The Production of Space

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Envoi

Imprisoned by four walls
(to the North, the crystal of non-knowledge
a landscape to be invented
to the South, reflective memory
to the East, the mirror
to the West, stone and the song of silence)
I wrote messages, but received no reply.

Octavio Paz
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edge and a misconstrued reality begin to be recognized? It so happens that this emergence can indeed be fixed: it is to be found in the 'historic' role of the Bauhaus. Our critical analysis will touch on this movement at several points. For the Bauhaus did more than locate space in its real context or supply a new perspective on it: it developed a new conception, a global concept, of space. At that time, around 1920, just after the First World War, a link was discovered in the advanced countries (France, Germany, Russia, the United States), a link which had already been dealt with on the practical plane but which had not yet been rationally articulated: that between industrialization and urbanization, between workplaces and dwelling-places. No sooner had this link been incorporated into theoretical thought than it turned into a project, even into a programme. The curious thing is that this 'programmatic' stance was looked upon at the time as both rational and revolutionary, although in reality it was tailor-made for the state — whether of the state-capitalist or the state-socialist variety. Later, of course, this would become obvious — a truism. For Gropius or for Le Corbusier, the programme boiled down to the production of space. As Paul Klee put it, artists — painters, sculptors or architects — do not show space, they create it. The Bauhaus people understood that things could not be created independently of each other in space, whether movable (furniture) or fixed (buildings), without taking into account their interrelationships and their relationship to the whole. It was impossible simply to accumulate them as a mass, aggregate or collection of items. In the context of the productive forces, the technological means and the specific problems of the modern world, things and objects could now be produced in their relationships, along with their relationships. Formerly, artistic ensembles — monuments, towns, furnishings — had been created by a variety of artists according to subjective criteria: the taste of princes, the intelligence of rich patrons or the genius of the artists themselves. Architects had thus built palaces designed to house specific objects ('furniture') associated with an aristocratic mode of life, and, alongside them, squares for the people and monuments for social institutions. The resulting whole might constitute a space with a particular style, often even a dazzling style — but it was still a space never rationally defined which came into being and disappeared for no clear reason. As he considered the past and viewed it in the light of the present, Gropius sensed that henceforward social practice was destined to change. The production of spatial ensembles as such corresponded to the capacity of the productive forces, and hence to a specific rationality. It was thus no longer a question of introducing forms, functions or structures in isolation, but rather one
of mastering global space by bringing forms, functions and structures together in accordance with a unitary conception. This insight confirmed after its fashion an idea of Marx's, the idea that industry has the power to open before our eyes the book of the creative capacities of 'man' (i.e. of social being).

The Bauhaus group, as artists associated in order to advance the total project of a total art, discovered, along with Klee, that an observer could move around any object in social space— including such objects as houses, public buildings and palaces — and in so doing go beyond scrutinizing or studying it under a single or special aspect. Space opened up to perception, to conceptualization, just as it did to practical action. And the artist passed from objects in space to the concept of space itself. Avant-garde painters of the same period reached very similar conclusions: all aspects of an object could be considered simultaneously, and this simultaneity preserved and summarized a temporal sequence. This had several consequences.

1 A new consciousness of space emerged whereby space (an object in its surroundings) was explored, sometimes by deliberately reducing it to its outline or plan and to the flat surface of the canvas, and sometimes, by contrast, by breaking up and rotating planes, so as to reconstitute depth of space in the picture plane. This gave rise to a very specific dialectic.

2 The façade — as face directed towards the observer and as privileged side or aspect of a work of art or a monument — disappeared. (Fascism, however, placed an increased emphasis on façades, thus opting for total 'spectacularization' as early as the 1920s.)

3 Global space established itself in the abstract as a void waiting to be filled, as a medium waiting to be colonized. How this could be done was a problem solved only later by the social practice of capitalism: eventually, however, this space would come to be filled by commercial images, signs and objects. This development would in turn result in the advent of the pseudo-concept of the environment (which begs the question: the environment of whom or of what?).

