

Space (without) Time and (eventually) Architecture

The Darmstadt Conversation of 1951

Carsten Ruhl

The Historical Present

Reference and contemporaneity are impossible to separate neatly from each other. Nowhere is this more apparent than in modernist architecture. The relationship between the two is commonly perceived as becoming problematic during the modernist period; according to the prevailing narrative, functionalism, rationalism, the influence of science, and the rejection of ornament severely limited the possibilities for referencing in favor of a normative focus on the present. However, the assumption that there was a one-sided shift toward contemporaneity is actually a stereotype, largely popularized by postmodernist criticism. In reality, the architecture of the early twentieth century continued to progress within the logic of historical genealogies and the large-scale movements of the epoch. What distinguished the architecture of this era from earlier periods was its radical application of the tools of historiography to its own present. To write history, paradoxically, required a radical relationship to the present—one that eschewed accepted references as far as possible. The new no longer emerged from a long process of breaking away from the known, but rather replaced it abruptly and contrastingly. Radical disregard and even destruction of the old, however, was accompanied by an equally radical practice of preservation. To convincingly demonstrate the existence of civilizational progress through physical objects required a selection of historical artifacts that could be considered representative of their epoch. The schizophrenic attitude of this dialectic manifested, as

Latour observes, in the simultaneous manic destruction of historical continuities and the no less manic conservation of some of their remains in archives and museums.¹ Architectural modernism was thus steeped in its own kind of historical consciousness—precisely because it negated history. Accordingly, some of the movement's principal figures saw themselves as witnesses to a “tradition” that, rather than having any historical origin, arose in the here and now. This model of a “history of the present,” however, came to an end after the Second World War. Faced with demolished cities and landscapes of rubble and ruin that remained for years as visible reminders of Nazi terror, any belief in a history that culminated in the present appeared fraught. But contemporaneity itself had also become fraught. Trust in a better present had no place in light of the collective trauma of the war. The future seemed more than uncertain. What could be seen in the cities of Germany were mountains of rubble and “ahistorical earth,” as architect and writer Max Frisch described his impressions immediately after the war. We shouldn't set our hopes too high for the future either, Frisch wrote, for it would be “inhumane to expect a person to see beyond his own ruins.”² How, then, might we nevertheless discuss rebuilding cities, much less architecture? In an attempt to answer this question, a conference was held whose significance for the architecture of the twentieth century has not yet been fully recognized. This conference reveals the paradoxes of a grave crisis that would, I argue, continue to shape architectural discourse beyond the immediate aftermath of the war.

Humanity and Space

In 1951, the war-ravaged city of Darmstadt hosted an exhibition at Mathildenhöhe, an early modernist architectural development and site of a former artists' colony. Entitled *mensch+Raum* (Fig. 10), the exhibition centered on the genesis of modern architecture between 1901 and 1951, alongside eleven *Meis-*

1 Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essais d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991). Cited here according to the following translation: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

2 Max Frisch, *Stich-Worte*. Selected by Uwe Johnson (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 66–68. Thanks to Mike Bill for suggesting these passages.

terbauten—master works of architecture designed especially for the exhibition.³ The city intended to use the exhibition as a sort of bridge between its recent past and the magnificent future it anticipated;⁴ exactly fifty years earlier, the same location had played host to the legendary *Jugendstil* exhibition *Ein Dokument Deutscher Kunst* (*A Document of German Art*; 1901). As with that former exhibition, Darmstadt aimed to generate a significant impulse that would lead to groundbreaking modern concepts for reconstruction. This was not to take place in the realm of residential architecture, however, despite the severe housing shortage at the time. The original plan for 120 exemplary dwellings was quickly set aside in favor of an array of public structures. These were designed by eleven “masters” who, according to the selection criteria employed by the exhibition’s advisory board, were considered “distinguished figures of contemporary architecture.”⁵ The outcome of this initiative for architectural excellence was rather astonishing. While Hans Scharoun, Otto Bartning, Ernst Neufert, Max Taut, Rudolf Schwarz, Hans Schwippert, and Willem Marinus Dudok were all architects who did fundamentally adhere—if at times from a critical distance—to the “unfinished project of modernity,”⁶ the jury also inexplicably selected Paul Bonatz. As a member of the Stuttgart School and later of the architecture group *Der Block*, Bonatz vehemently opposed the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). And although Bonatz was at first thoroughly critical of the Nazi regime, he went on to become a compliant constructor of monumental bridges in the late thirties, alongside Friedrich

3 The following publications were released for the exhibition and the accompanying conference: Georg A. Neidenberger, ed., *Mensch und Raum. Ausstellung 4. August bis 16. September 1951 auf der Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt* (Berlin: Brüder Hartmann, 1951). Otto Bartning, ed., *Darmstädter Gespräch. Mensch und Raum* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 1952). See also this reprint of the Darmstadt Conversation: Ulrich Conrads and Peter Neitzke, eds., *Mensch und Raum. Das Darmstädter Gespräch 1951, Bauwelt Fundamente 94* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1991).

4 Plans for the exhibition had begun in 1947. Considering the limited materials available after the war, they testify to Darmstadt’s massive cultural ambitions. See also Bärbel Herbig, “Die Meisterbauten. Renommierter Architekten planen für Darmstadt,” in *Architektur der fünfziger Jahre. Die Darmstädter Meisterbauten*, ed. Michael Bender and Roland May (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 1998), 10–23, here 10.

5 Herbig, “Die Meisterbauten,” 13.

6 Jürgen Habermas, “Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt,” in *Wege aus der Moderne*, ed. Wolfgang Welsch (Weinheim: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 1988), 177–92.

