

## The decisive text: on begining to read Heidegger's "Building, Dwelling and Thinking"

**Clive Dilnot\***

Professor of Design Studies, Dept. Art and Design Studies, Rm 609, Parsons School of Design, New School University, 2w 13th St. New York NY 10011

**W**hat follows is essentially the prologue to a longer paper on Heidegger's essay. What appears here is only that portion of the paper which deals with how we might think about reading Heidegger's essay. Such an effort might be deemed irrelevant save that the one clear truth about Heidegger's essay is that it is not read - if by "reading" we mean something other than the uncritical reproduction of a text, something nearer to the work of thinking the text beyond its own means, beyond the limits (and the limitations) of its own awareness (and hence beyond the limits of our awareness). If Heidegger's text is not read then the question of how Heidegger's text is to be read in relation to building - that is, as a provocation to our thinking about architecture - is central. In itself it allows us to read, and thus to think and this is its value.

### The decisive text

#### 1. An essay about thinking, an essay about building

We can begin very simply, with a claim in regard to the significance of Heidegger's essay. It concerns the manner in which what is forced into view through this text is the very condition, the peculiarity even, of the situation of architecture with respect to the work that the latter achieves and the conditions under which architecture "is" - let us say, in total, to the conditions of existence of architectural work.

Since this is fundamental - for it opens the very possibility of adequate knowing in architecture - we can call "Building Dwelling Thinking" a decisive text for architectural knowing. The force of this claim is emphasized if we consider that

few other essays within the corpus of philosophy, with the possible exception of certain moments in Bachelard's Poetics of Space, or some sentences in Bataille's critical fragments on architecture, are as revealing of the potential work of building. Fewer still permit an indication of the surpassing of conditions presently inimical to both the practice, and the self-consciousness, of architecture.

For a text to be said to be decisive implies that it works an act of demarcation. From out of the total field of a subject area something is separated off, decisively, as essential. What is essential in this case, in the forms of demarcation enacted and of the foundation constructed, is that a structure of questioning is established and set into being which touches on two moments of acute significance for architecture - first on the relations between and amongst the three terms of Heidegger's title (Heidegger is perhaps the first philosopher to begin to think this relation: hence, whatever view we come to regarding the adequacy of his answers, on these grounds alone the essay commands our attention) and, second, on what Heidegger describes as the "crisis of dwelling" in the present.

It is in "answering" this crisis, as a response to the profound questioning which reflection upon it has induced, that Heidegger creates the field of reconstructive work set out in the essay. Here Heidegger achieves, beyond the limits of his own ambition (or indeed of his capacity to deploy it) a new formulation in regard to the ground of being, one located, as we shall see, in the non-teleological and propositional work of "building-dwelling." This is key. At once for philosophy, though this revolution is yet still-born; but also for architecture. For the latter,

\* Clive Dilnot is currently professor of design studies at the Parsons School of Design and the New School in New York. Educated in Fine Arts and Social Theory, he lectured in the history, theory and criticism of art and design in Britain before moving to Harvard University in 1986 where he taught in the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts and the Graduate School of Design offering courses in the theory and ethics of architecture. He has been visiting professor at University of Illinois in Chicago, Rhode Island School of Design and the University of Technology, Sydney. Since Harvard he has taught in Hong Kong, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he was also director of design initiatives, and Parsons/the New School, where he teaches courses both in design theory and in the history and understanding of the present. He has contributed to conferences and institutions world-wide, and has written extensively on design history, theory and poetics, the understanding of the object realm, aesthetics, photography, and latterly on economics and on unsustainability. His recent publications include Ethics? Design? (Archeworks, Chicago 2005) and the essay for Chris Killip's Pirelli Work (Steidl, London 2006). His current concerns focus on the role of design capabilities in terms of how we can contend with the implications of the artificial as the horizon and medium of our world.

this "metaphoric" language provides the possibility of thinking the effective grounding of architectural work in an act of originary significance ("building-dwelling") that de-centers, but does not wholly destroy, the architectural project - which indeed (potentially) allows the latter its recuperation outside, of the need expressed by modern architecture to seek its condition in autonomy (the fetishization of architecture), inversion (the reduction of "building" to technique and the simultaneous valorization of architecture), and distinction (the pathological separation of architecture from building on categorical grounds).

We can begin an elucidation and recovery of the text by focusing on the moments of the title. Encompassed in the simultaneous presentation of the terms Building Dwelling Thinking, the title is both the point of announcement from which the work of the text begins and key to understanding the potential force of Heidegger's argument. The text, indeed, is nothing but the elucidation of the situation in which we presently find ourselves with respect to the structure of this relationship - that is to say, the situation of being forced to confront, and take full measure of, the consequences of the fact of its dislocation, of the non-relation currently existing between the moments of the title. Everything hinges on this point. For Heidegger, the analysis of this relationship, precisely because of its breakdown, its non-identity in the present, becomes the royal road to grasping both the character of our culture as a whole with respect to the forms of our "dwelling," and the nature of building-dwelling. Hence the essay "Building Dwelling Thinking."

The breakdown in the relationship of the moments of the title finds its most general embodiment in the engendering of a historical present characterized by the loss of relation to "dwelling" - in the particular and acute form of the failure to understand that this loss has actually occurred. This, at least, is Heidegger's case. To it corresponds the argument that our unhappiness with respect to our "homelessness" follows directly from the failure to grasp the nature of this plight - from our failure, in other words, to permit the moments of the title to "listen" (and thus to inflect, to belong) to one another.

"Dwelling" is this listening. In the "failure to listen" to one another in respect of each moment the

meaning of "dwelling" is obscured. It is then that building-as-dwelling retires behind the (historical) forms that building takes; behind its name, and, in fact, in our time, behind the twin forms of cultivation and construction, *aedificare* - the first which we could translate here as politics-without-dwelling, in which political activity ceases to touch on the true components of establishing culture; the second, worked in our time in the techniques of autonomous building practices, in construction science, the "profession" of architecture, the practice of "property development," and the like.

Heidegger's charge is essentially as follows: that in both cases - with the former in regard to the erosion of an organic relation to dwelling, with the latter in terms of the development of all those techniques that reduce ends to means, and through fetishism (inversion), autonomy (hypostatization), and fragmentation, cause these to dominate, and to occlude, the nature and reality of building-dwelling -- there is a loss of perception and knowing, of understanding; to such an extent that despite the "progress" of modern rational knowledge, despite differentiation, rationalization, and the division of labor applied to the field dwelling, we "forget," or occlude, the nature of building as dwelling.

