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[Imaginative Enclave in Maison de Verre.](#)

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Chapter 13

Imaginative Enclave in the Maison de Verre

Kati Blom

Intimation

This chapter discusses the relationship between spatial imagination and the unconscious in architecture. Spatial imagination relies on spatial perception and architecture's concrete qualities, which interact with our body, our unconscious and become noted in the associative intimation which we have with objects around us. For Sigmund Freud the personal sensuous experiences (percepts) are embedded in the unconscious. Any mental image has its origin in the perceptual, objectual world: 'all mental images stem from – are reproductions of – perceptions'.¹ In his second topographical model of the unconscious Freud concentrates on the super-ego, ego, and the id. One form of consciousness, consciousness of percepts, is associated with the skin and other sense organs. The skin mediates between the sensations of internal and external impulses. According to Freud memories do not surface into consciousness non-altered, rather they surface in a converted manner in the shape of preconscious mental images, dreams or other distorted sensuous data of which we were once conscious and now become again aware.

The reproduction of a perception as a mental image is not always a faithful copy; it can be modified by omissions or by fusion of various elements.²

Personal experiences are vital to discharge the enormous energy which lies in our unconscious. Experience happens at the bodily level; it does not happen in our minds, but in our embodied minds. 'Embodied mind' is a phenomenological concept which is used for instance by Shaun Gallagher to describe the fusion of the personal and sensual (preneotic) unknown mechanism of the body.³

Similarly James Gibson argues for an ecological approach to visual perception. He asserts that the human body reads environmental phenomena either as negative or positive

affordances, and this reading is automated, it does not need our conscious consent.⁴ Objects invite us to do something or we feel the need to detach ourselves from them (withdraw, run away, turn around). In this respect the body is assumed to have functions of which we are not aware. Architects influence whether buildings are read as habitable (positive affordance) or non-habitable (negative affordance). The filtering and evaluative process of the unknown is a constant in architectural experience; sometimes these evaluations cause our body to reject a place, sometimes to feel relief when residing.

We could ask what qualities in architecture trigger mental images to surface. Because this is a relation between object and subject, it has a special concrete acuteness and particularity to it. Gaston Bachelard's poetic image is a specific materially based on the mental image, which does not rely on our memories but our body's muscular relation to the object or space which reverberates in us. Bachelard thinks these images are functions of the intimate sense (*sens intime*).⁵

This *sens intime* is a concept for which I do not find a definition in Bachelard. According to the translators of *The Imagination* by Jean-Paul Sartre, Kenneth Williford and David Rudrauf, the term had been used by Pierre-Françoise Maine de Biran, and it does not refer to 'inner sense' but 'denotes the immediate self-knowledge of consciousness that grounds our explicit reflective knowledge and cannot be identified with or reduced to the knowledge acquired from sensory organs'.⁶ I am attracted to it because of its vagueness. When 'intimation' is used in social life it means to imply, hint; it refers to the hidden (unknown, or almost known, as in preconscious daydreams or mental images) and to the one who is aware of the hidden and wants to share it with someone else. Intimation in this sense is sufficient to trigger imagination because its minimal oblique expression requires more or less conscious interpretation to become fully revealed, hence its connotation of the political unconscious. I find this notion appealing. According to Jonathan Webber, who translated *The Imaginary* by Jean-Paul Sartre, this term 'the connotation of 'intimate' should be borne in mind. Sartre means to indicate our

awareness of what is closest to us'.⁷ The rareness and the fleeting smallness of this term attracts. The same applies to Bachelard's poetic images; they are oblique and withdrawing at the same time as they emanate an aura of synaesthesia compatible to vivid experiences of architecture.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his commentary on Sartre's *The Imagination*, uses the *sens intime* in the first paragraph when he summarises the difficulties of integrating the image into our mental faculties. He sketches the scenario that Sartre, like Hume, Descartes and Leibniz, have each returned to the question of the relation between the thought and image, the common denominator being that image is a revived perception. Nevertheless, no psychology so far has disputed the existence of the image.

As a modification of thought or a received impression, [the image] is a real part of the thinking being. In a word, it is a thing within. Experimental psychology will never challenge that conception. It will never confront it with the data of the intimate sense (*sens intime*).⁸

To have intimate knowledge of an environment is to gain and renew it at any moment, but more specifically, in some specific moments of inner turmoil or enjoyment of which we become aware. Architectural intimation also has a hint of the gestures we find in the environment, its provocations or silent suggestions in the form of 'affordances' or 'kinaesthetic gestures' or 'figures' which 'reverberate' in us. On the other hand, we also bring to the environment our own hidden passions, emerging affective dispositions, and motile intuitions. We visit and inhabit places, only to return to or reject them in our real life, or in our daydreams or dreams, due to their significance to us.

