

PAVLINA LUCAS

The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning

LOGBOOK

PhD Report



Arkitektur- og designhøgskolen i Oslo
The Oslo School of Architecture and Design

The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning

LOGBOOK

*The worst sin that can be committed against the artist is to take him
at his word, to see in his work a fulfillment instead of an horizon.*

Henry Miller

© Pavlina Lucas, 2013

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On the 69th day of my appointment as a doctoral research fellow in practice-oriented research at AHO I come to the idea to start a journal so as to document step-by-step the development of the artistic work that I will perform within the bounds of my project. Or rather, I should say a *logbook*, a record of my voyage, not by ship or aircraft as the dictionary definition suggests, but by way of an intuitive practice.

The idea of keeping a logbook comes to me, or I come to it, as I am reading the last pages of Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. At some point my mind drifts away from the space of the printed words and into that world where impressions, memories, thoughts and images, light up and fade away in a dreamlike succession. From the multitude of ideas that usually arise when I am in this state of mind, some recede and vanish shortly after their appearance, some linger flickering for a while in hope of getting actualized, and only a very small portion of these lead to action. Motivated by a sense of urgency, a feeling that this must be now or it will never be, I act upon my impulse and start my logbook right away.

As I begin, I ponder the notion that the record of this voyage is the core of my research project. For being immersed in and living fully each moment of the long journey ahead, taking each step as a corollary to the previous while developing the wish that has propelled the endeavor, and remaining ever aware of the evolution and context of my path, is indeed the essence of my task. The poem *Ithaca* by Konstantinos Kavaphes comes to my mind: the meaning of the voyage is not in the destination but in the adventure of the voyage itself. Or as Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in *Letters to a Young Poet*: "Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

Following these thoughts, the question *What is the definition of the noun design, as in research-by-design?* arises in my mind. I check the dictionaries. Different sources define design as "an outline, sketch, or plan, of the form and structure of a work to be executed or constructed"; "a plan or protocol for carrying out or accomplishing something"; or "a plan or drawing produced to show the look and function of something before it is made". Despite variations in the definition of the term, all sources essentially agree that a design is a plan deliberated in advance so as to guide the steps of a future action. I assume then that the term "by design" designates an action carried out according to a plan, but when I check the definition online at WordNet 3.0 I find out that it indicates an action done "with intention, in an intentional manner". Intention is defined as

“an act or instance of determining mentally upon some action or result, a purpose or goal”; “a determination to act in a certain way, what one intends to do or bring about”; or “an anticipated outcome that is intended or that guides planned actions”.

There is a crucial difference between design and intention: the former is a prescribed course of action towards a goal, while the latter is the goal that drives an action, but without prescribing a course towards its attainment. Otherwise said, design is a plan *of* action, while intention is the reason *for* action. Every research project follows an intention but not all of them are developed according to a design. In the present project I aim to explore how can intuition be brought into the production of an architecture, but I have no pre-conceived plan that will guide the course of my actions towards this goal. Hence, this research endeavor is *by intention* rather than by design.

Since my intention is not to find a universally valid answer to a *what* question, but rather to explore questions of *how* – *How can I disclose my intuitive insights and how can I bring these into the production of spatial experience?* – by *living* these during my journey, then the essence of this journey is the journey itself. A logbook of this exploration is then, by virtue of the immediacy it sustains between an event and its documentation, as unadulterated an account as possible of the evolution of this venture. By following the project step-by-step, I aspire to present as directly as possible its development, to offer a raw chronicle of my adventure.

However, I resolve to momentarily sacrifice immediacy for the sake of completeness and to look back so as to re-collect a pair of events that have contributed to my present disposition.

In late June 2007, while visiting the Documenta exhibition, I came across the art piece *Al Calor del Pensamiento* (1999) by the Chilean artist Gonzalo Diaz. In a basement room of the Neue Galerie ceramic filaments glowed intermittently, as if exhaling and inhaling, spelling the phrase: *WIR SUCHEN ÜBERALL DAS UNBEDINGTE UND FINDEN IMMER NUR DINGE*. This work touched me in a profound yet inexplicable way. (After some research I found that this phrase – which I translated as *We Seek Everywhere The Unconditional And Find Only The Conditional* – belongs to Novalis.) My chance encounter with this “heated” statement instigated a series of thoughts within me, which six months later formed the basis of my research project proposal to AHO. The proposed project *The Art of Place: In Search for the Absolute* centered on the questions: *What is the unconditional, the absolute? How can the absolute experience be attained and communicated?*

Then, two weeks ago as I was glancing over the English section at the local branch of the Deichmanske Library my eyes came to rest on a hardback pocket edition of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems and prose, published by Everyman’s Library, 1995. (My previous encounter with Poe was years ago, in a bookshop in Chur, Switzerland, where I bought *Eureka*, an account of his intuitive conception of the universe based on the proposition “because nothing was, therefore all things are”). As I picked up this small volume and flipped through it, two essays caught my attention: “The Philosophy of Composition” (1946) and “The Poetic Principle” (1950). I first read the latter.

In “The Poetic Principle” Poe wrote that Poetry is the elevation of the soul by way of glimpses into the world of “supernal Beauty”. These moments of heightened experience are simultaneously joyful and marked by “a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys of which . . . we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses”. According to Poe, the *poetic sentiment* – transient by “psychal necessity” – is developed not only in Poetry, but also in various other modes, such as Music, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture.

Thinking of the poetic sentiment as a profound but ephemeral instant, akin to Barthes’ *punctum*, I pondered my intended search for *The Art of Place* and I questioned the validity of searching for underlying principles that would then become normative, as a set of directives for the creation of spatial experience. I realized that this approach disregards the singularity and heterogeneity of experience and falsely assumes a universal ethic. As I recognized the fallacy of such a didactic quest, I resolved to abandon my search for a common denominator in instances of spatial poetry and to focus instead on such moments as they exist for me, without trying to systematize them. Eventually, I thought, it might perhaps be possible to come to some general principles, but this ought not to be the prime aim, the *telos*, of my project.

My inkling that it might in the future be possible to somehow systematize the knowledge that I will disclose during my exploration and direct this towards the production of architecture was substantiated when I read “The Philosophy of Composition”. Here, Poe recalled and described the process by which he composed his famous poem *The Raven*, claiming that “no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition – that the work proceeded step-by-step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem”.

