

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Down to Earth: Martin Heidegger, Le Corbusier, and the Question of Dwelling, Essentially

Ross Anderson

The philosopher Martin Heidegger and the architect Le Corbusier — two towering 20th-century public figures — each built for themselves small, sturdily crafted timber cabins well away from the cities of their busy everyday lives, to which they would repair annually to work in solitude and draw sustenance from their landscapes and locally archaic cultures. This article presents a close tandem reading of the architecture and inhabitation of Heidegger's staunchly traditional Hütte on the upper slope of a deep-green Schwarzwald valley and Le Corbusier's modern-ascetic Cabanon overlooking the beckoning azure waters of the Côte d'Azur. It draws on archival drawings and photographs, published and private statements, writings by others, and direct personal observations made in situ. These two unassuming yet inordinately significant dwellings seek to counter the overwhelming modern condition of 'technicity' by descending to the chthonic claims of the natural conditions, in alliance with Heidegger's post-war essays co-locating building and dwelling, and Le Corbusier's *Le poème de l'angle droit* that indexes a descent down to the question of dwelling, essentially.

Introduction

Although they have rarely been considered together, the philosopher Martin Heidegger and the architect Le Corbusier — two towering 20th-century public figures — shared both universal thematic preoccupations and concrete post-war historical circumstances. And each built for themselves small sturdily crafted timber cabins well away from the cities of their busy everyday lives — Freiburg-im-Breisgau and Paris, respectively — to which they would repair annually in order to work in solitude and draw sustenance from their landscapes and locally archaic cultures. These two unassuming dwellings — Heidegger's staunchly traditional Hütte that stands all alone on the upper slope of a deep-green Schwarzwald valley, and Le Corbusier's modern-ascetic Cabanon overlooking the ever-beckoning azure waters of the sunny Côte d'Azur — both possess the self-aware quality of a protest against modern bourgeois values and lifestyles. What is of most interest here is that the two timber-framed buildings each embody in their own way profound engagements with the question of meaningful dwelling in late modernity, an age that for Heidegger is disenchanted and in thrall of 'technicity'.

For both of them, the corrective to this disenchantment involved a return to beginnings — more ontological than historical — which meant descent down to the most primordial chthonic claims of the natural conditions of earth and matter in landscapes pregnant with meaning. But they did this in full awareness of the necessary

reciprocity, or the descending-ascending play of communication, between 'earthly' embodiment and the precise and removed articulations of language and geometry — a register also at stake in their attendant writings and other works, including Heidegger's post-war essays that co-locate building and dwelling and both Le Corbusier's Modulor — a professedly harmonious new dimensional system — and his free-verse *Le poème de l'angle droit* that indexes a descent from light to dark.

While the two protagonists shared abiding concerns, which they embodied in their respective dwellings, they came from different backgrounds, moved in separate circles, and possessed differing modes and powers of expression. So, the similarities and differences in their insights must be accounted for in proximate terms, taking into account for example some of the deep underlying antagonisms that have accompanied western culture for centuries and that shade between subtle disinclination and open animosity — including a testiness around the magnitude of the Mediterranean inheritance versus the Germanic.

The concrete historical context is that of post-war Europe — a time of social turmoil, angst, and self-questioning. Both Heidegger and Le Corbusier involved themselves in public debates at the time — particularly regarding the question of dwelling, and dwellings — which will be considered in the analysis that follows. But the main concerns of this study are those that have a much longer history; those that are involved with the fundamental issues of dwelling. A number of discourses are invoked — principally those of philosophy and architecture — in line with the professional assignments and capacities of Heidegger and Le Corbusier.

The mode of interpretation adopted for this study is that of phenomenological hermeneutics, which acknowledges that we live concretely in the world and that meaning is made in relation to our own particular concrete historical situation, one that includes our fore-understandings of the world and the tools to hand with and through which we register, manipulate, and articulate it. That is, there is a personal dimension to the study of history that needs to be acknowledged; it is impossible to step outside oneself in order to be 'objective' about one's subject matter. It is this acknowledgement that leads to what might be considered the 'speculative' character of my study, insofar as in addition to taking close account of the available primary and secondary written sources, I have relied upon personal, in situ observations that were made on particular days and under particular circumstances. It is also important to outline here the significant role that the preparation of the drawings of Heidegger's Hütte and Le Corbusier's Cabanon that accompany this study played in the development of my own understanding of the two buildings and the interpretations that I am able to offer of them. To construct the detailed three-dimensional models from which the drawings are extracted, it was necessary to 'read across' and reconcile different kinds of sources – including drawings by others, historical photographs, and eyewitness descriptions – all in an effort to represent as faithfully as possible the as-built reality of each building. More so than the knowledge of an historian, this approach draws on the skills of an architect. At the most basic level it demanded that close account be taken of all of the spatial and material characteristics of each dwelling so that their three-dimensional models could be made complete, which included details that at first seemed insignificant but that in fact turned out to be of consequence to the ways that the buildings were used and can be understood. For example, the decision as to whether a door is hung on the left or the right, or whether it swings forwards or back, or slides, can have implications for the inhabitation of a space and the views that are attained from it. And since the models were by necessity constructed slowly, and could always be navigated three-dimensionally, these implications had time to register themselves. So, the drawings are not simply vehicles for illustrating the critical analysis; indeed, to a large extent they are the medium in which it was conducted.

In both their dwellings and their writings, Heidegger and Le Corbusier expressed concern for what I have termed the descending-ascending play of communication between embodiment and articulation, which can be well understood with reference to a geometric figure that brings the theme to the level of abstract visual representation, and which will be a touchstone in this study. This figure, appearing as an illustration in the writings of the 17th-century hermetic philosopher Robert Fludd, is made up of two vertically interpenetrating pyramids or triangles that are mirrored so that the apex of the upturned one stands on the centre of the base of the other. In his expansive two-volume *History of the Two Worlds, Namely the Greater and the Lesser*, a treatise on the nuanced nature of the relationship between what he characterized as the

celestial world of the Macrocosm and the human world of the Microcosm, Fludd deploys the figure of the 'two pyramids' over and over again to illuminate the ascending-descending character of the relationship between these two worlds. In this work, published in 1619, Fludd termed his two interpenetrating pyramids the 'material' (below) – 'being the image of all those waters which sprang forth of the abyss or darkness whereof principally is the receptacle' – and the 'formal' (above), which has its foundation up in heaven and its 'cone on the earth, resembling the true flame of brightness which descends down' (Debus 1979: 136).

One of the plentiful etchings in the *History of the Two Worlds* illuminates the nature of the relationship between the 'material' and 'formal' pyramids by presenting them as a subtle yet didactic substrate (much like the drafted set-out lines for an architectural drawing) for a remarkable rendering of Jacob's Ladder, climbing up from a tufty earthen outcrop to a perfectly formed, luminous orb in the sky (**Figure 1**). There are six evenly spaced rungs on the ladder, labelled in ascending order: *sensus* (sense), *imaginatio* (imagination), *ratio* (reason), *intellectus* (understanding), *intelligentia* (intelligence) and *verbum* (the word). The natural affordance of any ladder, of course, is that it can be equally well descended as climbed, permitting communication between the primordial claims of the unformed natural conditions at the base and the precision of 'the word' at the top.

