

City, horizons of involvement, praxis

To architects, the phrase 'common ground' suggests the ground in which their plans are drawn. However, the phrase 'common ground' is an ethical concept that invokes the one thing a city ought to grant—a depth that accommodates with dignity the diversity of its peoples and their histories. The term 'ground' in this phrase is a metaphor for the conditions by which freedom is meaningful.

This essay seeks to understand 'common ground' through three themes or principles: city (in a post-symbolic, secular culture), horizons of involvement (in lieu of 'space') and praxis (our actions and reflections). Praxis is the exercise of choice, based upon judgement. The conditions for judgement are manifest as horizons of involvement, concretely qualified by architecture and its place within urban topography. Urban topography/architecture provide the horizons for praxis. Within the concreteness of praxis is enacted the primordial reciprocity of finite (free) individuals and the fundamental conditions. A city is a framework for the ethical interpretation of the natural conditions, most common-to-all.

City

Cities have always depended upon the natural conditions. Pre-industrial cities were most visibly and materially connected to their natural contexts and were the focus of an elaborate metabolism obeying seasonal/ritual cycles (fig. 1). It is still the case with contemporary cities, despite global supply chains and complex technical and bureaucratic systems even if seasonal rituals have largely given way to weather chat and a mentality of control (efficiency, comfort, resource-management). The dependency is attenuated, but Heidegger's remark that the city gives a definite direction to nature¹ is more true than are conventional slogans such as 'nature *versus* city/culture'.

We are accustomed to aerial/satellite views and city-maps; but no-one inhabits an entire city simultaneously, in the manner suggested by the generalisation 'space'. Rather we concretely inhabit sequences and clusters of settings. In any mature city – that is, a city whose districts or regions embody a relatively comprehensive differentiation from public institutions to commercial areas to slums, such as Delhi, Milan, London – these clusters and sequences will be set within a patchwork of districts or regions, each with its own 'direction' or character. One meaning of 'depth' is the city's capacity to accommodate such different regions. At a more intimate scale, 'depth' connotes the capacity of a block or high street to structure the fruitful co-existence of formal and informal life (a generosity greater than the usual meaning of 'mixed use'). In general, urban topography and architecture operate in different registers; the urban order must be tough enough to support bad architecture.

As against the tendency to look upon involvement in a city in terms of 'public-private',² a city is almost entirely shades of public life (the domestic loo is probably the only purely private room). Whether or not this 'public' life is also 'civic' life is the primary question. One is always involved with particular circumstances in particular settings – often the same ones, quite repetitively, day after day. The daily deeds, decisions, lapses, gossip – involvements with people and things – provide the matrix for any insights into 'city' as a meaningful whole.³ However it is essential to distinguish the general (e.g. city as 'space', 'system', 'city-scape' or 'fabric') from the universal (city as symbol, such as Heavenly Jerusalem, or Gomorrah). The *intensive* 'whole' of one's city, as opposed to its *extensive* entirety (the map or aerial view), behaves like a symbol: it is a permanent receptacle of metamorphosis, or of re-interpretation.⁴

'Lahore' or 'Los Angeles' are not symbols in the way that 'Heavenly Jerusalem' or Plato's 'city laid up in heaven' were.⁵ Rather, these mature cities are instructive about the modes of commonality in a post-symbolic culture.⁶ Beyond stereotypes and despite the banal similarity of urban peripheries the world over, a city's name is enough to orient the myriad of concrete involvements – conflicts, negotiations, accommodations, collaborations – which the city supports. The direction may be obscure, but an outsider will strive to adapt to the combination of climate, languages, smells, foods, noises, customs, styles, decorum, prejudices, preferences, beliefs, materials, topography – a city's culture – that is actually very rich, subtly different in different districts, and profound. An *ethos* is not given but elective, a commitment, most immediately to particular topics and people, more remotely to 'Lahore' or to 'Los Angeles'. This commitment to,

