

Introduction: the image of stoicism

At the north-west corner of the agora, the great central square of Athens, stood the Stoa of Poikile, or Painted Colonnade, so called from the mural paintings by Polygnotus and other great artists of the fifth century BC that adorned it. Here, in the early part of the third century BC, could often be seen a seated figure talking to a group of listeners; his name was Zeno and his followers, first called Zenonians, were later described as "men from the Stoa" or "Stoics".¹

Sandbach begins his book with an image, what a Greek would call a *phantasia*, of Zeno, the first stoic, the Cypriot of vaguely Phoenecian extraction, the foreigner, talking philosophy amidst the booksellers in the Painted Stoa, on the north west corner of the Athenian Agora. We get two potent images of Stoicism:

Stoicism 1: philosophy in the marketplace - think *The Moneylenders*, not *St. Jerome in his study*. Polyglot, noisy, dusty, a beady eye for the realities of daily life. Think how different stoic discourse of the city is - they advocated world, not city, citizenship - from the discourse of contemporary urban policy which seeks to undermine public space and public institutions by public-private partnerships, by privatisation, by denial of access, and by homogenizing difference. Just think how different the agora is from the shopping mall - private, homogeneous, in which the only acceptable mode of self expression is to shop. How long before security frogmarch Zeno out the door?

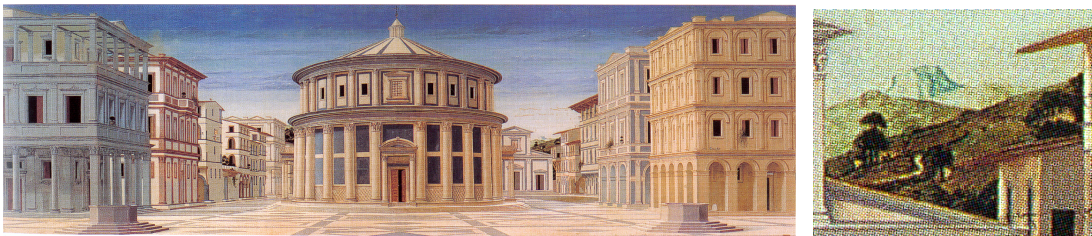
Stoicism 2: Philosophy spoken in the city but articulated from the margins, at a time when Athens was no longer a centre of

¹ F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975) p20.

² In today's cabled world, imagine sitting in your suburban DC home, watching a philosopher on foreign TV, glare, sand, and oil wells burning in the background.

³ See Robin Waterfield, transl. *Plato Phaedrus* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), his

A number of commentators (including *Phaedrus* translator Robin Waterfield) have pointed out that this is the only dialogue in which such prominence is given to the spatial context.³ It seems to me that here we have an image of reason spatialised, emptied out into the landscape. Not only is it dialogue, which is already an externalised, spatialised form, but the dialogue is pinned to the landscape at a number of places and we have no license to marginalise these comments over what we might call 'content'. So the space of rational discourse about an irrational subject, is mapped onto landscape; this landscape, if not exactly neutral, functions as a foil to the city, and this foil allows argument to happen and it also allows for care of the body, and care of the soul in so far as it is accessed through care of the body. This landscape is a foil to the city, in the way that landscape appears in the background of Renaissance paintings. *Phaedrus* and Socrates are not here to enjoy landscape for landscape's sake, to hold onto precious landscape moments, but to flow through it. They are here to reason in this landscape - it is background, and they are detached from it the way foreground is usually detached from background. They are here to reason about love, not to practice love. Reason is always detached, it is not performative with respect to the passions.