The historian of space who is concerned with modernity may quite confidently affirm the historic role of the Bauhaus. By the 1920s the

In 1920 Klee had this to say: 'Art does not reflect the visible; it renders visible.'
great philosophical systems had been left behind, and, aside from the investigations of mathematics and physics, all thinking about space and time was bound up with social practice – more precisely, with industrial practice, and with architectural and urbanistic research. This transition from philosophical abstraction to the analysis of social practice is worth stressing. While it was going on, those responsible for it, the Bauhaus group and others, believed that they were more than innovators, that they were in fact revolutionaries. With the benefit of fifty years of hindsight, it is clear that such a claim cannot legitimately be made for anyone in that period except for the Dadaists (and, with a number of reservations, a few surrealists).

It is easy enough to establish the historic role of the Bauhaus, but not so easy to assess the breadth and limits of this role. Did it cause or justify a change of aesthetic perspective, or was it merely a symptom of a change in social practice? More likely the latter, pace most historians of art and architecture. When it comes to the question of what the Bauhaus’s audacity produced in the long run, one is obliged to answer: the worldwide, homogeneous and monotonous architecture of the state, whether capitalist or socialist.

How and why did this happen? If there is such a thing as the history of space, if space may indeed be said to be specified on the basis of historical periods, societies, modes of production and relations of production, then there is such a thing as a space characteristic of capitalism – that is, characteristic of that society which is run and dominated by the bourgeoisie. It is certainly arguable that the writings and works of the Bauhaus, of Mies van der Rohe among others, outlined, formulated and helped realize that particular space – the fact that the Bauhaus sought to be and proclaimed itself to be revolutionary notwithstanding. We shall have occasion to discuss this irony of ’History’ at some length later on.17

The first initiative taken towards the development of a history of space was Siegfried Giedeon’s.18 Giedeon kept his distance from practice but worked out the theoretical object of any such history in some detail; he put space, and not some creative genius, not the ’spirit of the times’, and not even technological progress, at the centre of history as he conceived it. According to Giedeon there have been three successive

periods. During the first of these (ancient Egypt and Greece), architectural volumes were conceived and realized in the context of their social relationships — and hence from without. The Roman Pantheon illustrates a second conception, under which the interior space of the monument became paramount. Our own period, by contrast, supposedly seeks to surmount the exterior–interior dichotomy by grasping an interaction or unity between these two spatial aspects. Actually, Giedeon succeeds here only in inverting the reality of social space. The fact is that the Pantheon, as an image of the world or mundus, is an opening to the light; the imago mundi, the interior hemisphere or dome, symbolizes this exterior. As for the Greek temple, it encloses a sacred and consecrated space, the space of a localized divinity and of a divine locality, and the political centre of the city. The source of such confusion is to be found in an initial error of Giedeon’s, echoes of which occur throughout his work: he posits a pre-existing space — Euclidean space — in which all human emotions and expectations proceed to invest themselves and make themselves tangible. The spiritualism latent in this philosophy of space emerges clearly in Giedeon’s later work The Eternal Present. Giedeon was indeed never able to free himself from a naïve oscillation between the geometrical and the spiritualistic. A further problem was that he failed to separate the history he was developing from the history of art and architecture, although the two are certainly quite different.

The idea that space is essentially empty but comes to be occupied by visual messages also limits the thinking of Bruno Zevi. Zevi holds that a geometrical space is animated by the gestures and actions of those who inhabit it. He reminds us, in a most timely manner, of the basic fact that every building has an interior as well as an exterior. This means that there is an architectural space defined by the inside–outside relationship, a space which is a tool for the architect in his social action. The remarkable thing here, surely, is that it should be necessary to recall this duality several decades after the Bauhaus, and in Italy to boot, supposedly the ‘birthplace’ of architecture. We are obliged to conclude that the critical analysis of the façade mentioned above has simply never taken hold, and that space has remained strictly visual, entirely subordinate to a ‘logic of visualization’. Zevi considers that the visual conception of space rests upon a bodily (gestural) component which the

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trained eye of the expert observer must take into account. Zevi's book brings this 'lived' aspect of spatial experience, which thanks to its corporal nature has the capacity to 'incarnate', into the realm of knowledge, and hence of 'consciousness', without ever entertaining the idea that such a bodily component of optical (geometrico-visual) space might put the priority of consciousness itself into question. He does not appear to understand the implications of his findings beyond the pedagogical sphere, beyond the training of architects and the education of connoisseurs, and he certainly does not pursue the matter on a theoretical level. In the absence of a viewer with an acquired mastery of space, how could any space be adjudged 'beautiful' or 'ugly', asks Zevi, and how could this aesthetic yardstick attain its primordial value? To answer one question with another, how could a constructed space subjugate or repel otherwise than through use?

