

Visible/invisible draft 4 images.doc

Transparency: effable and ineffable

'Then a boundless depth opens up, effaces the walls, drives away contingent presences, *accomplishes the miracle of ineffable space.*'

Le Corbusier, introduction to *New World of Space* (1948)

'Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying its me?'

The opening lines of Beckett, *Texts for Nothing IV* (1951/1966)

Introduction

Space is not a bad starting point for a discussion of what is visible and invisible in contemporary culture because it is, like our subjectivity which we bring to every encounter - even to encounters with our self (I am thinking here of Beckett) - everywhere and nowhere all around us. Like our subjectivity, we see through space everywhere to things, and if it were not for its seeming invisibility, intangibility, nothingness, nothing would have an appearance. If space or subjectivity were to thicken, become material or be mistaken for material, nothing would have an appearance. We do not image it, and yet it seems to be the precondition for imaging everything else. The rationality and materiality of architecture (probably its two bugbears), makes the elusive status of space and its spurious logic all the more problematic. And lets be clear: by space, we don't mean space metaphorically speaking, like what pseuds call personal space which isn't space at all, but bad breath and body heat. We mean space literally, the space that architecture makes, the space between things.

Space and the self seem to be always already fading away. If I look really hard, all I see are the surfaces that shape space. Space with its essential emptiness, seems a disappearing act, which we cannot do anything with except, disappointingly,

measure.¹ And the harder I focus on what's going on in my head, the more I feel other to myself.² If there is a portrait of space, we find it in every photo and perspective painting. Space is not constituted by the walls, floors, and ceilings arranged *in* space (as in plan) but by the organization of these elements *on* the photograph around the vanishing point. The way they seem to get farther from the viewing subject or its surrogate, the camera, by getting smaller. This portrait of space is not exactly an image, but the organisation of the appearance of things to the subject. Likewise, the subject - its desire, knowledge, power - is precisely what is not captured in the portrait, no matter how many accessories it may be portrayed with. A portrait is just a talking head, a façade, meat with make-up. If there is an appearance of the subject to itself, to others, it is elsewhere.

There have been forays into invisible architecture, but most are about the attenuation of material, not space. Ives Klein proposed an air architecture.³ He worked on an air roof (tested in the kitchen sink) that would protect its residents from the weather by air pressure. It uses air pressure to make walls, but space is not air. We see the application of air thresholds today in cold storage systems, sometimes with clear plastic flaps. Diller + Scofidio's Blur Building is a spray mist that conceals the grid of pipes that emits it.⁴

¹ This insistence on the invisibility we call space is what Heidegger alluded to with his empty jug and what Lacan alluded to when he writes in *Seminar 7, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* that architecture like painting is organized around emptiness. Cf. Heidegger's paper, 'The Thing'. The emptiness of the jug is a precondition for engagement with it. In *Poetry Language Thought* trans by Albert Hofstadter (New York, Harper, 1971) pp163ff. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (New York, Norton 1992) p136.

² William James, who invented the term 'stream of consciousness', notes this phenomenon of self-scrutiny and relates it to psychosis. Cf. *Principles of Psychology* (London, Macmillan, 1890), the chapters 'The Consciousness of Self' and 'The Stream of Thought'.

³ See the catalogue, *Invisible* (London: Hayward 2012) p33

⁴ Swiss Expo 2002, Lake Neuchatel (Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland)

Discussion of the relation of architecture to the subject raises more promising possibilities for invisibility. We should expect to locate the invisible in the relation between subject and object. Something in the relation that renders it - if not invisible, at least - unseen. If, following Walter Benjamin, we receive architecture in a state of distraction, then invisibility is its default mode: architecture is the backdrop material that no one sees; nowhere is this more evident than when someone walks the street speaking on their mobile. Sometimes something is invisible because we blank it, which is tantamount to repression in the visual register. According to Lacan, there is always a blind spot in the centre of vision. This is the condition of the neurotic, to be positioned before his/her objects, but not see them; it is the opposite with psychotics. In his seminal paper, 'Mimicry and legendary psychasthenia', Roger Caillois notes that his distressed patients can see their objects, but cannot locate themselves. They are too disorganized to see from a position.⁵ This is a breakdown in the pact between subject and space: subject is supposed to coalesce to a point of thought and action; space is supposed to radiate from that point - it makes sense to subjects because it triangulates.⁶

In their elegant influential paper 'Transparency literal and phenomenal' (1963), Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky nominate transparency as the principle signifier of modernism and modern architecture. It is one of the most eloquent forays by architecture into the question of space and its visibilities. It may seem irksome to continue to associate space and

⁵ First published *Minatoure 7* (Skira, Paris 1935) republished in English in October 31 (MIT Press, 1984). Caillois documents symptoms of a form of psychical collapse of identity that he called *legendary psychasthenia*. He reports patients who claimed they could not locate themselves in the space they were in. Or who felt invaded by space, as if space failed to localise and individuate them.

