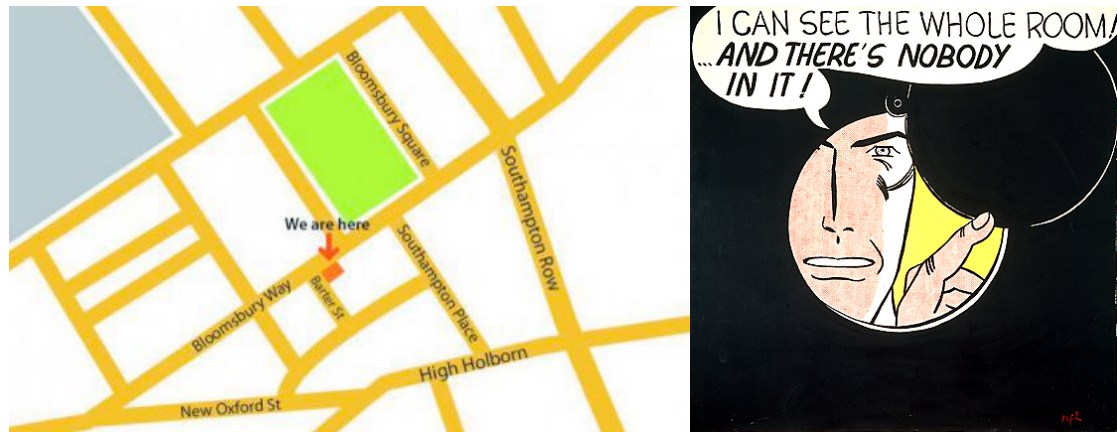


Architecture and its objects, 29 May 2013

Imaginary prelude

I'd like to begin with a suite of images that sketch out this lecture. The first two images capture the whole thing.



The first image - courtesy of our hosts, the Swedenborg Society - is about locating us in a place, this is what space does. It says to each of us: you are here. We know it does that because when it fails to do that, we find it deeply disturbing. The other image - Lichtenstein - is about the emptiness of space, its invisibility; we are always staring into it, and once in a while, we see something in it, to which we can establish a poetic relation. We know space is invisible because if it weren't, we couldn't see anything, poetic or no.

'Architecture is the masterly correct and magnificent play of forms in the light.'

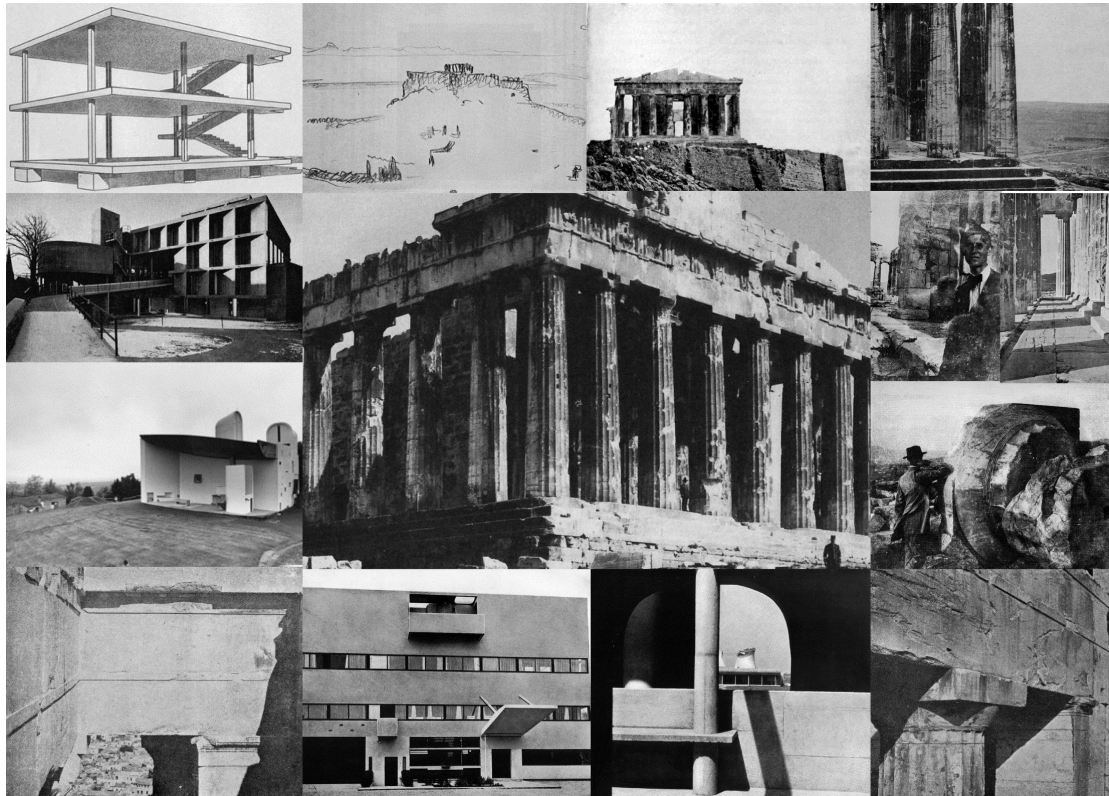
Le Corbusier, 1923

'Architecture is the view of an object in space from the eyes of man. It creates a spectacle where it takes an onlooker and puts him in front of the paysage: the architectural landscape.'

