

Desiring Practices



Architecture, Gender and
the Interdisciplinary

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Where ?

Above all, philosophers have enjoyed thinking about what there is. Ontology, the nature of what there is, and what general conditions things need in order to be—such questions form the background and foreground of the eminent arguments which describe the basis of seriousness in philosophical thought. In less systematic arenas of knowledge, it breeds the habit of a certain kind of question. Confronted by something, it provokes the question—"what is it?" Whether we feel compelled to answer with an essence, a definition, a designation of it as a member of a class, whatever the form of identity it takes, the *it* stands out as the elementary form of an object. It is true that this may take a wide range of logical forms, from a platonic idea to a grammatical category. Nothing, in essence, links all the different uses of the term 'object'; there need be no object in general. And yet, if we read philosophical texts or logical treatises, not in a philosophical sense, but with a novelistic concern, something immediately becomes apparent. In so many texts, the example of an object will take the form of a physical object which is distinct. Why else would the examples so often use mountains and rivers as their prime candidates for the transparency of what an object is?

We might consider that philosophical texts had a kind of pre-conscious, the arena within which the idea of an object is appropriated by a certain medium of expression. The medium of expression in this case is that of a physical object which is *seen*. Philosophers may retort that the logical status of examples is of no account; but still, we are left with the interesting fact that the first idea (first in the sense of initiating a chain of associations) of an object is this *thing*, a thing most aptly rendered by rivers, mountains, bald royal heads, pyramids, and the various stars of the heavens. Whatever the philosopher may wish to discard as the logical status of this mode of exemplification, it remains the intuitive point of the communication of an object. But it is a point which is subject to immediate repression.

The idea, we might as well say flatly the *phantasy* of an object, is subject to repression in the following way: the logical text encourages us to think only of the object as it is abstracted from its exemplification. It is as if I have to put the idea of a river or a mountain *on the table* before we can begin to refine it as the example of an object. Soon, the mountain must become non-physical, the river

must lose its dimensions, and the bald royal head be turned into a question of reference. But logical abstraction can never overcome the rhetoric of traces, in this case a mountain or a river. What logical abstraction attempts to repress is not only the concreteness of the object, but that more than the object was at stake in the pre-conscious arena in which it was appropriated by a certain mode of expression. That mode of expression is perhaps best described by the word, a *scene* or *phantasy*.

If we consider the pre-conscious phantasy which functions as the condition for the emergence of the object, we form quite a different view from the logician's of the orphaned singularity of the object. The pre-conscious phantasy implies that the object is seen, and from a certain point of view. This can be illustrated simply. If I refer to an object, let us say the Matterhorn, I feel reasonably certain that most people will call to mind that startling image of a narrow, snow-covered triangular peak. But in what sense is this *the* image of the Matterhorn? It is the view disclosed from the Swiss side of the mountain; from the Italian side, the configuration is very different. Indeed, from that side of the mountain, the Matterhorn does not look like the 'Matterhorn'. The name 'Matterhorn' then conjures up an image which is seen from a particular point of view, which is specifically located. Its location is not just a topographical line, it implies a subject position, a subject at a certain distance from the object. We can see then that even the elementary idea of an object in school texts on logic is founded on the repression of a scene of phantasy, in which the object is apprehended by a subject, a scene which is marked by a definite location. Ontological discourse, even in its most abstracted form, maintains the traces of another scene in which subject and object are related in a particular setting. I will return to this below.

However, there is another discourse besides the ontological, which is also a preferred mode for philosophers. It is the discourse of temporality, in which the time of the object becomes the immediate object of enquiry. It is in the late eighteenth century that thought which reflected upon itself as *critical* thought thinks its critique through the time of the object. The nature of the object depends upon when it is. Temporality becomes the medium of change. Relations between objects become saturated with time, for time is the index of a process. Philosophical discourse becomes historical through and through. Things are what they are as a result of a historical process and they will become what they will through the analysis of the object's history, and through the object's future, whose past the object now enacts. The object is the present moment of bisection between its origin and its end.

"When is it?" This becomes the typical form of question apparently about the present, but actually about the way the origin and the end are in a particular ratio which we call the present. At one level, this gives rise to a kind of Hegelian journalism, in which intellectuals compete to give more melodramatic interpretations of the present. It is always 'after' or 'towards' or 'in crisis'. It is late, always later than the layman thought. After all, if we were absolutely historically becalmed, with nothing of a transitional character in sight, the market for intellectual interpreters of the age would dry up. Traditional religious eschatology fits in well with radical critical thought, and the poor subject of history is reduced to the white rabbit—always late. But this radical temporalisation of all forms of relation, especially in the area of causality, operates a marked repression in one area of analysis—that of space and spatialisation.

