

PART II

THE KNOWN

Escape and imagination in the
second artificial landscape

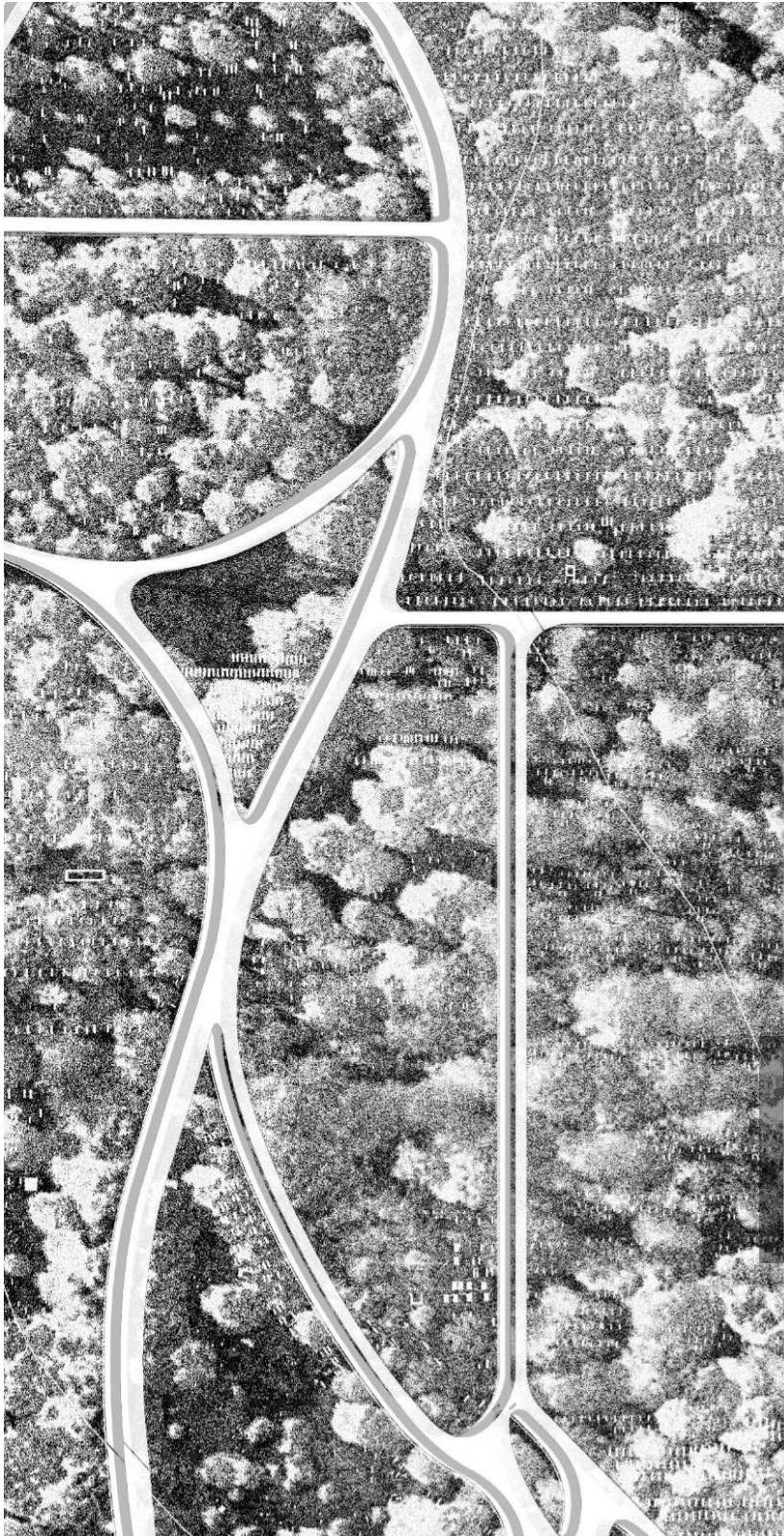


fig. 3.37. (author)
Textures of escape in
Brixton cemetery.

Chapter 3

Theory

Potentiality of intervention: reimagination of the cemetery in the encounter of the unknown inherent in artificiality.

Thus a piece of architecture is not architectural because it seduces, or because it fulfills some utilitarian function, but because it sets in motion the operations of seduction and the unconscious (Tschumi, 1994:96).

