CONTEXT AS A FIELD OF REFERENCE AND AS A PROCESS
One Thousand Years of Building and Rebuilding Prague Castle

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The photographer Josef Sudek has left us a remarkable shot of the Third Courtyard of Prague Castle. There does not appear to be anything exceptional about the composition and perspective: a view vertically downwards, a grid positioned diagonally, an open construction created by a circle, individual points and their clusters, the particularising play of descending light on a flat surface – all these are stylistic means which were standard in the photography of constructivism and of neue sachlichkeit from the beginning of the 1920s. But Sudek's photograph dates from 1936. What is remarkable is that it was possible to take it on the spot without any great manipulation by the photographer. It is for us to realise that the area caught in this shot is something we could describe as the sempiternal setting of Czech, secular, and church history. Ever since the 10th century this area has been crossed by all those who were living on or visiting the hill on which Prague Castle stands, whether they were heading towards the seat of princes (later, of kings) or were making for the shrine of the nation, the St. Vitus Cathedral and the tombs of St. Wenceslas and St. Adalbert; indeed, all of those who moved between the two poles – the one, secular, spreading out beyond the left-hand frame of the picture; the other, sacred, reposing on the right-hand side, and likewise out of view. Neither dominant is shown by Sudek, neither the sacerdotal nor the imperial. Taking an approach typical of the inter-war period, he concentrates on the space in between, and on the positive elements of function and activity.

Josef Sudek: The Third Courtyard, 1936

Essential tensions

Sudek's photograph is a convincing proof of the successful adaptation, at a consistently modern and realistic level, of the Third Courtyard, carried out by Josip Plečnik between 1927 and 1932. The aesthetic of the photograph is not adapted to Plečnik's creative ideas, but follows their principles. It is a non-hierarchical aesthetic, a language of forms, which guides equivalent elements to the harmony of full tension. "The content of a work finds its expression in the composition, that is, in the internally organised set of certain essential tensions,"[1] wrote Kandinsky, who in this way emphasised the basic dynamic understanding of shape and "the composition of shapes into a work" which is particular to this period. The circular definition of the St. George monument places the statue off-centre. The bronze statue and its narrow stone plinth are eccentrically

positioned, leading to a singular combination of ideas about movement and direction. The avoidance of the centre creates the impression that the circle is rotating, or alternatively that it is an element moving in advance in a direction which emphatically shifts the orientation of the statue and its plinth. At the same time, the inner space of the circle does have a centre in the shape of the outline of a square; however, this centre was not created expressly for the piece in question, but serves rather to anchor it in the system as a whole. This anchorage is the standard element of the broad spread of the space: a single unit is composed of nine light-coloured squares and framed by twenty-eight small dark squares. There occurs "a harmony of concentration and non-concentration" - once more I quote from Kandinsky's tract, not so distant in time and substance, "Punkt und Linie zu Fläche" ("Point, Line into Surface" 1926), in which he judges the simplest case of composition to be "the case of the centrally lying point – the point in the centre of the basic surface, which is the square", and then moves on to the off-centre structure, where the point steps out of the centre of the basic square.[2] To research the "elementary elements" in their mutual relationship and in their relationship to the "basic surface" was the theoretical task which Kandinsky set himself. Plečnik realised it in a way no less strict and principled; to which, however, one should add that his compositional solution has also a social orientation. Such teaching about free movement and unforced association was introduced into life in the seat of power in the way once expressed by the patron, President Masaryk: "The education of the electorate and their parliamentary representatives must be self-education and self-training."[3]

This comment by Masaryk, embodying a rejection of indoctrination and manipulation, dates from 1928. Ian Jeffrey, writing in 1995, drew attention to it when he discussed its meaning for Plečnik's applied democratic architecture and its system. The idea it ultimately expresses is certainly valid in our case: "And in some cases his intention is clearly to stage, by means of his architecture, the other citizen as participant in that process of 'self-education' being undergone by the spectator."[4]

The paving of the public precincts of the Castle with rectangular "constituents" perfectly serves the purpose whereby ceremonial escorts, military parades and the passage of sentries may be co-ordinated. Sudek perceived the courtyard in a different way, and Plečnik, who had the stones for the paving brought from many different quarries in Czechoslovakia so that the "highest space" could be covered in a dignified way representative of the whole, would certainly have approved Sudek's view. The space he created not only tolerates but also maintains the march of organised geometry (note for example, the group half-way up to the left), just as the foot-steps of those who ignore the grid (note for example, the individual pedestrians in the upper right quarter); it gives firm support and back-up in detail, but at the same time accommodates natural groupings, which are circular concentrations of many people.

However, Plečnik would have had some reservations concerning Sudek's photograph. To put it another way, he would have found it necessary to criticise a photograph which is too preoccupied with its pictorial effect. As I said earlier, the shot fails to show the relationship between the space and the buildings, the filling and the boundaries, the

empty and the solid, the horizontal and the vertical. The courtyard as shown in the photograph could freely continue, since no limit appears in either direction. This impression can be substantiated. Plečnik often really did use serial, neutral, even indifferent and prefabricated elements – materials and products of the new age. But here we touch on only a part of his artistic strategy.

