

Ineffable Space Le Corbusier

Taking possession of space is the first gesture of living things, of men and of animals, of plants and of clouds, a fundamental manifestation of equilibrium and of duration. The occupation of space is the first proof of existence.

The flower, the plant, the tree, the mountain stand forth, existing in a setting. If they one day command attention because of their satisfying and independent forms, it is because they are seen to be isolated from their context and extending influences all around them. We pause, struck by such interrelation in nature, and we gaze, moved by this harmonious orchestration of space, and we realize that we are looking at the reflection of light.

Architecture, sculpture, and painting are specifically dependent on space, bound to the necessity of controlling space, each by its own appropriate means. The essential thing that will be said here is that the release of aesthetic emotion is a special function of space.

Action of the work (architecture, statue, or painting) on its surroundings: vibrations, cries or shouts (such as originate from the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens), arrows darting away like rays, as if springing from an explosion; the near or distant site is shaken by them, touched, wounded, dominated, or caressed. *Reaction of the setting*: the walls of the room, its dimensions, the public square with the various weights of its facades, the expanses or the slopes of the landscape even to the bare horizons of the plain or the sharp outlines of the mountains—the whole environment brings its weight to bear on the place where there is a work of art, the sign of man's will, and imposes on it its deep spaces or projections, its hard or soft densities, its violences or its softnesses. A phenomenon of concordance takes place, as exact as mathematics, a true manifestation of plastic acoustics; thus one may speak of one of the most subtle of all orders of phenomena, sound, as a conveyor of joy (music) or of oppression (racket).

Without making undue claims, I may say something about the "magnification" of space that some of the artists of my generation attempted around 1910, during the wonderfully creative flights of cubism. They spoke of the *fourth dimension* with intuition and clairvoyance. A life devoted to art, and especially to a search after harmony, has enabled me, in my turn, to observe the same phenomenon through the practice of three arts: architecture, sculpture, and painting.

The fourth dimension is the moment of limitless escape evoked by an exceptionally just consonance of the plastic means employed.

It is not the effect of the subject chosen; it is a victory of proportion in everything—the anatomy of the work as well as the carrying out of the artist's intentions whether consciously controlled or not. Achieved or unachieved, these intentions are always existent and rooted in intuition, that miraculous catalyst of acquired, assimilated, even forgotten wisdom. In a complete and successful work there are hidden masses of implications, a veritable world which reveals itself to those whom it may concern, which means: to those who deserve it.

Then a boundless depth opens up, effaces the walls, drives away contingent presences, *accomplishes the miracle of ineffable space*.

I am not conscious of the miracle of faith, but I often live that of ineffable space, the consummation of plastic emotion.

Here I have been allowed to speak as a man of the laboratory, dealing with his personal experiments carried out in the major arts which have been so unfortunately dissociated or separated for a century. Architecture, sculpture, painting: the movement of time and of events now unquestionably leads them toward a synthesis.



[The figure] necessitates the horizon of the ground or architectural walls. Infinite horizon into which the radiant waves are going to sink, architectural walls poised to echo, to bring to life this acoustic time-space phenomenon evoked at the beginning of these notes. [Untitled, but one of the "Ozon" series, oil on wood, 1929/1944. From *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, January 1946, pp. 16–17. Copyright © 1992 ARS, N.Y./SPADEM, Paris.]