

The Architectonality of Psychogeographicism or The Hieroglyphics of Driftwork

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(in memoriam Guy Debord)

obscure & mysterious *grottoes* into which they enter, imitating serpents – spaces of return to an intimacy that “once upon a time” was shattered by memory – by the simultaneous reiteration & belatedness of memory – that faculty of human consciousness “closet to the divine”. But don’t they say that “to forgive is human, to forget is divine”? In the ritual reiteration or “remembrance” (*dhikr*) of the sufis one forgets the “self” precisely in order to recall the Self; – thus to re-member is to erase separation, & this erasure is a species of forgetfulness. (In certain key Islamic buildings like the Alhambra the reiteration of *dhikr* as calligrammatic text becomes the very definition of built space as mnemonic device or “Memory Palace” – not ornament but the very basis or crystal-precipitation-principle of architecture.)

“Since we *are* Jesus Christ,” as one of the Brethren of the free Spirit boasted, “the only issue is that what is already perfect in us should be reiterated ...” This process however leads to a paradoxical un-learning – hence to a loss of *fear* – so that one can “let oneself be led by one’s natural senses, like a little child”. Now, the cave stands for unconsciousness; – the goal however is not to lose unconsciousness but to recapture that which unconsciousness separated us from, that which consciousness “spoiled”. Thus within the dark grotto itself memory must be paradoxically inscribed – key images are reiterated (literally repeated in some cases by a palimpsestic or incisive over-drawing) – images which represent out lost intimacy as a pantheon of *animals* (“good to think with”) – each animal a special joy or “divine” function. Thus the the cave becomes the first intentional architectural space, the intersection of unconsciousness (the bliss of “Nature”) & consciousness (memory , reiteration).

Ever since Plato we’ve been taught to revere *anamnesis* – but let’s descend to the pre-Platonic cave, the paleolithic grotto, to recover the positive dialectic of *amnesia* – without which memory becomes simply a curse, coagulating at last as History (the degree of zero of memory as suffocation): the first city (Çatalk Hüyük) is already arranged as a *gridwork*, the very antithesis of the grotto’s aesthetic shapelessness, it’s meandering & amazing spaces, it’s melted stalagmites & stalactites – its organicity (which is never the less expressed as *mineral life*). The cities of Sumer & Harappa were likewise laid out as severe grids, cruel abstractions of linearity. To draw a line is to separate, to create spatial hierarchy (between priest & people, rich & poor, surplus & scarcity)

and to define the *topia* of memory against the dark unconscious of the tribe, the u-topian cave, the organic wild(er)ness. The *tertium quid* or *coincidentia oppositorum* here (between “grotto” & Babylon) might appear in the medieval city (which still survives in a few places in the Islamic world) where the excessive cruelty of the grid is mollified – not erased but softened – by a recording of a space according to the tree or the river-delta model (chaotic bifurcation ranging to complexity based on intra-dimensional “strange attractors”) – an urbanism of the organic, the aesthetic, & the complex or plural (as opposed to the inorganic, the ideological, & the simple or total).

The medieval city is an extruded grotto Some of these cities introduced allegorical pageants or parades in which huge emblem-complexes (composite hieroglyphs) were built & set up or carried around the labyrinth of streets. Myths & legends were acted out: – sometimes the Lord Mayor played the role of “Lord Mayor”, wandering thru a street-theater of encounters with symbolic characters (like Bloom in Nighttown), thus re-newing the City as its elected Hero undergoing the initiation of ritual marriage with the urban goddess.

Here the Free City comes to a synchronic & ludic consciousness of itself *hic et nunc*, rather than succumb to the miserabilist diachronism of power’s violence. In this Hermetic City we find the background or womb-space of the alchemical Emblem Books, and the narrativity of a Bosch or Breughel. Memory loses its heaviness here & takes on a folkloric air, carnivalesque (the festival as reiteration of pleasure) with built shapes that appropriate (thru design or thru the accidents of decay & accretion) the forms of breasts, phalluses, wombs, rocks & water, moss & flowers, even of wind & light.

The Babylonian grid-city wants memory to persist thru time – smooth & empty time – but as Dali showed, memory *persists* only in the deliquescence of measured time. The medieval-hermetic city (like Blake’s Green Jerusalem) preserves memory but in a “disordered” way – like akashic marmalade – time which is textured & full. “Babylon” preserves order (or *else!*) – but what happens to memory there ? Isn’t it transmuted into the poison formaldehyde of History, the re-iterated tale of *our* poverty & *their* power, taxonomic myth of the ruling class ? Who can blame us for harboring both a nostalgia & an insurrectionary desire for the narrow winding alleys, shadowy steps, covered ways & tunnels, middens & cellars of a city which has designed *itself* – organically, unconsciously – within an aesthetic of festive & secret conviviality, & of the curvaciuous negentropic mutability of memory itself ?

The psychic urbanism of the 1960’s constituted yet another attempt to reclaim *built memory* for this “Romantic” project – *rus in urbe*, as F. Law Olmstead put it – “The country in the city” – reintroduction of the eternal “baroque” (as in “baroque pearl”) or spontaneous form – (like the miraculous fungoid cinnabar grottoes of Mao Shan Taoism, created by the Imaginal potency of the Adept) – which is also the “divine” spontaneity, unconsciousness & *forgetting*, of Nature. A project for the builders of some near-future No Go Zone: – the city of psychogeographic resistance, the anti-grid, architectonality of driftwork, festal space – and the Cave of Fluid Memory. Rock & water – the reverie of the bard, the forgetfulness of the gods.

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