

Towards a Metaphorical Type of Architecture: The Inside of the Victorian House

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Abstract

The current paper starts from the concept of relatedness⁶ as an act of signifying: everything inside a house signifies. The metaphorical type of architecture that we have attempted to construct aims at viewing the types of objects within a house as linking knots in the web of the house, while the way in which these objects (be they ornaments or tools) are distributed in space reveals not only a character’s profession and/or personality (objects as extensions and projections of the self), but also indicates some kind of social hierarchy.

Keywords: architecture, space, relation, identity, hierarchy.

1. Space and relatedness

R. West-Pavlov ([17], p. 21) stresses the fact that the “spatial thought”, the common denominator of Kristeva, Foucault, and Deleuze (despite their different approaches to space: psychoanalytical, historical-sociological and exploratory-speculative respectively) is what Baudrillard (1987, p. 20-1 apud [17], p 22) identified as a “production paradigm”: common to all these three thinkers is the dual motif made up of ‘producer’ and ‘product’, a duality constantly blurred by the introduction of the term ‘production’ – the manner in which the spaces we inhabit are to be understood as processes, dynamic, ongoing series of events of which we ourselves are a part. Space is thus approached as a material/phenomenal rather than abstract notion, a more fluid and dynamic conceptualization (Massey 2005: 29 apud [17], p. 22).

In the article *La maison ou le monde renversé* (1980/1996/b apud [10], p. 344), Pierre Bourdieu reads meanings out of design, architecture, and relational positions of humans and objects in space; he argues that by moving within the house and between the inside and outside of the house, people internalized the structures and values embedded both in microcosm and macrocosm. In *Effets de lieu* (1993), Bourdieu establishes an intimate connection between a house, its inhabitants and the outside world: “the organization of space, together with the architecture of a house, the design and the furniture materialize and simultaneously reproduce cultural values in a society”, and Locock (1994: 1-9) claims that buildings both transmit and create social statements: “buildings are not only shaped by the society that creates them, they also impose constraints on subsequent social action”; he further stresses that: meaning is not an afterthought in material culture. Rather, it is the universe in which material culture is created”; Yeoh (1996: 17) moves even further by highlighting the fact that meanings of created space or built environment are constantly re-interpreted by different users according to their values, knowledge and priorities in everyday life, while Eco (1986: 77) emphasized the pervasiveness in architectural discourse, arguing that “functions are not only signified but also promoted and induced” in architecture (apud [10]: 342).

According to L. Holtedahl and S. Gerrard (eds.) ([10], p. 344), architecture, semiotically seen as a system of signs, fills both functional and symbolic purposes, since architecture functions and. The denotation of architecture, its functional purpose can be easily recognized. But in order to read the symbolic meaning of architecture, its connotative meaning, detailed cultural knowledge is

⁶ Relatedness may be defined as a semiotic web of relations in which humans are consumers of signs – objects in their function and utility – rather than consumers of objects themselves ([13]: 93). Thus, analysing relatedness with the Victorian house as a sign means analysing the way in which humans “consume” this sign of the house by identifying what exactly is the signification of a Victorian house when approached from the perspective of social, textual and interpretive codes.

required because symbols are neither fixed nor globally shared (Barthes, 1982; Rapoport, 1982: 45 apud [10], p. 345). When architecture is read in its cultural context, it can give important information for the analysis of social hierarchy, order, authority and power. Susan Kent also argues that "the study of architecture and the use of space can provide important information on the socio-political organization of society" (idem). Inequalities in physical space can reify and naturalize hierarchies: old over young, men over women, locals over newcomers, *les grands* over *les petits*; organization of physical space can have strategic dimensions.

