

Reflected Ceiling Plans

We allow the plan to dominate, which is a way of saying we insist on the POV being superior in a literal way, a view from above, which like a bird or God, sees those hidden sides and twisty turns that puzzle those in flatland life below. We give in to the convention of showing the ceiling as if it has fallen down to the floor, as if celestial features had mapped 1:1 onto a resting place suggesting its ruin, crushing the plan elements. To *preserve* scale, to allow the ceiling plan and floor plan to be superimposed, we commit not just a scale violation but a kind of scale atrocity.

We collapse the difference between the high and the low, but our unconscious brilliance in doing this is that the mapping is also a kind of map between the living and the dead, one that we need to look into a mirror to decipher, like the writing of Leonardo da Vinci. Like the dream, which cannot distinguish living and dead, we find ourselves not able to distinguish, in this scale catastrophe, the order of looking up and the order of looking down. A visitor from Planet Lacan would be amazed to see how the conventional architectural working drawing of the reflected ceiling plan perfectly captures the idea of the death drive.

So the reflected ceiling plan doesn't give us the chance to do what the ceiling wants us to do, look up. And, when we are in places where the ceiling frescos have been restored and put on view for tourists, we feel a bit of shame in looking into those special rolling devices that let us look up by looking down. Wonder, it seems, is connected to the obligation to raise our eyes, and if it gives us a pain in the neck so what? We are in an inferior position appreciating what is in a superior one.

The ally of wonder is the dream, where we lie flat and look up. There is no more wonderful way to do this than in a field on summer hay when the sky is blue and it's hot enough to make the breeze refreshing. With one's beloved near by, with a well-stocked picnic basket, the ease of looking up is easier because we have given up looking around. We don't care who's coming or what else is on the horizon. We are not scanning for danger; nature holds no threats. Our concern is what animals the clouds have become, what birds can amuse us, how sounds arrive in a different way to that place we finally give ourselves to gravity. Our necks are relaxed because our bodies have assumed the position of the reflected ceiling diagram for all the gods to see.

The face muscles are pulled back when we lie down, the sun and sky fill our eyes with extra luminosity, we loose weight. If we sagged standing up, this is gone. Our prone body is svelt and cosmic. And, just as the best booze and best books are on the top shelf, the best is epitomized by that blue of blue and crystalline dazzle we get from the sky, and the pleasure of lying down. True, there is wonder in looking down, in thinking we are getting a special kind of knowledge, but are the secrets of any city we fly into ever disclosed as we look out of the airplane window? Do we get more than a momentary techie thrill with Google Earth? Apart from the connections to spy satellite photography and the allure of maps, the discovery of mystery, the lost and found of life, is always going to be a matter of wandering around in what's below.

In a strange experiment, seven hospitals around the U. S. have agreed to construct soffits around operating theaters and to place objects on the soffits, invisible from below, to confirm or deny accounts of patients who, when they have been clinically dead for a few seconds or minutes, return to life to report walks down tunnels into light or even encounters with heavenly beings. The most common element of

these stories is the reverse view of the almost-deceased, their looking back at themselves, surrounded by the surgical team and instruments, lying flat as a body while they hover as a disconnected spirit on the way up and out. These accounts are so detailed and, apparently, accurate, that the test aims to challenge the idea by adding some unexpected objects to see if the dream is not simply a rotation of what the patient sees and supplements — stuffed animals seems to be the favorite choice.

If the plan view is really the time for the soul to say goodbye to the body and not just a power view to aid contractors installing vents and lights, it's in architecture's best interests to see how looking down is related to a going up, and forget about power, especially the power implied by the working drawing as an instruction. Instructions have to be made, and are often made in reverse to the way products that result from instructions are enjoyed. Print-makers etch a mirror image into the steel plate, photographers of old used to create negatives so that viewers could just double negate to get the right view again.¹ But, not many people are able to get the kind of pleasure reading the score of Beethoven's 9th Symphony that they get from listening to a good performance. The scaffolding can be beautiful but the building should be more beautiful. We shouldn't cry when we tear it down.

The dream is not the negative, the dream is a version of the positive that is "not quite positive," but it's not a reverse or backwards plate that, when printed, will produce some positive. It is unreal by going either slightly under or over the mark of reality.

Drawings made to instruct builders are not intended to expand imagination, they aim to shut imagination down, to make the intentions of the architect clear so that the builder can carry them out. For *other architects* they are like dreams because, in making the drawing, we see the lapse between the architect's thinking and doubt and his/her decision to "go ahead" and make the definite line definite. Is there a dream space of design? Of course, but we have to give instructions while fully awake, the dream must be suppressed. When the work becomes a "dream come true" it is always exclusionary — a dream for some but not for others, a dream disconnected from the fluidity of time and thrown onto the spatial grill like a fish caught for dinner.

