

Adorno's "Urbanism and Societal Order" and the State of Rebuilding West Germany, 1949

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Theodor Adorno's return emigration took place on November 1, 1949, when he arrived in Frankfurt by night train from Paris. He found the city of his childhood in shambles. Walking its streets in the days thereafter, he was astonished, as he noted in his diary, to find that tram lines still followed familiar trajectories although the city around them had disappeared. At the end of one of those lines was the Technische Hochschule of Darmstadt, a city some thirty minutes away from the Hauptwache at Frankfurt's center. Less than a month after his arrival, Adorno lectured there to a group of urbanists and architects. "Städtebau und Gesellschaftsordnung" ("Urbanism and Societal Order"), the lecture he delivered, is gentler and more diffuse than the writing for which he remains best known. It reads as cobbled together, a minor work. But from the perspective of postwar West German rebuilding, although it is unlikely that Adorno had followed from afar the debates and actions that kept West German architects busy between surrender and currency reform, it trafficked with surprising precision in the salient issues of the moment: the legitimacy of historical reconstruction after the war, the nature of urban beauty, the sociohistorical structures imprinted on city morphology, even the question of where first to invest the limited materials and capital available during the initial postwar years. Even more surprising are the conclusions Adorno drew. He ended his lecture with a plea for participatory design and planning of some form, through which the dweller could be included in the process of design and realization. This was

a demand not seriously raised or engaged until much later, in response to the conflagrations of the late 1960s. Adorno's lecture has waited even longer for a wider audience. It was not published in German until 2003; an English translation is still several years in the future.

"But why," I was asked by someone who should know when I first proposed a closer reading of this text, would I choose to engage "a piece, which really does not have much to recommend it intellectually? It has a certain biographic interest, not much more than that."¹

"Urbanism and Societal Order" may well be a sideline in the Adorno canon, although it is distinguished by the fact that it is one of his few texts to address cities or architecture. It was written while Adorno was still in transition between Los Angeles and Frankfurt. He admitted to his audience that he did not consider himself expert on the topic of either architecture or cities.² His self-assessment was not inaccurate. His talk hazards guesses, conflates developments, overlooks seminal research, sets up straw men. He presents his ideas not from a refined analytic perspective but as a collection of instances and impressions. This is not the Adorno one has been trained to look for. Nonetheless, his speculations are valuable as a petri dish, attracting and incubating debates in the air as West Germany emerged from its nadir.

The lecture follows a three-part structure: first, a discussion of beauty and societal context as the conventional parameters by which cities are evaluated, and of the inadequacies of those parameters; then, to support that critique and to offer other reference points, a selection of three historical case studies culled from Adorno's own, admittedly unscholarly experience of planning; and finally, a list of speculative, although only vaguely practicable, recommendations, culminating in a tentative but prescient discussion of participatory planning. At each juncture, an audience versed in the debates and efforts of the interceding years since the war could have brought quite different and likely more appropriate referents to bear. Some of those referents will be discussed here, each associated with a thought to which it seems, naturally, to inhere.

When Adorno disembarked the military train from Paris, it was the first time he had returned to Germany since emigrating in February 1937, first to New York and then to Los Angeles. In those intervening years he had changed more than his surname, shortened from Wiesengrund-Adorno to Adorno. He

1. Email from a former professor with whom I studied Adorno in graduate school, April 10, 2021.

2. Adorno refers to himself as a "layman in architecture" and notes that he took the trouble to confirm with Karl Gruber, his host, his assumption that medieval cities were "not entirely as spontaneous as we had believed" ("Städtebau und Gesellschaftsordnung," 13, 20; hereafter cited as SG).

had transformed himself from a Weimar-era “radical artist” to an institution-affiliated authority, from an exile to a naturalized American.³ He was leaving behind the clique of “California Germans” at the urging of his collaborator Max Horkheimer, who believed, as he wrote to the Adornos, that “our work on behalf of the United States and for peace will be far more effective” if practiced from Europe (fig. 1).⁴ Arrival in Frankfurt marked the beginning of a test case. His journal describes “the shattered feeling on stepping again into Germany, on seeing the native city was utterly absent.” But that is the extent of emotional response permitted. The entry continues to record that “for the entirety of my journey, I read the kitsch, libertine ingenu of Colette, which has quite good details of frigidity and a really positive ending.” The decision to deflect from his “shattered feeling” to this unaccountable nonchalance culminates in a strange, if not small-minded, remark in an entry made on that same day, at 1:00 a.m.: “Pension (single room) 7.50 per day; seems very expensive to me.”⁵ Twelve years, many thousand tons of explosives, and a historic genocide since his flight from Germany, Adorno was griping about the cost of his hotel. He seems to have been uninterested in the fact that he had just arrived in a brand-new country, one whose first parliament had first met less than two months before. Or perhaps, embedded in this critique of everyday avarice was an early intuition of the inextricability between cities and society and, by extension, of the divergence between a capacity to quantify the ruined cityscape and the ethical, moral, and societal urgency to confront its meaning.

The scale of destruction, of which Adorno saw a remainder in 1949 but within which his putative audience had been living for years, was well documented. Photographs, maps, and statistics had been recording Germany’s urban ruins since the latter days of the Third Reich and through the arrival of war correspondents attached to the occupying forces.⁶ At the start of aerial bombardment in the early 1940s, the National Socialist regime sustained civilian morale by investing substantial effort in speedy repairs; but the intensity of attack soon left cityscapes seemingly irreparable. West Germany’s housing stock was reduced by 20 percent just as its population increased by almost the same percentage between 1939 and 1946, attributable to the mass migration of settlers from what had been Germany’s annexed eastern territories.⁷ The years after surrender and before the currency reform in spring 1948 saw

3. Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, 178.

4. Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, 177.

5. Adorno, *Eine Bildmonographie*, 210. All translations are mine.

6. See, e.g., Schivelbusch, *In a Cold Crater*, 18–27.

7. Solsten, *Germany*, 77, 524 (table 5); Childs, *Germany in the Twentieth Century*, 122, 303 (table 11).

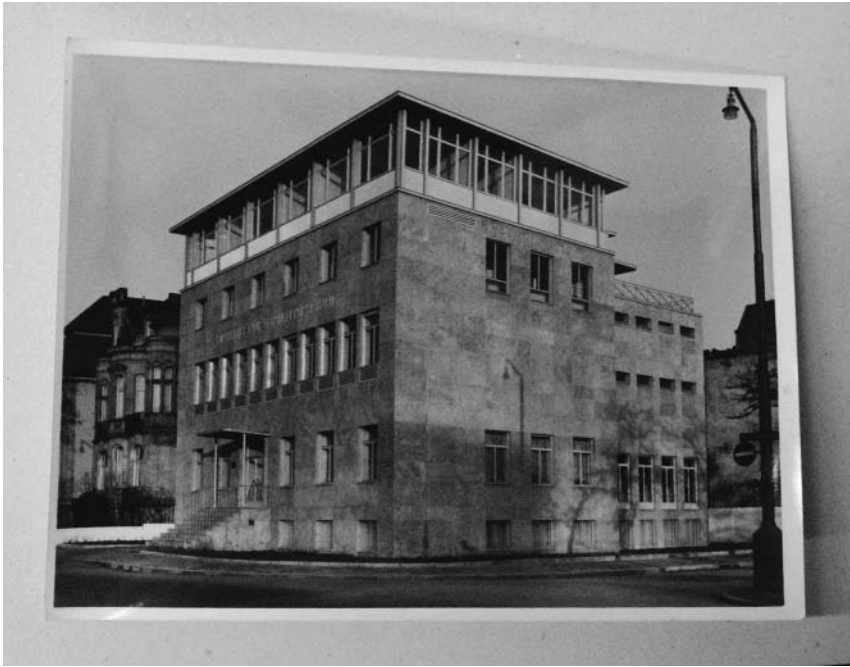


Figure 1. Hermann Mäckler and Alois Giefer, Institut für Sozialforschung, ca. 1951. Photo: Willy Keim. © Giefer-Mäckler-Archiv, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt am Main.

draconian rationing of building materials. An inevitably demoralizing process of cannibalizing the ruins that remained was the only viable way to construct anew.

