

Architecture Thinks Das Ding Called Theory: a brief encounter with the blank spot of desire on the London Underground

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Introductory bump on the head

So, what is *das ding* called theory and how do you make it work for architecture? *Das Ding*, 'the Freudian Thing?'¹ I'll tell you what I'd do. When the world bumps me on the head, I make theory in response. Theory is like thinking about thinking. You get bumped on the head by reality, you turn thinking into a thing – make thinking into a kind of woolly object called a thought. Mark Cousins, my former and now late PhD supervisor, used to say he didn't think that thinking existed. Have you ever actually seen anyone do it? Not me (and I grew up playing cops and robbers on the Columbia University campus, near Rodin's monumental *Thinker* just to the right of the axis of Low Library). Let's assume that thought is one of those *dings* that only exists when it is apprehended. If no one has ever actually seen a thought, then theory is what Lacan called a creative act. You make something exist that never existed before, you invent an all new signifier (James Joyce).² Theory turns thinking, which doesn't exist into something woolly that does. So, here's a bump on the head, here's a bit of reality, and here's my response to it.

On every London Underground platform there is a wall map of the London Underground. It's the first place people go when they get on or off the train, especially if they are transferring to another line. And the problem is that the place on the map where you are is always blank. So, you get off the train and all you know is you are here but you don't know what here is. The you-are-here spot is always worn blank by countless fingers pointing to *Here*. If we weren't in lockdown this essay would accompany a photo essay of London Underground station platform wall maps, I would go to every one of them and photograph the rubbed out spot with the scumbled edges.

I will speak of repetition, the representation of space, and the plan of the London Underground.



[Image 1. Shipwrecked on the apparatus of reality – instead of following the vanishing point down an avenue from one space into another, we get closer to the vanishing point. Rather than experiencing more reality, reality is replaced by the apparatus that supports reality.]

Beyond the pleasure principle

In his paper, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud broached the possibility that we could talk sensibly about a beyond to the reality of experience. The pleasure principle defines the domain of psychical reality. Psychical activity aims for pleasure which, in Freud's rather dour homeostatic psyche, is the relief from tension. He posits that there is something beyond this subjective world. Not outside it like science, but beyond it in the sense of its limits. We would expect that such talk would appear as a special form of non-sense. Beyond would be language without its formative

¹ Jacques Lacan, 'The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis (1955)' in *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W W Norton 2006) pp. 334-63.

² Jacques Lacan, on Joyce.

capacity. In a spatial environment, Vitruvius' *commodity firmness and delight* is pleasure principal stuff. So is perspective. If architecture and perspective form the spatial reality that constitutes the domain of the pleasure principle, it should be clear that we could not arrive at this beyond by following the vanishing point to another place, because this would simply be more reality. We would expect rather, that this beyond would be precisely the condition where subjective experience is destroyed by the representational apparatus that supports it. Imagine, architectural experience shipwrecked upon the vanishing point itself. In the case of the world formed by language, what is the apparatus upon which it would be shipwrecked?

Freud made three statements about the drives. In chronological order: 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (1915), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930). The first paper puts the drive in relation to the individual subject, and defines the drive as a stimulus-response apparatus. The second paper, puts the drive in relation to the everyday reality of the subject. In this paper, Freud lays down the challenge of how to think this beyond, and along the way endeavours to find evidence for the presence of a death drive, which appears as a form of repetition that unravels the life of the individual. The third and final paper puts the drive in relation to civilisation. This paper, equally grim in its outlook, argues that the drive – which is harboured in the individual – will destroy the social bonds that tie individuals to each other. This one was written at a time when being a Jew in Vienna was no longer possible.³

