Towards a Poetics of Light;

The Conceits of Light.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Interior Design.


School of Architecture and Design
Design and Social Context Portfolio
RMIT University, Melbourne.
August 2006.
Abstract

Towards a Poetics of Light; The Conceits of Light is a critical quest to map associations between rhetorical figures, psychological defences and spatial tropes in an attempt to conceive a poetic design that enacts conceit. Light is an emblem which echoes with an abundance of representations in literature, history, art and architecture and parallels may be drawn between their resemblances however apparently remote. Love, knowledge, hope and creative passion mark turns in the threads that knot ideas and their representations together. Return of the Immortals, the final project in a series of works exploring these parallels and representations, gathers together a cascade of tropes to structure a spatial experience which culminates in The Conceits of Light.
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* For further treatment of these myths and shadows in art history please refer to the lecture series on accompanying CD-Rom.
Foreword

It is inevitable, during masters research, that the question ‘what is a masters?’ be raised. It would seem appropriate to me to heed the relationship between ‘to be a master’ and ‘to hold a masters’ as indicative of the level of ‘mastery’ necessary to be considered either a ‘master’ or to be worthy of a ‘masters’. Both resolve in the title of mastery. ‘What is a masters?’ must consider both selected previous masters as precursors and be successful in exhibiting the student’s capacity to meet those precursors in spirit and ability, and where possible to expand and develop upon them. To complete a masters is to complete a long educational pathos where the student, in homage to precursors, rises to confirm their ability to stand amongst them. As Nietzsche so well puts it: “Nothing can be done about it: every master has but a single pupil—and he will not stay loyal to him—for he is also destined to become a master.”¹ The following is a body of work under the title: Towards a Poetics of Light; The Conceits of Light, a work which attempts to conceive a master.

The successful completion of a masters project is therefore not possible without precursors, some of whom do not come to light until the last red leer of research has lost its hue, some of whom too early on the journey station themselves to guide those to follow, a few of whom I would like take the opportunity to acknowledge here. Towards a Poetics of Light; The Conceits of Light marks the end of a long educational relationship with Peter King, a man whose luminous and liquequent mind has inspired and guided me through a myriad of labyrinths and whose friendship I cherish deeply. Alone in the wilderness of research I was thankful to find the administrative guidance of Trish Pringle who kept this project on track for its final submission. I owe her the gratitude of her trust and respect for although she leaves no trace conceptually upon the work it would have been impossible to complete without her. Pam Tramore must likewise be acknowledged for her administrative support. I would like to thank my examiners Ms. Caroline Vains, Dr. David Thomas, most notably Dr. Justin Clemens for his thorough consideration of all the work and insightful comments. Lastly this project owes its changing light to one who talks of what he loves in dream and keeps silent what lays in his heart, Martin Heide.

Introduction: The Shadow of Idea

‘Light’ is a vehicle for copious poetic metaphors. It may, at any one time, refer to a specific source of meaning or a collection of understandings however almost all representations of light are marked by a sense of innocence, grace, elegance, agility and authority. One such collection of metaphors is to be found in Idea, “or truly the Goddess of Painting and Sculpture”², who, as the frontispiece to Bellori’s Vita (Rome 1672), personifies the passage of inspiration into form. “Born from nature, it overcomes its origin and becomes the model of art; measured with the compass of the intellect it becomes the measure of the hand; and animated by fantasy it gives life to the image.”³ Idea employs the metaphors of light to personify the goddess (I-Dea, note the assonance), measure the intellect and animate the imagination to form a picture of how an artist should approach his/her work. However a detail in the image draws my attention. Upon the personified goddess’s face, most notably around the eyes and forehead, lies a shadow, and also upon the canvas on which she works, as the only thing upon the canvas that the viewer can discern. I am fascinated by the shadow, the ‘holes in light’⁴, the other⁵, the unhiddent⁶, for it compels me to think, imagine and create.

³ Ibid. Pg. 157.
In response to this fascination I have taken up a critical quest to map the associations between rhetorical, psychological and spatial insight; and further, to utilise this map in the design of a poetic work centred on light. The principal concern of the body of work that constitutes the project is:

What makes possible the incarnation of the poetic character of space?

And further,

what are the terms of this poetic character?

A certain pleasure is found in attending and deciphering the nuances and insights preserved in creative works. In order to answer the thesis questions paramount is a comprehension of the urge that is satisfied in their answering. How does one discover a way into the poetic spatial work? And why does one feel the urge to comment and consider the enigma that opens up the space of desire only to withhold a final gratification; to identify and make explicit the discourse of a poetic spatial work which is concealed within it? This urge, this longing, is the desire to transform the pleasure of spatial design into a pleasure of poetic spatial understanding, a pleasure of language.

The map of spatial poetics places the discipline of spatial design in dialogue with comparative literature, psychology, art and architecture. Space becomes the mediating medium wherein rhetorical figures are related to psychological tropes which are lastly rendered as eidetic representations. These relations weave the tapestry of my research into a body of work, taking up literary theory with myth, psychoanalysis with art history, and architecture with philosophy. There are moments of knotting in the tapestry where key ideas nest, ideas that I refer to as ‘scenes’ so that a clearer image of their concept may be described along with their context within the research. At other times it may seem that I have taken vast leaps before adding weft to woof. The map charts an expansive territory by no means exhaustive; however, the threads of research highlighted in these knotted, dense and shadowy areas are rich in ideas to which I have focused my activity.

5 Victor Stoichita, A Short History of the Shadow, Reaktion Books, London, 1997. Although a recurring theme within the work the idea of the Shadow as ‘Other’ is most thoroughly considered in chapter 1: ‘The Shadow Stage’, Pg. 11-41.

The body of work is comprised of projects and lectures. Although the projects fall into four clearly discernable categories I have chosen to exclude some from the thesis body for they shed no illuminating insight upon the thesis research question, though I believe them necessary to have completed if solely for the relief they provided. Thus the preliminary projects have been voided and the Light Lecture on Light may be considered the first document of the body of work. The early projects are studies of shadows in different guises and include: Promethan Box, Positive Shadows*, Shadow Portraits*, Camera Obscura, and Cast Shadow building. The later projects are more controlled studies of light and shadow which also employ reflection and poetry in their design and include: The Eternal Return*, The Hollow Men, Light on White, Thin King Model*, Of Wax and Feathers, and Material Ignis. The final project Return of the Immortals* is the concluding project which is a condensation of all the projects and a crystallisation of their insights. In this sense, the final work is both a capsule of the entire body of work and its ultimate manifestation. The accompanying lecture series* which includes A Light Lecture on Light, Shadows Cast by a Thin King, Revealing Light and Time, and Insufficient Substantiation, may be considered footnotes to the thinking behind the projects and further, insights gained during the research which have not found a significant place within the project work.

The work revolves around three original myths: Promethen Bound and Promethen Unbound (Aeschylus and Shelley) as the creator of man who gives him fire, The Origin of Painting and Sculpture (Pliny the Elder) based on the capture of a shadow, and Plato’s Cave Allegory; and echoes of their representations may be found throughout the work. Two significant scenes have been identified: The Scene of Instruction wherein phases of development are recognized, and The Scene of Catastrophe as a stage upon which the endeavours of man find meaning; as knots most generous in insight. Together, organised through the map of spatial poetics, they constitute a way of reading, a means of reading the final work and apprehending the ideas composing it.

