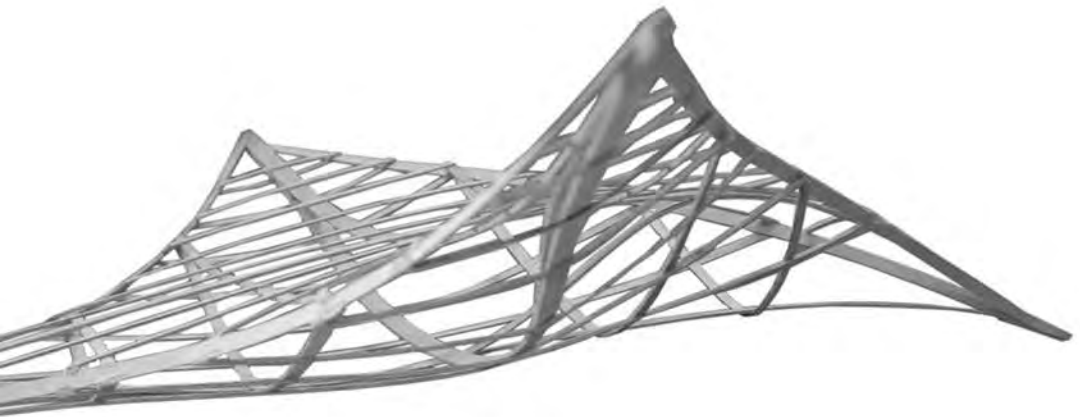Christian Preidel

Utopian Architecture Beyond the Concrete

The Transcendental and the Political Dimension of Laboratories and Religious Spaces

[transcript] Religious Studies

Christian Preidel
Utopian Architecture Beyond the Concrete

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This book relies to some extent on images of buildings and works of art to make a point. Due to copyright issues, many images cannot be reproduced in an open access volume. Therefore, information is provided as to where a particular image can be found on the internet or in print.[1] Sometimes this information is accompanied by an assignment to guide viewers to specific aspects of the image. Below is a list of artworks and buildings used throughout the book.

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1   Websites change and information may be removed without notice. Therefore, the author will provide specific hyperlinks only in the online version of the text. In addition, the source will be described as accurately as possible so that readers can find the image through an internet search or the *Internet Archive's "Wayback Machine"*.

Acknowledgements

Introduction to the Book

> Thus upon crutches does my philosophy
> advance.
> It does not have all the time in the world
> to arrive
> Like the wisdom of God.
> But it knows that there where it sits
> down it will be as well as elsewhere
> blindfolded,
> Seeing before and behind it a very long
> path, and lamenting over its tomb at
> the threshold of Canaan.
> *Jean Wahl*, Towards the Concrete

As pastoral theology moves into the digital age, it has to become sensitive again for the spaces, buildings, things, and the materiality that surrounds us. We are not immaterial creatures. This became especially apparent in times like the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 and 2021 when we were spending most of our time in our flats, sitting on chairs and sofas, touching electronic devices on which we had become so dependent for communication but which failed to provide us with the full sensory experience of being able to be outside and with people. The fact that the sensory experience matters in a digital age and that we are influenced by the space in which we live and the devices we interact with is nothing new. But in theology there seems to be a trend to evade the concrete, to focus on abstract concepts rather than hard material realities. Yet the church as an organisation is rooted in these hard realities, with its newly build community centres and the smartphones it buys for its pastoral workers.

But the terminology is problematic right from the start. There is, as we will see, no clear differentiation between what a thing, an object, a material artefact, or even an assemblage, a hybrid, etc. is. Neither is there a clear definition of materiality that unifies all authors referenced here. The same applies to the theological terms presented throughout the text, especially the terms church and community, which suggest a closed group housed in a closed building. It has become common knowledge that church transcends the narrow organisational structures. But what does that mean both in the German and the U.S. context?

As the readers progress thought the text, I hope that they will arrive at their own definition of what a materially sensitive church is, inspired by the philosophical, sociological, architectural, and artistic positions on the topic presented here.

At the same time, I am concerned with the concrete materiality of spaces, buildings, and things. I am also concerned with the way this is presented to the reader. Throughout the book I advocate for open forms in architecture and design, and with that comes the need to write a text that is open as well. Both the content and the design of this book thus are intended to encourage the reader to participate with his or her own ideas. After all, this is what differentiates the technology laboratories I present in the second part of this book from the social laboratories in the third part: Instead of unquestionable expert solutions, developed in walled-off laboratories, social laboratories believe in the cooperative production of knowledge by everyone concerned.

The Structure of This Book

But before I begin to talk about space and materiality, I want to introduce the discipline within which I situate myself and this book. I understand pastoral theology as a science of workplaces, i.e. the workplaces of practitioners within the church and the world.[1] I therefore begin the book with a look at the his-

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1   As *Gaudium et Spes* (esp. No. 4) makes us aware, church and world are closely related to one another. I am not only concerned with practitioners who work for religious organisations, but with architects, engineers, designers, etc. Thus, I do not want to draw a line between sacred and "secular" – whatever the term might denote – and certainly not between practice for the church and for the world. Both belong together as shall become apparent over the course of this book.

tory and the recent developments in pastoral theology through the lens of the building sites where such developments took place. The first part of this book is therefore devoted to two milestone projects within pastoral theology, the *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie* edited by Karl Rahner in Germany in the 1960s and Bonnie Miller-McLemore's *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* from the United States in 2011. Presenting these two handbooks is not only a way to situate my own work within pastoral theology but it is also a first and preliminary foray into the general concept that becomes important for the later chapters as well, namely that the spaces within which we live and work and the theology we practice there are closely interrelated.

Along with society, these spaces have radically changed over the last few years. The mentality of *New Work* is beginning to emerge outside the Silicon Valley, in startup incubators as well as in existing companies, which therein translates into flattened hierarchies and agile, iterative product development. As Florian Sobetzko and Matthias Sellmann demonstrate, such approaches can be applied in the field of pastoral theology as well (cf. Sobetzko and Sellmann 2017). In this book I want to take a step back and look at the material basis of this New Work revolution, located in the laboratories of high-tech companies. As buildings they are housing both humans – and thus provide one of the fundamentals of human existence as Martin Heidegger notes – *and* a particular mentality. This becomes especially apparent during the era of the communication industry in the last quarter of the 20th century, when corporations like IBM and AT&T dominated the market in the U.S. and overseas before the developments from the Silicon Valley disrupted their businesses.

The spirit of these companies lives on in the corporate campuses of Google, Apple, and Facebook. It is a mindset that combines everything-is-possible with company-knows-best. Therein a small elite group of engineers models nature according to their will and a large corporation provides a secluded space where said engineers can pioneer solutions for the whole of society. Likewise, the architects who build these corporate campuses participate in the same dominating perspective on nature and society. Thus whoever introduces practices of agile development and New Work to pastoral work must be cognisant of what concepts lie underneath. Therefore, one part of this book is devoted to the Electric Laboratory as a space which begets a particular mindset both in the engineer's and the architect's understanding of the world. That such a can-do mindset is in crisis will be my conclusion.

As a contrast to the sealed-off spaces of large corporations I propose an unfinished architecture and open spaces where the course society will take in the future is not predetermined by a small elite. To introduce these spaces, I go back in time and look at the parliamentary buildings of the late Bonn republic, a time when the Federal Republic of Western Germany was re-defining its role in the world. A divided Germany that had to come to terms with the atrocities of the Third Reich wanted to reinvent itself as an open and participatory society, which also entailed a sense of un-finishedness as well as a procedural approach to democratic decision making. The buildings of the Bonn republic reflect that self-understanding, at least from the perspective of the architects and their political clients. Like the laboratories, these buildings house people as well as a particular mindset. We could characterise it along the lines of the Habermasian ideal of a power-free discourse.

Our understanding of open architecture however should neither stop with the buildings of the Bonn Republic nor with the history of great white male architects. Rather, it is the small details that demand attention, which is why architecture is viewed here under the perspective of its materiality. It is on that level that a distinction between the corporate laboratory and the social laboratory can be fruitfully made. The buildings of large corporations resemble material battlegrounds with their use of enormous quantities of steel, glass, and concrete which is bent into futuristic shapes. Likewise, the self-understanding of technology corporations is determined by a dominant attitude towards the world of things, an authority to dispose of the material at will – and a frustration if it does not behave as planned. In contrast to this, we witness a materially sensitive architecture that works with instead of against the material. Modern designs have gone as far as giving the material primacy in defining both the properties and the shape of the building. And some architects even propose that materially sensitive and socially sensitive form-finding processes go together. Thus sensibility for the material world becomes a catalyst for solidarity with the whole of humanity and nature through building and designing.

Such an approach is particularly useful in the digital world where the material world, through the architecture of buildings as well as the design of electronic devices, permeates the daily lives in societies, which is why, according to BRUNO LATOUR, things must be represented as interdependent yet independent actors in order to come to terms with the fact that both on the social and on the political level human existence and the world of things has become intertwined.

Whoever becomes sensitive for that perspective will at some point also experience the "power of wonder" that such a realisation brings with it. And he or she will find countless examples of the independence of material actors both in the workplace and in his or her own house. The third and central part of this book is therefore devoted to such alternative spaces and alternative architectural, design, and also social work practices.

Church communities as well can become an example for good building in this regard. There are examples of churches which implemented open and participative approaches in both the process of designing and in the daily use of their buildings. We will look at two exemplary approaches, the rebuilding of the North West Bronx in New York and the church and community centre in Rif, Austria. They are both, to quote from a seminal film on the future of school buildings in Germany, *Incubators of the Future* (Kahl 2004).

This theme will be fully unfolded in the fourth and final part of the book, where I will go back to where I started, to the heart of practical theology, and ask how a materially sensitive approach in line with Latour and others can not only be preached but fruitfully practiced as well. While an investigation of current building practices that employ materially sensitive and people-empowering techniques must be the focus of another project, we will nonetheless take a brief look at church buildings and the link between the built environment and the worldview that is expressed therein. More concretely, we will look at the concept of an ecclesial community and its relation to the world around it that is expressed in church buildings and remodellings from the 1960s up to the present, taking these buildings seriously as pastoral actors – just like we take the people seriously that meet and worship in them.

The Structure of the Text

When we describe the building of a house as an open process, we have to apply that description to the research process as well. If buildings should allow as many people as possible to participate with their ideas, then texts should do the same.

In this context I want to introduce UMBERTO ECO's concept of the *open artwork* as a guiding principle – and since I refer to art, in particular architecture and photography, as condensation points for my thoughts, Eco's concept seems even more fitting. In *Das offene Kunstwerk* (Eco 1973), the open artwork, Eco pur-

sues the question how modern art can allow for a multitude of interpretations and enables the viewer to bring his or her own ideas into the process of perceiving a work of art. In modern music, that liberty of interpretation is even more important because the experience hinges on the performance.

> The interpreter has not only, like in traditional music, the possibility to interpret the instructions of the composer according to his own feelings, but he is asked to intervene in the form of the composition itself, often through determining the length or the sequence of notes in an act of creative improvisation.* (Eco 1973, p. 27) Quotations marked with an asterisk * have been translated by the author of this book.

This marks a break with the ideal of music as a closed artwork which relies on a "finished and definite message"* (ibid., pp. 28–29) transmitted from the composer, via the interpreter to the listener. Instead the interpreting musician becomes the "active centre of a network of inexhaustible relations"* (ibid., p. 31)[2], he or she becomes a co-author.

Yet at the same time, this openness presents a problem as the artist wants to give his or her interpreters as much creative freedom as possible without jeopardising the character of his or her work as a discernible original work by the artist "and not that of someone else"* (ibid., p. 55). This is why, according to Eco, there needs to be a guarantee that the communication between the artist and the interpreter does not descend into chaos. A "delicate balance that reconciles a minimum of order with a maximum of disorder"* (ibid., p. 175) is necessary for the artistic communication to work. Some artists have strained that balance between order and disorder to the maximum. The composer John Cage, for instance, emphasises openness and disorder. In his essay "Offenes Kunstwerk versus Kunst der Offenheit", open artwork versus the art of openness, Karl Baier (Baier 2003) notes that Cage questions Eco's concept of art with a radical openness that borders on the accidental. Baier shows that there is a conflict between Eco's Western perspective on the artist – one might detect traces of the original genius here – and Cage's Eastern spirituality where the concept of a discernible authorship is less important.

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2   In this description Eco refers to the composer and theoretician Henri Pousseur.

That balance between order and chaos, which I would rather interpret as a balance between determining one's own position and providing a surface where others can attach their ideas, has to be guaranteed by the artist. Eco refers to poetry to give his readers an idea how such a balance could be achieved. Since poetry is a written art form, all written texts can benefit from Eco's ideas – this is true of the current book as well. Referring to the French Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, Eco writes:

> It has to be avoided that a single meaning imposes itself: the empty space around the world, the play with typography, the spatial composition of the text help to give the word an aura of indefiniteness and allow it to prefigure a thousand things.* (Eco 1973, p. 37)

What poetry does on the page, theatre can facilitate on stage. Eco mentions Bertold Brecht's drama theory and the importance for the audience to become involved, especially as the dramatic tension does not resolve itself in the same way as in classical drama:

> [A] solution is expected and hoped for but it must come from a conscious participation of the audience. The audience becomes a tool for revolutionary pedagogy.* (ibid., pp. 40–41)

The significance of this sentence, especially for pastoral theology and this book, becomes apparent if we place it in the historical context of a changing perception of the world. Eco takes the reader along a journey from the closed and definite art of the middle ages, where the artist places himself in a "cosmos as a hierarchy of clear and predetermined order"* (ibid., p. 46), through baroque, where the rise of empiricism changes people's focus from essence to appearance, and then on to the artwork in modernity. Here he refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, phenomenology of perception, (1945):

> How can I experience the world [...], if none of the perspectives under which I view it is sufficient and the horizons are always open? [...] A belief in the thing and the world must be based on the assumption of a closed system – and yet such a closure become impossible.* (ibid., p. 51)

Eco sees a new freedom on the horizon, not just in intangible music, poetry, and theatre, but also for something as concrete as architecture. He mentions the new faculty for architecture at the university of Caracas which he calls "a school that invents itself every day"* (Eco 1973, p. 42) as its classrooms have movable walls that allow to reconfigure the floor plan of the building each day according to the needs of teachers and students.

In conclusion, then, we can say that an open text is not a l'art pour l'art but a reaction to what Eco describes as the problem of modernity. The author, as well as the poet and the architect, must find a delicate balance between presenting a unique standpoint and leaving the text open for the readers to bring in their perspectives. This is a risky proposition, since the conclusions drawn this way are possible, probable, but not inevitable. As with other creative processes, such as the later mentioned concept of abduction, there is a multitude of permissible interpretations. Yet at the same time, probability instead of necessity seems fitting for a book on the laboratory situation.

The Design of the Book

What Umberto Eco has alluded to in poetry, namely that the design and type-setting of a text plays an important role in the way it is being perceived as an open artwork, has been thought through in information theory. One theoretical position is that of the American statistician, political, and computer scientist EDWARD TUFTE, whose book *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* (Tufte 2003) argues that information design reflects the bureaucracy and power structures of the organisation from which the text originated. This is often a hierarchical structure (cf. ibid., p. 10), further aided by the computer programs that are used to present information, hence the title of his book.

As an example, Tufte illustrates how the PowerPoint slides of a NASA briefing on the planned re-entry of the space shuttle Columbia into the earth orbit presented information to NASA officials in a way that they were likely to underestimate the dangers of the damaged heat shield. As the shuttle was lost during re-entry that faulty information design had dramatic consequences.[3]

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3   Bruno Latour has also written on the many-parts-machine Columbia and its disintegration (cf. e.g. Latour 2005, pp. 20–24).

> The choice of headings, arrangement of information, and size of bullets on the key chart served to highlight what management already believed. The uncertainties and assumptions that signalled danger dropped out of the information chain. (ibid., p. 10)

Information can be presented in a way that lulls readers into a false sense of security. That problem is heightened when software supports a "cognitive style" (ibid., p. 26) that values the quick "sales pitch" (ibid., p. 13) over lengthy processes of thought and deliberation.

As a remedy, Tufte suggests a particular style of typesetting in his own books. Most strikingly, his texts feature a wide margin where additional information, provided either by the author or as pencil annotations by the reader, finds its space.[4] These texts are not just meant to be read but to be worked with and added to. In addition, Tufte flattens the hierarchical structure of headings and subheadings and condenses the text as much as possible.[5]

This book cannot emulate the different nuances of typesetting that Edward Tufte used in his books, especially *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, *Envisioning Information*, *Visual Explanations*, and *Beautiful Evidence*. However, the author hopes that within the constraints of this book with its rather small margins, readers can still become cognisant that a text is an open form, awaiting the readers' participation – and that might have been the most important aspect that Tufte wanted to make his readers aware of.

The Book Situated at the Margins of Practical Theology

As information design subtly confers world views, an open information design is also worthwhile to pursue as a theological endeavour. Instead of paving a straight way to the heart of the matter, the text as an open artwork evolves around its centre. That centre, however, remains beyond the author's grasp. To take an image from church architecture: In some modern churches the altar is

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4 My colleague Erik Müller-Zähringer has made me aware that such additions to a main text have a rich tradition, e.g. in the rabbinic tradition where annotations to the unchangeable holy text gain an enormous prominence.

5 A prime example that Tufte cites for his approach is Richard Feynman, Robert Leighton und Matthew Sands *The Feynman Lectures on Physics* (1963).

set a few feet off-centre to show that there is no straight connection between God and the altar table. Rather, what is at the heart of the liturgy remains outside the control of the community who gathers around the altar.

Reinhard Meßner (Meßner 2003) calls this the "ex-centric centre"[6] of the community. The community, according to Meßner, does not simply have God in their midst, but they orient they prayer towards God who then makes community happen (cf. ibid., p. 29).

> If the Christian community expects the final coming of God, his eschatological theophany, then the altar – the Christian altar, where the prayer for the parousia is voiced – is the ex-centric centre of the community, the place which leaves an open space for the outstanding coming of Christ, which is symbolically anticipated in the eucharistic liturgy.* (ibid., p. 35)

Meßner's text is a strong argument for a theology which leaves open spaces. The concept of openness of spaces within the church has also been brought forward, amongst others, by Thomas Erne when he writes about the church as a "hybrid" space (Erne 2017, p. 35) which could also include contemporary art installations that break up the traditional ways of "reading" sacred spaces. If theology does not leave open spaces, then both the Christian community and the theological text run the risk of becoming self-referential.

But can an open text still be taken as a theological contribution to the public discourse? This is particularly problematic at times where said discourse seems to demand not an ex-centric positionality but a bold stance.

There are good reasons to remain in a state of openness. One is the historic example that Catholic intellectuality gave during the interwar period, a time that resembles our own in its signs of insecurity and the search for institutions that would guarantee security, especially religious institutions.

> The "exploding" modernity of the prewar era, which came into its "crisis years" with the First World War and – in the words of Paul Valéry's famous diagnosis – has learnt that it was "mortal," did not just radically refuse an optimistic civil Christendom, which, together with the bourgeois era, was crushed on

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6   Meßner here alludes to the concept of *ex-centric positionality*, which Helmuth Plessner has introduced and which, in brief, refers to the ability of humans to relate to themselves – in contrast to animals who live out of their midst.

the battlefields of an industrialised mass warfare. It also [...] began to search for the "objective", which it thought it could find in Catholicism.* (Gerber 2013, pp. 124–125)

One Catholic intellectual who rejected this return to the seemingly safe haven of Catholicism was AUGUST MESSER, who is the protagonist of Stefan Gerber's historical study. Gerber cites exceedingly from Messer's own writings (Messer 1924) to portray a man of science and learning who was aware that some of his (Protestant) university peers saw Catholicity as a fallback into pre-enlightened ignorance and at the same time saw church leadership, Pius X. in particular, condemning modernity as a whole, the freedom of science included.

"We as intellectuals" must fear "that by becoming Catholic we will lose too much of what we value as an indispensable intellectual good, that is the freedom of philosophical and scientific thought".* (Gerber 2013, p. 126)

This was not simply aimed at the official position of Pius X. and his decree *Lamentabili* (1907), which made Messer leave the church, but rather at the general concept of an all too simple and unambiguous harmony between the knowledge of God and of the world. That harmony was set in stone by the First Vatican Council in its dogmatic constitution, *Dei Filius*: "God [...] can be known with certitude by the natural light of human reason from created things" (DH 1785).

Throughout his life, Messer suffered from this, in his perspective, irreconcilable difference. Even more so because for him the question of God always remained relevant. He wrote extensively about the problem that God and the world cannot be simply reconciled. Through his writings he gave a voice to many Catholic intellectuals of his time who did not want to be contented with a seemingly secure faith and its institution in the church at times of societal change (cf. Gerber 134). Messer's intellectual struggle adds to the concepts of ex-centricity and the open artwork in that he exposes the rifts and wounds that an engagement with the world necessarily leaves us with. Especially for practical theology, the question becomes virulent, as to what degree it is willing to leave behind its institutionalised safe haven of a specialist discipline with a proven system to classify anything it might encounter in the world. Messer's engagement with the signs of his time can thus become a primer for the engagement with the *things* of our time.

But before we come to the things and buildings in the second and third part of the book, we will, first of all, continue to explore the ground on which we stand. As the heading of this section suggests, it is practical theology. Thus the following first part introduces the disciplinary playing field, but it does so from a perspective that is materially sensitive and thus paves the way to the rest of the book. Some of the observations made seem to be marginal, but from these margins I hope to shed new light on the discipline.

Part I
A Situated Pastoral Theology

Portraits and Handbooks

In one of the long hallways of the theology faculty at Bamberg University – a white corridor, sparsely adorned with stucco in the oldest building of the university, a former Jesuit school – hangs a series of portraits of modern social ethics scholars. They show important contributors to the field such as Wilhelm Korff, Enrique Dussel, Dietmar Mieth, Hans-Joachim Höhn, and Marianne Heimbach-Steins.[1] Every morning on my way to work as an assistant at the chair of religious education I passed by this modern ancestral hall. These portraits stood for continuity and scholarly refinement in one of the youngest disciplines of the theological canon. This self-assertion was particularly important at a time when theology in Bamberg lost its status as an independent faculty and was integrated as a department into the humanities, a process which also called into question the need for the many theological sub-disciplines, such as social ethics, religious education, or practical theology.[2] It might well be that the practical theologian Rolf Zerfaß was moved by

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1 I found that a similar portrait gallery of important theologians hangs in the theological seminary of Tübingen, ending with the portrait of Franz Xaver Arnold (see below) (cf. Schneider 2009, p. 15).

2 Some scholars in the English-speaking world, e.g. Bonnie Miller-McLemore, prefer to call their field pastoral theology, being concerned with the challenges of pastoral workers. Historically, the discipline bears that name and focus as well. Today, many scholars, especially German-speaking, refer to the discipline as practical theology, to show that their area of concern extends beyond the church. Notwithstanding that the term "practical" can encompass other theological sub-disciplines, concerned with the applied side of theology, e.g. religious education, I prefer the term practical theology, as it encompasses the world, its culture, and the daily challenges of pastoral workers living in it. Thus, wherever I talk about the historical developments or positions that focus on the pastoral worker, I use the term pastoral theology. In all other instances, I use the denomination practical theology.

similar sentiments as he often began his lectures with the questions, "Where do we come from?", "Where do we stand?", "Where are we going?". Writing a habilitation thesis in the field of practical theology evokes similar feelings, especially when one comes from the outside – in my case from the fields of Christian social ethics and ecumenical theology: Where do I come from, where does my discipline stand, and where is it going – or, where do I want to take it, especially in times of social and cultural change?

It is hardly unknown that pastoral theology as a university subject begins with Franz Stephan Rautenstrauch's reform of the theological curriculum in 1774, which sought to improve the education and the professional training of Catholic priests in Maria Theresia's Austrian empire. While much has been written about the political circumstances of this reform in enlightened abso-lutism, which understood priests as a civil servants and the church as a cultural asset to the monarchy, RAINER BUCHER'S notion that pastoral theology started as a *crisis science* at the beginning of modernity is important for our quest to get to the roots of the discipline's need for self-assertion. Bucher argues that at a time when the old certainties of churchly traditions begin to falter, Rautenstrauch is both aware that there is a disconnect between the theological tradition and the practice of pastors – as well as with the paradigm shifts in science and society of the time – and he is doubtful whether the established disciplines can overcome that rift. The introduction of pastoral theology as a means to scientifically improve the practice of pastors is not only an addition to the theological canon but in essence a modern endeavour: "practice becomes reflexive, i.e. modern"* (Bucher 2001, p. 183). This notion already maps out the coordinates between which practical theology seeks to assert itself; on one axis the tradition of theological scholarship as well as its reception within the church, and on the other the current situation of a breaking down of certainties both in church and in society. Systematic theology, in its assessment of the Second Vatican council, might label these axes *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, arguing that theology needs both. The sociology of science, true to Thomas Kuhn,[3] might look at the graph over time and ask at which points in the history

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3   The systematic theologian Mark Massa has applied Kuhn's concept of paradigm shifts to the development of doctrine (cf. Massa 2008). In an earlier work, Hans Küng has used the terminology as well (cf. e.g. Küng 2018 (1987), 135–178, chapter: Paradigm shifts in Theology and the Natural Sciences*). However, Küng emphasises continuity over discontinuity and in many cases opts not for a new tradition, but a *re*formulation of tradition – bearing in

of theology the crisis was so profound that a paradigm shift occurred and the rules of the discipline were, in part, rewritten.

Scholars today, however, usually want to refrain from such overarching perspectives and understand their work neither as another step in a long line of tradition and refinement nor see it as a break with existing paradigms. Rather, we should direct our attention back to the portrait gallery at Bamberg University. A series of portraits allows the viewer to find commonalities and differences between them. It allows them to abstract from the individual persons to arrive at typologies. The Cologne artist AUGUST SANDER is well known for his photographic typologies of *People of the 20th Century*. While we recognise the seriality in Sander's portraits, which allows us to see what life was like, e.g. in the cities of the Weimar Republic, the artist himself directs us to the individuality of his portraits, arguing that every photograph shows the traces of life in the face of the portrayed person. However, he also makes the point that it takes a trained eye to see them: "A well-known poem says that every person's story is written plainly on their face, although not everyone can read it." (Laporte et al. 2018)[4] In the field of architectural photography, BERND AND HILLA BECHER have produced a similarly large convolute of typologies, in this case of industrial buildings. Like Sander's portraits, the Becher photographs exhibit both seriality in their identical compositions as well as individuality in that they direct the viewers' attention to the differentiating details of each building. In their strict composition and even lighting these photographs forbid any nostalgic idealisation of the days of the heavy coal and steel industry, whose decline they document. To answer Rolf Zerfaß' questions of where I come from, where I am, and where I am going with this habilitation, I propose a small gallery of ancestors in the tradition of both August Sander as well as Bernd and Hilla Becher, which will show both people and places. In doing so, I join not only the ranks of photographers but also those of visual sociologists.[5]

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mind the existential nature of belief systems and the (devastating) impact of paradigm-shattering when it comes to questions about "the wherefrom and whereto of world and man"* (ibid., p. 165).

4   Pierre Laporte relates that quote from August Sander's 5th radio lecture (1931). Cf. the analysis of Sander's topologies by Gabriele Conrath-Scholl and Susanne Lange (Conrath-Scholl and Lange 2004).

5   I have written on visual sociology briefly in my dissertation, albeit in the context of mind maps as visual representations (cf. Henkel 2017, pp. 105–107). Recently I have been particu-

I propose to look into two handbooks that mark the beginning and the current state of modern practical theology from the middle of the 20th to the early 21st century, a time period of tremendous, unparalleled economic and cultural change – which is only fitting for a crisis science. I will start with Karl Rahner's (et al.) *Handbook of Pastoral Theology* from 1964 in the wake of the Second Vatican council and its Copernican shift to the "pastoral principle" (Theobald 2014, pp. 212–213) as a paradigm of understanding the current times with their "joys and hopes, sorrows and fears" (GS 1) as a place where God's word becomes manifest. The second "handbook" will take us to the beginning of the 21st century and help us deal with the uncertainties and ruptures of late modernity from the perspective of English-speaking academia in the United States. We will also switch denominations from the Catholic Herder publishing house to the Methodist Vanderbilt University with its diverse set of students from different religious communities.[6]

The terms 'modernity', 'late modernity', and 'postmodernity' have been used differently by the authors referenced here. While some relate to Jean-François Lyotard's diagnosis of postmodernity as the "end of the large narratives" and then later to Francis Fukuyama's concept of the "end of history", others follow Anthony Gidden's diagnosis, that we are living in late-modern times, where the individual bears the burden of demonstrating his singularity after the breakdown of the collective identities which characterised the power-struggles of modernity. I follow the latter here, especially considering Andreas Reckwitz' *Society of Singularities* (Reckwitz 2019)[7]. According to Reckwitz, the strive for sin-

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larly drawn to the work of Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, who conducts photography workshops for marginalised urban residents to document their daily lives (Wanjiku Kihato 2010), and the work of Roman Williams, who uses a photography in his analysis of inter-religious settings (Williams 2015, 2016).

6   There is another important handbook project at the end of the 20th century, namely Herbert Haslingers *Handbuch Praktische Theologie* (1999). The omission of it does not deny its significance for the discipline. On the contrary, it will be referenced throughout the book.

7   In his text on the *Differences of Late Modernity**, the practical theologian Christian Bauer follows the same terminology, emphasising the the ambivalence and potential brutality of the times we live in: "The decisive difference between postmodernity and late-modernity is the contrast between plurality and difference. Our present time is not a *postmodern* field of flowers of colourful plurality where pastoral theology could restrict itself to a semantic picking of empirical flower buds. Rather, it is a *late-modern* battleground of steely [cf. the metaphorical and material qualities of steel discussed in this book, C.P.] multiplicities […]

gularity has also influenced late-modern architecture, which is an important context for our work here:

> With its repetitive structures, the International Style seems rather monotonous, and it has largely been neglected since the 1980s in favour of unique designs. So much so that it seems necessary for today's museums, concert halls, flagship stores, and apartment buildings to be built in an original style […]. In globalised and urbanised late modernity, the interchangeable spaces of classical modernity are to be replaced with recognisable individual places, each with a unique atmosphere that can be associated with specific narratives and memories. […] It is no surprise, then, that the late-modern subjects who move in these environments seek satisfaction in the particular. The type of subject that predominated in the West up to the 1970s — that is, the average employee with an average family in the suburbs […] — has become, in Western societies, an apparently conformist negative foil to be avoided by the late-modern subject.* (ibid., pp. 8–9)

The portraits of these two handbook-projects and their authors will be accompanied by portraits of the places where these projects came to be realised: the *Herder* publishing house in Freiburg, where Karl Rahner met with his co-authors, and the campus of *Vanderbilt University*, home to Bonnie Miller-McLemore. My aim is to raise awareness not just for these places, but for their details and their materiality in particular. Steel will be prominently featured here, as it will when we come to the corporate campus in the following chapter.

Figure 1: August Sander: Victim of Persecution, c. 1938; Catholic Priest, 1927; Young Farmers, 1914 / Bernd and Hilla Becher: Water Towers 1972-2009

Take a look at the aforementioned three images from August Sander's "People of the 20th Century" series. They can be found on the website of the *August Sander Stiftung*. Compare these images with the "Water Towers" series by Bernd and Hilla Becher. An installation view showing the seriality of the images can be found on the website of the *Tate* – formerly known as the Tate Gallery – which has six complete typologies by Bernd and Hilla Becher in its collection.

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where [pastoral theology] has to prove itself not just discursively but existentially" (Bauer 2014, p. 32).

Karl Rahner and the Deformed Steel Beam at Herder

The argument that "pastoral theology after Rahner is pastoral theology in the footsteps of Rahner"* (Bucher 2001, p. 184) points both to the importance of a redefinition of the discipline in the middle of the 20th century as well as to KARL RAHNER'S ability to answer to that need. Therefore, our focus here will be how he saw his handbook both at its inception in 1964 and at the end of its eight year long publishing process in 1972. As the project was initiated by the *Herder* publishing house, we will try to connect Rahner's definition of practical theology to a specific locale, namely the publisher's central office in the city of Freiburg im Breisgau in the South-West of Germany.

In 1960, *Herder* approached Karl Rahner with the idea for a practical-theological handbook. The author was already a contributor to the *Lexicon of Theology and Church*, had recently written on the subject in a well-received volume (Rahner 1959), and seemed to be one of the few prominent theologians willing to undertake the task of conducting such a project. Rahner sketched out his own plans during the summer of 1960 and met with representatives of the publishing house at the end of November the same year (Laumer 2010)[1]. Despite the skepticism from prominent representatives of the discipline of pastoral theology, who were conceiving a similar handbook, and the difficulty to find co-editors, Rahner began work on the project.[2] After several meetings with different rep-

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[1] See in particular pp. 124-126 (first plans); 127-143 (the foundational draft); 144-154 (the first meeting at Herder in Freiburg).

[2] He was later joined by Franz Xaver Arnold, Viktor Schurr, and Leonhard Weber. How wise these choices were is for instance evident in the case of the Tübingen "practical theologian" and later university president Arnold who taught pastoral theology, moral theology, social ethics, liturgy studies, and religious education, and who tried to bridge the gap between systematic and pastoral theology. Gerhard Schneider argues that Arnold conceptualised

resentatives of the publishing house and potential national and international co-authors – he unsuccessfully tried to bring French theologians, among them Marie-Dominique Chenu, on board –, the first volume was released in 1964. The project found its completion with the fourth volume in 1972 to which a fifth lexicon volume was added.

Already in his foundational draft for the representatives of *Herder* in 1960, Rahner emphasised the need for a redefinition of the discipline, independent from the mere practical concern to provide "tactics" for pastors, which was prevalent at the establishment of pastoral theology in Josephinism. He instead concerned himself with the "strategy" for how church as a whole realises itself in the world today (cf. Laumer 2010, pp. 127, 134) and called this an *existential* theology, concerned with the concrete actualisation of God's Word in current times, drawing on the resources of both other theologies and of the modern social sciences (cf. ibid., pp. 130–131). While many authors contributed to the handbook in the end, the theological nexus can be clearly identified with Rahner's definition of the discipline (cf. ibid., p. 273). It is therefore worthwhile to look deeper into the preface of the first volume, published in 1964, and the closing remarks at the end of the handbook's main chapters in the fourth volume, which appeared five years later in 1969. In contrast to the preface, these closing remarks form a whole separate chapter in which Karl Rahner reflects on the developments within Catholicism and religious life in general, arguing already in the heading that *The Future of the Church has Already Begun**. I will not follow textual exegetical methods in this introduction – a close reading e.g. along grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2008) would surely reveal more insights into the structure and wording of the texts – but single out several topoi which are helpful for the understanding of practical theology in the 1960s and the zeitgeist of that particular era, to which we will come back throughout the book.

