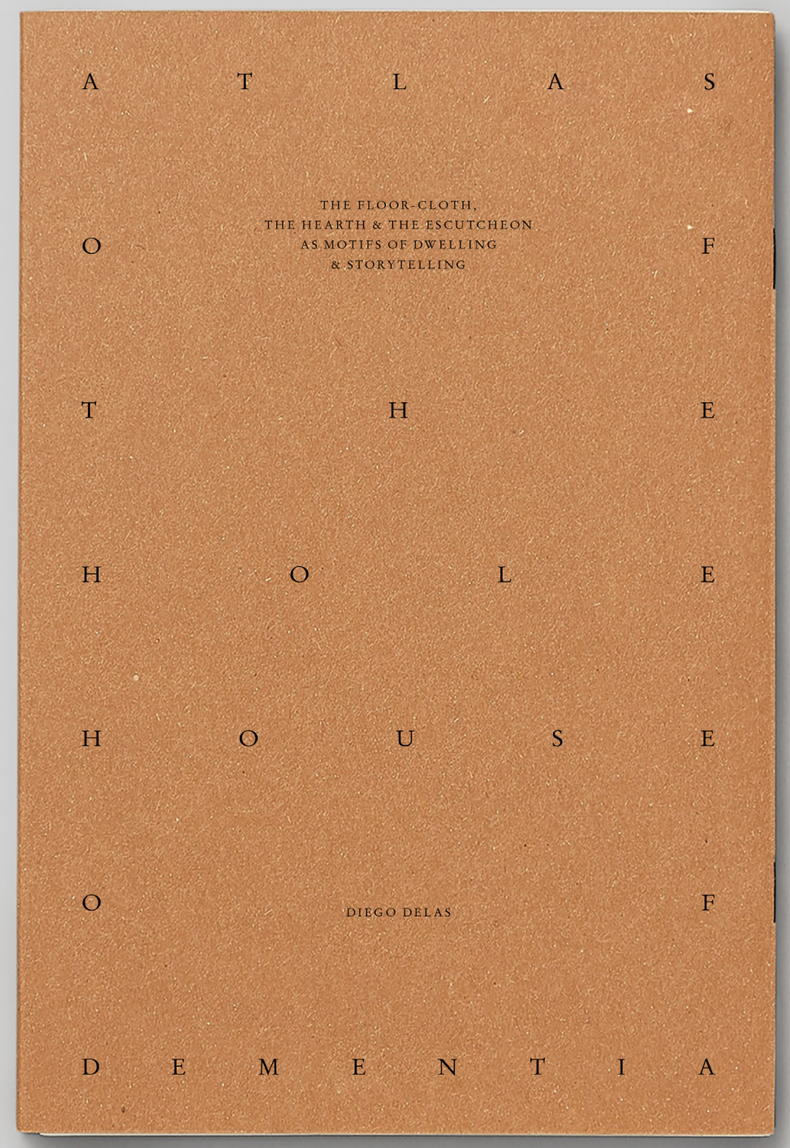
Diego Delas

DPhil Art (Practice)
The Ruskin School of Art
Atlas of the Hole
House of Dementia


ATLAS
OF
THE FLOOR-CLOTH,
THE HEARTH & THE ESCUTCHEON
AS MOTIFS OF DWELLING
& STORYTELLING
THE
HOLE
HOUSE
OF
DIEGO DELAS
DEMENTIA

THE FLOOR-CLOTH,
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AS MOTIFS FOR DWELLING
& STORYTELLING

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BODY

II THE ESCUTCHEON



What if, to tell you a story, I have to start from an absence, from a gaping hole, from the echoing cold pipes of time you looked back at, muted, outlying reflections, vivid therefore moving, effectively affective? Dream on.

