

The Production of Space

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Victor Hugo and Lautréamont. The problem is that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about. What texts can be considered special enough to provide the basis for a 'textual' analysis? Inasmuch as they deal with socially 'real' space, one might suppose on first consideration that architecture and texts relating to architecture would be a better choice than literary texts proper. Unfortunately, any definition of architecture itself requires a prior analysis and exposition of the concept of space.

Another possibility would be to take *general* scientific notions as a basis, notions as general as that of text, like those of information and communication, of message and code, and of sets of signs – all notions which are still being developed. The danger here is that the analysis of space might become enclosed within a single area of specialization, which, so far from helping us account for the dissociations mentioned above, would merely exacerbate them. This leaves only *universal* notions, which seemingly belong to philosophy but not to any particular specialization. Do such notions exist? Does what Hegel called the concrete universal still have any meaning? I hope to show that it does. What can be said without further ado is that the concepts of *production* and of the *act of producing* do have a certain abstract universality. Though developed by philosophers, these concepts extend beyond philosophy. They were taken over in the past, admittedly, by specialized disciplines, especially by political economy; yet they have survived that annexation. By retrieving something of the broad sense that they had in certain of Marx's writings, they have shed a good deal of the illusory precision with which the economists had endowed them. This is not to say that it will be easy to recover these concepts and put them back to work. To speak of 'producing space' sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it. Questions immediately arise here: what spaces? and what does it mean to speak of 'producing space'? We are confronted by the problem of how to bring concepts that have already been worked out and formalized into conjunction with this new content without falling back on mere illustration and example – notorious occasions for sophistry. What is called for, therefore, is a thoroughgoing exposition of these concepts, and of their relations, on the one hand with the extreme formal abstraction of logico-mathematical space, and on the other hand with the practico-sensory realm of social space. To proceed otherwise would result in a new fragmentation of the concrete universal into its original Hegelian moments: the *particular* (in this case descriptions or

cross-sections of social space); the *general* (logical and mathematical); and the *singular* (i.e. 'places' considered as natural, in their merely physical or sensory reality).

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Everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a 'room' in an apartment, the 'corner' of the street, a 'marketplace', a shopping or cultural 'centre', a public 'place', and so on. These terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish, but not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general to describe a social space. They correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute. Their interrelationships are ordered in a specific way. Might it not be a good idea, therefore, first to make an inventory of them,¹⁹ and then to try and ascertain what paradigm gives them their meaning, what syntax governs their organization?

There are two possibilities here: either these words make up an unrecognized code which we can reconstitute and explain by means of thought; alternatively, reflection will enable us, on the basis of the words themselves and the operations that are performed upon them, to construct a *spatial code*. In either event, the result of our thinking would be the construction of a 'system of space'. Now, we know from precise scientific experiments that a system of this kind is applicable only indirectly to its 'object', and indeed that it really only applies to a *discourse* on that object. The project I am outlining, however, does not aim to produce a (or *the*) discourse on space, but rather to expose the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis together within a single theory.

These brief remarks can only hint at a solution to a problem that we shall have to examine carefully later on in order to determine whether it is a *bona fide* issue or merely the expression of an obscure question about origins. This problem is: does language – logically, epistemologically or genetically speaking – precede, accompany or follow social space? Is it a precondition of social space or merely a formulation of it? The priority-of-language thesis has certainly not been established. Indeed, a good case can be made for according logical and epistemological precedence over highly articulated languages with strict rules to those

¹⁹ Cf. Georges Matoré, *L'espace humain* (Paris: La Colombe, 1962), including the lexicographical index.

activities which mark the earth, leaving traces and organizing gestures and work performed in common. Perhaps what have to be uncovered are as-yet concealed relations between space and language: perhaps the 'logicalness' intrinsic to articulated language operated from the start as a spatiality capable of bringing order to the qualitative chaos (the practico-sensory realm) presented by the perception of things.

To what extent may *a* space be read or decoded? A satisfactory answer to this question is certainly not just around the corner. As I noted earlier, without as yet adducing supporting arguments or proof, the notions of message, code, information and so on cannot help us trace the genesis of a space; the fact remains, however, that an already produced space can be decoded, can be *read*. Such a space implies a process of signification. And even if there is no general code of space, inherent to language or to all languages, there may have existed specific codes, established at specific historical periods and varying in their effects. If so, interested 'subjects', as members of a particular society, would have acceded by this means at once to *their* space and to their status as 'subjects' acting within that space and (in the broadest sense of the word) comprehending it.

If, roughly from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, a coded language may be said to have existed on the practical basis of a specific relationship between town, country and political territory, a language founded on classical perspective and Euclidean space, why and how did this coded system collapse? Should an attempt be made to reconstruct that language, which was common to the various groups making up the society – to users and inhabitants, to the authorities and to the technicians (architects, urbanists, planners)?

A theory can only take form, and be formulated, at the level of a 'supercode'. Knowledge cannot rightly be assimilated to a 'well-designed' language, because it operates at the conceptual level. It is thus not a privileged language, nor a metalanguage, even if these notions may be appropriate for the 'science of language' as such. Knowledge of space cannot be limited from the outset by categories of this kind. Are we looking, then, for a 'code of codes'? Perhaps so, but this 'meta' function of theory does not in itself explain a great deal. If indeed spatial codes have existed, each characterizing a particular spatial/social practice, and if these codifications have been *produced* along with the space corresponding to them, then the job of theory is to elucidate their rise, their role, and their demise. The shift I am proposing in analytic orientation relative to the work of specialists in this area ought by now to be clear: instead of emphasizing the rigorously formal aspect of codes,

I shall instead be putting the stress on their dialectical character. Codes will be seen as part of a practical relationship, as part of an interaction between 'subjects' and their space and surroundings. I shall attempt to trace the coming-into-being and disappearance of codings/decodings. My aim will be to highlight *contents* – i.e. the social (spatial) practices inherent to the forms under consideration.