Whoever enters the Third Courtyard and takes on him-or herself the exercise of "self-education" (which is an exercise not only of aesthetic self-education), can, so far as Plečnik's involvement is concerned, make two observations about which there exists almost no possibility of overlap, because they switch around like the pictures in a kaleidoscope: The stone surface, which is apparently sufficient to itself, puts vertical elements, people and objects into a freely-organised order, whilst being in conflict with the buildings at its edges; and the grid system, the building of which was started from the basic –that is, the south – side of the palace which is the seat of the Head of State, and which also treats in an elemental form the largest theme known by Prague ordering of space. The "essential tensions" flow from essential relationships.

Essential relationships

At this point of the discussion we must – in order to continue – go far back into the past, to the geographical shape of this hill and to its early history. The physical context – in Tomas Valena's sense, the "Topos" – was given by the ridge of the hill with its relatively flat top which offered three determining qualities: length, direction and drop, the change in the slope down from the plain. The castle building, the "Typus", made use of all three qualities in such a way that they continued to guide the future architecture and ordering of the space. A fortified wall was built along the edge, which remains today as the outer boundary of the castle building. The space in its full dimensions was too large to be effectively filled up and defended. Its length was for this reason divided crosswise, thus creating another constant which was repeated at several varying places within the castle, both to the east and to the west. In the late middle ages this pattern was consolidated: two fortifications were built to the west of the main castle. While fortifications of other castles extend concentrically around the nucleus of the castle, here they were placed one beyond the other, so that the dominant direction of approach along the ridge of the hill was not interrupted, but rhythmically graduated.

The basically long shape of the site meant that this castle does not, like thousands of others, sit as a compact complex on a cone-shaped hill, but is organised in parallel-spaced masses following a "linear scheme" (Valena). The "Topos" – more exactly, the east-west orientation – was supported by the symbolic orientation of the churches, so that these buildings (in some ways, foreign bodies in the context of the castle) help to create the harmony between "Topos" and "Typus".

So far it has been possible to characterise Prague Castle as an autonomous unit, a closed system. But a castle in itself is not completely self-sufficient – it is not a system. It can only be defined, case by case, with the help of its external relationships. Direct access and provisioning ("Kontakt") again took place at the narrow ends, but visual communication ("Konnex") from the long south side. That brought with it the


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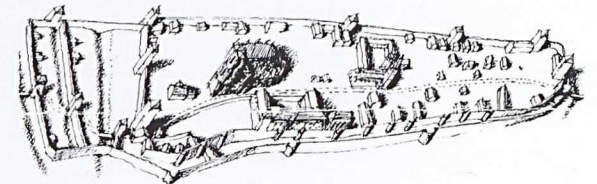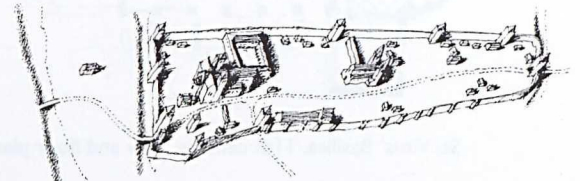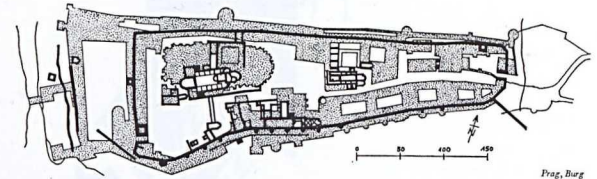
Structural development of Prague Castle
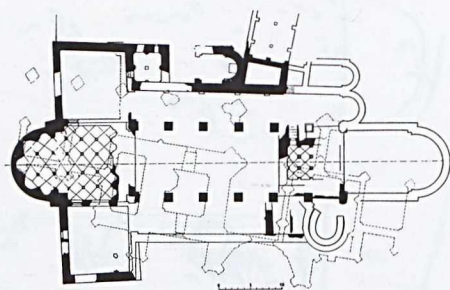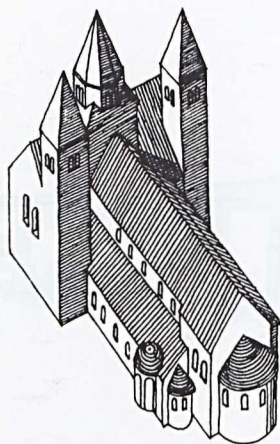
St. Vitus' Basilica, 11th century, view and floor plan

Gothic part of St. Vitus' Cathedral

tension of two vectors and two relationships, which continue to have an effect as far even as the paving stones of the Third Courtyard. The relationship between castle and city creates a basic tension from which grew the face of the city, and which became a driving power in the never-ending dialogue between the two authorities in the course of the centuries.

