and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the world's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real plight is this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real plight of dwelling as the plight*" (p. 161). Heidegger invites his audience to consider the essence of dwelling. Even though generally unrecognized and unthought, that essence confronts us moderns as *the* task.

Did Heidegger's discussion of the fourfold and the concluding example of the Black Forest farmhouse intersect with the problems faced by his listeners, who heard him in respectful silence? Where was he pointing? Heidegger certainly did not mean to suggest that the Germans ought to build as their backward forebears built two hundred years ago. "Our reference to the Black Forest farm in no way means that we should or could go back to building such houses; rather it illustrates by a dwelling that has been how it was able to build" (p. 160). But just what were his listeners and what are we to learn from this illustration? The dwelling that built the farmhouse did not know what Heidegger calls the misfortune of the withdrawal of the godhead's beckoning messengers. It had its measure in a sacred order. Like Heidegger's audience, we no longer know such a measure. Is it then still possible for us to dwell in anything like Heidegger's sense? Are we, on Heidegger's view, condemned to fail to live up to what the essence of dwelling demands? I am too much of a modernist to be able to take such suggestions very seriously. Should we then dismiss his example as hopelessly, perhaps even dangerously, anachronistic? The Black Forest farmhouse belonged to a world not yet touched by the Enlightenment or shaped by technology—to a premodern world. And if the Black Forest farmhouse should indeed lie irrecoverably beyond and

behind us, can we deplore this? Who of us would want to change places with Heidegger's Black Forest farmer? Only if we are able to substitute for the kind of dwelling that built this farmhouse one genuinely of this age will we be able to arrive at a notion of building that is not anachronistic. Does Heidegger's understanding of the essence of dwelling even allow us to delineate such a contemporary dwelling? What would it be like?

Recall once more Heidegger's problematic gloss on what it means to "receive the sky as sky": *not* to turn night into day. Is artificial light incompatible with Heideggerian dwelling? Or think of the revolution in communications and the way it has shaped the world we live in, especially our sense of space, and consider the gain in freedom bound up with this revolution. For Heidegger's Black Forest farmer the particular place into which he happened to have been born tended to become a destiny from which he could not escape, limiting the possibilities available to him in a way we would find intolerable. Place severely circumscribed vocation and community. Inseparable from such a strong sense of place is a lack of freedom. The rootedness of his existence was bought at a price few of us would and should be willing to pay. However we might want to reappropriate Heidegger's remarks on dwelling, such reappropriation will have to recognize technology's ability to liberate human beings and thus to allow them to become more truly themselves.

Just this promise of liberation is called into question by Heidegger's juxtaposition of dwelling as a staying within the fourfold and our inhabiting a world ruled by the essence of technology understood as the *Ge-Stell*, the construct.¹⁴ Technology, Heidegger insists, is not just a means to an end, an instrument we use as we might use a hammer. It is rather a way in which whatever is presents itself to modern man. This calls into question Gropius's confident pronouncement that "in the last resort mechanization can have only one object: to abolish the individual's physical toil or providing himself with the necessities of existence in order that hand and brain may be set free for some higher order of activity."¹⁵

Neither "construct," nor "configuration," nor the now common translation of Heidegger's term, "enframing," begins to preserve the wordplay and the associations of the German *Ge-Stell*, in which we should hear at least these two senses of *stellen*: to put something in a place or set it somewhere and to hunt it down or bring it to bay, as for example a wild animal. So understood, *stellen* means also *herausfordern*, "to challenge." Our science places nature before us by challenging it: its search for truth is a hunt. The mode of uncovering that Heidegger associates with technology thus already governs the science that is a presupposition of what we usually call technology. In its essence technology is therefore a way of understanding the being of what is, a way clearly marked by Descartes's famous promise in the *Discourse on the Method*, which opposes to "that speculative philosophy which is taught in the Schools, . . . a practical philosophy by means of which, knowing the force and the action of fire, water, air, the stars, heavens, and all other bodies that environ us, as distinctly as we know the different crafts of our artisans, we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature."¹⁶ Nature comes to be understood first of all as available material, to be used and to be disposed of when no longer of use. But such understanding fails to be open to things as they are. In this sense Heidegger can say: "*In the essence of the Gestell happens the neglect (Verwahrlosung) of the thing as thing.*"¹⁷ We inhabit the world neglecting things.

Like *Gestell*, *Verwahrlosung* is a quite ordinary German word, meaning precisely "neglect." Yet "neglect" fails to capture all that Heidegger has in mind. He would have us listen more carefully to the word, hearing in it not just *verwahren*, "to guard or keep something," so that *Verwahrlosung* would name the state of being left unkept or unguarded, but in *verwahren*, *wahren*, "to watch over and protect," and *wahr*, "true." *Verwahren* thus would mean: to watch over the thing so that it can present itself as the thing it is, as it is in truth.

Heidegger thinks the presencing of things in relation to the world, where "world" is understood as the way in which human beings relate to whatever they encounter. In this sense we can speak of the world of the Middle Ages or of the modern world. "World" names here a space of intelligibility in which all things present themselves. So understood, "world" names a necessary condition of all experience and as such cannot be lost. But Heidegger thinks the essence of technology more specifically, against the background not just of his understanding of human being as essentially being-in-the-world but of his understanding of genuine dwelling, and that means also against the background of the world thought of as the fourfold of heaven and earth, mortals and divinities. Only to think the world as the fourfold, he claims, is to think it in its essence. To present itself "in truth," a thing must also present the fourfold, which alone lets it be. But that objectifying reason which has shaped our modern world cannot make sense of the fourfold. What Heidegger calls the *Verwahrlosung* or "neglect" of the thing is therefore necessarily also a refusal (*Verweigerung*) of the world, a "world" that now no longer means just a space of intelligibility but also the fourfold. To *this* world Heidegger would have architecture recall us.

