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Of Space Forevermore

We have been flirting with space for over two millennia. And, as this *Forum* so clearly indicates, we have not had enough.

The Call for Papers for this special issue opens with a bold statement that makes the following claim: “with the invention of the internet—that infinite cyber space—our world has both radically expanded and contracted. Opened up, as our practice of intersecting with others has been drastically changed; but contracted, as this freedom has altered our experience of spatial distance forever.” More important, “our world, our cities, our domestic, private, and public spaces have undergone a drastic re-definition; these new spaces have forced a change in our understanding of the nature of space itself.”

Indeed. However, beware. The temporal framework superimposed upon space—that temporal linearity associated with the pre- and post-moment of the invention of the internet—could accidentally re-introduced the normative category of absolute time that rationalizes and legitimizes the events in the world that has both radically expanded and contracted. This temporal framework superimposed upon space, which, as it is argued, caused a re-definition of the material and immaterial attributes of space, should make us aware that this framework will only represent a present intelligibility of space and will only remain valid until a new invention replaces the invention of the internet.

As Fredric Jameson observes, “Always historicize” (9).

Consider the following: the realm of Newtonian absolute time and space, which had dominated Western epistemology since the publication of *Principia* in 1687, remained uncontested, despite George Berkeley’s and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz’s opposition, until the mid-nineteenth century when it was contested by Nicolai Lobachevsky’s and János Bolyai’s systems of non-Euclidean geometry, Bernhard Riemann’s n-dimensional geometry, Henri Poincaré’s assumptions concerning the inability to measure space itself, Clerk Maxwell’s field theory, Ernst Mach’s idea of relative spaces, Hendrik Lorentz’s experiments with objects moving through motionless ether, and, in the twentieth century, by Hermann Minkowski’s space-time manifold, Hermann Weyl’s four-dimensional

continuum, Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity, and Werner Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle. The imaginations that put forth n-dimensional geometry, field theory, space-time manifold, and four-dimensional continuum, are linked and link themselves to Einstein's famous dictum that "time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live" (Forsee 81).¹ If, indeed, time and space are no longer absolute, the artistic expression, for example, rather than being a representation of *real* and *existing* things, could focus on the unseen forces that control human destiny, on the invisible world hidden behind the façade of everyday reality and its practices, and on a space-time manifold, which exists parallel to a three-dimensional space. By moving away from the traditional concepts of matter, time, and space towards the unthought, the hidden, and the invisible, the Symbolist writers and painters introduced the notion of the fourth dimension as a legitimate part of human experience. Maurice Maeterlinck's dramas and Fernand Khnopf's paintings brought forth a space which would not be disciplined by the external order of things, but would allow the subjective "I," the Self, to travel through a four-dimensional space (Charles Hinton's four-dimensional thought-mechanics, science, and art (Hinton 86)) in a direction not contained in the knowledge of the Self imprisoned in a three-dimensional universe of social and political order.²

This growing belief that time and space are modes by which we think and not the conditions by which we live allowed some of the artists and thinkers not only to envision a universe in which a creative act is not a process of representation of some material "real," but a process that constructs an entirely new universe of things and objects. As Vasiliï Kandinsky noted in 1912:

A scientific event removed one of the most important obstacles from my path. This was the further division of the atom. The collapse of the atom was equated in my soul with the collapse of the whole world. Suddenly, the stoutest walls crumbled. Everything became uncertain, precarious and insubstantial. I would not have been

¹For discussion of these theories and experiments see, for example, Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), Milič Čapek, *The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1961), Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

² See Michal Kobiálka, "Vulnerable Space: The Symbolist Desire/ Practice of Thinking the Other," *Yearbook of Interdisciplinary Studies in the Fine Arts* (1991): 277-98.

surprised had a stone dissolved into thin air before my eyes and become invisible. Science seemed destroyed: its most important basis was only an illusion, an error of the learned, who were not building their divine edifice stone by stone with steady hands, by transfigured light, but were groping at random for truth in the darkness and blindly mistaking one object for another. (Kandinski 364)

