

**THE
HISTORY OF
A BUNGALOW**



**A NARRATIVE ESSAY ON MEMORY,
LOSS AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF
THE EVERYDAY**

Candidate 11146

11th January 2022

James Ashton

020 7146 1100 01 253 11 10



A memory blurred through loss

Draft of Estate Agent's
Newspaper Advertisement,

*Image taken by the Author and
adapted from Ashton (2019)*

Oh, longing for places that were not

Cherished enough in that fleeting hour

How I long to make good from far

The forgotten gesture, the additional act.

Rilke in Vergers, XLI.

Translated from French

(cited in Bachelard, 2014, p.77)

Submission Information

Submitted as part of :

AR30039

*History & Theory 4:
Issues in Contemporary
Architecture*

Candidate Number

11146

Page Count

37 Pages

Word Count

~ 2800 Words

(N.B. Not including
Dividers, Appendices, etc.)

(Title Page Image)

Photo of a Childhood Home

Image by the Author

Preface



culture of nihilism and consumption has resigned the built environment to objects or ‘products’ (Lefebvre, 1987, p.9) of aesthetics and ‘utility’ (Pallasmaa, 2000, p.7; 2008). Designed in excess cost, noise (digital and physical) and scale. Our world is now perceived as ‘devoid of mythopoetic content’ or ‘legend’, the everyday is “othered” as ordinary and our connection of being and world is strained (ibid.; Bachelard, 2014, p.37).

The essay aims to act as a form of requiem or memento of place, challenging these contemporary attitudes from a unique perspective:

Narrated as a series of recollections, the essay depicts a grieving Architecture student’s search for ‘repose’ in the immediate and ‘immemorial’ landscapes of their childhood, and now adulthood (see Harries, 1983; Bachelard, 2014, p.32). In this promenade of reverie, phenomenological meaning is found in ‘projected’ moments or embodied memories, these ‘[conscious and unconscious] dialogues’ between user and place (Pallasmaa, 2000, p.8; 2008, p.191; Lyndon, 2009) becoming transcribed from surface and space to poetry.

Coinciding with the start of my University education, grief resisted against the cynical ‘purg[ing]’ of preconceptions requested in lectures (Hurst and Lawrence, 2004, p.294). Indifferent to this and the separation of Architect and non-Architect, a form of skepticism to the “untrained” built environment, my own lived experience was part of a ubiquitous vernacular to be explored; part of the “everyday” (see Fisher, 2004; Lyndon, 2009; Pallasmaa, 2014).

Preface

Bachelard (2014) recognised that the experience of a house is not from narrative alone; the childhood home is our most primitive interaction with the built environment, ever resonating in memory regardless of cultural attitudes of anti-historicism and the architectural spectacle (see Pallasmaa, 2008).

The History of a Bungalow preserves in prose three landscapes either lost or left to ruin; now latent to empathic interpretation and to be re-inhabited by both author and reader (Fisher, 2004; Thomson, 2004; Bachelard, 2014). As poet and provided guide to you — as Virgil was to Dante in the *Divine Comedies* — we pass through these reconstructed ‘collages’ of space (Thomson, 2004; Pallasmaa, 2008, p.191). Recording a history from the ahistorical; typology and memory (see Leatherbarrow and Mostafavi, 2002, p.206).

As Lefebvre (1987, p.9; 2014, p.759) questions:

Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extra-ordinary in the ordinary?... If there was a magical dimension to daily life (rites, formulae, proverbs, traditions), that was also its complexity and its richness.

Beyond this rudimentary role of retrospective ‘biographer’ or ‘author of a humble [Bungalow]’ (Bachelard, 2014, pp.31, 26), this narrative-essay is structured in the mnemonic tradition. ‘Themes’ are explored through buildings and rooms (Pallasmaa, 2008, p.191), presenting them as chronological ‘periods of life’ or acts (Marcus, 2006, p.8).

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PROLOGUE

O

n a hill in the Welsh countryside there lies a Bungalow.

For more than twice a year, over eighteen years, I visited it to see my Mamgu (maam-gee, Welsh for Grandmother) and Tadcu (tad-key, Grandfather).

In October 2018 I began the undergraduate programme and soon after lost Mamgu, Tadcu having been gone for nearly a decade, all that remained was the Bungalow.

Grieving, I returned to it.

Act 1

Bungalow

Reminiscing on a Childhood
Home away from home through
a range of themes relating
to the phenomenology of
Architecture and the everyday.

Key words:

*solitude, silence, weathering,
preservation, ritual, light,
nature, landscape, rest*

A Childhood Home

Image by the Author



T

he journey began at midday when after lunch I would fall asleep.

Surroundings from this point were formed by the turns and bumps found along the road¹ and their distinct sounds: from the calm of the country lane to hectic noise from the motorway.

