

Pavlos Lefas

# DWELLING AND ARCHITECTURE

*From  
Heidegger  
to  
Koolhaas*

JOVIS

# DWELLING AND ARCHITECTURE

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*This is a preview of the printed book, containing only the foreword and the illustrations.*

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## *Foreword Rod Hackney (RIBA)*

“A great part of the present evil state of architecture is due to the client – to the man, (never a woman?), who gives the order, the man who pays.” We are all acquainted with the big businessmen, bankers and merchants – you know? Those responsible for the credit crunch, who tell us, “Ah, but I am merely a man of affairs, I live entirely outside the world of art; I am a philistine.”

Who’s having this whinge? – Another clue! “Never undress in your bedroom. It is not a clean thing to do and makes the room horribly untidy.” Thus prescribed the writer of the old testament for architects, still rigidly adhered to by self-respecting ‘Modernist Movement’ designers. Yes if you still haven’t got it, let me tell you, it is the Swiss/French Architect Le Corbusier’s, ‘The Manual of Dwelling,’ in his 1923 book, *Towards a New Architecture*. The gospel went on, “Keep your odds and ends in drawers or cabinets,” and the advice extended to keeping buildings off the ground, go high young man/woman and put the restaurants in the sky to thus avoid, “that fungus which eats up the pavements of Paris.”

Oh, Heidegger, wherefore art thou? Readers! Get yourselves introduced to a balanced approach to his views – it might be good for your souls! Chinese architecture students at Princeton University, with limited English language speaking skills, are told, “Don’t worry, Heidegger is incomprehensible.” Well, all will now be revealed, in clear script, as beautifully structured as you could hope for, in the following chapters. This is a bright, positive, intelligible and warm interpretation of Heidegger’s architectural thoughts. Heidegger was a poet. This book is poetry.

Arctic Eskimos, who annually move between winter and summer dwellings will understand it – they are born philosophers. To the Canadian Inuit, Heidegger’s carefully constructed relationship between building and dwelling is as poetic and skilful as persuading the visiting polar bear to go and eat somewhere else without having to shoot the beast.

This work wraps around Martin Heidegger’s 1951 *Building Dwelling Thinking* – distinguishing the limitations of modernism/de-humanised environments (when modernism became no more than a ‘style’), the liberation of individual/society, and human relationships with nature/locality. Nevertheless, while this writing helped to shape the arguments against Modernism’s arrogance, not all aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy were either applicable to architecture nor had they been applied would they have led to a humanised, tolerant, not repressive and not depressing environment: over 6 billion people cannot all be hunter-gatherers like the Inuit, can they?

Heidegger trusted human beings more than the proponents of Modernism did. To him we human types are manifest, warts and all; we revel in untidiness. Dwelling is not about living in a house; for us dwelling is a verb and the centre of everything we do. To dwell is not static – it is on the move and even when it stops its journey it is rarely still. It is there before we journey and there when we arrive, it is not place-specific. A good home is where we make it, it is where we lie.

The Dutch gypsy, Rem Koolhaas struts his stuff on the other side of the tennis net. No more unintelligible to some of Princeton’s professors than Heidegger perhaps, but much more appreciated by the fresh-off-the-international-transport-vehicle Chinese architectural students. After all Koolhaas’ urban designs are as clear to most as a colourful psychedelic MP3 cover.

To start with Heidegger and finish with Koolhaas is a rare safari, but the reader may conclude that it works! Both men believe that proper structures (buildings if you like – but please include caves, warehouses, shops, public spaces) allow ordinary mortals to dwell; both agree that a house is not, “a machine for living in” (Le Corbusier again in 1923), and both agree that God is in the mess of everyday living. Both believe that human beings are complicated, but they are at the height of the food chain; they are clumsy, cluttered and puzzling, yet they have produced evocative cities full of charm and surprise and many without Teutonic planners having had any control of them at all. Oh, Thank God for the human spirit. Whilst it remains free, complicated and undisciplined, the future is bright; the quirkiness is fun, the unexpected is what makes dwelling so magical.

Good architecture is about raising the spirit. It is not a piece of black and white photography without a human being in sight to interrupt the cold view of the building. The author of this work has remained true to this debate; academics, lovers of good design, as well as readers of a good argument, will enjoy this narrative and well-constructed theory.... In fact, true to its task, the following chapters will make a good place to live, a series of ten dwellings perhaps, a home fit for readers.