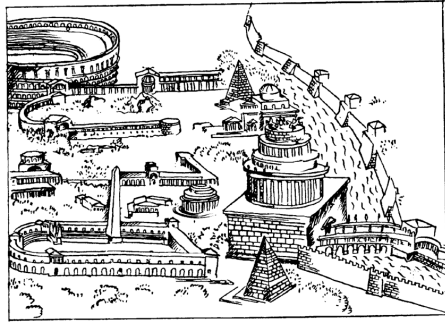
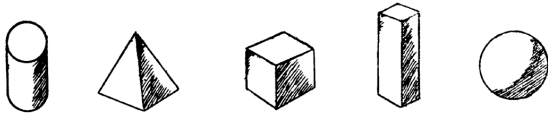
Le Corbusier, 1947



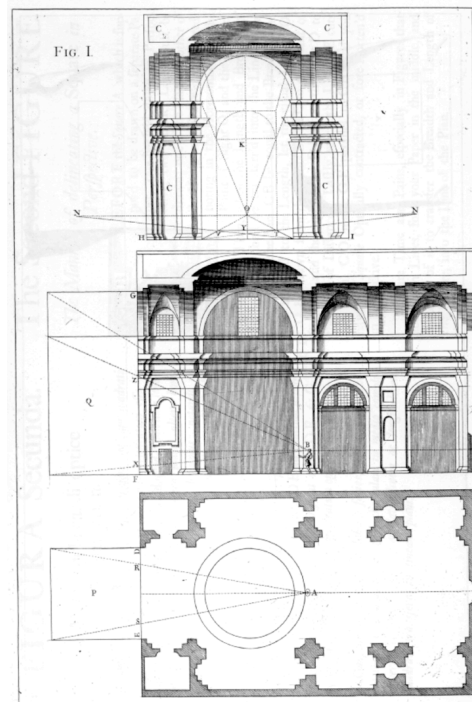
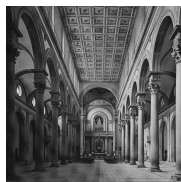
The paper is about space, but it has to begin with the cult of objects. Architects are fixated on the architectural object. What follows are familiar images of architectural objects. Its usually the Parthenon, for all sorts of good reasons. Le Corbusier was tortured by the Parthenon from the day he first saw it until the day he died. It is reflected in all his work, Domino, Garches, Ronchamp, Chandigarh (montage below). It has haunted him, and Mies van der Rohe. It haunted modernism. It is not the real object that haunted modernism - that's just a pile of old stones - but the symbolic one. The Parthenon as symbolic object. In order for something to enter the psyche, it has to be symbolized.



When I say this lecture is about space, space is here in the cult of objects. For without it, all of Le Corbusier's precious type forms, all his *objets types*, his *objets à emouvoir*, would be glued together into one sticky lump. Nothing would separate cylinder from cube from sphere and Rome would have no space in it [since space is nothing: there wouldn't be nothing to separate cylinder from sphere]. If we jump to another example, Sigurd Lewerentz's church of St. Peters, Klippan (1963), two things should be clear in this image: that Lewerentz loved the column as an exquisite object (as much as did Laugier below), it has as important a role in this church as that other hallowed object, the altar; and that the poetry of this image, its poignancy even, has to do with how column, beam, cross beams, vaults, and lights, are distributed in/by space. Look at how column becomes surface, how surfaces are oriented, the way lights grid the space.



Space seems to enter with the subject, as in Marc-Antoine Laugier's frontispiece of the primitive hut (1755), the architectural paradigm summoned by she who is at once the personification of architecture, and its first occupant. In the image by Andrea Pozzo (from his treatise on architecture and painting, 1693), Pozzo shows us an architecture thought and imagined by its centred subject. The occupant of architecture is shown positioned in the centre of his space, and from that centre, imagining its continuation. This image leads into my first image proper, of this lecture, an image of Brunelleschi's nave of San Lorenzo, Florence designed not long after he invented perspective (ca. 1420).



Introduction: architecture and space

What exists for architecture is space. It is hard to imagine a practice of architecture without it. Space is the material and the necessity of architecture. We make space so that we can put objects in it. Harman's argument for the ontological primacy of objects is one half of a debate about whether objects or relations are the primary building blocks of the world. As odd as this tussle may seem to the non-philosopher, it is not as if this debate were foreign to architecture. It is shadowed in architecture by the opposing positions of Aldo Rossi's theory of types (the type is the archetypical symbolic object) and Bernard Tschumi's event architecture, although I don't think most people see them as making mutually annihilating ontological claims.¹

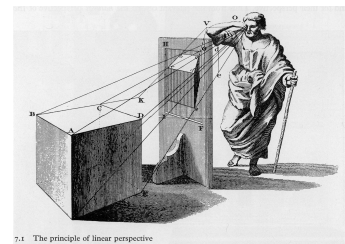
An object oriented ontology might initially look plausible for architecture. Architecture is about arranging objects in plan - there is the cult of the object - but space is the precondition for arrangement. The question: where or how does space figure in ontology. Harman argues in *Collapse III*, that we can speak about objects being touched by their qualities, that they have a relation or proximity to them; and in *The Quadruple Object* that space is a relation between a real object and its sensual qualities. In Harman's ontology, each object is a 4-fold complex, comprising a real and sensual object and real and sensual qualities; and space is a function of this relation.² The question about space is, paradoxically, spatial. Is space internal to the object, an emergent property of object structure. Or, is space external to the object which, for space, is simple. Either space is in the object, or the object is in space.

¹ See Aldo Rossi, *Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1982) and Bernard Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (Academy Editions, 1994).

² Space is a 'tension' between the real object and its sensual qualities; time is a tension between the sensual object and sensual qualities.

It is remarkable that a practice as material as architecture should have, as its object and necessary precondition, something as immaterial as space, which is everywhere and nowhere all around us. Space and time are the fundamental elements for architecture because it is with space and time that architecture structures the relations between objects and subjects. This necessity for spatial and temporal spacing (or *spatial and temporal temporizing?*) makes architecture absolutely different from the art object. Irrespective of whether or not the art object contains any space, it is still possible to speak unequivocally of the object. The subject of the art object is rarely part of the art; the subject of architecture is always within it. By subject I mean the subject of architecture, its intentional occupant. Elsewhere I have argued for the spatiality of the subject.³ The object is an intentional object, usually an object of desire for a subject. This paper will look at objects, subjects, and space from the point of view of architecture. It will have bearing on an ontology of/through architecture.

