

GRAPHICS ERTE THE ALPHABET

'The sequins turned up again like a leitmotiv.

Philip Steadman and I drove to Kansas City to find Goff. His office was in a well-rounded brick building by John Root. The door we were looking for was occupied. Through the opaline could be seen a shadow of an arm high up. The shadow moved closer and a sequin sparkled through the glass. Goff was at work decorating his own door. A large table was covered with trays of sequins and other decorative materials. He continued to work as he talked.'

Lionel March



PHOTO PRICE STUDIO



PHOTO DOOR | SEQUINS

APHASIA AND ATOPIA

I'll talk about 'calligraphy' (i.e. the art of drawing beautiful letters) and 'transcendentalism'; give a brief insight in European philosophy.

I'll do this storywise using Bruce Goff's architecture, René Magritte's painting, develop things in three steps into a most improbable plot. (I'll talk about American issues but I hope not to disappoint the Chinese).

PART I

'Not what it seems' - Goff and transcendentalism

In America 'Prairie architecture', as it is called, never got accepted within 'the canon', that is into serious books or critical reviews.

In an effort to describe the architecture of Bruce Goff, Lionel March sets out on a 'transcendentalist' course; trying to undo Goff's work from an all too naïve, simplistic and idiosyncratic spell. Not coincidentally Charles Jencks is quickly there with his exclamation 'TEEPEE', to lay the finger where it hurts.

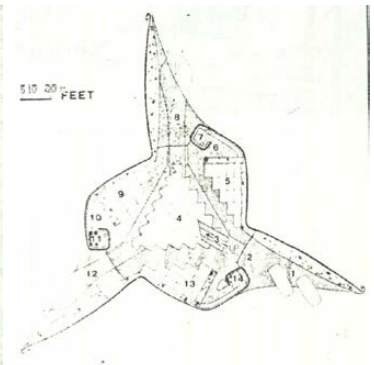
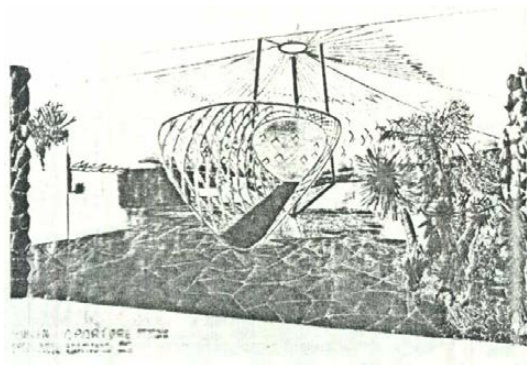
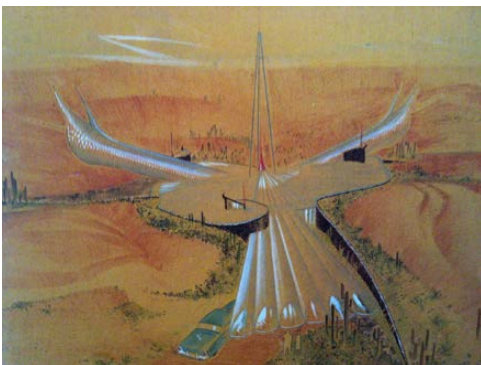
'This is nature, deriving ornament from crystalline structures, plant-forms, insect forms. Often the body of the house is symmetrical like an animal placed on legs and centered on the heart, 'the hearth', the fire place or conversation pit.' ¹

Then of course transcendentalism is the philosophy of Nature ...

In what could be called an American brand, Lionel March understands transcendentalism as a somewhat alternative stance, whereby he brings in religious motives to underpin it;

- As the Shakers stand toward the dominant Protestant Church.
- As Zen, Taoism stand to 'Confucianism' in traditional China.

In the meanwhile he leaves the three main protagonists : Kant, Fichte, Shilling unspoken.