Everything began with the decision to place the seat of the ruler on the south side of the castle. This eccentric choice of position is quite "typical", because the structural parts of the castle are usually linked with the fortification and in some cases create the rampart. In choosing the direction a complex of influences came into play, such as the river, the valley, the ford (later bridge) and the city, which drew the architectural complex in a southern direction to the extent that – and this is an important qualification – it could be seen from the valley. The earlier church buildings on the summit were –as far as mass was concerned – balanced, and created a closed complex of horizontal and vertical units. That was as valid for the St. Vitus' rotunda of the 10th century as for the Romanesque churches, and especially so for the basilica with two choirs which succeeded the St. Vitus' rotunda. However, from the start – independent of the direct attraction of the city – there was an internal orientation towards the south caused by the fact that the tomb of St. Wenceslas was placed in the southern vault of the rotunda and stayed in this position even in the Romanesque Episcopal church, which was constructed on completely different lines. Piety and respect are concepts which grasp reality only loosely. It is rather striking that conscious planning and building allows itself in this way to be just partially and locally influenced by history, and incorporates it into the overall conception as a sign and attractive moment. In so far as we want to understand Prague Castle in its thousand-year genesis, at least three processes and factors have to be respected: the internal interplay between "Topos" and "Typus"; its relationship to the city; and the never ending dialogue with its own history.

Reconstruction
and its thematic starting point
The defiance represented by the historical inheritance of tradition can become an impulse for unusual invention. Parléř's dignified south portal to the cathedral issues from three external arches into a single entrance, because more than one third of the transept lying beyond it is filled by the Chapel of St. Wenceslas. Parléř avoids this barrier by means of vaulting and through the use of vaulting techniques unsurpassed in history, in such a way that the vault links the vaulting of the three portals and of the one church; and this achievement of his makes a feature of the problem – with the free arched ribbing he literally rouses admiration for the difficulty of the situation. Parléř made his own decision on how to solve this challenging and unavoidable problem. He retained the southern location of the chapel, eccentrically positioned in relation to the new building of the church; and from the preceding church he also borrowed the idea that this ancient place should not automatically be absorbed into the new building, but should function as a special and positive element. It was not, on this occasion, a case of retaining the original groundwork and building onto it. Parléř created everything new: a rectangular ground
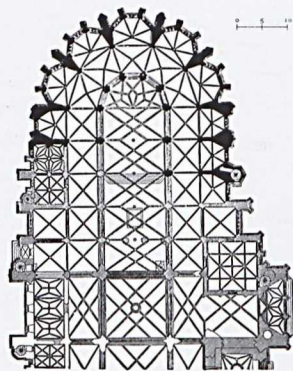
plan, walls and vault; but he demonstratively located the construction directly into the regular plan of the cathedral, so that in this way he could underline its special character. To repeat: the fixed point of the tomb was predetermined and was maintained, but it could without difficulty be situated in a chapel which would "not disturb in any insensitive way" (Bachmann) the symmetry of the cathedral and would not partially block the main entrance. Archaeologists know the different between spolium in se and spolium in re. The builders of the Romanesque Episcopal church incorporated the southern vault of the preceding structure as a true "spolium", as a spolium in se; Parléř abandoned this level of material tradition and developed another quality of "spolium", which is called differentiation and difficulty. It simulates the disturbing effect which the incorporation of the structure into the new would cause. It can be called the spolium in re.[5]

The relationship to the position of the Chapel of St. Wenceslas and the emphasising of what it means is however only one motif and one contribution to the southern accentuation of the complex, which was established once and for all in the 14th century. Charles IV allowed his palace and palace chapel to rise high above the older and partially demolished buildings of his predecessors. His decision to re-establish the Romanesque Episcopal church as a gothic cathedral had the effect that the vertical mass of the cathedral provides a still taller and vaster background to the palace of the sovereign. Charles's thinking and actions in the dimensions of the sacrum imperium were further concentrated on the dialogue between the seat of the ruler and the church of the ruler. The Chapel of St. Wenceslas, the Golden Portal, the south tower and the coronation chamber form a group of buildings on the south side of this church with which no other medieval cathedral has anything to compare; it is unique in its resolute diversion from the primary sacred line from west to east, in its concentration on the national and sovereign aspects of the cathedral and in its orientation towards the palace and the city beyond. And at the same time the settlement in the bend of the river Vltava responded by forming its own mass and elevating its own verticals. In this way an opposite pole and a magnetic field was created, within which every subsequent intervention had to function. The corresponding specification for this relationship is reciprocal adaptation.

In this way the builders of succeeding centuries were given an unambiguous constant which each of them realised differently, but which they neither could nor would substantially change. This applied equally to Plečnik. The modernisation of the Third Courtyard is tied to themes, strategies and motifs which had been determined by a thousand years of building and rebuilding of Prague Castle. And to speak of Prague Castle means also, for reasons already demonstrated, to speak of Prague. One set of lines is the foundation, as we said already, of the parallels to the southern wing forming the external side of the Castle and naturally copies the longitudinal profile of the complex, which was established from the very start of building on this site. Lines at a right angle to the longitudinal profile point towards the palace and on to the city. A third factor, decisive for appearance, is balance, the creation of a homogenous field, which resulted from the decision to use the square. The paving has not only a directional and a semantic character; it does not only say:

The Third Courtyard by K. Plutek, 1972

The reconstruction of Prague Castle in the Romanesque period

The panorama of Prague with Prague Castle

"Thence" and "Whence", but also "Here". "Here" is the highest point of the Republic.

