

Understanding the "POLIS"

"...The history of Architecture shows quite clearly that, despite its great heterogeneity, architectural space reveals a greater degree of stability than any other cultural situation or setting. The presence of primary symbols in architectural tradition contributes decisively to the formation of exemplary situations, which in turn generate, through further differentiation, whole families of architectural forms... The poetics of metamorphosis is the key to the process of figuration, the essence and the secret of any good and meaningful architecture...Architecture is not an imitation of nature, significant forms, types etc. In this sense Architecture is a "mimesis" of exemplary situations. In all urban civilizations the town is the first and inevitable reference for architectural mimesis. The town is the most complete embodiment of tradition and therefore the ultimate frame of reference and foundation for any architectural meaning..."¹

Urban order is the foundation of human existence, a truth which does not directly depend on our personal experience or understanding, but it is present in our culture as a latent meaning, as a series of possibilities and limits for every creative act. The capacity for contemporary cities to sustain archetypal design, in order to reveal the poetics of a shared culture and restore the "absence" of a common ground. The drawing as a language, which touches upon issues, which are essential for Architecture in order to restore vision. The task to investigate the given reality of the European city in order to discover in it those primary values, which can be transformed in time, to support a consistent and rich in imagination, radical reinterpretation of the contemporary city's structure

All that in a small room on the top floor of the Architectural Association building, 36 Bedford Square WC1B3ES, many friends with the strong conviction that any given topic for discussion and research was at the same time an invitation to think again and again... Diploma Unit 1. Dalibor Vesely, unit master, with Peter Carl and Mohsen Mostafavi.

To recollect what it was to study with Dalibor, tutor and mentor not only in the formative years of my studies, to be able to describe or even more, to be able to understand It appears impossibility in itself and, therefore, a worthwhile endeavor especially if it must be done over only few lines.

One unavoidably has to begin at the AA, the years astride late 70's. Alvin's magic wand had already begun to work its magic and the School was like an inverted architectural Babel where architects converged to work out their different idioms. Of course, eventually they would be "*scattered from there over all the earth*" but wherever they were they would "*always have Paris*". And the varied idioms, expressed as conversations in words or in drawing, spanned from Suprematism, Neo-Constructivism, 50's Revival, the architecture of electronic connections, the

¹ Dalibor Vesely, ARCHITECTURE AND CONTINUITY, Architectural Association Themes 1, London 1982

architecture of congestion and that of the wanderer. Drawings of all means, thin black lines on white paper, watercolors etched with ink and pencil, drawings of buildings ready to go on site, clean drawings, scruffy drawings, conceptual, abstract, detail, drawings of all kind.

This was the climate at the AA when the *teaching* of Dalibor broke ground.

"Teaching" is the word one could use after nearly forty years have passed but then it appeared as something else. It was more a series of *architectural investigations* of what Dalibor called 'exemplary situations':

Investigations in terms of the fact that the set projects already acknowledged the recognition that something was amiss and attempted to identify, explain and remedy it. And what was amiss was the constitution of the City, its supposed continuity, for some, or its designed discontinuity, for others.

Investigations in terms of the fact that although the projects covered a wide variety of themes, they all aimed at, converged at, one cardinal issue: the recognition of the ever-present conflict between the city as a construct of conceptual representation and the city as a repository of culture.

Investigations in terms of the fact that Dalibor could not draw to save his life. Like a blind seer, he depended on the sight offered by the drawings of his students. But he could read, and he had read and read and read... and he could bring together all that he had read into an inner kind of sight, a blind man's knowledge. However, maybe one is mistaking the intensity of his expressed conviction for knowledge and it would be truer to use, instead of knowledge, *suspicion*. So, guided by his suspicion he would, in turn, guide you [and *guide* is a mild word, an exercise in *architectural asceticism* is more apt] along the labyrinthine corridors of hermeneutic knowledge to a door, and he would unlock it and push you through, since he would not, could not, enter, for he was cursed. He was cursed with that other knowledge, which those, who do not possess it and can draw, call suspicion. The shadows in all the drawings of that time are no accident and no product of any Sun. The architectural drawing, with its ambiguous nature, was the most universal means of representation.