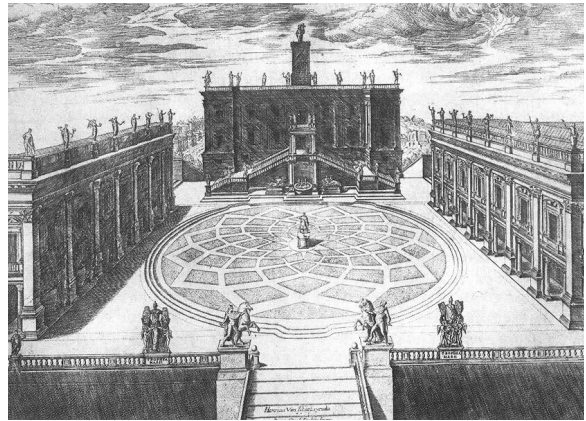


DEWLEN APARTURE_'ANIMAL'

¹ Charles Jencks. Bruce Goff : The Michelangelo of Kitsch', in Architectural Design, vol 48 n°10 1978



S.BOTTICELLI 'SPRINGTIME' 1480



THE CAPITOL ROME 1538-1655

Europe in the 15th and 17th century

As March touches upon Neo-Platonism in relationship to transcendentalism, he could have added that what invigorated transcendentalism was a mix of Renaissance ideas and Reformism (the religious variant). These had already replaced medieval Scholastics, whereby Aristotle (Plato's student and competitor) had over the ages been institutionalised by Christianity, the dominant church in Europe. In an epic (religious) struggle between good and evil, now Plato had been rediscovered, and this happened by a miraculous coincidence; Plato's writings had survived outside Europe in Arabic and Hebrew translations throughout the dark Middle Ages².

With transcendentalism on the brink, a total awe for Ancient Greek culture comes into place. Learn here that the friction between Plato and Aristotle, between Greek and Latin (the European lingua franca at the time) between soul in its different translations; 'psyche' in Greek, 'anima' in Latin starts here.

Disneyfication ? (Snow White and the White House)

'Wood will be without paint, no column or pilaster is there that supports nothing', As the Shakers stand for sober, good and honest craftsmanship it drew the attention already of Walt Disney who allotted such architecture to the refuge of Snow White and the like in his animation films and this placed against the Grimm mansions, the Gothic castles of the villains.

Give or take the gingerbread decorations and vulgarizations, Disney offers therefore a display for a traditional architecture America lacks. But a remarkable blindness is developed by March in defense of transcendentalism then: What happened with all those neo-classical, Palladian ideas that were imported from Europe and ran up to building the White House?

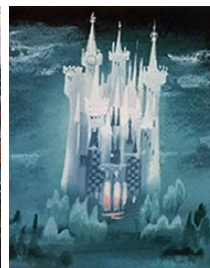
March takes the hurdle as following: 'If the self-build shack is to be taken as a model, the architecture stops here. But it was Louis Mumford who took transcendentalism already to FL Wright; in particular to clarify his most exotic, late and complex buildings (such as FLW Greek Orthodox Church). So that nothing remains to confuse transcendentalism with a return to a plain and simple nature.'



SHAKERS SELF-BUILD HOUSES



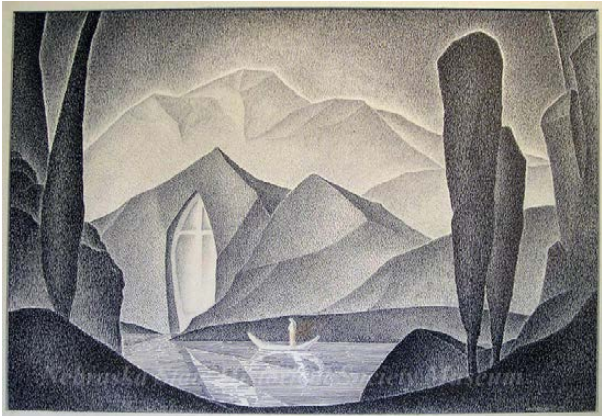
SNOW WHITE AND DWARF'S COTTAGE



THE VILLAINS



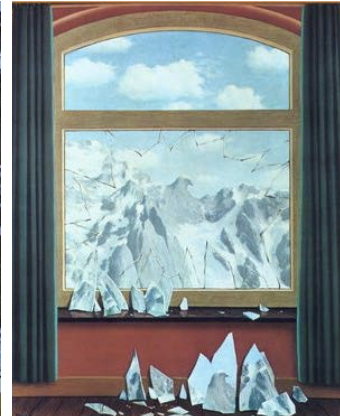
THE WHITE HOUSE



THE DOMAIN OF EDGAR ALLEN POE | ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION



