The Architectural Paradox

1. Most people concerned with architecture feel some sort of disillusion and dismay. None of the early utopian ideals of the twentieth century has materialized, none of its social aims has succeeded. Blurred by reality, the ideals have turned into redevelopment nightmares and the aims into bureaucratic policies. The split between social reality and utopian dream has been total, the gap between economic constraints and the illusion of all-solving technique absolute. Pointed
out by critics who knew the limits of architectural remedies, this historical split has now been bypassed by attempts to reformulate the concepts of architecture. In the process, a new split appears. More complex, it is not the symptom of professional naiveté or economic ignorance but the sign of a fundamental question that lies in the very nature of architecture and of its essential element: space. By focusing on itself, architecture has entered an unavoidable paradox that is more present in space than anywhere else: the impossibility of questioning the nature of space and at the same time experiencing a spatial praxis.

2. I have no intention of reviewing architectural trends and their connection to the arts. My general emphasis on space rather than on disciplines (art, architecture, semiology, etc.) is not aimed at negating academic categorization. The merging of disciplines is too worn a path to provide a stimulating itinerary. Instead, I would like to focus attention on the present paradox of space and on the nature of its terms, trying to indicate how one might go beyond this self-contradiction, even if the answer should prove intolerable. I begin by recalling the historical context of this paradox. I will examine first those trends that consider architecture as a thing of the mind, as a dematerialized or conceptual discipline, with its linguistic or morphological variations (the Pyramid); second, empirical research that concentrates on the senses, on the experience of space as well as on the relationship between space and praxis (the Labyrinth); and third, the contradictory nature of these two terms and the difference between the means of escaping the paradox by shifting the actual nature of the debate, as, for example, through politics, and the means that alter the paradox altogether (the Pyramid and the Labyrinth).

3. Etymologically, to define space means both “to make space distinct” and “to state the precise nature of space.” Much of the current confusion about space can be illustrated by this ambiguity. While art and architecture have been concerned essentially with the first sense, philosophy, mathematics, and physics have tried throughout history to give interpretations to something variously described as a “material thing in which all material things are located” or as “something subjective with which the mind categorizes things.” Remember: with Descartes ended the Aristotelian tradition according to which space and time were “categories” that enabled the classification of “sensory knowledge.” Space became absolute. Object before the subject, it dominated senses and bodies by containing them. Was space inherent to the totality of what exists? This was the question of space for Spinoza and Leibniz. Returning to the old notion of category, Kant described space as neither matter nor the set of objective relations between things but as an ideal internal structure, an a priori consciousness, an instrument of knowledge. Subsequent mathematical developments on non-Euclidean spaces and their topologies did not eliminate the philosophical discussions. These reappeared with the widening gap between abstract spaces and society. But space was generally accepted as a cosa mentale, a sort of all-
embracing set with subsets such as literary space, ideological space, and psychoanalytical space.

4. Architecturally, to define space (to make space distinct) literally meant “to determine boundaries.” Space had rarely been discussed by architects before the beginning of the twentieth century. But by 1915 it meant Raum with all its overtones of German esthetics, with the notion of Raumempfindung or “felt volume.” By 1923 the idea of felt space had merged with the idea of composition to become a three-dimensional continuum, capable of metrical subdivision that could be related to academic rules. From then on, architectural space was consistently seen as a uniformly extended material to be modeled in various ways, and the history of architecture as the history of spatial concepts. From the Greek “power of interacting volumes” to the Roman “hollowed-out interior space,” from the modern “interaction between inner and outer space” to the concept of “transparency,” historians and theorists referred to space as a three-dimensional lump of matter.

