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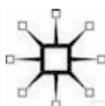
# Space, Geometry and Aesthetics

Through Kant and Towards Deleuze

Peg Rawes

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*For Clare and James*

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# Series Editor's Preface

Publication in a series of books that bears the title of *Renewing Philosophy* marks a work as having a kind of claim that may strike some as hubristic. The notion of a series having such a title is certainly indicative of a claim that philosophy both needs and is capable of renewal. The suggestion that philosophy needs such renewal is one that I will examine first in order to show how the work here being prefaced addresses this. If philosophy needs renewal this suggests that there are some matters that philosophy has traditionally not addressed sufficiently. In this work the suggestion would have to do with the status of geometry and philosophy's engagement in it. Both ancient and modern forms of philosophy have given geometry some attention as this work makes clear. We need only think, as the author we are here introducing directs us to, of the example of geometry in Plato's *Meno* to see how geometry held a significant place in the scheme of knowledge understood as significant in the ancient world. Similarly, the status of geometry in modern philosophy is clear simply by following the trail established by such founders as Descartes.

If, however, the recourse of philosophy to geometry as a body of knowledge that is somehow exemplary is clear enough as a general point the question emerges as to what it is that requires this continued recourse to geometry and in what sense the recurrence of the question concerning geometry might indicate a disquiet? If geometry seems to recur as something to which philosophy points what might be the reason for this recurrence and is the recurrence of geometry really a repetition of a question concerning a solid and well-defined single body of knowledge? Or does the reference to geometry in different philosophers point to different objects?

The moment these questions are posed we begin to note that the relationship between philosophy and geometry is not as evident as it first appeared. This work, the work by Peg Rawes, that I am presenting to the reader, would then be one that would first point to something recognisable (here philosophy, there geometry) in order to make clear that what appears before us is in fact not as 'familiar' as it initially seemed. In defamiliarising the relation philosophy has to geometry Rawes continues a peculiar 'tradition': the handing-down of a philosophical problem about the nature of philosophy itself. Just as the twin references of Plato

and Descartes made earlier indicated the prevalence of a question about geometry for philosophy so also their names are equally significant of a self-declared difficulty with the nature of philosophical inquiry. Plato's dialogues enact a continued questioning of the very inquiry that they undertake whilst Descartes is often said to 'inaugurate' the modern philosophy precisely by enquiring as to what it is that we can doubt. This self-questioning inquiry is certainly peculiar but the investment of philosophy in its own questioning would seem essential to marking it off from other forms of investigation that much more readily assume their problems, prospects and solutions.

Therefore, if Rawes indicates some problem with philosophical investigations of geometry then it would appear that nothing could be more of a philosophical act than such indication of a problem with philosophical inquiry. The nature of the problem posed here can be seen in two ways. First, there is the suggestion that there is a 'hidden' history or a doubling of philosophy's engagement with geometry such that geometry would seem in some sense to be investigating philosophy as much as vice versa. Second, there is produced here for us a type of historical investigation that does not match usual linear assumptions concerning history. Beginning with Kant we pass 'back' to Proclus before moving 'forwards' to Spinoza. Why would this kind of movement be followed as opposed to the convention of beginning with Plato or Proclus before moving on to Spinoza and Leibniz and placing Kant nicely after all the preceding? Does not the alteration of the narrative form place in question the suggestion that we can be sure which philosopher progresses over others? The later philosophers are doubtless always aware of how much they are in the shadow of the earlier, of how easy it is simply to repeat them, to recast in only slightly varied ways what has already been. But if this problem of influence has always been attested to in philosophy then the question of how philosophical progress is to be measured surely requires some attention to narration. The attention provided in the simple way of presenting here a methodological refusal to assume the place in history of the thinkers examined would appear to still be unsettled, however, by the manner of conclusion with that exemplary teleological thinker, Husserl. If, however, even this would be open to question might it not be because Husserl after all states again and again that the right method in philosophy is the adoption of a 'zig-zag' path, going backwards in order to go forwards but that each step further in an inquiry constantly requires the return to starting points in order to interrogate them again. This method of Husserl's would, if applied to this book, require a revisiting

of the earlier thinkers in its narration in the light of the later ones indicating a reason for resisting the sense that we have, with the concluding figure, reached the end point of our inquiry.

