

Building Images: Toward a Non-Dualistic Architecture

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Western culture has inherited and is struggling with a dualistic philosophical worldview that dates back roughly to the time of the Enlightenment, as typified by the French philosopher, René Descartes. Cartesian philosophy divides the world into the subjective and objective realms, and grounds our epistemological awareness in the personal, internal realm of pure thought, governed by pure reason, as typified by Descartes' most famous maxim, "*Cogito ergo sum*," I think, therefore I am."

As a result, our Cartesian heritage (at its worst) renders the objective world ultimately unknowable and devoid of value, accessible only through reason and subjective reflection. Contemporary science, which has recently begun to deconstruct the Cartesian split, nevertheless originally derived from Descartes' emphasis on reason as the sole means of knowing the world, and the objective methods of science were in some ways an attempt to bridge the gap between the subjective observer and the objective world. (The realization that those methods were flawed and ultimately relied on the underlying unity and interaction of the knower with the known has become the focus of much of the most recent theoretical work in contemporary physics, as exemplified by Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.)

In the field of architecture, Cartesian dualism culminated in the Modernist movement. The implications of the Cartesian influence on architecture are numerous, but we will mention here one of the core problems: our built environment, in striving for pure, ideal, (or what architect Walter Gropius called "complete") aesthetic structures that were essentially detached from the ecological world, had become sterile, stagnant, unnecessarily abstracted from the human condition, and

lacking in a sense of place. In short, Modernist structures failed to respond to their human or ecological context.

Criticizing the Modernist tradition, Karsten Harries challenges the validity of working toward the complete building:

Buildings should live. Only such a living architecture allows for genuine dwelling. We may dream of a house that can deliver us from the tensions that are part of our existence, of a house that grants us rest and peace. But such an environment means death. Life demands that the dream of the complete building remain unrealized.¹

Harries' argument suggests that Modernism's desire for abstract perfection leads ultimately toward stagnation, and that architecture must find a way to conceive of structures that remain connected to the imperfect but generative flow of the organic and human world.

Obviously, the foregoing discussion is by necessity a simplification of the subtleties and complexity of the Modern Movement. The efforts of Modernism were heroic and sometimes successful, especially as it de-stratified Western social hierarchy. To the extent that Modernism is being criticized here, it is in the service of responding to its mistakes and working toward a better architectural future. Modernism is important for us now because we are living in its wake; by understanding, in Hegelian terms, from whence the pendulum swings, we can understand where we are going, instead of simply swinging wildly away from Modernism.

TOWARD A NON-DUALISTIC AESTHETIC RESPONSE

In the wake of the implicit failure of Cartesian dualism, Western culture has been searching for a new paradigm that will address the split between the mind and the world, a paradigm with enough energy and promise to speak to the needs of the culture. Perhaps most prominently, the philosopher Martin Heidegger has addressed the problems of the Cartesian worldview by returning to what he views as the original insight of pre-Socratic Greek thinking: there is a primordial ontological unity between subject and object, a mutual participation and connection that both grounds subjective thought in the material world and at the same time reveals that the objective world is, *á priori*, infused with meaning and value.

Heidegger's original term for this fundamental ontological unity was "*Dasein*", in English "there-being", implying that the human being is always grounded in a physical place, and our Cartesian sense of a private subjectivity is actually artificially extracted from our essential grounding in the world. In contrast to Cartesian philosophy, Heidegger suggests that one is not authentically present when one attempts to step back in order to rationally or objectively view the world. Our most genuine presence always derives from *being there*; that is, being is composed of a place and a time. Seen in this light, Being is not an infinite state and thereby indefinite, vague, or vacuous. For Heidegger, Being is immediately present and specific: present to this time and specific to this place. The implications for architecture are myriad, but for our purposes, the central insight to be found in Heidegger's work is the idea that meaning does not derive from an interior human subjectivity, to be arbitrarily imposed on a meaningless landscape, but rather emerges from our primordial ontological relationship with the stuff of our world. *Thus, architecture can respond to the world not merely as landscape, but also as dreamscape, the source of our imagination and the ground of all meaning and value.*