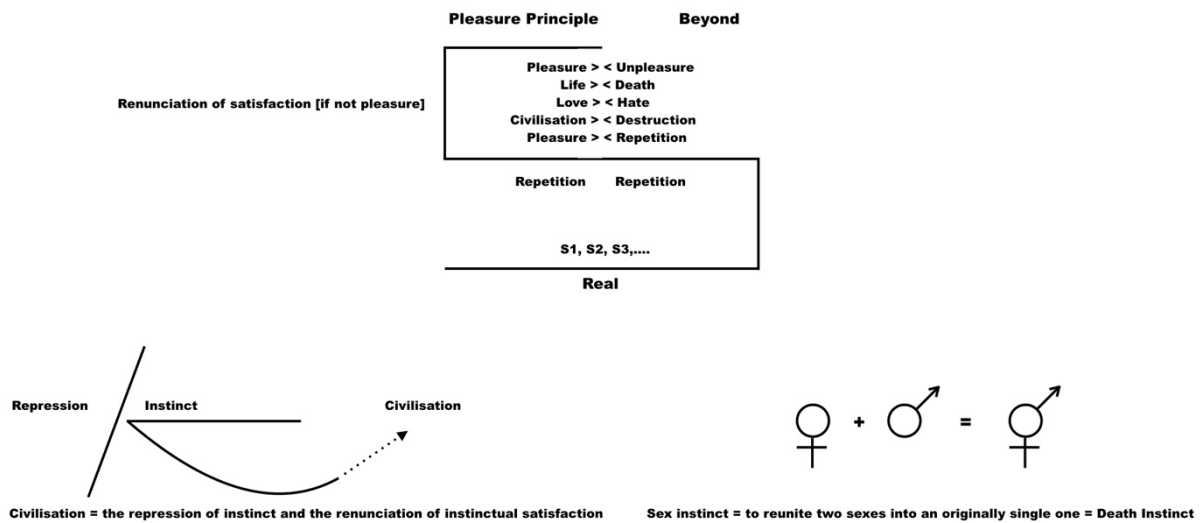
I would like focus on repetition, to be precise, focus on the position of repetition. I want to position it in the experience of London; and also there is a need to position it in Freud's thought. Freud's argument is a good example of what he calls condensation. It is inconsistent and overdetermined if you read it as an attempt to map into two separate domains the *pleasure principle* and a *beyond*. But there is a narrative thread. It leads from the domain of the pleasure principle [defined by binary logics, what Donald Kunze, following Žižek calls a primary virtuality] to a beyond of the pleasure principle [a secondary virtuality defined by *jouissance* or excessive enjoyment and repetition].⁴ In a nutshell Freud appears first to define the pleasure principle as the domain of the life drive as if the satisfaction of the life drive produces pleasure, and then to put in opposition to it the death drive and repetition. But he also argues that the pleasure principle is the domain of all drives, and that what constitutes all drives – what is beyond them in the sense of underlying them – is repetition. We do not have time to untangle Freud's argument but I have attempted to diagram it and Lacan's response to it.

In his discussion of repetition and the drive, Freud seems to condense – to be less generous, conflates – the subject and the organism. The death of the organism constitutes biological death. The death of the subject is the loss of its capacity for identity and desire. It may be more a collapse than a death. The compulsion to repeat appears in Freud's argument as both the general condition of all drives and as the particular feature of the death drive whose aim is to restore the organism to an earlier simpler more and ultimately inorganic state. With the loss of identity and desire, the

³ Sigmund Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915)', in *Sigmund Freud: On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Angela Richards and James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 113-38. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)*. trans. James Strachey. ed. by John D. Sutherland, *International Psycho-Analytical Library* (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1974). Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents (1930)*. trans. Joan Riviere and James Strachey. ed. by M. Masud R. Khan, *International Psycho-Analytical Library* (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975). See also the discussion of *Civilisation...* in Lorens Holm and Cameron McEwan, 'The city is a critical project – a poetics of collective life' in *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly* 23:2 (2019) pp.179-94.

⁴ Donald Kunze, 'Secondary Virtuality, the anamorphosis of projective geometry' in *Architecture and Culture* 8:3+4 (2021), special issue on *Architecture & Collective Life*.

subject ceases to exist for itself or for others – the symbolic order ‘blanks’ it like being ‘blanked’ at a party, but this is not the same as the death of the organism.



[Image 2. Reading Freud’s thesis on repetition and the drive – Freud sets up a series of dichotomies between what is the domain of the pleasure principle and what is beyond it. Repetition appears first on the righthand side of the argument, turns out to underly both sides. It is not the distinguishing feature of one drive but underlies all drives. Lacan relates it to the signifier chain that overlies the real as if the real were a substrate. Elsewhere in Lacan the symbolic order has a borromean relation to the real.]

In these terms, pleasure is then simply a detour to death. Freud says that organisms are distinguishable because every organism has its own detour to death. [p.] The path of pleasure is the detour that each drive makes to achieve its aim, which is death. Hence, for Lacan, all drives are death drives. [Peter Brooks used this trope in his book *Reading for the Plot: design and intention in narrative*, where he describes the plot of a novel as a squiggly detour from the first to the last sentences. To this day, whenever I read a book to my kids, we read the first and last sentences first and we try to see how they make sense together, before reading the intervening pages. Le Corbusier had an ambivalent relation to the straight and squiggly line. They both lead to the same place, but one is man’s way and the other the donkey’s. The straight way of man is disciplined by the symbolic order that expresses itself in goals and rules, in a word, drive; the other is the wayward way of biology and the instinct of the organism.⁵ All we do for pleasure, whether it is writing and reading this manuscript, singing Christmas carols, building buildings or building civilisations, is simply a detour to death. Freud says that character has the form of repetition as does indeed the transference. [p.] In the transference, the patient re-enacts with the analyst, the relationships s/he had with significant others, typically parents during formative stages of growing up. Past