IX

Surrealism appears quite otherwise today than it did half a century ago. A number of its pretensions have faded away, among them the substitution of poetry for politics, the politicization of poetry and the search for a transcendent revelation. All the same, though a literary movement, it cannot be reduced to the level of mere literature (which surrealism initially despised), and hence to the status of a literary event, bound up with the exploration of the unconscious (automatic writing), which had a subversive character to begin with but which was subsequently co-opted by every means available – glosses, exegeses, commentaries, fame, publicity, and so on.

The leading surrealists sought to decode inner space and illuminate the nature of the transition from this subjective space to the material realm of the body and the outside world, and thence to social life. Consequently surrealism has a theoretical import which was not originally recognized. The surrealists' effort to find a unity of this kind initiated a search which later went astray. It is discernible, for example, in André Breton's *L'amour fou*, where the introduction of imaginary and magical elements, though perhaps strange, detracts in no way from the annunciatory value of the work:

Sometimes, for example, wishing for the visit of a particular woman, I have found myself opening a door, then shutting it, then opening it again; if this device proved inadequate to the task, I might slip the blade of a knife randomly between the pages of a book, having previously decided that a certain line on the left-hand or right-hand page would inform me more or less indirectly as to her inclinations and tell me whether to expect her soon or not at all; then I would start moving things around once more,

(to be optimistic) oriented by industrial, proletarian and revolutionary rationality.

This is perhaps a convenient moment to consider what has been happening in the second half of the twentieth century, the period to which 'we' are witnesses.

1 The state is consolidating on a world scale. It weighs down on society (on all societies) in full force; it plans and organizes society 'rationally', with the help of knowledge and technology, imposing analogous, if not homologous, measures irrespective of political ideology, historical background, or the class origins of those in power. The state crushes time by reducing differences to repetitions or circularities) dubbed 'equilibrium', 'feedback', 'self-regulation', and so on). Space in its Hegelian form comes back into its own. This modern state promotes and imposes itself as the stable centre – definitively – of (national) societies and spaces. As both the end and the meaning of history – just as Hegel had forecast – it flattens the social and 'cultural' spheres. It enforces a logic that puts an end to conflicts and contradictions. It neutralizes whatever resists it by castration or crushing. Is this social entropy? Or is it a monstrous excrescence transformed into normality? Whatever the answer, the results lie before us.

2 In this same space there are, however, other forces on the boil, because the rationality of the state, of its techniques, plans and programmes, provokes opposition. The violence of power is answered by the violence of subversion. With its wars and revolutions, defeats and victories, confrontation and turbulence, the modern world corresponds precisely to Nietzsche's tragic vision. State-imposed normality makes permanent transgression inevitable. As for time and negativity, whenever they re-emerge, as they must, they do so explosively. This is a new negativity, a tragic negativity which manifests itself as incessant violence. These seething forces are still capable of rattling the lid of the cauldron of the state and its space, for differences can never be totally quieted. Though defeated, they live on, and from time to time they begin fighting ferociously to reassert themselves and transform themselves through struggle.

3 Nor has the working class said its last word. It continues on its way, sometimes underground, sometimes in the light of day. It is not an easy matter to get rid of the class struggle, which has taken myriad forms not accounted for by the impoverished schema usually so referred to – a schema which is nowhere to be found in Marx even if its devotees

claim to be Marxists. It may be that a fatal balance of power has now been reached which will prevent the working class's opposition to the bourgeoisie from ever becoming an open antagonism; so that society totters while the state rots in place or reasserts itself in convulsive fashion. It may be that world revolution will break out after a period of latency. Or perhaps world war will circle the planet in the wake of the world market. At all events, everything suggests at present that the workers in the industrialized countries are opting neither for indefinite growth and accumulation nor for violent revolution leading to the disappearance of the state, but rather for the withering away of work itself. Merely to consider the possibilities is to realize that Marxist thought has not disappeared, and indeed that it cannot disappear.

Confrontation of the theses and hypotheses of Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche is just beginning – and only with great difficulty at that. As for philosophical thought and thought about space and time, it is split. On the one hand we have the philosophy of time, of duration, itself broken up into partial considerations and emphases: historical time, social time, mental time, and so on. On the other hand we have epistemological thought, which constructs an abstract space and cogitates about abstract (logico-mathematical) spaces. Most if not all authors ensconce themselves comfortably enough within the terms of mental (and therefore neo-Kantian or neo-Cartesian) space, thereby demonstrating that 'theoretical practice' is already nothing more than the egocentric thinking of specialized Western intellectuals – and indeed may soon be nothing more than an entirely separated, schizoid consciousness.

