

Lynch
mimesis
Architects





Poetry

In the same way that the mindless diamond keeps
one spark of the planet's early fires
trapped forever in its net of ice,
it is not love's later heat that poetry holds,
but the atom of the love that drew it forth
from the silence: so if the bright coal of his voice
suddenly forced, like a bar-room singer's—boastful
with his own huge feeling, or drowned by violins;
but if it yield a steadier light, he knows
the pure verse, when it finally comes, will sound
like a mountain spring, anonymous and serene.
beneath the blue oblivious sky, the water
sings of nothing, not your name, not mine.

Antonio Machado (translated by Don Paterson)

mimesis reveals the mystery of order as a tension between its potential
and actual existence

Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation:
The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production*

The young poet... can attain a perfection without much training and experience—a phenomenon hardly matched in painting, sculpture or architecture... *Mnemosyne*, the mother of the muses, is directly transformed into memory, and the poet's means to achieve the transformation is rhythm... a poem, no matter how long it existed as a living spoken word... will eventually be 'made'... written down and transformed into a tangible thing... because remembrance and the gift of recollection, from which all desire for imperishability springs, need tangible things to remind them, lest they perish themselves.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

The metaphor with which I have been concerned with is more extended—a double one—in that it involves three terms, a body is like a building and the building in turn is like the world.

Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture*

Lynch mimesis Architects



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Introduction

Patrick and Claudia Lynch



... the theory
Of poetry is the theory of life.

Wallace Stevens, *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*

Mimesis is the physical, rhythmic incarnation of the urgency of the impulses that architecture begins with and echoes with. It is both intensely bodily and also immaterial, like the haunting resonance, Goethe suggested, of a bell that lingers and “evokes harmony”.¹

Architecture begins with dialogue and flourishes in conversations. In this exchange images are transformed from memories into words and drawings via physical gestures, and these in turn are transformed into a built world by intense thought and craft. But this is not the conclusion of the process. The philosopher Jan Patočka describes existence in terms of horizons that we are drawn towards, and for him, inhabitation involves as much imagination and language as it does hunger and desire.² For some of us, these are the same thing.

The idea of this book is to acknowledge the importance of what the literary critic Harold Bloom called, in his theory of poetry originally published in 1973, “the anxiety of influence”—a condition that he saw as an “anguished” drive towards originality in young, mostly modern poets.³ Influence originally meant “in flow” Bloom claims: “to be influenced meant to receive an ethereal fluid flowing in upon one from the stars... a power—divine and moral... in defiance of all that seemed voluntary in one”.⁴

As well as revealing something of the physical mimetic processes at play in the work of Lynch Architects, our aim is also to present some examples of influence, showing how past architecture, transformed via imaginative interpretation—what Bloom calls “swerving” or “poetic misreading”—is relevant and useful to an architect working today.

Our references as architects range across time, and in this case are, perhaps obviously, mainly European. The gestures and poises that we mime are always personal, of course, just as we learn a language from our parents—albeit actual or self-consciously adopted ones. But

1 Cited in Martin Heidegger, *Art and Space*, trans Charles H Seibert (*Die Kunst und der Raum*, SG Erker Verlag, St Gallen, 1969): “It is not always necessary that what is true embody itself; it is already enough if spiritually it hovers about and evokes harmony, if it floats through the air like the solemn and friendly sound of a bell.”