A way to characterize this play is as 'ontological movement', which is the term that Dalibor Vesely employed (see, for example, 2004: 70). He also adopted the term *Sprachlichkeit* (linguality), as a way to speak about 'communicative movement' that takes in spatial and material articulations of the world in addition to those of verbal language, thereby conveying the way that meaning is shared by different strata of culture and can be mediated by several disciplines – including philosophy and architecture. Though some of my observations venture the possibility that Heidegger and Le Corbusier engaged directly with Fludd's diagram made up of two interpenetrating triangles, the primary role that the diagram plays here is that of a leitmotif, enabling me to jointly discuss the philosopher and the architect via some of the ideas that they held in common but which they expressed in different terms. There is a speculative quality to aspects of my study, which engages what might be thought of as the metaphorical imagination, a capacity concerned with relativities and potentially with the identification of previously unnoticed likenesses amidst differences. As the philosopher of hermeneutics (and student of Heidegger) Hans Georg Gadamer pointed out, the difference between methodological sterility and genuine understanding is imagination, which takes in recollection, anticipation, and analogy. He wrote that 'it is imagination [*Phantasie*] that is the decisive function of the scholar. Imagination naturally has a hermeneutical function and serves the sense for what is questionable. It serves the ability to expose real, productive questions' (1976: 12).

My study is structured into three parts, the first of which addresses Heidegger's Hütte as a rustic dwelling place for



Figure 1: Robert Fludd's illustration of a Jacob's Ladder, ascending from the bottom rung, *sensus* [sense], to the highest, *verbum* [the word] (Fludd 1619: 272).

language, the second approaches Le Corbusier's Cabanon as a repository for geometry, and the third, concluding part considers the two protagonists and their buildings at the same time, united by the notion of building as fundamentally a matter of 'measure-taking'.

Heidegger's Hütte: A Dwelling Place for Language

In his essay 'Die Sprache' ('Language') – the transcript of a lecture first delivered in October 1950 – Heidegger declared that 'language belongs to the closest neighbour-

hood of man's being' and that 'we encounter language everywhere' (1975a: 187). But the apparent self-evidence of his statement was a prelude to a radical disputation that speech is not simply a faculty that we have at our disposal as a resource to draw upon for purposes of expression. Rather, it is language itself that speaks: 'Language is – language, speech. Language speaks'. And then Heidegger asserted that if we 'let ourselves fall into the abyss denoted by this sentence, we do not go tumbling into emptiness. We fall upward, to a height. Its loftiness opens up a depth. The two span a realm in which we would like

to become a home, so as to find a residence, a dwelling place for the life of man' (1975a: 189–90).

According to Heidegger, we encounter the speaking of language in what is spoken but this encounter with what is spoken is most often the residue of a speaking that is now long past (1975a: 192). Recognizing the need to clarify his apparently obtuse statement – 'to seek the speaking of language in what is spoken' – Heidegger turns to that which for him is 'spoken purely' – poetry. The particular poem that he chooses is Georg Trakl's three-stanza 'Ein Winterabend' [A Winter Evening], published in 1938, which he goes on to interpret almost line for line. The setting is a snow-covered traditional village, where a 'house is provided well, the table for many is laid'. Awaited are wanderers who 'come to the door on darksome courses', and who, having quietly stepped within, see lying 'upon the table bread and wine' (1975a: 192–93).

For Heidegger the direct, everyday rustic simplicity of the scene that is anonymously and continuously re-enacted is ennobled: 'Bread and wine are the fruits of heaven and earth, gifts from the divinities to the mortals ... The things that are called bread and wine are simple things because their bearing of world is fulfilled, without intermediary' (1975a: 203). But as 'purely' as poetry is spoken, the now-sublimated individual instances of its events occurred somewhere at some time, and Heidegger is concerned to preserve and re-enact this concreteness, both in his philosophy and in his own personal circumstances.

In his very brief yet immensely revealing 1934 essay 'Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?' ('Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?'), Heidegger wrote, 'The inner relationship of my own work to the Schwarzwald and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rootedness in the soil of the region'. He described his 'work-world' – a modest rustic dwelling on the steep slope of a wide mountain

valley, and where on a deep winter night, when a 'wild, pounding snowstorm ranges around and veils and covers everything', it is the 'perfect time for philosophy' (1981b: 27–28).

Small and remote, Heidegger's traditional shingle-faced Hütte built in 1922 stands all alone towards the top of a richly pastured Schwarzwald valley (**Figure 2**).¹ It is approached from above after a long walk up a winding dirt path through a richly green and deeply fragrant conifer forest. At first only the dark slate roof is visible, appearing as an outgrowth of the slope within which the building is partly entrenched. Halfway along, it pitches and becomes a hip-roof skewered by the masonry chimney rising from the hearth below that anchors the Hütte with its emphatically quartered plan (**Figure 3**). Partway along the descent down and around to the entry is a *Brunnen* (a water spout fed by a well) that continuously fills a long solid oak trough with gurgling cool water coursing endlessly from a spout housed inside a timber upright that is crowned by an unusual stellar ornament, which Heidegger called the *Brunnenstern* (**Figure 4**). From there, it is no more than another fifteen paces to the two narrow timber steps rising up to the front door that opens on to a small *Windfang* (vestibule) where winter coats are shaken off and shoes are set aside. Then the timber-panelled interior opens up, not that there seems to be very much to it at first. Looking around to the left, facing west, there is the corner niche where Heidegger's wife, Elfride, served hearty regional fare to occasional guests seated, four at the most, around a heavily crafted timber table. And straight ahead, past the anchoring hearth, is the simple kitchen where she prepared the meals. That is the sociable half of the Hütte. Looking to the right, now facing east, is the private half of the dwelling. It is hidden from view, first by the inner *Windfang* door if it is open and then by another door to

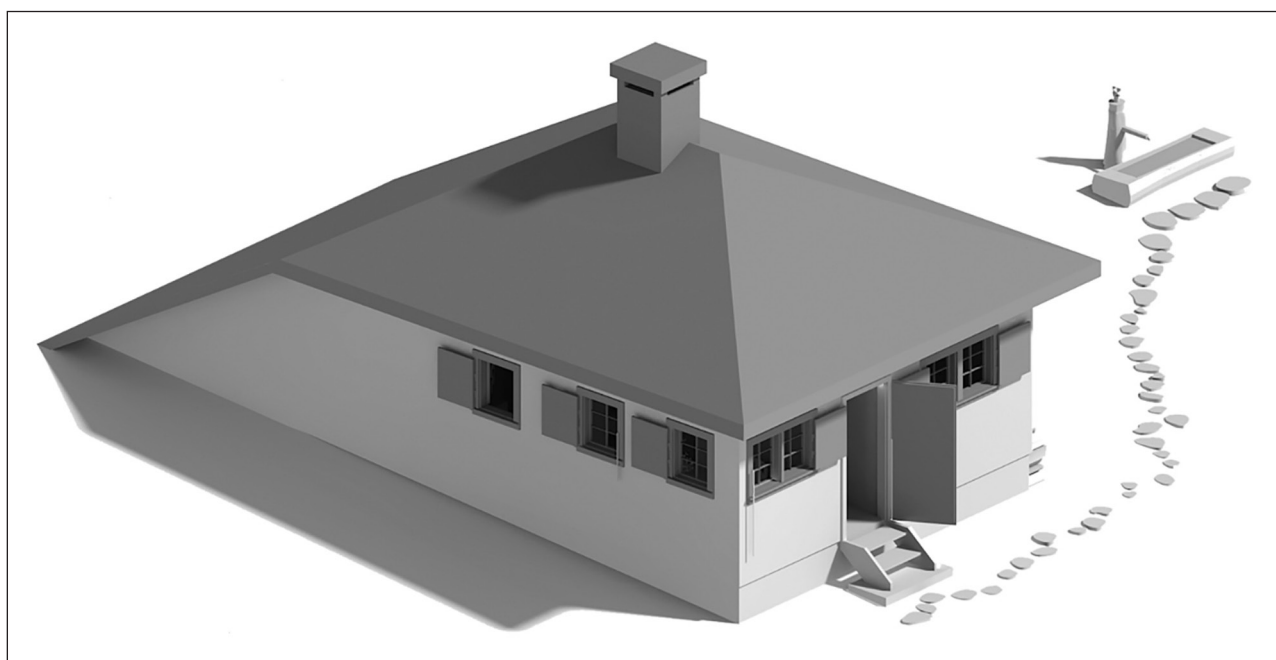


Figure 2: Oblique drawing of Martin Heidegger's Hütte at Todtnauberg. Drawing by Sean Bryen and Ross Anderson, 2019.

the sleeping room that is completely filled with three tall soft beds. And it was only through that room, and another door, that Heidegger attained to his ascetically furnished study that was dominated by his sturdy desk where he would write in solitude under the sway of the place, where 'questions become simple and essential' and where 'working through a thought can only be tough and rigorous' (1981b: 28).

