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Multiple Horizons: Phenomenology, Cubism, Architecture

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Multiple Horizons: Phenomenology, Cubism, Architecture

~ PAU PEDRAGOSA ~

ABSTRACT *Phenomenology is often described as a paradigm shift that calls for a re-assessment of inherited themes and concepts. One of its most important contributions is the central role given to the embodied subject as opposed to the conception of the disembodied subject that has dominated philosophy since Descartes. If perspectival painting best represents the paradigm of modern philosophy since the Renaissance, it is the multiple perspectives of Cubist painting that best represent the phenomenological paradigm. While the relationship between phenomenology and art has been widely studied, my aim in this article is to focus on the way in which Cubism represents the embodied, horizontal structure of our perception, and then to discuss the new form of contemporary art installation as an actualization of Cubist principles in the age of digital reproduction. The embodiment of the subject necessarily involves intersubjectivity, for others appear in the subject's contextual frame of public space. While for Arendt the shift from private subjective space to public intersubjective space is effected through dialogue, I argue that it is also effected architecturally, for architecture facilitates dialogue by offering multiple perspectives on common space and shared time. I suggest, finally, that architecture's multiperspectival strategies offer the humanities a useful model of a multi-disciplinary methodology.*

1. RENAISSANCE PAINTING: OBJECTIVE IMAGE AND SINGLE PERSPECTIVE

Our access to reality is always linked to a concrete situation, to a particular point of view, to a perspective that is given to us by our body, our society and our historical moment. However, instead of considering our given time-space as that which *defines* our condition, we usually think of it as a *limitation* we must overcome. Thus to attain objective knowledge we have to distance ourselves from everything that makes us particular, and take an impartial position free of subjective, geographical and historical conditionings.¹ Liberated from our finite situation, we attempt to see things as they are in *themselves*, objectively, that is, not as they are *from our individual perspective* but *from any possible perspective*.²



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This pursuit of objective knowledge, the desire and aspiration of both philosophy, from Descartes through to twentieth-century phenomenology, and science, results in the elevation of the human subject above anything that ties him or her to a particular place. Once disassociated from the concrete situation experienced through the body, the subject becomes a pure observer, or, as Descartes put it, a *res cogitans* or thinking substance, as opposed to the situation, the extended object or substance, the *res extensa*.³ The subject then comprehends himself in two different ways: on the one hand, as an observer that sees and thinks from a distance (thinking substance) and, on the other, as a physical body, as one more thing amongst the other things that occupy the space (extended substance). The human being is thus divided into the Cartesian dualism of a pure subject, the bodiless entity that does not occupy space, and a physical body or extended substance, which is quantifiable and mastered through science and technology.⁴

Thus we have an objective vision of both space and time. Space is conceived as the homogeneous space of the universe. As long as we understand space as a giant—paradoxically infinite—container, we can say, for instance, that we are in a room, inside a building, which is in a city, in a country, in a continent, and so forth to the infinite universe.⁵ Similarly, time is conceived as time of the world, time with a pattern of equal and successive instants that follow one after the other. This succession of equal units can be measured by a calendar or clock, forming spatialised time where each instant corresponds univocally to the definite position of things in space. What the clock measures is therefore the movement of objects in space.⁶

The Renaissance pictorial perspective is the best representation of this objective image of the world. Erwin Panofsky sees this pictorial perspective as the *symbolic form* of the Modern Age precisely because it represents an objective image of the world, which I have characterised as dualist.⁷ Renaissance pictorial perspective, in anticipation of Descartes, concerned itself with our perspective on the things that surround us in concrete situations, and brought about a shift in the concept of the subject and its elevation by transforming the observer that occupies a space with his body into a bodiless subject (an eye reduced to a point) that looks/thinks from a distance;⁸ the observing eye sees a homogeneous space: a grid of tiles on which the “*storia*” takes place.⁹ The eye itself has been excluded from the represented space, displaced to an infinite distance that is represented as the painting’s vanishing point. Renaissance pictorial perspective thus presents both objectified space and the subject that effects this objectification: it fixes both the observer and that which is observed.¹⁰

2. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE: FROM RENAISSANCE PERSPECTIVE TO CUBISM’S PLURALIST PERSPECTIVE

Phenomenology is a critique of the assumptions on which objectivism is constructed. It does not conceive the finite time-space situation as a limitation that has to be overcome and from which we need to distance ourselves, but rather conceives it as the very condition of the possibility of knowledge.¹¹ We could say that the progression from the Renaissance single perspective to the Cubist multiperspective consists in relocating the observer from infinite distance (the vanishing point) to a position within

reality. In other words: *What Cubism achieves by pictorial means is what phenomenology achieves by theoretical means.*¹² Cubism does not represent the world seen by a distanced and immobile subject but by the embodied subject that moves *amongst* objects. Going beyond Panofsky's "Perspective as a Symbolic Form" Cubism may be said to become the multiperspective symbolic form of the new paradigm of postmodernity.

