

memory theaters

donald kunze • art3idea.psu.edu/boundaries/

Locus Solus (an 'isolated place') has many precursors: not only the scientific museum of the 19th century but many the cabinets of curiosity of the 16c. and 17c., the observatory, and the famed 'theaters of memory' constructed most famously by Giulio Camillo and Robert Fludd. Several other kinds of objects also claim this inheritance: the shadow-boxes of Joseph Cornell, the Merzbau of Kurt Schwitters, the entire artistic movement of installations. The figure of the mad genius accompanies these constructions: Jules Verne's Dr. Nemo, Roussel's Canterel, even Ian Flemming's Dr. No. What do these mysterious isolated menageries have in common? —Memory, but not the kind of recall that can be assisted by a PDA but, rather, Platonic anamnesis, which employs the logic of anacoluthon to reconstruct the present 'from behind' in a sometimes literal but always mysterious rhetorical sense.

1. anamnesis



Joseph Cornell, 'Hotel Eden' (1945)

Plato introduced the idea of anamnesis through a Socratic metaphor about the recirculation of souls. Drawing from a famous story told in *The Republic*, 'The Myth of Er', a soldier who had remained dead on the battlefield until his miraculous resuscitation on the funeral pyre, souls set for rebirth pass through the River Lethe, causing them to forget everything about their former lives and their experience in Hades/Paradise. Rather than rely on the standard sources, the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, to learn about anamnesis, one should take seriously the Lacanian element of 'between the two deaths' and its motif of interpolation. Because navigation of Hades itself has to do with memory formulæ and the employment of 'authentic travel', anamnesis doctrine takes on the form of the travelogue for zombies, the same genre as Dante's *Divina Comedia*. Images take on the same topographical relationship to the overall structure of such *loci soli*, namely, that of a labyrinth, whose fractalized design confesses a reliance on synecdoche — one small part (a surplus, an object-cause of desire in Lacan's terms, a Rousselean error) becomes the basis for a corrected re-orientation. This correction structurally involves all four themes of the fantastic: the double, travel through time, contamination of reality by the dream, and the *mise-en-abyme* of the story-in-the-story. In its Lacanian-Borgesian-Calvinian context, anamnesis becomes the life's blood of Surrealist geography.

2. why build?

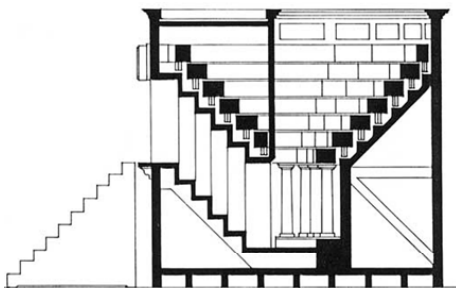
From the anecdotal framework of Plato through to the idea of a physical garden, the key to anamnesis has been construction. 'Construction', Marco Francari likes to say, is the obverse and companion of 'construing'. One does not try to construe the meaning of what has been made, one makes in order to understand, but the act of making itself is identical to understanding (Vico's principle of *verum ipsum factum*). Whether this making is narrative, architectural, or artistic, the universal key to the anacoluthic relationship between interpellation and interpolation that leads to the construction of a 'scaffold in reverse', what Vico called a 'common mental dictionary'.

3. giulio camillo's teatro del memoria

The story of Giulio Camillo, the 16c. fast-talking monk who got the attention of Francis I long enough to have the French king underwrite his project to construct a 'theater' capable of giving the 'user' access to any thought whatsoever — a real case of phantom memory! — is covered by Lou Beery Winneker in her admirable dissertation, which includes a translation of Camillo's book (probably the only 'theater' he intended to construct) with a commentary covering Camillo's interest in Kaballa. Whatever happened to the wooden structure that some claimed to have seen is a mystery. Could it have been the prize theft of the count Goethe visits in Sicily (*Italienische Reise*)? The important things to remember are that (1) Camillo was a reader of Hebrew and a student of the Kaballa and its theory of the soul; (2) Camillo was smart enough not to give away any secrets to the unprepared; (3) Camillo was more than just aware of the story of Simo-nides and the invention of artificial memory, and (4) as well meaning as she was, nearly everything Francis Yates wrote on this subject is misleading. See <http://art3idea.psu.edu/boundaries/puzzles/camillo.html>.

4. title

[text to be completed later]



Giulio Camillo's 'Theatro del Memoria'
(reconstruction by Kunze)



Jesus Raising Lazarus from the Dead,
Sacre Monte, Varello, Italy