Plečnik also followed his predecessors in that he interpreted a text which grew like a palimpsest from texts and commentaries, from the original utterance and from quotations; in other words, he made this text intelligible for his generation. We already see more clearly that his dealing with history was not philological, led by antiquarian anxiety and the piety of devotion. We may call it a thematic starting point: its followers remain faithful to the laws of form, but do not not adhere unconditionally to historical material, incorporating it, as the case may be, into reasoning which shapes traditional history in its thematic specificity into a new expression. We can also speak of "Parler's Law": history is understood as resistance and not (only) as substance. The historically changed form is "the form". Non ruina, sed forma docet.
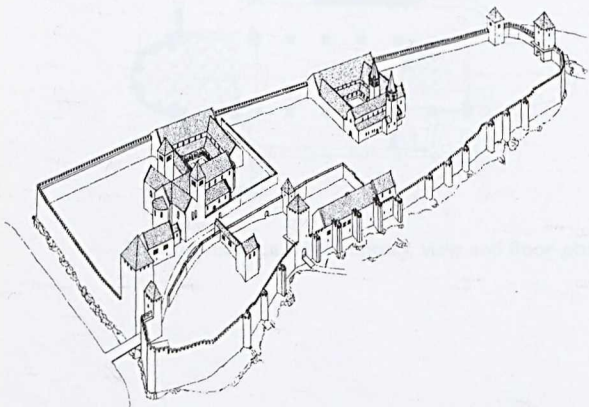
The challenge of history

Let us return to the question of reconstruction. At the level of the paving Plečnik substantially achieved what Pacassi had tried to do with the vertical aspect: unification, systemisation, the setting of norms. The material used (the paving stones) in relationship with the walls of the courtyard allows one to speak of "paved baroque". But the facade and the facing materials are not the only theme, and it is all one in which dimension the unifying takes place. Just as Pacassi demolished important complexes of buildings and put up new buildings on the open space, so Plečnik levelled the surface of the Third Courtyard which since the middle ages had been divided into two areas, so that now the whole surface lies flat like a mirror, and the last reminder of the natural drop of the land towards the valley has disappeared.

But by rebuilding and unifying Pacassi and Plečnik show their respect towards the law which prescribes a dialogue between the old and the new. Pacassi carried out the building of the transverse articulation of the fortifications, and in this way achieved what Prague Castle had always lacked, since the terrain had been too expansive: the constituent of a courtyard, which in this type of building is just as indispensable as components such as towers, walls, palaces, chapels, and so on. Enclosed courtyards had previously existed, linked with the sacred and profane complexes; reconstruction shows such areas to the east of the basilica of St. Vitus and to the north and west of the seat of the ruler, although the details of particular reconstruction projects differ. But Pacassi's interventions created courtyards in a spatial form of large dimensions. In the filling-in of the edges (the buildings of were left in place by Pacassi and predominate in every castle) he continued with transverse or internal sections towards the centre with buildings of the same height and form. In this way he handled what had been too large a terrain where group formations were dominant, and created an "environment" inside which Plečnik could stage his compositions.

Pacassi left the Matthias Gate of 1614 and positioned it into his building work as a "spolium": as a remembrance of an outdated form of dynastic architecture overtaken by him and his time, which more or less naturally followed from the need for defence. Both city and Castle were badly devastated in 1757 by the Prussians. Pacassi followed the wide-

spread tendency of his time not to build fortifications when he and those who commissioned him abandoned the idea of once more fortifying the Castle. The power of the state, as represented by the new building, was secure by virtue of its modernity and pragmatism.

But this demonstration and this incorporation into some sort of spolium in se, does not exhaust Pacassi's settlement with history. Of much more weight is the fact that he left almost untouched the medieval dynastic seat of Czech princes and kings. He removed the palace of Rudolf II, who elevated Prague Castle to be the seat of Habsburgs, but he did not touch the complex which had from the 10th century represented the political centre of the country. He simply covered the side which abutted on the courtyard with a unifying facade. When we look at the Castle complex from the city, the preservation of the old part is still more striking, because it is in fact the oldest and the most irregular building which is recognised as the centre in between the Theresian castle to the west and the Rosenberg Palace and houses of the nobility to the east. These were unified from the beginning of the reconstruction by a still longer and more monotonously created facade. One could take this presentation of the past in the centre of the complex as a disturbing fact if we consider Pacassi's approach to Prague Castle to have been a damnatio memoriae of everything Czech, as was the standard Czech interpretation during the 19th century. It is possible, as Tomáš Vlček reminds us in a discussion of this question, that the enlightenment, moving on the boundary between a new understanding of history and the will to create everything anew, could not allow the new to appear without a challenge from the old.

