

Andrew Benjamin\*

## ARCHITECTURE AS THE HOUSING OF LIFE: NOTES ON HEIDEGGER AND AGAMBEN

**ABSTRACT:** The paper begins with critical engagement with Agamben's interpretation of the limits inherent in Heidegger's thinking of the relationship between "dwelling" and "building." The overall argument is that while the positions of Agamben and Heidegger differ they are both marked by a resistance to the presence of an original form of relationality. Acknowledging the presence of what is called *anoriginal relationality* necessitates a rethinking of both building and dwelling. That rethinking, while indebted to Agamben and Heidegger, is equally a departure from the restrictions their positions impose.

**KEYWORDS:** Heidegger, Agamben, architecture, dwelling, uninhabitable

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\* Andrew Benjamin: Monash University; andrew.benjamin@monash.edu.

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O.

The initial question, the one that resides with the formulation *philosophy and architecture*, concerns how the “and” is to be understood. In the abstract the “and” can be as much disjunctive as it can be conjunctive. Even in the move from abstraction in which the “and” comes to be located squarely in the formulation *philosophy and architecture*, both separation and connexion are possible. If the “and” is to be retained and thus a relation envisaged, then the basis of any form of relation would need to be established. It cannot be simply posited as though there was philosophy and then architecture (equally as though there was architecture and then philosophy). One cannot be added to the other. Consequently, once it becomes essential to ground any form of relation, then that relation has to occur within a specific set of parameters. The project therefore is to begin to examine how the parameters, thus the setting which might ground and position the “and,” are themselves to be understood. It should be noted in advance that there is no one specific set of parameters and as a result the relationship between philosophy and architecture will always be a locus of dispute. Disputes will invariably begin with the specific force to be attributed to the “and.”

In more general terms however allowing for the “and” necessitates taking a stand in regards to architecture; a stand that might be understood as always already comprising an opening to the philosophical. It should not be thought that neutrality is possible. To take a stand is already to hold to a specific position. Even if the stand is directly philosophical, then, to reiterate the point noted above, it should not be thought that the philosophical has a singular determination. Even though the consequences of this positioning brings with it inevitable complications, points of departure can still be found. The argument to be developed here necessitates incorporating an analysis of two images that comprise specific instances of architecture’s own self-conception. The first image is the famous frontispiece by Charles Eisen from Marc-Antoine Laugier’s *Essai sur l’architecture* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1755), while the second is one of the images that accompanied Cesare di Lorenzo’s 1521 translation of Vitruvius. As will be argued, when juxtaposed these images comprise a fundamental either/or. In the first instance, on one side of the either/or, the architectural can be construed uniquely in terms of the object, i.e. the building. From within this perspective the predominating concern is form and its creation. The other side of the either/or starts with a network of relations

in which the building, the object, figures. However, its presence is only ever as an after-effect of the continual effective presence of that network. Viewed historically, that network is originally named as the *polis*, *urbs* or *città*. From within this position, architecture as the building depends upon the priority, in every sense of the word, of the city. While form creation is obviously important, and while it has its own site of philosophical engagement, part of the premise of this paper – the presence of a premise indicating that a stand has already been taken – is that an insistence on form creation and thus the restriction of the philosophical to an understanding of that creation divorces architecture from the priority of the city and thus the priority of the urban. While this may appear to be no more than a formal argument about the priority of the object – i.e. the discreet building – versus the priority of the city, understood as a network of relations, far more is at stake. Moreover, this is not just where the philosophical becomes important; more significantly, that importance resides in the presence of an ineliminable division within the philosophical itself. That division, one that complicates any thinking of the “and,” is between an understanding of the origin in terms of the singular, in the first instance, while in the second it pertains to a conception of the origin as a site of plurality. Even though the question to be addressed concerns how that plurality is understood, once plurality is located at the origin then singularities are only ever after-effects.

There is a further point that needs to be added. The position underpinning the argument presented here involves the claim that any engagement with the question of the being of being human has to begin with the recognition that being human and being-placed are necessarily interrelated. Once such a position is accepted, it then follows that the city has to be understood as the place of human life. (That life – human life – involves relations to other forms of life, namely animal life, plant life, etc.) To grasp this setting – the setting of life – philosophy would need, in the language of Donatella di Cesare, “to return to the city.”<sup>1</sup> In addition, once this position is assumed then philosophy’s continual concern with the “good life” (*εὐδαιμονία*, *vita beata*, etc.), can no longer be automatically equated with the “good life” of the individual. On the contrary, no matter how the concept of the individual is understood, the possibility of the “good life” can only ever be an after-effect of the

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<sup>1</sup> D. di Cesare. “It is Time for Philosophy to Return to the City,” *Journal of Continental Philosophy*, 1, 2020, pp. 201–218.