The aim of this shift is thus to bring the subject back to the specific situation from which he had distanced himself in the search for an objective representation of reality.¹³ The primary and immediate relation we have with the world is established with our body, which is not an objective body, seen from the outside, that moves within a quantifiable space and time, but is our *lived body*, sensitive to the qualities of the environment and establishing relations with the people and the things that surround us. These appear in multiple ways depending on the different perspectives that we have on them. The corporal condition of our experience means that we always see the world from an embodied point of view, for we can only capture what is accessible from a particular angle and nothing else. Thus, as Edmund Husserl maintains, we never perceive an object in its entirety but only a part of it, a side, a foreshortening.¹⁴ If we want access to new perspectives, we have to move, change our spatial position to see it from the other side. From this other position we shall have access to other partial and incomplete perspectives.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons of phenomenology is to make us aware of the finitude and partiality of our knowledge and perception of reality. But it is precisely this finitude that characterises the need to complete and round off what has only partly been given. As I can only capture one side of the object, I have the need to capture it as one whole. However, as Husserl explains, the whole object, or the object in itself, is not any of its sides or even the sum of them, it is an object of a different order that transcends perception.¹⁵ To explain our tendency to capture the whole object, Husserl introduces the distinction between "that which appears" and "the appearances."¹⁶ "That which appears" is the object in itself, while "the appearances" are the partialities, the multiple aspects through which we perceive the object. We only have perceptual (and thus cognitive) access to the object "mediated by" or "through" the modes in which it appears.¹⁷ Thus there is no object without the mediation of the plurality of aspects in which it is given, for there is no direct shortcut to the object in itself. Husserl calls the object that is constituted through its mediations intentionality. For him to be faithful to the perceived object means to attend in detail to all of its multiple modes of appearing. When we are engaged in the daily activities of our "natural attitude," the first term of the intentional relation—the plurality of an object's appearances (which is structured, as we shall see, within horizons)—is not thematic, because we direct ourselves to the object itself.

We can gain a better understanding of this fundamental contribution of phenomenology by turning to works of art. The simple comparison between a painting that employs a single perspective and a Cubist painting may lead us to say that the former is realistic, as we can easily identify its represented objects, and the latter is abstract, as it is difficult to identify what it represents. However, as Erwin Panofsky argues, it is precisely the opposite.¹⁸ This is so because from the different ways in which objects are offered to our vision, a perspectival painting selectively presents *only* the formal aspects, the profiles of the spatial form and not, for instance, different aspects and

nuances of colours, which are better thematised by Impressionism.¹⁹ Moreover, the perspective is constructed from a *single* point of view (forgetting that we see with two constantly moving eyes²⁰), thus immobilising the sequence in which the different aspects of things are given to perception. If perspectival apprehension represents our common, “natural” way of perceiving, Cubist representation is more faithful to the process of perception because it comprises a plurality of points of view and captures a plurality of aspects of objects. Thus, paradoxically, a painting employing a single perspective is more abstract than a Cubist painting that employs multiple perspectives in the same sense that our usual ways of perceiving, talking and knowing, are more abstract than philosophical discourse. While philosophy appears to us to be more abstract (as does Cubism), it is in fact more “realistic” in the sense that it is more faithful to things in that it thematises what we usually overlook.

Like phenomenology, which makes us aware of the whole perceptual plurality that normally goes unnoticed, Cubism thematises the appearing of objects, for it is the appearing that mediates and enables what is thematic, that is, the object to be perceived. By thematising the plurality of modes of the appearing of objects, Cubism thus succeeds in indirectly thematising what is usually non-thematic.

3. CUBISM: FROM THE REPRESENTATION OF LIVED SPACE AND TIME TO ART INSTALLATIONS IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

In a Cubist painting and collage we see juxtaposed and overlapping fragments that represent different sides of things, and we can see through them because they are more or less transparent. These fragments represent “the appearances” (the temporal sequence of the different foreshortenings, textures, colours) through which we perceive the objects.²¹ But Cubism not only represents an object from different points of view it also represents its context or horizons. What are the object’s horizons and how does Cubism represent them? To answer this, we first need to describe space and time as experienced by the living corporality that moves within it and then examine how Cubist art represents this experience by pictorial means. When things are not perceived from a distance, but from positions within and among themselves, we need a structure that adequately describes how they appear. This structure of perception can be described by using the concepts of *foreground* and *background* or *horizon structure*.²²

As noted earlier, we always see the world from a point of view; perception is situated by the body at a point in space and can only capture what is accessible from that point.²³ If I want access to new perspectives, I have to move, change my spatial position to see the object from another side. But some sides are present and others are absent. If I walk around or inside the object, my present perception fades to absence and the absent sides emerge to presence. In other words, the visible side of the object is its prominent *form*, while the sides that I have perceived and the ones that I possibly could have perceived (but are now absent) become part of its *background*. Similarly, things that are close to us constitute the foreground, and those things that are distant constitute the background. The prominent side or form of the object appears on a background that we should understand as a *horizon*. Husserl uses the term “horizon” to refer to the possible ways (now absent and part of the non-thematic background) in

which the object can be perceived. Our perception always anticipates the horizons of possible ways in which an object can appear. We start by seeing a precise aspect of the object that stands out from the background and that we capture in a thematic manner. This aspect prefigures the course to be followed by perception, regardless of whether we choose to inspect the object (internal horizon) or return our gaze to the environment (external horizon). For example, the book on the table is the immediate thematic object of my perception, but it is located in a very wide horizon: the table itself and the other objects that surround it, including the radio that can be heard in the background and voices of neighbours talking that I hear through the windows. When I concentrate on the book itself I am also more or less co-conscious of its surroundings.²⁴ This means that I take my present perception of the book as one of a series of possible—but now absent—perceptions (like the table, its surroundings, the sound of the radio, the voices). Each of these can become present and thematic. Thus the horizon is the connected series of the perceptions that I could have if I raised my head, if I moved in that direction, and so forth. It follows from this that perception involves movement and therefore time.