No less than Heidegger, the psychologist and culture-critic James Hillman, neo-Jungian theorist and proponent of "archetypal psychology", has articulated a non-dualistic paradigm that addresses the philosophical, aesthetic, architectural, ecological, and psychological problems of Cartesian dualism.² Hillman's root metaphors — "*psyche*" (or 'soul'), "*imagination*" and "*anima mundi*" (or 'soul-of-the-world') — are markedly similar to Heidegger's description of *Dasein* in that Hillman is attempting to describe the non-dualistic ontological and epistemological connection between human subjectivity and the objective physical world. In fact, both Heidegger and Hillman draw on the pre-Socratic Greek

philosophy of Heraclitus, who many contemporary philosophers agree represents the non-dualistic Greek philosophical tradition that existed prior to the beginnings of dualism in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.³ For Hillman, the *psyche*, or soul, is an ontological field that connects the human imagination with the images of the world. In Hillman's writings, both the objects of the physical world and the supposedly "internal" thoughts of the human mind are both images in the *psyche*, which acts as a mediating factor, bridging and infusing the subjective and the objective realms. In summarizing Hillman's work, the philosopher Roberts Avens writes:

The curative or salvational vision of archetypal psychology focuses upon the soul *in* the world as the soul *of* the world. The Gnostic soul has a decidedly non-human orientation: it does not belong to man; rather, man belongs to the soul or is in the soul.⁴

This notion of a trans-human imagination is relevant to architectural design in that it addresses (in contrast to the Modern empiricist scientific methodology) not *what* we can know but the *way* in which we come to know the world through imagination. Further it speaks directly to a philosophy of aesthetics. Toward this end, Hillman's work seeks to orient us in relation to the world around us: the geography of our personal soul in relation to the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world. That is, soul does not merely reside in humanity, to be projected out into the world, as in anthropomorphization; rather, humanity is a part of the soul in the world. Of our Western legacy of dualism in relation to the imagination, Hillman makes the following comment:

[Dualistic] notions abetted the murder of the world's soul by cutting apart the heart's natural activity into sensing facts on one side and intuiting fantasies on the other, leaving us images without bodies and bodies without images, an immaterial subjective imagination severed from an extended world of dead objective facts. But the heart's way of perceiving is both a sensing and an imagining: to sense penetratingly we must imagine, and to imagine accurately we must sense.⁵

When we imagine humanity as not the only source of soul but an integral aspect of the world soul, we are re-oriented, which has a profound effect on the source and quality of the imagination. Hillman's root metaphor, "the thought of the heart", speaks directly toward connecting us with the world. Hillman gives us insight into how we can psychologically position ourselves in the world, to be put back in our place.

Instead of viewing the world from an “objective,” rational vantage point, the seat of our perception should be the “heart.” From a dualistic perspective, the heart is either emotional (the source of my subjective feelings) or biological (a mechanical pump with no psychological significance). In contrast, from a non-dualistic perspective, the heart is not set off from the world, either as the seat of subjective emotion or as an objectified machine, but rather is attuned to the world as the organ of imaginative perception, of our receptivity to the world and our participation in it. Hillman cites Aristotle as the original source of this perspective on the heart:

In Aristotelian psychology, the organ of *aisthesis* is the heart; passages from all sense organs run to it; there the soul is “set on fire”. Its thought is innately aesthetic and sensately linked with the world.⁶

Hillman is saying that to reconnect with the world is to have an aesthetic response to it. Our most primary and innate reaction to the world is an aesthetic one. That is, our aesthetic sense is *a priori* to what it means to be human, and our aesthetic sense derives from the heart, as the metaphorical organ that breathes the world’s soul in and sets it on fire.