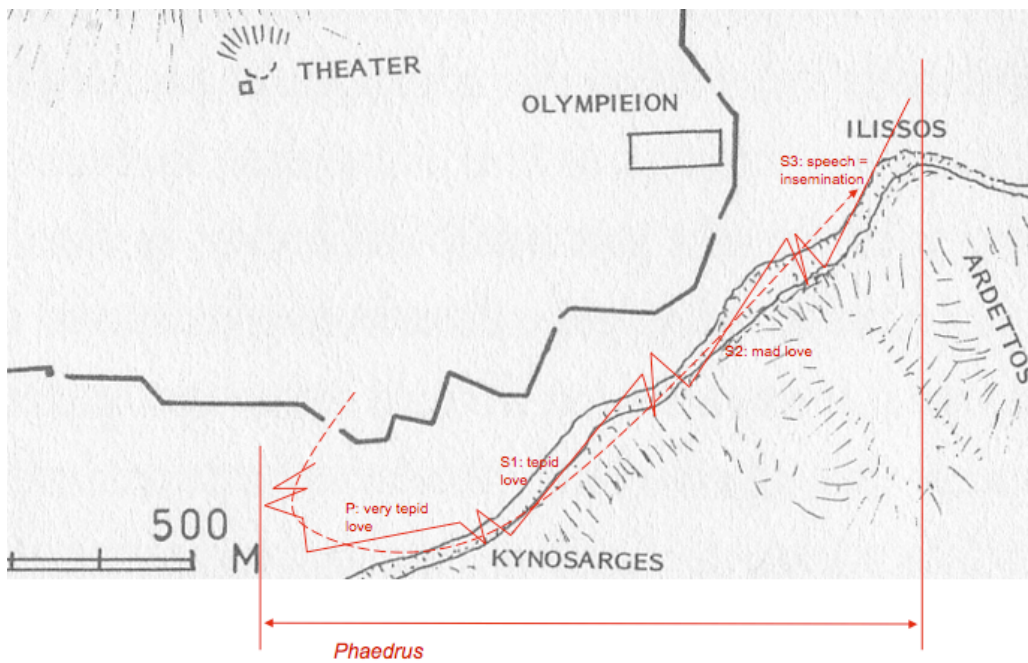


[*The Ideal City, Urbino, ca 1465, anonymous, + landscape detail*]

³ See Robin Waterfield, transl. *Plato Phaedrus* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), his introduction.



[Plan of Athens]



[Plan of *Phaedrus*: Socrates and Phaedrus depart the Itonia Gate to the southeast of Athens, walk east, pick up the Ilissos river. The dotted line represents their notional path, the solid line represents the back and forth of dialogue.]

Eudaimonia

There is no stoic architecture, per se, only stoic strategies for reading or occupying architecture. And to propose an architecture of detachment is a simplification, although detachment, landscape, and emptiness are themes I will stick with. In order, therefore, to address the question of stoic architecture, we have to first answer a prior question, what is stoic space, in particular, stoic ethical space? Because statements of ethics are closely inmixed with concepts of the self, this is tantamount to the question, what is subjective space? what is space *for* the stoic?

In Classical and Hellenistic Greek ethics, the *telos*, or end, of life is *eudaimonia*, or happiness in the sense of the good life. The particular Stoic twist on *eudaimonia* (distinguishing it from Aristotelian or Epicurean ethics) is that in order to achieve it, the stoic needs to divest him/herself of the possession whose acquisition we usually associate with happiness, such objects as health, wealth, lovers, children, even. The Stoics call such objects of the passions, *externals* (Nussbaum) or *indifferents* (Baltzly), and attachment to them leaves us hostage to fortune, exposes our happiness to risk by making it dependent on things over which we have no control. In *Medea*, it is Medea's passion for Jason that leads to unhappiness and murder.⁴ *Eudaimonia* depends not upon externals, but upon a fully internalised virtue [L182], it depends upon making correct choices, it calls for a

⁴ In her discussion of Seneca, Nussbaum shows that Medea's unhappiness stems from the fact that the passions of love and hatred are bound to each other. Cf. Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: theory and practice in Hellenistic studies* (Princeton UP: 1994)

detachment and *fashioning* of the self in what is otherwise an imperfect world beyond our control. The Stoics were committed to this world - they were not proposing to give externals away, but rather to stop wanting them. They want to stop wanting.

Stoic Desire

We need to look at the position the Stoics were arguing against. Since Plato articulated it in the *Symposium*, desire has been predicated upon the absence of the object.⁵ You only want what you do not have. This is also its formulation in psychoanalytic theory. The psychoanalytic subject is always moving towards its objects, in the way that a sailor is always sailing towards his/her horizon. What you want is either *over there*, or *yesterday* or *tomorrow*. Desire is the particular relation that the subject has to objects that are absent for it; what is here now is a real object, not an object of desire. In this account of the self, the cessation of desire is to have everything. This leads to tragedy or comedy. King Midas had everything; his animate world froze to gold. Paris Hilton appears to have everything; her world of surplus masks a doubt that perhaps she has nothing.