If that is how it was, in Prague such a solution would not remain confined to the time of enlightenment. Plečnik's reaction was not so different. The intention of spreading before the presidential palace a unified area and giving the varied buildings on the edge the basis of an uninterrupted horizontal (this idea of form is originally also a Prague idea) inevitably led again to a confrontation with history. The foundations of medieval buildings were discovered in the middle of the castle courtyard; whilst to the side, directly below the southern spire of St. Vitus, excavations uncovered the walls of the Romanesque basilica. Plečnik roofed these over, whilst raising the paving of the courtyard high enough for the ruins in the centre not to be demolished; they were covered by a reinforced concrete slab. It would have been unthinkable to sacrifice these testimonies of early Czech history whilst ensuring that Pacassi's building was granted a dignified foreground. So Plečnik was forced to lower the ground level to the north, which both visually and in reality lifted up the cathedral and its surrounding buildings, and raise it to the south, which consequently caused the breast-walls of the secular buildings to appear as though drowned in the new sea of paving. The level of the royal palace, now situated lower down, could only be approached by a ramp. The result, which is full of amazing contradictions, was in itself not completely new for Prague Castle. In the course of reciprocities between old and new history, if we stand between the resistance given by the ruins and the levelling tendencies of modernism, we take from where we should give – and vice versa. The presidential wing was given prominence by the ground plan of the paving stones. Plečnik – and therefore those who commissioned him – used it as the

relative quantity of the surface geometry. And the church lying on the opposite side benefited: its newer part is placed on a plinth and the older, ruined, part is covered. In such a context, which is always a reference context, it is not possible to create a new and an old hierarchy. Every intervention must, if we speak in the metaphorical verbal idiom, count with everything else.

Opening versus resistance

I would like to continue to follow the effect of the thematic starting point on two closely connected strategies which can briefly be described as opening and as visual linking. Plečnik's "amenagement" of the complex of Prague Castle can popularly be described as opening, which not only made the Castle more accessible, but also created alternative systems of pathways and courtyards, and joined buildings, gardens and approaches in such a network that the one-directional approach dictated by the topography no longer seemed necessary and inevitable. But again we must recognise that Plečnik was reaching for ancient themes and was continuing in them. Prague Castle, as a heavily fortified citadel, naturally was not a place for people to come and go as they pleased. But even though Hradčany takes its name from the Czech word for "castle" – "hrad" – Prague Castle is not only a castle, nor even an ideal castle. It has as its specific quality something which in western Europe is an unknown combination, being both seat of the ruler and national shrine. Whatever ruler incorporates into his fortified territory several churches, a place of pilgrimage and a cathedral, should not only count with a flood of visitors, including foreigners, but also take into calculation the consequent safeguarding of buildings and the particular expression of the place.

Pacassi was also confronted with this theme. He went so far as to open up the until-then closed complex of the Castle by a ceremonial courtyard facing the urban part of Hradčany, thus bringing the seat of the ruler into an almost family relationship with the palaces of his lords and making it altogether more open to those approaching. Plečnik grasped as a theme Pacassi's deepening of the central part of the Castle beyond the gate, the open vestibule, by first repeating what Pacassi had courageously done before him: the creating of depth. Plečnik hollowed out the interior of the adjoining building on the left and built the "hall" which today is named after him: he created a majestic entree, a powerful alternative to the Rococo vestibule opposite which leads to the southern part of the building. If we may return: we walk through the Matthias Gate and find ourselves in an open vestibule, from which to right and left are entrances to two internal vestibules, whilst the way ahead leads into another courtyard.

In creating the Third Courtyard Plečnik surpassed not only Pacassi but maybe all the court, palace and government architects in the world, by taking an open corridor through the presidential suite, thus creating transparency, mobility and freedom. And not only this; the landings on this corridor look like balconies from which the head of state speaks to the nation. They serve however the populace itself, which from here can see and be seen. As was said already: the task is not education, but self-education.

The theme therefore cannot simply be described as "opening". It is necessary to add: opening versus resistance, an inevitable opening in difficult circumstances, opening as a demonstrative act and as an in-

structive lesson. We came across this in the case of Parléř's "Golden Portal", which was certainly the most majestic entrance in medieval Prague. The triple-arched arcade, beyond which is only a narrow portal, and then the partly-filled transept and the Chapel of St. Wenceslas with its completely different orientation and very narrow entrance – these complications seem to be the rule rather than the exception. The description of this problem must be known to everyone who has been concerned with the face of the city of Prague. Staying with this motif, from renaissance times we come across the connecting courtyard (covered way) and the passage. "Courtyards were usually found inside a building situated between two lanes. What should be more natural among the narrow connecting paths of the Old Town, what should be more natural than for passages to be made through from the courtyards into the lanes. The motif grew in strength. Such passages were created everywhere. In this way the Prague "Pasáž" developed a quite independent existence."[6]