The revision of this body of work has been a most revealing and rewarding task. Through it I have been able to identify the hitherto elusive influence that has marked all my work to date, an influence to which I was blind in my complete devotion and yet from which I

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*Excluded projects include: time-line of light – identifying comprehensions and inventions of light from ancient cultures to the year 2000; Turrellian ‘light-mass’ boxes – wooden boxes whose interiors are painted in titanium white with small lenses to allow the passage of reflected light to fill the space with a hue witnessed as mass of light; Character Portraits – time lapse photographic portraits which capture an array of gestures to give the impression of a personality rather than a person; and Signatures of Light – time lapse photographic images of the impressions left by dancing light in darkness.

* Asterixis denotes projects documented in book form.

9 The lecture series may be found on the CD-Rom accompanying this thesis.
carried a burden of anxiety diligently. It seems doubtless to me that I will end before finding a way to rest this weight.

The following is an account of the masters by project *Towards a Poetics of Light; The Conceits of Light*. Select works within the body are accompanied by written documentation of the thoughts and ideas with which they are concerned and reverberate certain points within the final work, *Return of the Immortals*, of importance. Some insights that have been explored in them may be mute in this account; so I ask you to please refer to them at will as a way of tracing the footsteps I’ve left behind. Since I care most for the pleasures and insights that attend the apprehension of artistic and poetic spatial works, I endeavour to bring to light those that are housed within my own.
Part I

An adumbration: A brief interpretation of Alfred Hitchcock’s Spellbound

“I think the greatest harm done to the human race has been done by the poets. They keep filling people’s heads with delusions about love; writing about it as if it were a symphony orchestra, a flight of angels... The point is people read about love as one thing and experience it as another.”

Poets may have done the greatest harm to the human race, however their harm is the most valuable of gifts. Delusions of love, amongst others, inspire blind hope, a will to alight upon an illusive horizon for which we find uncommon strength. Dr. Petersen, a psychiatrist in the film Spellbound, refers to the patient who cannot deal with the difference between the blindness of their hopes, as expressed by the poets, and what they experience. They suffer their humanity. As the story unfolds however, one realises that it is precisely this suffering that generates the suspense in the plot; Dr. Constance Petersen herself becomes the heroine of a hope that may, at any moment, kill her.

Essentially the plot is a deconstruction of the theme; the limits of hope and the horizon of faith beyond the labyrinths of guilt. Suspense is established through an essential conflict, rather a contradiction, in the psycho-profile of Dr. Petersen herself. She is introduced to the audience as an accomplished, authorititative, young and graceful female coolly unaffected by either the hysterical fits of patient women or the reproaches of peer male doctors when their advances are considered merely amusing. ‘Miss. Frozen-Puss’, as her female patient calls her, researching ‘emotional problems and love difficulties’, is diagnosed with a lack of intuition in her work due to a deficiency in emotional and human experience. However, Dr. Petersen, in the early stages of the film, falls inescapably in love with a new doctor who is, of course, an impostor/patient and potentially a murderer. To be clear, the object of her desire seems to be antithetical to her constitution as ‘the human glacier and custodian of truth’. Suspense is built through interplay between her cold rational sleuth-like analysis of details and her infantile indubitable desire for the questionable J. B, played out on the stage of a guilt complex.

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10 Character Dr. Constance Petersen (Ingrid Bergman) in Alfred Hitchcock, Spellbound, produced by David O. Selznick, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, screenplay by Ben Hecht, based on a novel by Francis Beeding, 1945. 10’20”. [my italics]
Poetic tropes are transposed into psychoanalytic terms. ‘Amnesia’ performs a split in the plot producing two worlds out of one, an absent one held in repressed memories and a present one disturbed by what is missing. ‘Symptoms’ are the metonymic clues that must be analysed to yield associations and determine continuity in the plot motives. These symptoms include paranoia, ‘transfer of affects’, and a guilt complex. Whereas an array of props\(^1\) are devices of synecdoche; parts that represent whole images, the dream\(^2\) reveals symbols as a secondary source of symptoms, metonyms for repressed figures that express absent props, missing pieces or people in the continuity of the detective-analysis story. Metaphors are revealed in the analysis of these figures as carriers of meaning, often double meanings, meanings whose substitution from the absent sphere into the sane and present sphere of the narrative trace a course to factual events.

Dr. Constance Petersen psychoanalyses J. B., introduced as Dr. Anthony Edwards – the new chief of staff at the mental institution in which she works and resides – but who soon realises that he cannot remember who he is, only that he is not Dr. Edwards. The logic he employs convinces his mind into believing that he murdered Dr. Edwards and in an effort to repress the guilt of the act, replaced Dr. Edwards with himself. Only Dr. Petersen believes otherwise for she is convinced that she, herself, is incapable of loving a dangerous man; ‘the heart can sometimes see more clearly than the mind’. The key to the metalepsis in the story is provided by this early logic, the logic Dr. Petersen works desperately against. The actual murderer is the head of staff, the head of staff who was to be replaced, and is temporarily replaced, by Dr. Edwards – a substitute Dr. Edwards.

Poets have provided mankind with a fertile field of imagery and impressions that inspire the imagination to desire lofty plateaus and horizons and plunge our despair to depths of terror and fear. The Greek poets, “as writers to whom no resource of awakening the sympathy of their contemporaries was unknown”\(^3\) drew their imagery from the “operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed.”\(^4\) The study of the ‘operations of the human mind’ was not until Freud a significant theoretically and culturally defined field of inquiry and it is to his insights in psychoanalysis I turn to inform my poetic investigation. It would seem appropriate that much of his work employs Greek

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\(^1\) There is one prop that acts as a meta-prop and it is solely attributable to Dr. Constance Petersen; her spectacles. As a trope of synecdoche, the glasses, including her timing of their use, refers to a blindness and sightedness, a doubled seeing between the sight of her heart and the sight of her mind.

\(^2\) ibid, Scene designed by Salvador Dali, 1,19‘- 1.22”


\(^4\) Ibid.
tragedy as a means to understand sexual psychopathologies, and further, to develop a logic of the operations of the human mind.

Freud’s most notable Greek resource is Sophocles’ story of Oedipus. The trilogy tragedy, similar in structure and style to the Promethean Trilogy, tells the story of Oedipus in three parts. Part one, Oedipus Rex, to which Freud’s work most often refers, offers Freud a poetic field of resemblances from which he can distil apparent parallels between sexuality and intellectual activity. Part two, Oedipus at Colonus15; and three, Antigone, are of less interest to Freud due to the lack of parricide as a central concern.16

Freud’s literary fetish, if I may dare say, for parricide is because it reveals, due to the extreme nature of the case, most clearly the motive at the heart of the deed, namely ‘sexual rivalry for a woman’17. To return to the film, Dr. Petersen is the central woman over whom a type of sexual rivalry may be said to exist. There are numerous ‘father’ icons within the film who vie for a privileged place in her emotional concerns and it is only in the company of these ‘fathers’ does her icy disposition melt. However the film defines through doubling its most central ‘father’ figures; Dr. Murchison (original chief of staff) and Dr. Edwards (the deceased) & Dr. Edwards (the impostor) and J. B, the key ‘father’ figure(s). The film must perform a double parricide, a factual one for the intellectual analysand and a poetic one for the heart of Constance Petersen. This reading reveals the conceit at the core of Dr. Petersen’s psycho-profile that causes the contradiction identified earlier. Due to the story’s determining discourse and referent being the Oedipal Complex, Dr. Petersen must reinforce the champion of her heart and mind to be the child who overcomes the ‘father’, and further, who overreaches the ‘father’.

