The study of appropriation of space supposes a consensus on definitions. Here, the anthropological appropriation of built space is considered in relation to the socio-economic conditions of physical appropriation.

1 - Three preliminary remarks are necessary: on the importance of the contradictions related to the environment in the industrial civilisation, on the loss of bearings, on the rapidity of the transformations.

2 - The psychocultural processes operating in appropriation are related to practices, perception, images, representations, desires, aesthetic feelings, the imaginary, aspirations, plans. Between the objects arranged in the daily space and the subject who tends to appropriate this space, complex dialectical relationships are established.

3 - Examples are taken from the housing-space, during real-time, in the neighborhood space in the production space. This last example is based on a survey made by workers themselves, that shows the processes of "factual appropriation" of space. The links between work-space, housing-space and neighborhood-space are emphasized.

4 - The processes of appropriation can be studied only in relation to the processes of technological transformation and social transformation, the one not necessarily leading to the other. The inequality in the possibilities of appropriation is underscored. With the lodging, new objects, television in particular, modify both the social relationships and the mode of appropriation.

5 - In the appropriation of space by all possible? To ask this question is to open a discussion on the establishment of a genuine democracy.

All research on the appropriation of built space is hampered by a twofold ambiguity. On the one hand, the relationships between the notion of space and the actions of environment, milieu, territory, remain uncertain. On the other hand,
where persists a confusion between the exercise of the right to possession and the psychological processes of appropriation.

In the first place, it is necessary to recall that the word space, in our study, may be used only followed by an adjective, which contains within it the same meaning. The notion of socio-geographical space, taking into account the social differences and the arrangement of objects in relation to each other in the material setting, is the one we shall primarily retain in this paper. We shall include in it the natural space and the built space. To study the appropriation processes of this space, we shall insist on the practical, the perception, the representations, the desires, the values, the spatially related to this space. The notion of environment will be retained to speak of the socio-geographical space, concerning the transformations it undergoes on the part of men and the action it has on them. The milieu will be taken as the most general term, and the 'social milieu' will mean a group of men characterized by subjective ways of life, certain ways of thinking, relations to socio-geographical space, that does not however completely form a social group of social class.

In the second place, we shall find that the psychological processes of appropriation cannot be useful analyzed without taking into account the socio-economic processes of appropriation. The individual who owns his house and the one who rents it do not have the same representation of their housing-space, do not attach the same values to it, do not have the same feelings toward it. The ownership of land and objects gives a right and a power on the user, which makes them dependent, and this social dominance has multiple consequences on the psychological reactions of the persons concerned.

Starting from the obstacles in the social and psychological appropriation of space to day, we shall study the socio-social processes of appropriation and the subjective effects of the milieu, the daily space and the objects of appropriation. Then the processes of transformation to end by asking ourselves the question: is the appropriation of space by all possible?

- Three obstacles to appropriation of space in the present time

Before dealing with the specifically psychological problems, it is important, in our proceedings, to situate them in relation to the socio-economic conditions in which we can study them. The study of these conditions reveals a series of contradictions and confusions we can group in three sets.

Firstly the contradictions connected with the environment taken up, in the industrial civilization, proportions such that individuals and groups are bound by fear of future catastrophes. These contradictions are apparent in the opposition between the technological development, which ought to allow mastery over socio-geographical space, and the generalized degradation of the environment resulting from the bad use of these technologies because of competition, profiteering, the craving for power. Over population, pollution, urban degradation are felt as nearer and nearer dangers leading to liquidation. The planning of built space is submitted to competition, profiteering, domination by power, speculation and becomes the base of social conflicts. The power of a few on space opposites itself to the appropriation of space by all.

Secondly, the citizens of industrial societies sometimes seem to have lost the feeling which allowed them to find their horizons in geographical space as well as in social structures and in ways of thinking. In increasingly impersonal cities, confronted by an excessive amount of information which they cannot dominate anymore, manipulated by the mass media and by an organization of built space without relations to their needs and their aspirations, they are properly speaking ‘disoriented’, bewildered. Consequently, they lose the means of appropriating space.

...
Clearly, the technological transformations are constantly specious. The sociogeographical space is completely modified in little-time, sometimes before individuals and groups are able to reassociate and familiarize themselves with the new shapes that have emerged. For which follows a third obstacle to appropriation.