³ See my *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier: architecture space and the construction of subjectivity* (Routledge 2010).



Space and subject

Lets see how this works. Think of that paradigm spatial scenario that puts an object before a subject. I stand before the altar, contemplating my salvation. I have just entered the nave. At the other end, the altar. Between us, a space which positions us, qualifies us, signifies our importance. Those of you who are familiar with my work will recognize this as one of my clichés (*we all have a primal scene*).

This architectural scenario, that situates a desiring subject before its object - lets call it a picture - has the structure of fantasy for, firstly, it suggests that this stone could be my salvation, and secondly, that all I have to do is walk down the aisle to get it. Fantasy comes in the form of a picture of me being satisfied by an object - not simply of the object, but of me attaining it and being satisfied by it. All I have to do is walk the nave to be saved. If it is a renaissance nave, this fantasy is calibrated with a precision (6 Corinthian bays) usually reserved for the dreamscapes of the surrealists. It is a fantasy because when I get there, the

altar turns out to be a stone and my salvation lies elsewhere. I haven't even attained a stone, because touching something isn't having it. Salvation is possible, but its just not to be had/held in a stone, and its attainment is never as simple as traversing a space. The architecture does two things. It distances the object from me so that it conforms to the conventional wisdom about objects of desire (you only desire what you do not have, Plato, *The Symposium*); and it presents a seemingly credible scenario for attaining it.

This is how the advertising image functions. Give me that coke while I play beach volley ball, and I will be the man of my dreams to the woman of my dreams. Even my sweat will be as pure as the condensation dripping off the can. I wont say more here about this relation between advertising and space creation, except to point out that it is along these lines that we can understand how architecture intervenes in our desire. What makes me predisposed against a materialist architecture is simply that I do not think that the environmental problems facing our species will be solved by making better technology, but by intervening in our rampant desire, in changing what we want and how we want it. The way I see it, the interest in technology, and the discourses of instrumentalisation that attend it (including impact), are simply distractions from something much realer and more threatening, our capacity to desire ourselves into extinction.

Harman's thesis about the 4 fold does not adequately account for the altar (this may be a problem he has for all symbolic objects). Behind every object of experience - what he calls a sensual or intentional object - is a real one. The real object is never exhausted by our encounters with it. It is always more than what we think about it (theory) or do with it (practice). In the present case, I encounter a sensual object, the altar. According to Harman, there is a real one behind it, that is never completely accessible, but must be there because

the object world is autonomous from subjects, and because without it, we would never encounter the same object twice.

The altar is both a sensual object and a real object, but it is the sensual object, not the real one, that is deeper than our experience of it, that withdraws, that is never fully grasped by what we think and say and do with it. There is that hallowed stone that terminates the nave and is the focus of a liturgy that bathes it with significance and promises me salvation; and then there is that stone which generates no heat of its own and which is, disappointingly, just a stone. It is not a deeper object, it is the shallow desiccated husk of an object. The real object always brings us up short, with the brevity of a brute fact. *It is what it is what it is.* By itself, it goes nowhere, although it challenges us to make it a symbolic object. This is what we do when we insert it into a significant and signifying context, like architecture. By situating it in a nave, in a geometrized space, centred, framed, lit, sheltered, that stone becomes an altar, and so long as it remains spaced from us, it remains an altar.⁴

[If, instead, we argue that there are two sensual objects here, posing as one - a stone and an altar, both of which screen a real object within - it is not clear that the real altar will do its duty in Harman's ontology. The real altar is invoked because there must be a kernel of objectness that does not change from one encounter to the next. But the real altar, the altar as alter, the altar that promises salvation that is more than its qualities, is not necessarily the same for me as for you, or for me now and later. Although, according to Harman, anything including a relation can be an object (the Oedipal relationship I have with my father that only he knows

⁴ The altar is first a symbolic object, secondarily sensual or intentional. It is not simply an object with these qualities, but an object that has been given significance for me and for others because it is symbolized in discourse and because it is itself a symbol in a discourse.

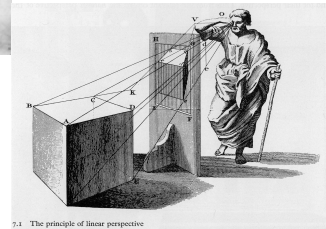
about), it is not clear in these cases what the real object is that endures beneath.]

Architecture puts objects in relation to subjects in a way that defines the relationship spatially and temporally. This is simply the form of a relation, similar to the subject-object relation in grammar, and, like grammar, is what Lacan would call a symbolic relation. This architectural operation has two steps:

- The object position: architecture uses the figure-ground relation of space to define the object. The altar is figure to the ground that is the nave.
- The subject position: architecture positions the subject by distancing the object from the subject in space and time. The position of the subject has to do with this nascent sense of a picture surface.

Architecture surrounds a thing with space, which gives it a contour and distances it from other objects. Architecture represents an object to a subject as an object, i.e., an intentional object, or, what I call, an object of desire. Architecture assimilates to media⁵. Giedion refused to talk about space, only space conceptions, as if recognising the symbolic status of space. I want to pursue this perspectival space conception further.

⁵ At some point in our future history, we are going to say 'Architecture assimilates to media' rather than 'Architecture assimilates to representation', because we are getting more and more used to media environments.



[*Modern domestic space*

If we move from renaissance to modern space, from church to house, not much has changed, even if the picture is less overtly perspectival. Although the domestic interior is more diffused because more familiar, and because its space is traversed in so many ways, the nave-altar scenario remains the paradigm for spacing object from subject. This iconic image from the history of modern architecture shows familiar domestic objects carefully placed around a room, each in its own ambient space in a way that only the free-plan can do. The perched hat, the open book, the arranged chairs. Even daylight and the outdoors, which are not usually described as objects, are made into objects in this picture (*roof-light, framed openings - anything can be an object*). A sense of absence suffuses the image. Objects seem to have been abandoned in mid-use. The absence of the occupants is confirmed by the camera caught in reflection. No one sees this room; a machine records it. There is a tension between the real object and the intentional one. The intentional one seems to be withdrawn from view, held in reserve, waiting; the real one is simply mutely other. The camera without cameraman confirms that it is the subject that is withdrawn. When the sensual object

(subject) withdraws the real object remaining, is a camera.]
[modern altars?]



