PAVLINA LUCAS

The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning

...IN MY END IS MY BEGINNING



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PhD Report Oslo School of Architecture and Design

CON-TEXT nr.64

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It was with an equal measure of delight and disappointment that I experienced my recent encounter with the (almost same) title that I had resolved to give to this text at the end of the book *Artistic Research* by Mika Hannula et al. Disappointment because I would not have the pleasure of originality and delight because I realized that I am now part of a network of minds thinking along the same lines. However, despite the fact that both Hannula's "(Instead of) Conclusions" and my "(Instead of) A Conclusion" point to the present inconclusiveness of practicing-research, there is a crucial divergence enclosed in their seemingly minor difference. In its singular form, *a conclusion* – akin in its essence to *an architecture* – makes it already evident that I do not intend to conclude for you. Whatever (inconclusive) conclusions I reach here are on my own account, not because I am an ungracious host, but because I do not want to undermine any conclusions that you might have already reached or will reach, by spoon-feeding you.

As my research project – like all other practicing-research projects – unfolds questions instead of closing hypotheses, it is incompatible with the hypothetico-deductive model, which has been the standard in academia. With my decision to pursue a doctoral research project that deviates significantly from the establishment, I forfeited the assurance of precedents and I signed on to the hazards enclosed in undertaking such an endeavor. Despite the risks implicit in my decision, I was enticed by the self-directed and self-sustaining nature of this sort of exploration, and so I embarked on the journey with a sense of trepid excitement.

The development of this journey entailed continuous choice making based on the bent of my instinct. This contributed to a heightened sense of authority over the project, but also to an increased level of anxiety – in the existential sense of the word – emanating from my awareness of the responsibility inherently affiliated with my freedom. But having full responsibility of the project also amplified my joy and gratification when unpredictable discoveries surfaced that illuminated not only the path of my journey, but my own self as well. Apart from being way-finding, this adventure has been also self-finding, helping me to see myself as a human being and as a creative individual in a new and clearer light.

Impelled by my wish to introduce intuition at the beginning of the creative process towards an architecture, and based on my proposition that photographic practice opens a way for answering the question *How can we disclose our intuitive insights and how can we bring these into the production of spatial experience?*, I set forth. In the background of my wish has been, on one hand, the cognizance that analytical reason has come to dominate the design of architecture and, one the other hand, the belief that starting from intuition and engaging this in a transactional relationship with the intellect endows the creative process with an authentic footprint.

The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning (Instead of) A CONCLUSION

During this explorative journey I tried to remain ever alert to my inner voice and aware of the circumstances encircling my endeavor, while making deliberate and committed choices that steered its development in the direction of the originary wish. The evolution of my project, impressed by my disposition and context, influenced by serendipity and chance, and animated by a host of unforeseeable factors, proceeded thus organically along a certain path that was one out of a myriad other possible ones. Undoubtedly this research would have become something entirely different if developed by another person, or even by myself in any other time or place.

Developing this project has been akin to initiating a structure on a definite foundation and thereafter progressing layer upon layer from the base up without a sectional plan, and therefore without the overview of an end result. In the absence of a framework to be systematically filled in, this edifice revealed itself gradually and unpredictably through the process of its own making. The emerging form was influenced by the resources in stock at each point in time and by the ever changing conditions of its site, while the end result coincided with the exhaustion of time and funding.

In the span of the four years that I worked on this project – at times more and at times less efficiently, as it is usually the case with such ventures I suppose – I acted at times as an artist, at other times as a scholar, and for two semesters as an instructor. Assuming these different roles and developing the project under their guise has not been a masquerade, for they are all part of who I am. Switching back and forth between these stances required a shift in my frame of mind, a challenge which I settled by inventing appropriate techniques of adjustment. I found that changing locales helped me to shift effectively between the role of the artist and that of the scholar. Hence, I conducted my hands-on work while travelling or in ateliers outside AHO and I reflected and wrote in my office, where I could also avail myself to the library resources.

This performance, enacted in the absence of a pre-formatted script, was a revision in progress and akin to a jazz improvisation. Just as the jazz soloist follows the inspiration of the moment and composes his music on the spot based on the contours of the tune or the possibilities of the harmony, so did I proceed following my impulses and carrying the melody using different instruments.

