

INTUITION, MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Martin Gledhill

'I throw a spear into the darkness. That is intuition. Then I must send an army into the darkness to find the spear. That is intellect'.

Ingmar Bergman

Abstract: In this short essay inspired by Reena Ardeshana's Institute of Memory project located in Bucharest (referred to throughout as 'the project'), I will examine how her three 'gazes' intertwine to facilitate an intuitive, psycho-geographic means of forming Place. These locational readings, enchantingly titled 'child's', 'ruin' and 'labyrinth', in themselves suggest wider themes of intuition, memory and identity inherent in the architect's working method. The methodology of the project is unusual and therefore pertinent in that it is both analytical and playful. Ultimately my perspective is psychological, and in particular Jungian in that it draws on the concepts of the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung (1875 -1961) and the school of analytical psychology. By this means, I propose a psychological reading of the design process albeit in absentia. The Project, then, is more than the project.

Key words: intuition, memory, identity, play, space, Jungian psychoanalysis

INTUITION

Where, how and why do we begin?

In prose, painting, music and architecture alike, where do ideas come from?

For the lyrical poet Rainer Maria Rilke *'the first line is always given'*. This unassailable call from the *'angelic orders'*¹ ignites the poetic imagination. Similarly, the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion rather wonderfully proposes that ideas are looking for thinkers to think them. In both instances, the artist is a host to, and is immersed in, an atmosphere of creative thought or noosphere.² The artist, or in our case architect, variously acts as an agent, antenna, transmitter or butterfly catcher. Others, in contrast, including the mathematician Jacques Hadamard, suggest a more grounded hop, skip and jump from preparation and incubation leading to a moment of illumination and subsequent verification. This is a process of relentless analytical excavation and observation, where hard won inspiration favours the prepared.

In her own search for where to begin, rather delightfully Ardeshana turns to the unfettered, natural imagination of the 'child's gaze' in order to haul from the darkness one layer of understanding latent within her location in Bucharest. This is a move that of course is tangible in that the traces of the Roma children at play are used to incise the ground as an initial design move, but is all the more intriguing when read figuratively. As implied in the term Roma, the children occupy a liminal, betwixt and between place and in casting objects across the landscape in an imaginative arc, the children are both coupled to the ground and travel freely across and above it. As Ardeshana acknowledges, this gaze was the most difficult to assimilate (or ground) within her proposal and there are two points which we can extract here. The first is that out of that difficulty a creative leap emerges where the children's traces flip from plan to section - perspiration begets inspiration. The second is linked to the word play itself and suggests a wider pedagogical issue. For most of us, the word 'play' is comfortably associated with children, less so perhaps with the (apparently) earnest endeavours of architecture both in practice and the academy. More often than not we find ourselves as designers caught in a binary stand-off between the rational, pragmatic and purposeful, and the poetic, intuitive and playful processes of imagination. Arguably the dominance of the former reflects a cultural milieu which owes much to the philosophical consequence of the Enlightenment (perhaps Endarkenment might be a better term). This is an argument developed in Ian McGilchrist's *The Master and His Emissary* in which he looks to the neurologically model of left brain/right brain to suggest that we live in the grip not only of a 'divided brain' but also a psychic usurping of the natural regulative capacity of the right hemisphere by the left side. The crisp allure of the lucid favoured by many an academic institution overlooks and diminishes the liberating nuances of the ludic,

intuitive imagination.

One of the central tenets of Jung's model of the human psyche is the creative potential of holding (and enduring) the tension between two opposites. The intensifying of this conflict is at the heart of the hard, transformative toil of the therapeutic encounter and the libidinal³ drive to psychic wholeness. This is a process which acknowledges the coexistence, reconciliation, and possible transcendence of those opposites. As implied in its title, Jung's essay *Two Kinds of Thinking*⁴ postulates two modi operandi, namely direct and fantasy thinking. To put it differently, Jung argued for the acceptance of physical and psychic truths and the need for both in our collective and individual lives. Indeed, in his own life Jung wrestled with a kind of glorious tension between scientism and mysticism. E.F. Shumaker's notion of divergent and convergent thinking has some parallels with Jung's model and the beating pulse between fantasy and resolution will be familiar to many an architectural thinker. As implied in the opening quotation, the capacity to integrate intuition and intellect lays at the core of the creative act. This is anything but 'child's play'.