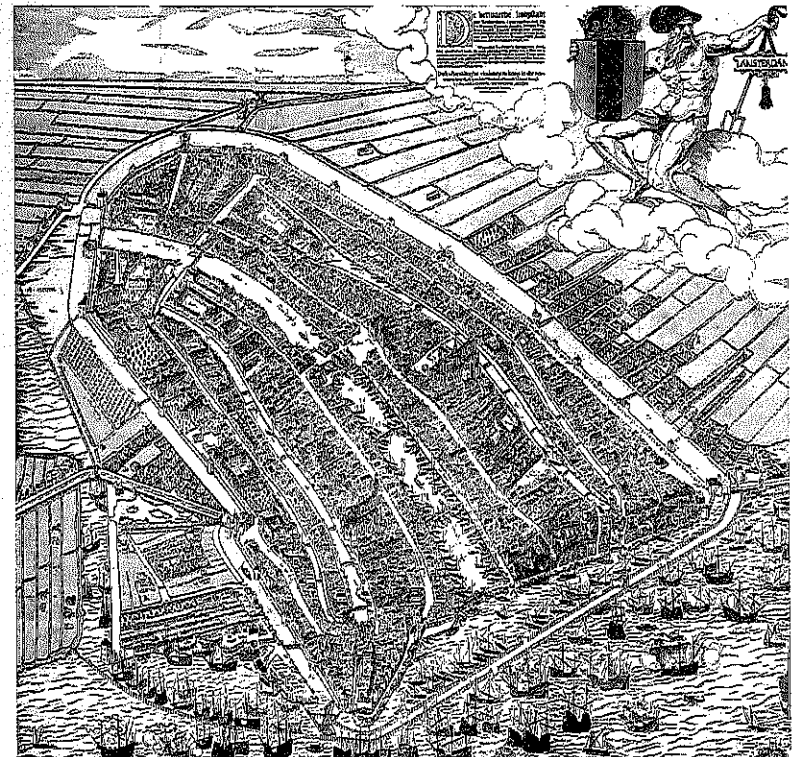


fig. 1
Bird's-eye view of Amsterdam, by Cornelis Anthonisz, 12-piece woodcut, 1544 (from his more famous painting of 1538), showing the negotiation between sea and cultivation
Collection of Amsterdam Historical Museum. Public domain

or solidarity with, an ultimately anonymous whole has always marked civic participation, since the most archaic cities.

This prevails despite the efforts of planners, economists and social scientists to depict the mature city as if it were a sheer aggregate of individuals, types, an economy, or similar conceptual generalisation. This analysis suggests that and as if the only way to conceive collective life is through such techniques as statistical description of trends or tendencies or networks. Under these conditions, individuals become 'subjects' or 'agents' embedded in a collective identity flattened to an abstract generality (appropriate for 'space'). This has shown its utility for purposes of market-classification/branding, postal-delivery, traffic-management and the like; but it occludes any capacity for the 'public' to also be 'civic'.

One may say with Rem Koolhaas, 'fuck context',⁷ but one never actually fucks context in general, only a particular context; and violation/re-interpretation is anyway more revealing than inevitably ersatz imitation. An intervention, like involvement with anyone or with anything is always a particular dialogue. It is unavoidable; the question is the quality or depth of dialogue ... and this begins with a profound understanding of one's interlocutor.

Horizons of Involvement

To speak of 'common ground of difference' or of 'depth' is to invoke motifs that run counter to the prevailing attraction towards concepts which flatten existence (e.g. 'space', 'system', 'information'), and thereby make it appear more susceptible to manipulation, design, calculation, prediction, management, control. As with Being, one is always 'inside': one cannot step outside or fully objectify the urban or architectural order. Instead of regarding the city as a totality, as a single substance from which the parts are subtracted, commonality arises from the continuity of different situations.

Metaphors of profundity (or 'depth') are more familiar from pre-Enlightenment cultures; but their use here is not meant to advocate a historicist recovery of, much less a return to, these cultures. As Gadamer remarks, the radical scepticism of Descartes and Nietzsche has ruptured the continuity of the tradition, making the past itself alien.⁸ Their use here is simply a matter of being honest to the case – civic commitment requires a different imagination than does a public aggregate – or 'market'⁹ – of subjects or agents. The terminology of 'subject' or 'agent' acknowledges individual freedom; but it fails to make thematic either freedom-with-respect-to-what (assuming we are not speaking of radical freedom, alienation) or the distinction between

freedom-from (liberation, initially from oppression, potentially from human finitude) and freedom-for (commitment, raising the question of commitment-to-what).¹⁰ The 'what' of both these expressions is something like the civic context outlined above. If, however, all involvements are particular (particular people, circumstances, topics/issues, in history), they are not a mere plurality of vaguely similar 'exchanges'. Their continuity appears in metaphors like 'common ground of difference' and 'depth', which defer to an ethical, rather than a purely epistemological, objectivity.