The charge is acute. Yet for all that we might ask: Does this still matter - for architecture? Is not architecture the practice of this overcoming? Is that not what the architectural professions profess? Is it not on the claim of the provision of "dwelling" that the legitimacy, status, and work of architecture within the community is secured? Undoubtedly so.

Hence the temptation to refuse, for architecture, Heidegger's (implicit) charge. But however tempting, however much, as itself an expression of architectural alienation, we are persuaded to deny the centrality of this concern, to place it as marginal to an architectural thinking theoretically transcendent of it, the charge is actually crucial. It describes all too well architecture's displacement, our displacement: "architecture's", and thus our own, true marginality with respect to the culture at large.

What is lost here, in architecture - but architecture does not know of its loss - is a relation: the understanding of the relation Building, Dwelling, Thinking. But this is "also" the relation which is determinant for,

is a condition of, the work of architecture, and its understanding. Thus, behind the occlusion of the relation Building, Dwelling, Thinking (and of building—dwelling) lies the occlusion of architecture. Architecture's invisibility to itself: the baffling counterpart to its evident visibility and materiality is grounded here, in the occlusion of this relation.

This three-fold occlusion is key. It is the three-step means whereby the "sense" of architectural work is lost. To put it more mundanely, but to follow the steps of this occlusion: understood only as a moment of "construction-as-cultivation," architecture has problematically erased from its consciousness, and thus from its practice, the terms of the relationship between building, dwelling, and thinking. But since architecture is peculiarly suspended in its underlying structural condition between these moments (as non-identical to any, but as part inhabitant of each), it cannot be thought if the relation of the moments of this relation cannot be thought. Through its pretension to autonomy, the manner in which it participates in the schema of means-ends relations, and through the fear of the endless ambiguity involved in this necessarily oscillatory condition of architecture caught within these conditions, "Architecture" inverts its relation to the three moments of the title; it hypostatistically declares itself independent of each, going so far as to constitute itself, in terms of self-identity, by defining itself against these moments - particularly, of course, "against" building. But, in so doing, architecture defines itself as an impossible condition - as building which is yet not building, as dwelling which is yet not dwelling, as thinking which is yet not cognition. If all of these differentiations contain a truth - for architecture is non-identical to each - still it is so differently to how architecture usually thinks this relation. To use a familiar language: architecture stands as differentiated from each of these moments, not as distinction-from, but as supplement-to. Architecture's difference from building, from thinking, is not based on distinction. Above all, architecture is not, or should not be, different from dwelling. But distinction describes the relations of self-knowledge through which the professional discipline of architecture locates itself relative to these other moments.

Indeed, here is the irony; even though architecture exists in and through these (negative) definitions - i.e.,

building activity exists, a profession exists - it does so fugitively, without theory, without consciousness, without self-knowledge.

The parallel is with Kantian aesthetics. Defined negatively, aesthetics exists, for Kant, largely in terms of what it is not. The real marginality of the "aesthetic," as Kant defines it, is expressed not only in the marginality of aesthetic experience to life itself (its closure into a special realm), but also in the inability of post-Kantian aesthetics either to specify more fully and adequately the positive nature of that experience, or to come to terms with those conditions of aesthetic experience where, as in architecture, the "aesthetic" moment is only one moment of an integral complex; one moment of a real object whose conditions include, but also exceed, the purely aesthetic realm. Defined negatively, in terms of opposition, such conditions cannot be thought (well) by aesthetic thinking. The form of the integral complex object involved here (in the work of architecture) escapes aesthetic theory. This lacuna is seen in every attempt to write an architectural "aesthetic." But as the latter cannot grasp the peculiar fold of aesthetic and non-aesthetic moments in architecture, so the differentiating character of modern architectural thinking similarly defines architecture in equally impossible terms. Hence there is a sense that just as "aesthetics" both does and does not exist, so architecture does and yet does not exist. Architecture exists, as a profession, but it cannot be thought because we think architecture now largely as Kant thought aesthetics, that is, negatively.

The result is a paradox. "Architecture" can only be thought fugitively. In the margins. The categorical structure that is architecture turns its back on the relations or moments that, in actuality, sustain it. But this means that architecture cannot be thought. If it cannot be thought, then it cannot fully exist, it cannot fully realize itself. Despite protestations to the contrary, this is architecture's condition. It is not that architecture does not exist because architecture is "dead." Conservative obituaries are here premature. Rather, not yet realized, i.e., not yet thought relationally, architecture has not yet come into being; it has not yet reconciled itself to itself as an event occurring between or within the relation Building, Dwelling, Thinking. Thus architecture has not yet dared to think itself

in this manner. Thus architecture awaits being thought.

The fact that we do not yet have architecture has consequences for dwelling. The crisis of dwelling occurs because, while we have "architecture," we cannot yet think an architecture that does not stand against dwelling (or against building, against thinking). Thus we can now understand that the "crisis of dwelling" is no more than a symptomatic (but structural) expression of the dislocated relations between the moments of the essay's title - which are also, as we have said, the moments of architecture's determination. In other words, both the relationship between these moments and the crisis induced by the drama of the "forgetting" of this relation stand on the problematic relationship; in our present situation, between the moments of the essay's title. This means, of course, that the centering of the essay on these moments, is not arbitrary. It is essential. The significance of the text lies, then, in the way the mapping together of these moments occurs, more particularly in terms of the description of the coming-to-be of our present unhappiness with respect to "dwelling," and in regard to how Heidegger attempts to think past the limitations these conditions give for dwelling (and by implication, for architecture).

## 2. The unsurpassable structure of the essay

The essay is concerned delineating the internal relations which occur between the terms of the title. It deals with three propositions or three questions: that of dwelling (asking "What is it to dwell?"); that of the relation of "building to dwelling" (asking "How does building belong to dwelling?"); that of the relation building, dwelling, and thinking (asking "How does thinking belong to dwelling?").

Concerning building-dwelling the essay deals with these questions in terms of understanding the work of building in relation to dwelling. Heidegger's innovation here is to transform the structure of this relation from two terms exterior to one another to an internal relation of equivalence (though not of identity). Concerning building, dwelling, thinking, which as the active moment of the text is key and determinant, the questions put up for

meditation are two-fold: "how do we think about building-dwelling?" and "how do we think about the relationship between building-dwelling (and being) and thinking." But the fact that we think about these questions brings us back to building. If how we think about building-dwelling is carried on the back of posing the question of "dwelling" (what it means to dwell, how it is that we attain to dwelling), then, as Heidegger somewhat reluctantly concedes, we find that since we attain to dwelling "so it seems, only by means of building" it is building which necessarily becomes the object of concern.<sup>1</sup> Thus, "Building Dwelling Thinking," logically enough, announces itself as, first of all, a meditation on Building.