To draw a parallel between the philosophies of a period and the spatial concepts of architecture is always tempting, but never was it done as obsessively as during the 1930s. Giedion related Einstein’s theory of relativity to cubist painting, and cubist planes were translated into architecture in Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein at Garches. Despite these space-time concepts, the notion of space remained that of a simplistic and amorphous matter to be defined by its physical boundaries. By the late 1960s, freed from the technological determinants of the postwar period and aware of recent linguistic studies, architects talked about the square, the street, and the arcade, wondering if these did not constitute a little-known code of space with its own syntax and meaning. Did language precede these socioecononomic urban spaces, did it accompany them, or did it follow them? Was space a condition or a formulation? To say that language preceded these spaces was certainly not obvious: human activities leave traces that may precede language. So was there a relationship between space and language, could one “read” a space? Was there a dialectic between social praxis and spatial forms?

5. Yet the gap remained between ideal space (the product of mental processes) and real space (the product of social praxis). Although such a distinction is certainly not ideologically neutral, we shall see that it is in the nature of architecture. As a result, the only successful attempts to bridge this philosophical gap were those that introduced historical or political concepts such as “production,” in the wide sense it had in Marx’s early texts. Much research in France and in Italy opposed space “as a pure form” to space “as a social product,” space “as an intermediary” to space “as a means of reproduction of the mode of production.”

This politico-philosophical critique had the advantage of giving an all-embracing approach to space, avoiding the previous dissociation between the “particular” (fragmented social space), the “general” (logico-mathematical or mental spaces), and the “singular” (physical and delineated spaces). But by giving an overall priority to historical
processes, it often reduced space to one of the numerous socioeconomic products that were perpetuating a political status quo.¹

6. Before proceeding to a detailed examination of the ambivalence of the definition of space, it is perhaps useful to consider briefly this particular expression of space in architecture. Its territory extends from an all-embracing "everything is architecture" to Hegel's minimal definition. This latter interpretation must be pointed out, for it describes a difficulty that is constitutive to architecture. When Hegel elaborated his aesthetic theory,² he conventionally distinguished five arts and gave them an order: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry. He started with architecture because he thought it preceded the others in both conceptual and historical terms. Hegel's uneasiness in these first pages is striking. His embarrassment did not really proceed from his conservative classification but was caused by a question that had haunted architects for centuries: were the functional and technical characteristics of a house or a temple the means to an end that excluded those very characteristics? Where did the shed end and architecture begin? Was architectural discourse a discourse about whatever did not relate to the "building" itself? Hegel concluded in the affirmative: architecture was whatever in a building did not point to utility. Architecture was a sort of "artistic supplement" added to the simple building. But the difficulty of such an argument appears when one tries to conceive of a building that escapes the utility of space, a building that would have no other purpose than "architecture."

Although such a question may be irrelevant, it finds a surprising echo in the present search for architectural autonomy. After more than half a century of scientific pretense, of system theories that defined it as the intersection of industrialization, sociology, politics, and ecology, architecture wonders if it can exist without having to find its meaning or its justification in some purposeful exterior need.

The Pyramid: Stating the Nature of Space (or The Dematerialization of Architecture)

7. Little concerned with Hegel's "artistic supplement," architects have nevertheless not regarded the constructed building as the sole and inevitable aim of their activity. They have shown a renewed interest in the idea of playing an active role in fulfilling ideological and philosophical functions with respect to architecture. Just as El Lissitzky and the Vesnin brothers sought to deny the importance of realizing a work and stressed an architectural attitude, so the avant-garde feels reasonably free to act within the realm of concepts. Comparable to the early conceptual artists' rejection of the art commodity market and its alienating effects, the architects' position seems justified by the very remote possibility they had of building anything other than a "mere reflection of the prevalent mode of production."

Moreover, historical precedents exist to give enough credibility to what could paradoxically be described
either as a withdrawal from reality or as a takeover of new
and unknown territories. "What is architecture?" asked
Boulée. "Will I define it with Vitruvius as the art of building?
No. This definition contains a crass error. Vitruvius takes
the effect for the cause. One must conceive in order to make.
Our forefathers only built their hut after they had conceived
its image. This production of the mind, this creation is what
constitutes architecture, that which we now can define as
the art to produce any building and bring it to perfection.
The art of building is thus only a secondary art that it seems
appropriate to call the scientific part of architecture." At
a time when architectural memory rediscover its role, archi-
tectural history, with its treatises and manifestos, has been
conveniently confirming to architects that spatial concepts
were made by the writings and drawings of space as much as
by their built translations.

