
Philosophy and the City

Having contextualized the 'cavalier' attitude mentioned at the beginning, particular aspects and problems concerning the urban can now be emphasized. In order to take up a radically critical analysis and to deepen the urban problematic, philosophy will be the starting point. This will come as a surprise. And yet, has not frequent reference to philosophy been made in the preceding pages? The purpose is not to present a *philosophy of the city*, but on the contrary, to refute such an approach by giving back to the whole of philosophy its place in history: that of a *project* of synthesis and totality which philosophy as such cannot accomplish. After which the *analytical* will be examined, that is, the ways fragmentary sciences have highlighted or partitioned urban reality. The rejection of the synthetic propositions of these specialized, fragmentary, and particular sciences will enable us – to pose better – in *political terms* – the problem of synthesis. During the course of this progress one will find again features and problems which will reappear more clearly. In particular, the opposition between use value (the city and urban life) and exchange value (spaces bought and sold, the consumption of products, goods, places and signs) will be highlighted.

For philosophical meditation aiming at a totality through speculative systematization, that is, classical philosophy from Plato to Hegel, the city was much more than a secondary theme, an object among others. The links between philosophical thought and urban life appear clearly upon reflection, although they need to be made explicit. The city and the town were not for philosophers and philosophy a simple objective condition, a sociological context, an exterior element. Philosophers have thought the city: they have brought to language and concept urban life.

Let us leave aside questions posed by the oriental city, the Asiatic mode of production, 'town and country' relations in this mode of production, and lastly the formation of ideologies (philosophies) on this base. Only the Greek and Roman antique city from which are derived societies and civilizations known as 'Western' will be considered. This city is generally the outcome of a *synoecism*, the coming together of several villages and tribes established on this territory. This unit allows the development of division of labour and landed property (money) without however destroying the collective, or rather 'communal' property of the land. In this way a community is constituted at the heart of which is a minority of free citizens who exercise power over other members of the city: women, children, slaves, foreigners. The city links its elements associated with the form of the communal property ('common private property', or 'privatized appropriation') of the active citizens, who are in opposition to the slaves. This form of association constitutes a democracy, the elements, of which are strictly hierarchical and submitted to the demands of the oneness of the city itself. It is the democracy of non-freedom (Marx). During the course of the history of the antique city, private property pure and simple (of money, land and slaves) hardens, concentrates, without abolishing the rights of the city over its territory.

The separation between town and country takes place among the first and fundamental divisions of labour, with the distribution of tasks according to age and sex (the biological division of labour), with the organization of labour according to tools and skills (technical division). The social division of labour between town and country corresponds to the separation between material and intellectual labour, and consequently, between the natural and the spiritual. Intellectual labour is incumbent upon the city: functions of organization and direction, political and military activities, elaboration of theoretical knowledge (philosophy and sciences). The whole divides itself, separations are established, including the separation between the *Physics* and the *Logos*, between theory and practice, and in practice, the separations between *praxis* (action on human groups), *poiesis* (creation of 'oeuvres'), *techne* (activities endowed with techniques and directed towards product). The countryside, both practical reality and representation, will carry images of nature, of being, of the innate. The city will carry images of effort, of will, of subjectivity, of contemplation, without these representations becoming disjointed

from real activities. From these images confronted against each other great symbolisms will emerge. Around the Greek city, above it, there is the *cosmos*, luminous and ordered spaces, the apogee of place. The city has as centre a hole which is sacred and damned, inhabited by the forces of death and life, times dark with effort and ordeals, the *world*. The Apollonian spirit triumphs in the Greek city, although not without struggle, as the luminous symbol of reason which regulates, while in the Etruscan-Roman city what governs is the demonic side of the urban. But the philosopher and philosophy attempt to reclaim or create totality. The philosopher does not acknowledge separation, he does not conceive that the world, life, society, the cosmos (and later, history) can no longer make a Whole.

Philosophy is thus born from the city, with its division of labour and multiple modalities. It becomes itself a specialized activity in its own right. But it does not become fragmentary, for otherwise it would blend with science and the sciences, themselves in a process of emerging. Just as philosophy refuses to engage in the opinions of craftsmen, soldiers and politicians, it refutes the reasons and arguments of specialists. It has totality as fundamental interest for its own sake, which is recovered or created by the system, that is, the oneness of thought and being, of discourse and act, of nature and contemplation, of the world (or the cosmos) and human reality. This does not exclude but includes meditation on *differences* (between Being and thought, between what comes from nature and what comes from the city, etc.). As Heidegger expressed it, the *logos* (element, context, mediation and end for philosophers and urban life) was simultaneously the following: to put forward, gather together and collect, then to recollect and collect oneself, speak and say, disclose. This gathering is the harvest and even its conclusion. 'One goes to collect things and brings them back. Here sheltering dominates and with it in turn dominates the wish to preserve . . . The harvest is in itself a choice of what needs a shelter.' Thus, the harvest is already *thought out*. That which is gathered is put in reserve. To say is the act of collection which gathers together. This assumes the presence of 'somebody' before which, for whom and by whom is expressed the being of what is thus successful. This presence is produced with clarity (or as Heidegger says, with 'non-mystery'). The city linked to philosophy thus gathers by and in its *logos* the wealth of the territory, dispersed activities and people, the spoken and the written (of which each assumes already its collection

