



hysterical stones

We may as well begin with the most hysterical of stones. Here are three of them.

stone number one: Alice fell down a hole. But in a later adventure, she met Humpty Dumpty and had a meaningful conversation. ("When I make a word do a lot of work," said Humpty, "I always pay it extra." "Oh!" said Alice. She was too much puzzled to make any other remark.")

stone number two: In a possibly apocryphal story, Brunelleschi, when asked how he would construct the dome of Florence Cathedral, smashed one end of an egg and stood it up. Presumably this was an uncooked egg, but no mention is made of the slime that must have oozed across the tabletop.

stone number three: "Our wholemole millwheeling vicocyclometer, a tetradomational gazeboctroton ... the sameold gamebold adomic structure of our Finnius the old one, as highly charged with electrons as hophazards can effective it, may be there for you, when cup, platter, and pot come piping hot, as sure as herself pits hen to paper and there's scribings scrawled on eggs hatchery." (J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*)

If all this sounds too bewildering, just take a look at these two riddles: Riddle No. 1 - What does this have to do with architecture? Riddle No. 2 - And is it inhabitable?

Oe-space, au-dela, au-dehors, o to eat her, odour eater, o the reader. [1]

O dor, oh dear, oh that's terrible, oh my sides, oh. (She was too much puzzled to make any other remark.)

Let us begin to answer these riddles. But first, before we commence, remind yourself that the ground, pun-gent with o-dors, is sticky in some places, and so we must treadwell. At the centre of your stony confidence is a molten core. A treacle well.

"Once upon a time, there were three little sisters," the Dormouse began in a hurry, "and their names were Elsie, Lacie and Tillie; and they lived at the bottom of well --" "What did they live on?" said Alice, who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking. "They lived on treacle," said the Dormouse, after thinking a minute or two. "They couldn't have done that, you know," Alice gently remarked. "They'd have been ill." "So they were," said the Dormouse. "Very ill."

[1] Jennifer Bloomer, 'D'or,' *Sexuality and Space*, 1992.

a volcanic architecture

"Architecture stands. It contains, orders and represents through firmness, commodity, and beauty; consisting of orders, entablature, and architrave; base, shaft, and capital; nave, choir, and apse; father, son, and spirit; world without end. Amen." [2]

Architecture stands. Architecture supports. Architecture holds up. Architecture, confident and muscular, stands fast. Architecture is never hysterical, never trivial, never irrational, never deranged, never illogical, never vulgar, never excessive, never frivolous, never aimless, never improper.

But behind the silence that is mistaken for perfection, underneath the supports that are mistaken for security, inside the footings planted firmly on the ground, arms akimbo, architecture is afraid. For there are rumblings, chatterings, giggles, harbingers of the other, wee dancing laughing things that leave smears and smudges on the line drawn between what is architecture and what is not. And in a profession traditionally consisting of the endless drawing of lines, perhaps this is the most important line of all. (And is this the same line that, in one of many narratives of

[2] Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, 1993.

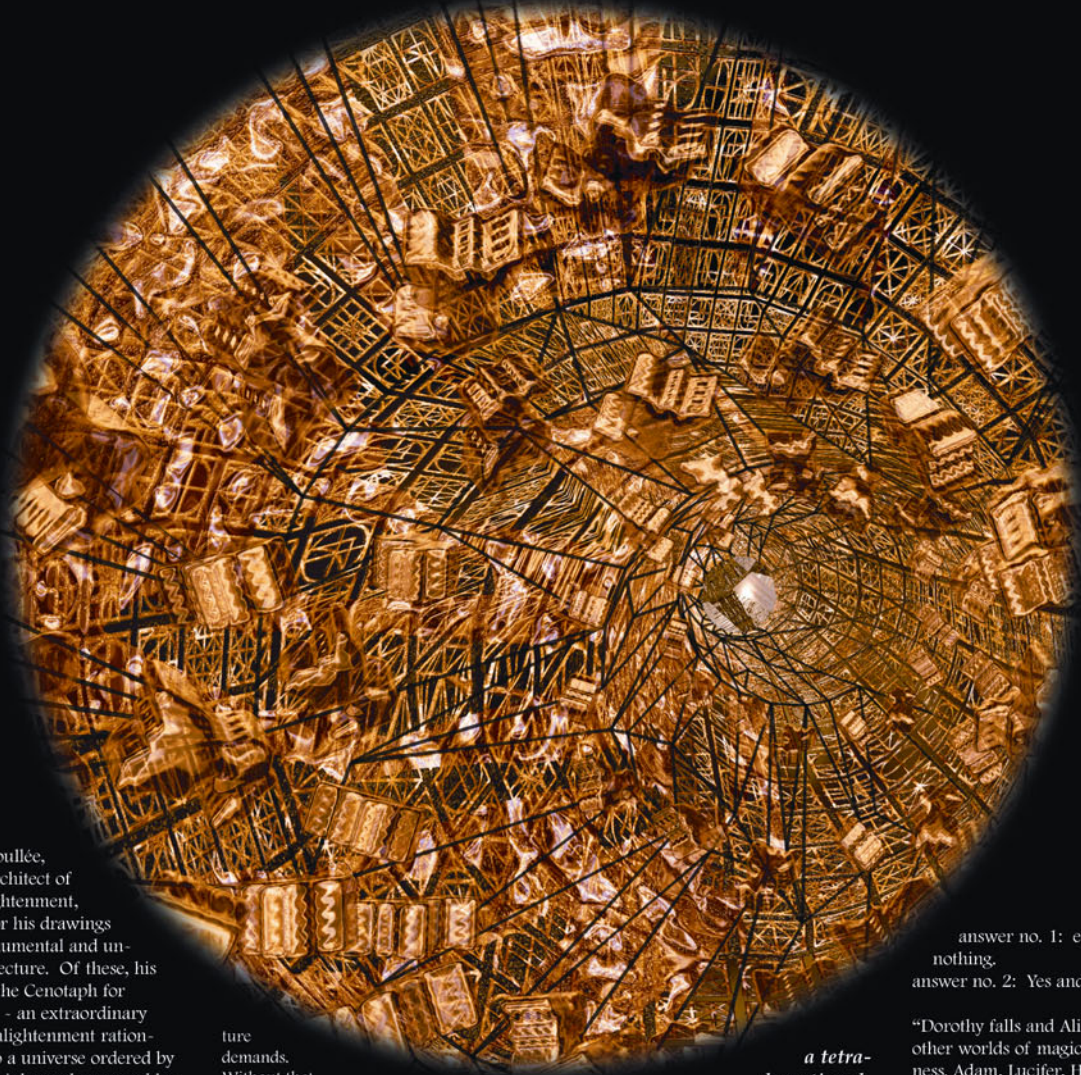
architectural origin, God, the first architect, drew around the Garden of Eden? A high wall, a great wall, impenetrable. And was this to keep things out or to keep things in? And through which doors do slippery serpents enter? At the very least, we may surmise that this wall was made of stone, an architecture of stability, durability, symbol of material permanence, a piling-up of matter never chipping, never crumbling, never collapsing. Never runny. A line that holds.)