Transparency literal and phenomenal

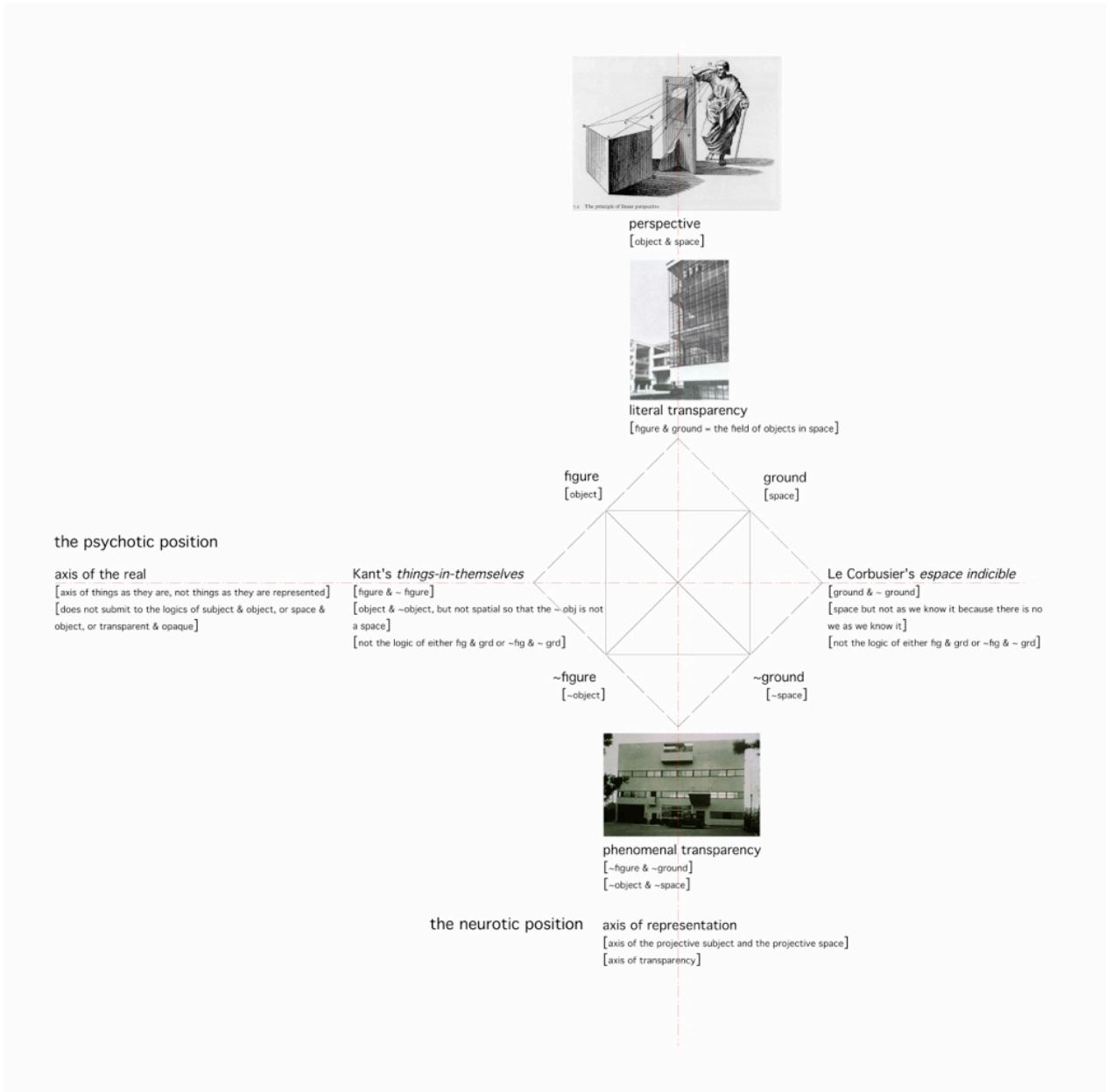
I want to pursue the question of space and how it positions the subject by invoking the plane surface. We have introduced the idea through the psychoanalytic account of desire, and through an oblique reference to renaissance perspective. It is also possible to understand it within the space of modernism. For the theorists of modern painting and architecture, of which Greenberg and his architectural counterparts, Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, are probably most well known, the plane surface was paramount.

In their ground-breaking paper, 'Transparency, literal and phenomenal', Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky argue that there are two types of transparency in modern painting and architecture, the literal and the phenomenal. And by implication, two kinds of space. Imagine: gazing at a painting or a façade. Literal transparency corresponds to a glass façade through which the viewer looks to see a space beyond, or to the canvas of an illusionistic painting. Now imagine: gazing at a cubist still life or (literally opaque) free façade. Phenomenal transparency (an unfortunate word in this

context for it refers not to phenomenology but to the conceptual, to a 'form of organisation') corresponds to implied depth where there is none, Derrida would have called it a reading event, Freud, projection.

When we follow their gaze through the façade/painting into depth, we find that literal transparency corresponds to the unequivocal delineation of figure and ground, objects individuated by space. In the case of phenomenal transparency, figures and grounds seem to fluctuate, to trade places, to join at their contours, to interpenetrate 'without optically destroying each other'. This is not a blend, a continuum, any more than the chiselled forms of the cubist still life might blur to grey, it is simply the not-figure confronting the not-ground (*uno momento*).