The aim of this book is to detonate this state of affairs. More specifically, apropos of space, it aims to foster confrontation between those ideas and propositions which illuminate the modern world even if they do not govern it, treating them not as isolated theses or hypotheses, as 'thoughts' to be put under the microscope, but rather as prefigurations lying at the threshold of modernity.³⁰

³⁰ Here, without further ado – and I hope without too much irony – are some of the sources I have in mind: the works of Charles Dodgson / Lewis Carroll (but with the emphasis on the author of *Symbolic Logic* and *Logic without Tears* rather than on the author of the Alice books); Hermann Hesse's *Das Glasperlenspiel* (1943), tr. by Mervyn Savill as *Magister Ludi* (London: Aldus, 1949 and New York: Henry Holt, 1949) and by Richard and Clara Winston as *The Glass Bead Game* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), especially the passage on the theory of the game and its relationship with language and with space – the space of the game itself and the space in which the game is played, namely Castalia; Hermann Weyl's *Symmetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952); and Nietzsche – especially, in *Das Philosophenbuch/Le Livre du philosophe* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1969), the fragments on language and the 'theoreti-

XI

This aim does not imply the elaboration of a *critical theory* of 'existing space' designed as a substitute for the descriptions and cross-sections that accept that space or for other critical theories that deal with society in general, with political economy, with culture, and so on. The substitution of a negative and critical utopia of space (or of 'man' or 'society') for the dominant technological utopia is no longer sufficient. Critical theory, after being driven into practical opposition – and even into the most radical form of it, whether 'punctual' (i.e. attacking particularly vulnerable points) or global – has had its day.

It might be supposed that our first priority should be the methodical destruction of the *codes* relating to space. Nothing could be further from the case, however, because the codes inherent to knowledge and social practice have been in dissolution for a very long time already. All that remains of them are relics: words, images, metaphors. This is the outcome of an epoch-making event so generally ignored that we have to be reminded of it at every moment. The fact is that around 1910 a certain space was shattered. It was the space of common sense, of knowledge (*savoir*), of social practice, of political power, a space thitherto enshrined in everyday discourse, just as in abstract thought, as the environment of and channel for communications; the space, too, of classical perspective and geometry, developed from the Renaissance onwards on the basis of the Greek tradition (Euclid, logic) and bodied forth in Western art and philosophy, as in the form of the city and town. Such were the shocks and onslaughts suffered by this space that today it retains but a feeble pedagogical reality, and then only with great difficulty, within a conservative educational system. Euclidean and perspectivist space have disappeared as systems of reference, along with other former 'commonplaces' such as the town, history, paternity, the tonal system in music, traditional morality, and so forth. This was truly a crucial moment. Naturally, 'common-sense' space, Euclidean space and perspectivist space did not disappear in a puff of smoke without leaving any trace in our consciousness, knowledge or educational methods; they could no more have done so than elementary algebra and

cal introduction on truth and lies'.

It should be borne in mind that the works cited here, like those mentioned elsewhere in this book, are meant to be placed in the context of our discussion – in the context of spatial practice and its levels (planning, 'urbanism', architecture).

arithmetic, or grammar, or Newtonian physics. The fact remains that it is too late for destroying codes in the name of a critical theory; our task, rather, is to describe their already completed destruction, to measure its effects, and (perhaps) to construct a new code by means of theoretical 'supercoding'.

It must be stressed that what is needed is not a replacement for the dominant tendency, however desirable that may once have been, but instead a reversal of that tendency. As I shall attempt at some length to show, even if absolute proof is impossible, such a reversal or inversion would consist, as in Marx's time, in a movement from *products* (whether studied in general or in particular, described or enumerated) to *production*.

This reversal of tendency and of meaning has nothing to do with the conversion of signified elements into signifiers, as practised under the banner of an intellectualizing concern for 'pure' theory. The elimination of the signified element, the putting-in-brackets of the 'expressive', the exclusive appeal to formal signifiers – these operations *precede* the reversal of tendency which leads from products to productive activity; they merely simulate that reversal by reducing it to a sequence of abstract interventions performed upon language (and essentially upon literature).

XII

(*Social*) *space is a (social) product*. This proposition might appear to border on the tautologous, and hence on the obvious. There is good reason, however, to examine it carefully, to consider its implications and consequences before accepting it. Many people will find it hard to endorse the notion that space has taken on, within the present mode of production, within society as it actually is, a sort of reality of its own, a reality clearly distinct from, yet much like, those assumed in the same global process by commodities, money and capital. Many people, finding this claim paradoxical, will want proof. The more so in view of the further claim that the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it. The social and political (state) forces which engendered this space now seek, but fail, to master it completely; the very agency that has forced spatial reality towards a sort of uncontrollable autonomy now strives to run it, into the ground, then shackle and enslave it. Is this space an

abstract one? Yes, but it is also 'real' in the sense in which concrete abstractions such as commodities and money are real. Is it then concrete? Yes, though not in the sense that an object or product is concrete. Is it instrumental? Undoubtedly, but, like knowledge, it extends beyond instrumentality. Can it be reduced to a projection – to an 'objectification' of knowledge? Yes and no: knowledge objectified in a product is no longer coextensive with knowledge in its theoretical state. If space embodies social relationships, how and why does it do so? And what relationships are they?

It is because of all these questions that a thoroughgoing analysis and a full overall exposition are called for. This must involve the introduction of new ideas – in the first place the idea of a diversity or multiplicity of spaces quite distinct from that multiplicity which results from segmenting and cross-sectioning space *ad infinitum*. Such new ideas must then be inserted into the context of what is generally known as 'history', which will consequently itself emerge in a new light.

Social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space (as defined by the philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity and the perception of 'nature') on the other. What I shall be seeking to demonstrate is that such a social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents, and that it is irreducible to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality. If I am successful, the social character of space, here posited as a preliminary hypothesis, will be confirmed as we go along.

XIII

If it is true that (social) space is a (social) product, how is this fact concealed? The answer is: by a double illusion, each side of which refers back to the other, reinforces the other, and hides behind the other. These two aspects are the illusion of transparency on the one hand and the illusion of opacity, or 'realistic' illusion, on the other.

