

**THE APPEARANCE OF SPACE:
SEVEN PHOTOGRAPHS OF SWANSEA BY RUT BLEES LUXEMBURG**
PUBLISHED BY FFOTOGALLERY PRESS & THE GLYNN VIVIAN ART GALLERY 200

TYPICALITY

Buildings become types when they carry some essential communication of something other than their singularity. Signifying not only their function but also something essential and symbolic. A symbol is half-complete and alludes to some other fragment which completes it. Typically speaking, some rhythm of completion resides within the patterns which resolve and situate our ideas about habitation. Habits of thought, for example, are already situated as well as help to situate us; one bad habit is the tendency to think that solely language situates us. For Merleau-Ponty, 'It is the structure of our spaces rather than our language which keeps us sane'.

It is not typical of architects that their buildings become types. It is exceptional. It is the exceptional that reveals commonality and its distinction is the capacity to enable us to see clearly, "forgetting the name of the thing one sees". Thus, the power of mimesis to reveal aspects of reality is uncommon but typical of architecture and of an architect's capacity to re-veil reality: only the sur-real is typical, laid onto and breaking through the surface of things.

EIDOS

The entirely contingent cannot overcome, at best, personal memories, and is not typical. The autonomous is typical, and alludes to another order of reality. Both contingency and autonomy seek to reveal hidden things: for the former it is buried and can be found in darkness and shadows; for the latter, secrets reside less in matter than in ideas and are recovered in form.

Pointing up or looking down: looking up you cannot speak easily; looking down, you can't see far. Looking down, I remember; up, I think. Speech occurs upon the horizon between my eyes and your ears. It is water and air meeting, commingling breathing and listening, horizontal, and receding.

INSIGHT

Insight is another thing than instinct or naked ambition, desire, thirst, or intuition. Insight is spontaneous application of experience. Suddenly, we see clearly. It is not clear how or why and it is impossible to repeat at will. Rather than try to construe a theory why seeing is infused with memory, let's instead savour an example of the intense liminal extensity of seeing and imagining. A space of desire where fantasy and longing tell us hunger hungers to situate itself-somewhere:

SECOND VOICE

*'Mrs. Rose Cottage's eldest, Mae, peels off her pink-and-white
skin in a furnace in a tower in a cave in a waterfall in a wood
and waits there raw as an onion for Mister Right to leap up
the burning tall hollow splashes of leaves like a brilliantined trout'
MAE ROSE COTTAGE (very close and softly, drawing out the words)*

'Call me Dolores

Like they do in the stories'

(Under Milk Wood, Dylan Thomas, J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1954)

Even if what it satisfies is not yet unknown nor known, desire orchestrates space and the imagination. Imagination haunts spaces looking for what is lost and what is partly remembered and longed for, even what cannot be found. Neither the past nor the future; oscillating in the parallax of the photographer's lens, the present wriggles past like a river of light caught on a string, liquid nearly matter, congealed time and crystals, chemicals, paper. I can see near but not far, this but not that, until a camera makes room for us to place things. So, I can see this here, that there, together, in a lucid room.

FIRST VOICE

*'...Only you can hear and see,
behind the eyes of the sleepers, the movements and countries
and mazes and colours and disms and rainbows and tunes
and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of
their dreams.*

From where you are, you can hear their dreams.'