Futurology

The preface for the first edition of the handbook – underwritten by all editors – begins by asserting the structural change that has taken place in many parts

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pastoral theology as "a discipline related to dogma and history"* (Schneider 2009, p. 16; cf. Schneider 2009, pp. 264–267), being therefore an ideal interlocutor for Rahner.

of the world and which reminds the church to fundamentally reflect "on its concrete ministry in the changing world"* (Rahner 1970, p. 5). Likewise, the first section of the closing chapter begins with the statement that the times are changing. But in this final section Rahner does not only remind the reader of the difficulties to produce a handbook of a discipline in the midst of epochal shifts but also argues that our understanding of time and temporality has changed. While in former times ancestry and tradition had a strong bearing on the present, in the current times, i.e. the 1960s, the outlook on the future determines our existence:

> As much as such a future with all planning and scientific futurology remains an unknown future, as much as all progress and planning bring forth factors of uncertainty, as much as ancestry and tradition remain essential existentialities of human existence, the fact is that man today has a radically different relation to the future than a man of former times. [...][H]e legitimises his presence through the future, which he plans, and not through his ancestry, and thus rightly is under the impression that the future has already begun and that such a statement is not a contradiction anymore.* (Rahner 1969, p. 744)

What holds true for man in general also holds true for the church and the discipline of practical theology as represented in the handbook:

> Everything that has been said in these volumes has only meaning and fruition in as much as it can account for the church of the future, notwithstanding that the church in being and history has no other norm than Jesus Christ, who has already been crucified and has risen, but as such is the one that is yet to come.* (ibid., p. 745)

Practical theology's task is to identify in the present the moments where this future of the church has already begun. It is futurology in essence.

Planning

Practical theology also provides a reflection of the instruments and practices with which the church addresses the future. In the foreword of the first volume Rahner and his co-authors argue that, while many theological disciplines have enlightened the essence of what it means to be church, when the "church how-

ever began to concretely deliver its message, care about the salvation of the individual, i.e. doing 'pastoral care'"* (Rahner 1970, p. 5), a theologically profound plan for the life of the church in the present time that went beyond pastoral "tactics" was still missing. The authors see this as one of the main reasons for a timid and often reactionary practice (cf. ibid., p. 5). In this situation the handbook offers not only an overview over the practices of the church in the world, but a decidedly theological option, an ecclesiological, or even ecclesio-genic, i.e. church-generating, perspective. Rahner's final chapter in particular is inspired by this hopeful planning metaphor.

> Man plans himself and his environment, he is faber sui ipsius [...]. Not just mind, truth, and moral demands are the land of the creative freedom of man, but the real world itself, which is not just the house, which man takes with little alterations as given from God or nature as his dwelling. It rather becomes material, a stone quarry for the realisation of his plans. Man begins to plan himself and his world, genetically, psychologically, economically, and sociologically.* (Rahner 1969, p. 746)

While Rahner sees the making and execution of plans as part of the modern existence, he sees the church lacking this perspective.

> She had always waited hoping and praying for the coming of the Lord as the end of history. But she had never been the one who planned her future in the world, creatively drafted it, and actively tried to realise it.* (ibid., p. 747)

While former times in history did not allow for such a planning outlook into the future, the current times, as Rahner sees it, do. With humanity boldly planning its future and with a church that is part of human history – a strong reference to the Council[3] – the time has come where the church itself must engage in what Rahner calls an "ecclesiological futurology."*

The planning paradigm presented here shows how Rahner owes much of his perspective on pastoral theology to the zeitgeist of theology in his (post-war and post-conciliar) time, which brought together the desire for concrete structural reform and a perspective towards the future. This culminated – as we shall see

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3   While the *Handbook* appeared during the Second Vatican Council, the project, which began much earlier, is not an application of the Council. There is however in the person of Karl Rahner, who was an advisor to the council, a personal link between the two.

in the final chapter – in the re-organisation of the parishes, often starting with the role of the priest as an organisational leader (cf. Ziemann 2007, p. 206), but then also looking at the future of the whole of the church:

> In these suggestions and blueprints for a restructuring of pastoral institutions, the term "planning" could be heard [...]. With that, the semantics from the realm of politics entered the Catholic church.[4] [...] In the background stood the experience of societal change which had "rapidly accelerated" in contrast to previous epochs. This also brought about a futurisation of the understanding of belief and church [...]. Not just pastoral sociologians but also cardinal Lorenz Jaeger of Paderborn and the council-theologian Joseph Ratzinger reflected now on the future of the church.* (ibid., pp. 227–228)

Against this euphoria for technocratic planning, we must however note that Rahner has never ceased to bring in the perspective of an *open* future, beyond human influence and planning phantasies.

Building

With the metaphor of planning, the aspect of executing these plans also comes into view. Like before, Rahner focusses on the (Roman Catholic) church in his reflections, asking "what must church do *today*?"* (Rahner 1970, p. 5) He therefore addresses his *practical* theological handbook to everyone who is engaged in the "self-construction of the church for its ministry to the salvation in the world"* (ibid., p. 5). As mentioned before, Rahner does not just see this building activity as a merely mental or spiritual activity but he has the concrete materiality of history before his eyes (cf. Rahner 1969, p. 747). He ends his final chapter with a call to action:

> What we can creatively anticipate from this near future remains a promise [...]. It comes towards us in God's action and we move towards it with our own freedom. Measured against the future of the church, as it will be, we know

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4   And with that the idea of the "technical feasibility of planning, its justification from the social sciences, and its socio-political self-understanding"* as well as the "high expectations in a reform-euphoria of the late 60s"* (Ziemann 2007, p. 248) – which cooled down in the 70s.

very little of it. But this little already means a great challenge for our own responsibility and action.* (Rahner 1969, p. 759)

Reading Karl Rahner's texts today, a strong positive vision of planning and building for the future becomes apparent. Despite the dangers of modern technologies,[5] the ability to take matters into his own hands is what differentiates modern man and paves the way towards a better future. Such an approach seems out of sync with our time when we experience that "we have much less of a handle on our own life, the time, and God, than was suggested by modernity"* (Schüßler 2015, p. 98). Rather, "with every event the world and our own biography can radically change, but we seldom know the direction of such changes"* (ibid., p. 98). The practical theologian MICHAEL SCHÜßLER calls this an event dispositive:

> In an event dispositive the world functions like the user surface of a PC. We have many windows opened simultaneously, next to each other, overlapping one another, with different contents, which might stem from different historical periods, which combine virtual and real. [...] This corresponds to the pragmatic shift in the understanding of time, which is an expression of a contingent, fundamentally situative, and present-based performance of human life in the present time [...]. Our life is not based on principles or the story of history, but on paradoxical practices* (Schüßler 2013, p. 141; cf. Schüßler 2015, p. 98; cf. also Agamben 2008)

In order to do justice to Rahner's approach in this retrospect, we must acknowledge that the same Karl Rahner who talks about planning for the future is also aware of the radically disrupting events that can cross our plans. But he in his time could not have been aware how painful the end of the great unifying narrative of progress would be. The end of linear progress in time as "the last quasi-transcendental foundation of theology"* (Schüßler 2013, p. 205) makes it im-

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5   Karl Rahner himself has written on the challenges of the biotechnologies of his time and the questions their promise of human omnipotence raises for theology. His essay on the "self-manipulation"* of man also exhibits a positive assessment of the planning powers of humanity on the basis of man's God-given freedom, his fundamental directedness towards the good, and his relative independence from the constraints of nature (Rahner 2002 (1966)).

possible for utopian thinking to be an option at the beginning of the 21st century.[6]

At the same time, the church remains the realm within which Rahner develops his argument. While the institution might change dramatically, and Rahner demonstrates this in several areas in his final chapter, it still provides the ground upon which these developments take place. The focus on the church might be due to the fact that the author is a systematic theologian with a profound interest in ecclesiology.[7] But it might also be rooted in Rahner's biography; he had experienced the time of National Socialism as a member of the Jesuit order whose members were drawn together by their common resistance against the regime.

> The role of the church as home grew more and more; One served the church, and one expected stability and affirmation from it, the less the general public could offer something like that.* (Kolosz 2014, p. 36)

Adding to that experience, Rahner's work as a pastor during that time, first in Vienna at the Institute for Pastoral Care, where he also worked on the *Vienna Memorandum*, and towards the end of the war in Lower Bavaria, we can understand that a practical theology for the building up of the church also strongly resonated with the pastoral worker Karl Rahner.

A Point of Culmination

Many pictures could tell the story of the handbook project and Karl Rahner's practical theology. There are portraits of the young Rahner with his Jesuit brethren in Innsbruck, Rahner with cardinal Walter König at the Second Vatican Council, or next to Joseph Ratzinger at the Würzburg Synod, and there are pictures of the theologian laboriously working at his desk (cf. ibid., 55–57,

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6   I will come back to that in the second part of this book. Especially my reading of Bloch and of utopian planning in architecture must be viewed under the impression that not only theology but late-modern thought as such can only ruefully look back on the periods in history where we could believe in the "message of the end of time"* (Schüßler 2013, p. 206).

7   The handbook might have looked different if it had based practical theology not on the "self-actualization" of the church but on the prolongation of the acting of Christ in the person of the pastor, as Franz Xaver Arnold proposed (cf. Laumer 2010, p. 275).

cover image). But I want to abstract from the person and his iconic image and turn to a little detail.

The fact that I have deliberately chosen this detail, or rather object, is important, since I do not want to insinuate that there is a natural relation between the object and Rahner's theology. What I do here can be best described as a constellation, an assemblage "bringing together in a creative way different things, of which one hardly thought that they would fit together – and whose contrasts open up a space for new insights"* (Bauer 2015, p. 10). An example from the history of philosophy illustrates this process: Walter Benjamin travelling to Naples to write a *History of the Baroque Tragedy*. In his book *Adorno in Naples**, Michael Mittelmeier provides an insight into the project:

> Equipped with 600 quotations from German baroque tragedies and their surroundings ("assembled in the best possible order and clarity") he makes his way to Southern Italy in April 1924.* (Mittelmeier 2013, n.p.)

What Benjamin sets out to do is to gain a new meaning from his assembled fragments, i.e. quotations. In his book, Mittelmeier shows how many German intellectuals – Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor Adorno, or Alfred Sohn-Rethel – travel to Italy and there develop a new philosophy from the fragments they brought with them and from what they found. Even more insightful is to observe what actually happens in Southern Italy, since it is not the philosophers but the local people who are the masters of assembling something new from the fragments.

> As callous masters of the art of improvisation the Neapolitans construct from non-functioning technical things a "lucky arsenal of the broken" and assemble them to something surprisingly new. Sohn-Rethel […] tells the story of a helmsman who unceremoniously uses the broken motor of his boat to make coffee. Or the proprietor of a latteria, who uses a defunct bike motor to whip cream. […] The things become miraculous because they are broken, or rather liberated from their proper contexts.* (ibid., n.p.)

Creating constellations of artefacts *liberated* from their former context can be understood as a method between cultural and scientific production still valid

today, e.g. in the culture of sampling in Hip-Hop and other music styles, in architecture, and art.[8]

The picture chosen here to highlight aspects of Karl Rahner's theology is more humble both in form and epistemological scope than Benjamin's fragments. In front of the Herder building in Freiburg stands a small fragment of a steel bar, a massive black T-beam with bolted on connection plates. It is the relic of the steel skeleton that supported the house before it was destroyed in a British aerial bombardment in the *Operation Tigerfish* in 1944. The steel bar is severely deformed as a result of the extreme heat and pressure when the building burned and collapsed after being hit. I want to look at two aspects of this fragment and with that direct our attention to two aspects of Rahner's pastoral theology.

Figure 2: Herder Verlag (2011): The Herder Publishing House in Portrait. Manuel Herder on the "Red House"

Watch the film portrait of the Herder publishing house: "Verlag Herder im Portrait: Manuel Herder über das 'rote Haus'". Manuel Herder stands in front of the fragment of the T-beam. You can find the video on *YouTube*.

Steel and Brick

When Hermann Herder took over the publishing house from his father Benjamin, he relocated the offices to a new building which he commissioned in 1910. The "Red House", as it was called because of the painted façade, was constructed in the neo-baroque style that sought to resemble monasteries in Southern Germany. The inner structure, however, was highly modern, employing a steel skeleton which supports the building. What looks like brick and mortar is only a thin cladding wall with elaborate stucco held up by a massive steel frame on the inside. As a material, steel stands for both the technical capabilities in the industrialised nations of the 19th and 20th century. But it also

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8   There is much more to be said about the technique of creating such constellations, the role of the creator and the eigenvalue of the material and intellectual artefacts used to create these constellations (cf. for the field of religion e.g. Altglas 2014). That must be the focus of another book.

stands for the catastrophe of industrialised warfare that e.g. Ernst Jünger has portrayed in his memoir of the First World War, *Storm of Steel* (1920).

When he rebuilt the red house after the war, Herder chose to restore the baroque façade as well and with that hark back to the architectural and stylistic reference system of neo-baroque and historicism. The publisher had other options: when the building was commissioned, he could have employed architects from the Bauhaus or the New Objectivity school. After the war the variety of options was even greater.

In the same way, Rahner's pastoral theology with its ecclesiological focus looks traditional from a modern perspective. It employs a reference system of church, its personnel, and its hierarchy. But the structure that holds up this system is modern: Rahner's ecclesiology and his theology of revelation[9] revolutionised the understanding of the church's existence as well as the role of theology in the world. They are based on a change of perspective that is characteristic of the Second Vatican Council and its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*.

> In this text, the church performs a change of location in that it locates itself in the midst of the world and the present time. The understanding of the pastoral changes – it becomes the benchmark for the dogma. Pastoral means: the acting of the church in the world. With that, the boundaries of the church are transcended. With that, social policy questions become theologically relevant, the world *today* becomes the place where the church must realise its mission* (Polak 2015a, p. 74)[10].

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9 Cf. e.g. *Hörer des Wortes* (Rahner 1997 (1941 and 1963)), based on his lectures in Salzburg in 1937, which develops a theology that takes God's revelation throughout history and man's ability to understand God speaking to him as a starting point.

10 Cf. also another article by the same author on the topic, which is referring to Karl Rahner and his essay on the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*: "The church needs an insight, which is not part of the – in the traditional sense revealed – *depositum fidei*, to act according to its nature. For theology this is – even 50 years after *Gaudium et spes* – a new, strange, and 'frightening' business. […] Theology and the magisterium have to deal with the present and are shaken to their very foundations: They rely on an analysis of the present time. […] *Gaudium et spes* taken seriously means: There is God's revelation that can be found in the present"* (Polak 2015b, p. 87).

Thus, what at first glance looks traditional in Rahner's text, i.e. the constant references to the church living out its mission[11], is a modern shift of perspective. "The systematic theologian of an epoch, reminds (the whole of) theology of its constitutive practical character"* (Bucher 2002, p. 173).

Bent and Broken

The steel monument is accompanied by a stone tablet on the side of the building which reads: "Martis cruenti vim horribilem igneis telis desuper effusam die 27. Novembris mcmxliv nuntiat hoc momentum terribile." It reminds the reader of the horrors of industrialised warfare which have destroyed the building. Manuel Herder, the current head of the publishing house, recalls the importance of the memorial: "My grandfather set it up in this spot. It was important to him. It is a sign against the war"* (Herder 2011). The industrial capabilities that made steel frames possible at the beginning of the 20th century also fueled two wars that would destroy much of Europe. Modernity is a story of brokenness. We could argue that in a similar fashion Rahner radically relates his theology and understanding of God to man's bent and broken existence.

There is however a striking difference between Rahner's project and the reconstructions at Herder. Going beyond the self-assuredness of classical modernity and towards a position that recognises the ambivalence of modernity, Karl Rahner's modern "frame" is not there to hold up an old façade but rather his *prima facie* traditional façade hides something radically new.[12]

Rainer Bucher argues that Rahner brought the rift to light that had been covered up during the Pian epoch (cf. Bucher 2001, p. 184)[13]. His pastoral theol-

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11 Rahner writes about the "Selbstvollzug", which could be roughly translated as the church "living out itself", were it not for Rahner's understanding of grace, which transcends the boundaries of the church. I.e. the "Selbstvollzug" is not qualified by the limits of the organisational body of the Catholic church but rather by the universality of God's grace which encompasses the whole of humanity.

12 I want to thank Michael Schüßler for his helpful comments on the difference between Rahner building something new with the old and Herder reconstructing something old with the new.

13 Bucher argues that this covering up in the years from 1850 to 1960 is not a return to old certainties but a fictional return and therefore itself a modern project (cf. Bucher 2002, pp. 170–171).

ogy reminds us that there is no seamless transition between the theological as well as churchly tradition and the acting of pastoral personnel in the world. His diagnosis is that of a complicated reciprocity. It seems that Rahner's pastoral theology both participates in and marks the end of the grand unifying narratives. From that perspective we must also read the planning and building imagery that Rahner presents us with – not as a definitive path to the future, but as an unstable option that could break down in the events of time.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore and Vanderbilt's Tumbleweed

Bonnie Miller-McLemore's *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* of 2012 differs both in perspective and method from Rahner's work. This becomes apparent in the foreword to the *Companion* as well as in a separate article by the handbook's editor, which attempts a self-definition of the discipline. Both will be the object of study in this chapter.

First of all, the foreword takes into account the developments of theology *and* the study of religion in English-speaking academia. Miller-McLemore attributes the shift away from a mere application of dogma to developments that happened outside the religion-related disciplines. Educators in professions such as law or nursing became aware that

> the expert practitioner in the professions possesses a kind of wisdom that escapes the quantifiable, technical, rule-bound restrictions of theory alone (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 2).

At the same time, theology itself increasingly turned towards the practical wisdom of communities under the influence of Latin American liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez (cf. ibid., p. 2).[1] This led to a worldwide rise of new approaches and study programs that testified to the discipline's pluralism. Yet,

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1 As with all positions that focus on the community, e.g. community organising – as described in the chapter on (142) –, there is the danger of losing both the greater systemic perspective as well as that of the individual. The latter has been a focus point in the controversy between the Catholic magisterium and liberation theology.

few publications in practical theology have marked this progress. Many previous overview books have had a homogeneous authorship and a largely intradisciplinary audience (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 4).

The multi-faceted nature of the discipline makes it difficult, Miller-McLemore argues, to write a concise handbook. Her attempt is influenced by the fundamental question that she rediscovered for herself during the establishment of a new Ph.D. program *Teaching for Ministry* at Vanderbilt University: "What is practical theology anyway?" Miller-McLemore's answer defines the shape of the *Companion*:

> Practical theology refers to an *activity* of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday, a *method* or way of understanding or analyzing theology in practice used by religious leaders and by teachers and students across the theological curriculum, a *curricular area* in theological education focused on ministerial practice and subspecialties, and, finally, an *academic discipline* pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to support and sustain these first three enterprises. Each understanding points to different spatial locations, from *daily life* to *library* and *fieldwork* to *classroom*, *congregation*, and *community*, and, finally, to *academic guild* and *global context* (ibid., p. 5).

Three aspects are noteworthy for our understanding of the structure of the handbook project. Firstly, from an epistemological perspective, there is a strong focus on believers and (reflective) pastoral practitioners, making the case for a strong link between the pastoral profession and the university subject. This is in line with Rahner's focus on the church community and its pastoral leader. Secondly, from the aspect of method, the order in which the discipline is introduced seems reversed compared to Rahner's handbook. The *Companion* starts with activities in the daily life of believers, then moves on to a methodological analysis, and at the end of the book seeks to integrate that into the history of the academic discipline. Taking the analysis of lifeworlds as a starting point shows a prominent sociological influence which other scholars of the discipline have shown as well. Thirdly, from the perspective of space, Miller-McLemore assigns specific locations to each area of the handbook – from the congregation hall to the academic library. Rahner turns to the specific location of the congregation as well, assigning academia as one location among many is a shift in perspective that underlines the insight that theology must become self-reflexive, as

e.g. Regina Polak put it, when she demanded that before the classical three step analysis – see, judge, act – comes another step: orientation.

> Therein we clarify in which situation (where and when), with which interests, from which perspective, with which previous experiences, and for whom ("option") the practice of the present is being reflected* (Polak 2015a, p. 72).

This allows us also to see the restricted viewpoint of theology in academia in terms of gender, race, nationality, educational background, and many more aspects we must be aware of[2] – especially if we remind ourselves of theology's option for the poor and the marginalised (cf. Polak 2015b, p. 84).

After the foreword, part one begins with the examination of "activities of daily life" (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 7). It encompasses mundane situations, such as eating, drinking, etc. These are analysed from a specific perspective, namely as "sites where faith breaks down and people struggle" (ibid., p. 9), not just in the private, but also in the public sphere (cf. ibid., p. 8). Even the naming of these activities in the gerund-form (-ing) is theologically motivated, as God himself is portrayed in Exodus 3:14 as the "becoming" God (ibid., p. 8). The chapter on eating for instance begins with the gathering at the author's family table (cf. Bass 2012, p. 51) and then moves on to discuss the chasm between God's wish that all be fed and the broken and exclusionary food system in the United States today, asking in the end how Christian wisdom can contribute to changing the situation (cf. ibid., p. 58). It is a refreshing perspective, but it runs the risk of subsuming the worldly experience all too soon under a Christian narrative, even if it is not the narrative of self-assurance for a theological discipline, as we discussed earlier, but that of individual faith stories. Miller-McLemore's definition of the nature of practical theology is telling in this regard:

> [P]ractical theology is a general way of doing theology concerned with the embodiment of religious belief in the day-to-day lives of individuals and communities. [...] It focuses on the tangible, the local, the concrete, and the embodied (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 14).

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2 Miller-McLemore names several "isms", that mar theological analysis: e.g. sexism, classism, "Christocentrism" (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 9). She is also aware that every book project in its selection of authors repeats marginalisations of different communities who are excluded from the project (cf. ibid., p. 15).

However, we need to add that "belief" can also mean relying on non-religious narratives which help us make sense of the world and our daily lives. Miller-McLemore's definition could profit from a sideview on the sociology of everyday life (cf. Schütz and Luckmann 1972) and a critique of everyday belief systems (cf. Lefebvre 1987; Henkel 2021a).

A Point of Culmination

The focus on the embodied harks back to a discussion that already surrounded the establishment of Vanderbilt University, the place where Bonnie Miller-McLemore holds the chair of *Religion, Psychology, and Culture* at the university's Divinity School. But instead of retelling the story of the Vanderbilt's foundation as a Methodist university in the South of the United States in the years after the Civil War, I want to localise and materialise the discussion, linking the aspects as they pertain to practical theology's role between theory and praxis. I will do this by highlighting a recent addition to the university's sculpture collection.

Tumbleweed (1987) by the American artist Mark di Suvero is a 9-meter-high steel structure. First set up in the Marcy Sculpture Garden adjacent to the *San Diego Museum of Art*, where it was set against Spanish Revival architecture in the background, the artwork was acquired by Vanderbilt university in 2015 and now sits on the green lawn of the university campus in front to the arts building, a modern, nondescript, red-brown brick structure.

Figure 3: Bryan Costales (2011): Installation views of Tumbleweed at Marcy Sculpture Garden / Clark Williams (2013): Installation view of Tumbleweed at Vanderbilt University

Photographer Bryan Costales documented the installation of "Tumbleweed" at its original site for *bcx.news*. Note the joints and cuts in the material. Clark Williams has photographed the current site at *Vanderbild University* for the university's news page when the sculpture was installed on campus.

Tumbleweed

The name of the sculpture guides the viewing experience, as the structure indeed resembles a tumbleweed bush, albeit reduced in form to just seven branches with a knot at the centre and greatly magnified.[3] The name evokes images of the lonesome prairie, which is absent on the green campus. As an artist who has overseen most of his installations, di Suvero was particularly interested in the constellations of his sculptures with their surrounding land- or waterscapes (cf. Collens 2015, pp. 8–9). Moreover, the environment presents a challenge for sculptures of such enormous size:

> Du to their weight and size, di Suvero's large-scale sculptures have relied heavily on the realities of space and gravity for their very composition. (Lawrence 2015, p. 22)

The contrast between university campus and prairie landscape points to the fundamental controversy that surrounded the establishment of the university. The initial plan was conceived by a group of progressive Methodist leaders who saw the Southern churches lacking an intellectual epicentre to educate its ministers,[4] especially if the churches wanted to cater to the growing educated middle class in the cities.

> For these clerics, the church should be the region's social and religious flagship – a dignified and glorious symbol of a morally upright and regenerated South. The supposition of the progressives was that in order to expand their mission beyond their traditional (but not monolithic) rural and plain folk constituency and evangelise to the rich and the middle class, as required by the Gospel, southern Methodism must have a more educated ministry. (Bishop 2011, p. 149)

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3 Several other of di Suvero's sculptures have similar resemblances, e.g. *New Star* (1986-87) and *Will* (1994) (Collens, Lawrence, and Choi 2015, pp. 126–127, 142–143).

4 A noteworthy parallel to the establishment of pastoral theology in Austria one century earlier in 1774, as mentioned above on page 28.

On the other side of the debate stood those who believed in the tradition of Methodism as a religion of the spiritual revival movement,[5] where preachers were called forward by God's spirit and, when found suitable by the elders, started preaching regardless of a college education. Rather, the education of the new cleric took place on horseback, riding through the prairie to remote rural settlements under the auspices of an experienced preacher.

> Traditionalist southern Methodists believed that a preacher, regardless of his educational background, should undertake a self-directed course of study while riding a rural circuit under the direction of an elder preacher who served as a kind of mentor. According to Methodist tradition, preachers were to "proclaim their own experience of conversion [...] in language understandable to their fellows." (Bishop 2011, p. 149)

The proponents of both positions, Bishop George Pierce for the traditionalists and Bishop Holland McTyerie for the progressives, fought out a heated battle over the importance of theological education as opposed to the praxis of preaching. It was only when McTyerie met Cornelius Vanderbilt in New York and was able to secure a large endowment from one of the richest entrepreneurs in the United States that the progressive side got the upper hand and was eventually able to open the university in 1875. Despite the troubled history with the Southern Episcopal Methodist Church that eventually ended in a split between university and church, the initial plans to complement the praxis of preachers with a profound education were successful and led to Methodism increasingly embracing the middle class. But with that the church also left behind some of its traditional membership, especially poor sharecroppers and African Americans (ibid., p. 161).

One has to be aware of this complex history of intellectual progressivism, wealthy donors, and a growing middle class in the cities if one wants to understand the long way Miller-McLemore's *Companion* project has come. The author herself is aware of that when she rebukes practical theology's self-portrayal as a marginalised discipline, outside of the circles of power. Not only has practical theology gained an increased importance over the years but it is also itself a part of the "modern university's pecking order, where mathematicians look down

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5   Which traces its history back to theology of John Wesley, who led the reform movement that broke with the Church of England.

on physicists, who look down on engineers, who look down on contractors and janitors" (Miller-McLemore 2012b, p. 9).[6] As such, one must be aware not to reverse the "clerical paradigm" that marred the discipline in its beginnings and turn it into an "academic paradigm" that makes us "devalue all things *clerical* or *practical* as lesser than all things *academic*, despite everyone's best intentions" (ibid., p. 13).

Much could be said about the role of praxis in practical theological research, but with *Tumbleweed* I want to direct our attention to the equally important role of praxis in the educational context. In her chapter on *Contextual Education* in Miller-McLemore's handbook, Emily Click tells the story of a young pastoral professional witnessing a child abuse case and grappling with an adequate response when she learns that the reaction patters taught to her in university might have adverse consequences in the field. Even more insightful than the (fictional) situation is the response of the student's class which refuses to tell her

> what she should have done differently. Instead, she discovers that the real work of reflection involves paying attention to complex layers of meaning that are embedded in these situations. [...][That] process teaches her how to weave a thread of theological interpretation through those many layers. (Click 2012, p. 351)

I want to focus on the *layered* nature of the relation between doing praxis and theoretical reflection that goes beyond a simple one-way application of theoretical insights to practice. For that I want to use *Tumbleweed* with its reminiscence of the bushes in the desert here as a powerful placeholder for "riding the circuit," i.e. repeatedly going through a multi-layered praxis, which escapes a complete analysis, as part of a theological education, even though students spend the majority of their time in an academic environment.

But the sculpture is more than a reminiscence of the wilderness. In its construction the artist himself reflects on the role of practice, or more precisely, the relation between doing art as both conceptualising and crafting. Di Suvero has always worked directly with his material, cold-bending the massive steel bars

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6 The author here quotes John Burkhart who argues that in the Protestant tradition Schleiermacher faced the same doubts when he tried "to carve out space for theological study as knowledge oriented toward practice" (Miller-McLemore 2012b, p. 9; cf. Burkhart 1993)

without the aid of models or drawings (Lawrence 2015, p. 19). The artist begins a dialogue with the material, or, as he puts it:

> When you're working your pieces you chew them. They are worn and that makes all the difference in the world. (Rydingsvard and Suvero 2015, p. 61)

Thus, *Tumbleweed* reminds practical theology of this fundamental link to praxis, not as a naïve showcasing of voices from the field, but as the beginning of an intimate dialogue with practice and its many shapes. This dialogue happens not only in theology and ministry but also in other disciplines which are in between conceptualising and crafting – architecture for instance.

Constructive Fragments

The features that unify many of Mark di Suvero's sculptures, besides the material (2.5-centimetres thick steel) and the colour – RAL 3000 fire-red, a bright colour reminiscent of Henri Martisse's use of bright colours as well as Jean-Baptist Camille Corot's use of the colour red (Lawrence 2015, p. 30) – are the gaps and missing bolts in the joints, the strange and contorted angles of the heavy steel beams, and the rough edges where the torch has cut through the steel. At first, the material seems heavy, reminding the viewer not only of industry but also of industrialised warfare, just as the steel bars at the Herder building.

> Many of his materials [...] were developed to aid in the advancement of our cities, our commerce, our military and our architecture. But di Suvero's interest in these materials runs counter to their intended uses, and is indicative of his humanism (ibid., p. 14).

These sculptures are not utilitarian supports for the needs of industrialists or militarists, rather, di Suvero has turned industrial production on its head, using its logical methods and materials to create works that invite play and contemplation (ibid., p. 14). In fact, most of the sculptures seem playful and almost levitating, despite that their construction is statically sound. Not even all of the

steel feet touch the concrete foundations, as if the sculpture is about to roll off in the wind.[7]

Adding to that perception of playfulness is the fact that in *Tumbleweed*, as in many other sculptures, di Suvero exhibits loose joints and material imperfections. In a conversation with di Suvero, the sculptor Ursula von Rydingsvard sees a certain "rawness in the kind of nuts and bolts that you use, and in the way in which you put things together" (Rydingsvard and Suvero 2015, p. 61).

With this observation I want to look at the *Companion*. While we can find many shortcomings in terms of a clear disclosure of its theoretical foundations – despite its repeated insistence on the concrete and tangible as well as the work of Don Browning (cf. e.g. Browning 1991) – and in terms of its maybe all too strong tie to the praxis of pastoral workers and students of Christian theologies, one of the great strengths of Miller-McLemore's book is that we get a glimpse at the process of theological reflection. We read how the authors bolt their theology together in their daily lives, as many chapters begin with personal stories where the authors experienced a situation that spurned their reflection on the topic. As Miller-McLemore points out, this is deliberate, as the authors were specifically asked "to ground their chapters in case study, concrete illustration, or thick detail" (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 14).

On a meta-level we can argue that the *Companion* follows a different epistemological construction principle than the other handbooks. It brings observations from the lived praxis to the table and then lets the reader follow along as the authors try to make sense of them – as they, like the steel artist,[8] work with and sometimes against the physical forces of real world experience. It is an open and ongoing process, within which the joining together of different fragments becomes visible. Like with di Suvero's *Tumbleweed*, these seemingly loose joints make the work almost playful to read, even if it does not shun away from "heavy" topics, such as racism, sexism, colonialism, or classism.

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7 Several of di Suvero's sculptures are actually designed to move in the wind, despite their weight.

8 Mark di Suvero openly talks about the hard work involved in constructing, moving, and assembling his pieces. He was even almost fatally crushed in the process of assembling one of his sculptures (cf. Knoll 1990).

On another level we could argue that this forming through assembling process[9] is a contrast programme to the planning and executing way of doing pastoral work that Rahner displayed.

The one thing that we might miss in this endeavour of constructively playing with fragments is the "knot", made of a red steel plate at the centre of most of Mark di Suvero's sculptures. It prevents the diverging steel arrows from from falling or flying apart. Finding such a point of convergence is difficult from the perspective of the sculptor. Many of di Suvero's sculptures are "open structures," lacking a "central core," and instead "invite viewers to pass under, through, around [...][them], viewing them from many angles" (Lawrence 2015, p. 30) and thus inviting "engagement and play" (ibid.). The artist nonetheless manages to join the different pieces of steel together without creating a massive fixed core – which, in my perspective, is one of the most remarkable achievements of his sculptures.

Likewise, finding such a point is also challenging for the theologian. Especially as one works with constellations of material artefacts, architecture, philosophy, sociology, the arts, and also theology. In our quest of trying to find a theoretical point of culmination that holds our observations together and is yet open so that our readers might "pass under, through, around" it we might fail. Our positions might not stand the structural forces that arise between our fragments, but we must not miss out on that opportunity; even a breaking down of our constellations would be a learning after all.

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9   I will come back to form-finding processes later in the book.

Current Projects on Embodied, Localised Thing-Theology

Bonnie Miller-McLemore's handbook is a strong advocate for a practical theology that starts with the tangible, localised, and embodied. I want to finish my overview of the two handbooks not with the demand for a third or fourth handbook, but rather I want to show how new approaches in practical theology emerge from – or are sometimes set against – these handbooks. I pay particular attention to those projects that tie in with my own work.

Miller-McLemore's attention to the daily lives of Christians links her work back to efforts that seek to establish praxis theory as a comprehensive methodological basis for practical theology. Julia Koll, for instance, follows Theodore Schatzki when she argues that a new understanding of praxis is needed that

(a) follows the bodily and material turn by "emphasising the bodily nature of the social,"* namely that a praxis, first of all, consists of routinised bodily movements which also incorporate artefacts that are used according to specific rules (cf. Koll 2019, p. 70);

(b) relativises the precedence of rational processes, of texts, and of other forms of written or spoken communication and looks at forms of knowledge that are based on an incorporate knowledge of how to "deal with" artefacts and persons (cf. ibid., p. 70);

(c) includes a time index in its analysis since practices can also subside and vanish (cf. ibid., p. 70).

Koll encourages practical theology as a discipline to take on another perspective that sees religion not as a disposition but as something that is learned, repeatedly practiced, and shared with others (cf. ibid., p. 78). This style of thinking

helps us, the author argues, to see the little things, "making coffee or delivering the parish newsletter [...] as practices with their own individual [theological] quality"* (cf. Koll 2019, pp. 81–82).

Complementary approaches that focus more on the artefacts than on the persons that routinely handle them can be found in the material approaches in ethnography, e.g. the work of Peter Bräunlein in museum studies, which traces the history of archaeology and cultural anthropology through the artefacts displayed in museums and university collections (Bräunlein 2012).[1] The study of religion has likewise contributed to an increased attention to artefacts, with Sonia Hazard criticising that current approaches are mainly anthropocentric, focusing on humans handling things rather than the things themselves. She introduces the position of new materialism[2] as distinct from that of the mainstream of religious studies in that

(a) "[u]nlike the symbolic approach, new materialists insist that matter cannot be reduced to or seen as exchangeable with text", i.e. the "power and value" (Hazard 2013, p. 67) of artefacts is not determined by the human subject that handles and describes them;
(b) new materialists thus "decentre" the human subject, no longer limiting the discipline to the sensing and thinking body of humans alone, and argue that we as humans with our bodies, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the microbes that live with us are also "assemblages of things, human and nonhuman" (ibid., p. 67);
(c) new materialism argues that those human-non-human assemblages as they exist over time in history cannot be broken apart to only look at e.g. the human body or the built environment detached from one another (cf. ibid., p. 68).