MEMORY

Where, how and why do we remember and forget?

The Greek goddess of memory was (and is) Mnemosyne. A mythological excursion maybe, but as the daughter of Gaia (earth) and Uranus (heaven) as well as the mother of the nine muses, she constitutes an intriguing, symbolic figure. Her genealogy involves the meeting of the above and the below. When read psychologically, the partnering of groundedness with airiness (read 'reality' and 'fantasy') is a union of mutual benefit. Furthermore, in giving birth to the muses whose guiding voices form the kernel of human ideas, inspiration and memory are inherently linked.

Arguably the practice of architecture is one of recalling, forming and at times reconstituting memory. I am probably not alone in feeling profoundly saddened by the devastating fires which consumed the medieval roof of Notre Dame and almost the entirety of the Glasgow School of Art - clearly more than their fabrics were lost. *The Destruction of Memory* is the subject and title of Robert Bevan's investigation into the psycho-cultural consequences of ideological acts which destroy buildings and therefore cultural memory as a military tactic.⁵ This amplified condition affirms the sense that buildings have a profound capacity to embody memory. This embodiment inevitably evokes an inquiry into our collective relationship with the past where the counterpart of destruction is preservation. Having completed her first degree against (in both senses of the word) the historic backdrop of the city of Bath, Ardeshana and myself are all too aware of the paralysing effect of architectural nostalgia⁶ and the 'shock of the new'. As with our first theme, we find ourselves in a second stand-off, one in which the past is pitted against the future (and vice versa) with no clear consensus of how to meaningfully intervene, add and renew in creating a sense of place. Do we preserve or demolish?

Whilst the discussion above is perhaps culturally extreme, it does however illuminate a more intimate dilemma implicit in the project. More often than not, the architect endures a kind of double ignorance when facing a site and its potential programme. Firstly, in having no innate knowledge or memory of 'the place' in which they are being asked to work (possibly for the first time), the 'helicopter architect' is really only a fleeting visitor. And secondly (and really this is a manifestation of the first state), the place maker is faced with a more intangible absence when beginning a project - 'the blank sheet of paper' or the 'green (in our case, brown) field site'. In this place of not knowing, we begin the desperate flailing for something to recognise, to hear, to find and to notice in order to begin - something to remember. From a literal perspective of course, the project is located in what appears to be an urban lacuna - the playground not only of the Roma children but also the bulldozer. Into this void the architect steps, bewildered, lost and maybe even alienated and so begins the task of remembering. In the reversing of a kind of cultural and topographical dementia, Ardeshana turns to the second of her three gazes - the ruins of the site.

The phenomenology of ruins held a particular fascination for the Picturesque and Romantic movements as it still does for many of us today. As the expression of time, nature, memory, mystery, imagination, human mortality and at times hubris, the ruin is an alluring and enduring trope. In exhuming the imprints of lost houses, lost monasteries and by implication, lost memories a second set of traces emerge from the project's site. These traces in effect rise up from the ground and complement

those of the Roma which, though starting above ground, eventually leave their mark in the ground. By this means, the site can be understood less as void but more so as a 'charged void'⁷ where nothing is something and absence becomes presence. In what might be termed the aesthetics of incompleteness (or decay) through an act of creative engagement, we seek to restore and complete the ruin in our minds. The ruin then is in a state of both becoming and unbecoming: by choreographing the various processes of change, transience and decay, the architect performs an act of physical and psychological healing. The Institute of Memory is both constructed of memory, and constructs memory. Here then memory is not so much recapitulated, remade or preserved but reformed and transformed in an ongoing, living and therapeutic process of assimilation through which a new identity is liberated.