⁶ The wall that the mime makes by miming, is a special case of invisibility. S/he sees something that others do not. In the sense that it is for him/her only, it is imaginary. The opposite of the mime's wall are experiments in digital architecture which aim for maximum not minimum visibility - visibility raised to the fever pitch of spectacle - but are otherwise immaterial.

subjectivity, yet it seems they always are associated. In 'Transparency literal and phenomenal', the question of the subject seems to shadow its authors' every move. It is ironic that by the time Rowe and Slutzky published their paper, Le Corbusier had invented another form of space that he called *indicible*, unsayable, indescribable, ineffable, upon which that shadow is nowhere to be found; its principle feature a resistance to transparency. This space entails completely other forms of subject than what we call here, the projective subject. It marks the limits of space and subjectivity, from the paradoxical position of the outside. It has implications for contemporary political society.

This paper will look at Rowe and Slutzky's articulation of modern space, and the challenges to it. It is part of an ongoing project about how architecture constructs subjectivity. In a nutshell, the subject's functions - its desire, identity, knowledge and power - map onto space. By subjectivity we do not mean sense of self. Most selves have a pretty nebulous sense of self. We mean above all, the function of I in discourse. Psychoanalysis has mined culture and experience in order to build a picture of I, its functions and articulations, that is both theoretic and empirical.

Transparent space and the projective subject

According to Rowe and Slutzky, there are two forms of transparency in modern art and architecture: the literal which is 'a property of materials', and the phenomenal which is an implied transparency where there is none, the effect of 'a form of organisation'. [161] They manifest in the different attitudes to glass. They compare the glass curtain wall of the Bauhaus by Gropius and the façade of Villa Stein by Le Corbusier. Gropius was interested in diagonal views of the corner which display the transparent properties of glass to their best advantage. Le Corbusier was interested in the taut 'planar qualities of glass' [167], the frontal view, and the Leger-like composition of strip windows, balconies, and other

elements which undermine simple figure/ground oppositions. In plan, Le Corbusier aligned columns and walls to imply a dense layering of shallow stratified spaces that crosscut the deep space running back from the façade; rather the way the jars and bowls in the cubist still life are organized by dense gridding and diagonals which seem to impart to them a dual allegiance, to the picture plane and to the shallow space sponsored by it. The phenomenal transparency of Stein depends upon spatial ambiguities: the simultaneous reading of overlapping spaces and spatial figures: 'one space which is explicit and another which is implied' [171], 'a real and deep space and an ideal and shallow one' [174]. 'Space becomes constructed' from particular 'locations' [175]. It is clear where Rowe and Slutzky's sympathies lie: the unambiguous exercises in transparent planes and objects in deep space by Moholy-Nagy (predictable); 'the Cubist "discovery" of shallow space' [170], the multiple readings of space and object, figure and ground, frontality and rotation, explored by Cezanne, Leger, and Juan Gris (good).

Rowe and Slutzky discern 2 types of phenomenal transparency:

1. The reading of shallow space into an opaque plane, the façade. Derrida would have called it a reading event. Freud, projection.
2. The simultaneous perception of a deep space (the view) crosscut by the reading of a shallow stratified space. They 'interpenetrate without optical destruction of each other'. [161, 168]

Rowe and Slutzky's argument plots a familiar narrative arc that moves from paintings (Juan Gris) to facades (Stein) to interiors. We assume they begin with painting because it is easier to articulate first in painting what they want finally to say about architecture. A multiply layered narrative arc goes from literal to phenomenal/implied, real to ideal, material to conceptual, and most critically from surface to space. They appeal to an implicit spatial logic that goes

through the plane surface to space, a logic we call projective. For Rowe and Slutzky, space is always the projection of a surface by a subject. It is always on the side of the phenomenal, ideal, conceptual; what we will call symbolic. It is the purpose of this paper to make this logic explicit.

Despite their interest in destabilizing simple figure/ground oppositions, they continue to think within the paradigm of the projective subject. Their primal scene: the visitor to the Bauhaus stands before its workshop wing, looking through the glass to the interior. This relationship was codified by Brunelleschi (15th Century) with the demonstration of perspective. He asked the good citizens of Florence to view the Baptistery through a perspective painting of the Baptistery, so that their view and his picture coincide.⁷ The viewer of the perspective painting gazes through it the way s/he gazes through a window (Alberti's metaphor, he was thinking of fresco), to an imagined depth beyond. Rowe and Slutzky assume a spatial scenario comprised of a subject - defined by the single (although not necessarily stationary) point of projection - standing before a plane surface (painting, glass curtain wall) viewing space. The surface screens an interior that is accessed by an inquisitive gaze. Perspective has been concocted by Cartesian man for whom two things are always before his eyes: an image and an idea. This scenario is the spatial template for all viewing, modernist or otherwise, at least since the renaissance. Panofsky called it symbolic form.⁸

With phenomenal transparency, the question of the subject becomes inescapable. It is no longer possible to fob transparency off on materials. Unlike the Bauhaus, Garches is

⁷ Cf. my *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier: architecture, space, and the construction of subjectivity* (London, Routledge 2010)

⁸ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York, Zone Books, 1991 (1927))

only transparent for a projective subject. This is nowhere clearer than in its monumental headwall, into whose opacity we are asked to read a shallow stratified depth. The plan diagrams and axonometric drawings that they publish of Le Corbusier's League of Nations project confirm it. They ask us to stand before it in our minds eye, to see the depth in it that they see (it has the form of a view sectioned by picture planes, Alberti's pyramid of vision).

