

NOT LIVING IN CAVES: PHENOMENA AND IMAGES OF THE LAND AND SHELTER

A B S T R A C T

Now, it's like that movie in 'The Croods' - people wanted to stay in the cave. Some wanted to stay in the cave, and that young girl, she wanted to go out and live again and deal with the challenges of living in a different world.¹

The work is showcasing a personal excavation of the broad concept of interiority, its meanings and multifaceted aspects. More specifically, its potent spatial poetics rooted against traditional views generically used in and around the architectural profession. It is dwelled upon various readings using the local socio-political context of a peculiar place of Western Australia as a colourful backdrop for interpretative purpose.

It is about subjective realities and their relation. While being set off by the day-to-day here and now, it reflects a much larger image of the human condition of our time and the ever-present concept of a cave, the ultimate human cradle embedded in our core. The story is also about the origin and everything that starts within the grotto.

'But that fails to appreciate how safe and warm it must feel in that WA cave [...]'²

Aleksa Bijelović

School of Design and the Built Environment,
Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia
Creative Practice Petokraka, Belgrade, Serbia
aleksa.bijelovic@curtin.edu.au
aleksa@petokraka.com

KEY WORDS

INTERIORITY,
PHENOMENOLOGY,
CONTEXT,
DIALECTICS,
POETICS

INTRODUCTION

Revolving around the ideas of safety, commonality, and personal freedoms, this is a phenomenological exploration intended to initiate the stream of conceptions rather than to offer closures or pose and answer any substantial questions. It is dealing with subjective interpretations of worldly appearances, looking to investigate general realities, recognising the meaning and nature of the idea of impartial facts. In the broadest sense, this is about personal excavations of the concept of interiority, its meanings, and multifaceted aspects. More specifically, its potent spatial poetics rooted against traditional views generically used in and around the architectural profession. It is dwelled upon various readings using the local socio-political context of a peculiar place of Western Australia as a colourful backdrop for interpretative purpose.

Considering the topic has been set vaguely and intentionally without much focus, reflecting the initial urge to address the phenomena broadly, the structure itself replicates this approach in terms of narration and composition by following the train of events. It wanders, detecting the clues, which arises one by one feeding from one another.

The main cache and the main driver of this effort was the particular personal pool of conscious experience, more specifically, the relation of sensation versus sense in the realm of personal consciousness. In addition, it has become the sub-topic of major interest along the way and if not much of clear attention has been given to it in writing, it did set the overall communication tone.

THE STORY

Let us put aside facts for a moment and explore the pure intimate inheritance that we keep, stories earned by birth, nourished through upbringing, education, social environment, and all the interactions we had with the world. Only a few stories stick with us consistently throughout one's lifetime and beyond. We take them for granted and we love them for being our anchors and support. They become our intuitive reflex, embedded so deeply that there is no need to question or judge, no urge to analyse, no doubts whatsoever. They are the cornerstones of our reality readings in day-to-day existence without us being aware. Even when confronted with rational propositions and analytical insights with opportunities given to re-evaluate the story through the lens of facts, the story carries on keeping the relevance. The importance of nurturing past traditions lies in the

human nature itself. We seek safety and shelter from the outside world and the universe that hold mystic forces we see as threat. We need comfort and to be comforted by fellow humans or by a place. All we do and all there is, is driven by this urge and it is not so much about preserving existence as it is about the safety as a state of mind — the sanity.

Most concepts of human existence own their shape and revolve around the cultural surrounding specific to those who made them. Throughout time, generations have shaped them, and being influenced by others, the outsiders, continuously shifted the narrative, appropriated values, meanings, and interpretations. Generation after generation has seamlessly woven the thread of storytelling, more long and complex with each passage, cherished and nurtured with love and care. A huge protective blanket that offered some sense when there seemed to be none. Some of the blankets grew so large that almost each corner of our little universe owned a piece of it. Each piece, no matter how specific to its surrounding, became a part of the same whole. Each thread woven into another, each with own local character, telling the same story as others do, although in different voices, in another faraway places. That silky idea that outgrew everything.