R. MAGRITTE THE DOMAIN OF ARNHEIM 1962



R. MAGRITTE THE DOMAIN OF ARNHEIM 1949

Psychology

Where does it leave Goff ?

Lionel March gathers his writings under the title 'Bruce Goff, the architecture of Happiness'³, in order to pursue with Edgar Allen Poe, to yield an interpretation on transcendentalism that is sufficiently deviant and quite 'romantic'.

I have a certain notion myself of Poe through Bachelard's writing⁴. The poet is the one running up and down the stairs : up to the attic where he can linger, while looking out over the adjacent roofs about triangles, beautiful proportions, light - or down the stairs to the cellar where he can succumb to groovy thoughts that are so much more inspiring or challenging.

In March's article, the tale 'The Domain of Arnheim' comes in the picture whereby the main figure Ellison gives himself over to gardening and the author (Poe) closes in upon a romantic view of transcendentalism. Through Ellison, Poe is in praise for the artificial garden which he places above the natural one. Curiously so, he puts away the nice proportioning of seize, of colour, geometry, as something vague as speech, which misses the point of 'wonder'.

In a same way Poe distinguishes imagination from mere fancy.

From this romantic stance onwards, Lionel March makes a move to an all American 'pragmatic transcendentalism'. The word that is out then is 'Transformism'⁵, in correspondence with the first industrial revolution that embarks on findings in physics and chemistry. 'Crystal formation', as well as a three step formation that, taking a rotting tree, leads 'from peat, over coal, to diamond', becomes a standard for poetic imagery.

Passing over good and vice, Lionel March never gets in the clear however about geometry, further than a slogan-esque 'the circle is the favourite geometrical figure of transcendentalism'; or about letters and numbers, 'all particulars are tropes and Nature is a vast trope'⁶.

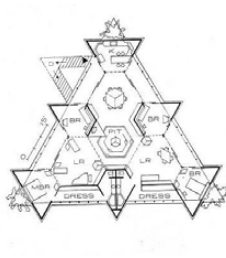
It's the 1970's right, in which Lionel March attempts to embed Goff's architecture.



FIRST NATIONAL BANK MISSOURI 1970, 'DIAMONDS'



BRUCE GOFF CRYSTAL CHAPEL 1949



CRYSTALLINE STRUCTURE & PLAN

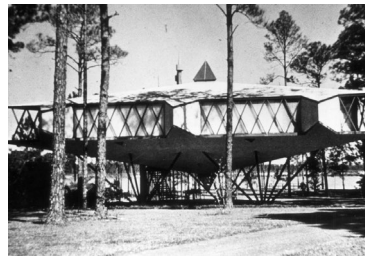


PHOTO GUTMAN HOUSE 1958



PHOTO GUTMAN HOUSE 1958

³ Actually March uses three titles, one for every page, in reminiscence of Geoffrey Cooke's book on Goff, March is reviewing here in Architectural Design Magazine.

⁴ The 'Poetics of Space' p.18-20 Gaston Bachelard, English version, Beacon Press Boston

⁵ Lamarck's pre-Darwinist evolutionary theory : Animals can change directly under the influence of environmental influences. 'Over a few generations the giraffe forces its neck to stretch to reach the highest leaves', - which is proven false by Darwin's 'natural selection'.

⁶ At a distance lurks the stride between poetics and the generic

'Leaps of faith' and/or a move to 'contradiction and complexity'

It's where we come into terms with transcendentalism in pursuit of Kant, Fichte, Schelling (Lionel March called upon already ... but forgets.)

