

## Paper TW

The Complexity of the Ordinary, Oct.2006

### *[re] Conceiving Presence* *Journeys in memory and space*

#### 1

*Some, seemingly oblique, outlines.*

In 1790, Xavier de Maistre<sup>1</sup> was punished for having gotten into a duel by being put under house arrest for forty-two days. De Maistre cleverly took advantage of his sequestration, finding within his own four walls a wealth of material to dwell on. His short book, *Voyage around my Room*<sup>1</sup>, recounts his expeditions during that time.

It is a travel book like no other.

Most of the travels were, indeed, leaps of the imagination -- but he did find a surprising amount of material in his room. He slowly leads the reader around its confined geography, describing the pictures on the walls, the vistas and prospects within and beyond the room, exploring and dwelling on ordinary objects that are otherwise taken for granted. And what he sees brings back memories, focuses ideas, leads him to look at things anew.

What de Maistre depicted, was, indeed, the complexities of the ordinary.

Yet, despite the clear and focused architectural descriptions of the room itself, it is the astuteness of the virtual implications of the described, that sets-off precise illustrative counterpoints of the world, outside the limits of confinement, but utterly present.

#### 2

In present day global (post) post-modern's frenzied quest for the *extra*-ordinary, the ordinary has become a somehow rare commodity, with a rapidly declining status.

Architecturally speaking, one could speculate it being both the rummage for branded amenity value, and a strong longing for identity, even at the expense of the genuine.

(The classification of "genuine", incidentally, is actually no longer an easy task)

Yet, at the same time, one can speculate about why the ordinary no longer is able to sustain some sort of conscious alertness. Is it the numbness of global mushrooming similarities or might something else be at stake? Could it be, that mnemonic qualifications no longer apply to decode the ordinary? Memory has become almost an occult skill in our own education system and the idea of haptic "rote learning" is still regarded as deeply unfashionable and viewed with great suspicion. Perhaps the deprecation of discredited methods for instilling memory skills has accidentally spilled over into a deprecation of memory as such.

Or, very possibly, a gliding shift in how memory actually is perceived is at stake. Due to the ever-escalating facility of technical means at our common disposal for audio-visually capturing, manipulating and re-distributing our impressions of the ordinary world, a variety of new semiotic<sup>2</sup> coding emerge.

The *incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier*<sup>3</sup> results in "empty" or "floating signifiers", defined as a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified. Roland Barthes referred specifically to non-linguistic signs as being so open to interpretation that they constituted a *floating chain of signifieds*<sup>4</sup>.

One attempt to somehow re-mediate this situation is Lev Manovich's project *Soft Cinema: Navigating The Database*<sup>5</sup>. Yet, the conclusive bravado of extra-ordinariness in subsequent architectural projects derivations relegates the ordinary, again, to a somehow lumbering discard.

### 3

The subject of memory has elicited studies of significant ambition and scope in the past decades. Frances A. Yates (*The Art of Memory*)<sup>6</sup>, Paolo Rossi (*Logic and the Art of Memory*)<sup>7</sup>, and Mary Carruthers (*The Book of Memory, The Craft of Thought*)<sup>8</sup> have each brought back into focus the artificial memory systems from the Classic Antiquity, Middle Ages and Renaissance that had faded from sight in our modern and post-modern milieu. The compelling issue, here, is the fact that ordinary architectural environments and human body are closely interrelated in the functioning of mnemonic techniques.

With the advent of film in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new mnemo-technical devices introduced different haptic approaches. In Sergei Eisenstein's essay "*Montage and Architecture*"<sup>9</sup> from 1930 - a pivotal work in an attempt to trace the theoretical interplay of film, architecture, and travel practices - the envisioned fundamental link between architectural ensemble and film was to take the reader -quite literally- for a walk. *Path* is the very word Eisenstein uses to open his explorations<sup>10</sup>.

Architecture is not simply about form, but also about event, action, and what actually happens in space. The theoretical approach of Bernard Tschumi's seminal work "*Manhattan Transcripts*"<sup>11</sup> - strongly influenced by Eisenstein, André Breton's Surrealism and the Situationists mapping strategies - opened up new vistas on how to decode and re-interpret the complexity of the ordinary in modern urban settings. Thus, at the same time introducing yet another mnemo-technical strategy to include the ordinary's presence in architecture and consciously re-view it.

Despite our rational beliefs, the assessment of the ordinary and its representation is closely confined to personal subjectivity, inter-cultural view-point(s), chronological placing and gamut set(s) of functionalities. The ensuing "mappings" will always include biased mnemonic onsets, whatever data or conditions investigated.

Madeleine de Scudery<sup>12</sup> chartered the diffuse straits of human emotions in her "*Carte de Tendre*"<sup>13</sup>, establishing a subjective cartographic visualization of the geography of love, inscribing affects onto an architectonics. Her maps from bygone times, however subjective, maintain a core of universality that continues to inspire contemporary artists<sup>14</sup>.