⁵ Cf Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*(Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) in particular chapter 4: ‘Freud's master plot: A model for narrative’. Plot is defined as a structuring operation employed by narrative, whose main principle is repetition of key elements whose effect is to delay the end. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* transl. by Frederick Etchells (1923/1927/1960) p.65 in the chapter ‘Regulating Lines’ in which he retells the myth of the primitive hut. Lacan distinguishes drive (*trieb*) – a symbolic activity – from instinct (*instinkt*), which is biological, a distinction flubbed by Freud's translators.

relationships are templates for future ones. We have the characters by which we are known because we repeat ourselves. We are known by our clichés.⁶

Death is beyond the pleasure principle not because it defines an other drive that stands in opposition to the life drives but because it underlies all drives. Lacan insists in *The Four Fundamental Concepts...* that we cannot understand the role of repetition in Freud's thought without understanding it as an encounter with the real. The shiftiness in Freud's thought about the position of repetition, death, and drive with respect to the pleasure principle has been the focus of most of the critique of the death drive. This critique treats Freud's thought as if he were using *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to map territories, and not doing it very consistently; it ignores the unbroken continuity of Freud's thought. When we attend to the Ariadnean narrative, Freud is quite clear from the beginning – from his first paper where he argues that the subject is a stimulus-response apparatus, the drive is its flywheel, and it constitutes a form of 'frontier' – that repetition is what is beyond the pleasure principle, beyond all forms of pleasure including the pleasure of death, which is repeated but once.

The London Underground

That's repetition in Freud's thought, now repetition in London.



[image 3 The London Underground, upon which is inscribed my desire and my identity + this emptiness of the real of desire]

I have become interested in what a locality is. The idea of a location seems to be about repetition. In the UK, everyone has a 'local'. That's the pub that you call home away from home, the home you escape from home to. Your local is not a local because it is near to your house, but because it is the one you always go to. What I like about the plan of the London Underground is that it presents London as an assemblage of localities, without ever confusing the integrity of their identities as distinct localities by representing London as if it were a continuous surface where all localities blend into each other. Each locale has a name and is given a dot and lines to every other locale, which connect them together without running them into each other. It is like the lure of a London that we could *never not* find a home in somewhere. A comparison between the LU plan and a plan of the London Underground – in which the lines of the underground are drawn directly onto London clay, as it were – should make that clear.⁷

When you are in a London Underground station and you go to look at the wall plan, more likely than not, the spot indicating the station you are in, is rubbed out. It is rubbed out because countless

⁶ It is possible to have a transferential relation to space, except most people do not have a highly enough developed relation to space to sustain it. for instance, in the locales to which I am attached, like my house, my office, and the grocery store I stop at on the way home, I may re-enact the spatial relations of play that I enacted around that Rodin, or I may work through, in the relations I have to my own home, the relations my parents had to our family home.

⁷ One of the interesting things about the LU plan – unlike, say, the NYC subway plan – is that it does not follow the street grid and hence the topography. It is a topology without a topographical surface.

people have stood here and put their finger on it. Putting your finger on the spot does not make you more here, but you do it anyway. It is a bit like when you are waiting for the lift and you press the button twice even though it does not bring the lift any quicker. Your finger always returns to the place of your desire. Your finger knows where your desire is, even if you don't. This double-doing has a name. It is called *idempotency*. It is the *idem* of Latin, like when you write *Idem* to repeat a reference. One of my colleagues, Donald Kunze called my attention to it. In *Seminar IX, Identification*, Lacan argues that idempotency is the basis for identity. Identity is idempotent, a form of double-doing, a repeat performance, a function of the repetition of signifiers (a signifier represents a subject to another signifier, that's his rather reductive definition of the social life of speaking beings). In the paper 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious, he argues that the repetition of the signifier is the domain of the unconscious. The fact that identity is a tautology does not mean that $A = A$ does not communicate something. *Here = Hammersmith*. In *Seminar IX Identification*, we learn just how multiple and *extimate* is identity, and how saturated it is with difference. Lacan argues that there is no repetition without identity (something has to stay the same in order for something to repeat). There is no repetition with pure difference. Likewise there is no identity without difference. The paradox of identity is that at its heart is the differential nature of the signifier, and in particular, the repeating signifier of the subject, *I*.⁸

Wherever you go, you are always at the *Here* of the plan, and the *Here* is always blank, the blank spot of the cumulative desire of countless subjects of London. That blank is not the Lacanian real – it can't be, the lacanian real is beyond the signifier – but it is the blank where, for the subject, desire opens onto the real. It stands there as the talisman for the limit of the subject, the subject of London for whom the subject and London wrap around each other in a single surface of attachment. The finger wears down a blank where desire is. Wherever you go, you are at the blank of your desire. The blank is not the image of death any more than it is the image of desire, the real has no image; it frames desire, like the hole in the picture that frames the vanishing point. Perspective identifies desire and locality, and pinpoints locality with a hole. In *Seminar VII, The Ethics*, Lacan says that the you-are-here of space (he is talking about the birth of perspective, the paradigm of you-are-here space) marks the emergence of a sensitive spot, a lesion, a locus of pain, a point of reversal of the whole of history, insofar as it is the history of art and insofar as we are implicated in it' [p104] He must be alluding to the hurt and disappointment associated with desire.⁹