There is definitely something with those three - even so when it is but a lesson in counting and ordering ones thoughts and names. What follows is a quick stepping through.

The first 'Kant' endowed Form with something absolute. There are hidden geometries (or dimensions ...) that man has to accept as a 'being in itself' (Ding an sich).

The second 'Fichte' (being notabene Kant's student) challenges him and provides a more pragmatic reading of Kant. Calling upon his own personality, Fichte puts will power and creative force to the fore. As a consequence he places 'thought' above 'being' or at least 'thought' versus 'being'.

One can see at a distance how the 'artificial' is going to be advanced in contrast of the 'natural' and Aristotle's premise being incorporated (again).

As a third member, Schelling is not to be ignored. It's where the naturalist stance falls into a more romantic sway. In Schelling's eyes 'art' as the most individual expression becomes the highest form of philosophy. His point is about the harmony of things whereby he addresses nature as the 'organon' .

When Goff, Wright and the like, proclaim an 'organical' architecture, as Prairie Architecture is also called, the source lies here.

And quite when it looks like that the locus of 'contradiction and complexity' is present amongst the illustre three of transcendentalism, so that a too simple and plain reading of nature (to use Lionel March's words) is quickly overridden...

... along comes Hegel as the exceptional fourth, who manages to unite these three interpretations into the 'three steps of philosophy' nonetheless. Transcendental dialectics becomes the true name then, or an ontology posed above logic, in what is generally accepted as metaphysics.

The first step is referred to as the 'in-itself' indicating Kant's 'being' or 'Nature'.

The second step relates to Fichte's move to 'otherness', or something 'different' or 'into the world', and describes the for-itself.

The third step relates then to Schelling and appeals for a coming back to oneself on a higher, mature, self-conscious level (the in-itself-and-fore-itself). It's the climax where philosophical insight turns around.⁷

Organical architecture: 2 icons



FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT_ 'FALLING WATER' 1936



GOFF_BAVINGER HOUSE 1950

⁷ The history of Philosophy, Hans Joachim Störing, p.83-84 - Hegel; p.77-79 - Schelling; p.69-71 - Fichte; p.44, 55 - Kant.

PART II

Not what it seems (Magritte and calligraphy)

Reading the word 'TEEPEE' coming out of the pen of Charles Jencks, unwillingly, unavoidably makes me think of Magritte's painting 'ceci n'est pas une pipe', which set the pace of a post-modern architecture (or PoMo as Jencks refers to it).

Then of course, given the time frame alone, Lionel March approach to Goff's work is from a post-modern perspective also; see whether Goff fits within these parameters or simply contradicts. In any case the complexity is on.

An introduction in 'langue': transcendentalism being denounced.

We have to pass by Michel Foucault to see metaphysics (not to say transcendentalism) engage with the more contemporary fields of surrealism and metabolism.

In a remarkable view Foucault sees transcendentalism lapse into transgression. He compares the 'transcendental eye' or 'I', not unlike the peeling of an onion, as a boulder made of several concentric scales of glass. Hereby it becomes a question of a glancing or peaking through the ever more sensitive inner layers in order to reach a brighter light and insight.

But imagine for a change that the eye is turned around its orbit while being forced to lure into the darkest night of the inner skull. Bloodvains are all around and significantly so the eye becomes opaque and transforms into a giant seed ball !

Foucault owes transgression to Georges Bataille (another name that means fight).

This effect of doubling (things or words) being imbued with doubt, or at other times framing doesn't ever leave the writings of Foucault.

Verse

The story goes that Magritte painted the 'image' of the pipe after seeing a same photo that Le Corbusier showed in 'Vers une Architecture'. Le Corbusier describes a pipe as the ultimate functional object in his quest for 'form follows function' and the 'rationalisation of the world'.

In response Magritte makes a statement by arguing that what you see is 'a painting of a pipe', and not the object itself. It leads to the birth of 'figure' next to 'form' and 'function'. Complexity is in the make. There is something in language which is about to overtake geometry in architecture.

