

WORDS FROM THE SHADOW

by Randy Cohen

How does one begin to write about something,
so important, so all-encompassing?
Does one begin with words as
images,
or of thoughts far away?
Are we in a vacuum
or is it a shadow...
A shadow.

How deep is a shadow?
Can you reach it?
If so,
how deeply?
Is it that we don't care about the shadow,
or is it that we are afraid of the shadow,
or do we not understand the shadow?
This must be it!

*...but the law of individuality collects its secret strength; you
are you and I am I, and so we remain.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson
"Uses of Great Men"
Representative Men, Volume IV

Now get this: we're within the shadow. Just metaphorically speak-
ing, as a place to be; just space, you understand? We're not
floating, but the space is large, and there are no details to speak of,
no mouldings, nothing, OK?

*It is a make-believe. It is no the real thing. We see the marble
capitals; we trace the acanthus leaves of a celebrated model
— incredulous: it is not a temple.*

Horatio Greenough,
American Architecture, Form and Function

No, it's not. You see, it's just a space that we'll consider some im-
ages in, and think about them; just ponder through envisioning.
This is the way we can discuss things, openly, democratically, free-
ly, right?

*...but partly it was because pecuniary canons of taste began
to exercise an undue influence: to be correct was more im-
portant than to be alive.*

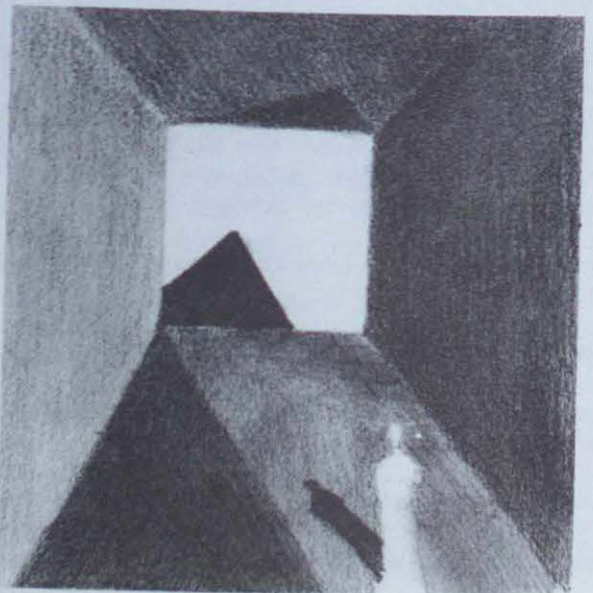
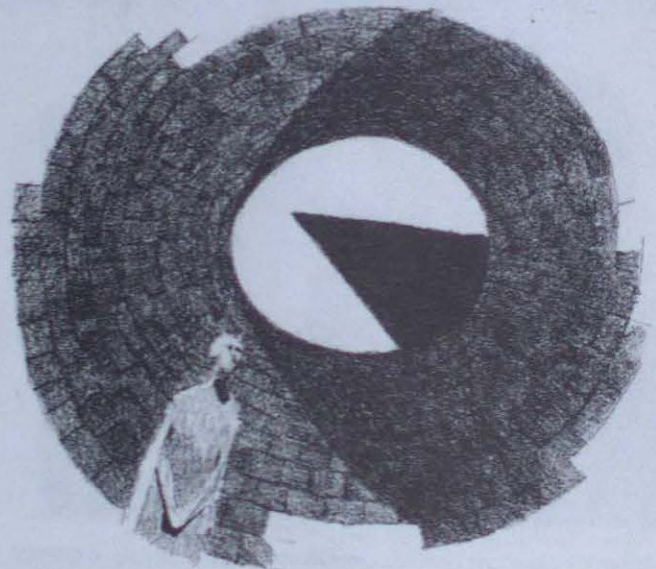
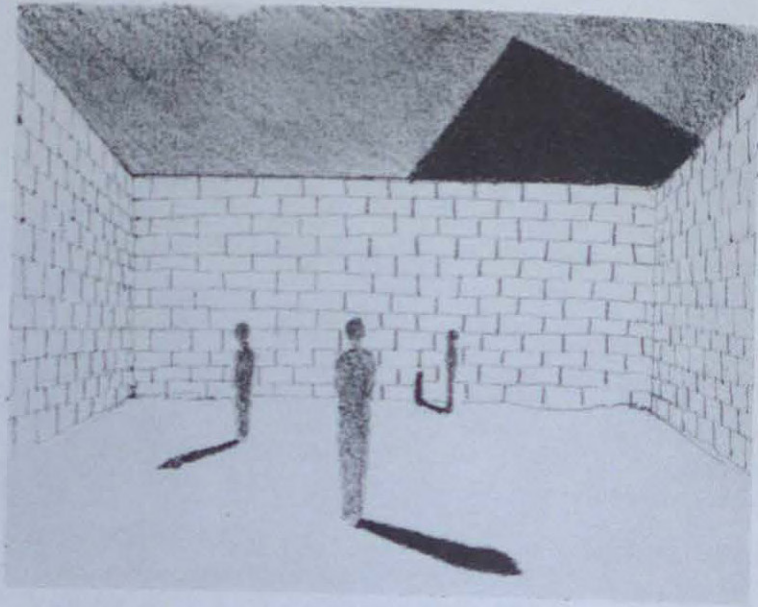
Lewis Mumford,
Roots of Contemporary American Architecture