Thus, perception grounded in some kind of an external (real, imaginary, or political) referent was seen as an error of the learned who were now “groping at random for truth in darkness and blindly mistaking one object for another.” This rejection of the traditional tools of artistic expression created new possibilities. In the fine arts, experiments with space-time, and specifically with its speed, direction, shape, rhythm, and density were the most revolutionary formal devices in Cubism, Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism.³ Collage, montage, nondevelopmental dialogue, compressions of time and space, and phonic exercises were frequently random combinations of a certain number of elements from other works, objects, and preexisting messages which were put together to constitute a new creation. This new creation was the work of a modernist artist who, unlike his/her past stereotypical images of a rebel or an alienated outsider, was participating in an intelligible social process challenging the emerging framework of industrialization and supporting new social constellations, such as the Russian Revolution. As Georges Braque’s paintings animating the discrepancies between vision and cognition, Luigi Russolo’s dynamic paintings of color zones and the objects positioned within them, Marcel Duchamp’s experiments with the *l’objet prêt*, found objects, such as an umbrella, a bottle rack, or a urinal, which replaced the conventionally defined “artistic objects” in a museum, or Kurt Schwitter’s *Mertz* construction exemplified, the new work of art was now believed to be “real” in itself, an autonomous reality that existed nowhere else.

“Time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live.”

³See, for example, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), J. H. Matthews, *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism* (Syracuse, NY.: Syracuse University Press, 1974), Christiana J. Taylor, *Futurism: Politics, Painting and Performance* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1979), Annabelle Melzer, *Latest Rage and Big Drum* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1980).

To continue this thought, since space is first and foremost a particular experience of a mode of thinking, as I wish to suggest, this statement reverberates with and is much closer to Henri Lefebvre's production of space, wherein power relations are embedded, than to Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space reflecting the impact of human psyche and imagination on a geometrical form. Indeed, it is worth quoting here the passage where Lefebvre unequivocally indicates that

space may be said to embrace a multitude of intersections, each with its assigned location. As for representations of the relations of production, which subsume power relations, these too occur in space: space contains them in the form of buildings, monuments and works of art. Such frontal (and hence brutal) expressions of these relations do not completely crowd out their more clandestine or underground aspects; all power must have its accomplices—and its police. (Lefebvre 31)

Lefebvre elaborates on this multitude of intersections in his well-known triad of spatial relations:

1. *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*.
2. *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.
3. *Representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolism, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces). (31)

Lefebvre's triad of *spatial practice* (perceived), which embraces the production and reproduction of each social formation, *representation of space* (conceived), which are linked to knowledge production, and *representational spaces* (lived), which form all

senses and all bodies, has opened up that which used to be thought of as empty and absolute. While Lefebvre is generally credited with altering the course of spatial studies (geography, architecture, theatre, and dance, for example) in the twentieth century, the fundamental concepts of classical physics—space, time, matter, and causality—to this day, even though they are deemed to be an illusion, remain a powerful one, indeed so powerful and “so fruitful that the concepts of absolute space absolute and time will ever remain in the background of our daily experience” (Jammer 173). Classical perceptions of space clash with the concept of quantum space or the internet’s infinite cyber space. The call for submissions encouraged the contributors to explore the consequences of this clash: construction or manipulation of space, claiming space, space and power, spatial boundaries, politicized spaces, reclaimed spaces, virtual spaces, queered spaces, moving spaces, space as non-entity, textual space, cinematic spaces, and so on.

To say that these topics fall into the domain of intellectual history tracing the emergence of a different understanding, construction, multiplication, and practice of space draws attention only to the external attributes of space, whether they are produced or imagined. What is left unspoken is the ontology of space that registers not only the forces of past and future in them, but also the pressures for systematic transformations and investigations thereof that materialize within them. The ontology of space will always be imbued with the traces betraying the presence of bodies and thoughts that had disappeared, no longer speak a language that is intelligible to us, or are glossed over by the memories that will forget them to allow the living to exist elsewhere. It is precisely these traces, rather than what remains in the background of our daily experience, that “come back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: ‘resistances,’ ‘survivals,’ or delays [to] discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of ‘progress’ or a system of interpretation” (de Certeau, *History* 4).