Discoveries that surfaced in one arena inevitably affected the development of my work in the others, and so my performance moved in concert (but not simultaneously) along distinct but crossing trails, bringing forth bodies of work different in scope and character but synergic with each other. These units of work rest now, in their gathered and composed form, at the center of this research report; but while I was immersed in the process of developing them I had no scheme in mind about their eventual form or synthesis. I did however remain aware of the fact that, notwithstanding the essentially interminable nature of my venture, I was obliged in the context of the PhD programme to halt at some point and package my work in a way appropriate to its nature so as to state my case publicly.

A few months before the end of my contract period I took a step back and looked at what I had produced in its entirety. In view of all the different strands of my project I was admittedly overwhelmed by their polyphony and bewildered by the question of how to compose these into a harmonious whole. After deliberating over this question for some time without reaching a satisfactory answer, I withdrew it from my mind and went sailing. And then one morning I woke up with a clear and complete image of my research report in my mind. What you have in your hands is the implementation of that vision, following a prolonged act of gathering and sythesizing that lasted for almost a year.

The period when I was collecting and composing my work into the present report was perhaps the most demanding but also the most rewarding out of the years that I devoted to this project. I began by trying to discern and to formulate as precisely as possible the significance of my journey to my own self, in essence taming my creative process and bringing its import home. Thereafter my task was to oversee the synthesis of the units of my work and to re-port them, bringing the insights of my journey out of its personal universe and onto a common platform in an accessible fashion. As the different episodes of my per-formance came gradually together and found their place in the company of each other, my voice emerged with increasing clarity and authority. Situating my work gave me a sense of placedness as well, accompanied by an unprecedented feeling of composure and self-confidence. The answer to the question lurking in every doctoral researcher's mind – *Why do a PhD?* – which had troubled me greatly from time to time, arose thus naturally and convincingly.

During this last phase of my research project I worked in parallel on the different elements of my report, switching between them according to the mood of the day and in quicker succession as the deadline for submission drew nearer. In these final weeks I have reached the level of profound concentration – accompanied by a seeming slowdown, or prolongation, of time – that I last experienced when I was giving birth to my son in a wood-workshop-turned-apartment in the Swiss Alps. The feeling that I must press on without halting has been very prominent throughout this segment of my journey, arising from a certain fear that if I let go of my focus now the insights present will just disperse and I will never be able to gather them together again.

However, while living my research journey I did not aspire to a final destination, but rather the opposite in fact. The essence of my voyage was the enactment of the voyage itself, and every episode of creation was a beginning opening up a world each time anew. Since beginnings and ends are conditions permeable by each other in the creative process – because an end is always implicitly present in every beginning and a beginning is always waiting in every end – there can be no final closure to this journey but only pauses that harbor a vital energy ready to burst into new cycles of work when the conditions are right. As an opus standing in a state of pregnant repose, this project report summons then, more than the gratification of a finality, the thrill of imminent new beginnings. But where and how can these take place?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since I will continue to evolve as a creative individual, what I have gathered from this research journey will inevitably be part, in one way or another, of my future work. Outside the confines of my personal universe, the import of this research project will be as varied as its points of contact "out there". As I see it, the contribution of my project to other individuals operates essentially on two levels. In its current state of closure, this research report constitutes, on one hand, an epistemological sample of the research mode it manifests, and on the other hand, an ontological example of a creative practice grounded in intuition. Each one of these two levels corresponds to a different audience.

As a sample of practicing-research, this project contributes to the discussion on this mode of knowledge production. Yet, while existing within this framework, my project – like all other projects of its kind – is singular in its ways, and constitutes thus a novel contribution to its epistemological milieu, akin to a star in its sky. When a critical mass of projects is present on this firmament they will form constellations, the map of which will be continually revised as new projects appear. Ergo, the position and significance of my project to its epistemological millieu will keep shifting according to the currently unforeseeable evolution of its map. Yet, in view of the *status quo* of practicing-research, I believe that the most pertinent contribution of my research report on this level is not the particular exploration it encloses *per se*, but the manner in which the episodes of this exploration have been brought together into a synergic whole.

As an ontological example of a creative practice grounded in intuition, this project is essentially an invitation to the creative community *en masse* towards this mode of working. My choice to enact my research through photographic practice does not preclude other means of approaching similar endeavors. Therefore, the significance and contribution of my research project on this level is situated in the realm of the consequences of the wish it unfolds, rather than in the particular way that the wish has been unfolded. This project report does not put forward a step-by-step recipe and it is not an exemplar to be copied, but it remains as a testament to the creative potential of intuition.

