

"Ceci Tuera Cela"

or

Architecture Deconstructs Nihilism



CHARACTERS

The Lover

The World

An androgynous choir (always invisible, off stage and behind the spectators)

The play should be performed slowly, during twenty-four hours of experiential time. It should last as long as the day, from sunrise to sunset. There are no intermissions. The appropriate rhythm will dictate the intervals between scenes. (Please note: left and right as denoted in the following script invariably refers to the spectators' point of view.

SCENE I

At the beginning, the stage is fully visible, although almost completely dark. It consists of a vertical section, showing two distinct places separated by the plane of the horizon. The play will unfold like a mysterious mechanism inflicted with spherical perspective, disclosing the structure of the book. The upper scene reveals the familiar airport waiting room with its glazed reflections and the rising sun. The Lover, sitting on a soft moulded plastic chair, hand on suitcase, is about to wake up. Barely discernible to the left, the city can be seen in the distance. On the right, the embarkation gate leads towards total darkness. The mobile lounge is absent.

The lower part of the section shows the bedroom with which we are also familiar. The Lover lies naked on his bed, face down, apparently deep in dreams. The slight morning brume is dissipating and amidst more pronounced shadows, the cracks on the wall that had become a map are gone. Behind the man still crouches a large cat with enormous bat-like wings outlined by the faint greenish light. In the rear stage, the sky corresponds to the black space of the upper realm, while a dark, fiery maelstrom (a dangerous whirlpool not far from the Norwegian coast), is the background under the horizontal dividing line. Eyes, large fish, crosses, eyebrows or black elongated birds, balances and broken boundary landmarks are among the heavenly signs that can be barely seen, all disappearing, while in the foreground the marionette wires that extend between the places of the upper realm and the body of the sleeping Lover become clearer and conspicuous, like the traces of shooting stars in the darkest firmament.

While the action develops in the airport scene, the sleeping Lover in his room remains more or less motionless. Only the wires of destiny vibrate with greater intensity or become warmer as the events unfold.

The play begins when the Lover, disoriented, opens his eyes and finds himself in the maze of steel and glass. His clothes are wet and sticky from sweating, and he is visibly overtaken by bitterness. An intensely bright, yellow sunlight spreads over the upper stage, glaring through a very low circular cut-out, about five feet in diameter. No other light is used.

THE LOVER (*addressing an intangible vision*): Oh Polya! Where are you, my pleasure? You are mine... you were mine... she was mine. Vanished with my dream. The clearest of dreams, perfectly recoverable. A divine intimation? Just before sunrise, a crepuscular dream that filled only the infinitely short instant preceding orgasm. The experience of zero. My hand sliding on her thigh and at the precise moment when the tightly articulated limbs finally yield, revealing the Void, then the dream stops, as if my inner being had opted for temporal space, chaos and life over the seduction of death and its promise of a non-dualistic vacuity!

THE CHOIR: The magician's power is the power of Eros, manipulation through passion and seduction, remaining ultimately unfulfilled in our temporal world. We are the victims of the artist and yet, this is our only hope for meaning, our sole alternative to catch a glimpse of the absolute.

THE LOVER: My brief dream was chased away by the sun, who was perhaps jealous of my power and happiness; it was vaporized by the light that denies a tomb to my Polya and, indeed, all building designed in the image of love. The light that ultimately obliterates the geometric incandescence, the coinciding point of life and death, may thus also destroy civilization. This light must come to an end!

THE CHOIR: According to the ancient Egyptians, the word "dream" derives from the verb "to awaken." And the sun is a two-way bridge of fire between Being and Non-Being.

THE LOVER: The millennium is approaching. We have flirted with reason for three thousand years. Moving perennially from East to West, we have lived in the twilight. Now it's time for the night, for the age of awakening. We must escape through the gap in time that allows us to reverse our direction and come back to our non-dualistic origin.