The Stoics suggested a different way. They propose instead to rewrite all expressions of desire as judgements of value. Instead of 'I want x' (or to give it the full force of the lost object, 'I wish I still had x'), they write 'x is good'.⁶ Past desire, becomes present reason. For Zeno, *eudaimonia* is achieved by going with the flow, a *good flow of life, living in agreement* with nature and human nature. For the Stoic, nature and human nature were rational, and they believed in a rational god. So long as the Stoics relation to the world and to god was a

⁵ *Symposium*, pp.

⁶ This formulation is from www.stanford.edu.

rational one, s/he would be happy.⁷ For the Stoics, the present instant is accessed by reason, and the infinity of reality is always present in each present instant. The past or future object, does not exist. I call this simultaneity. Now it is not clear to me precisely how to understand this. Let us assume, *contra* Lacan⁸ and any number of other detractors of the Stoics that it is not that the Stoics did not know desire, but that they did not map desire onto space and time. They mapped it onto the infinite matrix of logic and not onto the subject-centric matrix of near/far and past/future. This seems to be what Hadot is suggesting when, in *Philosophy as a way of life*, he sees the love affair between Faust and Helen as an expression of stoic present desire (they represent the union of past beauty and future reason in the present instant). He opens the chapter with: 'Then the spirit looks neither ahead nor behind. Only the present is our happiness.' [h217] And then: 'Happiness looks neither forward nor backward; And thus the instant becomes eternal.' [h231]⁹

We have to look more closely at the way the stoic soul is structured, and in particular, the role of reason, in order to understand how the stoic makes the transition from the experience of desire (for the lost object) to the judgement of value (infinite present existence), and what living in the present,

⁷ As Long states, our relation to god and the world is principally one of reason; in the first instance, it is not mechanistic, and not spatial or temporal. Our rational life is what distinguishes us from animals and other animate things. [L190]

⁸ Lacan said that the Stoics wanted to stop wanting. In psychoanalytic theory, there is no negation of, or opposite to, desire. It has no flip side. Lacan models desire as a single sided surface like a mobius strip. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts...*(New York: Norton, 1981) p.235.

⁹ I began by asserting that for the stoic, *eudaimonia*, or happiness, is the *telos* or end of life. For the stoic, happiness, is always present happiness. It is important to be clear just how totally at odds this idea of *telos* is from contemporary thought. In the psychoanalytic account of the self, we are always going toward ends, they are never present. If happiness is the end of life, we are always getting closer and farther from it, in the sense of a horizon or other sort of boundary condition, but we never occupy that limit. Full happiness, happiness fully present, would be its annihilation. [sublime]

present reason, present happiness, wanting the x that I have, means. Just to tell you where I am heading, this paper is ultimately about space; I shall argue that stoicism is a species of realism, and that to get a grip on what space is for the Stoic, we need to look at realist representations of space.

Long: structure of the stoic subject: impulse lekta phantasiai

According to Long, the soul in Greek thought is essentially animate, and its mobility is constituted of impulse (*hormē*) and representation (*phantasia*). *Phantasia* means representation; in Plato, appearance or perception; it is the general form of an image, where image could be either visual verbal or associated with any other sense. They are individual, not shared, experiences. The animal, by which the stoic meant any animate object, including humans, is impelled toward its representations. All animals have some sense of self-perception, which is one form of *phantasia*.¹⁰