The city of Frankfurt had set out early to mine these remains systematically at scale. Its enormous *Trümmerverwertungsanlage* (rubble recycling plant) produced roof tiles and concrete blocks cast from a slurry of ground rubble and cement. "The plant is built in such a way," bragged Eugen Blanck, *Stadtrat* (director) of Frankfurt's planning department from 1946 through 1948, in a 1947 paper titled "Gedanken zum Wiederaufbau Frankfurts" ("Thoughts on Rebuilding Frankfurt"), "that all of Frankfurt's rubble can be used within thirty years, including even fine-grain debris."⁸ From the perspective of today, the hyperbole of Blanck's timeline seems obvious: Frankfurt would be rebuilt well before 1977. But his conservative projection was understandable in the

8. Eugen Blanck, "Gedanken zum Wiederaufbau Frankfurts," October 15, 1947, typescript, Werner-Hebebrand-Archiv no. 159, Akademie der Künste Berlin.

early postwar era. As of late 1949, some two years after the Frankfurt rubble plant was first heralded, Adorno recorded his struggles to recognize his city amid its own detritus:

Long walk through the city. First Bockenheimer Landstrasse, intact by Frankfurt standards, in other words, only every other building destroyed. Everywhere are the wildest reconstruction activities. The opera is burned out and grinning: the true, the beautiful, the good. Goethestrasse and Goetheplatz are hardly recognizable. In front of the Hauptwache are ruins. Charlotte's palace is burned out but the parterre is in use. The Church of St. Catherine, where I was confirmed, destroyed, just like the Liebfraukirche belonging to the order of St. Agatha. Went to New Kräme Street. The old city is a nightmare, a terrifying dream in which one sees everything in the wrong place, as with the entire cathedral seen from Römerberg. Only at the Eisernen Steg Bridge did I finally feel the fantastic aspects of the whole correctly; I felt as though I were not there.⁹

Clearing rubble was only part of the problem. German cities competed for limited construction resources. Each took pains to document just how dire its destruction had been, and how urgent its need. Surveys in the form of maps and accounts, many of which built on work begun by Albert Speer's *Programm zum Wiederaufbau kriegszerstörten Städte* (*Program for Rebuilding Cities Destroyed by War*), were a commonplace.¹⁰ Frankfurt, for one, took a more creative approach to persuasive metrics, arguing for a "destruction rating" that should prove the city's greater need because of its "particularly unenviable proportion between volume of rubble and occupants. Frankfurt's twelve million cubic meters of rubble (in proportion between volume and population in 1939) produces a destruction rating of 22, compared with Munich's eight million cubic meters and ranking of 9, Essen with ten million cubic meters and a ranking of 15, Berlin with seventy million cubic meters and a ranking of 16. From these figures, it is clear that Frankfurt is among the most completely destroyed metropolises in Germany."¹¹ Other proportional metrics, represented in charts in the back of this same, four-page report, juxtaposed allocations with need among other Hessian cities, first by percentage of total population and then by percentage of total building material allocated. Hanau, for example, represented only 0.6 percent of the Hessian population

9. Adorno, *Eine Bildmonographie*, 210–12.

10. See, e.g., Düwel and Gutschow, *Blessing in Disguise*.

11. "Denkschrift über die Benachteiligung der Stadt Frankfurt a.M. bei der Zuweisung von Baustoffen," March 11, 1947, Werner-Hebebrand-Archiv no. 159, Akademie der Künste Berlin.

but received 4 percent of building material allocated to the state. Frankfurt, with nearly 10 percent of the total population, had to be content with 15 percent. Absolute numbers, it seems, had lost their power to shock as people became inured. Relative proportions might work if they registered the dead-weight of rubble against the needs of living inhabitants (fig. 2).

Numerical quantification was as much a concern in the social sciences as it was to building departments and municipal administrators; this was the context into which Adorno had stepped. The conviction that spatial form codetermined social outcome was widely held among contemporary architects and planners of all convictions, not only those loyal to the modern movement and its claims to rationality. It was shared by architects of National Socialist monumentality, but also by authors of the many less stridently ideological handbooks of the period. These handbooks advocated rebuilding along more or less historical lines while selectively allowing change for such necessities as automobiles, public health, and other modern demands.¹² Among those Adorno might have encountered on his return, Ludwig Neundörfer, head of the Soziographisches Institut at the University of Frankfurt, had been gathering empirical evidence even before the war was over.

In the 1920s and during the Third Reich, Neundörfer had studied cities through their transforming demands on agricultural hinterlands, and the implications of those transformations on space planning. His studies from the early 1940s looked specifically at the rural populations of German conquests in the east to promote the "mobilization" of "German peasantry."¹³ By 1949, however, Neundörfer had become a favored resource for the circle of architects that prided themselves on their self-critical, reflective approach to postwar reconstruction. Among those architects were the future presidents of the architects' union—the Bund Deutscher Architekten—and of the trade organization, the Werkbund (German Association of Craftspeople), that would help make Braun a household name, as well as architects who would go on to design Frankfurt's airport, a host of new corporate headquarters, and both West Germany's parliament and its embassy in Washington, DC. They included Neundörfer in the publications they issued, beginning in 1947. The first issue of the *Frankfurter Hefte*, for example, contained Neundörfer's calculations alongside church architect Otto Bartning's semiautobiographical fiction about a conversation

12. On Lübeck, Kassel, and Hamburg, see Düwel and Gutschow, *Blessing in Disguise*, 144–260. Many planners retained their positions after denazification, including Konstanty Gutschow, Rudolf Hillebrecht, and Wilhelm Wortmann. For examples of reconstruction planning handbooks, see Heilig, *Wende im Städtebau*; and Schmidt, *Ein Architekt geht über Feld*.

13. See Neundörfer's bibliography at https://de.zxc.wiki/wiki/Ludwig_Neundörfer (accessed February 14, 2022).



Figure 2. “The building blocks are produced as a self-help undertaking.” Caption on the back of an undated photograph from the Deutscher Caritasverband. © Giefer-Mäckler-Archiv, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt am Main.

with a young, disillusioned veteran amid the ruins of an unnamed city. The first issue of the Werkbund monthly *Baukunst und Werkform* featured Neundörfer’s “Inventory of the Collapse” next to an editorial statement that described ethical, rather than material, devastation: “The collapse destroyed the visible world of our lives and work. . . . We recognize the degree to which the visible collapse is only an expression of spiritual erosion and we could lose ourselves in despair. We are left to return to the foundation of things: it is from that point that our responsibility is to be understood.”¹⁴

Like a well-trained manager, Neundörfer measured what might be managed: 15 percent of all housing destroyed, 23 percent damaged, and, of a total 19 million units, an additional 4.37 million somehow unfit, all according with American estimates. Nonetheless, the consulting American sociologists charged

14. Durth, *Deutsche Architekten*, 59.

by the Rockefeller Foundation with rebuilding the social sciences according to American methodologies after the war were more frustrated by Neundörfer's episodic, empirical approach than by the overly "philosophical" approach at the newly founded Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) under Max Horkheimer, whom Adorno had just joined.¹⁵ Speaking in Darmstadt to planners familiar with the dire numbers and as a representative of the Institut für Sozialforschung,¹⁶ Adorno argued against such an instrumental approach to understanding cities:

Questions of urbanism are inextricably connected with the societal milieu within which they arise. I believe, however, that the perspective that I would like to call the "communal political" . . . fails. It substitutes more circumscribed problems—the constitution of a group, the professional structure of a city, demographics—for the connections within society; it substitutes other things for structure.