Consequently, instead of the word 'spatial image' I am arguing for the notion of 'architectural intimation', which is an event in between and in connection with the mind and the body, in the shared thin or limited Freudian surface or 'skin'. Architectural intimations cannot be reduced to sensations, because our intense personal relations project toward external

real buildings and evocative objects, and consequently reflect certain qualities, strange objects, and partial objects of the environment.

The Maison de Verre

To exemplify the complexity of spatial images as architectural intimation, I take the case of imaginative enclave implied by Kenneth Frampton when he writes about the Maison de Verre, Paris (1928–32) by Pierre Chareau. In spring 2014, I wanted to read something about the house before visiting it in order to test the idea of preconceptions and refutations, as this was the theme for an intimate meeting of the Architecture's Unconscious Network in Paris. I read texts about the Maison de Verre in order to imagine the spaces emerging from the text. When I then visited the 'real' Maison de Verre I could reflect upon my preconceptions while seeing it in the flesh.

According to Kenneth Frampton the Maison de Verre is a project about furnishing rather than spatial design.⁹ This remark by Frampton, which is noted by Sarah Wigglesworth¹⁰ as being dismissive of Pierre Chareau's talent as an architect, could be an expression of the puzzlement of Frampton toward the incremental and delicate interior which transcends anything a standard design practice would provide. I interpret Frampton to mean that this building is like furniture in the context of the site. The steel frame structure was erected but no working drawings existed, as Chareau and his client Mrs Dalsace worked using models to make communication easier. This spontaneous practice is like an artistic installation.

This intuitive design process of Chareau exemplifies how architectural processes work like an unconscious matrix, which allows us to do certain things, but not others. We are not fully in control of the process. The specific locality of this particularity encases it in the influence of the old building and its occupancy of the attic, as the prehistory or pathological circumstance we cannot fully know, but the consequences of which we meet in the Maison de Verre.

Text as Inspiration

Reading Frampton's article, my thoughts started to revolve around several puzzles, all indicating lighting conditions. Among the notes about Pierre Chareau's masterpiece, I stopped for a while at the paragraph about the glass brick walls. When imagining the effect of the famous luminous façade, I realised that one can discriminate between various different 'seeing-light' conditions in architecture. Architecture is experienced in the continuum of daylight/twilight/darkness.

The liminal case, where light-discrimination has a crucial role in spatial imaging, is the phase of twilight. At the Maison de Verre, the peculiar in-between phase of reduced illumination became an interest of mine: mainly a diffuse light, as in viewing outdoors when indoors. The instances of twilight and other in-between illumination phases are enhanced, I argue, by spatial imagination. I argue that the condition of seeing-as – in other words noticing the imaginative elements – interferes with the physiological act of sensing, thus making these moments in space more memorable. In these peculiar moments, intimations interfere with the normally unconscious way we live as bodies in space.

The Light Arrangement on the Stage of the Maison de Verre

I come from a functionalist view of light in architecture, and initially I was unwilling to dwell in these complex in-between luminous instances. The lighting conditions can be interpreted from a practical point of view: when designing, we engage with the variations of the shadows according to the angle of sunlight falling on objects. On the surface, this functionalist view dictated the design of Chareau's masterpiece. In the quarters demolished in order to construct what became the Maison de Verre, the lighting conditions were dark indeed, and consequently a lot of light was desired, to flush away the memory of the past darkness. The light on the three new floors, underneath the floor left untouched, was crucial to its new function as a doctor's practice and for the social life of the lady of the house. One could not use skylights to illuminate the floors below. The answer was to use glass bricks on the façades. Also, other manufactured building parts were used, such as train windows at the rear and the steel columns.

Frampton states ‘The original two floors had been so dark that the employees of the asinine old lady, who would live to be 100, were compelled to do their work during the day by artificial light’.¹¹ Frampton condenses two interesting cues here – attention is first given to the miserable light conditions of the old building. The second part of the jigsaw is the old lady who remained living on the second floor which made it impossible to demolish the old structure entirely. What Frampton calls ‘asininity’ is a combination of her old age and the prevailing dark conditions on the floors below her. This forced the designer to work around the obstacle of the second floor, which had to stay as it was. The narrative of the Maison de Verre has its mythical as well as ‘rational’ sides to it, adding to the surreal atmosphere which surrounds this place. We will leave the lady for a while and continue to uncover the functional reasons for Chareau’s lighting manoeuvres.

When Frampton’s text continues things start to look more puzzling than my rationalist view allowed – the text and my imagination guided me into a building which I had never visited before. He mentions the glass brick wall with ‘translucent Nevada lenses’ which diffuses the light and makes one experience the condition of the outdoors when indoors, intensified by the fact that the ‘real’ outdoors is invisible, when in the living room.

