

Peter J. Baldwin

ALLIES AND ALIBIES: CONCERNING RE-(RE)READING AND THE PENTIMENTOPOGRAPHY OF THOUGHT

05

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ABSTRACT

Drawing is quite unlike the image; it is not a finished thing, nor a singular moment, but something that develops and grows over time. It has a life cycle, it is a palimpsestuous record of the process of turning tacit knowledge and intuition into explicit form. Neither whole nor complete, the drawing process offers the creator an opportunity for reflection and criticality, rather than endless speculative cogitation. It is curious to observe that once 'completed' secondary and subsequent re-viewings and (re)readings of the work can challenge the original intention(s) and meaning(s) of the drawing. Often these serendipitous insights occur as a consequence of the perspectival shift from the position of Draw-or (author/drawer's) to Read-or (reader/author –referencing the role of the reader in the construction of meaning) or are the result of unintended, metaleptic exchanges between layers of meaning or compositional elements within the drawing, in essence a process of palingenesis, that provokes a renewed criticality.

In this manner, the drawing (verb/gerund) gains some independence from the hand of the drawer, and whilst not autonomous the drawing becomes a critical ally rather than a subjective, subservient creation. This in turn empowers the Draw-or, offering the opportunity for the development of an architectural logic based on a critical creative process of continuous, reflexive, (re)reading, of various inputs and influences, rather than a purely subjective set of sensibilities.

Born from a growing frustration with the (self-)imposed limitations of conventional architectural design practices, my own The (He)rose Garden, a subset of works within my emerging Magnum Opus Filigreed Gods – Diaphanous Bodies and Sacred Vessels, explores the mutability of meaning through a re-associative practice of pentimento as a form of artistic agent provocateur that prompts a deliberate dislocation of the trained architectural self.

BIOGRAPHY

Peter J Baldwin is an architect, artist and educator. Currently the Head of Architecture and the Built Environment at Birmingham City University, Peter has taught and lectured at schools of architecture across the UK. Known for his experimental architectural drawings and his scholarship on representational practice Peters' works have been widely exhibited and published and were recently included in Thom Maynes 'Impossible Drawings' Exhibition, A+D Museum (2024) and "In Memoriam" Exhibition, Yale School of architecture (2019). Peter's research has been published in recent issues of Architectural Design ("A Sublime Synthesis: Architecture and Art" (2023) and "The Allegorical Architectural Machine" (2024)).

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RETRACING ONE'S STEPS

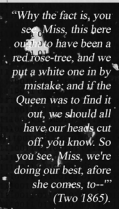
"The Process of bringing the latent world to visibility is most clearly demonstrated in the design of gardens where the given cosmic conditions are revealed in a visible order..."⁰¹

Dalibor Vesely.

Occupying a tangled linguistic position the gerund 'drawing' simultaneously conjures connotations of both the act(ion) and the object. Owing to this chronological doubling, the Drawing is often conceptualised as a dynamic environment, a gesture in process, a transformational translation of tacit knowledge into tangible form. Drawings can be added to, re-worked, amended, reconfigured, and deconstructed, fragments can be appropriated, re-appropriated, and discarded.⁰²

The inherent reflexive, dynamism of *drawing* offers the possibility for the subject of the Drawing to develop throughout the duration of its construction, in response to our growing understanding. These (re)readings can challenge the original intention(s) of the drawing, often occurring through the perspectival shift between Draw-or and Read-or – we are no longer caught up in the moment of creation, but are instead now actively required to re-read the resultant work – that brings with it an opportunity to re-construct meaning in a manner that often leads to deeper or serendipitous insights not originally intended or envisaged as a result of the (design) process.