OSLO | 19 OCTOBER 2008

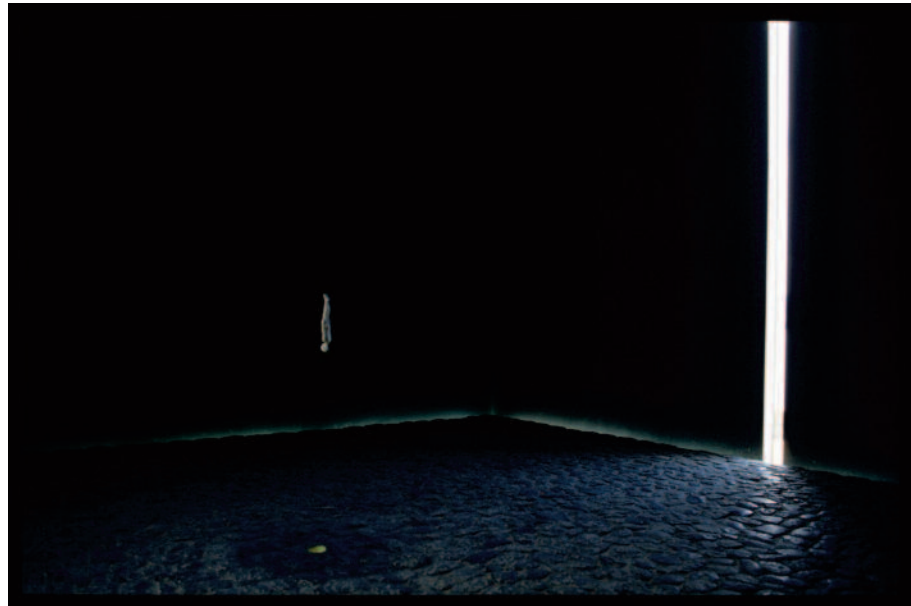
I decide to go through the photographs I have produced during the past ten odd years, to find the ones that still touch me by evoking the spatial fascination present at the moment of their genesis and to re-develop this by articulating it in words. (All photographs were originally captured on 35mm color reversal film with a Leica M6 camera.)

OSLO | OCTOBER 2008 - APRIL 2009

Transparencies digitized to match the originals.
No further post-production.

Texts jotted while re-visiting the images
and transcribed with minimal editing.

Date and location of the photographs is omitted
because I consider this information presently
irrelevant and potentially distracting.



There is a sense of lightness here.
Tectonic plates seem to levitate
temporarily enclosing a space
constituting the place where
this mysterious figure
can hang in mid-air
and feel at home.

I remain here for a while
cross-legged on the floor
the rounded cold stones
pressed against my skin.
I stay alert and waiting
anticipating some sort
of an imminent event.

But nothing happens
and nothing changes.
It all remains as I have found it
in this state of a frozen moment.

Here and now I come to know
the potency of expectation
the feeling of being at the edge
of an other unknown world.





I am taking one of my nocturnal strolls.*
The city is cool and quiet at night
and it almost feels like mine.

In the absence of a map
or of a destination
my senses are my guide.
I turn here and then there
following a distant light
a mysterious sound
or an odd smell
until I am lost.

I move along narrow allies
over arching bridges
under low porticoes
and through piazzas.
As I come to a crossroad
I stop and I sense
with my whole body
like an animal
where next?

I feel the delight of exploration
the thrill of discovery
a poignant joy of oneness
with time and space.

My body and that of the city
make love with each other
and it is mad and magic.

* *stroll* (*n.*) originates from the German *strollen*, variant of *strolchen* from *strolch* “vagabond, vagrant” and also “fortuneteller”; perhaps from the Greek *astrologos* “astrologer”.

Online Etymology Dictionary



I stop my late night stroll through the city
intrigued by a sparse collection of objects
gathered in an otherwise vacant storefront
and now illuminated by the street light.

A shopping cart.
A loose cable.
A bottle.
A box.
A fan.

Each object holds its position on this stage set
like a witness to an interrupted performance
perhaps to be continued tomorrow.

What is beyond that half-painted wall?
Where does the window open to?
Is someone sleeping there now?
I make my own tale.

I think of Joseph Beuys' vitrines.
Objects brought together
charging each other
composing a fiction.



I climb with care the narrow steps
wedged between the two walls.
The outer wall looms large
over the skyline of the city
the inner one crowns
a magnificent space.

The two walls embrace
holding onto each other
in their upward thrust
and as I move
through them
my hands feel
their texture
and the hands
that made them
rough mason hands
shaping stone after stone
and setting them in their place.
I see the structure gradually rising
stone set upon stone set upon stone
set on the earth and reaching for the sky.
And here I am so many years afterwards
in the space that these hands built
touching it, smelling it, feeling it
hearing the echo of my steps
as they take over gravity
to reach the summit
of the dome.



It is that hour when day turns into night
and as I walk down the boulevard
it appears and looms above me
like an animal in its cocoon
fragile and enigmatic.

The cloaked figure
emits a certain vital energy
the kind of energy that things
in the making tend to possess.
Sounds issue from its insides
and I get glimpses of activity
happening beneath the veil.
My imagination begins.

Soon silence prevails
and this animal remains
breathing softly, patiently waiting
for the next day and then the next
until the day when its shroud drops
and its body opens up to the world
and towards its slow way to decay.



What is a library?
A bibliotheque?

It is a chest for books, he says.
A receptacle where books are stored.
The place where books come to rest.
It is the sepulcher where books live.

This subterranean cavity
is precisely as he has described it.
Walls lined with printed volumes
light falling on varnished wood
and he buried in his research.

This room feels like a piece of furniture.
Intimate, well proportioned, humble.
A container made for reading
and nothing else.
I like it.



I feel sheltered and trapped at once.
The smell of earth soothes me
the danger of a catastrophe
keeps me on my feet.
As I wait
and wait
and wait
my ears search for clues
hinting the train's arrival
and my eyes scan the screens
for the comfort of an escape.
I am here and elsewhere at once.



I know that I am inside
but I could be outside
descending a staircase
leading to the center
of a southern old town.

The walls resound my footsteps
as my body moves downward
and I sense a joyful friction
that quickens my pace.

I know that it is daytime
but it feels like that time
when day turns into night
and street lamps light up.

And what a pleasure it is
to turn left at the landing
and find that great room
still full of bright sunlight
shining down from above.



We wind our way upwards
through ceremonial staircases
and then through back stairs
that we find unlocked.

It is bright daylight outside
and the city is busy as ever
but here is another world.
The world of artificial lights
sumptuous surfaces and
self-conscious footsteps.
The world of spectacle.

Looking down from the top
onto that magnificent space
I witness a performance
enacted by everyone
for everyone else.

And I am looking back at you
to see you looking back at me
to see me looking back at you.



Am I inside or outside?
I do not know.

My body is caught
in the midst of all these layers
some real and some phantoms
reflections of reflections
and I find nothing
to hold onto.

I am seized by
a feeling of nausea.
A sensation of vertigo
overwhelms and paralyzes me.
I can move in every direction
but I can not go anywhere.



Being inside the work
of this famous artist
I, like the animal
play dead; real time.

As I find myself in a state of empathy
whereby I can not tell the boundary
between reality and dream
between here and there
the words of Paul Ricoeur
from the preface he wrote
to Husserl's *Ideas*
come to my mind:

*I am at first lost and forgotten
in the world, lost among things,
lost in ideas, lost among plants
and beasts, lost among others
... for if I am lost in the
world, I am already lending
myself the character of a thing
in the world.*

OSLO | 24 APRIL 2009

During the past six months I have gone through the many hundreds of photographs that I have taken since 1999. In these years I almost always carried my 35mm camera with me loaded with color reversal film and I documented moments that touched me, taking one photograph on each occasion. After developing the film, I mounted the transparencies and stored them in boxes chronologically with the vague intention of making something out of them one day.