On building note - not architecture. And this is essential. For if the subject of the essay is building, the function of this meditation is not to think building in relation to construction, or in regard to architecture (as we already think we understand these terms), but it is rather, as Heidegger puts it, "to trace building back into that domain to which everything that is belongs." (145) To trace building back into this domain is to trace it back into the domain of being: it is to place building back into relation to that question which Heidegger calls the founding question, "What is being?"

We will see later what it means to place building in relation to the question "What is being?" For the moment we can simply note that the essay examines a three-fold relation thought in terms of this, its fourth, and essentially determining, relation. Heidegger uses this relation as the "medium" through which the autonomy of each moment of the title is questioned. The question, "What is being?" is therefore, at least in its first incarnation, the critical question. It enables critique to occur; it is the question that forces the moments of the title to concede both their limits (when these moments are considered autonomously, in fragmentation), and their potential force (once they are re-united with, or at least placed in relation to, the "founding question").

The passage of thinking the moments of the title through this question, yields the attempt to think past (if only schematically and by implication) our present antinomy with respect to building and dwelling.

<sup>1</sup> Marlin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, Harper & Row, 1971), 145. All page references are from this volume unless otherwise noted.

This "thinking past" is key for the attempt to escape the present crisis, to give an indication of the conditions (or means through which) we could perceive a potential historical and practical overcoming of our situation; it establishes the essay as not only decisive (for architecture) but unsurpassable.

That a text should be deemed unsurpassable does not mean that it is transcendent (or, that it necessarily proposes a transcendent viewpoint - although Heidegger's does, but this is not where the unsurpassability of his text lies). Nor does it mean that the text necessarily stands outside of history (Heidegger's does not). On the contrary, if Heidegger's text is unsurpassable now, it is because it delineates (through telling a particular kind of story) a historical condition, an actuality in regard to the condition of dwelling in our time. This condition of "crisis" and "loss" cannot be wished away by thought (transcendence), nor even finally overcome in the realm of practice (positivism). No matter how much we may wish it away, or however many moments of innovative practice may genuinely and wholly transcend it, the condition of "crisis" and "loss" remains.

This assertion may surprise. It is based on the proposition that an overcoming in practice - for instance, an architectural overcoming of the modern conditions of the displacement of dwelling as Heidegger describes them in his essay - cannot be fully an overcoming if the new actuality that is proffered does not enter consciousness, if it is not understood in its originative or natalic force, if it is not understood in terms of the creation of a space, or location, for dwelling. It is thus the effective argument of "Building Dwelling Thinking" that practice cannot in itself overcome this crisis. For this crisis is not only one of practice, of building, but of our self-consciousness (our thinking) with respect to the relations between our understanding and the moments - the spheres of action - of building, dwelling, and being. The loss of the relation Building, Dwelling, Thinking is the loss in thought as well as in actuality. Because this relation cannot be thought, practice, in general, cannot come to consciousness of achievements, or its failures.

To put this another way, Heidegger's essay is unsurpassable because the form of its anticipation

of the crisis of dwelling, together with the form of its description of the conditions for overcoming this crisis, describe an actuality of relations that can only be surpassed fully (in practice) when these conditions are overcome in thought - something that can occur only by first, paying attention to the overt and latent implications and meanings for building and architecture contained within the text; and second, by developing adequate means whereby the process of overcoming the actualities Heidegger describes are made available, publicly and pedagogically, to consciousness.

Such is the first and most profound claim that the essay makes with respect to architectural understanding.

### 3. The question of architecture

The claim that Heidegger's text has a specifically cognitive function with regard to architecture arises, or is based, in the essay's position with respect to the question of the self-understanding of architecture. Unlike other works which might be said to bear on, or aspire to, philosophical explanations of architectural meaning. Heidegger's essay functions critically to open the cognitive condition of architecture. Yet, at the same time, the fact that the text addresses these issues (and not simply in a conservative, and weak, or wholly affirmative manner, the issue of "dwelling") accounts for the resistance that it encounters a resistance best caught by Mark Wigley when he points out in a recent interview that while architects know they are obliged to read this essay, they also understand "that while [they] must refer to Heidegger, they must not observe Heidegger's work too closely"). In other words, the argument goes, the essay must indeed be read, but read in order to resist the threat (the questions) that it contains. But this resistance to the text, or better, to its questions and implications, merely represses a question that in the final analysis will have to be faced. It is not only Heidegger's essay that cannot be thought, Architecture too cannot be thought - and that is our problem.

One fact illustrates this point. We know we do not have architecture, do not possess in mind its essential characteristics, when we realize that much of the knowledge we have about building is registered in works of architecture. But under the modern

conditions of thinking architecture this knowledge remains effectively unavailable for thought. (The proof of the latter assertion is given by the obvious fact that such knowledge as is embodied in building remains almost wholly unavailable either for the profession in general, or for architectural pedagogy). Simply put, the knowledge of architecture contained in building is not replicated in consciousness. Above all, it is not replicated in the concept "Architecture." We might even say that it is the very presence of this term which blocks consciousness of what building achieves and what the *work* of architecture *does*. Architecture, broken from dwelling, is broken from itself. Hence the paradox: that in architecture, architectural possibility is repeatedly lost - and is so because in architecture, architecture can no longer be thought.

How it can be thought paradoxically is by declaring it "impossible." This does not mean that architecture does not exist. Architecture exists, just as building exists. The questions are rather: how does architecture exist in the modern period? In particular, how does it exist now, cognitively? How is it thought? How is architecture conscious of itself? How does it understand its own role and purpose? How does it know its own practice?

If we fail, as we will, to find an adequate answer to these questions, then we begin to understand all too well how the one and the other (architecture and Heidegger) correspond. For these are the determining questions, those at the heart of the issue. They ask how a practice exists in terms of its self-understanding. They ask how a practice is possible. They confront the difficulties of establishing practice under conditions where self-conceptualization (or adequate self-consciousness) is extremely difficult, and achieved only through strategies - such as autonomy, or the "borrowing" of a conceptual language from other arts or the sciences, (strategies that are ultimately counter-productive to both architectural practice and its self-understanding).