Historically such notions and practices of the reflective, reflexive (re)reading of the Drawing and its consequential re-working are not unknown within the world of drawing and image making – often invoked to position *drawing* as a critical practice. Frequently erroneously conflated with an adjacent artistic phenomena, the palimpsest, *pentimento* is one such example of compositional re-working in response to shifting circumstance, understanding, or meaning defined as the "the presence or emergence, of earlier images, forms, or strokes that have been changed and painted over."⁰³ The word *pentimento* is a direct translation of "repentance;" this term describes the practice of altering the composition of a painting after painting has started. Originally from the Greek word *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*), this compound word translates as "after/behind one's mind," however it might more accurately be understood as *meta* (after, with), and the verb *noeo* (to perceive, the result of perceiving or observing), creating a compound meaning 'to think differently after'. *Metanoia*, and by extension the *pentimento* that it precipitates, is a powerful reminder of the unintended insights and unanticipated inspirations that emerge from the fecund feedback loop of action and reflection that accompanies the palingenetic process of drawing.



"No meaning can withstand acceleration. No history can withstand the centrifugation of facts or their being short-circuited in real time (to pursue the same train of thought: no sexuality can withstand being liberated, no culture can withstand being hyped, no truth can withstand being verified, etc.)."

[Baudrillard]

This raises a curious question: can the *pentimento* be deliberately cultivated as part of the drawing process? Furthermore, can *pentimento* become a component within a compound condition, a 'pentimentopography' which incorporates notions of both *topos*- (place, situation, location) and *graphein* (writing), to suggest a practice and process through which a place or site might be drawn in such a way as to facilitate its own re-reading? Can *pentimentopography* become a process deployed deliberately as a critical and speculative practice intended to induce both a reflective pause and reflexive adaptation? In this manner, the pentimentopograph would gain some measure of independence from the hand of the drawer, through a forfeiture of absolute compositional authority, creating a new dynamism in the relationship between Draw-or (an amalgam of Drawer and Author, in reference to Barthes 'Unity of Meaning') and the Drawing, reconceptualised as a quasi-autonomous condition open to iterative adaptation, instantaneous inspiration and the serendipitous swerve of chance.

Substituting the sterile tabula rasa of the unanointed page for the dense developmental strata of earlier iterations of its own speculative existence, my ongoing work *The (He) Rose Garden* (2020-), a subset of experimental drawings taken from my ongoing meta-project *Filigreed Gods - Diaphanous Bodies and Sacred Vessels* (2019-) explores the development of one such pentimentopographic practice.

Created as a response to both the socio-spatial shifts in the relationship between house and garden, public and private realms imposed by the Covid-19 Pandemic and an intense fascination with the garden's enduring capacity to operate as an all-encompassing metaphor for the human condition,⁰⁴ the *(He)Rose garden*, began its unexpectedly and unintentionally extended life as a proposal for a 'socially distanced' garden as new form of domestic interface that would become an extension of the home, allowing for social gatherings and interaction, maintaining the requisite six feet of 'clear air' – a space demanded by government policy of the time, yet all the while anticipating a progressive return to 'normal' facilitated in part by the maturation of the planting scheme.

Originally presented at the *Re-appropriation and Representation* symposium on Architectural Research by Design hosted by the University of Edinburgh in late 2021, the project (to avoid the unwelcome and wholly