In our age of persuasive marketing, glossy photos of far off idyllic places or architectural marvels, often seduce us to travel to destinations that unfortunately do not seem at all to resemble our preconceptions. The reasons behind such disappointments are rarely explored.

In his bestselling "*The Art of Travel*"<sup>15</sup>, Alain de Botton reminds us that travel is a learning experience and by effectively employing our senses we will be handsomely rewarded. We are reminded that we travel not only to lose ourselves but also to discover ourselves. To observe, inquire into, and to appreciate ordinary surroundings that typically may not appear to be meaningful.

"*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes*" stated Marcel Proust. The "seen" might then be concretized further, in various transformations. Artist Rachel Whiteread challenges not only ordinary relationships with space, but also investigates and identifies the space between memory and experience.

With her “frozen” sculpture entitled *House*<sup>16</sup>, an extraordinary plaster cast of a house in East London, she managed just that. “House” and most of her other sculptures, all explore the relationship between matter and its corresponding negative space, between what we have imagined lost and what we have discovered found. Pointing to it. Naming the properties. Stealing the innocence from, as it were, the unnamable of the ordinary.

In his fine, polemic *plaidoyer* for a more haptic and sensuous architecture, challenging the fact that modern consciousness and sensory reality have gradually developed towards the unrivalled dominance of the sense of vision, Juhanni Pallasmaa<sup>17</sup> quotes David Levin’s plea for “*The urgent need for a diagnosis of the psychosocial pathology of everyday seeing -- and a critical understanding of ourselves, as visionary beings*”<sup>18</sup>

#### 4 *Journeys, focus and serendipity*

The quest for identifying the nature or cause of some phenomena can be overwhelming, especially when dealing with the ordinary. No handles to grasp, seem to be the most acute condition, as everything appears blurred. No problem, seemingly, to apply solutions to. Before establishing any kind of diagnosis, the actual way(s) of gathering data, might be considered.

One such attempt is a quite recent, somehow exceptional architectural diploma thesis<sup>19</sup> and its work process. Exceptional, since it does not seek the applications of solutions to problems but keenly concentrates on reflecting upon conditions of the ordinary.

In this work, the “complexities of the ordinary” are investigated, explored and chartered in a broad amalgam of oblique architectural and mapping stratagems, to be ultimately “concluded” in an architectonic distillate. All proceeding, are attempts to explore territories of “*psychosocial pathology of everyday life*”. Attempts to views and re-views certain domestic, “ordinary” settings, in seemingly remote contexts, presenting subjective *diagnosis*, *techne* and *poiesis*. Somehow representing an idea<sup>20</sup>, nonetheless, a concise measuring of data.

The thesis project deals with the representation and perception of ordinary physical spaces and their possible translation(s) into imaginary space by means of memory and /or preconceptions; likewise, a reverse process is, in the work, applied from the imaginary to the re-presented tangible. Thus opening oblique fields of “vision” on contextual issues, with an acute focus on “ordinary” spatiality and related conventional activities.

Contextually embedded in Havana, Cuba<sup>21</sup>, the work carefully balances in-between a variety of alternating opposite poles: between presence and absence, factual knowledge and preconceptions, precise data and blurred wishful thinking, present and various crucial past historical episodes, partiality and prejudice, acquired data and *faits trouvés*, remembrances and oblivion, between new and old, present and future and none the least, serendipitous events as vital, interactive, links.

The endeavour involves three journeys: two virtual, and one factual, to Havana. A *before* -stage, involving the pre-conception(s) of Havana, a data collecting field trip to the city, and an *after* -stage, relating the recollections and architecturally summarizing all the findings.

#### 5 *Preconceptions, prejudice and conditions of serendipity* (J:01)

The ordinary, when seen from remote and unstipulated distance, will always appear peculiar. This particularity happens to be enclosed by the actual discovery of the vastness of (one’s) biased ignorance. Likewise, with places one never visited previously.

In this regard, the notion of Havana and its contextual embedding in Cuba is not different.

One will then consult travel guides, and immerse into relevant literature and other researchable material, to fill the gap of the lack of knowledge with useful data, and obtain a more useful, in-depth, general grounded onset.

The cumulative effect of this indispensable ingestion of factual data seems however to have some obvious drawbacks. While presenting the backbone of an all-purpose outline - however thorough and matter of fact- this knowledge, while at first liberating, might obstruct eventual further personal examinations, by the very nature of its established factual mythologies.

To test the potential of the "ordinary's" latent openings for furthering the fields subjective interpretations of factual studies, a certain amount of encapsulations are introduced as working devices in the process, parallel to the broad general studies on the "topic"<sup>22</sup> of Havana.