The desk stands up against the outer wall of the room, below two small double-glazed casement windows looking immediately out at the *Brunnen*. Now directly in the line of sight, the *Brunnenstern* ornament atop the *Brunnen* asserts itself.² The provenience of the ornament that is carved out of solid oak with great care is a mystery, and whether Heidegger thought about it in Fludd's symbolic terms is uncertain. But on the visual level the *Brunnenstern* is remarkably similar to Fludd's diagram

of the two vertically interpenetrating triangles, except that here it is made material and spatial – now they are two intersecting tetrahedra (triangle-based pyramids) (**Figure 4**). Given the ethos of austerity at play everywhere else in the *Hütte*, there is justification to think that this single assertive form in Heidegger's immediate line of sight while he was working was of personal significance to him – a suggestion corroborated by repeated references to stars in the philosopher's writings. For example, in 'Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens' ('The Thinker as Poet'), he wrote, 'To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky' (1975c: 4). And more importantly, there is a very strong correlation of the reciprocity of *sensus* and *verbum*, as formulated and illustrated by Fludd, with Heidegger's own formulation of what he termed the *Streit* (strife) between 'earth' and 'world' – an intimate relationship summarily

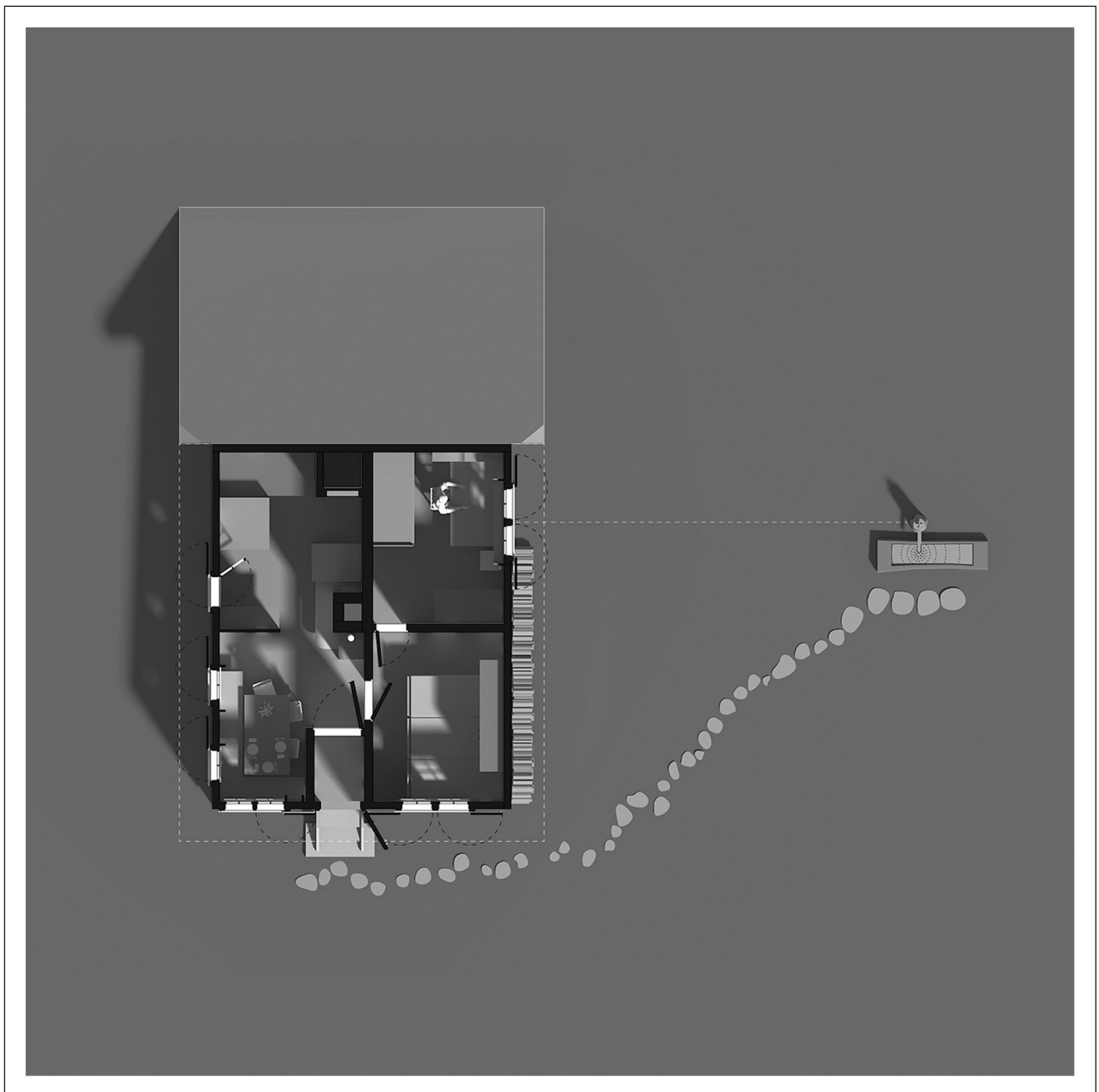


Figure 3: Floorplan of Heidegger's *Hütte* at Todtnauberg. Drawing by Sean Bryen and Ross Anderson, 2019.



Figure 4: The cubic-stellar ornament atop the *Brunnen* at Heidegger's *Hütte* – a configuration known as a *stella octangula* – is composed of two intersecting triangle-based pyramids. Photograph by Ross Anderson, taken on 19 July 2015.

described in 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes' ('The Origin of the Work of Art'): 'The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through the world ... The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it ... The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there' (1993b: 174).

To the extent that geometry was present in Heidegger's thinking, it was likely in the general terms set out by his mentor Edmund Husserl, who in 'Ursprung der Geometrie' ['The Origin of Geometry'] drew attention to the contribution of the habits, terms, and procedures of traditional building practices and the use of standardized tools, materials, and dimensions in the formation of geometry (1970: 353–78).³ Unconcerned with the

philological-historical question of the search for the first geometers who actually voiced pure geometrical theories, or for the particular propositions they discovered, Husserl apprehended 'origin' as always-possibly now, rather than as a necessarily historically distant event, which is also the way that Heidegger wrote of 'origin' in 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes'. Both philosophers were interested in the potential 'newness' of origin, made self-evident through the reactivation, or embodiment, of original meaning.