Tamms.⁷ Not until 1943 did Bonatz attempt an “escape from this insanity,” beginning a second (no less successful) career in Turkey before returning to Germany in his later years.⁸ Bonatz, of all people, was now to join the other architects in building a bridge to the city’s avant-garde beginnings while simultaneously orchestrating its departure into the new era.

From today’s perspective, it seems somewhat curious that the precarious composition of the master group did not cause more palpable tension, yet this was in keeping with the general tenor of Darmstadt’s anniversary exhibition. Exhibited alongside the master projects from August 4 through September 16 in the halls of Mathildenhöhe, the exhibition’s historical section, *Baukunst 1901–1951* (Fig. 11), intentionally omitted recent history, instead crafting a narrative of modern architecture untroubled by National Socialism that extended to the present time. The participation of *Neue Sachlichkeit* architects like Ernst Neufert, whose Nazi-era careers demonstrated beyond doubt that modern architecture and totalitarianism were mutually compatible, was apparently not viewed as contradicting this narrative.⁹ The exhibition’s three-day panel discussion left little room for controversy, however.¹⁰ As Otto Bartning, who chaired the panel, wrote in a letter to Scharoun, contributions to the discussion had to be written out beforehand and limited to ten minutes.¹¹ Aside from speeches by Otto Ernst Schweizer, Rudolf Schwarz, Martin Heidegger, and José Ortega y Gasset, the talks were pri-

7 See Werner Durth, *Deutsche Architekten. Biographische Verflechtungen 1900–1970*, 2nd ed. (Braunschweig: Vieweg & Sohn Verlag, 1987), 51ff. In his autobiography, Bonatz criticizes the regime exclusively for its megalomaniacal architectural ideas. Paul Bonatz, *Leben und Bauen* (Stuttgart: Engelhornverlag Adolf Spemann, 1950), 178–82. Also see Durth, *Deutsche Architekten*, 271.

8 Paul Bonatz, *Leben und Bauen*, 180.

9 Anna-Maria Meister, “Ernst Neufert’s ‘Lebensgestaltungslehre’: formatting life beyond the built,” in *BJHS Themes*, vol. 5 (2020), 167–85, here 169, <https://doi.org/10.1017/bjt.2020.13>. Meister points out that Neufert was one of the first professors to be allowed to resume work at a university following the war, despite the architect’s obvious collaboration with Speer and the regime.

10 Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 33–48. Documentation of the Darmstadt Conversation also includes a section featuring the “master works” that were on display.

11 Bartning to Scharoun, May 22, 1951, Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 4812 Bl.33–34.

marily “monadic mini-presentations”¹² read from a script. Spontaneous reactions and informal exchange were evidently unwelcome, in contrast to the first Darmstadt conversation of the year before.¹³ The rigid arrangement—featuring exclusively male guests and “masters” with table microphones in the foreground and a partially female audience in the background—evinced an intention to control the course of the conversation as much as possible (Fig. 12). Moreover, *Humanity and Space* was also an important media event, clearly intended to convey the impression that, despite all disagreements, there was a broad consensus on architectural issues. This time, the conversation was “lighter” and “more pleasant,” according to moderator Leo Maria Faerber in his introduction for Radio Frankfurt, which reported extensively on the discussion and broadcast it almost entirely.¹⁴

An open, unpredictable discussion might have touched on entanglements with the regime. Such a discussion was prevented not only by the rules governing the panel and the technical restrictions imposed by recording the dialogue, but also by the fact that two major figures who set the tone for the event were deeply implicated in the Nazi regime. Darmstadt’s director of city planning, Peter Grund, who organized and hosted the conference, had been a professor and director of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and head of the Landesstelle der Reichskammer der bildenden Künste (regional branch of the Third Reich’s fine arts authority) in Düsseldorf beginning in 1933. From 1935 to 1937, he was urban development advisor to the Nazi Party.¹⁵ During this time, Grund designed city halls, military parade grounds, and exhibition spaces, as well as curating one of the largest propaganda exhibitions of

12 In the words of philosopher Ludwig Giesz, *Das literarische Deutschland. Zeitung der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung*, August 5, 1951, 3.

13 See the documentation of the first Darmstadt Conversation: Hans Gerhard Evers, ed., *Darmstädter Gespräch. Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 1950).

14 Leo Maria Faerber, “Die architektonische Bewältigung unseres Lebensraumes,” *Radio Frankfurt*, first broadcast September 4, 1951, minutes (6:05) and (7:31), *Archiv Hessischer Rundfunk*.

15 For more on these incongruities and the role of Peter Grund, head of the municipal planning office, see Bernd Krimmel, “Darmstädter Gespräch Mensch und Raum. 1951 gehört, nachgelesen 1997,” in Bender and May, *Architektur der fünfziger Jahre*, 28–34.

the Nazi era, *Schaffendes Volk* (A Creating People).¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, for his part, made quite an impression on the architects in attendance with his presentation “Bauen Wohnen Denken” (Building Dwelling Thinking)—despite the philosopher’s well-known close involvement with National Socialism, from which he did not distance himself even after the war. Heidegger’s ties to Nazi ideology, moreover, were in no way limited to opportunistic behavior as professor and rector at the University of Freiburg. His Nazi sympathies ran far deeper, profoundly shaping his philosophical thinking—including his concept of *Raum* (space), which was loaded with racial ideology.¹⁷

How was such complete disregard for the immediate present and its embedded history possible? How could Grund, in his introduction, have failed to mention any personal experiences from 1933 to 1945, to make any reference to the massive destruction, collective trauma, and privation of post-war society? These questions continue to evade simple answers. Pointing out that the post-1945 period did not start from a blank slate but was shaped by continuities only partially explains this amnesia regarding reality. In fact, the forgetting was quite deliberate, as was the flight from reality evidenced by the architectural history retrospective of the Darmstadt exhibition. Grund’s opening remarks portrayed the preceding fifty years exclusively as an emancipation process for the modern architect under the aegis of reason.¹⁸ This rationality did not, however, refer to concrete solutions like remedying the urgent housing shortage left by the war—far from it. Grund’s conception of