In *Pour une sémiotique topologique*, A. J. Greimas [8] argues that it is necessary, in order to draw meaning out of an architectural, spatial discourse, to distinguish between: 'here' and 'there' as focalisation points, the sacred and profane, private and public, exterior and interior, superior and inferior, masculine and feminine spaces. The spatial language thus becomes – among other means of expression – the language through which a society signifies itself. He also takes into consideration such aspects as the perception of space: cultural differences manifest themselves on different levels and through all channels: thus, the thermal elation of an inhabited space will differ for an Englishman and an American, the sonorous or olfactory elation of an Oriental city will be experienced as disturbing by a Westerner ([8], p. 23). Space becomes a spatial text, an object-message in between the sender and receiver of the information in the act of communication, and the receiver/lecturer is invited to construct the grammar of this text. The way in which this spatial grammar can be established can be done by taking humans as *subjects* and the things as *objects* in that particular space, by analysing the relations among these and by categorizing them according to the verbal paradigms 'to live', 'to feel' and 'to perceive' (together with the two major meanings of 'to do' – individual and social); in this way, space becomes a signifier.

A. Renier ([14], pp. 45-59) offers a definition of the architectural space taking into consideration the various levels of a theoretical organization of objects in space:

1. the assembly of so-called 'static' systems: the different parts of the building, such as its structure and walls;
2. the dynamic systems: active systems (e.g. the door) and those with an active role (the lock which allows the door to be locked automatically, but which is itself drawn into the movement of the object that it activates, or the gesture of a human hand acting as an activation system).

This category also includes the systems which illustrate the action of an agent (individual or collective) over its environment and vice-versa, and also the action of individual agents over one another (Greniewski, 1995, *apud* [14], p. 48) (for example, the elevator and the persons that make use of it, or the case of the belated spectators who, in order to reach their seats, determine the already seated spectators to rise and allow for their passing).

3. the homeostatic systems: mainly characterized by their self-adjustment capacity (a thermostat heating system);
4. the systems that are able to independently maintain their structure, such as the cell, strictly connected with system number six, described below;
5. the systems characterized by a direct response to a stimulus of the environment, such as the plant which absorbs carbon and gives off oxygen, an important process for the well-being and functioning of an exterior or interior space;
6. the organisms able to integrate several stimuli into a single image: certain features of the animal kingdom: the presence of pets in houses/flats, which clearly affects the actions of the inhabitants of that certain space;
7. the organisms that are capable of self-reflection, in relation to this image of combined stimuli, prior to taking any action: the level of the human being which, however, can barely be analysed in isolation from the others;
8. the social organisations, characterized, on the one hand, by a collective perception of the natural phenomena, and, on the other hand, by an increased power of distancing from and reflection upon the social behaviours;

9. the transcendental systems which allow the evaluation of these social conducts and, on the grounds of a definite ideology, make their overcoming possible.

Another next level would include the cybernetic systems, but the interest here is in building a simplified system in order to define architectural space, in finding the ‘architectural objects’ that could accede to the role of signifier.

Thus, the architectural space cannot be reduced to the space of the plastician (who sees only an artful combination of material and colour), or to that of the constructor engineer, or of the architect, or of the human sciences specialist; the architectural space is not only the object of social practices, it is social practice. A. Renier ([14], pp. 54-58) further defines the architectural space as an assembly of objects (persons and technical objects) and relations among these objects whose nature is defined according to the systemic organisation presented above, and whose signification can be constructed on the basis of visual reading and analysis of the objects and their relations, their position(s), the distance(s) among them, their motions(s) and depth, and on the basis of auditory analysis of sounds produced by the objects (words, breath, cries, the sound of steps or the rustling of dressing materials, the sounds made by musical instruments, or by house appliances, etc.); then comes an analysis of the olfactory stimuli (natural or artificial fragrances coming from perfumes, plants, certain activities such as cooking, washing, transportation, etc.); and the analysis of tactile sensations (the surface of the walls, the floor, the various pieces of furniture, the clothes, the skin, etc.); and the kinesthetic analysis (for example, body weight can determine different types of movements and body postures when sitting on a chair, or taking an elevator, or climbing up a slope, or leading to muscular contractions after a long interval of seated activity, etc.).