In regard to the *Hütte* and the degree to which geometry thus understood is invoked, it is through the increasing formalization of the natural conditions that can be traced – via timber – from the conifer-forested landscape,

nourished by the dark soil, to the felling and chopping down of trees for the firewood piled up against the shingled walls to the more refined working and dimensioning of lumber that gives 'measure' and 'orientation' to the paradigmatically quartered building. That the Hütte was not designed by an architect, and that its builder has in fact only recently been revealed as a good-as-anonymous local carpenter known only as Herr Schweitzer (Heidegger 2010: 85–6) is significant, bearing in mind Heidegger's disqualification of individual authorship as a condition for authentic building, which for him was cognate with dwelling. He made this argument most explicitly and cogently in 'Bauen Wohnen Denken' ('Building Dwelling Thinking'), a lecture delivered to a room full of architects at the *Darmstädter Gespräch: Mensch und Raum* [Darmstadt Symposium: Man and Space], held in August 1951. The symposium, and the exhibition of architectural projects that accompanied it – including speculative propositions and projects by Peter Behrens, Heinrich Tessenow, Walter Gropius, Hans Scharoun, Mies van der Rohe, Bruno Taut, Alvar Aalto, Rudolf Schwarz, Hans Poelzig, and Le Corbusier – was principally intended as a forum to propose and discuss strategies for the immediate urban and architectural regeneration of Europe's cadaverous post-war cities.

Developing an argument that can only have come across as recalcitrant, Heidegger first of all acknowledged that today's residential buildings 'do indeed provide lodgings; today's houses may even be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light and sun', but then he asked rhetorically, 'do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?' (1993a: 348). He then traced the etymology of *bauen* (building), identifying that in Old High German it meant to remain, to stay in a place, to dwell. And then, most ominously, he asserted that 'the proper meaning of the verb *bauen*, namely to dwell, has been lost to us.' Rather than looking forward – anticipating a modern mode of dwelling and its embodiment in building – Heidegger looked back, since 'only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build'. He asked his audience to

think for a while of a farmhouse in the Schwarzwald, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and sky, divinities and mortals enter in *simple oneness* into things ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope, looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. (1993a: 361–62; italics in original)

Although this description of authentic building-dwelling is of unknown ancient provenance, it accords in all its particulars with Heidegger's own Hütte, which he therefore implicitly held up as a standard by which to measure other possibilities.

Le Corbusier's Cabanon: A Repository for Geometry

Le Corbusier's Cabanon was just such another possibility. In sight of a site 'lapped by the waves' (Le Corbusier 1958: 239) at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin on the Côte d'Azur, the architect drew up the plans in 'three-quarters of an hour' on Sunday 30 December 1951, less than six months after Heidegger delivered 'Bauen Wohnen Denken'. And while the little timber cabin certainly sits within a modernist orientation to austerity that Le Corbusier himself helped to both create and propagate, the Cabanon shares characteristics and concerns with Heidegger's staunchly traditional Hütte. And it is these resonances, offset by the obvious differences, that help to illuminate the common question to which they each propose to be an answer: How might we dwell meaningfully in modernity, a time that in Heidegger's words is stamped by the 'default of God' (1975d: 89).

Before turning attention to the Cabanon itself, it is prudent to first address the Modulor dimensioning system that the architect himself invented and patented, since it serves to both shed light on Le Corbusier's more universal preoccupations and beliefs, and will be seen to suffuse the architecture of the Cabanon.⁴ Le Corbusier's arduous pursuit of a felicitous proportioning system was rooted in his abiding belief that architecture at all times in history – whether that of 'primitive persons' or the 'bearers of high civilizations' – was always *measured*. By which he meant that they used a means of dimensioning that was in accord with the natural dimensions of the human body. He cites the elbow (cubit), finger (digit), thumb (inch), all of which were 'fit to serve as measures for the huts, the houses and the temples that had to be built'. However, one day, 'secular thought, in its turn, set out to conquer the world'. The French Revolution 'did away with the foot-and-inch system with all its slow and complicated processes'. From that time onwards the world was 'divided into two halves: the foot-and-inch camp and the metre camp'. On the one side, the 'foot-and-inch, steadfast in its attachment to the human body, but atrociously difficult to handle' and on the other, the metre, infinitely divisible into any number of dimensions, 'but all indifferent to the stature of man, for there is no such thing as a one-metre or a two-metre man' (Le Corbusier 1954: 19, 20).

In 1943, Le Corbusier set about inventing a dimensioning system that would once again be in harmonious accord with the dimensions of the human body but would enjoy the ease of use of the metric system – that is, a system that would reconcile the foot-and-inch camp with the metre camp. Convinced that the problem would be solved geometrically, he set out ambitiously to find a sequence of operations that would deliver a graphically elegant and mathematically incontrovertible proposition. He was convinced that the way to go about it would be to take the figure of a man with his arm upraised and place him inside two squares, one on top of the other. And then to place a third square astride the first two squares at the 'place of the right angle', wherever that might turn out to be (1954: 37). His attempts to locate this elusive right angle that he would later acclaim as 'the answer and the

guide' (2012: G.3 – Instrument, line 5) always began with the golden section, which for Le Corbusier had an 'organic inevitability' that led it to be traced out by 'children, the elderly, savages and the educated' (2007: 135). Eventually, he arrived at a proposition that delivered a sequence of three measures related to each other, though since they derived from an irrational number, any whole-number dimensions derived from the figure would be approximations. Realizing that the additive Fibonacci sequence produces whole numbers that, as they get larger and larger, converge towards the golden section, Le Corbusier adopted it as a feasible if necessarily inexact means of ascribing workable dimensions to his new geometric construction. He justified his rounding-off by making a distinction between the 'exact values' of mathematics and the 'practical values' of architecture (1954: 57).

The time had then come to ascribe actual dimensions to the Modulor in order to set it to use in the material world. For a long time, he and the couple of young architects in his office he had tasked with coming up with some answers had been working on the assumption that the height of the 'man with his arm upraised' was 175 centimetres tall, but when he increased this dimension to six feet – the height of 'good-looking men, such as the policemen' – in English detective novels, 'to our delight, the graduations of a new *Modulor*, based on a man six feet tall, translated themselves before our eyes into round figures!' (1954: 56). Well, almost – some extrapolations had to be made for the whole enterprise to be workable: 182.88 was rounded up to 183 centimetres. And the height up

to his navel was decided to be 113 centimetres. And if he raised his arm, it would reach up to 226 centimetres. So, with that, the three fundamental dimensions were set: 113, 183, and 226 centimetres. Then, to furnish a ladder of dimensional relations that would be self-similar at all scales, Le Corbusier initiated a Fibonacci sequence from the middle measure of 113 centimetres, which, moving down the register, delivers measures of 70, 43, 27, 16, 10, and so on, and moving up the register gives 183, 296, and so on. This became the final version of his 'red series', a term that Le Corbusier first coined for his 175-centimetre Modulor, and since inconveniently large gaps were left between dimensions, the architect began a second sequence from 226 centimetres (2×113), giving 140, 86, 53, 33, 20, 13, and so on. This was his new 'blue series'. By establishing these two syncopated series, Le Corbusier produced further proportional resonances and reduced the distance between consecutive measures.

