HANS SCHAROUN AND FRANK GEHRY

TWO "ICONOCLASTS" SEEKING FORM FOR THE MODERN INSTITUTION

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Introduction

Hans Scharoun and Frank Gehry, two architects seemingly very distant in time, place and culture, nevertheless, show striking parallels and similarities in their careers, their work, and their approach to architecture. More than a generation apart and practicing at radically different times and locations — Scharoun before and after World War II, mostly in Berlin, Gehry from the sixties to the present — the context and circumstances within which they developed their mature architectural work, and the issues they confronted, were remarkably similar.

Scharoun, in his formative years during the two wars, played an active role in the avant-garde movement that, in reaction to the Historicism and Eclecticism of the 19th and early 20th century, tried to generate a "New Architecture." The movement later coalesced around the notions of Rational Functionalism represented by Le Corbusier, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe and developed into what became known later as Modern Architecture or the International Style, at the expense of "Organic Functionalism" and its proponents such as Häring, Scharoun and Mendelsohn.

At about the time Scharoun died in the early 1970s, Frank Gehry began to come into his own as an architect. It was the time when Post-Modernism, in critique to Modernism's "reductionist approach," tried to reconnect again with architecture's long history and tradition — before Modernism "intervened" — leading to another period of historicism and eclecticism in architecture. Though Gehry never became a protagonist of Post-Modernism, he, unlike Scharoun who became marginalized by the dominant "Rational Functionalism," ultimately benefited from Post-Modernism because it opened up architecture towards a more inclusive, pluralist approach, drawing from, besides historic architecture, such sources as vernacular architecture, commercial imagery, and pop-art.

Art and artists, primarily painters, played a significant role in the lives and careers of both, Scharoun and Gehry. Both knew and were friends with some of the leading artists of their time — Scharoun with Kurt Schwitters and Hans Richter;[1] Gehry with Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Kienholz, Ron Davis and Claus Oldenbourg.[2] Artists were important for their development. Gehry frequently recounts "the positive support" he received "from the artists, which I was not getting from the architects. The architects thought I was weird."[3]

The influence of art seems readily apparent in the dynamic, sculptural quality of their work. It is this very quality, however, that is responsible for a great deal of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation by critics, professional peers, theorists and historians. Using simplistic, descriptive labels, the work is characterized as "expressionist" in Scharoun's case, or "neo-expressionist" in Gehry's. Implicit is the notion that it is "irrational," "formalistic," lacking any intellectual merit or rigor, the result of self-indulgent, personal expression; that it is all about style and not substance; and most damning of all, that it is "art" (sculpture), but not "architecture."

Common Viewpoint and Premises

Though both Gehry and Scharoun are often associated with specific, theoretical positions and movements (Scharoun with Organic Functionalism and Expressionism, Gehry with Deconstruction), neither is known as a theorist, nor would they consider themselves as such. This does not mean that they eschew theoretical discourse, or that their work is derived from some sort of intuitive pragmatism instead of a strongly defined viewpoint and a set of theoretical premises. To the contrary, Gehry is constantly involved in discussions with academics and avant garde practitioners about the significance of his work, and Scharoun, influenced by philosophers such as Buber, Gebser and Heidegger and the theoretical treatises of Häring, tried throughout his career to give intellectual clarity and articulation to the body of thought behind his architecture.

Of all the resemblances between Gehry and Scharoun the most profound and significant encompass their highly similar viewpoint on architecture, and the principles that inform their approach to architecture. As underlying premises they constitute more of a belief system rather than a normative, theoretical framework. Such a framework, as will be seen later, would be antithetical to their viewpoint and process of design. As fundamental propositions these premises can be summed up as follows:

- the strong commitment to the pursuit of architecture as an art, an art that is enmeshed with life; as such it has a social and cultural responsibility, and it's role is

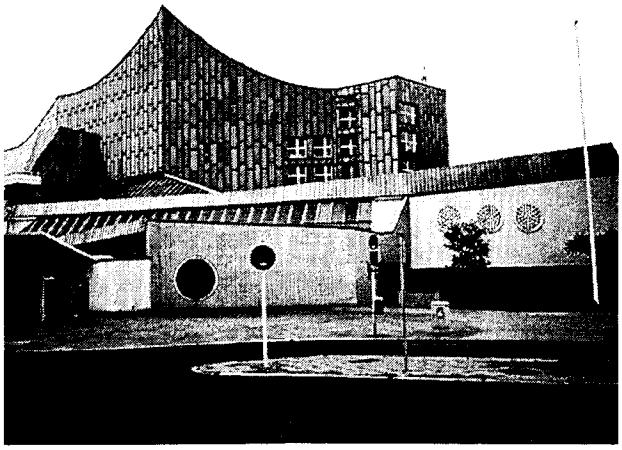

Fig. 1. West side of the Philharmonic Hall showing the main entry on the left, parts of the foyer, and the walls of the concert hall. Photo: Oliver Radford.

to explore and give tangible presence and meaning to societal issues, in particular the role of the individual, and the individual's place and relationship to the community in a highly pluralistic, democratic world.

- that, as an art, architecture speaks to our whole being, to our affective as well as our cognitive faculties; the senses, body, mind and spirit. Viewed by both Gehry and Scharoun as creative discourse, it sees art and utility, imagination and intellect, not as polar irreconcilable opposites, but as a productive synthesis , and attempts to engage the perceiving subject in this discourse by transforming him/her from a passive spectator into an active participant.
- As an art, a creative and phenomenological process, architecture is for both Scharoun and Gehry an open-ended process of exploration and inquiry. Architectonic solutions, their significance, their form and order, are derived from the particulars of the task at hand. They are not the result of a preordained and imposed aesthetic, theoretical or typological construct, or predetermined canon of form or geometric order. Their meaning is found as it is given expression in the latent reality of the idiosyncratic function and particular circumstances of the project, its "place" and location; a reality that is revealed as the existing is transformed; a reality that, by definition, reflects the heterogeneous complexity of our existence.