Contributions such as those of Giedeon and Zevi undoubtedly have a place in the development of a history of space, but they herald that history without helping to institute it. They serve to point up its problems, and they blaze the trail. They do not tackle the tasks that still await the history of space proper: to show up the growing ascendancy of the abstract and the visual, as well as the internal connection between them; and to expose the genesis and meaning of the 'logic of the visual' - that is, to expose the strategy implied in such a 'logic' in light of the fact that any particular 'logic' of this kind is always merely a deceptive name for a strategy.

IX

Historical materialism will be so far extended and borne out by a history so conceived that it will undergo a serious transformation. Its objectivity will be deepened inasmuch as it will come to bear no longer solely upon the production of things and works, and upon the (dual) history of that production, but will reach out to take in space and time and, using nature as its 'raw material', broaden the concept of production so as to include the production of space as a process whose product - space - itself embraces both things (goods, objects) and works.

The outline of history, its 'compendium' and 'index', is not to be found merely in philosophies, but also beyond philosophy, in that

deployed as part of specific strategies, and hence also the object of *wagers* on the future — wagers which are articulated, if never completely.

As to whether there is a spatial code, there are actually several. This has not daunted the semiologists, who blithely propose to determine the hierarchy of levels of interpretation and then find a residue of elements capable of getting the decoding process going once more. Fair enough, but this is to mistake restrictions for signs in general. Activity in space is restricted by that space; space ‘decides’ what activity may occur, but even this ‘decision’ has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order — and hence also a certain disorder (just as what may be seen defines what is obscene). Interpretation comes later, almost as an afterthought. Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its *raison d’etre*. The ‘reading’ of space is thus merely a secondary and practically irrelevant upshot, a rather superfluous reward to the individual for blind, spontaneous and *lived* obedience.

So, even if the reading of space (always assuming there is such a thing) comes first from the standpoint of knowledge, it certainly comes last in the genesis of space itself. No ‘reading of the space’ of Romanesque churches and their surroundings (towns or monasteries), for example, can in any way help us predict the space of so-called Gothic churches or understand their preconditions and prerequisites: the growth of the towns, the revolution of the communes, the activity of the guilds, and so on. This space was *produced* before it was *read*; nor was it produced in order to be read and grasped, but rather in order to be *lived* by people with bodies and lives in their own particular urban context. In short, ‘reading’ follows production in all cases except those in which space is produced especially in order to be read. This raises the question of what the virtue of readability actually is. It turns out on close examination that spaces made (produced) to be read are the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable. The graphic impression of readability is a sort of *trompe-l’œil* concealing strategic intentions and actions. Monumentality, for instance, always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wishes to say — yet it hides a good deal more: being political, military, and ultimately fascist in character, monumental buildings mask the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought. In the process, such signs and surfaces also manage to conjure away both possibility and time.