Dylan Thomas' 'Llareggub' (Buggerall) is a modern example of the instructive role of a fictional utopia. Situated on the cusp of dreams and common human situations, the usual outrageous emotions, of love, lust, regret, frustration, glee, naughtiness, desire for freedom and routine, etc., are grouped together in the characters of the play and arranged on the page of our imagination like buildings jostling besides each other on a hillside. Houses take on the characteristics of their inhabitants, and protagonists are named after their profession and domicile. For example, night is described 'in Dai Bread's bakery flying like black flour', and 'it is tonight in donkey street, trotting silent, with seaweed on its hooves', past 'the dogs in the wetnosed yards' and the 'dreaming wicked' boys, the 'oganplaying wood' and 'jollyrogered sea'. This elision of spatial character and phenomenology gives an intensely empathetic description to mundane places and makes them exemplary. Rather than acting as a metaphor standing in for something else, the traditional utopian project acts as a moral check to the hubris of logic and audacious scheming. The modern project can be considered the tendency to confuse theatre and life, to the extent that utopian projects, situated nowhere except in the imaginations of the architects of modern objective reality, were actually built at Noto, Sabbionetta, etc. These towns have the slightly sinister and self-conscious air of stage-sets awaiting action, an autobiographical necropolis by the Jesuit Gagliardi and mad Vespasiano Gonzaga. Still, like perfect daguerreotypes, everyone absent presumed dead. The dead haunt architectural drawings as much as the future inhabitants, they float up like Captain Cat's drowned companions in *Under Milk Wood*, in the crosshairs of near and far, past and present, dream anticipation and memory. Sometimes in photographs they take up residence, lucid inhabitants, fusing spaces with their bodies, silently showing what is inside, outside; and showing us what is outside is also inside us.

ARIADNE

A maze can be understood as a symbol of dislocation and disorientation, whilst a labyrinth suggests deeper levels of consciousness. Roberto Callaso believes that the myth of the labyrinth beneath the palace of Knossos on Crete, is a symbol of the unconscious. It is a site for the repression of King Minos' guilty secret, his impotence, which is manifest as his wife's buried fantasy for sexual gratification. Her fantastic world symbolized as the perverse creature of the Minotaur, the bull-headed man that feasts upon virginity (*The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, Vintage, London, 1993)

Daedalus constructed an ersatz bull-cloak for Queen Pasifae who uses this disguise to seduce the sacred bull. As the first architect and builder of the labyrinth Daedalus is responsible for connecting human consciousness to an image of chthonic burial of desire and the creation of the site of order. Architecture is thus linked in creation-myths to the transgression of limits and the fabrication of unnatural states. The guilt we often feel about the power of architectural spaces to befuddle us, is a symptom of our post-Romantic anxiety towards the natural world. We imagine a labyrinth to be confusing. However, the labyrinth is uniquely rational; there is only one way out. But one could begin from many places, be lost in infinite ways. The thread of love provides the way out for Theseus. Ariadne is the Hero's saviour. She shows the way in a practical manner and repairs the confusion caused by her parents' unbalanced behaviour. This spiritual in-balance disrupts the isotropia of mortal incompleteness. Ariadne allowed Theseus to interpret and understand the labyrinth; she made a prison meaningful. In a sense she made architecture an art of interpretation and orientation; consummated as an experience, in memory and re-presentation. Ariadne is abandoned later by Theseus upon Naxos. He became bored with knowing her knowing ways. She is left bereft of hope but is discovered by Bacchus and taken along with his party:

*'Abandoned, in her grief and anger found
Comfort in Bacchus' arms. He took her crown
And set it in the heavens to win her there
A altar's eternal glory...'*
(*Metamorphosis*, Ovid, trans. A.D. Melville, Oxford, 1986)

The consolation of Bacchanalian festival is a metaphor for lovers' salvation. Art, understood as festival, fulfils much the same function of consolation, imitation and dramatic re-enactment. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes of the power of artistic experience that requires us to 'construe the language of form and content so that communication really occurs', (*The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol and Festival*, CUP, 1986). He continues to allude to Hölderlin's poem *Bread and Wine*, stating 'that

"something can be held in our hesitant stay". Ariadne reconciles us to the powerful instability of interpretation and to the asymmetry of human temporality.

AMOROUS INGENIOUS

The lust for conquest of place and the search for fame and for the immortality of poetry, leads one to leave what is at-hand behind, to fly from security and stability in Icarus-like embrace of the sky. It is a symptom of the repression of their earth-bound mortality, that inspired the Greek heroes such as Ulysses, Hercules and Theseus, to aspire to become demigods and to vault over human concerns into history, leaving place and love behind.

