

Urban Space Wars: On Destructive Order and Creative Chaos

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

It is often said, and yet more often taken for granted, that the idea of 'social space' was born (in the minds of sociologists) from a metaphorical transposition of concepts derived from the physical, 'objective' space. The opposite is the case, though. That distance, which we are inclined to call 'objective' and to measure by comparing it with the length of the equator, rather than the size of the bodily parts, corporal dexterity or sympathies/antipathies of its inhabitants, used to be measured by human bodies and human relations long before the metal rod called metre, that impersonality and disembodiment incarnate, was laid down in Sévre, for everyone to respect and obey.

The great social historian Witold Kula demonstrated more thoroughly than any other scholar that not only in the subtle sense derived from the philosophical ruminations of Protagoras, but in a quite mundane, literal sense, and in an utterly un-philosophical way, was 'man the measure of everything'. Since time immemorial humans have measured the world with their bodies—feet, handfuls or elbows; with their products—baskets or pots; with their activities—dividing, for instance, their fields into 'morgen' plots that could be ploughed up by a man working from dawn to dusk. One handful is not, though, like any other; all 'anthropomorphic' and 'praxeomorphic' measures had to be as varied and haphazard as the human bodies and practices to which they referred. Hence the difficulty, arising whenever the power-holders wished to accord a uniform treatment to a larger number of subjects, demanding from them all 'the same' taxes or levies; a way had to be found to bypass and neutralize the impact of contingency and impose a 'standard' and binding measure of distance, surface or volume, while forbidding all other local, group- or individual-based, renditions.

Not just the question of measuring the space 'objectively' presented a problem, however. Before it comes to the measuring, one needs to have a clear notion of what there is to be measured. In the case of space measures, one needs an idea of 'distance'—and that idea was in its origins parasitic on the distinction between things or people 'close' and 'far away' and the experience of some things or people being 'closer' to one than some others. Drawing inspiration from Durkheim/Mauss's thesis of the social origins of classification, Edmund Leach documented the astonishing parallel between popular categorization of space, kinship classification and the differentiated treatment of domestic, farm and wild animals (Leach, 1964). The categories of home, farm, field and the 'far

Zygmunt Bauman, Professor Emeritus, Sociology, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK.

away' are in the popular map of the world on very similar, virtually the same, principle, as the categories of domestic pets, farm cattle, game and 'wild animals' on the one hand, and the categories of sister/brother, cousin, neighbour and alien on the other. As Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested, the prohibition of incest, which implied the imposition of artificial, conceptual distinctions upon populations 'naturally' homogeneous, was the first—constitutive—act of culture, which was to consist forever hence in the insertion into the 'natural' world of the division, distinctions and classifications which reflected the differentiation of human practice and practice-bound concepts and were not the attributes of 'nature' on its own but of human activity and thought.

Before it could be generalized and impersonalized (and thus before the 'distance as such,' that is independent of whom and from what it separates, could become thinkable), the 'near-far' opposition recorded the degree of taming, domestication and familiarity of various (human as much as inhuman) fragments of the surrounding world. Near, close to hand, is primarily what is usual, known to the point of obviousness; someone or something met, dealt or interacted with daily, intertwined with habitual routine and day-to-day activities. 'Near' is such a space inside which one can feel *chez soi*, at home; a space inside which one seldom, if at all, finds oneself being at a loss, feels lost for words or uncertain how to act. 'Far away' is such a space, which one enters only occasionally or not at all, in which things happen one cannot anticipate or comprehend and would not know how to react to once they occurred; a space containing things one knows little about, from which one does not expect much and regarding which one does not feel obliged to care. To find oneself in a 'far away' space is an unnerving experience; venturing 'far away' means being beyond one's ken, out of place and out of one's element, inviting trouble and fearing harm. Thus the 'near-far' opposition has one more, crucial dimension; that between certainty and uncertainty, self-assurance and hesitation. The 'far away' means problems—and so it demands cleverness, cunning, slyness or courage, learning the rules one can do without elsewhere, and mastering them through risky trials and often costly errors. The 'near', on the other hand, is unproblematic; the painlessly acquired habits will do, and since they are habits they feel effortless, giving no occasion to anxiety-prone hesitation. The categories distinguished and compared by Edmond Leach can be visualized as 'areas of condensation' interrupting an otherwise continuous line stretched between the two poles, on which all known or known-of beings and entities are plotted.