This *light diffusion* simulates a quality of illumination comparable to that experienced in the open air, thus contributing to the experience of the house as a ‘world within the world’, enclosing its own hierarchy of public and private spaces (emphasis mine).¹²

Frampton’s text continues to analyse the house’s different grids and elementary spatial and furniture constellations; that obviously being his ‘world within the world’.

The text acts as a trap for the spatial imagination. In what ways are the diffused light conditions outdoors and indoors comparable? To which grades of seeing-as does he refer? As-outdoors, or as-if-outdoors? Or only partially the same: almost-as-outdoors? In which capacity then could the indoors be as the outdoors? The only thing for sure is the fact that there is no visual connection to the outdoors, and that makes this enclosure prone to the imagination,

which – to borrow Frampton’s words – is another kind of ‘world within the world’, i.e. an imaginative enclave, more like a claustrophobic cell than breathing or bathing in light. It is truly a *mise-en-scène* of the eradication of darkness. The actual description, and indeed also my experience once in the Maison de Verre, suggests that the light, which illuminates the reception room, is diffuse and disorientating, even nauseous. The light is not diffuse in a flickering manner but rather ambient or homogeneous. This condition may have been different earlier, as the original ‘Nevada bricks’ have a more textured and uneven colour finish.

According to Mary Vaughan Johnson, many visitors feel claustrophobic in the reception hall (Architecture’s Unconscious Network second meeting, 9 May 2014). This is because of the effect of the glass bricks. First, the screen dominates, as its area is the same as that of the floor. Second, the diffuse light condition is a very particular one. The light, when diffused, is like that of a cloudy day, where the endless muted reflections of the sun’s rays through the clouds make the environment shadowless. The illumination is not full of scintillation but damped. The glow of the diffuse reflective light is similar to that on the street in the seventh arrondissement.

It is possible to experience very similar conditions in a forest or jungle where the source of the light is undefined. According to old photographs, Mme Dalsace had large plants inside, just behind the glass brick wall, and that may have enhanced the idea of being as-if-outside when being entertained in the living room. Similarly, the light conditions in dreams possess the quality of an undefined light source, similar to the morning shimmer just before the sun actually rises. These conditions are all exceptional, short lived, or imaginary. They are liminal experiences which heighten the intensity of absorption in the sensory system.

In order to induce make-believe, the owners lit the ‘floodlights’ in front of the garden and front façades in the evening to prolong this condition. The floodlights are more powerful than any of the lights used inside, and the glass bricks reflect back some of the light from the floodlights so that the façade’s surface is effectively a translucent skin. Frampton, continuing

the sentence cited above implying the imaginative, ‘as-outdoors’, enclave of the Maison de Verre, states, ‘This condition is maintained at night, when the interior of the house is again illuminated by light diffusing through its glass from the flood-lights mounted off the forecourt and garden facades’.¹³ This text reinforces the conjecture that once you are in, you are in the phenomenal ‘outdoors’, without temporal interruption, without seasonal or nocturnal cessation which normally is experienced when ‘in the open air’. The delicate condition of sensing the descending and diminishing daylight is replaced by eternal in-between-ness. The conscious image or setting of the outdoors, is rendered atmospherically stable but its effect is surreal and unsettling. The impossible task of capturing and keeping safe the passing light is felt in the hugeness of the living room and its symmetrical cubistic void which illuminates the cultured objects of the owners with a mystical inner glow (Figure 13.1). Artificiality is part of its lure and enigmatic attraction.

[Insert Figure 13.1 here – landscape]

Figure 13.1 The reception hall. In Kenneth Frampton, ‘Maison de Verre’, *Arena, The Architectural Association Journal*, 81(901) (1966), p. 262. The Architectural Association, Éditions du Salon des Arts Ménagers. À hauteur de la reproduction: Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris / Musée des Arts Décoratifs. Dans la rubrique crédit photographique: photo distr. Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

The Stage as Unstable Imaginative Enclave in Diffuse Light

Certainly, the reasons for the use of these glass bricks are complex; one of them being the need for privacy for both the clients of Dr Dalsace and the visitors in Mme Dalsace’s salon. Furthermore, the social niche of the inhabitants and their guests or clients is physically present in the exclusiveness of the huge imposing front façade, not ever found before. The psychological need for a social enclave or difference may be seen in the urge for the modern,

avant-garde. The knowledge of this peculiar house's role in the life of high-class ladies or cultural personalities is, of course, part of the informed visitors' aesthetic appreciation; at the same time it covers this house with an overstated sense of social exclusion. The Maison de Verre operates as a hostile fortress, or a confrontational 'object'.