1 *The illusion of transparency* Here space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein. What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which becomes incarnate by means of a *design* (in both senses of the word). The design serves as a mediator –

itself of great fidelity – between mental activity (invention) and social activity (realization); and it is deployed in space. The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or dissimulated – and hence dangerous – is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates. Comprehension is thus supposed, without meeting any insurmountable obstacles, to conduct what is perceived, i.e. its object, from the shadows into the light; it is supposed to effect this displacement of the object either by piercing it with a ray or by converting it, after certain precautions have been taken, from a murky to a luminous state. Hence a rough coincidence is assumed to exist between social space on the one hand and mental space – the (topological) space of thoughts and utterances – on the other. By what path, and by means of what magic, is this thought to come about? The presumption is that an encrypted reality becomes readily decipherable thanks to the intervention first of speech and then of writing. It is said, and believed, that this decipherment is effected solely through transposition and through the illumination that such a strictly topological change brings about.

What justification is there for thus claiming that within the spatial realm the known and the transparent are one and the same thing? The fact is that this claim is a basic postulate of a diffuse ideology which dates back to classical philosophy. Closely bound up with Western 'culture', this ideology stresses speech, and overemphasizes the written word, to the detriment of a social practice which it is indeed designed to conceal. The fetishism of the spoken word, or ideology of speech, is reinforced by the fetishism and ideology of writing. For some, whether explicitly or implicitly, speech achieves a total clarity of communication, flushing out whatever is obscure and either forcing it to reveal itself or destroying it by sheer force of anathema. Others feel that speech alone does not suffice, and that the test and action of the written word, as agent of both malediction and sanctification, must also be brought into play. The act of writing is supposed, beyond its immediate effects, to imply a discipline that facilitates the grasping of the 'object' by the writing and speaking 'subject'. In any event, the spoken and written word are taken for (social) practice; it is assumed that absurdity and obscurity, which are treated as aspects of the same thing, may be dissipated without any corresponding disappearance of the 'object'. Thus communication brings the non-communicated into the realm of the communicated – the *incommunicable* having no existence beyond that

of an ever-pursued residue. Such are the assumptions of an ideology which, in positing the transparency of space, identifies knowledge, information and communication. It was on the basis of this ideology that people believed for quite a time that a revolutionary social transformation could be brought about by means of communication alone. 'Everything must be said! No time limit on speech! Everything must be written! Writing transforms language, therefore writing transforms society! Writing is a signifying practice!' Such agendas succeed only in conflating revolution and transparency.

The illusion of transparency turns out (to revert for a moment to the old terminology of the philosophers) to be a transcendental illusion: a trap, operating on the basis of its own quasi-magical power, but by the same token referring back immediately to other traps – traps which are its alibis, its masks.

2 *The realistic illusion* This is the illusion of natural simplicity – the product of a naïve attitude long ago rejected by philosophers and theorists of language, on various grounds and under various names, but chiefly because of its appeal to naturalness, to substantiality. According to the philosophers of the good old idealist school, the credulity peculiar to common sense leads to the mistaken belief that 'things' have more of an existence than the 'subject', his thought and his desires. To reject this illusion thus implies an adherence to 'pure' thought, to Mind or Desire. Which amounts to abandoning the realistic illusion only to fall back into the embrace of the illusion of transparency.

Among linguists, semanticists and semiologists one encounters a primary (and indeed an ultimate) naïvety which asserts that language, rather than being defined by its form, enjoys a 'substantial reality'. On this view language resembles a 'bag of words' from which the proper and adequate word for each thing or 'object' may be picked. In the course of any reading, the imaginary and the symbolic dimensions, the landscape and the horizon which line the reader's path, are all taken as 'real', because the *true* characteristics of the text – its signifying form as much as its symbolic content – are a blank page to the *naïf* in his unconsciousness. (It is worth noting *en passant* that his illusions provide the *naïf* with pleasures which knowledge is bound to abolish along with those illusions themselves. Science, moreover, though it may replace the innocent delights of naturalness with more refined and sophisticated pleasures, can in no wise guarantee that these will be any more delectable.)

The illusion of substantiality, naturalness and spatial opacity nurtures its own mythology. One thinks of the space-oriented artist, at work in a hard or dense reality delivered direct from the domain of Mother Nature. More likely a sculptor than a painter, an architect sooner than a musician or poet, such an artist tends to work with materials that resist or evade his efforts. When space is not being overseen by the geometer, it is liable to take on the physical qualities and properties of the earth.

The illusion of transparency has a kinship with philosophical idealism; the realistic illusion is closer to (naturalistic and mechanistic) materialism. Yet these two illusions do not enter into antagonism with each other after the fashion of philosophical systems, which armour themselves like battleships and seek to destroy one another. On the contrary, each illusion embodies and nourishes the other. The shifting back and forth between the two, and the flickering or oscillatory effect that it produces, are thus just as important as either of the illusions considered in isolation. Symbolisms deriving from nature can obscure the rational lucidity which the West has inherited from its history and from its successful domination of nature. The apparent translucency taken on by obscure historical and political forces in decline (the state, nationalism) can enlist images having their source in the earth or in nature, in paternity or in maternity. The rational is thus naturalized, while nature cloaks itself in nostalgias which supplant rationality.

XIV

As a programmatic foretaste of the topics I shall be dealing with later, I shall now review some of the implications and consequences of our initial proposition – namely, that (social) space is a (social) product.

