

LIVED-SPACE

by O. F. BOLLNOW

PHILOSOPHY IN RECENT decades has been concerned to such a degree with the problem of the temporal structure of human existence that it may be considered the fundamental problem of present-day philosophy. The problem of the spatial constitution of human life, or of concretely lived-space has been dealt with surprisingly little.¹ It appears that since space belongs only

the least possible prejudice and see what we find. In this vein we inquire into the inner structure of space, as it appears concretely to man in his experience.

THE COORDINATES

We can take the first step in analogy with the more common approach used in investigating lived-time. Just as

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to the exterior surroundings of the life of man it might be less fruitful than the problem of time which holds man at its center. This idea is false and will not stand up on investigation. Of course the problem of lived-space cannot be developed simply by superficial analogy to that of lived-time, but gives rise to entirely new questions which would never be suspected if one started from the analogy of time. It seems idle to speculate on the superiority of one question over the other. It is better to approach the problem of lived-space with

the concrete time lived by man has been separated from abstract mathematical time, so here we seek what distinguishes the concrete living space of man from the space of mathematicians. We know about mathematical space from the efforts of the scientists. This is what we think of first when we speak of space. But we are less acquainted with live space. We live our everyday life in it, but do not reflect upon it. Therefore we can visualize it in its own peculiarity only if we borrow from the more commonly known mathematical space. For

simplicity we hold to the well-known perspectives of Euclidian space and base in it an orthogonal axis system.

The outstanding property of mathematical space is its homogeneity. No point and no direction is preferred to another; through a simple transformation one can make every point the coordinating zero point and every direction the coordinating axis. In *lived-space* these rules are not valid. In it there is both a distinct coordinating zero point which depends upon the place of the living man in space, and a distinct axis system which is connected with the human body. There are above all actual discontinuities, areas with distinct qualities that are separate from other areas by sharp boundaries. I shall attempt to establish this in particular.

It is best to proceed from the evident observation that lived-space must be applied to man who perceives and moves in it. This space should be considered above and below, fore and aft, right and left, by the direction scheme founded in the human body. But this already leads to difficulties; for the *one* axis is peculiar, the vertical axis, determined by the direction of gravitation. Above and below remain the same whether I stand or lie down. But among the other directions none is peculiar. That which is in front at the moment changes as soon as I turn around, and is now to the right or behind or somewhere else. Thus the vertical axis is related to the horizontal surface perpendicular to it. These two, the vertical axis and the horizontal plane from the lived-space.

We can add at once that the horizontal plane is no mere mental mathematical form but a very real fact. It is the surface of the earth on which we live and which divides space into two very different halves: the one is the air space above us, which our gaze can

penetrate but which we ourselves can penetrate but little, since we fall as soon as we are not held up. The second is the earth space beneath us, which we can penetrate even less and which is opaque to our gaze. It is on the surface between these two half spaces that our life is cast.

More complex is the question of the natural zero point of the space coordinates. This point is also determined through living man. Psychologists have attempted to locate it more exactly, as near the root of the nose, between the two eyes. But this identification of the zero point of lived-space with the momentary origin of sight is valid only for abstract perceptual space under isolated laboratory conditions. It does not apply to the relationship of the concrete living human being to his space. For it is characteristic of him that he is able to *move* to and fro in this space. This means that the space where a man finds himself at the moment may not be the space to which he belongs. There is what we may call a *natural place* to which he belongs, and only this can properly be called the zero point of his reference system.

All live movement in space occurs as a going away or a coming back. If I sit in the cafe, I can arise to fetch a newspaper and afterwards return to my place. But this place in the cafe is only a passing point of rest. After I have read my newspaper, I arise and go "home." But after I have returned to my place of residence, am I really "at home" there? Where is my *real* home? The romantics have seen in a profound way the task of man to find the "way home," and indeed this task is founded deep in the essence of man. But however we look at it, in some sense we can certainly say that man is home somewhere, and that his *house* is the reference point from which he builds his spatial world.

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But it would certainly be exaggerated and wide of the mark to call the individual house the center of a man's space. As the individual does not live alone but has a certain position as a member in a community, so also his house stands in a membered spatial surrounding. In the medieval settlement it was related to castle and church, but even today, if I live on the edge of a city I look to some perhaps not too localizable central point in "the city." Difficult as it may be to find it in a particular instance, there is such a middle point of life-filled space which is no longer the space of the individual man, but of the group and ultimately of the nation to which he belongs.