This report stands now before artists and architects, students and professionals alike, as a source of inspiration, towards new work in the same direction but not perforce in the same manner. Exactly how this project will re-begin is not possible to predict, as every individual will develop its seed in ways influenced by their own background and by the ground where the contact occurs. Any attempt on my behalf to predict how my seed will germinate would in fact be more destructive than constructive for it will undermine the openness that is needed for it to function as an inspiration. As so I rest, with the confidence that my work will somehow re-begin through the efforts of other individuals who are inspired by it.

From one step further away, I see that the integration of intuitive hands-on production and analytical reflection sets the *eidos* of the present project; but it is the articulation of the personal insights that have emerged through it in a manner comprehensible to others that identifies it as research, and what grounds its claim to *doctorateness*.

With the prototype of my research project report in my hands, I feel like Saint George atop the slain dragon. I have killed the beast and, as Frank Sinatra sang it, I did it my way! This feat would not have been possible without the support of a host of individuals, each one of whom contributed in their own way.

Thank you...

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Last but not least, I thank you my son Leonidas Lucas-Hoehn, for bearing with me through this turbulent journey, for inspiring me with your creativity, and for keeping my life in perspective with your love.

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APPENDIX A

20.11.2012

Research Committee
Oslo School of Architecture and Design

Subject: Submission of PhD project

Dear members of the AHO Research Committee,

My doctoral research project *The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning* — which involves development work of artistic character and consists of diverse components such as written texts, photographs and ceramic artifacts — does not find adequate expression in the PhD submission format currently established at AHO.

I hereby would like to bring the inadequacy of old forms to satisfy new conditions to the attention of the Research Committee and to apply for permission to use a delivery format that is more appropriate for my project.

Doctoral projects combining scholarly research with artistic work merit a report format that aptly expresses their singular nature, and which brings the knowledge produced into a synergic relationship with how this was produced. As Marshal McLuhan aptly put it, "the medium is the message".

I intend to deliver my PhD report as a set of booklets, each containing a unit of work, yet complementary to all others in a non-linear fashion. Hence, the PhD report will echo the process of the project's development and assume a life that will be actualized afresh with every new reading.

I thank you for your time and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Pavlina Lucas Stipendiat

Institute of Architecture

25,11,2012

Research Committee Oslo School of Architecture and Design

Dear members of the AHO Research Committee,

Following my attendance at the final presentation of two doctoral projects by staff members at Sint-Lucas School of Architecture (LUCA) undertaking a PhD at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) as part of a collaboration between these two institutions towards the development of practice-based research, I feel that I ought to report to you the knowledge that I have gained from this experience, on one hand, so as to support my application for permission to override the PhD submission format established at AHO, and on the other hand, so as to share with you insights on this mode of research from an environment with a longer tradition and wider experience than AHO.

The presentations that I witnessed in Belgium were by Arnaud Hendrickx (Substantiating Displacement) and Jo Van Den Berghe (Theatre of Operations, or: Construction Site as Architectural Design). In addition, in August 2011 I attended the final presentation of the first doctoral research project in artistic development work in the Nederlands - held at Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design (MaHKU) — by Irene Kopelman (The Molyneux Problem).

Notes:

- 1. The artistic work produced in the span of these research projects was at the center of all presentations. In Belgium, the final presentations took place within the locale of the exhibition, while Kopelman concluded her presentation with a tour of her exhibition, held in a nearby gallery. All researchers stated explicitly that their creative project work was the spine of their research processes and that this preceded reflection, categorization, theorization, and the invention of a terminology.
- 2. There was not a standardized or comprehensive printed volume covering the development of the projects from beginning to end. Instead, the candidates produced booklets for each unit of work, and supplemented these with a text that explicated the parameters of the project, including their intentions, framework, methods, and conclusions.
- 3. The projects were discussed from within the autonomous sphere that they had established. The lack of contextualization in a philosophical or historical framework was rather unsettling in my opinion. The debate on where should practice-based research projects be placed on the line that spans the distance between autonomy and contextualization is currently active and yet unresolved. I wonder where does AHO stand on this matter?
- 4. Drawing some general conclusions from my experience of attending these presentations, I would say that they have enriched my understanding of how knowledge is generated through creative work, rather than offering me a piece of factual knowledge, as is the case with traditional research.