This work's engagement with geometry frees the understanding of the philosophical concern with it from a subordination to the sciences that in each of the cases examined would be false. The indication of a different sense to this engagement, one that owes its interest rather to a reinvention of aesthetic registers is what indicates in this inquiry the emergence of something new. Just as the above observation indicated the need for a renewal so the staging of this work's investigation indicates also the capacity for such renewal to take place. Through the prism of a re-engagement with the philosophical concern with geometry a different sense of space as something that requires a set of aesthetic responses is released and this release marks this work as performing a 'renewal', a renewal, above all, *of* philosophy.

GARY BANHAM

# Preface

## Embodied subjects

This inquiry reflects my interest in multiple modes of constructing spatiotemporal existences and geometric figurations of life. Broadly, the research has a critical and constructive purpose: that is, to explore how ontological relationships between space, geometry and aesthetics can be productive and meaningful expressions of modern subjectivity. Also, although it is not the aim of this book to examine these relations in specific cross-disciplinary contexts, the discussion has a bearing for cross-disciplinary spatial, geometric and aesthetic research in a number of ways; for example, it is situated with the view that aesthetic examinations of the relationship between geometry, space and subjectivity may enable the development of architectural models of spatiotemporal relations, and contribute towards rethinking the notion of 'figuration' in modernist art practices.

My interest in geometric subjects and geometric figures is also undertaken in light of feminist philosophy's examination of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> While I would certainly not suggest that the geometric subjectivities explored here are explicitly sexed subjects, my focus on spatiotemporal forms of material and immaterial embodiment, and aesthetics, is developed with the view that these discussions are also at stake for thinking about sexed subjectivities; in particular, because of the need to examine how the triadic relationship between the sensing subject, aesthetics and space is actualised as reality for the individual, and how she/he might express it. Yet, for many feminist theorists, the abstract *disembodied* scientific basis of space and geometry has rendered them inherently problematic for developing theories of material and sexed experience. Contemporary ontological and feminist philosophers have observed, for example, that the perceiving subject is not granted access to these transcendental geometric spatial ideas and bodies. For some critics (particularly those who read Bergson through Deleuze's interpretations), these issues have led to the view that spatialised thinking and experience is better replaced by privileging time.<sup>2</sup> In addition, theories which claim that temporal ontologies 'solve' the issue of formal representation often rely upon accepting that an exclusive opposition between space (i.e., disembodied scientific knowledge) and time (i.e., embodied

aesthetic process) is inevitable. When directed towards the visual arts, such as architectural design and spatial practices, these discussions therefore frequently ignore how the individual operates in contemporary practices; for example, by constructing material and spatial experiences through scientific *and* aesthetic sense-based geometric intuition.<sup>3</sup>

However, thinkers such as, Christine Battersby, Judith Butler, Claire Colebrook, Edward Casey, Moira Gatens, Elizabeth Grosz, Kathleen Lennon, Genevieve Lloyd and John Rajchman, have also shown that 'local', 'particular' and 'embodied' configurations of spatiotemporal and material relations exist that enable the freely acting and sensing subject to exist.<sup>4</sup> So it is in this spirit that I invite the reader to explore productive historical examples of *embodied* spatiotemporal relations through which new examinations of aesthetic geometric sexed subjects may be developed.<sup>5</sup> In particular, by locating geometric and spatial thinking within Kant's aesthetic Critical philosophy, I suggest that scientific knowledge and aesthetic experience are brought together in the unity of 'geometric figure-subjects', rather than under laws of deterministic scientific progress. Each of the geometric methods and figures examined here therefore brings geometric inventions into an aesthetic project, not merely as studies of scientific progress: for example, this discussion suggests that Proclus' Neoplatonic commentary reconfigures Euclid's classical mathematics; Spinoza's and Leibniz's post-Cartesian texts reconfigure the sixteenth-century analytical geometry of Descartes; and Bergson's and Husserl's texts reconfigure Riemann's nineteenth-century theory of topological manifolds.

Geometric thinking may therefore be composed of dynamic embodiments, reconfiguring the relationship between aesthetics, space and the sensing subject. As a result, new 'figure-subjects' are opened up through which geometry may also enable cross-disciplinary examinations; especially for ontological research in philosophy, architectural design, art history and spatial practices in the visual arts.

## Towards Deleuze

This project is also informed by Deleuze's critiques of geometry, space and aesthetics, and by his examinations of 'minor' ontologies in Western philosophy; evident, for example, in his analysis of the fold in Proclus' and Leibniz's thought in *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque* (2001 [1988]), or in his examination of Spinoza's transcendental empiricism, in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988 [1970]), and in *Expressionism in*

*Philosophy: Spinoza* (1997 [1968]). In addition, *Bergsonism* (1991 [1966]), *Difference and Repetition* (1997 [1968]) and *The Logic of Sense* (1990 [1969]) also demonstrate Deleuze's reconfiguration of ontological philosophy by promoting minor traditions of abstract transcendental thought.