Implied here is the idea that thinking with the “head,” that is, with reason devoid of imagination, is restrictive, incomplete, and inherently abstracted from the more engaged participation with the world that the heart provides. As the poet W.B. Yeats writes in “A Prayer for Old Age,” “God guard me from those thoughts men think/ In the mind alone;/ He that sings a lasting song/ Thinks in a marrow bone.”⁷

In other words, our active participation in beauty depends on using Hillman’s thinking heart. The thought of the heart is to let our passion and imagination fuse with our sense perception. To think through the heart is to have readiness for wonder, to gasp at the world in its presentation. In Greek, this way of perceiving is called *aisthesis*. Hillman writes:

This link between the heart and the organs of sense is not simple mechanical sensationalism; it is aesthetic. That is, the activity of perception or sensation in Greek is *aisthesis*, which means at root “taking in” and “breathing in”—a “gasp,” that primary aesthetic response.⁸

Further, Hillman argues that aesthetics is not restricted to certain activities, such as sightseeing, or certain disciplines, such as art or music. Rather, each act of

perception is aesthetic, a breathing-in of the world in each moment as it presents itself:

By beauty we do not mean beautifying, adornments, decorations. We do not mean aesthetics as a minor branch of philosophy concerned with taste, form, and art criticism...nor can beauty be held in museums, by maestros at the violin, a profession of artists. Indeed we must cleave beauty altogether away from art, art history, art objects, art appreciation, art therapy. These are each positivisms: that is, they posit beauty in an instance of it; they position *aisthesis* in aesthetic events such as beautiful objects.⁹

Beauty is appearance itself, in the presented image of the thing. In contrast with the Platonic Ideas (the concept of a pure or transcendent ideal which can be extracted from each living thing, e.g.: the chair-ness of a chair), from Hillman’s perspective the “face” of each being is its own essential image as a part of the larger world soul.

Here begins phenomenology: in a world of ensouled phenomena. Phenomena need not be saved by grace of faith or all-embracing theory, or by scientific objectiveness or transcendental subjectivity. They are saved by the *anima mundi*, by their own soul and our simple gasping at this imaginal loveliness.¹⁰

Thus, each image exists for its own sake and is innately imbued with its own soul.

Implicit in this discussion is the idea of multiplicity. That is, Being is not monotheistic and transcendent, but polytheistic and immanent, present in each event in its particularity:

Awareness of Being can be recovered by re-directing attention to the center which is everywhere i.e., by realizing that there are many centers and that Being is wholly and indiscriminately present in each one of them. Each center—every thing and being—is a potential source of meaning.¹¹

THE UNIVERSAL IN THE PARTICULAR

György Doczi, in *The Power of Limits*, studies a range of organisms, from the very simple to the very complex, and demonstrates that all share an underlying proportional order, which is referred to as the golden mean. For example, in his analysis, we find that phenomena ranging from the proportion of a frog skeleton, root musical harmonies, and light vibrations radiating from

the center of a lamp all share the same proportional anatomy.

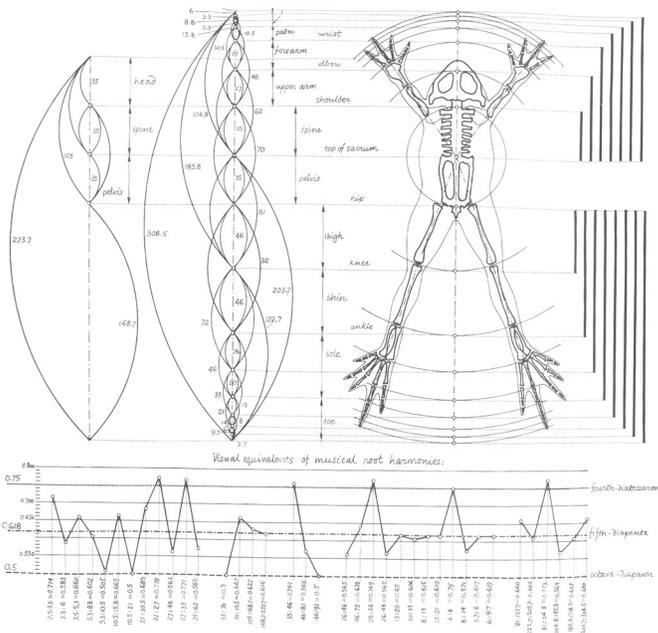


Figure 1. György Doczi, *The Power of Limits*.¹²

His study is relevant to our discussion because it is an empirical demonstration of our anatomical sharing, our connection with all other objects rising from earth. Further, if a connection exists between human physical anatomy and the anatomy of other things of earth, can we extend our questioning to bear on how our imagination relates to the world? Despite our physical connection with the world, is our imagination somehow isolated from it? Or, is there a fundamental relationship between our imagination and the things of the world? Doczi writes:

The basic pattern-forming processes of nature, which have shaped the human hand and mind, *can* continue to guide whatever the hand and mind are shaping, when the hand and mind are true to nature.¹³

Doczi is reminding us that our design process can be in harmony with nature our minds are formed by the same patterns to which we are responding: as without, so within.