We have known since Vitruvius — and in modern times since Labrouste
(d. 1875), who was forever harping on it – that in architecture form
must express function. Over the centuries the idea contained in the term
‘express’ here has grown narrower and more precise. Most recently,
‘expressive’ has come to mean merely ‘readable’. The architect is
supposed to construct a signifying space wherein form is to function as
signifier is to signified; the form, in other words, is supposed to enunciate
or proclaim the function. According to this principle, which is espoused
by most ‘designers’, the environment can be furnished with or animated
by signs in such a way as to appropriate space, in such a way that space
becomes readable (i.e. ‘plausibly’ linked) to society as a whole. The
inherence of function to form, or in other words the application of the
criterion of readability, makes for an instantaneousness of reading, act
and gesture – hence the tedium which accompanies this quest for a
formal–functional transparency. We are deprived of both internal and
external distance: there is nothing to code and decode in an ‘environment
without environs’. What is more, the significant contrasts in a code of
space designed specifically to signify and to ‘be’ readable are extremely
commonplace and simple. They boil down to the contrast between
horizontal and vertical lines – a contrast which among other things
masks the vertical’s implication of hauteur. Versions of this contrast are
offered in visual terms which are supposed to express it with great
intensity but which, to any detached observer, any ideal ‘walker in the
city’, have no more than the appearance of intensity. Once again, the
impression of intelligibility conceals far more than it reveals. It conceals,
precisely, what the visible/readable ‘is’, and what traps it holds; it
conceals what the vertical ‘is’ – namely, arrogance, the will to power,
with a display of military and police-like machismo, a reference to the phallus
and a spatial analogue of masculine brutality. Nothing can be taken for
granted in space, because what are involved are real or possible acts,
and not mental states or more or less well-told stories. In produced
space, acts reproduce ‘meanings’ even if no ‘one’ gives an account of
them. Repressive space wreaks repression and terror even though it
may be strewn with ostensible signs of the contrary (of contentment,
amusement or delight).

This tendency has gone so far that some architects have even begun
to call either for a return to ambiguity, in the sense of a confused and
not immediately interpretable message, or else for a diversification of

33 See Charles Jencks, Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods (New York: Praeger,
space which would be consistent with a liberal and pluralistic society. Robert Venturi, as an architect and a theorist of architecture, wants to make space dialectical. He sees space not as an empty and neutral milieu occupied by dead objects but rather as a field of force full of tensions and distortions. Whether this approach can find a way out of functionalism and formalism that goes beyond merely formal adjustments remains (in 1972) to be seen. Painting on buildings certainly seems like a rather feeble way of retrieving the richness of ‘classical’ architecture. Is it really possible to use mural surfaces to depict social contradictions while producing something more than graffiti? That would indeed be somewhat paradoxical if, as I have been suggesting, the notions of ‘design’, of reading/writing as practice, and of the ‘signifier—signified’ relationship projected onto things in the shape of the ‘form—function’ one are all directed, whether consciously or no, towards the dissolving of conflicts into a general transparency, into a one-dimensional present— and onto an as it were ‘pure’ surface.

I daresay many people will respond to such thinking somewhat as follows.

Your arguments are tendentious. You want to re- emphasize the signified as opposed to the signifier, the content as opposed to the form. But true innovators operate on forms; they invent new forms by working in the realm of signifiers. If they are writers, this is how they produce a discourse. The same goes for other types of creation. But as for architects who concern themselves primarily with content, as for ‘users’, as for the activity of dwelling itself—all these merely reproduce outdated forms. They are in no sense innovative forces.

To which my reply might be something like this:

I have no quarrel with the proposition that work on signifiers and the production of a language are creative activities; that is an incontestable fact. But I question whether this is the whole story—whether this proposition covers all circumstances and all fields. Surely there comes a moment when formalism is exhausted, when only a new injection of content into form can destroy it and so open up the way to innovation. The harmonists invented a great

musical form, for instance, yet the formal discoveries about harmony made by the natural philosophers and by theorists of music such as Rameau did not take the exploration and exploitation of the possibilities that far. Such progress occurred only with the advent of a Mozart or a Beethoven. As for architecture, the builders of palaces worked with and on signifiers (those of power). They kept within the boundaries of a certain monumentality and made no attempt to cross them. They worked, moreover, not upon texts but upon (spatial) textures. Invention of a formal kind could not occur without a change in practice, without, in other words, a dialectical interaction between signifying and signified elements, as some signifiers reached the exhaustion point of their formalism, and some signified elements, with their own peculiar violence, infiltrated the realm of signifiers. The combinatorial system of the elements of a set – for our purposes a set of signs, and hence of signifiers – has a shorter life than the individual combinations that it embraces. For one thing, any such combinatorial system of signs loses its interest and emotional force as soon as it is known and recognized for what it is; a kind of saturation sets in, and even changing the combinations that are included or excluded from the system cannot remedy matters. Secondly, work on signifiers and the production of a discourse facilitate the transmission of messages only if the labour involved is not patent. If the ‘object’ bears traces of that labour, the reader’s attention will be diverted to the writing itself and to the one who does the writing. The reader thus comes to share in the fatigue of the producer, and is soon put off.