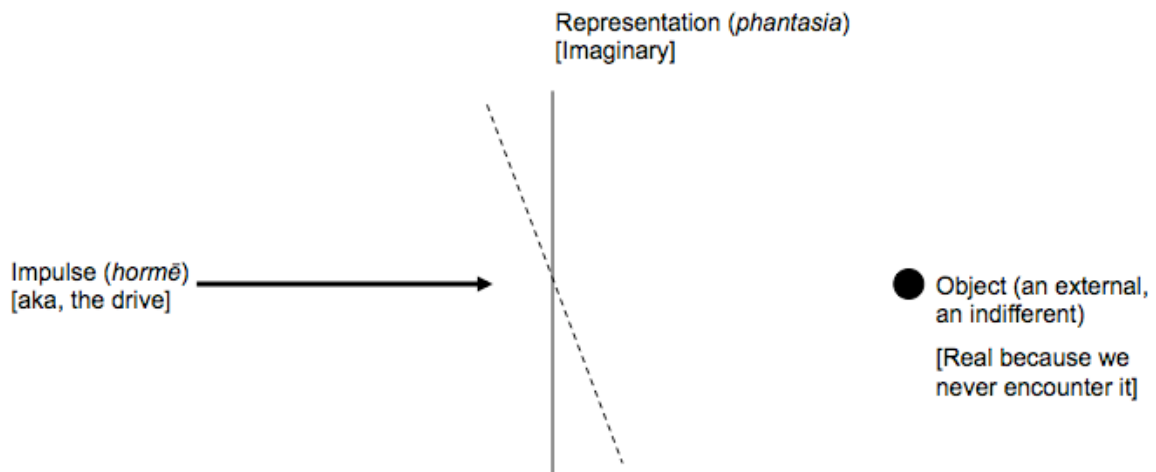
'Realist philosophers, no less than sceptics, relativists, and subjectivists, must make room for *phantasiai* in their philosophies of mind.' [L267] 'The Stoics classify all occurrent sensations and feeling, recollections, imaginations, and all transient thoughts as "representations".'

Long gives examples that include everything from reflection upon the square root of two to my sensing of something white. [L270-71] *Phantasia* define the stoic subject's phenomenological world. *Phantasia* is passive; our inner and outer worlds continually imprint themselves upon our mind by the *phantasia*. In addition to the faculties of *hormē* and *phantasia*, there is the soul's commanding part *hēgemonikon* [L270], which either assents to or retreats from *phantasia*.

In addition to passively enduring or having representations, we shape them by what we say about them. A representation has a

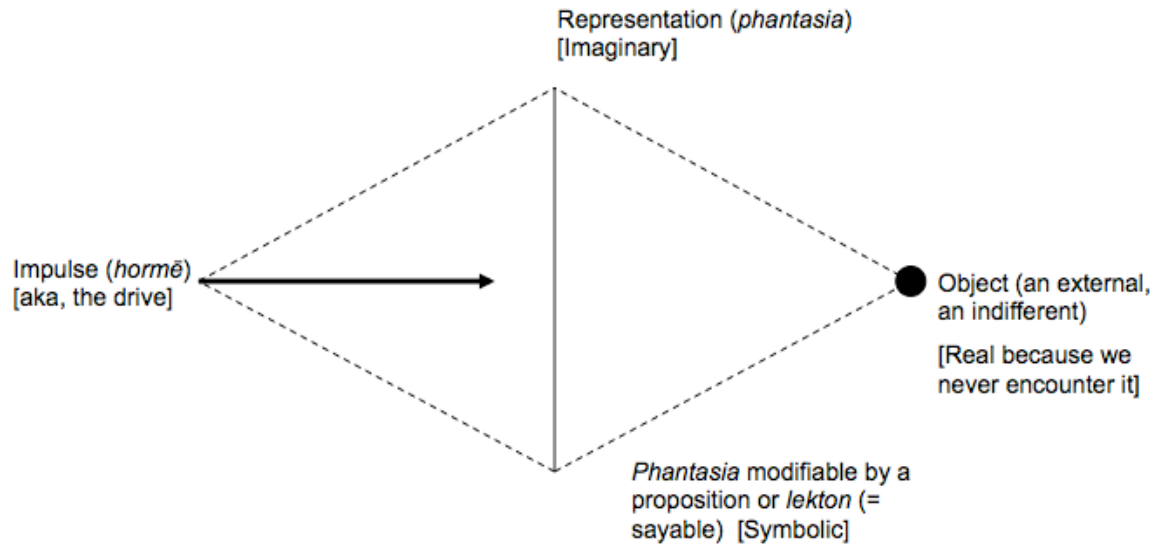
¹⁰ See Long, pp.