According to Heidegger, the problem of homelessness lies in the fact that, in our days, dwelling is experienced and perceived as “an activity that man performs alongside many other activities,” not as a fundamental trait of human existence. Here, a mansion in Ragusa, Sicily.



Having triumphed and been disseminated, modern architecture soon lost its expressive power: it was the architecture neither of the victor, nor of the defeated; neither of the working-class, nor of corporate capital; neither of the imperialist powers, nor of the colonies. By becoming established worldwide, it was reduced to ordinary, everyday architecture. Perceived as such, it was subject to critique. Here a government building in Lagos, Nigeria.



# *On Dwelling and Building*

Heidegger's concept of dwelling: The "gathering of the fourfold" (i.e., the four components of man's world – earth, sky, mortals, divinities). Dwelling achieved by building (constructing and caring). Heidegger: Buildings serve dwelling and reveal the essence of things (with reference to "The Origin of the Work of Art"). The landscaping around the Acropolis best appreciated in this context. Revealing the essence of things is achieved collectively. Dwelling is also achieved collectively. Man's involvement with things. Things are inseparable from space. Things create places. Dwelling is achieved in places.

Building is not just the erection of edifices. "To build is in itself already to dwell," Heidegger points out. Man's lasting desire to build is visualised in tools like these. Today one can purchase them at hardware stores; the ones depicted, though, were unearthed in Upper Egypt and are 3,500 to 4,000 years old.



Construction of the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao. Safety helmets hang on the wall of the local bar where construction workers used to go for a beer. According to Heidegger, dwelling does not take place after the completion of a process in which human beings have to deal with a set of existing objects they use to create a shelter. Dwelling is the result of human beings getting involved with things.



Dimitris Pikionis, late 1950s. Landscaping around the Acropolis, Athens. In Heidegger's words, the art work "first gives to things [in this case, to trees and rocks and *spolia*] their look [Gesicht] and to men their outlook [Ansicht] on themselves."



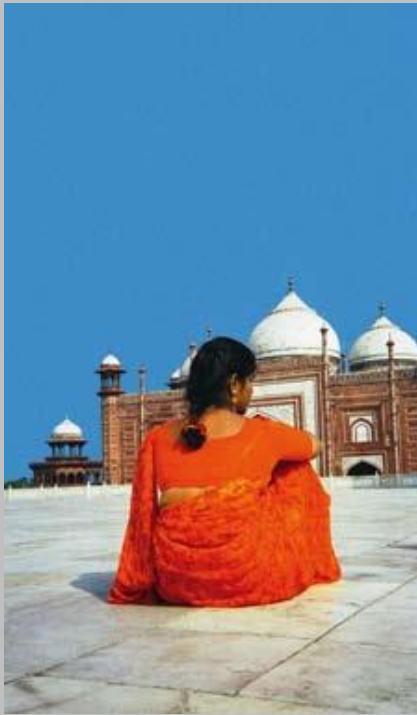
Heidegger, "A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing ... It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. ... Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence." Frederic Boissonas had already grasped this property of the work of art when he photographed "Parthenon after the Storm" in the early twentieth century.



A worldwide poll conducted in 2007 revealed the Taj Mahal as one of the "seven miracles of the world". The



Parthenon was not among them, as many people gave it the cold shoulder, seeing in it merely a symbol of the Western World: preserving (Bewahrung) the work in people's minds and in practice is collective and takes place in a specific cultural environment each time.



Cremations on the Bagmati riverbanks, near Kathmandu, Nepal. The smoke adds to the pollution that chokes the city; however, it turns all of its inhabitants into participants in a ritual of major importance for Hinduism.



Religion and mass culture: the involvement of the faithful with artwork can be collective and intense, albeit not necessarily extremely thoughtful.



# *Dwelling in the World*

Heidegger's dwelling achieved before the industrial revolution. "The plight of dwelling has nothing to do with the condition of the industrial workers" seen as referring to Engel's relevant book and as such contradictory to Heidegger's own statements in *Aufenthalte*. Was recollection possible in nineteenth century hovels? Thinking is crucial for dwelling. Building, important not only as process, but as artefact as well. Architecture matters. Heidegger: "true" buildings allow dwelling. "True" meant in specific cultural environment. The search for "true" buildings since Vitruvius and romanticism. Vernacular architecture produces true buildings. Loos.