These principles are clearly manifest in all of their mature work, but are most evident in their institutional commissions. At a time when the relationship between the individual and the community has become highly dynamic, multifaceted and interactive due to the rising importance of the individual, what constitutes community and how to represent it architecturally has become increasingly unclear and difficult to define. Both Scharoun and Gehry have taken on this challenge in a thoughtful and highly innovative manner which is one of the foremost reasons for the unorthodox, "iconoclastic" appearance of their buildings.

Two Specific Examples

Art institutions, in particular, play a significant role in the development of Scharoun's and Gehry's work and their approach to architecture. (Gehry is currently working on a major art museum and a large concert hall; Scharoun advanced his thoughts and ideas by entering a number of concert hall and theater competitions after the war.) This is the case not only because art institutions are typically at the forefront of societal change, but because they most ideally allow both architects to explore their conception of architecture and the process through which it becomes reality: architecture as an art that directly engages life, not merely represents it; that engenders the individual in a creative and meaningful discourse with the community, and society at large.

How Scharoun and Gehry have realized this issue through specific, architectonic means, based on a similar viewpoint and approach to architecture (albeit modified by the circumstances and means of their time, the particulars of the project and their personality) is discussed in the following via two examples, buildings that are emblematic for their work: Scharoun's Philharmonic Hall in Berlin and Gehry's Weisman Art Museum on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota.

The Philharmonic Hall, the home of the world-famous Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, was Scharoun's largest commission and is the building that made him famous. Scharoun received the commission after he won the competition for its design in 1956. The building was officially inaugurated in 1963 when Scharoun was already 74 years old. Between 1984 and 1987, after Scharoun's death, the originally planned Hall for Chamber Music was added by one of Scharoun's former collaborators.

The building is located in what used to be the former Tiergarten, an area near the then East German border and the old center of Berlin that was devastated by World War II. The Philharmonic Hall was the first building of a newly planned cultural forum that now also includes the National Gallery by Mies van der Rohe, the State Library by Scharoun, and other museum and institutional buildings. The forum was intended as a symbolic gesture: To be part of the center of a hopefully reunited, future Berlin. The site was a complete wasteland with the exception of the exception of the church of St. Matthew's which had survived the war. Scharoun's masterplan for the whole forum was only partially realized in its original form.

The exterior of the building is dominated by the massive, central volume of the hall, whose walls rise up like a cliff. Grouped around it in a seemingly improvised manner, and attached to the main mass like "lean-to's" via sloping glass skylights and metal roofs, are a series of polygonal volumes containing the foyer and ancillary spaces. Their forms dissolve into a multiplicity of colliding, intersecting planes, opaque and transparent surfaces, that constantly shift as one moves around the building. A clear, perceptible, overall order or "whole" does not emerge. This is re-enforced by the disparate variety of windows and openings, ranging from horizontal louvered window bands to round windows punched openings, square windows and whole glass facades, reflecting the

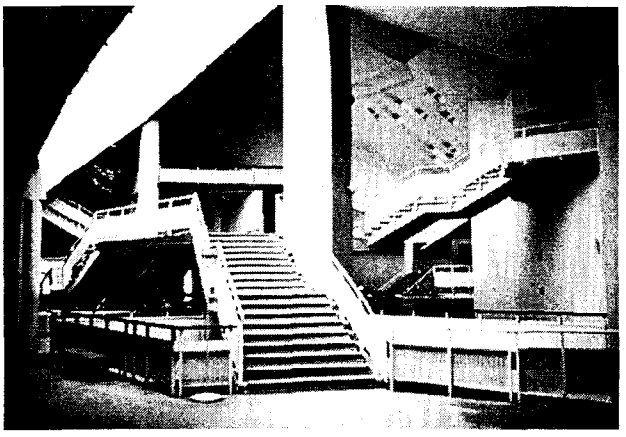

Fig. 2. Foyer on the upper level with large skylight and entries to various seating sections. Photo: Andrzej Piotrowski.

idiosyncratic nature of the functions they correspond to within.

One enters the building on the west side off the sidewalk through a simple, unpretentious entry and vestibule, that appears more like a side-entry or the entry to a subway station than the entrance to a major institution. No major, architectural feature or grand gesture, like rising stairs or a monumental portico, marks the entrance, with the exception of a few round columns supporting a low concrete canopy overhead. It is clear that Scharoun saw entry more as a passage, a process of transformation than a threshold, with the hall and the concert as the ultimate experience and climax at the end.

From the vestibule one moves freely, not on any axis, slightly to the left as the space widens and increases in height, and explodes into the foyer. The foyer, surely, ranks among the most complex, spatial organizations ever conceived in Western architecture. Of a Piranesi-like quality, it is a labyrinth of stairs, bridges, over and underpasses, columns and piers, light-wells, changing and receding walls, and angled ceiling planes. There is no center or perceivable hierarchy. Nor is there a clearly defined perimeter; the constantly shifting walls either recede into dark areas, dematerialize in light due to their white surfaces, or dissolve into translucent, stained glass-block, or transparent glass altogether. There is only a series of idiosyncratic places and locations which are experienced from different points of view as one moves in and through the space. This idiosyncrasy is reinforced by the varying placements, sizes and shapes of the structural elements, and disparate fixtures and patterns of lighting as they correspond to the particulars of each area. The only unifying elements are the exclusively plain, white stucco surfaces (whichalso vary in shading with the facing of the planes), and the continuous ribbon of staircase banisters which glow at night, lit by neon light tubing from underneath the handrails. Taken together these aspects reveal Scharoun's intention for the foyer as a democratic space: Highlighting the individual interactions within a heterogeneously forming community of likewise individuals as a prelude to the communal experience of the performance in the hall.