Let us note that in this preliminary, quasi-phenomenological insight into the essential meaning of the 'near-far' opposition, there was no need to refer to the physical distance. In their original and 'basic' sense, the 'near' and 'far away' are not *territorial* categories—not in the sense which we put today in the notion of the 'territory', thinking of a space ordered and determined solely by measurements, which in their turn are 'pure quantities'—as impersonal as only the numbers manage to be; of a space, inside which the question of distance between 'here' and 'there' has been resolved once and for all and for everyone involved in the same fashion. We think of 'territory' as a space inside which the information conveyed on the signposts and ordinance maps constitutes the sole reference point a hiker or a car driver may use to decide what is near and what

is far away (so that the differences between the estimates, if they occur, are fully explained by the difference in bodily fitness or engine power). In our description, however, let me repeat, the 'near-far' opposition stands for the difference between what is transparent through and through and totally familiar, and that which is opaque and incomprehensible; this difference may correlate with the distance measured in miles or kilometres, but the correlation is not inevitable or predetermined.

The invention of painterly perspective, accomplished in the fifteenth century by the joint efforts of Alberti and Brunelleschi, was a turning point on the long road to the modern conception of space and the modern methods of its implementation. The idea of perspective lay midway between the vision of space firmly embedded in collective and individual realities and its later modern dis-embedding. It took for granted the decisive role of human perception in the organization of space; the viewer's eye was the starting point of all perspective; it determined size and mutual distances of all objects falling into its field, and remained the sole reference point for the allocation of objects in space. The novelty, however, was that the viewer's eye was now a 'human eye as such'. It did not matter who were the viewers; the only circumstance which counted was that they placed themselves in the given point of observation—it had now been asserted that *any viewer* placed in that point would see the spatial relations between objects in exactly the same way. From now on, not the qualities of the viewer, but the fully quantifiable, socially indifferent and impersonal location of the observation point was to decide the spatial arrangement of things. The conception of perspective, in other words, simultaneously acknowledged the subjective relativity of space maps and neutralized the impact of that relativity—it 'de-personalized' the consequences of the subjective origins of perceptions almost as radically as Husserl's ideal of 'transcendental' subjectivity. The point of gravity had been shifted thereby from the question 'who?' to the question 'from what point in space?' as it was evident that not every human creature occupies the same place and hence sees the world in the same perspective; it had become equally obvious that not all sightings are equal in value and that there must be certain privileged points from which the best perception can be attained. It was now easy to see that the 'best' meant 'objective', which in its turn meant 'supra-personal', the overcoming of its own endemic relativity.

The pre-modern chaotic and bewildering diversity of maps was to be replaced therefore not so much with one universally shared image of the world as with a strict hierarchy of images. Theoretically, the 'objective' meant first and foremost 'superior', while its practical superiority remained the task for the modern powers to accomplish—and one of the principal resources of those powers.

What is transparent for some can be opaque for some others. Where some make their way without the slightest difficulty, others may feel disoriented and lost. As long as the measures remained anthropomorphic and had human practices for their sole reference point, they served human communities as a shield behind which the latter could hide against the curious eye and hostile intentions of intruders, above all against the impositions of intruders with

authority. In order to collect taxes and recruit soldiers, pre-modern powers, incapable of reading out the realities fully legible for their subjects, had to behave like alien, hostile forces: to resort to armed invasions and punitive expeditions. There was little to distinguish the practice of tax collection from robbery and looting and the practice of enlisting from that of taking prisoners; the armed hirelings of barons and princes persuaded 'the natives' to part with their produce or their sons by using the arguments of swords and whips; they got away with as much as the display of brutal force allowed them to squeeze. Ernest Gellner gave the pre-modern system of rule the name of the 'dentistry state': the rulers specialized, he wrote, in extraction through torture.