Another weakness of the terminology of 'subject' and 'agent' is the latent perspectivism, as if one's contribution were limited to an 'opinion' or 'point of view'. The ubiquitous fascination with 'perception' testifies to this perspectivism, with its obvious analogue in Cartesian epistemology. Instead of 'perception-of', we should speak of 'involvement-with', whether dealing with people or things.¹¹ The other person, or thing, exerts a claim, and an event or situation of communication ensues ... leading to understanding/perplexity, agreement/disagreement, etc. This situation orbits around its topic, issue or question, which claims all participants; and the topic will always have its tradition, or cultural history, in which one has a stake. Since Husserl, phenomenologists have referred to this context as an 'horizon', as the conditions for freedom, inevitably temporal/historical.¹² This is not the perspectival horizon familiar from painting or the camera with the observer at its centre. It is a horizon with the topic at its centre (fig. 3A).¹³

It is precisely the difference which creates the continuity, and which 'space' obscures by declaring everything 'form' within infinite simultaneity. St Paul's Cathedral communicates with St Paul's, Covent Garden (fig. 2) by way of all that happens between them. The primary vehicle of communication – and the most vivid incarnation of 'common ground' – is passage along the streets, courtyards, alleys, with their emphasis upon lobbies and reception rooms, commercial life and its signs (in which the absence of a sign, only a street-number, carries its own meanings), traffic-management furniture, drains. The meniscus of worn minerals, from asphalt to plateaux of granite, occasionally relieved by decorous planting (the medicinal 'green' of architects' plans and vocabulary), conceals the underground infrastructure, archaeology and geology ... whilst above is the ascent to penthouses, boardrooms, spires and air-handling equipment. Proceeding west from St Paul's Cathedral to St Paul's, Covent Garden, the indeterminate thickness above the ground floors of office-work accepts a greater frequency of dwellings. However, within the vertical stratification between earthly memory and aerial possibilities, the



fig.2
Stipple-plan of the topography of London between St Paul's Cathedral
(lower right) and Covent Garden (lower left)
Courtesy the author

rich structure of typicalities obeys as a whole the descent to the Thames and yet always acknowledges the specificity of each place – the backs which make the more prominent fronts, its deep interiorities or vacuous 'space' (generally pre- and post-War, respectively), its references and histories, sounds and odours, saints and devils, animals and ghosts. As it is with the putative 'man in the street', the commonality of 'ground' is manifest in the negotiation of differences. This is neither a jumbled collage nor a generalised field, but a deep structure harbouring sequences of temporalities/horizons.

So-called psycho-geography¹⁴ actually depends upon horizons of involvement. There are many horizons because every involvement makes its claim according to the topic. The absolute, single horizon is, like temporal unity, universal; we can be involved only with particular people or things in history. Horizon in the plural recalls Heidegger's metaphor of a 'clearing', a concrete/particular involvement soliciting attention to the depth of the horizontal conditions.

Patocka follows Husserl in seeing the horizon as full of potential.¹⁵ Insofar as horizon carries the cultural resources, it is evidently inexhaustible, but it also carries what is common-to-all. Like 'typical', 'common' veers between that which is banal, uninteresting or even contemptible, and that which is most profound, universal. Again, it is a matter of manifesting what is common through difference; metaphor or continuity rather than systematic repetition of similarity.

The phenomena summarised as 'a city's culture', above, prevail as institutions, always already-there. Institutions of this kind are more or less invisible as such, but are activated as soon as one becomes involved, as is evident in greetings – at a formal dinner or a garage, to a junior or senior, to an animal, or according to someone else's customs. Institutions are typicalities (conceptually) with attached constituencies (concretely). These constituencies are mostly anonymous (and mostly deceased, recollected), but are manifest in the particular person whom one seeks to greet properly, or in the character/direction of the context into which one seeks to intervene architecturally. Gadamer's term for horizon, 'tradition', reflects this depth of anonymous, ancient constituency as the conditions for freedom (which we are as free to get wrong, or misunderstand, as we are to profoundly understand¹⁶). Here lies the source and authority of architecture's capacity for memory.