2. A metaphorical approach to spatial relations

Chandler ([2], p. 110) stresses upon the spatial relations that are dominant for visual signs: “unlike sequential syntagmatic relations, which are essentially about *before* and *after*, spatial syntagmatic relations include: above/below, in front/behind, close/distant, left/right (which can also have sequential significance), north/south/east/west and inside/outside (or centre/periphery). These structural relationships are imbued with semantic signification: Lakoff and Johnson ([11], pp. 15-20) have shown that “orientational metaphors” are routinely linked to key concepts in a culture. According to Lakoff and Johnson ([10], p. 15), ‘orientational metaphors’ organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another and, most of them, have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral; these spatial orientation arise as a result of the fact that we have the kind of bodies that we have and that these bodies function in a certain way in our physical environment; ‘orientational metaphors’ give a concept a spatial orientation; for example, “happy is up” – the fact that the concept “happy is oriented up” leads to such English expressions as “I’m feeling up today”. G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen (1996, 1998, apud [11], p. 111) distinguish among three key spatial dimensions in visual texts: left/right, top/bottom and centre/margin; the horizontal and vertical axes are not neutral dimensions either; for example, a pictorial representation will be ‘read’ along a horizontal axis from left to right in European cultures (similarly to the way in which reading and writing are performed), unlike, for example, the Arabic, Hebrew or Chinese cultures; a distinction is also made between the left-hand elements (related to ‘the Given’) and the right-hand elements (related to ‘the New’); for example, Western cultures will represent the idea of ‘facing the future’ by images of people moving or facing to the right. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that when pictures make significant use of the horizontal axis, placing some elements left of centre and others right of centre, then the left-hand side is the side of the ‘already given’ – something the reader is assumed to know already, a familiar, well-established and agreed-upon point of departure, something which is commonsensical, assumed and self-evident – while the left-hand side is the side of the New – something which is presented as not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon the viewer, therefore something to which the viewer must pay special attention, something more surprising, problematic or contestable (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 186-92 apud [2], p. 112, and [15], pp. 201-204).

According to these theories, when we imagine characters described as entering a house, we tend to picture them as stepping from the left-hand towards the right-hand section of our mental image – the left being the already known background (the yard they have just crossed, or the road they have travelled along as ‘the Given’), while the right represents ‘the New’, the house they step in as an unknown space, ready to be discovered in the more or less near future, since movement about the house also implies movement in time).

The vertical compositional axis is also charged with connotative meaning, as we have already implied by mentioning Lakoff and Johnson’s definition of ‘orientational metaphors’ ([11]: 15-18):

- *up* is associated with goodness, virtue, happiness, consciousness, health, life, the future, high status, having control or power, rationality;
- *down* is associated with badness, depravity, sickness, death, low status, being subject to control or power, emotion.

Thus, a signifier located ‘higher’ than another does not imply only a simple, physical, spatial relationship, but also an evaluative one in relation to the signifieds for which they stand. For example, in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, when Clym goes to help the people get a bucket out of a well at Eustacia’s house, she is described as advising them from a “window somewhere above” ([9], p. 215), signifying the fact that not only does she consider herself above the status of the people of Egdon Heath, but she considers herself above Clym as well – and the events in the novel will subsequently prove this point.

Chandler ([2], p. 113) further illustrates a gendered spatial code by referring to Goffman’s (*Gender Advertisements*, 1979: 43) observations concerning the depiction of male and female figures in magazine advertisements, according to which men tend to be located higher than women in these advertisements, symbolically mirroring the routine subordination of women to men in society. The scene in which Rochester sends for Jane to come and keep him company may provide us with an example in this direction; his words – “you puzzled me the first evening I invited you down here” ([1], p. 116) – clearly signify his desire, as a master, to ‘apply’ his power upon the other inhabitant of his house: he has called for her to come, from the sanctuary of her room upstairs, and keep him company ‘down there’, at his feet.