Both forms of transparency imply the integrity and continuity of a positioned subject. Projection is not merely an architectural supplement to subjectivity; it is constitutive. Rowe and Slutzky ask us to do with the façade of Garches what we do all the time with the face, that other literally opaque but phenomenally transparent surface we encounter in every mirror and in every other's face. I am a subject for myself because you attribute subjectivity to me. I stand before you, you hear my voice, you follow my eyes, and upon the great surface of my façade (that image I project), you project an almost infinite phenomenal depth of intention, thought, love, doubt, fear of dying. This projective subject has at least three characteristics. It is positioned (in space) as a single point of thought and action. It projects (makes space). And, at least for the purposes of projection, what it projects on, functions for it as a screen.

We usually expect to encounter the screen as a façade, and in any case, as material.⁹ We read the phenomenal screen into space wherever we look. Garches restages this act by displacing the screen that first appears as a façade where it

⁹ Hence Rowe and Slutzky's façade studies in 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal Part 2' *Perspecta* 13/14 (1971) 'But some of these suppositions are of so tendentious... a nature that in the present article it is proposed to consign them to temporary oblivion, and to concentrate... not on the three dimensional or spatial aspects of phenomenal transparency, but... upon its two dimensional manifestations - upon phenomenal transparency as pattern [i.e. facades].' p288. This paper appears to backpedal to a position about facades from one about space that they thought was too radical.

is a form of material into the plan where it reappears as a form of organization. The screen that is first materialized as the façade of Garches, is then reinstated as a trace in the plan. Garches restages the symbolic conditions for viewing, which we experience as the transparency of space. This is an example of the power of architecture to show us what we already knew about space and ourselves. It is oft remarked the affinity of Le Corbusier's work to photography. It is now clear why. It is not merely that the work is photogenic, that it solicits - as it were - the camera's surrogate look. It stages the symbolic support of image production, which makes visual experience possible.

The screen undergoes two displacements in Rowe and Slutzky's account of phenomenal transparency: it is repositioned in the space and it becomes conceptual. This displacement is reflected in every perspective diagram. As a diagram for vision (which it purports to be) as opposed to simply an instruction about how to make realistic pictures, it depends upon a series of equivalences. The image is always depicted in two places: in the eye of the viewer (retina or mind's eye) and on a screen in the space s/he views, where it is always disappearing into the space itself.

When the argument shifts from facades to space, the road gets rocky. The complexity - unacknowledged by the authors - has to do with the fact that the transparency of space is not exactly a material property because space is not exactly a material (it is not-literally transparent); and yet it does not seem to require a great deal of cognition to look through it either (it is not-phenomenally transparent). Space is neither transparent nor opaque, only picture planes and facades are. The projective geometry that constitutes space defines the transparency of the picture plane. Things have an appearance to the subject because they are projected as an image upon the picture plane to the subject. For the subject, vision is about having perceptions, or in our terms images. Visual space is

the sort of space that supports images because it is invisible. Space is invisible because it is marked by the trace of the transparent screen. Even literal transparency is phenomenal, when it comes to space. To this we attribute its invisibility. Henceforth, we will designate as transparent space, the space that is invisible because it supports the phenomenal screen of the viewing subject. Although Rowe and Slutzky do not make this claim, their argument entails it.

Ineffable space

Lets see how different is what Le Corbusier says about *l'espace indicible*, some 20 years after Garches, 10 years before 'Transparency', in 1948.¹⁰

First some quotes.

Ineffable space is a radiant space of explosive energy.

'Action Of The Work (architecture, statue, or picture) on its surroundings: vibrations, cries or shouts (such as originate from the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens), arrows darting away like rays, as if springing from an explosion; the near or distant site is shaken by them, touched, wounded, dominated or caressed.' [p8]

In prose that tends to wax lyrical, Charles Jencks, Christine Boyer and other Le Corbusier scholars have interpreted his preoccupation with ineffable space as an attempt to synthesize the arts, and ineffable space as the emergent property of such

¹⁰ 'Ineffable space' was published in English as the first chapter of Le Corbusier, *New World of Space* (New York & Boston, Reynal & Hitchcock and the Institute for Contemporary Art 1948). The text was first published as an article, '*L'Espace Indicible*', in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, January 1946, pp9-10. He republished it in *Modulor 1* (1950) and *Modulor 2* (1955). Apparently Le Corbusier had problems with the translation of *indicible* as ineffable. What cannot be said is not necessarily ineffable. The ineffable implies something with no form or media of representation. Space is hardly a medium anyway. We interpret the ineffable to mean that space is not symbolisable, that it is not a symbolic form. It cannot function to produce images, or at least produce images by projection.

a synthesis. Roberto Gargiani and Anna Rosellini seem to get closer to the kinetic truth of ineffable space when they link it to Le Corbusier's contemporaneous chapel at Ronchamp, whose site had been exploded by war. In any case, the themes of synthesis and continuity, the appeal to the lyric, belie an extraordinary detail.

'Then a boundless depth opens up, effaces the walls, drives away contingent presences, *accomplishes the miracle of ineffable space.*[p8]

It is easier to say what the ineffable is not, than what it is. Lets put it in relation to its other: the projective space of perspective in which depth is bound by the vanishing point. The converging lines of the railroad track and Haussmannian boulevard appeal to this point, but it is implied by the view of anything.