In light of Deleuze's philosophy, this is therefore an examination of a 'minor' tradition of geometric thinking. But my examination of spatial senses of geometry in Proclus, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Bergson and Husserl is also *differentiated* from Deleuze's readings of spatiotemporal problems in these philosophers for a number of reasons:<sup>6</sup> First, I analyse the concepts of space, geometry and aesthetics, rather than following Deleuze and Guattari in their critiques of these problems through concepts such as, 'smooth space', 'percepts' or 'multiplicities'.<sup>7</sup> Second, I examine how the ontological concepts of space, geometry and aesthetics already undergo significant reconfiguration in each of the philosophical encounters, prior to Deleuze's radical re-invention of them as new sense-ontologies. Third, Deleuze's engagement with these philosophers is not the major subject of my research (these relationships need to be examined in a separate study); for example, developed through an analysis of the aesthetic Kantian subject, my inquiry into the sensing subject does not, in any pure way, follow Deleuze's theory of univocal singularities. Rather, I wish to show that, between Kant's Critical project and Deleuze's intensive inquiry into sense-reason in ontological philosophy, productive geometric encounters do exist; for example, the last chapter on Husserl may represent a detour from a straightforward empiricist trajectory towards Deleuze. Yet this chapter is included in order to examine how Husserl's geometric thinking, in particular, his promotion of geometric sense-intuition (which is certainly transcendental and eidetic) may bring to light connections with the transcendental empiricist sense that is expressed by Deleuze (even if Husserl's geometric ideas are not as strongly associated with Deleuze's thinking as some of the ideas of the other philosopher's 'geometric' ideas explored here).

This discussion therefore examines inventive thinking about space, geometry and aesthetics in philosophical texts that Deleuze has *already* significantly reanimated for contemporary researchers. Consequently, an 'oblique' relationship exists between my inquiry into the 'problems' of geometry, spatiotemporality and aesthetics and Deleuze's examinations of these problems in Continental philosophy; and in this respect, the book may be read as a response to Deleuze's examinations of spatiotemporality and sense.<sup>8</sup>

To an extent, this research also reflects the shifts in engaging with Deleuze's philosophy which has taken place over the past decade in

Anglo-American Continental philosophy. The project was largely developed between 1998 and 2004, although the final chapter was written more recently when discussions about the connections between rationalism, phenomenology and Deleuze's empirical-materialist thinking have taken on a more productive tone in Anglo-American analyses. However, when I first encountered Deleuze's writing during my postgraduate studies, his interdisciplinary collaboration with Guattari enabled many researchers to promote abstract thinking and practices that sought to reject the conventions of contemporary Continental philosophical practice. More recently, however, discussions about the relationship between Deleuze and ontological philosophy have undergone a shift towards exploring how he enables critical reconfigurations *inside* and outside the discipline. This project reflects these changes insofar as it examines some of the philosophical sources in Deleuze's thinking, re-evaluating their geometric, spatial and aesthetic scope within the discipline, as well as indicating their scope for other disciplines that explore aesthetics, the sensibility and subjectivity beyond philosophical boundaries. For cross-disciplinary readers, especially readers who engage with philosophy through the writings of Deleuze, I therefore wish to contribute towards greater understanding of some of the philosophical sources of his ideas.

Overall, my hope is that this project will not be seen as a step back into philosophical discussions that limit space, aesthetics and geometry to static, regulatory structures (and which Deleuze considered to be endemic in philosophy that does not engage with the living material world). Rather, this examination is undertaken in the belief that dynamic relationships between space, geometry and aesthetics are productive for contemporary practitioners working within philosophy and beyond; in particular, for generating alternative spaces through which geometry can be discussed without it being restricted to an exclusively scientific form of truth-making or knowledge.

The discussion is therefore constructed 'towards' Deleuze; readers will not find him at the 'end' of the book, rather, he is a 'virtual' voice in the discussion. Each chapter represents an inflection of Deleuze's desire for invention in philosophy, and insofar as I have chosen to engage with philosophers that inform his thinking, so each is implicated with his ideas.

## Notes

1. Genevieve Lloyd writes of the increased contemporary interest in historiographies of philosophy, some of which are informed by feminist philosophies.