16 A 1952 monograph on Grund’s work barely mentions the political upheaval of the era. The book suggests in several places that Grund’s architectural approach persisted despite opposition from the Nazi regime. It argues that his concept of a “modern mason’s guild” couldn’t have been realized under the Nazis. *Schaffendes Volk* is referred to only as a “large exhibition in Düsseldorf.” See Paul Girkon, *Der Architekt Peter Grund* (Darmstadt: Eduard Roether Verlag, 1952), 19. See also the current research project: <https://www.fh-dortmund.de/news/architektur-projekt-peter-grund.php>. Thanks to Stephan Gudewer for providing helpful insights on this matter.

17 See Christoph Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken und der Nationalsozialismus,” in *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 104 (2018), 202–19, here 213.

18 Peter Grund, “Ansprache zur Ausstellungseröffnung,” in Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 27. “The architecture of the last 50 years has exhibited the ambition to free itself of excessive intellectual and formal attachments. With new building materials and modern technical achievements, a corresponding design vocabulary has been developed. Man, his dimensions and his needs have been of primary concern in spatial design.”

Raum referred neither to a temporally defined category nor to an environment shaped by political, social, or functional factors. The aim of the event, as Grund had it, was to “impart to the creators of architecture a glimpse into the deepest foundations of their work, which stretch far beyond technical skills, into regions where the human becomes a vessel for infinite powers in this finite world.”¹⁹ Making mention of the immediate past was evidently just as undesirable as addressing urgent problems of the present. Instead, the primary goal was to rehabilitate the architect as a philosophical interpreter of space. For it was the privilege of the architect—and not the philosopher—to seek the “myth of the infinite.”²⁰ Grund thus imagined the architect once again becoming the preeminent builder of worlds, a metaphysician, with spatial creation being the “enigmatic art of architecture.”²¹ That “space” as a term was so loaded with racial ideology played no role for Grund, not least because of his own connections to the Nazi regime. Rather, he attempted a timeless definition of space that excluded any consideration of its material or physical qualities and everyday lived realities. To that end, he employed philosophical concepts that led far away from contemporary traces of the recent past, and toward a maximally universal definition of space in human nature and perception.²²

Accordingly, Grund’s explanation of architectural production was equally generalized, made worse by his vague allusions to cosmological creation myths of classical architecture theory. “The artist inspired by space,” according to Grund, “expresses his vision through architectural form.” In “evaluating and interpreting architecture,” he believed, it was “decisively and cruci-

19 Grund, “Ansprache,” 25.

20 Grund, “Ansprache,” 26.

21 Grund, “Ansprache.”

22 Grund, “Ansprache,” 25–26. Grund is talking here about space as a basic structure of consciousness manifest in all its forms, from primitive awareness up to the “realm of higher intellectual culture.” In his further remarks, he appears to be paraphrasing Kant. For Kant, space was neither a concept nor an object external to human perception. Rather, he understood it as a form of pure sensory intuition within the subject—a principle according to which our perception of reality is constructed. Abstracted from the human subject, according to Kant, “the imagination of space has no meaning.” Grund carried this idea over, in an extremely abbreviated and distorted form, to architecture. Kant’s remarks on space can be found in the first paragraph of the Transcendental Aesthetic. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* [Critique of Pure Reason], ed. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Kröner Verlag, 1993), 66–73.

ally important to understand it as an engagement with space. This creative engagement spills over into the two other intellectual modes of possessing space: the philosophical and religious views of space. In the beauty of architectural form, the artist fulfills the laws of measure and proportion, harmony and rhythm.”²³

Heidegger’s Foundation

Conference attendees may have expected deeper insights into those mysterious foundations of “the beauty of architectural form” from architects Otto Ernst Schweizer and Rudolf Schwarz, as well as philosopher Martin Heidegger. While Schweizer made the case for a balanced relationship between technology and aesthetics, Schwarz was the only speaker to address the historical reference point of the exhibition, the *Jugendstil* movement.²⁴ Already discernible in his talk was some of the criticism with which he would, just a few years later, set off the Bauhaus Debate.²⁵ In essence, he opposed the normative aesthetic ideas of architectural functionalism, but he also opposed the tendency to aestheticize architecture—a practice he observed among art historians, “aestheticians,” and photographers.²⁶ Schwarz was particularly annoyed by discussion of “modern architecture.”²⁷ He evidently associated this term with an ideological reduction of architecture to the current, present, and contemporary, whereas good architecture, in his view, could only arise by immersing itself in life and, from there, rising to a symbolic form oriented toward more extended timescales. Schwarz thus advoca-

23 Grund, “Ansprache,” 25–26.

24 Rudolf Schwarz, “Das Anliegen der Baukunst,” in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 60–71. Cf. Wolfgang Pehnt, “Eine Sache gelingt nie aus ihrer reinen Sachlichkeit.” Rudolf Schwarz im zweiten Darmstädter Gespräch,” in Bender and May, Architektur der fünfziger Jahre, 34–35.

25 Ulrich Conrads, Magdalena Droste, Winfried Nerdinger, and Hilde Strohl, eds., Die Bauhaus-Debatte 1953. Dokumente einer verdrängten Kontroverse (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2000).