Talk of the modern world now becomes problematic, for, ruled by objectifying reason and subject to technology, the modern world represents a refusal of the fourfold and thus conceals or hides its own essential being as world. The modern world is thus the *verwahrloste Welt*, the "neglected world." As Heidegger understands it, this neglect is not something for which we bear responsibility; rather it is part of our destiny, of a piece with the history of Being thought of as the process of metaphysics from its Greek beginnings to Cartesian rationality, a "progress" that has its other side in the transformation of the work of art from a world-shaping power, from work having an ethical function, into an aesthetic object.¹⁸ But even today art can be more than a production of aesthetic objects. If the world understood as the fourfold refuses to present itself to us moderns, poets and artists yet preserve its traces. Architecture, too, should serve such preservation.

Heidegger's understanding of the threat posed by technology to genuine dwelling is made clearer by a third proposition: "The *Ge-Stell* orders all that presences to be present as the always available items of the available material."¹⁹ Once again the translation is inadequate. *Bestellt* does indeed mean "orders," as one orders a meal; it also means "sends for," as well as "cultivates," as one cultivates a field. Whatever is, is ordered by the *Ge-Stell* in a way that reduces the many dimensions of its being to just one: it is ordered to present itself as "always available material at hand." That includes human beings. "The need for human material is subject to the same regulating ordering that characterized mobilization in time of war, as is the need for books of entertainment and poetry. . . . All material, including the raw material 'human being,' is used up for the technological establishment of the unconditioned possibility to make anything at all. Although hidden, such use is determined by the complete emptiness in which the materials that make up what is real now stand."²⁰

Written down at the time of World War II, these last remarks could be said to presuppose a caricature of reality that we have happily left behind. To that caricature corresponded the dehumanizing architecture of Hitler's Germany, including its concentration camps. But we cannot simply shrug off Heidegger's claim that the technological spirit presiding over the modern world threatens to reduce human beings to material subject to calculation and planning as just another resource. Think of traffic engineering, or of modern medicine, or of modern war—Heidegger would add Hitler's Final Solution to such examples.

Heidegger, too, understood the extermination camps as factories of death, buildings built to reduce human beings to human material, built to betray the essence of building because built to betray what is a condition of genuine dwelling: staying within the fourfold, which also means preserving the possibility of really dying. "Do they die?" Heidegger asks of those who perish in the extermination camps. "Hardly noticed," they are *umgelegt*, "cut down," "liquidated." Such perishing is not dying in Heidegger's sense. The death dealt by the Nazis to millions of innocent victims would deny them full humanity by denying them the possibility of a genuine dying. "Only those able to die become mortals in the full sense of this word. A mass of misery, of countless, dreadfully undied deaths everywhere—and all the same, the essence of death remains blocked. Not yet are human beings mortals."²¹

"Not yet are human beings mortals," Heidegger mournfully proclaims, inviting us to understand the concentration camps as an extreme example of what in "Building Dwelling Thinking" is called "the plight of dwelling," to recognize their "architecture" as the horrifying realization of the counterideal buried in the essence of technology: the antitype to Adam's house in paradise.²² Something of the leveling of distinctions Heidegger ascribes to the essence of technology reverberates in his own words. He does not name the murdered victims. He does not speak of Jews, Gypsies, or homosexuals. An inhuman detachment, according to Heidegger himself bound up with that technological age which revealed its monstrous essence in National Socialism, allowed him to say the following: "Agriculture is now a motorized food industry; in its essence the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers, the same thing as blockades and the reduction of a region to hunger, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs."²³ But monstrous as they are, it is not difficult to make sense of Heidegger's equations. They are indeed demanded by his understanding of the essence of technology and the plight of dwelling.

5

Despite the pressing housing shortage, few of those listening to Heidegger could have disputed that "the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses," that "the real plight" is rather "that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*." Such dwelling, Heidegger had told his audience, is possible only where there is strength to resist the temptation to make gods for ourselves and to worship idols. This must have touched those who heard him: had the Germans not fallen into idolatry when they substituted a house built by Hitler for that primordial building whose outlines haunt and elude us? And had Heidegger himself not participated in their dance around the