Starting from the earliest work, I went through my photographs, a carousel at a time, on those evenings when after the doctoral school and after putting my three-year-old son to sleep I still had the attention span necessary for the task. I needed to be in a state of concentrated ease and to have ample time available to immerse myself in the process of evoking the fascination that impelled me to press the shutter release on my camera in each case and to re-live this mentally.

I first looked at all the images in the carousel quickly, allotting about ten seconds to each. Then I went over them again in a much slower pace. I was not looking at the images as aesthetic objects, but as records of an intuitive impulse through which I could now activate a thinking process. Some images touched me right away, re-developing in me the fascination that I had felt in the first place. These images were like notes on a striking dream, and as I was revisiting them now I re-lived the emotional impact of that dream as vividly as when it first appeared to me. When I came across such an image, I stopped and took my time to *be* in it and to think my presence there and the space around me through words, which I jotted down as they surfaced. At the end of each session I composed these notes into the texts that are printed here.

During the same six months, I read Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* – originally published in 1896 as *Matière et mémoire* and cited here from the Macmillan edition, 1911 – and *Creative Evolution* – originally published in 1907 as *L'Évolution créatrice* and cited here from the Dover edition, 2004. I noted the following passages:

It is true that an image may *be* without *being perceived*; it might be present without being represented, and the distance between these two terms, presence and representation, seems just to measure the interval between matter itself and our conscious perception of matter. (p.27)

With the immediate and present data of our senses we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience. ... [Memory] covering as it does with a cloak of recollections a core of immediate perception, and also contracting a number of external moments into a single internal moment, constitutes the principal share of individual consciousness in perception, the subjective side of the knowledge of things. (pp.24-25)

The distinct outlines which we see in an object, and which give it its individuality, are only the design of a certain kind of *influence* that we might exert on a certain point of space: it is the plan of our eventual actions that is sent back to our eyes, as though by a mirror, when we see the surfaces and edges of things. (p.12)

Every time I acted upon an impulse and pressed the shutter release on my camera I produced a permanent visual record of that instant. These photographs remained mute witnesses to an “immediate and direct perception” until I came to think through them the experience present at their origin, lending thus a voice to the image. A *photograph* is hereby understood as the physical record in its autonomous state; while an *image* is my own reading of the photograph’s presence. Otherwise said, the photograph becomes an image and starts to speak only when I direct my attention and intentions towards it.

My dialogue with these images was, as Bergson pointed out, inevitably affected by my memory and influenced by my disposition. My interest in spatial experience was the sieve through which my perceptions were filtered. However, while re-living the recorded moments I remained in the act of my thinking, as this was becoming manifested into words.

Just as I had finished going through all my photographs, I happened upon Heidegger’s essay “Letter on ‘Humanism’” – originally published in 1946 as *Brief über den Humanismus*, and cited here from *Pathmarks*, Cambridge University Press, 1998. Reading this essay helped me to clarify the nature and significance of my process. For Heidegger, thinking (*denken*) is an act that negates causality because it unfolds the truth of being, understood as *dasein*, simultaneously with its own becoming. If thinking “does not become action only because some effect issues from it or because it is applied”, if it is an act that endures insofar as it thinks of being, it preserves its autonomy. (p.240) In this light, thinking is relieved from its “technical interpretation” as a means toward an end or as a “process of deliberation in the service of doing and making” (i.e. *praxis* and *poiesis* respectively) and it is “taken for itself”:

Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of the human being. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to being solely as something handed over to thought itself from being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being. (p.239)

Photographing has been for me an act of thinking, manifested spontaneously in the language of visual symbols. These photographs came to *be* as I myself was becoming; they are thought – both noun and verb at once – at the moment of their genesis. In this sense, each photograph is *absolute* in its origin; a presence of finite perfectness, the *isness* of which could not have been other than what it revealed itself to be at that moment. Kant argued that we are not capable of direct knowledge of the world because all our experiences are mediated through the mind, which structures perceptions according to *a priori* concepts. But the *photographic absolute*, emerging from a thinking process that evades causality and becomes as it is thought, concentrates time and space into a single and indivisible yet infinitely expanding point that *is* my being-in-the-world.

As I was re-developing an original experience through the presence of the image in front me, words emerged that articulated my thinking process in a common language. These words were naturally influenced by my disposition, but because I thought *of* and not *towards*, I remained entirely in the moment, immersed in the present act while disclosing and unfolding what emerged spontaneously.

The texts that have surfaced through these acts of thinking are not means to an end, but they are rather ends in themselves. As autonomous presences, these words are like stars that I placed one next to the other in the firmament of my unconsciousness. Only afterwards, when I step back and contemplate the constellations formed in this starry sky in an effort to derive knowledge towards future production, will my thinking slip out of its element and become purposeful as a *techné*:

When thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as *techné*, as an instrument of education and therefore as a classroom matter and later a cultural concern. One no longer thinks; one occupies oneself with “philosophy”. (p.242)

Thinking permeates action and production, not through the grandeur of its achievement and not as a consequence of its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment. For thinking in its saying merely brings the unspoken word of being to language. (p.274)

I am determined to remain in the element of my thinking as I continue on this journey. I foresee the development of my work as a series of creative episodes, whereby my “I” and its circumstances will be the prime resistant force. In my subsequent acts of photographing I will think spatial experience as this exists for me, staying *within* my act and not directing this yet towards a purpose. During the intervals of critical reflection that follow my photographic acts I will aim to disclose insights latently present in my practice, and by verbalizing these to bring them onto my conscious level before beginning again with a new creative act.

JAPAN | 17 - 29 JUNE 2009
Nikon Coolpix 8400

OSLO | 6 JULY - 28 AUGUST 2009
Images set atop each other.
No further post-production.









OSLO | 2 SEPTEMBER 2009

At the end of my journey to Japan, I had a sizable body of photographs. I recorded spontaneously what touched me at the moment, with the sole intention of keeping this. Each photographic act concentrated in it my being-in-the-world at that particular instant, and it was *absolute* in terms of this concentration.

Going through these photographs was a long-drawn-out process of re-living moments of intense spatial experience from my first contact with this foreign land and culture. Through each image, I re-developed my impressions, my thoughts, my feelings, present in that original moment.

I printed the images, pinned them on a wall in my apartment, and looked at them in their accumulation for some time each day. Gradually images formed relationships with each other and I explored these by trying different combinations. I settled on the pairs that felt somehow right and fixed these in place.

The theme of nature/culture has been very present in my mind lately, and this surely affected what I perceived in the images and how I urged them to meet each other. By their coming together, these images bring forth a world where the artificial co-exists with the natural in a seamless and dreamlike stance, rendering the rationally impossible plausible.