What I imagined when reading the text is that once you are in this building, it enclaves you within a certain local atmosphere. It is due to the glowing paraphernalia. The objects and the rubber floor become thinner in the prevailing artificiality. Instead, twilight gains materiality: its quasi-objective character is explained by Gernot Böhme when he studies the atmospheric qualities of twilight: 'Furthermore, the twilight has a character of a something, almost something which counters us'.¹⁴ According to Böhme, what is remarkable about twilight is that once noted it has a certain thingness about it, hence it becomes quasi-objective. You can understand quasi-objective in two ways – either it is a thing we encounter outside ourselves that is other to us, or it is about the diffuse light as concrete volume.¹⁵ It is the unconscious becoming pre-conscious in the sensing of the space. The quasi-stuff of the never-ending twilight and consequential artificiality resides over the furniture and planes of the living room.¹⁶ The diffuse illumination circumstance is, in effect, darkness-in-waiting, and the ghostly images or mirages start to overcome the reality; the architectural intimation becomes eerie.

Let us continue with Böhme's phenomenology. Further, in 'Das Atmosphärische der Dämmerung', Böhme notes that the twilight is sensed before it is perceived, and we automatically change our mannerisms. Like darkness, so twilight is a limiting factor, not because we choose this but because we are affected by the miniscule changes in sensual input. Unconscious bodily nerve impulses seep into our mindset, saturating it with intuitions of rest or the cessation of daily activities. Encountering the twilight means noticing not only it, but also the changes it makes in social and natural life.

Seeing-as: The Magic of Spatial Theatre

On the day when I visited the Maison de Verre, one remarkable encounter happened, which made me think of the French National Library and W.G. Sebald's image of it as an ocean-liner.¹⁷ The stairs from the ground floor leaving the reception hall have no handrails. They are quite wide, and the partial walls are further away. When ascending you have to look down to your feet, and the stairs reveal their structure, which is not bolted, but rests on hooks. You are elevated from the ground level and you ascend into a different world altogether. The feeling of voyage or travelling on sea is emphasised by some window features reminding you of industrial origins. Kinaesthetically, when entering the living room, the guest is boarding a ship, not the home of Mrs Dalsace.

The disappearance of the interior which is replaced by a make-believe outdoors or ocean ship deck is part of the operation of re-figuring or relocating the outdoors, reinforcing one's unsettling location. Are we in a phenomenal outdoors? Or somewhere in imaginative space? Before I can answer the question, let me point out a parallel case.

[Insert Figure 13.2 here – landscape]

Figure 13.2 Fujiko Nakaya, Veil (2014), in Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949). Courtesy of Richard Barnes 2013.

When you enter Philip Johnson's Glass House (1949), the interior seems to disappear – it seems to become empty, while you are perceptually transported outwards. In normal situations, being inside the house means that one may be drawn visually outside. This translocation was made apparent when fog was introduced in 2014 by artist Fujiko Nakaya in an installation on the premises (Figure 13.2). The temporal circumstances might have locked the spectator inside the house when transparent glass suddenly became opaque. Inside the glass box which is circumscribed by the fog the spectator realises the existence of the indoors, which enclaves him, similarly to the Maison de Verre. Are you here, but amidst the fog also in the

imagined outdoors? The light conditions may be similar, and you are not only connected to the outdoors visually: this must be a make-believe enclave of the outdoors. The imaginative enclave is unstable and free in its interpretations. The unconscious seeps into the real concrete world. In constant checking of the outdoor-indoor constellation you are in an intimate relationship with architecture. This is an intimation which has more seen-as than as-if qualities, because the connections between the outdoors and indoors are severed (Figure 13.3).

[Insert Figure 13.3 here – landscape]

Figure 13.3 Enclave in fog of Philip Johnson Glass House. Courtesy of Kati Blom 2015.

Phenomenal Episode

‘Inattentional blindness’ is a condition where the subject fails to notice a fully visible but unexpected object because her attention has been engaged by another object. The word describes a normal condition, which makes one’s brain discard information one is not focussed on for the moment. In the recent exhibition *Inattentional Blindness* (2014) in Galeri Zilberman, Turkey, Liddy Scheffknecht presented a work ‘Crop’ where the shadow from the window display could be misread as a shadow of a plant (Figure 13.4). The shadow is wrongly read as attached to the plant which acts as if it were an obstacle in between the sun and the floor. The ‘real’ shadow is in its normal position on the other side of the pot. The blurred, ‘real’ shadow and the sharp, ‘surreal’ shadow co-exist. As such, there is nothing alarming in this because it represents the usual state of affairs where there are many light sources present. But the existence of the non-rational in this topological puzzle is made clear when you see the white ‘shadow’ on the glass pane. The irrational link is established – the virtual enclave created. The surreal condition creates a subspace where the enigmatic conditions prevail, and even if we understand that we have erred, it is hard not to notice the surreal. To realise the error one must pause and solve the puzzle consciously. In the unconscious there are, according to Freud, no

negations or contradictions, but when we start to verbalise these preconscious ‘impossibilities’, the negation (*Verneinung*) marks the presence of the unconscious – we must halt to pay attention.¹⁸ This also shows the blindness of the unconscious to causality. In such an instance, the artwork becomes a miracle.