individual's location within a network of relations understood, on one level, as the city. Its presence needs to be understood as the actualization of a potentiality.<sup>2</sup> If this mode of argumentation is continued then what counts as architecture opens itself up to the possibility of a fundamental reconfiguration. The assumed centrality of built form and therefore processes of form creation would cede their place to an understanding of architecture as the housing of life. As a result, architecture, while involving form creation, becomes an inherently biopolitical occurrence. The entry of the philosophical into such a configuration would then acquire a different determination. The presence of the philosophical could no longer be explained in terms of the addition of philosophy to architecture as though one merely supplemented or translated the other. The point of connexion – thus one possible understanding of the “and” – would be in terms of “life.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, if it can be argued that philosophy's engagement with the question of what comprises the “good life” needs to be understood biopolitically (namely it needs to be understood in terms of the location of the being of being human within the city and thus as already placed), what the “and” that connects *philosophy and architecture* marks is the centrality of life within the both domains. In order to continue this development of the “and,” the next move here is to examine the way in which Heidegger's writings on architecture, notably in his text “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” and Giorgio Agamben's recent critical engagement with Heidegger can themselves be reconfigured in terms, not just of the centrality of life, but a presentation of the architectural as the housing of life. The project does not end with either Heidegger or Agamben. Their limitations provide further openings.

The either/or noted above involves a genuine division within how the relationship between philosophy and architecture is understood. (The distinction between, on the one hand, the identification of architecture with the form, form creation and thus with building, or, on the other, an insistence on a relational understanding of the architectural in which while there are objects they are positioned as after-effect of the operative presence of networks of relations.) Even in accepting this distinction, it still needs to be noted that the centrality of a concern with the object and thus with form creation still brings with it an engagement with a form of

<sup>2</sup> On the point see my “Potentially, Relationality and the Problem of Actualisation,” *Teoria: rivista di filosofia*, 1, 2020, pp. 115–124.

<sup>3</sup> See my “Thinking Life: The Force of the Biopolitical,” *Crisis and Critique*, 9, 2022, pp. 61–82.

life. However, it has a strict delimitation. It is a form of life that pertains almost uniquely to the individual and thus to the individuated subject. In other words, the continual identification of architecture with both the object and form creation is part of the project of a neoliberal agenda in which objects exist for subjects produced by processes of individuation.<sup>4</sup> Within this specific configuration, the question of life pertains exclusively to the life of the individual. As is clear, what is obviated as a result is any understanding of life as inherently relational.

### I.

Moving towards Agamben's engagement with Heidegger involves a preliminary step. As part of his detailed engagement with Heidegger on the complex relationship between *Wohnen* (dwelling) and *Bauen* (building) Giorgio Agamben in a recent text – “Abitare e costruire” – returns to the central question of life.<sup>5</sup> In part this is made possible because of the interplay between living and being-housed that is already at work in the word “*abitare*.” While the term “life” has its own determinations within Agamben's philosophical writings, more generally, in the context of this paper, the term “life” will be understood as having an inherently active dimension. (This is a position that is consistent with the continual devolution of life into forms of life.) Conversely, therefore, references to life are not to be understood merely in regards to its biological enactment. From within the space of concerns opened by Heidegger, and thus as part of the departure from the biological, “life” has to be thought, in the first instance, in terms of “ethos” and thus in terms of an originary ethics. This is significant precisely because the link between *ethos* and ethics stages part of the context of Heidegger's own thinking of the relationship between “dwelling” (*Wohnen*) and “building” (*Bauen*). That link is found,

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<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between architecture and neoliberalism see D. Spenser, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2017. The move to the object and its resultant insistence on a form of autonomy that was defined purely in terms of form creation has been the subject of a sustained analysis and critique by Pedro Fiori Arantes. See his *The Rent of Form: Architecture and Labour in the Digital Age*, University of Minnesota Press, Indianapolis, 2019. While the book is not directly philosophical in orientation it nonetheless demands a response to the question of architecture's possible link to the creation of other possibilities for life, where life is understood biopolitically. Namely, as a site in which subject positions are located, thus housed by the interplay of the political and the economic.

<sup>5</sup> G. Agamben “Abitare e costruire,” <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-abitare-e-costruire> (accessed September 27, 2022).

for example, in Heidegger's translation of Heraclitus fragment DK119: *ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων*. Heidegger's translation is as follows:

*Der (gebeure) Aufenthalt ist dem Menschen das Offene für die Anwesenung des Gottes (des Un-gebeuren).*

[The (familiar) abode for humans is the open region for the presenting of gods (the unfamiliar ones)].<sup>6</sup>