Alongside the spatial horizons, there are the temporal horizons. To describe our internal experience of time, we need to avoid thinking of it objectively, because perception is situated not only in space but also in time. The most basic level of perception consists of the perceivable data that are currently present and that form what Husserl calls the flow of the living present.²⁵ In the lived or immanent time of consciousness, new perceptions that we acquire through corporal movement are added to the immediately previous ones, thus creating trails of what Husserl calls *retentions*. These retentions are the past perceptions that become fainter as they recede from the present and become embedded in the depths of consciousness where they remain available in the form of active memory. Lived time is therefore somewhat like a Cubist canvas where, as we will presently see in more detail, current perceptions are superimposed on the retained ones and become “visible” through their transparency.

Current perceptions not only mix and combine with retentions (passive memory) and memories (active memory), but the perceptual flux associated with my movement contains some more or less familiar schemes or patterns that are repeated in such a way that I can anticipate what will be perceived next. The dynamics of perception confirm my expectations. Along with the retentions of the immediately perceived, the living present also contains *protentions* of what is immediately to be perceived, that is to say, spontaneous prefigurations of the ongoing perceptual development. Without this anticipating component, the meaning of the object as a unity would not be possible. Thus by means of retentions and protentions the living present, the flowing now, has a double intentionality towards the immediate past and the immediate future.²⁶ Protentions and retentions are therefore the temporal horizons of the present.

The phenomenological conception of space and time can be illustrated by a typical Cubist painting where we see juxtaposed and overlapping transparent fragments that represent different sides of things. But Cubism also represents the context of the objects, its horizons. It achieves this by representing aspects of objects that come from distant realities located in different temporal and spatial horizons. While the fragments into which the objects represented in the painting are broken still refer to the objects to which they correspond in reality, they appear on the canvas in a completely new

spatial structure. Represented reality loses its rigid definition, its functionality, as given by common perception, and is transformed into a new articulation that depends not only on the initiative of the artist but also on the world, on the horizon-structure that determines the mode in which things appear. The observer is compelled to transgress the usual procedures of recognition of pictorial representation to find through the association of memories links between the fragments that are not usually seen, and these links occur in horizons that can be elaborated infinitely.

Cubist representation is thus not perspectival but situational.²⁷ Each aspect or fragment of the objects is placed on the canvas according to the positions they occupy in the living space, in its horizon structure. Space in Cubism is not perceived through a formal structure but through its lived structure. It is important to see that the originality of Cubism lies not so much in the formal invention with which it represents this or that object, but in the completely new manner of representing the context, the situational space or the horizons that by definition are never completely thematic because they are always in the background. By representing fragments of objects that belong to different horizons, Cubism succeeds in representing the presence of these horizons.

By representing the lived space of our embodied perception, a Cubist painting represents our embodied condition in contrast to the disembodied subject represented in perspectival painting. But during the twentieth century, artworks were subjected to another form of disembodiment which was brought about by the new technologies of reproduction—mechanical and later digital—that transformed them into siteless copies. At the same time, the consumer of these digital copies was also transformed into disembodied viewer. In the wake of Cubism, we can understand the new form of art installation as a contemporary strategy to establish a situational space for the re-embodiment of the digital reproductions of original artworks, as well as the re-embodiment of the viewer who goes to and moves in and around the space of the installation.

In his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Walter Benjamin discusses the impact of technology on art, and uses the concept of “aura” to distinguish between the original artwork and its reproduction, copy or substitute. He sees this technological transformation as the “loss of aura” of the original artwork. The new virtual technologies of digital reproduction effect a disembodiment of the artwork by removing its original context:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its here and now, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. ... These “here” and “now” of the original constitute the concept of its authenticity.²⁸

What gives originality and authenticity to the work is its relationship to a definite place, and it is this relationship that also places it in history. “Reproduction” thus dislocates the work from the place where it belongs by creating multiple copies of it in the universal, open and homogeneous space of the virtual network of mass circulation. The copy has no place and therefore no history; it lacks authenticity, having lost the aura of the original.²⁹

The disembodied copy correlates with the disembodiment of the sujet. The loss of aura means that the originality of the work of art disappears when it is reproduced in multiple copies to which we have easy access and no longer have to travel to see the artwork in its original site. Nowadays, we wish art to come to us, to be delivered to our doorsteps. The difference between original and copy is defined in terms of our movement, of our embodiment: “If we make our way to the artwork, then it is an original. If we force the artwork to come to us, then it is a copy.” This movement, according to Benjamin, is linked to the figure of the *flâneur* who goes to see things and does not wait for them to come to him. The *flâneur* redresses the loss of aura.³⁰

Benjamin’s theory of aura allows us to understand the art of installation, which by transforming the viewer into a *flâneur*, re-embodies the subject: we need to go to the installation to see the original. The installation is an art form in which not only images and texts play an important role but also the space itself—which is not abstract, but the actual artwork. The images and texts that we find in an installation are reproducible, for we find them in the anonymous circulation of copies on the Internet and the mass media. The difference between the installation and its copies in cyberspace is that the original offers a context, a space for the insertion of these scattered copies. If the loss of aura means the loss of the original context of the work once it has been transported to the no-place of its copies, then the installation allows for the recontextualization of the copies. Installation is, therefore, a “re-auraization” of the copies that then become originals.³¹

The installation can therefore be seen as the actualization of Cubist painting and collage in the age of digital technology. The importance of Cubism, as we’ve seen, lay not so much in its formal invention, but in the new way of representing the situational space of the embodied structure of our perception. Likewise, the originality of installation consists not only in the role of images and texts but in the design of the context that enables the embodiment both of the “floating” images and texts and of the viewer or *flâneur*. The space of the installation gives the scattered copies of mass circulation another meaning in connection with other copies, according to the artist’s intention—as in the Cubist canvas where the fragments representing different objects are articulated in a new living spatial structure. The embeddedness of the images in relation to other images, their mutual incorporation and implication in the space of the installation, opens up a multiplicity of perspectives that is tied to the multiplicity of the installation’s visitors. Cubism develops strategies of representation based on situation and context; these strategies make it possible to transform the representation of abstract space into a representation of a living space. Contemporary art installations similarly develop strategies of design based on situation and context in order to transform the abstract space of the artificial into something living and the repetitive into something unique.³²