The first implication is that (physical) natural space is disappearing. Granted, natural space was – and it remains – the common point of departure: the origin, and the original model, of the social process – perhaps even the basis of all ‘originality’. Granted, too, that natural space has not vanished purely and simply from the scene. It is still the background of the picture; as decor, and more than decor, it persists everywhere, and every natural detail, every natural object is valued even more as it takes on symbolic weight (the most insignificant animal, trees, grass, and so on). As source and as resource, nature obsesses us, as do childhood and spontaneity, via the filter of memory. Everyone wants to protect and save nature; nobody wants to stand in the way of an attempt

to retrieve its authenticity. Yet at the same time everything conspires to harm it. The fact is that natural space will soon be lost to view. Anyone so inclined may look over their shoulder and see it sinking below the horizon behind us. Nature is also becoming lost to *thought*. For what is nature? How can we form a picture of it as it was before the intervention of humans with their ravaging tools? Even the powerful myth of nature is being transformed into a mere fiction, a negative utopia: nature is now seen as merely the raw material out of which the productive forces of a variety of social systems have forged their particular spaces. True, nature is resistant, and infinite in its depth, but it has been defeated, and now waits only for its ultimate voidance and destruction.

XV

A second implication is that every society – and hence every mode of production with its subvariants (i.e. all those societies which exemplify the general concept – produces a space, its own space. The city of the ancient world cannot be understood as a collection of people and things in space; nor can it be visualized solely on the basis of a number of texts and treatises on the subject of space, even though some of these, as for example Plato's *Critias* and *Timaeus* or Aristotle's *Metaphysics* A, may be irreplaceable sources of knowledge. For the ancient city had its own spatial practice: it forged its own – *appropriated* – space. Whence the need for a study of that space which is able to apprehend it as such, in its genesis and its form, with its own specific time or times (the rhythm of daily life), and its particular centres and polycentrism (agora, temple, stadium, etc.).

The Greek city is cited here only as an example – as one step along the way. Schematically speaking, each society offers up its own peculiar space, as it were, as an 'object' for analysis and overall theoretical explication. I say each society, but it would be more accurate to say each mode of production, along with its specific relations of production; any such mode of production may subsume significant variant forms, and this makes for a number of theoretical difficulties, many of which we shall run into later in the shape of inconsistencies, gaps and blanks in our general picture. How much can we really learn, for instance, confined as we are to Western conceptual tools, about the Asiatic mode of production, its space, its towns, or the relationship it embodies

between town and country – a relationship reputedly represented figuratively or ideographically by the Chinese characters?

More generally, the very notion of social space resists analysis because of its novelty and because of the real and formal complexity that it connotes. Social space contains – and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to – (1) the *social relations of reproduction*, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family; and (2) the *relations of production*, i.e. the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social functions. These two sets of relations, production and reproduction, are inextricably bound up with one another: the division of labour has repercussions upon the family and is of a piece with it; conversely, the organization of the family interferes with the division of labour. Yet social space must discriminate between the two – not always successfully, be it said – in order to ‘localize’ them.

To refine this scheme somewhat, it should be pointed out that in precapitalist societies the two interlocking levels of biological reproduction and socio-economic production together constituted social reproduction – that is to say, the reproduction of society as it perpetuated itself generation after generation, conflict, feud, strife, crisis and war notwithstanding. That a decisive part is played by space in this continuity is something I shall be attempting to demonstrate below.

The advent of capitalism, and more particularly ‘modern’ neocapitalism, has rendered this state of affairs considerably more complex. Here *three* interrelated levels must be taken into account: (1) *biological reproduction* (the family); (2) the *reproduction of labour power* (the working class *per se*); and (3) the *reproduction of the social relations of production* – that is, of those relations which are constitutive of capitalism and which are increasingly (and increasingly effectively) sought and imposed as such. The role of space in this tripartite ordering of things will need to be examined in its specificity.

To make things even more complicated, social space also contains specific representations of this double or triple interaction between the social relations of production and reproduction. Symbolic representation serves to maintain these social relations in a state of coexistence and cohesion. It displays them while displacing them – and thus concealing them in symbolic fashion – with the help of, and onto the backdrop of, nature. Representations of the relations of reproduction are sexual symbols, symbols of male and female, sometimes accompanied, sometimes not, by symbols of age – of youth and of old age. This is a symbolism which conceals more than it reveals, the more so since the

relations of reproduction are divided into frontal, public, overt – and hence coded – relations on the one hand, and, on the other, covert, clandestine and repressed relations which, precisely because they are repressed, characterize transgressions related not so much to sex *per se* as to sexual pleasure, its preconditions and consequences.

Thus space may be said to embrace a multitude of intersections, each with its assigned location. As for representations of the relations of production, which subsume power relations, these too occur in space: space contains them in the form of buildings, monuments and works of art. Such frontal (and hence brutal) expressions of these relations do not completely crowd out their more clandestine or underground aspects; all power must have its accomplices – and its police.

A conceptual triad has now emerged from our discussion, a triad to which we shall be returning over and over again.

- 1 *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*.³¹
- 2 *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.
- 3 *Representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces).

XVI

In reality, social space 'incorporates' social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act. From the point of view of these subjects, the

³¹ These terms are borrowed from Noam Chomsky, but this should not be taken as implying any subordination of the theory of space to linguistics.

tration and his own phallus is objectified for him as part of outside reality. Hence the Mother, her sex and her blood, are relegated to the realm of the cursed and the sacred – along with sexual pleasure, which is thus rendered both fascinating and inaccessible.