*Ethos* (ἦθος) is linked to a sense of place, an abode and thus being-in-place. The latter is identified in this formulation by the term *der Aufenthalt*. Consequently, ethics, ethos and place have to be thought together. And yet, this setting, despite appearances, is not on its own the point of departure. What attends is the related question – Who dwells? The reason for asking this question is straightforward. It has both an interruptive and a productive quality. Once asked, there can be no return to the simple positing of an abstract subject (the subject as no more than an abstraction). Moreover, only once this question is answered is it possible to take up the problem of how the place of dwelling is to be construed. Agamben has a clear answer to the first of these questions, the question – Who dwells? In part it is an answer that is implicit is his partial recalibration of the ethical in terms of what he describes in “*Abitare e costruire*” as occurring within a certain “monastic vocabulary.” Within that “vocabulary” ethics becomes a “*secum habitare*.” Namely, dwelling as dwelling with oneself which opens up both a singular dwelling with the divine and a dwelling with others, one forming and informing the other. The other difficulty that attends Agamben's return to the monastic is the reinscription of abstraction. (It is, of course, a conception of abstraction that comes undone the moment it is analysed insofar as its invocation is from the start the inscription of Christianised conception of the subject and subjectivity into a thinking of place, albeit one occurring in the guise of neutrality.)

Starting with the question – Who dwells? – as a description of the ethical is not straightforward. To think there is a single answer – and thus a single definition of the ethical (and ethos) – would be to miss the

<sup>6</sup> M. Heidegger, “Brief über den ‘Humanismus’,” *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1976, p. 356; M. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Basic Writings*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, p. 256. Charles Kahn, in his edition of fragments, translates this fragment as: “Man's character is his fate.” See C. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p. 81.

already overdetermined nature of place and thus being-in-place; place as the locus of different modes of occupation and thus territorialization. It is an overdetermination that is captured in the already-noted division between a concern with architecture defined in relation to the building and thus the singular subject on the one hand, and, on the other, a conception of architecture as always already relational and thus linked to the city. As has already been indicated, these two possibilities are already present in the history of architecture. More exactly, they are already present in architecture's imagistic presentation of its own myths of origin. Precisely because images are already the *loci* of informed form – namely sites that are determined by ideational content – once the conflation of the singular and the relational is refused, a radically different set of possibilities then emerge. An integral part of the project of this paper is to show how the recovery of this founding difference allows for a sustained repositioning of both Agamben's critique of Heidegger understanding the connection between dwelling and building, as well as what Agamben describes more generally as architecture's "historical *a priori*."

2.

The first image is from Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1755). It is the famous frontispiece by Charles Eisen (Figure 1). What is present here is the identification of architecture, not just with "le petite cabane rustique," but with the singular building. *Architectura* leaning on classical ruins points to the singularity of architecture (architecture therefore as a set of singularities.) The image is clear. At the origin there is a singular object. While the image identifies both the transformation of nature and the presence of an origin that is predicated on a form of ruination, the overriding concern of the image is the identification of architecture with the building. As Laugier writes:

The small rustic cabin is the model on which *all* the greatneses of architecture are imagined.

[*(L)e petite cabane rustique (...) est le modele sur lequel on a imaginé toutes les magnificences de l'Architecture.*] <sup>7</sup> (Emphasis added.)

<sup>7</sup> M-A. Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture*, Duchesne, Paris, 1755, pp. 9–10.

As a result the meaning of *being-at-home* in the building is left unaddressed. Hence the distinction, or the possibility of the distinction between *domus* and *aedes* is inscribed within the image itself, even if the question of their relation is left unaddressed. In addition, what this image sets in play is the interconnection of architecture and the housing of individual lives. Hence, there is the implicit response to the question – Who dwells? It is within the terms established by this “small rustic cabin” that architecture will not just become the house; it will equally take on the quality of a commodity, thus staging architecture’s eventual relation of necessity to real estate. Located therefore in the afterlife of this image is the history of architecture as the history of building, the latter’s relationship to the abstract subject – who will of course be the subject within the development of capitalist consumption – and what will become an inevitable link between architecture and the market. *Architectura* is pointing to far more than she could have known.

The other image has a number of sources (Figure 2). All stem from the images that accompanied Cesare di Lorenzo’s 1521 translation of Vitruvius.<sup>8</sup> The images were reproduced in a number of subsequent sixteenth-century translations of Vitruvius. In this instance, the image is from Gianbatista Caporali’s 1536 translation published in Perugia. The image is entitled: *la edificazione nell’eta de primi huomini del mondo*.

As such, it takes on the quality of an imagistic presentation of another one of architecture’s myths of origin. While it is possible to locate elements within the overall image of what will become the ‘primitive hut,’ what is significant here is that architecture begins neither with the *domus* nor the *aedes* – let alone their complex relation – but with the *urbs*. The latter is understood as involving modes of relationality. While these modes differ on the level of scale – from the village becoming the urban conurbation – it remains the case that relationality is figures within them as an original condition. The nascent city therefore has both originality and priority. While the move to the city as the locus of a more complex urbanism will perhaps only truly emerge once it becomes necessary to provide myths of origin for cities and thus to write into the city an account of its origin such that modes of relationality are also sites of both real and imagined memory, what the image presents is the singular

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<sup>8</sup> For a brief discussion of the source of the image, see the note and accompanying bibliographical references in Alessandro Rovetta’s edition of Cesariano. C. Cesariano, *Vitruvio De Architectura*, V&P Università, Milano, 2002, p. 21.