The film Spellbound is a kind of literary return to origins where psychoanalytical terms are returned to poetic tropes through story telling. This reading of Spellbound reveals not only the relationship between the field of psychoanalysis and the literary poetic tradition, but also a dialectic between the two, a discussion.

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15 to which I refer in the lecture Shadows Cast by a Thin King
17 Ibid.
A Map of Spatial Poetics

Return of the Immortals is an installation in which the viewer is engaged in a spatial experience through a cataract of rhetorical tropes. These tropes fall in the order of: irony, synecdoche, metonymy, hyperbole, and metaphor, and condense into metalepsis through which the referent of a conceit may be unhidden. The journey these tropes structure for the viewer has been explored in book of Return of the Immortals, therefore I will take the opportunity to examine the tropes more fully here as a response to the research question: What makes possible the incarnation of the poetic character of space?

Irony, from the Greek term εἰρῆν meaning ‘dissimulation’\textsuperscript{18}, refers to a simulation of ignorance\textsuperscript{19}. Socrates employed irony in his dialogues, as documented by Plato, by asking simple, even naïve, questions which gradually revealed the error of knowledge assumed by his interlocutor. For Quintilian eironcia refers to a double-sidedness of meaning where one thing may be said whilst concealing what is meant, or conversely, that what is said reveals what is not meant\textsuperscript{20}. Irony performs the function of distancing meaning from its veil of signifiers. What is said (or done) has its meaning elsewhere, an elsewhere decentered from its original or central concern, “a double-edgedness [that] appears to be a diachronic feature of irony”\textsuperscript{21}. This distancing between meaning and its vehicle raises the possibility of a third point-of-view, a privileged position from which to regard the two. There appears, for the artist of irony, a view of the world as paradoxical, incongruent, and somehow absurd, in which the bond between meaning and its expression is extended.

Many poets, including Sophocles, Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Kierkegaard, Dickens, Baudelaire and Proust, employ irony in their work. Kierkegaard wrote The Concept of Irony in 1841 in which he considered the hidden position irony makes available to the artist, and more radically, the possibility for the artist to seem absent. Socrates, in this way, was able to inquire as to the knowledge of others without ever having to reveal his own viewpoint. Through maintaining an ignorance of knowledge he is able to reveal ignorance at

\textsuperscript{20} ‘irony’
the heart of ‘knowledge’, a deficiency of meaning at the core of the concern. For Aeschylus, a ‘Cosmic Irony’ may be interpreted in his treatment of the fable Prometheus for he treats his figures as symbols whose relationships are fated to an eternity of becoming. From the vantage point afforded by irony, Aeschylus is able to consider the fate of the world, a fate he renders as inevitable symbolically whilst relating the story literally full of twists, deceits, tyrannies, and victories. The vantage point, similar to a God-like perspective, provides a diachronic, transcendent, and acute-though-detached position from which to arrange causal relations and explore the creation of meaning. This position, however, may also be considered as the site and sight of fate.

Shakespeare voices this so well through the mouth of Julius Caesar (1599):

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Irony opens upon a dialectic between what is absent (meaning) and what is present (signifiers). Freud examines dreams in an effort to discover meanings connected to but absent from dream symbols. Also, his proposal of ‘counter-reaction’ as a psychic defence employs irony. Where a child experiences, for example, the ‘Oedipus Complex’, a ‘counter-reaction’ (or ‘reaction-formation’) may take the form of an excessive display of affection toward the father. In the case of Dostoevsky, whose father was murdered when he was eighteen, epileptic fits and the desire to die are manifested as a response to an infantile desire for the death of the father. “A great need for punishment develops in the ego, which in part offers itself as a victim to Fate, and in part find satisfaction in ill-treatment by the

22 This idea has been taken up by Jacques Rancière in his recently translated work ‘Thinking between disciplines: an aesthetics of knowledge’, trans. Jon Roffe, in Parrhesia, No. 1, 2006, pg. 1-12. “The thesis…. to speak of an aesthetic dimension of knowledge is to speak of a dimension of ignorance which divides the idea and the practise of knowledge themselves.” Pg. 1.
23 Please refer to appendix 2: a short treatment of the Greek Tragedy Prometheus.
25 Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, act 1, scene 2, lines 134 – 140.
super-ego (that is, in the sense of guilt)... Even Fate is, in the last resort, only a later projection of the father.”

For Freud ‘counter-reaction’ opposes itself to a repressed desire by manifesting the opposite of the desire. It attempts to replace the desire with a symptom expressed at the other extreme. For this to happen, a context must be present in which the symptom may become evidenced, and thereby connected to, its repressed desire. In this way the dialectic between presence and absence allows for interpretation (or analysis) and in so doing, opens a space for the possibility of play, structured by a context (or convention - history).

Irony is not limited to a position of viewing for it also constitutes a way of seeing the world. An early example of this in spatial terms is ‘Molyneux’s Question’ which is published in the second edition of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding by Locke:

…I shall here insert a Problem of that very Ingenious and Studious promoter of real Knowledge, the Learned and Worthy Mr. Molineux, which he was please to send me in a Letter some Months since; and it is this: Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t’other, which is the Cube, which is the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quaere, Whether by his sight, before he touch’d them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which is the Cube? To which the acute and judicious Proposer answers: Not. For though he has obtain’d the experience of, how a Globe, how a Cube affects his touch; yet he has not yet attained the Experience, that what affects his touch so or so, must affect his sight so or so; Or that a protruberant angle in the Cube, that pressed his hand unequally, shall appear to his eye, as it does in the cube. I agree with this thinking Gent. Whom I am proud to call my Friend, in his answer to this his Problem.

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28 Ibid. Pg. 450.
For Locke sight is ‘the most comprehensive of all our Senses, conveying to our Minds the Ideas’\textsuperscript{31}, and it is in this connection between the impressions left by light in the eye and the Ideas that meaning may be sought. The Cube is a signifier, signifying the idea of a six-sided Platonic solid where all faces are the same and all angles are at ninety degrees. However, the problem raised by Molyenux does not end there for it also puts into question the connection itself. The irony is we have never seen a cube as a cube.

This question inspired an array of opinion from, but not limited to, Leibniz\textsuperscript{32}, Berkeley\textsuperscript{33}, Cheselden\textsuperscript{34}, and Condillac whose imaginative model of a statue given different combinations of the five senses is enlightening. The statue, internally organised as any man, is encased in marble. Condillac removes the marble from particular sites of sense of the body to consider the connection between the action of sense and the effect it has in or on the mind. In relation to the sense of sight Condillac makes this distinction: “The statue doesn’t need to learn how to see, but it has to learn how to look… It seems that we do not know that there is a difference between seeing [voir] and looking [regarder].”\textsuperscript{35} The statue ‘sees’ in the sense that it takes in light, a net of light\textsuperscript{36}, from which it can neither discern shapes, nor distance, nor movement. The statue must learn how to look, to bind the threads of light to ideas, to “put things in perspective.”\textsuperscript{37} To be clear, the statue can see no thing as distinct from the net of light of which it also is composed. In learning how to see it must distinguish, through the added sense of touch, itself from what is not itself.