26 Schwarz, “Das Anliegen der Baukunst,” in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 67.

27 Conrads et. al., Die Bauhaus-Debatte, 66. “The term ‘modern architecture’ is absurd in and of itself. There is no modern architecture, because architecture never operates on the scale of days or years, but only of epochs.”

ted subsuming historical time periods and present moments within cultural practices that remain untouched by the temporal frameworks imposed by historians and avant-gardists.

Martin Heidegger's highly regarded presentation appeared to offer approaches to an architecture developed out of life itself, beyond the periodization of art history or the normative dictates of the present. In his review for the newspaper *Das literarische Deutschland* (Literary Germany), the philosopher Ludwig Giesz lauded the "crystalline architecture of his thought process; the lapidary, solidly sculpted sentences." According to Giesz, it was only through Heidegger's overwhelming words that the Darmstadt Conversation first received a "foundation."²⁸ Indeed, Heidegger's speech did address fundamental issues—or rather, to stay within the metaphor, laid the foundations for a definition of space. Yet, contrary to the perception of the speech that has persisted to this day, the architecture within that space was not part of Heidegger's solution; rather, it seemed to be part of the problem. In a speech titled "Building Dwelling Thinking,"²⁹ he took the liberty of drawing attention to a few fundamental misunderstandings in architecture that he believed were manifested in the exhibition's title, *Humanity and Space*.³⁰ The title implied that space was an objective dimension outside of human *Da-sein*, yet space, Heidegger insisted, was inextricably connected to human existence. Against this background, Heidegger questioned whether architecture had truly grasped dwelling and building as a problem at all. Thus Heidegger's "foundation" already addressed concepts like dwelling, building, location, and space, connecting them to human existence. Without getting into the subtleties of these concepts for Heidegger, the essence of his message to the architects present was that locations, and therefore also spaces, are brought forth through—and not for—human existence. He occasionally

28 Giesz, *Das literarische Deutschland*, 3.

29 Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," in Bartning, *Darmstädter Gespräch*, 72–84. English translations by Adam Bobeck, "Building Dwelling Thinking by Martin Heidegger (Translation and Commentary by Adam Bobeck)," (unpublished paper, May 4, 2025), PDF, https://www.academia.edu/34279818/Building_Dwelling_Thinking_by_Martin_Heidegger_Translation_and_Commentary_by_Adam_Bobeck_.

30 Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," 11. "When we speak of humans and space, it sounds as though humans stood on one side and space on the other. But space is not something that stands opposite to people. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience."

illustrated this with concrete constructions, such as a bridge. As a structure, a bridge does not merely connect two already-existing banks; it identifies them as such, creating a location that did not previously exist: “The bridge gathers the earth as a landscape around the stream.”³¹ Only then, Heidegger said, did a space—a relationship created by humans between themselves and the “earth as a landscape”—come into being. Space, for Heidegger, was therefore not an absolute dimension, but rather a quality created by humans. It could not be extrapolated from rational architectural principles; it arose out of the customs of mortals as elements of the “fourfold” (*Geviert*). Provocatively, Heidegger illustrated this using an example with which he was intimately familiar: a *Schwarzwaldhof*, a farm in the Black Forest. “Here the insistence of the power to let earth and sky, the divinities and the mortals enter one-folded in things, brought the house into order.”³² Heidegger ended his remarks with an observation that must have sounded jarring given the postwar situation and the very real hardship people faced: “The crisis of dwelling,” he relativized, “is older than the world wars and their destruction, older than the increase of the population of the earth and the condition of the industrial workers. The real crisis of dwelling consists of the fact that the mortals always first search again for the nature of dwelling, that they must first learn to dwell. What if the homelessness of people consisted of the fact that people still do not even think of the real crisis of dwelling as the crisis? However, as soon as humans give thought to their homelessness, it is no longer a misery. It is, rightly considered and kept well in mind, the only summons that calls the mortals to their dwelling.”³³

Not only did Heidegger’s lecture implicitly question whether architecture and urban planning were necessary at all, but in discussing dwelling, he also broached a topic that remained nearly untouched during the conference. Moreover, his chosen example of a farm in the Black Forest neglected to respond in any way to the actual location of his reflections on location: the devastated city of Darmstadt. Heidegger’s foundation therefore remained ambiguous in two senses: neither the concrete location of the conference

31 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” 7.

32 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” 14.

33 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” 15.

(in other words, the present), nor the past or future played any role in it.³⁴ The temporal situatedness of Heidegger's thinking thus disappeared from view—especially regarding his concept of space. In *Being and Time* (1927), as in his 1951 lecture, Heidegger was primarily concerned with defining space through individual human existence. However, after the Nazi takeover in 1933, Heidegger very clearly adapted his concept of space to the new political reality: the collective and the “*völkisch* [ethnic] community” took the place of the individual.³⁵ In his view, *Führer* and *Geführte* (the leader and the led) came to form a sort of fated community “fighting for the realization of an idea.”³⁶ At the same time, “the referentiality of space, i.e. mastery of space and being-shaped-by-space” no longer belonged to the “being” of the human, but rather to the “mode of being of a *Volk*.”³⁷ The territorial expanse of a *Volk* was determined by their effectiveness in projecting themselves into space. The Nazis could hardly have wished for a better philosophical legitimization for their ideology of expansion.

Heidegger avoided any *Volk*-based interpretation of space in his Darmstadt lecture. Nevertheless, his sympathies for the Nazi *zeitgeist* must have been known to most of the attendees. Moreover, reading “Building Dwelling Thinking” against the backdrop of Heidegger's own *Hüttendasein* (hut-*Dasein*, or hut existence) in the Black Forest, one is hard pressed to describe the passage on the “crisis of dwelling” above as anything other than a cynical trivialization of the catastrophe that the world had just lived through. Heidegger did in fact hold the opinion that—despite the millions of people killed, displaced, and made homeless by the war—the housing crisis was at its core a “philosophical crisis of *Dasein*.”³⁸ Moreover, this was at a time when Heidegger, newly reinstated with emeritus status, was able to make himself comfortable

34 Contrary to what some have claimed, Heidegger showed little interest in addressing the actual housing crisis of the 1950s. See, for example, Jürgen Raap, “Nestbauverhalten. Häuslichkeit als zentrales Merkmal menschlicher Existenz,” in KUNSTFORUM, vol. 182 (October–November 2006), 45–73.

