Reading a Place
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Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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August 9, 2002
Blacksburg, Virginia
"The street, which I imagined might communicate to my life its surprises and detours, the street with its disturbances and its glances, was my one true element. There I partook, as nowhere else, of the wind of circumstance."

(Louis Aragon: "Le Paysan de Paris")
A series of chance encounters with the city of Cleveland leads to a non-objective reading of this place. It is an intuitive approach, an attempt to understand the complexity of a city in fragments and to change the city’s perception of itself. This thesis is a reciprocal play between conceiving and creating, revealing their close interrelation. It is an inquiry into how our imagination transforms our built and not-built environment. To be an architect is to dwell at the interface between the imaginary and the real, to draw from both worlds.
dedication
This book is dedicated to my mother and father, who brought me up in a very imaginative, supportive and loving way, to my sister, with whom I shared my imaginary worlds from early childhood on.
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crossing the boundaries
I believe that architecture can as well be defined as an expression of how we shape the space inside of our heads and draw boundaries between the interior of our minds and the external world.

Architecture oscillates between the imaginary and the real.

"Architecture is the visible expression of how a specific historical-cultural era shapes its space and boundaries between the inside and the outside."

(Robert D. Romanyshyn: "Technology as Symptom and Dream")
The environment changes by association and interpretation.

The way we approach a place—how we perceive and understand it—is a central element of reflection. Our understanding determines how we shape and constantly re-shape our environment.

A city can be a magical space conducive to a non-objective vision of the world. Buildings are interlocked into the urban fabric and its complexity of meanings. Wandering through the streets without plan or purpose can result in a sequence of surprising encounters and unleash chains of association.
The Surrealists understood very well the crisis of modern culture from the inside and were able to challenge it on the territories beyond pure thought. They tried to reconstruct a qualitative universe as opposed to the positivistic world of quantities.

The Surrealists had an interest in extraordinary every-day phenomena and studied rituals, myths, dreams, hallucinations, objective chance and madness.

The primary goal of surrealism was to reach an absolute point of reconciliation of dream and reality in order to find authentic life. The Surrealists believed in the existence of a key that opens the secret corridor to the mystery of life.
The Surrealists looked for imaginary ways of disrupting the given, conventional reality. However, Surrealism was much more than a mosaic of provocative revelations, more than merely a method of inquiry. The Surrealists believed that there is a profound meaning in the absurdity of life and that this absurdity could be transmitted into art. They were seeking to create a new myth.

"Can’t the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?...I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of reality, a surreality..."

(Andre Breton: “First Manifesto of Surrealism”)
In his book ‘Le Paysan de Paris’ Louis Aragon gives a collection of loosely drawn tales in which a character wanders through the streets of Paris. Locations change abruptly and are sometimes imaginary. It is a sequence of chance encounters and mysterious events.

“I must make painful effort to shake off this mental habit so that my mind, as would seem natural, can credit what my body sees and touches...

Is the knowledge that is derived from reason entitled to oppose, even for an instant, the knowledge of our senses?...
...In the confusion of certain places, there are similar keys giving access to the infinite. Where humans pursue their most promiscuous activities, the inanimate will sometimes reflect their deep-seated motives: our cities are thus populated with unfathomed sphinxes who will not halt the passing dreamer to ask him questions of life and death if he doesn’t train on them his wandering inner eye...”

(Louis Aragon: “Le Paysan de Paris”)
A collage to the Surrealists was a means of reaching two distant realities and showing a spark of their proximity.

To me the collage has been the exploitation of chance encounters and startling juxtapositions in my working process. The existing is sometimes obvious and disclosed, sometimes hidden and encoded. It is always the basis for the new. Reading the existing in different ways has been an inexhaustible source of association for me.
“Each day alters the modern feeling of existence. A mythology takes shape and comes undone. It is a science of life belonging to the innocent, a living science which engenders and kills itself. Am I too old at twenty six, to participate in this miracle? Will my feeling of wonder inherent in commonplace things indure much longer? I see it perishing in men, who advance in years as on a road that levels out, who bend ever more adroitly to the routine of this world, who progressively blunt their taste and flair of the fantastic. My fate, that is what to my despair, I shall never know.”

(Louis Aragon: “Le Paysan de Paris”)

“...he [the child] likes to link his imagined objects and situations to the tangible and visible things of the real world.”

(Sigmund Freud: “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”)

Escaping the limits of logic and common sense we enter the region of childhood visions and dreams. To understand artistic creativity we might look at children at play. When children play they create imaginary worlds of their own, worlds in which they may become completely absorbed.
But any one who really knew
between the first and
with one hand, I say: 44
all in one of the hundred
and some impressive opera-
and the whole of our
experience.