[Insert Figure 13.4 here – landscape]

Figure 13.4 Liddy Scheffknecht, CROP, 2013. Lambda print, 100 × 130 cm, *Inattentional Blindness*, 10 January–22 February 2014, Galeri Zilberman, Beyoğlu/Istanbul, Turkey.

Vivian Mizrahi, in a recent symposium about shadows, images and transparencies, claimed that air, glass, water and mirrors are all mediating substances. She observes that the glass pane of the window, which causes the sharp shadow, goes unnoticed. We are not sure of the ontological status of the white figure – it could be yet another shadow caused by the mystical redirection of the sun’s rays hanging in the air like a ghost or phantom. We can understand the transmission of the rays via glass only rationally, for the glass-sun link is not concretely present. It is certain that glass’s subliminality or non-phenomenality contributes to the increased sense of the surreal in the cast shadow. Similarly, the glass bricks of the Maison de Verre do not phenomenally contribute to the twilight which remains unexplained. Consequently, also the glass bricks become enigmatic. The surreal is, according to Merleau-Ponty, the attachment we have to objects in their infancy, in pre-perceptive directness. He refers to André Breton’s view on objects of desire, in vertiginous proximity.¹⁹

Objects of Desire or Repulsion

In the Maison de Verre, the supporting columns are ‘odd objects’ of which we become aware in the diffuse light. The old photo (Figure 13.1) shows clearly how the industrial pillars stand out among the bourgeois comforts. The columns are a structural necessity but their position in plan appears random. Before visiting the Maison de Verre, I found myself intrigued by the

immaculate minute design, where some elements in the drawings are incomprehensible. I could not, for instance, understand the meaning of the columns which are present in the drawing (Figure 13.5), but I felt no trace of them in the interior photo credited to Éditions du Salon des Arts Ménagers (Figure 13.6). Things did not align. These absurd permutations may have resulted either from the hidden and open function of the structure but also from the associative dialogue between Mrs Dalsace and Pierre Chareau.

[Insert Figure 13.5 here – landscape]

Figure 13.5 Oddly located columns which do not coincide with anything in the hall. Courtesy of Kati Blom 2015.

[Insert Figure 13.6 here – landscape]

Figure 13.6 The living room: no signs of the columns identified in the plans. One particular column disappeared (the one on the right, close to the bookshelves). In Kenneth Frampton, 'Maison de Verre', *Arena, The Architectural Association Journal*, 81(901) (1966), p. 261. Courtesy of Michael Carapetian 1966.

In my aesthetic consideration, I take into account the facts of which I am aware. Relating back to the old asinine lady and the darkness of the living quarters, the persistence of the condition remains in the unstable image of the prolonged twilight or diffuse light condition. The presence of the not-belonging parts (columns, glass bricks and the repeated encounter with them elsewhere in the house) work as the white shadow in Liddy Scheffknecht's artwork – they are not integrated into the experience and thus interrogate the stable nature of the concrete architectural configuration. Their irrationality invites other images or poetic explanations to enter; Bachelard's singular material imaginings take place. The ghost of the lady is everywhere, in the luminous façade and in the way glass bricks are used inside close to the doctor's surgery. Her existence is not private, for it is very concretely part of the house. The Maison de Verre

probes the darkness and twilight, the origin of which is located in the repository of the former second floor.

This is repeated and recreated in the unconscious of the architectural pilgrims who take photographs and always try to frame the picture to include only the new façade, and eliminate the attic as non-existent. Even for me, it took a while to realise the upper area did exist, although I had seen several hundred pictures of the house, both professional and amateur. The sections or plans suppress the upper floor, and Frampton's second visit as described in his article 'Maison de Verre' (1969) is no exception, by framing out the unnecessary relic (Figure 13.8). In contrast, Frampton's cross-section from 1966 shows boldly the empty, ghostly upper residence (Figure 13.7).

[Insert Figure 13.7 here – landscape]

Figure 13.7 Cross-section. In Kenneth Frampton, 'Maison de Verre', *Arena, The Architectural Association Journal*, 81(901) (1966), p. 258. Kenneth Frampton 1966.

[Insert Figure 13.8 here – landscape]

Figure 13.8 Cross-section. 'Maison de Verre', *Perspecta*, 12 (1969), p. 91. Kenneth Frampton 1969.