'The autonomy of language arrives with the separation of the word (the signifier) from the object it represents (the signified)⁸.'



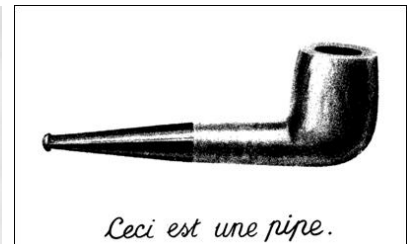
PAINTING R. MAGRITTE 1936



DRAWING N.H. JACOB | 'TRAITE COMPLET DE L'ANATOMIE L'HOMME' M.J. BOURCERY 1839



LE CORBUSIER WITH PIPE





PAINTING R.MAGRITTE 1966

Higher pipe, lower writing; 'the crevasse (cut) on the canvas'

But immediately there, Michel Foucault recognises a hidden feature or dimension, while comparing the one painting (1936) with an extra one Magritte made (1966); now presenting the painting of the pipe on an easel within a second painting (with a pipe).

Foucault reads it as the framing of the letter 'P' itself and as the onset of calligraphy.

As it appears, the pipe in the second painting is drawn as if on a blackboard. Scholarly. The pointer. The teacher correcting himself 'This is I This is not ...'. One can almost see the trembling chalky line coming about.⁹

It's very much a play that works for Foucault. In an earlier text he represented Don Quixote as a calligram already. As a slim figure without much perspective Don Quixote traverses the dusty Spanish plateau; he is being locked up then within an horizontal canvas.

Not unlike Quixote, Foucault uses words as battle, subversion to typify Magritte's painting.¹⁰ As Foucault proceeds he cuts up the sentence 'This I is not I a pipe', into sequences whereby the ultimate word is given to 'is not'. Since letters are images too, the pipe is being projected in doubles, multiples...

One can eventually imagine that the 'P' is evading as a smokey signal in a yet unpainted version. The pipe forms a plume of itself, floating above the 1986 version, again within another frame.

Foucault : 'The convention of language begins by converting and conveying it.'

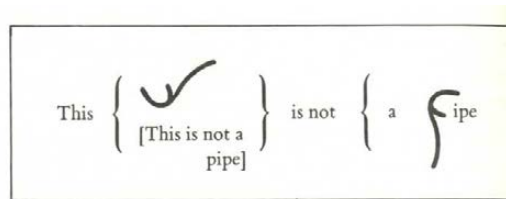
Sentences pop up freely now.

If the mystic writing pad leads back to Plato's idea of painting then the sequence 'is not' is primordial.

If not a pipe what is it then : 'A calf, a square, a flower' ?, by means of which Foucault underlines Magritte's affection for Guillaume Apollinaire's poetry ('Ordeurs', which is a French neologism combining "order and smell").



GIACOMETTI 'PLAZA' 1949



CALLIGRAPHY CONVERSION INTO A 'P'
DIAGRAM BY M.FOUCAULT



DOUBLES, MULTIPLES

⁹ Echos of Mallarmé's stammering on Nietzsche's question 'Who is there?'

¹⁰ This is not a pipe. M.Foucault p.26

An unrevealed plot

Reading Foucault's booklet on René Magritte's painting, a remarkable lacuna is left. It is like kicking in an open door; why not relate Magritte's pipe, past Corb's pipe, to Plato's couch ?

Well known is that Plato expressed his poor appreciation for painting through the following metaphor : 'First there is the idea, the concept; second the carpenter will translate as good and honest as is possible the idea into material. Third comes the artist making a painting of that couch. In such manner the artist is already two steps removed from the original idea.'

Magritte's 'this is not a pipe' wants to give the authority back to the painting whereby he is helped by the coincidence of psychology that infiltrates the surrealist movement.