Dreaming happens mostly as a diagram that has us looking up, but there's meaning in that to say that it's as much as looking down. When we really look down in dreams, it's because we are experiencing the rare treat of flying or floating, and there's no power issue or spying operation involved. There are two things: a feeling of a delicate, gentle liberty and wonder that we had not discovered it before, as if the power to fly had always been right at hand. The explanation for flying dreams is that the body experiences the sensations of breathing in reverse, instead of air inside the body we sense the body inside air. The brain adds details that fill this out. Note, this is not mirroring. A mirror image is a projection in the tradition of perspectives and ballistics calculations. It's the canon ball that hits the wall and comes back at you. Throwing, hitting, dodging, ricocheting. Magritte called out this fantasy of mirroring as the model of speculating by showing the young man in front of a mirror that refuses to do its job, that turns its back on

¹ Double negation does not return the binary state perfectly, "1/0/1" so to speak. The interval between the two deaths in ethnographic practices demonstrates this. Literal death is "negated" by an imagined interval of travel and trial, terminated by a second death in relation to the Symbolic order (judgment, vindication/condemnation). The soul's wandering ends; this imagined period usually corresponds to the time it takes for the flesh to desiccate and the skeleton to become the corpse's permanent remains. This drying-out period prepares the body for resurrection, where a new flesh is restored, but this 1/0/1, because it is eternal rather than mortal, makes the on/off/on process into a "super-symmetry" where double negation uses what was contingent about the first state to "prove" what is necessity in the final state.

projective geometry, so to speak. The fact of this refusal comes down to the necessity to create a gap in the mirror's attempt to represent us, and that gap, Magritte must have realized because he put a clue into this painting, is the chirality of thinking and even perceiving that makes everything a "lipogram," a code created by separating halves of things so that their reunion takes place in a place inside a place. Edgar Allan Poe did this so well in his short story, "The Purloined Letter," that we can compare the way the letter is hidden by being left out in the open with Georges Perec's novel, *A Void*, which is written entirely without the letter "e."

The point is not that this is hard to do in French or even English, but it's how the other words react to this absence, how they must take detours and accept substitutions. The lipogram is the road-map we use to get around the elephant in the room, and in a fundamental sense, all art is a lipogram of one kind or another. Here is my point: the mirror tempts us to think metaphor, the substitution of one signifier for another, is art; the lipogram proves to us that metonymy, where signifiers create meaning out of the relations they have *with* and *on account of each other*, is art. Drawings that must instruct builders cannot leave anything important out, they must be metaphorical, a presentation of one kind of signifier on behalf of another, a line for a wall. Drawings can however be metonymical, as Scarpa's surely were, in that they show how thought was trying to "get around" things that could not be drawn. No chance of seeing these as mirrors, as metaphors. They are metonymies. Their *relations* make *spaces*. In a dream we do not get instructions, or rather we don't get *clear* instructions. We get *relations*, we get *spaces*. If we don't literally float in space, we at least seem to float in time, relaxed, our muscles pulled back, making us svelte and light.

Buildings are often promoted as being "dreams come true," but the dream always seems to be someone else's dream. There is a "Trump Tower" aspect to all buildings, the ideological component that, at the same time it provides something it claims to be wonderful for someone who deserves or pays for it, is at the same time excluding others who will not enjoy it. This is architecture as ideology, and architecture is fundamentally ideological, at the level of being a business at least. Do we dream of buildings? Hard to say; dreams rarely afford the long presentational spaces required to see buildings as objects. Rather, we are more often inside buildings, moving through spaces. Even when outdoors in a dream we have a sense that the "for us" aspect of space makes it intimate, and sometimes this intimacy is horrifying. I say this to address one playful premise of the comic strip series, *Little Nemo*, where a young dreamer dreams of an inverted world where he is able to walk on ceilings. There are many other premises — the use of the bed as transportation, the defection of logic, the multiplication of Nemo's self-certain identity. Does Nemo get beyond the ideology of the strip, however? Does he achieve the irony that Herriman achieved in *Krazy Kat*, where the view of the panels is called into question? That is, are our demands for a coherent narrative always accepted as unquestionable? Nemo, ideology; *Krazy Kat*, anti-ideology, I think. Along these lines, I would point out that Nemo gets his kicks by distorting normality, but in the process he makes the normal more real than it deserves to be. There is something slimy about his return, his acceptance of material comfort, his "it was just a dream" attitude. With *Krazy*, the melancholy accentuated by the landscape and weird objects in the sky never leaves. We sometimes find the Kat singing a tune with puzzling lyrics on the last frame. This seems a bit like saying that Nemo "ideologizes" the imagination as a kind of wonder-fantasy, saying "look what I can do when I break the rules," while *Krazy* activates awareness of how weird the rules are in the first place, how enigma is inescapable and not entirely amusing.

