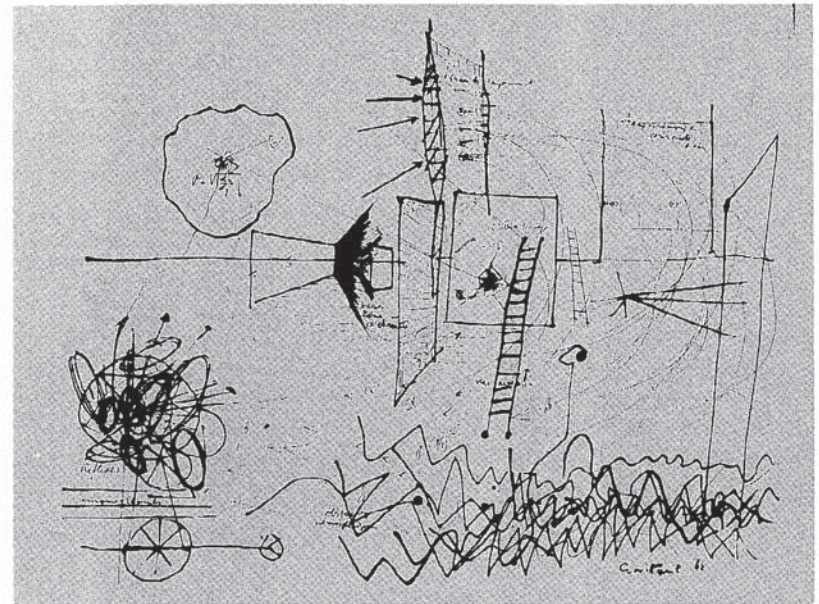


Lefebvre  
Writings on  
CITIES

# Writings on CITIES

Henri Lefebvre



Translated and Edited by  
ELEONORE KOFMAN AND  
ELIZABETH LEBAS

The work of Henri Lefebvre, the only major French intellectual of the post-war period to give extensive consideration to the city and urban life, has since his publication in English of *The Production of Space*, received considerable attention among both academics and practitioners of the built environment. This new collection brings together for the first time in English, Lefebvre's reflections on the city and urban life written over a span of some twenty years.

The selection of writings is contextualized by an introduction – itself a significant contribution to the interpretation of Henri Lefebvre – which places the material within the context of Lefebvre's intellectual and political life and raises pertinent issues as to their relevance for contemporary debates over such questions as the nature of urban reality, the production of space and modernity.

*Writings on Cities* is of particular relevance to architects, planners, geographers, and those interested in the philosophical and political understanding of contemporary life.

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Cover illustration: *Le retour a la dialectique, douze mots clés*, Paris: Messidor, Editions Sociales, 1986, page 13. Constant was a member of the Situationists International until he left it in 1960. His writings include *Pour une architecture de situation* (1953). Between 1956 and 1960 he worked with the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck on a series of models for what they called the New Babylon Project. Lefebvre was influenced by Constant's emphasis on play and the right to the city as a place of play and encounter.

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*Writings on Cities*



# PART III

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## Space and Politics

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*Introduction*

When a text wants to have a theoretical reach and claims to be self-sufficient, it is because the author has firstly proceeded to delineate and attribute to himself part of a field which he is attempting to close. A fairly crude, always suspect, yet habitual operation of private appropriation which passes off as legitimate given that private property includes ideas and knowledge! More than one scholar should apologize for putting up fences around his garden in order to cultivate it at leisure. Here, the author apologizes because none of the articles in this volume can be read without referring to works published elsewhere on everyday life, space, various rights (the right to the city, the right to difference) and on the reproduction of social relations of production, etc.

Research on the city and the urban refer to that concerning space which will be the object of a work to be published under the title *Production of Space*. This theory of social space encompasses on the one hand the critical analysis of urban reality and on the other that of everyday life. Indeed, everyday life and the urban, indissolubly linked, at one and the same time products and production, occupy a social space generated through them and inversely. The analysis is concerned with the whole of practico-social activities, as they are entangled in a complex space, urban and everyday, ensuring up to a point the reproduction of relations of production (that is, social relations). The global synthesis is realized through this actual space, its critique and its knowledge.