JAPAN | 17 - 29 JUNE 2009
Nikon Coolpix 8400

OSLO | 14 SEPTEMBER - 23 OCTOBER 2009
Images set next to each other.
Left hand images cropped.
No further post-production.

















OSLO | 28 OCTOBER 2009

As I continued working with the photographs from my journey to Japan – which are still pinned on my wall – relationships started to emerge between concentrated views of spatial elements and broader perspectives. The coming together of these not originally adjacent moments, instigate a spontaneous yet leisurely dialogue between them. The two voices, vibrating with a different tone, but in unison, bring forth an atmosphere that rises from, but which is higher than, the sum of its parts.

The wider view sets the stage, while the detail breaks the composure of this and sets it in a different light, so to speak. Or otherwise said, details are like staccato notes that punctuate the motif of the spatial melody and add a certain other kind of depth to it; that is why I cropped them into a square format.

Even though the two images are on the same plane of paper, the close-up images come forward while the wider views recede. My eyes move back and forth between the two, shifting focus, as in any other occasion that requires a negotiation between the near and the far, between the narrow and the expansive.

I try to recall spatial situations I experienced that have this sort of vibratory atmosphere, but no examples come to mind now, even though I am quite certain of their existence. Or maybe, I am just imagining.

I dream of an architecture originating in the interaction between *raum* and *ding*.

HARDAGER FJORD | 21 - 25 JUNE 2010
Panasonic Lumix G1

OSLO | 26 - 29 JUNE 2010
Images set next to each other.
Left hand images cropped.
No further post-production.

This unit of work was produced during
the workshop *The Color Of The Fjords* in June 2010.
The workshop organizers asked the invited architects,
artists, and designers, to address the conflict between the
natural and the manmade structures in the Hardager Fjord,
and specifically in the Stalheim and Ulvik Landscape Parks.



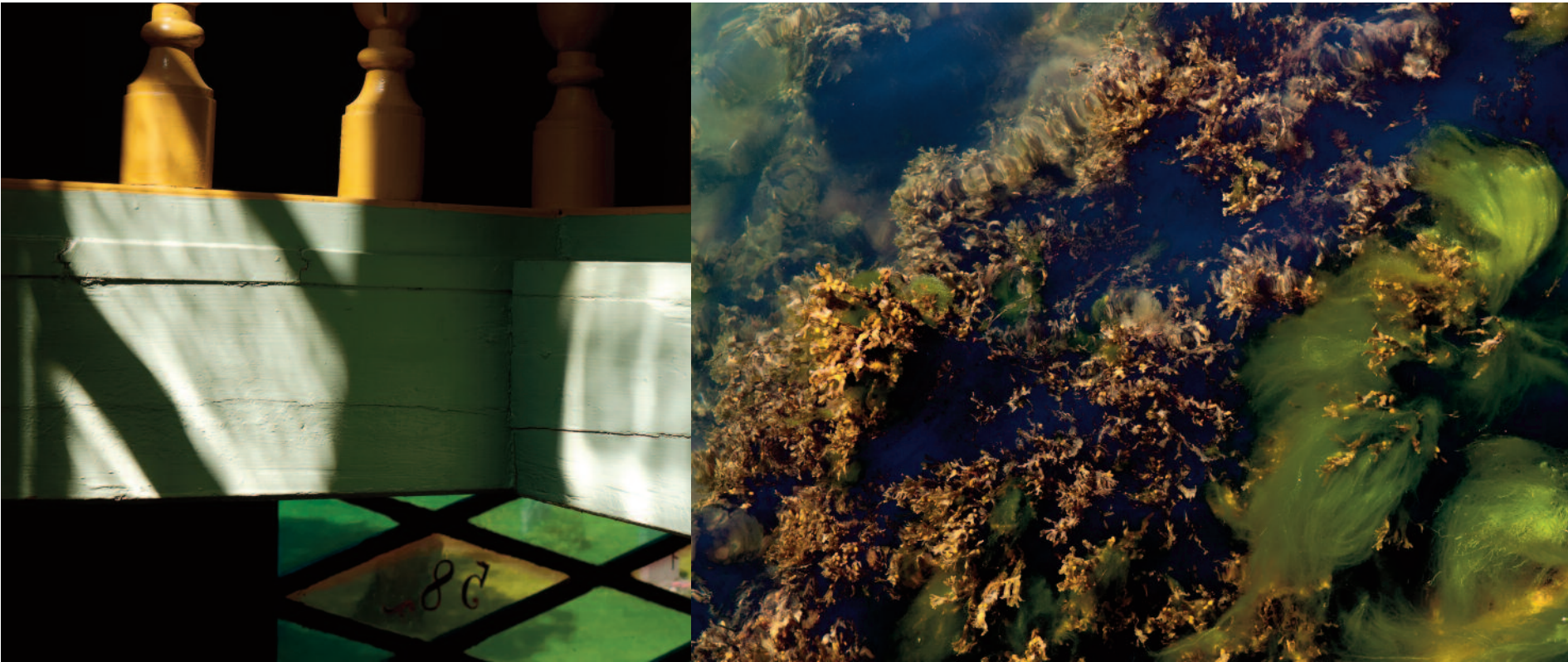














OSLO | 29 JUNE 2010

I photographed impulsively what touched me in the visited sites. Since I was not familiar with these places, I saw elements and conditions that remain unseen by local inhabitants because of their habitual contact with their environment.

When a certain photographic body was present, I began to think through the images the relation between the natural and the manmade. I urged the images to interact with each other and to form pairs through their conversation. In their coupling, the images reveal existing affinities between natural and artificial elements in the region.

These bi-partite images rephrase the theme of the workshop as a correspondence, rather than a conflict, between nature and culture. I hope that this work helps local inhabitants to see their environment anew through my eyes, constituting thus a beginning towards future development that maintains and promotes the consonance that these images exhibit.

OSLO | 2 AUGUST 2010

During the last three episodes of my journey, I prompted and partook in dialogues enacted through the meeting and interaction of images with one another. These conscious and intentful, yet impromptu, performances were contingent on and influenced by the disposition of my mind as this set itself upon the photographs.

Unlike the centeredness of single images, bi-partite images elicit a diffusion of focus. They instigate a certain vibrating motion, a cinematic perception that begins wide apart and gradually closes the space – real and imagined – of the encounter. Through their reciprocal interpenetration, the two images evoke a world that is beyond their sum.

In the first episode, the interplay of images set atop each other merged the natural and the man-made in a seamless fiction that brought the rationally impossible into the realm of the plausible.

In the second episode, detail images punctured the composure of the spatial scene placed next to them and instigated an expanded perception of depth, in a cinematic way.

In the last episode, the two images worked in unison to reveal correspondences between the natural and the manmade. Looking again at these bi-partite images now, I see that they possess an editorial character that forestalls their imaginary expansion. In this respect, this body of work is the least fruitful of the three.

• • •

Summarizing my last three creative episodes feels like a closure. I sense that the mode of exploration performed in these has exhausted itself, at least for the present moment, and so I find myself in a standstill on the creative front.