The mixture of my preconceptions in the form of the images was reinforced by other unsettling objects in the actual building. The real encounter with the glass house is a mixture of different thoughts, memories, images, allusions and prenominal acts. All these mental and visceral elements contribute to the whole house to become an intimation as the stairs, cupboards and glass walls rise up to remind the visitor of the magic initiated. It is not only the details which invigorate us; we agree that the building itself is vibrating (Figure 13.9).

[Insert Figure 13.9 here – portrait]

Figure 13.9 'Forecourt night view of house, illuminated both internally and externally'. The blackness of the attic is another noticeable feature. 'Maison de Verre', *Perspecta*, 12 (1969), p. 93. Michael Carapetian 1969.

The image of the Maison de Verre is a configuration of things we already know or have experienced, or can imagine from Frampton's texts. This architectural intimation is a fragile conglomeration of both percepts and imagined entities. According to Edmund Husserl, the imagined entity (image) is embedded in the perception: the perceptual conflict assures we are dealing with a mental image. (What is it? An image or an object?)²⁰ For Gaston Bachelard the material imagination is a creative process initiated by conflicts.²¹ The unconscious, according to Freud, is an accumulation of perceptions (sensual input) either repressed or not: there is no mental image (presentation, i.e. *Vorstellung*) which has not been once a percept.²²

One similar description can be found in Sartre's *The Imaginary*. A female actor, Françonay, mimics Maurice Chevalier (1888–1972); as the spectators know, it is a woman giving the impression of the famous male comedian and singer.²³ With a straw hat tilted diagonally over her head, the reality of a woman is changed to the illusion of a man not present. The image to which we agree is attended by a strong feeling of the presence of Chevalier. There is a conscious shift from the real woman to the impression of Chevalier. The physiognomy of 'Chevalier' affects one's body at the same time as one is conscious of the contradiction. Sartre asserts that the two realities, the real woman and the memory of Chevalier, are synthesised, and thus give a certain joyfulness and depth to the experience of the imitator's performance. 'This is ultimately because only a formal will can prevent consciousness from slipping from the level of the image to that of the perception'.²⁴ Percepts and illusions co-exist or are very close to each other. Husserl notes this closeness of phantasy and perceptions, and ponders about different possibilities of one phenomenon existing in either of the worlds; thus,

some phenomena would be in the process of 'becoming' to exist in either of the realms, in an in-between zone.²⁵

It is up to the observer to maintain the illusion of a man instead of the reality of a woman. The state is not that of the equilibrium. It is a very fragile intimation alternating between reality and imagination. The Maison de Verre has a simultaneous double life. We feel that the pretension in the setting reveals something, which is hard to maintain except by will. And the imagination adds to this physicality, infused by the sustained outdoor lighting, some precise artificiality and haunting beauty.

Imaginative Enclave is an Enclosure Imagining Connections

In the case of the Maison de Verre, the space is really a place. Hence it is a limited, Aristotelian enclosure. The glass brick wall and especially the surfaces, a luminous miracle, comprise the borders of the sensuous locality. All surfaces in the living room, as the screen of the Maison de Verre suggests, are impenetrable vertical surfaces with some notion of penetrable partitions. The visual connections are terminated; there is no way of any substantial sensuous testimony of the reality of outside. The only thing reminding me of the existence of the reality is diffuse light. The persistence of the otherwise short-lived twilight is disturbing and contributes to the realisation of the increasing artificiality of the space. The real vertical walls are mysteriously torn apart when the visitor starts to imagine the outdoors, trying to make sense of the peculiar stage, doing away with the real verticals to reinforce the fictional as-if image of the outdoors; getting to grips with the material reality which is vanishing in front of the observer is an example of vertiginous proximity, as Merleau-Ponty notes. So the connections in this enclave are imaginative, not real.

Scintillation and Architecture: Contrasts in Sensing Brightness

Let us return to the focus of my interest in Frampton's 1966 article about the Maison de Verre, the illumination. Frampton assumes that the glass brick façade was used to create a light condition inside the house compatible to that outside. He especially mentions the diffuse light,

which is prolonged in the evenings by light fixtures located outside the façades. Before visiting the house, I investigated the photos to detect the diffuse light conditions, which had been referred to in the text.

The photo (Figure 13.6) reveals a peculiar artificiality, as the living room is photographed from a spot in the balcony close to the façade, facing towards the objects, furniture and the surfaces, which are bathed in this indirect, shadowless light. Why is this so peculiar that it further animates me, and later even causes nausea? One explanation is that what I imagine does not correspond to anything I can express verbally, even if it was influenced by Frampton's text. I wanted to see what the text implies, because the text itself was full of fictional or poetic imagery (old asinine lady, her 100 years of life, darkness of the previous living quarters, etc.), which revives an oneiric presence.