A boundless depth would be a space unbounded by the vanishing point that terminates every view. Space not bound by the vanishing point would not calibrate distance, or at least not calibrate it by size, and not calibrate by depth from a viewer. Walls would no longer appear to converge as they recede from the viewer. Things may still look farther way - Le Corbusier has not eschewed depth, only depth bound - but they would achieve that look without getting smaller. We can assume that in the absence of the vanishing point, other attributes of space are absent as well. Objects would no longer occlude each other, for in order to overlap, they have to be seen from a point of view. Everything would be equally present, which implies a kind of instantaneity.

A boundless depth would be a space that cannot be put in relation to a viewing subject. If Le Corbusier is in this space, he is in it without position. The spatial subject is either, paradoxically, nowhere in this space, or else is distributed across its glittering surface, the way the dreamer

is distributed across the surface of a dream. As hallucinogenic as this may seem, it is closer to reality, for space is not really organised for the subject or its desire, not for me not for you. Walls do not really converge and objects do not really get smaller as they get farther away from us. And it really is full of energy and motion. If a boundless depth is less illusory than a bounded one, perspective seems to turn us toward and away from reality in a single gesture.¹¹

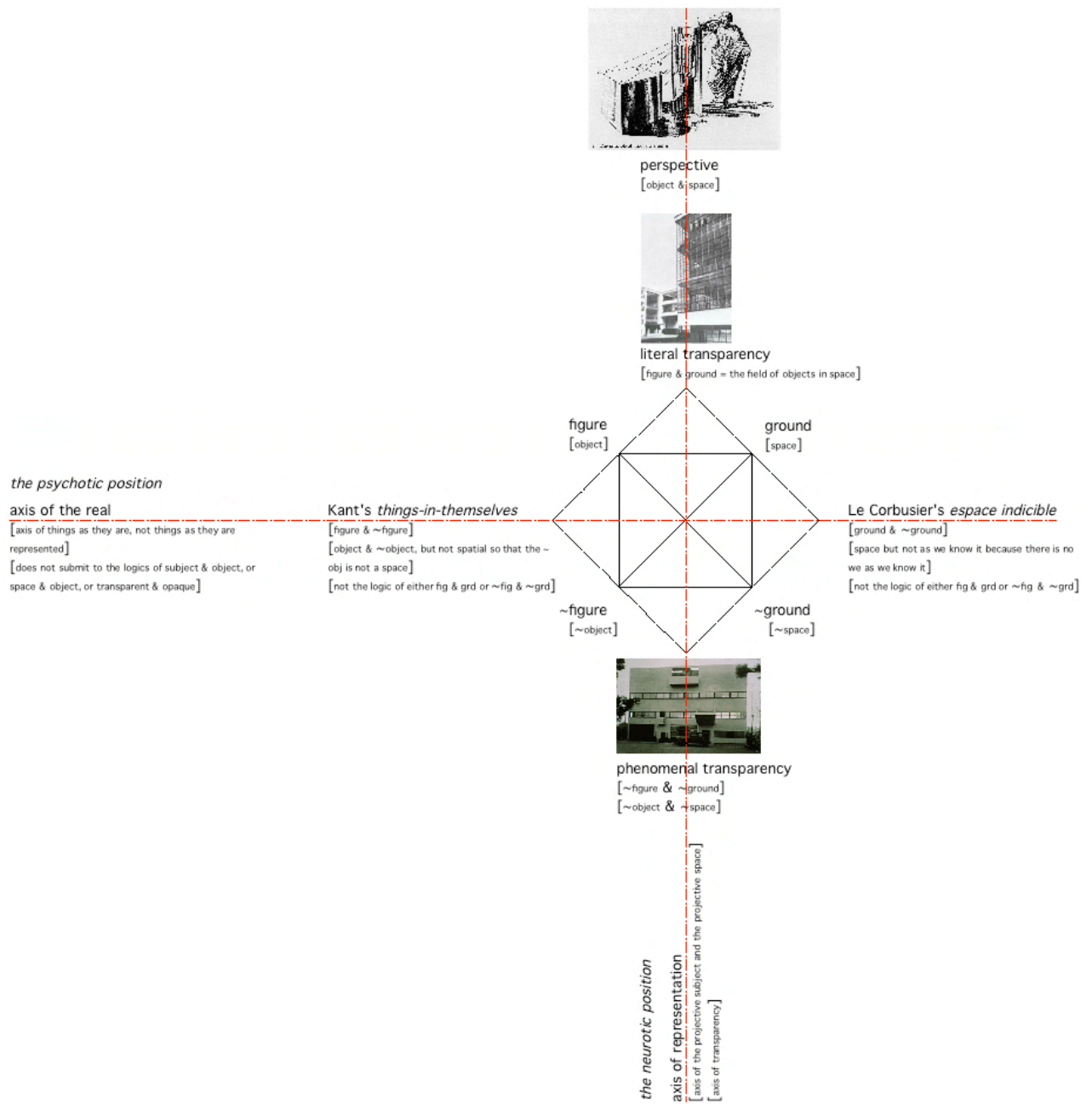
While it is difficult to deny the visuality of this space, it is equally difficult to recognize in this space the familiar functions that we expect of space. Although Le Corbusier experiences this space visually, it difficult to understand in what sense these experiences would correspond to images, in so far as these are defined by projection onto a plane surface, linking subject and object.