cause, in the object of which it is a representation. But any representation also has a propositional content. The representation is always defined by an proposition, the *lekton*, what Long translates as a 'sayable'. In the simplest terms, we assent to the representation, acknowledgement is implicit in conscious engagement with it. More importantly as Nausbaum makes clear, whether the *phantasia* of the loss of a person involves grief or good riddance depends upon a judgement as to who they are (lover, enemy), and the circumstances of death (accidentally cut down in prime, lingering death in old age). The representation is always framed, directed, formed by a proposition, and this proposition constitutes the emotion or passion that attends the representation. This combination of *phantasia* and *lekton*, representation and proposition, constitutes passion for the object.¹¹



[the stoic diagram of subjectivity: (above) impulse-representation-object; and (below) impulse-representation-object with their relationship stabilised or fixed by a proposition (Diagrams derived from description in A.A.Long, 'Representation and the self in Stoicism')]

¹¹ The recognition that the representation has a propositional content with which it is inextricable should be a conundrum familiar to anyone who has pondered the interdependence of Lacan's imaginary and symbolic registers.



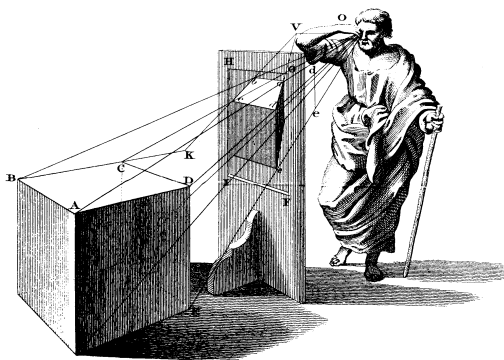
'...we are not simply recipients and users of our representations, but "students and interpreters of them". ...we fashion our own selves, and correct self-fashioning requires the interrogative and reflective task I have been describing, which is the work of each individual's assent or *prohairesis* or moral character.' [L281]

'Lekta will result in presentational content not because they are the actual source of what we perceive but because they are the way we are disposed to interpret that source.' [L285]

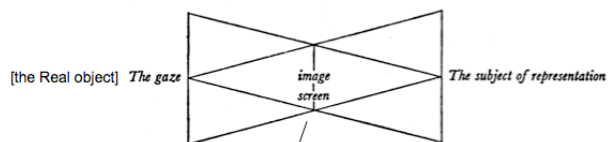
The Stoics insist upon the complete rationality of the mind, they reject the platonic division of the mind into a rational and irrational parts. For the stoic, passion is a defect of reason, and it is through reason that we repair its effects. Since passion has a propositional content, it ought to be possible to think it away, by an act of will. When you get through analysing the passion, it no longer exists for you as passion but as reason, and the object no longer has any affective, passionate, attachment to you.

This is as close as we will get to a formal account of the structure of the stoic subject. The stoic soul, constituted of impulse and appearance shaped by reason, behind which lies an

object, should not be completely unfamiliar to students of perception. This stoic apparatus is familiar as the diagram of perspective, in which a viewer views an object through a picture plane, upon which the image of the object is projected. The viewer is shown peering out of his eye, he is given his proper space; the world at which he peers is separated from him by a screen. There is critical difference. Whereas the perspective diagram purports to show the relation between a subjective interior and an exterior objective world, the stoic diagram shows a series of internal, subjective relations. All of the apparatus - not just its left half - relates to the Stoic subject. This phantasia is my phantasia. I am, in effect, a screen for myself, through which I view the objects of desire that are formed in my phantasia, positioned and shaped by how I think about them. Understood in this way, it is also similar to Lacan's diagram of the visual field, which represents in psychoanalytic theory, the general form of subjectivity, at least with respect to objects of desire in the field of vision. The object of desire is as much within you as without you. It would not be desired unless its counterpart were in you.



at the apex of the second triangle. The two triangles are here superimposed, as in fact they are in the functioning of the scopoc register.



I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopoc field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture.