That, of course, does not affect thoughts inside the shadow,
because here we are imagining a space that we are speaking within.
We can speak of our dreams here, we can project our images here,
without fear, because we are above all that. You see?

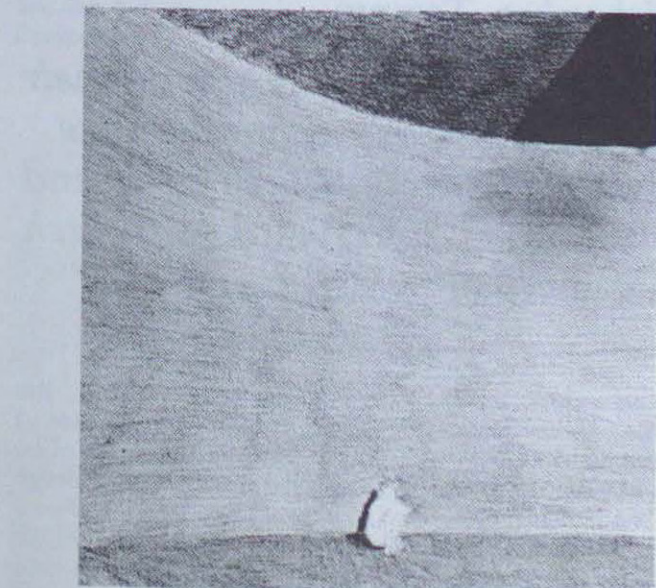
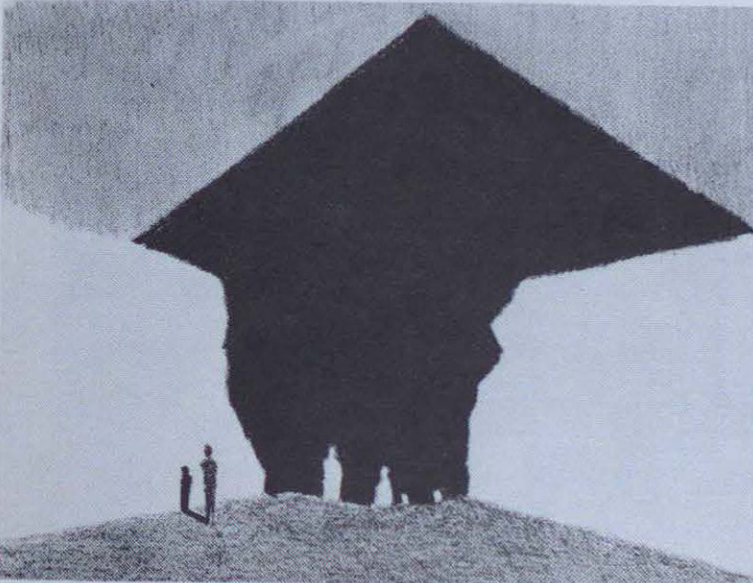
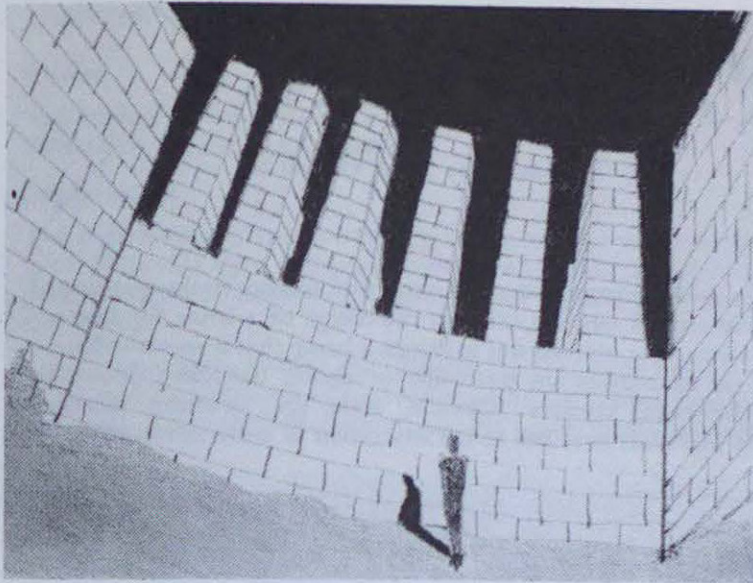
*The true architectural art, that art toward which I would
lead you, rests not upon scholarship, but upon human
powers; and therefore, it is to be tested, not by the fruits of
scholarship, but by the touchstone of humanity. Taste is one
of the weaker words in our language. It means a little less
than something, a little more than nothing; certainly it con-
veys no suggestions of potency. It savours of accomplishment,
in the fashionable sense, not of power to accomplish in the
creative sense. It expresses a familiarity with what it au-
courant among persons of so-called culture, of so-called good
form. It is essentially a second-hand word...*