The nine essays in this volume chase after these traces while surveying the very mediality of space. This existence-in-the-medium of space focuses on the manner in which space is thinkable, identified, and contrived. They posit that space is an open field of specifiable relationships, a countersite to place, an open field of potentialities, a haptic phenomenon, a territory in which objects can be situated, but never fully classified, or a

catachrestic configuration that escapes the confines of “the poisonous ingenuity of Time” (Beckett 4).

Zita Turi and Rhys W. Griffiths’s essays, for example, play with the distinction between space and place, as treated by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (117). What Turi and Griffiths add to de Certeau’s asymmetry of this nonidentical pair—space/place—is the differential specificity in which space is reinvented and rearticulated to resonate with the authors’ arguments about space that is freed from its conventional location within a totality, or produced as a unified totality promoting extensive processes of banalization.

Analyzing Peter Greenaway’s *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993) in terms of Foucault’s spaces of emplacement and juxtaposition as well as in terms of Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “any-space-whatever,” Turi sees the film as an event unfolding in disorienting environments, in unstable and heterogeneous spaces that are saturated with the practice of role-splitting. More important, for Turi, the space of the film is a multi-layered referential performance that, rather than presenting us with a film narrative unfolding in time, is instead a spatial storehouse of relics. What is intriguing in this treatment of space is a possibility that space is not an empty receptacle, but a multi-dimensional manifold. Thus, if the film is saturated with the props from the storehouse of relics or memories splitting and showing Jesus’s identity at various stages of his life, each identity-sequence becomes a celluloid, transparent fold. These folds are superimposed one upon the other—thus, the viewer is confronted with a scopic palimpsest registering on its surface the images from those other folds. Consequently, Greenaway’s film—a scopic palimpsest—presents us with a space where words, concepts, and objects, coming from those other frames/folds are now wrestled from their proper place assigned to them by tradition and relic-use-value. It is only now that words, concepts, and objects liberated from the bondage of their individual folds can reveal both the confusion of identities and the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous spaces.

In an interesting way, Griffiths continues this investigation in his treatment of Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) and Wim Wenders’s *Paris, Texas* (1984), both of which he contends resonate with and are grounded in a landscape lost to what Fredric Jameson labeled high epochs of late capitalism and the postmodern realities of sign economy.

Whereas Turi promotes the idea of the confusion of identities and the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous spaces, Griffiths, using a distinction between space and place as treated by John Agnew, draws attention to Guy Debord's assertion that capitalist production unifies space. This unification of space is at the same time an extensive process of banalization. Consequently, geographical specificity is replaced by the presence of sign economy that detaches objects from a concrete basis of meaning and transforms them into signs that delimit the boundaries of the new map in the era of late capitalist production. Both *Lolita* and *Paris, Texas*, avers Griffiths, recognize the age of the sign of economy rendering obsolete the heroic will of a human being in modernity and replacing it with the protagonist's impossibility of self assertion within the totalitarian sign economy.

Anthony Warde and Chris Pak choose science fiction as the medium for their exploration of space via sensuous geography and ecocriticism/terraforming. Warde puts forth the notion of sensuous geography that highlights the interaction between the human body and its surrounding land, rather than the dominance of the human over the landscape. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and, to be more specific, its post-apocalyptic world, is the site wherein the visual and abstract mapping, which leads to the distancing of humans from the world, is replaced with multi-sensory experience of space. As a consequence of an unexplained catastrophe, the traditional mappings by which humanity ordered the world disintegrates gradually. The names and the symbols on the map refer to a social and political order which has now disappeared. So has the technology of mapping and transcendental, absolute perspective. In this new space of unregulated relationships, there remains only an inadequation between the spaces: between the permanent and fixed space of Euclid and Newton, which used to provide us with our structures of belonging, and the tactile, sensory, and sonorous indices of spatial positions and orientations. The man and the boy moving through the blasted and borderless landscape become nomads *par excellence* who sense that, in this post-apocalyptic world, it is necessary to renounce one's experience, in order to intersect with and give oneself to the infinity of haptic space. "No line separates earth from sky, which are from the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or form nor center" (Deleuze 167).