I do not know in which direction my next step will be. However, I now see that there is not an absolute “out there” to be found. Instead, the absolute is within me, emerging as the concentrated and unbroken moment of my creative impulse and retained in the photograph. This is then re-developed and perceived through my act of reflecting on its image, over and over again, and each time anew, under the light of my intention.

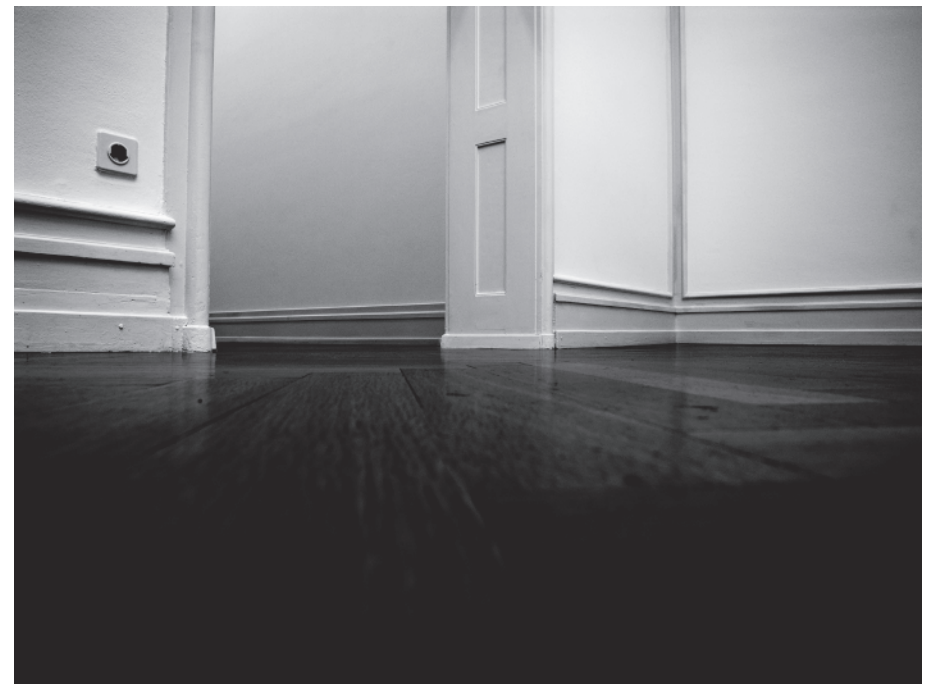
And so the fallacy inherent in my original project proposal, *The Art of Place: In Search for the Absolute*, becomes clear and prompts me to shift the scope of my research project and to change its title to: *The Photographic Absolute: An Architectural Beginning*.

KUNSTHALLE BERN | 20 NOVEMBER 2010
Leica M6. Monochrome negative film.

OSLO | 29 NOVEMBER 2010
Negatives digitized and reversed.
No further post-production.







OSLO | 30 NOVEMBER 2010

I enter the empty room of the gallery and
walk slowly towards the wall across me.
My body halts a few meters away from it
and I stand there, negotiating my presence
against that of the wall's white blankness.
The space between my standing body
and the vertical surface of the wall
feels charged and the air thickens
with an acute sense of enclosure.

I wish to feel more concretely this enclosure
but instead of moving towards the vertical wall
my body instinctively lowers itself toward the floor.
Crouched there, I acknowledge this horizontal surface
as the ever-present bearer of my body's mass and weight.
I wish I was barefoot so I could feel its smoothness
its imperfections and the grains of dust on it.

I move even closer to the floor, chest down
my body flat against the varnished wood
while the surrounding walls recede
like a backdrop to the scene.

And I think:
there *can* be architecture without walls
there *can* be architecture without a ceiling
but there *can not* be architecture without a floor
marking the topos of our physical presence.

The natural horizon
the boundary between earth and sky
separates the haptic from the optic
what we can touch, smell, taste
from what we can only see.

But what is an *architectural horizon*?

As I am lying here on the floor of this empty gallery room
I look around me and see the line marking the transition
between the surface of the floor and the rising walls
between the tangible and the seen
between the felt and the perceived.

How often do we touch the walls that surround us?
We look at them, we look through their openings
at near and distant views, we pass through them
through doors to other places and other rooms
we feel comfort or discomfort within them
but we so rarely touch the surface of walls.

With the floor, however, we are in constant contact.
This is the ground that makes our existence possible.

Our bodies are ever negotiating their movement
with the nature of the terrain that they traverse.
We shift our weight in response to its inclination
we calibrate our steps to ascend or descend
slopes and ramps, steps and staircases.
We adapt our pace to the grain of the ground
smooth and slippery or rough and textured.
We respond to its rigidity or softness
and we attune our steps to its temperature.
How soothing is a warm floor in the winter
and how we may tiptoe on cold marble.
And in its turn, the floor responds to us
speaking through the sounds it releases
as our bodies activate its material presence.

Walls around and above give us shelter
but they don't touch us as the floor does.

These thoughts come forth
as I find myself lying there
on the varnished wood floor
of this empty gallery room
looking and photographing
photographing and thinking
thinking and imagining.

The word "horizon" originates from the Greek *horizon kyklos* "bounding circle";
from *horizēin* "to bound, limit, divide, separate"; from *boros* "boundary".

Online Etymology Dictionary

HAVANA | 8 - 23 DECEMBER 2010
Leica M6. Monochrome negative film.

OSLO | 6 JANUARY 2011
Negatives digitized and reversed.
No further post-production.















OSLO | 22 DECEMBER 2010

They come here every day
some of them staring for hours
at the waters of the Florida Straits.

The Malecón is their balcony
onto that beyond they have not seen
but which they can always imagine.

The binding line of the horizon
defines the end of their room
the world they can perceive
and the beginning of
their imagination.

The void that rests
beyond the line of sight
they fill with mental images.
The horizon expands infinitely
through their act of dreaming.

*A dream is the bearer of a new possibility,
the enlarged horizon, the great hope.*

Howard Thurman

KUNSTHAUS BREGENZ | 11 JANUARY 2011
Haselblad 500CM. Color reversal film.

OSLO | 20 - 21 JANUARY 2011
Transparencies digitized to match originals.
No further post-production.
(Color casts in the images are due to the
temperature of the light source on-site.)