All this makes the study of religion more complicated, as such an approach is anti-reductionist in nature. But it also furthers Bonnie Miller-McLemore's project to look into the details of daily existence, the "sites where faith breaks

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1 Bräunlein has also contributed to a material turn in the sociology of religion (Bräunlein 2017).
2 A later chapter in this book will focus on the basic positions in new materialism and its relation to theology, cf. page 83.

down and people struggle" (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 7). Inken Mädler is one of the practical theologians who has undertaken this deep dive into the world of things. She does this ethnographically from the perspective of the material culture of everyday life, providing thick descriptions of things that her informants hold dear – a bible, a secretary, a ring, a computer, or a TV set – theologically overcoming the focus on a critique of consumer culture towards a phenomenological appreciation of things as part of a living network within which humans exist.

> Recognising the material environment, which shapes everyday life-situations, as well as serving as a visible and tangible model of them, contributes both methodologically and content-wise to a widening of the theological scope and enables us to extend practical theology phenomenologically.* (Mädler 2006, p. 357)

Mädler concludes her exploration with the argument that artefacts are relevant for sacramental theology, as well as for the theory of education and the liturgy of special occasions (e.g. funerals). She chooses the term "transfigurations"* to characterise the relation between humans and things.

> The glorification of the self in light of transfigured objects and the glorification of objects in light of the transfigured self is in its mutuality neither idolisation nor fetish. The theological ban over transfiguration would be only justified if it would promote a contortion into one's self and cultivate what Luther called "homo incurvatus in se ipsum". That this is not the case and that especially the things we hold dear function as signs for relationality par excellence was proven in this work. [...] Found treasures, presents, heirlooms, and collections stand as transfigurations not for themselves but for the being in relation of those whose extended self is configured by them. With these things humans embed themselves in the relational structures of their existence and hold themselves symbolically present, but they do not worship them (ibid., pp. 374–375).*

Thus we could see Mädler's work as populating the sites where humans exist – which Miller-McLemore visits throughout the *Companion* – with the objects that give a more detailed account of human existence in relation.

The aspect of "site" then finally brings me from the human and the artefact to the spatial dimension of practical theology, which I have already mentioned in my assessment of the handbooks and in my choice of specific sites to locate the handbooks' authors. In his book *Sakrotope*, which is a study of the material dimension of religious practices, Torsten Cress brings together both the place and its specific materiality in the study of religion. Looking at, among others, pilgrim churches in Jerusalem, the author argues that we need to widen our spectrum to include both "spatial arrangements [...] as well as figures, images, smells, colours, or light. Talking about a Sakrotop means emphasising both the performative as well as the material dimension of a religious context" (Cress 2019, p. 10).* An exemplary question would be "How do the elements of the interior of a church help a worshipper to collect herself and focus on the prayer?" (ibid., p. 11)* While Cress situates himself in the material turn within the sociology of religion, like the authors mentioned previously, he focusses mainly on practices and spaces that can be identified prima-facie as Christian.[3] As we will see, my own approach is in line with the material and spatial turns that the previously mentioned authors took. However, I will start from places that prima facie have nothing to do with religion.

Attention to Details

At the end of this introduction I want to go back to Rolf Zerfaß' question of "where do we stand?"[4] as practical theologians. After walking through the portrait gallery of important contributions to the discipline and ending with a mul-

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3   And with that his work relates to and opens up new perspectives in the practical theological discourse on sites, e.g. Sonja Keller's dissertation on the reuse of church buildings in urban areas, which also relies on qualitative methods to understand these Christian sites, while at the same time developing an interdisciplinary understanding of "sacred" space (cf. Keller 2016).

4   The question has also been the subtitle of the German edition of Francis Fukuyama's book *The End of History and the Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992). Fukuyama's thesis of a dominance of the Western, i.e. American, democratic model after the fall of the Soviet empire has been widely contested and later adapted by the author himself (Jordan 2009). The debate serves as a reminder that progress narratives are also influential in the history of science and that retelling the story of a discipline, such as practical theology, benefits from a narratological as well as a power analysis.

titude of approaches, I perceive an ever-increasing need for practical theology to take on other, outside perspectives.

This leads us from a church and practice centred approach back to a philosophical perspective from the outside, especially philosophy as a "cultural science"* that helps to discover the unchartered cultural territories of the present time (cf. Bucher 2002, p. 181).[5] In another essay on the perspectives of the discipline today, Bucher reminds pastoral theology that it must make its discoveries "in the ruins of the broken power systems"* (Bucher 2001, p. 195) and that in order to do so, it must not harbour master plans for the church in the world but "love for the small places"* (ibid., p. 195).

Thus I want to end this introductory chapter with a perspective that deviates from the pastoral planning fantasies that many church officials still harbour and which echoes in the handbooks as well, be that under the label the self-fulfilment of the church (Rahner) or the focus on an improvement of pastoral work (Miller-McLemore). As I worked on my dissertation on Catholic migration advocacy, the question arose as how to deal with voices from my interviews that deviated from the social ethics literature and church documents on migration. I found the approach of OTTMAR FUCHS particularly helpful for this conundrum as he is aware that as theologians we are both concerned with the long history of a faith community and our findings from empirical research. In this situation we must not pit tradition and praxis against each other. Fuchs rather argues that praxis could help us to rediscover tradition in the sense that it helps us "to see new approaches within which forgotten or ostracised positions become alive again"* (Fuchs 2000, p. 209). I owe as much of that sensibility for such positions to Ottmar Fuchs as to Christian Bauer and his "theology of the people,"* which argues along similar lines that we must cultivate a "mixed discourse"* (Bauer 2013, p. 83). Bauer's "theology of the people"* derives inspiration not only from his work on Marie-Dominique Chenu but also from a pivotal moment in the history of theology in 1970: At a congress of the magazine *Concilium*, lay members of the audience protested against the dominance of clerical theologians: "Subdued forms of knowledge revolted and demanded a voice. 1970 was something like the 1968 for academic theology"* (Bauer 2010, p. 59).

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5   In this book, my point of departure lies more within the realm of cultural studies – informed by philosophy.

In my dissertation I have taken the quotation by Fuchs as an invitation to re-read theological positions on migration informed by the perspectives of those concerned with the topic on a daily basis. Here, however, I am concerned with the way we can discover such positions in the first place. "God is drawn towards the details,"* Fuchs writes in another article,

> he does not become human in some large collective but in one individual hu-man being at one specific point in the history of the world. But there his in-culturation happens to the deepest and to the greatest extent [...]. Incultura-tion of the gospel has more to do with a deep-reaching exemplarity than with a far-reaching superficiality. Especially in societies where supra-regional su-perstructures in media, economy, and information technology are given pri-ority [...], we need to pay attention to what we call interpersonal primary cul-tures* (Fuchs 1995, p. 74).

Fuchs argues that theology must search for resources *in* these cultures, ac-knowledging that God is already there. Turning to the role of pastoral theology, Fuchs writes:

> Such an attitude of pastoral could be called a *culture-ecological* pastoral: an activity that starts with [...] individual *and* social creative [...] processes of hu-man beings and does not ignore one single salvific iota of them: neither in a society nor between [societies]* (ibid., p. 76).

What the author applies to the processes of the inculturation of the gospel in the European context, and the demands of an intra- and intercultural exchange, can also be applied to practical theological work in general. It must be attentive not just to the silenced voices but also to the hidden details. One could argue that pastoral theology must develop what Rolf Zerfaß demands for the teach-ing of the discipline: a "curiosity, willingness to be surprised, interest in the individual case, attention for the irregular, for a deviation from the rule,"* as well as "a fundamental option for the diversity of causes, motivations, values behind human acting, a distrust against the onedimensionality of vulgar the-ological worldviews"* (Zerfaß 1974, p. 175). This is done not just by discovering new voices "from the field" but also by taking a new look at the "field" from as many perspectives as possible, in particular the often overlooked material side of human life.

I want to illustrate this with an example from urban planning: To find out who is welcomed on a city plaza and who is excluded we could (and should) conduct interviews with residents and people passing through that area on a daily basis. But we could also look for traces of people und uncommon signs of use. This might lead us to discovering the score marks of skateboards on the stairs and railings of the plaza and to the discovery that the culture of skateboarding, and its physical interaction with the built environment, can give us a completely new perspective on urban planning (cf. Skateboarding and Architecture in Snyder 2017). Ultimately, both the skaters and the researcher working with them ask the same question: Where does inspiration come from and how can we learn to see our surroundings differently?

This Habilitation as One Particular Lens

The following proposal is my own contribution to this change of perspective, which I understand neither as a paradigm shift nor as a gradual evolution from the path the discipline took over the last 60 years. I rather perceive my work as a different perspective, or, as the architectural filmmaker Heinz Emigholz puts it, a slightly "canted vision" (Sicinski 2018) on the things that seem familiar to us.

Methodologically the following parts II and III can be read then as an interpretive lens, following Jan Kruse and his suggestion for qualitative researchers to read their material though different "analytical lenses"* (Kruse 2014, p. 493).[6] As such, it helps us to see the classical topoi of pastoral theology in a new light, as I will demonstrate in part IV when I look at the parish community and ask what its buildings and their materiality can tell us about the evolution of ecclesiastic communities in the 20th and 21st century.

But the following text can also be seen as an extension of what I started here with the types of practical theologians, their discipline-defining book projects, and the locations where these handbooks were conceived. It is a reminder that

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6   In my dissertation I have discussed Jan Kurse's approach in greater detail (cf. Henkel 2017, pp. 117–123). It is noteworthy that the idea of analytical lenses also links back to Herbert Blumer's "sensitizing concepts" and ultimately to the "levels of attention" that grounded theory approaches and other close-reading methodologies employ in their analysis of qualitative data.

practical theology starts with a "rift"* (Bucher 2001), in that praxis is no longer taken for granted, that we must reflect on praxis, and that ultimately our reflection must become self-reflexive as well. My book contributes another reflection to the ones found in and around the handbooks. It thus partakes in all of the above. It is a bit of the bent steel bar at *Herder* as well as the *Tumbleweed* sculpture and the turn to the experience of the preacher riding the circuit. It participates likewise in Karl Rahner's futurology and Bonnie Miller-McLemore's idea of living out the brokenness of the gospel and the world. It is an attempt to change our perspective.

On that basis then we can now proceed towards a realm that at first glance has few points of contact with the field of pastoral theology. The reader might expect a look at churches, religious community centres or parish schools at this point. But to train material sensibility in the 21st century, there are other "cathedrals" which are much more important for current societies. A digital society has become increasingly dependent on technology and communication companies and the products that emerge from their laboratories. At these sites I want to develop a material sensitivity in the following part. And not only that, I also want to argue that materiality has a political and potentially liberating perspective which can change our perspectives as historians of progress and as theologians. So while a journey to the United States in the 1960s might seem odd for a practical theologian, there is a lot to learn from the *electric laboratory*.

Part II
The Electric Laboratory

An Introduction to a Theology of Material and Space

> This is all we have: the cut grass on the front lawn, the cool shade the building throws onto it, the heavy steel bars on the front doors, the sound of our shoes on the marble floor of the lobby, the smell of solder from an engineer's cubicle, the silent movement of men and women, pieces of hushed conversations drifting up from the cafeteria, a ray of sun shining through the upper windows onto a forgotten office plant.
>
> *the author*

As we have seen in the first part, practical theology can develop new perspectives on its own disciplinary history by looking at the buildings within which its handbooks were forged. But in the 21st century such learning processes must not start necessarily within academia. They could also emerge from the world outside that is rapidly changing and that is increasingly dominated by information technology companies and their products and services as the motors for innovation and social change. Thus I argue in this second part that practical theology can learn both from the history of *technology* laboratories as the cathedrals of the 20th and 21st century and, as we will see in the third part, from the rise of *social* laboratories, which promote an open and networked approach to the world.

Before we can dive into these areas, we need however first to substantiate why our specifically material (and architectural) perspective finds resonances within theology. This is by no means insignificant as, from a theological perspective, the increased sensibility towards the material world brings with it

a shift in method when assessing the technological changes we will be concerned with. This becomes apparent when one engages in value judgements of what constitutes beneficial and detrimental developments. Where do such values, according to which theologians judge and church officials – or even politicians, companies, and the public – act, come from? Universal human rights, Martha Nussbaum's capability approach, Catholic Social Teaching? This part of the book proposes a different route in that it first of all seeks to understand in which spaces change originates and tries to discover how the material world is dealt with in these spaces. From these discoveries emerge new theological contributions.

The word *emerge* is important, because this and the following chapters do not seek the fundamentals for a good life beyond the material realities but within them. They employ a theological method we could call utopian materialism, transcendence from immanence, or: taking incarnation as seriously as intellectually possible by seeing the potential of both the material and the social realities without prematurely integrating them into a fixed system of thought. This approach thus stands in contrast to others at the intersection of sociology and theology, but it does not stand in isolation: the practical theory of Bruno Latour with its network of human and material actors, the theorists of both dialectic and *new* materialism, and also the front figures of a spatial turn as well as a praxeological turn in theology can and will be called up to the witness box.

Moreover, there is a strand of material sensibility throughout the history of theology. In the Judaeo-Christian world this is rooted in a double movement of God towards the world; Both creation and incarnation testify to a radical engagement and a radical solidarity of God with both humans and the world of things they live in. This fundamental perspective has influenced theology enormously.

A Spatial Turn with Material Implications in Systematic Theology

As a discipline closely related to pastoral theology, systematic theology has dealt for a long time with the theoretical implications that come with the inclusion of the world around us, from Melchior Cano's *loci theologici (alieni)* to the pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council. More recently, the *Topological Dog-*

matics of Hans-Joachim Sander, which focuses on the importance of place –
from urban areas to pilgrims' ways – but also has significant material under-
tones.

The preliminary positioning that Sander sets out is a de-centring of the
Cartesian position, a move away from the individual self as the unshaken bas-
tion of self-assurance and towards the acceptance of plurality and uncertainty
as factors outside the self. Sander sees these outside forces with the Second
Vatican Council as a *sign of the times*, which present a powerful theology of self-
relativisation which "we cannot escape theologically. It is as a *locus theologicus*
a source for self-relativisations which further both Christian belief and its talk
about God"* (Sander 2019, p. 21).

I want to highlight two ways in which Sander addresses the problem that we
cannot escape the fact that modernity shakes the foundations of our identity.
The first is the turn towards places[1] which enable us to see self-relativisation not
as a threat to but as a source for growth. With Michel Foucault, Sander intro-
duces heterotopias and contrasts them to utopian spaces:

> [Heterotopias] have a different content than the utopias that were so typ-
> ical for modernity. While non-places allow self-empowerment through [...]
> exclusion, which abstract from real places and sites, real places do not allow
> that. They corner us with voiceless contexts, which [...] can not retract to non-
> positionality* (ibid., p. 48).

In these places, new discoveries become possible because we cannot escape
what is happening and instead simply retract to dreams of a perfect utopia.
Sander argues that our discoveries in such real places are radically new. He
refers to Charles Pierce's concept of abduction, which happens when a surpris-
ing fact is not explained away but, through the praxis of "musing", is allowed to
take our thoughts to a new territory.[2]

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1   There is a difference between the English words *place* and *space*. Marc Augé differentiates
    between nondescript space and places with "identity, relation, and history"* (Augé 2012,
    p. 83). I base my translation of the single German word *Ort* on my own judgement as to
    which side of the distinction the author's intention falls.
2   Sander mentions a biblical example where something radically new changes our thought
    patterns: It is the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35.

The second way to address the shaking up of our identity concepts in modernity is for Sander the idea that nature is not only one of the main sources for such self-relativisations but also the starting point for the process of surprise → musing → abduction → a new view of God and the world. According to Sander, this is a powerful resource in the Christian discourse on creation.

> [B]elief in the creator [begins] where powerlessness lurks in the discourses about the objectivity of nature [...] [. There man] is confronted with a claim to power which he can neither subjectively nor objectively evade. [...][F]aith trusts in God as the way through this powerlessness [...] [I]t presupposes that this powerlessness – together with God and in the face of nature – is a resource to find those abductions that resist the destructive grasp in the discourses about nature* (Sander 2019, p. 104).

Being on this earth is neither a temporary state through which we as quietly as possible transfer on our way to eternal salvation, nor is it a place we can ruthlessly dominate regardless of the consequences. We are tied to life on earth and yet at the same time we feel that there is something beyond. In the postscript at the end of this book, Sander refers to Karl Rahner and his book *Hörer des Wortes*, hearer of the word, in order to address that feeling: "The more utopian we look out into space, the more heterotopian the little blue planet looks back. In this 'more over' it becomes apparent that we cannot be content with our own place"* (ibid., p. 377).

What Sander suggests at the end of his book is a spatial re-reading of Rahner's idea that we are confronted with something that transcends our existence. Without going into the details of Sander's concept of first, second, and thirdspace, which he takes from Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja[3], it is important to note that through the confrontation with spaces, new insights open up. Sander's book reads as an invitation to discovery and, with Soja's book in hand, an intellectual and an empirical journey to places.

That idea of observation, sensibility, and abductive thinking is important for the materialistic approach in this book as well. The insight, that our engagement with the world can uncover places of self-relativisation adds to that.

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3   First space is the physical space, second space the conceived space, and third space the social space (cf. Soja 1996).

A Spatial Turn with Material Implications in Practical Theology

Practical theology itself has also cultivated a sense of place, not just as a source for theological knowledge, but also as a venue of engagement for justice. In his book *A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*, ERIC O. JACOBSON wants the reader to see public space in a new light and consider his or her own engagement for the city.

Jacobson designed his book as a practical guide to make the reader rediscover the world around him- or herself, not just via auto-ethnography but from the perspective of a Christian.

> Where are you? […] You may think that the question is hardly worth asking. But since "Where are you?" was the first recorded question that God asked, let's run with it a bit. Wherever you happen to be as you read this book, you are most likely in a place that we can call a built environment. So take a second to look around before reading further. Who thought this space through, and what can you discern about their values as you interact with it? Did they value community very much? How can you tell? Were they thinking of you as a person as a resource user, or as a consumer? (Jacobson 2012, p. 11)

The engagement with the built environment is not focused on architecture, or at least not primarily. Jacobson is rather interested in public spaces between buildings in the city and how this space, through the appropriation of the public, becomes "enacted space" (ibid., p. 18).

But Jacobson is not content with a new perception of public spaces, he also contributes a specifically Christian perspective, namely that of a "geography of rest" (ibid., p. 271). In this perspective he critically looks at the commercialisation of space which legitimises the presence of human beings only in their function as consumers. "Theologically, this is somewhat problematic, because God created us as creatures with inherent worth. We are 'very good' because we are in the image of God" (ibid., p. 272).

The Judaeo-Christian concept of the Sabbath deals with this problem in a new way – with Sander we could say that at this point the process of abduction begins – by introducing the command of rest which breaks through the logic of commercialised, i.e. "busy," space.

> Practising the Sabbath teaches us two important truths. We have inherent value because God made us and declared us good. Second, our confidence comes, not from our own capabilities, but from God's faithfulness (Jacobson 2012, p. 274).

This in turn leads to a different engagement with the built environment, namely by creating places of rest, where human beings are unconditionally accepted as they are and where peace, shalom, reigns. In Sander's words, these are the heterotopias: "Places that invite us to rest and to engage with one another and with the world that surrounds us without demanding that we give something productive in return can be described as places of shalom" (ibid., p. 275).

From that Jacobson derives his demand to find a new way to build cities[4] and in particular public spaces. These spaces stand in stark contrast to the zoned environments of the car-friendly city of modern 20th century architecture.

> If our public spaces are ugly or inconvenient, we learn tacitly that our value as human beings is minimal. The kinds of environments that have been built by functional zoning also tend to contradict the lessons we learn on the Sabbath (ibid., p. 276).

While I subscribe to Jacobson's ethnographic sensibility for the built environment, I want to challenge the notion to think of space only from the point of how it relates to humans. Space as a location in the material world is more than just a place where shalom for human beings is happening. On the contrary, this human-centric approach runs the risk of missing out on the richness of both natural and built environments.

I am therefore with those theologians who argue for a material turn to complement the spatial. Such a theology does not just take space and place seriously but also their material basis. This is why I am consciously sidestepping many aspects of the spatial debate and focus on materiality.[5] At the end of this book, I will come back to spaces and places (of justice) – but with a more profound insight into the richness of the material environment within which church happens.

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4 Jacobson observes that, while the garden stood at the beginning of creation, a city stands at its fulfilment (cf. Jacobson 2012, p. 19).

5 As the reference to e.g. Inken Mädler (Mädler 2006) at the beginning of the texts suggests, this book is understood as a contribution to the material debate within theology.

Universal Service: The Cathedral of Bell

North America has always been a bold and hopeful country, especially throughout the 20th century. It trusted in its scientists to develop atomic power, put a man on the moon, and provide universal communication for all. Looking at popular science magazines from that era, every page speaks of a utopian trust in scientific discovery, which was also always coupled with the commercialisation of inventions. The *Bell Telephone Company* with its claim "one company, universal service" and its status as a communication monopolist is a prime example of this approach and the main focus of this chapter.

Architects revelled in that spirit of scientific progress and corporate power as well. They built impressive structures, using new types of concrete, steel, and glass; and most of them were convinced that their architecture would also better society as a whole. A visible expression of this utopian and commercial spirit are the buildings of three of the largest American companies in the 20th century: General Motors, IBM, and Bell. They are impressive and futuristic designs that employed the latest materials and told the onlooker that inside scientists are solving society's problems – and also that they and the company that employed them were the ones to trust.

Figure 4: IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center, Eero Saarinen (1961)

Simon Greig's image of the research center can be found at *Wikimedia Commons* under the title "IBM Yorktown Heights".

One basis for that boldness is a specific approach to the material world. From the scientist's perspective it meant that matter could be discovered and, in the end, mastered; from the company's perspective it meant that progress was con-

trollable like a business plan; and from the architect's perspective it meant that an artistic vision could be totally realised. This is a powerful and yet dangerous approach since it neglects the inherent potential of the world around the laboratory, both of matter and of people.

Universal service and bold architecture both came to an end at the beginning of the 21st century. Bell's research campus is now a derelict monument as is the company. But the dreams of universal service and total architecture did not end. Therefore, we can learn a lot from looking at the mindset of both technology companies and their architects.

Laboratory Architecture as a Company's Vision to Shoot a Man to the Moon Every Day

The story of the *Bell Telephone Company* is one of unparallelled success as a communication monopoly, as Tim Wu tells in his book on the history of *Information Empires* in the United States (Wu 2011). For our purposes I want to retell parts of that story by looking at the company's research facilities and their development from a small shop to the corporate campus at Holmdel.

Figure 5: Bell Laboratories Murray Hill, Voorhees, Walker, Foley and Smith (1941)

A picture of the original Bell Laboratories can be found at *Wikimedia Commons*, described by the author "Blaxthos" as "Lucent Headquarters in Murray Hill", which indicates the complex process of mergers and acquisitions from *Bell* to *Alcatel Lucent* (and later to *Nokia*).

The first Bell laboratory was housed in a cramped building in the midst of New York on 463 West Street. It provided little space and forced researchers to work under provisional conditions. The building resembled a magnified version of the laboratories of the early inventors such as Thomas Edison or the radio pioneer Guglielmo Marconi. When the *Bell Telephone Company* finally decided to move out of that first building in 1941, they commissioned the architectural firm *Voorhees, Walker, Foley and Smith* to design a new research facility in rural New Jersey that would be the antithesis of the cramped space on West Street. For the first few years, the new Murray Hill campus was praised for its ample and relatively flexible space as well as its tranquil surroundings. But the research

quickly outgrew the building and the inflexibility to adapt the site to the researchers' needs posed another problem. Moreover, the company found that the laboratory campus' "conservative Colonial Revival design [...] conflicted with its modern use and mission" (Hamilton and Wilcox 2015, p. 15). However, the campus is still in use, at the time of writing this book, for the telecommunication company *Nokia* (Coupland 2014).

In 1957, the internationally acclaimed architect EERO SAARINEN and his firm were asked to design a new building for a yet undeveloped site at Holmdel in New Jersey (cf. Hamilton and Wilcox 2015, p. 15). Landscaping was commissioned to the influential landscape designer HIDEO SASAKI, an American of Japanese descent. Eero Saarinen – son of the famous Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen, who followed the rationalist design in the tradition of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (cf. ibid., p. 16) – was deemed the right man for the project because he had already designed other commercial research facilities, the most prominent being IBM's Thomas Watson Research Center in Yorktown Heights, New York, and the General Motors Technical Center in downtown Detroit. The type of architecture that the executives at Bell had in mind and that Eero Saarinen was willing to deliver was that of the neo-futuristic corporate campus. This type of facility "symbolized a postwar [sic!] ideology of corporate research that emphasized basic research and took the university as the appropriate model for organizing science" (Knowles and Leslie 2001, p. 1).

   With these developments, the research laboratory moved out of the city and into a secluded, tranquil environment – which was also heavily protected against any non-corporate visitors. As Knowles and Leslie point out, the corporate campus created "spatial and symbolic identity and an elaborate public stage" (ibid., p. 2) for the companies who could afford that. This architecture is not merely functional, it is a public manifesto.

Figure 6: Bell Laboratories Holmdel, Eero Saarinen (1957)

In 2007 The *Cultural Landscape Foundation* has written an article about a planned development on the site of Saarinen's Bell Laboratories building: "Bell Labs: Birthplace of the Transistor and Cell Phone at Risk". It includes historic images of the building from *Preservation New Jersey*, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving New Jersey's historic places.

The laboratory did not only display the modern outlook of the company to the public, it also gave "meaning and identity to [...] its occupants" (Knowles and Leslie 2001, p. 3). And that meaning took on the form of a bold statement: The telephone company wanted to position itself as the spearhead of futuristic research (cf. ibid., p. 25). In this respect it seems fitting that *Life* magazine in May 1956 called Eero Saarinen's corporate campus buildings a "Versailles of Industry" (ibid., p. 5). The fountain display at the large pond of the Holmdel site was also worthy of that description.

Eero Saarinen did not just build a corporate image. He also tried to understand what was going on in a research laboratory. "He wanted to give the researchers themselves a significant role in designing the new laboratory" (ibid., p. 20). He saw on the one hand the (windowless) office where the concentrated researcher would work without outside interferences. On the other hand he designed walkways with garden views for relaxation and a cafeteria for collegial exchange (cf. ibid., p. 25). The building thus also spoke about the type of researcher Bell employed: It was no longer the engineer who had risen up through the ranks but rather the university graduate who came from outside (cf. ibid., p. 4) and was freed from the economic pressures the company's executives and the workers at the manufacturing plants had to deal with.

Figure 7: Inside Holmdel's research laboratories

Photographer Ezra Stoller has documented the interior of Bell Laboratories in Holmdel. His images can be seen, for example, in Karrie Jacobs' 2016 article in *Architect Magazine*: "The Bargain That Revived Bell Labs".

If we look at the empty Holmdel facility today from the perspective of the historically mindful observer, we can still perceive the great promises that came with these structures. First of all, there is the steel and glass façade of the building itself with its striking windows:

> From the outside, they looked like a low-brightness mirror, either blinding the viewer or dissolving into the sky and the landscape, depending on the angle. At night the glass panels disappeared entirely, revealing the stunning building within (ibid., p. 25).

Such structures promise something to the onlooker. On the one hand they stand for the massive might of the building, but on the other hand they make it seem transparent, revealing what is going on inside. Moreover, the glass at Holmdel was not simply transparent but semi-reflective, a technologically advanced material – so much so that the company supplying the glass had difficulties to produce it in quantities large enough for the building – that speaks for a technologically advanced company (cf. Hamilton and Wilcox 2015, p. 25). For the researchers working there, the windows also meant a wide view over a carefully landscaped park. The environment that Saarinen and Sasaki created spoke of peace and tranquillity but also of the complete control over nature. Historically, Saarinen's building stands for a self-assured corporate America which saw commercial research in large pastoral surroundings as the way forward, not just for companies but for society as a whole.

Magazines such as *Popular Mechanics* praised this role of technology in society. They did not just inform their readers about technological change, they also envisioned a utopian future, where technology would connect people and free them from the chores of labour. This type of science fiction often emerged from a collaboration between authors and scientists themselves. But it also had a specific corporate agenda. Popular Mechanics, for instance, pictured total control and the privatisation of space: You do not need to leave your suburban home if you can order by picture phone – supplied, of course, by the friendly monopolist Bell. And you would not encounter people who were not able to afford these technological wonders.

Figure 8: Popular Mechanics, February 1950

> Take a look at a scan on *The Internet Archive* of a 1950 *Popular Mechanics* article (issue 2, pages 112-113) by Waldemar Kaempffert: "Miracles You'll See in the Next 50 Years".

Bell Labs at Holmdel is still the model after which many large corporations build today. And the ideology behind the building still inspires CEOs and architects, even if the buildings in the Silicon Valley look different from Saarinen's plan for Holmdel. With that in mind, Jon Gertner tells the story of Bell laboratories as the forerunner of the corporate campus utopias of today:

> [B]efore the country's best minds began migrating west to California's Silicon Valley, many of them came east to New Jersey, where they worked in capacious brick-and-glass buildings located on grassy campuses where deer would graze at twilight. At the peak of its reputation in the late 1960s, Bell Labs employed about fifteen thousand people, including some twelve hundred PhDs. Its ranks included the world's most brilliant (and eccentric) men and women. In a time before Google, the Labs sufficed as the country's intellectual utopia. It was where the future, which is what we now happen to call the present, was conceived and designed (Gertner 2012, p. 10).

The author argues that the scientists understood Bell laboratories more as an "institute of creative technology", where "the line between the art and science of what Bell scientists did wasn't always distinct" (ibid., p. 11), than as a facility to research commercially successful products for a telephone company. This self-description of the scientists working at Holmdel tells us about a specific spirit that must have been present during the laboratory's heydays; approaching vexing problems from new and creative angles and doing that with a seemingly limitless amount of both money and self-assurance. Technologies like the cell-phone system were indeed complex on so many levels that they would require not only the best minds but also a great amount of optimism to solve. A fitting testimony to that optimism to tackle even the largest-scale problems is the building itself. It stands in stark contrast to the tiny cramped labs in New York where "a few men in a hushed lab" (ibid., p. 237) developed the amplifier. Saarinen's big black box told the story of "large teams attacking knotty problems for years on end" (ibid., p. 237). Anthony Tyson, a researcher working at Holmdel for more than thirty years, spoke of entering the building as "entering a nurturing atmosphere" (Hamilton and Wilcox 2015, p. 23)[1].

The aspect that creativity originated in the enclosed space of the laboratory leads us to a more general assumption, namely that enclosed spaces interact with the people working there. The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs argued that "there is no collective memory which is not bound to a space". As Bernd Schäfers puts it, space is a fundamental category of social action, it is the a priori of the social, it structures our social interactions (cf. Schäfers 2014, p. 33).[2] If we

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1 The quote is taken from Hamilton and Wilcox' personal interview with Holmdel researcher Anthony Tyson.

2 While I agree with the a priori of space, I do not subscribe to the inherent notion, that it is merely a basis for something else.

consider research a social endeavour, both in the sense of researchers collaborating and in the sense of them relating to society, then the big black box at Holmdel was more than just a building, it was a cocoon that shielded academic research from the real world and its economic and its social problems. Even the nature that surrounded the building was a landscaped scene, a picture to behold rather than a wild and threatening force. At Holmdel the material of the building and the landscape corresponded to a general idea: that man is capable of controlling nature and bending the material his way.

The Architect as the Almighty Designer

Architecture participated in this bold American dream as Eero Saarinen and other corporate campus architects gave it a visible expression. One of the reasons why architecture can make statements so bold is because architects themselves see their work not as a form of applied engineering, but as art. As such, architecture expresses particular world views. Thus when talking about the corporate campus architecture, we should give prominence to the role of the architect – as they have an agenda of their own and sometimes even a greater societal or political program.

To illustrate this, I want to start not with a large structure but with a family home, albeit this house is far from simple. Frank Lloyd Wright's (FLW) Fallingwater House is not just a prime exemplar of Modern architecture, it is also a house that is integrated well into its natural surroundings. One particular part of the house shows to what lengths FLW went to respect nature: A beam bends around a tree that had been growing on site before (cf. Wiebe n.d.). This makes no sense from an engineer's perspective, in fact it introduces a structural weakness, but it shows that architects do notjust solve the problems of their clients. FLW provided the wealthy Kaufmann family with housing but he solved this task in a very specific way. As a follower of Unitarianism, influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, his designs reflect a deep respect for nature (cf. Nobles 2018). It is striking that we see FLW's world view not just expressed in the Unitarian temple he built but also in the mundane architecture of non-religious buildings – not just the spectacular Fallingwater House.

Figure 9: Fallingwater (Edgar J. Kaufmann House), Frank Lloyd Wright (1938)

> The detail of a beam bending around a tree at Fallingwater was uploaded to *Wikimedia Commons* by user "Daderot" under the title: "Fallingwater Detail".

Since architecture is not just problem solving it has always been part of a greater ethical debate within society and architectural critics have given a voice to the social responsibility of architects: John Ruskin chided architecture that used cheap ornaments and fake supports as deceiving the people and thus being inherently sinful – applying the theological concept of sin to architecture. Adolf Loos, himself an architect, condemned the ornamented buildings of Vienna as childish and wasteful. Loos voiced his criticisms because he acknowledged "that architects were engaged in the socio-economic enterprise of rebuilding a better world for an increasing population" (Lagueux 2004, p. 11). Bruno Taut, also an architect, suggested that an efficient architecture would improve social behaviour because "through the structure of the house" people can be moved "to a better behaviour in their mutual dealings and relationship with each other" (ibid., p. 12).

Modernist architects took this link between architecture and society very seriously. They did not just want to build for the working class, they wanted to mark a clear break with the bourgeois elitist architecture of the past. This is why not only the design of their buildings but also the materials used for their construction took on a specific meaning. The architectural historian Sigfried Giedion – who worked with LE CORBUSIER and introduced the International Style, or *Neues Bauen*, in Switzerland – wrote a chapter on morality and architecture in his book *Space, Time and Architecture*. He did this by praising in one part of the chapter influential modern architects, such as the predecessor of Bauhaus and inventor of the Art Nouveau, Henry Van de Velde, and praising in the other part the new building material ferroconcrete (cf. ibid., p. 13). If we look at Le Corbusier's large buildings, such as the Unité d' Habitation, we find what Giedion described: a bold statement by an architect for a no-frills architecture and the use of new materials, especially concrete structures. Both the architect's vision and the material serve the purpose of (positively) influencing, if not bettering, the lives of the building's users.

Figure 10: Unité d' Habitation Firminy-Vert, Le Corbusier (1965)

> Thierry Allard has written an article on the *architecture photographer*'s blog about Le Corbusier's building, which includes not only pictures of the Firminy site, but also drawings and many details: "The Firminy workers' Unité d'habitation".