The different and the same – beneath the signification principle

There are two forms of repetition in Freud and Lacan and they are not to my mind as clearly acknowledged as they ought to be: the repetition of the different and repetition of the same. The repetition of the different defines the domain of the pleasure principle. It builds the world we know. Freud refers to it when he discusses transference as a form of repetition. Lacan refers to it (*Seminar IX*) when he argues that identity is inscribed within the differential relations of the signifier, and in

⁸ See the discussion around identity and *idem*. in *Seminar Book IX Identification 1961-1962*, and in particular the first session Wednesday 15 November 1961. *Seminar Book IX* is published online in English translation by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French typescripts, at https://nosubject.com/Seminar_IX (accessed 01 May 2021). The *No Subject* website is an invaluable source for Lacan's texts. Freud calls the subject an apparatus; according to Lacan, the subject is an apparatus that thinks itself – it has the same problem of identity that Lacan associates with Descartes' formula for subjectivity, 'I think therefore I am'. It is an act of creation. The 'I think' is not itself a thought but a thought is a thing. The identity $A = A$ is not an empty tautology, as is clear by its instantiation in Descartes formula and the *myself* of subjectivity, and the signifier, *I*, for identity.

⁹ It is the absence of a thing that frames desire. In his discussion of painting, Lacan compares the hole in the picture where the vanishing point resides, to 'the minus phi of castration'. Elsewhere Lacan relates architecture to emptiness, 'Architecture,... like painting,... is organised around emptiness'. See Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. trans. Dennis Porter. ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. (NYC: Norton, 1992) pp135 and 136. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* trans. Alan Sheridan. ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton Press, 1981) p103-4 and 105.

his discussion of the 'Insistence of the letter...' in the unconscious. We are known to others because we repeat ourselves in different ways. Repetition of the same is the brute fact beneath subjective experience. Freud refers to death and the stimulus-response cycle. Lacan refers to it when he says in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* that we cannot understand repetition in psychoanalysis except as an encounter with the real. When signification is put in relation to the real, signification is *nought but* repetition. Think static. Or a skipping record. We experience it as shock when we are yanked out of our reveries and realise that our desire is fantasy. It happens in small ways. When we are lying on our back with eyes closed, transported by Mozart, and the record starts skipping; our ascending reverie crashes to the material reality of skipping plastic. It happens when we realise that the *Here* is jute ground, that this fantasy of a *Here* is nowhere.

In Lacan's terms, there are not two domains, a pleasure principle which we inhabit and a beyond, but one domain with a limit: the domain of symbolic difference in which we articulate our subjectivities, is bound by a limit in which signification appears as repetition without difference. This limit is a single sided surface because there is not something on the other side of it. We can see how the signifier encounters the real. Signifiers are in relations of difference with other signifiers as they slide along the signifier chain, S1, S2,... S. They have a rather fluid relation with the signifieds that they slide on top of. What Lacan shows about Freud's expeditions beyond the pleasure principle and into the drive, is that beneath the song of the signifier is not a signified but the emptiness of the real. Not because one signifier replaces the other to articulate our identity and desire, but because underneath this articulation is, simply, repetition. When we are beneath the signification principle, and all there is is repetition, there is still a form of enjoyment, the enjoyment of repetition itself, which Lacan calls *jouissance*.

'The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern.' pp53-54.

'To this requirement correspond those radical points in the real that I call encounters, and which enable us to conceive reality as... *souffrance*. [transl. note = in abeyance, pending, and also pain] Reality is in abeyance there, awaiting attention. [then Lacan goes to the *Zwang* of the drive, primary processes, unconscious] ...experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus,... which forces us to contemplate what Freud calls,... the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, *the between perception and consciousness*.' pp55-56.

When the signifying condition of subjective experience is displaced by the repetition upon which signification depends, language appears as chatter and the subject is reduced to a blank. If the pleasure principle is where words mean stuff, and communicate a particular kind of *here*, Freud's beyond is where there is no *here* of language. This beyond is not the realm of non-sense, which any surrealist or dream hunter knows is in dialogue with sense, but a realm where the articulation of sense-nonsense has no traction. Freud would have done better with his metaphors to say *beneath* rather than *beyond*. [Don't underestimate the power of metaphors: the most distinguishing difference between Lacan's structuralist and Jung's depth analysis is the difference between the metaphors of surface and depth.] The sense of beneath rather than beyond appears in the London Underground plan where the Here of London, no matter which/what/where here, is reduced to the same spot of jute underlay.¹⁰

¹⁰ A reprise of Freud's paper '...Vicissitudes' should make it clear that something lies beneath the horizon of experience of the subject, and that is the biological fact of the organism, the brute fact of world that does not care about subjects or anything, but is only the working of a biological mechanism. This is not the realm of non-sense. Science does not make sense or non-sense, it simply is.