THE CHOIR: The firmament can no longer be addressed by its given name. Jacob's ladders collapse without a sound. Everything is upside down and all that is square is round. The Milky Way: ammoniacal vapours shining in empty space and bursting forth absurdly like the tears of a broken egg, the mucus of a dazzled eye or the opalescent offal of the shattered skull of humanity. It is only a gap of astral sperm and heavenly urine, the true substance of communion! Heaven gradually turns into hell and people must gradually turn into birds.

THE LOVER: Adam found Eve at the time of awakening. That is why women are so beautiful. The richest occurrences come to us long before our consciousness realizes it. When our gaze stops in the visible, we are already in love with the invisible. Intimate destiny! Your absence in death does not deny to poetry the power to give us youth and convey wonder, to animate space and to articulate the speech of genuine thought. Death is not an event, but a substance, and true poetry an awakening. Let us proceed into a night dream, again into myth!

THE CHOIR: Love may not be genetically efficient, but it perpetuates humanity through metempsychosis by willing death away. Man, born poet, is not a creation of necessity, he is the creation of desire.

THE LOVER (*standing up and facing the audience*): The external world is not made of inanimate matter. No impersonal laws are at all operational. All is flesh and the chiasm has been revealed. The death of Polya must be avenged. Catastrophe must ensue, or our ultimate transformation into objects will persist.

THE CHOIR: You know how it always is, and yet humanity remains deaf to the call for authenticity. Will we ever be at rest? So many times already! The same ending once again? Will you not finally believe in reality? The dream must be trusted. You have the divine in you, but beware of coveting the spurious. Or else you will never win out!

THE LOVER: There is a certain point in the mind, now at last accessible, from which reality and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, life and death, all cease to be perceived in a contradictory way.

The lover then proceeds to stop the sun from rising. He places his suitcase on a low table upstage and opens it with a deliberate motion, totally exposing its contents. He extracts first the book of poetry. "Reflections" is the title of the collection, but this is perhaps no longer important for the spectators. He next removes the pulsating, shiny sphere which, as it is held much closer to the proscenium plane, hides the artificial sun completely.

SCENE II

The spherical depth has now become dominant, analogous to the human eye. The conventional experience of perspective begins to collapse. The time-piece, activated by the sun, will soon stop. The end of the play coincides with the end of the book. The present reading is 23:23. At this moment, the structure of the work is disclosed as a superfluous geometrical instrument for the architect to measure in her body the longest possible day, precisely calculated during the Summer solstice, the 21st of June at 60 degrees North latitude. The vertical stage, with its structure of wires like a web of time meridians, is still visible, but now seems to be contained within the projections of the sphere, which also reflects the contents of the suitcase (this may be achieved through an ingenious system of lenses and mirrors).

The Lover continues to hold the sphere with fascination, probably aware of its important function as a geographical instrument and map. It is now clear that it has undergone a process of crystallization, by becoming smaller and more pure. With resolute motions, he then extracts a tool from his suitcase. As soon as he grasps the tool in his hand, the sphere appears intimately provoked. Showing his great expertise, he begins carving the object. His countenance shows an expression of strength and delight, typical of the craftsman in the act of creation. It is perfectly evident that he is making an orifice, perhaps eventually a circular orifice, very dark and profound. After being carefully polished, the black crystal resembles the pupil of an eye, or the inside of an egg, entirely void of light.

THE LOVER: The time has come for the end. The sun will no longer rise and the crystal will obliterate the dualism of shadow and light.

THE CHOIR: In its implosion, the sphere will turn to be the dark sky, synthesizing the space of the heavens and internal space, like the original mat pearl congealed in a heavy, fundamental water. Light will become corporeal and the matter of objects celestial.

THE LOVER: This sphere acts like an uncanny anamorphic mirror that distorts ordinary objects as they are projected outwards. The distorted objects, which are now real, reflect back on the incomprehensible, monstrous mirror. A key to our nightmarish jumble rests with the mirror reflecting the eye of the spectator, the black hole that I hold in my hands, the vortex of emptiness that will finally absorb and liberate all of humanity.