If we reverse engineer their argument, Rowe and Slutzky claim that even the implied depth of the cubist painting and the corresponding space of the free plan depend upon the plane surface. Space is represented on the façade/painting, and it goes on being represented on the interior of the plan, with implied picture planes. This intrusion of representation into space may seem to lead us away from ontology to epistemology. The significance of the intrusion of representation into the question of what exists for architecture is that it introduces the subject, for representation is always representation for a subject. Representation always puts an object in relation to a subject. It does not seem possible to talk about positioning an object in relation to a subject, outside the context of representation.



The Klein square

We can diagram their argument on the Klein Square (introduced to spatial discourse by Rosalind Krauss, but whose form has been borrowed by thinkers as diverse as Lacan and Harman). We begin by mapping the terms of the argument, figure and ground, onto the top corners of the square. The second term, ground, is understood by the argument to be the other of the first. From figure and ground, we derive the negations not-figure and not-ground, which are placed on the bottom corners. The Klein diagram depends upon distinguishing other from negative. In these terms, we are provisionally arguing for an ontology that

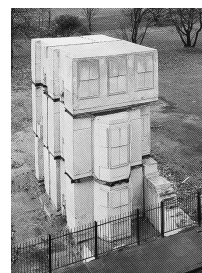
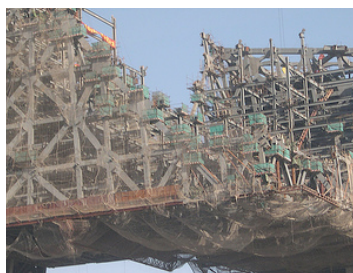
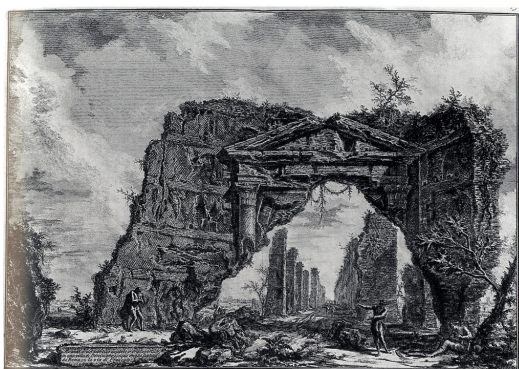
begins with a thing and its other, which are irreducible to each other, but necessary for their mutual intelligibility.

There are a number of ways of negating a term. In a binary figure/ground spatial logic, the ~figure is tantamount to a ground (space), hence a seeming equivalence of terms along the diagonal axes; but free from that logic, a ~figure could be anything, space or otherwise, that is simply not a figure to a ground. Similarly for the ~ground, it is simply whatever does not play the role of ground to a figure. Depending upon the context these terms could be satisfied by concepts (Rossi's type, Plato's form), screens, fluids or clouds, D+S's Blur building, spittle (Bataille), or subjects.

If we take the terms in pairs, they define two axes at right angles to each other. Figure and ground together define the plan forms of literal transparency or renaissance space. Not-figure and not-ground define the plan forms of phenomenal transparency or modern space. These two spatial positions, the literally and phenomenally transparent, define the invisible space that delineates objects. We call this axis *representation* because it relates to a form of space - whose main feature is that it is invisible - that supports representation and solicits the subject. It is space in so far as we are able to symbolize it to ourselves and to others, by means of words, drawings, and architecture, and has thereby been brought into discourse and made part of our world.

There is another more difficult axis marked by the positions figure & ~figure, and ground & ~ground, which forces us into the bastard logic of contradiction. These positions are difficult to characterize in anything but negative terms. Figure/~figure would be things - I hesitate to call them objects - that are not individuated by space. I read Kant's *things-in-themselves* as things not yet so individuated. He understood that space and time were not objects of experience, but the *a priori* forms of experience (*intuition*) that precede

experience and make it possible. We would not understand the world as a distribution of objects and a succession of events if we did not already organize the world in space and time. *Things-in-themselves*, mark this *a priori* condition of experience and representation. They are real objects stripped of their symbolic and imaginary accoutrements. Piranesi may have glimpsed this impossible inaccessible world when he drew the classical tombs on *Via Appia Antica*, stripped of the cladding by which architecture represents itself, as formless lumps of masonry.⁶



Ground/~ground would be a space that cannot do what space is supposed to do, which is to individuate objects. The only candidate I can think of is Le Corbusier's ineffable/unsayable space. It has lost its invisibility and begun to thicken, to become opaque. Elsewhere I have argued that this 'boundless depth' that 'drives away contingent presences' is not about a synthesis of the arts - as most Le Corbusier scholars would have it - but about a non-projective space. A boundless depth

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Macmillan, 1929) trans by Norman Kemp Smith. Cf. 'Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, First Part: Transcendental Aesthetic, Section 1: Space' (pp67-74), and 'Section 2: Time' (pp74-91) in which he determines that space and time are forms of intuition, and not objects of intuition, and defines the *thing-in-itself* as an *a priori* object of which space and time are not properties. 'Space is not an empirical concept which has been derived from outer experiences.' p68 'Space is a necessary *a priori* representation.' p68 'Space does not represent any property of things in themselves, nor does it represent them in their relation to one another.' p71 'Space is nothing but the form of all appearances of outer sense.' p71 'Time is not an empirical concept that has been derived from any experience.' p74 'Time is an necessary representation that underlies all intuitions.' pp74-5, and so on...

would be a space unbounded by the vanishing point that terminates every view, and thereby supports the appearance of objects to subjects. Walls would no longer converge as they recede from the viewer. If this space does not form views, it also does not emanate from a viewer. A boundless depth would be a space that cannot be put in relation to a viewing subject. Like Callois' suffering psychastheniacs, who can see the space they are in but not locate themselves in it, Le Corbusier is in this space, but he is in it without position and without any of the localizing attributes that we expect of spatial subjects.⁷

We call this axis *real* because whatever is on it is not representable by us to ourselves or to others, and if we have made a jump from the sensual to the representable, it is because for the purposes of this argument, we take it as axiomatic that what cannot be represented cannot be sensual. In this schema, the real object is in a different relation to the sensual than in Harman's ontology. It is not deeper or farther away than the sum total of its perceivable qualities, what we can perceive, describe, and communicate to others, but on a different axis. The possibility of this axis does not suggest that the other axis, representation, is falsification, or illusion, or subjective, or non-autonomous, or whatever, indeed the association of transparency with representation suggests the opposite, but simply to acknowledge that we throw the skein of the symbol - the concept and the image - over all our forms, by necessity, in order to bring them into discourse.