Conclusions

Commons

As an architect, I am interested in this idea of the locality, because it says something about how places emerge out of the continuity of the urban field through common use. These thoughts will change our idea of what a place is and what it is to occupy them. The locale is a crowd phenomenon. Locales are defined by encounter, not form and quality. They are a not wholly objective category. They may be a bridge to digital places which is relevant to an age in which the public space of politics seems to be moving on-line.

Repetition enters urban discourse in a number of places. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that we have a right to the city because that is where we articulate our subjectivity. This right is threatened by the repetitive nature of the built environment under capitalist development. When the environment is the same everywhere, social transactions are reduced to repetition and there is no possibility for choice. The lure of repetition and its limit is inscribed in consumer societies. Exchange value allows limitless access to commodities but reduces exchange to repetition of the same. [Consumer societies are always going in the direction of the death drive, which is probably why capitalism is so irresistible]. In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas introduces wearing-away as an architectural idea. In order to make sense of Le Corbusier's obsession with concrete, he argues that reality is being worn down and it is the job of a paranoid Le Corbusier to generate more of it, in the hey-presto manner of pouring a 'nothing' into formwork and concretising it. In the paper 'The Generic City', Koolhaas complains that identity is no longer operative in the city because heritage is being worn down by the expanding tourist industry and being devalued by the growth of populations. In what must surely be a piss-take of materialist philosophy emerging in the texts of Deleuze+Guattari who associate this materialism with schizophrenia, Koolhaas argues that the larger the population, the smaller our individual share of heritage. The generic city, unlike, say, the universal city [that which is the city in all cities], has lost its character, identity, centre, periphery, because of a form of repetition of the same. In *Architecture and the City*, Rossi describes the architecture of the city as construction, and the city as a repetition of many incremental acts of construction related to the collective memory, organised around what he calls 'permanences' in the city fabric. Rossi references the collective memory of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, but he could have referred to transference. I bring to my encounter with this place all my previous encounters. The analogic city is what endures of the city in all of us because it is – in the terms of this paper – what repeats differently each time.

The locality is equal parts a spatial and a subjective category. People point to the same spot because it is momentarily where their desire is. These repetitive behaviours create places by wearing them into the continuous fabric of the world. The community of people who touch the London Underground plan may seem like a pretty vaporous community, but it is no more vaporous than the community of people who 'touch' Tesco. It is only simpler. They touch Tesco once a week with their feet, and wear down its doorsills and checkout aisles as part of a more complex exchange with food, need, and desire. One of the ways we attach to places is by our continuous use of them, which use creates and transforms them. Locales are the worn spots to which the multitude return because that is where we buy our favourite beer and garner praise from others. It is through the attention to these spots where paths cross that we articulate our subjectivity with others. Planning policy and planning practices tend to assume that communities and identities are important and tend to address them through the provision of amenities and the amelioration of noxious conditions, but they rarely unpick the way they function. That attachment to places goes through representation should be almost a tautology because it would not work if it did not register in the psyche of the subject. We may not need a London Underground plan, but the wear has to be recorded somehow or it would disappear from collective consciousness.

We need to distinguish locale from place. The locality is not a destination but a steppingstone on the way to elsewhere. Place is the bed you return to every night; locale is the turnstile at airport security, a passing point, probably not memorable in the single encounter. The indexes of locality in the city are to be found in the quotidian infrastructures of public phone booths, post boxes, bus shelters, manhole covers, public toilet, drinking fountains, fire call boxes, granite curbs and benches, storefronts, what we might call the gathering points for everyday togetherness. And not in – or not only in – the piazzas and boulevards with their statues and other markers of esteem, that typically define the public realm. It is time to rethink the discourse of cities. Planning policy regards the place as a stable repository for character and identity, and the inhabitant of the place as someone who, even if only momentarily, dwells there. The sanctity of the place is matched to the sanctity of its dweller. This thinking goes immediately to mapping exercises on the lookout for typologies of enclosure (the piazza) or values that can be defined by boundaries. The conventional discourse of places as it is taken up in planning policy documents leads to a falsification of what a place is, as if cities were systems of places where something like settlement or stasis occurs, and not a system of passage points. The locale proclaims its commitment to transience; it says something about contemporary subjectivity. The subject of the locale is not a repository of character and identity, as if it were – like the notion of place we have abandoned – stained with qualities. The contemporary subject – psychoanalytic or otherwise – is not an enclosure, and its identity and desire are not internal to it. Marx tried to articulate a similar publicness for thought with his *general intellect*. And for Lacan the individual is a position in the field of the Other. We are never really in the moment, even in bed, but are always on the way elsewhere, dreading the pasts we have left behind, thinking ahead to other elsewheres, leaving our marks. I am always in transit.¹¹