"The real plight of dwelling is older than the world wars, older than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers," claimed Heidegger. The Black Forest cottage, where he used to retire in order to write, allowed "staying with things" by enhancing the intellectual awareness of its inhabitants and letting them experience the "great seasonal ups and downs." This was apparently not the case for working class dwellings in nineteenth century Western cities.



Derelict building among sealed structures in Harlem, New York. Could Heidegger's claim that, "yet as soon as *man* gives *thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer" be relevant here?



The layers of care and neglect are discernible in this palimpsest of human dwelling, which occasionally took place in this courtyard in Manhattan, New York. Clearly, dwelling cannot be identified with living in a house.



Adolf Loos, "Before God there are no good or bad architects, in His presence all architects are equal ...". Here, a 7,000-year old house model from Krannon, Thessaly, Greece. Is there such a thing as the archetypical house?



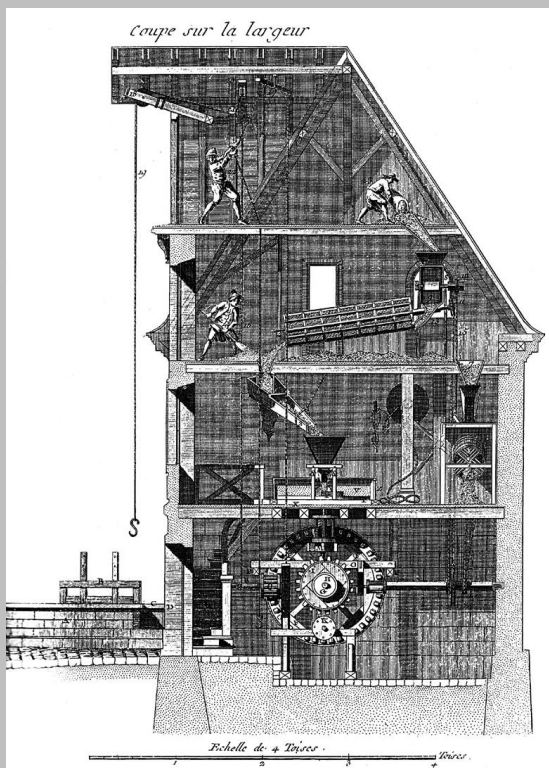
Berlin, 2006. “The bridge, if it is a true bridge, makes space for a site” for the fourfold, claims Heidegger. Here, the pride of the German Democratic Republic, the imposing *Palast der Republik* is being demolished to make space for a construction site. Is a building equally “true” for all?



# *The Technology Issue*

Heidegger: Technological advances tend to preclude staying with things. We intertwine our lives with tools. Relation to instruments is detached. Technology advances since times immemorial. We feel quite comfortable with advanced technology. Anthropologists: Use of tools requires abstract thought. Does abstract thought contradict staying with things?

Denis Diderot, *Encyclopaedia*, the design of a mill. As early as in the eighteenth century, producing bread was a complex procedure. Personal involvement with things essential to survival had given way to efficiency, even prior to the Industrial Revolution.



A simple tool may conceal highly specialised know-how. Here, dolerite pounders: they were used in ancient Egypt to work granite, which was too hard to work with metal tools, but pulverised when pounded by an equally hard or harder material.



This uncanny beautiful power generator is among the most environmentally-friendly devices man has ever created; they are, that is to say, among the most deeply familiar to him as being fully integrated into his environment.



Manhattan. “[Heidegger’s] concept of being-in-the-world implies a manmade environment,” notes Christian Norberg-Schulz. Are there limits to man’s “natural” predisposition to transform his environment?



# *Modern Architecture and Traditional Dwelling*

Le Corbusier and the house-machine. Positivist approach. Detached approach to the house, quantifiable criteria for evaluating houses contradicting Heidegger's imperatives. Taut: "Houses are built for people." Architects criticising modernism turned to Heidegger, not Taut.

Le Corbusier. La Maison des Hommes, 1942. The demands people should have of their dwellings are tangible, and are clearly and unambiguously visualised in this croquis.





“Today’s houses may even be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that dwelling occurs in them?” asks Heidegger. In each cultural environment there is a particular concept of what “home” really means. Here, the entrance to a house in Porto Novo, Benin.