Rather than searching for reductive historical formations, she writes that 'Reading strategies which may originally have been motivated by feminism are passing into broader attempts to treat the intelligent reading of history of philosophy as a conceptual resource for rethinking our present'. G. Lloyd (ed.), *Feminism and History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

2. Rosi Braidotti's, Doreen Massey's and Elizabeth Grosz's writings reveal some of the tension with reference to geometric space that exists in many feminist theorisations of spatiotemporal life, although each of these authors also examines productive modes of spatial thinking and life for the individual. In addition, each author's engagement with Deleuze's influential promotion of temporal life informs their analyses; for example, Braidotti follows Deleuze's desire for temporal and material life, over and above the spatiomaterial biological construction of subjectivity, in *Transpositions: on Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Doreen Massey's analyses of political, material and qualitative concepts of space engage with Deleuze and Bergson. However, her analysis of Bergson's philosophy of duration also perpetuates the opposition between space and time, partly because of reading his work through Deleuze's emphasis on the virtual and temporal, in *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 20–4; Elizabeth Grosz considers geometry to be a scientific form of knowledge. Yet, in response to Bergson and Deleuze, her analysis of biological and ontological reconfigurations of 'sociotemporal' life in the sexed, historical subject do not completely exclude the potential for spatiotemporal expressions of life to be reconfigured. See, for example, E. Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 193 and pp. 177–8.
3. By contrast, Brian Massumi's analysis of the act of producing architectural drawings or diagrams recognises the different modes of spatial thinking involved in the design process. He writes:
 

Grappling with the question of double architectural vision requires acknowledging that the diagram is a *technique of existence* and that design is always collective. Architecture will always benefit from the application of powers of formal analysis. But its basic medium is not geometry, or topology, or CAD, or design in general, or critique, or any other formalizable field. Its basic medium is the field of *experience*. B. Massumi, 'The Diagram as Technique of Existence', in É. Alliez and E. von Samsonow (eds), *Chroma Drama*. (Widerstand der Farbe, Wein: Turia + Kant, 2001), p. 175
4. These philosophers may be brought together because they generate productive ontologies for differentiated and embodied subjects. See, for example, C. Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993); C. Colebrook, *Philosophy and Post-Structuralist Theory: From Kant to Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), and edited with I. Buchanan, *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); E. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1998); M. Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); E. Grosz, *Architecture from the*

*Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2001), *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); K. Lennon, *The World, the Flesh and the Subject: Continental Themes in Philosophy of Mind and Body*, with P. Gilbert (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); G. Lloyd (ed.), *Feminism and History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); J. Rajchman, *Constructions* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1998), *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000).

5. Readers should note that the discussions outlined here operate at an 'abstract' level and are not articulated in terms of examining specific examples of material socio-political expressions of lived subjectivity.

6. Deleuze's attention to the spatiotemporal production of thought, in particular, his promotion of immanent and virtual forms of thought may also constitute a particularly radical form of 'geometric' thinking. See, for example, the essay, 'The Method of Dramatization' (1967). Deleuze states:

Spatio-temporal dynamisms have several different properties: 1) they create particular spaces and times; 2) they provide a rule of specification for concepts, which without these dynamisms would remain unable to receive their logical articulations; 3) they determine the double aspect of *differentiation*, qualitative and quantitative (qualities and extensions, species and parts); 4) they entail or designate a subject, through a 'larval' or 'embryonic' subject; 5) they constitute a special theatre; 6) they express Ideas. It is through all these different aspects that spatio-temporal dynamisms figure the movement of dramatization. G. Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953–1974*, edited by David Lapoujade and translated by Michael Taormina. (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 94

However, a detailed examination of this discussion lies outside the boundaries of this current project.

7. See, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), translated by Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1987) and *What is Philosophy?* (1991), translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994).

8. An indirect relationship exists between this and Deleuze's examinations into space, geometry and aesthetics. Deleuze is a significant source for this project, but his philosophy is not the 'subject' of my study. The term 'oblique' also recalls Jacques Derrida's essay, 'Passions: "An Oblique Offering"' in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, edited by David Wood, Oxford and Cambridge MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, written in response to Wood's invitation to participate in the volume. Derrida generates an 'oblique' response by rejecting a neat geometric relationship to the invitation, 'One can reject, as I have done, the word "oblique"'; yet he also notes that 'one cannot deny the *destinerrant indirection* [...] as soon as there is a trace. Or, if you prefer, one can only deny it' (Wood, 1992, p. 24; my emphasis).