Ineffable space is an explosion into a new form of space, in which we momentarily glimpse freedom from a subjectivity that confines us to views and positions and snares us in the web of a shared language of images. Le Corbusier is contemplating a space stripped of its symbolic form that binds us to a projective logic of image-screens and objects. Without this bind, space becomes an energy field for which the recycling stones of Ronchamp, which has been destroyed and rebuilt at least three times, are a metaphor.

By placing the subject into a view, perspective is the formula for the normal space of subject positions, such that distortions of it in film and photography are taken to

¹¹ Freud described psychosis as a turning away from reality. Our relation to reality is defined by the trop of turning and it matters little which sense it has. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'Splitting of the ego in the process of defense' (1940/1938/1937), in *Sigmund Freud, On Metapsychology: the theory of psychoanalysis*. Angela Richards and James Strachey (eds.) (Penguin; London, 1991), p 463. In my paper 'Psychosis and the ineffable space of modernism' forthcoming in *Journal of Architecture*, I link ineffable space to the particular relation to reality explicated in the concept of psychosis.

indicate suspensions of reality. Space appears to me as a screen that screens my objects so that I can imagine walking down the nave to what I desire. It is an essential part of the fantasy of transparent space that the object I desire is the object that I can get to from here. The ineffable is not about something added to make a better space (more energy); nor is it a simple displacement (a voyage to somewhere exotic). It is more like the same place, from which the symbolic apparatus has been removed. But it is not a simple removal, like the removal of the altar from the nave, which leaves the nave and the viewer untouched. Something is unbound. Whatever it is that anchors me to space, or that anchors me to me, seems no longer to operate.



[Klein square, mapping the literal & phenomenal transparency of space & subjects]

Klein Square

We can map Rowe and Slutzky's argument onto the Klein square, which Rosalind Krauss introduced to the humanities in her paper 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field'.¹² In the Klein square

¹² Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' in *October 8* (Spring 1979).

you place the two opposing terms of an argument on the top two corners of the square and their negations on the bottom two. The top terms, supplied by the argument are taken as given, but their negations are often subject to dispute. Rowe and Slutzky describe the phenomenal transparency of the Garches interior as a shift from the conventional figure/ground binary of the classical plan and perspective in which there is no ambiguity between what is object and what is space, to the not-figure/not-ground binary of the purist villa plan and cubist painting, in which there is the simultaneous reading of multiple spatial figures. We start therefore with figure and ground, the clear articulation of which underlies the representational possibilities of literal transparency. They are taken as given by the argument, and define default material reality. We locate their negations, ~figure and ~ground, on the lower two corners. In a binary figure/ground spatial logic, the ~figure is tantamount to a ground (space), hence a seeming equivalence of terms along the diagonal axes; but free from that logic, a ~figure could be anything, space or otherwise, that is simply not a figure to a ground. Similarly for the ~ground, it is simply whatever does not play the role of ground to a figure. Depending upon the context these terms could be satisfied by concepts, screens, fluids or clouds, the Blur building, spittle, or subjects. Literal transparency lies between the top two terms, figure & ground, which includes figures in their grounds, objects in their space. It is exemplified by the Bauhaus elevation and illusionistic painting. Phenomenal transparency lies between the bottom terms, as it is a spatial position defined by ~figure & ~ground. Here, figure and ground are always in flux, a condition exemplified by cubist painting, the façade and plan of Garches, which are organized in such a way that no part is ever unambiguously figure to another part's ground.

These two spatial positions, the literally and phenomenally transparent, define the space we call transparent because it is the invisible support for projection. They define the symbolic and imaginary axis of representation. We call this axis *representation* not only because - as we have seen - it relates to a form of space that is closely aligned with projection and perspective, but more importantly because it is space in so far as we are able to represent it to ourselves and to others, by means of words, drawings, and architecture, and has thereby been brought into discourse and made part of our world.

There is another more difficult axis marked by the positions figure & ~figure, and ground & ~ground, which forces us into the bastard logic of direct contradiction. These positions are difficult to characterize in anything but negative terms. Ground/~ground would be space that does not support representation. It is approximated by Le Corbusier's ineffable space, which has begun to thicken. It is space but it cannot individuate objects from each other or objects from subjects. Figure/~figure would be things that cannot be represented, objects that are not individuated by space. Kant's *things-in-themselves* are what exist before the forms of experience (what Kant called *intuition*) are imposed upon them. He understood that space and time were not objects of experience, but rather the *a priori* forms of intuition that precede experience and make it possible. We would not understand the world as a distribution of objects and a succession of events if we did not already organize the world in space and time. *Things-in-themselves*, mark this *a priori* condition in advance of representation. Piranesi may have glimpsed this impossible world when he drew the classical tombs on *Via Appia Antica*, stripped of the cladding by which architecture represents itself, as formless lumps of melting masonry.¹³

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929) trans by Norman Kemp Smith. Cf. 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, First Part: Transcendental Aesthetic, Section 1: Space' (pp67-74), and 'Section 2: Time' (pp74-91) in which he determines that space and