With some surprising results.

While some finds<sup>23</sup> prove to be quite hilarious and otherwise thought provoking, it is the viewing of a recently released - otherwise utterly forgotten - Russian film on Cuba from 1964 that, together with the most famed modern icon of the Cuban revolution, serendipitously steers the study of the "ordinary" in more than one memorable way<sup>24</sup>.

The film *Soy Cuba*<sup>25</sup>, apart from being a fabulous cinematographic trove, proves to have all the necessary ingredients to start up narrowing the quest for the ordinary, both geographically and contextually, in Havana. Two of its most memorable scenes take place in the Vedado area of Havana.

This area is then investigated with more substance, so as to narrow the possibilities of a workable context for the project. Possible accommodations in private settings in the Vedado area are found through popular travel guide books; The subsequent work focus on translating the sparse descriptions of these private "Bed-and-Breakfast" enclaves into a multitude of "prejudiced" drawings, models and virtual cartographies of the immediate context(s). Somehow, forming a collection of virtual journeys into remote spaces. Representing a situation not unlike de Maistre's travels, but with different translations.

The established material begins to form the basis of some sort of "understanding", reverberating all the bits and pieces of biased "information" of the initial collection process while at the same time providing a framework for formulating the actual thesis focus.

Paraphrasing Italo Calvino<sup>26</sup>, one could then assert that two types of imaginative processes are at work: the one that begins with the word and arrives at the visual image, and the other, starting with the visual image and arriving at its verbal (or other formal) expression. Some of the artifacts produced<sup>27</sup>, drew on Whiteread's approaches, others had de Scudery's stratagems inherently present, with keen translations owed to Tschumi's *Transcripts*.

The elaborated material, in all its disparate forms, is the steppingstone for the next investigations, to be undertaken on location in Havana. A necessary established platform, indeed, for judging and consciously calibrating the virtual subjective outlays with the forthcoming, hard-core factual findings.

## 6

### *"Tentative d'Épuisement de Certains Lieux Havaniens"* (J:02)

A twelve-day journey to Havana enables some subtle, yet remarkable studies. Ordinary, day-to-day routines and chosen, specific places are documented, supplemented with more ad-hoc, relevant undertakings.

In describing the ordinary, especially benign things and events, which no one would otherwise bother to notice, George Perec writings are a crucial inspiration<sup>28</sup>. Likewise, Giuliana Bruno's recently published book "*Atlas of Emotions*"<sup>29</sup> serves as pivotal source of both inspiration and oblique approaches for the work during the process of the thesis and is thoroughly consulted before and after the trip.

The core of the investigations centers on the chosen private accommodation and four other private living quarters of local Havanese and private acquaintances. The temporary "home" serves as the base camp for all "travels" undertaken, acting simultaneously as anchor, reference point and mirror.

Some of the activities have somewhat comic, surprising reverberations<sup>30</sup>, while others reveal the schismatic situation of a location where conditions of the "ordinary" balance between painful absurdities and adaptive views of realities, peddled by pervasive political ideology in daily life<sup>31</sup>.

The journey and its destination(s) although generously open for serendipitous happenings, and despite its -at times- surrealistic detours, has indeed been planned<sup>32</sup> (as is most of the work process) according to specific, self imposed constraints. These constraints, not unlike the stratagems devised by the members of Oulipo<sup>33</sup>, permit a more focused and determined view.

The journey in Havana produced a substantial photographic and audio-visual material, as well as detailed notes, sketches and other listings. The most important insight, however, was closely linked to Bruno's emphasis that the voyeur must also be the voyageur, that "sight" and "site" are irrevocably connected.

One of the derivative tasks involved during the whole project, is a sort of daily photographic diary, recording the documentarist's matter-of-fact upright standing portrait, every morning.

This imminent connectivity would also imply that the gathered materials later transformation into more formal translations, by whatever means used, requires a quite conscious set of approaches. Approaches, where lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity will simultaneously be tested, though in different fashions as when they had been captured.

Even in the short period set aside, the importance of *exactitude* in the recording of the ordinary, depends on the various active collected paraphernalia: words, images (still and moving) quick sketches, and many careful *Memos*. All taken together, an endeavor both of classic mnemotechnical skills, combined with the latest available technology, transformed via oblique, architectural *modus operandi*.

The Operationality of what Proust had labeled "*New Eyes*" was, indeed, the main part of the test bed. The crucial part then, will be to assess the qualitative potential of the imprints, and, first and foremost, to make sure that they do not only confine in purely retinal matters.

## 7

### *Laying out the jigsaw puzzle, recapitulating, and tying some knots* (J:03)

The collected material, though of impressive volume, is nevertheless focused. Five different locations, all private dwellings, and one public building are at the center of the pursued mnemotechnical investigation, including the temporary "home-base" as the primary hub for the undertaking. An ordinariness, from which all journeys, to and forth the other locations are undertaken.