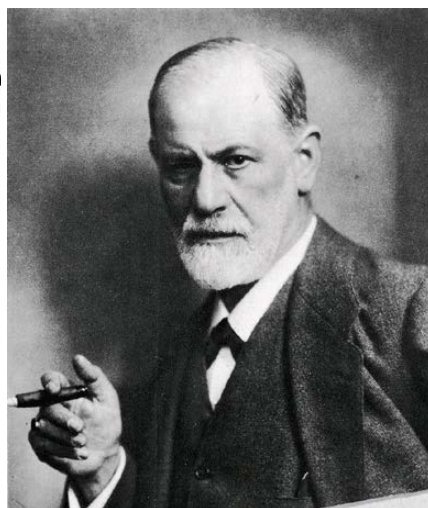
In the autobiographical text 'La Ligne de Vie' (French for 'lifeline') Magritte reflects on how and where his paintings came about. The text mixes dream with sexuality.

"In front of my eyes I saw the same light as when I came out of the cellars, tombes of the old graveyard, where I played as a child during the holidays. In a flush I made a whole series of futuristic paintings. I had one unchanging focal point, erotics, a pure and powerful feeling. The girl that I had known on the old graveyard was the subject of my dreams and became part of a restless atmosphere of stations, feasts, and cities that I created for her."¹¹

Psychology : In the realm of Foucault's cutting up the sentence 'This I is not I a p...', with articulation on 'this' now, one can descry a move to surpass the 'eye', the 'I think, I am', to a less personal and a more accessible signification.¹²



ERTE 'NUMERALS'



S.FREUD WITH CIGAR

¹¹ René Magritte 1898-1967, Exhibition Catalogue, p.45 (Dutch version) 1998, Royal Beaux-Arts Musea Brussels

¹² Pip : In Peter Greenaway's movie : 'The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover' (1989), the page called Pip is forced to swallow his belly buttons; being all the black button thorn form his white jacket. Later on again the lover was smothered by having to swallow the pages ripped one by one of his books in the library.



PRIMITIVE ART

PART III

Split-type

This part is about a missing link in Lionel March text on Bruce Goff's architecture.

Going through the book 'Illusion in Nature and Art' ¹³ I came across a series of primitive art work. What attracts the attention was that this kind of work was characterised as 'split-type' as if the symmetry that appears in the drawings above is reflected in the words used to describe it.

In a further explanation the 'symmetry' is linked with 'a-perspectival', as if that qualification follows naturally out of the first where indeed the primitive 'eye' is concerned.

Antropology

Curious even more, the split-type drawings are analysed in three possible ways : anthropology being trapped as it were in transcendentalism.

For Levi-Strauss 'split' indicates a stress factor that relates to 'masking', being a habit well known amongst African tribes. The message behind a double identity or personality is this of gaining prestige, status, riches within the group.

My intuition tells me that Levi-Strauss' interpretation, touching on words as 'dual' and 'hidden', has a Kantian ring to it.

The next explication (Boas) granted to split-type drawing is this of a slow 'transformation'.

What once originated as decoration round a volume, or void (a cup or a cube) became in due time folded open and got flattened, whereby the parts were laid back to back. As a result some early form of perspective was discovered.

I would give this empirical approach to Fichte's way of seeing things.

The last interpretation (Deregowski) is to grasp the split-type as a 'mark' of identification or a 'tag'. There is no intention to represent accurately the actual animals concerned but rather to attract attention to the object on which the animal is drawn.

Deregowski found similarities within heraldry in medieval European culture, as well as within children's drawings.

What is argued then is that learning to draw in an advanced, perspectival, 3-dimensional manner, goes at the expense of immediate recognition and expression.

Individual expression : maybe it's Schelling's domain that is tested here.



INGELA'S DOG



MASKS



HERALDRY

¹³ 'Illusion in Nature and Art', edited by R.L.Gregory and E.H.Gombrich, p.182-188. Duckworth 1973.

Aphasia and Atopia

Being stuck with three plausible and quite recognisable theses - having no 'Hegel' to unite and lead them further up; we can turn to our title 'Aphasia and Atopia' at last, or at least.

It's certain that we want to arrive at something else, and different than the downpour of transcendentalism in 'contradiction and complexity'.