Using Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy, Pak explores the notions of ecocriticism and terraforming. The earth is ravaged by overpopulation, pollution, global

warming, rising sea levels, war, famine, and economic and political inequalities between the rich and the poor. Mars, the trope of alien beauty, becomes the new destination. The chronotope of the first colonizing outpost presents a series of potential narratives, from the ethics associated with altering landscapes or the well-known and often exploited opposition between nature and technology or between the country and the city, to exploitation of the resources reminiscent of the capitalist mode of operation. In his analysis, Pak argues that, indeed, science fiction, as evidenced so poignantly by the recent success of *Avatar*, and its narratives of terraforming and terrafarming provide textual and optical spaces through which postcolonial and ecocritical concerns can be investigated through a motif of a new planet subjected to colonization and permanent habitation.

Paul Krumholz and Hope Bernard are interested in what happens to the attributes to space or place when objects, such as a car (Krumholz) or a piece of fruit (Bernard) move through it. Claude Lelouch's *C'était un rendez-vous* (1976), an 8:39 minute film showing the streets of Paris filmed by a camera mounted on the front bumper of Lelouch's Mercedes, does indeed realize the Futurist dream of visualizing space through movement of a speeding car: the sounds of roaring engine, the bodily sensations of a viewer watching the pigeons scatter around trying to escape their death under the wheels of a speeding car, or panic setting in when the car runs through every single red light. Krumholz reminds us about the power of montage, Walter Benjamin's literary technique of choice used to show the state of unrest which demands the contemplative attitude towards the object be abandoned in order for us to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment finds itself in precisely this moment, or Sergei Eisenstein's montage of attractions, yet another scopic technique, which was used in order to direct audience members in a desired emotional and ideological direction. Here, the haptic and tactile montages are directed towards a consciousness of the present which explodes the notion of absolute space. Space in Lelouch's film is no longer contemplated by a *flâneur*, who walks through Georges-Eugène Haussmann's Paris—a remodeled cityscape ready to accommodate new flows of people in an industrialized era—or a *derive-ur*, Guy Debord's agent drifting through urban space, but a *driveur*, a figure for whom the urban environment is an aesthetic distraction. Krumholz argues convincingly that the car racing through space does not only activate space—Paris, the streets, the other objects, etc.—but also, and

maybe more important, it activates numerous discursive formations linking themselves to that mechanized body. Like a Deleuzian diagram, the film reveals the emergence of other spaces tactically superimposed one upon the other—the spaces delimited by the discursive formations framed by Haussmann, Benjamin, Eisenstein, Marinetti, Debord, and Lelouch.

What happens when a piece of fruit is thrown onto the stage? We are familiar with the object's movement during a performance—the actor picks up an object from the table in the middle of the stage. Now this object becomes a piece of fruit—a prop demanded by the text or performance situation. This object is used according to the rules or use value assigned to it by nature or a theatrical convention. There are however objects in theatre which may disrupt this process of becoming or the divide between the audience and the actors—that famous impassable barrier that Bernard talks about while discussing the eighteenth century play, *The Author on the Wheel*. The flight of the piece of fruit from the space of the audience towards the stage challenges the divide and activates the space on both sides. The space of the audience is no longer a passive space; the space of the stage is no longer safeguarded by the illusion-producing mechanisms. The flight of the object is the illusion-crushing tactical maneuver that liberates the objects from being a product of consumption and allows it to become an agent of production in a space when all the hitherto recognized rules cease to be binding. Marcel Duchamp understood this well when he placed a urinal as an art object in a museum. So did Walter Benjamin, who in “Konvolut H” of *Passagenarbeit* stated that the world is present and ordered in each object, or a Polish visual artist Tadeusz Kantor, who, in his productions between 1944 and 1990, used a multitude of objects, the so-called objects of the lowest rank, to reveal the objectness of the object which was explored in a space not defined by the visual sovereignty of the eye producing the representational image in a classical pictorial space, but in a space where objects may, for a split second, escape the organizing principles of the culture industry (Benjamin 207).⁴

In her exploration of Colin Thubron's *A Cruel Madness*, Cornelia Wächter reminds us about Michel Foucault's heterotopia—this countersite to the real space—and, more specifically, about his heterotopias of deviation. Even though she builds her argument using Foucault's treatment of psychiatric hospitals as places designed (physically and in