"Hopeless with
Riddley."
exploring a place

“To have original, extraordinary, and perhaps even immortal ideas, one has but to isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most commonplace happenings appear to be new and unfamiliar, and in this way reveal their true essence.”

(Arthur Schopenhauer: ‘Parerga and Paralipomena’)
bird's eye's view
distance
detachment
control?

walking
bodily experience
tired legs
exhaustion
being exposed to
weather, sounds,
scents,
light and shade

driving
velocity
movie-like experience
immerse yourself into a place
descend / climb

place as
topography
landscape
everyday culture

place of
plays
encounters
Historically the Flats of Cleveland, Ohio were the transportation and economic hub of the region because of their siting at the northern terminus of the Ohio and Erie Canals.

Decades later, the Industrial Revolution ushered in an era of heavy industry, manufacturing, warehousing and distribution. This activity led to dramatic growth and established Cleveland as a national center of industry and commerce - with all the unwanted consequences (Rust Belt, environmental degradation, etc.)

The “Burning River” will forever be a symbol of Cleveland’s decline.

The bridges in the Flats are one of the area’s most fascinating features. Nine distinct types of bridges traverse the Cuyahoga including several movable types.
The Flats, a post-industrial wasteland, divide city center and historic neighborhoods.
A spirit of openness and receptivity can be exercised very well in the Flats, being a wide area on the border between the inner city and the outer suburbs and giving an increased sense that ‘anything could happen’.
While wandering through the Flats I made an attempt to lay my consciousness open to a series of impressions:

What do we perceive if we read the city as dream, as layers of history, as poem or play, as psychic labyrinth, as organism, or as a system of signs?
There is a connection between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. Walking down the street, trying to recall something, I automatically slow down.

Another time, remembering an unpleasant moment and trying to shake it off, I unconsciously speed up, as if trying to distance myself from a thing still too close to me.

"The remembrance is above all the site of the memory. Upon this base the memory can unfold itself and call up fragments of life, moments of happiness and periods of time."

(Andre Breton: “First Manifesto of Surrealism”)
collecting fragments
The city is a vision of connectedness and correspondence, an expression of analogically linked discoveries. It is a space filled with signs I try to decipher on my journey.

the order of a place

downtown cleveland  
upperworld

city founded on a bluff above the cuyahoga river  
protection  
distance  
overview

the grid  
orientation  
clarity of structure
An overlap and interchange of different experiences result in a labyrinth of connections. To walk down this labyrinth means to simultaneously explore circuits and networks of thoughts, recesses of emotions.
The city is a space filled with metaphors of ongoing transformations - the principle of flux.

the potential of a place

everything is possible
place in flux
constantly changing
unpredictable
forks
bends
perspectives
openness
endlessness
The isolation enforced by the Cuyahoga River gives the Flats a notion of mystery.

the enigma of a place

a sense of ordinary things in a mysterious void
The dream-thought is often a kind of thinking in opposites. An unexpected juxtaposition of ‘distant realities’ is a source of inspiration.

Heat and blown dust give the place a spectral appearance.

the melancholy of a place

light and haze
twilight zone
the suggestive presence of hidden things
The industrial remnants give an increased sense of the individual’s loneliness in an indifferent world.

the silence of a place

wasted and left behind collision collapse confusion

following the circumstance reaching dead ends chance encounters surprising vistas and perspectives
upperworld
the external world

the totality of things and events which exist outside the ego - the world with its landscapes, cities, houses, streets, squares and gardens, the things, the horizon, the sky and the cosmos.

underworld
the inner world

the space inside of the head of each ego is completely inside and invisible to other human beings. a dark, imaginary cave as large as the universe with floating islands of consciousness, with paths, corridors and labyrinths, with sequences of dark and light rooms interconnected, with thoughts, sentences and voices.
a place that is situated at the interface between the inner world of the ego and the exterior space of the world

a place at the threshold between underworld and upperworld

bridge - threshold - link

a place where glances of the inner chaos are rendered visible

outward glances, inward glances

a place of insights and panoramas

a transitional state between conceiving and creating
“Within the twilight zone of the memories one can find the emblems of a mythical theatre. It is a distant, eccentric theatre, whose stage is as estranged from life as an island full of spirits which materialise themselves under the cover of darkness. The night is the climate of theatre as mythology.”

(Andre Breton: ‘First Manifesto of Surrealism’)
city as theatrical space

moving - remaining still
performing - registering
presenting - grasping
interpreting - understanding
“The street is a rectangular stage set where encounters, gossip, games, fights, jealousies, courtship, and displays of pride occur.”