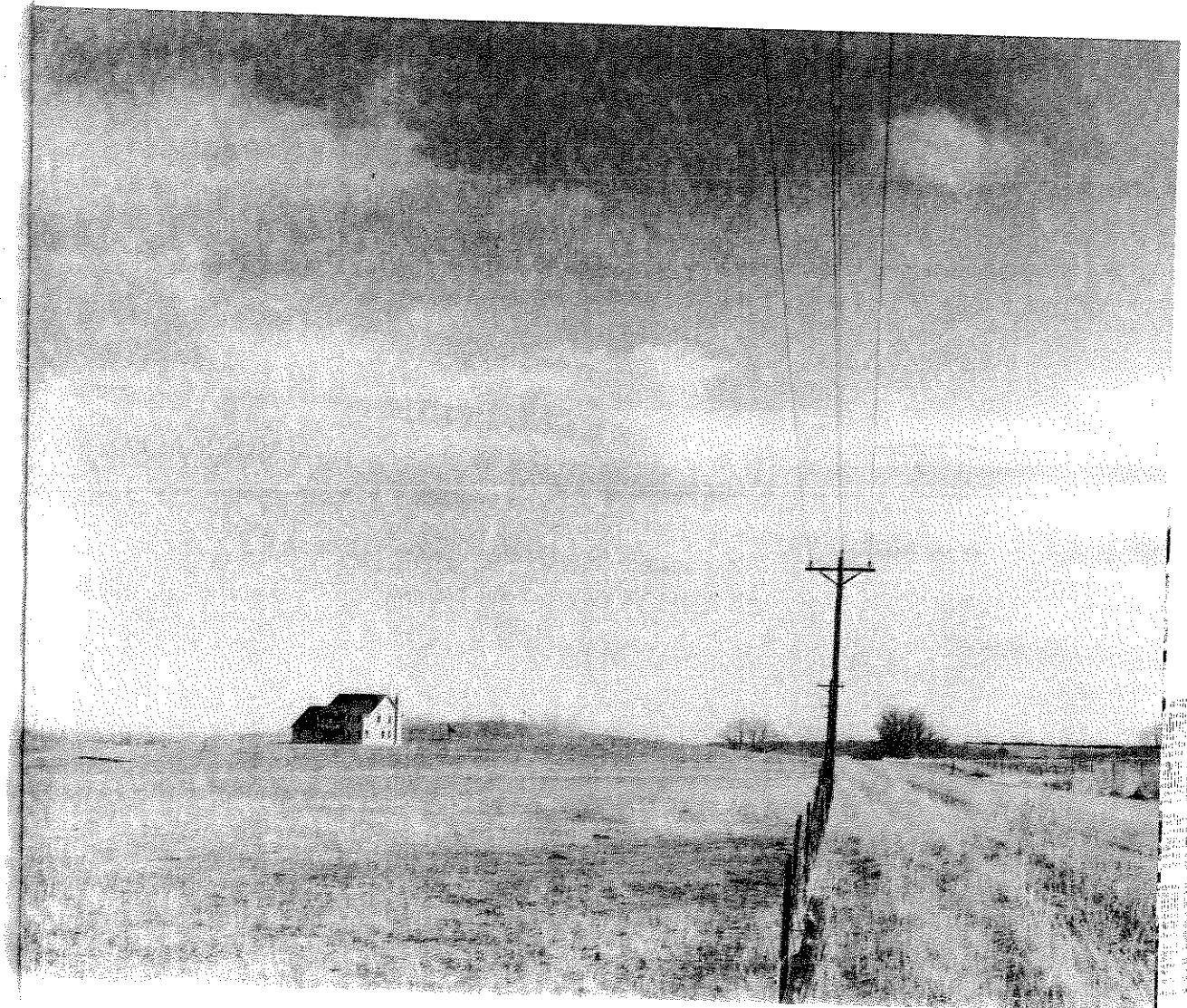
golden calf? Convinced that with the death of God the edifice of our culture had lost founder and foundation and lay in ruins, Heidegger had hoped to recover the archaic truth of pre-Socratic Greece for the modern age. That hope let him be receptive to the Nazis' promise of a new order raised on blood and soil. Those who seek inspiration and a sense of direction in the much-cited temple passage in "The Origin of the Work of Art" should remember that it was written at a time when Nazi Germany sought to reappropriate the Greek paradigm, which has played such a fateful part in German history, giving it architectural expression in its own brand of neo-classicism. Postmodern architects and theorists have shown increasing appreciation for both Heidegger's reflections and the Nazis' sublime perversion of Athenian architecture. To them especially I would recommend Robert Jan van Pelt's "Apocalyptic Abjection," which begins with a discussion of Heidegger's failed attempt to serve a distinctly German reappropriation of the greatness of our culture's Greek beginning; passes on to a discussion of Nazi architecture as a repetition of the architecture of Athens, of Hitler's attempt to make Berlin "into a mondial acropolis," Nuremberg into a national agora, Munich into a German necropolis; and concludes with an interpretation of Auschwitz as the topsy-turvy city Hitler built.²⁴ It should be obligatory reading for all who seek to appropriate Heidegger's thought for architectural theory, indeed for all who dream of recovering the greatness of its Greek beginning and also the seductive simplicity of Heidegger's Black Forest farmhouse for our modern culture.

Still, as long as we recognize that such farmhouses lie irrecoverably behind us, they help us understand more clearly what Heidegger calls the plight of our own dwelling, even as the failure of Heidegger's disastrous attempt to reappropriate the archaic in the modern age speaks to the threat of idolatry. We still must learn to dwell. But by saying that as mortals, we "*must ever learn to dwell*," Heidegger also suggests that it is not given to us to arrive at our true home. What he calls "the *real* plight of dwelling" is not something to be got rid off. We cannot really be at home in the world as long as we fail to accept that we are wayfarers, nowhere fully at home. This is how we must understand Heidegger's question, "What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight?" as well as his answer: "Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to this homelessness, it is a misery no longer."²⁵

1

Only if we succeed in substituting for the kind of dwelling that built Heidegger's farmhouse one genuinely of this age do we have a chance of arriving at an understanding of building that is not anachronistic. Such substitution calls for a reconsideration of his privileging of place over space. Consider once more the revolution in communications and the way it has shaped the world we live in, especially our sense of space and the gain in freedom it has brought. Place circumscribed the freedom of Heidegger's Black Forest farmer in a way that we would find intolerable. Television, radio, and telephone, satellites, cables, and computers let us experience whatever place we are in increasingly as a place we just happen to occupy and may want to exchange for another, should economic opportunities, love, or perhaps a promise of spiritual growth prompt us. If we are no longer rooted in one place, as farmers were for countless generations, this comparative lack of rootedness is just the other side of a vast increase in freedom.

The lure of freedom that challenges the binding power of place is as old as humanity. The story of the Fall, an ambiguous story of both place and self-assertion, provides a paradigm for stories of human beings refusing to keep their assigned place, stories that are inevitably also stories of liberation. Walls and closed doors have always been experienced as invitations to trespass. Attempts to diminish the importance of distance did not have to wait for modern technology: think of the history of transportation, beginning with the invention of the wheel and the taming of horses. The desire to defeat the tyranny of place is as old as humanity; technology has simply provided us with far more effective means—just consider the automobile and the possibilities of separating home and workplace that it has brought. Like all repetitions of the Fall, this attack on distance has to be understood in all its ambivalence. Certainly, it must bring with it increased rootlessness. Inseparable from such rootlessness is not only a loss of place but a loss of community. The closed community of Heidegger's Black Forest farmer has given way to the far less restricting, multidimensional community, or should we say communities, to which we all belong. Part of this splintering, which threatens to bring about the disintegration of community altogether, is the greater emphasis on the different roles played by the persons we meet with: the employer, the salesperson, the police officer, the teacher, the wife, the husband, all threaten to obscure the person. Along with this goes greater anonymity, the substitutability of individuals.



56 | Lone house, Boulder County, Colorado. Photo credit: Ken Abbott.