and recollection). It makes *simultaneous* what in the countryside and according to nature takes place and passes, and is distributed according to cycles and rhythms. It grasps and defends 'everything'. If philosophy and the city are thus associated in the dawning logos (reason), it is not within a subjectivity akin to the Cartesian '*cogito*'. If they constitute a system, it is not in the usual way and in the current meaning of the term.

To the organization of the city itself can be linked the primordial whole of urban form and its content, of philosophical form and its meaning: a privileged centre, the core of a political space, the seat of the logos governed by the logos before which citizens are 'equal', the regions and distributions of space having a rationality justified before the logos (for it and by it).

The logos of the Greek city cannot be separated from the philosophical logos. The *œuvre* of the city continues and is focused in the work of philosophers, who gather opinions and viewpoints, various *œuvres*, and think them simultaneously and collect differences into a totality: urban places in the cosmos, times and rhythms of the city and that of the world (and inversely). It is therefore only for a superficial historicity that philosophy brings to language and concept urban life, that of the city. In truth, the city as emergence, language, meditation comes to theoretical light by means of the philosopher and philosophy.

After this first interpretation of the internal link between the city and philosophy, let us go to the European Middle Ages. *It begins from the countryside*. The Roman city and the Empire have been destroyed by Germanic tribes which are both primitive communities and military organizations. The feudal property of land is the outcome of the dissolution of this sovereignty (city, property, relations of production). Serfs replace slaves. With the rebirth of cities there is on the one hand the feudal organization of property and possession of land (peasant communities having a customary possession and lords having an 'eminent' domain as it will later be called), and on the other hand, a corporate organization of crafts and urban property. Although at the beginning seigneurial tenure of land dominates it, this double hierarchy contains the demise of this form of property and the supremacy of wealth in urban property from which arises a deep conflict, basic to medieval society. 'The necessity to ally themselves against the plunderer lords associated themselves together; the need for common market halls at a time when industry was craft, when serfs in breach

of their bondage and in competition with each other were flooding to the increasingly rich cities, the whole of feudal organization was giving birth to the corporations (or guilds). Small capitals, slowly saved by isolated craftsmen, their numbers stable in the middle of a growing population, developed a system of journeymen and apprentices which established in the cities a hierarchy similar to that of the countryside' (Marx). In these conditions theology subordinates philosophy. The latter no longer meditates on the city. The philosopher (the theologian) deliberates upon the *double hierarchy*. He gives it shape, with or without taking conflicts into account. The symbols and notions relative to the *cosmos* (spaces, the hierarchy of matter in that space) and to the *world* (the actualization of finished matter, hierarchies in time, descent or fall, ascension and redemption) erase the consciousness of the city. From the moment when there are not two but three hierarchies (feudal landed property, guild organization, the king and his State apparatus), thought takes again a critical dimension. The philosopher and philosophy find themselves again, no longer having to choose between the Devil and the Lord. Philosophy will not however recognize its link to the city, although the rise of rationalism accompanies the rise of capitalism (commercial and banking, then industrial), and the development of cities. This rationalism is attached either to the State or to the individual.

For Hegel, at the height of speculative, systematic and contemplative philosophy, the unity between the perfect Thing, that is, the Greek city, and the Idea, which animates society and the State, this admirable whole, has been irremediably broken by historic becoming. In modern society, the State subordinates these elements and materials, including the city. The latter, however remains as a sort of subsystem in the total philosophico-political system, with the system of needs, that of rights and obligations, and that of the family and estates (crafts and guilds), that of art and aesthetics, etc.