The connection between the idea and the thing is extended and, in the ironic way of seeing, the viewer stands detached from the world being viewed, as a regarder. I would like to suggest that what makes possible the poetic character of space is foremost the view of the regarder; the ability to view and to interpret connections between signs and ideas. When regarding a painting, for example, the position of the viewer is distanced from the world of the painting and presented with the signs of a world, in light and shadow, which ask to be connected with the ideas the artist intended to reveal. Signs, by a point of difference, may

\textsuperscript{31} Michael Baxandall, Shadows and Enlightenment, Yale University Press, Bath, 1997. Pg. 18.
\textsuperscript{34} A surgeon who operated on a 13 year old boy’s cataract which had destroyed the boy’s sight such that he had no memory of having seen. His account of the case was cited in 1728 in Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society: ‘Cheselden’s Case’.
\textsuperscript{37} Please refer to Shadows Cast by a Thin King Lecture on CD-Rom for this idea in connection with the constitution of the ego.
be fractured or fragmentary, shifted deferred or transposed, substituted or sublimated, or may be a referent in their absenteeism. In attempting to regard a given poetic work some consideration of the terms of these signs and their connections seems appropriate.

Synecdoche, meaning ‘taking up together’[^38], enters the field of vision as parts which stand in for a whole, a whole that is absent. Poussin makes brilliant use of synecdoche in his painting *The Arcadian Shepherds: et in Arcadia Ego* by placing the shepherd’s finger and its shadow upon the letter ‘R’ in the inscription upon the tomb. The letter is not simply the perspectival vanishing point of the horizontal plane of the painting but the first letter of the name of the man who authors the formula “Et in Arcadia ego”: Cardinal Rospigliosi (who also commissioned the painting)[^39]. The letter, being identified by the shepherd, is a type of ‘hypogrammatical signature’, indicating, in reflection, the viewer to whom the view is dedicated.

![Poussin, The Arcadian Shepherds: et in Arcadia Ego.](image)

In representing macrocosm through microcosm Rene Magritte, in *Not to be Reproduced: The Portrait of Edward James*, employs synecdoche through the figure of the back of Edward James’ head, the least known part of Edward James to Edward James, as a part that represents the whole of Edward James – the double vision of Edward James.[^40] Quintilian equates “synecdoche with *ellipsis*, which occurs ‘when something is assumed which has not actually been expressed.’[^41] Instead the part expresses the unexpressed whole which may be grasped by the mind in its totality though not to the senses.

[^40]: Please refer to *The Book of the Eternal Return* and read in context of the lecture *Shadows Cast by a Thin King*.
“The concept of instinct is one of those lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical.” Synecdoche is a part taken up for the whole of something, however, when transposed into psychology, it stands in for the whole of desire and its action is voiced through the libido. Freud considers instincts as essentially “without quality, and, so far as mental life is concerned, only to be regarded as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work.” What distinguish instincts are their sources and aims. Where Freud’s analytical work requires an antithetical view of the representations of desire his work on instincts considers the synecdoche of those desires. The representations, as the object of desire to which the libido is driven, are the parts that stand in for the whole, in much the same way as the lovers’ shadow of Butades daughter ‘stood in’ for his soul, or the phallus stands in for the whole of desire. There is, therefore, the allusion to a process of reversal where the illusion (in part as a representation) takes over, and often replaces, the whole.

For the field of architectural design synecdoche is an essential part of the design process. When poised over plans we constantly refer to thick lines as walls, thin double lines as windows, and a sequence of parallel lines as stairs. Architecture has a complete representational vocabulary of synecdoche to stand in for the built environment as expressed in plans, sections, elevations, and details. These representations assume the role of that which has not yet been expressed. Further to this, ‘design’, in its very definition, refers to the whole of a work – it’s process, representations, and its manifestation. As a verb, ‘design’ stands in for the whole being of the work.

Synecdoche develops into metonymy in poetry through a process of exchange as a change of name. Where synecdoche allows a labelling of static relationships metonymy allows a labelling for dynamic relationships such as ‘Chronos’, who as time devours everything, or ‘Narcissus’ whose reflected beauty causes despair in self-love. Metonymy takes on the figure of prosopopoeia, ‘face-making’, where a personification of causality is presented as an image, an image often capable of taking on the ‘gaze’; a “transmutation of agency into

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43 Ibid. Pg. 83.


45 In Thomas Campbell’s *Ye Mariner of England*, ‘oak’ represents the warships as well as the material from which they are made:

   With thunders from her native oak,
   She quells the flood below.


46 Ibid. Pg. 706.
imagery”. Metonymy develops through association to bring about a continuity of imagery to which the spectator can relate. These may take the form of discrete emblems such as the hourglass (time), the sickle (death), or the scales (justice) or the human form in a particular gesture or pathos such as Augustus Rodin’s *The Thinker* (1880-82). In this way metonymy slips across a complex of symbols to form an alternate ‘face’, an emblem of sorts which defers meaning.

In an essay titled *Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances* (1956) Roman Jakobson develops an understanding of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of language in relation to aphasia (a language disorder of the mind). He proposes that the syntagmatic axes may be considered “as a horizontal line [here one word is associated with another through contiguity], the second as a vertical line where meanings can be substituted one for another.” Through considering cases of aphasia he applies the contiguous (or continuity) axes to metonymy and the substitution axes to metaphor further proposing that people who employ substitution suffer a ‘continuity disorder’, and those employing association suffer ‘similarity disorder’.

Lacan, following Jacobson’s thesis, applies to Freud’s work on dreams and the psychopathology of everyday life the language model for metonymy and metaphor. Freud’s dream analysis identified the action of ‘displacement’ (*Verschiebung*), which Lacan relates to metonymy, as it serves to ‘displace’ meaning. Lacan states that this is the “most

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appropriate means used by the unconscious to foil censorship."\textsuperscript{50} for in dreams the distortion and deferral of meaning is “exercised by one psychical agency in the mind over another”, a “censorship of endopsychic defence.”\textsuperscript{51} In this way ‘may-beetles’ become a displaced ‘name’ (figure) for sexuality\textsuperscript{52}, and the figure of Sappho, is a displaced form of the anxiety of sexual relations with people of inferior class.\textsuperscript{53}

Metonymy, or ‘displacement’ in Freud’s psychoanalysis, endeavours to repress instinctual representations [memories and desires] and keep them unconscious. It is thus, in Lacan’s treatment, a constitutive device in the creation of the unconscious and is bound as a part of the Imaginative Order; a means to “establish a relation between the organism and its reality.”\textsuperscript{54}

Transposed into spatial relations metonymy is a form of perspective. It is a common occurrence in models for scaled down figures of people to be placed at significant sites throughout. By the use of these, viewers are invited to imaginatively construct the view of the figure as their own. There is a ‘displacement’ of agency, a metonymic transferral of perspective composed by the imagination, which relates the scale of the figure to the proportions of the model. In this way an alternate reality may be conceived by the viewer, one in which they may transfer their vision (the most comprehensive of all the Senses’ and, I would like to add, the most metonymically agile) into positions most favourable to the sense. Salvador Dali employed metonymy in the dream-scene of the Hitchcock film \textit{Spellbound} to denote the watchful eyes of the guards at Green Manor, and Samuel Beckett compounds the metonymic trait of transferral in his only and imaginative film \textit{A Short Film by Samuel Beckett}\textsuperscript{55} (featuring Buster Keaton) through a series of eye orifices.