That is not all. I believe . . . that the "communal political" perspective is, perhaps inevitably, synonymous with the administrative viewpoint. It seems to be in the essence of such a perspective that specialists understand urbanism as a problem to be solved from above, by those who have been authorized to address it by virtue of society's distribution of labor; but that the humans for whom it is built have relatively little to say. (SG, 10–11)

These words undercut the validity of approaches such as Neundörfer's; but more importantly, they undercut the standard planning principle of functional segregation. It was a principle not limited to modernist planning or *Neues Bauen*, the term used to designate a particularly German school of modern architecture, but one also adopted by the National Socialist state through its ascription of a specific style to each functional category: neoclassicizing and monumental for public buildings; *Heimatstil* (homeland style, or an imaginary vernacular that referenced the half-timbered architecture of the Middle Ages) for residential buildings, including mass housing; and stripped-down steel and glass for industrial buildings meant to represent technical progress. Adorno derided approaches like Neundörfer's as bureaucratic:

Germany is not suffering from an economic crisis that affects any one person more or less than another, but rather is amid a collapse that brings every German to the edge of the abyss.

15. The Rockefeller Foundation funded both research institutes between 1946 and 1955 as a contribution to "democratizing" German education (Staley, "Rockefeller Foundation," 259–60).

16. Michael Schwarz, Akademie der Künste Archiv, Walter Benjamin Archiv, Berlin, email, February 3, 2022.

Just as, in the wake of heavy business losses, a good businessman initially undertakes an inventory to see what he still possesses, so, too, the beginning of planning for new construction has to reside in an inventory of the collapse.¹⁷

The lecture begins in a tone of clemency: imagine, amid destruction that left him estranged from Frankfurt even more than three years after surrender, why Adorno would choose to speak not of overwhelming need or loss but instead, of beauty. He asked his audience to locate the source of urban beauty between art and history even before he asked them to consider the dependency of either on the society in which both were produced. For his audience, beauty was a reprieve from the exigencies around them. Ultimately, never one to offer simple answers, Adorno would propose neither art nor history as paths forward. But for a moment, at the outset, Adorno allowed his listeners to engage not as technocrats or bureaucrats or experts but as people invested in understanding what makes any city worthwhile. He invoked the images of two cities vanished in the war, disappearances his words belie:

When we speak about the beauty of a city, what we actually mean is not the mere formal beauty of its physical ensemble; nor do we mean that which we call “expression” in the conventional sense, as when we speak about poetry or music. Instead, in a certain sense, the beauty of the city—if I can briefly speak in philosophical concepts—occupies an intermediary position between the beauty of nature and the beauty of art. In other words, it is not that a city’s beauty is determined by a definitive, clear intention as realized but instead, what we find beautiful in a city, for example an old city such as Bamberg or Rothenburg, is a strange intertwining of form and organic development on the one hand, and, on the other, a trace of the historical past which has been transformed into an expression that speaks to us. (SG, 9)

It seems he had visited neither since his return. In Bamberg, he would have found the *Mühlenviertel* (mill district) at the city’s center largely gone, a gap in the urban fabric that remained the subject of debate even seventy-five years later.¹⁸ The city had suffered most late in the war, when a fleet of some one thousand British bombers headed for Nuremberg had dropped their payloads there on March 31, 1944, after bad weather forced them to scrap the original mission.¹⁹ Rothenberg fared far worse, with half the medieval city destroyed in a bombing raid on March 31, 1945 (fig. 3). As the city burned, the heads of

17. Neundörfer, “Inventar des Zusammenbruchs,” 25.

18. Auer, “Ein Loch bedroht Bambergs Welterbe-Titel.”

19. Gehringer, “Vom Krieg verschont?”

the fire department, the police, and the Red Cross organized a doomed effort to save its historic city hall. This effort, celebrated by the city's National Socialist mayor in a 1950 memoir, had been transmuted for propaganda issued shortly thereafter.²⁰ It cast the event as evidence of heroism against the odds rather than as harbinger of defeat. By 1949 neither Bamberg nor Rothenburg was an untainted exemplar of an ideal Gothic or medieval city.

The specter of the medieval city might well have appealed to the professor at whose invitation Adorno was speaking. Karl Gruber characterized himself as a member of the architectural rear guard. In a 1946 lecture on rebuilding ruined cities, he'd argued that the medieval city was a natural expression of free citizenry, contending that "[just as] in life one free citizen [*Bürger*] stands beside another, so too does one's home [*Bürgerhaus*] stand beside the next."²¹ It is unclear why he invited Adorno to speak at all, or why the invitation was accepted.²²

Gruber was on record as a National Socialist sympathizer even after surrender, attributing the failure of the Third Reich to its rejection of organized religion, particularly Catholicism. He equated efforts toward democratization with the wholesale humiliation and radicalization of German society.²³ As head of planning for the reconstruction of Darmstadt from April 1945 through the spring of 1947, Gruber worked to retain the hierarchies and spaces of the historical city through stylistic and volumetric reconstruction, although not through exact replication, which he called a "film-set city."²⁴ He was forced to cede his position to Peter Grund, who instead reconfigured Darmstadt around a new major transportation axis. Nothing came of Gruber's efforts.

To be clear: equating the society of the Middle Ages and its architecture with a fictive Germanic authenticity was not limited to architects on the political right, such as Gruber. Walter Gropius had chosen the Gothic cathedral,

20. Wirsching, *Rothenburg ob der Tauber*. See also <https://docplayer.org/201383386-Rothenburg-ob-der-tauber.html> (accessed February 10, 2022). Helmut Puff quotes Joseph Goebbels's 1943 speech after the bombing of Kassel: "[After a German victory] you will march through the fields of rubble in happiness. . . . You will view these ruins as pledges and guarantors of victory. You will stand still in front of every house and say: we have sacrificed this house, too, for the victory" ("Ruins as Models," 262).

21. Romero, *Baugeschichte als Auftrag*, 189–91.

22. Gruber's papers are at the Technical University of Darmstadt but still largely unindexed as of January 2022.

23. "Democracy alone is no means of salvation in our situation. Confronted with the total lack of transcendence and pure materialist mindset of the masses that the German people represent today, God knows, democracy will only lead to delivering the power of the state once again into the revolutionary monstrosity that shouts most loudly" (Romero, *Baugeschichte als Auftrag*, 178).