My address to the Research Committee:

In 2008 I, together with the rest of the successful applicants for the position of doctoral research fellow in practice-oriented research, joined AHO. As stated in the brief of the advertised positions, AHO wished to develop its PhD programme in the direction of "Research by Design" and priority was to be given to research projects that were "practically biased, i.e. projects that combined research with development work of artistic, architectural or design related character". Furthermore, the brief declared:

Inherent in this concept is an idea that relevant development work within architecture and design will most successfully take place through creative project work, in which practice work is combined with critical reflection. ... AHO recognises that there is work going on in various international professional environments to develop a special doctoral degree based on "Research by Design". However AHO uses "Research by Design" as a concept that may operate within the existing doctoral degree programmes and doctoral degree education. The regulations that apply to the PhD programme are generous, and provide ample opportunities to combine scientific work, development work and artistic work.

Out of the ten researchers recruited in 2008, there are now only four, to my knowledge, who are still pursuing projects that can be placed under the general umbrella of "Research by Design". There must be a reason for this high "dropout" rate.

I can not speak on behalf of my colleagues, but I speak for myself as one of the researchers who have chosen to continue with research that combines practice work with critical reflection. Although some of the specifics of my project have diverged from the proposal on the basis of which I was invited to join the programme, this has remained unaltered in its essential scope and ambition.

I have previously discussed the lack of in-house support for projects such as mine with my supervisors, with the head of my institute, with the research administration, and with the rector of the school. By support I mean:

1. Discussion on research that includes work of artistic character so as to explore the spectrum of its possible manifestations, to check if and how can this mode of research "operate within the existing doctoral degree programmes" and whether the "generous" regulations currently in place are indeed compatible with it, and to see how "scientific work, development work and artistic work" can be combined.

2. Financial support to cover the costs of materials, expert knowledge, or production facilities. A group application for additional funding, submitted to the school by all researchers wishing to pursue projects that include making parts, was met by silence two years ago.

I have raised topic number one above repeatedly during our meetings at the Institute of Architecture, and I strove to remind my colleagues there of the presence of this mode of research and of the need to include and account for it in the strategic plan.

The challenges related to conducting research though creative project work, together with a sense of isolation in my work environment, resulted last Spring to a near absolute collapse of my morale and a serious flirt with the idea of abandoning my endeavor altogether. So as to counter this predicament and overcome my paralysis I have since taken the following steps:

- 1. I sought discussion platforms that helped me to better understand practice-based research and the ways that this can be developed and communicated. My decision to attend the PhD defenses in Utrecht and Brussels/Ghent was in tune with this objective and with my advisor's recommendation.
- 2. I recently established a connection with the ceramics department at the Oslo Academy of the Arts KHiO, so as to facilitate the production of the spatial artifacts that are part of my PhD project. I am working with the rektor of our school towards resolving the pragmatics of this collaboration between AHO and KHiO and getting stable access to the relevant facilities.

I thank you for your attention in reading this letter. I close it here and eagerly await your response to this and to my previous letter regarding the format of my PhD report.

Sincerely,

Pavlina Lucas Stipendiat

Institute of Architecture

21.12.2012

Dear Pavlina Lucas,

The research committee discussed your letter on November 28, and decided the following:

- 1. On the basis on the specifics of your research, you will be allowed to deviate from the AHO dissertation standard.
- 2. This happens on the following conditions:
- A. The AHO name and logo must appear and be visible on all items produced and published as part of the dissertation (the graphic style of the standard should be used as far as possible).
- B. The standard budget for printing will also apply for you. Additional funding for publication cannot be applied for through the research committee.
- C. The contents of the dissertation should be available for future research. This is a fundamental requirement which means that research and experimental material production should be documented.
- D. The dissertation (including documentation of produced objects) has to be delivered to the National and AHO libraries in 14 copies (see Kvalitetshåndboken). Copies should also be available for the committee, the research administration, supervisor(s) (contact the research administration for more details on this).
- 3. This decision does not create a general precedence, but relates to your specific situation. The committee has initiated a process directed towards a general revision of guidelines for dissertation standards.
- 4. The committee will, through the research administration, make the management of the school aware of the need to revise the standard budget for finishing and printing dissertations.