But once again: we must not lose sight of the gain in freedom this development has brought. If the loss of place can be mourned, must it not also be welcomed as an essential part of the increasing emancipation of the individual from the rule of the accident of place? Place no longer need be destiny, as it undoubtedly was for the Black Forest farmer. The more we want to emphasize freedom, the more likely we are to insist that emphasis on place should yield to a recognition of the value of open space (fig. 56). I remember how disturbed I was, when I first came to the United States, by buildings that did not seem to belong to the landscape. But inseparable from my uneasiness was a sense of openness and excitement. I can well imagine an American who, carrying with him memories of his

hometown's magic mile and coming to one of Europe's old cities, city walls still enclosing and sheltering the houses within, the entire city still an organic whole, would find all this order terribly depressing and confining. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall,/That wants it down." Robert Frost was not speaking of city walls, not even of walls of rooms or houses, but of a New England stone wall—and it is hard to want that down. But "Mending Wall" is of course not only or even primarily about such a wall:

*"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.¹*

Open spaces have long been linked to freedom. This is not a new point. At roughly the same time Heidegger's farmer is said to have built his farmhouse, the far more enlightened Joseph Addison expressed a very different ethos:

Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its Capacity. We are flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views, and feel a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul at the Apprehension of them. The Mind of Man naturally hates everything that looks like a Restraint upon it, and so is apt to fancy it self under a sort of Confinement, when the Sight is pent up in a narrow Compass, and shortened on every side by the Neighborhood of Walls and Mountains. On the contrary, a spacious Horison is an Image of Liberty, where the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the Immensity of its Views, and to lose itself amidst the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observations.²

"A spacious horizon is an image of Liberty." The open ocean or the view from some mountain top is preferred to the bounded beauty of a Black Forest valley. What announces itself here is not only the developing sensitivity to the sublime but also the connection between the sublime and freedom, which was to play such an important part in Kant's analysis. What so many travelers from Europe found and still find exciting about the American landscape, and not just about unspoiled nature but also about its often chaotic cities, is this openness in which a democratic ethos finds expression. This is true even of the suburban landscape with its jumble of supermarkets, hamburger joints, crisscrossing highways, and cars, which would seem to provide almost the perfect illustration of what is meant by "loss of place." Rootlessness and freedom both find expression in such an environment. This landscape is often striking in its ruthless disregard of physical place (fig. 57). But such disregard reflects the fact that place and with it proximity and distance are less and less determining facts of our lives. The accident of place no longer determines the job we are going to take, who our friends are going to be, where we are going to shop, and so on.

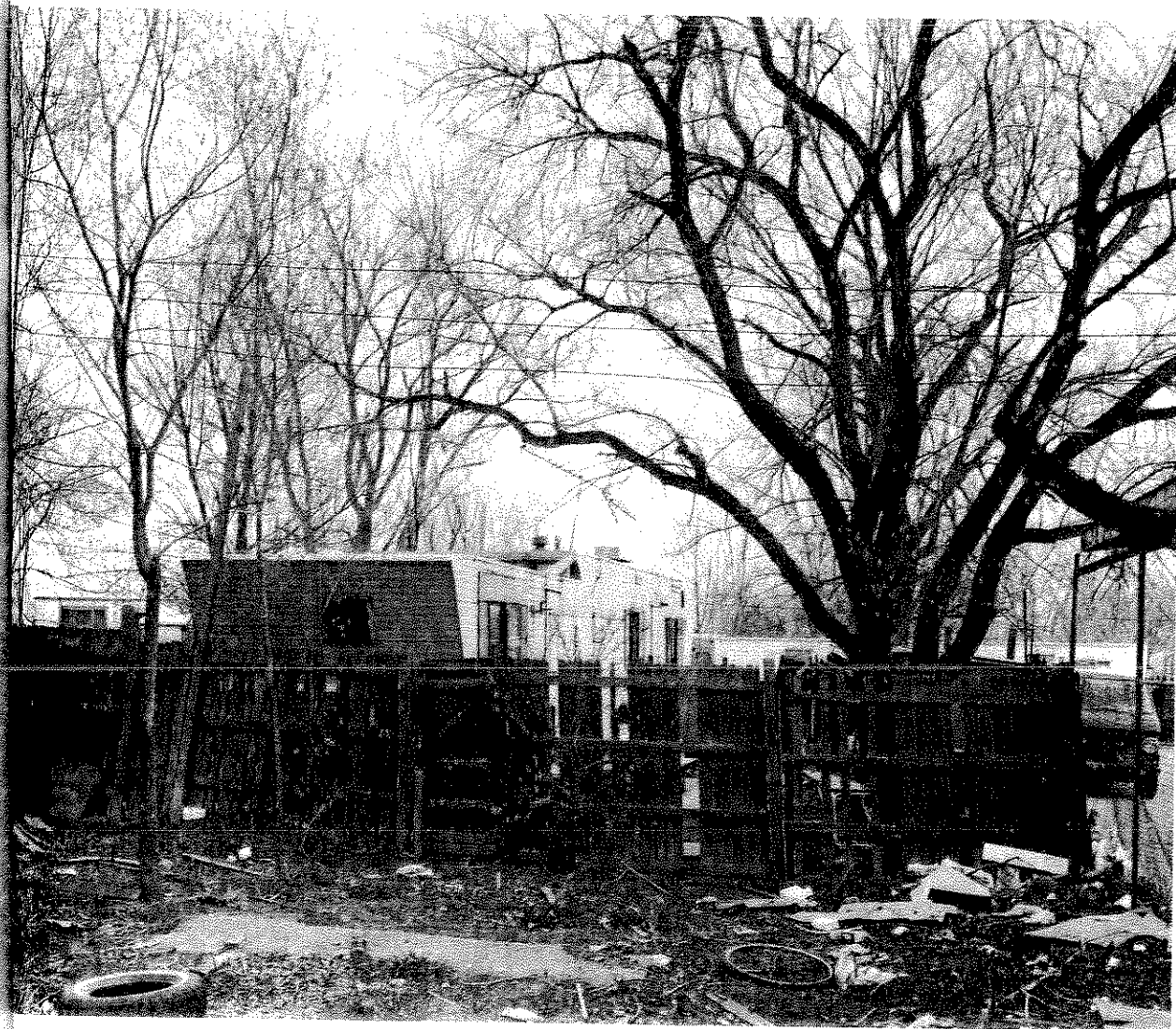
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Trailer park, Boulder, Colorado. Photo credit:
57 | Ken Abbott.