24. Romero, *Baugeschichte als Auftrag*, 189.



Figure 3. Rothenburg ob der Tauber after bombings in March 1945. Photo: Alfons Ohmeyer. Stadtarchiv Rothenburg ob der Tauber Fotosammlung, 90/1/1362. © Verein Alt-Rothenburg.

as rendered by Lyonel Feininger, to represent his Bauhaus school; Rudolf Schwarz, in many of his influential architecture theory texts from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, referenced the Gothic as one of the two truly German styles.²⁵ Yet it seems strange that Adorno would have shared that persuasion. In his lecture, he insists on the beauty of the medieval city, even though

they were embodiments in their entirety of a simple market economy, in which production existed for the purposes of the market but in which the means of production were not yet separated from those who produced, in which all relationships were comprehensible and in which, above all, for a series of sociological and economic reasons . . . the structure of community itself had a largely static form. . . . The needs of each individual would have led him to build in exactly such a way as was appropriate to a sustained whole. You can see that even such a purely aesthetic problem as the specific beauty of the medieval city can be adduced to a specific societal formula. . . . In fact, one of the most famous signatures of this beauty lies in the way that streets in that era produced vanishing points and, as a result, a kind of positive boundedness existed in those streets. This is also conditioned historically and societally. The boundedness of the streets is explained by their purpose in society, that cities were sufficient unto themselves and in principle needed to export or import nothing. (SG, 15–16)

This fictionalized account of the medieval economy and its urban consequences, rendered with so little nuance or criticism, is surprisingly out of character. One wonders what Adorno thought his audience might gain from this analysis, if not license for rebuilding in faux-historicizing form.

But it wasn't that, either. Adorno was no more interested in upholding the aesthetic ideal of the medieval city than he was sensitive to the fact that the cities he referenced had been transformed as much by ideology as by bombs. He used this rhetorical trope as a straw man to argue that the spaces and atmosphere for which the medieval city was valued had never been, after all, the spontaneous result of native knowledge, as the more idealized accounts would have had it. Instead, he argued, they were the outcomes of a specific, integrated, irreproducible social fabric. Likewise, he dismissed the belief that such spaces could be reduced to replicable principles, as Gruber would have done in Darmstadt. Adorno pillaried the British aesthetic theorists of aleatory-seeming form, William Morris and John Ruskin. "Even in the case of the medieval city," Adorno argued, "things were not entirely as spontaneous as we had believed; rather, in truth, . . . cities were probably at least in large part not as organically grown as they appear but rather, in a certain sense, derived through planning" (SG,

25. See Conrads et al., *Die Bauhausdebatte*, 42.

13). Urban beauty required reciprocity between planned intention and unmediated activity.

Although he demurred on what the new city might look like, Adorno was clear that historicizing architecture would result not in “the old Nuremberg but rather a toy store in the form of old Nuremberg” (SG, 24). To visit the historic center of Nuremberg since its rebuilding might suggest to some the toy store Adorno evoked. But the intrinsic argument Adorno brought to bear was not, as might have been obvious, that changes in the social and economic structures would preclude reproducing older forms. He instead proposed that the aesthetic structures had changed. The bounded medieval street had been superseded as a standard of beauty, “to the same extent that similar canons have changed in other art forms such as music, so that there is a beauty in the endless, in the unbounded, in the fragmentary” (SG, 16). Without ever articulating what that new beauty was, Adorno skirted traditionalism while still rejecting such rationally planned modernist cities as Mannheim, which he described as evoking “estrangement, the feeling that these cities are set against human beings as though they had been violently foisted on them from outside” (SG, 14).

The “toy store” debate would have had familiar overtones for his audience. Frankfurt had been at its center even before Eugen Blau’s rubble plans were complete. Conflict arose after Kurt Blaum, the first mayor of Frankfurt under American occupation whose tenure began, perhaps symbolically, on July 4, 1945, commissioned renderings of his vision for the city. Despite a full construction stop imposed on the city center, the series of perspectives showing a new, open downtown were presented at a public meeting in November 1945. Blaum’s vision opposed historicizing reconstruction. “One should not allow oneself to be led on by historicism of a romantic kind,” he said, “but instead must, while carefully adapting to the preservation-worthy values of the historical building memorial within an empathetic design spirit . . . build and shape in the spirit and character of the current and past era.”²⁶ Blaum lost his reelection bid a year later.

Among the historically resonant fabric Frankfurt had lost was the house in which Goethe had been born. Whether and how to rebuild the house was hugely controversial. In 1947 Otto Bartning, who had overseen the upkeep of all Protestant churches in Hesse during the war, was invited to give testimony on the rebuilding. He advocated an interpretative approach. Also invited was Ernst Beutler, an art historian certain to recommend in favor of exact historical replication. The new mayor cast the deciding vote: the Goethe house was

26. Durth and Sigel, *Baukultur*, 406.

rebuilt in its historical form and completed by 1949 to celebrate the bicentennial of Goethe's birth. Backlash against the decision and the historical repression it implied was swift. "The [Goethe] house on the Hirschgraben was not destroyed by a fire started by an iron or a lightning strike or an arsonist," as one commentator wrote, chagrined by the erasure that reconstruction ensured.²⁷ To replicate historical form was to encourage a collective act of amnesia. Adorno made no mention of the moral dimension implicit in historical reproduction, a dimension no less urgent today than in the late 1940s.

Rather than engaging the potential for a new urbanism to embody moral precepts by intent, he instead offered historical evidence of how cities were resultants of the social orders that produced and inhabited them. This was as true of the medieval city as of the modernist, with its prismatic forms and rationalized spaces, as inevitable products, he argued, of capitalism. There could be, he continued, no urban beauty from contemporary forms of society, whether capitalist or, as he noted later in the talk, Marxist. He cited as evidence both the German multifamily building and the Anglo-American semi-attached or single-family house. Both embodied unreflective or false individualism and "progressive capitalism, left entirely to its own devices and gone wild" (SG, 18). "The hideousness of Ackerstrasse is the precise complement of the hideousness of Kurfürstendamm," he wrote, comparing a tenement quarter he'd known in Berlin during the time he'd courted his wife to the posh Berlin avenue near the elementary school his friend Walter Benjamin had attended (SG, 18). Adorno was unrelenting:

The definitive bisection of society into incompatible classes reflects in architecture. . . . The thesis is this: that it is not a general economic category, like that of the tenement, which decides the value, or lack thereof, that an urban structure has but rather the actual standing that an entity assumes within the society. . . . When people are dehumanized to such an extent that the concept of dwelling itself is fractured . . . then the equilibrium that once embodied a higher value is destroyed and the result is something hideous and repulsive. This is the problem made evident in the multifamily dwellings. (SG, 19)

He cited only Werner Hegemann's 1930 critique of the tenement *Das steinernde Berlin (Petrifying Berlin)*, omitting the modern architects and architectural movements that had made condemnation of precisely this housing model a centerpiece of their work. In Adorno's case, this was at best studied ignorance. The German cities in which Adorno had lived earlier, Berlin and

27. Durth and Sigel, *Baukultur*, 412.

Frankfurt, were both centers of housing experimentation during the Weimar Republic, producing an enormous array of potential referents for lifestyles more or less communal, more or less urbane, more or less invested in private spaces or shared amenities, all associated with innovative financing and governance models. If nothing else, he must have known the Weimar housing movement's better-documented protagonists: Hebebrand's friend and colleague Ernst May or the Taut brothers, Walter Gropius and Hans Scharoun, at least as influential after the war as in the interwar period. These architects and many others had designed spaces within the public realm—spaces of reconfigured gender relations, leisure, food production, collectivism, and graded privacy—which would have directly addressed Adorno's reproaches about the economic and societal determinants of urban form. Perhaps he ignored these examples to satisfy his programmatic dislike of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Sobriety), a useful straw man with which also to dismiss modern architecture (SG, 19). Unlike his audience, for whom form was an inextricable part of their work, Adorno seemed to treat architectural and urban form as purely resultant. Only as he shifted from critique of the past to speculation on the future later in his lecture did he begin instead to focus on alternate parameters by which housing and its forms could be determined.