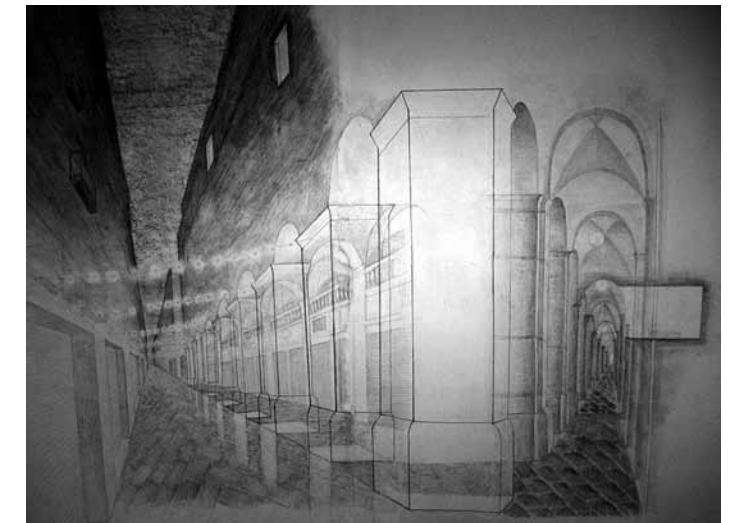
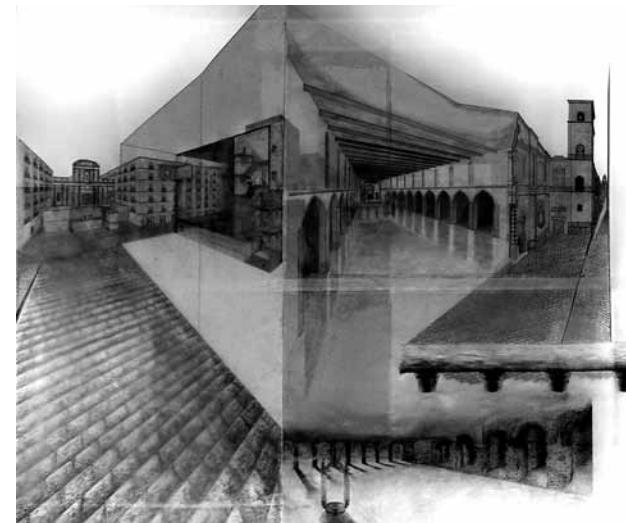
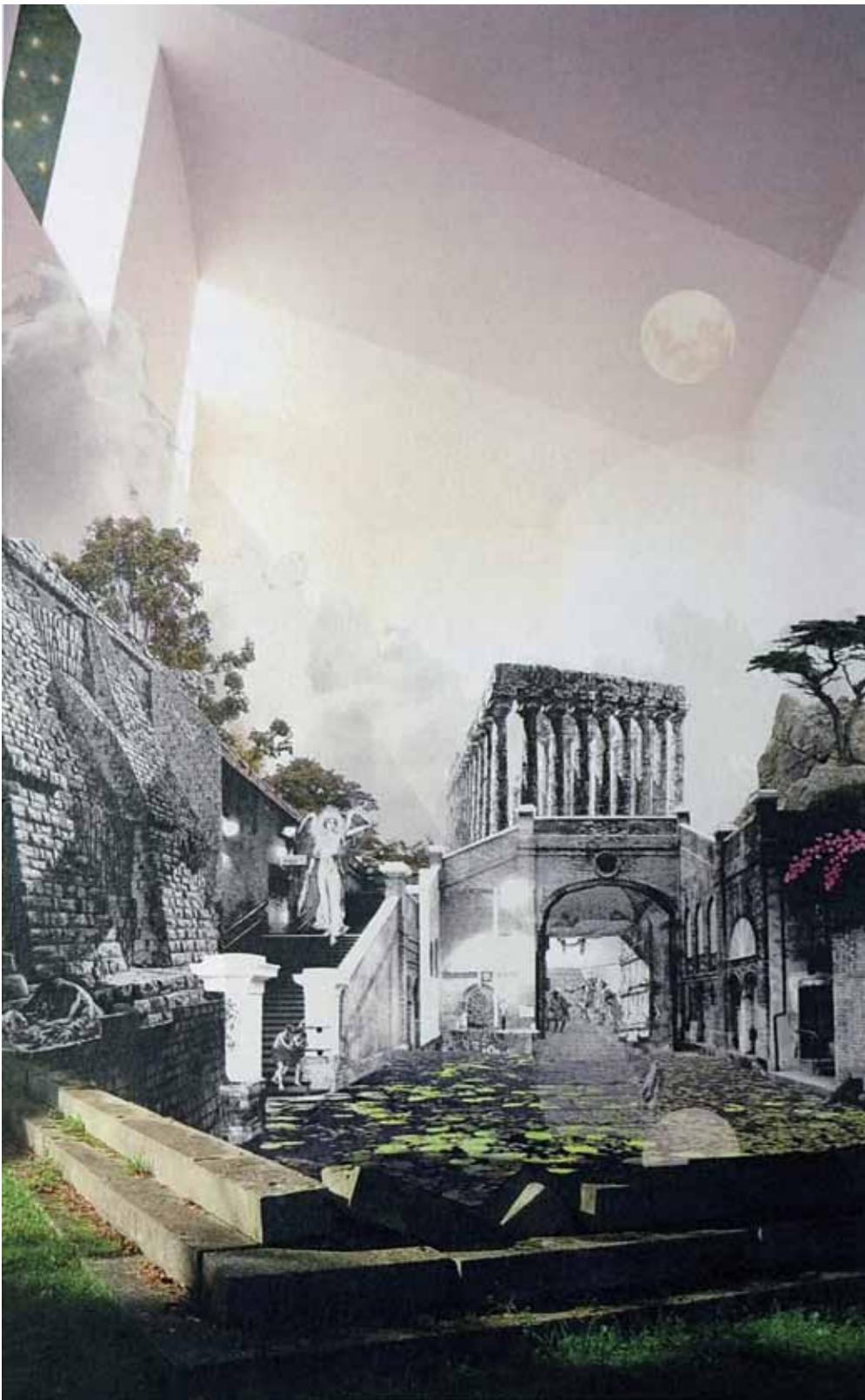
2 Patočka, Jan, *Body, Community, Language, World*, Open Court Publishing, 1997.