Yet: "the ejaculations of the other, when they come, are not easily wiped away. They can be messy and ugly, hysterical constructions, 'grotesque, grandiose, abracadabrant compositions,' circulating partial objects. Dark, polysomous, and out of control, like a dreamy fall." [3]

To begin to ask what a volcanic or non-rational architecture might be, is to answer that it might not be architecture at all.

But to reject architecture is to deny the golden flecks already sprinkled in. Achoo.

[3] Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text*, 1993.



site

Etienne-Louis Boullée, 18th-century architect of the French Enlightenment, is best known for his drawings of sublime, monumental and unbuildable architecture. Of these, his most famous is the Cenotaph for Newton (below) - an extraordinary monument to Enlightenment rationality, a tribute to a universe ordered by Newtonian principles and governed by neo-classical restraint, "a world complete in itself[,] integrated and full of repose." [4] Save for its unbuildability, this is a triumph of architectural perfection.

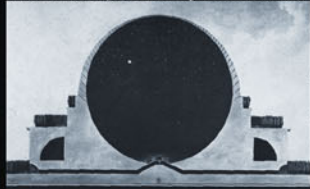
In the daytime, the illusion of night is produced within the chamber by sunlight shining through holes in the dome that correspond to the position of stars in the firmament.

At night, the illusion of day is generated by a blazing orrery suspended in the center of the enormous space. Here is J.-C Lemagny quoting

Boullée: "[Surfaces] must be clear of unnecessary decoration, which Boullée calls the 'sterile riches of architecture.' For him, only 'smooth masses produce virile effects.'...When I used picturesque elements as I did,' he writes, 'I had to be aware of being what is called theatrical, thus deviating from the purity architect-

ture demands. Without that purity, any design fails hopelessly.' And he adds, 'I think I succeeded in avoiding this error.'" [5] This is not a tough egg to crack. "Let us mine the spaces of or. Let us mine or. Or is a lacy network of g-litter embedded in rock." [1] Bewilderment, moving in a spiral dancing, is a perfect golden maelstrom. The moorings break. The whirligig begins.

[4] Rosenau, *Boullée & Visionary Architecture*, 1976. [5] Lemagny, *Visionary Architects*, 1968



and what is Boullée's 'sterile' 'riches' of architecture? (Rosenau, 1976)



a tetradomational gazebo-croton

(an unfinished construction for hysteric stones and petrified droppings, a mimicking thing that whispers slyly in my ear. Listen.)

All this, of course, is to begin to answer the riddles, "What does this have to do with architecture?" and "Is it inhabitable?"

(But like the answer to all such riddles, the answers for these ones might be devastatingly simple, child's play:

answer no. 1: everything and nothing.
answer no. 2: Yes and no.

"Dorothy falls and Alice falls, but into other worlds of magic and strangeness. Adam, Lucifer, Humpty Dumpty, and Icarus fall to desirable ends. ...The position to take is perched on the rim of the hole, at the moment the trap door closes, ready to fall. Not to fall from, but into. The fall from is hier-archi-cal and you can hurt yourself. The fall into is labyrinthine, dreamy, a dancing fall, a delirious fall." [2]

And so here we are at a beginning. Here is the forgotten lantern to Boullée's Cenotaph for Newton. Here are cryptic depth paving the way to alchemy. [6]

Here are some wee laughing dancing things.

Here is a sticky abyss.

Here is the dor.

Now put on your aprons.

Let us descend.

[6] Jacques Derrida, *Plato's Pharmacy*