However, it is not enough to establish that the burgher's house and the ruler's house make use of analogical principles. The passage which leads through the courtyard is again only an expression of a more deeply penetrating basic morphological law, which Oskar Schürer may possibly have been the first to succeed in formulating. His expressionist way of seeing and of visualising perceived a particularly natural affinity with reality, which Schürer called the contrastive system of artistic observation of the world, positioning "space versus body". Old Prague is not a city of points de vue, of axes and of perspectives reaching into the distance which "open to the eye a pathway through space". It is not a place ruled by "spatial harmony", in which areas are "mutually balanced and in a mutual relationship of peace (which is created) by splendidly laid out systems of ceremonial streets".[7] According to Schürer, Prague is not ruled by the "spatial figure" as such but by "spatial activities". "Here, bodies put together in a structure gradually grow in a direction upward to themselves and against themselves, contrastive relationships are created which break up the spatial figure and push it off balance. Assonance and dissonance in material is sought after, and is then increased to every over-topping accent, which changes in free rhythms into spatial forms. Yes, here rhythm functions there where symmetry works."[8] On the "potent", "mobile space" of the configuration of the city of Prague there reacts "an especially heavy body with a permanent effect – it provides at it were an answer". "Again we start from an entirety: the city as a body. We are struck by the materiality, by the weight of the main complexes, shifted into voids and into building structures, by the ordering of sections into blocks which lie between the heights as though swelling into each other. The whole of the Old Town looks like one solid block; the streets and lanes have the effect of being notches cut into it with a knife or shafts drilled into it. Block is not here lined up alongside block, as in cities of the south, where the weights of the body are gathered into quarters, relaxed by open city spaces and activated in spires."[9]

The pathways (and passages) are created inevitably rather than freely. The individual body offers resistance to them, resistance which has to be overcome, and the structure of the bodies has the effect that they turn aside, it squeezes them to each other and lets them go free only to put another obstacle in the way. Because that is so, not only in Schürer

there prevails a naturalistic idea of the stream which, in a situation where it comes up against a mass of material, seeks and actively creates its own pathway: "It is the encountering and the searching in space which refines the lanes into curves and which creates city spaces by means of deepening inlets; which moulds the body of the city."[10] This is the reason that streets laid down with a ruler, and 19th century blocks, have the effect of being more foreign in Prague than anywhere else; that is why Kafka, face to face with the most fatal of all interventions, could speak of Pařížská Street –constructed on the dimensions of Paris – as a "springboard for suicides", for it leads directly into nothingness –and inflicts two mortal crimes on the spirit of the spatial picture of Prague. And that is why Plečnik attempted but abandoned on principle the effort to link or tie his Church of the Sacred Heart contextually to the barren Vinohrady rectangle. (I am talking about the immediate, not the broadly-apprehended, relationship with the area.) Instead, he reinforced the isolation of the church's mass.

Let us return to Prague Castle. A pattern for subsequent ages and an exact antithesis to the spatial shaping of the city in the valley is presented to us in the rationalism of the Theresian castle. However, such total negations were really possible only in the 19th century. I am thinking for example of the thoroughly obscene waste of space we come across in the gigantic lobby of the Rudolfinum (1874–1884). This light hall, with its almost clinical effect, came into being as it were only a stone's throw from the ghetto, whose population was at its greatest in those years and in which all the principles of the Prague nature of space multiplied themselves into a negative consequence from the closeness, the darkness, and the ill arrangement of the place. In the case of Prague Castle I would affirm on the contrary that the making clear of the spatial situation did not in this case mean a tabula rasa but rather creates a thin film from which expressively project some ideas essential to the genius loci. I will just observe as an aside the frequently-mentioned fact that Pacassi conferred on the basic law of broken horizontals (firSt. formulated by Albert Ernst Brickmann) a more effective expression than perhaps any builder before him, in that he unfolded this continuous horizontal obstacle in front of the vertical dominants, whose number he considerably reduced.

However, let us remain with the relationship of pathways and space, of pathways and the body. All the paths through the castle sections and into the castle sections penetrate solid bodies. To the pathways on which this penetration is attendant they function appropriately as signs and not as complaisance become architecture, complaisance taking hold of the approaching individual and investing its movement within. Parléř cuts the three openings of his "Golden Portal" into a smooth facade relatively firmly and suddenly. The opposite, projecting part of the construction over the entrance into the present presidential wing is really only a part as such; the facade above and alongside does not "utter a word" about its task and its existence. The same is true for the entrance to the Old Royal Palace. And it is valid even for Plečnik's passage-way from the Third Courtyard into the Rampart Garden, connecting these two spaces. He drew up plans for a monumental garden facade, and was going to make this a grandiose approach by the use of ramps, terraces and pillared halls.

In the end however he decided (without in any way making a compromise) on a solution which, on the garden side, hardly projects at all beyond the wall in question, but opens it out at three levels; whilst on the courtyard side the passage-way is indicated by an extremely narrow bridging. This structure not only reminds one of an entrance to an underground railway; given a sideways examination from the courtyard, the rounded metal roof of the baldachin, with its waist-high outer stone walls and the free space between, gives the effect of a train entering a precisely-cut tunnelled shaft. The entrance simulates what is due to it from its user: he or she should precisely adapt to the passage-way demarcated for him or for her – the use of the singular is important here, because we are definitely not discussing such a thing as a funnel which sucks in and discharges many people all at once. Plečnik was not creating any sort of "transit space", as Benjamin characterised the ideal of transparent spatial moulding in the creative visions of the neue sachlichkeit of the 1920s. He is for all time a master of "floor-writing", if we are to use Benjamin's term, of handwriting reflected in the ground plan; as his predecessors interpret the law of the place in that it predetermines the entrance and the passage for rites de passages.