The passage of time is what makes the storytelling transcend lifetimes only to spread further and further until becoming that embedded truth, an anchor of humanity. Although the storytellers might not be aware of the existence of other places and other distant tellers, there is that same thread sharing the same human intimacy, that silky idea making this whole and complex system so beautiful and relevant to what we are, what we do and think of ourselves. It is not hard then to understand why it is so powerful. Those interwoven ideas have built the world we know and the same distant, unknown tellers made it possible.

Putting the facts back in. From time to time, when information of a different kind, a product of a different effort comes onto the stage and interferes with the story, conflicts may emerge; be it internal, interpersonal, societal, scholastic, political or any other relevant to the circumstances. From the scientific point of view, it could seem evident what has to be done — to dissect it differing facts from the story, to superimpose them against each other comparing the overlay, isolating the fiction, analysing the fiction, put the meaning into it and recompose the whole thing. Moreover, whenever in doubt, most of us tend to do that, often putting the facts in charge of the story, keeping the safe distance, taking the higher ground even. And it makes sense doing so. It is what we are trained for after all and we are good at it. There is nothing wrong with it, at least with

the process itself. The conclusions, readings and interpretations of the overlay make the whole difference. Not getting side blinded by the facts, or the concept of fact, as we know it.³ We have learnt and tend to think of it as something solid, the fact as a constant, found and measured, analysed, and processed, proved, a building block of critical thinking. Which is again, completely fine and in line with the world we are living in, almost true. Again, there lies the crucial aspect of this misunderstanding. Nothing is solid; no matter how thoroughly examined and looked at. Nothing can surpass the enormous wave of time and stay unchanged as to become an eternal unit to measure against. It sounds obvious, and the concept of fact has also changed throughout history, but whenever there is a chance to utilise it again and against the story, it just happens each time.

THE ORIGIN

One of the most seductive stories would be the one of origin. In its multitude of differences and contextual particularities lies the same overarching question of where it all comes from and how do we, humans, fit into it. Without much ambition or will to deliver an in-depth analysis or propose an interpretative position on the topic of origin, the sole interest here is focused on the single aspect of the story — the concept of cave. In turn, by reading different sources into it, reach out can be vast, giving us an almost infinite field of imagination building it upon the initial concept. The intent is to demonstrate how this imaginative construct could evolve being a tool for decoding other basic concepts, beyond the human habitat, be it organic or built, inherited, or created.

The idea of a cave being an archetypical human shelter is significant for it is so telling when superposed on to other contemporary ideas and concepts related to living environment, especially refracted through the daily socio-political context. Looking at how potent the use of the sole term can be, we see the strength of the concept itself and the power it carries within the collective memory. The use is always deliberate, mostly meant to discredit or harm another's position or way of doing, proposing that the targeted object is bygone or defunct. However, by shifting the focus to a different point in the story timeline, there is another cave, a grotto, and a completely different set of values attached to it. The antique grotto is far from defunct; it serves as a place of origin, housing divine powers and mystical forces. Everything we know came from it. Even the matter itself, the primal archi-form that was born in the earth's core, materialises in the primordial way through the grotto. It is still a shelter, keeping the most precious items, being the place that protects and care, and primitive in its purest shape.⁴

Then, there is the question of inside and outside, the relation determined by the human nature formed through fear, living alongside the universe and its forces. The cave-shelter, be it divine or profane, is the ultimate threshold lying between the two and the first piece of nature that became appropriated. It might be the initial point of mental distinction between in and out, at least in terms of evaluating one against the other using safety and comfort as the primary metric. We tend to shape our personal truths and subjective realities by building them upon our shelters. So, inside and outside could be just a construct of an endangered species searching for protection. We sense that, how both are fundamentally different and how there is a clear line of separation. Practically, we could debate and probably prove that there is no such thing as a definite demarcation between the two, but emotionally the line is clear.