To speak of the impossibility of this practice is not to suggest that it cannot be thought because architecture necessarily lies beyond thought, or is forever doomed to be outside of thought in some ontological fashion. This impossibility arises because architecture is situated in this place outside of consciousness: architecture in the modern period

lies outside of our historically limited modes of consciousness. Architecture lies outside of our patterns of thought not intrinsically but historically. This means that architecture is neither endemically nor necessarily outside of consciousness per se, but that it is necessarily outside of our consciousness. That architecture cannot be thought is a product of the fact that our (historically determined and limited) modes of thought are inimical to thinking architecture.

Thus architecture, as we know it, is a practice without a thought because it is a practice outside of *this* thought, *our* thought. To draw a picture of architectural understanding today would be to show an architecture unable to describe to itself (or to be described in terms of) what it "achieves", ideally or in actuality (an architecture that does not know its own practice, or fully understand the meaning of its own configurative and constructive work). Heidegger's essay addresses this problem, if elliptically.

Now, it is true that this second claim for the cognitive work of Heidegger's essay is paradoxical in the extreme. The essay begins, after all, by renouncing all claims to deal with architecture. In the opening paragraph Heidegger explicitly denies that "architectural ideas and rules of building" belong to the scope of the work and goes on, immediately, to place dwelling at the center of the enquiry and remove architecture altogether from the field it would presume to reign. In the full version this reads: "In what follows we shall try to think about dwelling and building. This thinking about building does not presume to discover architectural ideas [...] rather it traces building back into the domain to which everything that is belongs. We ask: 1. What is it to dwell? 2. How does building belong to dwelling?" (145)

We can already intuit why Heidegger might do this. But the question remains: is it possible to claim the text for architecture? Especially when the force of the essay appears bound up in this displacement? Are not all the substantive theoretical and performative implications of the work grounded in (and do they not flow from) this first denial of architectural centrality? The answer can only be affirmative. And we can only reinforce it. For the point of the essay lies in the fact that it *critically forces apart* architecture

and dwelling. It is through this separation and displacement that the text works, critically, to open a thinking in regard to the foundations of architecture. To take one example: This displacement enacts a reversal of the natural focus of other philosophical works on architecture (which begin from, but also remain within, the presupposed orbit of architecture). Architecture in Heidegger does not appear as an essential datum, a given, or a historically justified and present phenomenon which *must* be spoken about; it is displaced, constructed as superstructural to and a "distorted" production of an earlier and more foundational infrastructural condition (that of building-dwelling).

This is scarcely insignificant. It describes Heidegger's essay as apparently wholly antithetical to architecture. The only question that remains, therefore, is whether Heidegger's text does not leave architecture wholly behind through this act of moving outside the given, or contingent, limits of architectural self-consciousness, outside the realm of "architectural ideas and rules for building."

But this question is itself "historical." There is no absolute point at which we could say that a discourse has "left architecture behind," for the sense of how we draw limits to what architecture "is" remains a contingent, even a political issue. It is certainly historical. In any case, this question does not even lie on a spectrum of distance from some essential moment: there is no "near to" or "far from" an architectural center. The question of limits, and thus of "applicability," is a point of contestation and perception, not essence. It is not a matter of thinking the history of architecture (understood as a practice, a profession, an "art," a value), but the effective history of the relational coming-to-be of a category.

Thus if the crucial work of Heidegger's essay is to re-phrase architectural thinking at its foundational level, and if one moment of that work is to place the thinking of architecture back into a deeply historical context, this context must be wider than the one architecture normally allows itself. The historical reading of what has occurred, categorically speaking, must be re-situated, placed in a "new" context. The occlusion of the relation building-dwelling gives, to thinking, a series of severe limitations on what may and may not be thought as "architecture." The work of critical thinking is to overcome these limitations.

Thus, for example, if one of these limitations on thinking is given by the way that the question "what is being" is not allowed to be asked in relation to questions of building and dwelling, then one necessary moment of the overcoming of the limits to thought in architecture is the restoration of this relation. Indeed, this is the minimum condition of adequate thinking in this area. In Heidegger, this overcoming takes the form of a simultaneously radical and conservative reading of the relation of *building, dwelling, and being*.

What figures in this text, in the place of "rules and ideas" for building architecture, is the attempt to understand building in relation to being – and to enable architecture, as building, to be thought as an occasion to open the question of being. The re-opening of this latter question, in particular, displaces "traditional" architectural discourse and has the radical or disturbing function of "shaking" the limits of architecture. Indeed, the question delineates the artificiality of these limits and shows that such limits render architecture "impossible." In effect, the question predicts the difficulty architecture will have with thinking this alternative reading of its "work." But only an architecture that had forgotten its purpose on earth, "in relation to mortals" could consider the question "what is being?" as lying outside of the central concerns of the discipline. Only a blindness to implication could mistake the contents and nature of the essay's address - the *critical* concern for the relation of *building, dwelling, and being* - as something marginal to, or ultimately distanced from, architecture. The attempt to recover a sense of how building could be re-located within the domain of dwelling such that architecture-as-building could once again belong, explicitly, to the answering of the question "What is being?" is the "alternative" Heidegger's text offers.

Accepting this, we can see that Heidegger might actually reveal something of the necessary (but non-foundational).grounding of architectural work through its decentering. The bracketing of the condition of architecture "itself" is thus essential. Heidegger's denial of architecture brings about a redescription of the conditions under which, or within which, architecture exists: this redescription, or potential space of re-description, achieves a clearing for architecture to re-think its relation to questions of existence.

#### 4. The revolution(s) enacted in Heidegger's text

If we accept this methodological move, what do we now confront, both "for itself" and in relation to architecture? The question is significant because what we are attempting to read here is, first and foremost, a philosophical text. If Heidegger's essay stands in its own right as a meditation in relation to the "domain to which everything that belongs" (145) obtained through the moment, or the metaphor of building-dwelling (which is here much more than a metaphor), still the work remains a fragment of a much larger discourse (a part of Heidegger's life-long enquiry the question "What is Being?": "Philosophy seeks what being is, insofar as it is. Philosophy is en route to the Being of beings, that is, to being with respect to Being").

In the philosophical texts of the nineteen-thirties Heidegger calls "What is being" the question of philosophy, understanding that all thinking that makes a claim to serious reflection on the character of existence proceeds within "the vast orbit of [this] guiding question." The essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" manifests a similar consciousness. In it Heidegger is again concerned with thinking the "ultimate factum to which we come" - with thinking being. But in this essay he is asking about the "house of Being," asking indeed how mortals ("beings") stand concretely to Being with respect to how they dwell on earth. The revolution enacted in Heidegger's text, a revolution whose force or potential cannot be denied, is simply this: in this essay Heidegger, in thinking in what way being stands to Being, thinks being through the concept of dwelling - and thus arrives at the argument that dwelling (or *Wohnen*, "to dwell in," "to in-habit") is "the fundamental being-structure of *Dasein*," the privileged mode of access to being.