In this way is constructed an ensemble in which each item has a specificity, relating to a certain level on a certain aspect or element. Despite the connection between its elements and aspects, this ensemble

has nothing to do with a system or a 'synthesis' in the usual sense. Its meaning? Its aim? It is not to show a coherence or cohesion, but to seek by trial and error where can be located in time and space the *point of no return* and of *no recourse* – not on an individual or group scale, but on a global scale. This moment has nothing to do with historicism or a classical theory of crises: it would be nevertheless crucial. It is a question of metamorphosis or self-destruction (one not excluding the other). It would be the moment when the reproduction of existing relations of production would cease either because degradation and dissolution sweep it away, or because new relations are produced displacing and replacing old ones. The possibility of such a moment (a perspective which does not coincide exactly with the usual theory of revolution) defines a strategic hypothesis. It is not an indisputable and positively established certainty. It does not exclude other possibilities (for example, the destruction of the planet).

Haunted by this moment, many exert themselves to put it off, cast it aside, and exorcize through ideological magic the images which have been conjured up. Councils meet to discourse gravely and to maintain the representations (ideologies) which disguise the actual due date. Indeed, pollution, the environment, ecology and ecosystems, growth and its finality, all fragment and conceal the problems of space. Meanwhile, others invoke a fateful moment, wishing to hasten destiny by worsening it. They are nihilists driven by what they call the 'death wish'. Perhaps the best choice for a reflection which wishes itself knowledge and act, consists in not giving in to catastrophism, in determining a limited but quite precise point of attack, involving a tactic and strategy of thought.

Here we are trying neither to dramatize the situation nor neutralize it. It is possible that the moment of no return is nigh, that one should prepare oneself for it. The forces of destruction can no longer be described; they no longer have, as Jean-Clarence Lambert writes in *Opus* (June 1972) name or face. They are System, the only one, that of negation and death, which under a positive appearance attacks in its innermost depth existence itself. Sometimes, in the current prosperity of capitalist France, one wants to cry out: 'Beware! Revolution or death . . .' This does not mean, 'Let us die for the revolution', but rather 'If you do not want us to die, make the revolution, swiftly, totally'. This total world revolution should put an end to power, to this power which dominates human beings and the being of 'man'

without dominating any of the forces which come from them and turn against them: neither technique, demography, or space! Over whom is it exercised? On those who could appropriate for themselves these forces which have become foreign, these deadly realities. There is no abuse of power, for always and everywhere power abuses. Total revolution should put an end to this *abstract power* which claims to use means for an unknown end, while it has become an end in itself. This revolution would put an end to it by substituting *powers* of appropriation and re-appropriation. The idea of complete *subversion*, that of *revolution* aims at the destruction of politics, because all State power is destructive. Upon close examination, the first objective must be the *limitation* of power. For this the threat of its complete destruction is essential. Accordingly, the Church allowed its ambitions to be curtailed only when faced with atheism which threatened it. Scientism and technicism do not back down from philosophical criticism but from occultism and magic. 'Necessary rights' of habeas corpus and right to the city, are no longer sufficient. The urban must also make itself threatening.

This total and planetary revolution – economic, demographic, psychic, cultural, etc., is today *par excellence* the impossible – possible (that is, possibility, necessity and impossibility)! There is nothing closer and more urgent, nothing more fleeting and more remote. The idea of revolution refers to the global and to the conjunctural, to total and immediate practice; that is, to the existence of an enormous majority of people, silent or not, who subscribe to the present and go as far as to accept millenarism because it postpones until later the eventuality of a catastrophe. After us nothingness! Thus, so-called 'concerned' people waver between the jovial tone of optimism and radical nihilism, postponing deadlines.

At the centre, recognized here and elsewhere, is the process of *reproduction of relations of production*, which unfolds before one, which is accomplished with each social activity, including the most ostensibly anodyne (leisure activities, everyday life, dwelling and habitat, the use of space) and which has yet to be the subject of a global study. It was inherent in social practice and as such went unnoticed. It overcomes (until when?) reasons and causes of dissolution. The lots divided up from this vast field by specialities – political economy, sociology, demography, etc. – implied the global and left it in the shade, a blind field. Approached in this way, the analysis of globality

(which cannot be labelled 'system' in the usual sense of the word) cannot be found here. However, the articles included in this collection do not refer to unworthy although partial aspects of the global process. They offer stages of discovery. At a certain level they insert themselves into an aforementioned specificity, within a theoretical framework and reality approached critically.