A new and more precise material is meticulously elaborated. Plans drawings, sections, exploded view and more composite drawings establish a different kind of cartography of the ordinary. The term of "*psycho-cartography*" is used as a parallel devising overlay to the more affectuous "*carte de tendre*" schemata, all established with limpid factuality, yet deftly executed with a

professional, personal obliqueness. Were the small soap models in the beginning still emulated various stipulated virtual settings, the new material has an inherent, scaled objectivity at its core, in all its subjective formalism.

The transformation comes gradually, yet also accompanied by a growing sense of awe at the arduous task. The digital pictorials have, for the most, been used for “montage”<sup>34</sup> purposes, transformed by both digital and analog means. A new sort of “list” or catalogue of the inner contextual settings and the many journeys back and forth has been established. Similarly, the catalogued listings, in retrospect, reverberated some fine inter-active synaptic spatio-temporal leads<sup>35</sup>.

The many short film clips, by their very “documentary” no-nonsense visual approach, not only supplement but also factually state, in both time and space, of the sensed participatory presence on location.

In a way one could then label the outcome so far as pure and simple measuring, though all permeated with a certain “twisted”, oblique personal architectural filtering. While all these fine measurings are concise, they are - not yet - able to communicate broader haptic and emotional translations.

If the set goal of reversing “-“the *perception* and representation of *imaginary* space and its possible translation into *physical* space by means of memory and / or preconceptions” to “the *representation* and perception of *physical* space and its possible translation into *imaginary* space by means of memory and / or preconceptions” new approaches have to be investigated. In any case, the wobbliness of the visa-verso state needs to be, somehow, frozen into more tangible, however incongruous, forms.

The puzzle no longer was puzzling. Most of its pieces had been catalogued, listed and inventoried. This part of the journey was completed.

## 8

### *The fabrication of a different “Madeleine”*

The hapticity of the soft sponginess of the *Madeleine* cake, dipped in limpid, flavoured tea was able to unlock the corridors of Marcel Proust’s memory<sup>36</sup>, in a truly generous overspill of contextualised reminiscences of apparently, ordinary, banal settings and events.

The *Madeleine* per se, was not the catalyst. It was the careful blend of astute observations, acute sensibilities and artistic *mélange*. The craft of seeing metamorphosed.

The first two journeys of the thesis work focused on critically capturing, evaluating, mapping and manufacturing scale concretizations of the “biased” and “cool” excitingly seen, as attempts to encompass vision with haptic, mnemonic experience(s), the undertaking subsequently had to be shifted to more ataraxic transformations.

Through a large series of scale models, drawings and filmic visualizations, the “final” model eventually emerges during the end stages of the third journey. The elaboration of a pavilion like structure, encompassing, in various distorted ways, a chosen selection of the experienced inner and outer contextual spatialities. Embedded in the compact conglomerate, are some smaller artifacts retrieved during the undertaken journeys.

Special care is allocated to haptic materialization. The colors chosen, the tangibility of flooring, roofing and details all reflected upon the actual experiences. Contextually, the pavilion could basically be transferred in any “white box” setting, recreating in all its multi-faceted being, a corporal, sensual re-vision of the journeys, propelling the “user” into a definitively Havanese re-enactment of all components of the undertaking.

Named MOGOVH<sup>37</sup>, this concretized “Madeleine” would float on a modular grid of supporting columns, acting somewhat polemically, as *memes*<sup>38</sup>.

In some ways, this new Madeleine, could act with the inherent power of reminiscences of mock romantic architectural ruins, in this case, encompassing the recent Cuban historical reality, where the ideals of a revolution drowned in the pragmatics of world politics and their repercussions on daily life. Incorporating both a modern(ist) past and historical daily decay, mirroring a short temporal visit to a few fixed locations, revolving kaleidoscopically, yet with a subdued, ever present synaesthetic<sup>39</sup> awareness. Translating different *doors of perception*, yet still unchecked, as it would remain just a project.

The described project, although resulting in some sort of architectural “scale” concretization in form of the MOGOVH conglomerate project, incorporates more promising potentialities.

The present project, however genuine and sympathetic in outlook, work process and achieved results might, by some, still be considered to “flamboyant” and exotic in both its contextual situation and historical setting. Too “story-telling” dramatic in its personalized stance and, possibly, also in the architectural idiom of the translation.

Nonetheless, it represents a most welcome and quite courageous act in opening up new vistas and territories of explorations, endeavors that seemingly are pursued further with gusto and insight<sup>40</sup>. An outlook, that somehow is more than needed in architectural education, where the blurred boundaries of digitally produced virtual and real, comprise a dramatic shift in the approaches on how to assess the ordinary. And, first and foremost: the importance of the fact that attempts to conscious approaches retain and regain haptic dimensions so vital for understanding not only architecture but also its domestic, day by day repercussions.