This is also the axis of creation, from which something new and unknown emerges from a nowhere about which we cannot

⁷ See my 'Psychosis or the ineffable space of modernism', forthcoming in *Journal of Architecture* (2013). As hallucinogenic as it may seem, Le Corbusier's ineffable space is closer to reality, for space is not really organised for the subject or its desire, not for me not for you. Walls do not really converge and objects do not really get smaller as they get farther away from us. And it really is full of energy and motion.

speak. The creator (author artist architect) is in the position of having to draw forth something that is not yet known and not yet named, shaped, and materialized; but whose immeasurable distance pulls at his/her desire and whose imminent proximity clouds him/her with anxiety. Something emerges out of nothing to become, by the arduous work of representation, figure or ground, object or space. We receive our symbols from others, we are skilled in the ways of endless recombination (*witness this paper*). Rarely do we have to confront the horror and ecstasy of something new - creation in the sense of something coming from nothing. Arguably, the invisibility of space, in which we stand before the plane surface looking into infinite depth the way the frontier legionnaire stands at the parapet, is a defence against the anxiety of that possibility: Look! Nothing there!

[*The subject = object + media*

We can sketch a definition of Harman's sensual and real subject in terms of our axes. The sensual subject is the one we all know. I am one; you, my reader, are one. This subject exists on the axis of representation. Sensual subjects are objects that represent objects to themselves and to others using signifying media like pictures, architectures, words, actions. For them, space is accessed through the plane surface, which makes this web of relations possible. The sensual subject is a subject to itself and an object to others (we put others in the object position all the time), but the real subject is an object to itself as well. The real subject is not the body, but an aspect of the subject that does not depend upon the shifting sands of the signifying system. It has no experience that it can represent to itself, and hence call its own. The real subject, like a rock, is bereft of media, which is the condition of objects. Lets use an equation:

the sensual subject = real subject + media

the real subject = subject - media = object

The phrase 'the subject represents/symbolises something to itself and to others' is a keystone in analytic thought. We do not only use symbols to represent things to others, i.e. to communicate with others. We also use symbols to communicate with ourselves, without which conscious and unconscious experience could not exist. The real object is never in my head, only the thought of the object, or, in the language of Lacan, the symbolic object, which is an intersection of signifiers. I showed you the pictures of objects, the cult of objects, the Parthenon that haunts modern architecture. It is not the real object that haunts modernism - that is just a pile of old rocks, but the symbolic one, in other words Parthenon signifiers, and these we see in many forms, from pictures of the Parthenon to buildings like Ronchamp that are a response to it.

The difference between a subject and a rock, is that a rock does not have an unconscious. To say that the subject (in Harman's terms, sensual as opposed to real) is an effect of the space of representation, is a condensation of the tenets of psychoanalytic theory. The unconscious is the salient feature of the subject - without it we would only be rocks, automata, whatever - and it is the paradigm symbolic object. (Arguably, Lacan invented the symbolic order in order to rethink the unconscious away from Freud's biological metaphors to something that structuralism could deal with.)⁸ The unconscious only exists because it is summoned into existence by other subjects. Lacan says time and again *the unconscious is the field of the other*. Others are linked by media (language) to other others, without which they would simply be

⁸ The paradigm symbolic object in architecture is Rossi's type: the free plan, the parametric plan, the tower, etc. Rossi even relates it to the unconscious. In *A Scientific Autobiography* (1981) Rossi argues that architecture has to be forgotten to be significant, in other words, committed to the unconscious where it can be worked over.

objects. In the terms of the present argument, the unconscious is an effect of axis of representation.⁹]

[*Lacan and Harman*

Its time to come clean. My architectural thought has been oriented by psychoanalytic theory. The two axes draw on Lacan's three registers: the symbolic, imaginary, and real. In Lacan's text, the world of experience is a continuous surface (imaginary) articulated by thresholds (symbolic). The qualities of this surface may fluctuate, but it streams continuously, the way day streams seamlessly into night. The threshold where day becomes night is imposed upon experience to make sense of it. Most of what we know to be reality registers upon the subject as imaginary and symbolic: this is where Harman's sensual objects and qualities reside; it is captured by my axis of representation and its spatial subject. What Lacan calls the real, most people have never heard of. The real is beyond what we can perceive or think, and may be where Le Corbusier's unsayable space and Kant's *things-in-themselves* reside. The real cannot be witnessed, and if witnessed, not shared with yourself or with others because in order to share it, it must be symbolised and that is precisely what the real resists; although it may be possible to glimpse it in the way that, sometimes, if you whip around really really quickly, you can just about catch a glimpse of death's head peering over your shoulder. It is why the mirror is so prominent in horror.

⁹ This spatial account of the subject reorients architectural phenomenology away from its preoccupation with the qualities of 'place', which has for too long been its holy grail and salvation. Architectural phenomenologists think space is a hollow abstraction and place is redolent with qualities that will guarantee their subjectivity. But they miss the point. Phenomenology does not explain why we experience experience. Although it has an account of the sensual world, it has no account of the sensual subject. It is space that invokes the subject and creates the conditions for subjectivity by creating the conditions for representation, and hence the grounds for experience; objects with qualities are just, objects with qualities.