4. PUBLIC SPACE: THE CITY AS A WORK OF ART

Having contextualized the embodied subject in space and time, among things, we now turn to the *others* that share the space: the *public space*. The body introduces a decisive element that must be taken into account: our plural condition.³³ The position

that I occupy with my body excludes somebody else from occupying the same position; this gives rise to the necessary plurality of the points of view and different interpretations that others have of the same object. My partial and plural perception of an object is multiplied and enriched by the incorporation of the plurality of points of view that others have of the same object. This involves a shift from my lived, individual experience of space and time to the experience of intersubjective or public space and historical time. According to Hannah Arendt, we are now moving from the private space, the intimate sphere of subjectivity and lived experience, to the public space or the *space of appearance*: “where I see and am seen, I hear and am heard.”³⁴ While for Arendt this shift is effected by dialogue, I argue that it is also effected through the construction and design of public spaces. Architecture and the urban form of the city facilitate public discussion by offering multiple perspectives on shared public space and shared time.

Public space, according to Arendt, is formed by a plurality of people, which is what ensures the objectivity and reality of the world.³⁵ The objectivity that Arendt speaks of is not that of science, but of public accord, of the debate within the plurality of different and conflicting visions of the same object.³⁶ It is impossible to become rooted in public space except pluralistically: where there is no plurality there is no public life, because the fundamental fact that I cannot see an object simultaneously from all points of view means that there are no totalising views. Rootedness is the result of the connections that we maintain with others, with whom we debate different points of view with the purpose of progressively making public other aspects that are otherwise left forgotten in the background, of actualising potentialities, and in this way, of continually enriching the inexhaustible, infinite possibilities of life.

Yet open and plural dialogue does not occur in a vacuum but in a constructed world, materialised in urban and architectonic form. If, as we have seen, Cubism is the art that best represents the inherent plurality of perception by its thematisation of the horizons of the perceptual structure, we can now regard the city as the best mode of presenting the plurality of viewpoints in public space. The city is the exemplary constructed form of public space. Although public space is not limited to the city, it is the paradigm of plural space because it is where we encounter unknown others in an immediately corporal form, as happens in the streets of large cities.³⁷ Besides her conception of public space as the appearing of plural perspectives, Arendt identifies its constitutive aspect as the “common world,”³⁸ which is characterized by durability and permanence.³⁹ What allows this permanence is the array of constructed works, which, unlike consumer goods, do not disappear as fast as they are produced.⁴⁰

Among the more durable objects in public space the artwork is particularly significant. Its singularity lies in the fact that it is “the most intensely worldly of all tangible things” because it is more durable and permanent, unlike any usable object could be: “it is as though worldly stability had become transparent in the permanency of art. Something immortal achieved by mortal hands has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read.”⁴¹ The permanence of the artwork is the consequence of its inexhaustible or excessive presence that always demands that we return to it.⁴² We reread literary texts and continuously recontemplate the same images because there is always something else to be read or seen, with each new reception something new emerges, new interpretations always present

themselves. Artworks do not have any informative or usable function, for had they had any their presence would have been completed once they fulfilled the given function. Throughout history, this excessive, inexhaustible presence gives art its exemplary durability and worldliness. It literally “makes a world” by expanding the plurality of perspectives: it creates new and unforeseen possibilities of seeing things and interacting with them. This plurality of perspectives precludes a coherent and unitary representation because multiple viewpoints form an open horizon, always expandable, susceptible to subsequent completions. Thus the plurality of perspectives and durability, which, according to Arendt defines the work of art, also defines its intersubjective character: my partial perception of a work is enriched by the incorporation of other points of view to the same work.

The same can be said of the city: it is “the most intensely worldly of all tangible things.” It is where “worldly stability becomes transparent.”⁴³ Following Benjamin we can compare the experience of the city with that of an artwork. What he discovers in the new form of urban experience and the role of the *flâneur* is a new type of aesthetic experience that corresponds to the that of the artwork in the age of mechanical reproduction. Benjamin explores the ways in which things appear in urban spaces with their streets crowded with people, images, texts and all types of signs characteristic of modernity.⁴⁴ The aesthetic experience produced by an urban space includes the proliferation of copies and images of original works, and arises either through the *flânerie*, the movement of the embodied subject across the city streets, the cinematic projection or, nowadays, the art of installation. This proliferation of reproductions of artworks thus allows for a multiplicity of ways of appearing that does not imply a loss or fragmentation of the objects into unconnected parts. The opposite is the case, since, as we have seen, it is through the plurality of images (the “ways of appearing”) that the thing (“that which appears”) becomes accessible. Thus, Benjamin, in showing the ongoing presence of the singular thing mediated by the multiplicity of its images, reminds us that the thing itself always exceeds what a single image or a single appearing can show.⁴⁵ The proliferation of images that the city exhibits enriches the public space by means of new perspectives. The city appears as a collage or montage in which images are overlaid by other images or texts. We can therefore regard the city as a paradigmatic presentation of the plurality of viewpoints in public space.

5. PUBLIC SPACE: TEMPORAL DEPTH AND ARCHITECTONIC TRACES

Benjamin, however, did not see the modern city only as a work of art but saw it as the place where history is inscribed with urban traces or imprints.⁴⁶ These traces present the temporal depth of public space: the plurality of visions on a shared past and future.