Discouraged by the confusing variety of local measures and counting systems, taxing powers and their agents preferred as a rule to deal with corporations rather than individual subjects, or with village or parish elders rather than with individual farmers or tenants; even in the case of taxes as 'individualized' as the levies charged on chimney or windows state authorities preferred to allocate a global sum to a village, leaving the distribution of burdens to the locals (one can suppose that a decisive reason for preferring the payment of taxes in currency to taxes paid in agricultural produce was the independence of currency values, determined by the state-run mint, from local custom). And yet in the absence of the 'objective' measurements of land holdings, land registers and inventory of cattle, the indirect taxes—levied on activities difficult or impossible to hide in the thicket of interactions obvious to the locals but impenetrable and bewildering to occasional visitors (for instance, taxes charged on the sale of salt or tobacco, road and bridge tolls, payments for offices and titles)—were the means of obtaining income favoured by the pre-modern state, which, as Charles Lindblom aptly put it, had thumbs only and no fingers.

Territories fully domesticated, thoroughly familiar and intelligible for the purposes of the day-to-day activities of the villagers or parishers, stayed alien, inaccessible and untamed to the capital authorities; the reversal at that relationship was one of the main dimensions and indices of the 'modernization process'. Legibility and transparency of space, declared in modern times to be the distinctive mark of rational order, were not, as such, modern inventions; after all, in all times and places they were indispensable conditions of human cohabitation, offering the modicum of certainty and self-assurance without which daily life was all but unthinkable. The sole modern novelty was the positing of transparency and legibility as a *task*, as something which needs yet to be enforced on recalcitrant reality, having first been carefully designed with specialist expertise. Modernization meant, among other things, making the populated world hospitable for supra-communal administration; and that task required, as its necessary condition, making the world transparent and legible for administrative powers.

In his seminal study of 'bureaucratic phenomenon', Michel Crozier has shown the intimate connection between the certainty/uncertainty scale and the hierarchy of power. We learn from Crozier that in any structured (organized) collectivity the ruling position belong to the units which make their own situation opaque and their actions impenetrable for the outsiders, while keeping them clear and free from 'dark spots' and surprises to themselves. Throughout the world of

modern bureaucracies, the strategy of every, extant or aspiring, sector consists invariably and consistently in the attempts to untie one's own hands while imposing strict and stringent rules on the conduct of everyone else within the organization. Such a sector gains the most influence, insofar as it manages to make its own behaviour an unknown variable in the equations on which the choices of other sectors are based, while successfully rendering constant other sectors' conduct. In other words, most power is exercised by the unit closest to the sources of other units' uncertainty. The manipulation of uncertainty is essential; it is the primary stake in the struggle for power and influence inside every structured totality—first and foremost in its most radical form of modern bureaucratic organization.

Michel Foucault's panoptic model of modern power rests on a very similar assumption: the decisive factor in the power of the supervisors hidden in the central tower, over the inmates placed in the wings of the Panopticon building, is the full and permanent visibility of the latter; on the other hand, never being certain that the supervisors have diverted their attention to other wings, or are resting or otherwise engaged, the inmates must at all times behave *as if* they are currently being watched. The supervisors and the inmates (be they prisoners, workers, soldiers, pupils, patients or whatever) are inside the same space, but in diametrically opposite situations. The vision of the first is unobstructed, while the second needs to act within a misty and opaque territory.

Transparency is a *social relation*. To be in control of social interaction means to control the relative degree of transparency of the situations, in which various agents involved in the interaction are obliged to act. The modernization of social arrangements promoted by the practices of modern powers aimed at the establishment and perpetuation of such a control. One of the decisive aspects of the modernizing process was therefore the protracted war in the name of the reorganization of space. The goal of that space war was the subordination of social space to one, and only one, officially approved and state-sponsored map, and the disqualification of all other, competitive maps or interpretations of space, as well as the dismantling or disabling of all cartographic institutions and endeavours not state-established or state-endowed. The space structure which was to emerge at the end of the space war was to be one perfectly legible for the state power and its agents, while remaining thoroughly immune to semantic processing by its users or victims—one resistant to all 'grassroots' interpretative initiatives which could in principle saturate fragments of space with meanings unknown and illegible to the powers that be, and so make such fragments invulnerable to control from above.