We call this axis *real* because whatever is on it is not representable by us to ourselves or to others. In this sense it is beyond what we can symbolize or imagine. Its possibility does not suggest that representation is falsification, indeed the association of transparency with representation suggests the opposite, but simply to acknowledge that we throw the skein of the symbol - the concept and the image - over all our forms, by necessity, in order to bring them into discourse. This is also the axis of creation, from which something new and unknown emerges from a nowhere about which we cannot speak. The creator (author artist architect) is in the position of having to draw forth something that is not yet known and not yet named, shaped, and materialized; but whose immeasurable distance pulls at his/her desire and whose imminent proximity clouds him/her with anxiety. Something emerges out of nothing to become, by the arduous work of representation, figure or ground, object or space. We receive our symbols from others, and rarely do we have to confront the horror of something new - creation in the sense of coming from this nothing. Arguably, the invisibility of space, in which we stand before the transparent screen looking into infinite depth the way the frontier legionnaire stands at the parapet, is a defense against the anxiety of that possibility: Look! Nothing there!¹⁴

time are forms of intuition, and not objects of intuition, and defines the *thing-in-itself* as an a *priori* object of which space and time are not properties. 'Space is not an empirical concept which has been derived from outer experiences.' p68 'Space is a necessary a *priori* representation.' p68 'Space does not represent any property of things in themselves, nor does it represent them in their relation to one another.' p71 'Space is nothing but the form or all appearances of outer sense.' p71 'Time is not an empirical concept that has been derived from any experience.' p74 'Time is an necessary representation that underlies all intuitions.' pp74-5, and so on...

¹⁴ We can assign subject positions to these two axes based on the two clinical categories in psychoanalytic thought. If transparency literal or phenomenal marks what we could call the neurotic position of normal space, in which there are rules for the production of images, and hence good images and bad ones, we call ineffable space the psychotic position because it is marked by the lack of the law of perspective. The symbolic form of perspective, which binds the subject to its spatial reality seems to not work. There is now no getting it right or wrong, only the continual rearrangement of space

Conclusion: Space as ideology

The aim of this critique of Rowe and Slutzky has been to argue that the transparent screen is the conceptual apparatus that structures the experience of space and subjectivity. It thereby makes the experience of space and subjects possible. The screen is a symbolic form. The invisibility of space is an effect of the transparency of the screen. Without it - the screen and its transparency - objects would not have an appearance to subjects. This critique of Rowe and Slutzky has argued that for them, space is the projection of a plane surface even if it - as with phenomenal transparency - does not follow the geometry of perspective projection. Although they put their finger on the spatial effects of the most radical form of modernism, the template for their conception of space is derived from classical renaissance perspective; and this is because, in addition to being a way to represent space, perspective also corresponds to the way the subject is organized. In the discourse of psychoanalysis, the spatial subject is projective. Their insight was to discern within such a literal spatial practice as architecture, the moment when it lifts itself to the level of phenomena, when architecture ceases to be mute material and it begins to speak. This is the moment it becomes significant. We have argued that there is a sense in which all spatial practice is symbolic, and hence it is possible for any architecture to speak to us about our condition as subjects.

There has been a debate since the 19th century about whether perspective corresponds to reality. Gombrich maintained that we draw in perspective, because that's how we see, and he was not too bothered by the diverges of perspective from binocular optics. And for him, there was no wedge between experience and

and our relation to it. This disengagement of the symbolic order is the hallmark of psychosis. The symbolic order does not work for them; it is - in the terminology of Lacan in *The Psychoses* (1956) - *foreclosed* to them. This disengagement of the symbolic order puts the psychotic in direct relation to the real.

reality. We draw the way we see, and what we see is reality. Perspective is tantamount to optics and thus part of the reality given to us along with gravity and oxygen. You cannot take it or leave it. Panofsky argued to the contrary that perspective did not correspond to experience, which was binocular, fleeting, bounded, etc. Because we use it to represent space, it must therefore be a symbol for space which like any symbol does not have to look like what it symbolizes. It is not quite a symbol either: he compromised by calling it a symbolic form, a form for space which is symbolic as opposed to real or imaginary, which gives it the status of a concept for understanding spatial experience as much as it is a symbol for representing space. I argue here that it is a symbolic form, not because - as Panofsky would have it - it diverges from reality, but, because it is constitutive of the reality of ourselves and our world. Each subject is a single point of projection of a self that comprises perceptions ideas intentions volitions affects desire...¹⁵

It may seem odd to talk about the invisibility of space as if it were symbolic when it is an optical fact. However, the problem is not to understand the optics that underlies vision¹⁶, but to understand vision so that we can communicate visual experience to our self and to others. In order to do this, space and the subject have to have the formal logic of a transparent screen.

The degree to which this symbolic form is not optional is the degree to which it is a precondition for subjectivity as we

¹⁵ E H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1960). And E Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York, Zone Books 1991 (1927)). Cf. also A Perez-Gomez, *Architectural representation and the perspective hinge* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press 1997). And my treatment of this debate in L Holm, *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier: architecture, space, and the construction of subjectivity* (London, Routledge 2010).