Having invented the Modulor as a proportioning system professedly in harmonious accord with the human body and its typical postures, the next step was to properly set it to use in the design of a building – the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille, which was to be no less than a 'vertical city' for 1,600 inhabitants. The Modulor was brought to bear everywhere; in his brief summary statement, Le Corbusier boasts, 'We may safely say that such exactitude, such rigour and mathematics and harmony have never before been applied to that simplest accessory of daily life: the dwelling' (1954: 136). But even if that is the case, for the exactitude to matter in the real world it must be accepted,

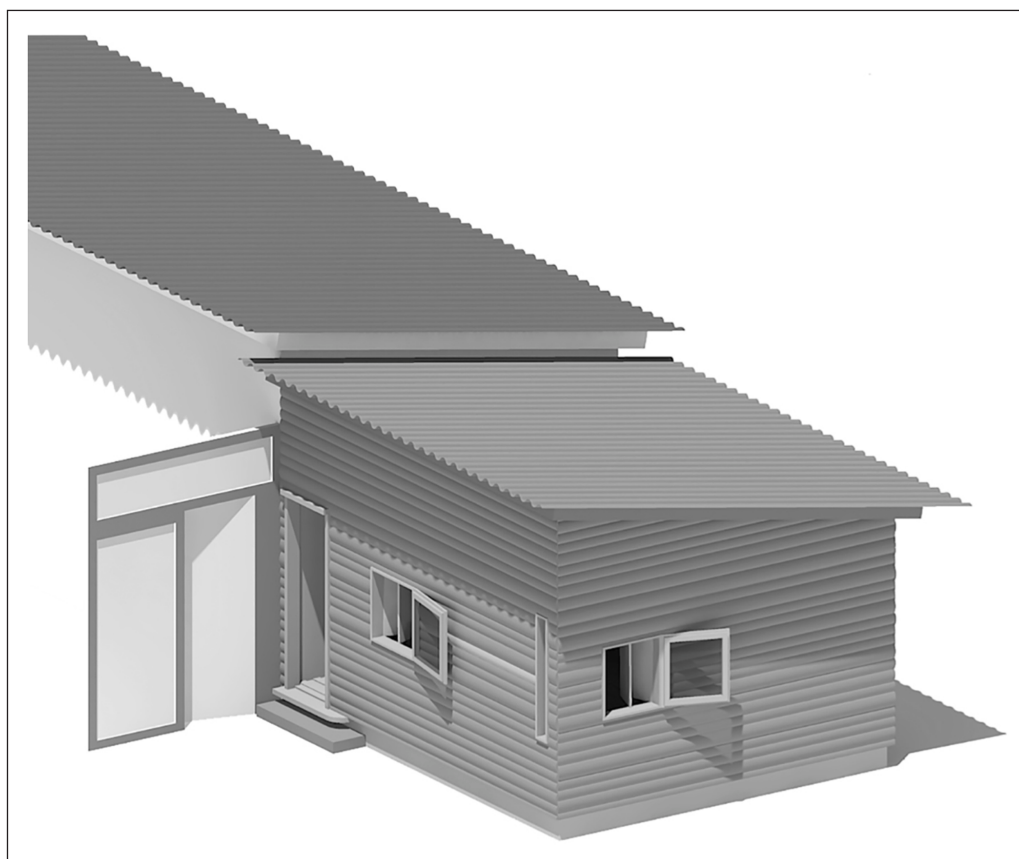


Figure 5: Oblique drawing of Le Corbusier's Cabanon at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. Drawing by Ross Anderson, 2019.

set into motion — made manifest. A battery of tradespeople contributed to the construction of the Unité — one of them was Charles Barberis, a carpenter from Corsica. His craftsmanship must have caught Le Corbusier's eye on the building site since he decided to engage Barberis on a very personal commission — the fabrication of a little timber-framed Cabanon 'at the end of a rock lapped by the waves'.⁵

But none of the wrought geometrical exactitude of the Modulor nor the adroit handiwork of Barberis is offered to the eye at first; the Cabanon seems to be a heavily built log cabin made from trunks with the bark still on (**Figure 5**). It turns out, however, that the half-round logs are in fact a façade of pine-bark boards nailed onto vertical wooden boards that are in turn affixed to a timber frame. And then the interior is lined with plywood. Quite elaborate, the Cabanon was fully prefabricated by Barberis in the summer of 1952 in his home town of Ajaccio in Corsica. The components were then flat-packed and ferried across to France, unloaded, then finally transported by rail to Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. This last stage of the journey was carried out in the dead of night so that the train could halt partway between stations to unload the pieces of the Cabanon just above its site. They were then carried down the steep and narrow gravelly path fringed with Mediterranean shrubs, bushes, and cacti, and set down on

the clearing, recently levelled, between the restaurant and the large trunk of a carob tree, whose broad canopy would in time provide welcome shade to the Cabanon in the hot months of summer.⁶

As built — tilted up on site and nailed together then capped with a roof of deeply corrugated fibre cement — the Cabanon clings to the seafood restaurant L'Étoile de Mer like one of the limpets on the wave-pummelled rocks down below. Stepping inside after ascending the two steps up to the slim sliding door that slips back into its neat recess in the prefabricated timber-framed wall, and having taken a couple of steps along the dark, narrow entry corridor lined with murals — it becomes apparent that the relationship between the two buildings is even more intimate than that. Charming as ever, Le Corbusier talked Thomas Rebutato (a retired plumber from Nice, who opened L'Étoile de Mer in 1948) into allowing him all-hours access to his kitchen and cut a hole right through the party wall to get to it. With a high threshold and head-height jamb, the lozenge-shaped doorway comes across very much like a portal on a ship or submarine. That is to the left. A few more steps ahead and then to the right, the little Cabanon opens up. Plywood-lined, compact, and unfussy but brightly painted, it was clearly built with both contemplation and recreation in mind.

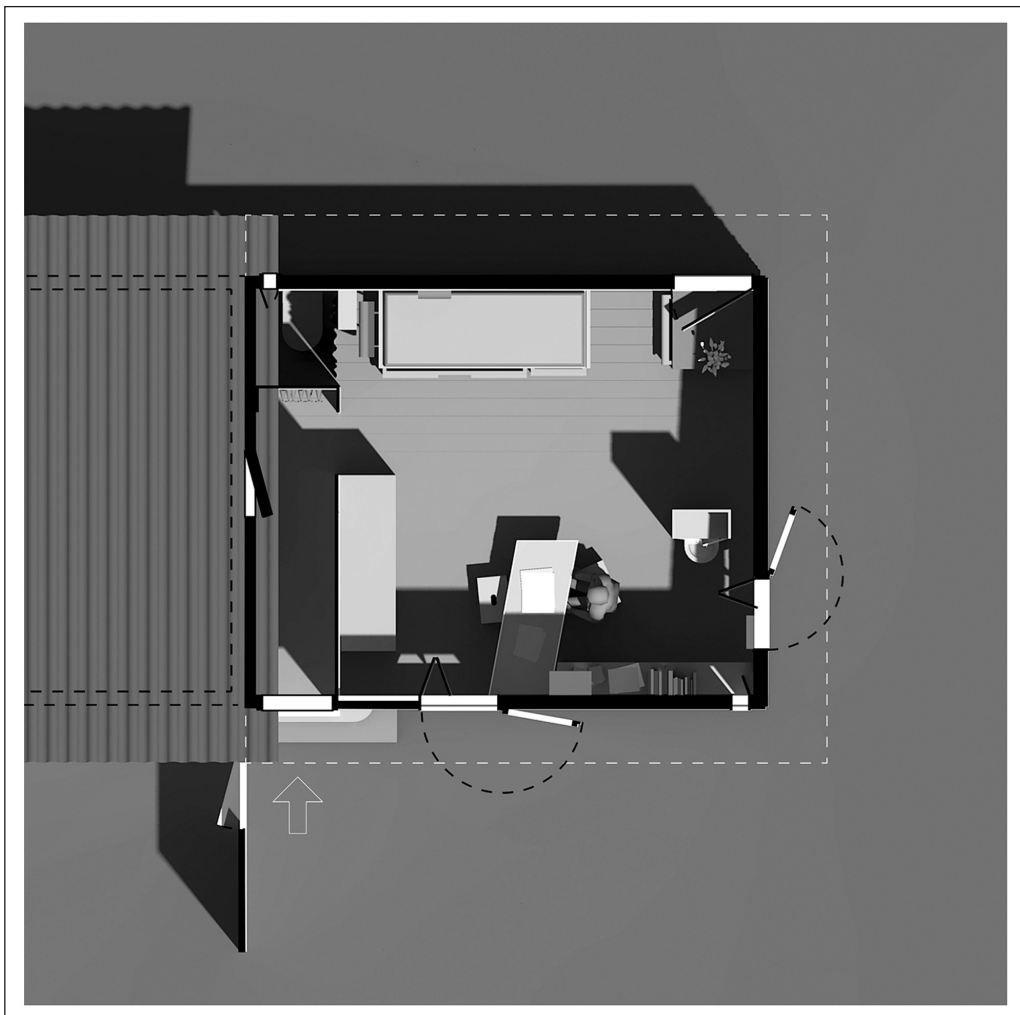


Figure 6: Floorplan of Le Corbusier's Cabanon. Drawing by Ross Anderson, 2019.