Intuitively, it is the geometrically simple space structure, put together of uniform blocks of the same size, which seems to come nearest to meeting such demands. No wonder that in all modern utopian visions of the 'perfect city', the urbanistic and architectural rules which the authors treat with untiring and unrelenting attention circle around the same basic principles: the strict and comprehensive planning of the city space (construction of the city 'from scratch', on an empty or emptied site, according to a design completed before the construction goes ahead), and the regularity, uniformity, reproducibility, identity of the space elements surrounding the administrative buildings which are

placed in the centre of the city, or better still on the top of a hill from which the whole of the city space can be visually embraced. Here the 'fundamental and sacred laws' composed by Morelly in his *Code de la Nature, ou le véritable esprit de ses lois de tout tempts négligé ou méconnu* published in 1755, may well serve as a representative example of thinking about the perfectly structured space of the city:

Around a large square of *regular proportions* public warehouses will be erected storing all the necessary supplies and entailing the hall for public gatherings—everything of the uniform and pleasant appearance. On the outside of that circle city districts will be *regularly* arranged—each of *the same* size, *similar* form, and divided by *equal* streets...All buildings will be *identical*...All districts will be so planned, that if needs be they may be expanded *without disturbing their regularity*... (Morelly, 1755, emphasis mine)

The principles of uniformity and regularity (and thus also of exchangeability) of city elements were complemented, in the thought of Morelly as well as of other visionaries and practitioners of modern city planning and administration, by the postulate of the functional subordination of all the architectural and demographic solutions to the 'needs of the city as a whole' (as Morelly himself put it, 'the number and size' of all buildings 'will be dictated by the needs of a given town'), and the demand to spatially separate parts of the city dedicated to different functions or differing in the quality of their inhabitants. And so 'each tribe will occupy a separate district, and each family a separate apartment' (however, the buildings, Morelly hastens to emphasize, will be the same for all families; this requirement could have been dictated, one may guess, by the wish to neutralize the potentially detrimental impact of tribal idiosyncrasies on the overall transparency of the city space); while such residents who for whatever reason fail to meet the standards of normality ('ill citizens', 'invalid and senile citizens', and such as 'will deserve a temporary isolation from the rest') will be confined to the areas 'outside all circles, in certain distance'; finally, the residents deserving 'civic death, that is the life-long exclusion from society', will be locked in cave-like cells of 'very strong walls and bars', next to the biologically dead, inside the 'walled-off graveyard'.

The likenesses of the perfect city, drawn by the utopists' pens, did not resemble any of the real cities in which the draughtsmen lived and dreamed. But, as Karl Marx was to point out (with a nod of approval) a little later, their concern was not with how to represent or explain the world, but how to change it. Or, rather, they wished reality not to constrain the implementation of their ideal designs, and dreamed of a new reality, made from scratch and to order. The 'small print' of every project of a city yet to be brought into being implied the destruction of a city already in existence. In the messy, fetid, rambling and chaotic, and anyway condemned to death present, the utopian thought was a bridgehead of future orderly perfection and perfect order.

Fantasy, however, is seldom genuinely 'idle' and even less frequently is it truly innocent. Not just in the heated imagination of the draughtsman were their

blueprints footholds of the future. There was no shortage of armies and generals eager to use the utopian bridgeheads to launch an all-out assault against the powers of chaos and to help the future to invade and conquer the present. In his eye-opening study of modern utopias, Bronislaw Baczko (1989) speaks of 'a double movement: that of the utopian imagination to conquer urban space and that of dreams of city planning and of architecture in search of a social framework in which they can materialize'. The thinkers and the doers of things were in equal measure obsessed with 'the centre', around which the space of the future cities was to be logically arranged, thereby meeting the conditions of transparency set by impersonal reason (that obsession, in all its interconnected aspects, is masterly dissected in Baczko's analysis of the project of the *City named Liberty*, published on 12 floréal of the year V of the French Republic by the surveyor-geometrician F.L. Aubry and meant as the sketch for the future capital of revolutionary France). For the theorists and the practitioners alike the future city was a spatial incarnation, symbol and monument of freedom, won by Reason in its protracted life-and-death war against the unruly contingency of history; just as the freedom promised by the Revolution was to purify historical time, the space dreamed out by the urban utopians was to be a site 'never polluted by history'. This stern condition eliminated from the competition all extant cities and condemned all of them to destruction.