INTRO

Imagine arriving at the door of an old house. Some sort of a promenade may have led you there. Walking on flat, old stones next to perennial Mediterranean plants, you see vines on the south wall, a willow, and a well.[53] Pallasmaa says a door handle is the handshake of a building. After that greeting, you enter a house, you glide into it and touch it with your wide-open eyes, the spaces intertwined and conjoined when navigated, when passed through.[54] All this in diagrammatic progression, a conversational piece. Or a drift into your ancestral, intimate trip towards the hearth: from the skin towards the heart you travel, piercing function, matter, et al.

But you will never get there without transgressing multiple borders. You pass by a niche between the attic and the kitchen, or you slide carefully down the chimney. What, in your meandering drift through the body of the house, connects the chimney, the hearth and the kitchen with the façade and the entrance? Perhaps it is the idea of retracing steps, of navigating backwards, perhaps it is the idea of reflected spaces and events, of inverse order and means: leaving feet-forward or walking backwards. Escutcheons are silhouettes.

MASTERS OF THE MIRROR

You could easily imagine early mediaeval printers as masters of the mirror, writing backwards on wooden plates, kings of the reflected celestial dome; on the water surface, a mirrored floor plan turned to marble, they spelled magic invocations. Since magic comes from words, and words animate things,

There has to be some sort of fear of forgetting, inherited at birth. The forgetting not only of memories but of the very time spent in this peculiar limbo inside another's body, memories discarded when we are born. After that, the clock is set to zero and it all begins in earnest. But memories of that space, bodily sensations and experiences must be kept, imprinted somewhere. Perhaps these feelings even influence the way we navigate spaces we encounter in our future life. Psalm 139 gives a bizarre but clear example of the new-born's dark inheritance, somehow built upon the idea of craft, of creation in absolute darkness, in an underground vessel of vessels as much as drawn into the book of books. I wrote it down so I can remember:

> *For it was you who formed my inward parts;*
> *you knit me together in my mother's womb.*
> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*
> *Wonderful are your works;*
> *that I know very well.*
> *My frame was not hidden from you,*
> *when I was being made in secret,*
> *intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*
> *Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.*
> *In your book were written*
> *all the days that were formed for me,*
> *when none of them as yet existed.*

Psalm 139 13-16, NRSV

GIACOMETTI AND THE WOMB

At this point, I wonder, what if you had in front of you one of Giacometti's plaster works, the Project of a Passageway.[ii] This tunnel-like space which expands and contracts throughout its length creating chamber-like cavities, makes you dream of rooms within the body. Walking back along these passageways with your gaze (the sort of looking that is like touching) navigating, sliding, drifting through tunnelled matter that is both flesh and space, may lead you to the uncanny point zero of the womb. Since we all inhabited one for a long period of time, I wonder what is left of such an experience. Perhaps we cannot remember without looking at and imprinting, moving. Walking engenders thinking; forward for reasoning; backwards for recollecting. But how about the spatial experience of being in such an interior without the knowledge of inhabiting the womb of the nesting of another, not completely there yet but drifting away? [QQQ mid 17th century: from Latin incubat- 'lain on', from the verb incubare, from in- 'upon' + cubare 'to lie'.]

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE AGAIN

The same door that welcomes your hand and arms and then your face, embracing your crossing of the threshold with its unfamiliar fragrances, sounds, and warmth, presents you with new discoveries and visions from inside the whale-house. It will surely bid you farewell by expelling you again into the cold. Though the door is the same, the nature of its two faces is as much an opposite as the barking scowl and the smile of youthful teeth in the same mouth. So now that you are leaving back into the silent outside, you are about to slip into recollection, into distraction. And there you go.

TU QUE ME MIRAS, ¿QUÉ VES? YOU WHO ARE LOOKING AT ME: WHAT IS IT THAT YOU SEE?

In Future Now ('Framtiden Vari Gar'), a 1986 programme on the Swedish national television, J. G. Ballard walks the reporter through his home and refers to his studio as the place where his imagination dwells. The room, filled with notebooks, books, a poster, and an assortment of other items, overlooks a tiny garden. I almost wept when I saw that gar-

BODY







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Thank you