In consequence, the search for a method to overcome these difficulties takes on an ever-growing importance. But before indicating some of its aspects, it is necessary to point out on one hand, for subjects, the psycho-social processes of appropriation and on the other hand, for objects, the daily spaces in which appropriation can take place. This distinction aims only at a better grasp, in connection with space, of the subject-object dialectics in the processes of transformation.

2 - The psycho-social processes of appropriation and the subject-object dialectics

In the appropriation of space, the individual and the social cannot be distinguished. Doubtlessly the appropriation of space begins by the appropriation of the body. Can a man who is not master of his body ever feel at ease in space and be familiar with objects? The industrial civilization has worked up to now by a very great inferiority in this field in comparison with other civilizations, from which derives the recent fact, in reaction to the degradation of the environment, of the conquest of the body and of natural spaces. But at the same time, appropriation is only possible in a society, in groups, in a social class in relation to other men. The sociogeographical space with which we are concerned is a space qualified, institutionalized, organized according to symbolic systems, systems of representation and scales of values. And this space is already, to a greater or lesser extent, someone’s property. Society’s projects for public spaces which has acquired rights on the land, the buildings, the objects, for private spaces. To have a feeling of appropriation also means to conflict or to find harmony with others. Migrant workers appropriate a neighborhood in an industrial city by a gradual takeover, by transforming it, giving it the shapes which allow them to feel at home together, to find their society again. To do this, they are confronted with landscapes, furnished room/owners, the police, the social services, the administration. Everyone of them there takes place a conflict of cultures and civilizations. Similarly, it is impossible for a worker to psychologically appropriate a middle-class neighborhood. The dialectics of codified-space experienced-space constantly arises in the appropriation processes, and the dominance ratio, linked to the conquest and the defense of spatial property, on the economic and legal level, is reenacted in the psychology of individuals and groups that are in different situations.

This preliminary sociological remark makes it possible to analyze the whole of the psycho-social processes at work in the appropriation of space. We shall here use the study of the constitution of these processes which we have examined elsewhere on a more general scale (1), and ask what does “appropriate” mean?

The first observations focus on the practices in a given sociogeographical space: the repetition of gestures, the relationships with others, the affinities given to objects, the itineraries etc. How are these objects, the distances between them, the guiding marks to find one’s bearings, perceived then by the actors? How are these perceptions associated to various memories so as to form more or less familiar images of space? How are more elaborate representations of space organized? How do actors view their own practices and the practices of others? What are the desires linked to these perceptions, these images, these representations?

At the meeting point of affective and cognitive aspects, at the meeting point
of desires and representations, these emerge aspirations related to the modification of built space, linked with all the imagery specific to the culture of a group, a social class, a society, but experienced in a particular way by each individual. To appropriate a built space already consists in being able to adjust the object space and the represented space, which already gives an impression of cognitive familiarity, and in being able to associate the desire to the representation and the use of objects in space, which gives an impression of affective familiarity.

Moreover, objects are arranged in built space according to a hierarchy of values. They are symbol-makers. They evoke therefore a hidden world and thus are linked to the imaginary. They also have an "affective symbolism" (as if they were loved ones or have been given by them or simply because they represent them directly (photos) or indirectly (smells, colour schemes).

As for the sexual symbolism of objects and their arrangement in space, the question has been sufficiently analysed in psycho-analysis to exempt us from reproducing here all that has been said on the subject. It is evident that incessant attractions and repulsions contribute to make the daily space more or less attractive or repulsive and to increase or neutralize a feeling of appropriation.

The appropriation of built space is also an aesthetic appropriation. The color schemes which the subject is more or less attracted to, the shapes felt as more or less harmonious, their associations to sounds and smells, the play of lights, the perspectives, may give an impression of pleasure, of fulfillment, of reassurance, while the unease provoked by disagreeable sensations can give one the impression he is a stranger.