The upper and the lower sections of a vertical axis, the connotations of top and bottom, represent an opposition between ‘the ideal’ and ‘the Real’; the lower section in pictorial layouts tend to be more down-to-earth representations concerned with practical or factual details, while the upper part tends to be related to abstract or generalized possibilities (relations corresponding to the particular/general or local/global polarizations): the upper section shows us what ‘might be’ while the lower section tends to be more informative and practical, showing us ‘what is’ (Kress and van Leeuwen apud [2], p. 113, [15], pp. 204-205).

The third key spatial dimension discussed by Kress (apud [2], p. 113) and van Leeuwen ([15], pp. 205-209) is that of centre and margin: while the composition of some visual images is based primarily on a left-right or top-bottom structure, other visual images are dominated by a centre-periphery structure: something presented as Centre is something presented “as nucleus of the information on which all the other elements are in some sense subservient”; the Margins are “these ancillary, dependent elements”; this distinction is related to the fundamental perceptual distinction between *figure* and *ground*: selective perception involves ‘foregrounding’ some features and ‘backgrounding’ others (the need to separate a dominant shape – a figure with a definite contour – is psychologically motivated as the need to separate things according to our own concerns and interests).

According to van Leeuwen ([15], p. 206), the function of the centre is to hold and connect the elements which are gathered around it; centre and margin form a multimodal semiotic principle which can apply to the way buildings are arranged in a village, the way items of furniture are arranged in a room, the way in which people arrange themselves in rooms or halls to tell stories, teach lessons, dance, sing, etc.; it may also apply to the way in which objects are arranged in an

exhibition or on a desk or a table, or to the way in which things are arranged on a page, or on a canvas, or on a screen. For example, in one of Miss Havisham's rooms, the rotten bridal cake stands in the middle of the room, but also in the 'middle of the house' (at the core of the space of the house): all the universe at Satis House spins around this "epergne or centerpiece" ([4], p. 113) through the symbolically charged ritual of Pip's walking Miss Havisham around the room (a Victorian ritual distorted into bitter and grotesque ridiculousness). The "black fungus" of a cake is also related to Miss Havisham's never having been seen to eat in public since the unfortunate event: there are no objects of food at Satis House and Pip is significantly 'fed' outside the house. Doody ([6], p. 420:431) identifies the social and psychological function of food (meals define characters socially and psychologically) and also mentions that "food is used to stage the search for meaning that is carried out every time one reflects on the relationship among the self, the world and others" (Pip does this while eating his bread and meat, and drinking his beer outside, in the courtyard of Satis House); as a particular form of ekphrasis, Doody argues, the presence of food in relation to a character in a novel involves a particular reminder of his/her participation in the world through ingestion of matter and also a supporting device for the reality of that character; food is also an "antidote" for dreams: "Food is magically 'normal'. Detailed references to it are semimagical bonds to the physical, the necessary, the contingent, and the valuable. Food preserves against illness. It is the sovereign remedy against dreams. It is a homage paid to the earth and to the body." Food is 'healthy', it is the symbol of the unshadowy.

Theo van Leeuwen ([16], p. 101) also distinguishes between objective and subjective space, a distinction that, according to him, is important for a critical discourse analysis: generally, the feelings and subjective experiences of the participants in a social practice indicate power relationships: "the regulators of social practices want people not only to do the right thing, but also to identify with it, to 'own it' in the contemporary jargon" and "subjective space representations link the space construction to an actor either by means of 'relative' circumstance ('to her left', 'on his right', 'above him', etc.) or by projecting spatial descriptions through perception clauses." Another distinction operated by him is that between decorative objects (for example, paintings) and resources (objects which are used to enact social practices – for example, the piano) ([16], p. 91).

Our analysis of the inside of a Victorian house will focus upon the way in which objects are involved in creating and constructing relations inside the house, along the vertical and horizontal axis, involving the already mentioned distinctions between up-down, left-right, centre-margin, also paying attention to the subjective and objective implications.