This is doubly significant: for architecture (in the first place, for building-dwelling), and for Heidegger's philosophy. In the essays and lectures following "Building Dwelling Thinking," while Heidegger almost immediately abandons direct reflection on questions of building and dwelling in favor of postulating the absolute primacy of language as the new site of being, he nonetheless continues to think of language in terms of dwelling: he defines language as the "house" of being, speaks of man "dwelling"

in this house, says of those who think and create poetry as the "custodians of this dwelling." Even more directly, he defines poetic creation in terms of dwelling, and speaks of it as coming to pass "Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building." Thus, even though Heidegger turns to language as the home, the abode, the location, of being (all these metaphors are at work in the late essays), the language of dwelling has nonetheless become indispensable for Heidegger's thinking. This is necessarily so because the relationship of being to dwelling is more than metaphoric. In linking being and dwelling (and through these, building and thinking) Heidegger has established not exactly an "ontological" framework, but the originary framework of human existence: of being coming-to-be. Building-Dwelling is the enactment of being. In other words, the (non-given) factum with which being can be identified is dwelling.

For both philosophy and architecture, the prime innovation of Heidegger's work in "Building Dwelling Thinking" lies first and foremost in linking the question of being to the question of dwelling, and then linking both, through dwelling, to the question of building.

The consequences of this revolution are profound. "Dwelling," thought of as the privileged mode of access to being, grounds our relationship as thinking-subjects to the founding question "What is being?" in the actuality of our modes of dwelling.

We can now go further and suggest that since dwelling cannot be separated from building then each moment of the equation can potentially be transformed. ("To build is to dwell," is one of the central propositions of "Building Dwelling Thinking" - and asserted as such on the first page. "We attain to dwelling so it seems only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal.") On the one hand, building is now bound irrevocably, at least in thought, to the question of dwelling. This not only transforms how we think of building, it implies that we say adieu to all concepts of essential, rather than historically contingent, autonomy. On the other hand, the relation of building-dwelling to being implicitly transforms the character of the "founding question." A concrete moment now enters with the potential to transform the abstract and ontological question of disclosure,

"What is being?" into the constitutive-constructive question, "How are we, through dwelling (-building) to construct, or to establish on earth and in relation to conditions of existence before which we stand, the mode of our being?" Thus, to read "Building Dwelling Thinking" - to think it and think through it - is to move from understanding the "founding question" as one about existence understood in terms of the disclosure of the true nature of things (the revelation of the relation of being to Being) to one about how (not-determinable, non-teleological) existence is to be shaped.

Although Heidegger (for reasons obvious to the internal political thrust of his thinking) does not pursue the implications of his own argument along this line of enquiry, and although in pursuing the logic of this issue we have gone well beyond the conclusions Heidegger wished to draw from his insights, he nonetheless notes their presence, as implication, at every point of his later thought. We shall have to further examine the reasons why Heidegger can neither continue the incipient non-representational insights opened in the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art", nor pursue the notion of the relation building-dwelling (why he must therefore transpose the question of dwelling into that of poetics). The more pressing question now concerns the indispensability of the concept of "dwelling."

"Dwelling" is indispensable for Heidegger because it stands for a mode of establishing relations that are "ontological" yet without either teleological or a unique originary form (amongst mortals, relations to nature, i.e., to "earth and sky," and to the sense of Being established amongst all modes of existence). If thinking is the commitment of Being by and for Being, dwelling is the establishing of the relation on earth between being and Being. Or, more prosaically, dwelling is the mode of presentation of being; the other place of being's openness to, and mode of establishing relations with, the manifest moments or conditions of existence of Being in general. Put yet another way, "Dwelling" is an event of establishing (building) relations that exist within history, for instance, within culture; but it is an event that, in its thinking, in its being thought, can break with imbedding, including our imbedding in the limitations of the "forgetful" modern world. The form of the "simple event" of dwelling is determined by

specific historical modalities or conditions, but it is yet not so determined as to merely reproduce these conditions. In other words, its reflexive presence is never wholly so; it is never wholly caught into presence no matter how much we may treat it as such (and in theorizing form, generally do). In that sense dwelling is prime. It simultaneously describes our "standing to," and establishing of, relations on earth, amongst mortals, etc., and the very possibility of the "clearing" into which we are thrown, and through which we establish relations to Being (hence "saving ourselves" from nihilism, from lack of meaning).

Heidegger does not stop at the insight that the (non-given) factum with which being can be identified is dwelling. At the end of the essay, in lines pregnant with implication, he sets in motion a second revolution by placing "thinking" into the relation between "building" and "dwelling": "But that thinking itself belongs to dwelling, in the same sense as building, although in a different way, may perhaps be attested to by the course of thought here attempted. Building and thinking are, each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling. The two are however insufficient for dwelling so long as each busies itself with its own affairs in separation instead of listening to one another, they are able to listen if both - building and thinking - belong to dwelling." (160-161)

In these sentences Heidegger is establishing a triangular relationship of necessity and inter-implication between the three terms of the title. Although he holds back from stating the final moment of the triangle (the inter-implication of thinking and building such that thinking, as thinking "for" dwelling, is also thinking for building: that indeed to think is to think for building) he has nonetheless dissolved the axiomatic autonomy of thinking with respect to building, thus paving the way for a genuine reciprocity between the three moments.

Here is the second revolution in thinking (and thus in practice) that Heidegger's essay offers. We sense what is involved here when we understand the astonishing series of propositions - astonishing, that is, at least in terms of architectural thinking - which Heidegger produces from his move and which we can describe, in this first summary, as the guiding propositions of his text.

. First: Heidegger establishes a relation between being and dwelling by grounding being as dwelling: "the way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is [...] dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal it means to dwell." (147)

. Second: Heidegger argues, dwelling is achieved by building: "We attain to dwelling" Heidegger says in almost the opening sentence of the essay, "only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling as its goal." (145)

. Third: This means that the usual separation between building, dwelling, and being, cannot be sustained. Particularly if we read this relation merely in terms of a means-ends schema, Heidegger says, "we block our view of the essential relations. For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling - to build is already to dwell." (146)

But then, fourth, we must also say that being (as dwelling) lies in building.