Differential spacings are subsumed into the temporal dimension. Spacings become moments of a process of historical transformation. Time ruthlessly empties space of anything except signs of a successive order. It may be that, intellectually, the only disciplines which are disposed to resist this radical temporalisation of orders and relations are anthropology and psycho-analysis. To both of these, temporalisation is the effect of certain relations, rather than the concept through which those relations can be conceptualised. Levi-Strauss' just rebuke to Sartre in *La Pensée Sauvage*, insists that history is a product of some social relations and not others, and therefore cannot function as a meta-category for the analysis of all social relations. Freud is more blatant. The unconscious knows nothing about time. The experience of time is therefore indirect, variable and oblique. In both of them, time is subservient to the movement of desire, to the discourse of the Other.

It is not surprising then how little of the intellectual commentary, which deals with art and architectural objects starts from the issue of space. It is not surprising that so much commentary still turns on the question of "what is it?" (that is, what class is it a member of, what is its essence, what is its meaning, etc.) and "when is it?" (where is it in a sequence, what is its significance, post-what, pre-what, what is its contradiction, etc.). Not surprising, but damaging. When so much architectural and artistic thought, so many drawings, models, interventions, installations and proposals are made in terms of a certain spatial desire, then the available critical vocabulary is a phase apart from what may currently be called *installation's* work.

If the title of this symposium, 'Desiring Practices', has more than a gestural meaning, it ought to be possible to say something of the relation of desire and objects which will illuminate the category of installation, that spatialisation of

objects in accordance with an affect. But where is the language to be had? The rest of this paper is a modest proposal that Freudian psycho-analytic theory may be teased into providing some of the terms needed to link desire with installations in space. Essentially it consists of the idea that analysis can speak of the differential 'scenes' in which the subject and object are caught up, in a way which avoids repeating the questions "what is the object?" and "when is the object?" *Where*, the great topographical question, is not aimed at the object as such, but at the *scene*, which inscribes the places of what is installed.

Desire is not a metaphysical category within psycho-analytic thinking. It is a category which arises from the failure of existence. The baby is born so early that its very survival depends, compared to other animals, upon a long period of nursing. The baby exists, but only within the circuit of life which is completed by the mother. Its biological needs are satisfied by the mother, or whosoever is substituted for the mother, such that the needs do not need to be represented. The mother satisfies the needs of the baby so that the circuit of need and satisfaction is repeated automatically.

Until, to put it mythically, one day the need is not met. At this point, the infant is catastrophically precipitated into the zone of representations. To begin with, as Freud remarks, the unfed baby may hallucinate the satisfaction of the feed. But you cannot drink hallucinations. The non-satisfaction induces, on one hand, the subject of desire, and on the other hand the object as substitution. The desire is born from the economy of non-satisfaction. But the object to which this desire is directed is by now not the object of the circuit need/satisfaction, but the object as object of desire. The world is now the world of desire and representation.

It is a world from which something is missing. This is the starting point, that there is something lacking. It is also its end point. For every desire, for every object of desire, is accompanied by a double, a kind of phantasmatic doppelgänger, the desire which would end desire, the desire to return, the desire to return to the place 'before desire', the paradise in which I have everything because I lack nothing. Each desire, then, is for what Freudian thought designates the 'lost object'. Now the lost object cannot be found; it is not some ur-object which we may patiently reconstruct. Rather, it is the dimension within which desire moves; loss is the effect of the appearance of desire as much as loss is the cause. But it should remind any attempt to foreground the category of 'desire', that it is as much about the condition of loss, as the positive value of desire.

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In fact, we already have generated a schema for thinking the subject's relation to objects and space. The subject's world is a world of desire and representations, which are also substitutions. From the beginning, this relation to the subject and space cannot be neutral; space is not a neutral medium for the subject. It is where the subject is already ex-centred, precipitated from that glorious nowhere of the lost object. This is already some analytic advance; the subject is not yet in space as an object might be. Rather, the subject is in a primary exile—an exile of projections and externalisations. There will be no neutral, not even an ordinary experience of space, for the very experience of space, or rather the subject's relation to space, is constituted by being the bisection of the moments of desire and loss. Of course, the defences of everyday life will annul this proposition and make even its theoretical statement here seem a little more melodramatic. But it can already be seen that from the point of view of the object, shall we say the architectural object, it matters that the subject is not just an empty psychological space, but the point which is doubly inscribed as loss and desire. Perhaps the important point in the idea of topography, from a sketch to a scale drawing of a form of representation, is that it is characterised as being both an image (representation) of itself and a means of analysing itself.

An obvious example is a map. It is both a representation of a territory and also an analysis of the territory. The analytic conventions such as the contour lines and the ideograms for churches and railway stations use a type of sign which is representational but referential. But imagine that there is a map which does not stand representationally in relation to somewhere else. Moreover, while it deploys signs, these have been emptied of convention and have no key. And yet such a map without a territory, designated objects that have no name, might describe the current situation of certain forms of installation work. It becomes an internalised topography.