Visual connections

The absence of axial systems of pathways in the Old Town has in the absence of enfilades its parallel on the Castle mound. If the first, ceremonial, courtyard still holds promise of a harmonious sequence of spaces, we are, once we have passed through the Matthias Gate, immediately warned of something different. The "deflection" described above, by which the body of the first transverse wing is deepened, becomes a law. Every time we pass through another section we must reorient ourselves, which means a diversion to the left or the right. Here it is not the law of the zigzag pathway as in the city, but a diagonal pathway leading in different direction. This law is already inscribed into the paving stones of the First Courtyard of the Castle, where the pattern from the place of entry into the space of the courtyard diverges to left and to right and lets the gate "lie on the left and on the right". (Plečnik was planning various unnatural objects which would block the gate: a monument was to be built here, at one point a victorious Czech lion, later even an obelisk.) The diamond pattern of the Third Courtyard, as I have said already, orients itself along the south wing and along that only; no other wing around the open space and no other building within the courtyard takes over this direction. Pacassi's reconstruction, even though its author rigorously squeezed an irregular whole into a defined scheme, cannot ensure any regular dimensions. And he was least successful with the Third Courtyard. In the context of the late baroque building of the castle it seems to be deficient, if not an actual failure; in Prague and on the specific place of Prague it now usefully asserts something which is generally valid. Once more I refer to Schürer, who showed that in the Prague ordering of space there operates in place of axiality a principle of axial tension or "the slanted crossing of axes".[11] In order not to go too much into detail, I will point out only the most well-known occurrence of this constant in urban landscaping: the Charles Bridge, which for five centuries was the only link between Prague Castle

and the city. As such it was the mediator of the connection between the spatial poles of the hill and of the city; it operated, as Schürer says, as a "conductor of tension". But being joined together is not without tension, not in Prague. "That (the bridge) stands at an angle to the basic axis of Prague Castle and the heart of the Old Town brings to the former a new tension."[12]

If we follow from the first this principle of forming, it appears only logical when the spatial form –which can do without axes and consequently without wide horizontal ordering – puts to use its far-reaching correlation in the vertical dimension. The space of pathways of old Prague is characterised by divergence between the path and the purpose, functioning close to and functioning in the distance. The direction of lanes on the same level of terrain as their near and achievable aims is on the second level transformed by the vertical dominants, and by the points of attraction which do not as a rule lie quite in the ideal extension of the section of the path along which we are actually walking. The basic tension between the city in the valley and the Castle on the heights becomes in the arrangement of one above the other another essential level of articulation shaping the appearance of the city. This has consequences for the placing and appearance of buildings and parts of buildings which are to be found on the second level. The division of these dominants into a lower level (intended for tactile apprehension and perception) and an upper level (operating through distance) is a known phenomenon in Prague architecture. In the Church of the Sacred Heart in Vinohrady, Plečnik thought up one of the most beautiful versions of this motif. Just as effective is the asymmetric placing of vertical elements which gives rise to broad spatial relationships. The southern massif of the cathedral and the eccentric placing of the spire of St. Nicholas in the Lesser Town quarter are the most well-known examples.

To express this clearly: Plečnik was not able to build upwards in Prague Castle. The only vertical dominant he planned at all, the stone needle which was to be a memorial to the Czech Legions, could not be realised in its full dimensions, nor in its most effective position, the Paradise Gardens in front of the presidential palace. Thus in the gardens and in the courtyards Plečnik limited himself to demonstrating the principle of visual connection over a predominantly empty space. For this purpose he used together with historical objects those which he created himself, as points of attraction both near and distant. I will stay in the Third Courtyard. The grid places one of the basic axes between the fountain of St. George and the entrance to the presidential wing. Vertical to this, Plečnik leads a line of draining grills. Then he draws a competing diagonal across the courtyard through the positions of the obelisk, the fountain of St. George and the fountain in front of the entrance to the Royal Palace. Then he crosses this line with a diagonal from the south portal of the cathedral through the steps of the presidential wing in the direction of St. Nicholas. At the level of the Rampart Garden gardens this line is formulated still more exactly; after passing down the shaft of the staircase, which on every turn in an outward direction takes into its view the still-distant target of St. Nicholas, it continues across a wide open space in the direction of the city and leads to the front edge of the garden, to the semicircular viewing platform. There is again an important

crossing of the axes "of off-centre free straight lines", as Kandinsky would say. However, in the Third Courtyard this system of lines is not inserted into the rectangular "basic surface" (Kandinsky), but positioned across an irregularly shaped ground plan and a perfectly regular grid.