We cannot ignore the temporal dimension of public space. Public space consists in a living temporalisation, in a constant debate about possible pasts and future projects. When public space is not animated and vitalised by debate, it is a dead space, abstracted from life.

As happens with the space lived in first person, in the common intersubjective space there is also a temporal structure. But there is a fundamental difference between

private time (the internal consciousness of time) and historical or collective time. To “see” time I have to look inside myself and consult my memory and my anticipations, but I cannot access the private time of others. I only have access to others through their appearing in the public space that we share, but in space we never see time. In space we can never see the past, which has already disappeared, or the future, which is yet to appear. So at a given point of time we only perceive spatial relations. If retentions and protentions, memories and projects always occur in internal, privately lived time, how then can we share common future projects and a common past?

The answer, according to Arendt, as we have seen, is that the access from private space to public space is conducted through dialogue. Private perspectives thus meet in the public space and are mediated by dialogue and debate. But it is also architecture that enables this shift or exchange. On the one hand, architecture reveals perceptual connections between the interior and the exterior of buildings, between the private (my intimate experience, memories and projects), and the public space (a shared history and future). Private and public spaces are thus architectonically intertwined. On the other hand, the temporal depth of public space—a shared past and future projects—are visible because of their architectonic traces. Thus architecture visually presents such traces by being designed for multiple perspectives and uses: it enables access to public space by means of the transparency and collage of overlapping layers that belong to different spatial and temporal horizons.

Let us first consider the horizontal structure of public time. As with the case of perceiving an object only a part of which I can apprehend from my location in a point in space, so too from my location at a point in time, I cannot perceive all the events of my past or the ones that I anticipate. The very same horizontal structure (or structure of form and ground) that operates in my experience of internal time allows me to comprehend collective time: a shared history and shared projects. Past, present and future mutually implicate each other. This process functions as follows: the past that I bring to the foreground—that I want to remember—is possible from the future and, conversely, the future that I shed light on is fixed by the past.⁴⁷ In the present, I continually select the past that I want to remember and the future that I project. Firstly, then, the future determines the past. The projects shared by the members of a society express the future they want. These common projects determine what needs to be remembered from their collective history, what historic form (what narration, heroic deeds, relevant characters, monuments, etc.) is brought forward from the background of their past in order to prepare the projected future. Secondly, however, the past determines the future, for the shared past determines the project we want to achieve, makes it stand out from the background formed by all possible futures. The history that is remembered is the basis for anticipating the future, it provides the categories by which we interpret what we want to achieve in the future. Finally, the present is where the other two temporal dimensions meet. Since personal memories and projects always occur in time that is lived interiorly, privately, they can only be shared in the present of the public space. This is precisely the place where this interiority becomes visible and public and, therefore, can become the subject of dialogue. Without public space, there would be no collective time.

Thus the importance of public space resides in the fact that it comes to life through its temporal depth. The collective past and future are debated in the present.

In a democratic society, the past and the future, memories and private projects—whether personal or of different groups—are discussed in the present of the public space where the two other temporal dimensions meet.

If plurality and debate define public space, then the imposition of a single point of view, of an official story, leads to the destruction of space. Public space is destroyed when reality is seen as a single aspect and is presented from a single perspective.⁴⁸ This happens in both tyrannies and mass societies. In the first case because there is one single point of view: the official truth of unchallenged power, imposes by force a single past and future through censorship and manipulation of the historical archives. In the second case, because each person repeats and disseminates their neighbour's perspective as public opinion. According to Arendt, in both cases “men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience.”⁴⁹ Without access to the open space of public debate, private life becomes the only refuge, there are only individual memories and projects or those from marginalised groups that are denied the right of public expression and that do not have the option of becoming visible or vindicating their memories and future projects.

As public space is plural by definition, it is enriched when the different interests from marginalised groups, which were previously destined to inhabit the invisible space of their privacy, are incorporated into the debate. This enrichment occurs when they enter into the public space and “co-participate in a common world that allows them to show what wasn't seen before, to add to the common debate what wasn't heard before.”⁵⁰ The result is a democratisation and vitalisation of this space.

The point I want to emphasise is that this democratisation of public space is made visible through architecture and the urban form. Benjamin, as noted earlier, saw the modern city as inscribed with traces or imprints, and it is these that allow us to comprehend the temporal structure of the public space by making historical depth public and accessible to all. Collective memory is thus deposited in successive strata that continuously rewrite, as in a palimpsest, the urban fabric.⁵¹ The top layers preserve something of that on which they are constructed. In this way, despite the fact that some things might have been forgotten, the city preserves past events, keeping them, so to speak, in readiness to be awakened, to be brought to life through common projects. Traces, like memories engraved in stone, can be recuperated to reveal new aspects. Architecture is able to embody such traces in new buildings so that the history inscribed in them, overlapping with other temporal layers, is seen in a new light. Thus, by designing multiperspectives and multiuses of this embodied history, architecture reveals the temporal depth that gives life to the constructed space of the city.

The city can therefore be perceived as a kind of Cubist painting. The perceived aspects of an object that occur in temporal succession are retained in the present. Cubism, as we saw, represents these aspects as successive sides that are overlapped but visible through transparency. In the same way, the urban fabric is formed by historical fragments that overlap. The *flâneur*, strolling about the city streets, aimlessly and leisurely, recuperates the past life of the things that inhabit its complex urban fabric. If Cubism successfully evokes the presence of different horizons through the representation of facets of objects that belong to distant horizons, the city too may be said to

succeed in evoking the presence of different temporal horizons through the perception of different strata of its past.⁵²

The recovery of temporal depth by means of traces reveals another aspect of the city—the relation between private and public spaces. We have seen that public space disappears when there is only private space, when, as Arendt puts it, people “are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience.” Public space comes to life through the private temporality (of the individual or group) that is exposed in the public light. Private and public spheres are intertwined like the subjectively lived temporality and its coming to light in the present of the public space. In architecture this intertwining is represented by the characteristic transparency of modern buildings.⁵³ In other words, it is the transparency, the same transparency already employed by Cubism, that reveals perceptual connections beyond those established by the functionality of daily life, linking distant objects from different horizons, from the interior and exterior of the private and public spheres.