As Scharoun stated himself, he wanted to create a

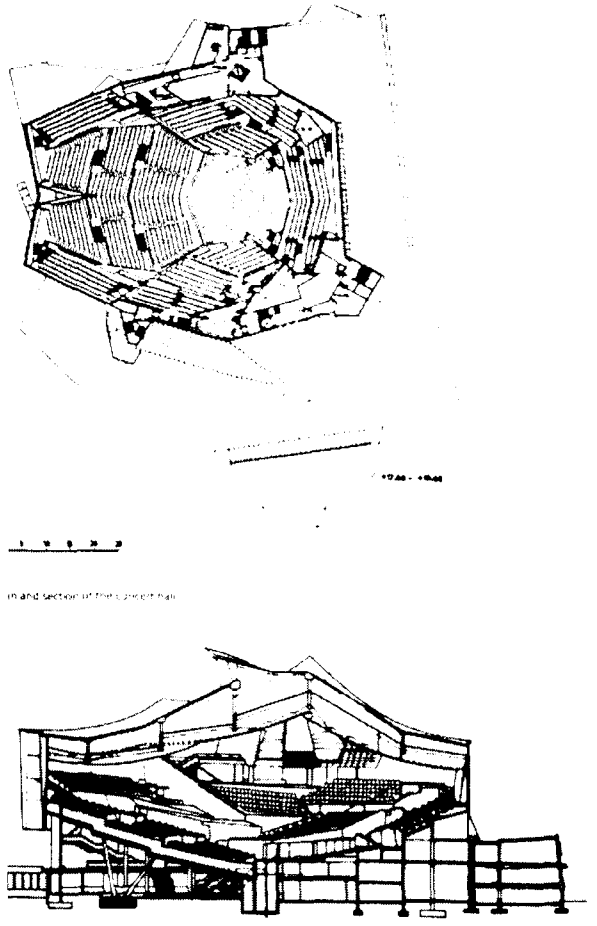

Fig. 3. Plan and section of the concert hall. The plan shows the seating arrangement, plus the roof outline of the foyer and ancillary spaces with the large skylight over the foyer, and the main entry (bottom). Plans, courtesy, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

"dynamic and tense relationship" between the foyer and the "festive calm" of the auditorium.[4] Yet, it was the revolutionary concept of the hall from which the design of the whole building originated. Conventional concert halls, primarily for acoustic reasons, are typically housed in a rectilinear volume, with the audience as a mass of anonymous listeners facing and confronting the orchestra with its conductor on a podium at the end of the hall. In the Philharmonic the never before realized concept was to have the audience surround the orchestra. The objective, though, was not merely pragmatic — to bring the listeners closer to the orchestra — it was also of a social nature. As Scharoun later explained it:

> *Music as the focal point: this was the keynote from the very beginning. [...] The orchestra and the conductor stand spatially and optically in the very middle and if this is not the mathematical center, nonetheless they are completely enveloped by their audience. Here you will find no segregation of 'producers' and 'consumers' but*

rather a community of listeners grouped around an orchestra in the most natural of all seating arrangements. [...] Here the creation and experience of music occur in a hall not motivated by formal aesthetics, but whose design was inspired by the very purpose it serves. Man, music and space come together in a new relationship.[5]

To realize the concept of "music in the round"[6] architecturally, Scharoun, as so often before, employed the metaphor of a landscape:[7] "The construction follows the pattern of a landscape, with the auditorium seen as a valley and there at its bottom is the orchestra surrounded by a sprawling vineyard climbing the sides of its neighboring hills. The ceiling, resembling a tent, encounters this 'landscape' like a 'skyscape' ..."[8]

While this metaphor eloquently describes the general layout of the hall in three-dimensional space, the visual, social and experiential quality is again, as in the foyer, the result of Scharoun's unique approach to architecture and heterogeneous conception of space. Although there is a symmetry axis that runs through the hall, necessitated by the symmetrical, semi-circular arrangement of the orchestra, it is disrupted in space by the irregularly shaped, sloping side terraces with their solid edges and walls that intersect and overlap in space at various heights. It is further strengthened by the fact that their raked rows of seats are not oriented towards the center of the hall, the conductor's podium, but shifted off center. This arrangement gives each terrace an autonomous, idiosyncratic identity, while at the same time a multiplicity of viewpoints that shift and slide as one moves through the hall. Though the rising ceiling unifies the space to some degree, it also enhances the strong sense of place of each terrace through its convex sections, its idiosyncratic patterns of recessed lights, seemingly randomly grouped, suspended lighting fixtures, and suspended, acoustical panels that seem to float through the space.