## 9

### *Considering new outlooks*

The ever present urge for blue-print like solutions and theories in architectural practice and certainly also in architectural education, whatever their onsets, still seems to clout necessary, more poetic/forensic like approaches to the assessment of the ordinary.

Through the conscious and oblique experimental use of architectural devices and practiced modalities, inter-actively combined with a variety of other field's *modus operandi* and personal artistic translations, new chartering of the ordinary can be tested. Contributing to broader, more generous yet still critical assessments of the domesticity of our environments.

In considering the complexities of the ordinary, German artist Peter Piller's<sup>41</sup> ongoing work might be an interesting future stepping stone for even more oblique, yet potentially profound architectural research: His vast collection of newspaper clippings of pictures of paramount banal “architectural” settings, certainly opens promising, novel and utterly different perceptions on the ordinary.

Once again, an artist's (re)view of the already existing, reshuffles our outlook with tremendous, renewed, impact. Piller's onset in finding the first picture produced quite an amazing outcry: “*The image held all I had been looking for: A maximum of nothingness*”<sup>42</sup>

Yet, this same attitude might be the utmost valuable criteria in trying to “see” the ordinary. This is one main reason for why the ordinary has mostly been overlooked: its own monumental, apparent non-qualities.

“A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral” stated St. Exupery. The real ordinary might just be a pellet in the deserts of Urbanity.

With renewed attempts to expose this blind-spotted, seemingly terra incognita, other ways of formulating (in)sights might surface, altogether opening substantial realms of survey.

Not with neo-romantic goggles, but with the clarity of a coroner, dissecting. Live tissue, this time.

...and the purpose of all our explorations will be to arrive there, where we first started, and thus recognise the place as if for the first time ever, again...<sup>43</sup>

## Notes:

---

<sup>1</sup> Xavier de Maistre, (1763-1852) French writer, younger brother of Joseph de Maistre, French diplomat and polemical catholic anti-revolutionary activist and writer.

<sup>1</sup> De Maistre, Xavier : *A Journey Around my Room*, London: Hesperus Press, 2004 - (New English translation with foreword by Allain de Botton)

<sup>2</sup> Semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems. This also includes the investigation of assessment, prediction and meaning: how it is that we develop meaning, make predictions, and apprehend the world. A sign itself has two essential components: a material signifier (Sr) and a mental signified (Sd). Semioticians argue that there is no necessary connection between the signifier and the signified.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, Jacques. Translated by Alan Sheridan. *Ecrits: A Selection*. London: Routledge, 1989 (p170)

<sup>4</sup> "Barthes, Roland ([1953]: "Myth Today" in *Writing Degree Zero* (trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith). London: Cape. 1967

<sup>5</sup> Lev Manovich, (URL: [www.manovich.net](http://www.manovich.net)) is the author of "The Language of New Media" (The MIT Press, 2001), which is hailed as "the most suggestive and broad ranging media history since Marshall McLuhan." The "Soft Cinema project" mines the creative possibilities at the intersection of software culture, cinema, and architecture. Its manifestations include films, dynamic visualizations, computer-driven installations, architectural designs, print catalogues, and DVDs. In parallel, the project investigates how the new representational techniques of soft(ware) cinema can be deployed to address the new dimensions of our time, such as the rise of mega-cities, the "new" Europe, and the effects of information technologies on subjectivity. (URL: [www.softcinema.net](http://www.softcinema.net))

<sup>6</sup> Yates, Frances A. *The Art of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Rossi, Paolo. *Logic and the Art of Memory*. Trans. Stephen Clucas. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage and Architecture" published in *Assemblage* no.10, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.116

"The word/Path is not used by chance. Nowadays it is the imaginary path followed by the eye and the varying perceptions of an object that depend on how it appears to the eye. Nowadays it may also be the path followed by the mind across a multiplicity of phenomena, far apart in time and space, gathered in a certain sequence into a meaningful concept; and these diverse impressions pass in front of an immobile

---

spectator. In the past however, the opposite was the case: the spectator moved between [a serie] of carefully disposed phenomena that he observed sequentially with his visual sense."

<sup>11</sup> Tschumi, Bernard: *The Manhattan Transcripts* New York: St. Martins Press, 1981

In this work, Tschumi argues that "The transcripts *explicit purpose was to transcribe things normally removed from conventional architectural representation, namely the complex relationship between spaces and their use, between the set and the script, between "type" and "program", between object and events*".

The dominant theme of *The Transcripts* is a set of disjunctions among use, form and social values, offering a different reading of architecture in which space, movement and events were independent, yet stood in various relations to one another.