The way architects and architectural critics talk about buildings and materials points towards the notion that architecture transcends the present realities. There are three levels on which we can look into this. First of all, we can situate architects within their time and see their designs as an expression of the culture of a particular period, the zeitgeist. Architects are not isolated engineers but they participate in the current debates and express them in their work. Architecture is – according to the writer Hermann Broch, who reflected on the visibility of culture – a manifestation of how a society at a particular time in history relates to the world (cf. Hahn n.d. P. 8). Architecture shows us how a period feels:

> Who would deny the favourable look of a curved railway bridge […], the elegance of a battleship […]? Since they emerged from our time […], we see grounded in them a part of our modern sensibilities. They embody an explicitly modern design and they must reflect the sensibilities of our time just as the […] carriage adorned with golden carvings reflected those of the 18th century* (Broch in ibid.).[3]

On a second level, architecture does not just reflect the intellectual currents of its time but is also indebted to overarching values. The architect Rudolf Schwarz – a deeply religious man, who was very sceptical towards the Modernist movement and who wrote a highly acclaimed book on church architecture – has tried to answer the question of how architecture can go beyond the fashion of its time. He sees the architect's duty to search for what holds the world together at its core: "unmutilated life in its living wholeness. […] This is why it is our first duty to make room for […][life's] freedom, where it can come to itself, where it can develop the tender beauty of its primal movements and which gives it a quiet sense of security"* (Schwarz 1953 in Hahn n.d.). This

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3   Broch himself refers to the architecture theoretician Hermann Muthesius.

idea of a deeper meaning in architecture is why Schwarz opposed Bauhaus architects like Hannes Meyer, since he saw that their architecture reflected a completely different idea of what holds the world together at its core (cf. ibid., p. 14).

But there is also a third and even more fundamental level on which architecture transcends present realities and that is the nature of architecture itself: Architectural designs anticipate a future state of the world. Designing is, according to Martin Heidegger, an answer to our being "thrown into this world," "entwerfen" is our answer to "geworfen-sein."

Martin Heidegger: Designing and Building as Part of the Conditio Humana

In his seminal article, *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* – building, dwelling, thinking – the German philosopher MARTIN HEIDEGGER looks into the semantic meaning of the words "wohnen," dwelling, and "bauen," building. He argues that we have lost the original meaning of building and dwelling as our main modes of existence as mortal humans on this earth: "The way in which you are and I am, the way, according to which we humans are on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. Being human means: Being on the earth as a mortal, which means: dwelling"* (Heidegger 2014, p. 101).

Figure 11: Martin Heidegger in front of his hut in Todtnauberg in the Black Forest

The photographer Digne Meller Marcovicz captured Martin Heidegger in front of his cabin in 1968. Her portfolio of images of Martin Heidegger has been published in print and can also be found on the pages of the *bpk Bildagentur*.

What is striking in Heidegger's text from the perspective of our discussion of corporate architecture is that Heidegger had a particular way (and form) of building in mind when he wrote about the essence of building. It was the small farm in the Black Forest which he referenced as a positive example and which we could understand as the antithesis to the glass and steel corporate campus.

The essence of building is to let [someone] dwell. […] Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built two centuries ago by the

dwelling of farmers. [...] It did not forget the family altar behind the communal table, it has made room in the living room for the sacred spots of the children's bed and the tree for the dead, which is what they call a coffin, and thus designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their way through time. A craft which stems from the dwelling, which still needs its tools and scaffolding as things, has built this farmhouse* (ibid., p. 109).

Heidegger's text can make us aware that architecture is not a technical service to the ideas of a client, but that architects themselves are connecting to the essence of being human through their acts of building. In more modern terms we could argue that architects connect to the needs of the client as a human being and also to the needs of the world as a whole. They thereby transcend all of the individual factors that go into each plan. Each step along this way entails a decision. Making these decisions is ultimately rooted in the freedom of the architect to anticipate a future state of the world that transcends what is already there. I would argue that architecture is a deliberately transcendental endeavour.

Failure and the Power of Wonder

While scientific, economic, and architectural optimism seem to go hand in hand at the Holmdel laboratories, history has shown that in none of these areas things went according to plan. At Holmdel the problems still remained large and, despite its size and considerable staff, few important inventions emerged from the laboratory. From a sociology of science perspective, this is only natural, as scientific progress does not move along straight lines. But instead of continuing on that sociological path, for example with Thomas Kuhn (cf. Kuhn 2012), it is worthwhile for the scope of a book that is concerned with the independence of material actors to start at the material basis of research. This will also prove to be instructive for the architectural discourse.

Philosophical materialism has had a significant influence on science and technology studies; in particular *new materialism*, which emerged at the beginning of the 21st century and "positions itself as a new paradigm in social and cultural studies" (Folkers 2013, p. 16). In its application to the study of scientific progress, new materialism makes us attentive to the fact that science and technology studies have for a long time regarded matter mostly as something that can be appropriated, that is readily at hand for the scientific process, and that can ultimately be dominated through the instruments of science and technology. What is lost here is not just the disturbing potential of matter but also the "power of wonder" (Stengers 2011). The new materialism movement, e.g. speculative constructivism, brings this power of wonder to the discussion in science and technology studies in that it does not just look at the current state of the world, what has been made, but also at what could happen in the future. The speculative constructivists' main argument is that matter is not passive but de-

veloping. They start with the "immanent, ontogenetic, self-organizing potentials" (Folkers 2013, p. 24) of matter.

With the aforementioned Martin Heidegger and his etymological reconstruction of the word "thing" we have to take into account another aspect of the material world, namely that things do not appear in isolation, or on the scientist's workbench. Heidegger spent a great deal of etymological effort on introducing the term "Ding," thing, in order to make his point, namely that thing – stemming from the Old-Norse – is not a mere object but an assembly. A thing, according to Heidegger, assembles earth and heaven, the gods and the mortals in what he calls the "Geviert", the fourfold, i.e. a (metaphorical) space with four sides.

JANE BENNETT, a new materialist, likewise argues for the perception of things as assemblages. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, she particularly looks at collections of things she finds in trash and debris. There she argues, the individual character of things, which refuses human intention, shines through (cf. ibid., p. 27). Her ideas, while resonating with the philosophies of Theodor W. Adorno and Bruno Latour, challenge modern conceptions of the subject. "The philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature" (Bennett 2010, p. ix). But Bennet's book is also a political endeavour in that the idea of matter as animated might potentially change how humans respond to issues:

> [h]ow, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or "the recycling," but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter? [...] What difference would it make to the course of energy policy were electricity to be figured not simply as a resource, commodity, or instrumentality but also and more radically as an "actant"? (ibid., p. viii)

Her aim is clear in this respect. A more rich description of life and a more sensitive approach towards the world as "the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (ibid., p. ix). If humans understand themselves as part of a network or "flow" of materialities, then they would also refrain from fantasies of omnipotence or at least replace the sense of boldness that

was prevalent during the last century with a more modest assessment of their capabilities.

Figure 12: Cornelia Parker, Neither From nor Towards (1992)[1]

Cornelia Parker's artwork can be found in the *Arts Council Collection*. It was also used as the cover for Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*.

One problem, however, remains both for Jane Bennett and for others attempting to get to the heart of things: It is an endeavour by humans, who, while cultivating a "patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body," (ibid., p. xiv) still speak and write in a human voice. But scientific writing can only begin to grasp the concept of a richly networked world. It seems then that the understanding for the material world lies on the threshold of language.

The Unspeakable in the Philosophy and Poetry of Jean Wahl

In his article for the *Encyclopédie Française* the French philosopher JEAN WAHL tries to grasp the transcendental potential of materiality. Three aspects from Wahl's text are taken here as attempts to introduce a more rich way to talk about materiality than classical empiricism, which "presents us with flat things that are exterior to one another and exterior to ourselves" (Wahl 2016, pp. 255–256), offers and which also holds up to be as "rigorous [difficile]" as other philosophical strands, e.g. modern rationalism.

The first aspect refers to Heidegger's etymology of a thing as an assembly. Wahl is also strongly influenced by the philosophy of science of Léon Brunschvicg, who "had the merit of showing that in science there is an activity of relating; these relations become incessantly subtler; and the universe is but an always-incomplete ensemble of this network of relations" (ibid., p. 260). Wahl further radicalises this view in that he forbids himself even semantically to think of the world as consisting of discrete elements.

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1   Parker's installation of suspended bricks from eroded houses that fell off the white cliffs of Dover was used as the cover image for Bennett's book.

> [W]hat is given to us primordially is an ensemble. There is in fact no word that could be satisfying here, since ideas like synthesis and even ensemble presuppose primordially separate elements that would then be gathered together (Wahl 2016, p. 259).

The second aspect which builds on this view of the world as a whole is the question of how we then perceive this world. Wahl here introduces the term "felt substances" to differentiate his view from the idealists' position and their concept of substances. Instead "we will have felt substances that can no longer be expressed in distinct attributes but rather gleam at the heart of appearances and are as ineffable as classical substances are effable" (ibid., p. 258). The concept of *feeling* also encompasses the idea of connectedness with the whole. The artistic experience hints at the fact that one is not simply surrounded by things one can abstractly *conceive* but that one *perceives* oneself as part of a world of things.

> A painting we are marveling at does not lie there before us like an external object; we are not merely in front of the painting. The communication between the painting and us is not simple presence of the one to the other. We are beyond the alternative between the "in front of" and the "in". [...] The world as it is given to us is made not of ideas and sensations, but of things (ibid., p. 262).

To adequately describe this relation Wahl resorts not to the philosophical treatise but to the power of poetry. This is his third contribution, namely that by realising that "philosophy is undoubtedly almost always impotent when faced with the reality of the thing" (ibid., p. 262) Wahl yields the floor to poetry. Acknowledging that there is another form of knowledge "that lets us commune with the density, with the enormous torpor of things" (ibid., p. 273), he includes in his article several of his own poems.

> For too long have we wandered too far from things.
> Here is a wall and a ceiling, an inkwell and a parchment.
> We are prisoners of the works of our hands
> And this is not what I mean by things.
>
> For a true thing is a living soul
> Which yet dissolves in the bosom of the universe.

> The grass is. I no longer see but a world all green.
> Everywhere I see now but a pulsing unity.

> (ibid., p. 262)

Through poetry Wahl is able to express the profoundness of our relationship with the world of things and our entanglement in it. He thus puts forward an exhortation for the philosophers of tomorrow to once again – as the early philosophers such as Heraclitus did – affirm their connection with what surrounds them.

> I see dimly the philosophers of to-morrow
> Anxious to be amid the breath and depth of things,
> Feeling space, time, feeling dense existence,
> Abrupt nextness and fusion of souls.

> (ibid., p. 273)

This mode of thinking about materiality in a more expressive and networked way also enriches the analysis of Bell's laboratory complex at Holmdel. At the very least it shakes the fundamentals of architectural critique. Architecture is not an architect's plan cast in concrete, steel, and glass which readily follows the architect's vision. Rather, the materials of the building behave unexpectedly, they rust, break, bend, and crack. Both the building's inhabitants and the architects have to adapt to the constant change of their cocoon. Also, scientific research is not the exploitation of dead material according to well thought-out plans. The material assemblages on the workbenches react unexpectedly. They can even shatter scientific theories so that researchers have to learn from the material and adapt their thinking to its potential – the field of microscopic (subatomic) and macroscopic (cosmic) physics is particularly rich in such stories, cf. e.g. Georges Lemaître's discovery of the expanding universe (cf. Hüfner and Löhken 2016). With that the economic superpower and boundless optimism of big companies, researchers, and famous architects cannot overcome the unexpectedness of their material premises.

An Artistic Intervention: Richard Learoyd's Crashed, Burned, and Rolled

Figure 13: Richard Learoyd, Crashed, Burned, and Rolled, C-Print (2017)

Richard Learoyd's "Crashed, Burned, and Rolled" series is best seen in person, as he uses large format prints. One image from the series is available online at the *Pace Gallery*.

Another way to describe the impact of materiality concludes this chapter. The series *Crashed, Burned, and Rolled* of the British photographer RICHARD LEAROYD portraits wrecked cars. The photographs are exposed via a large camera obscura directly onto photographic paper. The result is a life-size image, which shows every detail of the deformation of steel, glass, and various other composite materials that happened during a severe car crash. While the black-and-white direct photography introduces a sense of abstraction, the impact on the viewer is nonetheless one of a direct and brutal physicality. Learoyd's images show both the abstract beauty of materiality and the deadly severity of the deformation and reconfiguration of matter. They make us aware, in the sense of Jane Bennett, that matter is not something that is in our hands, but sometimes a brutal force to be reckoned with.

The Utopian Potential of the Material

Since the material basis of life is both important and yet not fully within our grasp, we need an approach to address and uncover the potentiality within the material world. ERNST BLOCH stands for a deep trust in the world and its materiality. In this chapter we will look at his take on materiality and focus the utopian potential of the material.

In his article *Transcending without Transcendence*, Ben Anderson argues for a transcendental quality of the material world on the basis of a materialist as well as utopian perspective. Anderson begins with Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* and argues that in the book hope is based on the observation that the world is not finished but in a process of becoming. That becoming is a material claim, as the future emerges out of the realities of this world, within which Bloch detects a utopian potential. This also entails a view of matter not as something dead and unchanging but as in the process of constant change. Anderson concludes that for Bloch transcendence is "no [...] position 'out there' or 'up there'" (Anderson 2006, p. 700) but part of the material world. In Bloch's own words: "Without matter we cannot get to the basis of (real) anticipation, without (real) anticipation we cannot grasp the horizon of matter"* (Bloch 1972, p. 13).

This is both a compelling and a risky line of thought. If the potential lies within the material world, then there is no separate realm of the Good to which we could resort if, or rather when, this world turns into a dystopos rather than a utopos. Bloch responds to this problem with a focus on the active element of human existence. He argues that precisely because there is no guarantee for a positive outcome of history, there is a call for action within this world. He understands action as a "means of transformative intervention [...] that strives to give and find hope through an anticipation of alternative possibilities or poten-

tialities" (Anderson 2006, p. 703). Hope and the anticipation of positive possibilities, i.e. utopias, must become the base for our engagement. Progress would then be "taking seriously what shines through"* (Bloch 1972, p. 415) already in history.

This is why a matter-of-fact view on the world must be complemented by what Bloch calls "speculative materialism" which acts as a "guard against restricting matter to the realm of mechanistic necessities"* (ibid., p. 456) because "we are standing at the front of the world's history, knowing that the path has just begun and we must follow it and complete the journey"* (ibid., p. 467). But this path is – and here Bloch uses the words of the reformist Thomas Müntzer – "not one of sure progress and of providence in the economy of salvation, but a hard and endangered ride, a suffering, wandering, being lost, searching"* (ibid., p. 468). What remains then for us? Bloch finishes his book with an epitaph of hope:

> The large workshop of human and worldly matter is not closed yet. [...] Instead of a transcendental being-done-ness the world carries in it an objective and real possibility and in that an inextinguishable potential to become a utopia, an anti-nihilism with a purpose* (ibid., p. 478).

Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* was widely discussed among philosophers as well as theologians of his time. One prominent interlocutor for Bloch's philosophy is the Jewish philosopher EMANUEL LEVINAS. In a symposium for the 400th anniversary of the University of Leiden in 1975, Levinas was asked to hold a disputatio which featured questions from his professorial colleagues on various aspects of his work. One question by Henk van Luijk was on the concept of future in philosophy. He specifically mentioned Bloch in this regard. In his answer, Levinas holds Bloch's philosophy in high regard while also contending that Bloch's concern is not his own.

> Of course there is hope in Bloch's work and with it utopian anticipation. But Bloch looks for a tangible future. His hope is immanent and the utopia is provisional. My concern is not Bloch's concern. I try to think transcendence that is not according to the mode of immanence and that does not return to immanence* (Levinas 1999, p. 127).

The main question for Levinas is how a philosophy that binds itself so radically to the immanent world can cope with the fact of death. According to Levinas,

Bloch's way out of the problem of death as the ultimate end of the individual is his focus on acting in this world.

> Because in a completely humanised world our being completely becomes a part of our work. According to Bloch, the fear of death would be nothing but a saddening thought in face of an incomplete work. That would be being sorry to leave a world which we have not been able to transform completely* (ibid., p. 127).

Acting, "tua res agitur", is what constitutes the individual, moreover, the individual becomes invisible behind his actions, "which means the fact that I am completely myself leads towards the world being more myself than I am: 'Tua res agitur.' [...] Through the intensity of this 'tua' appears an *I* against which death is powerless"* (ibid., p. 129).

An important expansion of Bloch's position can be found in the works of IGNACIO ELLACURÍA whose *Philosophie der geschichtlichen Realität*, philosophy of historical reality, follows the footsteps of his mentor Xavier Zubiri. Like Bloch, Ellacuría argues both against an idealist position and that of a *dumb* materialism. And like Bloch, who is indebted to a Marxist philosophy of history, he considers history as something that has materialistic roots. First of all, Ellacuría notes with Hegel that the history of the world is based on materialistic processes. Thus, historical processes are not solely the product of men of great character but we can say: "Show me the map of a country, its climate, its rivers and lakes, [...] its physical geography [...] and I can tell you a priori who the man in this country will be and which role he will play in history"* (Ellacuría and Fornet-Ponse (translator) 2010, p. 46).

But this is by no means a deterministic project. In contrast to Hegel, who sees the becoming of history as a series of inevitable logical steps, Ellacuría and Zubiri focus on the principle of becoming; reality is a dynamic process. They argue that "[i]n the praxis of history man [...] has to deal responsibly with reality; a becoming reality"* (ibid., p. 522). The reality of history has an open future.

The foundation for this claim lies in dynamism of matter: matter is not something dead and unmoving, or something that had to be set in motion by a primal mover. Rather, dynamism is an integral part of matter. This is an important feature of matter which adds to our concept of architecture and built space: it carries a time signature. Matter changes and space expands. This also

adds to our understanding of transcendence, since a principle of matter is that it always transcends itself by means of its dynamic character. Both dumb materialism and idealism, that sees matter merely as formed by ideas, would not allow for this inherent dynamism (cf. Ellacuría and Fornet-Ponse (translator) 2010, p. 522).

Another valuable addition to Bloch's materialism that links it with the thought of Bruno Latour and other modern philosophers and sociologists is that Ellacuría sees matter as connected and part of a dynamic cosmos. One cannot but detect a sense of wonder in Ellacuría's writing about the fullness and ever-changing character of the material world. This dynamism through history leads Ellacuría to a theological speculation, namely that, even though God is not part of the material world, he is a God of history, he binds himself to history and a people and thus becomes involved in a dynamic process.

There are many more positions in 20th and 21st century materialist philosophies that relate to Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* and specifically on his idea of potentiality within materiality, his deep trust in the material world, and his focus on human action. For the purpose of this book's focus on laboratory architecture and the proposal for a more sensitive approach towards the material world, I want to bring in three specific applications of such a perspective on materiality: One is a historical perspective on materiality, one stems from the sociology of science and the role of material and things therein, and a third one extends the idea of material artefacts to software.

Material History: The Case of the World Fair of 1867

An attentiveness for materiality is also influential for the way history is understood and in particular how historical artefacts are regarded. The starting point from a macro perspective could be an attentiveness for space which the historian KARL SCHLÖGEL proposes in his book *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*, in space we read time, where he gives prominence to the spaces within which history happens alongside with the stories of the great men and women of history. With Walter Benjamin and his figure of the *flaneur* who walks through Paris, Schlögel argues that one of the new techniques a historian has to learn is to walk attentively through a city and be guided by the spatial experience (Schlögel 2003). Today that technique might not only be applicable to the Paris of Benjamin but

also to the Holmdel campus, where the spatial experience of grandiose architecture provides us with a sense of the world view that led to the construction of the laboratory building and which had a profound resonance with the society of its time.

But the experience of space can also lead us to an attentiveness for a much smaller world, namely that of circuit boards and program codes. In that sense the modern flaneur shares many traits with an amateur in his basement laboratory. One could, for instance, look into the material history of Apollo 11's guidance computer to understand more about both scientific and political history, which were closely intertwined in the 1960s and 70s (cf. Donovan 2019), and from that also draw conclusions for the political effect of the scientific development of computer hardware today.

Figure 14: Draper Laboratory, Apollo 11 Guidance Computer (1966)

An image of the guidance computer is available at *Wikimedia Commons* under the title: "Agc view". It shows the DSKEY input module that the astronauts would use to enter their commands on the right and the main processing unit on the left.

An innovative contribution from the historical sciences to the concept that material and human are closely intertwined is FREDERIKE FELCHT'S study of the Paris World Fair of 1867. She shows that already in the 19th century an immense shift happened in the aftermath of the industrial revolution, with its mechanisation of manufacturing, mass production, and mass transport, that changed the way humans would relate to the non-human actors around them. Felcht begins with an epistemological observation, namely that in modernity man and nature became separated.

> In that things were understood as passive factors, a separation happened between modern and (seemingly) pre-modern. The concept that things had an inherent power was considered pre-modern and irrational. […] But a modern society in particular, where things are multiplying explosively, cannot get away from the power of things* (Felcht 2010, p. 45).

The World Fair of 1867, in this respect, appears to be the pinnacle of human domination over the passive world of things. It shows the objects of the modern

world, both the industrial products and the raw materials, and displays them in an oval under a massive glass dome. The exhibition was deliberately designed to show the unlimited potential of progress and that France was the centre of that endeavour. The design has also strong colonial undertones. First of all, France's colonies were not meant to exhibit industrial products but to portray themselves as deliverers of raw materials for French industries. Secondly, the whole concept of nature as passive was philosophically pitted against seemingly premodern concepts of animated nature prevalent in cultures outside of Europe (cf. Felcht 2010, pp. 45–46).

Figure 15: Ausstellungsgebäude für 1876 in Paris. Situationsplan mit Parkanlage, Allgemeine Bauzeitung *(1867)*

> The plan of the exhibition was published in the journal *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* in 1867. It can be found online at *Wikimedia Commons*.

Felcht criticises this artificial separation of the world in human subjects and passive objects by employing Bruno Latour's concept of the human-thing *hybrid*. Hartmut Rosa and his co-authors have called this hybridisation Latour's "provocation" for modern sociology. Latour argues that modernity claims to have separated nature and society but it has in fact only masked the "uninhibited mixing"* of the two (cf. Rosa, Strecker, and Kottmann 2018, p. 244).

> If we want to understand what is happening in our world, it makes more sense to be attentive for the interferences of human and non-human parts of actions, than to dissect them into subject-object relations. Ascribing actions only to human intentionality might be a way to evade any irrational mixing within which power comes from things. But with that we lose sight of the hybrids, who are crucially important for modernity* (Felcht 2010, p. 44).

These hybrids are becoming more and more prominent as industrialisation and globalisation move forward. Two aspects point towards this. First, the fact that the World Fair itself required for its completion a synchronisation between machines and workers in order to build its massive edifices (cf. ibid., p. 49). Secondly, the masses that come to the World Fair and that are attracted by their fascination for the things on display are so dense that they become fused with the mechanised world around them. The title of Felcht's article is telling in this

regard as it is based on a quote of a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen who describes the dissolving of the barriers between humans and things.

> If it says: "The streetcars and buses are stuffed and plugged and garnished with people", then humans are already merged with the things before they even come to the epicentre of the concentration of things and people [, i.e. the Paris of the World Fair, C.P.]* (ibid., p. 48).

Thus hybrid networks of people and things are a prevalent feature since the age of industrialised mass production and global streams of goods, capital, and people.

A New View on Science: Laboratory Life

The idea of streams of people and things is also important for another field from which we can learn an increased sensibility for objects and materiality. Bruno Latour's contribution to a materially sensitive sociology begins with his work as a sociologist of science and in particular with his study *Laboratory Life*. Therein the French sociologist, together with his Canadian colleague Steve Woolgar, stayed with the team of the *Salk Institute for Biological Studies* for two years as an "in-house philosopher or sociologist" (Latour and Woolgar 1986, p. 14) in order to describe the daily routines in a biotechnological laboratory in the 1970s. Latour and Woolgar discovered that laboratory work follows a set of predefined rules, which entails that every day is structured in essence in the same way: Each morning, the laboratory's technicians start their work, which means that they go to their workbenches, manipulate machinery (and sometimes animals) which overnight have produced long tables of data. The researchers arrive a little later, take that data, and turn it into articles. Secretaries and office workers correct these articles and mail them out. In the evening, "a Philippine cleaner wipes the floor and empties the trash cans" (ibid., p. 17).

This attentiveness to detail is based on an ethnographic approach which Hartmut Rosa et al. describe in the following way:

> In his newly established "science studies" he observes under the maxim to just "follow the practices of the actors" and registers – like an ethnographer who observes a foreign tribe – what is happening to natural scientists in their

daily laboratory work and in the "co-production" of scientific facts* (Rosa, Strecker, and Kottmann 2018, p. 230).

The aspect of co-production is especially important, making sociology attentive for the "headstrong" apparatuses and machines which are part of the production of scientific knowledge as well. Latour in that sense proposes a holistic concept of action which later became known as an *actor-network theory* and which shifts the focus from a sole interest in the •human actor to a networked theory of action. In that sense:

> "A" stubborn computer or a surprising flu epidemic is [...] suddenly more important and active than a civil servant quietly stamping away or the cashier in a supermarket* (ibid., p. 236).

Figure 16: Floor plan from Latour and Woolgar, Laboratory Life *(46)*

In "Laboratory Life" you will find a floor plan of the research site on page 46.

From the perspective of human-material networks one discovery is particularly important, namely that laboratory life is dynamic in character. The laboratory is not just a building where scientific discovery happens, it is in the middle of a flow: of people, of articles, of data, of materials, of electricity, of communication, and other material and non-material entities. But these materials and data do not just flow through the laboratory, they are also transformed along the way. And, as the sociological observer notices, this transformation takes an enormous amount of machinery, i.e. material is invested to transform other material. What makes the researchers wonder is that despite the "bulk of this apparatus, the end product is no more than a curve, a diagram, or table of figures written on a frail sheet of paper" (Latour and Woolgar 1986, p. 50). Thus, we can conclude that in order to understand the laboratory as a place of scientific discovery, the dynamics of the flows of material and information must be addressed.

Software as Part of a Dynamic Materiality

Software could be an ideal starting place to look into the dynamic character of Latour and Woolgar's study on laboratory life. Since the development of hardware is closely tied to that of software, at least since the 1970s, it makes sense for a study on the materiality of laboratories to include software as a non-human actor as well. Also for the purpose of raising material sensibility in everyday lives, one must take into account that the things humans surround themselves with are increasingly dependent on software in order to fulfil their function. In addition, even the built environment has become influenced by the development of software as architects are relying on computer-aided techniques from structural engineering in individual buildings to mapping public spaces.

A look into the history of software development underlines this increased importance. As MANDY NORTHOVER and her co-authors argue, from 1968 onwards, when the term *software engineering* "was coined at the NATO Science Conference in Garmisch" (Northover et al. 2008, p. 6), software played an integral part in the development of science. As a planned endeavour it became also structured and formalised, which meant that the developmental stages of software became traceable – and thus interesting as a historical document. From 1968 onwards, software developed from "conceptually 'low-level' programming" (ibid., p. 5) as an annex of hardware development to the main branch of computer engineering, with highly complex applications that – due to the invention of unified programming languages and operating systems – could be run on many machines. This was reflected economically when "the costs of software started to grow above the costs of computer hardware" (ibid., p. 6).

Software engineering has since developed from an informal project of a few engineers to a large-scale business operation (cf. ibid., p. 24) which requires a phased approach. Modern software development increasingly uses user-oriented, agile development models instead of top-down approaches in order to take the client on board and make him or her part of the development process: "Instead of requiring comprehensive documentation of the system's code and architecture, emphasis was placed on co-ownership of program code, and the production of so-called 'self-documenting' program code" (ibid., p. 8).

In that sense consumer collaboration and responding to change became paramount. This also meant that software was changing constantly. Philosophically, Mandy Northover and her co-authors locate software in the realm of Karl Popper's *World (iii)* which, "[u]nlike Plato's realm of pure forms, [...] is regarded as open to change, in the sense of an evolutionary development towards increasing complexity" (Northover et al. 2008, p. 10). A networked model of the modern world must thus incorporate the dynamic nature of software as well. Felcht's analysis of the World Fair today would probably not only look at buses and trams filled with people, but also at people "glued" to the screens of their phones in deep interaction with social software.

A Networked Model of the World

From public spaces down to household items, an appreciation of materiality can lead us to see ourselves as part of a greater network of humans and things. Bruno Latour is taken here as a material philosopher and sociologist that brings together the different approaches to materiality mentioned before. But his work does not only serve as a theoretical lens with which we can look at both technological and, later on, social laboratories, he also adds a decidedly political perspective to a materially sensitive theory.

In his essay for the catalogue of an exhibition he co-curated at the *Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe*, Latour chooses the German word "Dingpolitik", i.e. thing-politics, to highlight the importance of things in politics. However, before we enter the realm of politics, seeing things politically requires a more complex and nuanced approach to the non-human world in the first place. This is why Latour starts with a philosophical antidote against the oversimplification of objects in the theoretical discourse.

> For too long, objects have been wrongly portrayed as matters of fact. This is unfair to them, unfair to science, unfair to objectivity, unfair to experience. They are much more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material and networky than the pathetic version offered for too long by philosophers. Rocks are not simply there to be kicked at, desks to be thumped at (Latour 2005, pp. 19–20).

Likewise, in his essay *Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?*, Latour criticises modern philosophies for their simplistic treatment of the thing-world. Even Martin Heidegger and his philosophical and etymological appreciation of things falls short. Latour argues that Heidegger differentiated between meaningful things

from the world of the handmade, down-to-earth life in the huts and small farms in the Black Forest and the mass-produced objects of the industrial age.

> [A]ll his writing aims to make as sharp a distinction as possible between, on the one hand, objects, Gegenstand, and, on the other, the celebrated Thing. The handmade jug can be a thing, while the industrially made can of Coke remains an object. While the latter is abandoned to the empty mastery of science and technology, only the former, cradled in the respectful idiom of art, craftsmanship, and poetry, could deploy and gather its rich set of connections (Latour 2004, p. 233).

Our task then as post-Heideggerians is to apply the powerful vocabulary the German philosopher from the Black Forest reserved for the handmade things to all objects, especially those that science and technology look at. This also overcomes the fact that most object-oriented philosophies choose far too simple objects such as coffee mugs, chairs, and stones – most of them stemming from the lifeworld of the philosophers themselves – for their investigations (cf. ibid., p. 234).

Engaging with the complex objects of the modern world is not just a question of interest, rather philosophy's survival in the modern world hinges on overcoming a position that either sees things as mere fetishes or sees modern humans as completely dependent on the powerful forces of objects against which they are powerless. The position of the modern social critic and his relation to the world of humans and objects must be a third one, Latour argues, namely "to detect *how many participants* are gathered in a *thing* to make it exist and to maintain its existence" (ibid., p. 246).

This first of all demands a shift in the language with which philosophers speak about things. What we have already discovered with Jean Wahl becomes important for Latour's work as well, namely the return to poetic forms. Looking at the way Alan Turing in his 1950s essay on *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* (Turing 1950), one of the icons of the rational age, writes about the computer, reveals the "sense of wonder," or rather sense of poetic marvel that is integral to this treatise on a complex modern machine. "If you read this paper, it is so baroque, so kitsch, it assembles such an astounding number of metaphors, beings, hypotheses, allusions, that there is no chance that it would be accepted

nowadays by any journal" (Latour 2004, p. 247). Alan's engagement with the machine takes on undertones normally reserved for the realm of the ineffable, the religious.

> Lots of gods, always in machines. [...] Here Turing too cannot avoid mentioning God's creative power when talking of this most mastered machine, the computer that he has invented (ibid., p. 247).

But this new appreciation for things also demands a new role for the social critic and his view on the daily lives of people surrounded by things. The modern critic is no longer someone who uncovers what is hidden and then, from an authoritative, omniscient perspective, criticises the (human) social actors.

> The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution (ibid., p. 246).

This finally brings us to the political aspect of Latour's writings on thing-politics. First of all, ascribing political might to things is nothing revolutionary as it takes into account what is already happening on the political level. Humans are already connected through their attachment to things, or rather the *assemblages*, assemblies of things: "The Chinese, the Japanese [...] the born-again Christians don't want to enter under the same dome, they are still, willingly or unwillingly, connected by the very expansion of those makeshift assemblies we call markets, technologies, science" (Latour 2005, p. 37). Among those makeshift assemblies also appear the scientific laboratories.

> Scientific laboratories, [...] churches and temples, financial trading rooms, internet forums [...] are just some of the forums and agoras in which we speak, vote, decide, are decided upon, prove, are being convinced. Each has its own architecture, its own technology of speech, its complex set of procedures, its definition of freedom and domination (ibid., p. 31).

The laboratory thus takes on the role of a public agora in which the fact that we are attached to the things around us turns into a debate. However, we must be aware that with all those agoras, the question of representation and access remains just as important as in the Greek model, where the agora was populated only by the elder male citizens of Athens. A sensibility for the material world thus is also a question of justice, both towards men and things. But how should we as humans realise this? This is where in my view a Christian perspective on our topic becomes relevant.

A Christian Perspective

With philosophy and sociology called to the witness stand for the material side of the actor-network, I want to propose a Christian perspective which strengthens the human side as well. Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer* project helps us find ways how we as humans can become both materially and socially sensitive through subversive strategies.

As a theologian, I sometimes wonder how the Judaeo-Christian heritage that talks about the goodness and purposefulness of creation can even bring forward a world view that subjugates the material to the human will in a way that in the end leads to a subjugation of *both* men and material. I also wonder if the same heritage can contribute to a materially sensitive position which shows respect for all of the actors in the network. While I will only briefly touch on the first question, the latter shall be my main concern here. This theoretical position will then be brought in contact with Christian practice in the following parts of this book.

A Christian position that is sensitive to the potential of the material has to come to terms with the question that already became important in the discussion of Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*: How can we talk about the goodness of the material world when the material's potentiality can yield both positive and destructive results? Even if Christians, as well as Bloch, refer to the "already and not yet" (e.g. John 3:2) of salvation, and with that account for the unperfected state of the world, they must explain how the perfected state at the end of times will be reached – without forcefully bringing the world round to the divine plan.

An Exegetical Exhortation for an Engagement with the Material World

Materialistic exegesis has approached the problem of a perfected state in the material world with a focus on human praxis. If we take Kuno Füssel's guide to a materialistic reading of the bible as an example, it becomes apparent right at the beginning of his book that his reading aims at an overcoming of the current praxis, especially the politics of oppression as witnessed by him in the 1980s in the countries of Latin America. He is deeply engrained in the thought of Marx and Engels, which sought to change the praxis – and through that the "conditions for the perception and the circumstances of human life as such"* (Füssel 1987, p. 17) – and not merely to contemplate it.

> The efforts of materialistic theory are to recognise the individual moments of praxis – work, fight, thought – in a way that concrete change is guided by them. This is the moment where Marx and Engels separated themselves from Hegel's philosophy* (ibid., p. 15).

There is much to say for this reading of the Bible and two aspects stand out for a materially sensitive theology. One is that praxis, in particular the daily lives of the workers,[1] is given a prominent epistemological dignity, because these men and women "are experiencing the construction of reality with their bodies and not just with their minds, because they are grasping [or comprehending in the literal sense; C.P.] things with their hands"* (ibid., p. 17). This appreciation for a physical and bodily engagement highlights the importance of deeply engaging with the material world which other philosophers and sociologists, such as Jane Bennett or Bruno Latour, have emphasised in their approaches.

