

Degrees Of Enclosure



These places know what has happened. These columns carry within them a certainty that is as great as the number of stones and pebbles out of which they were made.

It might be the creeping strata of concrete sediment in which everything has happened. The constant, weighty pressure that has been accumulating pieces, debris from whatever has passed through it and broken into action against its walls, carrying it along and pressing it into itself.

It might be the empty spaces where anything might yet happen. Spaces that sneakily slip everywhere, in between walls and ceilings that by all means seem to want to press them out from between themselves. Miraculous spaces of potential, hemmed in, populated only by sparsely used furniture, voices and footsteps from elsewhere.

The miracle of life breathes in from other places, where someone else's voice, some other place's whistling wind and mechanical grinding fall together, and are caught here, eddying around each other, by pressing folds of architecture. They catch and mix, and deepen as they reflect through the grottoes of aggregate and cement, and the further they travel from their origin, the more the beams and corridors begin to provide mouths for them, speaking their faint echoes from between themselves.

If you listen there is the reflection of a song that ricochets endlessly, and faintly; and if you find yourself watching here, you are also being watched. What you are doing here has been predetermined, and what you are seeing is for your eyes alone.

There is a choreography between the sky and the deep basement, and between what has come before and what is definitely coming after. Along and under, through and between here there is a mile long, and fifty metre deep performance that is playing itself out with measured slowness.

There are roles that require the duration of industrially refined bronze, and of bricks fired at 1800degrees, roles that speak of permanence and age and heat, of deep passions and embedded energies that play themselves out over millennia, imperceptibly.

There are roles filled by carpets and cedar parquet, that explain the script by the sound they make as they are walked over, gently revealing a narrative of passing stories and intents that softly moves the plot forward, event by event, day by day.

There are roles that only last one act, never to be repeated, and are made of painted MDF, chipboard and veneer. They attach themselves to the brick and the stone, covering them up, and shouting their lines over them with bravura colours and graphical banners, only to be torn down and taken away as quickly as they came.

Then of course there are the walk-in roles, the extras who make the sounds and add the movement, the characters for whom the performance is put on, and without whom the epic choreography would grind to a halt. Their parts have been predetermined, and it is for each one of them that the bronze, the brass, the brick, the concrete, the parquet and the carpet are always waiting for, waiting to talk to, and perform with.

It is all whispers from elsewhere that this place speaks to you; all frozen, embedded stories of actions that it is storing underneath you; and all performances of a slowness that can only be architectural that it asks you to take part in. It is always asking to be talked to, walked through, watched and taken time over, always slowly, and always in a deep nostalgia that comes from knowing that it has become unobtainable in its very presence.

It is all winding nowheres that go everywhere, and which look down through inexplicable holes and staircases on somewhere else, whilst looking up at mountainous brown deposits, of unfathomable proportions, held up in the air for unknowable purposes, and across vast plateaus of tiled pavements sliding over and into each other.

This is a surreal play on the city, a magical story about space which was somehow never meant to come real: each cliff of sandblasted concrete is a chapter about some monstrous character with a bizarre but tender tale, and each passageway that leads nowhere has a secret world to which it leads, if only one would know the three secret words.

It is all mystifying sophistry, abstruse ramblings rendered into a concrete world that somehow, through some series of unbelievably fortuitous events, no doubt as strange as the place they resulted in, was created in a city that demands its every inch to fulfil a practical purpose. Somehow, in this great city of emphatic clarity and clear purpose, lies an abundant and vast grotto of equivocal ambiguities, and imaginative digressions.

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A filmic project commissioned by the Barbican Gallery, about the Barbican Complex

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