Figure 1. Charles Dominique Joseph Eisen, Frontispiece of Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture*, second edition, Duchesne, Paris, 1755.



Figure 2. “La edificazione nell’eta de primi huomini del mondo,” *Architettura con il suo commento et figure Vetruiuo in volgar lingua raporato per M. Gianbatista Caporali di Perugia*, Giano Bigazzini, Perugia, 1536, p. 46.

object as an after-effect of the network of relations that defines the city. At the origin there is an important inversion. The origin of architecture – as Aldo Rossi will later observe – lies in the city.<sup>9</sup>

Any description of the scene within this image has to note the differing modalities of time and movement. A road is present, connecting the houses, allowing and occasioning movement between them. While some houses are finished, others are being constructed. Work is being directed; thus work is being undertaken. The city is a site of its own creation and transformation. There is no single founding act, thus no singular *arché*. *Architectura* would have no one singular object at which to point. Relationality is therefore anoriginal. (The term “anoriginal” marking the presence of an already pluralized site at the origin.<sup>10</sup>) Images of transformation and creation have their own history within imagistic presentations of the urban condition. Equally, within this elementary urban condition domestic animals are present. The dog is wearing a collar. The nursing of the baby occurs outside the literal *aedes* marking it equally as the *domus* within the *urbs*. In other words, these are modes of human activity precisely because of their location within the urban. Life is at home within the urban condition. If there is to be a place of justice – and equally for the control and yet equally for the possibility of injustice – then it is the city. There can be therefore no *secum habitare* as a purely self-referring term other than one that assumes a preliminarily and original *nobiscum*. In other words, responding to the question – Who dwells? – moves from the singular to a response that demands both the primacy and the originality of the relational; i.e. anoriginal relationality. This setting occurs within architecture’s own history. Thus it is possible to interpret Vitruvius in terms of the centrality of this form of relationality. He notes, for example:

Therefore, because of the discovery of fire, there arose at the beginning, concourse among men (*conventus*), deliberation (*concilium*) and a life in common (*convictus esset natus*). (II, 1, 2)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See A. Rossi, *L’architettura della città*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 2018. On the continual relevance of the city as the locus for the “project” of architecture see P. V. Aureli, “Means to an End: The Rise and Fall of the Architectural Project of the City,” in P. V. Aureli (ed.), *The City as a Project*, Ruby Press, Berlin, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> In regards to the anoriginal see my “Recovering Anoriginal Relationality,” *Research in Phenomenology*, 47, 2017, pp. 250–261.

<sup>11</sup> Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, vol. 1, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 78, 79.

Life in common necessitates relational architecture – here the *urbs* – as the founding relational event. Moreover, it is a conception of the relational, as the image makes clear, in which there are already differentials of power, including gendered divisions. Judgement would have to involve the relationship between being-in-common as the presence of a conception of equality within human being, and commonality’s lived reality.

Within these images, there is a fundamental difference between the singular dwelling in which subjects are potentially in place – as the actualized presence of being-in-place – on the one hand, and, on the other, the inscription of already present subjects within an original form of relationality. In other words, what they project are different forms of life. While the differences between the images needs to be developed, the house as a singular object and the occupier – the dweller – who is equally there as a singular entity allows for a form of abstraction that then occasions a formulation, as will become clear, such as Heidegger’s claim that “*der Mensch sei, insofern er wohne*” (“man is insofar as he dwells”).<sup>12</sup> In other words, co-present here are the singularity of place and an abstract conception of human being where both are predicated on either the suspension or the effacing of any form of original relationality. What this means is that Heidegger’s formulation, while accurate, is also misleading because of its level of abstraction. The effacing of the relational means that he does not just fail to note the distinction between the locus of dwelling as that which grounds the interplay between *domus* and *aedes* on the one hand, and their relation to the *urbs* on the other, it also fail to recognize that their interconnection involves differentials of power. Those differentials entail that the actualization of the potentialities within relationality is always contingent. Hence the failure of recognition is fundamental once it becomes necessary to connect a description of architecture as the housing of life to philosophy’s own concern with the “good life.”

### 3.

Heidegger argues in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” as a result of what he takes to be the historical and etymological connections between *Bauen* and *Wohnen*, that “building originally means to dwell.”<sup>13</sup> This for

<sup>12</sup> M. Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” *Vorträge und Aufsätze, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 2000, p. 149; M. Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” *Basic Writings*, p. 349.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

Heidegger is a determination which is there today – perhaps as a type of vestige – in the word *Nachbar* (neighbour). In addition, *ich bin, du bist*, etc. he argues can be understood as “I dwell,” “you dwell” etc., as much as the more direct “I am,” “you are,” etc. From Heidegger’s perspective, *Bauen* and *Wohnen* have an indissoluble connection. Even though it will only be in terms of a form of abstract singularity, addressing the question of dwelling is therefore to address that which is proper to the being of being human. Agamben’s response to Heidegger starts with this connection between “building” and “dwelling” (*Bauen* and *Wohnen*). In so doing, he also ignores the question of the relational and thus responds to that connection in terms of the attempt to establish a disjunction – rather than Heidegger’s etymological connection – between “building” and “dwelling.” The presence of that disjunction constructs what Agamben calls, drawing on Foucault’s formulation, the “historical *a priori*” concerning architecture “today” (*oggi*).<sup>14</sup> This position is advanced in the lecture thus:

*L'a priori storico dell'architettura sarebbe allora oggi precisamente l'impossibilità o l'incapacità di abitare dell'uomo moderno e, per gli architetti, la conseguente rottura del rapporto fra arte della costruzione e arte dell'abitazione.*

[The historical *a priori* of architecture today is the impossibility or inability for modern man to live (*abitare*) and, for architects, it entails the consequent ruining of the relationship between the art of construction and the art of housing.<sup>15</sup>]

As a result of this “impossibility” Heidegger’s project, and this despite the presence of etymology, has emphatically come undone. The consequences of this now clear “impossibility” are, for Agamben, that “architecture today finds itself in the historical situation of having to build the uninhabitable (*l'inabitabile*).” In other words, the predicament of architecture restates, from a different position, the predicament

<sup>14</sup> In *The Order of Things* Foucault defines this “*a priori*” in the following terms:

This *a priori* is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man’s everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true.

M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Tavistock, London, 1970 (Routledge, New York, 1989), p. 172.

<sup>15</sup> G. Agamben, “Abitare e costruire.”

of human being. This occurs however in the way that differs from the form of abstraction that marks Heidegger's thinking of the relationship between "building" and "dwelling." (Though as will be argued, it is replaced by a different conception of abstraction.) The 'uninhabitable' entails a form of life that is radically distinct from the creation of the habitable and as a result marks the presence of differentials of power that are already there within the actualization of human being.

What has to be addressed is the question of what is stake in the identification by Agamben of a type of impossibility within Heidegger's attempt to construct a necessary connection between "building" and "dwelling." For Heidegger, this distinction leads to a sense of propriety. For Agamben, equally, a sense of propriety prevails. However, it involves a radical inversion. It is linked to the proposition for which he continually argues, namely that within the modern the "earth" has been repositioned as the "camp." Hence the formulation that "the camp is the *nomos* of the modern." The place of human being has been replaced. The "camp" is understood as

a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense.<sup>16</sup>

The contemporary place of human being incorporates the continual possibility of sustaining that which defined the actual camp, namely the place of the absolute *conditio inhumana*.<sup>17</sup> For Agamben, this has become the condition of "building" (*Bauen*) rendering impossible any fundamental connection to "dwelling" (*Wohnen*). Human propriety has to be reconsidered as a result. Inherent in that reconsideration is another answer to the question – who dwells?

For Heidegger the original condition is captured in the formulation of human being as always already earthly. And yet for Agamben this set up becomes an impossibility as a result of the continuity of the severance between *Bauen* and *Wohnen*. The significance of this position is noted once it is recognised, both that for Heidegger "*Bauen is eigentlich Wohnen*" ("Building is essentially dwelling") and equally that "*Das Wohnen ist die Weise, wie die Sterblichen auf der Erde sein.*" ("Dwelling

<sup>16</sup> G. Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 170.

<sup>17</sup> A formulation used by Agamben in *ibid.* p. 165.

is the way that mortals essentially are on the earth.”)<sup>18</sup> That severance, evidenced by the continuity of the creation of the uninhabitable, leads to a different philosophical and political position. Once the severances is instantiated in practise by architecture, and, as Agamben argues, that severance is far from novel. After all, in Filarete’s ideal city of Sforzinda, presented in his *Libro architettonico* (1464), contained prisons and torture chambers and thus uninhabitable spaces.<sup>19</sup> Given the move from the primacy the habitable to that of the uninhabitable, going on to define human being in terms of a setting created by the ‘camp’ rather than by the claim that “building is essentially dwelling” then becomes a possibility. The question is what does it mean to respond to this condition? In other words, is it possible to act in ways that can be understood as comprising strategic forms of resistance to the positioning of human being in relation to the ubiquity of the “uninhabitable” rather than an essential coalescence between “building” and “dwelling”?

#### 4.

As has already been suggested, Heidegger’s position is underscored by a specific sense of abstraction: abstraction as that which marks the presence of the non-relational. “Dwelling” (*Wohnen*) and thus “Building” (*Bauen*) do not admit of any sense of the differential and thus the implicit housing of the relational. Even though when actualized there may be forms of particularity, they are not the introduction of differentials at the origin of “dwelling” but are that which stands in the way of the recognition – thus the experience – of the original singularity of *Wohnen* and all that such a conception of the singular then entails. Heidegger’s argument is that the crisis marking the relationship between building and dwelling should not be conflated with a shortage of actual houses. The necessity in question is more fundamental since it pertains to how human being should be understood. Heidegger’s claim is that human being is housed as such, thus in being housed human being is. For Agamben, on the other hand, neither original meanings nor the implications of either terms have been “forgotten by us” (*uns verlorengegangen*).<sup>20</sup> Here it is vital to pay attention to Heidegger’s precise formulation. He writes of an “us” (*uns*). This

<sup>18</sup> M. Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> See Filarete, *Filarete’s Treatise on Architecture*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1965, chapter 10.