. Fifth: But this in turn provokes the further proposition or implication that if being (as dwelling) lies in building then to think about building is necessarily, even in the case of the explicit absence of this sense in such thought, to reflect upon being (i.e., reflection on being is always contained in building: only its active repression causes it to disappear from view, beneath the surface of building-thinking).

. Sixth: Conversely, if being (as dwelling) "lies in," that is, comes to visibility, to emergence through building (as dwelling), then to think about being (the very question of philosophy) is, in at least one of its moments, to need to think about building: i.e., philosophy (thinking) is incomplete if it does not think about building.

. Finally: Heidegger places this incipient relation (between building, dwelling, thinking) in a historical context by establishing the argument that in the modern period the relation building: dwelling (and perhaps even more the relation building, dwelling, thinking) has been sundered, such that the original, internal relation, between building and dwelling is occluded, and in two dimensions:

- first, in that we no longer recognize how building belongs to dwelling "and how it receives its nature from dwelling" (160) nor understand that the unhappiness in the present with our mode of dwelling (building, thinking) can be traced directly to this occlusion, that is to the forgetting of this relationship between building and dwelling;

- second, in that as "forgetting" takes place in consciousness, forgetting must therefore be understood as a loss of thought, or, better, as a loss of a relation in thought. Forgetting is thus the forgetting of how thinking too belongs to dwelling, and thus also to building - that both building and thinking are, "each in its own way, inescapable for dwelling." (160-1) (Moreover, it is a forgetting that thinking is also the thinking for building - as that which instantiates dwelling - which sets in motion a mode of being on earth). The tragedy of human dwelling, then, is the occlusion of the relation between *building, dwelling, thinking* and our mode of being on earth; it is the loss of the sense that both building and thinking "belong to dwelling." (161)

## 5. Answers resting on a bedrock of questions

We have said that the "crisis of dwelling" induces, in Heidegger, the project of re-describing (affirmatively) the foundational condition of dwelling. It is the latter which is of course the most well-known, if also bafflingly opaque, aspect of the text. It is, in large part, where the "meaning" of the text can be said to lie; it is here, through an exercise of thinking itself nearer (as George Steiner puts it), to an act of collecting and re-collecting (re-membering) dispersed vestiges of being than to traditional philosophical analysis, that Heidegger attempts to give us a structure of cognition with regard to thinking what it is that building-dwelling achieves. This memoration, presented in the form of a narration on and about dwelling, has the task of bringing dwelling, and thus the folded relationship of the title, into radiant illumination, into "disclosure" - itself understood as the inculcation, in thought, of the process whereby the object of a thinking (in this case) dwelling, has been attended to, "followed upon." (If Heidegger's text is at all mimetic it is in the form of this narrative of disclosure, mimetic not of the condition of dwelling, but of the process of its thinking by Heidegger).

In this act of memoration - the disclosure of the mode of thinking of dwelling - occupying the central portion of the essay, Heidegger attempts to name and describe the essential pattern of relations accruing to building-dwelling. But even if this is ostensibly the central effort of the text we need to keep in mind, reading Heidegger, or in thinking about his text, that the attempts to name and describe the essential patterns of relations accruing to building-dwelling are themselves a symptom, a response to the first and prior condition of crisis from which his work begins (and from which derives his essentially speculative insights into the "origins" or foundation of building-dwelling). As Reiner Schurmann has pointed out, one of Heidegger's prime motivations in the essays of this period is to "extend an appreciation of the situation in which we find ourselves today." It is from this position that Heidegger launches both his ruthless summary judgments of the history of our situation, of its coming to be, and his forceful reparative impulse. But this uniquely Heideggerean impulse rests on twin pillars; first, on Heidegger's perception of the "crisis" in dwelling, and second, on the structure of questioning that Heidegger's critique of the present has induced into being.

This structure of questioning is the essential and (non-foundational) "ground" that provides for a different basis from which to understand architecture's work; different, that is, in the decisive pattern of its relations from that given in the self-understanding of contemporary architectural practices. Read correctly, then, it is the structure of questioning that proffers the real meaning and force of Heidegger's essay.

Heidegger confirms this when, toward the end of the essay, he notes, "Perhaps this attempt to think about building and dwelling will bring out somewhat more clearly that building belongs to dwelling and how it receives its nature from dwelling. Enough will have been gained if dwelling and building have become worthy of questioning and thus have remained worthy of thought."

One of the difficulties, for criticism, in coming to terms with Heidegger's text is that it in effect performs its own respiratory commentary. Heidegger all too easily gives us the answers to the questions opened by his critique, thereby obscuring (at least to an un-critical commentary) the force of his enquiry. We have already seen this occur with the

very formulations which Heidegger discloses to us. In essays written immediately afterwards, Heidegger transposes the metonymical and contiguous nature of the relations explored in "Building Dwelling Thinking" into the realm of poetic and theological metaphor. In the final essay in the English book, Poetry, Language, Thought, this transposition between the realms of dwelling and the poetic is actualized in acute form. This move is important because it reverses the observation made earlier regarding the unsurpassability of the categories of dwelling and building for Heidegger's later thought. Here, we need also be aware of the extensive and real transformation that has occurred in the meaning of these concepts. If "poetry" is now the "primal form of building"; that "first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being," and that is the "original admission of dwelling," then the transposition of building, dwelling, and being is certainly acute. It is emphasized when Heidegger continues the refrain in lines toward the end of the essay "...Poetically Man Dwells...":

The statement, *Man dwells in that he builds*, has now been given its proper sense. Man does not dwell in that he merely establishes his stay on earth beneath the sky, by raising growing things and simultaneously raising buildings. Man is capable of such building only if he already builds in the sense of poetic taking of measure. Authentic building occurs so far as there are poets, such poets as take the measure for architecture, the structure of dwelling.<sup>2</sup>

The fact of this poetic transposition cannot be dismissed. Reclaiming the relations held within the essay depends upon arguing that the level of quasi-poetic, or analogical metaphor which Heidegger turns to after "Building Dwelling Thinking" (also already anticipated in the rendering metaphorical of the description of "dwelling" in the "Building" essay itself) is the philosopher's strategy for contending with — for hiding from — the radically materialist implications of his own thought. The argument must be that such a transposition — which Heidegger presents as possessing ontological necessity - is not necessary to the relations which he is describing.

This means that to grasp the essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" is not to grasp Heidegger's own formulations of the problem, especially as these appear to us in the guise of his terminology.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 227.