Yet this leap into pure space occurs somewhere; and the land and events are commingled in myth and craft to enable navigation and orientation. In many stories heroic journeys involve the creation of settings prescient for and propitious of particular events or actions. In particular, the recovery of lost love involves risking one's life in order to enable re-birth. The nether region lures inspiration, calls forth dreams of redemption and of literally buying back one's past. In *Hypnerotomachia Polyphilo*, the work of architecture is considered to be propitiatory (good luck comes to the one with skill the Greeks believed): the purpose of a well-designed place was to bring good fortune and a happy life. Throughout his *Hypnerotomachia*, our hero Polyphilo quests for his love of many things the appetite for which is inspired by one woman, the absent Polia. Translated in part as 'The Strife of Love in a Dream', *Hypnerotomachia* describes a series of spatial sites for ritual whose meaning are narrational yet fragmented, oneiric and dramatically temporal. As you wander with Polyphilo, the play unfolds to reveal architectural settings, which require interpretation. You are moved onward in imitation of the hero's search, his erotic impulse draws you in to the story and through the architecture of the book towards the city of love-Polia=Polis (Polyphilo, or *The Dark Forest Revisited* – an erotic epiphany of architecture, by Alberto Pérez-Gomez, MIT, 1994, presents a modern version. The original author is not known for sure but scholars believe him to be a Venetian monk writing in 1499). The quest for love is here bound up with the search for meaning in spaces. To interpret his dream, the hero must make sense of his visions, re-make images in order to perceive sense. Polia offers a guiding voice, which is barely present, until at the end of the story, she interprets the myth of Venus and Adonis. They witness this event retold by the gods yet are blindfolded by cupid. The primacy of vision, of far-sight and perspective is offered the alternative image of the necessity for closeness and tactility of touch. As a guide, Polia evokes an image of completion which is tragic and mortal and Polyphilo awakes from his dream to 'the memory of fulfillment... the wholeness that, however "weak", grounds us as purposeful beings in the universe'. Sensuality inhabits the realm of aesthetics, of bodily knowledge. Yet it triggers pictures of longing which the body craves and adores beyond the hope of satisfaction. Narrative is the first instance of ingenuity, as machine-like the drama unwinds, a fountain unfurling endlessly to its limit.

MERMAID REVERSAL

'The water came spurting in minute jets, blown from shells of Tritons and Naiads, from noses of marine monsters, spattering and pattering on the greenish surface, bouncing and bubbling, wavering and quivering, dissolving into laughing little gurgles; from the whole fountain, the tepid water, the stones covered with velvety moss, emanated a promise of pleasure that would never turn to pain. Perched on an islet in the middle of the round basin, modeled by a crude but sensual hand, a vigorous smiling Neptune was embracing a willing Amphritite; her navel wet with spray and gleaming in the sun, would be the nest, shortly, for hidden kisses in subaqueous shade. Don Fabrizio paused, gazed, remembered, regretted.'

(*The Leopard*, Giuseppe di Lampedusa, Fontana Collins, London, 1963, trans. A. Colquhoun)

The belief in a corresponding material and intellectual transformative capacity, is manifest in much Renaissance and Baroque art that seeks to fuse mytho-poetic themes with corporeal states, and to make metamorphosis visible through analogy and also to perception. Fountain statues in baroque gardens represented the fecundity of the marriage of the nether realms with mortal time. The bounty of this love is the Cornucopia of fruit and wellbeing, made possible by the vertical connection of water, bursting into light at head height and falling as semen, white onto the fertilized soil. Below, above and upon the earth-three regions are charted in mythology and infer theological and also modern psychic topography. Their measure appears before us in the redemptive capacity of imagination. Art and hydraulics conspire to merge lower and higher regions' combination. Mental and visceral, subconscious and cerebral impulses; sexual and cosmic, chthonic and celestial territories; are merged and revealed in the rise and fall of water. Past and future, here and there, desire and satisfaction appear together in the

commingling media of atmosphere. You see, hear, smell, taste vapour released from its perpetual flow into drops of sunlight. Time clots, is visible as clouds, enchanting and illuminating us. We watch enraptured the artistic coagulation of time as matter and light, the constellation of thought and thirst, lust bursting the dust; each second eternity. This microcosmic cycle of precipitation mirrors our own dry progress to rain. Until, in less explicit words and breaths, time starts up again, with a crash. Within this space of contemplation, the fountain is time as much as it is place.