The emphasis on societal parameters rather than formal analysis was widely debated at that moment, when the idea of *menschenwürdiges* or "human-worthy" housing was integral to West German architectural discourse. It would later be summarized as *Wohnenwollen* or the "will to habitation," a term coined by architect Hans Schwippert in 1951 at the second Darmstädter Gespräche, a conference held in the same city where Adorno was lecturing.²⁸ Schwippert's concept addressed the struggle to honor the human desire for openness and optimism in a historical context characterized by uncertainty and material want. During the conference his words would have reached a wider audience via radio broadcast; he meant *Wohnenwollen* as a call to action. "Building corresponds to the essence of our time," the preamble written by the conference organizers read. "The exigency of our time is homelessness." The contemporary architecture shown in the exhibition was filigree: white painted, thinly dimensioned, transparent, and ethereal. It was the idiom that prevailed throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, despite the challenges of its construction amid a dearth of the constituent materials steel, glass, and concrete. Transparency and openness were concepts central to the construction of the new federal Germany

28. On *Wohnenwollen*, see Schwippert in Bartning, *Mensch und Raum*, 87–88. In 1950 Adorno would participate in the first Darmstädter Gespräche, which pitted abstract and figurative art forms against each other.



Figure 4. Hans Schwippert, Parliament Bonn, 1949. Architecture Museum of the Technical University of Munich, Schwi-92-29.

and its citizenry (fig. 4).²⁹ In his lecture Adorno selectively ignored any of the ways in which the language of modern architecture might have been connoted at the time, although the building in which he would soon go to work, the Institut für Sozialforschung by Mäckler and Giefer, was indebted to this architectural idiom.

The shortcomings of multifamily housing in the German tradition were not the only threat to the "real respect" Adorno envisioned. The Anglo-American model of single-family or semi-attached home was no less beholden to the dehumanizing forces of the capitalist modern city:

If you visit an Anglo-Saxon country for the first time, then you will probably have the same experience as I, a layman in architecture: a sense of shock. This shock arises from the fact that all these single-family houses look quite similar to one another, if not identical. . . . What constitutes the shock? It is by no

29. I deal specifically with the architecture of this period in Widder, *Year Zero to Economic Miracle*.

means a result of the fact each unit is the same, nor of the abstract similarity of one to another, but instead . . . the principle of the *doppelgänger*. . . . This has developed to an extreme in the Anglo-Saxon single-family house. The problem that I have described here is again a problem of society. . . . Each citizen has the ideology of considering himself unique, unmistakable, and insists on this claim; but at the same time, conforms to values of society that demand measurement in such completely abstract units as time or money spent. (SG, 20–21)

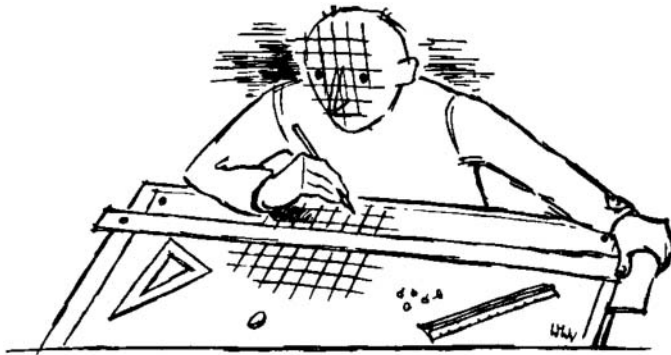
Although Adorno referred explicitly to the older semi-attached British townhouse or the New York brownstone, his description seems much more perfectly matched to the phenomenon of suburbanization, a trend he certainly would have known from his time in the United States. To suburbanize was, in fact, a solution proposed by various American advisers for West German rebuilding. Some of its strongest advocates were the expatriates Martin Wagner and Walter Gropius, who used their 1947 Harvard Graduate School of Design architecture and urban planning course to proliferate the model.³⁰ Even without mention of Levittown or other burgeoning postwar American housing activity, Adorno's condemnation seemed prescient. The architecture of false individualism was a valid concern.

Considerations of how best to cultivate the relationship between individual and collective was embedded in the fabric of West German society by this time. The concern was expressed in the guidebooks issued by both Catholic and Protestant churches to assist private citizens in their return to civil courage and ethical everyday life,³¹ as well as in the steps taken by the Allied occupying forces to restructure the way West Germans acceded to civil service positions.³² Inevitably, these concerns surfaced in architectural circles too, especially in discussions of architectural expression. One such example was the debate about what Walther Schmidt, editor of the periodical *Bauen und Wohnen*, called *Rasteritis*, or “grid-itis” (fig. 5). He coined the term in 1947 to describe how cities had become subsumed by *Rasterfassade* (gridded facades),

30. See correspondence between Werner Hebebrand and Walter Gropius/Martin Wagner from late summer and early fall 1947 in Werner-Hebebrand-Archiv 575, Akademie der Künste Berlin. Hebebrand provided maps and statistical information to Gropius as well.

31. See Karrenberg, *Evangelische Soziallexikon*, and its Catholic precursor, Nell-Breuning, *Politisches Wörterbuch*.

32. The Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaften in Speyer, founded in 1947 by the French occupying government, replaced the traditional system, by which career civil servants were drafted from the cadre of those trained in law, with a curriculum that mirrored the French tradition. For fifteen years it was the only school in West Germany at which career civil servants could train. See Widder, *Year Zero to Economic Miracle*, 221–50.



RASTERITIS

von Walther Schmidt

Figure 5. "Grid-itis" affects both the drafting board and the architect.
Bauen und Wohnen, no. 2 (1947).

each the exact register of the structural and functional grids behind it, as modernist architectural ideology dictated.³³ Schmidt pointed to the contradiction between the need for a highly rationalized and effective building construction industry, both to allay the devastating shortages of housing and to drive a slowly resurgent economy, and the demand that new societal values of freedom and freethinking be represented in buildings realized.

Schmidt's diagnosis comports well with Adorno's critiques of the "administrative" or bureaucratic in city planning as well as his distaste for the parallel phenomena of anonymity, represented by multifamily housing, and faux individuality. As Schmidt wrote:

If its use grows out of control, then the grid can come to symbolize lack of freedom, of condescension and recurrent impediment. . . . In the open landscape, one can wander freely but in a system of perpendicular crossing streets, one can only march or perhaps sneak along. We have had our experience with how "marching" tends to go and with those as well, who have chosen to sneak along . . . particularly in light of the fatal tendency among Germans toward systematization. . . . Human freedom operates only in a narrow space between

33. Schmidt, "Rasteritis."

necessities. It is a human and an artistic duty not to limit or distort this narrow space with pseudo-necessity . . . but rather—literally—to *test its measure freely*.³⁴

His *Bauen und Wohnen* editorial, written two years prior to Adorno's talk, also argued that failure in architectural expression was indicative of societal failure. The gridded facade was also associated closely with the way the building industry and its trade unions were organized after the war. The gridded facade was an infill strategy that involved applying finish material or stucco directly onto a building's structural grid and then inserting into the remaining aperture a combination of window and spandrel panel. This strategy, tried-and-true, allowed for different trades such as stone, metalwork, window and glazier, to work in sequence without overlapping liability; it also allowed for each fabricator to work only on the parts of the building in which each was specialized. The "fatal tendency among Germans toward systematization," the experience of both "marching" and "sneaking": these physical legacies of societal developments would be addressed at a much larger scale by the concept of the social market economy. The advent, beginning in the early 1950s with the first buildings in Germany designed and specified by American architecture firms doing business there, of the curtain-wall facade system, a system less dependent on a building's structural grid, would transform both industry practice and stylistic preference. But these developments occurred well after Schmidt's editorial. In 1949 Frankfurt, they were still only emergent.