THE CHOIR: Little by little the black hole will turn itself inside out, scattering in a spin-weighted harmonic motion. Neutrinos, electromagnetic and gravitational forces will break through the barrier of reflecting metal or crystal surfaces. This time the sphere will not be captured by the stratagems of reason and man will stop imitating his ancestors. From within the fertilized egg-cell at the moment of conception, the world will appear as pure concavity, as space: *Makom*. A new mode of dwelling on the earth, probably free from gravity in the conventional sense, will necessarily follow. Beyond the absolute-event-horizon we will be able to TOUCH the invisible light, remaining impervious to violent toroidal forces. Men and women will increasingly reduce in size in order to share the finite surface until, after the year 20,000, humanity will adopt the dimension of zero. Thus the human race will ultimately vanish in a dignified manner and attain infinity.

The spherical projection becomes filled with a dull yellow light in crescendo (the colour of sand). The light emanates from the surface of a floating square, inscribed in the sphere. It turns first to brown and then dark red which then becomes brighter (the colour of blood), while the luminous surface metamorphosizes into a triangle. Next the light changes to a dark-blue gray, followed by violet and then dirty green, emerging from the lower part of the sphere which now appears like a flat semi-circle (the colour of the sea). Gradually the circle completes itself, the light becomes more orange and finally incandescent yellow, turning into the brightest blue (the colour of noon), a radiation so glaring that the spectators are forced to close their eyes. The sphere is now so large that it is no longer noticeable.

THE CHOIR: A man slaying a bull, a vulture eating the liver! The scrutinized sun can be identified with a mental ejaculation, foam on the lips and an epileptic crisis. No longer the preceding sun that had made the objects visible, epitome of beauty and goodness. The scrutinized sun is horribly ugly and yet, death by the consumption of fire is the least solitary of deaths. A true cosmic death that takes the whole universe with it!

SCENE III

All the shadows in the upper stage have become permanent, regardless of the retinal fluctuations of light. The objects have shifted in their relative positions, as depth has continued to collapse. The scene, however, is similar to the beginning of the play. A premonition of laughter and catastrophe. The Lover now holds nothing in his hands. He stands up and walks gracefully to the embarkation gate. Facing the abysmal darkness on the right, oblique to backstage, he arrives at the edge of a platform. As soon as he stops, very simple dance music is heard, the precise opposite of Wagner.

THE CHOIR: It is the time of awakening; the time of poetry which is the saying of the truth; the time for the realization of the dream.

THE LOVER: The round-dance of thought must now conclude and become gesture, but not a fertility ritual. Depth is on top and our destiny is to overcome heaviness. But wings are useless. The force of flight is in the dancing feet and flying is no longer forbidden. To will is to fly, to will with optimism the liberation of humanity.

Jumping slightly, the Lover strikes the earth with his heels. Arching his body from the feet to the nape of the neck, he becomes infinitely vertical and rises into the freedom of night. He really flies, finally detached. The upper stage is now dark. We can only see the marionette wires that appear like shooting stars (continuing into the unperturbed lower section of the stage), and the Lover's body, free from gravity.

THE CHOIR: Ooo-oo-ooo. The experience of zero in a unified field of space-time. By means of a sustained action from this quantum field, through powerful ceramic superconductors, it is possible to modify the curvature of space-time geometry so that the body can rise and climb in any chosen direction.

The lover continues ascending, very slowly.

THE CHOIR: Being is becoming and there is no present or substance, only vacuity. Deeper, more profound, simple and essential than love itself!

The lover pursues his strictly vertical levitation, avoiding any impression of swimming or drifting towards the East or West. His deep breathing is noticeable. The atmosphere is absolutely odorless, without memories or spurious desires.

THE CHOIR: The substance of freedom is air, because air is nothing and gives nothing. This is the greatest gift.

THE LOVER (his voice now having an uncanny androgynous tone): Listen inside my head. I rise in the supreme voyage that goes nowhere along the horizon, desiring to reach the ocean in the depths of the sky that is never visible during the day. To become one with the primordial plasma, the opaque clarity or shade that is more brilliant than the light of the sun. Cold fire in the night, the semen of the universe, origin of a new sun.