Another point of break between the two entities becomes apparent when introducing the intimacy, in its spatial poetic sense.⁵ Although a much more complex topic, it is tightly related to the original idea of a shelter. Moreover, it grows out of it, of a highly personal, innate relationship humans developed with the surrounding. It can be said that various spatial relations drawn from intimacy transcend the generalised division of inside and outside and are often clearly present in other contexts of nature and built, but it is the primal intimacy of humans and the surrounding grown in the cave-shelter that later branched out towards the rest of the world. That is why we intuitively know where our intimate place begins and ends regardless of the physical space itself. We see materialised boundaries, they can be well mapped and defined but they mean nothing unless there is an emotional backup from that earliest sense of intimacy we inherited.

An inner instrument calibrates itself while lived experience grows, as new territories are met and embraced. It draws new mental boundaries as the time passes, building the places of intimacy, storing them in carefully organised emotional registers. Each one's instrument coordinates itself differently but as in the storytelling, each one's borders are just being a part of the same universal weave. Even when far and remote in time and space, and one cannot recognise the existence of the other, we do share the same origin, same emotional memory of our intimate self and places we inhabit. This is how we build our new threads we then weave in a common story passing it further for others to carry on.

WA CASE

Now, it's like that movie in 'The Croods' - people wanted to stay in the cave. Some wanted to stay in the cave, and that young girl, she wanted to go out and live again and deal with the challenges of living in a different world.⁶

Western Australia is a peculiar place. All that ever inhabited this land, from thousands years ago to this day; all living creatures existed and exist with and in spite of the land. The nature larger than life and old as the Earth can be, takes a stronghold. Where physical distance does not matter because infinity cannot be measured. Things hidden from us are yet to be discovered, but that ancient crust below and above the Indian Ocean is what makes it so special. It is harsh and relentless but giving to the point of exploit and destruction. Still, the land seems to be forgiving towards careless and greedy, maybe because it is so grand and immense that even the most selfish exploits remain trifling. So does the humanity as a whole against this colourful backdrop under the biggest sky dome there is.

Exploring the current moment and local context, one thing stands as a giant figure fuelling nearly all human endeavours, lives, and relations in and around this place in recent history. All the big shifts shaped by the selfish ambition to own and control, to hold power and direct others, most of that happened in the rush of pursuing exploits of the land, in the relentless hunt for resources. Regardless of what that did and what it still does to other living creatures, their lives, and memories, still inhabit the place. The vigour of pride hovers above all the hurt and lost, just adding layers and layers of golden dust and rust, a shallow burial ground where stories are laid to be forgotten.

Exploits of the land is what drives all the booms, busts around here, and is by far the most important engine of the society.⁷ The pride of many and the source of abundant wealth, the spoils of which many of us enjoy being sucked into the obliviousness, losing sight of land, the vastness and importance of all the stories being untold.

In this grand land, there is a place holding tens of thousands years of stories. A shelter and a memory register engraved into the old crust of the land. A cave. One of the few places of intimacy that has been a core of the story and the origin itself. We who take pride in our civilisational progress being overwhelmed by own intellectual importance; we tend to spend our lives being ignorant to

what came before, we take the land and the memory as spoils of conquest, an exploit, and for granted. That we do not know how to read and understand the stories, to access the memory treasure, we compensate by negligence, insults, and tendentious renditions. We are burying the story. Throughout the eternity, this shelter kept providing, evolving, and changing alongside the land and the living, cherishing the harmony of coexistence in harshness. Although now wounded and hurt, that special place still holds ground.⁸

But back to the boom and progress; one should conclude that a destruction like this is nothing more than just a natural flow of events shaping our universe as is. A trace in the landscape. Why would such a miniscule trace be of any concern when there is a big picture of things to be looked at? We are pushing forward. Is this just a way of leaving a mark in the memory, another tiny log in the collective register? This is how it was meant to be. Because humans are being the active part of the timeline, and not all memory makers are storytellers, there is also the other kind, the one that does not tell much, one that buries instead. So, are we all the same, being a part of the same weave no matter what we may think about actions of others? The matter of leaving a mark of one's existence while making a terminal wound on others — that is just how we go as species. Being a sacred shelter for thousands generations makes no difference, it is not even a decent obstacle. And these shelters turned out to be divine — just as ones where oracles made their ways long ago.