The questions, "is there any reason why one
cannot proceed from design that can be constructed to design
that concerns itself only with the ideology and concept of
architecture?" and "if architectural work consists of ques-
tioning the nature of architecture, what prevents us from
making this questioning a work of architecture in itself?" were
already rhetorical questions in 1972. The renewed
importance given to conceptual aims in architecture quickly
became established. The medium used for the communica-
tion of concepts became architecture; information was ar-
chitecture; the attitude was architecture; the written
program or brief was architecture; gossip was architecture;
production was architecture; and inevitably, the architect
was architecture. Escaping the predictable ideological com-
promises of building, the architect could finally achieve the
sensual satisfaction that the making of material objects no
longer provided.

8. The dematerialization of architecture into the realm of
corcepts was more the characteristic of a period than of any
particular avant-garde group. Thus it developed in various
directions and struck movements as ideologically opposed as,
for example, "radical architecture""s and "rational ar-
chitecture." But the question it asked was fundamental: if
everything was architecture, by virtue of the architect's de-
cision, what distinguished architecture from any other hu-
man activity? This quest for identity revealed that the
architect's freedom did not necessarily coincide with the
freedom of architecture.

If architecture seemed to have gained freed-
from the socioeconomic constraints of building pro-
cesses, any radical counter-designs and manifestos were
inevitably reinstated in the commercial circuits of galleries
or magazines. Like conceptual art in the mid-1960s, archi-
tecture seemed to have gained autonomy by opposing the
institutional framework. But in the process it had become
the institutional opposition, thus growing into the very thing
it tried to oppose.

Although some architects, following a polit-
ical analysis that we shall soon describe, were in favor of
doing away with architecture altogether, the search for au-
tonomy inevitably turned back toward architecture itself, as
no other context would readily provide for it. The question became: "Is there an architectural essence, a being that transcends all social, political, and economic systems?" This ontological bias injected new blood into a concept that already had been well aired by art theorists. Investigations into Hegel’s "supplement" received the support of structural linguistic studies in France and Italy. Analogies with language appeared en masse, some useful, some particularly naive and misleading. Among these linguistic analogies, two figure prominently.

9. The first theory claims that the Hegelian "supplement," added to the simple building and constitutive of architecture, is immediately struck by some semantic expansion that would force this architectural supplement to be less a piece of architecture than the representation of something else. Architecture is then nothing but the space of representation. As soon as it is distinguished from the simple building, it represents something other than itself: the social structure, the power of the King, the idea of God, and so on.

The second theory questions an understanding of architecture as a language that refers to meanings outside itself. It refuses the interpretation of a three-dimensional translation of social values, for architecture would then be nothing but the linguistic product of social determinants. It thus claims that the architectural object is pure language and that architecture is an endless manipulation of the grammar and syntax of the architectural sign. Rational architecture, for example, becomes a selected vocabulary of architectural elements of the past, with their oppositions, contrasts, and redistributions. Not only does it refer to itself and to its own history, but function—the existential justification of the work—becomes virtual rather than real. So the language is closed in on itself, and architecture becomes a truly autonomous organism. Forms do not follow functions but refer to other forms, and functions relate to symbols. Ultimately architecture frees itself from reality altogether. Form does not need to call for external justifications. In a critical article in *Oppositions*, Manfredo Tafuri can thus describe Aldo Rossi’s architecture as "a universe of carefully selected signs, within which the law of exclusion dominates, and in fact is the controlling expression," and the trend it represents as "l’Architecture dans le Boudoir" because the circle drawn around linguistic experimentation reveals a pregnant affinity with the obsessively rigorous writings of the Marquis de Sade."