Even today in Italy the roads of the old empire still lead to Rome as the acknowledged center, and every kilometer stone shows without explanation the distance from Rome. In general every nation before the discovery of Columbus relativized all that, had considered its territory the middle of the world and set up in it the "navel of the world," whether the temple in Jerusalem for the Jews or the palace of the heavenly emperor in Peking for the Chinese.

Thus as a rule the space lived by men arranges itself around a determining center, which is conditioned by his place of residence. From this point outwards the principal directions are determined, the "regions" in space laid out in four ways consecrated by the course of the sun: the directions of the rising and setting sun, of noon and midnight; but we cannot enter further into this division of the space of life.

THE DWELLING

After this rather general view we turn our attention to the "house" in particular; for although it is part of a larger whole, it remains the spatial center of the life of the individual.³ There

are two points I would like to make concerning this house. First, man, a fugitive on earth, gains a stay in so far as with his building, with the solid walls of his house, he roots himself tight to the ground. This is what Saint-Exupery elaborated so magnificently in his *Citadelle*, the solid city in the wilderness. To *dwell* is not an activity like any other but a determination of man in which he realizes his true essence. He needs a firm dwelling place if he is not to be dragged along helplessly by the stream of time.

The second characteristic of the house is that by means of its walls man carves out of universal space a special and to some extent private space and thus separates an *inner space* from an outer space. Man, who according to Simmel is characterized by his ability to set boundaries and then overstep them, set these boundaries most immediately and obviously in the walls of his house. This duality of inner and outer space is fundamental to the erection of the total lived-space, indeed for human life in general.

Outer space is the space of openness, of danger and abandonment. If that were the only space, then the existentialists would be correct and man would really be the eternally hunted fugitive. He needs the space of the house as an area protected and hidden, an area in which he can be relieved of continual anxious alertness, into which he can withdraw in order to return to himself. To give man this space is the highest function of the house.

Even in our profane time the house has a certain *sacred* character which everyone senses once he has adverted to it. Though we hear occasionally of a so-called "dwelling machine," an attempt to force the designs of the machine age on the function of dwelling, we quickly sense the inadequacy of the idea. Hu-

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man dwelling retains certain indissoluble elements of archaic life which, are best understood, even in reference to present conditions, by considering what the history of religion and ethnology has to say about the original relationship of man to house when myth was still the determining influence. After Cassirer and van der Leeuw, Eliade has recently pursued this question. For our purpose it makes little difference whether we consider the house of man or the temple as the house of a god. "House and temple are essentially one," says the Dutch philosopher of religion, van der Leeuw. This is also true of the structured human settlement, the city as a whole. The plan and establishment always follow principles of mythical origin.

In every case the first step is to carve out of chaotic space a definite area set apart from the rest of the world as a holy precinct. The Latin word *templum*, meaning something cut out, is an apt expression of this. Cassirer stressed it a generation ago in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, unfortunately almost forgotten: "The consecration begins when a certain area is taken out of the rest of space, distinguished from other places and in a certain degree religiously fenced off." The inhomogeneity which we spoke of in the introduction as the distinguishing mark of lived-space as opposed to profane space, is essentially this separation of the holy from the profane which is embodied in the walls of the house.

Significant also are the forms of construction of the house, as well as of the temple and city in those ancient times. To build a house is to found a cosmos in a chaos. Every house, as Eliade maintains on ethnological grounds, is a picture of the world as a whole, and therefore every house construction is the repetition of the creation of the world, the complement of the

work once performed by the gods. Furthermore this work created by the gods, this world, stands only in as far as its creation is repeated symbolically by man. Eliade tells us that "in order to live in the world, man must found it," and such a founding takes place in the building of a house. Therefore ultimately house building signifies a world creating, world sustaining activity which calls for sacred rites.