Peter Hemmersam
Head of the Research Committee

THE ART OF PLACE: IN SEARCH FOR THE ABSOLUTE

Project proposal included with my application for the position of doctoral research fellow in practice-oriented research at Oslo School of Architecture and Design - December 2007

In late June 2007 in a basement room of the Neue Galerie in Kassel Germany I came across Gonzalo Diaz's ceramic filaments glowing briefly and at regular intervals, exhaling and inhaling these words borrowed from Novalis: WIR SUCHEN ÜBERALL DAS UNBEDINGTE UND FINDEN IMMER NUR DINGE (WE SEEK EVERYWHERE THE UNCONDITIONAL AND FIND ONLY THE CONDITIONAL).

My unexpected encounter with this "heated" statement instigated the disclosure of a series of interconnected questions – generated through events I had experienced and texts I had read in recent years – which laid within me tangled and intertwined with the vague promise of a clarification.

What is the unconditional, the absolute?

In *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (La pensée et le mouvant, 1934), Henri Bergson expanded on the two ways in which the world can be known: absolutely and relatively; and the two modes in which this knowledge is gained: the former through intuition and the latter through analysis.¹

Intuition, as an indivisible experience of sympathy through which one connects to the inner being of an object, to the thing itself in itself, without mediation, offers the possibility to grasp what is unique and ineffable within it. What is known then is absolute and unconditional, in the sense that it is absolutely what it is. Analysis can reconstruct and represent an experience or thing, but the original can not be found within the simulacrum.

Intuition, or the intuitive method, is fragile and ephemeral but it can momentarily become strong enough to overcome the emptiness of dualism, the separation of the object and the subject, and attain through an expansion of perception the absolute and the eternal.

As Peter Zumthor stated in his lecture "Does Beauty Have a Form?", "we are in nature, in this immeasurable form that we will never understand, and now in a moment of heightened experience, we no longer need to because we sense that we ourselves are part of it". Thus, the absolute experience is this visceral and unmediated connection to the concrete world, which Heidegger called *Dasein*. 3

The concept of *Dasin* presupposes the existence of a world, a place, where life can be present. In his lecture "Silence and Light" delivered at the ETH in 1969, Louis Kahn stated that the beginning of architecture, like the beginning of all art, "starts from a kind of feeling that there must be a world within a world".⁴

How can the absolute experience be attained?

In order to be in-the-world, there needs to be a connection with a concrete place where the body and the mind unite in an intimate relationship with their environment. With this connection to the world comes the connection to the self. Following a journey to West Africa, Sverre Fehn wrote: "I discover and I am what I discover. When nowadays we travel to Morocco with the aim of studying primitive architecture, the idea is not to unearth – or to render present – new things, but rather to recognize oneself there".⁵

Antony Gormley's *Home* (1984) comes to my mind. Once body and home - the par excellence *there* of being - come together, a unity is expressed where the primacy of vision is obliterated and the other senses are reinforced, awakening thus the body to an empathetic and holistic engagement with the world. When the body is at home it is also in-the-world, *Da* becomes then *Überall*. Gormley himself declared:

I question the notion that the retinal response is the only channel of communication in art, and the notion that objects are discrete entities. I want the work to activate the space around it and engender a psycho-physical response, allowing those in its field of influence to be more aware of their bodies and surroundings. ...you could identify my project as a whole, as a kind of intimate architecture that is inviting an empathetic inhabitation of the imagination of the viewer.⁶

Overcoming the polarization of subject and object, the hegemony of vision, and the fracture of thought and feeling, and re-establishing a connection with the essence of life, is the primary task of art, architecture of course included. As Christian Norberg-Schulz wrote, the sanctuary of art is this clarifying place that presents an "image of unity to which it itself belongs, concentrating in it and expressing the qualities of its place, and its surroundings. It is this expressive concentration that is known as art, insomuch as it makes present a world".⁷

By bringing forth a world, architecture becomes the art of place. The fleeting image that comes before thought places us at the origin of the creative consciousness. In his seminal book *The Poetics of Space* (*La poétique de l'espace*, 1958), Gaston Bachelard studied the phenomenology of the imagination as "the poetic image that emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul, and being of man". As he wrote, "our soul is an abode [and] by remembering 'houses' and 'rooms' we learn to abide within ourselves".⁸

Imagination is irrevocably linked with memory, and memory is directly linked with embodied experience. The mental image can only come from the concrete world, from the full engagement of the body with its physical reality. As Pallasmaa noted in *The Eyes of the Skin*, the body is the very locus of "reference, memory, imagination and integration". The mental image and the absolute connection to the world that this accomplishes happens in places that address the body in all its sensual potential, bringing a sense of presence and belonging and unleashing memory and imagination.