Cultural institutions are neither concepts nor rules one can follow like a recipe.¹⁷ They prevail as a latent background/context, awakened and made compelling in the situation/involvement. There is always an element of creativity/interpretation here, as with any dialogue, which is the mark of our freedom to be insulting, crude, perceptive,

graceful, generous, etc. It is also a question of levels of involvement, which follow the stratification of embodiments.¹⁸ These, oriented about the topic, give the structure of any poetics, the basis of relevance for references, allusions, metaphors (fig. 3B).

The stratification of embodiments prevails within a reciprocal process, in which possibilities (freedom, Heideggerian 'world') only have meaning in virtue of their conditions (background, context, Heideggerian 'earth').¹⁹ Conversely, conditions only appear in the presence of possibilities. The topic of involvement invokes this reciprocity, by which we are played (fig. 3C). Common ground of difference never appears as such, but only in respect of the interpretative possibilities (world) of a topic.²⁰ However, the earthly or embodying aspects of this reciprocal process are those associated with institution, and with horizon. Accordingly, architecture and urban topography provide particular structures of embodiment, situated in a particular place and for a particular duration in history, of the more universal phenomenon.

Much as a language is a framework for being understood – rather than a collection of messages – so architecture and urban topography provide a framework for communicative involvements, the conditions for possible situations or praxes ... preventing everything from happening at once in the same place. A city is itself an institution topographically differentiated to provide institutional horizons of involvement, the cultural memory, tradition, objectivity. Because ultimately-common-to-all are the natural conditions, and because what is common-to-all is the basis of any ethics, we may say that a city is a framework for the ethical interpretation of the natural conditions. Actual natural conditions – a garden, wilderness, materials, light – are concrete manifestations of the ontological natural conditions, called *physis* in the Greek philosophical tradition.²¹ For a topic's possibilities of involvement, earth/*physis* is that in which appears the horizon of temporal unity.

Praxis

Praxis is civic life, why to have a democratic city. It is a particular form of the 'situation' of phenomenology,²² presuming a commitment to, or solidarity with, one's fellow-citizens. We stay with the original formulation of praxis, that of Aristotle, for whom the pre-eminent praxis was politics.²³ There are two dimensions to praxis – action and reflection. Action revolves around choice, rooted in judgment, and is always a matter of concrete/particular instances of choice. Reflection, called by Aristotle *theoria*, is essentially ethical speculation on the nature of our understanding of the good, the divine, the common-to-all.²⁴

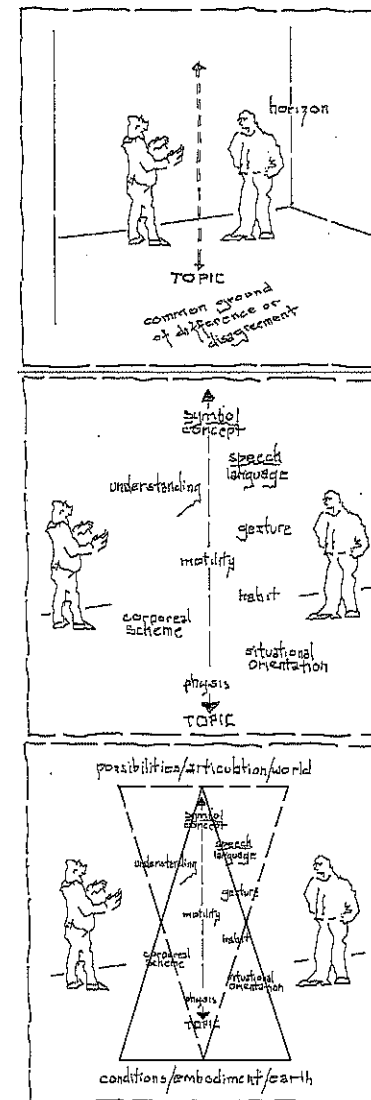


fig. 3
Horizons of Involvement
3A – basic situation of the claim of the topic
3B – the stratification of embodiments
3C – fundamental reciprocity of conditions and possibilities
Courtesy the author

It is evident this has nothing to do with the Enlightenment concept of theory (hypothesis) and practical application/justification. One seeks to recover something like the Aristotelian understanding in the face of the regular attempts to subject social life to instrumental protocols such as culture as project, moral ideals achieved technically, the bureaucratisation of nominally creative decision-making.²⁵ Agemben, following Arendt, rightly argues that our use of politics to manage resources for the sake of an economy of individual well-being (consumerism, labour, health) inverts the Aristotelian conception that we live within our resources for the sake of a profound politics, or human understanding.²⁶