It is very important from the outset to stress the destructive (because reductive) effects of the predominance of the readable and visible, of the absolute priority accorded to the visual realm, which in turn implies the priority of reading and writing. An emphasis on visual space has accompanied the search for an impression of weightlessness in architecture. Some theorists of a supposed architectural revolution claim Le Corbusier as a pioneer in this connection, but in fact it was Brunelleschi, and more recently Baltard and then Eiffel, who blazed the trail. Once the effect of weightiness or massiveness upon which architects once depended has been abandoned, it becomes possible to break up and reassemble volumes arbitrarily according to the dictates of an architectural neoplasticism. Modernity expressly reduces so-called ‘iconological’ forms of expression (signs and symbols) to surface effects. Volumes or masses are deprived of any physical consistency. The architect considers
himself responsible for laying down the social function (or use) of buildings, offices, or dwellings, yet interior walls which no longer have any spatial or bearing role, and interiors in general, are simultaneously losing all character or content. Even exterior walls no longer have any material substance: they have become mere membranes barely managing to concretize the division between inside and outside. This does not prevent 'users' from projecting the relationship between the internal or private and a threatening outside world into an invented absolute realm; when there is no alternative, they use the signs of this antagonism, relying especially on those which indicate property. For an architectural thought in thrall to the model of transparency, however, all partitions between inside and outside have collapsed. Space has been comminuted into 'iconological' figures and values, each such fragment being invested with individuality or worth simply by means of a particular colour or a particular material (brick, marble, etc.). Thus the sense of circumscribed spaces has gone the same way as the impression of mass. Within and without have melted into transparency, becoming indistinguishable or interchangeable. What makes this tendency even more paradoxical is the fact that it proceeds under the banner of structures, of significant distinctions, and of the inside–outside and signifier–signified relationships themselves.

We have seen that the visual space of transparency and readability has a content – a content that it is designed to conceal: namely, the phallic realm of (supposed) virility. It is at the same time a repressive space: nothing in it escapes the surveillance of power. Everything opaque, all kinds of partitions, even walls simplified to the point of mere drapery, are destined to disappear. This disposition of things is diametrically opposed to the real requirements of the present situation. The sphere of private life ought to be enclosed, and have a finite, or finished, aspect. Public space, by contrast, ought to be an opening outwards. What we see happening is just the opposite.

Like any reality, social space is related methodologically and theoretically to three general concepts: form, structure, function. In other words, any social space may be subjected to formal, structural or functional analysis. Each of these approaches provides a code and a method for deciphering what at first may seem impenetrable.
These terms may seem clear enough, but in fact, since they cannot avoid polysemy, they all carry burdens of ambiguity.

The term ‘form’ may be taken in a number of senses: aesthetic, plastic, abstract (logico-mathematical), and so on. In a general sense, it evokes the description of contours and the demarcation of boundaries, external limits, areas, and volumes. Spatial analysis accepts this general use of the term, although doing so does not eliminate all problems. A formal description, for example, may aspire to exactitude but still turn out to be shot through with ideological elements, especially when implicit or explicit reductionistic goals are involved. The presence of such goals is indeed a defining characteristic of formalism. Any space may be reduced to its formal elements: to curved and straight lines or to such relations as internal-versus-external or volume-versus-area. Such formal aspects have given rise in architecture, painting and sculpture to genuine systems: the system of the golden number, for example, or that of the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders, or that of moduli (rhythms and proportions).

Consideration of aesthetic effects or ‘effects of meaning’ has no particular right of precedence in this context. What counts from the methodological and theoretical standpoint is the idea that none of these three terms can exist in isolation from the other two. Forms, functions and structures are generally given in and through a material realm which at once binds them together and preserves distinctions between them. When we consider an organism, for example, we can fairly easily discern the forms, functions and structures within this totality. Once this threefold analysis has been completed, however, a residue invariably remains which seems to call for deeper analysis. This is the raison d’être of the ancient philosophical categories of being, nature, substance and matter.