I need not pursue this interesting perspective further, for its only purpose was to clarify in a pure and original case something that is maintained in house construction today in a paler but still essential form. It is not an accident that handmaking customs in cornerstone laying, house-raising and dedication festivals are more enduring here than elsewhere. They help us understand the inviolability of the home which has perdured in modern jurisprudence as an important fundamental right of man, the disproportionate gravity of the crime of burglary, and the inviolable right of the guest, which still exists, though weaker than in times gone by. The guest always enjoys the protection of the house. So even today the house is in a deep sense an inviolable area of peace, and thus sharply differentiated from the outside world without peace. And if there are no longer demons to threaten man outside the walls of his house, the threat of the outer world has not changed.

Though the house is an area of security and peace for man, he would pine away if he locked himself in his house to escape the dangers of the world outside; his house would soon become a prison. He must go out into the world to transact his business and to fulfill his role in life. Both security and danger belong to man, and consequently both areas of lived-space, as life develops in the tension between outer and inner space.

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Therefore he needs a link between the spaces within and without, an opening in the wall of the house which surrounds him. He needs a door by which he can leave and a window through which he can at least see the world outside. I have written about doors and windows elsewhere, and so I turn now to the other world that stretches beyond the threshold.

THE OUTER SPACE

I shall not dwell on the fact that the boundary between the security of the inner space and the insecurity of the outer is not so abrupt as it has seemed heretofore. When I leave the protection of my house, I do not immediately step into a hostile world. I remain at first in a protective neighborhood, an area of trusted relationships, of vocation, friendships, etc. Around the individual house is the broader area of that which we call home (*Heimat*). It thins out slowly from the relatively known through the comparatively unknown, into the completely unknown.

Three concepts characterize this world outside the protective boundaries of the house: breadth, strangeness and distance.

1. Breadth stands in contrast to narrowness. As clothing may or may not allow the body freedom of movement, so breadth in the space around us denotes the absence of restriction, room to move. Man will step out into wide-open spaces if he is not held back. The endless dimension of ocean or plain opens up before him when he steps out of the narrow valley. Wide spaces uplift man and gladden him, but their sublimity may also overpower him.

2. Strangeness stands in contrast with what is his own. Strangeness is the area where man no longer knows his way around and where he therefore

feels helpless. He can of course go into strange places to learn new things or on business, but he is outside the trusted area, in a hostile world, and the feeling of strangeness can overpower him. We all recognize the feeling of inexpressible homesickness.

3. Altogether different is distance, which speaks to man from the blue mountains on the horizon. It is not threatening and hostile as strangeness, but enticing and alluring, endowed with indescribable charm. When man wearsies of the ordinary existence, when the sameness of every day threatens to constrict his life, then distance beckons him. The longing for distant places is the basic urge of all romanticism which by a strange twist makes the road to far places the way back to a forgotten origin.

ROADS

The foreignness of the outer world shows itself as soon as a man leaves his house. The space of the outer world is not conveniently accessible. The land itself opposes encroachment, and man conquers it only by opening roads. Roads open up space and organize it.³

It is surprising how quickly such roads are built and how long they are maintained. No sooner do job opportunities arise on a construction project than paths appear for the workmen. They are laid out not by plan, but by the needs of life. But once they are there, often after only a few days, no one strays from them without cause. All movements are executed in their network as in an artery system. It is noteworthy that even the animals in the woods keep to their haunts, and zoologists tell us that in lands untouched by humans these haunts remain the same for hundreds and even thousands of years. The roads laid by man also, the great trade routes which connect settlements, are not

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slightly changed once they appear. It entails a large-scale operation by a strong civil power to lay entirely new planned routes. Thus Roman military power built the road system of the empire which has by and large prevailed until the present day. Under the two Napoleons were built the great country highways of France as well as the magnificent thoroughfares of Paris. Finally modern business is slowly creating its own network of expressways.

Such routes may take many forms, and they open space in very different ways. Consider two examples: the auto route and the hiking path. The auto route is a highway in the most emphatic sense, a means of moving from one place to another. It is therefore no place for loitering. As Schiller says: "There is no home here. Everyone passes hurried and aloof and no one inquires about the other's aches and pains." How much more true of the modern auto route! The pedestrian who wants to walk about leisurely has no place here; he blocks traffic and can be glad if he returns home unharmed.