[the screen with Symbolic and Imaginary components]

[perspective diagrams (Taylor) + diagram of the visual field (Lacan)]

The empty house

The problem is, how, with this apparatus for stoic subjectivity, can we understand the Stoic disengagement from externals. It

would seem that the stoic must dismantle this apparatus, or at least let it fade away. The replacement of passion by reason - what Nussbaum calls the extirpation of passion - is not simply an adjustment of the symbolic lines in the apparatus, but a fading of the apparatus, a fading of the subject to itself. The Stoics use the trope of *emptying out*. The stoic project of disengagement does not impose a lack *upon* the subject (for this is desire), but a lack *in* the subject. There no shortage of objects in the world, but they have no affective existence for the subject. Long states that "Epictetus' injunction to use representations correctly gains a useful conceptual resource in the causal gap which the self fills between *phantasiai* and *lekta*." [L285] This modicum of invisible ethical subjectivity is all that remains of the subject when it is emptied out of its objects and only reason remains. This fact is made poignant by Seneca' frequent use of the home as a metaphor for the soul, when he is discussing the rationalisation of passion and thereby disengaging from externals. 'The wise person can stay at home.' And not foray out to seize externals. 'All my goods (connotation of domestic goods) are with me.' 'Externals', and emptying out, allude to the fundamental architectural category of inside/outside. The distinction inside/outside is desperately problematic, beyond the scope of this paper to untangle: in the present context, the seeming simplicity of the architectural distinction - marked by doorframes and window frames - can only be understood as an attempt to stabilise a concept that is otherwise out of control. You stay in your home but you empty yourself out. In order to stay in your home, you must empty yourself out.¹² The Stoic allusion to emptiness implies that the psyche is a container. For the Stoic, it is a rational inside, emptied of its passions, or an inside made rational by the

¹² Inside/outside maps onto the landscape distinction between foreground/background. What is outside is far away, viewed at a distance from a window. But this emptying our cannot be what in psychoanalytic thought it called projection because that produces more *phantasiai*.

emptying of these irrational contents. The object of passion is external to the subject - a car, a wife - in the way that they may be external to the house, but they are also external to an interior of reason. There is reason on the inside, and this rational inside is emptied of the passions. Happiness is inside the soul. But this soul is empty. The spatial problem of the Stoic is not that there are not objects. The stoic architect is as capable as anyone of surveying the world of objects. The problem has to do with the stoic. One of the primary ways the subject relates to space is in terms of inside/outside. The subject is inside, the subject is an inside. From this inside, s/he surveys a spatial exterior. Without an inside, it becomes difficult to stabilise the relation of the subject to the world, let alone to theorise it.

Landscape redux

Not the landscape in a Claude Lorraine, where you might meet your lover, but the indifferent landscape in the background of 'The Ideal City' or 'Mona Lisa'. Think of this Stoic space as a kind of non-affective landscape. Imagine occupying the landscape that form the backgrounds of these paintings, where the encounter has already been missed. You bypass the relationship that you might have had with *Mona Lisa*, in which two figures are affirmed with respect to one another, eye to eye, contemplating her beauty, wondering who she is - and so, for a moment she is the surrogate of every potential lover - and enter instead the landscape that does not appear in any preparatory sketches and that does not seem to join up properly from one side of her head to another. These landscapes are strange, but not so much because they are full of unfamiliar objects, but because they are empty. What objects there are, seem to have little purpose. When we enter these landscape details, we occupy them as a neutral foil to inter-subjective or affective (passionate) relations, and not as a missed encounter with the object, which would return us to endless displacements of desire. The depth represented by this

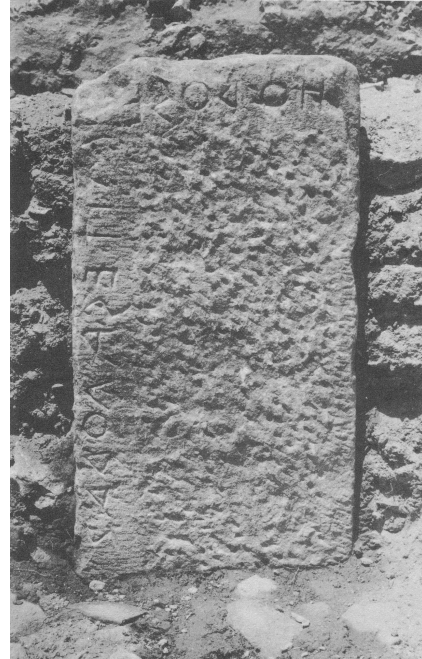
landscape background is a foil to the depth that we usually read into the faces of the one's we love; the possibility reflection upon Mona Lisa as depth reading, seems to be precisely what is questioned by the placid smile of Mona Lisa. By contrast, reflection upon Chuck Close's portrait of Linda does not involve falling deeper into the surface of her face, but lingering on the technical virtuosity of its surface. If the Stoic is/has been emptied, it must mean that s/he is always outside. That even the rational inside is outside. The Stoic dwells in the landscape background of Mona Lisa, does not engage with the depth of Mona Lisa's face, and prefers the real superficial depth, the outside, of the background. But not because there is a choice, but because the Stoic lives in a world of background landscape, landscape that is indifferent to its viewer/occupant.