The latter stands as a snare. Its lure is poetic and theological. The lure of tradition. Therefore, to reproduce Heidegger's language in commentary means nothing. Far from revealing the relation between being, dwelling, building, and thinking, Heidegger's categories may serve, at various moments, as much to obscure as to open the potential understandings that this essay is ostensibly designed to achieve. One cannot get to the relations between Building, Dwelling, Thinking, simply by accepting the terms we are given. If we must begin with Heidegger's words, we still must read through his terminology; we must read through Heidegger himself, let alone through his commentators and readers in architecture. (To speak of Heidegger's text as decisive for architecture is to claim that it is necessary in terms of the issues it raises. But this is not to claim that the text possesses the final word in respect to these issues).

Methodologically speaking, this point is crucial. Without making a distinction between reading Heidegger's text critically and allowing a Heideggerean, or ontological, reading to hold sway, it might seem inevitable that what is offered here could only be the Heideggerean agenda re-packaged for architectural consumption. But this is scarcely my ambition. Even less is it to reproduce the "architectural" readings of Heidegger.

If we follow the transpositions Heidegger makes with the insights that his thinking collects, it is hardly surprising that in the usual reading of Heidegger in architecture, a structure of questioning is taken for a body of answers: a non-determinable, foundational, or originitive opening that metaphorically uses the relation building, dwelling, thinking to critically establish another space for thinking these moments and their relation is taken for a series of determinable, grounded and locatable datum "about dwelling."

This is precisely what occurs in some of the more recent seizures of Heidegger's name in architecture, conducted, apparently, in order to force into being an "ontological" conception of an architectural ground, or to press on us yet another phenomenologically, or hermeneutically, justified invocation of "dwelling." But neither of these essentially reproductive strategies of "working" what is involved in this text are adequate to what is at stake here, either with respect to the modes of reading they offer, or to the conception

of "dwelling" they produce. On one hand, the second tends to force us back to the ideology of the "return," and to the myth of an ontological foundation for building practice (for phenomenology or hermeneutics, read in this context, the recourse to tradition and to the mythology of the "return"). On the other, the former (the "Heideggerean" or conservative readings) produces a concept of dwelling that could scarcely have less categorical, tactical, or critical force with respect to engaging the recalcitrant mindlessness of the property market or the perversions of an architectural practice in a commodity economy.

The moment we look in detail at architectural readings of "Building Dwelling, Thinking," it becomes obvious that reading Heidegger is a problem for architecture. (By reading we mean something more than a simple acquiescence either to the structures and (wholly misleading) vocabulary of Heidegger's language, or to the given structures and presuppositions of architectural theorizing.) Suspicion of its pragmatic viability (based on its apparent self-exclusion from the architectural field), together with an unthinking, simplistic, and even totemistic usage already confines the article to the margins of architectural theory (or delivers it into the ghetto of "place theory"). The reading of the essay in the terms outlined above further obscures and dissipates the radical force of Heidegger's formulations to disturb architectural self-understanding.

If this last point implies a way out of the problem (since it seems to suggest that the only adequate reading of Heidegger is one which begins from, or even celebrates, the condition of disturbance) it is perhaps because it is endemically critical. To see the text as a source of disturbance for architecture is to emphasize its value not as the container of a series of propositions, to be extracted and "applied" (in a recuperative manner) to the problems of contemporary architecture (not as re-assurance), but as a structure of questioning - *as a structure to be forced, if necessary, into revealing the questioning potential, the disturbance which it endemically contains.*

Another methodological point is revealed by this statement. The situation where Heidegger's text is not read in any meaningful sense - when the reading is still informed by a suspicion that the essay is of

marginal interest to the discipline of architecture, or when its provocations to consciousness and (architectural) performance are ignored - can be structurally compared to Heidegger's description regarding the reception of Nietzsche's thought. In the first volume of the Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger complains that while in philosophy Nietzsche has long been either celebrated and imitated or reviled and exploited, "the confrontation with [this thinking] has not yet begun."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power as Art*, Vol. 1, trans. D.F. Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 5.

The parallel is worth pursuing because it offers up a structure of reading that may be useful in dealing with Heidegger. Against the failure to read Nietzsche, Heidegger evokes the notion or strategy of "confrontation," Heidegger's term for the form of genuine criticism - "the only way to a true estimation of a thinker." By confrontation Heidegger means a twofold engagement with the text. On the one hand, this engagement is a comprehensive reflection on a text, or thinker; a tracing out not only of a work's weakness (simple critique), but also through the genuine "taking on board" of a thinker, a thinking through of the effective force, "the project of what is thought, or constructed here, its implications, [and] the power of its disturbance to our own circle of customary expectations." On the other hand, this engagement implies that one undertake such a confrontation precisely in order to "become free for the supreme extortion of thinking," to use the engagement with a thinker (text, object) in order to learn how to accomplish the (free) work of thought. Confrontation is then a three-fold working of a text: the doubled "confrontation" with the think pursued in the text, and the "thinking about" the relation of the text to what it "applies to" (here, for example, to the thinking about architecture).

But confrontation presupposes that the text is indeed a structure of questioning. This view stands as a negation of the attitude of simple "application" of text to practice, the attitude that maintains that there is one thing, "the words of Heidegger," and another, "architecture." In terms of the latter syndrome, the job of "thinking architecturally" involves applying the one (as a given) to the other (also a given) to obtain the maximum pragmatic benefit from such a "confrontation"; the benefit is defined, however, by the implicit stipulation that neither side of the relation be touched, affected, transformed, or above all, put into question, by the other.

Such is the way theory often enters the architectural field. It is by and large how Heidegger has entered architectural discourse thanks to readers who look to Heidegger's text for the "solution" of problems, above all searching (as for a talisman, or a fetish) for a "grounding" for architecture. This is, itself, already a problem. If Heidegger's essay is "decisive" for architecture it is not because it supplies this form of decisive knowledge. If it has, in the end, pragmatic consequences, they are not the kind of consequences one might at first sight expect as the architectural "meaning" of the essay.

But the more fundamental problem invoked here concerns what this form of positivist (and utilitarian) reading of Heidegger "achieves" - that is, with the occlusion of the essay's structure of questioning.

A parallel might be made here with Derrida's recent remarks on "deconstructivist architecture." Just as the readings of Heidegger common to current architectural theory and pedagogy have neutered the disturbance to architecture that his text contains, so too "architectural" readings of Derrida have failed to elicit serious reflection on architecture, but have been used instead to legitimate a late, essentially tradition-bound, and now politically regressive, *avant-gardism*. These readings, far from deconstructing architecture, have simply sedimented some of its more obscene aspects. They have managed to reverse all of the truly disturbing implications contained in the deep structure of Derrida's work, and thus work to deny the real force of its deconstructive impulse.