Of the many conceptual divergences which have come to characterise the relationship between the one-time colleagues Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) and Carl Jung, one is especially relevant to our discussion. Jung's development of Freud's notion of the personal unconscious to include a 'deeper layer', which he termed the collective unconscious, implies a wider notion of shared and even archetypal memory. This concept constructs the human psyche as a palimpsest or series of strata moving down ancestral time but also through the common psyches of human groupings ranging from and including family, community and nation. This psychic model is especially apposite for us in that it derives from Jung's 'house dream' of 1909 in which he finds himself descending down through a house comprising successive architectural styles ranging from a Rococo salon to primitive cellar.⁸ At the risk of literalising, the resonance of the project's multi-layered methodology with Jung's psychic model suggests something profoundly innate in the working method. If memory in this sense is ever present, the question is - is it repressed or expressed? That dilemma is as much a psychotherapeutic issue as it is an architectural one.

IDENTITY

What identifies us?

'For the moment when the model will be most like him (her)self, In knowing how to find and catch such a moment consists the art of portrait painting.'
Dostoyevsky

Whilst Dostoyevsky is more obviously talking about identity in portraiture, his observation might well be applied to the understanding of the nature and identity of place. The project endeavours to construct an authentic sense of itself and in part this is intimately derived from an understanding of its location. This sense of belonging or genius loci being sought in the project is not however a dainty act of contextualism nor an act of heroic, abstract intervention. Paradoxically, the proposal as it ultimately emerged is as much an exercise in repairing as it is one of scarring. Especially when read from a distance (in both senses) the project represents a scar or tear running across what remains of the city grain in this part of Bucharest. At the risk of stretching the metaphor, the term 'scar' can be read less derisively as a distinguishing mark. In this regard perhaps, 'tattoo' would be a better word in that it signifies identity and belonging. Paradoxically both a scar and a tattoo are made by an act of wounding either inflicted upon, or willingly chosen by their host. Likewise, even the most delicate acts of 'architectural dentistry' are disruptive and even destructive. Ironically then, architecture could be understood as a process of creative destruction.

The third of Ardeshana's analytical gazes is the 'labyrinth'. This viewpoint sits enigmatically between the earthliness of the 'child's gaze' and the meta-perspective of memory as manifest in the 'ruin gaze'. As a compositional grammar, this third gaze not only consolidates competing strata but in doing so develops a spatial complexity, uniqueness and authenticity which is enchantingly clear and diffuse at the same time. This is the project's true identity.

The symbolic charge of the labyrinth stretches at least as far back as the archetypal maze which Theseus navigates with the help of Ariadne's thread. It continues through history to the Gothic cathedrals, although the allegorical centrality of the labyrinth in the pavement of Chartres is perhaps lost beneath the tourists' selfie shuffles these days. Nonetheless, the etymological affinity of the words maze and a-mazing is suggestive of the labyrinth's enduring hold on our imaginations. This is the thesis of Charlotte Higgins aptly titled *Red Thread - On Mazes and Labyrinths*.⁹

From an aerial (removed) perspective, the labyrinth's twists, turns and dead-ends make sense - less so from the disorientation experienced on the ground.

In the mythologies of both Greece and Christendom, the phenomenon of the labyrinth is linked to a directional force in that there is symbolic destination. In the first instance, the labyrinth is a mechanism of oppression as the minotaur is incarcerated within it. But what were the Cretans (and us now) really scared of exactly? As with Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, the minotaur is much understood as a being that stands for a dual nature - that of human and beast - read 'rational' and 'intuitive'. Whether Theseus did humanity a favour when he killed his prey, I doubt. And as for his abandonment of Ariadne, whose intuitive guile unwinds the story - enough said! By way of contrast in the second, Christian, example, the teleology operates almost in reverse as it is more aspirational than repressive. The allegory suggests that whilst the metaphorical way is difficult, glory ultimately awaits. Indeed, the attainment of that glorious end is contingent upon that labyrinthine difficulty. It would be too obvious to suggest that the creative process is labyrinthine but in reading both of the above symbolisms concurrently, we can interweave two considerations: firstly 'destination', whether that be 'monster' or God - i.e. project in the directional sense of the word. And secondly 'journey' - i.e. process by which we find our way. Considering the notion that 'to wonder is the beginning of all knowledge', here we might just as well supplant wonder with wander. The project's ludic methodology alludes to this interchangeability and complementarity in its imaginative process.