*To dwell* is only reduced to a designated function which can be isolated and localized, that of *habitat*, reasons for which have been put forward in *Right to the City*. Here the reader will find these reasons again, considered anew and perhaps more detailed: the action of State bureaucracy, the planning of space according to the requirements of the (capitalist) mode of production, that is, the reproduction of relations of production. An important, perhaps essential, aspect of this practice will come to light: the fragmentation of space for sale and purchase (exchange), in contradiction with the technical and scientific capacity of the production of social space on a planetary scale, the consequence of which is a critical analysis of a current and disastrous procedure. In a binary correspondence needs, functions, places, social objects are placed directly (point by point) in a supposedly neutral, innocuous and innocently objective space; after which linkages are set up. This procedure which bears an obvious relationship although never made explicit as such, with the fragmentation of social space, the theory of direct correspondence between terms (functions, needs, objects, places) leads to *projects* which as visual projections appear clear and correct on paper and the *plan* of a space distorted from the start. Fragmentation results in a false and uncritical analysis which believes itself precise because *visual*, of places and sitings. A more advanced and especially more concrete analysis modifies terms which seemed more positive, 'operational'. Indeed they are within a certain 'framework'. This analysis gives rise to a truly specific operation. It is not a question of *localizing* in pre-existing space a need or a function, but on the contrary, of *spatializing* a social activity, linked to the whole of a practice by *producing* an appropriate space.

So what is *architecture*? It has been talked about a great deal and for a long time, since architecture has existed and therefore architecture as a craft, in the division of labour. Could it be an art? This definition only still tempts those who love to draw façades, persist in turning out mouldings, skilfully distribute materials and pleasantly sculpt volumes. There are some. Could it be a technique? If so the engineer

supplants the architect, whether he specializes in concrete or road-works. Could it be a science? In which case it would be necessary to construct a methodology, an epistemology or a doctrinal corpus. Now the fruitlessness of this hypothesis is obvious. Supposing it could be established, this corpus would be self-sufficient and without any other effectiveness than its transmission. Architecture cannot be conceived other than as a social practice among others (for example, medicine) in the practical ensemble which sustains and which society at present supports (the mode of production): a relationship to be ascertained. The doctor calls upon a number of sciences, perhaps all of them, and uses many techniques. Therefore medicine cannot be a specific science given that it must borrow knowledge from physics, biology, physiology, mathematics as well as from semiology and sociology. It includes many specialities. On the one hand it stretches from dietetics, hygiene, the control of the most 'normal' activities such sport and preventive medicine; and on the other to so-called mental medicine – which does not simplify matters. Consciously or otherwise, the doctor uses very general concepts related to philosophy: the normal and the abnormal, health and illness, equilibrium and disequilibrium, system (nervous, glandular, etc). These concepts justify a theoretical reflection and yet a medical epistemology seems difficult and of little use. Doctors vacillate between the use of computers to process data, and the intuition of the general practitioner who knows his patients personally. Whatever his choice, the doctor cannot easily reduce knowledge to a narrow speciality; nevertheless he almost always specializes and increasingly so. If he divides up his field of experiences and applications, he must reconstitute the global, the body, the organism, the relation to the environment, the living unity of the human being in society. And conversely. Finally, who will say that medicine and doctors are not affected by the influence of capitalism? There is no doubt that there exists a capitalist medical practice and another, non-capitalist, 'social' or 'socialist' one. None the less, as a practice, medicine came before capitalism: it will continue after it, whatever its end will be. Whether capitalist relations of production stimulate medical research and efficiency by giving them adequate motivations and directions or whether they hinder them is uncertain. Biology and biochemistry it seems are making giant strides, but not without adding to a list of already impressive threats of other risks, other anxieties, other deadlines. How can medicine break away from this hold and find better forms of

research and action? The question is posed with only some seriousness. The answer is not certain, the solutions are not obvious.