In the case of a produced ‘object’, this constitutive relationship is different: the application to materials of a practical action (technology, labour) tends to blur, as a way of mastering them, the distinctions between form, function and structure, so that the three may even come to imply one another in an immediate manner. This tendency exists only implicitly in works of art and objects antedating the Industrial Revolution, including furniture, houses, palaces and monuments; under the conditions of modernity, on the other hand, it comes close to its limit. With the advent of ‘design’, materiality tends to give way to transparency – to perfect ‘readability’. Form is now merely the sign of function, and the relation between the two, which could not be clearer – that is, easier to produce and reproduce – is what gives rise to structure. A case where this account does not apply is that not uncommon one where ‘designer’ and manufacturer find it amusing to confuse the issue, as it were, and give
engendered or produced (mental) space. As a consequence, thought has been left in the unhappy position of having to plump either for a split between mental and social or else for a confused mixture of the two. The first choice meant accepting a chasm between the logical, mathematical, and epistemological realms on the one hand, and practice on the other. The second imposed an implacable systematizing and absolutely all-inclusive logic of society, of the social (and spatial) res, of the commodity, of capital, of the bourgeoisie, of the capitalist mode of production, and so on.

'True space' was thus substituted for the 'truth of space', and applied to such practical problems as those of bureaucracy and power, rent and profit, and so on, so creating the illusion of a less chaotic reality; social space tended to become indistinguishable from the space of planners, politicians and administrators, and architectural space, with its social constructed character, from the (mental) space of architects.6

V

Around 1910 academic painters were still painting 'beautiful' figures in an 'expressive' way: faces that were moving because they expressed emotions – the emotions of the painter – and desirable nudes giving voice to the desires of spectator and painter alike. The pictorial avant-garde, meanwhile, were busily detaching the meaningful from the expressive. They were not too clearly aware of this, however, for they were no great manipulators of concepts. Yet through their experimental activity these painters were acute witnesses to the beginnings of the 'crisis of the subject' in the modern world. In their pictorial practice they clearly apprehended a new fact, one bound up with the disappearance of all points of reference: the fact, namely, that only signifying elements could be communicated, because only they were independent of the 'subject' – that is, of the author, of the artist, and even of the spectator as an individual. This meant that the pictorial object, the painting, arose neither from the imitation of objective reality (all of whose points of reference – traditional space and time, common sense, perception of the 'real' defined by analogy with nature – were disappearing), nor from an 'expressiveness' bound up with emotions and feelings of a subjective kind. In their pictures these painters subjected the 'object' to the worst

— and before long the ultimate — atrocities. And they set about this work of breaking and dislocating with a will. Once the rift between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ had been opened, there were no limits. So wide did this rift become, indeed, that something else was able to emerge.

If we are to believe the most authoritative commentators, the turning-point was 1907. It was at this time that Picasso discovered a new way of painting: the entire surface of the canvas was used, but there was no horizon, no background, and the surface was simply divided between the space of the painted figures and the space that surrounded them. Whereas Matisse during the same period was perfecting the rhythmic treatment of the picture surface, Picasso bent his vigorous efforts to its structuring; indeed he went beyond structuring (to put it in the terms of a later date) and rendered it ‘dialectical’ through highly developed antagonism of line and plane rather than of colour, rhythm or background. He was not dismantling the picture surface alone, but objects too, so setting in train that paradoxical process whereby the third dimension (depth) was at once reduced to the painted surface and restored by virtue of the simultaneity of the multiple aspects of the thing depicted (analytical cubism). What we have therefore, all at once, are: the objectified end of points of reference (of Euclidean space, perspective, horizon line, etc.); a space at once homogeneous and broken; a space exerting fascination by means of its structure; a dialectical process initiated on the basis of antagonisms (paradigms) which does not go so far as to fracture the picture’s unity; and an absolute visualization of things that supersedes that incipient dialectical framework.