01:
**594 Days:
Construction Geometries,
Decay and Repair**

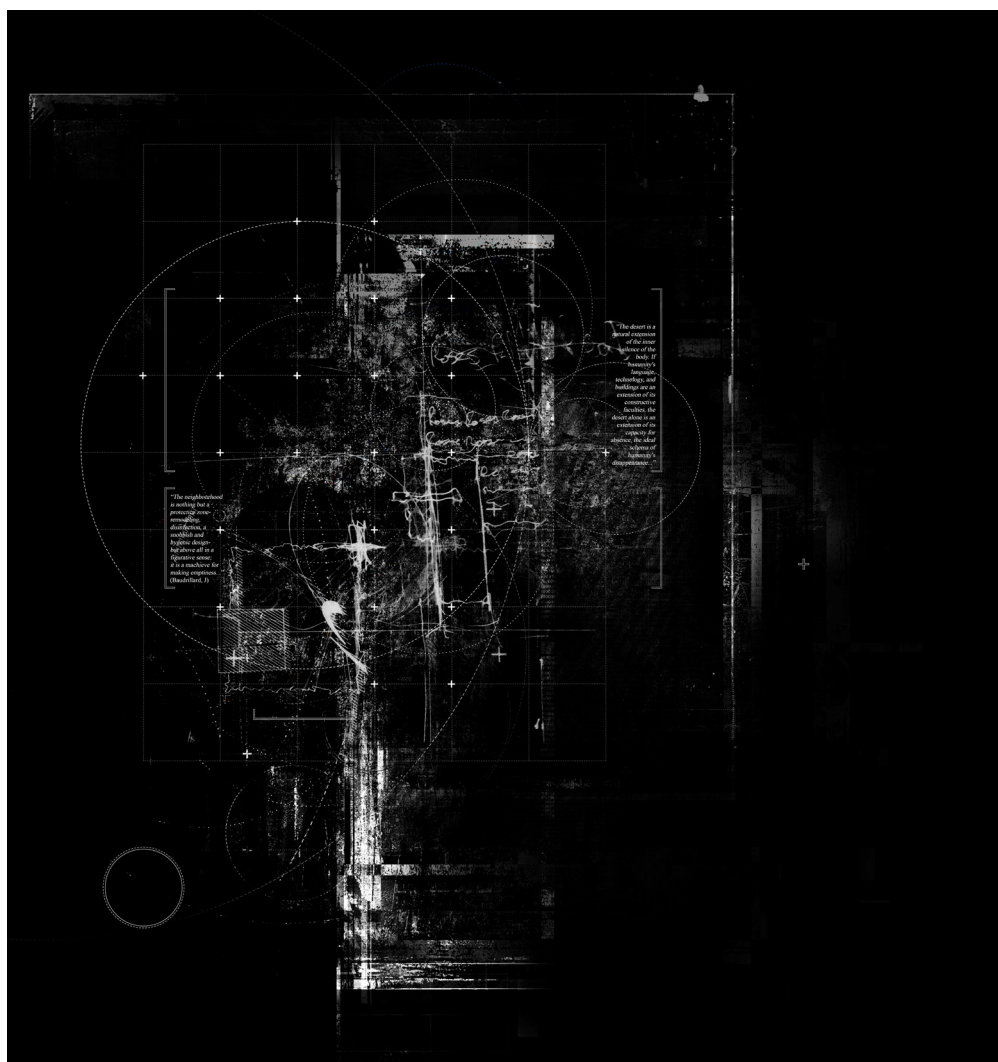
A *(He)Rose Garden*, 2021.

A simultaneous projection merging aspects of both perspectival study and construction plan. Driven by the transient and the (in)tangible, as seasons shift and the fecundity of summer gives way fall, the drawing charts the gardens construction, completion and its syncopated states of growth, maturation and decay.

02:
**Conurbation: A House and a
(He)Rose Garden.**

A (He)Rose Garden, 2020.

Considerations of key proportional relationships and proximities, and a setting out of fixed nodes and non-negotiable boundaries. One of the first drawings within the pentimentopographic series this drawing grounds its successors anchoring them within the space.



03:
A (He)Rose Garden.

A (He)Rose Garden, 2020.

A speculative study of the initial condition of the garden, mapping its existing features, and boundaries both solid and permeable overlaid with the dynamics of occupancy and event.



inappropriate distinction between text and visual media) has by some curious quirk of fate become a gesture in process, an example of the very phenomenon it sought to explore. Placed on hiatus by the pandemically-induced pause in the production of this Issue, the original artefacts and article, and the concept at its core; 'The Pentimentopographic Drawing' (that is to say the performative practice of projecting later iterations and ideations onto the established substrata of earlier works as a critical and creative act(ion) of reflexive, reflective self-appropriation) has been picked up, put down, re-read and re-considered, providing the *Prima Materia* for an ongoing alchemical experiment.⁰⁵ The drawing(s) record an architectural odyssey formed of palimpsestuous interactions and pentimentographic reinterpretations. These in turn have birthed a whole, heterogenous, host of lectures, exhibitions, artefacts and articles, each layered with the cumulative traces of their own (re)making.

