

*LAMBENT MATERIALS:
BODY, NATURE & COSMOS IN GWENDRAETH HOUSE & GARDENS*

'We are not in space like things. Rather, we haunt space.'
Maurice Merleau-Ponty

'Irresistibly the festival penetrates each and every working day... A grain of Sunday is hidden in each weekday, and how much weekday in this Sunday!'
Walter Benjamin

A house memorializes its inhabitants. People and their things resemble each other and establish both human character and architectural character, and its location, as a form of haunting. Inhabitation is a form of habitual activity whose etymology is closely related to the 'haunts' of someone: *"Where would I find Peter? Oh, his haunts are regular, try The Red Dragon or The Fox; failing that, try the garden"*. Animistic qualities are suggested in the exchange between people and their places and the influence of one on the other. 'In House images', Peter Finnemore offers, 'the generations of conversations, actions, emotions are embedded like psychic stratas dwelling within the walls and physical make up of a house. The past is continually present...' This atmospheric and psychic resonance is sensible to us, if elusive. And this suggests to Peter that photography can act as a 'diving rod to tap into these energies or emotions' making available to us the stratification and lamination of time and memory in shadows and light.

GWENDRAETH HOUSE

This divination is visible in the imprint of a body's habitual shadow in watermarks on wallpaper, in yellowing and stains. Shirts filled with light make a body diaphanous; it is as if luminosity is embodying absence. Suggesting the powerful presence of an absence or loss. The co-existence simultaneously in the same space of what cannot be seen, what was there and what remains from what has left. What is left? Artifacts; personal things; foot-worn carpets laid atop one of each other; clothes hanging in front of windows, sunlight fading delicate colours; shirts flying through the garden air. Blurring shirts and blurring sight. Making visible the abiding agony of remembering and the stubbornness of time. Something is seen by the camera's eye for us which, usually, pulls under the surface of sight. The house photographs spatialize domestic and national things. A lucid room places them for us, creating a *camera con vista*, or a miniature world inside of ourselves.

*'A house that stands in my heart
My cathedral of silence
Every morning recaptured in dream
Every evening abandoned
A house covered with dawn
Open to the winds of my youth.'*
René Cazelles, *De terre et d'envolée*

Gaston Bachelard¹ believed that we each accrue a house inside us that is made of all the places where we have lived, and that for each of us house means the summation of these other houses. Suggesting that each house is here and also elsewhere. As each experience is also something similar and different from our past, a house may be filled with the ghosts of other places and can be seen as the repository for these lambent memories. Peter's house collects recent time and his photographs relate the situations of human time with their location. Inhabitation is exposed as repetitions of acts and the replacement of things; their combinations reveal a lifetime of accepting and adjusting habits and suppose humans' endless arranging and list making, viz.: Emotions: menace, fear sentiment, longing, endurance, involvement; Effects; entropy, surfaces peeling revealing hidden textures, trapped air, brittle glue, rosy tapestries, painted wood, similarly painted metals, suppressed surface differences and expressed depth disjunctions; Observations: perishable, weak, contingent, conversational, dependant, awkward, familiar, temperamental, unforgettable, unnoticed, reassuring, careful; Conclusions: beautiful loss, time obliterates things before thought.

¹ The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard, Beacon Press, 1969.

THE GARDENS OF GWENDRAETH HOUSE

Gwendraeth House accumulates things and its garden is similarly available for manipulation. It is a site for the expression of mythic visions of nature and themes associated with abundance, excessive fun, fecundity and imaginative possibilities. The analogy of a garden as Prelapsarian Eden, or recreated Hellenic Golden Age, was typical of a Renaissance garden and made it a place of cosmic significance and poetic potential. Renaissance architecture and gardening recovered the ancient belief in an explicit connection between constructed reality and poetics. Architecture united mathematics and optics- knowledge of the visible and invisible realms of reality- with poetics- the articulation of presence- in the revelation of their relationships and hierarchies. Architecture, as a mode of poetics closely related both to rhetoric and painting, was considered the art that discloses how and why things fit together well. A Renaissance garden was a form of theatre from, and within which, to view the world. A Belvedere, or at least the view of the beautiful it offered, presents a microcosm of the world, in which, we see human actions as if in a drama; a celestial firmament and dimension of witness is applied, invoking essential situations of tragedy and retribution.

LAMBENT BODIES: COSMOLOGY & PHOTOGRAPHY

They believed in the 16th century that if you dug a deep enough hole you would be able to see the stars during the daytime. Whilst the techniques of seeing may have changed and certain beliefs shown to be untrue, the motivation may remain the same throughout time. One such surviving intuition is the capacity for new art, with new technologies, to seek to reveal what is hidden. This phenomenon is considered by Hans-Georg Gadamer to be the capacity of art experience to open connections of thinking across human time, he insists that 'art of whatever kind always speaks a language of recognition.'² In another context he asks us 'And is art not really defined by the fact, that, whatever may be presented in it, humanity encounters itself.'³ This encounter obliterates temporal and national borders through its intensely particular qualities- what is local is universal, the material reveals the immaterial. For Gadamer, the renewing capacity of festive time enables it to be at once unique and repetitive. This paradox fuses the present with the past, and also elaborates a sense of imminent recurrence. The festival unites consciousness of time passing with another mode of experiential clarity and recognition, of cosmic time revolving around us anyway. Rupture and rift, continuity and horizon- the festive experience stills and enlivens our sensation of time; stalls the rhyme of the year and starts it up again revitalized, altered, transferred.

Art understood as festival, symbol and play, suggests that *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, lies within our capacity to empathize with a particular mode of historical thinking which is personal and experiential in a shared and communicable manner. Aesthetic experience is not only sensuality or conceptual, but an example of the heuristic capacity of the mind to spontaneously recall things via the body and of the phenomenal affects of things to imbue sentiment and meaning. The paradox of art time is that it is extempore and also fulfilled; infused with place and also idealized experience, commingling, ambiguous, ambivalent, here and there, then and now, within and without, new and renewal, deeply within in and outside of time.

Art experience is absorbed and aloof; free and enraptured; spontaneous and extempore; intuitive and vivid. This capacity for duplicity enables new art forms to tamper with time. We needn't hold the myths of historical progress dearly, primitive and modern are nothing more than names given to the living and the dead, and the same snow falls on the living as on the dead. The border that connects both is the site where Peter unearths currents of recognition of what is forgotten. Beyond the house and its garden is a graveyard where his Nan was taken. His photographs of her and of her things prepared him for this passing.

The garden games retell this story as if it were mythically important.

In two photographs it is shown to us, that despite ourselves, we might agree. *Divination* and *Shadow (Mud & Gold)* record the absence of a human figure within seed and in the presence of a shadow respectively. Natural fecundity and light commingle; earthly time and cosmic time are joined in the form of a body. The connection occurs in the Shaman figure of the artist. His vision extends our own 'til we

² *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Hans Georg Gadamer, CUP, 1986.

³ 'Intuition and Vividness', in *ibid*, p.167

see, deep into the spaces left behind by him, perpetuity & propinquity, a premonition of creation as a premonition of death.

Orpheus in the garden, the bard's lyre becomes Leica; Avant-Gardener digs for meaning with his Pentax. Light is dead matter, stardust. The world, for Peter Finne more, is made of lambent materials, waiting to be seen again.