London. Lenin stayed at a house that stood on this site in 1905, while planning the revolution in Russia. Is dwelling all about the same thing for each and every one? Can the functions taking place in a dwelling be rationally prescribed, as Le Corbusier wished to do?



A rationally designed recycling bin in Strasbourg set against the “primordial” house during Christmas festivities. Modern architecture was perceived as a detached design and planning philosophy that ignored man as a historical being and addressed him solely as a thinking being. As such it was incapable of providing “homes” for real people. Is

rationality incompatible with dwelling after all?

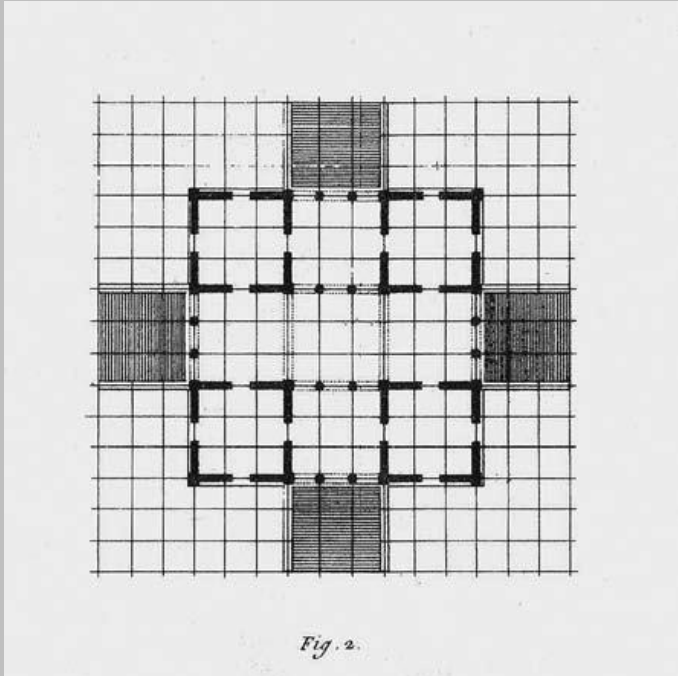


Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, outskirts of Paris, France, 1928: Walter Benjamin identified dwelling with living in a case, in a secluded and secured area; he held that the destruction of intimacy warranted by the well-protected interior was revolutionary. Transparency and the interplay of exterior and interior spaces would bring traditional dwelling to an end. The similarities to a Renaissance *villa suburbana* pointed out by Colin Rowe were not initially perceptible.



J.N.L. Durand, drawing from *Précis des leçons d'architecture*, early nineteenth century. The building form results from a juxtaposition of clearly defined structural units: walls, columns, doors. The apotheosis of *ratio*, long before the

emergence of modern architecture ...



Bruno Taut. Block of flats in Berlin, Germany: According to Taut, modern architecture should not have the destruction of the housing model that people have in mind as its primary objective.



# *Earth, Character, Aesthetics*

Does distancing from the earth preclude dwelling? Taut: Yes, Le Corbusier: No. Heidegger provided a solid explanation in favour of yes. His views changed over time, and the earth's importance receded. Does homogenisation and industrialisation preclude dwelling? Innovation is an obstacle to dwelling only in specific cultural environments. Taut: Today's buildings lacking aesthetic quality. Heidegger: village in Olympia unadorned. *Ornamentum* and *decorum*. Simmel: development from utility to aesthetic value individualises things; in that sense allows dwelling. The public: post-war modern buildings ugly. "Soulless," indifferent cities.

Barbican Centre, London. The elevated streets of the mega-structures of the 1960s and 1970s simply secured transit from one building to another. Those who walked them had no other option but to follow the most efficient route. One may assert that the problem of disengagement from the earth lies mainly in the restriction of choices, and not in being cut off from the soil.



New York. Meatpacking district. The fact that several activities are better served at ground level does not necessarily mean that contact with Mother Earth is a *sine qua non* for dwelling.



Taut claimed that most of the problems contemporary architecture was faced with were due to the fact that it was no longer practised as an art, in the sense of arts and crafts. A highly-developed construction industry does not necessarily create inhuman urban environments, which is evident in this instant in Manhattan, New York.