MEDIATING OBJECTS ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

"[a] Drawing should be understood as a gesture in process, nor an explanation or illustration of an idea or concept that has been worked out elsewhere."⁰⁶

Clive Knights.

Drawing is well established throughout the creative disciplines as a communicative practice and form of observational recording based on visual representation and pictorial information. Architecture – in addition to this more broadly established communicative role – has traditionally conceptualised the drawing as a mediating object, a synthetic condition that allows for simultaneous observational recording, projective imagining and the testing of intuition against a variety of externalised factors, both physical and immaterial.⁰⁷

In his seminal essay "Translations from Drawing to Building," the British architectural theorist and historian Robin Evans reflects upon the consequences of the distinction between these distinct outputs, contentiously stating that drawings, rather than buildings are the primary outputs of an architect's labours.⁰⁸ This distinction furthers the separation between the artistic practice of sketching as a means of understanding the composition of the final piece – a practice that might be

considered projective – and the architects need to work through drawing as an intermediary arena for experiential understanding, a means of communication to an often-external audience. Paradoxically analogising and yet challenging prevailing notions of drawing as a form of linguistic construct, Evans work alludes to the complex, oft contradictory, dialectical discourse that surrounds semiotics and the study of meaning. And yet, from an architectural perspective at least, drawing is quite unlike other forms of language; at once a projective enactment of a future possibility and the residue of the act(ion) of bringing into being, the drawing occupies an ontologically complicated condition, a cognitive and chronological parallax that renders meaning both immanent and imminent.



04:
**273 Days: A Projective Plan
Beyond the Kitchen Window.**

A (He)Rose Garden, 2021.

Considering the relationship between a key view, and the emerging plan for the garden the drawing anticipates the initial stages of planting and growth.

ON (UN)CERTAIN GROUND

Owing to this intrinsic, dialectic dualism, the study of drawing as a communicative media and gesture of disclosure evokes one of the fundamental contradictions of Western Philosophy, the 'Metaphysics of Meaning'.⁰⁹ Whilst it will not serve our interests to linger long over this complex conundrum, it is nevertheless vital for the purposes of this enquiry to establish the underlying tension between absolute and relativistic meaning revealed by our careful consideration of drawing.

It was perhaps inevitable in an age increasingly dominated by the quantitative, by empiric advancements and technospherical innovations, that the Kantian Noumenon – the conceptualisation of knowledge and, by extension, meaning as an external 'object' that exists independently of human perception – would become the dominant form of thought.¹⁰ Yet such object-oriented ontologies, originating in the Cartesian primacy of cognition,¹¹ fail to acknowledge the vital and inextricable roles of the body as the (pre) reflective ground of phenomenological experience, and the phantasmagorical ambiguity of the imagination in the construction of meaning and understanding. Whilst numerous alternative epistemologies – from de Saussure's semiotic relativity¹² to Surrealism's appropriative rehabilitation of the fragment – have been advanced to explore and explain these more evasive aspects of meaning, such notions have remained firmly in the margins of western thought.¹³

In his seminal text *The Language Parallax* the American poet and scholar Paul Friedrich attempts to reconcile the dialectic tension between semantic certainty and poetic ambiguity through the conceptualisation of a 'linguistic parallax'; a hauntological position that, much like its optical namesake, allows multiple simultaneous meanings and interpretations dependant on the speaker and listener knowledge and understanding of the subject, its context and their individual ideologies.¹⁴ Intimately entwined with notions of linguistic relativity and poetic indeterminacy, implicit within Friedrich's 'Parallax' is the notion that meaning itself might also be subject to a temporally transient and contingently contextual relativity. Not unlike Barthes "Death of The Author,"¹⁵ Friedrich's work calls into question the 'Unity of Meaning', challenging previously established ideologies that presume an absolute and immutable assignation of meaning that occurs at the very moment of creation (which is discernible by the astute