All the principal institutions of Aristotle's polis were characterised by agon/conflict and its resolution – judging and making laws, tragic drama, religious sacrifice, games, symposia.²⁷ The agonic situation comprises a) its topic, b) a communicative distance, c) the common ground of difference/disagreement and the horizon of the topic ... all the elements which comprise 'involvement', and therefore praxis (fig. 3).²⁸ Praxis is not conducted according to rules, rather the norms of praxis arise within praxis. Judgement is a matter of experience, wisdom, maturity – morals and politics are done for their own sakes, acting in solidarity.²⁹

Architectural design is not simply a talent or expertise; it is part of civic praxis. Drawing upon Aristotle's *Poetics*, Dalibor Vesely argues that architectural interpretation (*mimesis*) is a hermeneutics of typical situations.³⁰ The *Poetics* builds its argument around tragic drama, the most important aspect of which is the narrative (*mythos*), whose core is the choice (*prohairesis*) made within praxis; and Aristotle characterises tragic drama as *mimesis praxeos*. Tragic drama exposes human finitude to reflection, and stands between actual political or legal decisions and philosophy ('poetry is more philosophical than history'³¹). Gadamer rightly draws analogies between absorption in the performance and commitment to the hermeneutics of a question. The typical situations of praxis are not only that from which poetics, tragic drama (and ritual) arise; they are the receptacle of the drama of understanding and of orientation.

However the architecture is not the drama (in the *Poetics*, Aristotle hardly mentions the theatre and set-design is a very secondary consideration³²). Architecture is a discipline of peripheral vision, of setting the conditions and horizons for praxis. For Aristotle, the action of praxis takes place in the agonic settings in which the democratic polis is at stake – the *bouleuterion*, *heliaia*, theatre, temple, stadium and the house (then more of a public institution). The architecture of these settings is enough to establish the conditions for participating

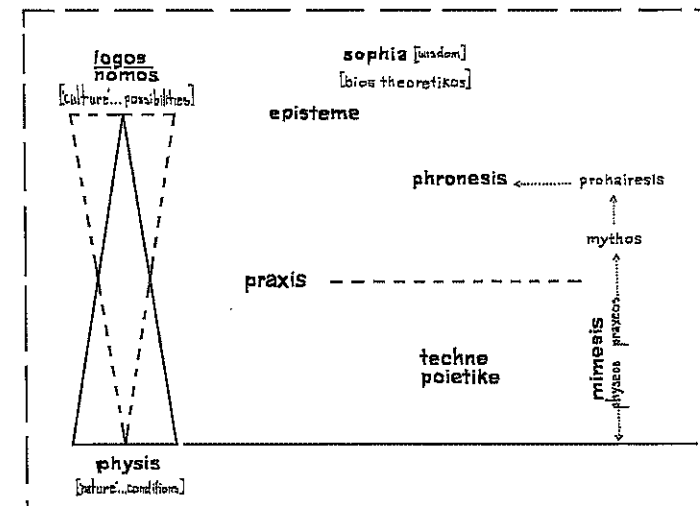


fig. 4
Architectural mimesis/interpretation set within the stratification
of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI
Courtesy the author

and for witnessing, neatly formulated by Le Corbusier as 'word addressed to earth'.³³ Gadamer places architecture in the domain of mediation, of ornament, largely on the grounds of its affiliation with beauty—from *cosmetes*, with its root in 'cosmos'—embodiment of the true.³⁴ However, mediation has a structural significance: it uses the description of place to reconcile finite, vulnerable, particular human history with the primordial natural conditions.³⁵ This aspect of architectural interpretation invokes a hermeneutics of earth, a *mimesis physeos*. The familiar 'imitation of nature' goes beyond 'nature of something' to *physis* itself, in this case qualifying the conditions for praxis/involvement.