I have one line of inquiry in order to study further the dullness or dead quality of the light in the photo. It is obviously important to eliminate direct sunlight, but consequently this setting dampened the possible glittering or iridescence, and consequently, even if not intentionally, minimised the variations of lustre in the interior of the Maison de Verre. The lustre of the surfaces is a key to this growing uneasiness due to the diffuse light.

The nature of the surface has deeper significance to our visual perception than the form or shape of an object. According to James Gibson, surfaces are detected by human sight with absolute and astonishing accuracy; we are able to distinguish the texture, viscosity, reflectivity, density or edibility of the things around us, to the extent that Gibson denies that the human visual system is capable of 'seeing' depth or three-dimensionality space.²⁶ The information we gain is dependent on the sensed stimulus but also on the grade of illumination, as homogeneous ambient brightness and darkness may fail to stimulate sight receptors, and consequently no information is available to the visual system.²⁷ The percept is then that of 'nothingness' if the condition prevails.²⁸ The dullness or lifeless appearances of things are unconsciously noted, and without doubt the glossiness or iridescence; and the possibility of observing them is an

important psychological factor. Lack of direct sunlight makes the observation of the grade of brightness of things more difficult.

In architecture, the shadow or lack of shadow is of interest, for it has an impact on the way we perceive space. Consequently, the dullness of diffuse light in the Maison de Verre eliminates sharp shadows and direct sunlight, and contributes to the ghostly artificiality of the setting. The glimmer or flickering translucency is minimised, as noted earlier in this chapter, due to the newer, more perfect glass bricks. Even if the earlier ones also eliminated the sharpest differences, they seemed to maintain some of the flickering quality of the light coming through the foliage, for instance. The light entropy contributes to the claustrophobic or unsettling impact that the Maison de Verre's light condition has on some visitors.

Finnish architect Juha Leiviskä for instance notes how sharp corners, and accordingly sharp shadows, are important in architecture, as round corners or curved walls eliminate the shadow and the spatial clarity is lost.²⁹ He does not approve of the concave walls in Reima Pietilä's Student Union Building (1966) of the Dipoli Conference Centre on the Otamiemi Campus of Aalto University in Espoo, Finland. In contrast, Juhani Pallasmaa muses enthusiastically about the chiaroscuro of Alvar Aalto's round walls:

The emotive impact of light is highly intensified when it is perceived as an imaginary substance. Alvar Aalto's lighting arrangements frequently reflect light from a curved white surface and the chiaroscuro of the rounded surfaces give light an experiential plasticity, materiality, and heightened presence.³⁰

Juha Leiviskä's designs create a different, optically vibrant spatial experience, where the planes are cut precisely to punctuate the space, which then radiates and results in an undulating light condition, a bit like in the play of light in water, never still, rather scattered rhythmically. The sharp corners are in contrast with shimmering white planes giving the rooms a distinct spatiality.³¹ In the Finnish language there is a word for 'water glimmer', a short-lived *vedenvälke*. For me the presence of life in the form of glittering or vibration is an important quality in the environment. It has been said that in Nordic architecture, the light has a central

role, and possibly this is due to the sensitiveness to radiance or 'coldness-incandescence' in snow and ice. Nordic people can tell when the ice no longer supports them by its radiance. This is due to decreased glossiness, which in turn is caused by the consistency of ice becoming more liquid. Radiance changes in all living things. We can unconsciously know the presence or absence of living energy.

Discussion

In the architectural intimation we fuse previous knowledge or memories with the acuteness of the concrete object-world in order to create a personal, subjective relationship with an environment. The surreality is triggered in the intimation if the real qualities are substituted by mental images surfacing mainly from our unconscious. These preconscious surreal images are in conflict with our day-time consciousness, causing doubt or hesitation, even nausea in the environmental experience.

Psychoanalyst and author Christopher Bollas describes well how the everyday environment becomes part of our daily associative thinking. Each evocative object resonates in us in a particular way, either causing attachment and enjoyment, or dejection. As in Freud's dream work where free association and creative imagining are crucial, orientating ourselves in a human environment can liberate our kinaesthetic and emotive being, and create new connections and amplify spatial intimations.

According to Bollas, monumental buildings symbolise patriarchal stiffness, and some of them may be created as 'archi-excrement' by architects. Consequently, the public experiences them as offensive.³² Buildings, when they are designed as identifiable monuments, evoke memories or mental images similar to other evocative, smaller objects.³³ More precisely, this term 'evocative object' refers to inner associations: 'The term 'evocative object' was used in psychology to refer to the self's capacity to evoke an internal mental representation of the object'.³⁴ In the Maison de Verre, the ambiguous columns and glass bricks in the square outer wall were evocative objects to me. The vague disposition of the columns in the photo and their

disappearance in the actual nauseating diffuse light conditions, present in the photo, made certain other associations surface from my unconscious.