The Kat's seriousness is tempered with gentle regard, his love for the Mouse, his accommodation of the Dog's infatuation. No one knows, even, if the Kat is a girl or a boy cat, "he" seems to be both or at least either/or. Nemo is always a little boy, always in need of adult others, which includes the adult other who adulates him while looking at the Sunday edition funny pages. Crazy doesn't need us, we need him, or her, or him/her. That's what holds our attention. Dreams are there to keep us asleep, and sleep is what the brain needs to relax and allow the garbage that accumulates during waking activities to be taken away by the bloodstream. Think of the dream as a "one minute more" thing. There to entertain and hold our attention as dreamers, not to instruct or warn (although this can be the case), and certainly not to admonish (although this is also sometimes the case).

Dreams are weird, no less so in that they disappear on awakening; also their time sense runs against our linear model idea. Florensky described the event dream where an external event triggers a dream in which the event itself figures as the *last* rather than the first thing that happens. This can be explained, I think, if we understand how the unconscious actually retains experience in the order in which they are received, and how the unconscious is a kind of memory that, when requested, can only produce things *via* the second memory, which we think is our only real memory. But, it's not. The unconscious remembers or rather retains everything, even when we are in the womb. Nothing is lost, nothing forgotten. But, then again, nothing is given back like a xerox copy of a file. It's put into a code that we can only barely crack because the code is a double code and the double is not just the code, it's the message.

In dreams we have lucid dreaming, which is an element of awareness or even control of the dreamer in the dream. There is also the omen or dread that exerts influence and predicts events in the future. Guilt shapes some dreams into admonitions, pleasure too makes its imprint. On the reality side, there is day-dreaming, the most insipid form dreams can take, based on idle wandering, the bane of all grade school teachers. But, there is also the useful power of allowing images to happen in a dream-like state. In its pathological form, these are delusions and they can be so powerful that they dominate all other holds on reality. Dreams have after-effects that haunt our waking reality, senses of foreboding usually but sometimes happy anticipating. Unlike the lucid dream, where we gain control where we normally have none, dream after-effects cripple our happiness or give us promises that are so thin that they disappoint more often than not. The back-and-forth between sleeping and waking shows only one thing: there is a boundary, and the boundary is a gap, a chasm. Going from one side to another is rarely easy, but the fact that there is traffic all over the place makes us assess each side in terms of what is mirrored on the other.

In such cases, the model used to talk about the uncanny is often useful. We say that opposites do not form binaries, which place opposites at the end of a single line, one on either side and consider the middle ground as a problem. Rather we say that each element is inscribed into the interior of the other. In our case, the dream is not just inside waking reality, it's at the heart, but a heart that is alien and uncommunicable even though it serves as a center. This antagonism is found on the opposite side, but in reverse. Dreams have, at their core, a heart of wakefulness, alertness, of reality made into a Real with a capital 'R'. We never get out of the antagonism, we are never "fully" in a world where only one or the other force presides. We are never fully awake, never fully asleep. The antagonism prevents either side from being a utopia, so we cannot say "dream world" without also saying that it looks perfect but at its core there's this nagging flaw, this little demon. It would be better to draw a big circle, label the interior "antagonism," and draw two arrows running through it, one towards the dream, the other towards waking.

Does it matter which train we take, the dream or waking? Chuang-Tse thought not, in his cute aphorism about the man who dreamed he was a butterfly and wondered that he might also be a butterfly dreaming he was a man. This look makes idealists or solipsists out of everyone, and is naggingly irrefutable but we do not need to treat subjectivity as a prison in this way. We have some limited grasp of the structure of our situation. I would argue that this is what makes us “psychoanalytical subjects” and not other kinds of subjects. That is, the nature of the subject revealed by psychoanalytic theory that is about structure will, if it does its job correctly, will reveal how the drives, the death-drive in particular, keep subjectivity centered on the function of antagonism. Certainly those models of subjectivity that promise us peace and happiness “if only” we fix our attitudes, whether it’s to stop using computers or to recycle, are not modeling subjectivity but promoting ideology, and we should complain even if — or especially if — the ideology happens to be one we agree with.