BUILDING THE INTIMACY

From April to September 2020, throughout autumn, winter and the first spring, an unintended intimacy building exercise occurred. Somewhat forced by the world occurrences that shifted our attention, the big shift has opened a field of different perspectives. Once again, the story of origin resurfaced with offerings. It was a time to find and embrace own cave, a shelter. To construct one out of memories on a tiny piece of the grand land. Just figuring out how to become an ally and build trust. The conflict and harmony of inside and outside, intimate, and else.

Spending time staying in touch with that piece of land, day-by-day, observing and rethinking, inevitable changes appeared on the surface while nature went through its cycle. With all the changes the land went through, in all the simplicity and grace, it was the finest example of how an entity of a so different kind can become easy to understand. It is right to believe that at points when

things are clear, true intimacy can arise. With that intimacy in sight, the shelter becomes more and more palpable, and folly keeps at bay. Safety is conquered by embracing the shelter and habitat regardless of physical and spatial. We use space to define things, to be sure and to stick to the facts, to spot our bodily presence in some context, but true intimacy exists in other realms being materialised only by chance. We read our emotions into places and spatial relations without realising how highly personal and detached they are from the physical world. The moment internal balance shifts, places become lost, almost as if they do not exist in their physical form anymore. Those strange experiences of spatial ties and their potency to shape one's feeling of safety and comfort are phenomenon that deserve to be explored with passion. Without any generalised attitude, a personal, highly subjective journey.

All there was to be done is to document the nature's flow, how it leaves the traces of time on the surface, marking each step just to keep track of what happened, who has been there and why. Even with human meddling, the flow was just a sober string of events; the slow pace that grinds with ease kept going. Micro shelter grew larger, the inside started leaving the boundaries of spatial and things became clearer.

But that fails to appreciate how safe and warm it must feel in that WA cave [...] ⁹

CONSEQUENCE

Concluding that regardless of physical scale, the act of conscious engagement with a piece of land in a period of time awakens senses, calibrating them against the change of natural cycles. The consciousness represents a crucial part of this exercise. It serves as a vehicle of intention that makes a difference between a random documentarian act and a phenomenological action, no matter how unstructured it is. It also performs as a catalyst of insights, clues, moving the whole thing forward.

That phenomenological action is based on interpretation where contextual observations create a primary image of experience. The process then employs the concept of poetic imagination resulting in the context changing the original meaning, becoming a slightly different image, a subject of a new cycle. With each subsequent iteration, the similar change occurs until the observed subject has become personalised, reinvented, and familiar.

The meaning of that newly reinvented context is that now it has a potential of a safe place and is ready to become a part of the interior boundary, a spatially intimate place. It cannot be a question of inside and outside but is a relation between intimate and else. Intimate equals a familiar, safe place that can become a shelter when in need. And, it might be a cave too, a new place of origin of a different kind.