<sup>20</sup> M. Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” p. 141.

is the “us” that already figures with an answer to the question – “Who dwells?” Despite its form, the ‘us’ in question is no more than the plural version of an abstract singularity. In Agamben’s formulation of the predicament of human being the setting is radically different. In a recent text Agamben describes this setting as living in a “burning house” (*casa brucia*). The implications of living in a ‘burning house’ are captured in the following explanatory proposition.

It is as if power ought at all costs to seize hold of the bare life it has produced, and yet as much as it tries to appropriate and control it with every possible apparatus – no longer just the police but also medicine and technology – bare life cannot but slip away, since it is by definition ungraspable. Governing bare life is the madness of our time. People reduced to their pure biological existence are no longer human; the government of people and the government of things coincide.<sup>21</sup>

The extension of sovereignty such that there is a coincidence of “the government of people and the government of things” is a proposition with its own emphatic form of registration. Moreover, it creates an opening. As a result of Agamben’s formulation, and thus even if elements of it can be questioned, what has to be addressed is the problem of what counts as a countermeasure. The problems are clear: however, are there responses that move beyond either the naturalization of the condition he describes, or stances created by passivity. For Agamben, what this predicament evidences is the presence of a complex form of inversion. The reduction of people to what he describes as “pure biological existence,” for him, has its counter in the affirmation of the absence of any content or identity. It is as though what is at work here is a form of absolute negation. A pure negativity which not only resists its own negation into a positivity but remains defined by a predominating “without” (*senza*). This “without” singularises and abstracts. In fact, it is the counter sense of abstraction that is there in Agamben. Part of the argument is that what is lost in both Agamben and Heidegger’s different senses of abstraction are modes of original relationality, modes in which the differential predominates; an example of the identification of such a position has already been noted in Vitruvius, in his invocation of “life in common.” Were being-in-common to be taken as the point of departure, then its presence

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<sup>21</sup> G. Agamben, *When the House Burns Down*, Seagull Books, London, 2022, p. 6.

as an already plural site would complicate how the place of human being was understood. Divisions within cities, hierarchies within the urban, different flows of movement enacting public/private distinctions, logics of carbon heightened, attenuated or even suspended, etc., redefine the place of human being in terms of a *locus* of different interconnecting territories. The process of redefinition would mean that a simple opposition between the habitable and the uninhabitable failed to capture what is present on the level of description, let alone what would have to be involved in the formulation of countermeasures. They would be formulations that were as much philosophical as they would be architectural. Informing both would be a concern with questions pertaining to the enactment of potentializes within forms of life.

If what is at stake is original relationality – a form of relationality there at the origin, thus as noted anoriginal relationality – then it gives rise to a series of relations that always involve what can be described as modes of territorialization. A formulation of this nature, one linking plurality and activity, becomes necessary once there is the move away from differing forms of abstraction. What such a formulation is intended to identify is that while being-in-place as a descriptive term is accurate insofar as human being is of necessity placed, it is also the case that place is always already structured by hierarchies of power. Modes of territorialization are the effective presence of those hierarchies of power. The move from place to modes of territorialization has to attend questions of governance. Rather than naturalize hierarchies of power, what has to be argued is that within them – within that which attends them – is the possibility of that which is other. In other words, once the priority of relationality is allowed, then other modes of relationality become possible. There is the potentiality for the suspension of those hierarchies and the maintenance of identities that involves different modalities of plurality. (Even accepting the necessity of limitations, it remains the case that this is a position that can be argued philosophically, acted out politically or enacted on the level of design.) It is in terms of this plurality of identities – thus the plurality of forms of life – that what continues to attend is the possibility of justice. Negotiating between plural forms of life, holding to the insistence of plurality and thus to maintain a life without injury, which is a life without injustice, necessitates both a reconfiguration of how life is understood philosophically and equally allow the question of the conception of architecture that attends a just life, a life without injury, can best be posed.

5.