It is not clear how Harman's real relates to Lacan's, because although Harman's real object alludes to what lies beyond experience, at least everyday experience, to divide the world into objects is already a symbolic distinction. The world is just the world, a brute mute given. Whether the real comes in the form of objects, is questionable, because it is questionable whether the real comes in a form. In any case, Harman's and Lacan's reals are distinguished by their orientations. Harman's real object is always already withdrawing beneath the appearance of things, retreating from the subject, slipping through the grasp of any theory or practice. This is perhaps a source of comfort, for we have an uncomfortable relationship with reality. Lacan's real is always already threatening to burst through the appearance of things, and its impending proximity registers on the surface of the subject as anxiety, if not shock.^{10]}

¹⁰ Lacan's text is a theory of experience (an epistemology?) but it slips sideways into ontology when it contemplates the real. It seems to be a version of extreme correlationism, because it lays claim to neither the human subject nor the world, and thereby eschews both idealism and reality. The subject and the world remain unknown. All that is known is the correlate, the symbolic, imaginary, and real registers of experience. The subject remains unknown to itself although it is known to others: it sees itself reflected in its many altars, but these reflections mislead it away from the unconscious because they only ever turn out to be stones. To recentre the subject around its unconscious, was Freud's Copernican revolution: the subject no longer revolves around the focal point of its conscious intentions; it has been displaced to an unconscious that resides outside the subject, in the field of others.



Collapse

Before the conclusion, a summary.

We began by pointing out the paramount role of space in architecture. It is the material of architecture. Although this was more a policy statement or a definition of what architecture is than an ontology, nevertheless, space appears to support the subject as we know it. And this gives it a

certain necessity. We intimated that position in space was an inescapable aspect of subjectivity (there are dispersed objects but no dispersed subjects). But our main point was that the salient symbolic feature of this space is the structured subject-object relation that assimilates to the picture surface. In my view, Harman does not treat subjects systematically enough. In his ontology, they are just another object that other objects have an effect on, like fire has an effect on cotton. My account of space at least gives a systematic account of one salient aspect of subjectivity: that as subjects we situate ourselves before our objects, that space is structured for the subject in a way that makes it possible for this to happen, and that we use architecture to do it. (Subjects are special objects not because they have feelings but because they have a special relation to space.) Where does this leave ontology?

Our most minimal claim, then, is that architecture has a ontology consisting of objects and space, which is different from but does not necessarily challenge object-based ontologies like Harman's. Space is necessary for objects; without it they would all be lumped together as one (subjects included). It is a dialogic ontology for a heterogeneous world. The problem is that it is as difficult to situate space within Harman's classification of sensual and real, as it was to situate that symbolic object, the altar. If, following Harman, we call this experienced space sensual on the basis that it structures the subject-object relation, we reserve real space for the nothingness that remains if we strip out all the objects and surfaces by which space is shaped and qualified by architecture. Even geometry is a function of the objects in space, not the space. On this view, space, real space, space itself, is a featureless nothingness. The difficulty with this reading is that it is hard to understand how Harman's real, which goes in the direction of the essence of things, the real presence of things far away from the

subject, could arrive at nothingness, which seems to negate presence and essence and facilitate proximity.

Another possibility for real space is the one that shadows the subjective space of representation, which seemed to have been alluded to by Kant and Le Corbusier, and which aligns with my category wrecking real axis. It assimilates to Lacan's real. This space confounds the logic of figure ground and does not thereby individuate objects or subjects or space. Real or no, it is difficult to understand this space as space. This space has seemed to thicken, to become material, because it is not transparent to subjects and objects. It eliminates the subject because it cancels the difference between space and object. It is the opposite of the nothingness that we put forward a minute ago, as Harman's real space.

Alternatively we can regard space as simply the necessary precondition for the existence of objects. It is the principle of difference and individuation presupposed by a heterogeneous world, without which the world would be a continuum. If we take this position, then real space, the space of my real axis, would simply be the cancellation of this principle. Although it may be necessary for the existence of objects, there is no reason to think that the principle of difference is itself necessary. Again, this is not the nothingness that is the other to objects that we put forward as Harman's real space, but the negation of the possibility for individuating objects. [a difficult paragraph, an other Klein diagram]

There is nothing ontologically necessary about objects. Space did not have to exist. The world of objects is contingent in an ordinary sort of way. This altar might have been that altar; coke might have appeared in a different can. But behind this ordinary contingency, is the more radical contingency of space. Subjects could never carve the world up into the particular objects that it is - the altars, the cans of coke - if the world were not already marked by the potential for

objects by space. Because we can individuate the world as objects, because we can situate ourselves as subjects to our objects, it must be marked by this potential. The world could have been one, but if it were, we would not be here to know it, because a world without space and objects would not support subjects as we know them.¹¹

Instead of a conclusion, a collapse.

We glimpse this radical contingency in certain catastrophes like the collapse of the World Trade Towers, where it seems that space, object, and subject are returned to a state of one. People and spaces, office furniture, suspended ceilings, walls windows and doorways, were reduced to a single inhalable primordial soup, like Genesis in reverse. As if all the articulations of difference upon which architecture is erected, all the articulations between subject and its objects, the space that contains them, as if all the details that carefully articulate materials and surfaces from each other, were undone. Buildings fall down all the time, but it was something about the encompassing scale that turned this collapse into the expression of an ontological possibility. These moments always seems to come at us too fast for comfort. We expect that the universe will implode into one, or explode into many, but what we witnessed with the Trade Towers was an explosion into one.