The social-geographical space experienced by the subject (individual or group) is also the space of action, and its degree of appropriation depends on the degree to which it is possible to act more or less freely. Psychological appropriation that seems more closely linked to physical property. The legal owner of land, buildings, objects can use them in any way he wishes, and he feels master of the space surrounding him. On the other hand, the space that belongs to someone other than himself has a feeling of restraint, a feeling of non-belonging, an atmosphere of uncertainty. The built space is, in this case, a ground of conflicts, of domination, of rivalries in claim, which are felt in all the details of daily life. This is true of accommodation, but also of outside spaces. An ethnic group, a social class, may feel they are strangers in a neighbourhood whose land belongs to landlords of whom they are dependents, or more generally to a State they do not view as their State, but as the one of another class or of another ethnic group. Yet there exists an appropriation without lawful right when the imaginary plays an important role, and we shall come back to it, but it makes latent conflicts and the contradictions specific to material conditions and social structures.

To sum up these few remarks on the psycho-social processes, we may say that the appropriation of sociogeographical space, observed from the point of view of the subject, individual or group, involves at the same time cognitive, affective, symbolic, aesthetic processes in relation to other individuals and other groups and to objective situations of dominance linked to the modes of property.

3 - Daily Spaces and the Objects of Appropriation

These various psycho-social processes and their relations with actually experienced situations demand to be analysed in the various aspects of daily life. In this perspective, the house, the lodging, are the first places of appropriation. Whatever the judicial mode of occupation, the members of a...
family take possession of the inner space, share it between themselves, reserve rooms for common use and individual territories (room, corner, furniture ...). The occupation pattern of the house reproduces the family structure, and the arrangement of objects reflects the harmonies, the conflicts, the prevalences, the affinities, the rejections. The lack of room, in too small lodgings, makes the appropriation of space difficult and often diminishes the aesthetic aspects. The proximity increases the effective aspects of appropriation and often curtails the aesthetic aspects. On the contrary, too big lodgings, in the upper classes, allow many esthetical pleasures, make it possible to organize the space according to the representations one has of it, privilege individual appropriation, but increase the effective distances between the inhabitants.

To take only one example of daily life in the home, the meal space is the place of collective appropriation where each one at the same time has his place, his angle of vision, his distance towards the others. The rule, the models which govern the arrangement and the use of objects vary largely from one country to the other and in the same country, from one social class to another. They are sometimes totally opposed. The appropriation of food by eating with the hands in an Arab country accompanies a certain form of communication between persons, a way of sitting down, gestures which give to the meal space its specific and attractive character. In a rich European family, the accumulation of conventions of prohibitions, of recommendations to the children may give to the meal space a rigid character which limits effective appropriation. In other social milieux, where these repressive aspects are less prominent, the meal may more easily be a time of relaxation, of joking, a time when, as a guest said while pushing away the remains of food that were in his way, "people make themselves at home in their plates". In any case the meal space is a place of communication, of pleasure and at the same time of learning, of socialization. In it, the relation desire-representation-value-turns may be a source of tension or of relaxation. The space can be cold or warm, depressing or comforting, but never neutral. All living spaces could be studied in this way. The bedroom, sometimes only the parents' bed and the sexual pan, in British families the closed space of the closed bed, give to the man and woman an intimate private space. The spaces reserved to children, adolescents, younger ones, relatives and friends reflect the child/adult relationships, the desire of independence and evasion differently expressed by boys and girls, the circuit of acquaintances of each generation. The impression of familiarity, of ease, of proximity derives here from the harmonization between the desires of communication or isolation, between the representations of others and the relationships with them, the possibility of respecting the privileged relationships according to a hierarchy of values that the subjects refer to.