A striking example of this is found in Le Corbusier’s terrace solarium of the Baistegui apartment in Paris, where rather than using transparency he used fragmentation and collage. The terrace presents simultaneously an open interior and a closed exterior. The grass carpet and the opening of the space to the sky signifies the exterior, while the furniture and the fireplace signifies the interior. At the same time, the association between the fireplace and the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, partially visible at a distance, leads us to further associate the domestic, the private, the public and the monumental. The solarium thus opens itself to a series of readings in which individual elements are fragments that reveal the implicit significance of inhabiting a room, a city, and nature.⁵⁴ Regarding this terrace, we can repeat what Arendt says of the Paris Benjamin lived in and theorised about: It is “an *interieur* open space with the arch of the sky as a majestic roof.”⁵⁵

THE HUMANITIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF MULTIDISCIPLINARITY

The use of multiple perspectives in art, architecture and the city developed during the twentieth century in parallel with phenomenology, which replaced the single perspective of Renaissance painting and its objective representation of the world. The double abstraction in Renaissance art of both the observer and the observed also applies to the object of investigation and the subject that carries out the investigation in the natural sciences, where, as James Mensch says, “we abstract from the embodiment of both the scientist and nature.”⁵⁶ Scientists become abstracted in the sense that they can conduct the same experiment independently of their embodied cultural background. Similarly, the physical world is abstracted from the “secondary qualities” of bodies, such as colours, tastes and smells, so as to explain them in terms of universal laws that can be measured and calculated mathematically.

In contrast to the exact natural sciences, the humanities involve another kind of understanding. Instead of explaining things “through observing and abstracting,” the humanities interpret “through embodying and particularizing.”⁵⁷ This kind of understanding arises when the observer is resituated within reality so as to grasp it in its concrete complexity, without falling into the reductionism of abstract objectification.

Here the task of the embodied subject is to perform a counter-movement of concretion within the reality that surrounds him. I have tried to show how painting, architecture and urban forms enable this kind of understanding by means of embodiment and multiple perspectives. Overlapping, mobile points of view represent aspects of different objects located in multiple spatial and temporal horizons. Art, architecture and urban forms thus offer a model for understanding complex realities that may be a useful method for the humanities.

I would like to conclude by pointing out the potential benefits of this approach. The “human scientist” finds herself within the situation that she wants to understand. She forms part of the object of research—she is not distant, abstracted from it—but is fully engaged with it. The problem, however, is how to universalise this knowledge or experience without reducing it to an abstraction. We can compare multi-perspective representation with the mapping of a region, when we try to grasp it not from an external, privileged point of view but from the surface of the terrain.⁵⁸ This understanding from the surface has a certain kind of objectivity, for like the coordinates of a map, it is achieved through the interconnections and relations between the parts that form it. A single viewpoint is not enough to obtain a view of the entire region; what we need are multiple points of view from different positions within the landscape, views that partially overlap with others. It is only by completing this process of overlaying the multiple views of the same landscape that the whole can be comprehended.

If, then, the main characteristic of this representation is the interconnection of multiple points of view that enables the mapping of a complex field, whether physical or conceptual, it can surely be a useful model for multidisciplinary research. A multidisciplinary map of a particular subject can only be produced by connecting different points of view from multiple landmarks through a process of *flânerie*, of travelling and traversing along and across its conceptual region. It is only by moving, looking, and relooking, that a situation can be understood and represented. We should therefore not seek explanations from a single privileged point of view but rather look at a wide field of relations in which the subject matter can be localized (*Erörten* in German means ‘to explain’, with *Ort* meaning ‘place’). To explain something thus implies to put it in its place, to put it in relation with other things that appear in its horizons, spatial as well as temporal. As I have tried to argue throughout this essay, multi-perspective representations—in philosophy, in art, and in the modern city—thus proceed by interconnection rather than by reduction, by interdependence rather than by simplification.

NOTES

1. James Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood: Alterity and the Phenomenology of Obligation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 51: “The understanding fostered by the sciences is global. Scientists all over the world share their results, collaborate, and make progress together. The universal understanding that science expresses ignores racial and political boundaries. Crossing borders without difficulty, its collective enterprise declares itself to be open to anyone independently of his or her cultural background.”
2. Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49, 50. Putnam calls this perspective “externalist realism”: “The world consists of some

fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is. ... I shall call this perspective the externalist perspective, because its favorite point of view is a God's Eye point of view." Opposed to this, Putnam vindicates the internalist point of view: "There is no God's Eye point of view that we can know or usefully imagine; there are only the various points of view of actual persons reflecting various interests and purposes that their descriptions and theories subserve."