The locale shifts the discourse about place from public space to common use. The locale constitutes an unacknowledged form of commons. It is not jointly owned, but we all use it and our use marks it. It is akin to the village common, the public footpath and creative commons publication. The village common is typically open land within settlements. It has a legal status that protects it from development that would take it out of common use, because it is already in common use. It is common due to its use not its ownership.¹² The identity and desire of a community is inscribed in the land that is identified through this inscription. It is a cumulative effect on the many, but it is not divisible to its authors. The blank on the map is a mark or inscription to which no one holds the copyright.¹³

A grammar of togetherness

The locale needs pride of place in the grammar book of the multitude. I refer to the work of the political philosopher Paolo Virno, and to key concepts in the work of the Hannah Arendt, in

¹¹ It is axiomatic in Lacanian analysis, understood as the logical entailments of Freudian analysis, that the primary categories of subjectivity – identity, desire, the unconscious – are supported by others through language, a wholly externalised medium of exchange. The operative concept is Lacan's *field of the Other*. Paulo Virno has a good discussion of Marx's general intellect, for which see Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, *Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004) pp.37ff., about which more later.

¹² For common land see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Village_green; creative commons https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_access; right to roam https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_to_roam. Accessed 03 May 2021.

¹³ There are differences. The *Here* of your local is not protected by common law that protects commons and rights to roam, no matter how long it has been serving beer. The *Here* on the map is also attendant upon a cognitive and reflective event that is not necessarily attendant to the hillwalker whose walk helps to maintain the inscription of the walker's path upon the land. This dialogue between use of the land and inscription is something the land artist Hamish Fulton works with. Hamish Fulton, produces walks that become works of art when publishes them with inscriptions and photographs.

particular to her arguments that the *polis* is the space of appearance for political action and the site for the togetherness of people, where in lies their power. For architects, there is a question as to how this space emerges and what plan notation we use to represent it.¹⁴

Arendt and Virno are emphatic that the city is above all a linguistic landscape that codifies subjective relations:

'The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be.... It [the polis] is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.' Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* pp198-99

'The contemporary metropolis... is built on the model of language. The metropolis appears as a labyrinth of expressions, metaphors, proper names, and propositions, of tenses and moods of the verb; and saying this is no simple analogy. The metropolis actually is a linguistic formation, an environment that is above all constituted by objectivized discourse, by preconstructed code, and by materialised grammar. To find one's bearings in a metropolis is gaining linguistic experience.' Paolo Virno, 'Three Remarks Regarding the Multitude's Subjectivity and Its Aesthetic Component' p33

Arendt's space of appearance is the space where positions are aired publicly so that their authors are held accountable. Whilst the obvious spatial typology for the space of appearance is the piazza where crowds assemble or the debating chamber where their representatives assemble, it is clear that for Arendt, the polis is a subjective condition, not a spatial one. The polis can happen anywhere that people gather and we carry it with us where ever we go, subject to our evoking it. It is the linguistic space of speech and action.¹⁵

In *The Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno argues that the multitude is a grammar and not a fictional unity, like 'the people', and seeks to revise political discourse accordingly. The multitude is 'the mode of being of the many', the plurality of individuals, and it has a grammar that defines it even as it resists a contour. Virno's work is important for architecture because it means that the multitude has a linguistic grammar that resists the spatial grammar of enclosure. The grammar of the multitude appears in a symbolic environment where it appears as a code.¹⁶

The hallmarks of this grammar are repetition (its origin lies in childhood strategies for protection – he is reading the bit of *Beyond...* on the Fort/Da game), common places (he is reading Aristotle's *Rhetoric*), and strangeness (Rossi said, *I am strange to myself*). Virno distinguishes the common places and special places in language. The special places of language – the language that defines a particular political party, club, profession – gives way to common places, the language of generic categories, turns of phrase, which organise thought in underlying and recurring patterns. For Virno as for Marx, thought is a public category, not sequestered within the individual. Common places are

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, *Semiotext(E) Foreign Agents Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004). Paolo Virno, 'Three Remarks Regarding the Multitude's Subjectivity and Its Aesthetic Component', in *Under Pressure: Pictures, Subjects, and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. by Daniel Birnbaum and Isabelle Graw (Frankfurt: Sternberg Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) pp198-99.

¹⁶ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, *Semiotext(E) Foreign Agents Series* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004) p75.