NOTES

-
- 1 Morrison, interview.
 - 2 Worthington, "Scott Morrison scrambles to assert control."
 - 3 Mulligan, and Correia, "Facts."
 - 4 Moravánszky. *Metamorphism: Material Change in Architecture*.
 - 5 Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*.
 - 6 Morrison, interview.
 - 7 National Mining Day, "WA's Economy."
 - 8 Turner, "Juukan Gorge."
 - 9 Worthington, "Scott Morrison scrambles to assert control."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Bayne, Tim and Michelle Montague, ed. *Cognitive phenomenology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Christofides, C. G. "Bachelard's Aesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 3 (Spring, 1962), 263-271. <https://doi-org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.2307/427324>.
- Dalmas, Franck. "Cœur, Temps and Monde in Le forçat innocent of Supervielle: A Poet's Existential Metaphors of Prison and Shelter." *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* vol 33, issue 1 (Date of Publication). <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1695>.
- Magrini, James. "Dwelling and creative imagination in Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology: Returning to the poetic space of education and learning." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49, no. 8 (2017), 759-775. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1194738>.
- Moholy-Nagy, László. *Von Material zu Architektur*. München: Langen, 1929. https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/moholy_nagy1929.
- Moravánszky, Ákos. *Metamorphism: Material Change in Architecture*. Basel/Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017.
- Morrison, Scott. "Interview with Karl Stefanovic, *Today Show*." Interview by Karl Stefanovic, Today Show, Nine Network, 24 August 2021, transcript, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/interview-karl-stefanovic-today-show-4>.
- Mulligan, Kevin and Fabrice Correia. "Facts." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/facts/>.
- Reisman, David. *Sartre's phenomenology*. London, New York: Continuum, 2007.
- Rolls, Alistair Charles and Elizabeth Rechniewski, ed. *Sartre's Nausea: Text, Context, Intertext*. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Rizo-Patron, Eileen, Edward S. Casey, and Jason M. Wirth. *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard*. New York: SUNY Press, 2017.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. London: Penguin, 2021. Kindle eBook.
- Smith, David Woodruff. "Phenomenology." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology/>.
- Taylor, Mark, and Julieanna Preston, eds. *Intimus: interior design theory reader*. Chichester: Wiley Academy, 2006.
- Turner, Rebecca. "Juukan Gorge won't be the last priceless record of human history to be legally destroyed by mining." *ABC News*, 11 Jun 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-11/juukan-gorge-aboriginal-heritage-site-just-one-of-many-destroyed/12337562>.
- "WA's Economy Best In World During Covid-19 Pandemic," National Mining Day, <https://www.miningday.com.au/was-economy-best-in-world-during-covid-19-pandemic/>.
- Worthington, Brett. "Scott Morrison scrambles to assert control as Dominic Perrottet opens the international border." *ABC News*, 15 October 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-15/nsw-international-border-perrottet-morrison-naional-cabinet/100542740>.

NE ŽIVETI U PEĆINAMA: FENOMENI I SLIKE ZEMLJE I SKLONIŠTA

Aleksa Bijelović

“E sad, to je kao u onom filmu ‘The Croods’ – ljudi su želeli da ostanu u pećini. Neki su želeli da ostanu u pećini, a ta mlada devojka, želela je da izađe i ponovo živi i da se nosi sa izazovima života u drugačijem svetu.”

Rad prikazuje lično iskopavanje širokog koncepta unutrašnjosti, njegovih značenja i višestrukih aspekata. Tačnije, njegova moćna prostorna poetika ukorenjena je protiv tradicionalnih pogleda koji se generalno koriste u i oko arhitektonske profesije. Zadržan je na različitim čitanjima koristeći lokalni društveno-politički kontekst neobičnog mesta zapadne Australije kao šarenu pozadinu u svrhu interpretacije.

Reč je o subjektivnim realnostima i njihovom odnosu. Iako je pokrenut svakodnevnim životom ovde i sada, on odražava mnogo širu sliku ljudskog stanja našeg vremena i sveprisutnog koncepta pećine, krajnje ljudske kolevke ugrađene u naše jezgro. Priča je i o poreklu i svemu što počinje u pećini.

„Ali ne razume se koliko sigurno i toplo mora biti u toj WA pećini [...]“

KLJUČNE REČI: UNUTRAŠNJOST, FENOMENOLOGIJA, KONTEKST, DIJALETIKA, POETIKA