The trouble with this thesis ³² is that it assumes the logical, epistemological and anthropological priority of language over space. By the same token, it puts prohibitions – among them that against incest – and not productive activity, at the origin of society. The pre-existence of an objective, neutral and empty space is simply taken as read, and only the space of speech (and writing) is dealt with as something that must be created. These assumptions obviously cannot become the basis for an adequate account of social/spatial practice. They apply only to an imaginary society, an ideal type or model of society which this ideology dreams up and then arbitrarily identifies with all 'real' societies. All the same, the existence within space of *phallic verticality*, which has a long history but which at present is becoming more prevalent, cries out for explanation. The same might be said apropos of the general fact that walls, enclosures and façades serve to define both a *scene* (where something takes place) and an *obscene* area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated: whatever is inadmissible, be it malefic or forbidden, thus has its own hidden space on the near or the far side of a frontier. It is true that explaining everything in psychoanalytic terms, in terms of the unconscious, can only lead to an intolerable reductionism and dogmatism; the same goes for the overestimation of the 'structural'. Yet structures do exist, and there is such a thing as the 'unconscious'. Such little-understood aspects of consciousness would provide sufficient justification in themselves for research in this area. If it turned out, for instance, that every society, and particularly (for our purposes) the city, had an underground and repressed life, and hence an 'unconscious' of its own, there can be no doubt that interest in psychoanalysis, at present on the decline, would get a new lease on life.

XVII

The third implication of our initial hypothesis will take an even greater effort to elaborate on. If space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production. The

³² A thesis basic to the approach of Jacques Lacan and his followers.

diaphragm; Virgo over the stomach; Libra takes care of the second part of the back; Scorpio is responsible for those parts that belong to lust. . . .’

It is reasonable to assume that spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period. Relations between the three moments of the perceived, the conceived and the lived are never either simple or stable, nor are they ‘positive’ in the sense in which this term might be opposed to ‘negative’, to the indecipherable, the unsaid, the prohibited, or the unconscious. Are these moments and their interconnections in fact conscious? Yes – but at the same time they are disregarded or misconstrued. Can they be described as ‘unconscious’? Yes again, because they are generally unknown, and because analysis is able – though not always without error – to rescue them from obscurity. The fact is, however, that these relationships have always had to be given utterance, which is not the same thing as being known – even ‘unconsciously’.

XVIII

If space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history*; here we have the fourth implication of our hypothesis. The history of space, of its production *qua* ‘reality’, and of its forms and representations, is not to be confused either with the causal chain of ‘historical’ (i.e. dated) events, or with a sequence, whether teleological or not, of customs and laws, ideals and ideology, and socio-economic structures or institutions (superstructures). But we may be sure that the forces of production (nature; labour and the organization of labour; technology and knowledge) and, naturally, the relations of production play a part – though we have not yet defined it – in the production of space.

It should be clear from the above that the passage from one mode of production to another is of the highest theoretical importance for our purposes, for it results from contradictions in the social relations of production which cannot fail to leave their mark on space and indeed to revolutionize it. Since, *ex hypothesi*, each mode of production has its own particular space, the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space. Some people claim a special status for the mode of production, which they conceive of as a finished whole

or closed system; the type of thinking which is forever searching for transparency or substantiality, or both, has a natural predilection for an 'object' of this kind. Contrary to this view of matters, however, examination of the transitions between modes of production will reveal that a fresh space is indeed generated during such changes, a space which is planned and organized subsequently. Take for example the Renaissance town, the dissolution of the feudal system and the rise of merchant capitalism. This was the period during which the code already referred to above was constituted; the analysis of this code – with the accent on its paradigmatic aspects – will take up a good few pages later in the present discussion. It began forming in antiquity, in the Greek and Roman cities, as also in the works of Vitruvius and the philosophers; later it would become the language of the writer. It corresponded to spatial practice, and doubtless to the representation of space rather than to representational spaces still permeated by magic and religion. What the establishment of this code meant was that 'people' – inhabitants, builders, politicians – stopped going from urban messages to the code in order to decipher reality, to decode town and country, and began instead to go from code to messages, so as to produce a discourse and a reality adequate to the code. This code thus has a history, a history determined, in the West, by the entire history of cities. Eventually it would allow the organization of the cities, which had been several times overturned, to become knowledge and power – to become, in other words, an *institution*. This development heralded the decline and fall of the autonomy of the towns and urban systems in their historical reality. The state was built on the back of the old cities, and their structure and code were shattered in the process. Notice that a code of this kind is a superstructure, which is not true of the town itself, its space, or the 'town-country' relationship within that space. The code served to fix the alphabet and language of the town, its primary signs, their paradigm and their syntagmatic relations. To put it in less abstract terms, façades were harmonized to create perspectives; entrances and exits, doors and windows, were subordinated to façades – and hence also to perspectives; streets and squares were arranged in concord with the public buildings and palaces of political leaders and institutions (with municipal authorities still predominating). At all levels, from family dwellings to monumental edifices, from 'private' areas to the territory as a whole, the elements of this space were disposed and composed in a manner at once familiar and surprising which even in the late twentieth century has not lost its charm. It is clear, therefore, that a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that

space, of understanding it, and of producing it. As such it brings together verbal signs (words and sentences, along with the meaning invested in them by a signifying process) and non-verbal signs (music, sounds, evocations, architectural constructions).

The history of space cannot be limited to the study of the special moments constituted by the formation, establishment, decline and dissolution of a given code. It must deal also with the global aspect – with modes of production as generalities covering specific societies with their particular histories and institutions. Furthermore, the history of space may be expected to periodize the development of the productive process in a way that does not correspond exactly to widely accepted periodizations.