2. 1. Objects as extensions and projections of the self

Objects in a culture are almost always perceived as meaningful, particularly to people belonging to that culture; they construct a system of signification which mirrors the meaning structures of the entire culture: jewelry, clothes, furniture, ornaments, tools, toys are all signs which help reconstruct to a certain degree of completeness the society's traditions, values, rituals; for these reasons, archeology, for example, can be defined as a semiotic study of objects and artifacts; there is also a common belief around the world which holds that objects are not only signs standing for conventional social meanings, but that they also possess some inner force above and beyond the physical (a manifestation of this belief is fetishism – the conviction that some inanimate objects, fetishes, are imbued with supernatural attributes); animism is evidence that people perceive certain objects as special kinds of signs; just like works of art, objects are considered to be reflections of innate forms of thought that seek expression in real world physical forms ([3], p. 207).

Objects may also be perceived as:

- extensions of the self: for example, the automobile (or the nineteenth-century carriage) is experienced by many as an extension of the body and thus as a protective extension of the self, creating a space around the physical body that is as inviolable as the body itself;
- substitutes for human beings: for example, in some cultures of the Caribbean, it is believed that one can cause physical or psychological damage to another person by doing something

injurious to a doll constructed to resemble that person ([3], p. 208): in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, Susan Nunsuch constructs a wax doll resembling Eustacia and then throws it into the fire, the wax doll's melting away parallels Eustacia's stepping towards death);

- projections of the self: in relation to others, wearing jewelry projects an image of wealth, or too much jewelry worn simultaneously projects an image of snobbism; a simply furnished room may indicate a monastic kind of life.

Emphasizing the fact that relationships between humans and objects contribute to the construction of space, Bourdieu (1996, 1993 *apud* [10], p. 342) points out that there is no space which is not hierarchic and which does not express social hierarchies: the place a human, or an object, occupies in space is defined according to its surface, its volume, or the range of space it consumes; physical space is visible, concrete and measurable, easily perceived by everyone, independent of their knowledge, position and wealth – this is what, according to Bourdieu, makes space consumption one of the most obvious ways in which to display power. Bourdieu also considers that besides being situated in physical space in a fixed location, human beings and things can be situated in a relational position in space: the location in physical space is mirrored in the relational position in social space. Social space is created by the relative position of a human or an object to other humans or objects: social space is thus always defined in relation to something or someone. This relative or relational position is both time-distance position and a relative place (over/under/in/between, etc.) position; social space exists only in relative positioning while physical space is a defined location and is “the mutual exclusion (or distinction) of positions which constitute it, a juxtaposition of social positions” (1993: 160 *apud* [10], p. 343). Human beings and objects are thus always situated simultaneously in physical space as a physical location, and in social space, as a location “which can be characterized by its position relative to other locations (as standing above, below, or in between them) and by the distance which separates them” (1996, p. 10 *apud* [10], p. 343). The different social spaces appear in physical space according to the way in which humans and objects are located, and also the way in which objects are used and human and material resources are distributed in physical space according to social space: social structures reconverged into physical structures organize and qualify socially as “in rise or decline, entry (inclusion) or exit (exclusion), bringing together or distancing in relation to a central and valued site” (Bourdieu 1996: [14] *apud* [10], p. 343).

Another distinction should be made between primitive objects and collections: primitive objects refer not necessarily to rough objects, but to objects in their function of resources: they are objects fulfilling certain primary needs, undecorative, contrasting sharply with the Victorians' need and taste for collections of all sorts of curios: “the presence or not of objects, their place in the home, their storage, their means of acquisition, the reasons for their disposal, their relationship to other household goods and their relationship to the homemaker all produce nuances of ownership, use and meaning” ([12], p. 50). Collections included furniture, paintings and other decorative objects, amassed over the years by a family or families; collections are unique not only by what they contain, but also by the way in which they are arranged.

In conclusion, besides the already mentioned major functions of objects as extensions and projections of the self, another one is that of tools in the construction of social hierarchies. The Victorian house as a space of social and cultural practices turns into a social space where hierarchical relationships are established by using objects to create distance; the way in which objects and whose objects are those which occupy a certain space is also significant.

2. 2. Objects as indicators of profession

In their function as indicators of profession, objects behave mainly as resources (according to van Leeuwen's distinction between decorative and resource objects). Objects become the resources and the tools by means of which occupation is signified. But by signifying occupation, objects also contribute to the construction of social space (according to Bourdieu's distinction between physical and social space).