(Aldo Rossi: “The Architecture of the City”)
city as theatrical space
transforming a place

“The discovery of a new beginning in an existing space acts like a vacuum permitting stories to flow into it.

Emptiness is one of the essential spaces of theatre.”

(Louis Aragon: "Le Paysan de Paris")
The beginning of the design process is an unexplicable act. Some ideas spring from my reading of the place.
A close interconnection of water and land (indentations and piers) characterizes the new landscape. Industrial remnants and moving bridges (partly still active) become an integral part of it. The goal is to enhance rather than take away the unique features of the Flats by juxtaposing the existing and the new.
The movable bridges of the Flats remind me of a theatre’s stage-machinery. Industrial settings have inspired performing artists before. The Cuyahoga River seems to be the orchestra pit between the Flats and the City.
The separation and isolation of the Flats through the Cuyahoga is enforced by the topography of the place. Downtown Cleveland, sitting on a bluff, rules over the area almost ignoring the industrial wasteland at its feet. A connection is necessary to revitalize the Flats.
city as theatrical space

1. theatre landscape (vertical)
   school for performing arts
   school as catalyst

2. threshold
   activate the in-between
   bridges connecting down-town/school for performing
   arts with theatre park in the
   flats

3. theatre landscape (horizontal)
   theatre park
   recreational and cultural
   living spaces
In the glacial epoch the drifting earth crust created folds and plateaus. The moving ice-masses of this period carried gravel, sand, clay and boulders. Cleveland’s bluff is a result of this movement. Over a period of ten-thousand years, the valley was cut by running water, forming the Cuyahoga River.

The shifting earth masses generated plateaus on different levels. As the cutting water, plateaus are features that determine the new architectural landscape. A close interconnection between land and water results in a landscape-relief.

moving earth masses
horizontal theatre landscape

stage - auditorium

a single undivided place without partition of any kind
direct contact between audience and the show
between audience and actors
city as backdrop
city as stage
performance encircling the audience
performance on water
audience on water
city as backdrop

Theatre is a blend of the outside world with the imagination.

Architecture is the meeting of space and life.

The theatre park is a sequence of settings which punctuate spacious intersections and prompt a sense of dramatic focus.
"...sometimes the importance of an event itself 'gives place' the spatial transformations of a site."

(Aldo Rossi: "The Architecture of the City")

Plateaus at different levels, display-screens, ramps, bridges and underground spaces serve as stage settings in this park. The architecture of the park also provides multiple opportunities for access to and from the water. Some of the existing industrial buildings are re-used by the performing arts school (workshops etc.).

The park could be the catalyst for future development in the Flats.
Water is the ideal medium for the de-realisation of the existing reality.

"Whether they admit it or not, whether a conscious or unconscious act, at heart audiences are searching for a poetic state of mind, a transcendent condition by means of love, crime, war or insurrection."

(Antonin Artaud: “The Theatre and the Double”)
I am falling.
I am falling.
I express my fear with the sound of fury, in a solemn bellowing.

...

I cry out in dreams, but I know I am dreaming; my will-power prevails on BOTH SIDES OF DREAMS.

...

But I must fall in order to scream this struck-down cry. I fall into caves from which I cannot emerge, from which I will never emerge.

...

(Antonin Artaud: “Seraphim’s Theatre”)
vertical theatre landscape

"The action will unfold, extending its trajectory from floor to floor, from place to place, with sudden outbursts flaring up in different spots like conflagrations."

(Antonin Artaud: "The Theatre and its Double")
In order to establish a connection between the two worlds on either side of the Cuyahoga River, a ‘satellite’ of the Flats is ‘transplanted’ to downtown Cleveland.

Programmatically as well as architecturally the two sides are related. They correspond: one in a horizontal direction, the other in a vertical plane.
transplanting a place
The performance tower marks the entrance to the city center of Cleveland. At the same time it points to and gives a hint of the new performance park in the Flats. The connecting bridge is a visible link.
It is through defining borders that space becomes visible. The same principle applies to the psychic realm inside our heads. We have to construct vessels, housing and traps, entrances and exits in order to render it visible. The reality of the external world reflects the reality of our minds.

"I personally feel that a box is an entrance to another world. I don't know to where, some other world. I say this, but the opening to that other world is not very different from a dead-end alley if I stifle my nausea as I examine the world outside my little observation window... I am a box man, which is the same as not existing... A box man can't very well take off his box and simply return to the ordinary world. When he takes it off it is to emerge into another world just as an insect metamorphosis."