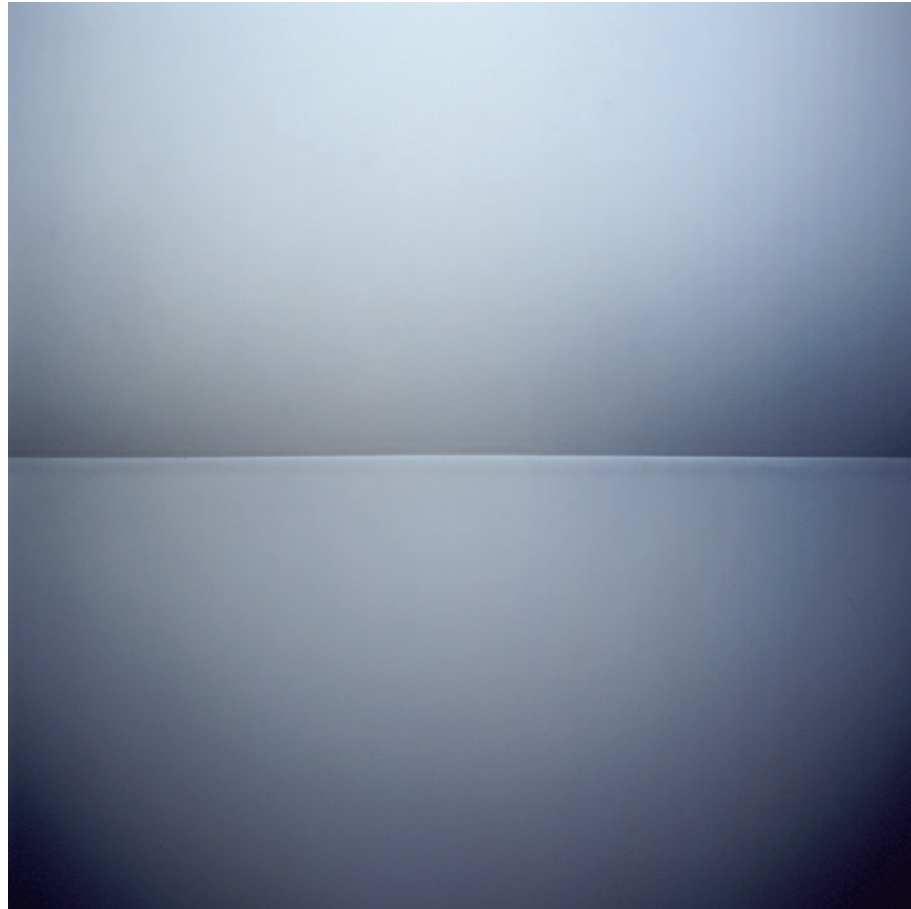












OSLO | 4 FEBRUARY 2011

The architectural horizon
bounding us to our place
is created by the meeting
of the constructed planes.
It takes place as the floor
finds the vertical surface.

From the finite and certain horizon
at the edge of the gallery's floor
an infinity emerges.

In the reality of the material
in the measurable contours
I meet the immeasurable:
an expanded, imaginary,
erotic horizon
beyond...

SERPENTINE PAVILION | 18 JULY 2011
Haselblad 500CM. Color reversal film.

OSLO | 25 JULY 2011
Transparencies digitized to match originals.
No further post-production.







OSLO | 31 JULY 2011

Matter constitutes our sensual world.
It arises out of an infinite expanse
that is time and space at once
and touches us.

The line that marks
the end of one material reality
and the beginning of another
is also a horizon.

Architecture composes these horizons
one beginning where the other ends
into an ensemble that pulsates
with a vital energy
at the rhythm
of our soul.

I have always been deeply intrigued by the fact that as an architect I am potentially able to create space as a sensitive body which - still in itself - has the capacity to frame the movement of life and more, to echo and even influence life taking place. Life takes its place. Creating some of the places life takes - that is architecture to me. It makes me think of an art form which seems to concentrate on the particular relationship between life and things: still life.

Peter Zumthor
(Excerpt from the introduction to the studio
House Without a Form, GSD, Spring 1999.)

OSLO | 11 SEPTEMBER 2011

Looking at the photographs from
the Serpentine pavilion
I feel the reality of the materials
their sensual presence.

Yet, in the transitions
between the here and the there
between the warm and the cold
between the hard and the soft
between the large and the small
I find a surreal
dreamlike, fantastic
almost absurd constitution
that makes me think of Alice:

*Down, down, down. Would
the fall never come to an end?
"I wonder how many miles
I've fallen by this time?" she
said aloud. "I must be getting
somewhere near the center
of the earth. ... I wonder
if I shall fall right through the
earth! How funny it'll seem
to come out among the people
that walk with their heads
downwards!"*

OSLO | 22 OCTOBER 2011

More than three years have passed since I embarked on my PhD journey. During this time I have read countless words and written a few, I have taken hundreds of photographs, I have had numerous discussions with my advisors, and I have designed and taught a workshop. Every one of these activities has affected the evolution of my path, bringing me to my present location.

I now take a step back to reflect on where I am and, in extent, on who I am. Am I a photographer, an architect, a teacher, a scholar, a researcher? I am all of these. And these different Pavlinas have surfaced during this adventure to meet the demands of the moment. I have immersed myself in acts of photographing, I have thought these acts with the mind of an architect, I have read and written texts as a scholar, and as a researcher I have remained aware of my process and the significance of this. Yet during these years, I now realize, I have not used my sense of touch.

Being in close contact with the materials out of which this world is made had always been an essential element of my being. But since I embarked on this endeavor, I have not mixed plaster, I have not poured concrete, I have not sanded wood, I have not bent metal, I have not formed clay, I have not hammered a nail. My hands have become soft. And when I think about making something now I feel paralyzed. I have ideas in my head, images of things that I want to make, but as we all know: there is a great deal of distance between an idea in the head, or even in the sketchbook, and this finding its rightful form and stature in the world of matter. It is in the span of this expanse that creation takes place.

Peter Zumthor – with whom I collaborated regularly between 2000 and 2003 and intermittently after that – wrote in *Atmospheres* (p.37) that I was “a marvelous architect”. Recalling this now doesn’t make me feel proud, but rather, I feel distressed, anxious, even embarrassed. Once I was a maker of things and making gave me confidence and strength, a sense of place in the world. But since I moved to Oslo I have not produced with my hands. I have of course used my fingers to write or to release the shutter on my camera, but my hands have not *actively* participated in creation. I look at them now and they feel alien to me, my whole body feels like a stranger to itself in fact. I fear that I have lost my touch. I am like Samson without his hair: powerless, helpless, homeless.

In my state of confusion and near despair I recognize that I can only find myself again through making. “Make anything, use your hands, overcome this paralysis and regain your confidence” I tell myself, while I find solace in the thought that what I have gathered so far on this journey is not lost, it is part of me now, and it will somehow find its way into the world through my fingers. And I keep saying: “Don’t doubt, have faith.”

ATLANTIC OCEAN (SINT MAARTEN - AÇORES) | 6 - 30 JANUARY 2012
Haselblad 500CM. Color reversal film.

OSLO | 17 - 19 FEBRUARY 2012
Transparencies digitized to match originals.
No further post-production.















AT SEA | 26 JANUARY 2012

Even if the instruments swear that
the boat is pressing on in its course
it seems to me that we stand still
while nature performs around us.

Here, in the open sea
the line of the horizon remains the datum
more or less distinct, more or less present
but unfailingly there nevertheless
against which the world
reveals itself ceaselessly
and always anew.

This horizon is time and place
coming together as one
containing what has passed
carrying what will come
collapsing memory
and imagination
in an enduring
per-formance.