The task of architecture, as the art of place, is to awaken the imagination. The sensual presence of architectural form ignites images that constitute the world of absolute experience. It is through these poetic images that men achieve communion with each other.

How can mental images be communicated?

As research fellow in practice-oriented research at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, I plan to draw primarily (but not exclusively) on the writings of Christian Norberg-Schulz, Gaston Bachelard, Henri Bergson, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger, and on the oeuvre of Louis Kahn, Peter Zumthor, and Antony Gormley, so as to explore the relationship between the theories of emotion, the study of experience, and architectural presence, with the aim of answering the questions: How can mental images be communicated? and Where is the core of the profound yet fleeting connection to the world that occurs in certain places? In my search for the phenomenological determination of the poetic image and the ontological significance of its communicability, I plan to work between philosophy, phenomenological observation, and project work in the form of one-to-one installations.

In the Spring of 1999 Peter Zumthor taught the option studio *House Without a Form* at Harvard Graduate School of Design. I was fortunate enough to participate in the studio, and it was through the work I produced during this semester that architecture began to make sense to me. In the introductory text to the studio, Zumthor wrote:

And within the house, a sequence of seven spaces. We design it, which means we search for it in our memory, intuitively, imagining it to be a real thing of architectural flesh and blood. ... Form is not yet an issue. We think only about sensation, about materials and sounds and smells and shadows and light and about what our hands touch and what our feet walk on and about what the rooms and their sequence allow us to experience and feel and about the way these qualities might fit together and suit their place and enhance the different ways of use.

Working with one-to-one installations so as to explore and communicate the concrete presence and sensual atmosphere of an imagined yet still unbuilt place, was profoundly influential on my development as a practicing architect. I feel that there is a fertile and still unexplored ground along this path, and it is in this direction that I would like to continue my evolution as an architect and researcher. The proposed PhD project *The Art of Place: In Search for the Absolute* is a consequence of this ambition.

¹ BERGSON, H. The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics. N.Y.: Carol Publishing Group, 1992.

² Lecture delivered at the ETH, Zurich, November 1998.

³ HEIDEGGER, M. Being and Time. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962.

⁴ RONNER, H. and JHAVERI, S. Louis I. Kahn: Complete Work 1935-1974. Basel: Birkhäuser, 1987.

⁵ NORBERG-SCHULZ, C. Architecture: Presence, Language and Place. Milano: Skira, 2000.

⁶ BIRNBAUM, D. Remembering the Future: On Antony Gormley in YAMAWAKI, K. Antony Gormley: Still Moving Works 1975-1996. Hokuriku, Japan: The Japan Association of Art Museums, 1996.

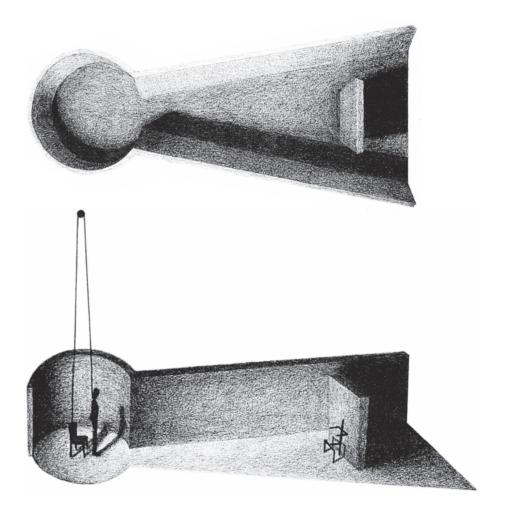
⁷ NORBERG-SCHULZ 2000, p.39.

⁸ BACHELARD, G. The Poetics of Space. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. pp.xviii & xxxvii.

⁹ PALLASMAA, J. The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses. Chichester: Wiley, 2005. p.11.

MATEOSIS

Cyprus, 1994 Installation: Merkouri Municipal Gallery Performance: Larnaca Salt Lake



I TRIED TO MAKE SOMETHING USEFUL



























I MADE SOMETHING USEFUL