Absolute space was made up of fragments of nature located at sites which were chosen for their intrinsic qualities (cave, mountaintop, spring, river), but whose very consecration ended up by stripping them of their natural characteristics and uniqueness. Thus natural space was soon populated by political forces. Typically, architecture picked a site in nature and transferred it to the political realm by means of a symbolic mediation; one thinks, for example, of the statues of local gods or goddesses in Greek temples, or of the Shintoist's sanctuary, empty or else containing nothing but a mirror. A sanctified inwardness set itself up in opposition to the outwardness in nature, yet at the same time it echoed and restored that outwardness. The absolute space where rites and ceremonies were performed retained a number of aspects of nature, albeit in a form modified by ceremonial requirements: age, sex, genitility (fertility) – all still had a part to play. At once civil and religious, absolute space thus preserved and incorporated bloodlines, family, unmediated relationships – but it transposed them to the city, to the political state founded on the town. The socio-political forces which occupied this space also had their administrative and military extensions: scribes and armies were very much part of the picture. Those who produced space (peasants or artisans) were not the same people as managed it, as used it to organize social production and reproduction; it was the priests, warriors, scribes and princes who possessed what others had produced, who appropriated space and became its fully entitled owners.

Absolute space, religious and political in character, was a product of the bonds of consanguinity, soil and language, but out of it evolved a space which was relativized and *historical*. Not that absolute space disappeared in the process; rather it survived as the bedrock of historical space and the basis of representational spaces (religious, magical and political symbolisms). Quickened by an internal dialectic which urged

it on towards its demise though simultaneously prolonging its life, absolute space embodied an antagonism between full and empty. After the fashion of a cathedral's 'nave' or 'ship', the invisible fullness of political space (the space of the town-state's nucleus or 'city') set up its rule in the emptiness of a natural space confiscated from nature. Then the forces of history smashed naturalness forever and upon its ruins established the space of accumulation (the accumulation of all wealth and resources: knowledge, technology, money, precious objects, works of art and symbols). For the theory of this accumulation, and particularly of its primitive stage, in which the respective roles of nature and history are still hard to distinguish, we are indebted to Marx; but, inasmuch as Marx's theory is incomplete, I shall have occasion to discuss this further below. One 'subject' dominated this period: the historical town of the West, along with the countryside under its control. It was during this time that productive activity (labour) became no longer one with the process of reproduction which perpetuated social life; but, in becoming independent of that process, labour fell prey to abstraction, whence abstract social labour – and *abstract space*.

This abstract space took over from historical space, which nevertheless lived on, though gradually losing its force, as substratum or underpinning of representational spaces. Abstract space functions 'objectally', as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships: glass and stone, concrete and steel, angles and curves, full and empty. Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity). The signification of this ensemble refers back to a sort of super-signification which escapes meaning's net: the functioning of capitalism, which contrives to be blatant and covert at one and the same time. The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there. Differences, for their part, are forced into the symbolic forms of an art that is itself abstract. A symbolism derived from that mis-taking of sensory, sensual and sexual which is intrinsic to the things/signs of abstract space finds objective expression in derivative ways: monuments have a phallic aspect, towers exude arrogance, and the bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space is everywhere. All of which calls, of course, for thorough analysis. A characteristic contradiction of abstract space consists in the fact that, although it denies the sensual and the sexual, its only immediate point of reference is genitivity: the family unit, the

type of dwelling (apartment, bungalow, cottage, etc.), fatherhood and motherhood, and the assumption that fertility and fulfilment are identical. The reproduction of social relations is thus crudely conflated with biological reproduction, which is itself conceived of in the crudest and most simplistic way imaginable. In *spatial practice*, the reproduction of social relations is predominant. The *representation of space*, in thrall to both knowledge and power, leaves only the narrowest leeway to *representational spaces*, which are limited to works, images and memories whose content, whether sensory, sensual or sexual, is so far displaced that it barely achieves symbolic force. Perhaps young children can live in a space of this kind, with its indifference to age and sex (and even to time itself), but adolescence perforce suffers from it, for it cannot discern its own reality therein: it furnishes no male or female images nor any images of possible pleasure. Inasmuch as adolescents are unable to challenge either the dominant system's imperious architecture or its deployment of signs, it is only by way of revolt that they have any prospect of recovering the world of differences – the natural, the sensory/sensual, sexuality and pleasure.

Abstract space is not defined only by the disappearance of trees, or by the receding of nature; nor merely by the great empty spaces of the state and the military – plazas that resemble parade grounds; nor even by commercial centres packed tight with commodities, money and cars. It is not in fact defined on the basis of what is perceived. Its abstraction has nothing simple about it: it is not transparent and cannot be reduced either to a logic or to a strategy. Coinciding neither with the abstraction of the sign, nor with that of the concept, it operates *negatively*. Abstract space relates negatively to that which perceives and underpins it – namely, the historical and religio-political spheres. It also relates negatively to something which it carries within itself and which seeks to emerge from it: a differential space–time. It has nothing of a 'subject' about it, yet it acts like a subject in that it transports and maintains specific social relations, dissolves others and stands opposed to yet others. It functions *positively* vis-à-vis its own implications: technology, applied sciences, and knowledge bound to power. Abstract space may even be described as at once, and inseparably, the locus, medium and tool of this 'positivity'. How is this possible? Does it mean that this space could be defined in terms of a reifying alienation, on the assumption that the milieu of the commodity has itself become a commodity to be sold wholesale and retail? Perhaps so, yet the 'negativity' of abstract space is not negligible, and its abstraction cannot be reduced to an 'absolute thing'. A safer assumption would seem to be that the status of abstract