Under changing atmospheres
the horizon appears to move
at times closer to my body
at other times further away.
The vessel and I together
as we have become one
stand at the threshold
of this volatile world
and see ourselves
in its light.

OSLO | 14 FEBRUARY 2012

I recall how my body felt one with the vessel
as we traversed the expanse of the liquid field.

I look at the photographs I took during the storm
by fixing my camera on the rail of the aft deck.
Each exposure lasted for more than a minute
so that the film could gather
enough light in the darkness
to render an image.

These images contain time
and my being within it.

Here, in the emptiness of the open sea
under a darkness broken by moonlight
I saw myself in a mirror
that was also a window
onto an immeasurable
yet palpable cosmos.

And I think: *Isn't this an architecture?*



OSLO | 11 APRIL 2012

Yesterday, on my way home from work, I saw a construction site by the river where they are digging channels to lay rainwater collection pipes. The excavated earth was deposited in a giant heap. I went close and touched it. It was moist and very slippery.

Today I went by the construction site again. I filled two plastic bags with mud and went to the workshop. I placed it on the workbench and offered it to my hands. I had no plan to follow, no theory to prove, no assignment to fulfill. My hands *per-formed* without a script, and in their performance they gradually found their way to the material and gave it form.

perform (v.)

circa 1300, “carry into effect, fulfill, discharge” via Anglo-French *performir*, altered (by influence of Old French *forme* “form”) from Old French *parformir* “to do, carry out, finish, accomplish” from *par-* “completely” + *fornir* “to provide”. The theatrical/musical sense of the word is from 1610.

per (prep.)

1580s, from Latin *per* “through, during, by means of, on account of, as in”.

form (n.)

early 13th century, from Old French *forme* “physical form, appearance, pleasing looks; shape, image” from Latin *forma* “form, contour, figure, shape; appearance, pattern, design”. One theory holds that it is from Greek *morphe* “form, beauty, outward appearance”.

Online Etymology Dictionary



OSLO | 19 APRIL 2012

Today I happened upon this passage while reading *The Cave* by José Saramago:

Indeed, very few people are aware that in each of our fingers, located somewhere between the first phalange, the mesophalange, and the metaphalange, there is a tiny brain. The fact is that the other organ which we call the brain, the one with which we came into the world, the one which we transport around in our head and which transports us so that we can transport it, has only ever had very general, vague, diffuse and, above all, unimaginative ideas about what the hands and fingers should do. For example, if the brain-in-our-head suddenly gets an idea for a painting, a sculpture, a piece of music or literature, or a clay figurine, it simply sends a signal to that effect and then waits to see what will happen. Having sent an order to the hands and fingers, it believes or pretends to believe, that the task will then be completed, once the extremities of the arms have done their work. The brain has never been curious enough to ask itself why the end result of this manipulative process, which is complex even in its simplest forms, bears so little resemblance to what the brain had imagined before it issued its instructions to the hands. It should be noted that the fingers are not born with brains, these develop gradually with the passage of time and with the help of what the eyes see. The help of the eyes is important, as important as what it is seen through them. That is why the fingers have always excelled at uncovering what is concealed. Anything in the brain-in-our-head that appears to have an instinctive, magical, or supernatural quality – whatever that may mean – is taught to it by the small brains in our fingers. In order for the brain-in-the-head to know what a stone is, the fingers first have to touch it, to feel its rough surface, its weight and density, to cut themselves on it. Only long afterward does the brain realize that from a fragment of that rock one can make something which the brain will call a knife or something that it will call an idol. The brain-in-the-head has always lagged behind the hands, and even now, when it seems to have overtaken them, the fingers still have to summarize for it the results of their tactile investigations, the shiver that runs across the epidermis when it touches clay, the lacerating sharpness of the graver, the acid biting into the plate, the faint vibration of a piece of paper laid flat, the orography of textures, the crosshatching of fibers, the alphabet of the world in relief.

These words come as an affirmation at a time when this is most needed.

OSLO | 7 JUNE 2012

I feel the urge to make a wearable piece of architecture
to use my body as the site of a spatial experience.
This urge presents itself as an *ANAIKH*
as an emphatic *es muss jetzt sein*
and so I follow its call ...

11 JUNE 2012
AHO CROQUIS SALLE





13 - 18 JUNE 2012
LIV I LEIRE WORKSHOP





OSLO | 13 AUGUST 2012

My intention was clear
but the image of the form
flickered in my mind
like a nebulous apparition
that was the sole guide
at my beginning.

I made a cast of my body
as the site where the form
could reveal its specificity
via the work of my hands.

Building the shape
on the cast of my body
was an unscripted act
that evolved unhurriedly
and unforeseeably
until a form emerged
which felt complete.

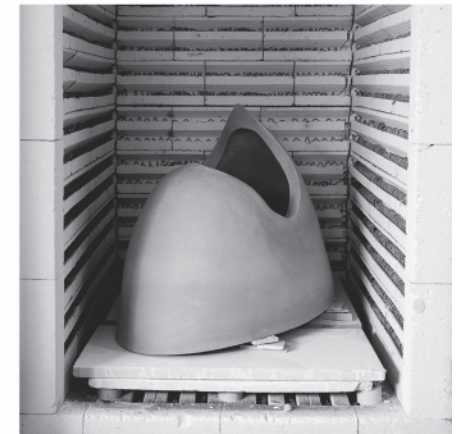
Although the image in my mind
was not fluent at its beginning
it spelled its choice of material
without any hesitation: clay.

Clay is yielding and demanding at once
and as I molded it towards my intention
I was obliged to obey its commands:

*Keep me moist.
Build me layer upon layer and
make sure I join well together.
Account for shrinkage due to firing.
Give me the time I need to dry and
handle me with great care before firing.
Choose the right temperature for me
as this will affect my strength
my texture and my color.*

15 AUGUST 2012

LIV I LEIRE WORKSHOP







OSLO | 16 AUGUST 2012

Upon wearing my artifact
– giving it to its proper site that is –
my body feels the weight
pressing down on it.
Then the two bodies
– my body and that earthen body –
begin to accommodate each other
finding the balance between them
enacting a territory together.
A portable territory.

I start walking
reluctantly at first.
My impaired eyesight
is a disquieting experience
taking me out of my comfort zone.
I feel helpless yet empowered at once.
The concave walls of my new enclosure
retain my voice when I speak and give it
back to my ears as a voluptuous body.
As I move I feel the ground beneath
more astutely than ever before
and with every new step
the force of gravity
draws me closer to
the earth bearing
under my feet.

Portable Horizon is a vessel that carries me back
to my flesh and bones through its per-formance
with my flesh and bones, grounding my being
in the here and now against the *siteline*
of an ever evolving sensual horizon.

TO BE SEDUCED BY ARCHITECTURE IS ALL WE ASK...