and educated observer), offering instead the notion that the observer (who may or may not be the original author of the work) is implicated in the construction of meaning through the critical and reflective process of (re)reading. This suggests that after its initial, physical completion a work might be conceptualised as entering a secondary solvency, a state of metaphysical malleability, where meaning is (re)constructed through the hermeneutic alchemy of imaginative interpretation and reflexive understanding.

FILIGREED GODS - A (HE)ROSE GARDEN

But perhaps we have strayed too far from our intended trajectory, into the tangled briar of linguistic theory, metaphysics and meaning. Returning once more to the topic at hand we might, however, draw on (pun intended) this linguistic malleability and the obvious parallels it holds with the process of graphic enaction that we reductively refer to as drawing. Re-viewed and re-conceptualised through the pluralistic probative lens of *pentimento*, (the) drawing is transformed, taking on a strange new life of its own. As we abandon traditional iterative notions of sequence and series, and the attendant expectations of representational and temporal exactitude, we find ourselves in a foliated fecundity of figments and fragments, traces and residues, fertile ground for the creative imagination.

No longer parenthetically pushed to one side (suspended on an intellectually adjacent but ultimately other surface) earlier ideations and iterations are folded into a semiotic and graphic strata, a filigreed field of accumulated marks, (in)tangible traces, surface residues, and residual relational entanglements. Each mark, each gesture of disclosure forms part of a topo-graphic terrain that paradoxically reveals and conceals the (en)action of making.

As the surface becomes ever more saturated and chrono-graphic fixity begins to fail, and the complex choreography of chance draws past, present, and prescient fragments together, the resultant annotative accretions become points of graphic and conceptual resistance, disrupting both the hand and mind of the author.



With each successive act, the stratum grows ever more deeply sedimented, subsequent efforts to effect change become act(ions)s of negotiation, metanoic mediations, reflexive re-readings and re-interpretations, that destabilise established notions of creativity and the anticipated dialogue(s) between intention and outcome, memory and material, author and artefact. As the drawing itself becomes an ever-more active interlocutor, we forfeit ultimate compositional control, in favour of a choreo-graphic co-authorship.

A WORK IN PROCESS, (IN)CONCLUSIVE FINDINGS:

Evolving beyond its origins as a hybridized interface, a paradoxically liminal socio-spatial segregator that mediated and regulated public and private realms the *(He)Rose Garden* has become something far stranger; a speculative cartographic praxis of ritual(ised) resilience and re-imagining. Occupying a pentimentopographically pluralised state that documents the complex choreography of becoming, through a simultaneous spectral super-positioning of design iteration, construction information, and the syncopated seasonal cycles of growth, fecundity and decay, the garden is haunted by the (in)tangible tracteries of the latent world and the psycho-geographical atmospheres of its own becoming.