35 Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken,” 207.

36 Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken,” 212.

37 Peter, “Martin Heideggers Rechtsdenken,” 213.

38 Ursula Pia Jauch, “Über den Raum des Denkens. Ein paar Bemerkungen, ausgehend von Heideggers Hütte und mit einem kleinen Holzweg zu Mies van der Rohes Villa Tugendhat,” in Salvatore Pisani and Elisabeth Oy-Marra, eds., *Ein Haus wie Ich. Die gebaute Autobiographie in der Moderne* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 63–83, here 72.

in his archaic hut in Todtnauberg and his Freiburg villa. He made himself comfortable in an intellectual sense as well: “Building Dwelling Thinking” craves “security in that which has been passed down, that which has long existed, and that which is grounded in the earth.”³⁹ What seems even more shocking from today’s perspective is how enthusiastically the lecture was received. After prolonged, approving applause,⁴⁰ the architects present eagerly took up some of Heidegger’s terminology in the ensuing discussion. Otto Bartning, for example, made use of the metaphor of the bridge and spoke of the “Heideggerian *Wendung* [turn].” Neither Heidegger’s support for the Nazis nor his conspicuous criticism of architecture itself was mentioned for the remainder of the event. In fact, his remarks were construed in the ensuing discussion as an argument in support of modern architectural aesthetics: for *Offenheit* (openness) and *Leichtigkeit* (lightness and ease).⁴¹ The way in which Heidegger tied “building” to the primordial meanings of words before their civilizational distortions in modernity evidently struck a powerful chord.⁴² This influence extended far beyond *Humanity and Space*; “Building Dwelling Thinking” is one of the most commonly cited philosophical references in architectural theory.⁴³ Furthermore, the way in which Heidegger philosophized about space even set a stylistic precedent—many have since attempted to imitate the erratic linguistic style that characterizes Heidegger’s writing in

39 Jauch, “Über den Raum des Denkens,” 70.

40 “Heidegger über Denken Wohnen und Bauen,” August 5, 1951, Archiv Hessischer Rundfunk.

41 Hans Schwippert, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 86–87. “If building evolves out of the feeling of dwelling, and if location evolves out of building, and space comes from location—following Heidegger—then something remarkable has happened to us: our spaces want to have *Offenheit*, *Leichtigkeit*, not the harsh, austere borders of dark caves.”

42 Philosopher Ursula Pia Jauch speaks of “long and murmured linguistic meanderings.” Jauch, “Über den Raum des Denkens,” 67.

43 Kenneth Frampton, for example, published an editorial statement in the journal *Oppositions* in 1975 on his reading of Heidegger’s lecture that barely engaged with the philosopher’s thoughts and their context. Instead, he focused on the power of language and its sometimes dire ecologic, social, and economic consequences for the built environment. In this interpretation, Heidegger is transformed into a pioneering thinker on the “sustainable” design of locations and places, both linguistically and architecturally. Kenneth Frampton, “On Reading Heidegger,” in *Oppositions*, 4, The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1975, n.d.

architecture and architecture theory.⁴⁴ The result has been an interpretation of Heidegger ranging from naïve to superficial, involving a simultaneous mystification of architecture and de-politicization of the concept of space.⁴⁵

But back to *Humanity and Space*. Above all, it was the theory of an architecture developed from the “feeling of dwelling”—that is, from human existence itself—that had the architects present literally dreaming of an existential re-foundation of their discipline. Some architects, like Hans Scharoun, even saw in this theory a direct affirmation of their own design practices. Heidegger, for his part, spoke years later of an “unspoken agreement between your [Scharoun’s] work and my essays.”⁴⁶ Scharoun, meanwhile, consistently referenced the “address given by Martin Heidegger during the Darmstadt Conversation of 1951” in his lectures at the Technische Universität Berlin (Technical University of Berlin).⁴⁷ Their mutual expressions of appreciation were not only based on a metaphorical foundation: Scharoun’s spectacular school design for Darmstadt can, at least at first glance, be interpreted as an architectural translation of “Building Dwelling Thinking.” Heidegger likely also appreciated the way Scharoun spoke about architecture in general. In his short contribution to the discussion, Scharoun noted that the “organizing principles” of architecture were not “abstract statutes,” but rather “living encounters with *Sein* (being) and *Tun* (doing)—that is, with spatiality and time, or, as Kant, I believe, said, with space as the *Bewusstseinsform* [form of consciousness] and with time as the *Anschauungsform* [form of intuition].”⁴⁸ For Scharoun, theoretical models needed to be replaced by a sensibility for spatial consciousness, and therefore a sensibility for the aesthetic interrelationship between architecture and observer, in order to engender a

44 See Peter Zumthor, *Architektur Denken*, 3rd expanded edition (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010). Peter Zumthor’s “magic of the real” is, especially from a linguistic point of view, an adaptation of the text it references.

45 Ullrich Schwarz, “Vom ‘Ort’ zum ‘Ereignis’: die irreführende Rezeption Martin Heideggers in der Architektur,” in *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen*, vol. 86, book 12 (1999), 50–57.

46 Heidegger to Scharoun, 18 October 1957, Akademie der Künste, Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 424.