3 Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 1973, Oxford University Press, 1997. In the 2nd edition Bloom refers to “the anguish of contamination” felt by Shakespeare from Marlowe. Bloom describes a series of types of influence (Clinamen or Poetic Misprision; Tessera or Completion and Antithesis; Kenosis or Repetition and Discontinuity; Daemonization or The Counter-Sublime; Askesis or Purgation and Solipsism; and Aprophades or The Return of the Dead). He suggests but does not emphatically declare that “strong” poets risk more, risk themselves, in going beyond selfhood in their work in terms of “emptying out” (Kenosis) of personality, albeit with Messianic overtones. He also suggests a sort of ‘daemonic’ quality in poetic work that transcends the safety of influence as copying, citing the Biblical example of Adam and Satan in Milton as archetypical of modern poets seeking to invent themselves, whilst acknowledging and, or, rejecting the paternalistic influence of tradition. What is obviously similar, but often unacknowledged by visual artists, is our debt to others, something that Bloom describes as the original influence of art upon our younger selves—what he calls a poem speaking to “the poet in the poet”. This means that initial poetic attempts are called forth at first as impersonation, and stylistic imitation often remains exactly simply that. Mature poetics involves risk, and what is at stake is different in every case, but influence remains as at least as important as subjective experiences, if not more so, Bloom suggests: “We need to stop thinking of any poet as an autonomous ego, however solipsistic the strongest of poets might be. Every poet is a being caught up in a dialectical relationship (transference, repetition, error, communication) with another poet or poets.” (p 91).

4 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, p 26.

Patrick Lynch, *Study Collage for a balcony room on Victoria Street*





the theatrical nature of mimesis means that it remains directly relevant to the public nature of architectural praxis.

For example, the influence of the Ca d'Oro, a sixteenth century house situated on the Grand Canal at Venice, is relevant to us because it presents a decorous facade to an important thoroughfare—a typical situation that we find in cities today. Its deep face mitigates its southerly orientation with a civic aspect, whilst protecting a domestic environment within. It protects both in terms of creating privacy and avoiding asocial autonomy: the stone facade projects a strong identity that enables a private world to exist behind an architectural mask. The deep balcony is an ambiguous threshold, an environmental and psychological buffer between the city and the Ca d'Oro's inhabitants—establishing a symbiotic balance between inner and outer lives. The Ca d'Oro's potential inspiration for architecture today is profound. We hope that its transformation in our work begins to reveal the potent imaginative possibilities inherent in design—not least in avoiding any crudely stylistic sense of imitation.

In Vienna, last summer, one of us for the first time, but it felt like we'd been there together many times before. Like a lot of capital cities, it is like walking around in a film made up of memories almost entirely culled from books and films. It is an odd sensation, like being in a museum of architecture, or one's subconscious gallery of memory images.

This isn't an unusual condition, or emotion. In fact, it bears close comparison to the process of designing, and to those moments when it sometimes feels like you are trying to find the right book, and can only do so by putting out your hand for it as it were: or like tracking down an allusion suggested in a dream. Which suggests that there should surely be some kind of literary theory based on the primacy of images. And there is. It is called architecture.