Freed from reality, independent of ideology, architectural values are striving toward a purity unattained since the Russian formalist criticism of the 1920s, when it was argued that the only valid object of literary criticism was the literary text. Here, the tautology of architecture—that is, an architecture that describes itself—becomes a syntax of empty signs, often derived from a selective historicism that concentrates on moments of history: the early modern movement, the Roman monument, the Renaissance palace, the castle. Transmitted through history, and removed from the constraints of their time, can these signs, these diagrams of spaces become the generative matrices of today’s work?
10. They might. Architectural theory shares with art theory a peculiar characteristic: it is prescriptive. So the series of signs and articulations that has just been described may undoubtedly prove a useful model for architects engaged in a perpetual search for new support disciplines, even if it is not clear whether systems of nonverbal signs, such as space, proceed from concepts similar to verbal systems. However, the real importance of this research lies in the question it asks about the nature of architecture rather than in the making of architecture. This is not without recalling the perverse and hypothetical search for the very origins of architecture. Remember: at the outset, does architecture produce copies or models? If it cannot imitate an order, can it constitute one, whether it be the world or society? Must architecture create its own model, if it has no created model? Positive answers inevitably imply some archetype. But as this archetype cannot exist outside architecture, architecture must produce one itself. It thus becomes some sort of an essence that precedes existence. So the architect is once again “the person who conceives the form of the building without manipulating materials himself.” He conceives the pyramid, this ultimate model of reason. Architecture becomes a cosa mentale and the forms conceived by the architect ensure the domination of the idea over matter.

The Labyrinth: Making Space Distinct (or The Experience of Space)

11. Should I intensify the quarantine in the chambers of the Pyramid of reason? Shall I sink to depths where no one will be able to reach me and understand me, living among abstract connections more frequently expressed by inner monologues than by direct realities? Shall architecture, which started with the building of tombs, return to the Tomb, to the eternal silence of finally transcended history? Shall architecture perform at the service of illusory functions and build virtual spaces? My voyage into the abstract realm of language, into the dematerialized world of concepts, meant the removal of architecture from its intricate and convoluted element: space. Removal from the exhilarating differences between the apse and the nave of Ely Cathedral, between Salisbury Plain and Stonehenge, between the Street and my Living Room. Space is real, for it seems to affect my senses long before my reason. The materiality of my body both coincides with and struggles with the materiality of space. My body carries in itself spatial properties and spatial determination: up, down, right, left, symmetry, dissymmetry. It hears as much as it sees. Unfolding against the projections of reason, against the Absolute Truth, against the Pyramid, here is the Sensory Space, the Labyrinth, the Hole. Dislocated and dissociated by language or culture or economy into the specialized ghettos of sex and mind, Soho and Bloomsbury, 42nd Street and West 40th Street, here is where my body tries to rediscover its lost unity, its energies and impulses, its rhythms and its flux...
nessed by twentieth-century architecture. Suffice it to say that current conversation seems to fluctuate between [a] the German esthetic overtones of the Raumempfindung theory, whereby space is to be "felt" as something affecting the inner nature of man by a symbolic Einfühlung, and [b] an idea that echoes Schlemmer's work at the Bauhaus, whereby space was not only the medium of experience but also the materialization of theory. For example, the emphasis given to movement found in dance the "elemental means for the realization of space-creative impulses," for dance could articulate and order space. The parallel made between the dancer's movements and the more traditional means of defining and articulating space, such as walls or columns, is important. When the dancers Trisha Brown and Simone Forti reintroduced this spatial discussion in the mid-1960s, the relationship between theory and practice, reason and perception, had to take another turn, and the concept of theoretical praxis could not be simply indicative. There was no way in space to follow the art-language practice. If it could be argued that the discourse about art was art and thus could be exhibited as such, the theoretical discourse about space certainly was not space.

The attempt to trigger a new perception of space reopened a basic philosophical question. Remember: you are inside an enclosed space with equal height and width. Do your eyes instruct you about the cube merely by noticing it, without giving any additional interpretation? No. You don't really see the cube. You may see a corner, or a side, or the ceiling, but never all defining surfaces at the same time.

You touch a wall, you hear an echo. But how do you relate all these perceptions to one single object? Is it through an operation of reason?