This play between *mimesis praxeos* and *mimesis physeos* (fig. 4) might seem to violate the important division that Aristotle makes between *phronesis* and *techné* (the know-how relevant to making something such as a house, a shoe, a speech). Praxis establishes its norms within praxis, and this precludes attempting to make morals or politics into an instrumental programme, in a manner familiar to us from the architectural utopias. However, the contexts in which architecture currently happens are very distant from civic craft guilds. Architectural design now requires being able to reconcile primordial spatial and material phenomena with a range of discourses, techniques and people that move between technical specialists, bureaucrats, users or constituents, politicians, journalists, scholars, and so on. It is not easy to preserve the integrity of the topic/question/issue in circumstances where the building codes are the most explicit representation of common-to-all. Something like practical wisdom is needed if we are to recover technological making for ethical reflection. Because it incorporates the embodying conditions of participation/understanding³⁶ and can communicate with the most abstract discourses, the closest we have to a practical philosophy is phenomenological hermeneutics.

For Gadamer, practical philosophy, hermeneutics, *theoria* are the basis for social reason—the possibility of exposing to all what is desirable in a way that is convincing. Unlike other goods, *theoria* is enhanced by sharing, by the communal attunement to a topic. The Socratic dialogue has its roots in the collaborative agon, a trusting of the disagreement to help find the truth of a topic. For Plato, the back-and-forth movement between dialogue and dialectic is expressed as ascent and descent through levels of participation/understanding. Similarly, it is necessary to distinguish ethics (practical philosophy) from morals (particular concrete decisions). Judgements in architecture are related to moral judgements, as the regular invocation of 'decorum' testifies (despite the long history of trying to frame decorum as rules of correctness in architectural theory).

The topics of practical philosophy (hermeneutics) are the typical situations of praxis, repeatedly transposed into particular concrete involvements. There is a constant effort to relate particular circumstances to the reality under discussion. This re-enacts the archaic drama of free/finite individuals seeking orientation within the fundamental/primordial conditions. Praxis, lived for its own sake, is the nature of that drama in a democratic city. Interpretation (hermeneutics) is always 'on the way', a relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment, oriented about the topic or question.

We cannot avoid these conditions, it is a matter of interpreting them well or badly. The 'anonymous whole', the conditions of our freedom, of which the horizon is the frontier of interpretation, comprises city, institutions, tradition/memory, the natural conditions, in that order ontologically.³⁷ If the ethical metaphor of 'common ground' is to be concretely manifest, it would seem to be a city, endowed with sufficient depth/generosity of horizons of involvement to allow the diversity of individual histories to be reconciled with the fundamental natural conditions of the one world of which we have all always been part.

- 1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. London: SCM Press, 1962. p. 71
- 2 And against the ubiquitous figure-field, or 'Nolli', plan to represent this relationship.
- 3 Aristotle recognised that the particular is our only mode of participating in the universal *Metaphysics*. 1040b28
- 4 These metamorphoses are of different kinds. The temporal order nests short-term cycles within more long-term transformations. Concretely, whole regions/districts may change (e.g. the Marais, Five Points, the Galata quarter) as populations migrate in and out; a block will alter quite rarely, a building maybe every 50–100 years, interiors (and signage) on 5–25 year cycles, then there are seasonal, weekly, daily cycles of change/renewal. The inability of modern edifices—e.g. Canary Wharf, Forum Les Halles, most housing—to adapt as well as, for example, the London townhouse, suggests (costly) cycles of replacement/forgetting rather than adaptation/renewal.