The other aspect that is noteworthy is the partiality against the reigning political discourse, which stabilises the power and exclusivity of a small group of people. While terms such as "class struggle" seem outdated nowadays, the question if and how theology should be partial and how its liberating potential should influence politics remains valid.

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1 Füssel is conceptually rooted both in the Marxist vocabulary and in the struggles of Latin America in the 1980s and 90s.

> The *partiality of God's acting* in history prohibits a neutral, literal, and timeless-general reading, which dismisses everything into the mental/spiritual. The belief of scripture is liberating praxis [...]. Materialistic reading of the bible means: awaking the sense of scripture as liberating praxis! (ibid., p. 27)

There is no doubt that the focus on the human engagement with the material world is an important learning from materialistic exegesis. Regarding the practical application of that approach today, it is important to search for an actualisation that widens the scope beyond the basic ecclesiastic communities of the 1980s. After all, the first part of *Lumen Gentium* (LG 8) follows the call to deeply engage with the world, which it applies it to the whole of the church:

> Christ Jesus, "though He was by nature God [...] emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave", and "being rich, became poor" for our sakes. Thus, the Church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice. Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart", "to seek and to save what was lost". Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ (LG 8).[2]

And at the same time it is important that an actualisation of materialistic exegesis does not just help us engage with the concrete, material historical realities but reminds us that this engagement must follow the path that is respectful of the material realities of the world. It resembles Latour's constructive critic we discussed earlier rather than an absolutist ruler who bends the world to his or her will. One could argue that such an image of God challenges our longing for a divine architect to make things right against the injustices of history.

While an absolutist position could claim many biblical references, the might of Israel under its God or the forceful beginning of the kingdom of heaven in the apocalyptic tradition, there are passages that make us doubt whether God

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2 Herbert Haslinger has exemplified the meaning of this passage for the mission as well as the essence of what it means to be church in detail (Haslinger 2015, p. 337).

is indeed an almighty architect. The *Songs of the Servant* in the book of Isaiah speak of the servant of JHWH and his role in the history of salvation. They are part of the Deuteroisaiah tradition, which we might situate in the context of the Babylonic exile of Jerusalem's elite and their waiting for their liberation and return home. The authors were probably a group or a school of prophets which set the might of God and his plan for salvation against the dire situation in exile (cf. Rösel and Schwiderski 2011). Four songs speak about God's servant who will come and "bring forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42.1). But this servant is different from a powerful ruler:

> 2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
> or make it heard in the street;
> 3 a bruised reed he will not break,
> and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;
> he will faithfully bring forth justice.
> 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged
> till he has established justice in the earth;
> and the coastlands wait for his law.
>
> Isaiah 42:2-4

Verse three is particularly important from a materialist perspective since it talks about preserving the structure of the material, however bruised and burnt it is. It is working with rather than against the material world. This requires time, as the servant needs not to be "discouraged." There are many passages, especially in the creation story, that speak of the wonders of nature at the beginning of the world, but this perspective adds that the eigenvalue of things will also be preserved at the *end* of time. Furthermore, since the *Songs of the Servant* have been understood as a parable either for a group of people within Israel, Israel as a whole, or the coming messiah, the preserving of the material also hints at the preserving of the human nature, however bent and bruised it is. This brings us to the question of how messianic power is being enacted.

Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Project as a Subversive Praxis

While it exceeds the scope of this book to look into GIORGIO AGAMBEN's philosophy as a whole and in it discern between aspects that contribute to a materially

sensitive pastoral theology and more problematic passages that display an essentially pessimistic undertone,[3] he is an important interlocutor here, because he tries to deal with the temptation of power, in fact he questions power itself, much like the *Songs of the Servant* do. What makes Agamben's position different is that he does not call for the divine sovereign – in the sense in which Carl Schmidt portrays an absolute ruler in his 1923 *Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form* (Schmidt 2016), Roman Catholicism and political form. Rather, Agamben proposes a "potenza destituente," which does not destroy the structures of oppression and then turns into an oppressive power as well. Agamben's use of power is taken here as a strategy how human actors can be both active, in the sense of Bloch's "tua res agitur", and at the same time preserve the delicate and tightly woven web of human and non-human actors that surrounds our existence in this world.

To understand Agabmen's position it is helpful to remind ourselves of his philosophical background. He became first known as an interpreter of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger, claiming that "one worked as an 'antidote' for the other, as they looked at the same problems from different perspectives"* (Gorgoglione 2016, p. 66), as Ruggiero Gorgoglione writes in his account of Agamben's philosophy. But Agamben's opus magnum are certainly the books that loosely form the corpus of his *homo sacer* project. According to Gorgoglione, Agamben works with the method of a Foucauldian "philosophical archaeology,"* trying "to understand how a discourse formed and then became canonised"* (ibid., p. 76). In the case of *homo sacer* he looks at the discourses of bio-politics.

> According to Agamben, the political is based on two contradictory but complementary processes. One regards the transformation of life into good life *(bíos)* and parallel to that the other regards the exclusion of naked life from the political existence* (ibid., p. 78).

As the title *homo sacer* suggests, Agamben looks in particular at life excluded from politics, which he calls "naked life" or, referring to the practice of declaring persons as outside of the law in both antiquity and modern states, *homo*

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3 Agamben's criticism of democratic decision making during the coronavirus pandemic, which the philosopher laid out in an open-ed in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, has raised opposition from prominent theologians (cf. Agamben 2020; Florin 2020).

sacer. Today's *homines saceri* are for Agamben the "ultra-comatose, refugees, or the inmates of a camp"* (Gorgoglione 2016, p. 80).

Agamben's philosophy is decidedly political in that he argues that the status of the *homo sacer* stands at the beginning of politics, the constitution of the body politic itself. Political order begins with the power of the sovereign who creates order and at the same time produces naked life. Here Agamben follows Carl Schmidt and his concept of an initial "state of exception" during which the sovereign declares other people *homines saceri* (ibid., p. 103).

For Agamben the figure of the *homo sacer* shows that the exclusion of people is a necessary feature of the political order and not a by-product of the past atrocities of war and genocide. Agamben also reminds us of the deadly consequences of these exclusions, which become particularly prominent in prisoner-of-war camps such as Guantanamo or the camps for migrants in Italy. In these places, the political power manifests in the fact that it holds people in a suspended state where they are completely bereaved of their rights and the control over their bodies and actions, *their potentiality to act*, where they "are no longer alive but not dead yet"* (ibid., p. 103).

There are, however, ways out of this state of suspension, a form of resistance that breaks through the bio-political dispositive,[4] which Agamben looks at towards the end of his *homo sacer* project. Two of them we shall be concerned with here. Agamben mentions them – unfortunately only briefly – at the end of his book *The Use of Bodies* (Agamben 2016).

The first way that I want to mention here is the concept of *forma di vita*, or form of life, which for Agamben is every life that "evades every possible definition and therefore can autonomously control its potentiality"* (Gorgoglione 2016, p. 110). This control over one's own life and its potentiality means that one emancipates oneself from the reigning bio-political ontological dispositive which states that every potential must be realised in a specific way. This is where Agamben uses words such as de-institution, de-activation, or neutralisation to denote that his break through the power structures is different from other forms of resistance (cf. ibid. 131). Here the aforementioned "potenza des-

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4 Agamben uses Michel Foucault's terminus "dispositive" to describe ensembles of power structures and systems, within which politics and modern life as a whole happens (cf. Agamben 2008).

tituente" comes into play as a way "to deactivate something and render it inoperative – a power, a function, a human, [an] operation – without simply destroying it but by liberating the potentials that have remained inactive in it in order to allow a different use of them" (Agamben 2016, p. 273).

The second way I want to highlight is Agamben's idea that we need to break through the total reign of capitalism which bases everything on the structure of consumption and consumer value. He calls this strategy "profanation," which he sees as "neutralising the given function of things [...] and opening new and not yet given configurations of the relations between humans [and] things"* (Gorgoglione 2016, p. 126). As I understand "profanation" it means bringing back the richness of connections and the networked nature of our relations to things and people. It means that both things and people are set free from the function they are to fulfil in a modern economic and political system. Their eigenvalue – and stubbornness – is valued again.

Agamben is relatively brief when it comes to showing how his proposed de-institutionalising forms of resistance can be applied in the real world. I want to refer to two examples here that Agamben uses and that show how he meant the de-instituionalising power to be put into practice. Along these lines I can then further proceed with my own suggestions for human action in the third part of this book.

In his essay *Das Erfordernis einer destituierenden Gewalt und die Suche nach einer messianischen Lebenskunst*, the need for a destituent power and the search for a messianic way of life, Martin Kirschner takes up a biblical example from Agamben's *The Use of Bodies*, namely the way the apostle Paul relates to the Mosaic Law. Kirschner sets out to explain that Paul in 1 Cor 15:24, where he portrays the messiah as someone who will "disempower all dominion, authority, and power," and in Romans 10:4, where he says that believers will be "set free from the law," does not argue for a destruction of the law. It is rather a neutralisation of the destructive power of the law and an opening up a space for a new and positive use of the law (cf. Kirschner 2018, p. 14). The "messianic contact to the world [...] breaks the system of power relations within which we exist and that hold us captive and determine us; he disrupts them so that we can [...] approach them in a different way, so that we can use them freely"* (ibid., p. 23).

Paul can say that the messiah can both render the law inoperative and at the same time present himself as the telos, i.e. the "end or fulfilment" (Agamben 2016, p. 273), of the law because he sees the dawning of a new form of living,

which does not do away with the old ways for something new – that would be to institutionalise just another form of political power in Carl Schmitt's sense – but to live in a state which Paul defines with the formula "as if not", in 1 Cor 7:29-31: "From now [...] those who use the things of the world [should live] as if not engrossed in them".

> The "as not" is a deposition without abdication. Living in the form of the "as not" means rendering destitute all juridical and social ownership, without this deposition founding a new identity. A form-of-life is, in this sense, that which ceaselessly deposes the social conditions in which it finds itself to live without negating them, but simply by using them (Agamben 2016, p. 274).

Another example mentioned by Agamben is the way in which the Franciscan monks tried to protect their *form of life* against the authoritative control of the Catholic church: they chose to live in radical poverty.

> New and relevant was the idea to base a form of life on radical poverty. In this way the Franciscans renounced every form of property and with that [in the dispositive of the medieval society; C.P.] every right, they neutralised the exercise of power without questioning the existence of the institutions. This is why the Franciscan order could respect the power of the church and ignore it at the same time* (Gorgoglione 2016, p. 127).

But Agamben does not just refer to a particular strategy of one monastic order, he also sees the potential of the contemplative way of life as such as a way to de-activate the present power structures through the mode of *inoperativity*.

> One can [...] understand the essential function that the tradition of Western philosophy has assigned to the contemplative life and to inoperativity: [...] the properly human life is the one that, by rendering inoperative the specific works and functions of the living being, causes them to idle [...][,] so to speak, and in this way opens them into possibility. Contemplation and inoperativity are in this sense the metaphysical operators of anthropogenesis, which, in liberating living human beings from every biological and social destiny, and every predetermined task, render them available for that peculiar absence of work that we are accustomed to calling "politics" and "art" (Agamben 2016, pp. 277–278).

Being freed from the having to function in a predetermined way – along the dominant narrative or bio-political dispositive – enables humans to see themselves and the world around them in a new light, as well as to engage in changing their surroundings through politics and reacting to them through art. At the end of his epilogue to *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben quotes the philosopher Baruch de Spinoza to describe the joy this would bring.

> And in this consists the greatest good that, according to the philosopher, the human being can hope for: "a joy born from this, that human beings contemplate themselves and their own potential for acting" (ibid., p. 278).

In this way I see Agamben's writings at the end of his *homo sacer* project as showing a way how human beings can subversively de-activate power relations without breaking the network of relations. It is a way that demands a completely different mindset from the company-knows-best and bending-the-material-your-way mindset that has prominently featured in the description of the *Bell Laboratories* – but also, albeit in fainter traces, in Bloch's focus on human action – in this second part. Most importantly, Agamben provides us as human actors with a strategy that takes into consideration that, following the Christian imperative, we must act to make this world a better place.

The End of a Totalitarian Vision

The fragmentedness and openness of both the material and the social world makes us aware that unifying strategies of reducing the world under one vision, both in architecture and communication electronics, are destructive. We need a culture of respect for the diverse and with that comes the end of the totalitarian vision of old.

In 2015 the *Heritage Consulting Group* filed an entry for Bell's Holmdel laboratory as a historic site. This is fitting not only because Eero Saarinen's design has been an important masterpiece of Modernist corporate campus architecture but also because his plans are an expression of the spirit of a time that is long gone now: the abundant optimism in centralised corporate planning and an expert-only approach to solve societal problems through technology.

The philosophy behind Holmdel is not only outdated, it is also potentially dangerous. In an op-ed in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, the art historian and cultural theoretician Jörg Scheller analyses the world view behind right-wing terrorism. He argues that the danger of terrorists lies in their closed and internally coherent world view as well as in their willingness to use extreme violence to make the world conform to that image:

> We all are looking at the world through ideological lenses, but [...][w]e know through reason and sensibility that our picture of the world is just a mosaic piece in the image of the world. As liberal persons we are searching for what John Rawls called an "overlapping consensus" between different world views. [...] Right-wing terrorists on the other hand want to turn their image of the world into the world itself. They want to eradicate the difference between the image and the world, or, if you want, that between art and life [...] It is therefore worth noticing that the first radical avant-garde movement of the

20th century, the Italian futurists, worked together with fascism in order to overcome the separation between art and life" (Scheller 2019, p. 42).

This struggle for a total conformity between art and life, or rather between artistic vision and the real world, is also visible in the designs of famous architects. Eero Saarinen is by no means a very radical person – he listened to the needs of the building's inhabitants – but he had a vision and a view of the world which he expressed through his buildings. If we add to that the world view of his client, namely that *The Bell Telephone Company* could improve society through its monopoly of "one universal service," we find that the Holmdel campus sought to express one coherent world view with little room for divergence.

The Corporate Campus Lives on Today

Figure 17: Apple Park, Sir Norman Foster (2018)

An image of Apple Park opens Karissa Rosenfield's reprint of Max Tholl's interview with Norman Foster at *ArchDaily*: Norman Foster's interview with The European: "Architecture is the Expression of Values".

On a more subtle level, such coherent world views, that emphasised a science knows best – or rather tech-company knows best – approach, are discernible in the contemporary campuses of Apple, Google, and Facebook as well. The corporate campus, whose architectural vision and material basis I have described above, is not merely a style of the past. The architectural might of that style lives on in the new Bay-View Headquarter of Google in Mountain View by Bjarke Ingels (BIG) and Thomas Heatherwick (Heatherwick Studio), in the new headquarter of Facebook in Menlo Park, and in the Apple Park in Cupertino, designed by Sir Norman Foster. All of these corporate headquarters are located in the Bay Area of California and exhibit the same bold architectural statement, a striking style with high-tech materials set in a green and tranquil environment.

Eva-Maria Seng describes the architectural vision of these corporate campuses by reference to the earlier buildings of architects such as Eero Saarinen. She

also fundamentally asks what kind of utopian world view is being expressed in these corporate campus buildings.

In her assessment Seng distinguishes between two different ideal types of utopian architecture. There are *archistic*, i.e. ruler-centred and centralised utopias, which find their architectural expression in large buildings with identical uniform units. The utopian idea behind them is a uniformisation of and control over the lives of the building's users. This architecture embodies a collectivist lifestyle (cf. Seng 2017, p. 386). Although not intended as a model for social control, Le Corbusier's Unité d' Habitation is an impressive example for that type of building.[1]

Figure 18: Group of Slumless Smokeless Cities, Ebenzer Howard (1902)

Howard's plan can be found at *Wikimedia Commons* under the title: "Garden City Concept by Howard". It was originally used in a 1902 reprint of Howard's "Garden Cities of To-morrow" by *Sonnenschein Publishing*.

The other type of utopian architecture Seng describes is the *anarchistic* type, i.e. the simple hut set in nature which then developed into the garden city. Ebenezer Howard further developed that model to scale it up for the industrial age (cf. ibid., p. 389). This type emphasises the small-town community as an anti-model to the sprawling cities. Another noteworthy trait of anarchistic utopian architecture is the use of impromptu structures and recycled materials which sometimes borders the amateurish. The architect Wang Shu for instance calls his firm the "Amateur Architecture Studio" and alludes to the "Chinese reality of spontaneous, illegal, and provisional house building"* (ibid., p. 393).

Modern corporate campuses encompass elements of both the archistic and the anarchistic type since they exhibit elements of uniformity as well as impromptu architecture. From a politically sensitive position it is important to note that with the link to utopian and dystopian models of society, the architectural styles lose their innocence. Now it is not so much the wonder and marvel at the technological advancements that companies like Bell and IBM promoted in the middle of the 20th century and the optimism they displayed in their corporate

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1   Seng links Le Corbusier's building in Paris to Moissej Ginsburg's and Ignati Milini's *Dom Narkonfina* in Moscow.

campus architecture. Rather, such types of architecture are increasingly viewed from a critical angle as the mistrust in the tech industry grows, e.g. the fear of total surveillance and the misuse of data (cf. Lanier 2014). This potentiality of the corporate campus to be both a symbol for positive developments and for the growth of an industry built on personal data, evokes Bloch's dialectical materialism. The Google headquarters and the Apple smartphone can be both, beneficial and detrimental to society's advancement in how much they foster or hinder social cohesion or individual freedom.

We must therefore be very aware of the moments when the old company-knows best ideology is presented to us as the solution to society's problems. In their essay *The Californian Ideology* Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron argue:

> [At times] of profound social change, anyone who can offer a simple explanation of what is happening will be listened to with great interest. At this crucial juncture, a loose alliance of writers, hackers, capitalists, and artists from the West Coast of the United States have succeeded in defining a heterogeneous orthodoxy for the coming information age – the Californian Ideology. [...] the Californian ideology promiscuously combines the free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies. This amalgamation of opposites has been achieved through a profound faith in the emancipatory potential of the new information technologies. In the digital utopia, everybody will be both hip and rich (Barbrook and Cameron 1996).

This all-encompassing ideology of a "hip and rich" tech start-up-culture masks the existing social and economic inequalities which still exist, in California as well, and which are by no means alleviated through the advent of technology and the tech industry. The seemingly open and "free-wheeling" culture is not fundamentally different from the old corporate campuses on the East Coast. Rather, it follows the same tradition of large-scale planning and centralist infrastructure which tends to favour the entrepreneurs and lab engineers but not the ordinary city dweller. But it is to the people of the city that theology must answer. Thus the following third part will focus on the political implications of new approaches to materiality. This will have an impact on theologies, mostly in the tradition of the theology of liberation, as well.

**Part III
Social Laboratories**

From Central Planning to a New Sensibility

The second part of this book ended with a call to develop a new sense of sensibility for the material-human network. This part is concerned with its implementation in our day-to-day lives. It also marks a shift away from laboratory architecture towards inclusive and open forms of architecture. This in turn demands a new role for those engaged in the public building process, the architect, but also the designer and the community organiser. The redefinition of their roles also redefines the role of church and theology in a public process which could best be described as a social laboratory.

In this first chapter I want to focus on the consequences a heightened sensibility for the subtleties of the material world has for planning processes. As an example I want to show how the planning of public space and public buildings has changed.

Addressing the Needs of a City: An Artistic Primer

Planning a whole city can be seen as a rare instance where the architect's and the city planner's world view manifests on a grand scale. I have chosen two cities as examples of entirely planned spaces here to show to what extent design philosophies can be realised in that way. The focus, however, is not on the design of the city itself, but on the way these cities work for their citizens today.

Brasilia and Chandigarh are places where a renowned architect was given a carte blanche. Work on Brasilia started in 1957 when the Brazil's president Juscelino Kubitschek began his campaign to develop the interior of the country and relocated its capital. Together with the city planner Lucio Costa, the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer oversaw the construction. The plans for Chandigarh are also rooted in a project of national reassurance, starting as a dream of

India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1949: "Chandigarh was meant […] to produce a powerful symbol of a new and progressive India" (Stierli 2010). In contrast to Brasilia, Chandigarh's architects were foreign to the country. First the American Albert Meyer and after his resignation the British couple Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry, who partnered with the French Le Corbusier.

The photographer Iwan Baan photographed these cities in 2010 to document how the inhabitants are *Living With Modernity* and make the planned spaces their own. The pictures in the book are accompanied by two essays. One is by the Dutch novelist and journalist Cees Nooteboom, who reflects on what it means that these cities were created "ex nihilo", the other is on the political circumstances of the cities' planning processes by the Swiss architectural and art historian Martino Stierli.[1] Before turning our attention to the photographs themselves, we should therefore note a particular line of thought in these essays that integrates with the theme of this book. It is the difference between planned possibility, or *potentiality*, and realised *actuality*.

Cees Nooteboom compares the task of the city planner who starts from scratch with the experience in the Netherlands where land was created in the middle of the sea. Before the first building is erected, the planner pictures a future state: "The buildings he sees are still virtual, a possibility. […] Suddenly everything is possible. Possible feet that will walk down possible streets […] The possible church, the possible school" (Nootebom 2010). But the city on paper is different from the one in the real world. There is a difference between an architect's vision and the real world realisation of that vision.

> In architectural blueprints, no grass grows between the stones. The concrete shows no sign of efflorescence and rust is not part of the design. People in architectural sketches are faceless outlines, predictable shadows […] architectural sketches are always silent, whereas cities never are (ibid.).

What is important from my perspective is that both the materials and the people have not realised their potentiality yet, nor have they interacted. Their interaction turns the city into something radically different from what the architect

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1   Stierli has also published on Robert Venturi's seminal book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) on the planned – and car friendly – city of Las Vegas and its richness in architectural signs and symbols.

imagined. This is where Baan's photographs become important as he demonstrates "the interplay between what is designed and what is experienced, between the Platonic idea and the current reality of a practice that has taken possession of that idea" (ibid.).

What we can take from Nooteboom's and Stierli's essays is a tension between planning and living, between the potentiality of the material and its actuality. Baan's photos strikingly show that difference.

Figure 19: Jeff Wall Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona, *transparency on light-box (1999)*

> Jeff Wall's photo is part of the collection of the *Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen* and can be found under the title: "Morning Cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona/ Morgendliche Reinigung". It is the second of two prints made in 1999. The photo was taken when the *Fundació Mies van der Rohe* in Barcelona invited the photographer in the same year.

One photograph pictures the water basin in front of the *Palácio da Alvorada*, the seat of the Brazilian government built by Niemeyer in 1958. A cleaning worker fishes for leaves and other debris with a long pole. We see not only the pool and the palace behind it but also the large bronze statue *As Banhistas*, two bathing women, by the Brazilian sculptor Alfredo Ceschiatti, who collaborated with Niemeyer. The photo exhibits strong references to Jeff Wall's *Morning Cleaning*, which shows a window cleaner in Mis van der Rohe's *Barcelona Pavilion*. We immediately understand that these architectural icons require a lot of labour and care to preserve their spotless looks. But we also understand that architecture does not function without human beings.

Figure 20: Palácio da Alvorada, Oscar Niemeyer (1958)

> Iwan Baan photographed the Palácio for his book "Brasilia - Chandigarh. Living with Modernity". Some of the pictures from the book can be seen on the website of *Lars Müller Publishers*. However, the picture of the Palácio with a worker cleaning the pool in front of it can only be found in the book on pages 66-67.

The other image shows the inside of one of Le Corbusier's governmental buildings in Chandigarh. The room is cluttered with old desks and paper files piled as high as the ceiling. Cees Nooteboom mentions this picture in his essay.

> When I look at Iwan Baan's photographs, I wonder how Le Corbusier, who once said that a house should be a "machine for living," would have related, for example, to the sight of the incredible chaos in the office [...] When Le Corbusier was growing up in the early years of the last century, which is already so distant, futuristic circles shared a veneration of machines, but the photograph of this room blatantly disregards the originally futuristic element of the city (Nootebom 2010).

The machine-like architecture and the ideal of making the humans that inhabit them function like machines is disrupted here. It shows that architecture can both work with and against its users.

Figure 21: Government office, Le Corbusier (n.d.)

A picture of an overstuffed office building in Chandigarh can be found in Iwan Baan's book "Brasilia - Chandigarh: living with modernity" on pages 156-157.

Baans photography raises the question of the scale of architectural planning, that is, whether these plans are made by decree and architectural blueprints – seemingly from above – or if they have the building's and the city's users in mind and start from below. Both Brasilia and Chandigarh, despite them being a symbol for national pride and a spirit of optimism, had to be appropriated by the people before they could work for them. While the architects' disregard for the small details of daily lives did not stop people making these cities more liveable, there are better ways to make people and buildings work together. A vital idea is that of an open architecture that changes with its users.

Addressing the Needs of a City: A Planner's Perspective

In his book *Person-Centred Planning*, the architect and Pritzker Prize laureate RICHARD ROGERS addresses the problem of social cohesion in planned spaces. He sharply criticises the compartmentalised and neatly ordered city as envisioned by Le Corbusier: "Some planners still long to create ghettos in the shape of commercial districts, industrial districts, dormitory districts, shopping districts and the rest without realizing the social cost for the individual" (Tickell 1995, p. x). Against these versions of the city Rogers develops a different, "pluralist and integrated, diverse and coherent" (ibid., p. x) form.

As in the discussion of Brasilia and Chandigarh, I want to focus on specific aspects in Rogers' book which relate to my topic of material-human networks.

Rogers mentions the deep impact of advanced communication technology both on the city and its citizens. Yet at the same time as people are growing together, Rogers sees social separation on the rise. "We have never before been linked more closely electronically and physically, yet never before have we been more socially separated" (Rogers 1995, p. 150). Against these tendencies he proposes a new form of urban culture which is participatory in essence. A key concept therein is that of "creative citizenship" which,

> is participation in essentially creative communal activities. It could animate communities; it could fill a vacuum in many lives now empty of purpose; it could provide status, satisfaction and identity, and begin to tackle the cause of much of society's disharmony and alienation (ibid., p. 150).

For Rogers this cultural shift towards participation, inclusion, and creativity manifests in the built environment. He thinks that we can build democracy, a thought which I want to come back to at then end of this chapter. "Safe and inclusive public space [...] is critical for social integration and cohesion. Democracy finds its physical expression in the open-minded spaces of the public realm, in the quality of its street life" (ibid., p. 152). The backside of this is that we can also build fascism, or, in its milder form, systems that "de-empower"[2] us: "It is no accident that under Fascist or similarly repressive regimes the city is segregated and specifically designed to overwhelm the

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2   A term by the designer Friedrich von Borries, whom I will come back to in the next chapter.

individual. [...] At present we are building cities that segregate and brutalise rather than emancipate and civilise" (Rogers 1995, pp. 152–153).

As a remedy, Rogers does not present the reader with a blueprint for a built environment that empowers citizens and fosters cohesion and creativity. But he hints at a key concept in the design of public buildings and public spaces, namely flexibility and openness to change. Rogers observes that the pace with which cities are changing accelerates as the institutions that place their iconic buildings in the city have ever shorter lifespans. "[R]ailway stations are converted into museums, power plants into art galleries, churches into night-clubs" (ibid., pp. 163–164). As a consequence, architecture must embrace rather than resist social change.

What particularly stands out from the perspective of this enquiry into the materiality of architecture is Rogers' observation that a new flexibility will manifest materially. For Rogers both buildings and public space are becoming more open and permeable, which in turn fosters openness and engagement of citizens.

> Architecture is changing in response to environmental demands and the development of new high-performance and bio-responsive materials. Le Corbusier described architecture as the "masterly correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light". In the future, however, buildings will tend to dematerialize. It will be an age not of mass but of transparency and veils: of indeterminate, adaptable and floating structures that respond to daily changes in the environment and patterns of use. The buildings of the future [...] will be less like the immutable classical temples of the past and more like moving, thinking, organic robots.
>
> This new architecture will change the character of the public domain. As structures become lighter, buildings will become more permeable and pedestrians will move through them rather than around them (ibid., p. 165).

Rogers' position is especially important for public architecture, e.g. by a city or state government. The urban planner points towards public buildings in France in the late 1990s and the way they seek to foster "community, pride, and cultural achievement" (ibid., p. 160). While we must be aware of the fact that there is no direct link, or correlation, between building with flexible and light materials and an increase in social cohesion and democratic participation, we can argue that architecture at least needs to aim to reflect these social values.

Addressing Spiritual Needs: An Architect's Perspective

We can go beyond Rogers' perspective and more into the actual material detail of buildings to get a more complete perspective of the way in which a building can serve the people. I want to bring in the perspective of the architect Peter Zumthor on the spiritual qualities of buildings. Before going into detail, however, this warrants a primer on what I mean by "spiritual".

In his essay *Placing the Sacred*, the theologian Philip Sheldrake argues that public spaces must not only include civic values but also religious ones, they must tell "narratives of redemption" (Sheldrake 2007, p. 254). From an architectural perspective Robert Birch and Brian Sinclair argue that architecture does not just address the physical and intellectual needs of its users but also their spiritual needs (Birch and Brian 2013). They refer to the psychologist Abraham Maslow and his article on *Peak Experiences as Acute Identity Experiences* in which Maslow defines the term *peak experience* as "a name, a word, a concept that expresses the amount of sameness that exists among the experiences of life, insight, creativeness, orgasm, parturition, mystic (oceanic, cosmic) experience, certain athletic experiences, aesthetic experience, and some others as well." (Maslow 1961, p. 254) The psychologist discusses examples from his therapeutic practice to identify 15 aspects which more clearly define how these peak experiences are experienced by his clients. Some of these aspects are helpful to recapitulate here to get a better idea of what Birch and Sinclair try to convey when they talk about buildings addressing a wide range of spiritual needs of their users. For Maslow's clients a peak experience can mean:

1. The person [...] feels more integrated (unified, whole, all-of-a-piece) than at other times. [...] less spit between an experiencing-self and an observing-self, more one-pointed, more harmoniously organized

2. As he gets to be more purely and singly himself, he is more able to fuse with the world, with what was formerly not-self [...], the creator becomes one with his work being created

3. The person in the peak experience usually feels himself to be at the peak of his powers, using all his capacities their best and fullest (ibid., p. 255).

Two aspects are striking here. The first is feeling integrated with the world, which goes as far as the creator becoming one with his or her creation. This

reminds us of Bloch's concept that the person becomes so absorbed in his doing in the world, that the world carries more of the identity of a person than the person themself – in Levinas' terminology of the "tua res agitur". The second aspect is that a peak experience also fosters the person in all their capacities. This reminds us of Richard Rogers' "creative citizenship," where individuals realise their full potential. We must, however, note that this realisation goes beyond the logic of the (labour) market, where human beings are seen as nothing more than a commodity with a clearly defined set of potentials to be realised.

One way in which Birch and Sinclair see architects trying to evoke peak experiences is by allowing for a "full sensual engagement" which in turn "encourages a focus on the present, a 'here-now' mindset, 'free of past and future'" (Birch and Brian 2013, p. 86). That *sensual quality* of architecture has been explored in great detail by Peter Zumthor in his book *Architektur denken*, thinking architecture.

What makes Zumthor's book different from other architectural publications is that he starts not with design but with the idea that architecture evokes memories. These are the "foundation of architectural moods and images which I try to fathom in my work as an architect"* (Zumthor 2017, p. 8). Zumthor's way to engage with these deep experiences is to pay close attention to the materials with which he builds. I want to focus my attention here on the way the architect talks about materiality, the self-will of the things, and the attention it demands from the architect.

The first aspect I want to mention is that Zumthor encourages architects to think more deeply about the materials they use, not just with regards to their static and artistic characteristics, but rather in terms of their "poetic qualities"* (ibid., p. 10). While Zumthor does not regard the material itself as poetic, he argues that architects can place materials in different contexts to bring out "not only the way in which the specific material is commonly used, but also its own sensual and purpose-giving properties"* (ibid., p. 10).

This demands attention to the material itself and its properties. Zumthor recalls a conversation that clarified this aspect for him:

> "In my mother tongue, in Spanish," my young colleague answers, "there is this nearness of the words wood, mother, and material: madera, madre, materia." We start a conversion about the sensual properties and the cultural meaning

of the primary raw materials wood and stone and how we can bring them out in our buildings* (ibid., p. 56).

Throughout his book Zumthor shows a great concern for the materials themselves. He talks about "their dignity, their memory"* (ibid., p. 53)[3] which architects must respect. We can also see his vocational training as a cabinetmaker shining through (cf. ibid., p. 47).

Zumthor is aware that this aspect connects him to the work of Martin Heidegger. What he takes from Heidegger's dictum of "residence with the things as a fundamental trait of being human"* is "that we are never just in the abstract but always in a world of things, within which we think"* (ibid., p. 36).

But Zumthor does not see the material in isolation of the human experience. On the contrary, he asks us to be attentive of our reactions to houses and cities: "which smell was in the air, how did my footsteps sound, how did my voice sound, how did the floor underneath my feet, the door handle feel in my hand"* (ibid., pp. 65–66)? He wants us to detect "the magic of the real, the material, [...] the things that surround me, that I see and touch, that I smell and hear"* (ibid., p. 83) when we describe architecture. Even the landscape that surrounds the building must be "felt"* (ibid., p. 99) by the architect.

But the result is not just an attention for the materiality, it is a liveable environment, a building that *houses* its inhabitants. Throughout his book, Zumthor refers to different buildings and his sensual reaction to them. One is a small mountain hut which he sees as a prototype for

> [buildings] that offer me, in an informal and natural way, situations, that fit to the place, to the daily routine, to my occupation, and to my [mental and health; C.P.] condition [...] without making much fuss about it* (ibid., p. 44).

Zumthor is interested in an architecture that allows for emotions but does not provoke them forcefully (cf. ibid., p. 29) and that is able to take on and absorb in itself the traces of human life (cf. ibid., p. 24).

This in turn means that inhabitants are part of the developmental process of a building. Zumthor refers to John Cage and his music[4] to argue that only

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3 Zumthor names the Finnish filmmaker Aki Olavi Kaurismäki as one of his role models for a respectful treatment of the material.
4 We could link that to Umberto Eco's *open artwork*, cf. page 17.

through performance – which I understand as both building and living in a building, with its materiality and sometimes the materials stubbornness as well (cf. Zumthor 2017, p. 62) – a building comes to life. According to Zumthor,

> [Cage] was not a composer that heard music in his mind and then tried to write that down […] He worked out concepts and structures and had them performed to only then find out how they sounded.* (ibid., p. 31)

Thus, the way out of the crisis of corporate campus architecture and planning is on the one hand cooperative communal planning and on the other hand an openness for the spiritual needs of humans and the transcendental potential of the material.

A Sense for the Greater Good through Building: An Architectural Perspective

How are the demands of Richard Rogers and Peter Zumthor realised in architectural practice? While both are quoting examples from architectural praxis, I want to look at a particular style of building that matches the corporate laboratory we looked at in the second part of this book. It is the public architecture of democracies, which finds its most visible expression in parliamentary buildings, where the civic virtues – and spiritual needs – of people are addressed. These buildings speak for the ideals of a society, even if its citizens cannot afford a house built by Zumthor or are not as fortunate as to live in a city quarter planned by Rogers.