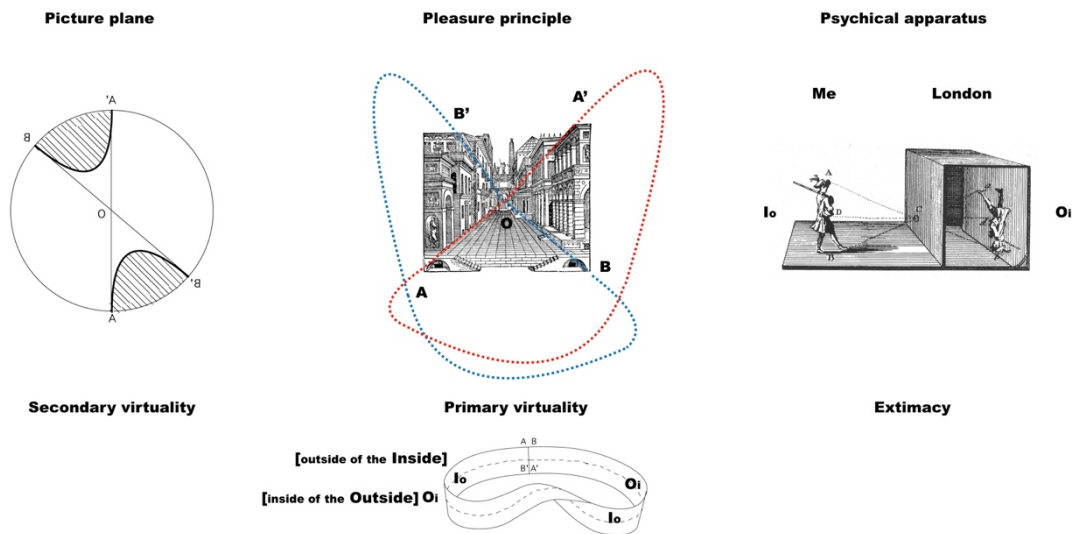
the tropes that mark out and organise discourse. The 'common' condition of the multitude is 'being a stranger', 'not feeling at home'.¹⁷ If we seek to replace place with locale in planning discourse, it is because Virno's *not at home* alludes to the transience of the locale subject, and because Virno's common places are the locales where our desire emerges as a grammar of the multitude.

We must pause here to underscore the creative role of the LU plan in this dynamic of desire, repetition and the real. Virno's insistence on the linguistic nature of the city acknowledges the necessity of inscription for any form of grammar. In psychoanalytic thinking, fantasy is what supports desire. The LU plan presents a fantasy of localness which supports my desire to be here. The jute ground of the LU plan is no more real for the subject than London clay; the idempotency of desire wears away the fantasy of a locality as it is inscribed in the plan, which supports our desire to be here. There would be no sense to being here, and there would be nothing to wear away, without the plan. Without it, London is just London. Nor is the spot a placeholder for the object of desire, it is rather the placeholder for the subject in the city. We desire our object. We never attain it. That's just the way desire and the modern subject works. The object of desire is always there and the subject is always here, here, here,... on its way to attaining the object. This leaves a trace that emerges as a cumulative effect in our representations of the city, the rubbing out of the public spot where our object never was.

The locality is a form of attachment that can only be collective. As architects our duty to politics is to think the city in its capacity to be the signifying field that organises the multitude for public action. If we could develop the plan notation for a locale London, we would have the grammar for attraction of people to people through places. This is a different political-spatial geography than most plans of London and it may be more suitable for the politics of the multitude.¹⁸ If we are to come together to make collective decisions about our existential problems – our damage to the environment, population growth, and the like – we need new spatial notations and new models for togetherness than those of conventional politics, based on typologies of enclosure, the piazza, the boulevard, the debating chamber – lets now regard them as forms/forums for repression, architectural forms of the pleasure principle. We may need models whose exemplars are, for the moment, known by their common absence, which we make by following our desire.

¹⁷ Virno, op. cit., pp.35-40.

¹⁸ Compare for instance the London of enclaves described by Rowe in his attempt to read the city along the lines of democratic party politics, a city of defensible enclaves occupied by competing special interest groups. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1978).



[image 4. The apparatus of the subject is a single sided surface.]

Topologies of Surface

Freud calls the subject an apparatus. We are *vorstellung*-machines (Freud) or signifier-machines (Lacan). We produce signifiers in response to stimulus. That is the lesson of '...Vicissitudes'. I am here on my way there, I touch the map signifying my desire. That repeated touch identifies a locale to which I am associated. A psychical space of repetition that makes London a city of localities to subjects whose identities are constituted by the local-ness of London. I want to end with a comment on what sort of space this is.