The role of imagination in architecture in relation to the narrative of the *second artificial landscape* is explored which, through nostalgic desire, produces the reality of the city. Karsten Harries's essays *Building and the Terror of Time* (Harries, 1982) and *The Two Faces of Nostalgia* (Harries, 2017) is adopted as a framework to reveal the slippage between imagination and nostalgia in architecture. The potentiality of imagination, *reveries*, as a form of death is further developed in relation to *physical Death* and *amnesic death, revenants*, (both as loss of significance resulting from loss of memory and erasure, as well as the desire to forget) to Brixton Cemetery, tethering death back to cemetery, thus reanimating the nostalgic remnant both physically, but also *intimately* through what Roland Barthes describes as *little death (La Petite Mort)* experienced by the dwellers, when confronted by the artificiality of the remnant's material and the unknown that pervades the forest as mythological archetype.

Once situated in/participating in the construction of the narrative *second artificial landscape*, the dweller's intimate engagement with unfamiliarity is underpinned by the theoretical discourse presented by Finnish architectural theoretician Juhani Pallasmaa (1936-) in his book *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (2011).

Escape as perpetuant for nostalgic recreation.

According to Harries (2017:7) the built environment is a testament to the power of nostalgia in its propensity to alleviate Man from a sense of homelessness caused by the terror of space and the terror of time. Whilst recognising Man's desire to escape the elements and find comfort in shelter, Harries claims that a more profound sense of *being sheltered* is demanded and thus describes the endeavour of building as the 'domestication of space' spawned from a desire to control both the physical and psychological environment. Again, he parallels *The Burrow* in this construction of the *first artificial landscape* to control the real, stating that "[i]t is homelessness that lets man build; the terror of space provokes him to creation (Harries, 1982:59). He recognizes that escape is accomplished by rooting dwelling in the familiarity of a wholesome past, however, this does not fully satisfy. In speaking of architecture as a sanctuary against the terror of space, he suggests that one must necessarily acknowledge how architecture functions as a sheltering from the terror of time:

*The condition of fallen humanity is shadowed by death*²⁰. *Not only is man vulnerable and mortal, but he knows of his mortality, knows that all that now is and all that still awaits him will some day be past [...] The past will overtake every present [...] Shelter promises protection from time's terror. To feel sheltered is to have banished feelings of vulnerability and mortality* (ibid., 1982:60).

Making analogy to the biblical story of the fall of Man and banishment from Paradise, he suggests that it is Man's homelessness in the world which inspires dreams of "a genuine homecoming, or paradise lost and regained" (Harries, 2017:9) to escape suffering from the terror of time and the terror of space by projecting the promise of paradise onto the future. Bachelard²¹ emphasises this reconstruction of paradise by suggesting that the familiarity of nostalgic memories and the comforting spectre of protection which it offers incites an incessant desire to reconstruct it in an effort to *escape* the terror of time — the desire to which Kafka's burrowing creature finally succumbs: "paradise is more than just a dream...We live fixations, fixations of happiness" (Harries, 1982:61). It is for this purpose, he argues, that Man has

²⁰ The dual nature of death is discussed in the following section. Milton captures this condition of death in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*: "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe" (Milton, Orgel and Goldberg, 2008:3) does not refer to death through sin, it rather describes death as the violence that allows consciousness to expand and thus experience intimacy.

²¹ Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) is a French philosopher renowned for his psychoanalytic discourse on the poetics of space.

engaged in the creation of *axis mundi*²² which, through fantasy, facilitates their escape from the anguish of reality and the terror of time — the resemblance of which is evident in the cemetery. Nostalgia is an act of remembering in the pursuit to forget, a desire for distancing inevitably producing mutedness through disillusionment, the “real disappearing to make room for an image, more real than the real...the remainder disappearing from the assigned location to resurface inside out, in what it was the remainder of” (Baudrillard and Glaser, 2014:144).

The two faces of nostalgia.

The term *Nostalgia* was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer, an Alsatian medical student who studied in Basel, to describe the vernacular word for ‘homesickness’ (*Heimweh*) by joining the words *nostos*, meaning ‘a journey back home’, and *algia*, meaning ‘pain’. It described the physical affliction of a patient caused by an inability or unwillingness to be content with memories of a home left behind, and the paralyzing need to return — nostalgic memory becomes an impediment to explore and absorb the unknown. Towards the late eighteenth century the understanding of nostalgia gradually ceased to be considered a medical ailment, however, gaining prominence in poetry and philosophy as a reaction to a dissatisfaction with the culture of reason of the Enlightenment. Acutely aware of this manufactured escape, philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) criticized this propensity to transform present reality into a remembered or imagined simulacrum of some lost paradise, claiming that nostalgia suffuses and enslaves the imaginations of those unwilling to embrace the progress of reason presented by the Enlightenment and that the nostalgic longed to escape to the halcyon of youth, captured and restored by fragments of memory which existed in a realm oblivious to suffering and circumscribed by what is known. But when the nostalgic does manage to return home “reality is likely to shatter its imaginative construction and leave the sufferer disappointed” (Harries, 2017:12).