(Kobo Abe: "The Box Man")
The performance tower consists of two structurally and thematically different parts that embrace each other.

Four volumes define and protect the inside space like a shell. The volumes are oriented at different angles: The shell breaks open. The resulting gaps direct daylight inside the tower and permit views to the outside.

(trans-)forming space

The inner life of the tower is characterized by an open space: platforms, bridges and ramps are supported by concrete columns. The heart of the open space is a void, a vertical shaft, offering a setting for performances in a vertical direction. The firewalls of the existing building collect the inner space from the other side.
level 01
street-level
1 cafe
2 retail
3 exhibition

level 04
bridge-level - entrance to the school for performing arts
1 restaurant
2 school for performing arts
3 exhibition
The floors change continuously from bottom to top, forming a space that expresses movement in verticality.
level 09
school for performing arts
1 lobby
2 performance space
3 classroom

level 11
school for performing arts
1 lobby
2 performance space
3 classroom
The lobby space projects out of the building, breaking through the rigid structure of the protecting shell. Performances could extend into this lobby space revealing the activity inside of the performing arts school. It is a contribution to the street and to the city.
level 18
hotel
1 reception
2 lounge
3 bar
4 breakfast room / cafe
5 roof garden

level 12
school for performing arts:
  dining hall
  kitchen

level 13
office space

level 14
office space
level 19
hotel (wellness area)
1 swimming pool
2 hot tub
3 massage
4 fitness

(trans-)forming space

level 16
office space
level 17
office space
level 24
studio apartment
1 kitchen
2 dining room
3 living room
4 roof garden

level 20
hotel

level 21
hotel

level 22
hotel
**level 25**
- studio apartment
- 1 sleeping gallerie

---

**level 23**
- hotel

---

**east elevation**

---

(trans-)forming space
level 01 - 03  
retail  
cafe  
restaurant

level 04-06  
school for performing arts:  
vertical performance space  
lobby

level 07  
school for performing arts: library

level 08-11  
school for performing arts:  
dining hall

level 09-11  
school for performing arts:  
administration  
faculty  
exhibition

level 01 - 03  
retail  
exhibition  
cafe  
restaurant
level 18-19
hotel: roofgarden
wellness
restaurant/bar

level 20-23
hotel

level 24-25
studio apartment

level 13-17
office space
the shell
“And the show’s true nature will not be empty words any more than the action’s direct, immediate hold on the spectators. For the action, diffused over a vast area, will require the lighting for a performance to hold the audience as well as the characters.”

(Antonin Artaud: "The Theatre and its Double")
The vertical performance space provides opportunities for experimental theatre. It is a space of possibilities as well as a space of challenge and restraints.
the void - vertical performance space
"We want to make theatre a believable reality inflicting this kind of tangible laceration, contained in all true feeling, on the heart and senses. In the same way as our dreams react on us and reality reacts on our dreams, so we believe ourselves able to associate mental pictures with dreams, effective in so far as they are projected with the required violence. And the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, not for a servile imitation of reality."

(Antonin Artaud: ‘The Theatre and its Double’)
the void
“I believe that as from a certain point of view the sight of someone in a dream is a proof of his metaphysical reality, so, from the same point of view, the revelation of a work of art is the proof of the metaphysical manner that something appears to us and provokes in us the image of a work of art, an image, which in our souls awakens surprise - sometimes, meditation often, and always, the joy of creation.”

(Giorgio de Chirico: ‘Meditations of a Painter’)
As a mode of making, architecture can reveal qualitative differences between contiguous elements. Further it can transform these differences into habitable settings, constructed thresholds.

A threshold, a physical transition, is a metaphor as well. It gives place to the tensions and conflicts between an individual’s conscious and unconscious. It is a place for a possible reconciliation of the imaginary and the real. From this point of view, architecture can activate its own highly-charged psychological attributes.

Further the threshold describes the transition from conception to creation, an in-between space rather than a clear line. To be an architect means to dwell in this transitional space, between conceiving and creating, between the imaginary and the real.

Architecture is analogous to the human mind: as the mind, architecture suggests rather than determines or imposes.
I want to thank Professor Heinrich Schnoedt, Professor William Galloway and Professor Scott Gartner: you have been very supportive and inspiring teachers; Professor Mark Schneider: you have challenged and influenced my way of thinking in a profound way, far exceeding the study of architecture; Mike Temple: for being my friend and companion. It has been a pleasure to share my thoughts and time with you; Dawn Bushnaq: for sharing moments of insanity. I so much enjoyed your intellect and your sense of humor; all my friends in Blacksburg: for sharing times of hard work and fun.
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