THE CHOIR: Night synthesized with the light of love. Real flight is always blind. Forever rising towards the cold, high and silent place integrated with our own Being.

While the scene stays unchanged and the slow, undisturbed ascent of the lover continues, the voice now comes distinctly from the lower section of the stage where the body of the Lover remains motionless on the bed.

THE LOVER: I saw myself partaking from the world of light. All was a rainbow of coloured light, yellow, red, green, blue and white. I experienced an overwhelming nostalgia for the colours of the world while I was carried outside myself by the violence of the presence. I wanted to fly in the air, but I noticed there was something resembling a piece of wood at my feet which prevented me from taking flight. I kicked the ground with violent emotion and rose, shooting forth like an arrow from the bow. Suddenly I saw that Black Light had enveloped the entire universe. Rays of light joined in me and rapidly pulled the whole of my being upward. Finally I reached the sphere of spheres, without quality or dimension and I was annihilated, losing consciousness. When I came back to myself I realized that this absolute light was I. Whatever fills the universe is I; other than myself there IS emptiness.

THE CHOIR: The yes and the no have been left behind. Now the formless is. In the perpetual present the soundless is, total and unending.

The levitating body in the upper stage now starts to vanish, a dark vapour transformed into black space and cosubstantial with the pleroma. While this happens, the marionette wires are pulled in all directions, becoming tense and incandescent. The naked body of the Lover, lying face down on his bed, shows undisguised signs of excitement through motion, rubbing his groin and feet against the surface of the sheets.

THE CHOIR: Love is the first scientific hypothesis for the objective reproduction of fire, the origin and apocalypse of culture. Prometheus was a vigorous lover.

The body of the Lover now appears fragmented. In every limb there is a whole body, the gestures of humanity are present in every part. But the gender of each limb is definitely not recognizable. Beautifully crafted pieces rub against one another and become visibly inflamed.

THE CHOIR: The fire is not pure any more, it has been stolen from the gods. Desire is genetically inefficient, but it abides at the root of human order. Infinity remains and humanity endures between an eclipsed Beginning and a glaring Beyond: a two-way traffic that discloses the architecture of the flesh of the world. We await.

Two delicate hands carefully take a long and erect piece of flesh and slide it into a dry fissure. Always two hands. Slowly and deliberately they rub it, patiently rotating and waiting. The work has a rhythm which is accompanied by other motions, primitive music and song. After a few minutes of expert craftsmanship a new order has been created. The primordial dialectic of soft and hard has been synthesized in a novel, intimate substance. Neither a text in the past, perpetually absent, nor a pure and eternal presence of nothing. Rather, the future universal language: the bodily fragments are totally enveloped by a humid, invisible dark fire. The androgynous head, placed on the pillow, suddenly opens its eyes in an orgiastic expression of death. Depth has now collapsed completely. The shifting objects have all dissolved into the centre. The stage becomes absolutely pitch black. No more games of appearance. The last images to vanish are a view of the planet from outer space and the death-bed in the room.

From the plane of the earth, dividing the black space above and the dark fire below, the participants can feel the emanation of an intense heat. They breathe deeply, with a deliberate, musical rhythm, extending their senses and opening every pore of their bodies. They finally experience the omnipresent coincidence of desire and fulfilment: their individual completeness as necessary participants in the continuum of life. The new light, diffused in infinite space, is obviously dark. But the obscure presence of the Lover's tomb is undeniable: the first architecture of a new age made with the spectators' own flesh, primordial substance of interfused mind and matter, the final coincidence, supreme apex of analogy. The intimate, warm emanation radiating from the tomb, capable of penetrating beyond the surface of things and present to all the senses, is ours forever to keep and share.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez is the Bronfman Professor of Architectural History at McGill University. He has taught and lectured in numerous schools of architecture in Europe and North America, and is the author of *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 1983). This article is part of a forthcoming work on the relationship between eroticism and architecture in the dream of Poliphilo (1499).