It is the same for architecture and the architect. Of course, architectural practice predates capitalism. As with urbanism, from which it was not separate, it was submitted to the orders of more or less enlightened despots. The architect, artist as well as learned man, accepted the major fact of the priority of monumentality, the importance of religious or political buildings, over *dwelling*. With the industrial period, architecture disengages itself, but badly, from religious and political constraints. It falls into ideology – that of functions which are impoverished, structures which are homogeneous, forms which are frozen. Today, after the revolutions of the industrial era, architecture approaches the urban era with difficulty. The architect too calls upon all the sciences: mathematics, informatics, physics, chemistry, politics, economics, even semiology, psychology, sociology. As the doctor, he puts into action an encyclopedic knowledge. Yet, his practice remains fixed, limited on all sides. He is awkwardly placed between the engineer and the draughtsman; he does not know where he fits between developers, users, financial backers and public authorities. If he does have a specific role in the (social) division of labour, the product of this labour does not appear to be clearly specified. He too avails himself of a number of stock concepts (carefully catalogued: scale, proportions, ‘options’, etc.) which justify a reflection close to that of philosophy but which are not self-sufficient and are not enough to construct a doctrinal corpus. Finally, architecture differs from painting, sculpture and the arts, in that they are related to social practice only indirectly and by mediations; while the architect and architecture have an immediate relationship with dwelling as social act, with construction as a practice.

The architect, producer of space (but never alone) operates over a specific space. Firstly he has before him, before his eyes, his drawing board, his blank drawing paper. Of course, the blackboard is not very different. This drawing paper, who does not consider it for a simple and a faithful mirror? Whereas all mirrors are deceptive and besides, this blank sheet is more and something else than a mirror. The architect uses it for his *plans* in every sense of the term: a flat surface upon which a more or less nimble and skilful pencil leaves traces which the author takes for the reproduction of things, of the tangible world, while in fact this surface forces a decoding and recoding of the

‘real’. The architect cannot, as he easily tends to believe, *localize* his thought and his perceptions on the drawing board, *visualize* things (needs, functions, objects) by *projecting* them. He confuses *projection* and *project* in a confused ideality which he believes to be ‘real’, even rigorously conceived, and so escapes him because the procedures of coding and decoding through drawing are routine and traditional. The sheet at hand, before the eyes of the draughtsman, is as blank as it is flat. He believes it to be neutral. He believes that this neutral space which passively receives the marks of his pencil corresponds to the neutral space outside, which receives things, point by point, place by place. As for the ‘plan’, it does not remain innocently on paper. On the ground, the bulldozer realises ‘plans’.

And this is why and how drawing (and by this one must also understand design) is not only a skill and a technique. It is a mode of representation, a stipulated and codified know-how. *Therefore it is a filter* selective towards contents, eliminating this or that part of the ‘real’, in its own way filling the lacuna of the text. In aggravating circumstances this filtering goes further than being an ideological specialization. It may even conceal social demand.

What is a code? What is a coding–decoding? Let’s quickly say that apart from a number of blatant examples (the highway code), a code does not consist of a system of prefabricated rules. All codes define a focused space by opening up a horizon around a text (message), by deploying it and consequently encircling and closing it. This text can be practico-material and social, and therefore not always necessarily written. Images also can be coded and decoded! The complexity of operations executed escapes as much the readers, as language and its production escape the speakers. The agent (here the draughtsman) believes himself to be in the only practice. He thinks he is reproducing while in fact he produces! He skips over intermediaries, going from one result to another result. Every coding brings a placing into context and ‘production’ of a certain meaning which substitutes itself to the given text and can either impoverish it or valorize it by enriching it. Hence ambiguity. Coding–decoding implies an effect or mirage effects, for the formal structure of a code appears only at the moment when production declines, or the appearance of meaning fades. The code that is formulated is no more than its shadow! Nowadays the most subtle of semiologists are saying that a code is a voice and a way: from the ‘text’ – the message – arise several possibilities, choices,

various utterances, a plurality, a fabric rather than a line. Hence, a certain 'work' on the text (message) which produces meaning starting from attempts and fragments which provoke a complex movement: valorizations and devalorizations, advances coming up against obstacles, with 'fading'. Each coding would be a proposed outline, taken up again, abandoned, always at the outline stage, engendering a meaning among many others. The hand searches, the pencil hesitates. The hand believes it reproduces and substitutes. It obeys a voice which speaks, which says and interprets the thing, believing that it is seizing it. The voice, the hand, the instrument, believe that they are 'expressing' (reproducing) whereas they are acting, 'producing'; but the product of this work does not have the qualities and properties with which the author credits it. He is doing other than what he says and believes.