The very pavement already cuts a piece of ground out of the natural world around it. For the user of the road, especially for the modern motorist, space is changing. The world is becoming one-dimensional, distances covered and distances to be covered. The motorist does not move in the surrounding country, but just on the road, and remains separated from the country by a sharp boundary. The countryside becomes a panorama which passes by. That does not necessarily mean that he is indifferent to it. He can enjoy its beauty, but it is remote as a picture. His real feeling of space is that of breadth and of the speed which opens up broad spaces. This is the space he lives, his real space, not the picturesque view. Only when he leaves his car and begins

to walk again does space change and he returns to his previous reality.

The hiking path is altogether different. It is not cut hard into the countryside like a rationally laid road but clings to the natural landscape. It curves and winds where the auto road goes straight, it leads thoughtfully around a tree which the road builder would consider an obstruction and tear away. Movement on such a path is different, and the feeling of space is different. The path does not shoot for a destination but rests in itself. It invites loitering. Here a man is *in* the landscape, taken up and dissolved into it, a part of it. He must have time when he abandons himself to such a path. He must stop to enjoy the view. But this jettison of rushing to goals, this inner aimlessness, is really the life function of rambling. Man steps back from the rational goal-striving to which the civilization presses him, back into an earlier, I might almost say prehistoric, state in which he can freely enjoy the pure present. As Linschoten put it: "True roaming is somewhat like a *return to primeval happiness*," the wanderer "has returned to the basis of all things." (Note: In this vein we have also here in Tuebingen a dissertation [by Stenzel] treating the anthropological function of wandering as a return to origins, and the inner rejuvenation that it brings).

HOUSEKEEPING

Again I must break off where an interesting question begins, because there are further aspects which will help to show the fruitfulness of the idea of lived-space. One is the question of the shaping of living space to their purposes (*Lebensraum*) by the people living in it. We touched upon one aspect of it in speaking of the construction of houses and roads. It is Heidegger who speaks of an "arranging" (*Einräumen*)

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of space, transferring the concept of straightening out a room or chest of drawers to the space organized by human beings, where man puts everything in a certain place to be ready for later use. Heidegger's concept of being-at-hand also implies such a being-ready at the proper place. Human living-space is just such a purposeful arrangement of places and positions to which the things around them belong. This book belongs on the bookshelf and that in the work-room, the pliers to the tool box, and everything has its proper place.

Dilthey already pointed out that this thoroughly organized space is a component of the objective spirit and is intelligible to us because of this. The order of seats in a living room, the order of houses along the street, all this is intelligible to us because in it human goal-seeking finds an object.

Sometimes, however, this order is disturbed by life itself; for it may happen that a man will carelessly let something lie or hurriedly misplace it. This is the disorder which constricts his living space, and he must restore it by arranging things once more. This is a strange state of affairs but important for the understanding of space. In an objective sense man does not always have space to the same degree. It is lost through disorder and can be restored through order. Therefore human activity can create space, and we might paraphrase Mephistopheles: "Order teaches you to gain space."

LIVED DISTANCE

It would be interesting to investigate the lines of force which life follows within this thoroughly organized space. I select only one very simple question: the concrete, live distance between two such points in space. This distance is not to be identified with the

abstract, geometrical distance in centimeters, but is conditioned by many circumstances, favorable and unfavorable. I have tried to clarify this problem with the following question: How great is the concrete live distance between a point on a wall of my home, to the point straight through on the other side of the wall in my neighbor's home? Mathematically, depending upon the thickness of the wall, it may be a half meter. Concretely it will be much farther, for to reach it I have to leave my room, my house, and go out on the street to my neighbor's house. Then if I am not well acquainted with this neighbor he may make such a wry face at my question that I may prefer not to ask it at all. In other words, a point which is mathematically near may be practically very far away, perhaps inaccessible. More generally, the structure of the space I experience and live through follows the "lines of force" of my concrete life situation.

The same situation may exist in an Alpine valley. The connecting roads all lie on the valley floor where places are easily accessible, while a place in the neighboring valley, fairly near in terms of kilometers, may in practice be attainable only by going a long way around. Excellent illustrations of this are found in the space views of so-called primitive peoples. It is told of an Indian tribe of the South American jungle where a river is the only practicable connection that they think of directions not as north and south but as up and down stream, right and left of the current, and that their scheme "straightens" the meanderings of the river bed. We do the same when we travel on a riverboat. We do not altogether overlook the turns, but we do not realize their depth. We straighten the course of the river in our imagination and are often astounded when we see the "real" course on a map.