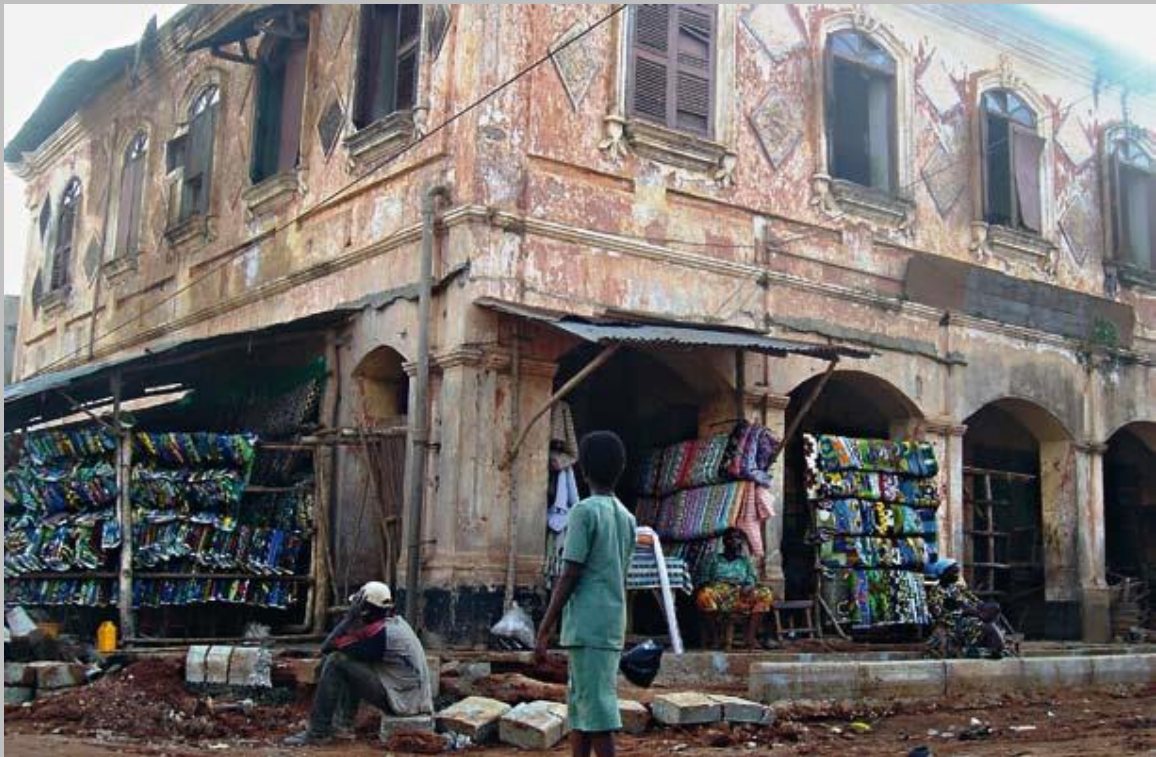
Robert Venturi and his team awakened our awareness of the fact that ordinary, “un-heroic” architecture is founded on generally understood codes of communication; the city thus becomes intimate and the built environment reflects the relationships between members of societies. However, un-heroic does not necessarily have to be identified with ordinary. Here the Rosa Luxemburg monument in Berlin; inspired by the dumping of Luxemburg’s body in the Landwehrkanal, following her assassination in 1919.



# *The Making of Things*

Are Heidegger's thoughts valid? How do people build? Positivist approach, phenomenological approach. Is building a "natural" procedure? Loos' admiration of building "naturally." Contemporary "evolutionary" (not fully prescribed) landscaping. Phenomenological approach conforms to empirical data. So does positivist approach. Heidegger's strength: building is about man, not abstract principles.

It is quite clear that Heidegger pointed out some aspects of dwelling that many people recognised as familiar. In order to assess the validity of his reasoning, we should ask: How do people actually dwell? Here, a reused colonial house in Porto Novo, Benin.



Tim Ingold, “The forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings.” Here a street in central Lagos, Nigeria. We cannot expect to have the whole city planned in detail before we engage in its construction, but we must have, nevertheless, at least a vague idea of how the intended environment is going to look.

Berlin, landscaping in the *Reichstag* area. The granite banks are made to hold the rainwater, thus keeping the traces of rain visible for long. Nature’s “institutionalised” presence in the city contradicts its uncontrolled presence, as is the case with the commercial street in Lagos, shown in the previous image, which becomes muddy each time it rains.