This process of mis-reading Derrida exhibits precisely the same movement of appropriation described above, namely a structure of questioning is appropriated (literally, transformed) and in its place is substituted (stripped of all critical force) "a body of answers." In the case of deconstruction, "theory" (the framework and terminology of Derrida's essays) is used in a highly traditional role (in terms of architectural theory), as a device to legitimate a mode of representation of architectural problems, or a desired aesthetic; or, what amounts to the same thing, as a way to produce a semantic field within which purely formal (as against genuinely syntactical) manoeuvres can be semantically justified.

Given the pragmatic and appropriative traditions in architecture, there is a point where such "use" of

a text is not only legitimated, but expected. If we reflect briefly on the nature of the text-as-question we can demonstrate that no necessary warrant, no general or structural necessity, exists for this enforced transmutation.

If the distinction between the structure of questions contained in a text and the answers to its own questions that the text proposes seems, from the outside, critically essential; and if the blurring of this distinction seems to signal that the work will be misunderstood spuriously, that is, affirmatively, in terms of the "answers" it provides; then this might arise because we intuitively recognize that the answers are induced into being by a fear of the questions. The answers are scarcely integral to the work; they are, instead, the mere consequences of the original structure of questioning.

As Barthes reminds us in the introduction to *On Racine*, if the act of writing, be it artistic or critical, issues in a form, it not only provides or produces (a) meaning (thereby placing meaning-in-general in the world) but inevitably and necessarily, also puts a question to the world: "To write," Barthes says, "is to jeopardize the meaning of the world" (in however tiny (or colossal) a manner). In every act of writing (of configuration), a rend is made in the metaphysical — the given fabric of the world; this is inevitable, and is without the possibility of answer. In Barthes' felicitous phrase, to write is "to put an indirect question [to the world] that the writer, by an ultimate abstention, refrains from answering."<sup>4</sup>

To put this another way: Artefacture induces doubt, and this is inevitable.

This condition has important consequences for how we think of works (whether as works of art, criticism, or theory). The act of writing, which turns ostensibly on the act of giving or supplying an answer (to a question which lies outside of the text), can now be seen to necessarily itself induce a questioning. Thus, the act of form-making turns, in actuality, on the provision of the question. We might even say that the work is constituted as a form is by structuring itself as a question, or a state of questioning (putting a meaning in question). Only such designation "of putting a meaning in question" bestows on the work its status as work, thus giving it the capacity,

in the respiration it then induces, to live as a form, capable of inciting from us the attempt of response, the attempt to give an answer.

To place "an indirect question to the world" brings its own terrors. This is why in so many cases, the work stands in fear of its work of un-doing, in fear of the unanswerable gesture it has made, and therefore rushes to complete the tear that the thrust of its own questions has opened in our world. Such work "works," in effect, to its formula powerfully acceded to and encouraged by weak criticism and pragmatic desire: The "answers" given by the text provide the ostensible rationale for its coming-into-being - the answers are the text. This formula accords with our common and "information-bound" sense of tending to obtain "the facts about things," but it does not detract from the structural fact that any work - an academic essay no less than a novel - in any instant is inevitably a complex and unstable fold of these two conditions, opening up. and closing its own question.

Moreover, since the answers contained by the text are largely the consequence of the questions it opens, that is, they are derived from the abyssal fear of plunging the world into essential doubt, then a hierarchy is discernable; the questions by and large precede the answers. Furthermore, if the answers are "supplemental" (this said in full knowledge of the enigmas it opens up), then far from being the "clearest thing," the most obvious aspect of the text, they are quite the opposite. The conditions of the production of answers would suggest the perennially enigmatic and problematic quality of all "answers" - for what was written and formulated as a question "beyond hope of an answer," as Barthes says, is scarcely redeemable in a single answer, a simple platitude, a cliché.

The answer then, read as an answer, is incomplete, and radically so, vis-a-vis the question opened by the text, or the work - for all of what is said here applies also ipso facto to the work of art. No matter how assertively the answer is given, no matter how much the author (or critic) "endows with [his] own substance the meaning proposed," the work (or the critical text) lives - has its transhistoric being - in its incapacity to be finally "redeemed" in terms of a (single) answer. It lives, by the formula "the meanings pass, the question remains." Thus, in

<sup>4</sup> R Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1983), lx.

the game of question and answer (of respiratory commentary) played by author-critic, and by author as reader-critic, the questions remain ultimately victorious — and the text's significance remains with the form of the direct and indirect questions that it contains.

To be sure, as Derrida points out at the beginning his discussion of the work of Emmanuel Levinas, the question scarcely appears as such: "the question is always enclosed; it [...] appears only through the hermeticism of a proposition in which the answer has already begun to determine the question. The purity of the question can only be indicated or recalled through the difference of a hermeneutical effort."<sup>5</sup> The question, then, must be won; it is not evident. The text will dissemble on this point. But this dissembling is essential. For if the effort at holding open the question, at allowing it a space to come into being when it "has not yet found the language it has decided to seek," seems "very little-almost nothing," it is still to work at keeping open "a community of the question" and preserving the space within which the ethical is founded. To remind ourselves of the question, to keep it open, is thus to into view "that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question". Also, in this act "is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and

duty of decision. An unbreachable responsibility," that of the foundation of the ethical. Thus to think the question is to keep open the possibility, and disallow the premature enclosure of the ethical moment. Philosophically, this is the difference between the discipline "as a power and adventure of the question itself and philosophy as a determined event or turning point within this adventure." If "philosophy" (i.e., thinking in general) - and let us now say the relation Building Dwelling Thinking is to live this adventure, to remain alive at all, to remain alive to, and for, the ethical, then the power, the force, the space, the delicacy, of the question "must be maintained. As a question. The "liberty of the question [...] must be stated and protected." This is the work of thought.

This argument reveals that the force of the work lies not in the answers it gives - which the critic then submits to a questioning, an interrogation - but rather in the manner in which, within it, or by it, meanings are put in question. To be sure a work, a successful work, puts forward what we might call a "transcendent and compelling vision." A work, it is said, "might set out an agenda." Yet it is an illusion to think that this capacity stems primarily from the "answers" that the work gives. The truth is that the successful concept, far from naming an "answer" rather, the more intelligently, or the more originally, or the more adequately, names a problem. What is compelling in the concept-question is the depth of answer that it obtains from us, who must respond to its call.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153. See esp. 79-81.