We must be aware that the link we are making between civic virtues and architectural forms is a contested one. In his book *Beautiful Democracy* Russ Castronovo critically deconstructs the ideals of American city planners at the turn of the century who sought to better the lot of the country's poor through beautiful buildings and city parks but were also displaying their cultural (and white) supremacy (Castronovo 2007). Heike Delitz goes even deeper in her analysis of the "Built Society"* where she develops an architectural sociology that neither reduces buildings to mere expressions of a society's values nor chimes in with

the architects who think that they can change society through architecture.[5] Rather, Delitz argues that there is a symbiotic co-existence between buildings and the ideals of the society. For parliamentary architecture, she argues that the modern open glass parliaments

> are generating a new form of the political system, […] which its representatives might not have been able to understand themselves* (Delitz 2010, p. 16).

To sum up the caveats mentioned in this paragraph: while parliamentarians might commission buildings that represent the ideals of a liberal democracy, they themselves might fully realise them only when they enter the finished building.

A group of public buildings that stands out in this regard are the buildings of the Federal Republic of West Germany after the Second World War in the new capital of Bonn and in other West-German cities. I want to single out one particular building, namely the Bundestag building by GÜNTER BEHNISCH, as displaying a spirit of openness and modesty through its design and materiality and thus giving visible expression to the values of the young German republic after the war. I will preface this by a short introduction to democratic building.

In his sociology of architecture, Bernd Schäfers devotes a chapter to *building for democracy*. In it he begins with revolutionary architecture that wanted to turn the ideals of the French Revolution into monumental architecture. Science played an important part in the revolutionary world view – alongside liberty, equality, and fraternity – and therefore large structures like the Newton Monument by the classicist architect Étienne-Louis Buellée were devoted to the idea of a society led by scientific reason. Architects like Buellée wanted to turn the ideals of the revolution into brick and mortar in order to make a lasting impact in the fluidity of history.

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5   The author does, however, take the claims of such architects seriously, especially when she applies her theory to examples from the building practice of the 1920s ("Life Reform"), the 1930s ("Neues Bauen"), or the socialist megablock architects of the 1960s. In these examples Delitz draws heavily but critically on the self-descriptions of the architects involved.

Figure 22: Haus des Landtags, Horst Linde (1961)

> Photographer *Marcus Ebner* has documented Horst Linde's building. Especially interesting is the night shot of the illuminated cube.

But democracy does not only rest on values, such as liberty and equality, it is also indebted to a specific type of political process that is in essence a public one. Thus, democratic architecture also encompasses public space. The state parliament of Baden-Württemberg, for instance, features an open, glazed ground floor above which the parliament's assembly room sits. Horst Linde created a low and open structure where the glass around the ground level makes the upper plenary room almost levitate. The Federal Constitutional Court of Germany in Karlsruhe also employs glass to give the impression that the decision-making process of the court is open and transparent to all citizens. Both the original building by the Berlin architect Paul Baumgarten from 1969 and the 2007 extension by the Berlin architect Michael Schrölkamp rely heavily on that material. Finally, the dome of the Reichstag in Berlin, built by Norman Foster, which allows visitors to see the parliamentarians at work, is also a highly transparent structure.

Figure 23: Baumgarten-Bau, Paul Baumgarten (1969)

> A documentation of the Baugarten-Bau can be found on the website of *Bundesbau Baden-Württemberg* under the title "Bundesverfassungsgericht, Karlsruhe".

It seems then, that democratic architects have taken a leaf out of Adolf Arndt's famous speech *Demokratie als Bauherr*, democracy as a builder, and created transparent and accessible spaces that embody the ideals – as well as the humbleness – of German democracy after 1945 (Arndt 1961). But glass architecture has also been criticised for that it merely gives the illusion of openness. As we have seen with Holmdel, glass is not just transparent, it can also act as a powerful barrier.

Thus democratic architecture hinges not on the material per se but a different approach to building. Günter Behnisch and Partner stood for this.[6] Their design of the new parliamentary building in Bonn spoke of an open and humane architecture: a humane scale, a non-monumental type of architecture that does not want to overwhelm the visitor, the openness of space, keeping a low profile and thus showing respect towards the other buildings that surround it – and the process character and unfinished nature of the building itself. One architectural critic summed up the ideas behind Behnisch's architecture:

> This building is a platonic ideal image of what we have come to as a community, as a state, after the years of the NS dictatorship: openness, justice, liberty [...] the message is: freedom, relaxedness, unpretentious self-assurance and generosity. There might be more dignified parliamentary buildings, but a more liberal, a more democratic one can hardly be found* (Battis 1994, p. 4).

Figure 24: Plenary Building Bundestag Bonn, Günter Behnisch (1992)

The German *Bundestag* has documented the "Behnisch-Bau" in the section "Parlamentarische Schauplätze in Bonn" under the title "Behnisch- und Schürmann-Bau".

For some critics, however, the building lacked the monumental power and might that a strong and well-fortified democracy needed. Johannes Groß remarked:

> In its relaxed airiness, the openness to all sides [the parliamentary building is] a monument to the ideals of the 60s and 70s, the old Federal Republic of [West; C.P.] Germany. It is a beautiful annex to the national gardening show next door. It is the refusal of the state of emergency turned into architecture* (ibid., p. 4).

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6   This is probably also due to the biography of the architect. As a young officer on a submarine in the Second World War, Behnisch must have experienced claustrophobic spaces coupled with authoritarian power structures. Both are absent in his buildings.

A Sense for the Greater Good through Building: A Parliamentarian Perspective

The ability of the building to have an impact on its users, making them slow down and reflect, is hard to support empirically if we do not want to enter the realm of the psychological experiment. But there is at least an interrelation between reflexive architecture and reflected users. There are few places where this is more apparent than in the parliament, especially when parliamentarians reflect on the mission of *the house*. I am referring here mainly to the analysis of the opening speeches of the German parliament at the beginning of each legislative period during its residency in Bonn. Werner Patzelt has undertaken an analysis of these speeches and focused on "discourses of transcendence" within the opening addresses of the Bundestag's presidents by seniority, such as Paul Löbe, Konrad Adenauer, Ludwig Erhard, Willy Brandt, Herbert Wehner, or Marie-Elisabeth Lüders.

Patzelt argues that by looking at transcendental discourses, it becomes possible to understand "how the new beginning in 1949 turned into a particular [...] political order, which over the years [...] has turned into an order we take for granted [...] and which today even more than before is being defended with a civic religious zeal against extremists"* (Patzelt 2013, p. 158). Patzelt then goes on to distinguish between different types of (transcendental) discourses (cf. ibid. 162). My question here, however, is how transcendental discourses refer to the space and the materiality of the parliament and thus hint at the interdependence between space/material and democratic values.

Figure 25: Interior of the Bundestag Bonn, Günter Behnisch (1992)

An article with pictures of the interior of the "Behnisch-Bau" was printed in the magazine *Bauwelt* 83.41 (1992) on page 2351.

The first discourse I want to look at is the "through the night to the light" discourse (cf. ibid., p. 167). As the parliament begins its work in 1949 – and years before it moved into the Behnisch building –, its first president by seniority, Paul Löbe, reminds the parliamentarians of the physical destruction of the war which corresponds to a moral destruction:

[Who had travelled to Bonn on his way to the opening of parliament has seen] the shocking witnesses to the destruction which was brought about by the [Nazi; C.P.] seizure of power. These are just the visible witnesses, but every one of us knows that with the outer destruction there had also been a destruction of mind and soul in our peoples. [...][What is needed then is] to replace the ruins with a cosy house and inspire courage in the discouraged* (Löbe 1949 in ibid., p. 168).

Only eight years later, Marie-Elisabeth Lüders can rejoice in the fact that such a homely place has indeed been built: "The resurrection and the expansion of our country and our relations to the world"* (Lüders 1957 in ibid., p. 170) have been successful. It is important to notice how the presidents connected the path to democracy with the rebuilding of the country. Both Paul Löbe and Marie-Elisabeth Lüders see the development of democratic ideals through the metaphor of rebuilding. That rebuilding is not done by a single architect, but by *us*, the democratic citizens of the Federal Republic of West Germany.

The second discourse I am interested in is called by Patzelt the "plus ultra" discourse, which aims at a transcendence of the status quo. In the 1970s Willy Brandt argued for a renewal of the political order in Germany:

In the 70s we will have only as much order in this country as we encourage a shared responsibility. Such a democratic order needs an extraordinary amount of patience for listening and trying to understand one another. We want to dare more democracy. We will open our procedures and will satisfy the critical need for information* (Brandt 1969 in ibid., p. 183).

It is noteworthy that Brandt speaks about the need for transparency and for listening, which later Behnisch and Partners tried to realise in the open plenary building in Bonn. What Brandt did not see, however, was that while the architecture of parliaments employed glass and open spaces, it was still the architecture of star architects and prominent planning commissions. The problem, as Adolf Arndt has emphasised – but answered only with a call for more star architecture – is that it is hard to instil a sense of *we* into citizens looking at the plenary building when they are not part of the planning process.

New Strategies for Materially Sensitive People

This brings us from the architectural and material qualities to the role of the persons involved. Like we did before, we move from an attentiveness for the material world to possible strategies we could implement to raise said attentiveness. However, in this chapter I do not want to bring in a theological perspective as a corrective to a philosophical discussion on materialism. Rather, I want theology to learn from the perspective of practitioners.

Not only architects have changed their approach to building and public space to allow for a networked world to come to its own right and thus included the wholeness of living. Designers and community organisers likewise have done so and therefore can become role models for a renewed pastoral practice and practical theology as a whole.

The Architect: Material and Social Self-Formation

From the way Willy Brandt understood politics as listening and trying to understand, we can detect the need to make planning more open and inclusive, which applies not only to politics but to architectural planning and its emphasis on the star architect as well. Modern planning approaches focus both on the public as an independent actor and on the material as an important factor. It is an architecture that strongly connects the network approach in materialism with social theory. The architect WALTER KLASZ is an architect who puts this approach into practice.

Klasz' development as an architect and his relation to both the material and the social might best be described in reference to his book *in-between* in which he reflects on his artist residency in New Zealand and on his principles for con-

struction. The title *in-between* suggests that Klasz seeks out spaces in between: he is interested, as his colleague Wittfrida Mitterer writes in the introduction, in the "dialogue between humans and space and between humans and nature" (Mitterer 2017, p. i); he practices architecture "between research and practice" (Kern 2017, p. vii), as Christian Kern writes in the same book; and he works with students in the "'inbetween-phase' in their lives", a time "determined by insecurity but also by openness" (Michl 2017, p. v), as Thomas Michl notes.

From an architecture-theoretical perspective, Wittfrida Mitterer places Klasz also in the in-between: between the schools of high-tech architecture of e.g. Norman Foster, bionic architecture of e.g. Frei Otto, and the "age of parametrical design" (Mitterer 2017, p. iv) with its use of digital tools and CNC-aided production. The result is an architecture that the artist Paul Woodruffe characterises as "capable of creating a bridge between the unconscious and the conscious" (Woodruffe 2017, p. xi).

In order to do that, Klasz has developed a strong sensibility for the material with which he builds. Woodruffe writes

> [...] the nature of a material is encouraged to show itself through the designer's hand. Walter creates forms that have deep roots within human necessity: to provide shelter, social space and a connection to place, but, most importantly, these forms impart a sense of wonder, and demonstrate a respect for the natural world (ibid., p. xi).

The architect Christian Kern characterises Klasz' work along the same lines.

> Walter listens to the material inherent behaviour, trying to find a sort of melody in the continuously changing form [...] His research vehicle is the scaled physical model [...] using his hands – feeling real physical forces and limits in the material (Kern 2017, p. vii).

How this approach turns out in practice is what I shall be concerned with here. I want to focus on three practices: working with scaled models, referencing vernacular architecture, and working socially with the need of humans – as social and relational beings – in mind. Klasz describes his approach to find new architectural forms as one coming from manual practice. Thus we find him working with scale models of wooden structures during his residency.

> I am a practising architect. It's a fundamental sensation to watch forms emerge and to actively take part in this process. I worked for six weeks in the wood barn without any distractions, just listening to the material inherent properties of wood (Klasz 2017, p. 40).

In these "iterative experimental form-finding" processes the architect experiments with differently bent and joined strips of wood. From one form to the next, Klasz further and further reduces the complexity of his design and the additional aids, such as cables, that hold the form in place. He is "trying to reduce active design work in order to let the form emerge on its own, believing strongly in self-organised form-finding" (ibid., p. 73).

Figure 26: Iterative experimental form finding, Walter Klasz (2017)

> Walter Klasz's experiments with iterative form finding are documented in the architect's online publication "*inbetween*" on pages 52-53.

The observer notices ever new forms emerging not from the addition of technical complications but from a further reduction of the inferences of the designer. In the experiments the attentiveness towards the material and its self-will is literally taking shape. They also connect to the work of Frei Otto, one of the pioneering architects of light structures. For his *Tanzbrunnen* pavilion for the *National Gardening Fare* of 1957, Frei Otto built a scale model of the structure's skeleton which he then dipped into a soap solution. The resulting soap membranes were the models for the tarpaulin membranes of the actual structure.

    This working with the materials also bridges the gap between architecture as an art and as a craft. Danny Rowlandson refers to that as "knowledge which cannot be expressed as theory and can only be understood through experience" (ibid., p. 85) and links back to Heidegger's term "performative knowledge." Form finding through self-emergence and knowledge acquisition through experience are therefore closely linked.

The second aspect I want to highlight is Klasz' veneration for vernacular architecture. He includes both to the alpine architecture of his native country Austria and the Polynesian boat design of his host country New Zealand. Both architectures have in common that they use local materials, are designed with the needs of the users in mind, and "can be given up to nature when they don't work anymore" (Klasz 2017, p. 64).

Figure 27: Frei Otto: Tanzbrunnen (1957). From the "Werkarchiv Frei Otto" at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

> The bubble model of the "Tanzbrunnen" is featured in the 2020 exhibition catalogue "From Models, Media, and Methods. Frei Otto's Architectural Research" by the *Yale School of Architecture*.

Such an approach underlines the networked nature of architecture. Its materiality is rooted in nature – which is also allowed to take back what is no longer used – and its use is rooted in a user-centred social structure. The approach stems not just from a practical perspective but also regards the "huge emotional desire in our society to have a closer relationship to our environment again" (ibid., p. 64). Peter Zumthor showed a similar sensibility for natural materials, the integration of architecture in nature, and the human need to emotionally connect with the building – partly through its materiality. Christian de Groot aptly describes Walter Klasz when he works with his materials as also emotionally involved.

> I have got the feeling that you have had fun while experimenting in the wood barn. The emerging forms release a smile in our face. There is a difference between just being attracted by a shape and being moved by an aesthetical form in a deeper way (ibid., p. 79).

This joy of interacting with nature also makes the architect aware of his buildings' impact on nature. A lightweight design with both a small physical and carbon footprint is the result, such as in the project *A Cloud for Fresh Snow*, where a minimal-impact mountain shelter was constructed.

The third aspect I want to mention is the social dimension of the form finding process. Klasz himself teaches students, a practice to which his colleague, the academic advisor Hazel Redpath, refers in her pedagogical theory.

> I noticed that the beauty of your structures emerges when you set boundaries and then give freedom to the material; I would like to suggest that this might also be possible in an education setting, where the students interact with their environment – and the focus shifts, through "enabling constraints" to creating the conditions for emergence rather than managing for outcomes (ibid., p. 90).

Leaving the rooms of the university, Klasz' approach to form-finding can also be applied to the engagement with the community during planning and building processes. An example that goes beyond the mere gathering of ideas from a building's users during the design phase, is Klasz' project *Baetsch in the City*.

Figure 28: Walter Klasz and Paul Woodruffe: Baetsch in the City (2013)

The hut built by Walter Klasz and Paul Woodruffe is documented on the architect's *website* in the article: "Ein Baech in Wien".

The architect had to delay the start of his residency in New Zealand, so he began, together with his project partner Paul Woodruffe, to transplant the experience of a Kiwi beach to the heart of Vienna. They chose a small park surrounded by streets, the Nietzscheplatz in Ottakring, as their project site where they constructed a structurally integer timber frame. Their idea was, as Woodruffe describes it in retrospective, "to get the ball rolling," hoping that local citizens would donate "old pieces of buildings and interior furniture" (Woodruffe 2013, p. 48) which would be attached to the substructure. The building thus was not constructed in its entirety in an architect's office but it would grow with the help from those who lived around it. Besides naturally attracting children, youth, as well as "drinkers from the edges of the park over" (ibid., p. 48), Klasz and his partner also held public meetings in which they would be "sitting in a circle on the new floor visualising what could be done with this space" (ibid., p. 48). The result was not just a building with a "warm wood interior with its books, chairs, donated paintings, odd glasses, cups and saucers, just like an old Kiwi bach [=beach; C.P.]" (ibid., p. 48), but also a social gathering space and the emer-

gence of spontaneous interaction and creativity, "an impromptu concert from a man who once had a voice and a talent" (Woodruffe 2013, p. 48). At the end of the project the architects sealed the building with plastic wrap to protect it from the nearing autumn weather and left it in place as a social sculpture.

From my theoretical perspective I am drawn to the idea that the architect's – as well as the public intellectual's – task is to provide space and a substructure to which others can then add. I also want to highlight the epistemological premise, namely that knowledge is acquired in interaction with the natural and the social world, which are given the status as co-producers – like the performers of John Cage's music. This is an important learning for pastoral theology and its working structure.

The Designer: Subversively Changing the World through its Products

The second approach I want to introduce is that of the designer. Akin to architecture, design also works intensively with the material, especially product design, which is responsible for the material world – filled with things – that we live in. The architect and design scholar FRIEDRICH VON BORRIES attempts to define the ethics of design in his book *Weltententwerfen*, designing the world. Like Klasz, von Borries opposes the philosophy of company- or architect-knows-best and looks at the social aspects of his work.

He begins his book with a definition of the word "entwerfen," designing, and refers to the Heideggerian definition of "being thrown into this world" (cf. above) to describe humanity as born with the inherent need and ability to design. He adds to Heidegger's etymological approach the philosopher Vilém Flusser's position, who understands designing as an act of liberation as well as of becoming human.

> The central element of incarnation [...] is the designing, the path from subject to project. While the "sub-ject" (Latin *subjectum* that which has been thrown down) is subjected, the project throws or thinks forwards. When we design, we liberate ourselves* (Borries 2016, p. 13).[1]

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1   The play on words in German, i.e. "ent-werfen" as throwing, is not easily translatable.

On that basis von Borries distinguishes between design that liberates and de-sign that subjugates.

What makes the act of designing unique and interesting in the context of mate-riality is the fact that it has a concrete object to work with. Again, von Borries – like Heidegger – looks at the etymological roots of the word: "Object has two meanings. The first refers to the materiality [...] but more fundamentally de-signing an object means that something stands against us[2] [...] which we have to object to make the world a better place"* (ibid., p. 15). This etymology refers to the liberating, and conflict-ridden, practice of designing.

But there is also a second notion, namely that the act of designing some-thing turns an *abstractum* into a *concretum*. Through design, abstract concepts, such as the living conditions of people, become palpable. And it is through that palpability that we can understand them and change them (cf. ibid., p. 18). If we follow Marx and Adorno in that the post-industrialisation world is full of things, so much so that humans begin to treat each other as if they were things (cf. ibid., p. 17), then we can not only better understand the world by looking at objects, we can also change the world by designing them in a better way. Design will thus become a leading discipline for the future because "in design one does not just describe and analyse problems, but design is always geared towards solving problems"* (ibid., p. 135).

This notion brings von Borries to the conclusion that design is a highly political affair and that designers must recognise their responsibility both for liberat-ing and for subjugating designs.[3] The ethical imperative penetrates the world of even the most mundane objects.

> A chair can be liberating as well as subjugating. [...] A throne is subjugating [...] But a chair can be liberating as well [...] With the cantilever chair the static sitting is dissolved into a dynamic swinging, into a moment of freedom that questions stable relations; a materialist paradigm shift* (ibid., pp. 28–29).

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2   Again there is a similarity in the German language, this time between object, i.e. "Gegen-stand," and objecting / standing against, i.e. "entgegen stehen."

3   Von Borries refers to Bruno Latour who argues that materiality and morality are being fused into one. Thinking both together becomes especially important as designers start working not only with buildings but with genes and implanted chips.

This is where von Borries sees a new role for designers: They are designing mundane objects – and even participate in the design of subjugating products to make a living – but they are "despite all pragmatism […] working in secret on projects that turn the existing conditions upside down. These projects are the subversive potential that drives their work in and on the social realities"* (Borries 2016, p. 127). But in order to change the world through design – hence the title of the book *Weltentwerfen*, designing the world – the designers also have to change their own life: "Designing the world always means to design one's own life but […] in the sense of a positive porousness – to accept one's own inadequacies as well"* (ibid., p. 130). This design philosophy is thus not only a political one, it is also a personal one that is open, porous, and never finished.

If we relate von Borries' world design to Klasz' social form-finding, we refer to a rich tradition of conscious and social designing small and mundane things but also developing architecture on the large scale. On that basis we can see a counter movement emerging against the all-encompassing fantasies of earlier city planners and laboratory designers.

The Community Organiser: Listening to People's Voices as Co-Creators

The last role model I want to mention is one I call the "community organiser," which includes city planners, researchers on the ground, social workers, and committed citizens. These people run the social laboratories that give the name to this part of the book. I therefore want to introduce the idea of social laboratories first before giving voice to a prominent representative of community organisers, the German-American priest Leo Penta.

As mentioned above, form-finding processes are experimental in character. Therefore, it is only natural to connect the idea of social and material form-finding with the idea of the laboratory. The laboratory in question, however, differs from both corporate campus architecture and the scientific university laboratory that Latour and Woolgar visited. Social laboratories are not only rooted in a different approach to architecture but also in the theory of science, in particular in theories on the relation between university and public. In the face of large societal transformations, the university and the company can no longer seclude themselves as independent producers of knowledge – scientists claiming the same independence and power as the star architects we discussed be-

fore – if they want to play a role in the transformative processes that happen at their front door.

Building on the long tradition of research on civic engagement (i.e. service learning), action research, and the public co-creation of scientific knowledge, there has been an increase in research on social or *open* laboratories over the last 10 years. The term real-life laboratory, Reallabor, has been used to characterise projects, that open up the university towards the public to discuss societal transformations and the role of science and research in shaping these transformations. Niko Schäpke et al. have compiled a list of research approaches and of projects that have opened such laboratory spaces (cf. Schäpke et al. 2017, pp. 29, 63–67). Many of them deal with research on the transformation of mobility, of how public and private transport must change in ever growing cities and how science, politics, and the general public can develop working solutions for these transformative processes, cf. the real-life laboratory for a sustainable culture of mobility in Stuttgart.

Schäpke et al. have also sought to single out the common characteristics of real-life laboratories: They are based on the idea that science does not just produce knowledge about the state of the world or normative claims of how the world ought to be, but that it also produces transformative knowledge about the path from the current state to a future state (cf. ibid., p. 9). Real-life laboratories are therefore part of transformative research which looks into the transformation of physical and of social structures (cf. ibid., p. 11).

Their research method is the real experiment, Realexperiment, a type of public experiment which understands the setup and the execution of experiments as a participative endeavour between scientists and stakeholders from the public. Experiments are not set up in a controlled laboratory space and cannot be executed in one day. Rather, over the course of several months, these experiments move back and forth between scientific research, public participation, and real-world implementation. They are more a type of scientifically controlled public intervention than a laboratory experiment. The aim is to take the learnings at the end of the experiment and either look more deeply into what made the intervention successful or to broaden and scale up the intervention so that it can be applied in other contexts as well (cf. ibid. 39-40).

Figure 29: The process of real experiments (Schäpke et al. 2017, p. 23)

A graphic illustration of the different phases of real experiments can be found in the source mentioned above on page 23. It shows both the different phases from "problem definition" to "implementation" and the different levels of involvement during the different phases from "information" to "empowerment".

One such real experiment that happened at the real-life laboratory in Stuttgart was the construction of *parklets*, small wooden structures that replaced parking spaces in the city with public areas where people could sit and enjoy a green and social outdoor space. These were designed in a collaborative process between researchers and the public and they were also discussed both on site and on the internet. The researchers designed multiple *parklets* while closely monitoring and engaging in the conversations that erupted on the project's facebook-page.

Figure 30: Parklet Stuttgart, Reallabor für nachhaltige Mobilitätskultur (2018)

The "Parklets" in Stuttgart are documented on their own website *Parklets für Stuttgart*.

This hands-on approach to space and the material realities that is characteristic for a real-life laboratory is important if we want to implement a new type of socially responsible laboratory. In fact, experimentation alone lets us get in close contact with the material.

One way in which this experimental approach can be brought to the praxis is the idea of *community organising*. Albeit much older than the real-experiment, its proponents can tell us a lot about the personal involvement it takes to engage with urban spaces and the people therein. How that is realised in practice is best described by Leo Penta, who is one of the theoreticians behind Christian community organising. As a Catholic theologian he started to initialise citizens assemblies in the U.S.

Penta followed the tradition of Saul Alinsky, the father of community organising in the United States, who founded the *Industrial Areas Foundation* in Chicago and went on to organise civic participation in many parts of the U.S. The main idea behind Alinsky's organising was to form a stable and powerful

coalition of citizens who were living in a particular part of a city or town and who were directly affected by political and economic decisions in that area. Community organising starts with the needs of those who are affected, which is why professional community organisers are engaged in a lot of door-to-door listening campaigns. After listening the organisers try to bring citizens together and enable them to publicly voice their problems and to set their own agenda for change (cf. Alinsky 1971).

Leo Penta tells his journey as a community organiser as that of a young priest who came to Brooklyn in 1987, then one of the poorest areas of New York. That poverty showed in burnt down and neglected houses as well as unkept tenement houses that resembled dangerous prisons rather than places for living.

> Soon after my arrival it became clear that the common methods of pastoral care and social work would not be sufficient to deal with the situation. Not only the poverty and the variety of social problems resulting from that questioned everything, but also the obvious fact that that part of town was on the verge of total decline* (Penta 2007, pp. 55–56).

The clergyman rallied leaders of other faith communities who were facing the same problems and were often the only remaining institutions in that part of the town. The key to his success was, as Penta later understood it, that he organised his response based on the principles of community organising as set forward by Saul Alinsky and his successor Edward T. Chambers. The community leaders around Penta "did not want to just add another patch to the wound – just another soup kitchen, warm room, or a homily on eternal life [...] they looked in earnest and systematically for new ways to act"* (ibid., p. 58). So they started to build long-term relations in the neighbourhood, started listening to key persons within the community, and also left the comfort of their own social group: "I was asked for instance to get in touch with a young black baptist preacher. I realised how difficult it was at first for me to look beyond my own solidified white world and empathise with his world"* (ibid., p. 59).

The leaders of the diverse faith groups in Brooklyn formed an organisation – the East Brooklyn Churches – and began to build a large-scale accessible housing project. They were able to turn their neighbourhoods around: "The neighbourhoods pronounced dead rose again and with them their church communities"* (ibid. 63).

There is much to say about the rise of community organising in the 1990s and the challenges it faces today as cities grow and neighbourhoods break apart.[4] But what is important for the scope of my book is that Penta describes a personal strategy of paying close attention to how his neighbourhood looks, even sounds and smells, in order to take care of its wellbeing. Furthermore, as a pastoral worker he was not content with abstractly analysing a situation but rather took on the role that Friedrich von Borries imagined for the designer: work out concrete – as in material – solutions for seemingly abstract and insurmountable social problems.

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4   The link between affordable private housing and the growth of a new community around a church reminds me of housing development in Germany after the war, when church officials were full of optimism that their model of church could go on forever thanks to an ever-increasing Catholic community. I will come back to that in the fourth and final part of the book.

Examples of a Material-Human-Sensitive Church

Religious actors still play an important role in the public space as we can see on our city maps and the prominence of sacred places therein. In these spaces pastoral theology can apply the insights of this book – from the electric to the social laboratory – and learn from the experiences of artists, philosophers, architects, and urban planners along the way. The practices I want to describe here exhibit traces of the material- and human-sensitive church I have proposed throughout this book. This chapter is mostly concerned with hands-on approaches. How they translate into a new theological appreciation of the role of churches in society will be the concern of the fourth and final part of the book.

Getting Hands-on in the North West Bronx: How a Church Fights for Spatial Justice from within the World of Things

Following the example of the community organiser, I want to refer to my personal experience with community organising in the United States. In the fall of 2018, during a research leave, I conducted a short field study and an interview at the *North West Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition* (NWBCCC). It is a good example of the Penta-style community organisation mentioned above. The NWBCCC grew out of the abandonment of the Bronx in the 1970s. With redlining, the effective exclusion of certain areas out of the banks' credit system, white flight, and de-investment by mostly white landlords, the Bronx was hit very hard both economically and socially. When landlords began to burn down their buildings in order to collect insurance money, citizens started to organise. What grew out of a discussion group at Catholic Fordham University, which is in the midst of the Bronx, became a stable organisation, which addresses the

issues of the North West Bronx, first and foremost housing, education, and security.

My interview with two community organisers – a male organiser who has worked in the area for a long time and a female organiser from the outside who became a leading figure in the organisation – revolved around the question of how space and technology can come together to create visions for a better living in the community. In the following passages I want to highlight some of the central themes which connect to the aspects of architecture, materiality, and space I have addressed so far.

a) The Negative and Positive Power of Space

The NWBCCC has experienced the destructive power of space ever since it started as a reaction to the neglect of the Bronx. The group set this negative power of commercialised space in contrast to the positive image of man as created by God. The religious imagery proved to be a powerful source to voice resistance.

> Landlords would literally burn their own buildings, the only option for them to get a return on their investment.[...] So, community members, clergy, leaders and residents began to talk [...] – "we have dignity, we are in light of God, we deserve more that this!" – and began to organise. [...] And began to look for resources and built safe and affordable housing. And that became the basis of our organisation (NWBCCC 2018, pp. 42–47).[1]

But space can also be a positive asset. Spaces are rich in history and heritage, which is why my male interlocutor, an experienced organiser, mostly referred to the oral history of the people who live in the space. "If anyone took the time [...], you would see that there is incredible historical knowledge, intellectual heritage [...] other intelligences, other ways of knowing that could be leveraged to do things" (ibid., pp. 20–23).

With Karl Schlögel we might add that the space itself, the buildings and streets, bears a powerful remembrance of the past: the positive as well as the negative events that shaped the community. In addition, we might introduce

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1   The numbers refer to my transcript of the interview, which is available upon request. I used a simplified transcription system based on Dresing and Pehl (Dresing and Pehl 2015).

the level of objects – derelict objects and even trash – that tell a story of the place and show its richness and the capabilities of its inhabitants.

b) Action Comes from Hands-on Experience

The roots of community organising lie in the engagement with the people living in the area and in their tangible experience of living conditions:

> It is essential for us in organising to talk about something that is tangible. So, it is about the leak in your apartment [...] because that is survival mode [...] in order to survive I need to address that. But when you address that you can look at systemic change (ibid., pp. 77–70).

This physical engagement is also present in the visioning process of the NWBCCC core staff. "What does the Bronx you want 20 years from now look like. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? [...] That cycle of tapping into people's experiences [...] is what organisers do daily" (ibid., pp. 80–82).

The basis for this approach is that engagement with and understanding of the world only comes from a tangible, physical, hands-on experience: "You understand the world by acting in it." (ibid., pp. 91–92) This resonates with the idea of being part of a network of human and material actors.

The whole community organising process at the NWBCCC is therefore a very physical job. Organisers walk the streets, they "are 'on the street' (ibid., p. 26) and 'knock on doors,' (ibid., p. 71)" in order to get people involved.

Both my male and my female interlocutor also talked at length about the organisation "creating" spaces for participation (cf. ibid., pp. 7, 83, 92, 100), "inviting" people into a physical space (cf. ibid., p. 92), giving people "the spaces to actualise" (cf. ibid., pp. 26–27). And finally, the organisation's goal is to transform spaces. All that is a physical activity which brings one in contact with the world – and also with the resistive potential of materiality to confound our plans.

c) Technology Must Become Part of the Landscape

The second part of the interview was concerned with the role of technology in community organising. One of the main issues with digital technology was

that while NWBCCC relies heavily on it for community organising – collecting different voices of people who cannot be present at meetings for instance (cf. NWBCCC 2018, pp. 132–136) – technology did not originate within the community:

> Thinking about how the tech industry originally developed, it was just a bunch of white kids in San Francisco or wherever, thinking about challenges from their lens. And not about a community being developed. […] It's no wonder that technology is just to replace their moms (ibid., pp. 113–116).

It became obvious throughout this interview that technology lacks a sense of place and a real connection to the city and the people living there. That is precisely the criticism that concluded the second part of this book on corporate campuses. To address this, my male interlocutor referred to the culture of hacking. "It is a no-brainer why Twitter has the features that it has, because social movements were using it and had to develop go-arounds and stuff like that" (ibid., pp. 150–152). The adaption of technology to the needs of a particular space is an important aspect to understand the dynamic and political potential of the human, material, and software network. This can even take on a very physical form:

> The good thing about advanced digital technologies and advanced manufacturing: Because of that scarcity thing it was that somebody designed something over here and then another person manufactures it. […] Now it is like most things could be together: 3d-printing. […] You could be your own director, actor, producer. […] What that means is that the community has more opportunity to take advantage of that and make sure that new technology develops through the lens of how we see problems. So that we could start making shit that matters (ibid., pp. 116–122).

The 3D printer here acts as a link between the immaterial software world – which through digital applications is a dominant factor in the lives of many people in the community – and the physical world. It helps to bring both worlds together and to overcome a bilateral speechlessness of people who live in the physical and those who mostly live in the digital world:

> People that are not into the digital world do not know how to operate. Whereas people who are not in the physical world do not know how to operate [there] (ibid., pp. 109–111).

The experiences of both interview partners show that community organising is a way for religious communities to deeply engage with the physical world of the people living in the city. While the interview shows a deep reflection of the value of space, as a space for personal and community growth, I think that the NWBCCC and other community organisations could profit from a deeper reflection on the materiality of the space around them. This is why my approach towards real-life laboratories focuses less on the space but more on the material qualities and the political consequences of engagement. My argument is that while we are already quite conscious of space and spatial justice, our efforts will potentially fall short if we do not recognise how much our daily lives are influenced by material experiences.

Gerhard Wegner, for instance, writes about the role of religious communities in the provision of space within the city. Understanding space as participative and inclusive he argues that we need to actively overcome the seemingly natural border between *we* and the others. *We* in this sense must become a shared identity (cf. Wegner 2015, p. 62) and the individual or the group's sense of what is normal and accepted must include other versions of normality as well. It is a rocky path towards that. "The practice of changing from a construction of normality to the acceptance of alterity usually goes hand in hand with narcissistic wounds"* (ibid., p. 63). This has consequences for churches and religious communities which are in essence a clearly defined *we* within a clearly defined space. And they are usually organised in concentric rings around a middle of a few active members and full-time professionals (cf. ibid., pp. 64–65), even if the claim of many church communities is that they are oriented towards the social sphere that surrounds them.