¹⁶ To understand what red means we look at renaissance paintings, bullfights, and catsup, and not electromagnetics, even though electromagnetics is the physics underlying red. This is because we are not motion detectors rigged to burglar alarms, but motion detectors for whom the motion detecting of other detectors is meaningful.

know it. The world could have been otherwise, but if this were the case, the I would not be constituted to know it. I have no examples of this experiment in architecture and painting, the visual arts generally, except Le Corbusier's speculations about ineffable space, which seems not to be characterized by transparent depth and hence not to organize subjects into single positioned points of projection. Such experiments would be unrecognizable as space to its inhabitants or to local authorities, planners, and building control; because, like Le Corbusier's ineffable space, it would be material, it would thicken towards opacity, I would not find I in it. In literature, Beckett seems to explore the limits of language as a space that supports a unified and enduring I. In his text, the subject's signifier becomes phenomenally opaque. Beckett has a way of distributing the I in sharp stuttering staccato bursts across his text. We are never sure if it is the same I every time, or if they know each other.¹⁷

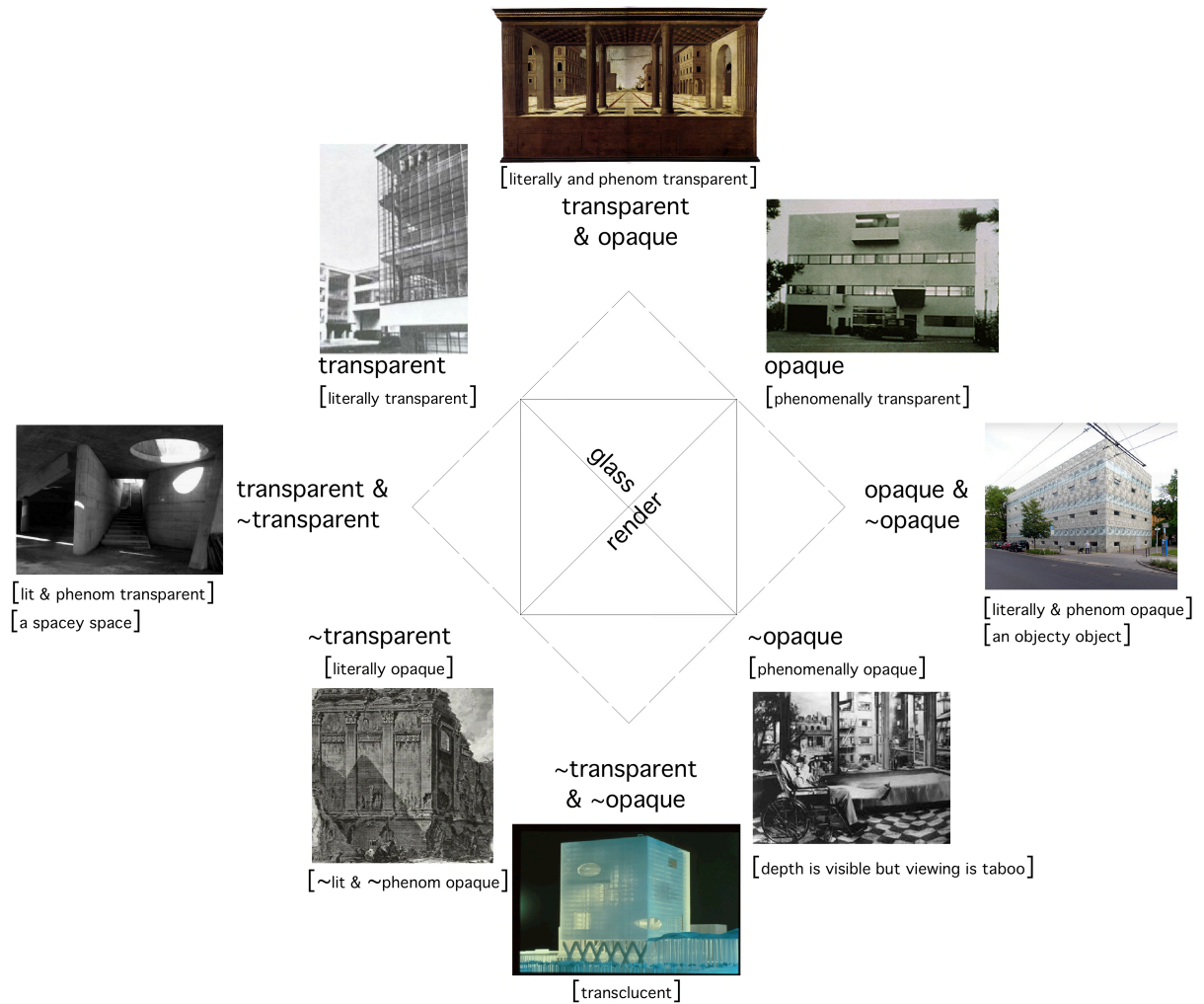
In order for something (optics, any fact about the world) to be brought into the human world of discourse and hence humanized, we must find the language with which to name it and describe it, share it with others. So argued Hannah Arendt, in *The Human Condition* (1958). For Rowe and Slutsky, the surface is the signifier under which space is summoned by others into discourse. Real space, whatever that may be, slippery and unknown (Vidler would say *dark*) because otherwise inaccessible, lies beneath it. Although perspective is not exactly a language, it is the symbolic form by which we communicate visual experience to ourselves and to others. For the subject, it is a matter of how the experiences of different subjects are cross referenced with each other in order to build a collective world. One of the consequences of

¹⁷ 'Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. ...if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.' The beginning and end of Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (1952).

image projection is that we can share images. You cannot have my view, or even my image of a view, but you can come to my position and see what I see, or else I can snap a photo or sketch a perspective and show you my view. We can share views in the same sense that we can share meanings, because there is a public language (words, pictures) for conveying it. In this sense, the proposition that there is space and subjects - a you and a me - is *a priori*. We don't first observe each other out there, and then conclude that we are subjects. It is not an empirical proposition; more like a policy statement. In this sense, perspective is an agreement with others, and the objectivity of space an infinitely cross-checkable intersubjectivity made possible by perspective. In order to be paid up members of humanity, we have to agree to all sorts of symbolic agendas, one of which is that there is a perspective form that organizes space and subjects. If it has the compulsory force of language, it is because, without it, spatial discourse as we know it would be impossible.