Events seem to be able to bind us to places, as much as blood ties. Memories and desire make a stronger bond of imagination and inspiration than prejudice and fear. Socrates comments upon the power of water to inspire desire, and Phaedrus learns the secret of place, its propitious capacity to inspire action and to bring good luck (Phaedrus, Plato). The power of transformation to remake emotion is one of Ovid's themes also. Ancient Syracuse was made an extension of the Athenian world not only through trade but also in becoming part of the mytho-poetic map that orients classical thinking. The Sicilian nymph Arethusa-Cyane viewed Pluto's abduction of Proserpine, and tries to teach him the art of seduction. Heartbroken, she became the pool that she haunted:

*'Beyond consoling, and in endless tears
She wasted all away. Into the pool-
... Her shoulders back and sides and breast dissolved
In slender rivulets and disappeared,
And last, in place of warm and living blood,
Water flows in along her wasted veins
And nothing that you could grasp remains.'*
(Metamorphosis, Ovid, Op Cit., p.112)

Arethusa-Cyane is a bay 'confined by narrow points of land'. She declares, 'here in Sicily I dwell/ An alien, but no land in all the world/ Is dearer now to me. I, Arethusa, /Have here my home, my heart.' Her body and her home are confused emotionally, and the fluid image of water evokes a metamorphic exchange between place and psyche.

Mellifluous light, salt earth, tectonic plates subduction, carbon-dioxide erupting as volcanic magma absorbed in fruit by me, then released in my breath, precipitation of as stone-rain sunk to the sea-bed again. Energy dissipates in memory, returns in matter, via air

BALANCE

In fact, the real labyrinth at Knossos was a much less terrifying place than its myth suggests. The 'Labyrinth', crossed axes, which sit on the mount of Sir Arthur Evans's recreated city plateau, symbolize nature and man in harmony and 'suggest that the whole palace was sacred ground' (Minoan Civilization, Stylianos Alexiou, Heraclion, 1964). Their use, to sacrifice the sacred bulls that danced each spring on the public square. Skilled gymnasts drew beauty from the condemned animal's movements. 'At this one-sided game, in which girls as well as boys performed, the acrobat or victim stood in front of a charging bull, grasped its horn, and turned a somersault along its back, an athletic feat which seems to be impossible. The bull was certainly a scared animal, and itself a principle victim of sacrifice', (A Handbook to the Palace of Minos Knossos, J.D.S. Pendlebury, Macdonald London, 1954). The earliest example of Western art, distinguished from Asiatic and African sculpture, is of a boy somersaulting over the back of a bull, using its horns for purchase. The Stalactite columns in the palace's basements were anointed with the bull's blood and marked with twin cuts of the axes (thus becoming known as the labyrinth). The columns symbolized the return of the sun, as a boy god, to the sun-blessed fecund earth. And they reproduce the sacred cave formations of Crete where the Minoans worshipped stalactites, 'pillar worship had a material application in domestic cults, where main supporting piers in basements are marked with double-axes and equipped for the reception of liquid offerings... The young god was evidently the deity of the sky who bought fertility to earth, dying in winter and coming to life again in Spring. Stone dripping from the heavens to earth, a thread of time renewed each Spring in the youth's dance of death with the sacrificial bull. Culture is born in this act of sacrifice to nature of man's excess, revealing drama and tension in the beauty of the dance. Ariadne's thread can be found in the customs that survive binding places to cosmic time via rituals, festivals and also in acts of private devotion and memory. Balance is established not by human suffering, but in recognition and renewal. Architecture does not repress the nomadic urge for excess and glory, but allows us, like a dancer, to appear, to reappear and to disappear.