NWBCCC has opened up that closed social space. But what I feel is lacking is to transcend their *we* towards what the *Commission on Urban Life and Faith* of the Church of England called an "interconnected" vision of space (Commission on Urban Life and Faith 2006). This goes beyond the concept of a "mixed economy", of church that sets up new "contextual churches"(Müller 2019, p. 132) besides the traditional parish church. It is a radical transcending of church as both a people and a place. One way to transcend itself is, as we have seen with Heidegger, to build, however small the structures might be. This is why I want

to turn my attention to the church community as a builder and the role of the architect therein.

Social Forming in Rif: A Church Rich in Material and Social Awareness

In 2009 the Catholic church of Rif-Taxach, a small village 18 kilometers south of Salzburg, commissioned the construction of a church. One of the challenges was that the building was also to include a community hall for the 4.000 citizens of Rif and connect to a nondescript neighbouring building that the church community had built in 1996 as its parish hall. Furthermore, the church would stand in the midst of an already built private residential area. It was thus a building well connected but also one surrounded by different interest groups. An approach that was both sensitive to its surroundings as well as independent was needed.

Walter Klasz won the commission and became involved in the planning process which led to the construction of the church in several steps from 2011 to 2014. In line with his interest in the self-formation of material, he describes the planning process similarly, namely as a socially self-forming process. The architect's role in it is

> reducing the direct form-giving as much as possible and focus on the boundary conditions. […] In a dialogue […] a solution forms itself out of the middle. The participants bring their experiences and even their individual inspirations, ideas, and convictions into the midst and trust in the interactive process out of which a form emerges. This form is at best then not a compromise but something new that could only arise by the involvement and at the same time the letting go of the participants* (Klasz 2016).

In 2020, eight years after the initial opening of the church in 2012, I revisited the site with Walter Klasz. Together we chose three photographic positions which show different views of the church. I want to describe two positions here with each position highlighting a different aspect of the building's materiality, the interactions with its surroundings, the way the planning process came together, and a particular view of church and world.

Figure 31: St. Albrecht in Rif, outside view from a neighbour's garden. Photo by the author.

Figure 31 shows the church from a neighbour's garden. While the roofline is clearly visible from behind the trees, the glass façade of the building makes it blend in with the sky, reducing the visual impact. This is important for the church as a part of the neighbourhood. During the planning process the architect and the planning committee held one of their meetings in a garden adjacent to the planned site to demonstrate their sensitiveness to the demands of the neighbours. The translucent material of the building and its specific shape – as well as its height which was kept well below the allowed dimensions – highlight the importance of architecture that respects its surroundings.

On the other hand, the specific form of the church, which does not mirror the architecture around it, and the contrast between the garden cluttered with objects of everyday (family) life and the clear structures of the church point to architecture's independence and the difference between sacred and secular space. But that difference is not marked by a clear demarcation. The façade

seems almost permeable and in this respect stands in contrast to the walled-off garden, enclosed not only by a row of trees but by a tall wooden fence as well. The building tells a different story than the private house, it is a public and accessible space – further aided by the ramp that makes the chapel not only wheelchair-accessible but highlights that accessibility.

The architect himself writes about "a new openness of Catholicism without losing its identity" (Klasz 2020). In another project he worked on a concept to dedicate a wing of a monastery, the Stift Wilten in Innsbruck, to a non-profit café and co-working space. Having such an open space inside a monastery would allow us "to develop a new culture of open communication that shares one goal: improving the dialogue between different people looking for a meaning in their lives" (ibid.).

Figure 32 takes us inside the church to the back right corner. The most prominent feature on the inside is the walls made of glue laminated wooden planks. This focus on wood as a material is accentuated by the fact that there are no windows in the chapel's walls. The light filters in from an invisible line of windows in the ceiling shining directly onto the wood and by that bringing out the raw character of the material. In addition to the visual, wood has also a tangible and olfactory quality which becomes obvious as well. The visitor is immersed in the warm glow of the wood and the peaceful atmosphere devoid of any distractions. Even the Stations of the Cross are not hung on the wall but are embedded in the terrazzo floor.

This arrangement brings out the sculptural qualities of the building, which the architect explicitly mentioned in our dialogue. The church does not need to be adorned by artworks, it itself is a walk-in sculpture. But the wood also changes, during the day under the different lighting conditions, and over the years as it weathers and ages. When Klasz renovated the parochial church of St. Martin in the diocese of Graz, he inspired bishop Hermann Glettler to write about the church. His words can also apply to the structure in Rif:

> Whoever believes that he has structures and concepts for eternity is wrong. We are and we remain listeners to God's word. In it we hear the call of God for our time. [...] We must remain permeable and responsive. The contemporary design is a hint that the church must not get trapped in tradition but must, inspired by the "signs of the times", live its mission in the midst of a unstrung society, driven by many demands* (Glettler n.d.).

Figure 32: St. Albrecht in Rif, inside view. Photo by the author.

From that perspective it is important to notice that despite the architect's intention the church's users have appropriated the building. Also visible in the picture is a small tapestry made by a group of children preparing for their First Communion.

While we see a strong relation to the building process in this example, what I felt lacking was a prolongation of the social processes that led to the building of the church. The aforementioned practice of the NWBCCC to *continually* listen to the community as well as to continually, ethnographically, experience the changing space could be beneficial here.

NWBCCC and Rif As New Ways for Pastoral Planning

Both the NWBCCC and the church in Rif are good examples how a sensitive engagement with the world can happen in practice. While the NWBCCC focuses on the needs of the people in an already built environment, the process at Rif was much more focused on the material and architectural qualities of a new construction. But both processes emerged from the experiences people have with their material surroundings and their relation to the space where their daily lives happen.

Taking again a practical theological perspective, I would argue that churches and religious communities need to strive to change their surroundings. This starts not with the engagement of an architect but with a different type of architectural, city, but most importantly pastoral planning.[2] In the words of aforementioned Leonie Sandercock:

> I see planning as an always unfinished social project whose task is managing our coexistence in the shared spaces of cities and neighbourhoods in such a way as to enrich human life and to work for social, cultural, and environmental justice. This social project has an imperfect past and an uncertain future (Sandercock 2003, p. 134).

The optical, haptic, and olfactory qualities of an environment in particular are important for such an approach. In that way Sandercock continues:

> I propose a different sensibility from the regulatory planning that dominated 20th-century practice – a sensibility that is as alert to the emotional economies of cities as it is to the political economies; as alert to city senses

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2   I use the term here very loosely for all planning activity that originates within church communities and that has at least an indirect impact on their surroundings.

(sound, smell, taste, touch, sight) as it is to city censuses; as alert to the soft-wired desires of its citizens as it is to the hard-wired infrastructures; […] as curious about the spirit of place as it is critical of capitalist excesses; a sensibility that can help citizens wrest new possibilities from space and collectively forge new hybrid cultures and places (ibid., p. 134).[3]

In summary, Sandercock calls for a therapeutic approach to planning, which means that she focuses on the relationships between different stakeholders in the planning process. Many disputes, she argues, are not only due to resources, but, for instance, lack of recognition (cf. ibid., p. 139). To address that, a new language in planning is needed.

> What has been missing from most of the collaborative planning/ communicative action literature is this recognition of the need for a language and a process of emotional involvement, of embodiment (ibid., p. 139).

If such a language can be found, then planning is not just a minimal compromise that leaves everyone unsatisfied, but it can be the vehicle for collective growth of a community (cf. ibid. 139). This language must also encompass the relations of persons to the objective world – the stored knowledge in the buildings and things that to which interview partners at the NWBCCC and in Rif referred.

What does this then mean for churches and religious communities? The first consequence would be for religious communities to take on the role as a facilitator for social change within a certain area on the basis of the material presence of the church through its built infrastructure. The richness of churches and religious community infrastructure, not merely Christian but also Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish, has been exemplarily well researched by Katie Day and her students in their study *Faith On the Avenue*, which illustrates the rich cultural and architectural past and present of churches and other religious buildings along Philadelphia's *Germantown Avenue* (Day 2014). Recognising one's own powerful presence that transcends the walls of the church and the community centre is a good starting point.

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3   Sandercock refers to the work of the consultant Charles Landry in Helsinki who used a "'survey of the senses' to analyse the city through its sounds, smells, and panoramas" (Sandercock 2003, p. 138).

What follows from that is a recognition of all the other actors within that particular area. I hope that by now it has become apparent that this recognition is not just restricted to humans, or particular well-voiced exemplars among them, but to all actors. I therefore would encourage a theology that goes beyond popular theology – or *theologia popular*, as it is more aptly called in Latin American contexts – and more towards a networked or embedded theology. Recognising the potential of all these actors towards development and integrating that potentiality in a theology of growth could become the heart and soul of religious involvement in the city.

Schooled by the critical appreciation and a hands-on approach to the concrete world around us, I want to take us back to a topic nearer to the heart of practical theology in the fourth and last part of this book. From laboratories and parliaments I want to take us back to ecclesiological concerns and what we as theologians can say about the role of church communities in the 21st century.

Part IV
A Situated Church Community

Concrete Communities

Developing the theoretical foundations for a materially and spatially sensitive practical theology in a discipline with a long tradition in dealing with pastoral practice in an academic environment of theoretical reflection is not an easy task. Especially at a time when the problems of both church and society are so pressing that they demand immediate action instead of allowing ourselves the luxury of "musing" (Pierce) in the realm of architecture, art, as well as the history of technology companies (primarily in the United States), parliaments, and social movements. But there are practical consequences which arise out of this "musing."[1] To make a case in point, I want to address a typical theme of pastoral theology, the church community, its recent history, and its role in society today, from the perspective of a materially and spatially sensitive theology. As we will see, focusing on materiality offers new perspectives on the subject.

A Definitional Conundrum: Parish or Community?

To define what a church community is and how it relates both to the church – especially in Catholicism with its centripetal tendencies – and to society as a whole is a difficult task, given the diverse shapes and forms church communities took on over the history of Christianity. For the Catholic world, at least, Erich Garhammer makes a suggestion. He argues that there has been a movement from house communities in cities in the times of early Christianity to territorially defined parishes during the middle ages and up to the

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1   Whether that warrants the term "abduction" in the Piercean sense cannot be the focus of our debate here. I would like to refer to Hans-Joachim Sander who has commented on the role of abduction in the process of doing theology (cf. Sander 2019).

19th century, towards a renewed interest in the community aspect of church in the 20th century. To make his point, the author tells the story of pluriform beginnings and a network of house churches, which, like the antique cultic associations, occupied private houses converted to seat up to 70 people (cf. Garhammer 1996, p. 49).[2] From the 7th century onwards, Garhammer suggests, the increasing de-urbanization and Christianity's spread in rural communities required a different organizational approach, that of the territorially defined parish. From then on, each parish had its pastor, who provided the whole spectrum of spiritual care to all people living in his territory. The system reached its pinnacle in the 18th century with Josephinism's territorial pastoral planning on the drawing board. At the same time, the old structures frayed at the edges, most prominently and controversially with the liturgical movement at the beginning of the 20th century. This shift happened as a cultural change, Garhammer argues, in that such movements provided an alternative, based on voluntary association[3] and personal commitment to deepening one's life of faith, to the parish, to which one belonged automatically. Garhammer notes that while one could deduce a movement from house community to parish and back, especially given the renewed interest in small associations – the family[4] or the base ecclesial community – since the Second Vatican council, organisational forms from history do not suit as a model for the present. A return *ad fontes* does not mean that we should uncritically adopt the early house churches as authoritative for our time.

> Historical study does not want to show that it has always been this way but it sets the variability of history against the actualistic claim to exclusivity of the factual. Employing the different understandings of community over the course of the centuries one can thus study how Christian tradition and concrete societal circumstances influence one another* (ibid., p. 45).

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2 Despite their relative independence, these houses sought to integrate and establish a "commune", i.e. social, doctrinal, as well as financial relations, as the story of Paul's collect amongst the Roman house churches for their suffering brethren in Jerusalem tells us (cf. Romans 1:26).

3 The chasm between voluntary association and parish can be traced back as early as the 11th century with the establishment of the mendicant orders in the cities and their pastoral care as an alternative offer for city dwellers (cf. Garhammer 1996, pp. 59–60).

4 Cf. AA 11 or LG 11 where the house church is mentioned but, in contrast to Christianity's beginnings, encompasses only members of the household (cf. ibid., pp. 50–53).

Nonetheless, the idea of a life of faith and an active role of all community members – not just the priest – in the building up of the local church was a powerful mental image for church members as well as officials in the 1960s and onwards. I want to particularly focus on the theology of community that Karl Lehmann develops in his contribution for volume 29 of the series *Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft*, Christian faith in modern society, from 1982. This encyclopaedia of 30 volumes harks back to the comprehensive handbook idea that we have explored at the beginning. Not only was it conceived at the Herder publishing house, its editors and authors were also prominent figures of Catholic as well as Protestant theology, who sought to define theology's role in church and society 17 years after the Second Vatican Council and seven years after the Würzburg Synod ended, both prominent dates at least for the Catholic contributors. Karl Lehmann stands in this tradition as a systematic theologian, assistant to Karl Rahner during the Second Vatican Council, and on his way to become the bishop of Mainz just one year later in 1983. His text tries to define what a (parish) community is and, while written in the spirit of change of the 1960s, it already exhibits the beginning conflicts of the 1980s, which would influence Catholic communal ecclesiology in the future. I want to highlight two aspects here that further develop Garhammer's historical observation and that help us to understand how church communities saw themselves from the 1960s onwards.

1. Utopia: Right at the beginning, Lehmann mentions that the word "community"[5] has gained prominence in the years after the Second Vatican council when theological theory as well as churchly praxis were concerned with the question how Christians live and pray together. Such "a change in speech convention often points towards a shift in awareness"* (Lehmann 1982, p. 8), away from the abstract idea of church hovering above reality and towards the concrete individuals sharing a life of faith. Yet a "communal ecclesiology" is much less defined than concepts like "parish" or "local church."

    Thus the principle "community" has been so much charged with a plethora of pastoral expectations, that this concept of a social form turned into a real

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5   Lehmann uses the German word "Gemeinde" here, which translates differently, depending on the context. I choose "community" whenever I talk about the voluntary or house church character and "parish" when I talk about the institutional or territorial form of church.

utopia: A community of the highest unanimity and radical equality in inten-
tions, the abolishment of all differences, the renouncement of any primacy,
"a community free of power," at the same time a "small herd" and a universally
open community* (Lehmann 1982, p. 10).

But official church doctrine, or the execution thereof, has also contributed
to great expectations towards the local communities. The old ideal of the
parish providing the full extent of spiritual as well as social care to its mem-
bers (cf. ibid., p. 53) has been also applied to the community and has cer-
tainly contributed to the decisions of the *Common Synod of the German Dio-
ceses* of 1975 with its demand for mobile pastoral teams and professional
charitable services (cf. ibid., pp. 54–55). But Lehmann himself is also not
innocent when it comes to utopian ideals. For example, he speaks about the
priest as the "good shepherd" who holds the community together (cf. ibid.,
pp. 54–55).

2. Locality: The second area of both progress and conflict that Lehmann often
refers to is the local character of the parish and the question how the com-
munity concept still refers to that. Perhaps the most interesting angle[6] the
author pursues is to link the churchly parish to the political municipality.
To understand why this link can or cannot be made, we have to look at the
German word "Gemeinde" again. As mentioned before, we could translate
this either as (voluntary) community or (administrative) parish. But there
is a third meaning; "Gemeinde" is also the word used to describe a local po-
litical municipality, i.e. a term stemming from the world of political admin-
istration.

If we focus on the community, then such a voluntary association has little to
do with the political realities of an administrative district. But if we look at
the parish as an administrative entity, then there are many similarities with
the realm of local politics. In fact, the divergence into politics brings new
prominence to the concept of the parish. In both cases there is an underlying
administrative rationale that tries to handle the complex realities of people
living together by mapping and grouping them together. This administra-

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6 At least the students in my lecture on the subject commented on this most often when
reviewing Karl Lehmann's text.

tive concept then in turn influences the social reality (cf. ibid., p. 12). The most important aspect of parish or municipality as a local community is, however, that

[t]he constraint to need to live together in a physical space is an important factor when conflicts are dealt with or interests are being balanced* (ibid., p. 14).

According to the author, communities in the sense of a municipality or a parish must include a diverse range of people – not just those with aligned interests – living together for some time – not merely sharing a few weeks on a campground together (cf. ibid., pp. 14–15). This conflictual living together of diverse people is what makes the idea of the parish as a somewhat forced community so attractive for Karl Lehmann. One cannot escape one's surroundings, neither Catholic parishioners with diverging beliefs nor the whole spectrum of society from different social and cultural backgrounds that live in the vicinity of the church.

The parish community proves its unconditional love especially where it not just meets brothers [and sisters] in faith. It does its Samaritan deeds undiscriminatingly even for someone who does not belong to it. Nowhere can it prove better that it is the sign for God's love for all human beings.* (ibid., p. 30).

What the concept of the parish therefore upholds is that it forces its members to be a part of the whole community, not merely an elite of kindred spirits.

On that basis we can now look at how churches actually embed themselves locally and what that tells us about their embodiment of the definitional conundrum I have mentioned here.[7]

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7 It should be mentioned, however, that this short introduction to church as community or parish is by no means exhaustive. Already in 1948 Karl Rahner published a contribution to the subject matter with his "Peaceful Considerations on the Parish Principle"* (cf. Rahner 1948).

Concrete Typologies

As the other parts of this book already suggest, I approach this question from an architectural perspective, looking at what and how church communities have built. I particularly focus on the building's materiality and then discuss how it relates to the self-image of that particular local church as well as to the broader discourses of community concepts at the time. Albeit the descriptions will remain brief, they are exemplary in character, aiming to define elements in a church building that transcend the individual locale and that would eventually lead towards a typology[8] of *concrete* community concepts that is, however, beyond the scope of this book. I will therefore limit myself to the churches I have visited and photographed during the completion of this book and that have influenced my teaching of the subject.

Beginnings

The 1960s were a time of great optimism in Western Germany. The economy as well as the population were growing[9] and development areas sprung up on the outskirts of towns and cities. Building a house and owning a car became a symbol for individual advancement in the years after the war. The city of Fulda is a case in point. Situated on the fringes of Western Germany, in the east of Hessen close to the inner-German border – actually the economically underdeveloped area adjacent to the Soviet Zone –, it profited from the same trends that took place in other cities as well. In the north end of the city a new district, Ziehers North, was developed on the greenfield, which included not just terraced houses but also kindergartens, schools, and businesses. From 1953 onwards, its population quickly rose above 3,000 inhabitants. In a predominantly Catholic city like Fulda it is small wonder that within this development area a Catholic church community started forming, which quickly exceeded 1,200 members. In the first years, a provisional space was found in the assembly hall

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8   Cf. the aforementioned Bernd and Hilla Becher's architectural photographs and August Sander's project *People of the 20th Century* (cf. page 29).

9   From 1950 to 1960, the population in Western Germany grew from 51 to 56 million people. From 1960 to 1970 a similar increase, from 56 to 61 million could be noted, marking both decades the fastest growing since the Second World War (Statistisches Bundesamt 2011).

of a vocational school before a church building association formed in 1964. Only three years later, in 1967, the local bishop Adolf Bolte consecrated St. Paul. Not only had most of the people living in Ziehers North donated for the building, the leaflet for the inauguration also lists 75 advertisements from commercial supporters, such as the local grocer or the city's mutual savings bank (cf. Katholische Kirchengemeinde St. Paulus 1967).

Figure 33: St. Paulus, outside view. Photo by the author.

The building design which won the architectural competition was a modern plan in form of a square base with an octagonal roof that resembled a tent. The architect Herbert Rimpl, a well-known architect in the post-war[10] period, placed the structure on a plateau overlooking the district with the octagonal

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10 Rimpl was classified as "exonerated" during the denazification processes. He was, however, active during the Third Reich, building, amongst others, the Heinkel aircraft works. In contrast to the architect's arrangement with the powers that be, the streets and places in Ziehers North are named after resistance fighters during the NS regime. The church itself

roof, clad in aluminum, towering high above the adjacent single-story community center and the small bell housing. Right from the start the building was designed for a growing community, the community hall could seat 180 people, the kindergarten had room for 100 children, and below the ensemble there was a basement which, amongst others, would house a hobby room for the church's youth group which, as the writers of the inaugural leaflet tell us, would edit the movies they shot of the many church festivals. Everyone was convinced that the church would grow further and that it would be a pillar of the community:

> Today we would call this a city quarter. [...] One wanted to give the people who moved here a home, one wanted to give them opportunities to meet one another. [...] There were many families with children who built their own house here [...] in the terraced housing which was more affordable for people back then. [...] People stood together* (MF 2020).[11]

To understand what version of church community the building expresses, I want to take a closer look at the interior, in particular one specific view from the altar towards one of the exterior walls, and point out three details of the building.

1. Abstract lead glass windows in the gables of the octagonal roof are the only opening openings of the church towards the outside. They are, as the leaflet for the inauguration tells us, conceptualised in reference to both Impressionism and Expressionism. As the whole building, their formal language stands for a break with the architecture of the National Socialist era, which the builders of the church shun as "pseudo-monumentality"* (Katholische Kirchengemeinde St. Paulus 1967, p. 24). The church, like the new city quarter around it, would stand for the modern Germany that had left the atrocities of the past behind it.
2. The walls are clad in travertine, a stone from the quarries near Rome. As much as the church is staged as a modern building, it seeks to integrate

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is located at the "square of the White Rose," named after the Scholl siblings, who founded a student resistance group in Munich.

11 MF is St. Paul's lay administrator. I interviewed him on site.This and the following interview with FD was conducted during my research for a lecture on ecclesiological concepts in practical theology in early 2020.

Figure 34: St. Paulus, inside view. Photo by the author.

itself in the Catholic tradition, in this case through the material that connects St. Paul with the churches of Rome. At the same time, the folded stone cladding changes the acoustic properties of the interior. Together with the pinewood ceiling it minimises reflections and optimises the audibility of speech and music. According to Michael Will, who regularly worships in the church, the atmosphere of St. Paul is subtly different from other churches: There is a "warm harmony between speech and music. It just feels more homely"*12 (MF 2020).

3. Finally, we notice a window made of angled glass panes that separates a chapel from the rest of the church. This room is called "mothers' chapel" both by the inauguration leaflet and by my interviewee. Young mothers

12 The arrangement of the benches around the altar also contributes to that "homely" feeling of the church's interior, seating people closer together and allowing for eye contact between the participants. Cf. also Sacrosanctum concilium's (1964) demands for modern church buildings fostering an atmosphere of "active participation" (SC 124).

were supposed to sit there with their children during mass. This glass wall stands for the self-understanding of this church community between tradition and new beginnings. On the one hand, it is a high-tech solution as it acoustically seals the chapel off from the rest of the church while loudspeakers in the chapel transmit the sound from the main room to it. It is designed for convenience, allowing mothers, as the inaugural leaflet tells us, to participate in "the holy mass without disturbing it. There is even room for a stroller"* (Katholische Kirchengemeinde St. Paulus 1967, p. 13). On the other hand, it displays a traditional understanding of a separation between the "holy mass" and the profane noise of children. It also allocates young mothers to the role of watching their children in a room separated from the centre of events.

What can we say about this building from a spatially and materially sensitive practical theological perspective with our eye trained at laboratory buildings and parliaments? First of all, we notice the modern concrete, glass, and aluminum architecture. We remember how optimistically these materials were used and how they stood for a growth-oriented, anything-is-possible mindset in architecture. We recognise that attitude not only in the building of the church but the whole development area where modern materials allowed people to build fast and economically – the aluminum roof of the St. Paul is a case in point as it replaced the copper in the original design since the church building association could not raise the funds for such an expensive material. We are sensitive to the active role of the material as well, as we notice how the walls, windows, and ceiling change the feel of the room, playing an active role in the overall experience of the community's celebration on Sundays. But we also notice the material's double character: the glass, for instance, that separates the chapel from the main room suggests transparency and visual participation, yet seals off and excludes a group of people that might potentially disturb the ordinary course of things.

Church Communities Today:
Three Alternative Visions

Endings

By now, we have also become sensitive towards the fact, that the optimism of laboratory architecture ended when the times changed and when the material refused to be bent to the will of the architect. Likewise, the story of many church buildings from the 1960s takes a turn. The history of another church in my home town, located 20 kilometres from St. Paul, is telling in this regard. St. Barbara in Neuhof-Ellers[1] also develops together with its surrounding part of town. In the 60s the miners of the adjacent potassium mine built their houses on the out-skirts of the small town of Neuhof, which, like Ziehers North, is situated in the east of Hessen, close to the inner German border. And like the first-time home-owners in Ziehers, the miners of Ellers founded a building society and within just a few years raised money to erect a modern church for their community. St. Barbara is also built in a modern style of its day by the architect Joseph Bieling, who specialised in sacral buildings in the diocese of Fulda: tent-shaped struc-tures, A-frames, rotundas, and a modern take on the traditional hall church with a slender separate bell tower – which is what the miners of Ellers chose as their form. The same optimism that we witnessed in Ziehers is present here as well, as the words of the parish priest Wilhelm Hasenau announce at the in-auguration of the building:

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1 I have written about St. Barbara as an example for modern fantasies and the end thereof in the realm of digitalisation, comparing the enthusiasm in church architecture in the 1960s to today's enthusiasm for building digital structures. We must be aware, I argue, that both developments are highly contingent (Henkel 2021b).

It stands there as a triad of stone, concrete, and glass. A jubilation, a glorifi-cation of God, about which one can say: "If the people are no longer singing their hosanna here, then the material, which has come alive in the hands of the masters, will announce the praise of God"* (Hasenau 1963, p. 5).

Figure 35: Joseph Bieling: Model of St. Barbara (1958)

The history of the church is documented on the website of the parish, i.e. the *Katholische Pfarrgemeinde St. Michael Neuhof*, under the title: "Geschichte der Fil-ialkirche St. Barbara".

In October of 2008, the parish closed St. Barbara. The church had become too much of a financial burden for the shrinking community. The dreams of un-limited growth of the 1960s had not materialised. The church's central heating, installed in times before the oil price shock, had ceased functioning and the modern flat roof had started leaking, resulting in mould growing on one of the exterior walls. For the last and final service, the miners' association – most of its members now pensioners – raised their flag for the last time before the eternal light was put out and the altar stone removed.

Figure 36: Daniela Möller, Osthessen News (2018): St. Barbara, altar stone.

In an article on *Osthessen News*, photographer Daniela Möller documented the removal of the altar stone: "Letzter Gottesdienst rührt zu Tränen - Katholische St.-Barbara-Kirche entweiht".

Looking at this church community from the specific viewpoint of this book, there is a noteworthy connection between these churches and the laboratories of the 1960s and 70s. The architectural critic Niklas Maak writes about a for-mer VEB[2] datacenter in Potsdam which occupies the site of the former Garrison Church. Its side wall is adorned with a large mosaic titled,

"Man conquers the cosmos", which depicts the stages of the scientific-technical evolution of man – from farming machinery and space flight to

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2   VEB stands for "owned by the people", which was the prefix the nationally owned industries took on during the GDR.

data science. In Silicon Valley they would now protect such a house as part of their own antiquity, as an early temple of euphoria for the future. Not so in Potsdam. Because the datacenter, which opened in 1971, stands on the site where the bell tower of the old Garrison Church has been rebuilt. [...] An this is why [the mosaic next to the relics of the church][...] is a symbol for the rift that goes through society: It is about what city one wants and what place history and art have in it* (Maak 2020, p. 35).

Maak concludes that the euphoric utopian buildings of the 1960s have become an unpleasant and embarrassing reminder of the recent past, of the GDR and its dreams for the future. There are many residents who want to get rid of that past and replace it with historic buildings from a seemingly glorious age – the middle ages as in Nuremberg or the German Empire as in Berlin. Modernity rots away, as Maak argues, and it has become an embarrassment. The architectural critic, on the contrary, demands to keep these buildings from the 60s and 70s, because especially "research facilities and data centres [...] are the most important buildings of the present time; both are places where the future of society is decided"* (ibid., p. 35). This would be a good reason to keep such buildings, which "tell the story"* (ibid., p. 35) of progress and failure.

The church in Neuhof-Ellers shares a similar fate. Its materials, made to last for many hundred years – as the poem read aloud by the workers at the topping-out ceremony boasts – have deteriorated quickly and visibly. The hall no longer houses a community and now the question arises as what to do with it. It now stands as a monument to the all too recent past. Like the communal swimming pool – which featured an innovative aluminium roof that could transform the indoor into an outdoor pool, praised by architectural critics (Röper 1973) and that had to close in 1998 – it has become derelict, yet its massive structure still stands in the heart of the community.

Continuations

St. Mary in Ditzingen near Stuttgart is a church from a similar age which could well have shared a similar fate. Like St. Barbara in Neuhof-Ellers, it is a huge concrete hall church, modelled after Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel. Its outer walls feature large artificial rifts in the concrete which the architect designed

to let light in and literally break through the monumentality of the building. And like in Neuhof-Ellers and Ziehers North, the congregation is dwindling. The large hall is not filled on most Sundays. It could tell the same story from a practical theological perspective that Rainer Bucher alludes to in his article *die Gemeinde nach dem Scheitern der Gemeindetheologie*, community after the failure of the community theology. Therein the author defines community theology as

> the pastoral-theological transformation discourse that became operative in the praxis in the middle of the 1960s and that initiated the reformatting of the ecclesial base structure towards "small communities of responsible Christians." "Community" was conceptualised as a structure to follow the parochial structure of the peoples' church, which was perceived as anonymous, weak in retaining [people] and in making decisions* (Bucher 2013, p. 24).
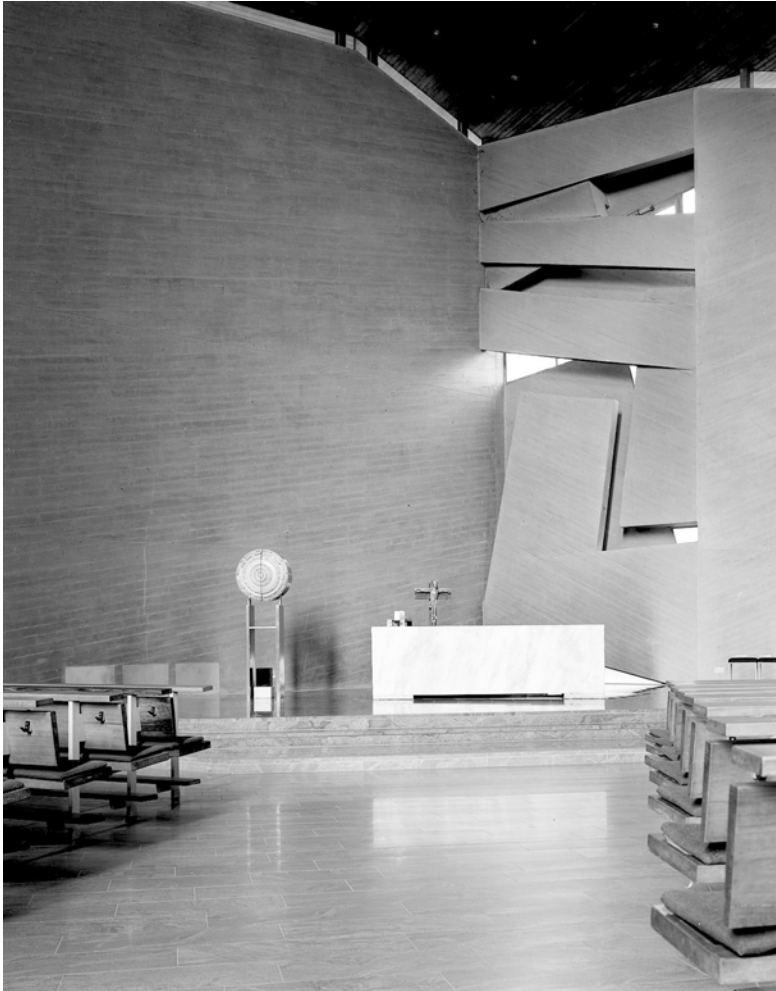
We have already seen the extensive strain such a principle put on the individual members in the discussion of Karl Lehmann's text. It is small wonder then that Bucher as a pastoral theologian[3] sees these tendencies amplified. But moreover, he also puts the failure of the community project in a larger perspective, namely that the concept wanted to be only "half modern."

> The communal theological modernisation wanted to liberalise ("the responsible Christian"), and yet rope [Christians; C.P.] in into the "parochial family". [...] It wanted to be a group of volunteers, but yet it was tied to a specific territory; it wanted to be there for everyone, but it was so less and less and it became more and more [...] "a place where people assiduously revolved around themselves, around the bell tower, the church festival, and the few people who at the moment (and for how long anyway?) were in charge in the parish council"* (ibid., pp. 30–31).

The second of the following pictures shows the view from a window of the meeting room of the parish council in Ditzingen, with the church on the right – next to the forgotten potted plant – looking out into green fields. This room has become particularly important, as it is the place where my interview partner

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3   Rainer Bucher writes about his position: "As a pastoral theologian I am concerned with the situation of the church in late-modern societies. This situation is critical, diverse, and confusing at times, but always exciting and appealing"* (cf. Bucher 2020).

Figure 37: St. Maria, Ditzingen, main hall. Photo by the author.

in Ditzingen, a young pastoral worker, spends most of her time in committee meetings.

In this room, which on the other walls displays pictures and trophies of the parish football team from the 1980s and 90s, the parish finds its identity. It still

Figure 38: St. Maria, Ditzingen, meeting room. Photo by the author.

works well internally, with many groups and many committees, but there is already a discrepancy between the community, which in itself functions well, and the city and its life realities, as my interview partner mentions.

> I realise that even after three years I am sitting in this bubble. [...] If we have people in the parish council [...] who had a seat there for 50 years, who am I to deny them that they have found a home here* (FD 2020).

Besides the meeting room, which in the summer would turn hot and stifling, this self-sufficiency finds another visible expression in the church building itself. There is the question:

> how exclusive is the church community actually [...] That becomes visible in the large church interior, which looks open [...], but nonetheless there are concrete walls there, which are opened up, but still this is a building which is closed in itself, just like the community* (ibid.).

St. Mary is a church that stands for continuation. Its building is listed as a protected landmark and will therefore not fall under cost-cutting measures and its community is still vibrant enough to continue for many years despite recruitment problems. St. Mary could continue on a road of small reforms. Less an less people, however, would want to sit in the benches and even less parishioners would want to spend their afternoons in the meeting room pictured above. And at one point in the future the church might, as my interview partner puts it, "just cease to exist."*

New Beginnings

A different dealing with a church as a landmark can be found at the raumschiff.ruhr, a churchly "spaceship" in Essen. The city is in the middle of the Ruhr region, the former heart of coal mining and steel industry in Germany. The "Villa Hügel" of the Krupp family, one of the largest arms producers in the Second World War, still towers over the city's outskirts and the Ruhr river. From 1850 to the closure of the last mine, coal mining and heavy steel dominated the region. Today, Essen epitomises the structural transformation of the whole region, and other industrial regions in Western Europe as well. The city of 600,000 inhabitants has changed into a place of commerce and service industries, but it still suffers from the aftermaths of the decline of its old industries, its unemployment rate still doubling the German average (10% as compared to 5.1% in early 2020 before the pandemic). The town was the European City of Culture in 2010, yet it still has to deal with legendary traffic jams on its main arterial roads as well as an empty inner city as people desert the centre after closing time.