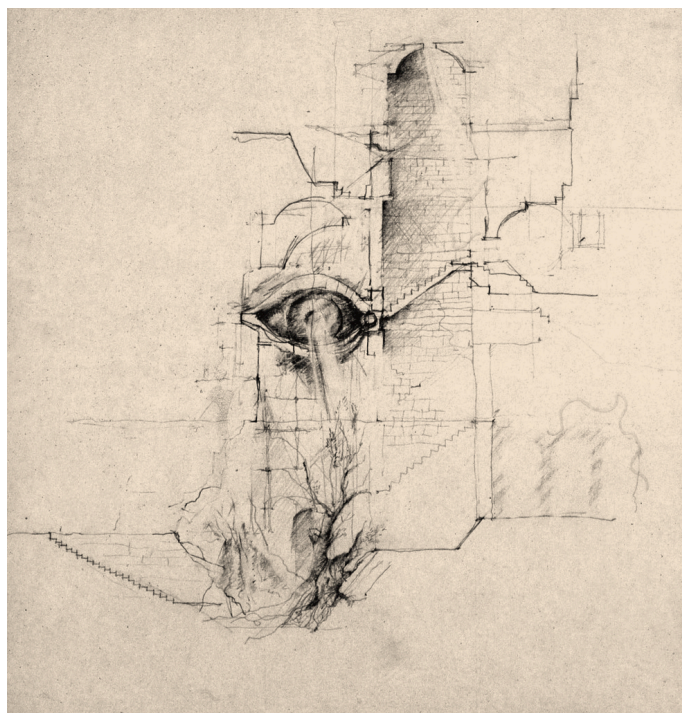
As for the object of those investigations, the *exemplary situations*, they are those urban structures - such as the street, the city center, the house, the garden, and the block - that have travelled with us from the past to the present and have thus acquired the difficult wisdom of time. This collected wisdom, exemplary situations have incorporated into their form and thus become present as phenomena incarnate. As such, they are open to interpretation in space and time through drawing.

Somewhere there, I think, lays the connection and there the teacher.

Athanasios Spanomaris, April 2016



Necropolis, drawing A. Spanomaris



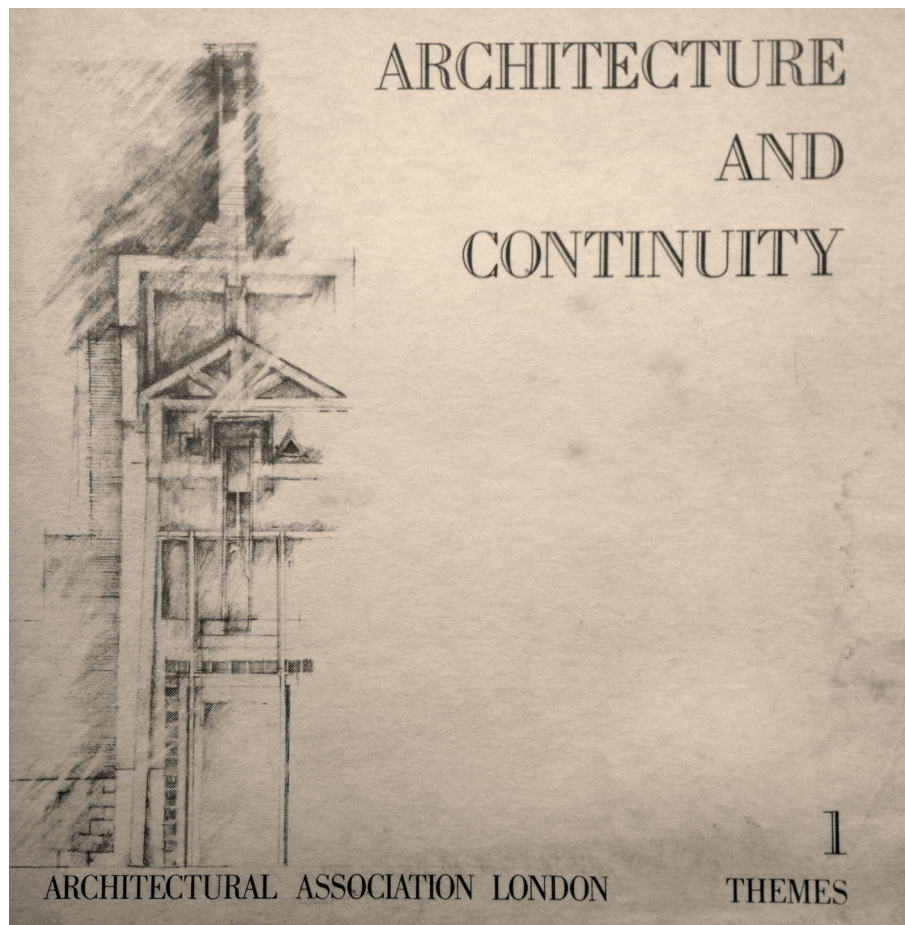
Brown Hart gardens, drawing A. Spanomaris



Forum the Garden, drawing A. Spanomaris



The apartment, drawing A. Spanomaris



The front cover of the catalog of the exhibition.