47 Hans Scharoun, reading at Technische Universität Berlin, June 23, 1952, Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 4469 Bl. 97–110.

48 Hans Scharoun, Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 94.

specific spatial awareness.⁴⁹ In this sense, Scharoun's remarks somewhat aligned with Heidegger's assertion that building takes place on a foundation of cultural practices and subjective spatial perceptions, even if their respective justifications could not have been more different. While Heidegger had, in *Being and Time*, already rejected Kant's philosophy—with its assumption of transcendently grounded spatial perception—in favor of ascribing everything spatial to human existence, Scharoun referenced precisely the Kantian tradition that Heidegger had criticized. He did so comparatively unreflectingly, however, interpreting Kant's philosophy merely as a contribution to the psychology of space and not as a transcendental philosophical analysis of perception. Furthermore, he ignored the fact that Kant applies the term "architectonic" not to any cognitive instrument, but merely as a metaphor for his epistemological "art of systems."⁵⁰

Reference versus Existence

Architecture as cognitive instrument, expression of this cognition, and its physical implementation: Scharoun had ambitious goals for his school design in the Darmstadt exhibition. In his comments, he repeatedly emphasized that he had based his design not only on urban planning and functional requirements, but primarily on the spatial consciousness and presumed development of children. This would be the first time a school building would take into account the various phases of human cognitive development, from primitive spatial awareness to rational spatial consciousness. Scharoun illustrated his design using colorful exhibition panels (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14) that depicted not architecture, but various forms of social community. They suggested that these communities would naturally create their own distinct spaces without requiring architecture—from the intimate space of the family to the workplace and large public gatherings. While Scharoun, unlike Heidegger, did not describe dwelling as a condition inherent in human existence, his conception of classrooms as nest-like dwellings or cells that would fulfill children's needs in the various stages of their development did allow

49 Sep Ruf, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 89.

50 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, (Riga, 1787 [1781]) in Raymund Schmidt, ed., *Immanuel Kant: Die drei Kritiken* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993), 748.

for many points of connection to Heidegger's thinking. Heidegger could therefore feel validated in his belief that "building" as a marker of locations ideally emerged from lived practice rather than formal architectural training. While Scharoun aimed to contribute to the democratic upbringing of a new generation, Heidegger avoided any spatiotemporal concretization of his ideas about space.

Scharoun did not completely dispense with aesthetic references, however. Space as a form of consciousness and time as a form of intuition may have determined his architectural conception, but to visualize his idea, Scharoun used a comparison that was already well established in modern architecture. Just as Sigfried Giedion had done ten years earlier in *Space, Time and Architecture*,⁵¹ Scharoun juxtaposed his school design's new modernist conception of space with cubist painting. According to Giedion, cubism was the first movement to take into account that spatial perception is inseparable from time. Giedion's famous comparison of Picasso's painting *L'Arlésienne* (1912) with Gropius's Bauhaus building at Dessau (1926)⁵² aimed to suggest that modernist architecture and painting shared the same spatial principles. Giedion believed that Gropius's architecture, like Picasso's painting, could be described by terms like transparency, simultaneity, and interpenetration. Yet there was an obvious and sizeable gap between the photograph of the Bauhaus at Dessau and Gropius's architectural conception of space. What appeared in the photograph as a complex layering of time and space was actually based on an entirely conventional understanding of floor plans, as Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky concluded in their 1963 analysis of Giedion's analogy.⁵³ The impression of interpenetrating spatial layers was conveyed exclusively by the photographic construction of cubist architectural structures—not by the architecture itself. Nevertheless, Scharoun still saw in cubist painting a model of space that was exemplary for architecture. The paintings of Picasso and Braque, for him, clearly showed how "different temporal states are attuned to each other in a new concretization of time—such that different levels of consciousness are, so to speak, simultaneously active and effective, or bring

51 Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The growth of a new tradition* (Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press, 1941).

52 Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 400–403.

53 Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," in *Perspecta*, 1963, vol. 8 (1963), 45–54.

different circumstances into a single actuality.”⁵⁴ Yet Scharoun went much further than Giedion in this analogy. His adaptation of cubism was not limited to a more or less convincing visual comparison. As is clearly visible in his school design model (Fig. 15), Scharoun genuinely saw cubism as a productive principle for spatial organization. In his model, volumes appear very literally to fall into each other, creating a complex spatial relief whose form cannot be explained exclusively by insights from philosophy or progressive educational theory.

Scharoun’s unusual combinatorics of “extra-architectural” references did stir up controversy in the end, even if it was limited to aesthetic positions. The alleged divide between building and thinking only reinforced conservative architects like Paul Bonatz in their belief that nothing could be gained for architecture as they understood it using this approach. In his remarks at the Darmstadt conference, Bonatz cited the passage from Paul Valéry’s *Eupalinos: Or, The Architect* (1927)⁵⁵ in which Socrates concludes that the creative instinct, even if it rests on comprehensive knowledge, ultimately defies definitive conceptual formulation. Bonatz regarded neglect of intuition—by which he really meant historical architectural references—as an impermissible overthinking of the problem of art. This criticism was not leveled at Heidegger’s grand philosophical teachings, but at Scharoun’s school design. With evident satisfaction, Bonatz lambasted “this complicated organism” in which “so many intentions have been mysteriously incorporated.” The “child specimen is irradiated, first from the left, then from the right, vertically arranged, horizontally integrated, supplemented and treated according to a strictly scientific system—I can only imagine that the end result of it all is nothing more than a homunculus.”⁵⁶ As an extreme counterpart, Bonatz compared it to Hans Schwippert’s design for a *Realgymnasium* (secondary school), saying, “Here the classes are lined up in uniform rows on four floors like in a Siemens factory, with students being carried along the conveyor belt in absolute anonymity, until they hit the final wall—the graduation exam.”⁵⁷ For Bonatz, important tendencies in modern architecture were thus exposed

54 Scharoun, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 95.

55 Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte* [Eupalinos: Or, The Architect] (Gallimard, 1923), transl. William McCausland Stewart (Oxford University Press, 1932).