We have seen 'ceci n'est pas une pipe', slip into 'split-type' drawings. Eventually Bruce Goff would prefer the graphics of Erté above René Magritte's paintings and gouaches.¹⁴ But - there is something with this 'TEEPEE', drawn as a figure 'A' - what justifies our move to calligraphy.

In the continuation of earlier lectures¹⁵, we set out from the words 'Atopia and Aphasia', which one can find combined by M.Foucault, now in relation to Borges encounter with a traditional Chinese Encyclopedia.

- Atopia means 'without place' but is also commonly understood as 'oversensitive' (or allergy in medical terms).
- Aphasia means speechless.

Again aphasia and atopia are familiar with many words that begin with an A, or have an A as a prefix. This goes back to ancient Greek where 'A' means 'without' or 'no' indeed.

- Aperspectival means then 'without' perspective;
- Atypical means 'without' type.

Since 'A' is the letter the European alphabeth 'or table of letters', begins with; than one can assume the letter 'A' as being something that stands close to nothing. $A \neq 0$



TEEPEE



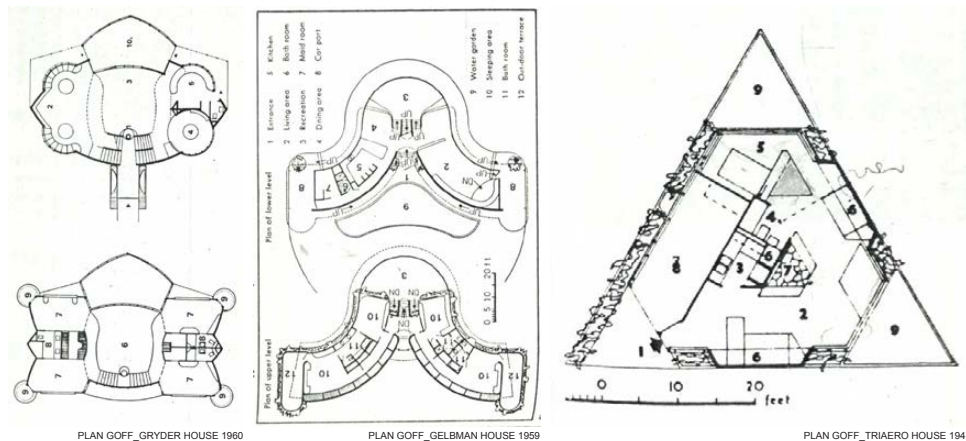
PAINTING R. MAGRITTE_ 'THE AGE OF FIRE' 1927



ERTE_ 'LETTER M' IN THE ALPHABET

¹⁴ Erté, 'The Numerals, the Aces, the Alphabet, Precious Stones, and the Seasons', The Complete Graphics. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

¹⁵ A Register of Wording & Defenestration & The Detente of the Arch



PLAN GOFF_GRYDER HOUSE 1960

PLAN GOFF_GELBMAN HOUSE 1959

PLAN GOFF_TRIAERO HOUSE 1941

The world of wonder

Borges was amused by the improbable Chinese categorisation of animals A) belonging to the Emperor, B) embalmed, C) tame, D) sucking pigs, E) sirens, F) fabulous, G) stray dogs, H) included in the present classification, I) frenzied, J) innumerable, K) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush etc. etc.

Our point is that the 'aphasia-atopia' word combination may work also in relation to our 'split-type' drawings, shown above :

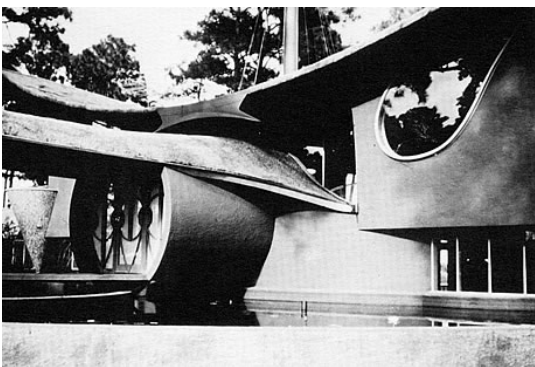
The 'Tsimshian bear', the 'Haida shark', the 'Haida duck', being the respective proper names of these three drawings don't go back to traditional Chinese art however, as it would sound like to a western ear. They belong quite to the North-western American tribes (Indians...) that happened to live where Goff came to build his houses. These drawings are very much a prairie thing and Bruce Goff must have found inspiration in them.