The floorboards are painted bright canary yellow and the plywood-panelled ceiling is set at 226 centimetres – the height of a man's upstretched hand, according to the Modulor. It is mostly painted in oblong fields of mint green and candy-apple red above the resting areas, white above the sink and working area, and pale sky blue for the part that is lifted 43 centimetres above the rest – the Modulor's measure between elbow and fingertip. The ceiling of the constricted entry corridor is black, amplifying its tunnel-like character.

Spartan in character and few in number, the timber furnishings comprise a low bed with two built-in drawers below and a work table-desk bestrewn with drawings and writings and attended by a pair of crate-like stools that legend has it were fashioned from Ballantine scotch whisky cases fished from the sea. There is a tall built-in cupboard for clothes, plenty of open shelves for drawings and books, and a squat standalone storage chest on casters that sometimes doubled as a bedside table. The fittings are also few. There are three small fixed lamps, one at the head of the bed, one at its foot, and one above the window behind the table, on which stands one mobile upright lamp. Attached to the stub-wall behind the table is a utilitarian metal sink for washing hands and brushing teeth. The plumbing is, unsurprisingly, exposed.

The expansive view of the sea is less exposed – viewable only through two small square casement windows. They are 70 centimetres square (a fundamental Modulor dimension) and have an inner shutter that is hinged down the middle and folds inward. The inner face of the left-hand half of the shutter of the window near the sink hosts an abstract figural painting by Le Corbusier, while the other half is mirrored. Both halves of the other window, just in front of the worktable-desk, are mirrored. The shutters of both windows can be readily adjusted to acquire bright blue views of the alluring Mediterranean on summer days, or to shut the cabin down at night or for winter.

There are also three inward-opening fly-screened ventilation hatches that marshal the coastal breezes. Two of them are vertical – one right over on the edge of the wall opposite the wash basin, and the other diagonally opposite, behind the lavatory that is tucked away at the end of the entry corridor, with only a curtain to safeguard modesty. In photographs, their narrow sills sometimes host small potted plants or the shells, pebbles, and worn pieces of bone that Le Corbusier collected on the shore below – his *objets à réaction poétique* (objects of poetic reaction). The other hatch is horizontal and is actually proportioned more like a window. It is at the foot of the built-in bed, above the spare mattress that was sometimes dragged over to the corner of the room in summertime, and where Le Corbusier was photographed by Lucien Hervé wilting in the heat of a summer's day. In all, the interior is full of ingenuity and wit, living up to Le Corbusier's own estimation of it as containing 'all the charms that the architect could pull from his bag' (Le Corbusier, cited in Petit 1970: 112).

Zooming out now to take in the overall plan of the Cabanon, and for the moment taking at face value Le Corbusier's declaration that it measures 366 by 366 centimetres square (cited in Boesiger 1953 78; Cohen 2008:

652), it seems most plausible that the plan is composed of four rectangles, measuring 226 by 140 centimetres, that pinwheel around a central square of 86 by 86 centimetres (see Chiambretto 1987: 41) (**Figure 6**). More than dimensionally correct – and in agreement with the pact signed with the Modulor – this spiralling arrangement is in tune with the motion implied by the building's spatial organization. But, as has been intimated, Le Corbusier's pithy description of his Cabanon as 'a single room of 366 × 366 cm floor area and 266 cm in height' requires qualification. All told, the plan does indeed measure 366 centimetres in one direction, front to back, but side to side it measures 366 centimetres *plus* the 70-centimetre corridor that he seems to have ignored. This elongated rectangle, 366 by 70 centimetres, precisely delineates those functions that are necessary but secondary – the entry and its corridor (including the portal through to the restaurant), and at the end, the lavatory. Situated between the Cabanon and the L'Étoile de Mer, this long sliver of plan seems to have been thought of as a kind of buffer, peripheral to the Cabanon proper.

While the regulating presence of the Modulor is most readily observed in the horizontal disposition of the plan, it also dictates all of the vertical dimensions. Moving up from the finished floor level the following dimensions, all of which come from the red series, can be tallied-up: the height of the bed at 43 centimetres, so too the stools; the table-top at 70 centimetres, the sill of the two squares windows at 113 centimetres, and their jambs at 183 centimetres; and finally, the ceiling 226 centimetres above the floor.

It is by now clear that the Modulor regulates the material and spatial extensity of Le Corbusier's Cabanon in a manner all pervasive, and that he had great confidence in the harmonic measuring system that he had been refining for the better part of a decade. During the latter part of that time he had also been composing what might be characterized as the intensive counterpart to the extensive Modulor – his *Le poème de l'angle droit* [Poem to the Right Angle] (1955), which as Peter Carl has noted is 'concerned to articulate the analogical structure of reality' (2006: 30).⁷ It is important to mention the poem here since it registers, in a tableau of lithographs that are coupled with the text of the poem and give an order to it, the descending-ascending play of communication between embodiment and articulation with which this study has been concerned. This arrangement, which Le Corbusier referred to as an 'Iconostase', comprises seven symmetrically aligned strata of nineteen 'icons', top to bottom 5-3-5-1-3-1-1, and labelled A through G (A=Environment, B=Mind, C=Flesh, D=Fusion, E=Character, F=The hand, and G=The right angle).⁸

Within the context of the present discussion, two of the lithographs deserve particular attention, since although the presence of the right angle to which the *poème* is dedicated is of course everywhere in general, it is embodied most explicitly in these two lithographs in particular. The first is A.3 – very top and centre of the Iconostase. A male figure stands erect on the shore of a sandy bay, positioned in such a way that the sea-horizon far beyond crosses at the height of his genitals, presenting an emblem of

procreation, 'signing a pact of solidarity with nature: this is the right angle' (2012: A.3 – Environment, lines 14–15). Superimposed over him, but failing to mask his nakedness, are two vertically twinned triangles, arranged just like those in Fludd's diagram, printed as a solid transparent red.

The second explicit incidence of the right angle is at G.3, standing singly at the bottom and centre of the tableau. It is the icon on which the Iconostase is grounded, primordially instantiating the founding of a location – a place of incipient order. As depicted in the icon, Le Corbusier still has his pencil or stick of charcoal in his hand. Having first of all delimited a square with rounded corners, inside of which the right angle has just been inscribed – in fact his hand has not yet left the earth/paper – the architect declares, 'with carbon we have traced the right angle' (2012: G.3 – Instrument, lines 1–3). The way that the boundary of the plan has been drawn in one deliberate, continuous thick charcoal line – except where it was lifted from the page to leave a gap for passage into the defined and measured interior from the exterior that is not – recalls the ceremonial ploughing of the bounds of an ancient city,⁹ or the ritualistic setting-out of a temple on its site.¹⁰

Heidegger and Le Corbusier Considered Together: Building as Measure-Taking

When considering the meaning of this drawing-ploughing of a profound boundary that consecrates the mutually belonging of an in- and outside – which Le Corbusier brought to the level of symbolic visual representation in his icon – Heidegger's writings come to mind, particularly his later ones in which the decisive root term *Riß* comes to the fore, such as 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes'. Only clumsily translatable into English (usually as rift, cleft, or fissure), Heidegger wrote most succinctly of the nature of this *Riß* in the following sentence that, for its fine and revealing rhyming construction that drives home the shared etymology of terms, warrants citation mostly in the language in which it was composed: 'The *Riß* is the unitary belonging of *Aufriß* and *Grundriß*, *Durch-* and *Umriß*' (1993b: 188). It is the second of these words, *Grundriß* – sandwiched between *Aufriß* (outline) and *Durchriß* (rip) – that arrests the eye, since even today it is the orthodox German word for a building plan. So, following Heidegger, and language itself, an architectural plan is, quite literally, a rift in the ground.

