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An Architecture of Cracks, Debris, Junkspace and the Alethosphere

John Shannon Hendrix

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The buildings that people build can represent the psyche of human beings. A crack in the orthographic whole of the psyche can be a reaction to the intolerability of the condition of human society, resulting in neurosis, paranoia, wish-fulfillment, fantasy, sublimation, and a splitting of the psyche in its formation in language, science and technology, the unconscious, in the demands of society. According to Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a source of human suffering is “the inadequacy of our methods of regulating human relations in the family, the community, and the state” (19). The human being “becomes neurotic because they cannot tolerate the degree of privation that society imposes on them in virtue of its cultural ideal” (20). It is certain that “our present-day civilization does not inspire in us a feeling of well-being” (21), and “when the most extreme forms of suffering have to be endured, special mental protective devices come into operation” (22), fantasy, wish-fulfillment, sublimation. Thus “each one of us behaves in some respect like the paranoid, substituting a wish-fulfillment for some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him, and carrying this through into reality” (15).

The superstructure of language, rules, codes, science and technology in society forms the unconscious of the individual, according to Lacan, as the Other, but entails a necessary alienation from conscious thought. According to Freud, “From pathology we have come to know a large number of states in which the boundary line between ego and outer world become uncertain, or in which they are actually incorrectly perceived—cases in which parts of a man’s own body, even component parts of his own mind, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, appear to him alien and not belonging to himself. ... So the ego’s cognizance of itself is subject to disturbance, and the boundaries between it and the outer world are not immovable” (3). According to Lacan, language is the source of *méconnaissance*, in the community of symbols into which the subject is inserted. In its participation in the Other, the ego misrecognizes its own unconscious, but it is the unconscious which constitutes the ego, the Imaginary function. The subject is excentric to the ego, to its own mechanisms of thinking, and does not know what it is. It is impossible for the subject to know itself, given the dichotomy of the Imaginary and Symbolic, conscious ego and unconscious, orthopedic body image and language. The knowledge on the part of the subject of its unconscious is replaced by the illusions of consciousness, the mirage of the *cogito*, the thinking subject. The subject decenters itself in its commitment to language; science and technology are manifestations of the mechanisms of language, symbolic structures, into which the subject inserts itself, and through which the subject loses itself. Language itself is as a machine in that it detaches itself from the subject, and objectifies the subject in its detachment. In language, in its objectification, the subject is fragmented and disconnected, but the ego of the subject retains the virtual and alienated unity given by the gestalt image of the ideal ego in the mirror stage. The subject is divided in language, and further divided by the relation between language and the object, between the Other and the other object or person.

Fantasy, the wish-fulfillment caused by the *objet a*, the object of desire, is represented by Lacan by an algorithm, which is the desire of the elided subject for the *objet a*, the *plus-de-jour*, what is inaccessible to desire or wish-fulfillment. Fantasy is the promise to the subject of that which is unattainable in its existence in being, and it protects the subject from that abyss within itself. The condition of the object of the fantasy, the *objet a*, is “the moment of a ‘fading’ or eclipse of the subject that is closely bound up with the *Spaltung* or splitting that it suffers from its subordination to the signifier” according to Lacan (*Écrits. A Selection*, p. 313). As soon as the subject enters into language, the attainment of the *objet a* is impossible. The *objet a* is the leftover produced when the subject enters the Symbolic order. The object identification of the Imaginary ego provides the subject with the stand-in object of its desire, in the illusion of consciousness in the ego, and the Symbolic order, the unconscious, robs the subject of the stand-in object of its desire in the fragmentation of the body.

Desire is the product of the impossibility of the Imaginary in the Symbolic, the splitting of the subject between identification with the other person and identification in the Other, the cultural superstructure and the basis of the unconscious, the splitting in which the unconscious is formed, in the repression of desire as misrecognition, *méconnaissance*, which is the only recourse of the subject. The splitting occurs in the processes of language, in metaphor and metonymy, as the impossible representation of what the subject cannot know as itself; as Lacan writes in *Écrits*, “it is the concrete incidence of the signifier in the submission of need to demand which, by repressing desire into the position of the misrecognized, gives the unconscious its order” (*Écrits*, p. 709). Desire is maintained by language, as is the dehiscence of the subject, and the possibility of the unconscious, and “it is the nature of desire to be radically torn.” (*Seminar II*, p. 166).

The crack in particular, as distinguished from the cut or the split, has entered architectural aesthetics in the last two decades, beginning perhaps with Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin in 2001 (Figure 1). Other examples are the Cooper Union building by Morphosis in 2006 (Figure 2) and the office building in Aarhus by Seth in 2017 (Figure 3). The cut or the split was a vocabulary element of deconstructivist architecture, reflecting the split in language between the signifier and signified. The cuts were smoothed over by parametric, epigenetic and folded forms produced by the computer, but they have reappeared in the surfaces of those forms in the form of cracks, as in cracks in the epigenetic landscape of the psyche as envisioned by Freud.