Undoubtedly this has to mean the breakdown of neighborhoods in the traditional sense. But this breakdown need not be deplored: the diminished power of place, a consequence of technological advances that allow the individual to participate in an ever-increasing number of groups and subcultures, may be taken as an index of modern, civilized living. The house or apartment house becomes just another place where one happens to sleep, eat, make love, perhaps raise a family—at any rate not a place that allows for an integration of all the important human functions. It is a place, Heidegger would say, where one merely resides but does not dwell. Life in the metropolis scatters individuals into different activities. What matters are these activities. Such a life demands functional frames in which distance matters less and less, requiring efficient systems of communications that minimize the power of place and distance.

The full consequences of this attack on distance remain uncertain. It seems difficult not to welcome the way it has helped free human beings from what I have called the accident of location: no longer is place destiny. Such liberation, however, is attended by its frightening shadow: the attack on distance also threatens us with a homelessness never before known. Some, to be sure, have suggested that the revolution in communications has allowed us to make the whole world our home, that we are on the verge of the global village, but such metaphors are, I fear, products of wishful thinking. Consider once more television. There is no doubt a way in which it negates distance: the far away and the nearby are equally brought into our living room, but only as pictures from which the observer is excluded. Or think of the telephone company's advertising slogan, inviting us to reach out and touch someone. Anyone in love will know that this call is only a very deficient mode of touching. Genuine intimacy demands a different kind of proximity.

The attack on distance also has to turn against intimacy. Intimacy and a sense of distance go together: eliminate one and you eliminate the other. That goes also for the sense of personal distance, established, for example, by distinctions between formal modes of address or by dress codes. Where everyone is called by his or her first name and sex becomes a matter of casual encounters with increasingly interchangeable partners, genuine intimacy becomes difficult to achieve as we deprive ourselves of the symbolic distances whose breakdown makes such achievement possible.

Instead of genuine proximity we are increasingly offered only its perverted analogue: the equidistance and thus the homogeneity, the indifference, of place—think of television programs and our relationship to their heroines and heroes. This attack on distance brings with it a loss of place of which the mobile home is but an expression: there is a sense in which most of us today live in mobile homes. It is not surprising then that such houses are easily left, exchanged for another. The ease with which we relocate ourselves and replace buildings is witness to a more profound displacement that may be welcomed as an aspect of humanity's coming of age or deplored as a loss of genuine dwelling. When all places count the same, we can no longer place ourselves and become displaced persons. This raises the question: if modern life demands minimizing the importance of distance and that means inevitably also the significance of place, does it also demand the death of an architecture that grants a sense of place?

It would be a mistake to see in this progressive displacement of human beings only the result of technological progress. That progress, a precondition of the modern metropolis with its lonely crowds, only realizes a displacement founded in the commitment to objectivity on which rests our technology and the science on which it depends. This commitment has shaped the world we live in and our sense of reality.

What does "objectivity" mean here? I would like to define it in opposition to our usual way of understanding things. First of all and most of the time we find ourselves caught up in the world. The way we experience the world is inseparably tied to the activities in which we are engaged. Our interests determine what we pay attention to. Our encounter with things is also subject to a point of view that is ours because of whatever place we happen to occupy. Our experience of things is mediated by our body, and therefore dependent on its makeup and subject to the accident of its location in space and time. Thus each person sitting in some room experiences it in a different way, from a different perspective, and yet each experiences the same room. This sameness of the room is not itself something seen; it is rather a presupposition of our seeing, which is inescapably bound to a particular place and point of view. That we nevertheless understand ourselves to be in the same room shows that our location is not a prison. Nor must we change positions to see things differently: in imagination we can put ourselves in other places even without moving. It is thus possible to ask someone to draw a picture of some room as it would look from an unavailable point of view, say at the center of the ceiling. And we can also ask for descriptions of the room less ruled by perspectival distortions, less subject to the accident of location; we call these descriptions more objective. Complete objectivity entails freedom from all perspectival distortion. Science aims at descriptions that are objective in this sense. It thus rests on a self-displacement by which the subject elevates the embodied self into a thinking substance. Such self-elevation is the point of Descartes's turn to the *cogito*. The thinking self that is the ideal subject of science has freed itself from the limits imposed on it by its body and the accident of its location. That liberation, however, is a liberation only in thought. We lack eyes to see things objectively. To make sure that its descriptions of the world are more than fantastic constructs, science therefore returns to the world in the form of experiment and technology. Technology carries the liberation from the accident of location into the world. Such liberation is at the heart of what Heidegger discusses as the rule of the *Ge-Stell*.

The commitment to objectivity that is a precondition of science and technology has to transform our sense of space, which leads to a characteristically modern sense of homelessness. To make this point a bit clearer let me turn to a thought experiment by the fifteenth-century cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, which helped to destroy the geocentric worldview of the medievals.³ Cusa asks us to imagine someone on a moving ship, drifting in a large body of flowing water: might not such a person, unable to see the shores, think himself the unmoving center of the world; and were not his contemporaries like such a person, when they proclaimed the earth to be the center of the cosmos? But such security is false and rests on perspectival illusion. With equal right a lunarian could claim the moon

to be that center, a Martian, Mars. Rest and motion, the cardinal insists, are relative notions. What we take to be fixed depends on our point of view. This reflection was to help give others the courage to reject the geocentric worldview, but Cusa was not a forerunner of Copernicus; he did not place the sun at the center of the cosmos but rather denied that it makes sense to speak of such a center at all. Infinitely extended, space, according to the cardinal, has no center, just as it has no boundaries. Once again it is the freedom of thought that helps us to escape from the accident of location and to break out of the prison of perspective. As that prison is shattered, so is the closed world of the Middle Ages. Unlike that world, a world that assigned to man and to all things their proper places, the boundless space of the moderns leaves us lost in space. Space here conquers place. The Copernican revolution transformed the earth quite literally into a mobile home. Nietzsche is right to speak of "the nihilistic consequences of modern science. . . . Since Copernicus man has been rolling from the center toward X."⁴