The dissociation between the expressive and the meaningful and the liberation of the signifier had enormous consequences. The more so, because these developments were not confined to painting. Pride of place is given to painting here on account of its special relationship to space at the moment under consideration. In the first place, the liberation in question went so far as to affect the signification itself, in that the sign (the signifier) became detached from what is designated (the signified). The sign was now no longer the ‘object’ but rather the object on the canvas — and hence the treatment received by the objective realm as (at the same time and at one stroke) it was broken up, disarticulated, and made ‘simultaneous’. As for the ‘signified’, it remained present — but

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8 ‘... the space they occupy and the space they leave unoccupied complement each other as the positive and the negative’ (ibid.).
hidden. It was thus also (and above all) disquieting, evoking neither pleasure, nor joy, nor calm – only intellectual interest and most likely anxiety. Anxiety in face of what? In face of the shattered figures of a world in pieces, in face of a disjointed space, and in face of a pitiless ‘reality’ that cannot be distinguished from its own abstraction, from its own analysis, because it ‘is’ already an abstraction, already in effect an analytics. And to the question of what takes the place of subjectivity, of expressiveness, the answer is: the violence which is unleashed in the modern world and lays waste to what exists there.

To return to the case of Picasso, there is nothing simple about it, and we should indeed treat it as a ‘case’ rather than joining the pathetic chorus of the cultists. The notion that Picasso is a revolutionary artist (‘revolutionary’ because ‘communist’) who – his ‘communism’ notwithstanding – has conquered the bourgeois world and so achieved universal glory, is the product of a horrifying naivety, if only on the grounds that the ‘communist world’ has in fact never accepted him. Picasso has in no sense conquered the world – nor has he been co-opted. Initially, he supplied the ‘vision’ that the existing world implied and awaited, and he did so just as the crisis broke, just as all the reference points were evaporating and violence was being unleashed. He did so in parallel with imperialism – and with the Great War, which was the first sign that a world market was at last becoming established, and the earliest figure of the ‘world’. In parallel, too – and simultaneously – with the Bauhaus, or, in other words, with abstract space. Which, again, is not to say that Picasso was the cause of that space; he did, however, signify it.

Picasso’s space heralded the space of modernity. It does not follow that the one produced the other. What we find in Picasso is an unreservedly visualized space, a dictatorship of the eye – and of the phallus; an aggressive virility, the bull, the Mediterranean male, a machismo (unquestionable genius in the service of genitality) carried to the point of self-parody – and even on occasion to the point of self-criticism. Picasso’s cruelty toward the body, particularly the female body, which he tortures in a thousand ways and caricatures without mercy, is dictated by the dominant form of space, by the eye and by the phallus – in short, by violence. Yet this space cannot refer to itself – cannot acknowledge or admit its own character – without falling into self-denunciation. And Picasso, because he is a great and genuine artist, an artist who made of art an all-consuming fire, inevitably glimpsed the coming dialectical transformation of space and prepared the ground for it; by discovering and disclosing the contradictions of a fragmented space – contradictions
which reside in him, and in all his works whether given form or not — the painter thus bore witness to the emergence of another space, a space not fragmented but differential in character.

VI

During this same period, Frank Lloyd Wright set out to abolish enclosing walls designed to separate the inside from the outside, interior from exterior. The wall was reduced to a surface, and this in turn to a transparent membrane. Light flooded into the house, from each of whose 'rooms' nature could be contemplated. From this moment on, the materiality of thick and heavy walls relinquished its leading architectural role. Matter was now to be no more than an envelope for space, ceding its hegemony to the light which inhabited that space. Following the tendency of philosophy, of art and literature, and of society as a whole, towards abstraction, visualization and formal spatial relations, 'architecture strove for immateriality'.

Before long, however, a disjunction manifested itself that had not emerged at the outset. Walls having lost their importance (whether as walls or as curtains), interior space was liberated. The façade vanished (though it would reappear in the fascist era, with its pomp and brutality even more pronounced, its monumentality more oppressive than ever), and this led to a sundering of the street. The disarticulation of external space (façades, building-exteriors) may be clearly observed in Le Corbusier, as much in his written works as in his buildings. Le Corbusier claims to be concerned with 'freedom': freedom of the façade relative to the interior plan, freedom of the bearing structure relative to the exterior, freedom of the disposition of floors and sets of rooms relative to the structural frame. In actuality, what is involved here is a fracturing of space: the homogeneity of an architectural ensemble conceived of as a 'machine for living in', and as the appropriate habitat for a man-machine, corresponds to a disordering of elements wrenched from each other in such a way that the urban fabric itself — the street, the city — is also torn apart. Le Corbusier ideologizes as he rationalizes — unless perhaps it is the other way round. An ideological discourse upon nature, sunshine and greenery successfully concealed from everyone at this time — and in particular from Le Corbusier — the true meaning and

content of such architectural projects. Nature was in fact already receding; its image, consequently, had become exalting.