Plečnik's "diacritical marks"

It is obvious: not even Plečnik is a friend of the axis which is self-explanatory and self-supporting. It is necessary to work one's way towards the axial relationships established by him. The breach through the palace works as an axis only when a person fully adapts to it and actively follows it. Co-operation is what is counted with. But it is unnecessary to view this exercise too strictly and authoritatively. All the pathways have their rewards, those created by his predecessors in the distance, in the foreground those created by Plečnik himself. I am speaking of the objets de phantasie which he assigned to all his individual entireties. (It is quite appropriate that this term was used in connection with Fabergé's Easter eggs.) These are the vases, bowls, vessels, balustrades, obelisks, fountains, grills, historical relics, garden furniture and so on.

Often these attractions have only a local significance; one should not fall into the error of wanting to link everything with everything else. I have always held to the proposition that the contextualist and developer Plečnik is a Slav who has at his disposition a different wealth of super-segmental signs than the German or the Englishman. Especially and exactly when the text he is creating is in a foreign language. I will remain with the comparison language – writing – architecture. Plečnik in fact worked in Vienna, Prague and Ljubljana – that is, in German-Austrian-speaking countries, countries where German was the language spoken and written. A different method of writing supplied him with strata, segments, units. In that method he can change nothing, or only a very little. The "pronunciation" of this material changes when it is given diacritical marks. Marks which modify the juxtaposition and polishing of consonants, which accentuate or attach rhythm, which in essence transform the melody of the language as a whole. But diacritical marks are not only instructions for correct pronunciation; they are in themselves small decorative shapes which embellish the writing. Plečnik offers us both possibilities, but he doesn't always say which of them is in operation: whether it is the attraction which is effective in its own place, enlivens the unit and delights the passer-by, or whether it is the sign as vector, which has an inherent meaning and passes it on, which builds meaningful relationships in a rich context. In either case, it helps when a person has learned to read this last transcription, applied to an old text. It says that even in the acquired inheritance of the 20th century, the national claim to that inheritance does not necessarily have to end in sterile restoration or noisily impressive gestures.

There is still no adequate monograph on Prague Castle and its ordering of space. Czech literature on the subject is assessed and listed in: D. Menclová, České hrady, Prague 1972.

The architectural history of the main churches is summarised very well in: L. Kotrba, Der Dom zu St. Veit in Prag, Bohemia sacra. Das Christentum in Böhmen 973–1973, ed. F. Seibt, Düsseldorf 1974, p. 511 following (including all the older literature) and Romanik in Böhmen, ed. E. Bachmann, Munich 1977; Gotik in Böhmen, ed. K. M. Swoboda, Munich 1969; Barock in Böhmen, ed. K. M. Swoboda, Munich 1964, passim (including the history of secular architecture). On the subject of Plečnik and his rebuilding the following monographs are available: D. Prelovšek, Josip Plečnik. 1872–1957. Architecture perennis, Salzburg-Vienna 1992 and P. Krečič, Plečnik. The Complete Works, New York 1993.

On methodology, see R. Trancik, Finding Lost Space. Theories of Urban Design, New York 1988 and T. Valena, Beziehungen. Über den Ortsbezug in der Architektur, Berlin 1994.

Morphologische Betrachtungen zur Prager Stadtgestalt by A. E. Brinckmann, Stadtbaukunst vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit, Potsdam 1925, p. 43 ff, Ch. Norberg Schulz, Genius loci – Landschaft, Lebensraum, Baukunst, Stuttgart 1982, p. 78 ff, and above all O. Schürer, Prag. Kultur, Kunst, Geschichte, Vienna – Leipzig – Prague 1930. The last book requires an explanatory note. I do not hesitate to describe it as the most significant monograph to have been written by a German art historian in the inter-war period. It is unique in its combination of the overall historical view and its analysis of the space of the city in close-up. Worthy of mention is also the care taken in dealing with the Czech and Jewish components of the history of the city. And exceptional in the whole of German literature on Prague up to the 1980s is Schürer's persevering insistence on the continuation of the development of the city in the spirit of modernism. This applies however to the editions which came out in 1930 and 1935 (!) but not to the final edition of 1939, by which time Schürer had allied himself with National Socialism and had therefore had to rewrite the whole book.

1) W. Kandinsky, Punkt und Linie zu Fläche, Bern 1973, p. 31.

2) Ibid. p. 34 ff.

3) Quote from I. Jeffrey, Prague and Josip Plečnik, London Magazine April/May 1995, p. 80 ff.

4) Ibid. p. 81.

5) With reference to these concepts and to the concept of repeated use generally: see S. Settis, Von auctoritas zu vetustas: die antike Kunst in mittelalterlicher Sicht, Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 1988, p. 157 ff.

6) O. Schürer, Prag. Kultur, Kunst, Geschichte, Vienna – Leipzig – Prague 1935, p. 411.

7) Ibid. p. 376.

8) Ibid. p. 377.

9) Ibid. p. 385.

10) Ibid. p. 383.

11) Ibid. p. 378 ff.

12) Ibid. p. 377.