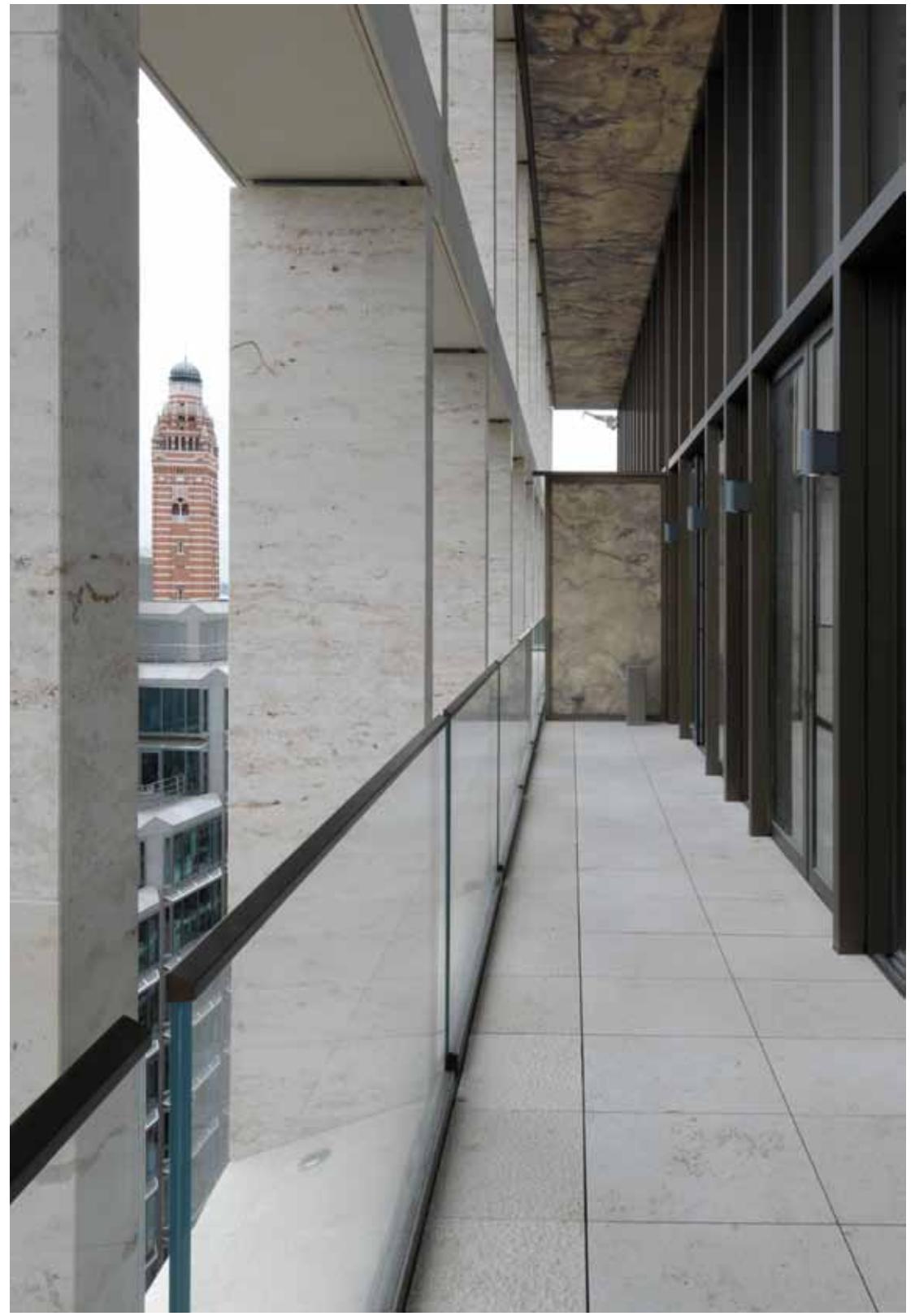
We once saw the poet, painter and playwright Derek Walcott speaking in London and heard him declare that "poetry is really images, whose power stays with you long after you have forgotten the words of the poem".⁵ This suggests to us that architecture might be said to be, essentially, a type of concrete poetry.

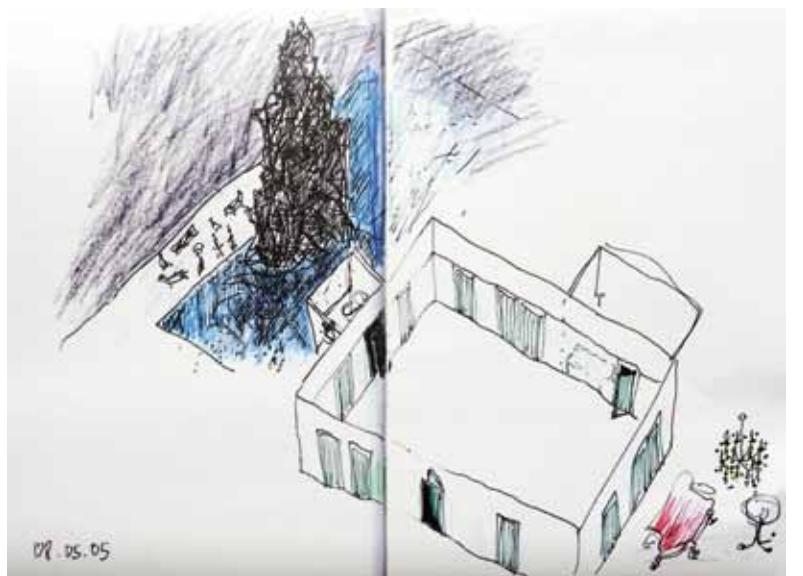
⁵ In conversation at The Queen Elizabeth Hall 25 February 2004. Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*, Faber, 2003, considers the reciprocity between landscape and language in the work of Caribbean-French painter Pissarro.

Opposite
Pete Youthed, *Study for a Monument to William Blake*, Undergraduate Unit at London Metropolitan University, 2006–2007, taught by Patrick Lynch, Alun Jones and Karin Templin

Above
Naples Drawings, Intermediate Unit 1, 2002–2003, The Architectural Association, unit masters Andy Houlton, Patrick Lynch and Tony Swannell







Claudia Lynch, *Dream House*



Claudia Lynch, *Marsh View Living Room*

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