As if to compensate for this eruption of a real oneness into our world of difference, the image machine went into overdrive. The shock with which the collapse was received, and the media overdrive that attended it (*it was just like the movies*) confirm that what we witnessed was the emergence of the Lacanian real. Even the real comes with a message, its

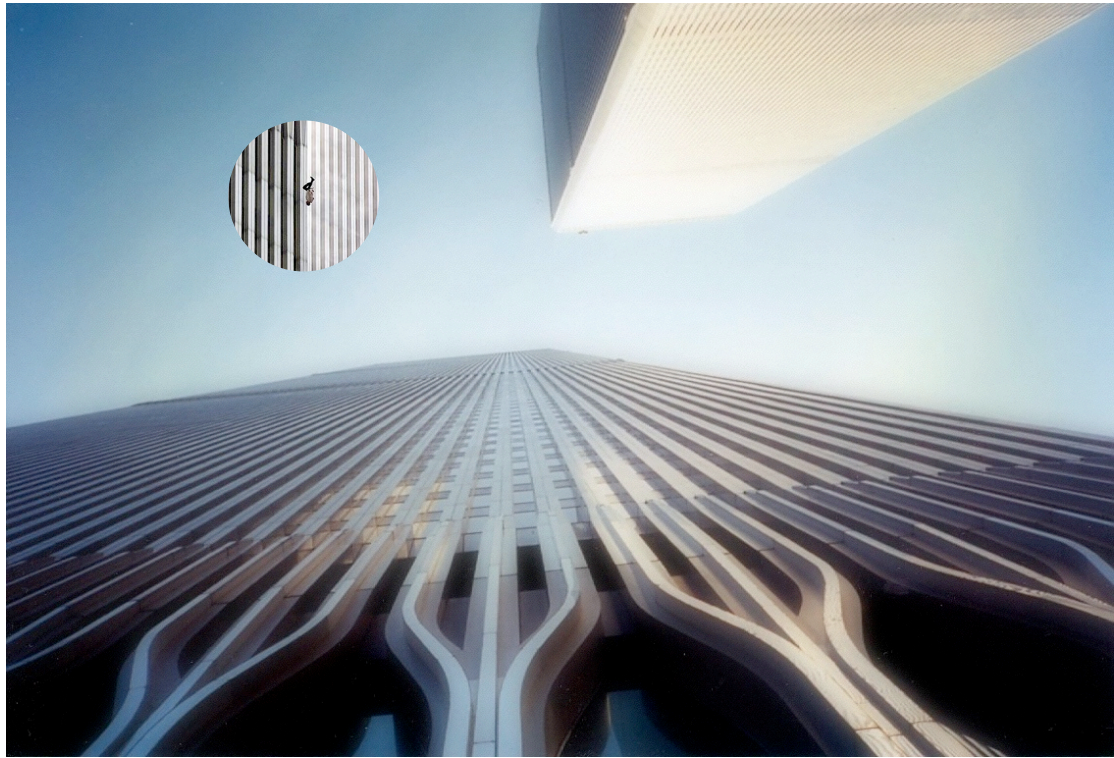
¹¹ This contingency may be what Plato was trying to capture by his image of creation as a threshing floor, something that goes back and forth, the threshing of creation, it could be this, it could be that, nothing is fixed except the lack of fixture. Cf. the discussion of Chora in Plato, *The Timaeus*.

just not possible to articulate it with certainty. It is not exactly saying that our world could have been different, which it could (indeed something new is on ground zero), but that our world is only a possible world.

Starting from the position of the subject, which was what Pozzo visualised (1699), I had hoped to rescue the world from idealism, but I am not sure I have. If I have argued that Harman's object oriented ontology is too reductive to account for architecture, that it needs space, and that space seems to drag with it, the spatial subject, our only way out has been to argue that at least this spatial world is contingent. The world is just the world. There is no reason for preserving it. Creation will go on without us.

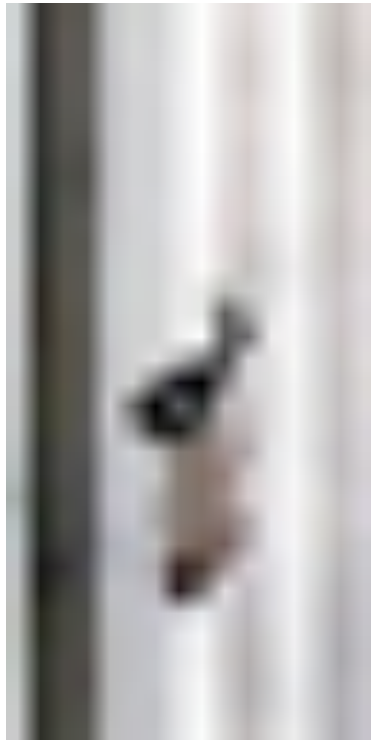
Lorens Holm

Monday 03 June 2013

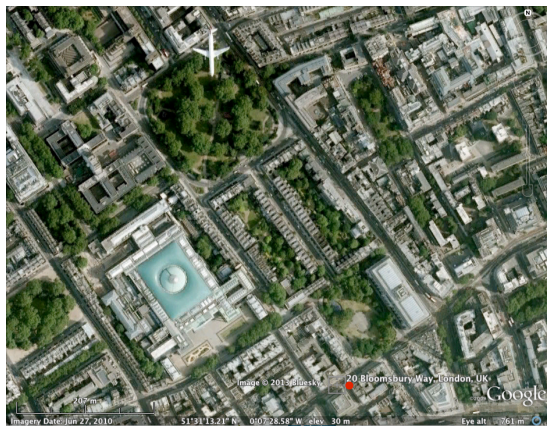


Imaginary postlude

I said that we sometimes glimpse the real. Of course we don't really, for what we see is always only death and destruction. We simply sense its proximity, its closeness to the surface of our world (our symbolic and imaginary reality), as if it were about to erupt through its seamless surface. We sense its closeness beneath the surface, in the smarmy sheen of these self-assured corporate facades of the Trade Towers.



I suspect that if the real were to erupt into our world, terminating our capacity for the symbolization and representation of objects, one way we might notice it is in the disruption of signification. There might still be material signifiers floating around, but they would be simply material, and not signifiers. Like space on my real axis, they would begin to thicken, become opaque, no longer support communication. We might, for instance notice that we and our world would become pixelised. Something like these images of someone falling into pixilation or of someone walking into it.



Finally, another example of the sense of closeness of the real, the real rushing toward the surface of our tidy world, about to explode into it at any moment. This is a screen grab from the Google Earth view that came up when I tried to locate the Swedenborg Society, me trying to be here now. Not even the Google Earth around Heathrow (I checked) seems to capture a plane.