The view of positivist anthropology emphasises the unique capacity of human beings to contrive in their minds not-yet-existing things and bring them into being on the basis of mental pictures. To what extent, though, are such pictures elaborated, and to what extent are they just general plans of action? Here, a street in Bilbao, Spain. People tend to feel comfortable in urban environments formed over time by a multitude of active agents.





An elderly couple of apparently Russian origin reads Dostoyevsky in Central Park, New York. From the Middle Ages onwards intellectuals adopted a completely different approach towards nature from country people, on the one hand, and naturalists, on the other.



In contemporary cities the *final cause* is increasingly unknown to the ones who embody the *efficient cause*: today's decision-makers (be it city planners or politicians) have little control over the "end product" of their activities as showcased in this shop window decoration that surprises passers-by.



# *The Building of Dwelling*

Design procedures to blame for rigid imposition of plans, not problems supposedly inherent in analytical thought. People do not have control over the arrangement of their physical environment: a fair price for today's high living standards? Nineteenth century speculative building and subsequent regulations. Attempts in 1960s to draw users into the design process: limited success. Riots and graffiti: registering one's presence? New design approaches.

In the early 1970s Richard Sennett criticised extremely well-ordered cities and called for the creation of environments that could incorporate anarchy, diversity, and creative disorder. Here, street life in Salamanca, Spain. People may feel comfortable in built environments frozen in time.



Graffiti may be a manifestation of a wide spectrum of attitudes towards already shaped urban environments: contempt and disdain; attempt to leave somebody's imprint on it; a will to make it livelier, less formal, to creatively change it.



Occasionally, by participating in shaping their surroundings, inhabitants could damage a town's character. Here, a street in Porto, Portugal, where there was a strong tradition of decorating the buildings with *azulejos* – famous Portuguese blue ceramic tiles.



Entrance to a multi-storey building in central Athens. Third floor: University of Athens, Department of Economics, staff offices; Fourth floor: Alpha Bank, legal affairs; Fifth floor: Portalakis brokers; Seventh floor: University of

Athens, Department of Economics, staff offices ... Significant changes in the built environment are often restricted to changes in the use of already existing buildings, leaving its former configuration intact.



Adolf Loos says, "The aim of a work of art is to make us feel uncomfortable; a house is there for our comfort. A work of art is revolutionary, a house conservative..." Here, a shop window in Berlin, Germany. Shop windows undermine the stability of the image of buildings.



# *The Building of Places*

Being is spatial. Norberg-Schulz: existential space. Phenomenological approach. Giedion, analytical thought, “modern” approach to space. Lynch’s detached approach. Frampton reads Heidegger. The concept of non-place. Place became important for architecture. Genius loci. Are places the product of building? Heidegger in some sense inconsistent. The architect’s reading of Heidegger a selective one. Place reduced to its properties. Heidegger condemns modernist building at Olympia, which supposedly “respected” the place. Different mindsets revealed.

Informal mosque in central Athens. The origins of architecture, maintains Vittorio Gregotti, lie not in the hut – architecture’s sacred cow since Vitruvius – but in putting a stone on the ground to recognise a place in the midst of an uncharted territory and an unknown universe.



“Man’s relationship to the environment therefore consists on the one hand of trying to integrate its structure into his personal schemata, and on the other of translating his schemata into concrete architectural structures,” notes Norberg-Schulz. Here, a gas station in Cotonou, Benin; in this instance, this activity does not translate into a specific architectural structure. It was modern architecture that monumentalised ordinary everyday activities, by claiming that form should result solely from function.



Researching the ways cities are registered in their inhabitants’ minds, K. Lynch concluded that, “... a good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security ...” Cities should not be structured simplistically in order to be liveable; people can find their way and feel comfortable in genuinely uncanny environments, such as the subway network.



In Mark Wigley's words "Heidegger always insists that the fundamental sense of the word 'in' is not spatial in the sense of the occupation of a 'spatial container (room, building)' but in the sense of familiar." Here the New Africa Shrine Club, Lagos, Nigeria; one of the places creating a sense that people belong together.



Berlin-Kreuzberg, known in the 1970s as "Turkey's third largest city". TV antennas are directed towards a satellite that



transmits programmes in Turkish. Can contemporary technology turn the “non-place” of a constantly unfamiliar, alien city into a familiar “place”?