This characterization of the creation of an architectural plan as an act of violence, as a rip, tear, or rupture – a *Riß* – provokes a return to Heidegger's essay 'Die Sprache' and to Trakl's poem 'Ein Winterabend'. The wanderer who has come to the door on darksome courses quietly steps within. 'Pain has turned the threshold to stone' (1975a: 192). Pausing to interpret this enigmatic line that he has cited from Trakl, Heidegger asks rhetorically, 'But what is pain?' and responds himself: 'It is the *Riß*' (1975a: 201). The pain separates, tears asunder, but it simultaneously gathers: 'Its rending, as a separating that gathers, is at the same time that drawing which, like the pen-drawing of a plan or sketch, draws and joins together what is held apart

in separation'. The threshold 'bears the between' of the outside and the inside, and 'must never yield either way'. It is hard because pain has petrified it, and 'presences unflagging in the threshold, as pain' (1975a: 192, 201, 202).

It is noteworthy that the theatre in which Heidegger plays out his drama of the unflagging pain of the threshold is modest and domestic – a homely dwelling that is 'provided well' – rather than, for example, the public edifice of temple or a church, buildings which explicitly thematize the threshold between human and divine and that have since ancient times embodied the mediated meeting between the two with great devotion and nuance. Heidegger reveals his motivation in his reading of the final line of 'Ein Winterabend': 'Silently God's bread and wine'. He interprets this to mean, 'The houses of the many and the tables of their daily meals have become house of God and altar' (1975a: 193). That is, he melds the dwelling and the temple. And he also does so elsewhere, asserting for example in *Wozu Dichter* (What Are Poets For?) that 'Language is the precinct (*templum*), that is, the house of Being' (1975d: 129).

The decantation of the symbolic content of the temple into the house that occurs in Heidegger's post-war philosophy is matched in Le Corbusier's writings – actually quite consistently over his working lifetime. In *Une maison-Un palais* [A House, a Palace], published in 1928, he asks rhetorically whether traditional modest dwellings such as fishermen's houses would not 'become like the Pantheon in Rome, dedicated to the gods?' (Le Corbusier 1928: 38).¹¹ Then thirty years later, in *Modulor 2*, he writes of the house and its hearth as a temple: 'Numbers lend dignity to the houses of men. They make a temple out of an ordinary dwelling: the "family temple"' (1958: 156). And then ten years after that, in *Mise au point* – his final piece of writing that has been spoken of in semi-hushed tones as his 'final testament' – Le Corbusier reveals that 'one preoccupation has stirred me, imperatively: to introduce into the home the sense of the sacred; to make of the home a temple of the family' (Žaknić 1997: 91).

But although Le Corbusier was committed to the prospect of the sacred – the sense of which he aspired to instil in the home – he was averse to the whole ornamental and ritualized apparatus of institutionalized religion and did not conceive of transcendence in terms of heaven, declaring, for example, that 'some things are sacred, others are not, regardless of whether or not they are religious' (cited in Petit 1970: 183–84). His version of the sacred involved continuity with tradition, not so much with the religious architecture of the past as with vernacular dwellings in nature, whose 'timelessness' served as a way of overcoming history. In *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (*Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning*), which immediately followed *Une maison-Un palais*, he claimed to have always done vernacular architecture: 'I have drawn the hut of the savage, the primitive temple, the house of the peasant, and I have said: these organisms created with the authenticity that nature itself places in its works – economy, purity, intensity – it is they that, one day of sunshine and clear-sightedness, became palaces' (1991: 161).

Heidegger of course also exalted vernacular dwellings, and was much more explicit in his adherence to the way things had always been done than was Le Corbusier, for whom tradition was more a standard of achievement to be reckoned with than it was a prescription for design. What they both held in common — certainly in their own dwellings under consideration here — was an orientation to primitivism, which August Wiedmann, in his book *The German Quest for Primal Origins*, succinctly defined as ‘an irresistible and seemingly inexplicable attraction to beginnings, a compulsive recollection of origins and roots’ (1995: 4–5).¹² All primitivisms are, with varying degrees of profundity, primal affairs of the earth, and have in common an acknowledgement of earth’s claim against a world too afflicted by scientism, bureaucracy, technology, and intellectualism. But whereas the primitivism of Le Corbusier’s Cabanon was a quasi-revolutionary vision of renewal, Heidegger’s Hütte was more explicitly an attempt to preserve ancient, medieval traditions, and in so doing has invited the charge of nostalgia that Karsten Harries and others have levelled against it. For Harries, nostalgia is a ‘sickness born of an inability or unwillingness to be content with memories or dreams of a home left behind’. Since the nostalgic feels an acute need to actually return home, ‘memories of home become an obstacle to making a new home in the wider world’ (2015: 10).

Heidegger returned ‘home’ to Todtnauberg again and again, right into his final years. On Friday 23 September 1966 — three days shy of the philosopher’s 77th birthday — Heidegger was interviewed in his Hütte by the editors of the national weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*,¹³ and amidst the concrete historical passages of clarification and justification are moments of genuine revelation, pithy statements that encapsulate a lifetime of thinking, particularly regarding ‘technicity’, and it is for this reason that some people speak of the interview as his ‘last will and testament’.¹⁴ ‘Technicity’ was Heidegger’s own term for the modern global condition of humanity, a time in which ‘all our relationships have become merely technical ones’. He followed that sentence with the assertion that ‘it is no longer upon an earth that man lives today’, and ‘technicity increasingly dislodges man and uproots him from the earth’ (1981a: 56). This evocation of ‘earth’ is what is of most interest here — earth as *Boden*, as ground or foundation for thought and building, and as that which denotes place and tradition.

Heidegger’s positive counter to the devastating ubiquity of ‘technicity’, which he proceeded to outline in his interview, was both a recall of history — ‘everything essential and of great magnitude has arisen only out of the fact that man had a home and was rooted in tradition’ (1981a: 57) — and a looking forward to a future well beyond the view of all of us, except perhaps a poet. Friedrich Hölderlin was Heidegger’s seer, ‘not just one poet among others’, but rather ‘the poet who points into the future’ (1981a: 61–2). In his essay ‘... und Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch ...’ (‘... Poetically Man Dwells ...’), first delivered as a lecture in 1951, Heidegger had asserted that it is poetry that ‘first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling’ (1975b: 216).

And then, most interestingly for present purposes, he gathered together earth, measure, poetry, and architecture. For Heidegger, both poetry and building are fundamentally concerned with ‘measure-taking’, which ‘gauges the between, which brings the two, heaven and earth, to one another’ (1975b: 219).¹⁵ It is this measure-taking that ‘brings dwelling into its ground plan [*Grundriß*] ... The taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling’. He pauses to clarify that when he invokes measure he does not have in mind anything properly quantifiable, nothing precisely ‘dimensioned’. Heidegger is rather bringing another understanding to bear — that of measure as a ‘meting-out’, a spanning of the between, ‘the upward to the sky as well as the downward to earth’ (1975b: 218).