More than one good draughtsman will have trouble recognizing himself in this ironic picture of his professional lived experience. Yet, drawing obviously entails a risk, that of a substitution to objects, especially people, bodies, their gestures and acts, of graphic arts. He is *reducer* even if it does not seem so for the draughtsman during the course of his action. With 'design', form signifies function, and structure only has to incorporate in a matter treated in a profitable way this 'signifier-signified' relation. The distance between these three terms, function, form, structure, which formerly made it possible to bring them together into an organic unity, not visible as such, has been reduced. The signs of objects give rise to signs of signs, to an increasingly sophisticated *visualization*, where the limit is reached when inevitable figurines come on the stage, in charge of 'animating' space. These fixed signifiers of mobility and activity speak of symbolic murder. They make the procedure of coding-decoding by concealing it. They must be used to condemn it by putting an end to two myths: the expression of reproduction and fabulous creation.

Legibility passes for a great quality, which is true, but one forgets that that all quality has its counterpart and its faults. Whatever the coding, legibility is bought at a very high price: the loss of part of the message, of information or content. This loss is inherent in the movement which rescues from the chaos of tangible facts, a meaning, a single one. The emergence of this meaning breaks the network, often very fine and richly disorderly from which the elaboration began. It completes its erasure by *making another thing*. The snare of legibility is therefore everywhere, especially when the *auteur*, here the architect,

believes to be holding up to and have well in hand the 'thing' from which he started, namely, to dwell. In fact what he has done is to substitute it for habitat! Visual legibility is even more treacherous and better ensnared (more precisely, ensnaring) than graphic legibility, that is, writing. Every legibility stems from a paucity: from redundancy. The fullness of text and space never go together with legibility. No poetry or art obeys this simple criteria. At best legibility is blank, the poorest of texts!

Ensnared and ensnaring, legibility hides what it omits and which a more attentive, analytical and critical reader detects. Is not the homology (homogeneity) of all the spaces represented and recorded on the surfaces the most efficient of reductive ideologies? An ideology very useful to the reproduction of existing social relations, transported into space and the *reproductibility* of spaces!

It goes without saying that such a code does not stay within the narrow confines of individual know-how. It becomes a question of skill. To this effect, it enters into social labour and the social division of labour. Thus, it is transmitted and taught by self-enhancement to become tradition and pedagogy. The visual code, as such insufficiently or poorly formulated, has been the basis of the teaching of drawing, of fine arts and architecture over a long period. Challenged, but still influential, it perpetuates itself as the only solid pedagogic skill (not only in France, but in Italy, and probably elsewhere).

The architect cannot confine himself to drawing and cannot avoid oral consultation with other agents of this production, space. Foremost the user, but also the bureaucrat, the politician, the financier, and so on and so forth. To such an extent that there is a tendency to present the architect no longer traditionally as a man of drawing, but as a 'man of words'. An interesting but questionable assumption, for it forgets the general problematic of space (and its production), to retain from the particular problematic of architecture the desire to legitimize the profession. Moreover, we all know that for the user and the architect, neither the 'signifiers' nor the 'signified', nor their sequences coincide.

The general problematic of space requires particular questions to be approached in another way, for example, that of the profession. It subordinates the profession to general questions. It rejects the separation between the architect and the planner. Sharing space and sharing it with other agents, including proprietors, they divide and fragment it each in their own way; and thus fragmentation appears theoretically



justified. To each his level and scale of intervention and thus the global escapes and flees. Each operates over an abstract space, at his level, at his scale, the architect at the micro, the planner at the macro. Now, given their pathetic results, the problem today is to overcome these fragmentations and therefore determine the junction, the articulation of these two levels, of the micro and the macro, the *near* and *far order*, neighbouring and communication.

Would it not be precisely at this scale, that nowadays thought can intervene and intervention be situated? At the lower level, that of the building, all has been stated, restated, fiddled with. For the time being the higher level belongs to road and highway engineers. Exploration begins from an all too complex urban space: it is too early to make concepts operative. Many studies lose themselves in gigantism by making the building higher or larger (see Soleri, Aldo Rossi, etc). Most famous architects today have not broken with monumentality. They attempt a compromise between the monument and the building whereas others disperse social space into ephemeral units, atoms and flows of housing. What can be thought and projected is situated at the intermediary level, as can be witnessed in the studies and projects of Constant, Ricardo Bofill, the studies of Mario Gaviras in Spain, etc. The lower level is that of the village and the neighbourhood, and the macro level is that of the urban. Between the two and at the sharp end is the population, for which one could now attempt the production of an *appropriated space*, for between ten and twenty thousand inhabitants. For now – as a stage! It is at this scale that the ‘right to the city’ can intervene operationally and stimulate research.