Central to the metonymic perspectival imagination is the displacement of agency into any intimated \textit{ethos}. The metonymy of agency allows for the imaginative construction of \textit{otherness} in composite, congruent or contiguous frames in spatial relations. And further, allows for constructions of \textit{otherness} to be considered as perspectives for critique. Metonymy is an initial stage in spatial relations for the burgeoning of perspectives (discrete positions of ethical regard) beyond representation alone. Metonymy reveals relations of difference available to the viewer, to where their imagination allows (or bares) their capacity to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{52} See Sigmund Freud, ‘The May-Beetle Dream’. Ibid. Pg. 395.
\item \textsuperscript{53} See Sigmund Freud, ‘A Lovely Dream’. Ibid. Pg. 390
\item \textsuperscript{55} Alan Schneider (Director), \textit{Film (1965)}, written by Samuel Beckett, USA. 1965.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
comport themselves to a perspective of the other. In this way, metonymy, presented as a
spatial trope, constructs a spatial multiplicity where the viewer may comport themselves to a
range of agencies, agencies from which apprehension(s) of a given space is made available.
This ability is due to, returning to Condillac (and Lacan), a putting into perspective a part of
the seeing subject. “That is to say: the constitution of the ego (and of its limits) corresponds
to the statue abandoning a portion of itself (and of its life) to the outer world, to the world
of objects that are themselves constituted in this very same gesture.”

Of all the poetic tropes metaphor is the most widely employed device. Metaphor carries
meaning “from one place to another” to bring about a condensation of meaning through
resemblance in the transfer. “Aristotle would say that that Homer’s metaphors let us ‘see’
better.” In Book III of Rhetoric Aristotle articulates metaphors to be similes “with the
explanation omitted” and as such often have the quality of a riddle, but goes further to
explain “the proportional metaphor” which “must always apply reciprocally to either of its
co-ordinate terms. For instance, if a drinking-bowl is the shield of Dionysus, a shield may
fittingly be called the drinking-bowl of Ares.” Here the meaning of something, the shield,
is substituted with the meaning of another, the drinking-bowl, through a proportional
transfer of subjects, Dionysus for Ares; for the drinking-bowl is a symbol of Dionysus as the
shield is to Ares (God of War).

Metaphor applies to the vertical paradigmatic axes in Jacobson’s thesis where those
suffering from ‘continuity disorder’ (metonymy) employ a substitution of one thing for
another; and further, the identity of one thing for another. Lacan uses a line from Victor
Hugo’s ‘Boaz Asleep’ poem, which is a part of the Legend of the Ages (1859-85) series to
illustrate the point; His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful. “The creative spark of the
metaphor does not spring from the presentation of two images, that is, of two signifiers
equally actualised. It flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the
other in the signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its

56 Alenka Zupancic, ‘Troubles with Truth’ in The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two, MIT Press,
Pg. 507.
60 This series was designed “To portray humanity in a kind of cyclical work; to depict the human race,
simultaneously and successively, in all its aspects – history, fable, philosophy, religion, science – which comprise
one vase ascension toward the light...” Note here the synchronic (simultaneous) and continuous (successive)
attitude toward the depiction of the human race as accounting for ‘all its aspects’. The synchronic position is
aligned with metaphor, and the continuous with metonymy. As cited in Victor Hugo, Selected Poems of Victor
2001. Pg. 313. (I’d also like to note the frontispiece is an engraving by Paul Chenay of Victor Hugo’s image “Le
Burg” (“The Fortress”) (1862).
(metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain.”61 The sheaf has been substituted for Booz, for the attributes of Booz were to be neither miserly nor spiteful, attributes that cannot be applied to the sheaf. However, in this ‘carrying of meaning from one place to another’ the attributes naturally aligned with the sheaf [elsewhere translated as ‘harvest’] usurp Booz and instead provide [ daemonically62] a prophetic resurrection of Booz as a Natural figure; his ascension to paternity at the end of the poem.

“Metaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense, that is, at that frontier which, as Freud discovered, when crossed the other way produces the word that in French is the word par excellence, the word that is simply the signifier ‘esprit’ [wit, or Witz for Freud]; it is at this frontier that we realize that man defies his very destiny when he derides the signifier.”63 Lacan is here referring to the daemonizing trope of hyperbole which is formed through and within the symbolic and imaginative axes of Lacan’s discourse (metaphor and metonymy respectively). It is the trope for influence, where the condensed metaphor, substituted in name to another object, identifies the ‘spark’ of sense from the non-sense and in so doing, provides a key to understanding the connections between the idea and its representations.64

Metaphor may be allied with the defence of sublimation, for which Freud diagnoses Leonardo Da Vinci due to his “over-powerful instinct for research and the atrophy of his sexual life (which was restricted to what is called ideal [sublimated] homosexuality).”65 Sublimation is the result of sexual impulses, which, unable to be utilized during childhood due to the deferment of the reproductive functions, turn perverse and as such realise opposing mental forces such as disgust, shame and morality.66 It is the action of a


62 Please refer to book of Shadow Portraits


64 Harold Bloom says hyperbole is most important for High Romanticism in poetry for “hyperbolical in its visions of the imagination, . . . the process of influence is identical with all belated versions of the Sublime.” Harold Bloom, A Map of Misreading, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003. Pg. 73. Edmund Burke distinguishes between the sublime (infinite, solitude, emptiness, darkness and terror) and the beautiful (brightness, smoothness and smallness) and Kant furthers his work in his Critique of Pure Reason where he equates beauty with the finite and the sublime with the infinite. (see Cuddon). I would like to add that psychoanalysis is a belated art of interpretation (analysis). Poems must first be written.


diversion\textsuperscript{67}, where the ego wishes to divert the desires of id through the moralising agent of the super-ego, the metaphor of the father ("signification of the phallus").\textsuperscript{68}

The defence of sublimation regulates moral and ethical life, redressing the sexual impulses with more socially admired ambitions. In life the defence of sublimation ‘normalises’ but in poetry metaphor, “which we might call the normal trope, drives the poem into hopeless dualistic images of inside as opposed to outside.”\textsuperscript{69} What is required of the poet, which is not required of ‘normal’ life, is an attempt to unify the metaphors of a poetic work, a final representation which restores or apprehends the fractures or slips of metonymy and the substitutions of metaphor. One must be able to apprehend the whole of a poem, not necessarily the whole of their life.