VII

The belief that artists, plastic artists, are in some way the cause or ratio of space, whether architectural, urbanistic, or global, is the product of the naivety of art historians, who put the social sphere and social practice in brackets and consider works as isolated entities. It is worth stressing this point, because what we are considering here was a change of course, not only in the history of art but also in the history of modern society and its space. That painters paved the way for the architectural space of the Bauhaus is indisputable. But how exactly did they do so? Just about the same time as Picasso, other great artists such as Klee and Kandinsky were inventing not merely a new way of painting but also a new 'spatiality'. It is possible that they went even further than Picasso in this direction — especially Klee. The object (painted on the canvas) was now apprehended in a perceptible — and hence readable and visible — relationship to what surrounded it, to the whole space of the picture. In Klee's work, as in Picasso's, space is detached from the 'subject', from the affective and the expressive; instead, it presents itself as meaningful. Picasso, however, projects the object's various aspects onto the canvas simultaneously, as analysed by eye and brush, whereas for Klee thought, guided by the eye and projecting itself onto the painted surface, actually revolves around the object in order to situate it. Thus the surroundings of the object become visible. And the object-in-space is bound up with a presentation of space itself.

It fell to the painters, then, to reveal the social and political transformation of space. As for the architecture of the period, it turned out to be in the service of the state, and hence a conformist and reformist force on a world scale. This despite the fact that its advent was hailed as a revolution — even as the anti-bourgeois revolution in architecture! The Bauhaus, just like Le Corbusier, expressed (formulated and met) the architectural requirements of state capitalism; these differed little, in point of fact, from the requirements of state socialism, as identified during the same period by the Russian constructivists. The constructivists displayed more imagination (in the utopian mode) than their Western counterparts; and, whereas they were characterized as reactionaries in their country, their Bauhaus contemporaries were dubbed subversives. This confusion has already persisted for half a century and is still far
from having been dispelled: ideology and utopianism, inextricably bound up with knowledge and will, both remain vigorous. In the realm of nature rediscovered, with its sun and light, beneath the banner of life, metal and glass still rise above the street, above the reality of the city. Along with the cult of rectitude, in the sense of right angles and straight lines. The order of power, the order of the male – in short, the moral order – is thus naturalized.

There is nevertheless a strange contrast between the creative effervescence of the period we have been discussing, just before and just after the First World War, and the sterility of the second post-war era.

VIII

In the 'advanced' – i.e. the industrialized – countries, the inter-war years saw the beginnings of fragmentation in the kind of thinking about space that took place outside (or beyond) classical philosophy, as also outside the sphere of aesthetics proper – the kind of thinking, therefore, that sought some connection with 'reality'. In crude outline, theses were put forward on 'cultural space' which were then contested – on the face of it, at any rate – by theses on behavioural space. Culturalist anthropology was opposed not by the liberal humanism bequeathed by the nineteenth century, but rather by behaviourist psychology. And the two doctrines came together in the United States.

The ethnologists and anthropologists (among whom we should once again cite Mauss, Evans-Pritchard, and Rapoport) tended to project onto the present and future their often sophisticated analyses of societies as far removed and isolated as could be imagined from history, from cities, from industrial technologies. So far from relegating descriptions of peasant or tribal dwellings to the realm of folklore, this school of thought sought inspiration therein. The success enjoyed by this approach must be attributed to the fact that it evades modernity (in its capitalist form) and promotes mimesis, in the sense of a propensity to reason by analogy and to reproduce by means of imitation. Thus the theory of cultural space was transformed into a cultural model of space.

This static conception was countered by another – equally static – according to which space as directly experienced was indistinguishable from a set of conditioning factors and could be defined in terms of reflexes. At least this theory did not place a desiccated abstraction, namely culture, in the foreground. It even went so far as to assign the cultural sphere to the category of 'representational spaces', so indirectly