Lynda Lowe is an artist who explores the nature of perception. Her work takes the theory of Doczi one step further by presenting images of our scientific intellect (i.e. mathematical relationships and geometry) with representations of nature. For example, in her painting series, *Book of Commons*, Lowe blurs the distinction between our ordered intellectual perception and our

intuitive sense of the world. She never leaves the sensate world to show the imaginal, and in doing this she illustrates that those worlds are in fact identical. Of her work, the artist says the following:

Surrounding any given image or subject of investigation, there is a field of possible interpretation. The perceived 'something' is always in the middle of other frames of reference that lend it significance. I am interested in the way that interpretation follows these many tangled routes. As perceptions are processed, an intertwined matrix of meaning is formed, one that is paradoxically rational and irrational, from the soul and from the mind.¹⁴

The following two images are from a series of paintings by Linda Lowe entitled, *The Book of Commons*.

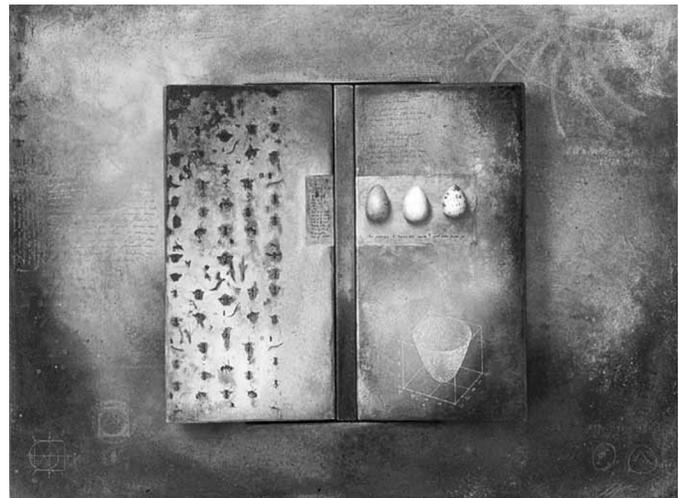


Figure 2. Lynda Lowe, *Book of Commons: Origin*. Painting

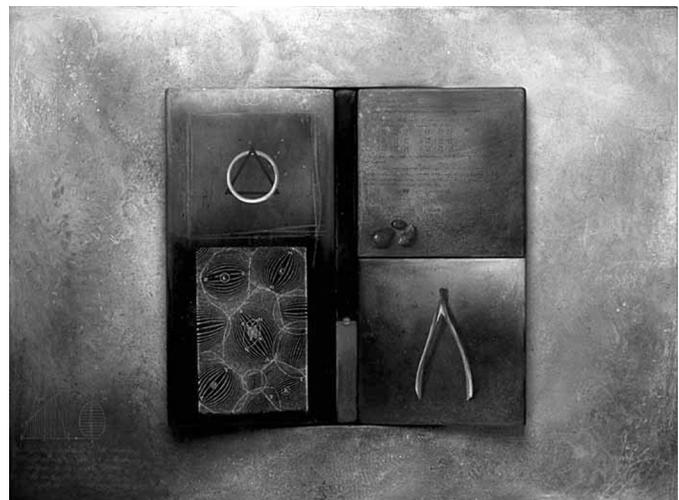


Figure 3. Lynda Lowe, *Book of Commons: Wishbone*. Painting

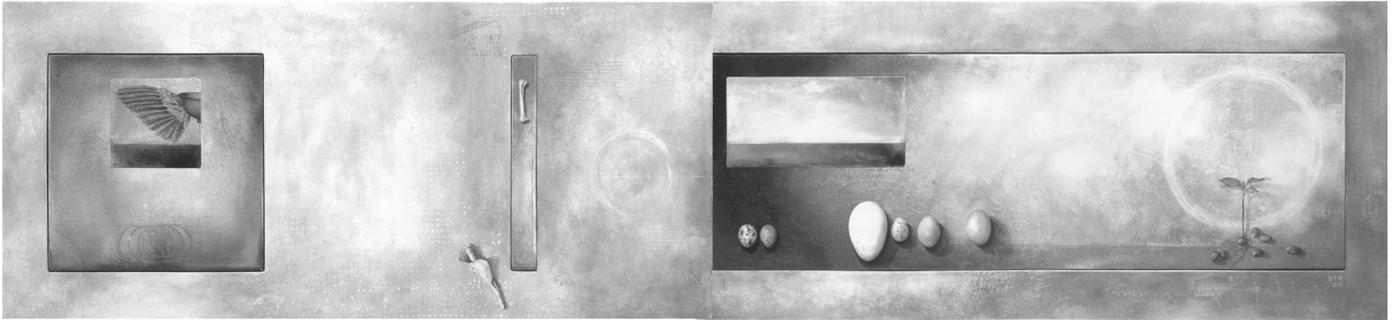


Figure 4. Lynda Lowe, *Release*. Painting.

Lowe's work is expressive of her design process. She moves between scientific and artistic images, which is suggestive of a give-and-take between our intuition and the outside world. Furthermore, it says something about perception and meaning-making. For example, in *Release* (Figure 4), Lowe presents multiple frames of perception, moving from literally natural objects such as eggs and bones, to more impressionistic images suggestive of deeper layers of meaning. Instead of merely presenting objects to the viewer, Lowe paints the metaphorical space between the subject and object, thereby blurring the boundary between the two.

Lowe's paintings are exemplary in bridging the chasm between the mind and the world; between art and science; and between analysis and poetry. Without intuition and poetry, the scientific mind stagnates and becomes concrete. By the same token, art becomes irrelevant if it does not address the lived realities of the physical world. Lowe's work is a bridge that allows a reunion between our artificial modern dualities.

IMAGINATION

James Hillman offers a way of conceptualizing imagination as the unity between the mind and the world through the classical idea of the *anima mundi*, or soul-of-the-world:

We need further explanation of the *anima mundi*:

...Let us imagine the *anima mundi* as that particular soul-spark, that seminal image, which offers itself through each thing in its particular form. Then *anima mundi* indicates the animated possibilities presented by each thing as it is, its sensuous presentation as a face bespeaking its interior image-in short, its availability to imagination, its presence as psychic reality.¹⁵

By being aware of the soul in the world is to have reawakened our aesthetic reaction to it.

Thus, Hillman would say that Lowe is presenting the "soul-spark", the animating image that lies in each of the objects she paints, or what Wallace Stevens calls "the poem at the center of things."

As the work of Doczi and Lowe implies, one implication of a non-dualistic approach to imagination is the idea that images are not "formed" by the mind, arising from an unknown source "inside" the subject. Rather, images are seen to arise from the world itself. Each event is an image, and the operation of the subjective level of imagination is not so much forming the image as it is "deforming" it. The French philosopher of imagination, Gaston Bachelard, writes:

Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of *forming* images. But it is rather the faculty of *deforming* the images, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images; it is especially the faculty of *changing* the images.¹⁶

This idea implies that the imagination is not above or beyond the immediacy of the sensate world. When the human imagination is most relevant, it draws on images from outside itself for its inspiration. As Hillman quotes Sendivogius, "the greater part of the soul is outside the body."¹⁷

THE HOUSING OF BEING

The word "architecture" is derived from the Greek roots *archai* and *tekton*. The *archai* in Greek thought were the original, essential forms, not transcendent or abstracted in the Platonic sense, but (as Hillman suggests) constituting the world-soul, which is present and immanent in things. *Tekton* (akin to the root *technos*, from which we derive our words "technique" and "technology") refers to the art, craft, and skills that build and make manifest the *archai*, the essential forms. The implication is that architecture cannot divorce these forms from their artful embodiment in craft. Architec-

ture is neither one nor the other alone: neither disembodied ideas nor arbitrarily constructed physical forms. In a non-dualistic architecture the physical form and the archetypal form are simultaneously present. The built form must embody both in order to be both temporally present and yet eternal. The poet William Blake speaks directly to this idea: "Eternity is in love with the productions of time."¹⁸