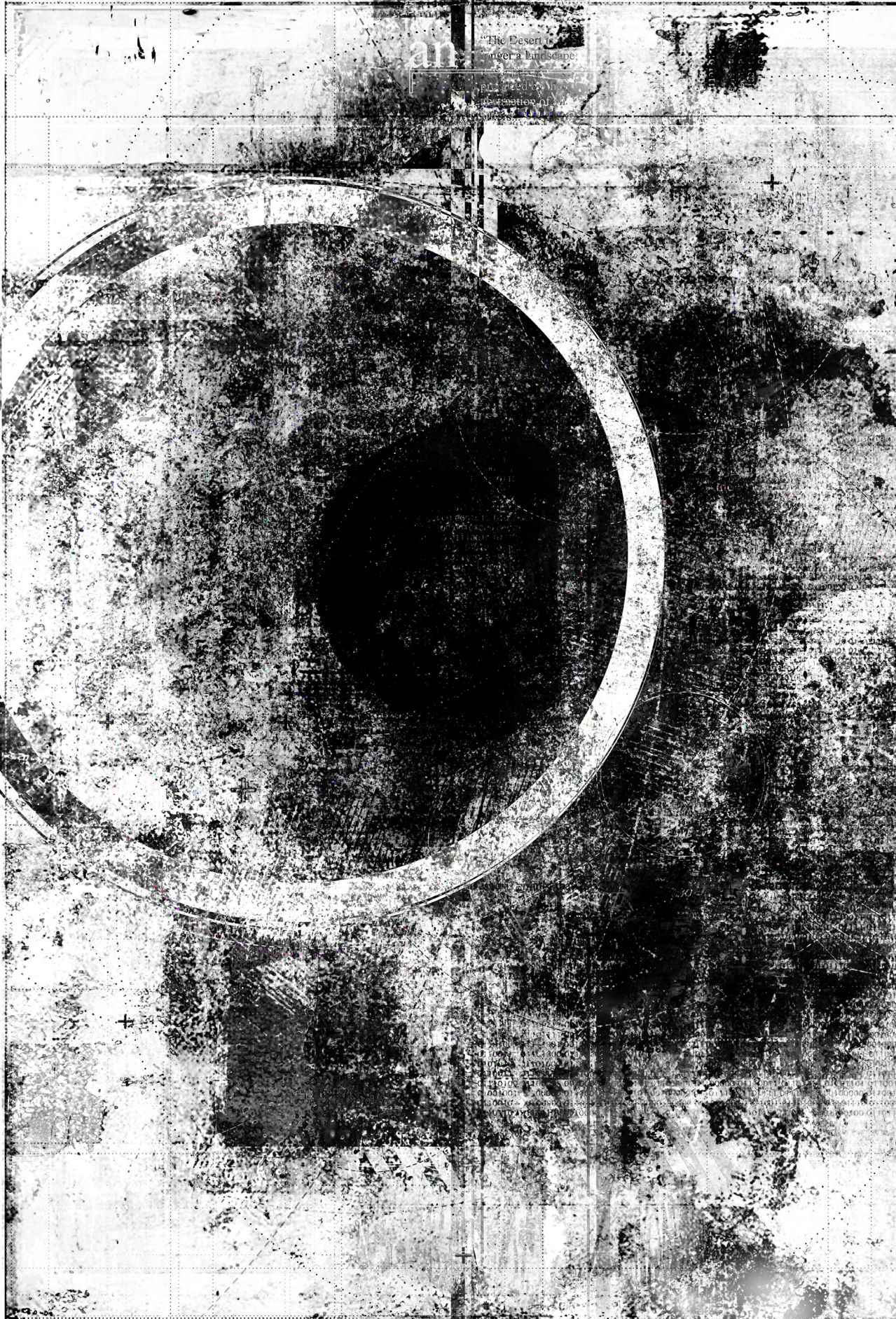
Transformed by the accretion of successive speculations and the residues of the reworkings that inevitably evolve from subsequent second order solvencies, the drawing enters an alchemically (in)determinate state, becoming a 'pataphysical prompt' poised on the cusp of linguistic saturation that defies definitive interpretation, paradoxically liberating the Draw-or (allowing room for serendipitous discovery) and implicating the Read-or (Reader/Author) as a co-conspirator in the construction of meaning.

No longer finished (or perhaps finish-able), the drawing becomes an invitation for imaginative interpretation, for (re)reading, (mis)reading and (mis)appropriation, and with each hermeneutic interaction new meanings and deeper understandings can be found...

05: Celestial Cosmologies and Viral Pandemics

A *(He)Rose Garden*, 2021.

The garden unfolds, fuelled by a diverse array of compositional influences from the improbable geometries of Poussins 'Landscape with a Calm' (1651) to the luscious indulgences of Piet Oudolf's *New Perennials*. Hard and soft surfaces coalesce forcing the dynamics of circulation, and view to shift in response.