By way of a final point regarding the labyrinth, its designer was Daedalus, the father of Icarus and the archetypal representation of the craftsman as well as architect. Whilst Icarus's soaring exploits with the 'garish sun' more obviously has a firm hold on our mythological imaginations, those of his father are less well remembered. Who do we honour as hero and heroine? The tension between thinking and making is also implicit in this issue, and of course both define the art and craft of architecture. The project's narrative materiality offers a fine grain methodology which complements and continues the three gazes of the child, ruin and labyrinth. The architectural gaze is surely one seen from afar and close up, and is heroic as well as ordinary.

The figure of the hero/heroine figures large in Jungian psychology. For example, the story of Odysseus's homecoming to Ithaca is often read as a metaphor for evolution of the psyche. This is a process which Jung terms 'individuation' - the imperative of consciously becoming one's 'true self'. This is distinct from the individualism which arguably characterises the contemporary world. The Jungian model posits a self-realising, regularising force at the core of the human psyche referred to as the Self. The capital letter 'S' is deliberate in that it is used to distinguish it from the idea of ego and coupled to it are the concepts of (and issues with) persona and shadow. The persona or social mask(s) are ones we all necessarily wear; Jung's argument however is that our persona become psychologically problematic when we over-identify with them. The shadow is in part the realm of repressed and 'darker' aspects of ourselves but more so, the dormant, unfulfilled and unknown potential within us. The stereotypical image of the architect (and indeed any project itself) can be seen through this conceptual lens. Working methods, built projects and architectural personalities alike are vulnerable to mimicry and a kind of expedient, uncritical idealising. An authentic architectural identity or 'true self' is as much a question of belonging to oneself, as it is a relational engagement with people, locale, programme and cultural context. The chance encounters evident in the project assist the search for an authentic architectural identity.

CONCLUSION

I have endeavoured in this short and perhaps esoteric piece, to argue for the poetic rationalism which I find to be so implicit in the project. On account of its playful, architectural innocence, the distinguishing feature of Ardeshana's methodology is that through it, an uninhibited, creative landscape is generated within which the 'angelic voices' which Rilke alludes to, are to be heard. She has wrought a fine and difficult balance in constellating those voices into a tangible form. The project occupies, as does all architecture, a liminal place between the real and the imagined in whatever way we understand those terms. Moreover, the project points to something beyond itself. For this author at least, the psychological understanding of the creative process remains an unexamined aspect of design education. Given the

psychological layering which can be extended across the project, I, together with the reader, may well wonder what affect the project had on its author's own psyche. As a student once said to me 'you are not your work but you are the project'.

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NOTES

- 1 C.f. J.B. Leishman's and Stephen Spender's Introduction to Rilke's *The First Elegy of The Duino Elegies*. Chatto & Windus, London, 1981.2. Vittorio Gregotti was the editor of *Casabella* from January 1982 to January 1996.
- 2 A term used by the Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in *The Vision of the Past*. William Collins, Sons, Glasgow, 1922. Broadly meaning the atmosphere of human consciousness and mental activity.
- 3 I use the word in the Jungian sense to mean life energy rather than its reductive uses as sexual drive (although the two are not mutually exclusive.)
- 4 Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler (eds.); William McGuire (executive ed.); R.F.C. Hull (trans), *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation Vol. 5*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London & Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1912/52.
- 5 Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*. Reaktion Books, London, 2016.
- 6 The etymology of the word renders it as 'a longing for home'.
- 7 A term I have borrowed from the monograph of the work of Peter and Alison Smithson - *The Charged Void: Architecture*. Monacelli Press, New York, 2002.
- 8 C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections; An Autobiography*. Recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, and translated by Richard and Clara Winston. London: Collins and Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1961/62/63.
- 9 Published by Jonathan Cape, London, 2018.