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Still more interesting is an example reported by the ethnologist, Jensen: A rather long Polynesian island is cut by a high and impenetrable mountain chain. The direction scheme of the inhabitants consists in the directions mountain-ward and oceanward, left or right around the shore. It never occurs to them that a place on the other side of the mountain might be reached or even thought of as directly over the mountain; the way leads necessarily along the shore. The interior of the island is simply not there for their lived-space, so that they illustrate a topologically interesting ring shaped image of space.

SPACE IS FELT

To round out the picture I would like to include one more viewpoint. Distances within lived-space depend strongly on how a man *feels* at the moment. Binswanger to my knowledge was the first to introduce the notion of the *inclined space* (*gestimmten Raums*), whereby he means by inclination (*stimmung*) the total state of feeling which goes through a man and at the same time binds him to the surrounding world, and which underlies and influences in some way all the movements of the soul. In this sense we may say that lived-space depends on a man's present disposition.

We all know how the distances of remote objects changes with atmospheric conditions. In sunshine they recede into the blue mist and in the clarity preceding a rain again approach within reach. So also they change with the moods of man. Binswanger quotes Goethe here: "O God, how the world and heaven shrink together when our heart cowers in its barriers." Fear means literally constriction of heart, and the outer world draws in oppressive and heavy on the man in fear. When fear departs the world spreads out and

opens a larger space for action, in which a man can move freely and easily.

Binswanger was concerned principally with pathological conditions. The words of Schiller that "things jostle each other hard in space" taken strictly are true only in a depressive state, just as in a euphoric state space opens wide. "A person does not collide," he says, "with things as with something hard; rather they recede and 'make room' so that one passes through without injury." Similarly Nietzsche points out that in ecstatic exaltations "Space and time perceptions change; immense distances are scanned and first become perceptible; the span of sight over great masses and distances."

In this vein the psychiatrist Straus has analyzed the space experience of the dancing man: It is an undirected space in which the movement of the dance back and forth and around a point of origin on a restricted surface can still be executed without a feeling of being hemmed in. Straus speaks of a "present" space resposing in the present without a future commitment. In it movement takes place which rests in itself and is joy-giving through itself. He contrasts it sharply with the "historical space" of our purposive activity, a distinction which leads beyond the understanding of space deep into the problems of philosophical anthropology.

A final closing remark: What is said here of outside space is true in due measure of the space of activity (*Spielraum*) of human associations. Where the spirit of envy and rivalry take hold of man every one stands in the other's way, and there is painful narrowness and friction. But when men come together in the true spirit of colleagues friction disappears. One does not deprive the other of space; he rather *increases* the acting space of

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the other by working with him. "The more angels there are, the more free space" Swedenborg once said, for he considered the essence of the angelic not the use of space, but the creation of space by selfless devotion. Rilke repeatedly emphasized this as the work of the lover. "Lovers," he once said, "continually generate space, breadth and freedom for each other." With these meditative and beautiful words I should like to close my discussion.

REFERENCES

1. The term "lived-space" (erlebter Raum) is taken from E. Minkowski, *Le Temps Vecu*, (Paris, 1933). His book, *Vers une Cosmologie*, treats the problem of space somewhat in the manner of the present article. As well as I know, the first to develop the question was Graf Karlfried of Durckheim in his *Neue Psychologische Forschungen*, (Munich, 1932) but his beginnings were not carried further. While Heidegger gave prominence to time, H. Lassen, in his *Beitragen zur Phanomenologie und Psychologie der Anschauung*, (Wurzberg, 1939) gives precedence to space in the discussion of man. Recently the Buytendijk school published a successful series of studies on the subject in the yearbook *Situation*, (Utrecht and Antwerp, 1954).
2. On the subject of the house cf. O. F. Bollnow, *New Security*, (Stuttgart, 1955).
3. "The road opens space" is a quotation from the Dutch psychologist, Linschoten, in *Situation*, a yearbook published by the Buytendijk circle, which contains several articles dealing with the problem of lived-space in the perspective of Phenomenology.

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