Nostalgia and a desire to forget are thus intermingled. A presupposition of the founding of a colony, of a new way of dwelling and building, is that the idea of home leaves those venturing into the new dissatisfied. They want something new and different, and yet the colony remains bound to that mythical home that continues to enthrall them. All responsible building is a creative repetition of the past that is open to new possibilities. And so, again and again, colonies have sought to preserve the image of home in a

²² Harries describes such artefacts (especially from primitive cultures) as a repetition of ‘divine building’, again, recognised as productions of artificial paradise and momentary escape (Harries, 1982:61).

new environment, enacting a contest between nostalgia and the need to forget (Harries, 2017:15)

It is here that Harries presents the second face of nostalgia by evoking an ambivalence in Kant's discussion thereof. Even though this escape to confront reality by finding refuge in the past is futile, the nostalgic, he states, is "right not to feel at home in the world, to want to escape from it, but wrong in the desire to actually return to that home whose memory haunts him. Homelessness is the human condition" (ibid., 2017:14). Nostalgia, to him, offers reprieve in allowing the dweller to be absorbed in the familiar splendour of this illusion — forgetfulness, if only momentarily.

Baudrillard, however, discerns a further potentiality presented in the frailty of the tether between nostalgia and amnesia. His claim that nostalgia has not only circumscribed the real, but that nostalgia alone remains (Baudrillard: 1994:39) is not a lamentation, but rather emphasises his recognition that this remainder holds the material from which to produce significance:

When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity [...] Desire in the form of nostalgia become the driving force behind the consumption, and hence the production, of the past (Poster, 2001:110).

It is the longing to escape which produces a desire to create. Nostalgia is reconfigured through the dweller's reinterpretation of the object, or his imaginative reconfiguration of the nostalgic material. Both the nostalgic material (system) produced by the desire to escape and desire itself (tool), is engaged. Nostalgia creates a gap where amnesia either claims or becomes a tool to reimagine the original material, revealing its productive potentiality. It is this gap which offers space for intervention into the cemetery as nostalgic remnant, but more significantly, which provides the potential of intimation though the dweller's reimagination of this remnant.

The amnesic gap inherent in nostalgic remnants.

The weight of the architecture reflects the gravity of the task at hand: to restore meaning — both personal and collective — by revitalizing myth and ritual (Taylor, 1992:211).

Nuttall (Malcomess and Kreutzfeldt, 2013:20) further elucidates the significance of

how this amnesic gap, created by escape, can become a device to reanimate the nostalgic remnants which it produced. The notion of a gap, to her, is a place where memory (revenants / *verbeeld-ing*) and imagination (reveries / *verbeelding*) touch, where intimacy is experienced when the memory instilled into the artificial material of the city is not lost, but redeemed by its continuous morphing into new surfaces, propelled by this mythological narrative (of new desires). The act of reconstruction does not necessarily imply the erasure of previous states but, rather, intimately reimagines the existing through this mythological depth. Graves, however, further reveals the significance of this mythological depth by arguing that it is “crucial that we reestablish the thematic associations invented by our culture in order to fully allow the culture of architecture to represent the mythic and ritual aspirations of society” stating that:

The basic aspiration expressed in myth and ritual is the longing for wholeness and reconciliation in which every trace of personal and social fragmentation is overcome. Myth and ritual are mnemonic strategies through which individuals attempt to return to the eternal origin of their being for renewal and regeneration (Taylor, 1992:214).

He describes this as a “re-membering” which, through this process, overcomes the “dis-memberment” which Man has inevitably suffered in the course of time and thus concludes that “[a]rchitecture becomes the search for an arché that can serve as a secure foundation for human existence” (ibid., 1992:214).

The role of amnesia in reimagination of the nostalgic remnant.

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), the French intellectual renowned for his influential writings on the interrelationship between culture and space, states that the *right to the city*²³ comes exactly through occupying this gap created by escape. The gap does not disintegrate the potentiality of the city, but becomes dispersed when relieved from the illusion of ‘realism’ which so often deludes planners and developers. The *oeuvre* of the city comes, to him, as a response to the historic city which is “no longer lived and no longer understood” (Lefebvre, Kofman and Lebas, 1996:148), when the nostalgic material of escape becomes elusive and is made fragile due to amnesia. Intricacy

²³ *The Right to the City* is an essay that appears in Lefebvre’s book *Writings on Cities*, published in 1996, which calls to question the motivations and methods of those who plan and develop the city. Lefebvre, questioning the grasp of scientifically ‘rational’ methods of analysing the city, proposes that the *oeuvre* (as opposed to the product) of the city can manifest when planning rather originates from an anthropological analysis of the layers of this landscape which would harbour the dweller’s need to “accumulate energies and to spend them, even waste them in play” through imagination (Lefebvre, Kofman and Lebas, 1996:147).