- 5 Plato, *Republic* 592b
- 6 In contemporary practice, one sees another patchwork – practices/beliefs millennia old are to be found alongside resolute materialism, new cults, dogmatic fundamentalisms, humanism, etc.
- 7 Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, New York: Monacelli, 1995.
- 8 'Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy', in *Reason in Age of Science*, p. 98
- 9 Michael Sandel speaks of a 'market society' in *What Money Can't Buy: the moral limits of markets*, London: Allen Lane, 2012.
- 10 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, 'The Way of the Creator', in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, (trans. Hollingdale, R.J., Rieu, E.V.) 1961. London: Penguin p. 89
- 11 Heidegger, *Op. cit.* p. 115
- 12 On horizon, see Edmund Husserl, 'The Origins of Geometry', appendix to *The Crisis of European Sciences*; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, *op. cit.* Part One.III and p. 416; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, Second Part, II.1.b.iv; see also Dermot Moran, 'Gadamer and Husserl on Horizon, Intersubjectivity and the Life-World' (but bracket 'intersubjectivity'), in A. Wiercinski (ed.), *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012.
- 13 We might say that the horizon of a topic is collective, all participants are played by it; whereas the perspectival horizon is individual, everything other than the subject is an object (however deeply embedded in a context).
- 14 Psycho-geography is a problematic concept, trying to reconcile the 'inner life' of the psyche with geography, the most anonymous dimension of place and psyche's supposed opposite; however the conceptual difficulty can be ignored in appreciating what is in play in the works of Sebald, Sinclair, Benjamin (*One-Way Street*), Breton (*Mad Love, Nadja*), Aragon (*Paris Peasant*), Joyce (*Ulysses*), and many others.
- 15 Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, London Open Court, 1998, p. 34
- 16 Joyce's *Ulysses* builds the European city from folk who thrive off immediate needs and partial or mis-understandings, in which the deeper themes are mostly latent, occasionally bubbling to the surface in off-hand remarks, songs, puns, the occasional poignant moment or the even more occasional profound speech or text.
- 17 This is the primary defect of the Styles, for example, which try to frame 'culture' as specifiable, even enforceable, attributes.
- 18 derived from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: RKP, 1962.
- 19 See Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*.
- 20 It is neither the *res extensa* of Descartes nor is it that fiction which might 'ground' metaphysics.
- 21 See, for example, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1014b16. 'Nature' is a hopelessly ambiguous term in our culture – ranging from its status in the sciences to landscape views, home gardening, ecology and so forth. However, all of these are cultural – there is no nature outside culture. In order to recover its ontological meaning – the natural conditions – one must resort to *physis*.
- 22 On situation see Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2004, Chapter 2
- 23 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI (at 1094a28, politics is famously called *architectonikes*); Gadamer (to whom the argument here is significantly indebted), *Truth and Method*, Second Part, II, and the three essays on Practice in *Reason in the Age of Science*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1981.

- 24 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, First Part, II.1.c; and, again, the three essays in *Reason in the Age of Science*.
- 25 For these reasons, the Marxist version of praxis is too deeply implicated in his materialism, his conceptions of class and labour and his project of intramundane salvation for our purposes.
- 26 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; Stanford University Press, 1998; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- 27 The common or official discourse in which praxis was enacted – rhetoric – included this agonistic structure (the *agones* of pro and contra).
- 28 Moreover, conflict is the norm – one should speak of 'common ground of disagreement' since, even if the other agrees, s/he exerts a claim which is not oneself. The point at which conflict shades from creative to evil is subtle, and like health: how much disease is needed for a healthy immune system?
- 29 Richard Sennett's *Together* (Allen Lane, 2012) contains interesting qualifications of 'solidarity' versus 'sociality' in its first chapter.
- 30 Vesely, *Op. cit.* Chapter 8
- 31 *Poetics* 1451b6
- 32 Conversely, Vitruvius hardly mentions tragedy or comedy, focusing on the theatre and the *periactoi*. See Book v.8
- 33 Le Corbusier, speaking of the chapel at Ronchamp (*Le Livre de Ronchamp*, p. 18) '... and, as far as I know, in ignorance of the Heideggerian strife/agon of world and earth.'
- 34 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, First Part, II.2.b. Huizunga makes the interesting assertion that architecture enters 'play' with the addition of sculpture, as if this explicitly figural element were supplementary to the primary architectural order, but latent in it (*Homo Ludens*, p. 167).
- 35 Peter Carl, 'Ornament and Time' (*AA Files* 22+23) argues that ornament appears on regalia, furniture and architectural surfaces – that is, between history and the architectural qualification of the cosmic conditions. It also suggests that the Loosian reaction against ornament had the consequence in modernism of attempting to embody this mediation in the overall topography of buildings.
- 36 Therefore avoiding recourse to such formulations as 'form + content' or 'materiality' in order to recover material poetics from abstract matter.
- 37 These are aspects of anonymity to which one can commit. Infrastructure is also a somewhat anonymous representation of collective life. However, infrastructure generally represents the mature city as a mass-phenomenon, usually at a commensurate scale and is often hidden. Despite its occasional appearance as a spectacle – J.M.W. Turner's 'Rain, Steam and Speed: the Western Railway' (1844) – or with metaphoric value – the sewers in *The Third Man* (1949) – it has required a variety of aesthetic expedients (from which Siegfried Giedion took his point of departure) to attain respectability, let alone invite commitment. Conversely, in the hand-made metabolism of urban slums, the need for common services can become a vehicle of collaboration, solidarity and civic pride.

Common Ground

a critical reader

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Marsilio

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