13. This operation of reason, which precedes the perception of the cube as a cube, was mirrored by the approach of concept-performance artists. While your eyes were giving instructions about successive parts of the cube, allowing you to form the concept of cube, the artist was giving instructions about the concept of cube, stimulating your senses through the intermediary of reason. This reversal, this mirror image, was important, for the interplay between the new perception of "performance" space and the rational means at the origin of the piece was typically one aspect of the architectural process: the mechanics of perception of a distinct space, that is the complete space of the performance, with the movements, the thoughts, the received instructions of the actors, as well as the social and physical context in which they performed. But the most interesting part of such performance was the underlying discussion on the "nature of space" in general, as opposed to the shaping and perception of distinct spaces in particular.

It is in recent works that the recurring etymological distinction appears at its strongest. Reduced to the cold simplicity of six planes that define the boundaries of a more or less regular cube, the series of spaces designed by Bruce Nauman, Doug Wheeler, Robert Irwin, or Michael Asher do not play with elaborate spatial articulations. Their emphasis is elsewhere. By restricting visual and physical
perception to the faintest of all stimulations, they turn the expected experience of the space into something altogether different. The almost totally removed sensory definition inevitably throws the viewers back on themselves. In "deprived space," to borrow the terminology of Germano Celant, the "participants" can only find themselves as the subject, aware only of their own fantasies and pulsations, able only to react to the low-density signals of their own bodies. The materiality of the body coincides with the materiality of the space. By a series of exclusions that become significant only in opposition to the remote exterior space and social context, the subjects only "experience their own experience."

14. Whether such spaces might be seen as reminiscent of the behaviorist spaces of the beginning of the century, where reactions were hopefully triggered, or as the new echo of the Raumempfindung theory, now cleaned-up of its moral and esthetic overtones, is of little theoretical importance. What matters is their double content: for their way to "make space distinct" (to define space in particular) is only there to throw one back on the interpretation of the "nature of space" itself. As opposed to the previously described pyramid of reason, the dark corners of experience are not unlike a labyrinth where all sensations, all feelings are enhanced, but where no overview is present to provide a clue about how to get out. Occasional consciousness is of little help, for perception in the Labyrinth presupposes immediacy. Unlike Hegel's classical distinction between the moment of perception and the moment of experience (when one's consciousness makes a new object out of a perceived one), the metaphorical Labyrinth implies that the first moment of perception carries the experience itself.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there may be no way out of the Labyrinth. Denis Hollier, in his book on Georges Bataille, points out that from Bacon to Leibniz the Labyrinth was linked with the desire to get out, and science was seen as the means to find an exit. Rejecting such an interpretation, Bataille suggested that its only effect was to transform the Labyrinth into a banal prison. The traditional meaning of the metaphor was reversed: one never knows whether one is inside or not, since one cannot grasp it in one look. Just as language gives us words that encircle us but that we use in order to break their surround, the Labyrinth of experience was full of openings that did not tell whether they opened toward its outside or its inside.

The Pyramid and the Labyrinth: The Paradox of Architecture

15. To single out particular areas of concern, such as the rational play of language as opposed to the experience of the senses, would be a tedious game if it were to lead to a naive confrontation between the mind and the body. The architectural avant-garde has fought often enough over alternatives that appeared as opposites—structure and chaos, ornament and purity, permanence and change, reason and intuition. And often enough it has been shown that such alternatives were in fact complementary: our analysis of a dematerialization of architecture in its ontological form (the Pyramid)
and of a sensual experience (the Labyrinth) is no different. But if the existence of such an equation does not raise doubts over its complementarity, it certainly raises questions about how such equations can go beyond the vicious circle of terms that speak only of themselves.

The answer may lie in the context in which such an equation takes place. A common accusation of analyses or even of works that concentrate on the specific nature of architecture is that they are “parallel,” that is, they fold and unfold in some Panglossian world where social and economic forces are conveniently absent. Not affecting the determining forces of production, they constitute harmless forms of private expression. We shall therefore briefly consider the ambiguous particularities of the relationships between architecture and politics.