But: oops! We’ve lost sight of the ceiling. Why are they there? Is the functionalist explanation good enough, is keeping out the elements or decorating our thoughts about the heavens enough? I use both the *utilitas* and *venustas* options of functionalism. What about *firmitas*, the boring one in many people’s books. What about to put something up that is in constant danger of falling down, of suspension? Yes, we do need to keep out the element and keep in the expensive fossil-fuel generated heat or coolness. We do need it to be not too unsightly, and sometimes artistically inspirational. But, what about the relation to our position that puts us face to face with the ceiling, the prone position. It’s the one nearest the dream, the one assumed at death, the one where we and our shadows finally come to an agreement.

The ceiling is trying to tell us something by whispering through a very narrow channel, one barely recognized, hardly ever celebrated. When we look up at the ceiling from a bed, we usually condemn ourselves: “nothing better to do than stare at the ceiling.” Hospital patients are thought to go mad without the horizontal distractions of TV, visitors, flowers. Alvar Aalto was one of the few architects who spent any time wondering about what bed-ridden subjects might want to learn from the ceiling. Dentists are famous for putting distracting posters on their ceilings, but has anyone ever found these to be engaging? Yes, there are ceilings out there that are worth the money: domes, domes with oculuses, high-up frescos showing angels and apostles, maybe even God. We get the idea: the ceiling is related to dying and being released from gravity and sin at the same time. Even cultures that insist on chopping holes in roofs to let the souls of the recently deceased out get the idea, even if art is not involved. This is not *venustas* or *utilitas*, but the *firmitas* of things going up and things going down.

It would be bad to tell you this story again, I have told it so many times *here* that those who have not gotten the point are not going to get the point — the half-life of missing the point is forever, as the saying goes. When the story of the invention of memory by Simonides happens to occur at the occasion of the collapse of a ceiling that presses guests at a banquet like flowers between the pages of a book, we have to pay attention. It’s the ceiling that automates this process. The ceiling is the “unconscious” of the story, since it “remembers everything.” No one escapes this memory. Only the poet, Simonides, who is called out of the banquet hall just before the ceiling falls, is spared, but he is called out by two strangers who are not there when he goes to see them.

When the ceiling is removed, the crushed bodies cannot be identified, but Simonides remembers their names because he has used the *position* of each guest at the banquet table. The order in life is now the order in death, 1:1. It’s an easy job; the automaton’s 1:1 plan view allows Simonides to enjoy a “reflected

ceiling plan” as if he were a god above. He *is* a god above in the sense that his account, a narrative order of names, allows the souls to rest because the families can bury them, something they couldn’t do without naming the corpses.

Then, Simonides remembers or does not remember. At least the story has it for us to remember but, strikingly, no classicist has ever noticed this, not ever, that the story is a chiasmus that creates a “ceiling” that will “fall to the floor,” that the contents of the story are the same as the structure of the story. The host, a wrestler and thus one of a pair, has asked the poet celebrate his recent victory, but Simonides has made half the poem about another pair, the twin gods Castor and Pollux. Why? That’s another story! This is a two-for deal, but the host refuses to pay half the fee! But, we find out at the *end* of the story that he gets this missing fee back again, when he restores another kind of pairing, bodies with names. In other words, it’s all about two’s, it’s all about a ceiling in relation to a plan view, about how up relates to down. But, like the use of chiasmus in the story, invisible to classicists though in plain sight, other issues prevail. Frances Yates for example sees only the pedagogical value that reduces Simonides to just one more ancient rhetorician who uses the method of memory places. This is the picturesque attitude carried to idiotic extremes. This is not a “celebration of memory,” in the way that places prop up our forgetful memories as they try to reconstruct pictures of what we have seen and done. This is about the second memory, the unconscious memory, the memory that is perfect, 1:1, the memory that doesn’t miss a trick, the memory that does not suffer antagonism because it’s about antagonism in the first place.

The unconscious memory is the unconscious. The unconscious is memory. This memorious automaton allows us the dream memory to dress up the soul as it journeys outward to another life, and then it makes us forget the ruse. We accept the dressing room as memory, not just the place where memories are constructed for daytime use. Recognizing the unconscious requires us to think about the subject as psychoanalytic — there is no other theory of mind that recognizes the unconscious, let alone puts it in a position of authority. And, when I say that Lacan, in rescuing the death drive from Freud’s ego-psychology followers and from Freud himself, saved the day in terms of allowing us access to the unconscious as a “mechanism” that is at the same time fully a diverse infinite mind, I am not kidding. Architecture needs Lacan the same way dreams and waking need the idea of antagonism rather than the binary that separates them. We cannot say “mechanism” without invoking the “instrumental reason” that is offered up as the reason for everything wrong with architectural production, teaching, and theory. But, the history of instrumental reason says the opposite. It is the muteness and passivity, the total lack of resistance of the “instrument” in situations such as prayer, ritual, and meditation that allows for the flow of energy to go from one side of things to the other. It is the *lack* that is *jouissance* in psychoanalysis that makes subjects subjects. It is the role of the negative in Hegel’s dialectic. It is the hate that makes love and love that makes hate. It is not the nice things we say but the nothing we say when we are saying things. As Raymond Carver put it, it’s what we talk about when we talk about love — i.e. a nothing that lets things flow.