True, Baczko focuses on only one meeting place for dreamers and men of deeds—the French Revolution; but this was a place most frequently visited by inspiration-seeking travellers from far and wide, as the meeting was there more than anywhere else intimate and most joyfully celebrated by both sides. The dreams of the perfectly transparent city space served the political leaders of the Revolution as a rich source of inspiration and courage, while for the dreamers the Revolution was to be first and foremost a bold, determined and resourceful building company, ready to engrave on the building sites of perfect cities the forms conjured up in sleepless nights spent over the utopian drawing boards.

One of the many cases explored by Baczko (1989) is the story of the ideal land Sévarambes and its yet more perfect capital, Sévariade¹: Sévariade is 'the most beautiful city in the world'; it is marked by 'the good maintenance of law and order'. 'The capital is conceived according to a rational, clear, and simple plan, which is rigorously followed, and which makes this the most regular city in the world'. The transparency of city space derives mostly from the decision to divide it neatly into 260 identical units—*osmasies*, each one being a square building with a facade 50 feet long, a large inner courtyard, four doors and one thousand inhabitants 'comfortably accommodated'. The city strikes the visitor with 'perfect regularity'. 'The streets are wide and so straight that one has the impression that they were laid out with a ruler' and all open onto spacious plazas in the middle of which are fountains and public buildings' also of a uniform size and shape. 'The architecture of the houses is nearly uniform', though an extra sumptuousness marks the residences of important people. 'There is nothing chaotic in these cities: everywhere a perfect and striking order reigns' (the ill, the mentally handicapped and the criminals have been evicted beyond the boundaries of the city). Everywhere here has its function, and so everything is beautiful—as beauty means obviousness of purpose and simplicity of form.

Nearly all the elements of the city are interchangeable—and so are the cities themselves; whoever visited Sévriade knows all other cities of Sévrambes.

We do not know, Bacsko observes, whether the draughtsmen of perfect cities read each other—and yet an impression is created in the mind of their reader that ‘throughout the century all they do is continually reinvent the same city’. This impression is given by common values and a shared concern with ‘a certain ideal of happy rationality or, if you will, of rational happiness’—implying a life conducted in a perfectly ordered space cleansed of everything haphazard, accidental and ambivalent. The cities described in the utopian literature are all, in Bacsko’s apt expression, ‘*literary cities*’—not just in the sense of being the product of literary imagination, but in another, deeper sense: they could be *recounted* in every minute detail and contain nothing ineffable, illegible, defying clear representation. Much like Jurgen Habermas’s (1987, p. 323) conception of the objective legitimacy of assertions and norms, which can be only universal and thus demand ‘the effacing of space and time’, so the vision of the perfect city implied the total rejection of history and the levelling up of its remnants. As a matter of fact, that vision postulated the *invalidation of space* (and of time as well, on that occasion) through the elimination of the qualitative differentiation of space which is always a sediment of equally differentiated, and thus historical, time.

The postulate of the annulment of space and time blends with the idea of ‘rational happiness’ into a pressing and pitiless command, once human reality is contemplated from the windows and administrative offices. It is from this perspective only that the diversity of space fragments, and particularly their open-ended and under-determined destination amenable to multiple interpretations, deny the chance of rational action. From this perspective it is difficult to imagine a model of rationality distinct from one’s own and a model of happiness different from living in a world bearing the impression of that rationality. Situations which are transparent when watched from alternative perspectives and decoded with alternative keys appear not only to be an obstacle to the transparency of one’s own field of action, but a drawback signalling ‘opacity as such’; not only a hindrance in the implementation of one’s own rationality, but a state of affairs incompatible with ‘reason as such’.