As in the foyer, the boundaries of the space are obscured or suppressed, either because the wall planes are reduced to insignificance or, on the sides where they become more prominent around the control room due to the rise of the ceiling, disrupted by a collage of irregular dark and light surfaces, and on the opposite side, displaced by the organ (Fig. 4). Thus, a coherent, homogeneous, geometric enclosure or whole is not perceivable. It places the emphasis onto the terraces, the individuals in the group, and the orchestra in the center. Since not only the musicians but almost every seat in the hall can be seen by each visitor, it creates not only a strong sense of community but also an intimate relationship between the individual, the musicians and the community of listeners. The high acoustic, visual and social quality of the hall combine to create a total, musical experience which, meanwhile, has achieved worldwide acclaim, as testified to not only by visitors, but also famous musicians and conductors.[9]

In comparison to Scharoun's Berlin Philharmonic, the Weisman Museum by Frank Gehry is a small building, though it has an equally powerful presence at its site on the University of Minnesota Minneapolis campus. The museum is named after Frederick R. Weisman, an alumnus

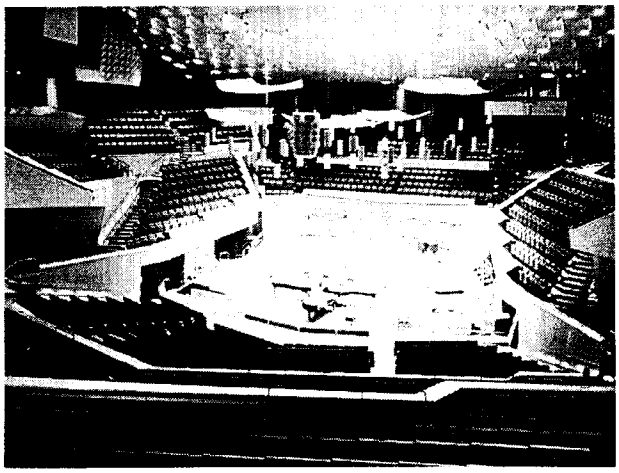

Fig. 4. Interior of the hall with the orchestra in the center, the seating terraces, the control room on the left and the organ on the right. Photo: Andrzej Piotrowski.

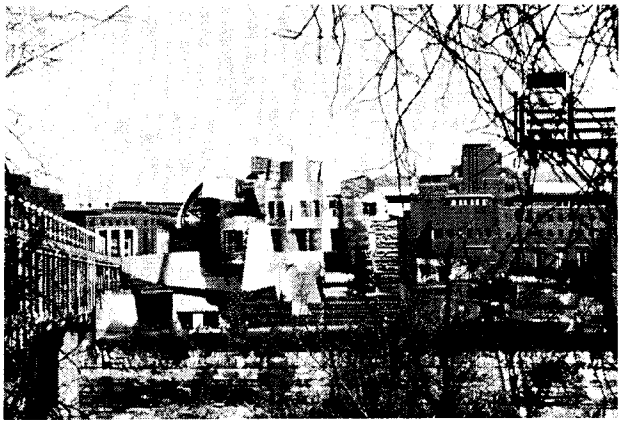

Fig. 5. Exterior of the Weisman Museum from the west, showing the bluffs of the Mississippi, the double-decker bridge on the left and eclectic mix of buildings on the east part of the campus. Photo: Warren Bruland.

and art collector whose donation (including part of his modern art collection) made it possible to build it. It opened in 1993, 30 years after the inauguration of the Berlin Philharmonic. It was Frank Gehry's first commission of an art museum from scratch, and is the first permanent home for its collection of some 15,000 artifacts, including major works by Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keefe.

The purpose of the museum is two-fold: to serve as a study center for scholars and teaching museum for students, and as meeting place between "town and gown" and resource for the community at large. Thus, the challenge was to find a site that not only was at the center of campus but was also strategically located so that it was easily accessible to the public and had a high visual presence within the metropolitan community of the Twin Cities.

The chosen site lies at the western edge of the main campus where the Mississippi separates the old eastern part from the newer western part and is crossed by a double-decker bridge which, on its lower level, contains a major vehicular artery, Washington Avenue, that serves

as the primary access to the campus and important link between Minneapolis and St. Paul, and on its upper level operates as a pedestrian bridge between the two sides of the campus. Tucked in and directly adjacent to the southeastern end of the bridge where it enters the main part of the campus, the site slopes steeply down to the river and on its northern edge is level with and connects to the pedestrian bridge (Fig. 5). On its east side, it extends into a plaza which on the south is bounded by the large and massive, dark brick Art Deco building of the Campus Union and, to the north, opens onto a formal, tree-lined mall, bounded by neo-classical buildings. Beyond the plaza, to the east, the context consists of an eclectic mix of traditional and modern brick buildings, including some concrete towers.

Gehry met the extraordinary challenge of the site not by trying to fit in, or emulating its architectural context, but responding to the particulars of its diverse and complex reality by transforming it, and making it explicit in the building. This is visible in the most prominent facade that faces the river. In its undulating and irregular, convex and concave shapes, partially generated from desired views up and down the river, the facade not only connects the building and campus vertically down to the river, but "rebuilds" the river bluffs, and through its "liquid," metal surfaces, echoes the river below. Through its fortress-like character it anchors the bridge and serves as a bridgehead and gateway to the east part of the campus. Yet, while it connects, it also separates itself from the context and creates a strong, idiosyncratic presence of its own. The sculpture of the dynamic forms, of solid and void, shade and shadow, is an icon for the building, symbolizing its function as a museum of art. The shiny, stainless steel surfaces reflect the sky and explode into a fiery spectacle of colors with the setting western sun, making the building stand out and visible even from downtown Minneapolis.

