

Red Rooms, Water Enclosures and Other Unfolding Spaces

Lauretta Vinciarelli

The architectural space that I have painted since 1987 does not portray solutions to specific demands of use, it is not the space of a project; at least not a project as the rational answer to a program. Rather, this space is the outcome of a mental process, that unfolds itself in images and resists verbalization. These paintings are a form of biography of my own mind/body (I wish this could be one word); the mental process I referred to can be described as a form of dwelling on questions of *origin*.

On origin Hegel says in the *Science of Logic*, “At the passage of nothing into being, there is a moment when being and nothing coincide, their difference disappears,” and Fulvio Fachinelli, Italian psychoanalyst, in his book, *The Ecstatic Mind*, adds “In this confidence of being and nothing, in this void, charged with tension, dwells, for a time that is immeasurable, the ecstatic; we all fall in it, when on the grip of anguish.”

Bible and Big Bang Theory both propose this disquieting contiguity and the consequent overlapping of being and nothing. This is a paradox and reason does not deal with it. In our culture there is a fundamental resistance toward searches that, going beyond reason, shift in the territory of *ecstasis*. It is sufficient to remember Sartre’s stern judgment of Bataille. A reaction of fear of an anthropological power suspected of dissolving reason. Still, the fear is justly founded.

Bataille, in *Inner Experience* tells us that “the Hegelian man...is accomplished, is completed in the adequation of project...the only obstacle to this way of seeing...is what in man is irreducible to project: non-discursive existence, laughter, ecstasy, which link man—in the end—to the negation of project, which he nevertheless is—man ultimately ruins himself in a total effacement—of what he is, of all human affirmation.”

Paradoxes, dismissed by modern skepticism, appear in science, in particular in mathematics. For Hegel, paradoxes on infinity began to surface after “nothing” was assumed as a number and given the symbol zero. The following equations, for instance, are dis-

quietingly metaphysical:

$$n/0 = \text{infinity}$$

by Baskara, Indian mathematician of the eleventh century;

$$n \times 0 = 0$$

which gives

$$0/0 = n$$

by Euler, seventeenth century European.

$$0/0 = n$$

means that the relationship of two nothing can assume any value, or that any value is just nothing divided by

nothing. For Dogen, Japanese Zen master of the thirteenth century, this may have been a satisfactory definition of Being itself.

All literature, in the West as well as in the East, that describes spiritual search, confirms that the ascent or the descent, toward ecstasis or nothingness is paved by anguish. Quite naturally, the majority of us retreat from it before reaching the bottom. Only few are capable of sustaining the pain, to go through it and experience the exultance afterwards. Some artists have depicted exultance: in recent time, Matisse, in the past, Piero Della Francesca and Beato Angelico. Bataille is a prolific describer of the path itself, perhaps of the path for itself. In *Inner Experience* we read, “When I solicit gently, in the very heart of anguish, a strange absurdity, an eye opens itself at the summit, in the middle of my skull. This eye which, to contemplate the sun, face to face in its nudity, opens up to it in all its glory, does not arise from my reason: it is a cry which escapes me...It is only by means of sickly representation—an eye opening up at the summit of my own head, at the very spot where naive metaphysics located the seat of the soul—that human beings, forgotten on Earth—such as I am today revealed to myself, fallen, without hope, in oblivion—gain access, *suddenly*, to the heart-rending fall into the void of the sky?.” The “apex mentis,” Bataille’s eye, the door to ecstasis, is activated not only



by mystics, but also, obviously, by all sorts of creative thinkers, in the arts and sciences alike. It seems that when the boundaries between subject and object are dissolved, in the ecstatic state, a new perception of the whole emerges, everything is also nothing, in an *instant* that contains together maximum acceleration and absolute immobility.

For me—for my work—the interesting aspect of the process toward illumination is that the human body is involved in it as the indispensable mediator. Ecstasy is an experience, not a philosophy. This non-rational process sweeps off in an instant some of the basic tenets of Western thought, as the preeminence of the mind over the body, duality; all this for a glimpse of

wholeness, that we have to see, perhaps through a “strange eye.” The body is transformed. Descriptions of it arise that are metaphors for transcendental union. In Christian mysticism the body acquires an extraordinary plasticity: in the ecstatic state even gender is transcended. Saint John of the Cross, for instance, surrenders himself *as a bride* to Him, the infuser of the *tasty knowledge*.