In *Seminar XVII* of Lacan, the alethosphere is the expanded Other, the cosmos of technology which forms the subject, fueled by science at the service of capitalism. The presence of science is manifest in the intersections of waves, of which we are not aware. The alethosphere is the spheres or zones fabricated by science, effects of formalized truth. Science is constructed out of nothing; its articulation only takes form in the signifying order. The lathouses are the devices that populate the alethosphere, organs of extension everywhere, objects which are the cause of desire, the *petit objet a*, governed by science. Lathouses are the “gadgets and things” (149) forged by science, in which science is objectified. Entering a relation with the lathouse causes anxiety, the anxiety of the hysteric and the subject as *objet a*, surplus and *jouissance*. The discourse of the hysteric creates the desire for knowledge, which results in its division and tearing apart. The hysteric is divided by the master signifier and is alienated from it. Knowledge occupies the place of *jouissance*, beyond the pleasure principle, in the hysteric’s discourse. Surplus *jouissance* is found in the master’s discourse, which is a product of the accumulation of capital in capitalism, which is tied to science and

propelled by the university discourse. The discourse of the university represents the hegemony of knowledge, which guarantees the hegemony of science. The university student is the *astudé* or astudied, the *objet a* in the university discourse or the discourse of science, the slave in the master's discourse.

According to Freud, the root of all psychopathology is the Oedipus complex. In the Oedipus complex, the child realizes that he is marked by lack, and is incomplete, and marked by anxiety, because of the inadequacy of a real phallus, or lack thereof, which is a substitute for the mother's desire which the child cannot satisfy. The father castrates the child and makes it impossible for the child to be the phallus for the mother. The prohibition of *jouissance* by the father or master signifier hides the impossibility of *jouissance*, or of the *objet a*, the object of desire. The possibility of *jouissance* is a neurotic illusion, a product of the play of signifiers. Through the effect of the master's discourse, the male as speaking being disappears, as a result of castration (154). The omnipotence of the male, which represents the *jouissance* of the female, is where "man, when he speaks as a master, discovers that he is a failure" (154), says Lacan. Castration is the deprivation of woman expressed in the failure of discourse, resulting in obsessional neurosis, hysteria, anxiety, paranoia, wish-fulfillment, fantasy, sublimation, and a splitting of the psyche in its formation in language, science and technology, the unconscious, in the demands of society.

What might be the visual traces of the alethosphere? (Figure 4) At the beginning of the industrial revolution, imagine the *Prisons* of Piranesi in relation to the alethosphere. Vast, terrifying, sublime and irrational, but all the product of human construction. The prison that the human race builds for itself, the prison of knowledge and technology, filled with instruments of torture and confinement, and the billowing mechanisms of human ingenuity which create an atmosphere of cacophony and distortion. (Figure 5) In *Learning from Las Vegas* in 1972, Venturi et al. celebrated the proliferation, cacophony and distortion of the decorated shed, constructing a cosmos of excess, signifiers, kitsch, simulacrum, hyper-reality, and junkspace, as defined by Koolhaas in 2006: the debris and residue of the human occupation of the planet, the product of the meltdown of science and modernization, where there is no connection between parts in a landscape of the orchestration of chaos, (Figure 6) no matter how technologically advanced. The debris that occupies the architectural landscape is the product of multiple explosions of human civilization and the human psyche: war, violence, crime, technology, political conflict and oppression, reification in capitalism, economic imbalance, etc. (Figure 7) The shards of the explosions coming from the alethosphere, the unseen cosmos of technology and information at the service of capitalism, are aestheticized in architecture as high art, as at Gehry's Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris in 2014, and they are embedded in the very fabric of the human community (Figure 8). The alethosphere, and the built environment which is a product of it, in the hegemony of the master's discourse, necessitate the impossibility of desire of the subject in language, where the subject is torn. The lathouse, the gadget which is the product of technological advancement, as the *objet a*, the substitution for desire, is the only compensation.

Desire for Lacan is caught in the dialectic of the Imaginary and Symbolic and rendered impossible, as the subject is rendered impossible. The object which stands in for the *objet a*, the lack in the subject, might be the lathouse object, the gadget to which the subject connects itself in order to be connected to the alethosphere, the Other, the inaccessible unconscious; or it might be a fetish object, like a work of architecture, or a collector's object, or money, commercial products in

advertising, sexual fantasies, identification with collective beliefs like patriotism or racism. The object of the *objet a* is the displacement of the subject or the other person in the Other in the form of culturally conditioned desires, such as style, fashion, music, architectural forms, a certain profession or activity, etc. In advertising, commercial products are often represented as that which is unattainable, for example Coca-Cola as the “real thing,” as pointed out by Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. The subject does not desire Coca-Cola; the subject desires the *objet a*, that which it lacks, which is the real thing, in the domain of the Real, that which is inaccessible.