Adorno did not stop at condemning the urban architectures of so-called free market capitalism. He had as little patience for what he called Soviet "camps," or *Lager*. The word *Lager* is full of innuendo. Whereas in standard German usage, a *Lager* might neutrally describe "storage," as in the *Lagerhaus* or "warehouse," its meaning when applied to the housing of humans rather than goods resonated with its most infamous usage: *Konzentrationslager* or *Vernichtungslager* (concentration or extermination camp). One wonders what effect his language had on the audience:

The technical capacity to furnish all human beings with a worthy dwelling is so overpowering that countless human beings end up—I almost said would be—locked in storage units [*Lager*]. That tendency is in no way limited to the so-called capitalist countries. The camp or barracks style has spread throughout the Soviet Union and in Russia to an almost eerie degree. I would also say that this tendency to transform the world into a system of camps or storage facilities is juxtaposed to the high castles of the corporations. It is not something we

34. Schmidt, "Rasteritis," 292.

want to support simply because it is integral to our era. Rather, I would say, it should be the urbanist's purpose, despite all the difficulties with which he is confronted at this instant, to imagine planning housing, planning cities, in which free human beings can dwell, and not producers and consumers, not private capitalists or salaried employees or employers. I want to express to you that this is the decisive societal and moral demand to be placed on the urbanist today. (SG, 26)

Perhaps Adorno meant to shock his audience out of their default ideology of efficiency and functionality, their *Rasteritis* and bureaucratic purview. Perhaps it was meant only to rouse a dozing audience before his lecture culminated in what he thought to be his most important point: what would it mean to build housing and cities for "free human beings"? Was there, in the claustrophobic worldview he would later describe in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, even the possibility of such freedom? Could Adorno, relentless critic of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, its corollary in architecture the *Neues Bauen* and the political utopias promised but never achieved by modernism, actually believe that architecture could anticipate a societal form that could make human beings free?

The "administrative" viewpoint against which Adorno had argued earlier in his lecture, he asserted, was to blame for the difficulties. "Specialists," he had explained, "understand urbanism as a problem to be solved from above. . . . The humans for whom it is built have relatively little to say." Even if those specialists believed that they represented the best interests of the people they housed, their practice "transforms the dweller into an object rather than a subject" (SG, 11). Rebuilding offered a unique opportunity to conceive the city differently; as Adorno said, albeit with little specificity about how this was to be achieved, "we should not fall into a general habit of reification as we consider how to rebuild cities, a reification that assumes humans are the objects of institutions and not that the institutions are there for the benefit of humans" (SG, 12). Although he admits, based on his experience with musical taste, that "following the will of the people in a democratic way" produces "results . . . so primitive and kitschy that your hair would stand on end" (SG, 28), he is insistent that those in his audience act dialogically, in conversation with those people for whom they build.

He proposed an architecture that would reverse the practice of favoring institutions over the humans whom those institutions were meant to benefit. To provide a concrete example of what he envisioned, he offered analogy to the medical clinic. It was an area in which contemporary architects were already at work. Consider, for example, drawings produced by Otto Bartning in 1950–51 for a hospital in Darmstadt (fig. 6). Human figures in a whole array of postures



Figure 6. Otto Bartning, drawing for a women's hospital (Frauenklinik Darmstadt), 1951.

© Universitätsarchiv der Technischen Universität Darmstadt, Bartning bequest, UniA DA 938 Nr. 2011P08084.

populate these plans, far more precisely and vividly than typical abstract ergonomic standards would have required. Bodies under treatment lie on gurneys, other bodies in motion use sinks or furniture, others clasp hands. Bartning's colorfully painted drawings are attentive to people in various states of health and interpersonal relations; and to water, plants, movement, and objects. These often-overlooked occupants are constitutive of his architecture. "There is a difference," Adorno said. "In medicine . . . there are countless clinics that give you the sense, as soon as you enter, that you are actually the object of the clinic, that you are there on behalf of the clinic. . . . In a well-run clinic, however, one notices that what happens to the patient is not an abstraction but occurs with real respect for the individual." "Would it be possible," he added, for the "general populace to contribute to planning cities about to be rebuilt?" (SG, 12).

Nevertheless, Adorno's well-known mandarinism resurfaced in his skepticism about the capacity of those people whose participation he advocated. He stopped far short of the participatory planning—*Bürgerbeteiligung*—that would emerge later in the century in Germany, through such practices as

participatory art, the activism of 1968, tenants' rights laws, and allied efforts.³⁵ Worth mentioning here is that the period between war's end and 1949 had produced a very different sort of participation in planning and building, without which even the small amount of construction between 1946 and 1948 could never have been realized. Even less well documented is the importance of participatory construction to any architectural practice during that period, even among those who would be numbered among the best-known architects of the postwar. As he walked the streets of Frankfurt, Adorno might well have seen efforts, ongoing throughout German cities, to sort usable brick from rubble. While it figures large in social histories of the period, the implications of that practice, confined to the comparatively short and desperate period at war's end, has largely been ignored by architectural history writing.³⁶ Labor and sweat equity also constitute a form of *Bürgerbeteiligung*, even if these were not the subject of Adorno's consideration. It also seems worth noting how these practices transformed the way architects could work, for and with the people they served, even if those practices were soon set aside as social relations were returned to more conventional straits after 1949.

The need to harvest rubble is well documented: except perhaps via black market connections, there were no other building materials available before currency reform. Moreover, rubble had to be cleared to make sites accessible. Crushed and remixed as aggregate in concrete at plants like those in Frankfurt, rubble was a boon to rebuilding once collected, just as it was an impediment when heaped along city streets. The importance of material salvage to postwar survival is captured in the mythic *Trümmerfrauen* (rubble women).³⁷ But there was a far more expansive range of practices by which "emergency" buildings were realized, both for housing and for public assembly, from whatever materials were at hand. Emergency building programs fostered new opportunities, albeit largely unheralded, for community participation in the construction of cities. In the roles of both clients, especially as church congregations organized reconstruction of their damaged buildings, and producers, as construction workers in projects conceived as social undertakings, laypeople became the protagonists of rebuilding during the initial postwar years.

Notkirchen, or emergency churches, served much more than only religious functions. As complicit as the churches had been in the fascist regime, their importance after the war is unequivocal. In the absence of a functioning

35. One remarkable example of how participatory planning can be realized is <https://hausderstatistik.org> (accessed February 22, 2022). Perhaps Adorno would be pleased?