'TEEPEE' is then not a loose exclamation. The round a-perspectival, symmetrical animal nature that Charles Jencks uses to describe Bruce Goff work finds an origin in these 3 little 'dragons'.

Abaddon

One of the first words in the English dictionary is abaddon which relates both to hell and to abandon: to leave, to leave one's home. If we leave Georg Hegel for Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁶, we find out that abaddon - not necessarily implies religious features as 'heaven versus hell'.

For Nietzsche Abaddon/abandon invokes his fascination with early or pre-Hellenistic culture while looking at the Orient or the Levant or the East. To him, it's where braves fought for fame and glory without the promise of an Afterlife.



PICTURES GOFF_GRYDER HOUSE 1960



PICTURES GOFF_TRIAERO HOUSE 1941

Allegory

Nowhere can one find so many affiliations between men and animals as in Nietzsche's 'Also Sprach Zarathustra' (a hail of aphores) in a manner of blessings or curses.

Nietzsche nowhere uses proper names (no John, Paul, Peter, Luke), but articulates on characteristics : the true-sayer, the rope-danser, the giant called 'Coincidence'.

So I won't withhold you the following extract. Hereby Nietzsche is offering an alternative genesis than the Christian Trinity : it's a story about procession and limitation, a piece of poetry, and we are situated in the desert once more.

Of the three metamorphoses :

One : from Ghost to Camel¹⁷, the latter being the bearing one, of heavy duties.

Two : what the Camel dismays;

from Camel to Lion, the latter being the predating, robbing, the no-saying; freedom seeking one.

Three : What the Lion dismays;

from Lion to Child, being the innocent, the playing one, the yes-saying one.

But Nietzsche wouldn't be Nietzsche if he didn't offer an extended fourth character which is the Dragon indeed.

There he talks in shimmering scales, shining armour to the Lion :

There cannot be a 'ich wille' I want or I will but only a YOU BE-LONG !

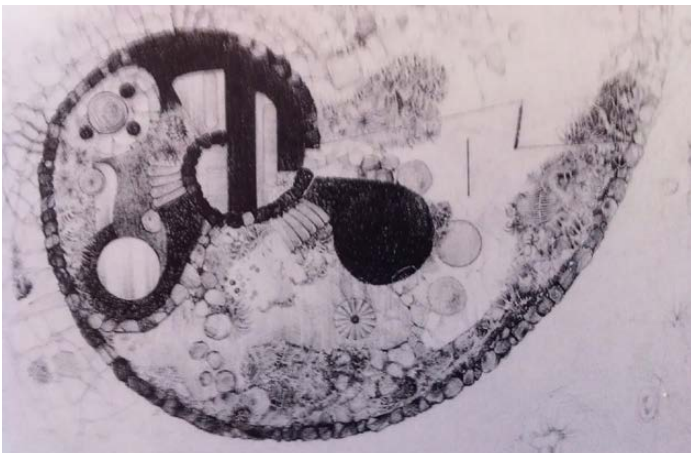
Calligram

And one can see something travel through space and time, between different languages;

TEEPEE tumbles into the drawing of a capital 'A' what we read likewise in the Chinese character of a Dragon - a Long 龙 - opening up in sequences, being decorated with sequins.



OWN PICTURES GOFF_FORD HOUSE 1948



PLAN GOFF_BAVINGER HOUSE 1950



INTERIOR VIEW GOFF_BAVINGER HOUSE 1950

¹⁷ Camel : at other instances Nietzsche would refer to the Mule 'I-A' - 'Also sprach Zarathustra' (Dutch version) p.3-6