The human body, compact, solid when we touch it, machine-like when we dissect it, is *empty, lofty, spacious, luminous, receptive-receptacle* when considered by the ecstatic. It even becomes a landscape, as when Dante speaks of the heart in terms of a lake where travels the vessel of the soul.

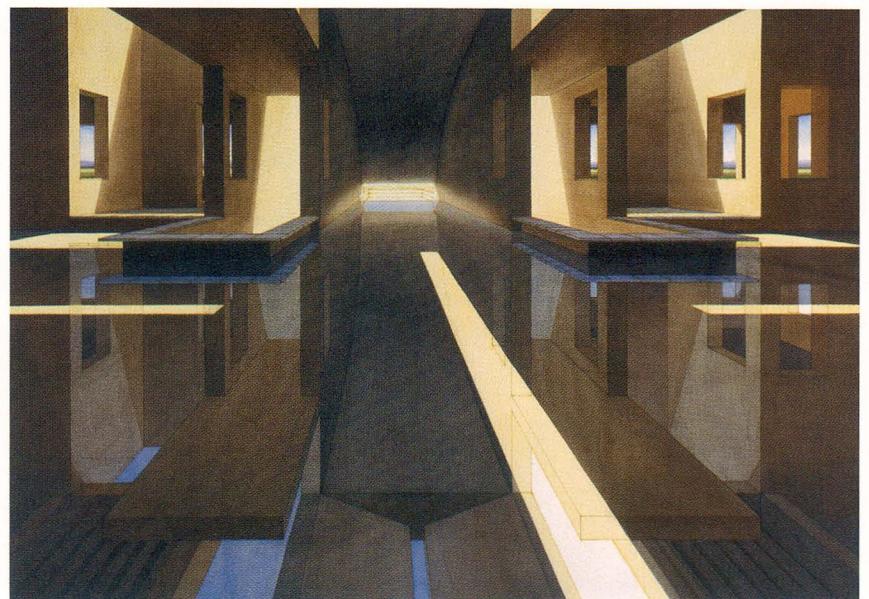
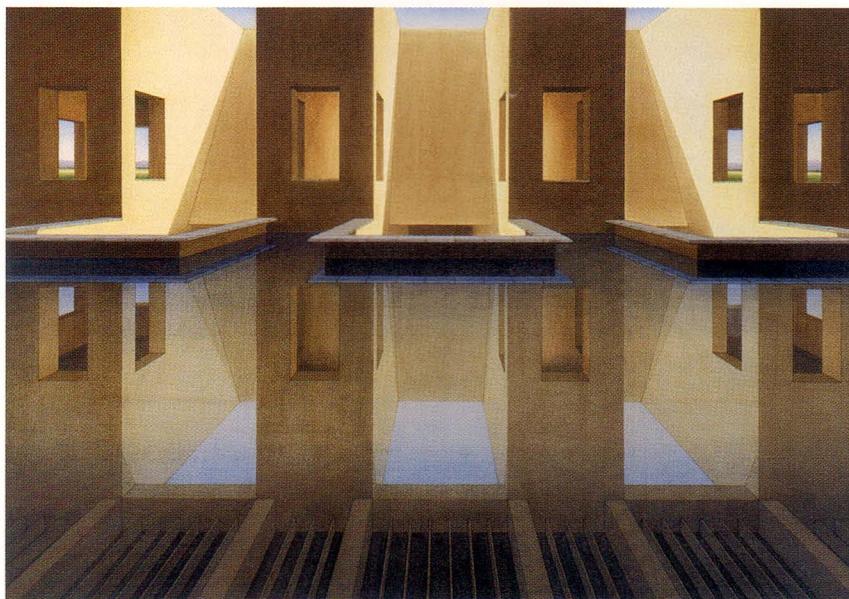
Somehow, and here I am in a difficult territory, my own anguish made me encounter the *concave body*.

It could very well be that the other in myself, the other of my own internal dialogue, is of the nature of architecture, for, the long familiarity with it, may have invested the concave body with a specific imagery. So that *easily*, dwelling on origin, surfaced in the aspects of architectural space.

Bibliography

Fachinelli, Fulvio, *La mente estatica*. Adelphi, 1989.

Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*, trans. John C.H. Wu. Shambala, 1989.



*Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub;
It is on the hole in the center that the use of the cart hinges.*

*We make a vessel from a lump of clay;
It is the empty space within the vessel that makes it useful.*

*We make doors and windows for a room;
But it is these empty spaces that make the room livable.*

*Thus, while the tangible has advantages,
It is the intangible that makes it useful.*

—Lao Tzu
Tao Teh Ching

