

Every notion of progress is refuted by the Iliad. The perfection of the first steps makes any idea of progressive ascension ridiculous. But at the same time the Iliad is an act of provocation as far as forms and shapes are concerned; it defies them and draws them into a fan that has yet to be fully opened. And this state is thanks precisely to the commanding sharpness with which the poem excludes, even expels from within itself, what for centuries to come would be articulated in language. That perfect beginning, through its very appearance, evokes the absent counterweights: Mallarmé.

Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmos and Harmony*

From the outside, there is something faintly sinister about the former water reservoir. It has the shape of a house, yet there are no windows, none of the accoutrements of domesticity you would expect in this neighbourhood. Built in the interwar years, its shape is mere camouflage, hiding it from future enemy bombers. Its walls are massive, almost 2 metres wide, designed to withstand an air raid. As you enter the building, it feels as if the walls were exerting pressure on you, amplifying the earth's compact mass. As all subterranean structures, the reservoir circumscribes a time zone of its own, an interstice between historical and geological time, sheltered and claustrophobic at once.

You first walk through three antechambers, bare save for a few remaining pieces of machinery. Dispersed on the walls are a few fluorescent pink images. As you go up to them, you realize that they are photographs of antique statues, mostly detail views, shot with an infrared camera. At this range of light, invisible to the human eye, the statues appear physical, tangibly nude – ghost bodies released from the stone they were trapped in. They recall 19th-century spirit photography, the idea of the camera as an instrument capable of showing the invisible, instead of a merely establishing the self-evident. On the walls of these concrete antechambers, they remind you of friezes in a crypt or an oracle site, antiquity conjoined with modernity, cancelling each other out in the chthonic eternity and its negative transcendence.

You then climb down a flight of stairs into the former water reservoir. At first, you just hear the sound of two interlaced synthesizer loops. They render the space you are about to enter audible – its extension in space, its volume, the echoing heaviness of its walls. The water it used to store has been replaced by sound waves.

Once you are in the space, your eyes have to adjust. The only source of light is a row of strobe lights at the far end of the space, alternately pulsing in a slow rhythm. Now and then, the regularity of the strobe patterns is interrupted by signals, picked up by four microphones distributed

in the space. They are ephemeral indices of presences in the room, detached from their bodies.

After a while, you notice that the strobes are aligned with four rows of massive supporting pillars. You behold a figure in the space, its silhouette sharply contoured by the pulsing light, all details eradicated. The strobes do not illuminate the space, they rather highlight its darkness. You see light, not that which is being lit. Figures flash up for a moment in a pulse reminiscent of the clicking shutter of a film camera. They are mere two-dimensional apparitions without physical mass and corporeal presence, quite unlike the statues you saw on the photographs upstairs. Your aural and your visual sense are disjointed: You just glimpse the outlines of the pillars and maybe of a figure, only the sound lets you fathom the expanse of the space, flooded by echoes.

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