As illustration for these statements, we shall here refer to the objects from Jaggers' office as described in Dickens' *Great Expectations*. It is a subjective experience of space, realized visually through Pip's point of view:

There were not so many papers about, as I should have expected to see; and there were some odd objects about, that I should not have expected to see – such as an old rusty pistol, a sword in a scabbard, several strange-looking boxes and packages, and two dreadful casts on a shelf, of faces peculiarly swollen, and twitchy about the nose. Mr Jaggers' own high-backed chair was of deadly black-horse hair, with rows of brass nails round it, like a coffin; and I fancied I could see how he leaned back in it, and bit his forefinger at the clients [...] I sat down in the cliental chair placed over against Mr Jaggers's chair... ([4], p. 188).

Jaggers is a criminal lawyer hired by Magwitch to provide Pip with money on his way to 'gentlemanhood': the office is described as meeting with or failing to meet with Pip's expectations: in fact, the underlying idea is that Jaggers does not believe in Pip's dream of becoming a gentleman, and if he were not paid, he would not help at all. The objects in his office are charged with signification: the old rusty pistol and the sword in the scabbard remind of piracy, and the two casts ('famous clients of ours' as Wemmick later describes them) represent faces marked by swollen, agonizing expressions (as if they were the result of some pain inflicted upon the original bearers of those heads) – all these send to the kind of clients Mr Jaggers serves. The meaningful coffin-like chair shows the immorality of Jaggers' job – that of defending criminals – which cannot but lead to some kind of death, at least spiritual, if not physical. If Jaggers's chair looks like some kind of a Mephistophelic chair, the cliental chair is that of the sinful come to make a pact with the devil: the reverse is also true: in helping so many criminals escape unpunished in exchange for money, Jaggers is the one selling his soul; in fact, we do not know anything about his background, he has no family, and he treats everybody in the same hardened way as he treats his clients: he fears that his friendship with others may inconvenience his profession, but he is also self-isolating himself, patronizing everybody around (he is the only character who knows almost everything about all the other main characters in the novel). Even when Pip is invited to have dinner at his house, Jaggers alone serves the meal and clears the table.

We should also mention Jaggers's careful use of the soap, an object also to be found in his office, together with his ritualistic way of washing and drying his hands:

I embrace this opportunity of remarking that he washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist. He had a closet in his room, fitted up for the purpose, which smelt of the scented soap like a perfumer's shop. It had an unusually large jack-towel on a roller inside the door, and he would wash his hands, and wipe them and dry them all over this towel, whenever he came in from a police-court or dismissed a client from his room ([4], p. 233).

His need of hygiene is a response to all the dirt and filth around; Barthes (*apud* [7], p. 221) distinguishes between saponites able to kill filth and saponites able only to drive filth away: their symbolic action lies in separating light from darkness. We consider that with Jaggers, the action of the saponites is not that of killing, completely eliminating dirt, but only that of temporarily driving it away.

The objects in Jaggers' house act as a last clue: his house is actually converted into an office; what should be profession, social, outward practice is brought inside the home and transformed not only into a way of living, but also one of being:

There was a bookcase in the room; I saw, from the backs of the books, that they were about evidence, criminal law, criminal biography, trials, acts of parliament, and such things. The furniture was all very solid and good, like his watch-chain. It had an official look, however, and there was nothing merely ornamental to be seen. In a corner was a little table

of papers with a shaded lamp: so that he seemed to bring the office home with him in that respect, too and to wheel it out of an evening and fall to work ([4], p. 234).

The lack of ornamental objects implies the presence only of resource objects, objects used as tools that, together with the way in which Jagers presides over dinner, questioning and tempting into answering Pip, Herbert and Drummle, is again an exhibition of his professional qualities. The office discourse spreads itself over dinner just like over any other business meeting: “‘At half-past nine, gentlemen,’ said he, ‘we must break up. Pray make the best use of your time. I am glad to see you all’” ([4], p. 237). Nevertheless, Jagers sits in the centre of the entire plot: the convicted murderer who now works for him as housekeeper is Estella’s mother, while Estella’s father is Magwitch, for whom Jagers is paid to work for, coming thus into contact with Pip, too.