16. These have been well researched in the past few years. The role of architecture and planning has been analyzed in terms of a projection on the ground of the images of social institutions, as a faithful translation of the structures of society into buildings or cities. Such studies underline the difficulty architecture has in acting as a political instrument. Recalling the nostalgic and attenuated cry of the Russian revolutionary “social condensers” of the 1920s, some advocated the use of space as a peaceful tool of social transformation, as a means of changing the relation between the individual and society by generating new lifestyles. But the “clubs” and community buildings proposed not only required an existing revolutionary society but also a blind belief in an interpretation of behaviorism according to which individual behavior could be influenced by the organization of space. Aware that spatial organization may temporarily modify individual or group behavior, but does not imply that it will change the socioeconomic structure of a reactionary society, architectural revolutionaries looked for better grounds. Their attempts to find a socially relevant, if not revolutionary, role for architecture culminated in the years following the May 1968 events with “guerrilla” buildings, whose symbolic and exemplary value lay in their seizure of urban space and not in the design of what was built. On the cultural front, plans for a surrealistic destruction of established value systems were devised by Italian “radical” designers. This nihilistic prerequisite for social and economic change was a desperate attempt to use the architect’s mode of expression to denounce institutional trends by translating them into architectural terms, ironically “verifying where the system was going” by designing the cities of a desperate future.

Not surprisingly, it was the question of the production system that finally led to more realistic proposals. Aimed at redistributing the capitalistic division of labor, these proposals sought a new understanding of the technicians’ role in building, in terms of a responsible partnership directly involved in the production cycle, thus shifting the concept of architecture toward the general organization of building processes.
17. Yet it is the unreal (or unrealistic) position of the artist or architect that may be its very reality. Except for the last attitude, most political approaches suffered from the predictable isolation of schools of architecture that tried to offer their environmental knowledge to the revolution. Hegel’s architecture, the “supplement,” did not seem to have the right revolutionary edge. Or did it? Does architecture, in its long-established isolation, contain more revolutionary power than its numerous transfers into the objective realities of the building industry and social housing? Does the social function of architecture lie in its very lack of function? In fact, architecture may have little other ground.

Just as the surrealists could not find the right compromise between scandal and social acceptance, architecture seems to have little choice between autonomy and commitment, between the radical anachronism of Schiller’s “courage to talk of roses” and society. If the architectural piece renounces its autonomy by recognizing its latent ideological and financial dependency, it accepts the mechanisms of society. If it sanctuarizes itself in an art-for-art’s-sake position, it does not escape classification among existing ideological compartments.

So architecture seems to survive only when it saves its nature by negating the form that society expects of it. I would therefore suggest that there has never been any reason to doubt the necessity of architecture, for the necessity of architecture is its non-necessity. It is useless, but radically so. Its radicalism constitutes its very strength in a society where profit is prevalent. Rather than an obscure artistic supplement or a cultural justification for financial manipulations, architecture is not unlike fireworks, for these “empirical apparitions,” as Adorno puts it, “produce a delight that cannot be sold or bought, that has no exchange value and cannot be integrated in the production cycle.”

18. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the non-necessity of architecture, its necessary loneliness, throws it back on itself. If its role is not defined by society, architecture will have to define it alone. Until 1750, architectural space could rely on the paradigm of the ancient precedent. After that time, until well into the twentieth century, this classical source of unity progressively became the socially determined program. In view of the present-day polarization of ontological discourse and sensual experience, I am well aware that any suggestion that they now form the inseparable but mutually exclusive terms of architecture requires some elucidation. This must begin with a description of the apparent impossibility of escaping from the paradox of the Pyramid of concepts and the Labyrinth of experience, of immaterial architecture as a concept and of material architecture as a presence.