[*Mona Lisa + Chuck Close, Linda, 1975/76*]

Socrates' dialogue about mad love segues into a discussion of the relative merits of writing versus speech. Socrates claims superiority for speech, largely because speech is writing on the

soul and writing is writing on paper (Derrida has a field day with this formulation). Speech is living, it inseminates the soul. So that even reason, via speech, is subject to the passions; and even the 'inner' passions are tainted by the exteriority implied by writing. We get a sense here of the instability of the Stoic project, perhaps any project in the subjective register: mad love, born of speech, wrecks reason by inseminating it and making it full again, at the every moment when it attempts to articulates itself from its other, from unreason. In any case, this passion, *eros*, is written onto the body by the erogenous zones. It is the only 'inner' psychic state or attribute that is spatialised. I have always thought that the gardenwork of Ian Hamilton Finlay could tell us something about how in the *Phaedrus*, reason is externalised in landscape, and how *eros* written on the body points to an implicit erotics in the gardenwork of Findlay. His concrete poetry, placing words in the landscape, the sense of indifference between concrete word and landscape. Of course looking at the photographs suggests the opposite. The photographs solicit our eye just here or just there. This is one of the *lekta* of photography. If anything should convince us of the impossibility of the Stoics project of emptying out, it is the impossibility of disinterested representation. It seems also to be the way boundary stones are distributed around the Agora now; they are for us a form of silent notation.



[Ian Hamilton Findlay + Agora boundary stones]

An extreme form of realism

I would like to conclude by returning to the question of space. I have been concerned throughout with subjective space, space as it is represented to the perceiving subject by the perceptual apparatus of consciousness. Subjectivity is always a form of inside. I would like to remain with these representations of space that stick with the perspectival form of the subject. As we have seen, this is closest to the stoic subject who is always the subject of the *phantasia/lekton* couple. As we shall see, this is the form of space that represents space as a dialogue between the overlaying dichotomies of near/far and inside/outside.¹³

¹³ It may be possible to represent the space of reason, this infinite plenitude predicated on emptiness, by certain forms of field in which distance becomes a matter of coordinates (Deleuze's smooth and striated space come to mind). This space is not necessarily organised according to near and far with respect to the position of the subject.

Mona Lisa distinguishes foreground/background by any number of devices. What happens when this distinction is erased because everything is equally present to the viewer. I refer to the photo- or super-realist painters of the 1960's, who seemed for a while to define a certain type of New York space. They worked from photographs. They capture every glint of light, every reflection and sheen on the shiny surfaces of store fronts and car bumpers which seem to be their preferred subject matter. They anticipated ray tracing by 30 years. These paintings are so incredibly realistic they make the paradigm perspective spaces of the Renaissance, like the view down the nave of Santo Spirit (Brunelleschi, Florence, 1440's) toward the altar, look like a surrealist exercise in desire. Perspective is the principle form of visual desire because perspective holds us apart from our objects - Brunelleschi's altar - by calibrating the distance to them, even as we are captivated by them. As in the case of Close's *Linda*, in Robert Estes' paintings of New York, everything is present. They subject New York to an optical regime in which all details are seen and nothing is hidden. Detail obliterates distance. Unlike the *Ideal City*, or Brunelleschi's nave - they are both *phantasia* which screen their object - these paintings seem to open so transparently onto their object that they begin to undermine the apparatus of perspective upon which they depend. The picture plane is so transparent, it almost ceases to exist. Where everything is visible to the viewer, what we are presented with is not the desire to see *x*, but rather the visual correlate of King Midas. The cessation of desire has its visual correlate (the cessation of viewing) in a form of representation where everything is seen.