For Hegel, philosophy and the 'real' (practical and social) are not, or rather, are no longer external to each other. Separations disappear. Philosophy is not satisfied to meditate upon the real, to attempt the link up of the real and the ideal: it fulfills itself by achieving the ideal: the rational. The real is not satisfied with giving excuse to reflection, to knowledge, to consciousness. During a history which has a meaning – which has this meaning – it becomes rational. Thus the real and the rational tend towards each other; each from their own side moves

towards an identity thus acknowledged. The rational is basically philosophy, the philosophical system. The real is society and law and the State which cements the edifice by crowning it. Consequently, in the modern State, the philosophical system, becomes real: in Hegel's philosophy, the real acknowledge the rational. The system has a double side, philosophical and political. Hegel discovers the historical moment of this shift from the rational into the real and vice versa. He brings to light identity at the moment when history produces it. *Philosophy achieves itself*. There is for Hegel, as Marx will articulate it, at one and the same time a becoming of a philosophy of the world and a becoming of the world of philosophy. An initial repercussion: there can no longer be a divide between philosophy and reality (historical, social, political). A second repercussion: the philosopher no longer has independence: he accomplishes a public function, as do other officials. Philosophy and the philosopher integrate themselves (by mediation of the body of civil servants and the middle class) in this rational reality of the State – no longer in the city, which was only a thing (perfect, it is true, but only thing), denied by a higher and more inclusive rationality.

One knows that Marx neither refuted nor refused the essential Hegelian affirmation: *Philosophy achieves itself*. The philosopher no longer has a right to independence *vis-à-vis* social practice. Philosophy inserts itself into it. There is indeed a simultaneous becoming-philosophy of the world and a becoming-world of philosophy, and therefore a tendency towards wholeness (knowledge and acknowledgement of non-separation). And yet Marx thrusts Hegelianism aside. History does not achieve itself. Wholeness is not reached, nor are contradictions resolved. It is not by and in the State, with bureaucracy as social support, that philosophy can be realized. The proletariat has this historic mission: only it can put an end to separations (alienations). Its mission has a double facet: to destroy bourgeois society by building another society – abolish philosophical speculation and abstraction, the alienating contemplation and systematization, to accomplish the philosophical project of the human being. It is from industry, from industrial production, from its relation with productive forces and labour, not from a moral or philosophical judgement, that the working class gets its possibilities. One must turn this world upside down: the meeting of the rational and the real will happen in another society.

The history of philosophy in relation to the city is far from being accomplished within this perspective. Indeed, this history would also suggest the analysis of themes whose emergence are linked to the representation of nature and the earth, to agriculture, to the sacralization of the land (and to its desacralization). Such themes, once born, are displaced and represented sometimes far from their starting points in time and space. The points of imputation and impact, conditions, implications, consequences do not coincide. The themes are enunciated and inserted into social contexts and categories different from those which distinguish their emergence, inasmuch as one can speak of 'categories'. The urban problematic, for example that which refers to the destiny of the Greek city, used to disengage itself or hide itself, cosmic themes anterior or exterior to this city; the visions of a cyclical becoming or of the hidden immobility of the human being. The purpose of these remarks is to show that the relation considered has yet to receive an explicit formulation.

What relation is there today between philosophy and the city? An ambiguous one. The most eminent contemporary philosophers do not borrow their themes from the city. Bachelard has left wonderful pages on the house. Heidegger has meditated on the Greek city and the logos, and on the Greek temple. Nevertheless the metaphors which resume Heideggerian thought do not come from the city but from a primary and earlier life: the 'shepherds of being', the 'forest paths'. It seems that it is from the Dwelling and the opposition between *Dwelling* and *Wandering* that Heidegger borrows his themes. As for so-called 'existential' thought, it is based on individual consciousness, on the subject and the ordeals of subjectivity, rather than on a practical, historical and social reality.

However, it is not proven that philosophy has said its last word on the city. For example, one can perfectly conceive of a *phenomenological* description of urban life. Or construct a *semiology* of urban reality which would correspond for the present city to what was the logos in the Greek city. Only philosophy and the philosopher propose a *totality*, the search for a global conception or vision. To consider 'the city' is it not already to extend philosophy, to reintroduce philosophy into the city or the city into philosophy? It is true that the concept of *totality* is in danger of remaining empty if it is only philosophical. Thus is formulated a problematic which does not reduce itself to the city but which concerns the world, history, 'man'.

Moreover, a certain number of contemporary thinkers have pondered on the city. They see themselves, more or less clearly, as philosophers of the city. For this reason these thinkers want to inspire architects and planners, and make the link between urban preoccupations and the old humanism. But these philosophers lack breadth. The philosophers who claim to think the city and put forward a philosophy of the city by extending traditional philosophy, discourse on the 'essence' of the city or on the city as 'spirit', as 'life' or 'life force', as being or 'organic whole'. In brief, sometime as subject, sometime as abstract system. This leads to nothing, thus a double conclusion. Firstly, the history of philosophical thought can and must reclaim itself from its relation with the city (the condition and content of this thought). It is a way of putting this history into perspective. Secondly, this articulation figures in the problematic of philosophy and the city (knowledge, the formulation of the urban problematic, a notion of this context, a strategy to envisage). Philosophical concepts are not operative and yet they situate the city and the urban – and the whole of society – as a totality, over and above analytical fragmentations. What is proclaimed here of philosophy and its history could equally be asserted for art and its history.