<sup>12</sup> Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701) better known as Mademoiselle de Scudéry, was a French writer. She designed the famed "Map of Tenderness", which was engraved by François Chauveau and published in the first volume of her *Clélie: Histoire romaine* (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1654).

<sup>13</sup> The map is a description of an *Arcadia*, where the river of Inclination waters the villages of *Billet Doux*, *Petits Soins* and so forth. It served as a board game in the salons of Paris at the time. Her map had no place for either marriage or physical sexual expression, but otherwise it covered a wide gamut of the manifestations of a person that would make him or her either attractive or repulsive for a close relationship.

<sup>14</sup> This is especially evident in the work of the French artist Annette Messager. Her remake of *Carte de Tendre* (1988) can both be read as a garden, map and as drawing. Argentinian artist Guillermo Kuitca, likewise, travels the domains outlined by de Scudéry: working with architectural methods and geographic imagery. His road maps, regional charts, architectural plans and composite drawings, though radiating from Buenos Aires, speak beyond its borders.

<sup>15</sup> de Botton, Alain: *The Art of Travel*, London, Penguin Books, 2003

By blending his own images with the aesthetic endeavors and travel experiences of some of the most renowned authors and painters such as, William Wordsworth, Gustave Flaubert, Edward Hopper, Vincent van Gogh, John Ruskin, Charles Baudelaire, and Alexander von Humboldt, de Botton demonstrates a few crucial points: That it is the "teachings" of these individuals that enables us to re-assess how to appreciate nature, to fall in love again, and -first and foremost- to recognize the beauty and poetry of such simple and ordinary scenes as a motel, service station, or an airport.

<sup>16</sup> *House*, perhaps Whiteread's (b.1963) best known work, was a concrete cast of the inside of an entire Victorian terraced house completed in autumn 1993, exhibited at the location of the original house - 193 Grove Road - in East London (all the houses in the street had earlier been knocked down by the council). It drew mixed responses, yet winning her the famed Turner Prize for best young British artist in 1993. Many of Whiteread's works are casts of ordinary domestic objects and, in numerous cases, the space the objects *do not* inhabit (often termed the "negative space"). Instead producing a solid cast of where the space within a container would be; particular parts of rooms, the area underneath furniture, etc. Whiteread says the casts carry "*the residue of years and years of use*".

<sup>17</sup> Pallasmaa, Juhani: *Hapticity and Time*, *The Architectural Review*, May 2000

<sup>18</sup> David Michael Levin: *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, University of California Press, LA, 1993.(p. 205)

<sup>19</sup> **Eli Yael Goldstein** (b. 1978): "*Conceiving Presence: Journeys in Memory and Space - Havana, Cuba*". Architectural diploma thesis at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, Dept. 4, Copenhagen, June 2005. Supervision: Associate professor, architect maa. Thomas Wiesner. A Pdf. file of the project can be obtained from Eli at [yaelgold24@hotmail.com](mailto:yaelgold24@hotmail.com)

<sup>20</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, (1832-1920) German psychologist, generally acknowledged as a founder of experimental psychology and cognitive psychology. Wundt widens the term *Idea* to include "*conscious representation of some object or process of the external world*". In so doing, he includes not only ideas of memory and imagination, but also perceptual processes.

<sup>21</sup> The choice of Havana as a location to "treat" was based on various reasoning: Norwegian Eli Goldstein had, at the beginning of the thesis already build up a very impressive travelling experience throughout most of the world, having also, periodically, lived in different countries. Havana, and Cuba, seemed to be an obvious choice as one of the last places in the world with a clear dichotomy between reality and virtuality (social, political and artistic) and with a decisive halt and decay in

---

architectural matters. And, last not least: Eli had "the mapping impulse": In a variety of previous study projects, she had demonstrated her fine-tuned artistic talent to "re-viewing" places with a keen focus on the simultaneity of event, action and emulation in architectural translations. These involved various mappings and recordings as well as always keen and critical visions on the interaction of mnemonic and social matters.

<sup>22</sup> It has to be noted, that the work process followed the usual *modus operandi* of projects in architectural education: a thorough programme had to be developed, outlining purpose, scope and work methods chosen, prior to the ensuing work. With the actual difference from usual programmes, that both the programme for the studies prior to the visit in Havana and the subsequent thesis programme -handed in before the trip- allowed for a very wide variety of oblique activities: ie. Film viewing, subjective "blind" mappings and models, and otherwise anything that could be activated as useful "devices" in the work process. The architectural conclusion of which was left open, and okayed by the censors before thesis work started.

<sup>23</sup> During the course of research, a large amount of Cuban post-stamps and their iconography were studied. Apart from numerous local and international historical commemorations, one stamp from 1983 hailed a prize record holding Cuban milk cow, which had more than fulfilled quotas set by the Cuban 5 year plan. Parallel to this information during the course of the thesis work, worldwide press coverage was given to a certain Raoul Martinez who had been successful in breeding "mini" milk cows the size of large dogs. The cows where meant to alleviate milk shortage in Cuban Urban areas.