In the 1950s, after the war, planners wanted to rebuild Essen as a car-friendly city. One of the obstacles was the Market Church in the middle of town. The old hall church, which had been a house of Protestant worship since 1630, had been almost completely destroyed by aerial bombardement safe for the outer walls. A citizens' initiative campaigned against the demolition, so that the church was rebuilt as the pedestrian mall around it grew. In 2006 the architect Eckard Gerber was commissioned to complete the original floorplan by rebuilding the completely destroyed western choir. He proposed a structure made from blue glass panes which stands out from the rest of the building.

In 2016 the *Protestant Church of Essen* greenlighted a project conceived by the pastor Rebecca John Klug, who suggested a space where young adults can experiment with new forms of church in the region.[4] The raumschiff.ruhr was not planned as a traditional parish with a fixed membership and Sunday services. Rather, it was intended to make an offer to the community by hosting events that are open to all. Such offers included *orbit*, an open prayer night on Wednesdays with the telling description "sandwiches and blessing," combining the hearty culture of the steel industry workers' lunch with a rite that breaks through the everyday routine. It also housed a co-working space in the basement of the church, which had been converted with large windows to resemble a storefront. Some participants regularly returned and even saw the "spaceship" as their new church community, others just come for a single event. The project displayed similarities to the *Fresh Expressions* movement of the Church of England as well as to other pastoral innovation projects, like *St. Mary* in Stuttgart. As it happens with experiments, the raumschiff came to an end in 2021. That seems typical for the discrepancy between the ever temporary character of new approaches and the timeless attitude towards – or rather never-ending prolongation of – traditional parish structures like the one mentioned in the previous chapter. Nonetheless there are learnings that can be applied to other settings, be they temporary or permanent.

From a practical theological perspective, Michael Schüßler has written about such forms of being church today. I want to mention two of his articles to programmatically situate the "spaceship" between two different poles: liquidity and stabilisation.

Liquidity: In his article on "liquid church," Schüßler argues, that the word "liquid" can take on many meanings: flexibility, finality (as in liquidating), or affluence (as in liquidity) – meaning that a liquid church is not just flexible, but also gives freely what it has received through the power of the Gospel (cf. Schüßler 2014, p. 26). Flexibility and finality are two sides of the same coin. Under the di-

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4   Essen is a church district of the Protestant Church in the Rhineland, which itself is a part of the federation of protestant churches in Germany (EKD). The raumschiff.ruhr thus was part of the official structure of the Protestant church and had been featured both locally and nationwide as a lighthouse project for the renewal of the church.

agnosis of a "liquid modernity"[5] there is an ever increasing skepticism towards permanent structures. This also affects attempts to create safe havens of stability within the church, small communities as a bastion in the tempestuous sea of uncertainty (cf. ibid., p. 27). One consequence of this diagnosis is the need to explore new spaces. Schüßler refers to Pete Ward's suggestion to find ways of being church besides the Sunday service. But Schüßler's argument goes beyond doing worship and mission in new venues. With Kees de Groot he emphasises the socio-critical aspect of Bauman's work, arguing that exploring new spaces must go deeper than proverbially pouring the old wine in new wineskins and fundamentally change the self-understanding of what it means to be church. Schüßler continues this line to Rainer Bucher's analysis by arguing that

> [t]he projects of city pastoral, youth churches, many aspects of spiritual care in prisons and hospitals, or even urn halls, are not just new spaces for church. In these spaces church functions along completely new principles. The church does not have a good grip on these spaces but it allows itself to be changed by what is happening there* (ibid., p. 31)

Going liquid, then, also means losing control. The author further substantiates that claim with Hartmut Rosa's analysis of the time structure of modernity, which is no longer slowly moving along a linear controllable structure, but constituted of events over which we have only limited control and which can upset our world in an instant (cf. ibid., p. 33). On that basis then, Schüßler can argue that church can still occupy fixed spaces within the city, but it can no longer fully control what is happening in these spaces.

Stabilisation: But within the departure into the unknown waters of a liquid modernity, each organisation needs moments of stability. This can be best understood if we, for a moment, turn from practical theology and ecclesiology towards the scientific research on organisational development and innovation. In his concept of social change, the economist Uwe Schneidewind argues

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5 The term has been employed by Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that liquid modern times do not need fixed governing structures, since power is no longer exerted by telling people what to do but by leaving them with the choice of life options, ever unsure whether or not their choice is a good one. This creates a situation of permanent stress – Have I chosen the right occupation, friends, or clothing? – and vulnerability (Haugaard and Bauman 2008, p. 112).

that organisations do not change continuously but that there are windows of opportunity, within which new developments accelerate and take off (cf. e.g. Schneidewind and Scheck 2012, p. 49). In a similar fashion, Frank Geels describes (technological) transition processes as change that happens in between phases of stability. It is important to note, however, that change in Geel's model happens on different levels, so that even during phases of relative stability on the upper levels of the societal sectors, small niche innovation already path the way towards organisational change, which happens when the tipping point is reached.

Figure 39: Frank Geels: A dynamic multi-level perspective on technological transitions (Geels 2002, p. 1263). This model for change resembles in part the theory of paradigm shifts within science as brought forward by the above mentioned Thomas Kuhn (cf. page 28).

> The image in the above source shows the rocky path that some (but not all) developments in "technological niches" have to take to disrupt the current "socio-technical regimes" and then begin to influence the wider "landscape developments" in society.

On that basis, we can understand that institutions have an inherent inclination towards stabilisation. This holds true for churches in changing times as well. Michael Schüßler's argument in his article on the *Fresh Expressions of Church* movement makes a case in point: The fresh expression movement could either lead towards a prolongation of the established models of church as a community, which has been portrayed above, or it could become a "theology-generating cipher for different new forms to bring one's own life and its resonances in the world in contact with the god of Jesus"* (Schüßler 2016, p. 334). As theologians we are drawn towards the latter perspective, but we must recognise that many church communities who adopt approaches from the *Fresh Expressions* movement are rather interested in stabilising their community, continuing history instead of letting go of the idea of duration as a distinguishing feature of church (cf. ibid., p. 344).

Thus a pastoral theology which recognises the organisational structure as well as the dynamics of change within the church must reckon with both

movements, liquidity and stabilisation.[6] This can be experienced at the raum-schiff.ruhr, especially if we are sensitive to both the potential of people and the materiality of places, as the following picture illustrates.

With Kirsten Graubner[7] we look out of the doors of the Market Church, where the raumschiff.ruhr is housed, and onto the busy pedestrians in the shopping district of Essen. Trained as a pastoral and social worker, she was leading the spaceship and coordinated its programming. I want to point to two material details in this picture to begin a conversation on the materiality of a liquid yet stable church.

1. We observe that the protagonist in this picture is wearing hiking boots, an outdoor attire, which in this context not only stands for practicality but also for the ability to go out into the unknown.[8] The founder of raumschiff.ruhr, Rebecca John Klug features in a volume on the experiences of churchly in-novators with the title *Vom Wandern zum Wundern,** from wandering to won-dering, which aptly fits our protagonist's attire. Therein Maria Herrmann and Sandra Bils collect essays from different, mostly young, church profes-sionals, many of them describing their personal journey and the factors that led them to become innovators. In the first chapter, Maria Herrmann gives and overview over the different types of "wanderers" that the volume brings together. Under the heading *A Miracle in His Eyes,** she argues, that wander-ing away from the established forms of church and searching for new ways to live one's faith has been the staple of church history.

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6 Michael Schüßler suggested, with reference to Hartmut Rosa ("dynamic stabilisation"), that these terms are not antithetical. However, I want to emphasise the revolutionary char-acter of going liquid since the powers of change can hardly be contained by a single organ-isation, be it as large as the Catholic church.

7 This is the only picture in this chapter that includes a person. It could be understood as a blend between the architectural typologies of Bernd and Hilla Becher and the personal typologies of August Sander.

8 There is a discussion around the cultural significance of wearing outdoor attire in the so-ciology of fashion. It is important to note, that the protagonist's work "uniform" differs greatly from clerical clothing. Cf. Fellini's references to clerical clothing in his film *Roma*. For the use of fashion as a tool for the self-staging of religious professionals cf. Berenike Joachim-Buhl (Joachim-Buhl 2018).

The ministry of those who in retrospect might command admiration, often starts with something that seems less glamorous and gracious, that is a premonition that something does not fit, maybe does not fit anymore. [...] All too seldomly can we trace back, centuries or just decades later, which and how many wounds have been inflicted on these hiking paths, which the church often only saints in retrospect* (Herrmann 2017, pp. 8–9).

Hermann then goes on to describe the moments where something "does not fit anymore."* For example, if someone asks themself "why this hour on Sunday morning at 10 am has so little to do with the rest of the week"* or "[w]hy one's own musical taste, one's own aesthetic, one's own ways of life matter so little in the current conducts of churchly life"* (ibid., p. 11). Such findings, brought about by the "gift of not fitting in,"[9] often evoke feelings of self-doubt and loneliness, the "wounds" that Herrmann talks about. The "miracle" that the author mentions in her title then is the transformation of these feelings into productive change.

Thus, the physical act of putting on different clothes could be seen as one step on the way towards such a transformation. It signifies a shift in self- and world-perception, marking the beginning of small individual interventions that in the end result in systemic change within the organisation. A change that continues even after the raumschiff has moved on and other volunteers now need to find a way to make something of the space in Essen without a full-time church-employed facilitator like my interviewee.

2. Another detail is the glass door. We have already looked into the different symbolic meanings that glass can take on in architecture. Here I want to turn our attention to the similarity between the double entrance door of the church and that of the many shops in the city. The stele to the front right even looks vaguely like the anti-theft devices found at the entrances of chain stores and the heavy-duty floor mat further underlines the shop-like appearance. When I interviewed Kristen Graupner, she confessed that coming for the first time to Essen she had not noticed the church in the pedestrian area.

Yet, at the same time, the door handles form a cross and the glass is inscribed not with brand names but words mainly from the religious

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9   Herrmann borrows this term from the *Fresh Expressions of Church* movement (cf. Herrmann 2017, p. 11; Baker and Roll 2014).

spectrum – cross, baptism, chalice – or signifying something out of the ordinary – anguish, consolation, silence, birth. Thus with that door, the church first of all references what is already there, the stability of the church as a building and its theology clad in well-known terms. But the door also recognises that the cultural reference system is increasingly lost. It looks out onto a shopping district where glass doors are ubiquitous but words like chalice and consolation are not.

Good architecture should consist of both a reverence to its surroundings and a conscious break with them. The design of this door then could be understood as an answer to the question as to how a church deals with what Rainer Bucher has described as the separation of three things that once belonged together "the experienced social reality of the church [...], its sense and symbol system [...], and what is accepted and experienced within society"* (Bucher 2013, p. 28).

Another picture of the raumschiff.ruhr tells a similar story that features both liquidity and stabilisation coming together in one object. It is a sofa that sits in the co-working space in the basement below the church. Large shop windows light the room which opens towards a small square.

I want to emphasise two points with this picture.

1. First of all, the sofa is a carefully chosen design element. Many commercial co-working spaces as well as the inner-city branches of large corporations have now adopted the ragtag look of basement workshops or inventors' garages. They stage themselves as creative places with flat hierarchies and transparent structures. However, the "designed" nature of such spaces often shines through and beneath the surface one often finds the hierarchical "Californian Ideology" described earlier.[10] On the other hand, there are spaces where creativity and the challenge of the powers that be is actually encouraged: the fabrication laboratories (FabLabs), community cultural centres, or even the public libraries in a city quarter. Eric Klinenberg de-

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10 Churches themselves are not immune against the "designed" nature of spaces that camouflage hierarchies. Youth church projects, be they Catholic, Protestant, or Pentecostal, are sometimes little more than old concepts of church staged in modern spaces. I have written about the hierarchical nature of projects that on the surface speak an equal and accessible design language elsewhere (Henkel 2018).

scribes them as "Palaces for the People," arguing that beautiful places open to all give the city dwellers dignity, regardless of their income (Klinenberg 2018).

The ragged old sofa can stand for both, a stabilisation of the old commercial hierarchies clad in shabby-chic attire and a break with the powers that be in the market place. Only when we look at the actual use of the space, an open space for different social groups regardless of their income, we can see that in the case of the spaceship, the sofa does not signify commercial appeal but giving back something to the city that has become a rare good: a non-commercialised yet beautiful space. Speaking a modern design language is more than just a gimmick in this regard, it is more than simply modernising a church basement, it is treating with respect all city dwellers, as they are invited in an aesthetically pleasing environment. Architecture can treat people well, as we have discussed, and the sofa is a small but vital element of that trait.

2. Secondly, I want to turn our attention towards the fact that the sofa is a disused piece of furniture which the raumschiff.ruhr's team saved from the dumpster. This might happen out of necessity – shedding weight in the literal sense to change places – but it also comes at a cost: people have to let go of something beloved. Within a church we experience similar trends. One pertinent example is the synodal process in the diocese of Trier. From 2013 to 2016 it followed the central metaphor of a "change of perspective" which, amongst other things, included a new look on the parochial structure. The closing document, which employs a wandering metaphor in its title *Heraus gerufen. Schritte in die Zukunft wagen* – called out, venturing steps into the future – promotes the opening up of new pastoral spaces. It wants to lay to rest the ideas that "every parish can and should look the same on the outside"* (Bistum Trier 2016, p. 21), that "the life of the church must be centrally organised"* (ibid., p. 23), and that "the church acts only where church officials are present"* (ibid., p. 19). It encourages parishes to try new "milieu- and situation-specific offers"* (ibid., p. 27) basing their actions on the people they want to serve.

Drawing on the life forms of individuals is more important than following one's own ideas when making offers. The leading question comes from Jesus: What do you want me to do for you? (Mk 10:51)* (ibid., p. 45).

Yet with this change of perspective also came the need to let go of some beloved ideas of how the church should function, especially on the local level. The storm of indignation that followed the synod was primarily driven by the outrage over the merging of parishes. As in other dioceses, people did not want to give up their individual parish and its full array of services – and, as we have seen above, buildings –, however seldomly they used them. The sofa can point towards a different way: a re-contextualisation. It is no longer part of an individual private living room for which it was designed and bought in the first place, but it is now used by different people in a open space. In the realm of the church with its furniture consisting not only of buildings and their inventory but also of ideas and social forms, Michael Schüßler calls such a reconstextualisaion "freigeben," liberating, releasing (to the public). Referring back to the social and material form finding we discussed earlier, that requires to look at these structures in detail and with as many members of the community as possible to find out what to keep, what to recontextualise, and what to lay to rest peacefully.[11]

The raumschiff.ruhr shows that design choices can be liberating (in the sense of Friedrich von Borries), that the design of church spaces can contribute to the church's mission to "let the other come to life"*(Schüßler 2016, p. 344). But such design choices have to be made deliberately, they require expert knowledge in design, architecture, and their connection to practical theology. And they require space that can be designed. But what happens if there is no longer a religious space in the midst of the city?

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11 Regarding the ability to say farewell to beloved churchly structures cf. also (Müller-Zähringer, Knorreck, and Henkel 2019).

Figure 40: raumschiff.ruhr, Essen, view from the church. Photo by the author.

Figure 41: raumschiff.ruhr, Essen, view of the co-working space. Photo by the author.

Church Communities in the Future:
Church Without a Home

In the north of Baden-Württemberg lies Bad Friedrichshall, a former mining and salt producing community. The city's youngest district, Plattenwald, started life as a housing development for late repatriates. The new quarter was situated between the large hospital in the southwest of Bad Friedrichshall and the town of Amorbach, a part of the city of Neckarsulm with its large *Audi* automobile plant. The district formed a link in this industrial region, providing housing close to the workplace for many new citizens who came to Germany in the 80s and 90s. What makes this district interesting for this book is that it compares well to Ziehers North and Neuhof-Ellers where families built their first homes in the 1960s. But Plattenwald is also different in one crucial aspect, it is a heterogenous quarter: the 3,000 inhabitants stem from 55 nations, housing ranges from large apartment complexes in the middle, to semi-detached and single houses which form a ring around the centre. Such a history and heterogenity also mean that no unifying religious building project appeared in the community, its central square occupied by a single high-rise block that houses the administration and not a large church.

In this area the question how church can help to "let the other come to life" takes on a new significance as there is no established community or church building on which to build. Instead we are thrown back to the place and its demands. If a spatially and materially sensitive practical theology must prove itself in one place, then it is a quarter like Plattenwald. I want to sketch out how we could meet the demands of that place as practical theologians and propose a research project that applies what this book has brought together in theory. In my design, I want to focus on one particular aspect where theology is needed, namely community-building.

Figure 42: Overview map of Plattenwald in Open Street Map.

OpenStreetMap data is available under the Open Database Licence: open-streetmap.org/copyright.

Modern neighbourhoods are increasingly segregated, especially in-between cities, or hybrid-cities[1] on the border between rural and city struc-tures. While the living quarters are mixed, the inhabitants seldom meet as their workplaces and the places where they spend their leisure time are not in the vicinity of their homes. With an increased mobility came the loss of importance of the local spaces (cf. Burfeind 2018). This has also consequences for local involvement, which increasingly becomes transitory and informal (cf. Alscher et al. 2009, pp. 34, 55) and, more importantly, no longer incorporates a wide range of people from different ends of the social and cultural spectrum, as the traditional local citizens' associations did (cf. Noack and Schmidt 2014). What is missing is a common local narrative,[2] a physical and metaphorical space around which people gather, much like the church and the building association in the Catholic quarters in the 1960s, because social practice, as

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1   The terminology was introduced by Thomas Sieverts (Sieverts 1997). For a critique on the undefined-ness of the term cf. Hesse (Hesse 2004, p. 71).

2   Of course, there are large-scale narratives, such as "home country" or "nation," which can potentially unite citizens, but these container narratives first of all suggest a homogeneity which they cannot redeem in practice and they are often used to exclude groups of people (cf. Ekué et al. 2017, p. 163).

Miggelbrink argues, hinges on the process of giving symbolic meaning to the world around us (cf. Miggelbrink 2002, p. 45).

My suggestion on how to foster social cohesion reverses the process that established religious communities usually follow. Instead of starting with a close-knit community that slowly discovers the world around it, the citizens of Plattenwald discover their lifeworld, find common places in the physical world, and on that basis develop a common language. The end result is then not the establishment of a Catholic parish. What Michael Schüßler made the church take to heart also applies to practical theologians who are willing to expose themselves to the situation in Plattenwald:

> Spiritually, what will matter for the church is trusting an event in the traces of the gospel, wherever it happens. And even when no new parish member is won and one does not know whether the story with God is begun, continued, or disrupted. [...] One must not restrict God's presence to those spaces where he is explicitly named or emphatically believed in* (Schüßler 2014, p. 43).

Starting a concretisation of my practical theological approach in the district of Plattenwald could be understood as a radicalisation of that trust

(a) in the gospel mandate for seeking "the peace and prosperity of the city" (Jer 29:1) which is part of a larger discourse archive of Christianity and its discourses on hospitality
(b) in the experience of ecumenical and interreligious theology, which sought to establish common places between churches and religions, e.g. in the design of common places of worship and encounter
(c) in the liberating option of practical theology to enable people to take matters into their own hands, such as community organising
(d) in the "power of wonder" (cf. page 83) with which practical theology can approach places and find new meaning.

All these aspects make practical theology suited to find new perspectives even in a place without a church, or, with Christoph Theobald, we could find "faith where we do not expect it"* (Theobald 2018, p. 75). We could find themes and topics in the existential search for meaning and community that resonate not only with our experiences as theologians but with the gospel story and the dis-

course archive of the church as well. I do not want to go into detail in this final chapter, firstly because others have written much more profoundly on the theory of such resonances (cf. e.g. Kläden and Schüßler 2017; Koll and Friedrichs 2018; Hörsch and Pompe 2019) and secondly because before resonances happen, we need an attentiveness for the space and its people, which is the topic of this book.

Theologians do, however, need a disciplinary partner if they want to develop a sensitivity for place. This is where, besides architecture and design, which have already been mentioned above, human geography comes into play. The technique of collective mapping in particular can enable theologians to get a new perspective on their surroundings and to foster a change of perspective in others as well. Collective mapping is in essence a workshop design that brings participants of a specific part of town together to walk through their neighbourhood and create an alternative map of the area. It is based in critical geography, which argues that maps "do not represent the world [...], but visualise both natural and social phenomena"* (Bittner and Michel 2018, p. 298), which means that maps also represent power relations. Democratising map making and using it as a tool to reflect on the local situation has been used both by critical geographers (Halder et al. 2018) and citizens' grassroots organisations (Iconoclasistas 2016). As a tool it complements and (politically) concretises the idea of the flaneur described earlier and turns it from a single to a group activity.

   While the critical geographer is versed in the design of mapping workshops, it is the task of the practical theologian to bring the experiences of his or her discipline into the dialogue. Leading questions could be: In what places have faith communities built visions for the future and what aspects from these places are transferable to the public realm? Where did a faith community's futuristic visions turn to stifling experiences and what are the built and material factors that contributed to this development? What liberating strategies could we take from past examples where faith communities engaged with the built environment around them and the people living therein? And lastly, and most importantly, are there questions that have not been asked in the dialogue with the built environment, especially questions of human freedom and the role of the built environment as an actor that contributes to that – or that subjugates people by design?

Practical Theological Implications Beyond the Concrete

The questions I have proposed for Plattenwald show that a materially and spatially sensitive practical theology can even occupy spaces where church is not a popular topic, because it has long transcended

> the status of an applied priest's theology towards a Council-inspired theology of the church […] and gone further towards a late-modern existential theology […]. That is the charming aspect of this discipline: There is nothing truly human which in the framework of a "new theological existentialism" cannot become its subject* (Bauer 2015, p. 5).

We might add to Christian Bauer's statement, which appeared in the first article of an issue of a German magazine for pastoral theology (PThI) on the status of the discipline in 2015, that there is also nothing that is part of the human-material network that is out of reach of the discipline. I want to end this final chapter the way I have begun the book: by looking at the status of practical theology in 2020, though not by means of another handbook project[1] but by looking at the open questions one of the interlocutors to PThI's special issue has posed.

From the perspective of systematic theology,[2] Saskia Wendel remarks that while there are many voices and many research approaches in practical theology today, there were few who looked at the aspect of embodiment.

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1 Although Birgit Weyel and her colleagues in 2022 have released a new *International Handbook of Practical Theology* from an ecumenical and interreligious, as well as transcultural, perspective.

2 The other interlocuter, whom I will just mention here briefly, writes from a Protestant perspective. Christian Grethlein considers the problem that the interlocutors from the social

> Emotions, affects, bodily performances, and their phenomenological reflec-
> tions, deliberations on the construction of "body" […] along with power dis-
> courses seem to play only a minor role (at the moment), at least in the con-
> tributions published here* (Wendel 2015, p. 122).

While my book has done little to remedy the lack of a critical perspective on the
body and the power discourses that surround it, it has nonetheless tried to make
practical theology aware that even in its most reduced – and contorted – under-
standing as an applied science, it rests on the physical world.[3] It depends on the
houses, streets, concrete pillars, and glass panes which constitute human exis-
tence and which are not just passive elements, but whose design subtly shapes
power relations in church and society. That attentiveness for the little details
of our existence can help us also to become attentive of our own bodies and
the way in which they are used, as well as misused. The aforementioned Jane
Bennett and her "Political Ecology of Things" has made that link between things
and bodies explicit – just as Bonnie Miller-McLemore has established the link
between bodies and what they do in their everyday lives, eating, playing, loving.

There are also commonalities that Wendel finds in the contributions of prac-
tical theologians. Besides a reception of the Second Vatican Council it is the "an-
thropological turn" in 20th century theology (cf. ibid., p. 125). There have been
many turns since, and the "material turn" I propagate here is just one among
the many, but as the ecological crisis demonstrates, there needs to be a sense for
the environment that must complement the "anthropological turn", no longer
seeing nature as a passive object to be dominated but as part of a mesh, or rhi-
zome, of relations. My approach is part of the many critical questions on the
status of the human subject (cf. e.g. Bauer 2021) as well as on the question if
the "optionality" of practical theology for the poor and oppressed must not be
extended beyond the human scope.

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and political sciences as well as philosophy are manifold and yet the theological references
remain mostly within the Catholic spectrum (cf. Grethlein 2015, p. 129). He also argues that
there is precious little to read about practical theologians from the United States. I hope
that I have been able to bring in some of these perspectives and, vice versa, translate some
of the German discussion for the English-speaking world.

3   Other practical theologians have since sought to remedy the lack of body-power dis-
courses, for instance in dialogue with ethnography.

We might even further this thought by allowing for perspectives to enter our deliberations which are neither human nor material. Virtuality and the status of artificial intelligence are also considerations that practical theology has to take into account if it proposes to live in the mist of the present realities. While Christian social ethics (Filipovic et al. 2018) or moral theology (Brandt 2019) have debated the status of intelligent machines, I wonder what the specific perspective of practical theology is, which is a discipline that begins with

> constitutive activities of daily life [...] where faith breaks down and people struggle (Miller-McLemore 2012a, p. 7).

Or, to put it briefly that is "a cultural science of the people of God"* (Bucher 2002, p. 185). I would argue that we have yet to realise the full potential of our discipline when it comes to *digitalisation*, meaning that we need a sensitivity for the new spaces that are being created virtually and their material basis. As my starting point with the electric laboratories of large corporations shows, such an approach would be closely intertwined with the physical and the power-structures upon which the virtual world rests. With Bruno Latour we can thus say:

> Nowadays, everyone knows that there is no GPS without three satellites; [...] drones in Pakistan without headquarters in Tampa, Florida; [...] When Harold Garfinkel described the skills necessary to "pass" as a member of a society, you could say it was a totally intangible social phenomenon that could be only qualitatively described, but not today when every detail of your avatars on the Web can be counted, dated, weighed, and measured. [...] Go tell Google engineers that their vast arrays of servers are just virtual! (Latour 2011, p. 802)

A materially sensitive practical theology would perhaps be more aware of the dangers of this brave new world that is being created and would remind itself constantly of its "optionality" in the face of the temptations of seemingly limitless – because non-material[4] – possibilities.

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4 I have written on the materiality of the virtual world in connection with the topic of "home" as a place (Henkel 2020).

Conclusion

> The thought that things can be infinitely suppressed, that they are without rights, without a will, without feelings and without the need for autonomy can only come from someone who thinks that they have neither life nor power. But they do. What else would all those poems, paintings, verses, history, dreams be about [...]?*
> *Erich Kästner*, Aufstand der Dinge, *The Uprising of Things*

As pastoral theologians we need to be attentive for all things and even the most mundane. This happens only through subversive tactics and not via a great plan. This is why pastoral workers should pay attention to their surroundings, the stories of church buildings and the community ecclesiology they embody. But this is also why pastoral workers should themselves become active, take on the roles of architects, designers, and community organisers to change the world around them. Furthermore, everyone within theology who is interested in the fate of human existence needs to find not only a way to give humans a voice but also a language to make the rich network around us speak.

An Artistic Intervention: Thing Photography

Before I come to a conclusion of this book, I want to remind myself and the reader of what is at stake if we take the world of things seriously. I thus come

back to the second part of this book and Richard Learoyd's photography of a crashed and burned car, albeit from a much subtler angle.

Figure 43: Thomas Demand, Badezimmer (Beau Rivage), C-Print (1997)

> Thomas Demand's image can be found, for instance, in the collection of the *Kunstmuseum Bonn*.

The artist THOMAS DEMAND builds life-size models of historical scenes in paper and produces large-format photographs of them. His models are minutely exact representations of historically important places, but the materiality, the smooth paper texture and the lack of any imperfections, makes us acutely aware that we are looking at a picture and not at a real scene. The bathroom where Uwe Barschel, then Prime Minister of Schleswig-Holstein, drowned in 1987 or the table to which the entrepreneur's son Jan Philip Reemtsma was tied by his abductors in 1996[1] are as objects part of our collective memory. The tragedy that is associated with these objects shows how powerful the material world around us is for our lives, even in life-and-death situations.

Demand's photography makes us aware that our lives are tied to things and that photography can bring out that eigenvalue in them. In her dissertation on everyday life objects in photography, CHRISTINA PACK looks at the the history of object photography. She focuses on photographic positions that emphasise the independence of things.[2]

It is noteworthy that Pack looks at the connection between humans and things in photography through the signs of usage that things show. Because the photographic portrait is increasingly questioned as a means to show the essence of a human being, the things that are used by humans are employed as a proxy. Thing photography thus shows the paradox of photography itself. With Walter Benjamin (cf. Benjamin 1939) Pack argues that "the technical apparatus deprives reality of life [...] on the other hand the photographic representations of lifeless things are seen as having a life of their own"* (Pack 2008, p. 18).

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1   Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre reflected on the artwork in his book *Remix 3* (Stuckrad-Barre 2019).
2   Pack's own position is influenced by cultural studies (cf. e.g. Böhme 2006).

I want to focus on the fourth chapter of Pack's analysis of different photo-graphic positions, which she has captioned with *das Eigenleben der Dinge*, the independent existence of things. In it the author analyses the photo series *Stiller Nachmittag*, quiet afternoon, of Peter Fischli and David Weiss as well as the series *Vasen-Extasen*, vase ecstasies, of Anna and Bernhard Blume. The Rube-Goldberg-like balancing contraptions of Fischli and Weiss and the hu-morous spectacle of an attacking vase that Anna and Bernhard Blume show are both ways in which photographers argue that things have a life of their own. Pack sees this as a comment on the increasing importance of everyday life objects in the industrial age. With Jean Baudrillard's *The System of Objects* she argues:

> The objects are no longer accompanied by the spectacle of hands in which they merely have minor roles, but today their high grade of finality makes them the lead actors of a global process in which man has taken on a minor role* (Baudrillard 2001, 74 in ibid., p. 198).

Her résumé is therefore that on the one hand things show, through traces of hu-man use[3], their close relation to humans. Referencing another important work of photographic theory, *Chambre Claire* (cf. Barthes and Leube (translator) 1989), Pack argues that "if Roland Barthes says that the referent 'adheres', the same can be said about used things"* (Pack 2008, p. 274). Yet at the same time they evade a close relationship and have a life of their own (cf. ibid., pp. 276–277). The medium of photography shows this relation and evasion. But, moreover, with the aforementioned philosopher Vilém Flusser we can say that we as humans have the capacity to take a step back from this close relationship as well.

> The medium of photography seems especially suited to step back from the every day world of objects and come up with a new image of things* (ibid., p. 277).

Thomas Demand masterfully employed the medium to that effect.

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3 This is also Pack's link to the medium of analog photography where the things leave *traces* of light on film.

Churches as Open Artworks and Museums for the Future

Religious and monastic communities have a long tradition of building, both sacred and profane spaces, churches and libraries,[4] hospitals and community centres. What they have also built to great extent are museums – one might think of the *Vatican Museums* in Rome or any of the small diocesan museums in one's diocese. But while these museums host great collections of art, what they are missing from my perspective is a testament to the open artwork. This is the final perspective with which I want to release the reader into the open with.

Most of the demands for a new sensibility towards the interconnected world have been realised in smaller projects which are too many to mention here. But what I see lacking is a bigger picture, a flagship project that could show the local church communities how they can realise a new way to interact with space, the materiality, and the people around them. As religious life in Germany and other countries in Europe and around the world changes, churches and religious communities have to think about their future presence – which includes their built presence as well.

An interesting example how to build for the future, which takes up a lot of the aspects I have mentioned above, is the *futurium* in Berlin. It is a museum built by the German *Ministry of Education and Research* which does not see its role in the collection and display of objects – in contrast to the equally newly built ethnographic museum *Humboldt Forum* also in the centre of Berlin – but to enable citizens to think about the future. The museum shows potential technological developments and asks its visitors how they relate to them. It is in that sense the exact opposite to the walled-off research campus of large technology companies. It is the social laboratory I see as complementing, and in many functions replacing, the technological laboratories of the past.

In its brochure, the museum opens with a quote from one of the first futurologists, Robert Jungk, from the 1990s:

> We need a strong fantasy movement where not just a few experts but everyone interested – which includes laypeople – should participate. [...] Only

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4 E.g. the main library at the *Catholic University of Eichstätt* was built by the aforementioned Günter Behnisch and his partners.

someone who invents the future in advance can hope to effectively influence it* (Zipf and Luckas 2009, p. 8).

The idea is to turn visitors into inventors and with that change the way a museum functions. Museums of the past had "an instrumental role in the building of modern nations [...] they celebrated the past glory and present objectives."* The museums of today "must look forwards instead of backwards"* (ibid., p. 24).

The exhibition space in the *futurium* is organised in different areas: From the use of robotics to sustainable energy sources, from the power of artificial intelligence to the future modes of transportation, the museum tries to envision what the future could look like. But it does not only show the technology side of these developments, it also demonstrates how they will influence man and nature. Throughout the exhibition the visitor is asked to take a stand as to what developments they find beneficial, where they see caveats, and where they want to know more. Thus the exhibition changes constantly. As visitors record their opinions, the museum adapts its exhibition as well as its educational programs.

I will highlight two aspects for the future of the material presence of churches. First of all the attention to and engagement with the world of things. There is a powerful strand in both theology and official church talk that criticises the mass-produced and mass-marketed goods, especially electronic devices. Yet at the same time both theologians and church officials use technological artifacts. This double standard reminds me first of all of Heidegger's very narrow definition of thing as something stemming from the world of handmade rural production and secondly of Bruno Latour's criticism of current philosophy which shuns away from an engagement with the world of things and instead focuses on the old critique of the things being mere fetishes.

The *futurium* takes a different route in that it devotes a whole section of its exhibition to the question "What do all the things do?"* (ibid., p. 68) In it, the curators focus on our everyday lives and the way things are integrated. They ask how much we rely on things but also how sustainable that reliance is, without neglecting the importance of things not just for the individual but for the growth of society as a whole.[5] Therefore a space for a positive appreciation

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5   I am particularly drawn to the idea to look at everyday life. Cultural studies have a long tradition to approach the everyday, the mundane. E.g. the sociologists Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann analysed how we are both born into a seemingly self-evident lifeworld and at the same time are constantly inter-subjectively working on the construction of that

and reflection of our interwoven-ness with things, like Latour's parliament of things, must be a necessary feature of pastoral practice today. But it must also feature in our church buildings.

The second aspect I want to single out is the design of the *futurium* as a building. The exhibition hall on the first floor is surrounded by open spaces for discussion and experimentation on the ground and second floor. The architects Richter and Musikowski say that the building spatially structures the program of the museum, namely exhibition, events, and workshops. They also mention that they wanted to create a house that was as flexible as possible to function as a "vessel for the future [...] a space where different futures can move in"* (Zipf and Luckas 2009, p. 39). In that respect the *futurium* can also become a role model for churches to open up their spaces for experimentation.

The *fablab* movement, which started at the MIT in 1990, has emphasised the need to share knowledge worldwide but produce things locally. This approach links to the co-production of knowledge in citizen-science projects and real experiments as mentioned earlier but also refers to the need for a tangible engagement with the materiality of the world.

 Opening up that definition to also include the local grassroots activities and worldwide network of knowledge that faith communities have to offer would be the task for the future. In the scope of this book I can only do as much as to argue that it would fit right into the demand for new and experimental form-finding processes to happen within the church.

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world. As mentioned before (cf. page 48), with Henri Lefèbvre we also find a critic of everyday life as determined by the constraints of the capitalist market economy (Schütz and Luckmann 1972; Lefebvre 1987).

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