Heidegger’s formulation of the proper meaning of measure resonates strongly with the one that Fludd proposed, and which he depicted as a Jacob’s Ladder that affords an ascending-descending play of communication between the earthly ‘material’ world at the base and the ‘formal’ world at the top, the place of the precise and removed articulations of philosophy and geometry. It is exactly the vitality of this register (and particularly architecture’s role down towards the bottom of it — the domain of earthly embodiment) that has been at stake in my tandem reading of Heidegger’s resolutely traditional Hütte and Le Corbusier’s Modulor-measured Cabanon. I read these two buildings as significant bearers of meaning in and of themselves, each embodying a profound engagement with the question of meaningful dwelling in late modernity, a question that both the philosopher and the architect also addressed in their writings. Heidegger and Le Corbusier each did so, however, from their own disciplinary standpoint, which invited consideration of a common theme from the perspective of two separate though mutually illuminating discourses — philosophy and architecture. The study has the quality of a cultural interpretation. This is in tune with the approach of philosophical hermeneutics, which intends to illuminate fundamental conditions that lie beneath that which can be understood with objective certainty, bridging the gap between our familiar world and primordial meanings that resist assimilation, the most important of which here involved dwelling, essentially.

Notes

- ¹ I visited Heidegger’s Hütte on 19 July 2015, and profited greatly from this direct experience of the building within its context. I also learned a great deal about it during my discussions with Heidegger’s granddaughter Gertrud, who kindly hosted me at the Heidegger family home one afternoon in Freiburg-im-Breisgau. It is to be noted that there are no original plan drawings of the Hütte in existence, if in fact any were ever made. It is likely that Heidegger himself would not have kept them, since as far as the practice of architecture in general was concerned, ‘he certainly had no concrete conception and no experience whatsoever’, as Gertrud Heidegger wrote to me on 17 May 2010. In regard to the literature on the Hütte, Adam Sharr’s book *Heidegger’s Hut* (2006) remains the most substantial

treatment of the building in architectural scholarship, and I would like to thank him for his personal correspondence on some aspects of the building that he wrote about, particularly its interior layout.

- ² The configuration of a taller than pragmatic vertical element crowned by a geometric ornament is a vernacular tradition in the Schwarzwald, but the exact configuration appears to be unique to the Hütte, as Julia Scheu from the Martin Heidegger Museum wrote to me on 11 July 2008. For a focused study of Heidegger's Hütte that makes particular reference to the *Brunnen* (a water spout fed by a well), see my book chapter 'Brunnenstern: The Talismanic Presence of Architecture and Ornament in Heidegger's Hütte' (2012: 127–54).
- ³ For an extended study of Heidegger's stance towards mathematics in general, see Roubach (2008), and for an essay that addresses the place of geometry in his thinking and that takes Husserl into account, see Elden (2001).
- ⁴ For a compact study of the Modulor that both narrates the history of its development in Le Corbusier's architectural office and that locates the endeavour in respect to the proportional preoccupations of some of his predecessors and his French and European contemporaries, see Cohen (2014). Cohen was most concerned to carefully recount the development of the Modulor as a proportional system as such, rather than to address its practical application, limiting, for example, his comment on its presence in the Cabanon to 'the 'petit cabanon' he [Le Corbusier] built in Roquebrune Cap-Martin for his summer holidays [that] measured $3.36 \times 2.26 \times 2.26$ meters' (Cohen 2014: 7). On Le Corbusier's fraught relations with mathematicians and mathematics, see Loach (1998) and Linton (2004), and on specifically the Modulor, see Ostwald (2001) and most recently Rozhkovskaya (2020).
- ⁵ Despite its background presence in architectural discourse, Le Corbusier's Cabanon has attracted surprisingly little attention in its own right. The architect's own sanctioned accounts are limited to the few pages devoted to the building in Boesiger (1953: 78–9); and its appearance in Le Corbusier (1958: 239–45). And for secondary literature, see Chiambretto (1987), Benton (1987: 146–203), Gargiani and Rosellini (2011: 390–95), Cohen (2012: 222–23), and Flueckiger (2016: 45–77). I prepared my three-dimensional reconstruction of the Cabanon using Le Corbusier's own sparse set of drawings (1983: 339–51), as well as those made later by others, chiefly Chiambretto (1987), Unwin (2010), and Flueckiger (2016). I also profited enormously from close analysis of the multitude of candid photographs that Lucien Hervé took at the Cabanon between 1952 and 1964, a representative selection of which are published in Sbriglio (2011: 277–87).
- ⁶ This paragraph draws from the various works on Le Corbusier's Cabanon, as detailed in endnote 5.
- ⁷ Peter Carl introduced me to this way of thinking about Le Corbusier as an architect who simultaneously transposed everyday matters to an analogical milieu 'largely of his own making' and profoundly rewrote and adapted tradition to his contemporary circumstances. See, for example, Carl's two essays in *AA Files*: (1991: 48–65) and (1992: 49–64).
- ⁸ The themes at play in *Le poème de l'angle droit* and their manner of expression as seven strata or steps of ascent-descent recall Fludd's Jacob's Ladder – a connection further substantiated by the fact that Le Corbusier in fact drew his own Jacob's Ladder, published as a full-page illustration in *Le Corbusier* (1950: 27), although it is to be noted that the ladder is not *only* a Jacob's Ladder insofar as it is clearly related to the very topography of Algiers. For an interpretation of some of the other themes in *Le poème de l'angle droit*, see Moore (1980: 110–39).
- ⁹ The paradigmatic example is the mythical founding of Rome by Romulus, who according to Plutarch circumscribed the boundary of the city, 'having shod a plough with a brazen ploughshare' that he yoked to a bull and a cow, which together 'drove a deep furrow around the boundary line'. At the location of each of the gates, Romulus 'took the share out of the ground, lifted the plough over, and left a gap' (1914: 120). For a discussion of this myth and history that also takes in the later rites of consecration that were involved in the founding of garrison towns across the empire, see Rykwert (1976).
- ¹⁰ For example, medieval German masons inscribed the plan of a Late Gothic chapel directly in the ground by carrying out a strictly sequential set of geometric operations that paid tribute to geometry as such, going well beyond the pragmatic necessities of circumstance, thereby exposing a concern for origins that was a matter of both a return to essences and a recovery of time in the temporal sense.
- ¹¹ Tim Benton has asserted that 'Le Corbusier's moving account in *Une maison-Un palais* of the fisherman's houses in the pine forests of the Bassin d'Arcachon is the architect's most heart-felt piece of writing on domestic architecture' (2018: 379).
- ¹² On the issue of primitivism with particular reference to architecture, see Egenter (1992); and Odgers, Samuel, and Sharr (2006).
- ¹³ Heidegger had never made a reckoning with the German public in regard to his affiliation with the Nazis in 1933–34 while rector of the University of Freiburg – an association that he had neither explained, justified, nor repudiated – and his interview with *Der Spiegel* was an opportunity to do just that. On the topic of the architectural ramifications of Nazi thinking on modern architecture, which takes into account Heidegger's writings, see Anderson (2017).
- ¹⁴ 'He [Heidegger] saw this as an opportunity to meditate upon the meaning of Being, particularly under the guise that most profoundly characterizes contemporary culture – labelled by him "technicity" (*Die Technik*). In these terms the interview takes on the quality of a last will and testament' (Richardson 1981: 45). The photojournalist Digne Meller Marcovicz shot an extensive suite of photographs to accompany the tran-

scription of the interview that was published in *Der Spiegel* on 26 May 1976, five days after Heidegger's death. These photographs are of particular documentary value insofar as they capture not only the interior of the building but also the way that it was furnished and occupied (Meller Marcowicz 1985).

¹⁵ For an analysis of '...Poetically Man Dwells...' that focuses particularly on Heidegger's understanding of measure, see Hill (2014: 145–54).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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