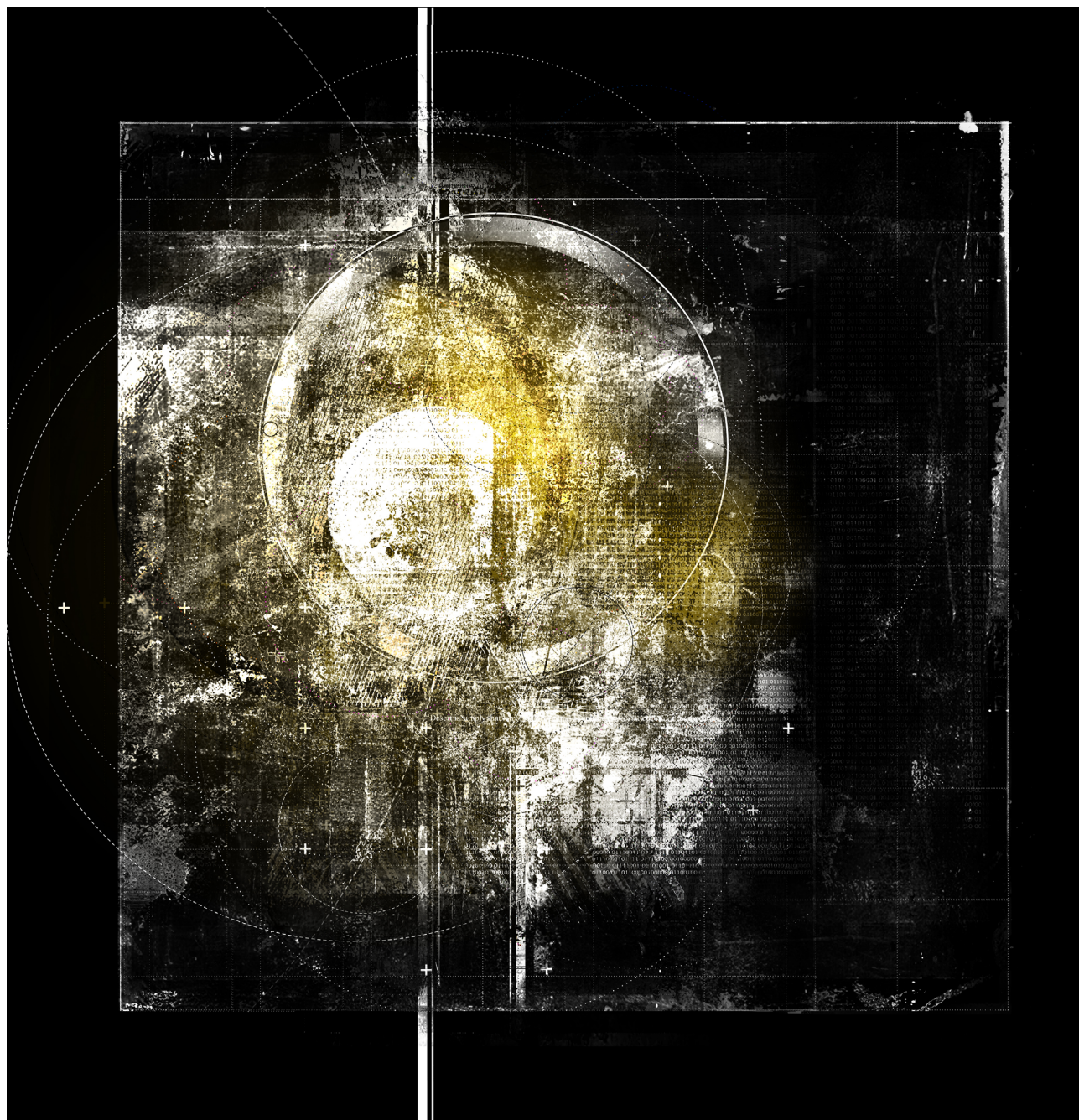


06:

**Diurnal Variations:
a Bronze Bowl, Luna-Seas and
Luna-Tics**

A (He)Rose Garden, 2021.