As a social subject the defences of introjection and projection, forms of identification and alienation, help to gain stability of the psyche in relationship with others. “Introjection is a fantasy transposition of otherness to the self, and as an identification seeks to defend against time and space...Projection seeks to expel from the self everything that the self cannot bear to acknowledge as being its own.”\textsuperscript{70} Through these defences a degree of self control is attained which both makes possible and limits the agencies of perspective attainable in metonymy and the substitutions of metaphor. They may be given the quality of defending against previous defences to some degree.

The analogue poetic trope is metalepsis, a “trope-reversing trope”, where a metonymic agency employed earlier in the poem is substituted with an earlier or later figure. “The metalepsis leaps over the heads of other tropes and becomes a representation set against time, sacrificing the present to an idealized past or hoped-for future... a representation either proleptic of “preposterous”, in the root sense of making the later into the earlier.”\textsuperscript{71} Through the use of metalepsis the sheaf of Victor Hugo can become the Boaz of a God whose parting eyelids reveal the crescent of the moon (the sun which nourishes Nature)\textsuperscript{72};

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid. Pg. 69. This is the first published use of the term ‘sublimated’ (– review footnote 2).


\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. Pg. 103.

\textsuperscript{72} Please refer to book of \textit{Shadow Portraits}.

\textsuperscript{73} The stanza, to which Lacan’s fragment refers reads:

\begin{center}
His beard was silvered like a stream in May.
[His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful];
\end{center}
and Ammons, in *Sphere: The Form of a Motion*, says goodbye to nature where in the end he means to begin again – an image for *longing*; and Proust, in *Time Regained*, produces an image of eternity from a single moment of youth.

These tropes, and their psychoanalytic correspondents, constitute a psychopoetic map which endeavours to develop into a psychoaesthetics of space however, prior to embarking on such a mission, one final poetic trope, transposed into the spatial, needs to be considered; the conceit. The conceit, from the Latin *conceptus* meaning ‘concept’, was “a synonym for ‘thought’, and as roughly equivalent to ‘concept’, ‘idea’ and ‘conception’” however it also denotes “a fanciful supposition, an ingenious act of deception or a witty or clever remark or idea.” Conversation tends to incorporate a number of poetic devices, such as the above, and may therefore be considered an elaborate and overall governing trope. This trope, albeit its atrophy in modern poetry, poses a particular question, and in response a source for answers, for considering, conditioning, and constituting space.

In the poetry of John Donne, renowned for his adroit use of the conceit, the trope becomes an organising principle for his poems. For Donne “no scheme of thought, no interpretation of life [could become] a complete and illuminating experience.” The central theme that permeates his work is an intense analysis of his own personal agencies, as lover, friend, philosopher, all of which cannot be unified, none of which seem to be ‘satisfied’. A wandering sense of curiosity pervades the love poems where love may be conceived as a view of eternity, infidelity, or equally well a flea; and further, in his Elegie *On his Mistris*, poetry itself becomes his immortal lover, the poet within him – the poet without him, which will wander on in poetry to come and has wandered in the hearts and minds of poets before, the poetry of the other of the self as the sublime mistress of influence whose gaze the poet passionately labours to embrace.

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When some poor gleaning-woman met his sight,  
“Drop a few ears deliberately,” he’d say.  
76 I use this term specifically in reference to Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, (1841)  
77 John Donne, *The good-morrow / Lovers infinitenesse*  
78 John Donne, *Song (Goe, and catche a falling starre)*.  

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Conceits in poetry are enunciations of this connection, sparks in the apprehension (embrace) of an idea, marks of the ‘one [that] turns’ to two.\textsuperscript{80} However, the ‘sublime mistress of influence’ toward which the poet directs his most intimate and ardent desire, is not an idea of the Platonic caste where the realm of the ideas (light) and the realm of the appearances (shadow) are structured in two complementary yet separate ontological domains; she is the other of the poet himself.\textsuperscript{82} Conceits reveal the necessary deception of conception, the deferment of a centre, through recontextualising (or transcending) the ontological separation onto a metaphysical plane of immanence (cosmological).\textsuperscript{83} In other words, the Idea is none other than the ‘eternal return’\textsuperscript{84} (metalepsis\textsuperscript{85}) in twilight.

Where Nietzsche invokes the image of ‘midday’ as “noon, the moment of the shortest shadow, the end of the longest error; zenith of mankind”\textsuperscript{86}, as “a ‘hole in time’ [the “well of eternity”]”,\textsuperscript{87} a ‘time-within-time’\textsuperscript{88}, wherein one’s shadow is directly beneath oneself and thus becomes “the thing and its shadow”\textsuperscript{89} I invoke the figure of twilight. Twilight is a figure of light, not a figure of time, and in this way inscribes both time and space in its appeal to a daily benediction where light and shade marry. Further to this, twilight refers both to two (twi) lights and between (be-twix-t) lights wherein a representation of Nietzsche’s figure of ‘two’ remains with the added dimension of doubt.\textsuperscript{90} Doubt is particularly significant for both its allegorical link to shadows and its ability to inspire thought. Through invoking a Cartesian understanding of thinking and being (cogito ergo sum) I am suggesting that the diversification of creative action may be aligned with a poetic striving for an intimate, yet elusive, grasp of the ‘sublime mistress of influence’. For in doubt the mind cannot bring

\textsuperscript{80} Trope, Greek ‘turn’ tropeos.
\textsuperscript{82} I employ gender specifications here not as a (romantic) oversight, but as a reference to Lacan’s concept mOther.
\textsuperscript{83} Though not a direct source, reverberations of this sentiment can be found in Eugene Fink, Nietzsche’s Philosophy, trans. Goetz Richter, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers, Continuum Press, London and New York, 2003. Pg. 133.
\textsuperscript{84} A central concept in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche; please refer to book of the eternal return.
\textsuperscript{85} “The thought of the eternal return sublates the difference between past and future or better it imubes the past with the open possibilities of the future and the future with the determinations of the past. Both characteristics blend together in a peculiar way: events in time are on the one hand already determined and on the other hand not yet determined, they are already decided and they need still to be decided. The past shares the characteristics of the future and the future those of the past.” Eugene Fink, Nietzsche’s Philosophy, trans. Goetz Richter, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers, Continuum Press, London and New York, 2003. Pg. 78-79.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. Pg. 27.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid. Pg. 27. Hence ‘the thing’ (as one) becomes two (as one thing).
\textsuperscript{90} “Doubt implies a reference to a double, a doubleness of mind: to be of two minds about things,” and footnote: “Consider the German word for doubt, Zweifel, with its reference to a double, Zwei; see also the word for despair, Verzweiflung. The “wound” of this doubling is not only negative; it is also an opening of self-transcending.” Will Desmond, Being and the Between, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995. Pg. 21.
Itself to a unity of intelligibility and instead alights upon the power to inscribe unto itself a horizon beyond hope, and beyond time. In short, the constancy of the ‘two’ as ‘one’ requires both light and shadow as a mark of the between, the twilight space in which a cascade of connections and reflections between signs and ideas may be discovered.