There were those who, like Giordano Bruno, welcomed this liberation as a liberation of the spirit that would soon lead to political change. But enthusiasm was to yield to despair. The infinite space thus opened up began to fill humanity with terror. We could turn to Donne or to Pascal, or to Schopenhauer's famous introduction to the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*: "In endless space countless luminous spheres, round each of which some dozen smaller illuminated ones revolve, hot at the core and covered with a hard cold crust; on this crust a mouldy film has produced living and knowing beings; this is empirical truth, the real, the world."⁵ Nietzsche was to appropriate Schopenhauer's dismal vision in the very beginning of his early fragment *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, so popular with postmodern critics weary of all centers. It is the same vision Turgenev lets the nihilist Bazarov express in *Fathers and Sons*:

I'm thinking life is a happy thing for my parents. My father at sixty is fussing around, talking about "palliative" measures, doctoring people, playing the bountiful master with the peasants—having a festive time in fact; and my mother's happy, too. Her day is so chockful of duties of all sorts, of sighs, and groans that she does not even have time to think of herself; while I . . . I think. Here I lie under the haystack. The tiny space which I occupy is so infinitely small in comparison with the rest of space, which I am not, and which has nothing to do with me—and the period of time in which it is my lot to live is so petty besides the eternity in which I have not been and shall not be. . . . And in this atom, this mathematical point, the blood is circulating, the brain is working and wanting something. . . . Isn't it loathsome.⁶

Bazarov experiences himself adrift in the infinite, a stranger unable to find a place to call his own. What foundations are left to build on, what centers by which to orient oneself? The more technology carries the attack on place into our everyday life, the more we can expect that life to be tinged by a sense of being on the road, of not belonging, of being denied the possibility of really dwelling somewhere. Hopper's paintings offer illustrations of what I want to call the terror of space (see fig. 77).

Inseparable from this terror of space is the need for boundaries strong enough to establish place. Architecture has one source in the attempt to make what is originally a strange and alien environment more our own, to transform space into place, so that instead

of being cast into a strange and alien world we are allowed to dwell. It thus has offered defenses against the terror of space, and such defenses are especially needed in a culture that has attacked distance as effectively as our own. This is one lesson Heidegger's Black Forest house has to teach us. But again the question returns: is it still possible for us to have such an architecture? It may appear that this suggestion demands something that is not only undesirable, but impossible—undesirable because it glorifies the mystery of belonging to a particular place or region at the expense of freedom, impossible because it asks us to step back into a pre-Copernican world, to return to a pre-Copernican understanding of space.

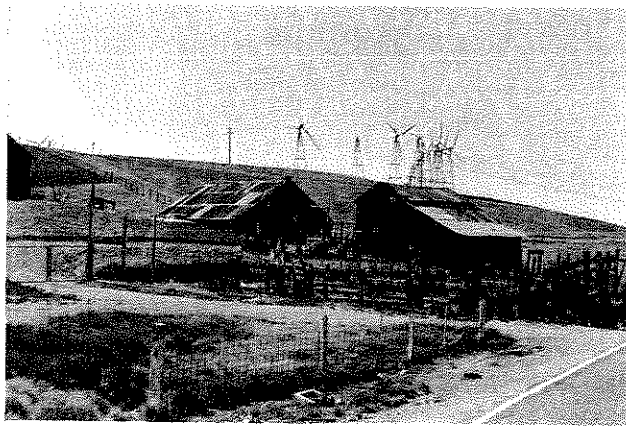
An answer to this question is implicit in the recognition that the human being cannot be reduced to a thinking substance or a disembodied freedom. Human being belongs to both body and spirit, to the earth and to the light. An adequate understanding of dwelling must do justice to this twofold belonging, which is never without tension. Such tension may be found intolerable and may lead to attempts to negate it; two strategies of negation offer themselves:

1. We human beings may try to assert ourselves as essentially free spirit and attempt to reduce nature, including our own bodies, to mere material to be understood and controlled. Such assertion must demand open space as the only environment that can do justice to a genuinely human dwelling. But should spirit triumph altogether over the earth, architecture would lose its point. For if our true home is of the spirit, there is no reason to place much emphasis on our material home. The accident of our location must then not only be accepted but welcomed. It is in such self-assertion that the look of mobility so characteristic of our architectural environment has its deepest foundation.

2. Conversely, aware that such one-sided emphasis on the spirit must lead to nihilism, one may glorify an existence that reduces human beings to no more than part of nature and idealize the person with roots. But roots that are too strongly developed imply a lack of freedom and thus a less than full humanity.

We have to recognize the rights of both body and spirit. Our building must acknowledge both the sheltering power of place and the indefinite promise of open space (fig. 58).

58 | Farm buildings and windmills, Alameda County,
California. Photo by author.



I have cited Nietzsche's maxim that ever since Copernicus, we have been drifting toward X. But do we in fact live in a post-Copernican world? To some extent that is surely the case. Astronomy has pushed toward the limits, which is also to say toward the origin of the universe. We have sent rockets to and beyond the moon, and dreams of placing human beings on other planets no longer seem altogether utopian. Still, in many ways the space of our everyday experience remains pre-Copernican. We have to grant Heidegger at least this much: first of all and most of the time the space we live in is not the space of astronomers nor the space of Euclidean geometry with its x , y , and z coordinates. These spaces only open up in reflections that presuppose what I have called the pursuit of objectivity and with it a disengagement from the world, a profound self-displacement. But disengagement presupposes a prior engagement. Engagement and place have at least temporal priority.

Once more I would like to return to the problem of distance. We tend to take the objective approach to distance so much for granted that distance tends to be understood as a neutral quantity. That a place three miles away is farther away than a space one mile away seems so obvious that it hardly merits further reflection. Given a certain way of looking at the world it is indeed obvious. What is not obvious, however, is that we should always look at the world in this way. In what sense is it obvious that Greenland is closer to the United States than England? Look at a map, measure the distance! But when is the ruler an adequate guide to what is close and what is distant? In the world we live in, distance cannot be reduced to a quantitative measure. That goes especially for the space of architecture, if not for that of civil engineering.