The appropriation of the housing-space cannot be studied without reference to the lodging's surroundings, and more broadly, to the neighbourhood and the city. In an old working-class neighbourhood, the staircases, the landings, the halls, the sidewalks, the shops, the "kiosks" are part of the familiar space. Every street is stamped with an effective mark, an attraction or a rejection. A school. The lodging is a place where neighbours are welcome and the separation between private-space and outside-space is not as marked as in middle-class neighbourhoods. Appropriation is much more common to a larger group. The falling back on oneself, recently endured, is often due to the fear of losing face because of the smallness of the lodging, and because the lack of means to arrange it to one's taste creates embarrassment when friends or neighbours come in. Moreover, in working-class environments at least, the appropriation of the bour- geois and the neighbourhood space cannot be separated from the appropriation of the work-space, the impression collected is the latter reverberating on the others. Built space includes the whole of these particular spaces. The production space, the space of work, the production space, the tension between object ownership and...
appropriation of space is maximal. Between the craftsman who owns his workshop and all the instruments he uses and the worker who takes his place every morning in front of a machine, the property of a multinational enterprise like the factory itself where this machine stands, there is a radical opposition. For the craftsman, each machine has its place in space: he has himself arranged the objects to fit his convenience and his tastes. The workshop is part of himself and he is part of the workshop. The factory worker does not seem to have any of these possibilities. He is deeply sensitive to his dependence in a space foreign to him and this feeling influences his relationships to space during all of his life. On this subject it would be useful to study, together with the appropriation processes, the processes of "deappropriation" of built space. The means used to make a subject, individual or group, feel that the space in which he moves does not belong to him are multiple and should be carefully analysed, either in business concerns or in accommodations where the tenants are limited in their rights to space.

An example of this dependence is provided by a study made by workers themselves, in which they invited participation (2). In the enterprise they work in, everything is done to prevent the psychological appropriation of production space. They are limited in their gestures, both by the necessities of the work and by the will of the director, who arranges them as space as if they were objects. One morning, a man found a message: "n, who is on this machine, will pass on another machine ..." without any other explanation. Often the overseers are ordered to prevent conflicts between the workers. A woman declares: "The monitor watches us, we feel she measure the work, we feel this stress."

The constant constraint in space is linked to the constraint in time, rhythm of work, distribution. In this production space, the worker is deeply alienated, in both senses of the word at once exploited in his work and made a stranger to himself. The inequality in the appropriation of space is blatant. "The smallest one in the most cramped by the system, and, as you go up, each one has more space: in the factory, the turner is at his machine, the foreman already has 70 sq. meters, the works manager has 100 sq. meters, the boss has 2 or 3 hectares and the big boss has the planet."

This worker's statement may give us food for thought, especially since the constrained in space goes on outside. When out of the factory, the worker still feels foreign, and a demonstration, during a strike, can give him the impression of a "conquest." "It was as if we had conquered an unknown land. We were taking the Grand Rue, and it really gave the men an impression of fulfillment". Thus, we come back to the appropriation of the street and of the public space, to the appropriation of the neighborhood and the appropriation of the lodging. We are led to distinguish between the collective appropriation of public space, the appropriation in common of space in a small neighborhood unit by people of the same class, same social milieu and the private appropriation of a lodging by an individual or a "household", family or group of people living together. But this makes us understand more clearly that the three kinds of appropriation are interdependent: the one sometimes compensating for the frustration and "disappropriation" in another's sector. The problem constituted by this interdependence will appear more clearly through the study of the transformation processes.

1 - Appropriation processes and transformation processes.

In spite of all the constraints undergone and the limitations felt, in spite of the pressures applied by those who own the built space, or by those who have the power to organize it according to their models and their desires, individuals and groups always succeed in a certain measure in having a more or less strong feeling of appropriation for the space they live in. But a new difficulty...
by virtue when the organization of built space transforms itself as an ever
specifying rhythm, never allowing the subjects to find their bearings and to
become attuned to objects. The industrial civilization is so deeply marked
by fast technological transformations, and by the changes in conditions resul-
ting from it, that the disappropriation of space is sometimes presented as a
progress, a liberation. The possibility of finding anywhere in the world the
same type of lodging, with the same commodities, would allow people to travel
without luggage since they could find upon arrival the objects they need,
arranged in space almost in the same way. This utopian image, which hardly
realizes the preoccupations of some repeatedly during architects, is a projec-
tion in the future of the modes already experienced nowadays by the business-
class of the single high executive, of whom the worker we quoted said he possess-
ated ‘a single large room to himself’ in the hotels near international
airports are already giving us a first taste of it.