<sup>24</sup> The most known icon of the Cuban revolution is the picture of Che Guevara. More than ordinary icon, the picture is used on incredibly diverse paraphernalia globally having become a "branded" sign with, indeed, "floating significance". The original picture was taken by the Cuban photographer, Alberto Korda in 1960. Korda generously gave a copy to the Italian publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who subsequently made a fortune by publishing it without any copyrights, creating great problems for Korda in Cuba. See also "The Story of the Image of Che Guevara" > <http://www.pix.dk/korda2.htm>  
Incredibly, as Eli Goldstein discovered in the course of her preliminary investigations for the thesis, Korda's son, Fidel Korda, a photographer himself, now lived and practiced in Oslo! It was through Fidel Korda that Eli was able to establish some vital contacts in Havana for the project.

<sup>25</sup> *Say Cuba / I am Cuba*, 145 min. b/w, directed by Michael Kalatozov. Cuba/USSR, 1964, French DVD release 2005, mk2 editions > [www.mk2.com](http://www.mk2.com) [UK release 2006, Mr Bongo Films, ASIN: B000EMGBN4 ]

This Soviet-Cuban hymn from 1964 to the Castro revolution has more than its fair share of agitprop naivety - but for its sheer dazzling technique, and the glorious beauty of its monochrome cinematography, it rightly deserves impregnable classic status. One crucial scene is a breathtaking architectural hand-held traveling shot that moves sinuously through the partygoers and bikini-clad women by a penthouse hotel pool, winding up underwater with the swimmers. Later, in the epic funeral scene, the camera soars up past Havana balconies, noses through a cigar factory and then appears to float over the rail looking down on the giant procession as if suspended from a cloud.  
And this, decades before Steady-cam technology or digitalized manipulations!  
The movie was actually never shown for more than three decades: both the Cuban and the Soviet authorities deemed it respectively too biased and too hedonistic after its completion. American director Francis Ford Coppola bought the film rights in 1997, after seeing it for the first time at a film festival commemorating Kalatozov.

<sup>26</sup> Calvino, Italo: *Six Memos for The Next Millennium*, London, Vintage, 1996, ISBN 0-09-973051-0 [p. 83]

<sup>27</sup> "Scale" models, made from drawings describing the accommodations. The models where cast in soap. see also note # 31

<sup>28</sup> In his novel *Tentative d'Épuisement d'un Lieu Parisien*, published in 1975, French-born writer Georges Perec (1936-1982) does just what the titles implies: he attempts to describe everything he notices from his seat in a coffee shop at the Place Saint-Sulpice in Paris. In his most famous novel *Life: A Users Manual*, from 1978, a Parisian apartment block is described in detail as it could be seen if the entire facade would be removed, exposing every room. The novel acts a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, written according to a complex plan of writing constrains, primarily constructed from several elements, each adding a layer of complexity. Most of Perec's novels abound with experimental word lists, and meticulous attempts at classifications of banal, ordinary things and settings.

Perec, George : *Life, A Users Manual*, David R. Godine Publisher, 1988 (reprint 2000) ISBN; 0879237511

<sup>29</sup> Bruno, Giuliana: *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, New York, Verso, 2002 ISBN: 1-85984-802-8. The book is a highly original endeavor to map a cultural history of spatio-visual arts. It Traverses a varied and enchanting landscape with forays into the fields of geography, art, architecture,

---

design, cartography and film. Throughout it, Bruno insists on the inseparability of seeing and traveling. In an evocative montage of words and pictures she emphasizes that the voyeur must also be the voyageur, that "sight" and "site" are irrevocably connected.

<sup>30</sup> Eli had painstakingly carried a small collection of her elaborated models with her to Havana, to facilitate dialogue about her project with possible interlocutors. The "models", were small casts, made in soap. Soap, it turned out, is a valued and scarce commodity in Cuba today. It was thus impossible to communicate conceptually -or else- over such precious artefacts. She nevertheless salvaged them back. [An undertaking that no longer is possible today, as the inclusion of such paraphernalia has very recently been prohibited in air travel luggage]

<sup>31</sup> Eli's visit to the famed *Instituto Superior de Arte* [ISA] also reflected the schizoid situation between vision, ideology and pragmatic adaptation. ISA's three of five planned beautiful parkland pavilions complexes where build between 1961 and '65, were mostly abandoned in the end of the 60's. Due partly to its incensing sensuous and oneric architecture - deemed too bourgeois - in favor of the more rigorist soviet architectural planning that subsequently was practiced. The schools nevertheless seem to have re-adapted to conditions. Regarding this marvelous architectural ensemble, that now seems to finally be rescued from oblivion, see:

Loomis, John A. *Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> The original "dramaturgy" before the trip, was to focus on four "presences" and their dwellings in Havana: Jorge Coalla-Potts [*Owner of Eli's accommodation, a private bed&breakfast*], Odey and Mira [*Cuban/Norwegian friends from Copenhagen, living in Havana in this time*] Josefine Bazin [*Eli's Swedish hairdresser/friend from Copenhagen, serendipitously on vacation in Cuba at the same time*] Fidel Korda [*Alberto Korda's son in Oslo, who contributed with new addresses and some contextual spots from his childhood memories in Havana*]  
The subsequent "cast" or gallery of places and persons was enlarged in phase two and three by 4 new "players/dwellings/places" Kristina Vives [*Curator, wife of a painter and fotografer, friend of Odey and Miguel Curated the work of Korda*] Miguel, Greta, and the ISA complex,.

<sup>33</sup> Oulipo stands for "Ouvroir de littérature potentielle", which translates roughly as "workshop of potential literature". It is a loose gathering of French-speaking writers and mathematicians, and seeks to create works using constrained writing techniques. It was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. Other notable members include novelists Georges Perec and Italo Calvino, Constraints are used as a means of triggering ideas and inspiration, new structures and patterns; most notably is Perec's "story-making machine" which he used in the construction of *Life: A User's Manual*. In the present project, various constrains were continuously put into practice. i.e.: investigation through Cuban stamps, inspection of the Vedado area via *Soy Cuba*, choosing potential accommodation via LonelyPlanet, asking Fidel Corda for one specific spot in Havana, and introducing Cristina Vives, the Cuban curator of Alberto Corda's work, into the project, etc. Add to this the many mathematical stratagems used to choose between multitudes of similar produced work specimens in the process.

<sup>34</sup> A technique of editing in film, in which several images are juxtaposed, superimposed or shown in succession, to present an idea or theme greater than the sum of the individual images.

<sup>35</sup> A surprising amount of serendipitous overlaps established themselves: Cristina Vives's apartment was right opposite the Hotel Capri, filmed in *Soy Cuba*, opposite Korda's studio from the 60's. The sister in law of Eli's Cuban host, Jorge Coala-Potts drowned in the pool of the Hotel Capri when the large pool mural collapsed on her while swimming, some years after *Soy Cuba* was made.

<sup>36</sup> Proust, Marcel, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. I, Swann's Way, Pléiade [1954].  
"No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate, than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place." So in Swann's Way, the first part of his seven-volume work, did Marcel Proust begin his remembrances. Soon the past was unfolding in his pages: "And once I had recognized the taste of the crumb of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-flowers which my aunt used to give me . . . immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like the scenery of a theater." Ibid., p.45

<sup>37</sup> The initials refer to Eli's classification for the six localities/protagonists.

<sup>38</sup> The term and concept of meme is a neologism that first appeared in the 1976 book by Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins defined the meme as "a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation" Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the

---

broad sense, can be called imitation. > Dawkins, Richard : *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989 ISBN: 0192860925

<sup>39</sup> *Synaesthesia* is a general term covering the condition of a simultaneity of haptic perceptions whereby stimulation in one sense triggers stimulation of a different sense. A synaesthete is able to hear color, taste shapes, describe the color, shape and flavor of somebody's voice, or music, the sound of which looks like "shards of glass". Throughout history many notable artists have claimed to have synaesthesia, including Rimbaud, Kandinsky, Scriabin and the Russian filmmaker Eisenstein. Recent scientific research has moved the condition from the domain of mainstream neurology to mainstream neuroscience, though explanations for the conditions cause remain controversial.

Eli Goldstein has the gift of being a full synaesthete, possibly explaining her very finely tuned observation abilities.

For more information on this topic, see:

Harrison, John. E. *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001

<sup>40</sup> Eli Goldstein's new, ongoing collaborative psycho-cartographic project (Kjersti Wikstrom and Eli Goldstein : *Transcendence: Psycho-Cartography*) can be followed at Dixpatx Art Collective under the following URL:

<http://www.dixpatx.com/> > work in progress link(s)

<sup>41</sup> Peter Piller's (b.1968) characteristic main *oeuvre* so far, is his fabulous archive of 8000+ "banal" pictures of urban and suburban contexts, cut-out from provincial German newspapers. Piller is currently professor at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig.

<sup>42</sup> Nicolaus Neumann : *Peter Piller, Der Komödiant des Altpapiers*, in ART/Das Kunstmagazin #8, August 2006. p. 36. More on Peter Piller's work, see his website, > URL: <http://www.peterpiller.de/>

<sup>43</sup> This sentence is a quote, often attributed to T.S. Elliot. Other sources ascribe it to Nostradamus.