Oh Architecture, what are you? Elusive and concrete at once, you give your charms away in glimpses and then you cloak yourself in mystery again. You make us thirst for you. You keep us awake all night thinking about you, laboring over you, contriving ways to reach you. And when we finally get to sleep, you haunt our dreams, enchanting us in all your different guises. You give us images that turn in our minds and stir our hearts, so that we can never stop longing for you, never stop hoping that one day you will make us privy to your secrets. Like the Sirens, you lure us with your song and we follow your seductive call into uncharted territories. And there is no going back, no thread to help us retrace our steps and find the exit from your labyrinth. We forget ourselves and we get lost in the madness of our desire for you. Sometimes we do manage to reach you, to touch you and to be touched by you, albeit briefly, but long enough to feel your pulse. These moments keep us aroused and astir in your pursuit. We travel the world over to meet you and to be in your company. We find you in stately places with high domes and coffered ceilings, we find you perched on mountain slopes, or hiding away in narrow alleys. Sometimes we find you in the soft contours of a carpet, in the gently carved cavity of a rock, or under a hot tin roof. Majestic and extravagant, or humble and serene, you are always so marvelous and

compelling. In your presence we find ours and in your body we feel our own. You move us and you ground us. You give us the sounds and the smells, you give us the light in your shadows. You give us places where we can escape history, places where we can dream dreams of Bill the Lizard and the Mad Hatter. With you we are at home. We are so enamored of and so captivated by you Architecture. We are at your mercy. You know this of course, as you artfully tease us, pushing us and pulling us hither and thither with the vague promise of giving yourself to us now and then. And we get so excited by this prospect that our hearts begin to beat faster and our bodies tingle with anticipation. Sometimes we even start to hyperventilate and thoughts rush through our heads at an incredible speed. Questing after you keeps us alive. We stage festivals in your name and we all gather from near and far, dressed in our best attire, to pay homage to your various manifestations and talk about you. We are all so desperately trying to understand you Architecture. We strive to find your meaning in words, but just as we think that we have pinned you down, you slip away from us again. What do you want from us? We realize that the answer can not be that simple, for you are polymorphous and speak so many languages. So we each address you in our native tongue, pleading with

you to give yourself to us and let us decipher your enigma. We photograph you, film you, sketch you, paint you, draw you. Like the maiden from Corinth, who traced the shadow of her departing lover on the wall, we also try to somehow keep you. We are always so afraid of losing you, you see. For sometimes you turn aloof and distant, mumbling incomprehensible theorems to yourself. Then you shed your vigor and your vibrant charm, you wither away and become lifeless and bare. And we drown in despair and loneliness, afraid that we have lost you forever. But then you rise, like a phoenix from your ashes, and so youthful and fresh you are again. You sweep us off our feet with your new vitality and all we wish is that you enchant us and seduce us once again. And so we keep courting you, striving to be your deft lovers and bear offspring that is worthy of your name. What reckless and unscrupulous hedonists we are! We squander our lives indulging in sybaritic liaisons with you while our planet is in dire straits. But we are not going to apologize. No one has ever apologized for loving. For we really do love you Architecture. (And sometimes we really do hate you too.) We need you. Do not forsake us.

ARCHITECTURE, TO BE SEDUCED BY YOU IS ALL WE ASK.*

* Inspired by *TO BE WITH ART IS ALL WE ASK...*, Gilbert & George, 1970.
Written in December 2012. Published in *Conditions*, Issue 13.

OSLO | AUGUST 2013

Looking back now, I see how my journey began over and over again by way of each creative act and how every one of these episodes set my world anew, each time a little differently and a little more precisely.

The work brought forth through my practice evolved as I myself was evolving. We developed together and inseparably my work and I. On the way, we were lost and we were found, over and over again, each time recovering ever more clearly the sight of ourselves and claiming ever more firmly our site. And thus we attained an increasing sense of wholeness and the confidence to act and to speak in our own language, without seeking justification or external endorsement. And so when you ask: *Why that and not another?* or *Why so and not otherwise?* I answer: *It felt right to me at the time.*

Eventually an architecture emerged, as one instance out of a myriad other possible ones, and claimed its place with certainty in a material and a form. This architecture is not useful in the traditional sense of the word: it does not provide shelter from the elements, nor is it a monument to some x international. But neither is it useless, for by turning my insights inside out it shows me who I am and helps me to understand and to place myself in the world around me.

This sort of self-sustaining and self-reflective practice is like a snake that keeps biting its tail and pulling off its skin. It is often said that we, as creative individuals, work on only one project throughout our entire lives, again and again but in different forms. Each creative act is like a skin we leave behind so that we can keep advancing and shedding more skins. As we get older, perhaps we, like snakes, shed skins less and less often, but maybe, I indulge to think, more and more poignantly.

From the position where I stand now I can see far behind me, in the distance but distinctly, a skin I had shed two decades ago – and which was incidentally my ticket to architecture school. The installation and subsequent performance titled *Mateosis* was the last time I brought my own body – actively and intentionally – into my work, before entering the world of architecture at Harvard. (This project is presented in the current research report in Appendix C.)

I still remember the moment when the image of this project first dawned on me with such urgency and clarity that it was impossible to ignore it. I could not justify or explain it, but I *had* to do it. And so, I found a big gallery space, I rented three thousand bricks, and I set to work casting my body and making all the elements of the *mise-en-scène*. I worked day and night for a fortnight on the installation, and then I tore it down and enacted a performance with my likeness, copulating with it, and then destroying it and walking away.

While working on my *Portable Horizon* I kept thinking that somehow this work harks back to *Mateosis*, but I could not quite spell out the affinities between the two projects. Since the term “hark back” kept flashing in my mind, I looked it up online and found out that it is originally a hunting term referring to “hounds retracing their steps to find a lost scent”. Indeed! The journey of this research project has led me inadvertently, but purposefully nevertheless, back to the scent of my first beginning.

By acknowledging my body – its contours, its extensions, its mass, and its weight – by building around it, on it, with it, trusting my senses, and above all, by placing intuition at the forefront and following this, I found and founded myself all over again. By bringing my own very real physicality into my practice, I reinstate it at the center of my world and ground my existence. I feel alive (again).

I could call my practice a *sensual (and essential) humanism*.

. . .

This Logbook constitutes in its present state of gatherance the history of the evolution of my creative journey within the frame of my doctoral research project. While composing this chronicle I was influenced by the term under which every historian operates: personal judgment. Writing history is inevitably a selection process affected by the disposition of the author, and as Goethe stated cynically, “not all that is presented to us as history has really happened; and what really happened did not actually happen the way it is presented to us; moreover, what really happened is only a small part of all that happened”.

This little history that you have in your hands has been an exercise in taming my creative process. As the natural instincts of a domesticated animal can never be completely mastered, in the same way, I could not draw out all the insights latent in my work. Without doubt, more and more of these will reveal themselves to me in time.

For the moment, I offer this animal to you and urge you to take it home and let it develop there, mad or tame, as you wish.

*Thus grew the tale of Wonderland:
Thus slowly, one by one,
Its quaint events were hammered out –
And now the tale is done,
And home we steer, a merry crew,
Beneath the setting sun.*

Lewis Carroll
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