The building's appearance, as well as its scale, change as one moves around its sides. While the metal facade wraps around the corner to the north side, it fractures and dissolves into separate, curvilinear components: some as large overhanging canopies attached to the flat, but also metal-clad wall of the building; others envelope the walkway along the north facade and connect it to the pedestrian bridge. On the south-side the metal facade wraps around the corner but the undulating shapes transform into crisp, polygonal forms that are superimposed on a large, plain, terra-cotta colored brick wall in response to the, though darker, surrounding, brick buildings. This wall, though dramatically reduced in scale, also envelopes most of the north-side where the building faces the Union Plaza. There it is juxtaposed with the metal-clad north facade that wraps around the northeast corner, and the large, matte-gray lightwell structures that form the building's roof. As a consequence, each facade has its own idiosyncratic presence that responds to particular conditions of the surrounding context and, as will be seen later, its interior environment. Thus, the building can be perceived only from multiple points of view, denying a perspectival perception. Its logic or "whole" is assembled in the mind from multiple experiences and movement.

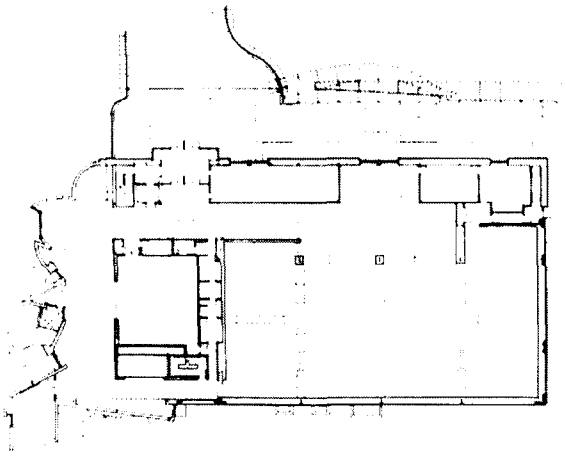

Fig. 6. Main gallery plan showing walkway, connection to double-decker bridge and public entry on the north side (top). The dotted lines indicate the irregular shapes of the superimposed lightwells over the walls and openings in the main gallery, and the overhanging metal canopies on the outside. Plan courtesy of Frank Gehry & Associates and Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle Ltd.

In spite of its visual and formal complexity, the functional layout and vertical organization of the building is quite straight forward and simple (Fig.6). The main floor contains most of the public space. A core, containing a multi-purpose room that can also be used as an auditorium, plus a number of ancillary spaces, divides the building into two zones. The western part is characterized by the undulating west wall with views to the Mississippi and the Minneapolis skyline, and through which it receives its light. Aside from exhibitions, it is also used for social functions. The eastern part contains the main galleries for permanent and temporary exhibitions. The thick walls that divide up the space, appear to be structural, but are actually movable. The gallery spaces are lit by a combination of natural light from lightwells (which can be closed) and artificial lighting from above and the floor. The north wall is lined with the museum store and curatorial spaces. A mezzanine floor above the core contains administrative and curatorial offices, and extends via a bridge on the north side over the store and curatorial spaces to house the elaborate, mechanical and electrical support systems. The three floors below the main level contain art storage, workshops, technical support functions and parking.

As one approaches the entry along the walkway that connects the bridge with the plaza along the north side of the building, one essentially "enters" the museum because of the partial enclosure created by the overhead metal canopies and the solid railing of the walkway. Coming from the east, a big window provides a first look into the museum.

Upon entering through the vestibule and the "thick" wall with the store a surprising phenomenon occurs: a bright, vertical space opens up (approximately 36 feet high), flooded with daylight that bounces off its white surfaces, of a scale and height that is totally in contradiction

Fig. 7. Interior of the high, long gallery space running from west to east through the museum. View from the east. Photo: Warren Bruland.

with one's expectations from the outside. It runs east-west almost completely through the whole museum and seems to continue through the window on the west side to the Minneapolis skyline. The space is bounded and articulated by a heterogeneous panoply of architectonic elements: Walls, overhanging ceiling planes, positive and negative volumes, truss-like-forms, slanting cylindrical forms and rectangular skylights, that are juxtaposed, superimposed, or intersect. As one moves along from west to east the perception constantly changes, one appears to be constantly "in-between" in a space bounded by planes and surfaces, or in-between objects; in a space de-materialized by light and white surfaces, or re-materialized through volumetric forms and architectonic elements; on the "inside," and simultaneously on the "outside," like in a street.

This pattern and phenomenon also extends to the other galleries that one enters from this space, though it occurs in different form. As the plan (Fig.6) indicates the galleries seem to be traditional, rectilinear rooms bounded by thick walls and connected by openings in the walls. Together with the uniformly horizontal ceiling plane (approximately 22 feet above), and unified by the continuity of all-white surfaces, a sense of a conventional

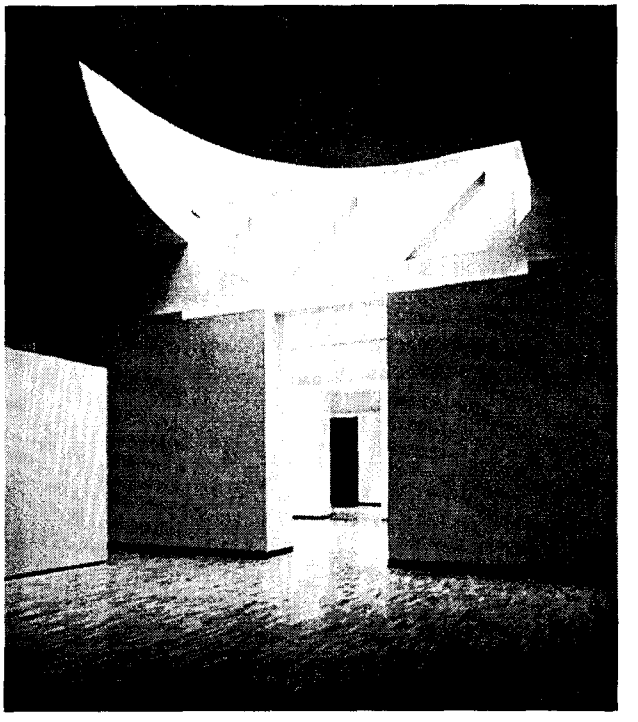

Fig. 8. Interior of main galleries with exposed truss fragment and lightwell above. View is diagonally through wall openings from the southwest corner to the northeast (see plan, Fig. 6). Photo: Jeff Wheeler.