The Lacanian subject desires as soon as it enters into language. Desire is not present in primordial Imaginary experience prior to the mirror stage. Desire is the product of the “murder of the thing” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 104) by the symbol in language, which instigates the lack experienced by the subject, according to Lacan. The desire of the subject is thus “the desire of the Other” (p. 264), and it is also the desire of the other person, in the dialectic of the Symbolic and Imaginary. This can be seen in the desire of the dream, which is not a conscious desire, not regulated by the conscious ego. The dream enacts its own desire, which is the desire of the Other in the unconscious. In the same way, the conscious subject is the subject of the desire of the Other in language, rather than its originating agent. The subject is that which is represented by a signifier to another signifier in language, according to Lacan. Consciousness is a construct of desire in the Other, which uses consciousness in its own regulation and concealment from the subject.

In that the object of desire is a substitute for the *objet a*, the lack of the subject, the object is external to the desire of the subject. Desire is sustained by the subject and not by the object. The subject is an apparatus of absence in which the *objet a* is constituted. “This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object,” as Lacan explains in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (p. 185). The object of desire is a fill-in for the lacuna in the subject, for the hole in the signifying chain which represents the subject. The desire of the subject is supported by fantasy. “The fantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire. The subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an ever more complex signifying ensemble.” As desire is the desire of the Other, and the alethosphere, desire is socially engendered, through the language of the Symbolic.

The subject does not want what it desires, but desires what it thinks it is supposed to desire as a speaking subject, in order to sustain itself in language. Thus “the object of desire, in the usual sense, is either a fantasy that is in reality the support of desire” (p. 186), the reaffirming by the ego of the subject that it is desiring what it is supposed to desire, “or a lure,” the deception of the subject by its ego that the object is what it is supposed to desire, as in the lighthouse. The desire of the subject is divided in metonymy, which re-affirms the subject as that which is represented in language, and at the same time eliminates the subject from that representation. Desire is both reaffirmed and negated by language, because desire is constructed by language, by the discourse of the Other, which is the unconscious, and in the master’s discourse in science and the university, at the service of capitalism, in the alethosphere. The subject is only partially existent in the Other and the alethosphere, and thus only partially existent in its own desire, which is inaccessible to it, as is the unconscious. The desire of the Other is that which links the signifiers in a signifying chain, and that which results in the elimination of the subject.

The subject of Lacan is alienated from itself in signification; it is alienated from its own desire in language, by language. The subject, as in the Hegelian subject, is self-alienated in the doubling

of its reason, in the doubling of the signifier which produces signification, and which institutes the *objet a* in language as the lack of the subject, the self-negation of the subject in reason, and its self-alienation in its language. As soon as the subject speaks, it desires, and as soon as the subject desires it does not know itself, and its *méconnaissance* is sustained by its desire. As soon as a signifier represents the subject to another signifier, the subject is alienated from itself in its desire. “Alienation is linked in an essential way to the function of the dyad of signifiers” (p. 236), says Lacan in *Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*.

As soon as the alienation is accomplished in the singular representation of the subject by a signifier to another signifier, the subject is eliminated from any further signification, which becomes self-enclosed and inaccessible to the subject. The subject cannot access that by which it is constituted. “If we wish to grasp where the function of the subject resides in this signifying articulation, we must operate with two, because it is only with two that he can be cornered in alienation. As soon as there are three, the sliding becomes circular,” says Lacan. The alienation is accomplished with the binary signifier, as “the signifier is that which represents the subject for the other signifier.” The binary signifier is also the mechanism of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of the dream. The representation which takes the place of the representation is the signifier which takes the place of the signifier, which represents the subject to it. The subject is elided in the dream in the same way, as the *Unterdrückung* of the binary signifier. The subject is thus self-alienated from its desire in the dream as well, in its aphanisis or fading, which is a product of the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as the elision of the subject is the product of the binary signifier in conscious discourse, in which the mechanisms of the unconscious, metaphor and metonymy, determine the subject unknown to itself. The subject is unknown to itself in the Other, and in the alethosphere, and it is the instruments of the lathouse which sustain the illusion of the subject knowing itself in the substitution for desire in the *objet a*. The architecture of cracks, debris, junkspace and the alethosphere all function as fetish objects or substitutions for the unattainable desire and self-knowledge of the subject; they represent the subject to itself in the impossibility of the representation, that which takes the place of the representation, the fetish object in the lathouse. The fetish objects in the lathouse participate in a signification which reveals that which cannot be signified, and the impossible desire of the subject which reveals the non-existence of the subject. Desire is the mechanism of its own non-existence, as it is perpetuated by the illusion of object identification in the Imaginary ego, in the lathouse, and the illusion of the consciousness of the subject in language in the Symbolic, the Other, and the alethosphere.

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Figure 1. Daniel Libeskind, Jewish Museum, Berlin, 2001



Figure 2. Morphosis, Cooper Union, New York, 2006



Figure 3. Seth, Office Building, Aarhus, 2017



Figure 4. Piranesi, *Prisons*, “The Drawbridge”



Figure 5. Robert Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972



Figure 6



Figure 7. Frank Gehry, Fondation Luis Vuitton, 2014



Figure 8