The subject of locales and the London of locales are not two identities in relation to each other, but a single spatial identity with a quite particular topography. Lacan was interested in Möbius strips and other non-orientable single sided surfaces because they seem to describe this continuous surface of signification. This is also the spatial logic of the picture plane, the index of reality, when it is extended beyond the pleasure principle to infinity. The projective plane is an infinite single sided surface, which means that a straight line going off on one side will return on the other. Lacan discusses the paradox nature of perspective in *Seminar 13*. The perspective window is simply a small portion of the projective plane. It appears as if the perspective window puts me inside and the world outside. Which makes of architecture either a falsification of reality or a form of repression whose aim is to model desire as a field of objects from which I am distanced, compartmentalised, thresholded, rather than as absences in a continuous surface. In the domain of the pleasure principle, where perspective appears as reality, there is a London that is 'out there' and my identity 'in here'; but the London that I am attached to through repeated encounters that identify me to London and London to me, forms a single surface of signifiers that wraps identities of people and places and allows of no threshold between inside/outside or between place/dweller, but only continuity.¹⁹

¹⁹ Donald Kunze describes the first and second virtualities that are constituted by perspective space and projective space respectively. Kunze refers to the property of these figures: the non-enclosure of these figures. The outside of the inside, O_i , and the inside of the outside, I_o . See Donald Kunze, 'Secondary Virtuality, the Anamorphosis of Projective Geometry' in *Architecture and Culture 8:3+4* (2021) special double issue *Architecture & Collective Life*. Guest edited by Lorens Holm and Cameron McEwan.

End

My finger knows where I want to be even if I don't. On every London Underground platform there is a wall map of the London Underground. It's the first place people go when they get off the train if they are transferring to another line. The *Here* on the map is always a blank, a rubbed out spot with scumbled edges, worn blank by countless fingers pointing to we are here on the way there. A bump on the head by a woolly spot that opens onto a common desire in the public realm. All you need is a little bit of theory and you have produced a community of desire.

This small detail from life in London is relevant to understanding place-based communities, cities and settlements, neighbourhoods, the commons, and the grammars of togetherness that make politics possible. It focuses on the nature of the encounter rather than the qualities of the place. It has a complex topology. It appears within a grammar of use, not form. The extraordinary thing about the locale is that it appears as a blank, a nothing, and not as a positive thing with qualities. It suggests a new ethics of collective engagement with the public realm that rejects presence as a public category and has nothing to do with fantastical positivist models of planning discourse, and which is more in line with contemporary thinking on communities.²⁰ It is a blank but it is a very fecund blank. This new figure of politics, the subject of the locale, an integer in Virno's multitude, replaces Aristotle's statesman, the freeman who represents a unified political position. It is also different from the strongman of strongman democracies and mobocracies – a figure with whom we have become familiar recently – who is, we will venture without offering anything to support our claim, a subject of the repetition of the death drive, a politics wedded to consumerism that goes nowhere, a nihilism that we might call death cult politics.

Freud's thought was exploratory and expeditionary, and it probably cannot be dissociated from the last gasps of European expeditionary colonialism at the north and south poles, such as were roughly contemporary with Freud writing. How could anyone think a beyond to reality. And not think it without running into non-sense and contradiction? Freud's beyond was senseless repetition, repetition without end. Lacan's beyond is the real, the real marks the limits of the imaginary and symbolic order of everyday reality even as it is engaged with them. So it is interesting how he relates them, Freud's repetition with his real. It is at the point where the signifier encounters the real, that it is reduced – despite the richness and complexity of a life – to deaf dumb and blind repetition.

Lacan's discussion of *das ding* in *Seminar 7 the Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, is a precursor to the development of his key figure, *objêt a*. The cause of desire, the object of the drive. *Das Ding* is *objet a* without its punctal properties, Lacan's gaze and point of light in the visual field that allows him to assimilate it to the apparatus of perspective. In desire, the attainment of the object is delayed. In the drive it is repeated. In that seminar, Lacan argues that Freud's *ding* is the thing in its 'dumb reality', the dumb real that resists symbolisation. The pleasure principle is the apparatus whose function is to distance the thing from the subject, to hold it safely close but not too close. Safely close produces pleasure, and too close produces the unbearable pain of *jouissance*. The signifier circulates *das ding* without attaching to it, as it does *objêt a* in Lacan's diagram of the drive in *Seminar XI The Four Fundamental Concepts....* The blank spot on the LU plan is not the signifier of the identity and desire of the subject within the field of the Other, but the deaf dumb and blind spot to which the subject always returns, and that positions identity and desire as a single complex of a single extended locale London subject.

Lorens Holm, Draft, 07 May 2021

²⁰ I am thinking of, e.g., the philosopher Roberto Esposito, for whom community is organised around nothing: 'Nothing seems more appropriate today than community'. See *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*. trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford University Press, 2010). The opening sentence, p1.