gallery enclosure begins to emerge (Fig. 8). However, this perception is countered by a number of seemingly, contradictory, architectonic moves of form, space and light. The enclosing walls do not rise all the way up to the ceiling, they stop approximately five feet below the ceiling with a sharp edge before they continue up to the ceiling. Hidden from view in the recess is cove-lighting that washes up vertically and, thus, "disconnects" the ceiling from the walls. Together with the openings it reduces the walls to "thick wall sections" or partitions. This is reinforced by the fact that the continuity of the walls is disrupted over the openings by exposing fragments of the trusses that support the ceilings and the roof, and brightly lit, curvilinear, spatial volumes that are in stark contrast with the darker ceiling and seem to dissolve in light. Spatially, as they "jump" over the truss fragments, they both, separate, and simultaneously connect, the galleries with each other.

As the plan reveals, the big lightwells that provide natural light to the galleries are superimposed over the openings in order to minimize the incidence of direct, natural light on the walls and the artwork. This bathes the trusses in light and elevates the openings with the trusses to "monumental" thresholds or gateways, further disrupting the continuity of the space by "re-materializing" the opening into a strong, figurative, architectonic element. As a result, a juxtaposition emerges between architectonic space and architectonic form, placing the perceiving subject into an ambiguous state of "in-between". As one moves through the spaces the views constantly shift with the changing juxtapositions, as do

the perceptions. As the plan further shows, the lightwells are not consistently placed over every opening (in one instance actually over the intersection of two walls), nor are they of identical shape or geometry, therefore no coherent pattern or order becomes apparent. In each case they subvert, through their idiosyncrasies, the geometric order and sense of "whole" created by the walls and the ceiling, and help create a unique array of special "places" in the continuity of space.

As the plan further indicates, the openings in the walls do not form a traditional enfilade, but are lined up diagonally. Thus, the perception of one's place in space changes, depending on one's position and view: From depth articulated by layers of receding planes making the museum appear larger than it actually is, to the immediacy of spatial enclosure, to the idiosyncrasy of particular places created through natural light and/or architectural form.

The unique quality of the architectural experience, and the heightened interactive relationship between the individual and the architecture, generated by the juxtapositions and superpositions of space, form and light, has been born out by the enthusiastic reception the building has received from the visitors and critics alike. It, still, begs the obvious question whether these complex, architectonic strategies are also beneficial to the display of art? The answer to this question is positive. Gehry's space/form conception, by emphasizing the particulars of place and form over the continuity and coherence of the whole, lets the work of art come forward and assert its own idiosyncrasy. This is true, certainly, for the larger, more prominent pieces. The flexible lighting system that provides for closing off the skylights and changing the ambient lighting quality through the cove and recessed lights in the ceiling, plus the potential to highlight particular areas from spots in the ceiling or off the floor, makes it possible to adjust the conditions also to smaller, more intimate works of art. Gehry, thus, has achieved a creative synthesis between art and architecture; one where architecture enhances the experience of art, rather than interferes with it, or is rendered mute to anonymous, neutral background.

CONCLUSION:
Comparative Analysis of Major Concepts

The Individual, Society and the Institution

Our world is undergoing radical change forcing society to become increasingly more heterogeneous, pluralist and democratic. What began with the emancipation of the individual, triggered by the industrial revolution, is accelerated exponentially by what is called the information revolution, profoundly changing and transforming our sense and understanding of community. And with it, it is quite literally exploding the static, one-dimensional relationship between the individual and the community into one that is dynamic, multi-dimensional, interactive, and constantly in flux, like a forever changing kaleidoscope. What constitutes "community" and stands for it is not predetermined anymore. It is being defined and structured as it is being created, or comes into being, as is the idiosyncratic relationship between individual and community.

These radical changes form a serious challenge to society's institutions, since they, in the most immediate and visible way, embody the community and their very purpose is to engender stability. Thus, they tend towards stasis and are resistant to change. For architecture, the changes present an equally challenging issue. Just as the nature and meaning of the contemporary institution in a more pluralistic and democratic society have come into question so have the building types and forms that were representative of them. Neither Rational Functionalism, late Modernism, or Post-Modernism, if for different reasons, were ultimately able to come up with satisfactory solutions to the issue.

The prevailing building type that still reverberates through much of today's architecture dates back to the 19th century. Inspired by classical architecture its intention was to represent community by monumentalizing it, using formal, axial layouts, pure, geometric building forms, perspectival space, a classical canon of architectural elements, and grand scale. The purpose of this kind of architecture was, through its aesthetic and scale, to engender both awe and pride in the individual as a member of the community. The buildings represented the power and achievements of institutionalized society to which the individual was subordinate as subject.

Meaning, as both Scharoun and Gehry would assert, cannot be created or constructed, it is uncovered and evolves. Neither, to use modern linguistic terms, is meaning the result of syntactic structure as Rational Functionalism thought, nor just semantics, as Post-Modernism believed, but dependent on both. But these aspects are not the problem, they are only the symptoms.