⁴ See Michal Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre* (Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

terms of governing the mentality) for the exertion of disciplinary power, she modifies Foucault's ideas by bringing to the fore de Certeau's belief in agency that prevails even under the circumstances where spaces are altered into places. Consequently, patients, she argues, can create spaces of their own by utilizing or manipulating these topological places. However, as a narrator of *A Cruel Madness* makes the reader realize, even escaping topos does not guarantee that a different topographical space will be reached. The perception of physical space can be manipulated and be subject to change; a narrator, however, remains imprisoned not in the actual psychiatric hospital as much as in the place of his own mind. As a corollary, a confinement imposed by the asylum, a topographical place, is secondary. Playing with the nonidentical pair of topological and topographical places, Thubron draws attention to that which cannot be really contained in Foucault's heterotopia of deviation (external), its taxonomical scheme of classifying madness, or in de Certeau's binarism of place/space or strategy/tactics: patients' mental spaces deregulate the normative and the rational. More than that, they activate the dormant or anesthetized images and memories floating in the unregulated space. To escape the ghosts, the narrator paradoxically seeks protection in the asylum in order to liberate himself from being entrapped in the space of his mind.

There is one more essay which completes this palimpsest. Like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Garbage, the City, and Death*, it deals with the city—the archive of localizable spatial fragments. Daniel Portland, however, does not deal with the fragments which tell the story of the scopic drive towards progress but with waste material that offers evidence and a critique of progress. His is a radical gesture of exploring George Bataille's concept of accursed share or excess within a general economy. For Bataille, this accursed share or excess was luxury. For Portland, this accursed share of excess is a queer. He asks: to what extent queers might be complicit with gentrification of an urban environment; to what extent queers might be a useful feature of a postmodern brandscape in the experience economy. Portland's narrative weaves through John Walter's film *Desperate Living* (1977) and William S. Burroughs's novel *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* (1971). Mortville is a spatial configuration of unredeemable excess—a town for people who should live here in constant mortification as announced by the queen of Mortville, Queen Carlotta; a guerrilla gang of boys dedicated to freedom battles take us to

the rubble and unfinished buildings on the outskirts of a Mexican city, to a Penny Arcade Show where the teenagers are naked except for blue steel helmets and are being bugged, or across North Africa or the American suburbs. In both cases, we are not faced with oppositional tactics, or oppositional homosexual tactics, but with tactical maneuvers of the one who opposes the fantasy that generates endless narratives of progress. Portland calls for queer theory and politics that stand united against seeing queer subjects as complicit in the project of sanitation of urban industrial spaces. As *Desperate Living* and *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* show, accursed share and sinthomosexual—waste material and a queer subject reveling in unkempt space—engage in a critique of bourgeois progress, brandscape, and experience economy.

Space/place, heterotopia, “any-space-whatever,” terraforming, nomad space, haptic space, tactile space, topological/topographical place, mental space, gendered space, queer space/geography, or as the members of the Wake Forest University collective remind us: medieval sense of space and place, land usage amnesia, environmental ethics, place construction and reconstruction, ideological displacements in space, cultural and human geography, spatial organization of social relationships of power, the dialectics between natural and cultural spaces and places, and spatial mnemotechnics, all of these tropes of space allow us to fully comprehend that, indeed:

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (Foucault 23)

Space is the object’s freedom.

Space has its own history and historicity.

Thus, while dealing with space, I am always confronted with heterology—an ethical investigation of the rationalizations that give visibility to space, of the

technologies for the objectivization of the world, and of that which brings focus to the manner in which space can be thinkable, identified, and contrived. My encounter with space is always the encounter with the Other in which the Other is not only the expression of a possible space or the structure which conditions the entire discursive field and its functioning, but forces me to acknowledge my own historicity in the moment of this encounter. Here, the state of unrest, the mode of thinking, rather than the condition by which to live, and catachresis are the expressions of a possible space that is folding back upon itself to reveal my presence, as the authors published in this issue of *Forum* so eloquently illustrate, in film, in literature, on stage, in the city, in memory, in history, in politics, in ideology, in gendered landscape, in brandscape, and in the mind. . . .

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