Architecture is in a unique position to effectively undertake the burden of actualizing a non-dualistic philosophy. Buildings enclose us and are a direct metaphorical manifestation of Being itself. *Architecture is a psychological enclosure for our conscious awareness of Being; or rather, architecture is an enclosure that is our consciousness itself.* It is our consciousness made visible, and a place where imagination is manifested in the seemingly mundane world of our everyday lives.

Within the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein*, as within Hillman's notion of soul, there exists a relationship between humans and space that is fundamental. Heidegger imagines a building as a poetic bridge, a hermeneutic presence that creates both spatial and poetic relationships and mediates between humanity and the world: it connects us to something outside ourselves, thus rendering the place and ourselves more present and unified. Through this metaphorical map-making, we can poetically orient ourselves in relation to other phenomena, which brings us down to earth thereby reinforcing our *á priori* relationship with space.

Heidegger uses the example of a bridge as a metaphor for architecture's relationship with earth: the banks on either side of a bridge exist, in a sense, because a bridge connects and creates the dialectic between them. Simultaneously, the bridge has "gathered" the two banks to itself, thus asserting itself as a location. The miracle of the built thing is that it creates relationships that never existed before, the site is a site because the built thing exists; dichotomies, opposing places spring up now because there is now an object that connects them. When this reciprocity is happening within a built form, it is what makes a location an authentic dwelling-place for humanity.¹⁹

For Heidegger, the notion of dwelling poetically is a "measuring". Heidegger's "gods" — the immanent and invisible forces (or in Hillman's terms, the archetypal powers) that animate the world — are the measure by which humanity evaluates its own dwelling on earth

and under sky. The built thing acts as a "between" space, which serves as a poetic mediator between humanity and the gods. We find our place, our sense of authentic dwelling in the poetic, by "the meting out" of the span between us and the sky above and the earth below. Our very nature depends on spanning these poetic distances. The built thing can mediate this spanning. Thus, in a sense, a building is a poem in which we live, and in a sense we are that poem.

NOTES

- ¹ Harries, Karsten. "The dream of the complete building," *Perspecta*: The Yale Architectural Journal, Inc., and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1980); 36-43. p. 43
- ² From 1959 to 1969, James Hillman was the first Director of Studies of the C. G. Jung Institute, Zurich. In 1970 he began the movement of "archetypal psychology", which focused on a critique of culture and ideas, thereby contrasting with Freudian psychoanalysis and with Jung's "analytical psychology", whose focus was mainly on individual psychopathology.
- ³ Tarnas, Richard. *The passion of the Western mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1991.
- ⁴ Avens, Roberts. *The new gnosis.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1984. 5.
- ⁵ Hillman, James. *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1993. 107-108.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ⁷ Yeats, William Butler. *The collected poems of W.B. Yeats.* New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951. 281.
- ⁸ Hillman, James. *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1993. 47.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ¹¹ Avens, Roberts. *The new gnosis.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1984. 18.
- ¹² Doczi, György. *The Power of Limits.* Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1981. (Refer to Fig. 118 on page 71). ... 1981 by Gyorgy Doczi. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston, <www.shambhala.com>
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ¹⁴ Lowe, Lynda. *The Book of Commons* [online]. [Cited 16 September, 2002]. Available from World Wide Web: (<http://www.lyndalowe.com/main.htm>).
- ¹⁵ Hillman, James. *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1993. 101.
- ¹⁶ Bachelard, Gaston. *On poetic imagination and reverie.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1998. 15.
- ¹⁷ Hillman, James. *The thought of the heart and the soul of the world.* Dallas: Spring Publications, 1993. 89.
- ¹⁸ Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.* London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. xviii.
- ¹⁹ Leach, Neil. *Rethinking architecture: a reader in cultural theory* [collection]. Heidegger, Martin. "Building, dwelling, thinking." New York: Routledge, 1997. 105.