At issue is not merely how to express meaning through appropriate imagery or contemporary, architectonic means, but it centers on a re-definition, and thus also physical re-ordering, of the perceiving subject and the building as representational object in response to the changed, and changing, relationship between the individual and the community. It involves a shift from the traditional juxtaposition and dominance of the object - as manifest in the traditional, institutional building type - to a more inclusive, experiential and participatory interaction between subject and object; one that explores representational and symbolic aspects as part of the subject's individual and communal identity. Because the relationship between the individual and the community in contemporary society is no longer static, but dynamic, pluralist and highly idiosyncratic, it becomes an issue, an ongoing, open-ended question.

Conversely, there can be no fixed, predetermined, architectonic solution in the form of a universal model or type, aesthetic canon of form, or geometric order. *Each solution, by definition, has to be idiosyncratic.* Furthermore, as anyone even vaguely familiar with a computer knows, we exist at any moment in a nexus of shifting, juxtaposed adjacencies of space and time. What is far can be near, what is adjacent very distant; what is inside, simultaneously outside. Or, to say it with Foucault, we live in a heterotopic world.[10]

Both Gehry and Scharoun are conscious of these conditions. They are integral to their approach to

architecture: Architecture as an art, a creative discourse between the subject and the building object; solutions derived from the inherent nature of the task at hand and the diverse particulars of the site and it's context; design as a phenomenological process of exploration and interpretation, revealing reality as it transforms.

If the above mentioned fundamental societal issues — the heightened role of the individual, and the individual's dynamic and pluralistic relationship to the community, and the heterotopic nature of our existence — are responsible for the congruency between Scharoun and Gehry in their approach to architecture, it is logical that they inform the architectural means employed by each architect and are, at least to some degree, reflected in an array of similarities in the physical expression and form of their work. These aspects can be summarized under the general categories of: response to context; conception of space, form, order and light; and attitude towards structure, materials, and detailing.

Transforming Context

Both Scharoun and Gehry have often been criticized for their, supposedly, anti-contextual approach; the creation of autonomous, idiosyncratic object-buildings that as personal expressions, are unrelated to their surrounding context. Though this is understandable because their work appears to be deliberately outside the mainstream, it is the result of a simplistic misreading. It is based on the unquestioned assumption that context means a homogeneous, harmonious order to which a new building should adapt and which it should extend. It is clear from the above discussion that this oversimplifies the reality of the world and its heterogeneous complexity. Contrary to common belief, both Gehry and Scharoun do respond to both, the existing and latent forces, physical and symbolic, of the surrounding environment, and make them explicit in their work. The function and inherent nature of the new building they see as an integral part of this context. Rather than accommodating to context, they are creating context as they transform it. To impose an "external" form or order would be antithetical to their premises and approach. As Jeff Kipnis has observed, Gehry's work, (and also Scharoun's) is not expressionist or neo-expressionist but transformative. "[It is] not about idiosyncratic individuality against the anonymous background of standard types of community, it is about a new community constructed out of idiosyncrasies."[11]

A-perspectival Space and Heterotopic Form and Order

The contextual misreading of Scharoun's and Gehry's architecture is amplified by the misunderstanding of the architectonic form, order and expression of their work, primarily from its outward appearance but also its spatial organization. It is characterized - and dismissed - as irrational, formalistic, personal and often, as self-indulgent. In Scharoun's case it refers to the polymorphous "sculptural" assembly of seemingly autonomous volumes, intersecting planes and disparate architectonic elements such as windows, skylights, roofs and staircases. In Gehry's case it refers to the sense of movement generated by curvilinear forms, the seemingly, mannerist distortion of rectilinear volumes and planes, and the stark juxtapositions of space, form and light, disparate materials and surfaces, and non-identical architectonic components.

Perhaps the most remarkable resemblance between Scharoun and Gehry, considering that it developed half a century apart, if for somewhat different reasons, is their attitude and conception of space, which could best be described as a-perspectival. For Scharoun space had special significance and meaning: Space rather than form, and space generated from the notion of place, event, and human consciousness. In the development of his a-perspectival space conception he was influenced early on by his mentor Hugo Häring and the ideas of cubism, and after the war, the Swiss cultural philosopher Gebser. Häring equated progress of culture and the human spirit with the progression from "geometric" to "organic form"; geometric form (and by implication, fixed perspectival space) preexisted as order and, therefore, was imposed from outside, while organic form arose from within and therefore, was "open" and democratic in nature. Gebser in similar fashion, but as a result of the new conception of time developed by cubism, postulated that this progression occurred in stages from the un-perspectival to the perspectival from the Renaissance on) to the "a-perspectival" of our time, where time and space merge into a continuum.[12]

For Scharoun, space is not the negative vacuum within a solidly bounded, geometric volume. Space is not generated by physically enclosing it, but by giving tangible presence to places and locations in space. Its role is to engender activities and events rather than contain them. As Janofske has pointed out, for Scharoun space is a form of consciousness; it is phenomenally defined rather than materially.[13] Its purpose is to heighten the individual's consciousness and "place" in relation to the community of other individuals. It explains Scharoun's lifelong quest for a pluralist, democratic architecture.

It also explains Scharoun's a-perspectival conception and definition of space. Though it contains centers, there is no center; being in one place means being in others as well, visually and cognitively. The planes that ultimately bound space are the outcome of a search for form, not its input. Not only do they not follow any, by the intellect recognizable, and thus preexisting, geometric order or form, they often are also de-materialized through glass, white surfaces, or light. Since the boundaries disappear or recede, and a geometric whole is not perceivable, the perspective dissolves into multiple, but different points and viewpoints in space. A coherent order or "whole," though not present in the object form, is constructed cognitively in the mind of the perceiving individual through affective experience and movement, thus transforming the traditionally passive subject into an actively involved participant and partner in the dialogue with the architectonic object.