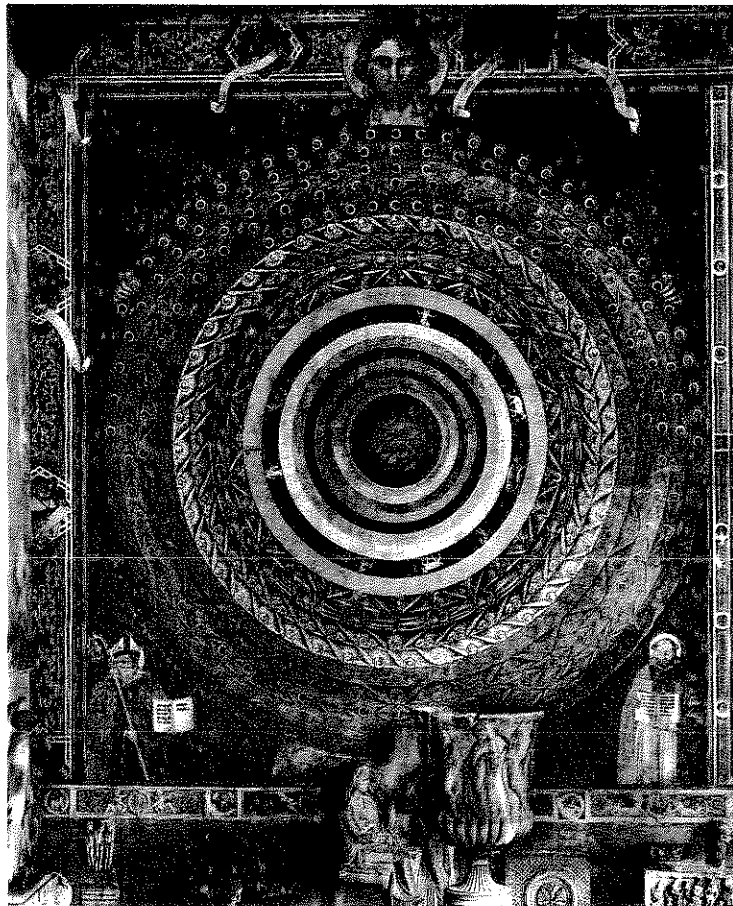
Let me give an example: imagine a bedroom in which you are lying in a bed placed against the outside wall. As you lie in that bed, you start considering that this wall right next to you is only a few inches thick; you think of the rosebush without, invisible to you yet separated from your head by only a few inches, only a few bricks between you and the red flowers and prickly thorns. Such reflection may strengthen your sense of the room as *your* room. Everything in that room is close to you, as the rose is not. But the more you focus on the objective proximity of the rosebush, the more a sense of the uncanny, perhaps even a sense of dread, is likely to come over you. The normally sheltering wall threatens to give way. A sense of homelessness seizes you that is not without its own excitement and freedom.

Compare the way we experience space first of all and most of the time with the objective world picture presented by a modern mapmaker: to her distance means quantitative measure. Depending on her specialty, the mapmaker may have as good an understanding of the topography of New Guinea as of that of Connecticut, representing it in quite the same way: the form of representation chosen is not bound by the accident of location. Is it obvious that such a modern map is better than a medieval *mappa mundi*, which placed paradise at the top, hell at the bottom, and Jerusalem at the center and perhaps projected the whole on the body of Christ, thus asserting a profound harmony between cosmos and humanity? The modern mapmaker no doubt gives an objectively far more correct account, which does greater justice to the quantitative aspect of space. If you want to use the map to

get from one place to another, the modern map will prove much more useful. The medieval world map, in contrast, helped interpret the significance of humanity's place in the world; it articulated an ethos. Mapmaking here had an ethical function. The map represents the world as a meaningful order, a building built by God, who joined spaces so that human beings should be able to dwell. Similarly, medieval cosmology represents the world as a cosmos, as a well-joined order sustained by God in which human beings have their proper place near the center (fig. 59). Is this cosmology less adequate than the modern? In an obvious sense this is no doubt the case. It is less true, less adequate to the way things are, given that the discovery of "the way things are" requires objectivity. But we should keep in mind the measure of adequacy that is here being presupposed. Science's pursuit of truth is indeed inseparably bound up with the commitment to objectivity. But despite journeys to the moon, despite all we have learned about space, the world we live in remains in many ways geocentric. Still the sun rises and goes down again.

Piero di Puccio da Orvieto, *God Holding the Universe*. Camposanto, Pisa. Credit: Alinari/Art

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Let me give another, more architectural, example. It has become customary to build churches with towers (see fig. 68). Why? One could reply: the tower has become an established convention, an accepted and expected part of the church type. Eco might have said that it helps the builder to denote "church." But if so, what is the origin of this convention? Was its establishment arbitrary? Traditionally towers were generally placed in the west. In the past few hundred years this tradition gradually eroded, as other considerations came to be more important. One reason towers were once placed in the west, oriented toward the setting sun, was that they were thought of as bastions against the forces of evil, bastions perhaps presided over by St. Michael as general of the heavenly host. Evil was tied to the west, because it is here that light is daily defeated by the forces of darkness. Presupposed by the church type is the natural symbolism of light, which intertwines with that of space, giving different meanings to east and west, and therefore also to north and south.

I have tried to contrast two conceptions of space; one objective, homogeneous, neutral with respect to value, the other regional, heterogeneous, and freighted with values. If we rest content in the conviction that the objective interpretation is simply the correct one, we fail to consider human being in its full range. To reduce space to objective space is to make it impossible for human beings to ever discover their place in the world. As Nietzsche pointed out, such impossibility is the mark of nihilism, which could be understood simply as the inability to understand the world as a dwelling. But such inability rests on a false, because overly reductive, understanding of our own being in space. We must not forget that the objective understanding of space presupposes a much richer experience, is the product of a reflective transformation of space, and that in the course of this transformation gain is balanced by loss. What is gained is greater objectivity and with it truth; what is lost is precisely the dimension of meaning. Space ceases to speak, but only to those who have lost touch with their own being. To be sure, we live in a technological world, a world shaped by science and its pursuit of objectivity, but not all the dimensions of the world we live in are circumscribed by technology. Technology must be affirmed and put in its place. That means to recognize its liberating potential as well as the threat it poses. To recognize the latter is to perceive also how important it is to recover what has been lost: a sense of place. We still need architecture, we moderns especially.

or origin of nature into a symbolic form of universal guardianship."

10 Building and Dwelling

1. Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972).

2. Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," first published in *Darmstädter Gespräch Mensch und Raum* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt, 1952), pp. 72–84. Translated by Alfred Hofstadter as "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 145–161; quoted passage, p. 160. I have substituted "sky" for "heaven" as a translation of *Himmel*, and "place" for "location" as a translation of *Ort*. This work is hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

3. See Francesco Dal Co, "Dwelling and the 'Places' of Modernity," *Figures of Architecture and Thought: German Architecture Culture, in 1880–1920*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), pp. 13–81. Like so many analysts of the metropolitan condition, Dal Co sees "no harmony" in modern urban dwelling; he observes, "If dwelling is nothing but the unresolved manifestation of the lacerations of living and hence an experience given to regret, then it is up to modern man to know this condition to its fullest extent, to the essence of metropolitan homelessness" (p. 42). But while modernity and harmonious dwelling are impossible to reconcile, I cannot quite agree with Dal Co when he claims that for Heidegger, too, dwelling

is not the harmonious expression of the relationship to the preexistent place; and that every organicist conception that embraces the nostalgia for a virtuous and mythic "prehistory" of dwelling is, in essence, based on a regret for the lost blood-tie between the land and the refuge. The belief that the refuge is continuity with the given place; that the home is a completion of the natural landscape; that the extension of man's hand from it, as it attempts to seize "usables," is the continuation of a fraternal relationship with nature, the "kinship" that endures in the communality of the search for nourishment—all of these beliefs are to be found in Spengler as well as in Tönnies, and also to a lesser extent in Sombart. Heidegger's considerations turn this thinking upside down: without dwelling there can be no place; it is construction that evokes the place and transforms the space. (p. 38)

To be sure, in *Being and Time* Heidegger, very much in the spirit of his place and time, makes

homelessness constitutive of the human condition. But soon he was forced to recognize the one-sidedness of such an understanding. Although essentially homeless, we yet dream and need to dream of home. From the earliest publications of the aspiring theologian to the very end there is thus a great deal of nostalgia in Heidegger's writings. Titles like "Schöpferische Landschaft: Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?" "Vom Geheimnis des Glockenturms," and "Sprache und Heimat" speak for themselves. One could perhaps say that Heidegger makes such nostalgia constitutive of authentic modern dwelling: we moderns need to confront our homelessness. Heidegger's Black Forest farmhouse thus conjures up a home that is indeed "the harmonious expression of the relationship to the preexistent place." Its description is meant to challenge us "to build out of dwelling," where "dwelling" names not something first made possible by human building but rather "the manner in which mortals are on the earth" ("Building Dwelling Thinking," pp. 161, 148), a dwelling that, precisely because constituted by the loss of home, needs to be illuminated by figures of home.

4. This characterization is called into question by, even as it calls into question, Heidegger's insistence on the essential homelessness of human beings in *Being and Time*. To be sure, there already Heidegger had pointed out that first of all and most of the time we feel at home in the world; and in *The Genesis of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Theodore Kisiel calls our attention to the way Heidegger, in his lecture course "Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy" (1924), "still seems to accept pleasure as the background disposition of being-in-the-world" (p. 296). The "lightness of being" is said to "belong to joy" (p. 295). But *Being and Time* links authentic existence to a recognition of our essential homelessness in the world. Any thoughtful appropriation of Heidegger needs to confront this apparent tension in his thought. See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953), pp. 188–190, 276–278; trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 232–235, 320–323.

5. Cf. Dal Co's rather different interpretation of this passage in "Dwelling and the 'Places' of Modernity," pp. 37–38.

6. See Enrique Larrañaga, "Towards an Architectural Theory of Dwelling in Hispanic America" (master's thesis, Yale University, 1983), pp. 177–219.

7. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), pp. 76–77.
8. Dal Co, *Figures of Architecture*, p. 39.
9. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 47.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
11. Martin Heidegger, ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 223.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
13. It is instructive to read Heidegger's essay in the context in which it was first delivered. See *Darmstädter Gespräch*.
14. Martin Heidegger, "Die Gefahr," in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge, 1949*, vol. 79 of *Gesamtausgabe*, (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), pp. 46–67.
15. Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, trans. P. Morton Shand (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), p. 33.
16. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* 6, in *The Philosophical Works*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), 1:119.
17. Heidegger, "Die Gefahr," p. 47. For a fuller discussion of this "neglect of things" see Karsten Harries, "Philosophy, Politics, Technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology*, ed. Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), pp. 225–242.
18. See especially Heidegger's postscript to "The Origin of the Work of Art," pp. 79–81. Cf. Gropius, *New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, p. 90: "Thus our informing conception of the basic unity of all design in relation to life was in diametrical opposition to that of 'art for art's sake,' and the even more dangerous philosophy it sprang from: business as an end in itself."
19. Heidegger, "Die Gefahr," p. 46.
20. Martin Heidegger, "Die Überwindung der Metaphysik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), p. 97.
21. Heidegger, "Die Gefahr," p. 56.
22. 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. 317–381.

23. Martin Heidegger, "Das Ge-Stell," in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, p. 27. For a fuller discussion of the statement and the outrage it provoked, see Harries, "Philosophy, Politics, Technology," pp. 233–234, 244 n. 35.

24. van Pelt, "Apocalyptic Abjection," p. 335.

25. Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," p. 161.

11 Space and Place

1. Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Latham (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), p. 34.

2. Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, no. 412 (23 June 1712); reprinted in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *Selected Essays from "The Tatler," "The Spectator," and "The Guardian,"* ed. Daniel McDonald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), pp. 464–465.

3. See Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Banning, 1981), book 2, chap. 12, p. 117. Also Karsten Harries, "The Infinite Sphere: Comments on the History of a Metaphor," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 13, no 1. (January 1975), pp. 5–15.

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente, Herbst 1885–Herbst 1886*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 12:127. *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), preface, p. 8

5. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 2:3.

6. Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, 1950), pp. 148–149.

12 The Voices of Space

1. That architecture must base itself on such antecedently given meanings was a commonplace in the eighteenth century. Cf. Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux: Architecture and Social Reform at the End of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 146:

"The character of monuments," wrote Ledoux, "like their nature, supports the propagation and purification of morals." In this sense, Ledoux was echoing Rousseau's nostalgia for an original moral language, where social signs were