Such an object in this sense may not always revive good memories, or even any mental images which linger in the preconscious. The significance of ‘ugly buildings’ or revolting objects is also to discharge some unconscious energy to dejection (melancholia); the attitude or pose towards this particular building or object may not ever change, or may change during one’s lifetime.³⁵ The most important factor that contributed to the emergence of the fragile paradoxical architectural image was the diffuse and dampening light conditions which I could sense in the old black and white interior photos, and also when I visited the house. Absence of iridescence and oscillating natural light intensified the artificiality of the interior and made the twilight itself quasi-objective and surreal, enclosing me rather than connecting me to the world outside.

In the case study of the imaginative enclave caused by the Maison de Verre, I have also pointed out that the architectural processes themselves can be seen to reflect unconscious acts from our side (the way we photograph or redraw this particular building without its attic, or the way we design buildings in an ad hoc manner). Also the prehistory of any building, like the partly demolished ancestor of the Maison de Verre, can haunt the existing building. The Maison de Verre’s specific made-up construction is a phantom of a specific trauma of not being able to reject the dependency of the earlier occupancy. I have explained how this prehistory is felt at a personal level, during a fleeting architectural intimation.

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious*, trans. Graham Frankland, with an introduction by Mark Cousins (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 91.

² Ibid.

³ Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

⁴ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), pp. 127–43.

⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 100–102.

⁶ Kenneth Williford and David Rudrauf, 'Translators' Introduction', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. xxxviii.

⁷ Jonathan Webber, 'Notes on Translation', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. xxx.

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Review of *L'Imagination*', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imagination*, pp. 162–71, p. 162.

⁹ Kenneth Frampton, 'Maison de Verre', *Perspecta*, 12 (1969), pp. 77–128, p. 77.

¹⁰ Sarah Wigglesworth, 'Maison de Verre: Sections through an In-vitro Conception', *Journal of Architecture*, 3(3) (1998), pp. 263–86, p. 265.

¹¹ Kenneth Frampton, 'Maison de Verre', *Arena, The Architectural Association Journal*, 81(901) (1966), pp. 257–62, p. 258.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Gernot Böhme, 'Das Atmosphärische der Dämmerung', in *Anmutungen: Über das Atmosphärische* (Stuttgart: Editions Tertium, 1998), pp. 13–34, p. 19: 'Vielmehr hat sie selbst [die Dämmerung] den Charakter eines Etwas, fast eines Gegenstandes'. Translated by the author.

¹⁵ This is repeated in Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p. 90, when he claims that 'images' are not things, i.e. precepts of actual things, but quasi-objective 'melanges'.

¹⁶ It is worthwhile mentioning that the quasi-objective stuff over the objects when perceived in exceptional light conditions reveal quickly how depth is relative to us, and loses its 'objectual' character. The reflections from the objects' surfaces compromise 'voluminosity', the thickness of air full of undefined redirected sun rays from undefined sources. See for instance Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 310. Oliver Sacks counts these instances when we become aware of the undefined depth as pre-perceptions: Oliver Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On* (London: Picador, 2012), p. 113.

¹⁷ W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 387.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious*, pp. 4, 70, 91–2. Furthermore, Freud states that: 'recognition of the unconscious by the ego is always expressed in negative formulations' (p. 92).

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver David (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 66.

²⁰ See John B. Brough, 'Translator's Introduction', in Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, trans. John B. Brough (Husserliana, vol. XXIII) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. xxix–lxviii, pp. xlvii, xlix.

²¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 88–9.

- ²² Sigmund Freud, *Johdatus narsismiin ja muita esseitä* [*Introduction to Narcissism and Other Essays*], trans. Mirja Rutanen, ed. Ilpo Helén and Mirja Rutanen (Helsinki: Love Kirjat, 1993), pp. 130–31.
- ²³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*, pp. 25–9.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- ²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, p. 141.
- ²⁶ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 22–32, 83.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 150–51.
- ²⁹ Juha Leiviskä, ‘Rakennustaiteen keinot tänään’ [‘Contemporary means for the art of building’], *Arkkitehti, Finnish Architectural Review*, (5) (1976).
- ³⁰ Juhani Pallasmaa, ‘Tangible Light: Integration of the Senses and Architecture’, in *D&A (07)* (Hørsholm, Denmark: Velux Group, 2008), pp. 8–13, p. 13.
- ³¹ Kati Blom, ‘Undulating Light’, *Arkkitehti, Finnish Architectural Review*, (3) (2004), pp. 72–85.
- ³² Christopher Bollas, *The Evocative Object World* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 68.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–94.