To restate my point, the paradox is not about the impossibility of perceiving both architectural concept (the six faces of the cube) and real space at the same time but about the impossibility of questioning the nature of space and at the same time making or experiencing a real space. Unless we search for an escape from architecture into the general organization of building processes, the paradox per-
sists: architecture is made of two terms that are interdependent but mutually exclusive. Indeed, architecture constitutes the reality of experience while this reality gets in the way of the overall vision. Architecture constitutes the abstraction of absolute truth, while this very truth gets in the way of feeling. We cannot both experience and think that we experience. "The concept of dog does not bark,"10 the concept of space is not in space.

In the same way, the achievement of architectural reality [building] defeats architectural theory while at the same time being a product of it. So theory and praxis may be dialectic to one another, but in space, the translation of the concept, the overcoming of the abstraction in reality, involves the dissolution of the dialectic and an incomplete statement. This means, in effect, that, perhaps for the first time in history, architecture can never be. The effect of the great battles of social progress is obliterated, and so is the security of archetypes. Defined by its questioning, architecture is always the expression of a lack, a shortcoming, a noncompletion. It always misses something, either reality or concept. Architecture is both being and nonbeing. The only alternative to the paradox is silence, a final nihilistic statement that might provide modern architectural history with its ultimate punchline, its self-annihilation.

19. Before leaving this brief exploration of architecture as paradox, it is tempting to suggest a way of accepting the paradox while refuting the silence it seems to imply. This conclusion may be intolerable to philosophers, in that it alters the subject of architecture, you and I. It may be intolerable to scientists who want to master the subject of science. It may be intolerable to artists who want to objectify the subject.

Let us first examine the Labyrinth. In the course of this argument, it has been implied that the Labyrinth shows itself as a slow history of space, but that a total revelation of the Labyrinth is historically impossible because no point of transcendence in time is available. One can participate in and share the fundamentals of the Labyrinth, but one's perception is only part of the Labyrinth as it manifests itself. One can never see it in totality, nor can one express it. One is condemned to it and cannot go outside and see the whole. But remember: Icarus flew away, toward the sun. So after all, does the way out of the Labyrinth lie in the making of the Pyramid, through a projection of the subject toward some transcendental objectivity? Unfortunately not. The Labyrinth cannot be dominated. The top of the Pyramid is an imaginary place, and Icarus fell down: the nature of the Labyrinth is such that it entertains dreams that include the dream of the Pyramid.

20. But the real importance of the Labyrinth and of its spatial experience lies elsewhere. The Pyramid, the analysis of the architectural object, the breaking down of its forms and elements, all cut away from the question of the subject. Along with the spatial praxis mentioned earlier, the sensual architecture reality is not experienced as an abstract object already transformed by consciousness but as an immediate and con-
crete human activity—as a praxis, with all its subjectivity. This importance of the subject is in clear opposition to all philosophical and historical attempts to objectify the immediate perception of reality, for example, in the relations of production. To talk about the Labyrinth and its praxis means to insist here on its subjective aspects: it is personal and requires an immediate experience. Opposed to Hegel's Erfahrung and close to Bataille's “interior experience,” this immediacy bridges sensory pleasure and reason. It introduces new articulations between the inside and the outside, between private and public spaces. It suggests new oppositions between dissociated terms and new relations between homogeneous spaces. This immediacy does not give precedence to the experiential term, however. For it is only by recognizing the architectural rule that the subject of space will reach the depth of experience and its sensuality. Like eroticism, architecture needs both system and excess.

21. This “experience” may have repercussions that go far beyond man as its “subject.” Torn between rationality and the demand for irrationality, our present society moves toward other attitudes. If system plus excess is one of its symptoms, we may soon have to consider architecture as the indispensable complement to this changing praxis. In the past, architecture gave linguistic metaphors (the Castle, the Structure, the Labyrinth) to society. It may now provide the cultural model.

As long as social practice rejects the paradox of ideal and real space, imagination—interior experience—may be the only means to transcend it. By changing the prevalent attitudes toward space and its subject, the dream of the step beyond the paradox can even provide the conditions for renewed social attitudes. Just as eroticism is the pleasure of excess rather than the excess of pleasure, so the solution of the paradox is the imaginary blending of the architecture rule and the experience of pleasure.