3. Conclusions

The function of objects as extensions of the self is particularly that of offering a sense of protection; the function of objects as projections of the self is that of mirroring certain aspects that an individual values most, consciously or unconsciously.

Renier ([14], p. 55) distinguishes between two categories of objects important to the reading of architectural space: technical objects and persons, the analysis of the nature of their relationship leading to a characterization of their entire assembly.

The early-nineteenth century industrialized production of goods had affected the quantity and quality of the contents of the home ([12], p. 3): furnishings were more varied, many goods were cheaper, textiles were more easily available and shops better stocked, therefore, homes filled up with objects. But the esteem of certain goods, Ponsonby argues, was also dictated by the moral or religious role of the home: furnishings that suggested comfort, particularly upholstered items that gave the impression of a secure and cosy interior, were valued; the middle-class wife was not expected to go out to work or even to work in the family business, instead she was supposed to enhance the domestic environment with her handiwork: thus, embroidery and other needlework were essential elements for beautifying the home but a host of other skills were also expected, such as painting china, pokerwork (the art of making pictures or patterns on wood using a series of deep grooves made by heated pokers), and pictures made of shells or scrolls of paper: “while essentially a private world, the home performed a public role through providing a suitable backdrop for entertaining visitors” ([12], p. 4).

By merging the above-mentioned theoretical statements and, by using the relationships established between Dombey (as an object in Renier’s sense) and the objects in his house, we have attempted to demonstrate such hypotheses as:

- the Victorians used objects both as extensions and as projections of the self;
- in their extensive function, objects signified the ‘protective’ measure taken by Victorians against letting the others see their true inner self, objects also functioning as a continuation of the Victorian code of clothes and all the other values that money supported; they also signified power through the way in which, for example, rich furniture was exhibited around the house;
- as projections of the self, the analysis of the objects in Dombey’s house will focus upon the clash between need and appearance.

We shall here refer to Dombey’s way of using, or better said not using objects after the funeral of Mrs Dombey’s death, his act of ordering things to be covered up being charged with several apparently disparate meanings:

When the funeral was over, Mr Dombey ordered the furniture to be covered up – perhaps to preserve it for the son with whom his plans were all associated – and the rooms to be ungarnished, saving such as he retained for himself on the ground-floor. Accordingly, mysterious shapes were made of tables and chairs, heaped together in the middle of rooms,

and covered over with great winding-sheets. Bell-handles, window-blinds, and looking-glasses, being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders. Every chandelier or lustre, muffled in holland, looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye ([5], p. 25)

The act of covering rich furniture and turning it into ghost-like shapes signifies, beside Dombey's practical and miserly thought of carefully saving the furniture untouched for the later use of his son, a more deeper significance – there was no need of exhibiting so much luxury since there were to be no visits received and therefore nobody to admire and spread the rumour about Dombey's wealth: once the lady of the house dead, there was nobody else to preside over social gatherings, tea meetings or business receptions and not that Dombey would not have managed the task himself, but an object was missing from his 'private collection' (a wife), and until a wife was not provided instead, the house could not open again. Not only does the idea of luxury disappear from the house, but also that of comfort, if comfort there had ever been: the house seems now to be populated by hosts of phantoms, the accounts of deaths and dreadful murders from the newspapers linger about as if anticipating Paul's death, and the once sparkling chandeliers are turned into monstrous tears. These statements are also supported by the fact that when Dombey is engaged to Edith, he has the entire house completely refurnished and redecorated: a new wife meant the replacing of the missing link, and the recommencing of the social rituals: hardly are the two married and the house redecorated, that Dombey orders the business reception to be organized, with certain duties to be fulfilled by Edith, as a wife and a mistress of the house.

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