In interview, these painters make some extraordinary statements. They claim that their paintings are realer than photographs. Like reality, but unlike the photograph, everything is in focus, every part of the painting is given equal attention and no object

is preferred to any other, moving vehicles are shown without blur. They capture a present instant.

These painters got something right about New York. They cottoned on to the fact that New York is a realist project, and it precisely because of its extreme realism that it gets very close to hallucination. In these paintings, New York has the terrifying clarity of dreams. It is precisely because these images are drained of affect, and not because - like the surrealist image - they are replete with it, that they begin to have the status of the hallucination. They double reality, double it perfectly, and by so doing, undermine it. The stoic who is emptied out, whose house is full of nothing but reason, is someone from whom all experience comes from the outside. There would be nothing on the inside that would be the counterpart to the outside. There would be nothing repressed in the stoic world, and hence no return of the repressed. The world would be meaningful but the meaning would be frozen. Things would mean just what they mean, literally, no more no less, without interpretation and analysis, without slippage and deferral, without the excess of meaning that seems in our world to erupt everywhere, in slips of the tongue, in the uncanny, in free association, in the possibility of metaphor. These are all the ways that signifiers mingle and tarry. We make meaning but meaning subjugates us and runs riot with our reason. Not so the stoic. The stoic would never have been properly subjugated by the signifier. The image of the stoic banishing all externals so that he is left with nothing but an external world, recalls nothing so much as that celebrated 19th century psychotic Dr. Shreber, and his relation to architecture. Shreber stands at his window in the asylum, timber shutters thrown open, shrieking into the storm, shrieking at God's little helpers who have come to get him. For Shreber, desire no longer has anything to do with the

absent object. It has now been concretised in the form of divine rays that come from god and feminise his body.¹⁴



[Richard Estes, *M104*, 1999]

The photo-realist city is not an object of reflection, it is an object of technical delineation. This is a realist world, but it is not an empirical one. Unlike the stoic, the empiricist is interested in what s/he looks at. The empiricist is interested in the bus (where is it going, how is it driven, who manufactured it), but not the storefront, or in the storefront (what do they sell, who are the clientele) but not the bus. These paintings treat everything equally because they are only interested in assenting to reality in all its exquisite detail.

Nussbaum on several occasions refers to an empty image when she tries to visualise the world of the stoic, the stoic's *phantasia*. Because for her, empty means without affective engagement, without desire. It is a world in which Medea does not hate Jason

¹⁴ Cf. Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of my nervous illness* (London, Dawson, 1955); and Jacques Lacan, 'On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis (1958)' in *Ecrits: the first complete edition in English* (New York, W W Norton, 2006) pp 445-488.

for jilting her. But we can see that the visual correlate of this world without affect, is a completely full world. The Stoic's *phantasia* is anything but empty. The desiring eye sees less than everything because what it sees is not the same as what an other desiring viewer sees. These paintings represent the view of the subject who sees everything, and because of it, the subject begins to disappear. Although they have a point of projection - the point opposite the vanishing point from which every perspective is projected - we are hard pressed to say that they position a viewer. It is not the position of the viewer that is under threat, but his/her existence. Photo-realist paintings represent space to the viewer as an outside, exclusively: the absolute externality of space. We compare them to the images of another New York painter, Edward Hopper, for whom space is always a relation between an inside and an outside. We identify with one and project ourselves into the other. I think we recognise the murky subjectivity in Hopper. Let us define the subject of photo-realist space. In both the photo-realist subject and the stoic subject, the existence of the subject is denied, not because of the forsaking or retraction of objects, but because of the emptying out of the subject of the passions and of the objects to which the passions attach. Reason is left with not an empty house, but a house with no interior. The liberal democrat who withdraws with disgust and melancholy from politics because s/he cannot reconcile the image of burning oil fields with the evangelical doctrine of freedom, is not playing the stoic. S/he still has a house. The stoic does not know disgust or melancholy any more than s/he knows love. The stoic world is a world of simple facts to which s/he harbours no response.

The stoic seems to inhabit a 1960's post-modern super-realist existential space, and if there are contradictions and loops and folds and arabesques in this position, that wreck thresholds and

categories and the impermeability of surfaces, they are masked by the cool portrait of reason.

Lorens Holm, January 2014