3. René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, ed. Charles Adam et Paul Tannery, in *Œuvres de Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), vol. 6, 33: "Next, I examined attentively what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed. ... From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist" (my translation).
4. Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood*: "Only the 'I' of the 'I think'—the 'I' that grasps the primary, numerable qualities of bodies—is taken into account. This is the 'I,' Descartes assures us, that can be considered apart from the body. The gain here is in the universality of our understanding. Since selfhood is reduced to the status of a disembodied, pure observer, each observer is substitutable for any other. Each can perform the same crucial experiments and observe the same results, since each limits himself to the selfhood that is a correlate of these abstract and measurable aspects of reality. There is, then, a double abstraction that makes possible the universality of science. We abstract from the embodiment of both the scientist and nature. The nature that is the same for everyone is the nature that is graspable in terms of universal, mathematically formulatable laws; this is the nature that has been stripped of its sensuously embodied presence. The same holds for the scientist whose observations can be universally confirmed. All the cultural and physical particularities that set this individual apart have been discounted" (52).
5. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Gesamtausgabe 2, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann GmbH, 1976), 54. See also Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *El hombre y el espacio*, trans. Jaime López de Asiain y Martín (Barcelona: Ed. Labor, 1969), 23, 24; originally published as *Mensch und Raum* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1963.)
6. For the objective (or common) concept of time, see Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §§78–82.
7. Erwin Panofsky, *La perspectiva como forma simbólica*, trans. Virginia Careaga (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2008), 24; originally published as *Die Perspektive als "Symbolische Form,"* ed. Friz Saxl. Vorträge (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1927): "If perspective is not a factor of value, it is surely a factor of style. Indeed, it may even be characterised as (to extend Ernst Cassirer's felicitous term to the history of art) one of those "symbolic forms" in which "spiritual meaning is attached to a concrete, material sign and intrinsically given to this sign" (this and all subsequent quotations from this book are my translations).
8. Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 64–78.
9. Panofsky, *La perspectiva como forma simbólica*, 39: "It is not too much to claim that a pattern of tiles used in this sense (pictorial motif that will henceforth be repeated and modified with a fanaticism only now entirely comprehensible) represents the first example of a coordinate system: for it illustrates the modern 'systematic space' in an artistically concrete sphere, well before it had been postulated by abstract mathematical thought."
10. Panofsky, *La perspectiva como forma simbólica*, 49. "The history of perspective may be understood with equal justice as a triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control; it is as much a consolidation and systematization of the external world, as an extension of the domain of the self."
11. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 153. As Heidegger says, we are not disinterested spectators but actors committed to, and in, the world. However, what characterises a situation or perspective (our historical world) is that we can never find it in front of us, as in that case the

situation would no longer be a situation, a point of view, it would become an object of knowledge, which then would not determine us anymore; on the contrary, it would be we who determine it through a pre-established method. But if we cannot exit from a situation, then we can never truly know it. As Heidegger says, what is important is not to exit this circle (hermeneutic circle), but to enter it adequately.

12. What we say about Cubism can be said of art in general, especially of painting; this is Eliane Escoubas's claim in "Painting," in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, ed. Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree (Heidelberg: Springer Dordrecht, 2010), 251: "Here painting would put into work the 'how' (*das Wie*)—the *eidōs* (aspect)—insofar as the aspect is *no being*, but *the appearing of that which appears*." See also Tani Toru, "Appearances," in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, 18.
13. This aim is also that of human science, as Mensch puts it: "What is required is a shift in our paradigms. We must move from the scientific model of *understanding through observing and abstracting* to one of *understanding through embodying and particularizing*. A corresponding shift is required in the notion of the self that understands. The observing self distinguishes itself from its object, which it regards at a distance. In Descartes's paradigm, this self is autonomous and disembodied. It grasps its objects, not through the senses, but through the understanding that abstracts, counts and measures. The embodying self, by contrast, understands through overcoming the distance between itself and its object. Its understanding is through its own states. ... They express what is common to its sensuously embodied environment. The paradigm here is understanding through flesh. Universalization, rather than abstracting from the fact of having an embodied standpoint, takes flesh as its prior basis" (*Ethics and Selfhood*, 54).
14. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Band I, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Husserliana 3/1, ed. Karl Schuhmann (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 86–89. Husserl calls these parts, sides or foreshortenings "Abschattungen;" for a commentary, see Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 89–93.
15. Husserl, *Ideen*, §41.
16. Edmund Husserl, *Studien zur Arithmetik und Geometrie*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Husserliana 21, ed. Ingeborg Strohmeier (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 282: "The representation of the identity of the object [is] mediated. I have a sensation of unequal angles, yet I judge them as equal. The square must 'appear' with unequal angles [in such and such relations], when it should have equal angles. The parallelogram is the appearance of the square, and represents the square to me."
17. Toru, "Appearances," 18.
18. Panofsky, *La perspectiva como forma simbólica*, 14: "Exact perspectival construction is a systematic abstraction from the structure of this psychophysiological space. For it is not only the effect of perspectival construction, but indeed its intended purpose, to realize in the representation of space precisely that homogeneity and boundlessness foreign to the direct experience of that space. In a sense, perspective transforms psychophysiological space into mathematical space. It negates the differences between front and back, between right and left, between bodies and intervening space ("empty" space), so that the sum of all parts of space and all its contents are absorbed into a single *quantum continuum*."
19. Husserl, *Ideen*, §41, 85. Husserl differentiates between aspects or nuances (*Abschattungen*) of form and colour.
20. Panofsky, *La perspectiva como forma simbólica*, 14, 15: "[Perspective construction] forgets that we see not with a single fixed eye but with two constantly moving eyes."
21. Arnold Gehlen, *Imágenes de época. Sociología y estética de la pintura moderna*, trans. J. F. Yvars and Vicente Jarque (Barcelona: Península, 1994), 139: "In this way many of the famous paradoxical novelties that were introduced by Cubism are explained, for instance, the procedure of offering several simultaneous points of view of the same thing in the same painting: precisely, the merely optical reference is not presupposed, but *the thing in itself*, to the *essence* of which belongs the quality of uncovering itself through its different facets..."