What turns “one spot among other spots” into a “place” allowing man be integrated into his environment is, according to Norberg-Schulz, the attribution of character to undifferentiated space. Here, an entrance to a social-housing unit by Bruno Taut.



The Xenia Hotel at Olympia, Greece, designed by Aris Konstantinidis, a modernist architect who attempted to integrate the supposed essence of Greek vernacular architecture into his buildings. What Konstantinidis did was to abstract from an extremely complex reality and reduce it to those features he considered essential. This kind of abstraction was incompatible with Heidegger's rationale; he found the then unfinished hotel appalling.



## *Modern Spaces – Contemporary Places*

Places and “feeling at home.” A new adoration of <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> the past. Contextualism of the 1960s and the 1970s, postmodernism of the 1980s, new urbanism. Places and memories. Mimicking the past does not allow dwelling more than modern architecture. Augé, Non- places. Heidegger's influence obvious. Cities studied on the basis of Heidegger's thought. The city reaches beyond its footprint. The city is both its physical elements and the bonds that unite people to each other. Ideologies take over. If thinking is crucial for dwelling, ideologies create places, allow dwelling.

Cities are shaped by aspirations to endurance in time, as well as by their inhabitants' everyday activities. Here, a family tends its makeshift garden in close proximity to the Brandenburg Gate, in Berlin's centre in 1946. This “place” was eventually reintegrated into Berlin's historical centre, acquiring a new identity, equally significant to the one it had as feeding grounds.



“Cities are the repositories of memories, as well as memory’s texts: their layered surfaces, their coats of painted stucco, their wraps of concrete register the force of these currents both as wear and tear and as narrative. That is, city surfaces tell time and stories. Cities are full of stories in time,” says Leonie Sandercock. Here, twin-towers memorabilia sold at stands in the Ground Zero area, New York.



The identity of today’s cities is shaped, and their subsequent coherence achieved through the imposition of patterns of thought on people. Pure ideologies take over. Experts, writers and artists define the “evocative power”, and also the

“points of reference” and the “monuments” of cities. This is hardly a novelty. Here, the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It was established to house St. James’s remains, which were carried over from the Holy Land to Galicia, Spain, on a barque in the space of seven days.



A typical “non-place” of contemporary cities – in this case, a sidewalk next to a billboard – becomes “place” for sanitation workers who are taking a short break. The distinction between “places” and “non-places” is rather arbitrary.



Lagos, Nigeria. Common practice has turned this highway into a parking lot serving customers and shop- owners of the neighbouring commercial area. “Cities are ... an assemblage of active historical agents making daily choices of how to

live well ...” says Sandercock. Cities were always defined by the actual relations they sheltered, as well as people’s awareness that these relations were of concern to them.



# *Dwelling Disengaged*

Influx of images. Cities not defined by buildings <sup>[SEP]</sup>in the common consciousness. Buildings do not create places. Is our ability to form ties with places undermined? Koolhaas: we do not need identity. Is dwelling precluded in generic cities? People move from place to place: nineteenth century mobility <sup>[SEP]</sup>of the poor skyrocketed. Today the poor are bound to places. Betsky: architecture without buildings. Dwelling is achieved in the most extreme conditions. Disengagement from traditional dwelling can take many forms.

The man-made environment never consisted solely of tangible things. Sculptures like these stimulated people’s imaginations, creating in their minds worlds that would exist in parallel with the real one. We now perceive them solely as decorative. Cities are places of memory, as well as places of oblivion, fortunately so.



Shop window during rearrangement: the small-scale equivalent of extremely complex and seemingly disordered contemporary cities. "Architecture must be the beacon of coherence in the world we inhabit. We live in an environment that is becoming so difficult to define or even see that we need architecture to make sense of it ... architecture is that which allows us to be at home in the world," says Aaron Betsky. Architecture has therefore to assume the role poetry has in Heidegger's "...Poetically Man Dwells...": to make human beings aware of their position on earth.



People may live dignified and satisfying lives even in the most extreme circumstances, involving the absence of a fixed home. Here, homeless people are trying to establish a “normal” life under a bridge in central Strasbourg. Is the care taken an indication of the longing for a fixed domicile or a manifestation that life can be happy even in these conditions?



This picture, entitled “Life goes on”, was shot by Red Army photographer Jewgeni Chaldej in summer 1944, in Sebastopol. Will building as a process cease to be necessary for achieving either dwelling or a rather vague sense of “feeling at home”?



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