56 Bonatz, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 91.

57 Bonatz, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 91.

as extremes: on the one hand, superficial rationality and transparency, and on the other, an organic architecture of unnecessarily complex “overthinking.” He offered colleagues the well-intended advice to “not always start by making these things your worldview and war cry.”⁵⁸ This was not meant as a commentary on Nazi ideology, however. The ambivalent nonchalance with which he used such terms demonstrates once again how he unreflectively maintained his pre-war attitude toward the Neue Sachlichkeit in the years between 1933 and 1945, and beyond. As before, Bonatz implied that such theorizing proved senseless in architecture, which ultimately made a mockery of the conference’s ambitious premise. Matter-of-factly, he concluded, “I do not believe that we will achieve our goal through scientific and intellectual contemplation; instead, there must be practical consequences.”⁵⁹ The “practical consequences” that resulted from the conference primarily consisted in Scharoun’s school not being built while Schwippert’s was. But Bonatz’s design for a Darmstadt masterwork—a concert hall on the site of the burned-out Neues Palais, which had housed the Gestapo headquarters from 1942—also went unrealized. His proposal—with its openly classicist architecture referencing the “theater of antiquity” and the “classical,” along with his advocacy for a ceremonial setting that would preclude any use beyond high culture—failed to win approval at this time and in this place. Bonatz’s talk of “maintaining style” (*Stilhaltung*) and architectural “schools” was, as the saying goes, behind the times. Scharoun, on the other hand, did manage to build two schools a few years later, both based on his Darmstadt model. They are still considered some of the most successful school structures of this period (Fig. 16).⁶⁰ At the same time, Scharoun repeatedly addressed school

58 Bonatz, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch, 91.

59 Bonatz, in Bartning, Darmstädter Gespräch 92.

60 These are the Geschwister-School-Gymnasium in Lünen (1955–1962) and the Volksschule in Marl (1960–1970). The latter was threatened with demolition in 2004, despite having been granted protected landmark status a few years earlier. The author of this essay advocated for preserving the building. See Carsten Ruhl, “Unterlassene Hilfeleistung—Pflegefall. In Marl droht einer Scharoun-Schule der Abriss,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 Dezember 2005, 34. All of Scharoun’s school designs from 1927 onward were shown together for the first time in an exhibition co-developed with students at the Ruhr University Bochum’s Institute of Art History, entitled *Andere Räume. Hans Scharoun’s Schularchitektur* (Other Spaces: Hans Scharoun’s Architecture for Schools). The exhibition also featured his entry for the international competition for Marl’s new city hall, which was ultimately won by the

design issues in his lectures, including theoretical questions. The question of “how democracy, as a universal principle, might realize a way of life” was at the heart of these reflections, being of vital importance in the post-war era. Scharoun clearly distanced himself from “representations of power and politics” and “ideological thinking,” believing that “today, the people [*Volk*] must themselves be sovereign.”⁶¹

From the Absolute Present to the End of History

Humanity and Space marks an important turning point in the history of architecture. In view of the traumatic experiences of the Nazi era, the idealistic transformation of history and present in early modernism did not prove a viable model for the future. Even continuities between pre- and post-war architectural positions—historical references to typologies on the one hand, and functionalist or organic contemporaneity on the other—could not disguise this fundamental inadequacy in the modernist attitude. In general, concrete temporal references—the recent past, present hardships, and the uncertain future—gave way to more universal, philosophical reflections that centered on architectural space. These reflections were characterized by misunderstandings, escapism, hubris, and repression. Above all, they revealed what Ulrich Conrads, who took part in the Darmstadt conversation as a young architect, described as the Adenauer era’s “factual restoration” and “intellectual restriction.”⁶² Yet even from a distance of forty years, Conrads found no reason to criticize this remarkable self-conception of an entire architectural generation. On the contrary: in *Humanity and Space*, Conrads saw “hope for construction motivated by human love”—a hope he saw as more relevant than ever amid contemporary crises such as the Gulf War (1990–1991). Thus, *Humanity and Space* took on a completely new meaning beyond the “presence of memory” suggested by the title of Conrads’s short intro-

Dutch firm Van den Broek and Bakema. The school underwent repairs in accordance with its historically protected status until 2015.

61 Hans Scharoun, “Raum und Milieu der Schule,” lecture of October 14, 1960, International Conference on School Building in Milan, (Akademie der Künste, Hans Scharoun Archive, Nr. 4812 Bl. 336–345).