Frank Gehry's space/form concept, though perhaps less clearly driven by an explicitly articulated ideology, is informed by similar notions and objectives. Like Scharoun's, it is based on the 20th-century conception of space-time and simultaneity of viewpoints and experience, and thus, is essentially a-perspectival. But, as can be expected after another 50 years of development, it has

evolved to another level. While Scharoun's conception is still aimed at creating a multiplicity of places within the continuity of space, but not form, Gehry's is responding to a more heterotopic conception of space and time, signified by both disjuncture and shifting relationships. Hence not only the fragmentation of form and space, but also the ambiguity and tension between them. The sense of a-perspectivity occurs through idiosyncratic juxtapositions and superpositions of space, form, light, materials and scale, thereby constantly subverting any emerging sense of an intellectually perceptible, overall order or whole. It places the perceiving subject in a constant state of in-between: space and form, light and space, place and passage, inside and outside, whole and part, etc. As in Scharoun's case, this phenomenon heightens the individual's consciousness and generates a highly affective and interactive relationship with the architecture.

Suppression of Detail

Resemblances between Gehry and Scharoun exist also in their straightforward, pragmatic attitude towards structure, the use of materials, and detailing. Both view structure as a necessity that has to be dealt with, but it has no special significance for their architecture. Structural and tectonic elements are more often hidden and covered up, than visible. It is in character with their aim to obliterate any intellectually perceivable order and, thus, "whole" on the side of the architectonic object.

Gehry's exploration of mundane, industrial materials is already legendary, but Scharoun also did not feel that high quality architecture necessitates the use of precious materials. The same attitude applies to their sense of detail. Both consider details a means to an end and treat them in a matter-of-fact and ad-hoc kind of way. They fear that exaggerated and systemic attention to detail may lead to a self-serving aestheticism, push forward the object-quality and thus, distract from the architecture itself. As a consequence, Gehry's, and even Scharoun's buildings often have a look of improvisation and "unfinishedness" to them, reflecting also in this aspect the pluralist, process-oriented approach that both architects embrace.

The above discussed four categories of similarities - exploring the institution in society, transforming contexts, a-perspectival and heterotopic space, and the suppression of detail — all reveal a fundamentally phenomenological stance on the part of both architects. Art in their view is not something added to function and technology, but a means to clarify and make visible the complexity of our life and existence, and engage us in a creative discourse with the world around us.

This viewpoint clearly places both, Gehry and Scharoun outside the established conventions of architectural practice. Thus, their work is often characterized as "irrational" or "expressionistic." But neither Scharoun nor Gehry are iconoclasts. What is not understood are the understanding, logic and sophisticated premises from which their work evolves: the nature of contemporary society, and the role and responsibility architecture has within it.

While being outside the mainstream has not hindered Gehry's career — to the contrary, he has meanwhile achieved worldwide acclaim, including the Pritzker Prize of Architecture. Scharoun had to fight all his life for understanding and recognition. Being not part of the predominant movement of Rational Functionalism but critical of it as a member of the Organic Functionalism, or more commonlyExpressionism, his work was marginalized, if not altogether ignored, by the historians that shaped the history of Modern Architecture. If it were not for the Philharmonic Hall in Berlin, he probably would have remained little more than a footnote in the history of 20th-century architecture. Perhaps, in the afterglow of Gehry's success and the acquired historic distance, Scharoun's pioneering contribution to contemporary architecture will receive the recognition it deserves. It, certainly, is overdue.

NOTES

[1] Peter Blundell Jones, *Hans Scharoun* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1995), pp. 35-36.

[2] Acceptance by Frank O. Gehry in *The Pritzker Architecture Prize 1989, Frank Owen Gehry* (The Hyatt Foundation, 1990).

[3] quoted from an interview with Bill Lacy in: Bill Lacy, Susan de Menil, ed., *Angels & Franciscans; Innovative Architecture from Los Angeles and San Francisco* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992).

[4] Blumdell Jones, op. cit., p. 179.

[5] Ibid., p. 178.

[6] The power of this concept and innovative arrangement was immediately recognized by Herbert von Karajan, the renowned music director of the Philharmonic, who recommended Scharoun's competition entry strongly to the jury (cf. Blundell Jones, op. cit. p. 177). That this concept, despite it's difficulties, could be realized acoustically was the result of technological advancements in acoustics and the close cooperation between Scharoun and the acoustician Lothar Cremer (Ibid. pp. 182-183).

[7] For Scharoun the metaphor of landscape was of special significance. It relates to his ideal conception of architectural space that, like a landscape, is defined by "places" and "locations" in space instead of a geometric order or enclosure. For a more in-depth discussion of this cf. Eckehard Janofske, *Architektur Räume: Idee und Gestalt bei Hans Scharoun* (Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden, 1984).

[8] Bllundell Jones, op. cit., p. 178.

[9] cf. for instance Theodor Adorno, quoted in Janofske, op. cit. p. 134; or Pierre Boulez, quoted in Blundell Jones, op. cit., p. 221.

[10] cf. for instance his seminal essay: Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces (Diacritics, v. 16, no. 1, 1986).

[11] Charles Jencks, ed., *Frank O. Gehry: Individual Imagination and Cultural Conservatism* (London: Academy Editions, 1995).

[12] for a more detailed discussion cf. J. Christoph Bürkle, Hans Scharoun. Artemis Verlags – AG: Zürich. 1993. p. 29.

[13] for an in-depth treatment of Scharoun's conception of space, cf. Janofske, pp. 112-117.

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