Hardly popular to trash dressing-room memory and extol instrumental cause in places like this and on occasions such as this. Yet, I imagine that if we were allowed to have a discussion on the matter, this counter-intuitive argument could be separated from the debate about computer drawings. One of our cherished values is the idea of scale, that seems to be impossible to establish in computer graphics. Here, I side with computer graphics, as if to say I am giving you everything I can to make you disagree with me. Scale is there to be broken, and it is broken by looking critically at the divided line that separates large on

one side from small on the other. Getting larger larger larger seems to always head in the direction opposite to getting smaller smaller smaller, and we are stuck, like Alice in Wonderland, taking one pill or another. I compare these to the pills offered Neo by Morpheus — good name for our occasion, eh? — in the movie, *The Matrix*. The blue pill lets you sleep, the red pill wakes you up, gets you out of the fantasy.

I want a third pill. I don't like the choice that forces me to trash the instrumentalism of the negative, the automaton, the marvelous grace that Heinrich von Kleist described in the god-like movements of marionettes once they have given up all control. This is instrumentalism, that's the proper name for it. Instrumentalism is the *firmitas* that failed when the ceiling of Simonides' banquet hall came falling down. It is the *firmitas* that we dream of failing to get to the point where we can start over — the theme of every catastrophe film ever made. What goes up must come down, but then — and this is architecture's key intimate relation to the death drive — once it comes down there is another kind of going up. A better kind? Can't say, but it's a release, a second life, a resurrection of the dead. After all, what is religion if not a "start over" proposition?

I did not give you a theory of dreams. I did not give you a theory of ceilings. I did not explain the psychoanalytic subject is, I only confused you more. I did not *want* to give you the answers, I did not think that any answers that could be given would be worth having in the first place.

I didn't want to do anything actually! But, since this gig pays off in the conversations and good company I have to be a bit less of an ass-hole than I'm making myself out to be at this point. I did want to make you think about what's missing today in architecture theory and how to get it. Forget the binary that puts instrumentalism opposite poetry. Even as a binary, it sucks. Forget about picturesque "nice memory" where we have nostalgic bits and tatters pasted into scrapbooks. That sucks, too, it's not really that nice.

Forget about everything, actually, and start over. I'm not going to "celebrate" your ideas because I'm not going to celebrate mine either. I'm going to start from scratch. I'm going to try to forget. Problem is we can't. Our real memories, our unconscious, is taking notes all the time. It never sleeps, even when we sleep. That's where I'm putting my money. Architecture theory today has no good relationship with the unconscious, let alone theories of the unconscious. So do something about it. Don't mess around with which of the three Vitruvian virtues you like the best, they're all interesting. They are more like Lacan's three rings, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real than anything going. *And*, they fit together in a kind of a knot like Lacan's three rings he used to symbolize the relations.

The knot tells you something. It tells you that you need a topology. You don't need projection except to say that this is how and where people go wrong. When we do drawings, we have to make projections to tell the builders what to do, the show the client what he or she paid for. But, drawings can and must be also topological, which is to say that while we are drawing the drawing, the drawing is also drawing us. And of course, it's not the me/it aspect of this that's important. Do not romanticize the way the drawing "informs thought." It's the flipped predication that makes us drawing the drawing always a case of the drawing drawing us. We are drawn. We are inscribed into the drawing so that when it draws us it draws an *us* that is "in us, more than us."

This gets rid of the stupid aspect of scale that is doing us no favors. I don't say scale is unimportant, it's only the rigid distinction that limits us. Small and large are not binaries, they are cross-inscribed. This is why and how large things in dreams — monsters, Wizards of Oz, landscape — fall apart,

vanish with a “boo,” or turn and twist before our eyes. Their *largeness* is gone, along with their powers to contain us. This is why and how small things in dreams, folklore, and fairy tales can have such enormous magical capability.

The ceiling up there may have fallen down, but we have fallen up, to the place we belong.