Who can be surprised that urbanism has not been able to constitute itself as either science or practice, but instead has only been able to institute itself (that is, become an institution) by pouring forth heavy ideological clouds? Only an especially sharp critical thought could free urbanism from a prevailing and fettering ideology. But this critical thought, after a few moments of hope soon dashed (about fifteen years ago), could only but turn against urbanism.

If it is true that the words and concepts ‘city’, ‘urban’, ‘space’, correspond to a global reality (not to be confused with any of the levels defined above), and do not refer to a minor aspect of social reality, the *right to the city* refers to the globality thus aimed at. Certainly, it is not a natural right, nor a contractual one. In the most ‘positive’ of terms it signifies the right of citizens and city dwellers, and

of groups they (on the basis of social relations) constitute, to appear on all the networks and circuits of communication, information and exchange. This depends neither upon an urbanistic ideology, nor upon an architectural intervention, but upon an essential quality or property of urban space: centrality. Here and elsewhere we assert that there is no urban reality without a centre, without a gathering together of all that can be born in space and can be produced in it, without an encounter, actual or possible, of all ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’.

To exclude the *urban* from groups, classes, individuals, is also to exclude them from civilization, if from not society itself. The *right to the city* legitimates the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregative organization. This right of the citizen (if one wants, of ‘man’) proclaims the inevitable crisis of city centres based upon segregation and establishing it: centres of decision-making, wealth, power, of information and knowledge, which reject towards peripheral spaces all those who do not participate in political privileges. Equally, it stipulates the right to meetings and gathering; places and objects must answer to certain ‘needs’ generally misunderstood, to certain despised and moreover transfunctional ‘functions’: the ‘need’ for social life and a centre, the need and the function of play, the symbolic function of space (close to what exists over and above classified functions and needs, which cannot be objectified as such because of its figure of time, which gives rise to rhetoric and which only poets can call by its name: desire).

The right to the city therefore signifies the constitution or reconstitution of a spatial-temporal unit, of a gathering together instead of a fragmentation. It does not abolish confrontations and struggles. On the contrary! This unity could be, according to ideologies, called the subject (individual and collective) in an external morphology which enables it to affirm its interiority the accomplishment (of oneself, of the ‘being’); life the ‘security – happiness’ pair already defined by Aristotle as finality and meaning of the *polis*. In all these cases, under all these names, philosophers have foretold and perceived from afar the reconstitution of what has been fragmented, dissociated and disseminated, during the course of social history. Having defined the goal, they have badly determined its conditions, of which some are political (involving in this term the criticism of all politics) and others are morphological, spatial-temporal.

Thus conceived, the right to the city implies and applies a knowledge which cannot be defined as a ‘science of space’ (ecology, geopolitics,

ekistics, development planning etc.), but as a knowledge of a *production*, that of space.

In Marx's time, economic science was getting lost in the enumeration, description and accounting of objects produced. Marx replaced the study of things by the critical analysis of the productive activity. Resuming the initiative of the great economists (Smith and Ricard) and connecting to it the critical analysis of the mode of (capitalist) production, he extended knowledge to a higher level. Today a similar approach is necessary with regard to space.

For many years the science of space has been trying to find itself in vain. It cannot find itself. It disperses itself and loses itself in various considerations about what there is in space (objects and things), or over an abstract space (devoid of objects and geometrical). At best, this research describes fragments of space more or less filled up. These descriptions of fragments are themselves fragmentary, according to the compartmentalization of the specialized sciences (geography, history, demography, sociology, anthropology, etc.). Such that 'science' therefore disperses itself in divisions and representations of space, without ever discovering a thought which, as Hegel (see *Philosophy of Right*, sect. 189) says about political economy, recognizes in the infinite mass of details, the principles of understanding which prevail in a field.

This difference between 'science of space' and knowledge of the production of space, its portent and meaning will be indicated elsewhere. Hence the previous referral and further apologies to the reader.

Today, the right to the city, fully understood, appears as *utopian* (not to say pejoratively, utopist). None the less, should it not be included in the imperatives as one says, of plans, projects and programmes? The cost of it can appear to be exorbitant, especially if one accounts for these costs in terms of current administrative and bureaucratic frameworks, for example, those of local authorities. It is obvious that only a great increase of social wealth at the same time as profound alterations in social relations themselves (the mode of production), can allow the entry into practice of the right to the city and some other rights of man and of the citizen. Such a development supposes an orientation of economic growth which would no longer carry within it its 'finality', and no longer aim at (exponential) accumulation for itself, but would instead serve superior 'ends'.