From the point of view of spatial administration, modernization means the monopolization of the cartographic rights. Monopoly, however, is impossible to obtain in a palimpsest-like city, built of the layers of successive accidents of history; a city emerged and still emerging out of a selective assimilation of divergent traditions and an equally selective absorption of cultural innovation—both selections subjected to changing rules, seldom present in thought at the time of action and amenable to quasi-logical codification only with the benefit of hindsight. The monopoly is much easier to achieve if the map *precedes* the mapped territory—if the city is, from its creation and throughout its history, but a projection of the map upon the space; and if, instead of desperately trying to capture the disorderly variety of urban reality in the impersonal elegance of the cartographic grid, the map turns itself into a grid in which the urban realities yet to arise are to be plotted, deriving their meaning and function solely from the site allocated within the grid. Only then could the meanings and functions be truly

unambiguous; their *Eindeutigkeit* will be vouched for in advance by the exclusion or disempowerment of alternative interpretive authorities.

Of such a condition, ideal for the cartographic monopoly, the most radically modernist architects and urbanists of our era dreamt openly. Le Corbusier is, arguably, the most famous among them. As if to demonstrate the supra-partisan nature of the task of spatial modernization and the absence of any link between its principles and political ideologies, Le Corbusier offered his services with equal zeal and absence of scruples to the communist rulers of Russia and the *fascisants* rulers of Vichy France; as if to document the endemic irrationalism of the modernist ambitions, he fell out with both: the involuntary yet inexorable pragmatism of the rulers cut the wings of radical imagination. In *La ville radieuse*,² the book published in 1935 and destined to become the manifesto of urban modernism, Le Corbusier passed the sentence of death on the extant cities, those sediments of unruly, thoughtless, urbanistically ignorant and hapless history. He charged the existing cities with non-functionality (some logically indispensable functions have no satisfying agents, while some overlap and cause confusion among the city dwellers), with insalubrity, and with offence to the aesthetic sense (brought about by the chaotic maze of streets and architectural styles). The shortcomings of existing cities were much too numerous and the rectification of each one of them separately was not worth the effort and the resources required. It would thus be much more reasonable to apply a wholesale treatment and to cure all the illnesses in one go—by razing the inherited cities to the ground and cleaning the site for the building of new cities, planned in advance in every detail; or by leaving the *Parises* of today to their own morbid fate and transporting their residents to new sites, correctly conceived from the beginning. *La ville radieuse* presents the principles meant to guide the construction of the future cities, considering the examples of Paris (impenitent, in spite of Baron Hausman's bravado), Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro; all three projects start from zero point, attending solely to the rules of aesthetic harmony and the logic of functional division.

In all three imagined capitals, functions will be given priority over space; logic and aesthetics alike demand the functional non-ambiguity of any fragment of the city. In the space of the city, just as in human life, one needs to distinguish and keep apart the functions of work, home life, shopping, entertainment, culture, administration; each function needs a place of its own, while every place should serve one and one only function. Architecture is, according to Le Corbusier, like logic and beauty, a born enemy of all confusion, spontaneity, chaos, messiness; architecture is a science akin to geometry, the art of platonic sublimity, mathematical orderliness, harmony; its ideals are the continuous line, parallels, straight angle; its strategic principles are standardization and prefabrication. For the Radiant City of the future the rule of architecture aware of its vocation would therefore mean the *death of the street* as we know it—that incoherent and contingent by-product of uncoordinated and de-synchronized building history, the battleground of incompatible uses and the site of accident and ambiguity. The tracks of the Radiant City, just like its buildings, will be consigned to specific tasks; in their case, the sole task will be that of traffic, of transporting people and goods from one functionally distinguished site to

another, and that sole function will be cleansed of all present disturbances introduced by aimless strollers, idlers or accidental passers-by.

Le Corbusier dreamt of a city in which the rule of 'le Plan dictateur' (he always started the word 'plan' with a capital 'P') over the residents will be complete and unquestioned. The authority of the Plan, derived from and grounded in the objective truths of logic and aesthetics, bears no dissent nor controversy; it accepts no arguments that refer to, or seek support in, anything other than logical or aesthetical rigours. The actions of the City Planner are therefore by their nature immune to the commotion of electoral excitements and deaf to the complaints of their genuine or imaginary victims. The 'Plan' (as the product of impersonal reason, not a figment of individual, however brilliant or profound, imagination) is the sole—both necessary and sufficient—condition of human happiness, which cannot rest on anything but on the perfect fit between human needs and the unambiguous, transparent and legible arrangement of the living space.