- [Cubism] rehabilitates the very same singular object in the array of all its properties" (my translation from the Spanish). Originally published as *Zeit-Bilder. Zur Soziologie und Ästhetik der modernen Malerei* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1960).
22. James Mensch, *Embodiments: From the Body to the Body Politic* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 25. See also Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood*, 155.
 23. For analyses of the perception of an object in space, see Husserl, *Ideen*, §§41–44; for a systematic summary of these analyses, see Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations*, 86–93.
 24. Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 97.
 25. Husserl, *Ideen*, §81, 182. The main points he had reached on immanent time were already summarized in his lessons of 1905–10 (Husserliana 10). Later, Husserl confesses his dissatisfaction with those results, and picks up the theme in the so-called *Bernau Manuscripts of 1917–18* (Husserliana 33), and in the courses combined together as *Analysis of Passive Synthesis* from the years 1920–21, 1923, and 1925–26 (Husserliana 11).
 26. Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis: aus Vorlesungs und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918–1926*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Husserliana 11, ed. Margot Fleischer (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), §27, 125.
 27. Dalibor Vésely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 338.
 28. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 214–15; originally published as "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), vol. 1, pt. 2.
 29. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 62.
 30. Groys, *Art Power*, 63.
 31. Groys, *Art Power*, 64: "Because the distinction between original and copy is entirely topological and situational one, all the documents placed in the installation become originals."
 32. Groys, *Art Power*, 64, 65: "To be an original and posses and aura means the same thing as to be alive. ... The practices of art documentation and of installation... develop strategies... of inscription based on situation and context, which make it possible to transform the artificial into something living and the repetitive into something unique."
 33. Mensch, *Embodiments*, 5.
 34. Hannah Arendt, *La condición humana*, trans. Ramon Gil Novales (Barcelona: Paidós, 1993), 59; originally published as *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1958): "[The term 'public' means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (all quotations from this book are my translation from the Spanish).
 35. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 59, 60: "For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality. ... The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves."
 36. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 67: "Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the 'common nature' of all men that constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object. If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality."
 37. Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 232: "The city, which is to say, the concrete space of human beings together, is the space in which we are constantly engaged in a process of negotiation of self and other, through the relatedness to one another in our corporeality, including the corporeality of speech, and that is enabled through our mutual engagement with the multiple present thing."
 38. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 62: "This world... is related to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands. ... To live in the world means essentially that a world of things is

between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.”

39. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 64: “Only the existence of a public realm and the world’s subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence.”
40. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 107, 108: “Viewed as part of the world, the products of work—and not the products of labor—guarantee the permanence and durability without which a world would not be possible at all. It is within this world of durable things that we find the consumer goods through which life assures the means of its own survival. Needed by our bodies and produced by its labouring... these things for incessant consumption appear and disappear in an environment of things that are not consumed but used.”
41. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 185.
42. Mensch, *Embodiments*, 82.
43. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 185.
44. Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, 228–30.
45. Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, 230: “If the focus in Benjamin’s work is said to be on the image, then the image can be understood either in terms of a mode of presence of the thing or its absence. Understood as the mode by which the thing is present, then the image, which is never a single image, but always multiple, can be said to allow a coming into presence of the very multiplicity that is already given in the thing. ... What the proliferation of the image can enable—whether that proliferation arises through the movement of the city-street or the cinematic projection—is a realization of the manner in which the thing always supports a multitude of images, without the necessary loss of the thing itself. Indeed, it is through that proliferation that the thing as thing is itself made available.”
46. Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, 231.
47. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §65. Heidegger calls temporal “ecstasies” a past, present and future, in the sense that each is outside itself in the others, forming a unity or original intertwining. Temporality is not obtained as a sum of the ecstasies, but by each being permanently dislocated in the others. Here I am following James Mensch’s paper, “Remembering and Forgetting,” presented at the World O.P.O Conference, “Reason and Life: The Responsibility of Philosophy,” Segovia, Spain, 19–23 September 2011.
48. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 67: “This can happen under conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case with tyrannies. But it may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspectives of his neighbour. In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience.”
49. Arendt, *La condición humana*, 67.
50. Jacques Rancière, *El espectador emancipado*, trans. Ariel Dilon (Castellón: Ellago Ediciones, 2010), 64; originally published as *Le spectateur émancipé* (La Fabrique éditions, 2008).
51. Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, 231: “Benjamin’s project, then, is one that is directed at the constant excavation of such traces, and the recuperation of the lives of things in the life of the city.”
52. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), Convolute M2, 4; originally published as *Das Passagen-Werk*, Band 5. *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982).
53. Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, 232: “The idea of the thing that emerges here, and that is tied always to multiplicity... is actually an idea that is essentially bound to a certain conception of the public realm that is exemplified in... the specific form of the built city. The theme of transparency that one finds so prominent in Benjamin (the transparency that he takes to be an essential characteristic of modernity) is, once again, not a transparency that is to be understood in terms of a loss of self, other, or of thing, but rather in

terms of the essentially embeddedness of things, their nesting, in relation to other things, of their mutual incorporation and implication. Moreover, the multiplicity of the thing is directly tied to the multiplicity of the public realm which is itself made possible through its unification in the thing as singular.”

54. Vésely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*, 344.

55. Arendt, Hannah. *Hombres en tiempos de oscuridad*, trans. Claudia Ferrari (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1992), 159; originally published as *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

56. Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood*, 54.

57. Mensch, *Ethics and Selfhood*, 54.

58. See Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 34, 35. According to Malpas all philosophical thinking is topological.