This is the topography of the subjects of desire. The subject desires. Desire has a strange affinity to that map with no reference, the installation. Desire is both a representation and a means of analysing that representation. The subject's desire may be expressed as a wish, as a *phantasy*. This phantasy can be thought of as a little scene. It may be largely unconscious on the part of the subject. Indeed, the subject's role in the phantasy may be obscure; certainly the phantasy is wholly that of the subject, but what role does the subject play within the scene beyond that of the produced? It may turn out that the subject is dispersed across the phantasy in a way that fundamentally complicates Freud's view that the author and hero of the daydream are the same. A phantasy may have not such obvious points of identification; it may show no self-evident means of distinguishing between the subject of the phantasy within the phantasy, and the objects of the phantasy within the phantasy. The distinction

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can be drawn only within Freud's analysis of desire, whose terms can be glimpsed in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*. His initial distinction is to divide desire into its object and its aim. In this way, a phantasy may be subject to a preliminary analysis, the object of desire, and the aim of the desire.

But for Freud, the object and the aim never exist, save in a particular mode of existence which he terms the oral, the anal, the phallic and the genital. There are various ways open to the Freudian narrator to try and pass these terms by the sceptical listener. For Freud, they are terms which describe the various stages of infantile development in which a succession of bodily zones, erogenous zones, become the loci and, as it were, the topics of that moment of development. In the oral stage, the mouth becomes the privileged organ through its relation to the breast and feeding. The oral moment expresses the lack of differentiation between the infant and the breast-as-a-world. This is brought to a conclusion through the infant's development of a more aggressive mode, which leads to the anal stage. The anus becomes both the place and the topic for a struggle over the infant's shit. The infant's sense of giving the shit as generosity, but of not wanting to give it up on demand, make the anal stage a battlefield for establishing some of the most fundamental cultural rules concerning control and the difference between the inside and the outside. The phallic and genital stages are taken in the more evident sense that the stages each supply their own forms of pleasure and that these essentially take different masturbatory routes to it.

But it is clear that the erotogenic zones and the *aims* appropriate to them are in no way reducible simply to versions of prefigurations of genital sexual relations, just as it is clear that this is no simple teleology. For these are stages of relations between the subject and the object which are not extinguished when they are surpassed. They are never surpassed. It is axiomatic that, for Freud, if the psychical difficulty of maintaining oneself at a certain level is too great, there is a universal tendency to regress, to abandon one stage, one erotogenic zone for the earlier and more certain pleasures of a previous stage. But merely to stress the precariousness of the development and its subjection to regression, still somehow does not prise the stages from a developmental sequence.

A more relevant conclusion, as far as we are concerned, might be to think that the terms oral, anal, phallic and genital describe not so much the erotogenic localisation of the developmental sites of pleasure, as the terms for the enactment of specific types of relations and fixations. In short, they may be the terms for particular modes of experience. 'Orality', we may think, describes a relation between a certain mode of experience of an object, including a certain quality of spatial relation. It may have its origin in the relations between the

mouth and the world, but that relation can be dispersed across the body and can be invested in any of its organs. In this way it might make sense to speak of 'oral vision'. Oral vision would be, first, the vision of the oral stage: what characterises the relation of the mouth to the breast would have to be translated into visual terms. Fortunately, our language already testifies to the archaic link between eyes and orality. You are delicious, I could eat you. The idea of oral vision would call forth an experience of drinking in a world which is not yet differentiated from the act of feeding. Perhaps we might think of orality as a spatial possibility in which the subject's aim is to consume the object and exhaust the register of space. The anal register might be thought of as particularly significant for architecture. For the anal drama is the human subject's first introduction to the limitless problem of the distinction between the inside and the outside. The particular resolution or pathological failure to resolve this issue will mark the subject's experience of the distinction in ways which have yet to be recognised.

The phallic and genital stages are those to which, in some sense, architecture is already partly alerted. The isomorphism between buildings and the phallic trace has long been an architectural trope, though one which it seems unable to employ without a smirk. The real question, of course, is not the relation between the phallus and the tower or skyscraper, but the relations between the tower and the anxiety about castration. The skyscraper is not the embodiment of the phallus (for the phallus is that which cannot be embodied), but rather the manic defence against fears of castration.

The role of castration, which is outside the scope of this paper, is the late moment at which gender arises. If this paper is marked by an absence of remarks about gender, this is largely because the Freudian scheme of sexuality and its development postpones, until after the anal stage, the division of the sexes. Before that, sexual development pursues a singular trajectory. Indeed, however differential the relation of desire to the object, in the two sexes, it will still have a single bedrock in the oral and anal stages. Theories within the human sciences have expended much labour on the consequences of sexual difference at the Oedipal level. Indeed, the Oedipal drama has provided the norm for analysing cultural practices in their sexual division. By contrast, the purpose of this paper has been to suggest how the sexually undifferentiated oral and anal stages may still have much to suggest in the preliminary tasks of mapping the subject's unconscious relations to objects in space.