



CITY AND PSYCHE

Ricardo Carranza

“...we can only hold fast to the fact that it is rather the rule than the exception for the past to be preserved in mental life..” Freud

One of Freud’s main thesis treats the psyche as the sum and synthesis of the human being’s life experiences. The conservation of the past allows us to recognize ourselves in any moment of our existence. Thanks to the psyche, we have security of the identity while also having past experiences filled with emotions, for better, or for worse. From our point of view, the potential of having the past constantly in the present draws the line between the role of the brain and that of the psyche. A tangle of the psyche’s organs, neurons and microneurons, is induced to a specific series, like a constellation, starting from an unexpected situation, like the famous case of Marcel’s ‘madeleine’, Proust’s alter ego. The accident shows the psyche’s process in Freud’s point of view. To exemplify his thesis, Freud appealed to the description of the historic stages of Rome, and with that, he developed a reasoning that branches on the impossibility of representing the psyche visually and the reason why. In our opinion, the subject’s main idea, lies on Freud’s work that we read repeatedly, like the link between architecture and psychoanalysis, **because** we work with the architectural concept integrated to a broader cultural context.

Historians claim the most ancient Rome was “Roma quadrata”, a population surrounded by fences on the Palatine Hill. That followed the “Septimontium” phase, a federation of colonies over their respective hills, after the city was surrounded by the Servian Wall, and even later, after all of the republican era’s first Caesar transformations, the city that the Emperor Aurelian shut down with his walls. We will no longer follow the changes around the city. Now we could ask ourselves what a current Rome visitor, provided by the most complete historical and topographical knowledge, would still find from these old stages. Apart from a few ruptures, they would see the Aurelian Walls almost intact. In certain places, they would find parts of the Serbian Wall, brought to light by excavations. If they have enough information – more than the current archeology –, they may draw every trace of that wall and each contour of “Roma quadrata” on the city map. From the buildings that one day occupied this frame, they would find vestiges when there are a great number of them, because they no longer exist. The greatest Rome Republic knowledge would allow you, at the most, to indicate



where the temple and the public buildings were located at the time. There are ruins from those places nowadays, and even though they are not from the same buildings, they are restorations from later times, made after fires and destructions. Needless to say, that all of those ancient Rome sediments, can be found scattered in the tangle of a metropolis merged in the last few centuries, starting from the Renaissance. There are still a lot of ancient elements that can be found in the city soil or under modern buildings for sure. From our point of view, this is how you preserve the past: in historical places like Rome.

Now we could make the fantastic assumption that Rome is not a human habitat. It is a psychic entity with an equally long and rich past, in which nothing that has ever existed ever perished, along with the last development phase, all the previous ones would continue to live. That means that in Rome, the Caesar's palaces and the seven suns "Septizonium" would still be raised over the Palatine; that the Castle Sant' Angelo would still show on its battlements the beautiful statues that adorned it until the Goths invasion etc. Even more: the place where the Caffarelli Palace could be again, without having to be removed, the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and not only in its last aspect, such as it was seen by the Romans from the Imperial time, but also the oldest ones, when they still had Etruscan shapes and were decorated with terracotta antefixes. Nowadays, from the Coliseum, we could also admire the missing Nero's Domus Aurea; from Piazza della Rotonda, we could see not only the current Pantheon, as it was left for us by Adriano, but also the original Aprippa building; and the same soil would hold Santa Maria sopra Minerva church and the old temple in which the church is raised. With that, it may be enough that the observer would only change the direction or position of their view, to get one or two of those visions.

Evidently, there is no sense to keep feeding a fantasy that takes us to the impossible. When we want to represent historical results spatially, it can only happen with a space overlap; the same space cannot be occupied twice. Our attempt seems like an idle joke; it has only one justification: to show us how far we are from mastering psychic life's peculiarities through visual representation.

We used single quotation marks for italic words in the original text. [N.A.]

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How to cite:

CARRANZA, Ricardo. City And Psyche. **5% Arquitetura+Arte**, São Paulo, year 14, v.01, n.17, e103, p. 1-3, jan./jun. 2019. Available at: <http://revista5.arquitetonica.com/index.php/magazine-1/literatura/cidade-e-psique-2>

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