If there is something ineffable about transparency, it is precisely at that moment when we realize, in our architectural reveries, that the subject and space coincide. It is to this coincidence between the subject and space - such that they align, superimpose, are transparent to each other - that we attribute the invisibility of space and the subject. In their different media, Le Corbusier and Beckett tarry with breaking the couple between the subject and its space: Le Corbusier touches the limits of space, Beckett the limits of the I. By so doing they arrive at an opacity that marks the limits of experience. With his earlier work - Garches, League of Nations, the purist villas - Le Corbusier did the opposite, he showed us how the subject and space are coupled, how they are both planar, transparent, and coincident. This coincidence is certainly not literal. There is patently no screen in me or in my room. Nor is it phenomenal: the transparency of the Garches headwall is phenomenal precisely because it is literally opaque (there is another Klein diagram to do that maps literal

and phenomenal transparency against literal and phenomenal opacity, which would capture Vidler's category-wrecking translucence), and neither I nor space are opaque. The transparency is ineffable, unsayable, unseeable, because it an effect of the couple that has to precede the saying and the seeing, to make them possible.



[Klein square, a parenthetical mapping of literal & phenomenal transparency of objects]

Political postscript

This thesis about the transparency of space and the subject has consequences for political society. Transparency is the dominate ideology about space, and architecture - the whore and enforcer of power - has more than any other practice

incorporated this ideology into its fabric and instituted it all over the world. It may be most obvious in Haussmann's programs for Paris where the single point perspective boulevard became the way to extend state power into an unruly city - the Situationists knew it, they called it spectacle - but it happens everywhere that there is architecture.

The pervasive surveillance regimes that we find increasingly to be imposed upon us by our governments, are simply an extension of the ideology of transparency of which Haussmann, by different means and technologies, is a salient example. CCTV systems, seeing eye drones, universal identification cards, web auditing and monitoring, urban clearance, and other panopticonic regimes of extreme visibility threaten us by eroding our sense of intimacy. This was the message of Orwell's *1984*, where the state apparatus endeavoured to limit thought by limiting language, and where falling in love (evidence of an internal life) was a crime. Hannah Arendt argued that totalitarian regimes destroy public life by destroying private life. The space of public appearance - the paradigm locus of political life and edification - is only possible if we maintain our intimacy.

A decade after 'Transparency...', Rowe and Koetter published *Collage City* (1978). In this seminal text on the urban imagination, they distinguish two types of city, the collage city and the city of total control. The collage city is a loose assemblage of urban fragments that reflects the incremental development of the city in history. This is a theory of the city as enclave (neighbourhood ghetto quarter): distinct forms of urban fabric are linked to distinct forms of social demographic. Their example is Hadrian's villa which is a composition of independent courtyard buildings, each with a central space walled off from others. The city of total control is a single entity, the result of a big idea rather than many little ones. Their figure for the latter is Versailles which was designed to be viewed from a single

point. Rowe and Koetter relate the collage form to the libertarian democracy comprised of quasi-independent but competing special interest groups, unions, minorities, political associations, chambers of commerce and the like, as if all these groups were placed-based; and the Versailles form to totalitarian regimes where all walks of life are controlled from a single point of power.¹⁸

It is surprising that Rowe did not return to his earlier distinction between the literal and phenomenal in order to develop this thesis. Without the distinction between the literal and the phenomenal, their account of city form and political power is false. Versailles is literally transparent, depending on lines of sight to all corners of the territory; the fragments of Hadrian's villa are literally opaque to each other. But the sense in which the enclave, as a unit of urban and social form, is opaque to the look and power of the despot is usually phenomenal. Most enclaves do not literally have walls around them. The Manhattan grid, is literally transparent. Its straight streets allow you to look forever. But there are clear neighbourhood boundaries that you cross at your peril. We expect phenomenal opacity in the case of the glass wall for which there is an taboo against looking (the self-imposed blind spot of the neurotic). There is a power struggle between the enclave which needs to preserve its phenomenal opacity in order to survive, and the centralized power of the state to which all enclaves must be literally transparent. If the enclave is literally transparent and phenomenally opaque, the normally projective subject is the opposite: literally opaque (the face) and phenomenally transparent (desire, intention, whatever you project on my face).¹⁹

¹⁸ Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press 1978) Cf. the chapter 'Collision City and the Politics of "Bricolage"', pp86-117, for the comparison between the totalitarian regime of the city of total control and the plural democracy of collage city.

¹⁹ It is possible to map all the possibilities for literal/phenomenal transparency/opacity onto the Klein square. Phenomenal opacity is a glass façade that is subject to a taboo against viewing or whose

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March 2013

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transparent surface otherwise disrupts the gaze. The courtyard elevations of New York City apartment buildings are examples of the former. Despite their close proximity, people tend not to stare into each other windows, at least not obviously. This social contract is broken by Jimmy Stewart's photographer in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954); it is this taboo as much as the malevolence of the occupants across the courtyard that spells trouble for Stewart and casts a pall of unease over the movie.