While waiting for something better, one can suppose that the social costs of negation of the right to the city (and of a few others),

accepting that we could price them, would be much higher than those of their realization. To estimate the proclamation of the right to the city as more 'realistic' than its abandonment is not a paradox.

It is (implicitly) understood that this little book, and those which accompany or follow it, if only in a dialectical manner, does not cancel out the previous ones: it takes them up again by trying to carry them to a higher level. Discourses of a certain (analytical) type here change themselves into other presumably superior discourses. Concepts, formerly situated in *abstract* spaces because *mental*, are now situated in *social* spaces and in relation to *strategies* which deploy themselves and confront each other on a planetary scale. The mental cannot separate itself from the social and never has been except for (ideological) representations. In classical philosophy, the 'subject' and the 'object' remained one outside the other. They meet in the chasms of the Absolute, of original or terminal Identity. Today, the mental and the social find themselves in practice in *conceived and lived space*.

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*Institutions in a 'Post-technological'  
Society*

In 1971 the Museum of Modern Art (New York) initiated a reflection upon the future. As one knows, the most lucid Americans have abandoned the idea of indefinitely continued economic growth, an idea that remains with the political leaders. For these analysts of American society, growth must cross a threshold (with or without a revolution in the conventional European sense), and pass onto a higher stage. In this new society productivism will be transcended and growth controlled and directed as will be the use of techniques (information, cybernetics, missiles and warheads etc). It is not conceivable that each well-to-do American family own three, then, four, and eventually ten cars, ten then twenty television sets, etc. The future society will not be an industrial society but an *urban society*. It will begin by resolving the problems of the American city presently underestimated, and formulated in terms of the environment.

Why the Museum of Modern Art? Because the group of intellectuals supported by the Rockefeller Foundation or those associated with it believe that the University does not respond to this task. Their project includes the creation of a new University, focused on architectural and urbanistic problems to be surrounded by an experimental city.

In 1971 the instigators of this project sent to the future participants a voluminous black book that presented an initial theoretical outline. The interest of this document was that it used, not without some confusion, Marxist concepts (superstructure, ideology, etc.), together with non-Marxist terminology and concepts (value systems, etc). The term 'design' in the American sense is full of meaning and hopes. The

designer, a real demi-god (*demiurge*), would be capable of modifying the environment and creating a new space so long as he is supplied with new values. A design of liberty would have a mission: to embody values and re-establish a correspondence between superstructures and spatial morphology of society.

In January 1972 a symposium examining this project took place at the Museum of Modern Art. Fifty guests, the majority of international reputation, including linguists (Jakobson), writers and poets (Octavio Paz, H. N. Ensensberger), philosophers (Foucault), semiologists (Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes), sociologists, etc. had been approached. In the end only thirty participated in the symposium, among whom were four lecturers and ex-lecturers from The Sociology Department at the University of Nanterre (Jean Baudrillard, Manuel Castells, Alain Touraine, Henri Lefebvre).

The first session was opened with a presentation of the project by its director Emilio Ambasz. It was enhanced by the reading and commentary of a magnificent poem on his city, Mexico by its author Octavio Paz. Then followed the first panel on Law and Value led by a jurist Ronald Dworkin, Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Oxford. He discussed how the problem of social transformation was thought about in Anglo-Saxon countries. One cannot do anything without changing the Law, the supreme Value, but once the Law is undermined, one doesn't know where one is going and the worst is feared. In other words, it's impossible to change anything without changing everything; but how to change everything without beginning with a beginning, without calling into question the structural keystone of a society, thus without throwing oneself not without risks into a revolutionary enterprise? The imperturbable logic of Anatole Rappaport increased the dilemma and widened the alternative instead of reducing it.