36. An important exception is Kappel, *Memento 1945?*

37. Treber, *Mythos Trümmerfrauen*.

political administration, churches helped the occupying forces distribute aid and food, find lost relatives, provide education, and begin the process of so-called moral reeducation. In 1946, 96 percent of all Germans identified as practicing Protestants or Catholics.³⁸ No other element of society was so widely shared or respected, despite the acknowledged moral failings of both churches under the National Socialist regime. “Democracy . . . lives from Christianity and alone protects law and liberty. It is the responsibility, therefore, of the church to foster democracy,” stated Pastor Martin Niemöller at the Treysa Conference of August 1945.³⁹ Church reconstruction also offered a much-desired opportunity for architects. “The existential had precedence; no one wanted to live in cellars,” as Ulrich Conrads, associate editor of *Baukunst und Werkform*, explained. By contrast, “churches were comparatively free of purpose, therefore spatial building was only possible in church building.”⁴⁰

The ambitions for *Notkirchen* ranged from rudimentary repair to much more elaborate undertakings. An example of the latter, emergency building in name only, was a historicizing stone church for Stuttgart’s Leipzigerplatz that required nearly three years for completion. Designed by an acolyte of conservative architect Paul Bonatz, Rudolf Lempp, it included elaborate metalwork and stone carving. Only the use of salvaged stones noted in its construction drawings would qualify the Paulus Notkirche as an emergency structure.⁴¹ By contrast, church repair and building in Cologne, a city that revered its Romanesque church architecture and its robust Rhineland Catholicism, was deliberately conceived in phases from makeshift to permanent. Over the decades the *Dombaumeister* (cathedral building superintendent) Willy Weyres oversaw the inventory, planning, and ultimate restoration to usefulness of all Catholic churches in Cologne, of which an estimated 70–80 percent had been destroyed or damaged. Weyres was a master logistician. Records of the work he oversaw, which extended well into the 1950s, are remarkably comprehensive, including cost and source of all building supplies, names of firms contracted, and source of funding.⁴² They document the many *Notkapellen*

38. Springhart, “‘Daß es eine Hoffnung gibt für Deutschland . . . ,’” 95.

39. Besier, “Ökumenische Mission,” 320.

40. Conrads in conversation with the author, Berlin, February 3, 2004.

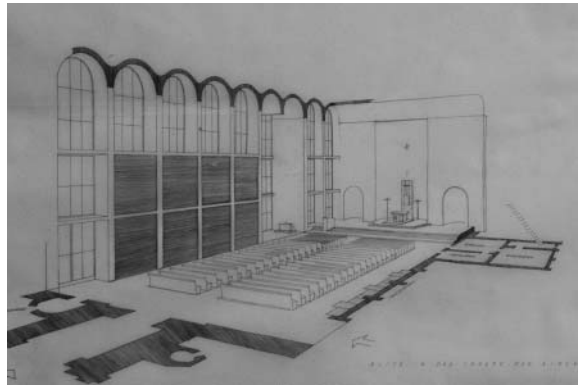
41. The drawings are in the Lempp Archiv at the Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität München.

42. For example, St. Gereon (temporary repairs in 1949, with repair work continuing through 1957), Wl. [Wilhelm] Weyres 147, Historisches Archiv des Erzbistums Köln. For a broader overview of Weyres’s role, I wish to thank archivist Josef van Elten and Gerald Enz, who is working on a dissertation on Weyres.

(emergency chapels), *Notdächer* (provisional roofing), and other temporary or emergency structures used to make the churches serviceable. Each project was bespoke, its architectural resolution unique to found conditions, in a complex process repeated dozens of times over throughout the city. In most cases, the congregation served by the church was called on to consult, manage, and contribute to the projects, and thus were involved in the project of realizing architecture in new, intimate ways.

The patience, foresight, and ingenuity required to repair each church individually through a series of phases, from urgent structural deficiencies to, years later, building out the same space as community life stabilized, was considerable. It distinguished the work of the Werkbund architect Alois Leidl, whose office was in Leydt near Cologne. Leidl was better known as a journalist, activist, town planner and architect of new ground-up churches; but in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he took on a series of unspectacular commissions to repair churches in small Rhineland towns. Photographs from a 1949 project for a church in Lucherberg, to name one example, show a brick church shelled almost beyond repair. In dialogue with a committee of congregants, Leidl prepared five distinctly different schemes and calculated required material, potential for future buildout, cost, and timing, all part of cultivating his otherwise unseasoned clients. One proposal even calculates, brick by brick, the material to be gained by lowering the roof by a meter to patch other areas of the church. The wooden roof structure he drew was carefully dimensioned and calculated to require the fewest and thinnest timbers possible, since lumber was at a premium. Initially the interior was left as bare brick masonry. Later it was plastered and, in a final phase, outfitted more extensively with ecclesiastical art and objects. Leidl's design innovation, a series of modern concrete arches to replace the bombed walls, then glazed with milk glass, evoked industrial architecture. It was a solution that would have been inconceivable under any other conditions, when more conservative taste dictated (figs. 7–10). The state of emergency made an architectural virtue of necessity. In such cases as this church, for which the congregation served as a client operating under pressures of cost, labor, material, and time, the participation of laymen in the architectural expression of repair, both short-term and long-term, provided entirely different architectural and social possibilities than the more conventional circumstances that had dominated in the past.

As vital as churches were to the structural restoration of West Germany, the catastrophic dearth of housing was even more immediately urgent. Studies such as Neundörfer's registered the scale of need, but architects were left to



Figures 7–10. Alfons Leitl, Lucherberg Parish church, 1949. Photos: Arthur Pfau, Mannheim. Historisches Archiv des Erzbistums Köln, NL Leitl 283 and PK 139.

respond without typical materials or industrial production. Egon Eiermann, whose influence and success in the 1950s and 1960s eclipsed even his important prewar and wartime career, described the global scale of the housing problem, noting that even “17 percent of all housing units in the United States still do not have running water.”⁴³ Eiermann was speaking to an assembly organized by the Deutscher Caritasverband, a Catholic charitable organization, in Freiburg on May 23, 1946. Raised in Berlin, he moved after the war to southwestern Germany, where his father had been born, after a bomb destroyed his

43. Egon Eiermann, “Vortrag über die Planung von Wohnhäusern,” typescript for a lecture at the Caritas-Tagung der Diözese Freiburg in Hettingen on May 23, 1946, Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (KIT) Archiv, Eiermann bequest, Reden Aufsätze Interviews, 1.

Berlin office. Enterprising and persuasive, Eiermann completed two housing projects near Freiburg in collaboration with Robert Hilger, whose initials, not Eiermann's, appear on all the project drawings.

Unlike many mass housing schemes of the Weimar era, which applied factory technologies and Taylorization regimes to the problem, the Caritas projects were realized using the simplest of building materials and the glut of semiskilled labor at hand: unfired mud brick laid up by the people, many of them refugees, who would later occupy the houses. In his 1946 lecture he described a disastrous housing shortage exacerbated by "the ex-migration of East German populations" who had "for the most part been redistributed to rural areas that have therefore become the focus of attention."⁴⁴ The rebuilding of cities, he claimed, was beyond his ken, since it would be subject to economic transformations that remained unforeseeable. Instead, he focused on solving the problems of rural areas, because, he claimed, these areas were vital to feeding the entire population. He touched on factory prefabrication in wood and steel to provide rapidly built housing but argued that the crippled German industry and building material shortages obviated such approaches. In "this first phase we need to get through, to construct . . . with ad hoc, primitive means," he countered,⁴⁵ although by *ad hoc* he meant rational, minimal, realizable but not of lesser quality than conventional buildings, most certainly not temporary. He reviewed for his audience a variety of different building materials and the difficulties they might represent, then concluded:

Thus, here in Hettingen, we had decided to use a material that occurs locally by nature, and that is earth, but not in the typical form of rammed earth for which formwork and significant quantities of material are required, but instead, in the form of airdried blocks. A former brickwork has been reactivated . . . that can produce earth block in its existing facilities that are dried here and then brought to the construction site. To build with this primitive material requires some experimentation and some construction organization. . . . But need dictates. I am convinced that we have arrived at a remarkable achievement with these primitively simple buildings.⁴⁶

The buildings that resulted are in many ways remarkable. They offer a precedent to architecture in the current era of war, migration, climate change, and resource conservation. The settlement included outdoor spaces in gradations of privacy as a means to enhance the extremely compact rectangular floorplans

44. Eiermann, "Vortrag über die Planung von Wohnhäusern," 1–2.

45. Eiermann, "Vortrag über die Planung von Wohnhäusern," 3.

46. Eiermann, "Vortrag über die Planung von Wohnhäusern," 10–11.

of the semi-attached houses. Kitchen, toilet, and bathroom were concentrated on one side of the small entry foyer to minimize the cost of pipes and plumbing. A square living room that faced a garden separated the plumbed rooms from three bedrooms. The walls were entirely mudbrick, laid up in alternating patterns rather than simple running bond. Construction drawings depict built-in cabinets, windows and doors in wood, cleverly dimensioned and simply built, although likely not by unskilled refugees. The photographic images recall the housing experiments of the 1920s, not the dire circumstances of the rubble collectors for whom forty years' work had been anticipated in Frankfurt (figs. 11–12).

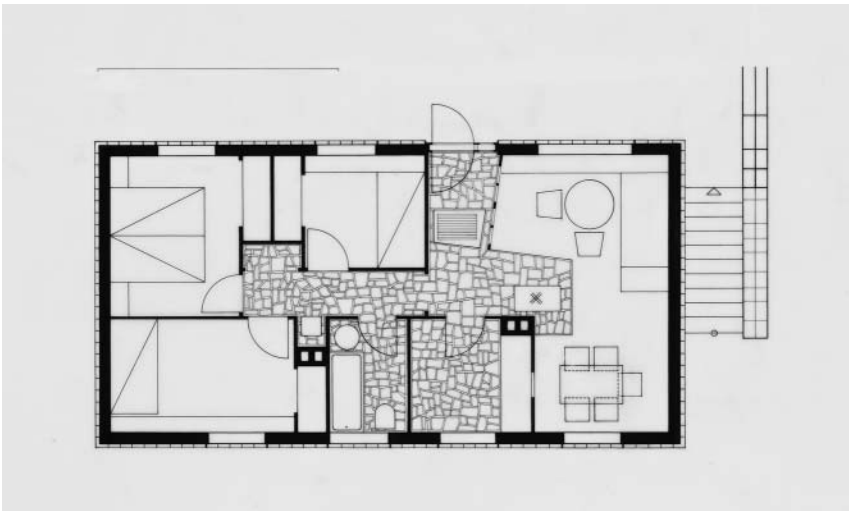
By January 1950, however, Eiermann had lost interest in such experiments. When a magazine asked to publish these early projects, he was dismissive: “The buildings planned in early 1946 by Mr. Hilger and me, and partly realized through occupant participation in the hamlet of Buchen, are not appropriate for publication.”⁴⁷ With the return to economic and professional prosperity came—as might have been expected—a repression of the experiences borne of postwar desperation.

The desperate period into which Adorno chose to insert himself was still palpable at the publication date of his *Minima Moralia* (1951). Here, in the section titled “Asyl für Obdachlosen” (“Asylum for the Unhoused”), he spoke directly to the problem of home and housing in terms that resonate with the language he used in his 1949 lecture as he reflected on the impoverishment of Ackerstrasse, on the one hand, and the falsity of Kurfürstendamm, on the other. Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to claim that, as might be true of his lecture, *Minima Moralia* registered his postwar experience. According to his biographer Detlev Claussen, *Minima Moralia* is far more the product of Adorno's exile in California.⁴⁸ Still, in a critique relevant to both his American and postwar German experiences, Adorno decried both property ownership and temporary occupancy of a property operated on profit principles.⁴⁹ What could the practical solution be, then, for the problem of housing? For his own purposes, Adorno's return emigration was a moment to realize an aspiration to the comfortable upper middle-class surroundings that he had known in his childhood, a comfort to which Adorno's collaborators and friends assumed he had long had access despite periods of penury. His arrival in the 1950s as an intellectual in

47. Eiermann's original German reads as follows: “Die von Herrn Hilgers und mir Anfang 1946 geplanten und teilweise in Selbsthilfe durchgeführten Bauten im Kreis Buchen sind für eine Veröffentlichung nicht geeignet” (Eiermann, “Letter to the Editor of the *Bauzeitung Stuttgart*, January 24, 1950, KIT Archiv, Eiermann bequest, Siedlungswerk “Neue Heimat” Siedlungen der Siedlungsgemeinschaft 1946–48 Schriftverkehr).

48. Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, chap. 7.

49. Waggoner, “How Not to Be at Home in One's Home,” 36.



Figures 11–12. Egon Eiermann and Robert Hilger, housing in Buchen and Waldrün near Hettingen, 1946–49. Saai, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Eiermann bequest EE#071_VP_D_A and Eiermann BSIII.

Frankfurt's gracious Westend, his vacations in a fashionable hotel in Switzerland's Engadine Valley:⁵⁰ these belong among the uncomfortable contradictions that also surface as his call to participatory urbanism gives way to a plea for architectural tastemaking. For those familiar with the architecture of the period, the schism in his words and deeds recalls roughly contemporaneous images of expat architect Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, who, from the depths of his conventional, leather Chesterfield sofa, demanded that his client Edith Farnsworth come to terms with an exposed and ascetic lifestyle in the house he designed for her (1946–51).

How much or little Adorno knew about everything that had occurred in West German architectural circles since 1945—the debates, the rhetoric of reconstruction, the rethinking of architecture as social and political symbol, the experiments in participatory planning of different sorts—has yet to be traced. The response of his audience to the lecture he offered in Darmstadt is unrecorded and the influence of his words, to the extent there is evidence, at best negligible. His “rearguard” host Professor Gruber, conceivably displeased by the way Adorno had ultimately withheld license to use the vanished historical city as a standard for rebuilding, would have been even more unhappy at the words with which Adorno ended: “We must be avant-gardists.” “We have to realize at this moment, based on our elevated consciousness,” he told his audience, “what the true interests of the human beings are, those human beings with whom we deal; and realize that we ourselves, if these people seem blunted, retrograde, and narrowly petty bourgeois, can act nonetheless on their behalf by representing to them what we have recognized to be correct.” His condescension finally outed, he nonetheless allowed, “This cannot happen if we simply make declarations from our own bureaucratic position but only when we enter into actual conversation with these human beings” (SG, 29).

Adorno's interest in the city was, clearly, inseparable from his vision for societal form, even if he left that form unspecified in his lecture. The city in ruins was, ultimately, as much a societal indicator as the buildings of the medieval city or the brutish tenement. Adorno, the self-proclaimed “layman,” knew what he was seeing as he walked through Frankfurt on that first night: “One of the most frightening experiences that one can have when such catastrophes as the ones that passed over our cities occur is not so much what appeared out of the air . . . but instead that these catastrophes are in fact the executors of larger societal tendencies. These tendencies may have forced themselves into the spotlight, but as a whole, they could no longer be held back” (SG, 29).

50. Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, 217.

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