Of the many intangible phenomena that influence the garden, perhaps the most evident and least obvious is the action of celestial bodies. The Garden, is in part conceptualised as a celestial orrery, its mechanisms and movements, biological rather than machinic.



07: In anticipation of a Harvest Moon.

A (He)Rose Garden, 2021.

Reinterpreting fragments of earlier iterations, exploring the dynamics of interplay, growth and decay. An enclosure, a fleeting proposal for a garden office (all the rage in 2021) is slowly subsumed by suggestions of planting. The Moon hangs gibbous over the bronzed bowl which reflects the penumbral radiance.

NOTES

- 01 Vesely, Dalibor. *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation*. MIT Press, 2004, 83-84.
- 02 See: Baldwin, Peter J. "Dynamic Reciprocities: Exploring the Site of Production." *A Sublime Synthesis: Architecture and Art* (Architectural Design, Vol 93, Issue 5), edited by Neil Spiller, 80-87. Wiley, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2977>
- 03 Merriam-Webster Online. s.v. "Pentimento." accessed 7th January, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pentimento>.
- 04 I have discussed this work previously in the following talk: Baldwin, Peter J. (2022). "S[Y/N]thetic Territories; Waste[Is] Lands & WWW.underlands." Paper presented at *Amps: (IN) TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S)*, University of Kent, Canterbury UK, 17th June, 2022. <https://amps-research.com/event/canterbury-2022/schedule/designing-pasts-futures/synthetic-territories-wasteislands-www-underlands/>
- 05 On *Prima Materia* see: Haeffner, Mark. *Dictionary of Alchemy From Maria Prophetessa to Isaac Newton*. Aeon Books Limited, 2015; see also: Baldwin, "S[Y/N]thetic Territories; Waste[Is]Lands & WWW.underlands."
- 06 Knights, Clive, response to the talk: Baldwin, Peter J. "(a) Lies and Alibis." Virtual Lecture, 14th October, 2020. Posted 16th October, 2020, by Archizoom. YouTube, 2:07:41. <https://youtu.be/gBZSyuH1w04?si=YHY85qCUx855GmiX>
- 07 See: Baldwin, Peter J. "An Architectural Autopsy: Dissecting the Exquisite Corp(u)se." In *Exploring the Unheimlich*, edited by J. Tankard and T. Grove. University of Westminster Press, forthcoming.
- 08 Evans, Robin. "Translations from Drawing to Building." In *Translations from Drawing to Building and other essays*. MIT Press, 1997.
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- 11 See: Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*, Vol. 2. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- 12 See: de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. Fontana/Collins, 1974.
- 13 See: Baldwin, Peter J. "Diaphanous Bodies: A Hauntology of the Mediating Image" *Ghost Stories: Architecture and the Intangible* (Architectural Design, Vol 94, Issue 4), edited by Peter J. Baldwin, 84-91. Wiley, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.3079>
- 14 Friedrich, Paul. *The Language Parallax: Linguistic Relativism and Poetic Indeterminacy*. University of Texas Press, 1986.
- 15 Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Image Music Text*, translated by S. Heath. Fontana Press, 1977.

FIGURES

- 01 "594 Days: Construction Geometries, Decay and Repair," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2021.
- 02 "Conurbation: a House and a (He)Rose Garden," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2020.
- 03 "A (He)Rose Garden," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2020.
- 04 "273 Days: A Projective Plan Beyond the Kitchen Window," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2021.
- 05 "Celestial Cosmologies and Viral Pandemics," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2021.
- 06 "Diurnal Deviations: a Bronze Bowl, Luna-Seas and Luna-Tics," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2021.
- 07 In anticipation of a Harvest Moon," *The (He)Rose Garden*. Peter J. Baldwin, 2021.

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