Fragmentary Sciences and Urban Reality

During the course of the nineteenth century, the sciences of social reality are constituted against philosophy which strives to grasp the global (by enclosing a real totality into a rational systematization). These sciences fragment reality in order to analyse it, each having their method or methods, their sector or domain. After a century, it is still under discussion whether these sciences bring distinct enlightenment to a unitary reality, or whether the analytical fragmentation that they use corresponds to objective differences, articulations, levels and dimensions.

One cannot claim that the city has escaped the researches of historians, economists, demographers and sociologists. Each of these specialities contributes to a science of the city. It has already been ascertained and corroborated that history elucidates better the genesis of the city, and especially identifies better than any other science, the problematic of urban society. Inversely, there is also no doubt that the knowledge of urban reality can relate to the possible (or possibilities) and not only to what is finished or from the past. If one wishes to build a commercial or cultural centre, taking into account functional and functioning needs, the economist has his word to say. In the analysis of urban reality, the geographer, the climatologist, the botanist also intervene. The environment, global and confused concept, fragments itself according to these specialities. In relation to the future and the conditions of the future, mathematical calculations provide essential evidence. Yet, what gathers these facts together? A project, or in other words, a strategy. On the other hand, a doubt remains and is even confirmed. Is the city the sum of indices and facts, of variables and parameters, of correlations, this collection of facts, of descriptions, of

fragmentary analyses, because it is fragmentary? These analytical divisions do not lack rigour, but as has already been said, rigour is uninhabitable. The problem coincides with the general questioning of the specialist sciences. On the one hand, the only approach which seeks to find the global reminds us strangely of philosophy when it is not openly philosophical. On the other hand, the partial offers more positive but scattered facts. Is it possible to extract from fragmentary sciences a science of the city? No more than a holistic science of society, or of 'man', or of human and social reality. On the one hand, a concept without content, on the other, content or contents without concept. Either one declares that the 'city', the urban reality as such, does not exist but is only a series of correlations. The 'subject' is suppressed. Or the continues to assert the existence of the global: one approaches and locates it, either by extrapolations in the name of a discipline, or by wagering on an 'interdisciplinary' tactic. One does not grasp it except by an approach which transcends divisions.

Upon closer examination, one realizes that specialists who have studied urban reality have almost always (except in the case of a logically extremist positivism) introduced a global representation. They can hardly go without a synthesis, settling for a quantity of knowledge, of dividing and splitting urban reality. As specialists, they then claim to be able to go legitimately from their analyses to a final synthesis whose principle is borrowed from their speciality. By means of a discipline or interdisciplinary endeavour, they see themselves as 'men of synthesis'. More often, they conceptualize the city (and society) as an *organism*. Historians have frequently linked these entities to an 'evolution' or to an 'historical development': cities. Sociologists have conceptualized them as a 'collective being', as a 'social organism'. Organicism, evolutionism, continuism, have therefore dominated representations of the city elaborated by specialists who believed themselves to be scholars and only scholars. Philosophers without knowing it, they leapt, without legitimizing their approach, from the partial to the global as well as from fact to right.

Is there a dilemma? An impasse? Yes and no. Yes, there is an obstacle, or if one wants another metaphor, a hole is dug. No. One should be able to cross the obstacle because there is a quite recent *practice* which already spills over the speculative problem, or the partial facts of the real problem, and which tends to become global by gathering all the facts of experience and knowledge, namely, *planning*.

What is involved here is not a philosophical view on *praxis*, but the fact that so-called planning thought becomes practice at a global level. For a few years now planning has gone beyond partial techniques and applications (regulation and administration of built space) to become a social practice concerning and of interest to the whole of society. *The critical examination of this social practice (the focus being on critique) cannot not allow theory to resolve a theoretical difficulty arising from a theory which has separated itself from practice.*

As *social practice*, planning (which it becomes without having reached a level of elaboration and action, which indeed it can only reach through confrontation with *political strategies*) has already crossed the initial stage, namely, the confrontation and communication of experts, and the gathering of fragmentary analyses, in brief, what is called the *interdisciplinary*. Either the planner is inspired by the practice of partial knowledge which he applies, or he puts into action hypotheses or projects at the level of a global reality. In the first case, the application of partial knowledge gives results which can determine the relative importance of this knowledge: these results, experimentally revealing absences and lacunae, enable us to specify on the ground what is lacking. In the second case, the failure (or success) allows the discernment of what is ideological in the presuppositions, and to identify what they define at the global level. Thus, what is effectively involved is a *critical examination* of the activity called 'planning', and not a belief in the word of planners or the unchallenged acceptance of their propositions and decisions. In particular, the displacements and distortions between practice and theory (ideology), between partial knowledge and results, come to the fore instead of being hidden. As does the questioning over *use* and *users*.