La ville radieuse remained on paper. But at least one architect-urbanist, Oscar Niemeyer, attempted to make le Corbusier's word flesh when the chance occurred. The chance in question was a commission to build from scratch, in a desert-like emptiness unburdened by history, a new capital matching the vastness, grandeur, untapped resources and unbound ambition of Brasil. That capital, *Brasilia*, was the paradise of the modernist architect: here, at long last, the opportunity had come to brush aside all constraint and limitations, material or sentimental alike, and let loose the architectural fantasy. On uninhabited plateaus of Central Brasil one could shape the residents of the future city at will, after the likeness of perfect patterns of logic and aesthetics—and do it without any need to compromise, let alone to sacrifice the purity of the principles to the irrelevant yet obstinate circumstances of place and time. One could calculate precisely and well in advance the yet inarticulate and inchoate 'unit needs'; one could design, unhampered, the yet-non-existing, and therefore silent and politically powerless, inhabitants of the future city out of scientifically defined needs for oxygen, thermal and lighting units. For the experimenters, more interested in the job well done than in its effects on those on the receiving end of the action, *Brasilia* was a huge and lavishly subsidized laboratory, in which various ingredients of logic and aesthetics could be mixed together in varying proportions, their reactions observed in an unadulterated form, and the most pleasing compound selected. As the assumptions of the le Corbusier-style architectural modernism suggested, one could in *Brasilia* design a space made to the measure of man (or, to be more exact, of all that in man which is measurable), and thus a space from which accident and surprise was evicted and barred return.

For its residents, though, *Brasilia* proved to be a nightmare. Quickly, a concept of *brasilitis*, the new pathological syndrome of which *Brasilia* was the prototype and the most famous epicentre to date, was coined by its hapless victims. The most conspicuous symptoms of *brasilitis*, by common consent, were the absence of crowds and density, empty street corners, anonymity of places and facelessness of human figures, and the numbing monotony of an environment devoid of anything to puzzle, perplex or excite. The master plan of *Brasilia* eliminated the chance encounters from all places except for the few

specifically designed for purposeful gatherings. To make a rendezvous on the only planned 'forum', the vast 'Square of the Three Forces', was, according to the popular jibe, like planning to meet in the Gobi desert.

Brasilia was, perhaps, the space perfectly structured for the accommodation of *homunculi*, born and bred in test tubes; for the creatures composed of administrative tasks and legal definitions. It was certainly (at least in its intention) a space perfectly transparent for those charged with the task of administration and those who articulated such tasks. Granted, it could be a perfectly structured place also for those among the residents who identified happiness with life free of problems, because free of choice and adventure. For all the rest, it proved to be a space denuded from everything truly human—everything that fills life with meaning and makes it worth living.

Few urbanists consumed by the modernizing mission had a field of action as vast as that of Niemeyer. Most had to limit their flight of fancy (though not their ambition) to small-scale experiments with the city space—framing here and there the devil-may-care, self-complacent chaos of city life, correcting one or another mistake or omission of history, cramming a little fenced-off niche of order into the universe of chance—but always with equally limited, far from comprehensive and in large part unpredictable consequences. In his brilliant study of the 'uses of disorder', Richard Sennett (1996, pp. 39–43, 101–8), invoking the findings of Charles Abrams, Jane Jacobs, Marc Fried and Herbert Gans—researchers simultaneously varied in temperament yet similar in their sensitivity to the experience of city life and investigative competence—paints a frightening picture of the destructions visited upon 'the lives of real people for the sake of realizing some abstract plan of development or renewal'. Wherever the implementation of such plans was undertaken, the attempts to 'homogenize' the city space, to make it 'logical', 'functional' or 'legible', were followed by the disintegration of protective nets woven from human bonds, by the overwhelming and psychically devastating feeling of abandonment and loneliness coupled with that of inner void, horror of challenges which life may bring and contrived illiteracy in the face of autonomous and responsible choices. In an artificially conceived environment, calculated to secure anonymity and functional specialization of space, the city dwellers face an almost insoluble problem of their own identity; it was precisely the faceless monotony and clinical purity of the artificially construed space that deprived them of the experience and the opportunity needed to come to grips with that problem and to resolve it. The lesson which the planners must learn from the long chronicle of lofty dreams and abominable disasters, which combines into the history of modern architecture, is how to take responsibility for their acts 'in a historical unpredictable society rather than in a dream world of harmony and predetermined order'. Whoever ventures to dabble in reforming the city space must accept that 'men can never become good simply by following the good orders or good plan of someone else'. Human responsibility, that ultimate and indispensable condition of morality of human intercourse, would not crop up out of perfectly designed space, and most certainly would not be born in the hygienically pure space, free of surprises, ambivalence and conflict. Only such people could assume that responsibility