3 [FOREST AS ARCHETYPE]

FOREST AS MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPE of gaining enlightenment by encountering the unfamiliar and death. Intimation is experienced by the dweller through the reimaginative potential of this encounter. The forest is reanimated, ephemerally by the dweller as a **THIRD INTIMATE LANDSCAPE**, through the reimaginatin of the **FIRST ARTIFICIAL LANDSCAPE**. "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious" [Carl Jung].

2 [ARCHITECTURAL INSERTION]

The architectural insertion teases the dweller's imagination with the artificiality constructed in the cemetery by the fantasy to escape Death/death (axis mundi) and the city (nostalgia and verdurous forest). The architecture is inserted into the forest, appropriating artificiality and escape, as a **SECOND ARTIFICIAL LANDSCAPE**.

BRIXTON CEMETERY as nostalgic remnant of the first artificial landscape. Memorialization recognised as deferral of imagination.

1 [NOSTALGIC REMNANT]

**AMNESIA OF
ARTIFICIAL ESCAPE:**

- 1 NOSTALGIC FOREST
- 2 MEMORIALIZATION
- 3 AXIS MUNDI



is gained, allowing the city to proliferate as a place where the “imagination [can] be deployed, not the imaginary of escape and evasion which conveys ideologies, but the imaginary which invests itself in *appropriation* (of time, space, physiological life and desire)” (ibid., 1996:155). Bachelard suggests how imagination reanimates the nostalgic material through intimation:

Imagination is not, as its etymology would suggest, the faculty of forming images of reality; it is rather the faculty of forming images which go beyond reality, which sing reality...[through] the new image grafted onto the old...The imagination will see only if it has “visions” and will have visions only if reveries educate it (Bachelard and Farrell, 1999:16).

The cemetery's revenant material.

Acknowledging that the cemetery, as a nostalgic remnant of the *first artificial landscape*, represents the manifestation of the desire to not only escape the physical reality of the city, but also the unknown which pervades death, and that this resulted in the destabilization of significance and desacralization of the cemetery into a hostile, uninhabitable forest due to the amnesic loss of relevance to escape (with the cemetery being passive), provides the possibility to mechanise this desire which created the cemetery. The remnant is made revenant. The intervention, however, inverts the process whereby desire to escape caused the loss of significance (because of a lack of engagement with the unknown and further disengagement due to loss of memory) through deconstructing the inherent artificiality within the cemetery.

The forest is restored through intimations of reimagination. Amnesia is prevented through the encounter with the unknown inherent in death, in the archetypal forest and in the fantasy of artificiality. Reveries thus reanimate the remnant.

The forest as mythological archetype.

The potentiality of reimagination is further validated by understanding *the forest* as mythological archetype of representing a realm of chaos where the pervasiveness of the unknown is overcome by engaging, and not escaping the unknown and ultimately Death/death. The encounter with the forest is not only intimate in the dweller's engagement thereof, but in the reimaginative process whereby the unknown is revealed and the terror thereof assuaged.

Within mythology and lore, the forest is often the locus of intervention. The frequency with which the image of the forest occurs in cultural narratives is a clear indication of the universal significance of its symbolism. It is in and within the archetypal forest

fig. 3.38. (author)
Reimagination in the
encounter of the
unknowns pervading the
cemetery.

that we encounter depths of psychoanalytic potential. The recurring motif of these narratives exceed familiarity. Our knowledge of them preceding when they were first presented to us in the form of lore as children, suggesting some deeply intrinsic insight drawn forth or inherited from our cultural memory and collective consciousness regarding the site and our experience of it.

The dweller who is, in this case, *subject* of psychoanalysis, the hero of myth, the protagonist of fairy tales finds him or herself at an existential impasse in some manifestation. In order to overcome this, the dweller naively undertakes the risk of entering the forest. At this point the dweller may not fully comprehend the dangers to which they will ultimately expose themselves. They are, however, well aware of the potentiality for it. The forests of narrative expression, the archetypal forest is deep, dark and dense. However uncultivated and inhospitable, the forest is by no means uninhabited. Psychically and geographically the forest lies beyond the boundaries of the consciously constructed realm, but is engaged and ultimately overcome through reimagination.

We construct our idealized world, in fantasy, according to all the information we have at our disposal. We use what we know to build an image of what we could have and, therefore, of what we should do. But we compare our interpretation of the world as it unfolds in the present to the desired world, in imagination (Peterson, 1999:34).