space must henceforward be considered a highly complex one. It is true that it dissolves and incorporates such former 'subjects' as the village and the town; it is also true that it replaces them. It sets itself up as the space of power, which will (or at any rate may) eventually lead to its own dissolution on account of conflicts (contradictions) arising within it. What we seem to have, then, is an apparent subject, an impersonal pseudo-subject, the abstract 'one' of modern social space, and – hidden within it, concealed by its illusory transparency – the real 'subject', namely state (political) power. Within this space, and on the subject of this space, everything is openly declared: everything is said or written. Save for the fact that there is very little to be said – and even less to be 'lived', for lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what is 'conceived of'. History is experienced as nostalgia, and nature as regret – as a horizon fast disappearing behind us. This may explain why affectivity, which, along with the sensory/sensual realm, cannot accede to abstract space and so informs no symbolism, is referred to by a term that denotes both a subject and that subject's denial by the absurd rationality of space: that term is 'the unconscious'.

In connection with abstract space, a space which is also instrumental (i.e. manipulated by all kinds of 'authorities' of which it is the locus and milieu), a question arises whose full import will become apparent only later. It concerns the silence of the 'users' of this space. Why do they allow themselves to be manipulated in ways so damaging to their spaces and their daily life without embarking on massive revolts? Why is protest left to 'enlightened', and hence elite, groups who are in any case largely exempt from these manipulations? Such elite circles, at the margins of political life, are highly vocal, but being mere wordmills, they have little to show for it. How is it that protest is never taken up by supposedly left-wing political parties? And why do the more honest politicians pay such a high price for displaying a bare minimum of straightforwardness?³⁵ Has bureaucracy already achieved such power that no political force can successfully resist it? There must be many reasons for such a startlingly strong – and worldwide – trend. It is difficult to see how so odd an indifference could be maintained without diverting the attention and interest of the 'users' elsewhere, without throwing sops to them in response to their demands and proposals, or without supplying replacement fulfilments for their (albeit vital) objec-

³⁵ I am thinking, for instance, of the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU) and its leader Michel Rocard, defeated in the French elections of 1973, or of George McGovern's defeat in the US presidential election of 1971.

tives. Perhaps it would be true to say that the place of social space as a whole has been usurped by a part of that space endowed with an illusory special status – namely, the part which is concerned with writing and imagery, underpinned by the written text (journalism, literature), and broadcast by the media; a part, in short, that amounts to abstraction wielding awesome reductionistic force vis-à-vis ‘lived’ experience.

Given that abstract space is buttressed by non-critical (positive) knowledge, backed up by a frightening capacity for violence, and maintained by a bureaucracy which has laid hold of the gains of capitalism in the ascendent and turned them to its own profit, must we conclude that this space will last forever? If so, we should have to deem it the locus and milieu of the ultimate abjection, of that final stability forecast by Hegel, the end result of social entropy. To such a state of affairs our only possible response would be the spasms of what Georges Bataille calls the acephal. Whatever traces of vitality remained would have a wasteland as their only refuge.

From a less pessimistic standpoint, it can be shown that abstract space harbours specific contradictions. Such spatial contradictions derive in part from the old contradictions thrown up by historical time. These have undergone modifications, however: some are aggravated, others blunted. Amongst them, too, completely fresh contradictions have come into being which are liable eventually to precipitate the downfall of abstract space. The reproduction of the social relations of production within this space inevitably obeys two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other. Thus, despite – or rather because of – its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space ‘differential space’, because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It will also restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice. It will put an end to those localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge. By contrast, it will distinguish what abstract space tends to identify – for example, social reproduction and genitality, gratification and biological fertility, social relationships and family relationships. (The persistence of abstract space notwithstanding, the pressure for these distinctions to be drawn is constantly on the increase; the space of gratification, for instance, if indeed it is ever produced, will have nothing whatsoever to do with functional spaces in general, and

in particular with the space of genitivity as expressed in the family cell and its insertion into the piled-up boxes of 'modern' buildings, tower blocks, 'urban complexes', and what-have-you.)

XIX

If indeed every society produces a space, its own space, this will have other consequences in addition to those we have already considered. Any 'social existence' aspiring or claiming to be 'real', but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very peculiar kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the 'cultural' realm. It would fall to the level of folklore and sooner or later disappear altogether, thereby immediately losing its identity, its denomination and its feeble degree of reality. This suggests a possible criterion for distinguishing between ideology and practice as well as between ideology and knowledge (or, otherwise stated, for distinguishing between the *lived* on the one hand and the *perceived* and the *conceived* on the other, and for discerning their interrelationship, their oppositions and dispositions, and what they reveal *versus* what they conceal).

There is no doubt that medieval society – that is, the feudal mode of production, with its variants and local peculiarities – created its own space. Medieval space built upon the space constituted in the preceding period, and preserved that space as a substrate and prop for its symbols; it survives in an analogous fashion itself today. Manors, monasteries, cathedrals – these were the strong points anchoring the network of lanes and main roads to a landscape transformed by peasant communities. This space was the take-off point for Western European capital accumulation, the original source and cradle of which were the towns.

Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the 'world of commodities', its 'logic' and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state. This space is founded on the vast network of banks, business centres and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices. Within this space the town – once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and centre of historical space – has disintegrated.

What of socialism – or, rather, what of what is today so confusedly referred to as socialism? There is no 'communist society' in existence, and the very concept of communism has become obscure inasmuch as the notion serves chiefly to sustain two opposing yet complementary