If we return to the frontispiece of Bellori’s Vita (Rome 1672), the goddess Idea, as the ‘sublime mistress of influence’, overcomes the origin (one) through becoming two in the personified symbol of a woman who looks not to the light but to the middle, perpendicular to where light and shadow are cast. Idea invokes twilight. The shadow on her forehead is the ‘veil’ of light, an attached shadow, which is in the process of being transposed and revealed on the page represented as a cast shadow. Measured with the twin footed ‘compass of the intellect [it] becomes the measure of the hand’ and reflects the nature of mankind as a creator; and ‘animated by fantasy’, by the imaginative and symbolic orders as prescribed by memory and imagination, ‘it gives life to the image’ or its creation. It is shadow and light as one that constitutes the multiplicity of creations which, in twilight, recognise the conceit of being and becoming; the conceit of light read poetically.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow

Part III

Appendices

The Early Works

Promethean Box 31
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Camera Obscura 36
Cast Shadow Building 38
Photographic documentation of:
white opaque perspex box, 400mm3,
statue of Pandora and her shadows,
Autumn 2003.

Adumbration, from ‘ad’ meaning before and ‘umbra’ meaning shadow, as a figure of Prometheus, meaning foresight, is explored allegorically as a cast shadow of Pandora.

The past Hours weak and gray,
With the spoil which their toil
  Raked together
From the conquest but One could foil.

Panthea: Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, act IV.
Positive Shadows

Photograms (‘light’ ‘writing’) of glass vessels and their projections through the employment of two light sources.
Spring 2003.
Please refer to book of Positive Shadows.
Shadow Portraits

Digital photographic documentation of shadows employing (one and) two lights. Autumn 2004.
Please refer to book of Shadow Portraits.
Camera Obscura

Box Camera Obscura

A pin-hole camera obscura with a mirror inside to transfer the image onto a glass plane from which images may be traced or photographed.

4mm card, wooden frame, glass, mirror.


a self portrait from the box
Cast Shadow Building

A simple window screen is lit obliquely to generate a cast shadow, which is in turn turned into window screens over three levels. This project was devised to strengthen the parallel studies in perspectival drawing and construction.

2mm card, wooden frame, glass.
The Late Works

The Eternal Return  41

The Hollow Men (film)  refer to DVD

Light on White Paintings  43

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Of Wax and Feathers Model  48

Material Ignis  50
The Eternal Return

An installation piece designed for Sensoria Festival 2003 based on Rene Magritte’s Not to be Reproduced: A Portrait of Edward James.

Mirror, wood, VISY MDF alternative cardboard, salt.
Spring 2003.
please refer to book of the eternal return.

Magritte, Not to be Reproduced: A Portrait of Edward James.
Light on White

White paintings that utilize the refractive indices of different white paints to produce a shimmering effect when passing.

titanium white, magnesium white, opalescent white, flat white, suede white, and plaster on canvas. Spring 2004 – Spring 2005.
Thin King Model

A spatial exploration of the modernist style related to the lecture *Shadows Cast by a Thin King*.

plaster, perspex, and light.
Autumn 2005.
Please refer to book of the Thin King.
Of Wax and Feathers

A spatial exploration of the modernist style related to both the myth of Daedalus (father of Icarus), and the third Oracle of Delphi.

wax, feathers, light.
Spring 2005.
Material Ignis

Further exploration and development on the material poetics of the modernist style exploring time – past, present, and anticipated.

basalt stone, wax, feathers, light.
Spring 2005.
The Final Work

Return of the Immortals
Return of the Immortals

An installation conceived, developed and designed as the final project of Towards a Poetics of Light: The Conceits of Light.

light on white paintings, basalt stone, light.
please refer to book of Return of the Immortals.
*Return of the Immortals* is a theoretic, poetic, and artistic spatial work. The design is to be understood in its entirety as an installation, apprehensible over time.

From entering the installation a type of irony is already evident; what is central to the installation is unlit, unavailable to the viewer. Every attempt to approach the lighted paintings directly is foiled by a shadow, the viewers’ shadow, a part of the viewer which becomes a part of the work. The viewer is split between shade and light, is present lit and present in shade, creating in their position between the ‘tower’ and the paintings a threshold; a division of space. To overcome this division a new position in which to regard the installation is necessary, a position from which both the experience of the participant and the work may be regarded as a whole. From this position a poetic reading of the work becomes available.

The work must be analysed, the connections between the ideas and their representations ask to be revealed; the work must be *read poetically*. 
Three significant myths have been identified for their employment of shadow and light as central allegoric devices. Each myth condenses in their use of light and/or shadow a number of meanings for which a field of interpretation becomes available in their reading. I would like to examine each briefly here.

~ Plato’s Cave Allegory ~

Plato presents a discussion in *The Republic* between Socrates and Glaucan known as *The Cave Allegory*. Socrates entertains an imaginative scene where man is imprisoned in a cave, chained to a wall upon which shadows are cast in such a way that he cannot turn from them. The shadows constitute reality for man, *tό ὄληθες*, the unhidden and his enlightenment is relative to his ability to comport himself to these shadows, to the unhidden. In other words, man becomes more ‘real’ and more ‘unhidden’ to himself through interpreting and comporting himself to the shadows. To liberate a man from his reality, the ‘unhidden’ real of the shadow, and attempt to reveal it as mere shadow is both a violent act and an invitation for attack. The act of liberation must therefore be performed in stages. First the prisoner should become accustomed to shadows, then reflections in water, and then slowly to the things themselves. “After that he would find it easier to observe the sky at night and the heavenly dome, and to look at the light of the moon and stars rather than at the sun and its light by day...Finally, I believe, he would be able to look directly at the sun itself, and gaze at it as it is in itself, without using reflections in water or any other medium.”

The allegory employs both shadow and light as metaphors for human knowledge, two types of human knowledge. Martin Heidegger reads and interprets the story through the lens of philosophy, a philosophy of *Das Sein* with a sharp deductive reasoning centred on a deep etymological interpretation of Plato’s terms. In contrast to Heidegger’s work, another reading profits from a poetic interpretation, a poetic interpretation centred on a conceit outside the sphere of the allegorical story itself but within Plato’s documentation of it. The question such a reading would raise is: given the story is accepted by Glaucan as an

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93 Ibid. Pg. 30.
analogous to the relationship humanity has with Truth, how might one “ascend” to “gaze” at the “sun”?

The story is prepared by Socrates as a parallel vision to reality, an alternative point of view from which to conceive “reality” as sheer appearance. If Glauccon accepts the analogy, which evidently he does, then he also accepts his position as a prisoner within the cave. Further to this, he must also accept that Socrates may in fact be a fellow prisoner, a fellow prisoner who, as Plato documents it, has been liberated from the cave and has returned to liberate others. However, Plato gives Socrates a defence from the probable death that may become him in the event of liberating a prisoner. Through storytelling, Socrates is distanced, separated from his fellow cave dwellers and is present in the status of a third person even though his first person presence as narrator remains well defined. If this is so then the story may provide the prisoners a kind of map to enlightenment, a map to the “real” and the “true” and... the “good”, a map rather than a liberator.

I would like to continue a little further into Book VII of the Republic (518) where

Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind’s eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

This continuance to the story interests me for Plato’s use of the eye as a vessel to carry the tenor of light. He privileges light over shadow and places at the gateway between the two an observer who delivers Plato’s judgement to the “perplexed and weak” traveller, he laughs at (or perhaps with) he who passes into the light, and prefers a judgement of lament for he who passes into darkness. Note, however, that the pleasure is at this gateway.