Part of the argument is that with the necessity of architecture's relation to the creation of what Agamben identifies as the "unhabitable" – whose creation, as noted, is part of what he calls the "historical *a priori*" of architecture – architecture cannot separate itself from its implication in processes that lead to the position in which the 'camp' rather than the city having become "the *nomos* of the modern." In other words, it cannot separate itself from the reduction of life to "bare life" (*la nuda vita*). Here it is essential to be careful. That reduction is in fact a production, a production which in singularizing leaves its own traces. Opened up as a result is the possibility of other modes of production. What is of significance about Agamben's arguments is that the possibility of a response to the position he describes is already there in the way those arguments are formulated. However, its recovery would demand a further positioning that he will not make. It emerges in the following claim:

*Abitare – questa è la definizione che vorrei provvisoriamente proporvi – significa creare, conservare e intensificare abiti e abitudini, cioè modi di essere.*

[Living/dwelling – this is the definition that I would like to propose to you provisionally – means creating, preserving and intensifying modes of living and habits, that is, ways of being.<sup>22</sup>]

This position is ground in the claim that in Agamben's terms the human is an "*inhabiting being*" (*un essere abitante*). This is of course a restaging of the position that is already there, as noted, in Heidegger – namely – "man is insofar as he dwells."<sup>23</sup> What Agamben's formulation actually allows is the direct inscription of life. What that entails is that living and dwelling come to have an important coalescence. As a result there is a concomitant need to rethink life, thus allowing for its intensification. A rethinking that moves the philosophical and thus a thinking of the "and" beyond Heidegger's identification of building and dwelling while simultaneously opening up the question of responding to the presence of the uninhabitable.

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<sup>22</sup> G. Agamben "Abitare e costruire."

<sup>23</sup> M. Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," p. 349.

While there is the possibility that life can be identified with the *conditio inhumana* – in other words, while there is always an ineliminable precarity that accompanies life, life coming undone as a result of its incorporation either into the uninhabitable or the undoing of productive forms of plurality occurring in other ways – what attends such possibilities delimits it in an important way. At the outset, that delimitation has a twofold quality. Firstly, there is the non-necessity of that condition’s actualization. In other words, the actualization of the *conditio inhumana* cannot be assumed. It can always be met with a counter strategy. The possibility of strategic counter-measures – and the move to the plural is fundamental in order to understand what is involved in the formulation or design of countermeasures – enjoin a politics played out as much on the level of the philosophical as it would the architectural. The development of countermeasures would take place in the name of other possibilities for life, thus other forms of life. Their actualization within the philosophical and the architectural would, of course, be determined by the specificity of each. Secondly, there is, within Agamben’s formulation, “ways of being” (*modi di essere*) (thus presenting a contrast to his identification of the ethical with the monastic) the implicit conceptualization of human being as being-in-relation. Moreover, this conceptualization is already present – i.e. it is not being adduced to human being, it is a description of its already-placed quality. This has the important consequence that recognition of the anoriginality of being-in-relation would allow that set-up to then function as a ground of judgment, were versions of the creation of the uninhabitable to prevail. What follows from this is that the violence – and this would be a step towards a philosophical definition of violence – that undoes relationality, the violence that individualizes and thus allows for the creation of *conditio inhumana*, always operates on the level of the particular. In other words, violence is only ever particular. Violence is the creation of particularities – thus the undoing being-in-relation – that is then part of the possible actualization of violence in all its forms. Violence presupposes the presence of the relational, as it results from the latter’s undoing. The defence of the relational is not a defence of an abstraction with a singular quality; rather it is a defence of forms of life. Defending relationality is suspending the means that seek injury and injustice. In other words, rather than start with Agamben’s assumption that there is “bare life,” life would be understood – life always becomes forms of life – in terms of what philosophy has continually allowed for, namely the “good life.” That would be to express the position in directly positive

terms. Perhaps, to be more circumspect, it is possible to deploy a more negative formulation. When Adorno wrote that “there is no correct life in the false” (*es gibt keine richtiges Leben im falschen*), such a formulation demands a response to the question of what “a correct life” (*ein richtiges Leben*) might actually entail.<sup>24</sup> Part of any answer would be the suspending the injuring processes occasioned by contemporary forms of governance.

6.

In an extraordinary passage from his recent *When the House Burns Down*, Agamben returns to the possibility of judgment.

We must learn to judge anew, but with a judgment that neither punishes nor rewards, neither absolves nor condemns. An act without goal, which removes existence from all finalities, which are necessarily unjust and false. Merely an interruption, an instant balanced between time and the eternal, in which flashes up the faint image of a life without end or plans, without name or memory—and is thus saved, not in eternity but *sub specie aeternitatis*. A judgment without preestablished criteria and yet political for this very reason, because it restores life to its naturalness.<sup>25</sup>

One of the central questions that attends this formulation is what is meant by “naturalness”? The suspicion is that for Agamben, no matter how it is understood, “naturalness” has an equivalence to “bare life.” Namely, to that which is “without content.” The political, for Agamben, involves therefore this sense of “restoration.” In sum, the difference with Agamben, in this specific context, pertains to how the original is understood. What here is the *ἀρχή*? In the context of the argument that has been developed throughout this paper, the *arché* is not delimited by the “without.” On the contrary, the *ἀρχή* is the site of an original plurality and thus an original relationality. Moreover, the distribution of human being within an original relationality brings an inevitable sense of propriety into play, since that distribution has both a transcendental quality as well as having different configurations within modes of territorialization. The latter become *loci* of judgement precisely because an original plurality can be attributed a transcendental quality.