Louis Sullivan,
"A Roman Temple (2),
Kindergarten Chats

The shadow's meaning now becomes a little clearer. We can see
the space lightening up from its earlier very darkness, although
there is still no detail recognisable. The space itself has a fantastic
quality, as though, in a way, it were alive. It seems to be an emo-



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tionally charged space, and, hence, it exorcises or drains from one, their own inner creative forces. Doesn't it?

So he asked the man how the architect made the outside of the temples and the man said: "Why, he made it out of his head; and he had books besides." The 'books besides' repelled Louis: anybody could do that; but the 'made it out of his head' fascinated him.

Louis Sullivan,
The Autobiography of an Idea

But you see, what is happening to the shadow is that, as time goes on, as one becomes older, wiser, more conservative in one's ways, the notion of the many images disappears. There is no need for the space; all has been decided, all is lost. Death looms behind — hopefully, far behind — impending retirement. We accept rules, don't we?

And he was told that these 'Orders' were 'Classic', which implied an arrival at the goal of Platonic perfection of idea. But Louis by nature was not given to that kind of faith. His faith ever lay in the oft-seen creative power and glory of man. His faith lay indeed in freedom. The song of spring was the song in his heart.

Louis Sullivan
The Autobiography of an Idea

The shadow knows no such faith, either. The depth is full; it is dense but it is open. It suffers through only a lack of input, as it is voracious in feeding. As signals weaken, the shadow struggles to retain its identity. It is an all-too-common struggle, as the space we have come to know vanishes; a kind of dematerialisation or vegetabilisation has taken place. Hasn't it?

We believe firmly and fully that they can teach us; but let us learn principles, not shapes; let us imitate them like men, and not ape them like monkeys.

Horatio Greenough,
American Architecture, Form and Function

When one has understood which forces are timeless, which never fluctuate, then what they call 'reality', the more suitably described ruthless, gutless mercenary world, can be overcome. This is a great potential. The source, the shadow, from within which the strength of idea may come.

As a Christian preacher may give weight to truth, and add persuasion to proof, by studying the models of pagan writers, so the American builder by a truly philosophic investigation of ancient art will learn of the Greeks to be American.

Horatio Greenough,
American Architecture, Form and Function

As the cycle begins to reach full circle, as if to say one were returning from whence one came, and bearing in mind the lessons learned, it will be from within the shadow that one must seek the unknown, one will cast aside preconceptions, and from within, will come forth the next architecture, always from within.

Is the art I advocate to be built upon the sands of books, upon the shoals of taste and scholarship, or is it to be founded upon the rock of character?

Louis Sullivan,
"A Roman Temple (2),
Kindergarten Chats

Lurk in the shadow.

He is great who is what he is from nature, and how never reminds of us others.

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
"Uses of Great Men",
Representative Men, Volume IV