But the reality of the transformation of built space is far in quite diffe-
rent. The technical transformations of buildings take a part in the conflicts
and the social struggles that occur in large cities. The built space is trans-
formed, not in answer to the needs and the desires of appropriation of the
owners of the inhabitants, but first of all to achieve a greater efficiency
in production, to allow a greater profit in the orientation of the consumption
of accommodations and enclosures, and finally privileges the richest. The cottage,
the individual house with garden which workers and members of the lower middle
classes have sought for long, is becoming a luxury difficult to obtain or to
maintain, and in any case, at the cost of very long daily commuting. The old
working-class neighborhoods, where the poor quality of the lodgings and the
insolubility were compensated by a very intense appropriation of space in common,
are destroyed and replaced by high-rise luxury buildings where members of the
richest classes then come to live. Following a well-known process, the former
inhabitants are then relegated in new towns away from the center, in spite of
their protestations. Whatever they gain in material advantages (which are not
always evident), they lose in possibilities of appropriation.

On the other hand, old disintegrated neighborhoods are renovated and the very
well equipped flats, whose prices rapidly go up, are sold to new very rich
inhabitants who have a taste for the old, the "retro", according to the fashion-
able expression, and they appropriate the space, materially and psychologically.
Meanwhile, the workers and clerks find housing in collective buildings, suburbs,
"land development projects" now become "new towns", built either according to
tables of needs, conceived mechanically, multiplying the repetitions and cre-
ating the space of boredom, or built in imitation of the models of the upper
class which the builders belong to, models which do not correspond to the
expectations of workers, clerks, lower executives for whom they are meant. There
results a deep discrepancy between what is built and what is actually experienc-
ed which makes the psychological appropriation of space even more difficult.

Within the lodgings, the technical transformations modify the practices, the
possibilities, the modes of appropriation. The plans held by new objects
change, for the members of the family, their habits of accommodation and the
ways of distributing in. Television in particular plays a double role
from this point of view. On the one hand, the grouping of people around it
marks it as one of the most important magnets in the life of the group,
considerably more so than the dining table. On the other hand, it introduces in the
daily space another space which superposes itself to the first in the representa-
tion the viewers have of it. There may result from this a confusion whose
effects have not always been noticed. A man who has just spent several hours
in front of his television set may, in a way, feel foreign to his own daily
universe. The discrepancy between the poverty of his actual lodging, and the
luxury of the represented lodgings may become more striking and create a
...
relative lack of interest for nearby objects, but the representation of catastrophes, of famine, of wars may reinforce the desire of appropriation and the need for security in the home. Through television, the outside world invades the private space, but the outside world interesting is an artificial world represented by those who own the mass media, and the illusion of the diminution of barriers and distances is soon felt to be an illusion. On the contrary, for the most privileged, the richest, whose lodging is in harmony with the representative functions of films and television, the impression of widening, of possessing the outside world may be increased. The opposition between rich and poor is far from suppressed by these new technologies.

1 = Is appropriation by all possible?

In function of the changes in the housing-space, work-space, neighborhood space, surrounding space, and in function of the geographical mobility which multiple transport, therefore successive appropriations, a certain uniformity in appropriation could seem to be developing. In fact, the barriers which are often be reinforced as long as changes in the architecture of societies will not be made. The technological transformations in built space will not largely lead to social progress. The effort to prevent consists in reversing the problem's same. The technological means have become such that they ought to give the possibility to use them in urban and building, not for competition, nor the conquest of power, nor profit, but the organization of space that benefits the dominant groups, but to adapt the built space to a new project of society where the appropriation of space by all would be possible.

The appropriation of space consists in the possibility of moving, possessing, relaxing, sitting, feeling, admiring, dreaming, learning, creating, according to one's desires, aspirations, projects. It corresponds to a set of psychobiological processes, which is situated in a subject-object relationship, between the subject (individual or group) who appropriates and the objects arranged around him in daily life. It associates practical, cognitive processes and affective processes. It is limited by the obstacles to physical and juridical possession and by the socio-economic conditions to which the subject is submitted.

The appropriation of space is not an isolated individual act. It is social in essence for the objects and their arrangement in space are message-bearing. Appropriation of space is communication. It is deeply marked by social relationships, the whole of social structures, the ideologies. To develop the possibilities of appropriation demands the transformation of the whole society and of the built space which is only its expression. At the most, in each individual, in his own lodging, it is the whole conception of existence which is concerned. In this perspective only, the psychobiological study of appropriation takes on its meaning. Finally, it comes into an ambitious project: to contribute to the construction of a real democracy.

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