The second panel gave rise to a lively discussion between scientists destined to become part of the new University and to be involved in the creation of the experimental city. The semiologists (especially Umberto Eco and Gillo Dorfles, both from Milan) were subjected to a virulent criticism which virtually led to a kind of autocritique. 'Make nature significant and signs natural', declared Dorfles as watchword. This semiology was caught in a cross-fire: on the one hand, the realists, including M. Schapiro and the economists, referred to the practical aspects of the construction and constitution of the city; on

the other, the leftists and the ultra-leftists who showed that signs and significant events inevitably emanated today from the failed and condemned society. This is what Jean Baudrillard brilliantly demonstrated, not without adding some very dark remarks indeed about the 'death impulse' inherent in any contemporary project. As for Castells, he declared that the massive, and therefore revolutionary, intervention of the people is indispensable for any social transformation, including those of the way we live, of the city and its space.

The third panel was dominated by Christopher Alexander's discourse. He explained why he had abandoned his ambitions and earlier objectives of parametric architecture and the application of cybernetics to construction. The crucial event for him seems to have been the conflict between the students and Senate of a major American university when he as the architect chosen for his audacity, had to redesign the campus. The management wanted to impose upon the students and the architect the division of the campus into specialized spaces, whilst the students wanted multifunctional spaces and rejected single purpose spaces, especially one exclusively devoted to rest and leisure. Incensed, the young and brilliant theoretician of architecture came to the conclusion that one could only devise a space for a concrete community (a concept that was developed at the last session by Susanne Keller). As a result Alexander turned to Buddhism and the doctrine of Zen and left the United States to construct elsewhere the spatial morphology appropriate to life in a community of this type. There followed a discussion, as lively and lengthy as it was obscure, that Hannah Arendt's address was unable to clarify.

The last session was supposed to draw some conclusions from all the debates. Alain Touraine persuasively expounded his thesis that the University must produce knowledge and not ideology, a role that the University does not consciously ensure. Martin Pawley, going even further, incriminated the techniques of manipulation and the militarization of universities as an authoritarian response to the students' protest in a large number of countries.

Out of these discussions, of which this short résumé fails to convey their richness and confusion, J. Tabibian (California Institute of the Arts) drew optimistic conclusions about the future of the project, the new University and the experimental city.

What of the meaning of this meeting? Well there are several. Certainly the slogan 'save the city' is going to dominate the political,

scientific and cultural life of the United States for some time to come from now. The project (University and the City) supported by an economic and financial power can have multiple consequences. But what came out of these debates was the firstly the confusion, the admission of impotence, coming from the specialist sciences and scholars (economists, sociologists, semiologists) as well as from the supposedly relevant authorities. In the United States one does not know exactly how to deal with the city and they are ready to listen to suggestions coming from Europeans, even a Marxist one.

Here then is the complete text of my paper on 'space, the production of space, and the political economy of space' of which only a shortened version was delivered at New York due to lack of time. The crisis of political economy is today obvious and public despite being carefully covered up and masked by the interested parties, namely economists. It is part of the general crisis of the so-called social sciences. Political economy has failed practically and theoretically, but from this failure we add a few characteristics in describing the crisis.

This crisis differs from that of linguistics or history. Linguistics has counted on an opposition, made into a dogma and authoritative core of knowledge, the opposition being 'signifier-signified' (Saussure and his school). But one becomes aware that the notion of value plays a decisive and specific role even in linguistics: value attaches itself to the polysemy of all words: the relationship signifier-signified, real or reality is not univocal and depends on 'values' which are not simply connotations or elements of a second degree but specific ensembles. As for history, it falls under a reactive critique which denies historicity, and under an active critique which defines it, by showing that the modern world is entering a world 'time' that cannot be thought of any longer according to a traditional historicity but in terms of the concept of 'strategy'.

The totality of these sciences are located without knowing it (and it was the 'unthought' of epistemological reflection itself) in the *reproduction of the relations of production* of existing society. Each scholar accepted this or that partial factor of this reproduction, involved themselves in it and contributed to it. This was primarily the case of economists, though not forgetting sociologists such as Max Weber and Durkheim. Political economy had an ideology and even the principal ideology of this period: productivism, the theory of indefinite growth in the socio-political context of capitalism, models of

growth adapted to State capitalism and the politics of national organizations (recently international). In this context, the crisis means that the reproduction of relations of production comes to light and is understood as such. That means that knowledge is being reconstituted on new grounds and already through the radical criticism of existing sciences, of their blind contribution to the reproduction of relations of production . . .

Seen from close, these failures of economists reveal even better their meaning. In fact, they have confused political economy as science and political economy as praxis, techniques, acts of power. Their 'modelling' has been directed more and more consciously.

## PART IV

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### Interviews