62 Ulrich Conrads, “Präsenz des Erinnerten,” in Conrads and Neitzke, *Mensch und Raum*, 7–8.

duction. In Conrads's reading, the Darmstadt Conversation stood for a sort of universal pacifism that resisted the "monstrous defeat of enlightenment, of human dignity, of love" that he observed in his own time. Such an interpretation was only possible, however, by ignoring the historical context of *Humanity and Space* and its evident absence of memory. At any rate, the conference did not provide an architectural impetus for the present—and likely could not have on such a foundation. "The gentlemen of 1951 are beyond a doubt master architects of outstanding merit, but their personal styles generally lack forward-looking qualities,"⁶³ was the withering verdict of art historian Hans Maria Wingler. The sole exception, as determined by outside observers, was Hans Scharoun's "overthought" architecture, which received an extensive review in the journal *Rassegna Critica di Architettura* as early as 1952.⁶⁴ Today, Scharoun's design is nearly unanimously considered to have particularly stood out. Yet beyond such isolated contributions to a pedagogically progressive architecture for a new democratic Germany, the Darmstadt Conversation primarily shows how difficult it was for survivors of the Nazi terror to build a common narrative beyond poetic and philosophical reflections. This had far-reaching consequences, especially for an understanding of contemporaneity. Shaped by an awareness that history no longer had a clear direction, this place and especially the period since the sixties were defined by an absorption of all previous "isms" that, understandably, had no interest in producing any "isms" of its own.⁶⁵ A new form of individualized contemporaneity replaced modernism's dialectical intertwining of reference and contemporaneity, and no longer defined itself through an awareness of living in a historical time. As Juliane Rebentisch showed, particularly regarding art since the sixties, contemporaneity was reduced to the transience of moments, becoming essentially fluid and—unlike modernism—no longer calculating in terms of eras. This meant a loss of temporal consciousness on the one hand and, on the other, a gain in critical potential: historical narratives, cultural identities, and "new traditions" revealed their constructedness

63 Hans Maria Wingler, "Das schöpferische Beispiel. Architektur-Ausstellung zum 'Darmstädter Gespräch,'" in *Die Neue Zeitung*, August 11–12, 1951, n.d.

64 Ciro Cicconcelli, "Lo spazio scolastico," in *Rassegna Critica di Architettura*, no. 25 (1952), 8–15.

65 Juliane Rebentisch, "The Contemporaneity of Contemporary Art," in *New German Critique*, no. 124 (February 2015), 223–237.

under the paradigm of *posthistoire*, thereby losing some of their normative force. However, today's resurgence of imperial narratives and autocratic thinking raises the justified question of whether this optimism has, in turn, reached its own end.



Fig. 10.
Exhibition catalogue mensch +
Raum (humanity + Space), ed. Georg
A. Neidenberger, Berlin: Brüder
Hartmann 1951, Cover.

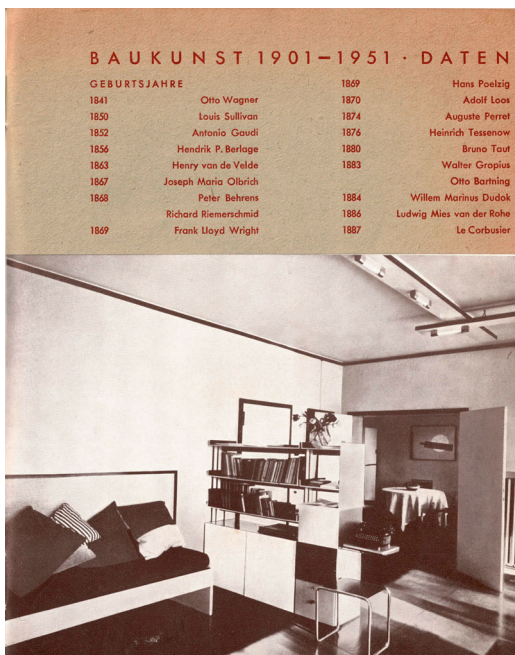


Fig. 11.
Exhibition catalogue mensch + Raum (humanity + Space), ed.
Georg A. Neidenberger, Berlin: Brüder Hartmann 1951, page
with architects' years of birth and photograph of the interior
of the Masters' Houses in Dessau.



Fig. 12.
Photograph of the Darmstadt
Conversation of 1951, photographer
unknown Source: Bundesarchiv
(German Federal Archives),
Signature: B 145 Bild-F000074-3601.

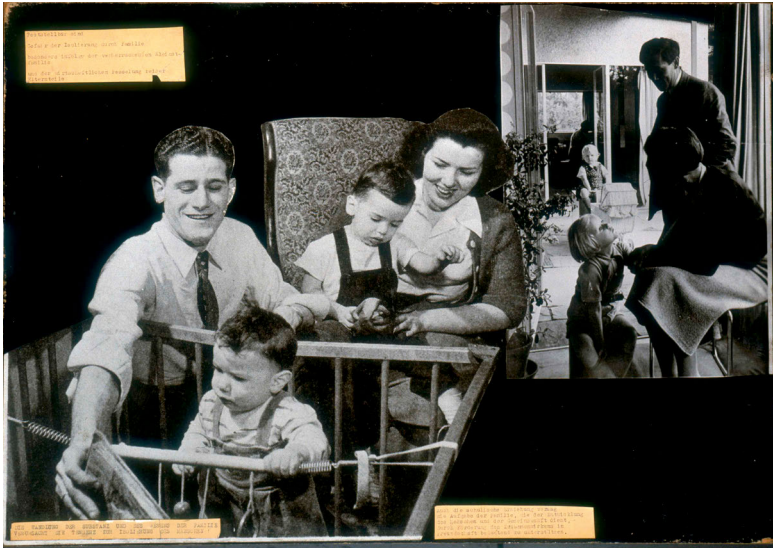


Fig. 13.

Hans Scharoun: Photo collage for the exhibition Meisterbauten (Master Buildings)
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-Scharoun-Archive, Nr. 1499 Pl.175/8.02,
photographer unknown.



Fig. 14.

Hans Scharoun: Photo collage for the exhibition Meisterbauten (Master Buildings).
Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-Scharoun-Archive, Nr. 1499 Pl.175/8.04,
photographer unknown.



Fig. 15.

Ewald Gnlika: Photograph of Hans Scharoun's Model design for a school in Darmstadt, 1951.

Source: Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Hans-Scharoun-Archive.



Fig. 16.

Gunnar Klack: Photograph of the Volksschule in Marl, 1968–1971, Hans Scharoun/Michael Hellgardt, taken in 2017.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scharoun-Schule-Marl-08-2017.jpg>.