as would have mastered the difficult art of acting under the conditions of ambivalence and uncertainty born of difference and variety. Morally mature persons are human beings who grow 'to need the unknown, to feel incomplete without a certain anarchy in their lives'—who learn 'to love the "otherness" among them'.

The experience of American towns analysed by Sennett points to one well-nigh universal regularity: the suspicion against others, the intolerance to difference, the resentment of strangers and demands to separate and banish them, as well as the hysterical concern with law and order, tend to reach the highest pitch in the most uniform, the most racially, ethnically and class-wise homogeneous local communities. And no wonder: in such localities the foundations of the 'we-feeling' tend to be sought in the illusion of equality secured by the similarity of everybody within sight, while the guarantee of security tends to be adumbrated in the absence of differently thinking, differently acting and differently looking neighbours. In such localities it is exceedingly difficult to acquire the qualities of character and the skills needed to cope with human difference and situations of uncertainty; and in the absence of such skills and qualities it is all too easy to charge the Others, for reason of being other—strange and different—for the pain and fear caused by one's own inability to 'read the space' and find one's way in it. On the other hand, the functional under-determination of space fragments, the co-presence or the simultaneous possibility of many and varied interpretations of their meaning and the clash between independently composed and used maps of the city space—they all teach that not all strangers are strange in the same fashion and thus discourage the doomed yet tempting attempts to fix once and for all one's own relation to the world using the allegedly unchangeable and non-negotiable attributes of group identity as the glue; they also prompt the effort to define one's identity in terms of the acts that a person is capable of performing, rather than in terms of a given and predetermined set of attributions and received traits.

The sign of human maturity is coming to terms with one's own freedom; while that in turn implies the readiness to accept new, often unpleasant and sometimes painful (since different from the customary and habitualized, heretofore uncritically accepted and thus cozy, homely and comfortable) meanings and to face up to the situations not fully under one's control and not likely ever to lend themselves to one's control—and to face up to such situations without craving to control them single-handedly. The under-determination of the city space, its amenability to many, also mutually contradictory, interpretations, its hospitality extended to many different and uncoordinated cartographic efforts, and the resulting opacity, ever negotiated yet ever anew reborn, do not generate 'chaos' (in the popular sense of a situation in which everything may happen, and everything may happen with equal probability). The ostensible disorder (which is a disorder primarily, perhaps solely, by administrative ruling—as a derivative of the ambition to total control) is in fact a specific form of equilibrium—an equilibrium which is perpetually created and reformed through intermittent frictions and negotiations, in the course of which the autonomous actions of free agents are simultaneously the source of initiative, the moving force and the evaluating authority. Only in the atmosphere of such fluid and perpetually

incomplete, self-constituting and self-reforming equilibrium may human freedom take root and moral selves mature.

Notes

1. *Histoire Des Sévarambes*, by D. Vairasse was, according to Baczko, a reading so popular in the century of Enlightenment, that, for instance, Rousseau and Leibniz quoted from it without indicating the source, obviously appealing to knowledge common among their readers.
2. The content of *La ville radieuse* has been subjected to a most incisive and inventive analysis by Yale political sociologist Jim Scott; the commentary that follows owes a lot to his seminal insights.

References

- Baczko, B. (1989) *Utopian Lights: The Evolution of the Idea of Social Progress*, trans. J.L. Greenberg (New York, Paragon House).
- Habermas, J. (1987) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).
- Leach, E.R. (1964) 'Anthropological aspects of language: animal categories and verbal abuse', in: E.H. Lenneberg (Ed.), *New Directions in the Study of Language* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Sennett, R. (1996) *Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (London, Faber).