

SPACE

The word SPACE bears several definitions.

If we take a look at the use we make of the term in everyday life, we say: space at the front and at the back, the space of my room, the space of Belgium, intersidereal space, life space, space as emptiness, etc...

All these expressions are so different they apparently have nothing in common.

But the expression I would like you to keep in mind is:

Space as possibility, as something possible for me to feel my own, a space to be conquered, ultimately a space that I have conquered and that continues to grow, becoming wider.

One example:

Imagine arriving in a city where you have never been before. You have a map but it's an abstract image: a network of crossing streets, places, names, but all of this says nothing to you.

You know one thing: the station and, in front of it, the hotel where you are staying.

From there, you will start to move radially across the city and gradually space will start to widen and you will know more and more streets, corners, landmarks, etc...

What is significant is that you will possess the city little by little and your possibilities will grow, your grasp of the city will increase, etc... According to the different means you make use of, space will be different. Your possibilities will be enriched and will augment. In other words knowing a city by foot or by car is different. We can know a city through the telephone book, without leaving the hotel. We can know it through its public transport, driving one's own car, etc...and each time it will be different. In all cases, the more you give yourself tools, the more you will strengthen your grasp on the city and space will be richer.

If you keep moving, observing, making contacts, thinking through associations and comparisons, you will increase your power over this new city.

Space means POSSIBILITY, concentric possibilities, within a grid which gets denser and denser.

Above all, remember that:

- 1° The more varied are the means you use to explore the city, the more the city grows and the space of your possibilities is enlarged. (You will also understand that for certain people, a town remains "little").
- 2° We are always "the center" of the space. In the case of a new city, it is the hotel where you are staying that becomes the "center", the point which you always come back to, the starting point of all new expeditions.
- 3° Space means freedom, a freedom that we give ourselves.
- 4° Space is "dynamic".

You can now better understand what I mean by SPACE.

Space is what we know of things, it's made of concentric areas that become larger and larger and that we establish according to our experience, our past, our self-confidence and the means we give ourselves. You thus understand that space has not limit. *We* define its limits. The more we explore, the more space will be extensive.

Equally, you will understand that the space of the villager is "everything up to the horizon", while space for a jet pilot is much more vast.

Right at the beginning we mentioned the expression 'the space of Belgium', but this may be something very different for a business agent travelling across the country and for someone who has never left their city. They would use the same expression but Belgium will be much vaster for one than for the other. It is not the surface in square kilometres that counts (although we can consider it in these terms) but the fact that Belgium represents a space of freedom, a field of action and possibilities much larger for the former than for the latter.

Space is thus what we can take possession of, it is what is possible to possess and conquer. We can do so according to our affective experiences and background, which give us confidence and audacity, but also according to our knowledge and intelligence.

Balzac's sentence "*Paris, this immense field ploughed by ambitions!*" well illustrates this idea.

Space is therefore experience, with me at its centre.

For the mountain dweller, space is everything from his house, situated at the bottom of the valley, to the summit of the mountains surrounding him.

But intersidereal space is an abstract notion (as nobody has ever been there).

Space is not only a geometrical dimension (that everybody knows, but that nobody lives), it is a possible surface, a vast area that is possible to me, a territory that I give myself and a freedom that I achieve and possess.

You will also understand that one can suffer from space, from lack of space, not in terms of square meters, but in terms of the possibilities that are being denied.

The space for the worker confined to his machine tool is smaller than that of his superior, who can go everywhere in his factory. The worker cannot go in the atelier next door nor in the offices. For him, the space of the factory is very little. It is not by chance that the happiest people in these businesses are those that take care of maintenance. They can move and go everywhere without restriction. They are allowed to go in every room - for them the space of the factory is big.

We know that claustrophobia is a spatial frustration: one feels in jail, trapped. It is the fear of feeling one is being put in a box, the apprehension of feeling confined despite ourselves that triggers anxiety. The natural reaction is to escape from the cursed place, to walk faster. We prefer to climb 10 floors up the staircase than to feel imprisoned in a box, that is the elevator. The energy needed to climb all the floors seems less significant than the one needed to overcome one's anguish.

Considering space as a freedom that we give ourselves is a perspective illustrated, for example, in the history of architecture. When we say that the Renaissance has generated a new space: what we mean is that we have moved away from the thick walls of the Middle Age castles, we have decorated the walls, we have opened new windows and created balconies.

In other terms, we have granted ourselves a new freedom that had been, until then, forbidden.

The shift towards the "plan libre" also gives rise to new space. We were no longer dependent from supporting walls. We place a new structural frame and articulate the walls where we want them, allowing more freedom in our movements, greater fluidity.

Pictorial space is each time a new freedom that we give ourselves and that we offer to the spectator.

While SPACE holds a good number of definitions, all of these embrace one common notion: a POSSIBILITY that the individual gives himself.

(translation: Laura De Caro)

Marc Crunelle

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