<sup>24</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1997, p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> G. Agamben, *When the House Burns Down*, Seagull Books, London, 2022, p. 12.

Again, even if Agamben were right and the house is “burning” and that as a result the continuity of interaction within that house are “with the ones with whom you will have to exchange a last glance when the flames come close” there is still a counter. (The burning house cannot be separated, of course, from Heidegger’s invocation in “Letter on Humanism” that “language is the house of Being” [*Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins*].<sup>26</sup> There is of course a different housing question.) The value of the formulations and images from Vitruvius that have already been cited is that they stage the necessity to think an original relationality both in itself and in connection to the immediacy of “fire.” That the house is burning is, on one level, not the point. The question to be addressed concerns how this incendiary house is to be understood. Fire will demand its own genealogy. The suggestion here is that a response to Agamben’s “burning house” can be found in Horace, *Epistles*, 1.XVIII: 85-86. Horace writes:

*nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet,  
et neglecta solent incendia sumere vires.*

For it is your concern when the wall of your neighbour is burning  
And neglected fires are accustomed to assuming great power.<sup>27</sup>

The proximity to which Horace refers is not just a relation defined in terms of intersubjectivity and thus mere commonality. At work here is not being-in-common as an abstraction without location. Rather, it is a relation that has the quality of being-there. However the “there” in question involves a named presence – “walls” (*paries*). Houses divide and connect. *Paries* in the end cannot be separated from *murus*. Taken together they disclose the placed nature of human being. Walls – be they literal or as identifying spaces within placed relationality – delimit modes of territorialization. Equally, walls are threatened by fire. Recalled because the centrality of wall and placed relationality – the latter as being-in-relation and being-in-place articulated within modes of territorialization – and the enduring threat posed by fire, is Heraclitus DK44.

The people must fight for its law as they would defend the city walls.

<sup>26</sup> M. Heidegger, “Brief über den ‘Humanismus,’” p. 313; M. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” p. 217.

<sup>27</sup> I also discuss these lines from Horace in my “Thinking Life: The Force of the Biopolitical,” *Crisis and Critique*, 9, 2022, pp. 60–82.

There are at least two important considerations at work in the claim that the defence of “the city wall” (*τείχος*) is undertaken by “the people” (*δῆμος*) with the same alacrity as they defend *νόμος*.<sup>28</sup> Firstly, it identifies both place – the space disclosed by the walls – and *nomos* as conditions of human plurality. Secondly, the fragment ties together the disclosure of spaces and the presence of the law.

Fire figures within this setting. It is not reducible to a threat merely to subjects or even to the intersubjective. What is threatened is their conditions of possibility, namely the disclosed space of human being. (Human being as being-in-place.) And if the opening provided by Heraclitus were pursued, then the interarticulation of place and law would have to be incorporated into any understanding of the risk posed by fire. (Both law and place as transcendental conditions of human sociality.) The threat of fire therefore necessitates both a conceptualization and a response that has to begin with the relational. Such a response is essential once the threat is given extension, such that it incorporates as much the ineliminability of catastrophic climate change as it does the naturalization of forms of energy – coal, oil, and gas cannot be separated from any genealogy of fire – and their ensuing modes of control. While both Heidegger and Agamben address the ethics of architecture, the way in which abstraction figures within their respective arguments means that, albeit for different reasons, neither can address the ethical once both *ethos* and ethics start from the anoriginality of the relational, the setting of which is its articulation within differentials of power. Hence the relational here is as much a relation to the other as it is to place. Both are themselves articulated within differing modes of territorialisation. It is the presence of these modes that yields sites of judgement. This is the setting in which the question of how the “and” – the “and” connecting and separating philosophy and architecture – is both to be understood and addressed.

Agamben’s response to Heidegger does not seek to avoid judgement. After all he writes that “we must learn to judge anew.” However he then adds a few lines later that it should be a “judgment without preestablished criteria”. And yet, once fire becomes a defining concern what is opened up is fire’s almost axiomatic relational setting. There can never be

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<sup>28</sup> References to Heraclitus are to the edition established by M. Marcovich, *Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary*, Los Andes University Press, Merida, 1967, in which it is Fragment 103. Marcovich usefully links the fragment to DK 43, in which Heraclitus draws a connection between violence and fire. In any genealogy of fire the connection between violence, fire and law established by Heraclitus would have to form an integral part.

just fire. As the flames get close – and here as the climate crisis becomes more emphatic, any evocation of fire is haunted by its always possible reality – the response has to be grounded in attempts to realize modes of plurality that suspend organizational logics that sustain fire. Differing forms of movement towards their actualization, be this a creation of philosophical propositions or design interventions, are always already linked to the anoriginality of relationality. The creation of the uninhabitable, the denial of relationality, the creation of singularities in order to be confined or excluded call on judgment. Judgement is possible precisely because the refusal of relationality is the refusal of the actualization of a potentially that is always already there defining the possibility of the “good life.”

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