And further:
But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being...94

Plato reverts to the opening scene of his allegory to substantiate his claim of the ‘instrument of knowledge’ following movements of the soul. But if knowledge already resides in the soul, then his substitution is a clue to reverse the poetic images of inside and outside given at the opening of the allegory. The light of the sun may be considered the deep darkness of the unconscious; the shadows upon the wall may be considered the bright and clear evidence of facts as given in broad daylight.

Although I reserve a doubt that Plato actually meant what I have interpreted, the interpretation itself is not necessarily to be ruled out. Just as deconstruction is a “method of criticism and a mode of analytical inquiry”95, so too is this poetic interpretation a type of deconstruction which reveals an insight, a useful insight for this thesis.

The myth of Prometheus is a Greek Tragedy in three parts by Aeschylus, two of which have been lost, only *Prometheus Bound* remains. The poet Shelley wrote the third part again, *Prometheus Unbound*, after careful contemplation on Greek tragic poetry. The myth speaks of the creation of man by Prometheus, his gift of fire and instruction in the arts, Zeus’ tyrannic retribution upon Prometheus, and finally his prophesy and release by Hercules. For Shelley, “the only imaginary being, resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in [his] judgement, a more poetical character than Satan.” 96 “Prometheus is a cross between a rebel archetype, a symbol of intelligence, and the personification of human progress.” 97 As a Titan God during the war with the Olympians Prometheus’s mother Clymene prophesised that the side wielding ‘guile’, or intellect, would be victorious. After approaching the Titans and being rejected, Prometheus offered his intellectual ‘guile’ to Zeus and the Olympians who subsequently won the battle, though Prometheus does exhibit some lament in his fate.

After Prometheus (meaning foresight) created man and gave him both fire from Mount Olympus and instruction in the arts Zeus fashioned him a wife, the first woman – Pandora, who he rejected. Instead she married Epimetheus (brother of Prometheus and whose name means hindsight) and the jar she carried was opened, letting fall all the evils that were to plague mankind. The last gift to leave the jar was hope. Prometheus responded by providing his creation blind hope, a blindness that allows us to endure life knowing we will

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die. Man is a creation capable of conceiving himself but also of deceiving himself. Prometheus created man with life that is finite but unbound, indeterminately determinate, imaginative and memorial.

Zeus’ concern over man’s wielding of fire and artistic instruction was valid. For all other animals, graced with certain specific qualities including speed, sonar, the ability to fly or breathe underwater, Nature, personified by the deities, maintains control. For man, with the guide of progress, development in skills to overcome, control and make resource of Nature threatened the fundamental value and power of the gods. Of all the instruction Prometheus gives to man little requires fire. Fire is employed as a symbol rather than literally to denote all technological and artistic advancement and further, as recognition of man’s ability for self-consciousness. Prometheus makes available to man the service of the gods rather than their domination, and for Zeus, whose command is tyrannical, this means the greatest undermining and reversal of power. Prometheus is therefore a rebel of the utmost kind for his generosity and devotion to man will eventually bring about the dissolution of the gods, including himself; or more precisely, man is to inscribe the gods within himself and thereby usurp them.

Mankind, as ‘creatures of a day’ in contrast to the eternal longevity of the gods, free Prometheus a little more with every creative, intelligent, progressive act or thought they conceive, and conversely, bind Zeus a little more into the visions Prometheus provided us the power to have. Hercules, descendant of Io, who is prophesised by Prometheus to free him from the mountain, is the personification of strength. We need the strength of our convictions and the strength to endure our convictions, for as the Gods disappear their poetry still survives.
Pliny the Elder recounts the story of Butade’s daughter circumscribing the shadow of her lovers’ profile upon a wall prior to departing for battle in his *Natural History*. Through capturing the shadow, the daughter is symbolically retaining her lovers’ semblance, his *double*, his *other*, in order to keep the essential part of him upright and alive so that he will return. Sadly it seems he did not, and her father filled the shadow with clay and produced a relief of the lost love. The story of the origin of painting and sculpture makes present the absent through the circumscribing and recasting of the shadow. Where the captured shadow accounts for the *other* of the lover, a doubling that acts as a confining vessel for his soul, the clay likeness is also a vessel, a vessel for this *other* of the lover.\(^98\) This is a poetic symbolic manoeuvre which, informed by historical social and cultural beliefs, is an expression of perplexity in the face of human mortality.

Love, hope, and creative passion in the face of death are the source origin for painting and sculpture in Pliny’s document. Knowledge is to be found on both sides of the page; in the vision of death that will take the lover, and in the vision of life (via history) that moves Pliny to write. The artistic act becomes a kind of veil, a method of disguising the face of reality in the form of death (mortality – that which makes us different from the Gods) so that we can envision life, a life as life.

Something might be true, even if it were also harmful and dangerous in the highest degree; indeed, it might be part of the essential nature of existence that to understand it completely would lead to our own destruction. The strength of a person’s spirit would then be measured by how much “truth” he could tolerate, or more precisely, to what extent he needs to have it diluted, disguised, sweetened, muted, falsified.99

In all arts, therefore, the fountainhead may be considered light for its ability to provide a shadow as distinct from utter darkness. However reality is like an excessively strong light, to recall Plato, and the means to regard it, lest we be blinded or destroyed by it, is to shade it. As Nietzsche points out, it is wrong to identify Truth with the Symbolic, however, if the shelter of life is the Symbolic, then the exposure of the Real, to which Truth should be related, must come through the interpretation of the Symbolic.100. The origin of artistic representation provides us with the power to limit our vulnerability in face of the Real, but still distil meaning from Truth, the hidden, through the abundant doubled likeness of the shadow.

For Plato, light takes on the metaphor of ideal knowledge, however knowledge is not conceived in reference to the perceptible world but rather that of the obscure unconscious. In the Promethean myth light is the symbol for man’s power to wield knowledge, to take control of and make creative resource of Nature. And in the myth of the Origin of Painting and Sculpture, light is the progenitor of shadow, through the capture of which is a means to grasp the immortal.

Bibliography


Baxandall: \textit{Shadows and Enlightenment}, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1997. Michael Baxandall is an art historian who discusses shadows and their impact on the visual experience in this work. Ranging in time from the eighteenth century to modernity, Baxandall considers with scrutiny the scientific psychology through to the artistic employment of shadows and teases out the tensions of ideas and notions associated with shadows. Shadows are not just ‘holes in light’; they are mysterious and telling extensions of bodies in space that have the ability to affect our visual experience.


Desmond: \textit{Being and the Between}, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1995. This text is instrumental to this masters project for it’s insightful development and model of the structure of being. Identifying and exploring philosophical dimensions of man’s engagement with the world, Desmond’s thesis weaves the univocal, equivocal, dialectical and metaphorical into a fourfold tapestry of understanding being.


Heidegger, in his thorough and precise consideration of Plato’s Cave Allegory, reveals the nuances of the language, thought and history of the primary story which has questioned the essence of man’s ability to claim truth and knowledge.


This book charts the symbolic evolution of the tower both as image and architecture and its relationship to significant modernist thinkers and poets such as W. B. Yeats, Robinson Jeffers, R. M. Rilke and Jung.

Amid the changing light of their own smiles,
Like one who talks of what he loves in dream.

Shelley, Prometheus Unbound.