I awoke at the bridge².

Cresting the bridge, my eyes floated towards the moonlit sky³ and down to dashed streets. On either side, the burning glow of halogen lamps melted through stone, shadow flowing across the road and wisps of grey fog peeling from pebbled edges. As embers to a hearth, cul-de-sac and close became indiscernible coals stacked to the valley, warm breaths of silence filling the midnight air, industry resting at its head⁴.

Act 1

Red letterboxes⁵ preside at the foot of each hill. Batch-produced, they stand defined by weathering — as we all are — their flakes of paint are left unsettled by contact with past and present inhabitants, forming a tapestry upon its surface⁶. Easily recognisable to myself but indiscernible to others, it is a monument⁷ and a wayfinder to guide me there. I would always greet it as an old friend; arms wide, stretching from the long car journey. This time being the last.

Ascending the steep slope of the hill, I emerged from the fog and in front of me was the Bungalow.

At the front of the house there is a door reserved only as a welcoming face to the unaware, it would separate people into two groups: society and family. We knew not to use it, for it wasn't a threshold for us. Light would radiate from the glass that lined its edges, diffusing through the thin cloth and flickering to the movements inside, signalling if someone was in. There now remained a blue pallor coating the edges of the glass like ash to a fireplace. The lights were off inside. These shadows were new and unfamiliar⁸. To enter from the garden, I encircled the Bungalow and passed through two wide but low iron gates, the sequence of opening and closing them, driven by my subconscious.

Looking out beyond the garden and although concealed within the dark, the weight of the valley's void could still be felt. Silhouettes of woodland, fields and hills appear warped by its mass. I breathed out into it, this silence⁹ now manifested in front of me. In this moment, hindsight revealed the power of this place; how the Bungalow and its landscape were totally disconnected from the world, noise unable to enter it. Isolated from the virtual clamour of our contemporary environments, each visit grounded me from the constant stream of information flowing through our cities, towns and pockets. Here silence could be truly heard and even seen. Seeking solitude and refuge¹⁰, it was an anchorage¹¹ in both contemplation and grounding to the world.

Bungalow



Garden to Valleys,
and the distant forest

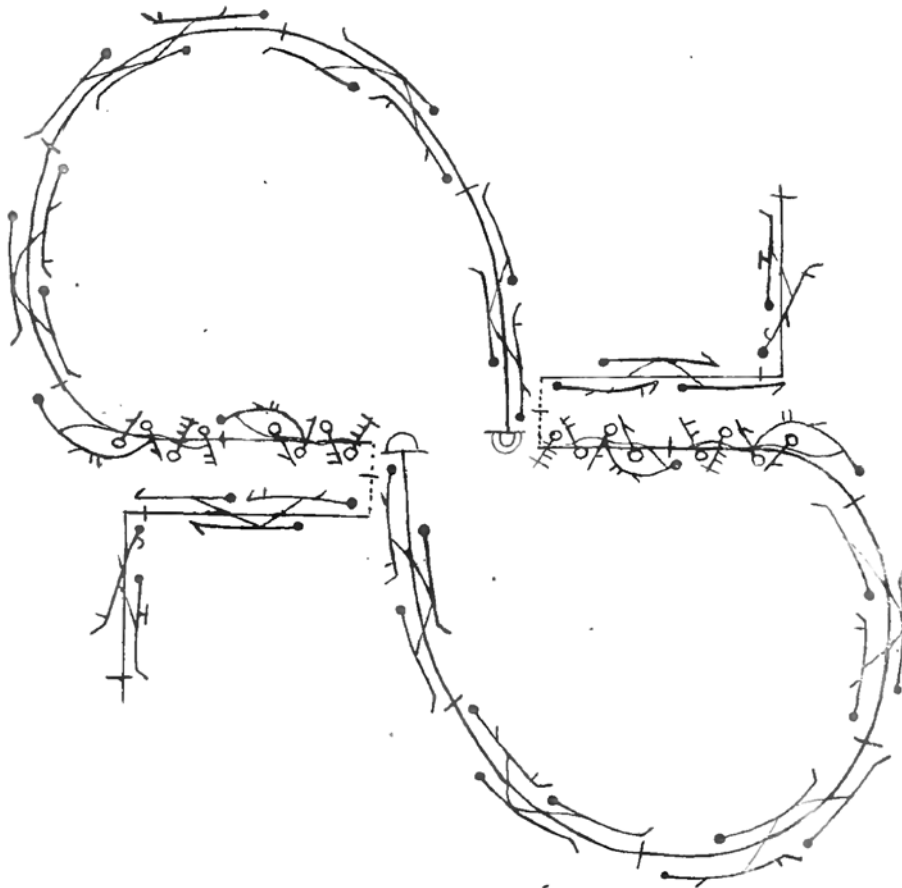
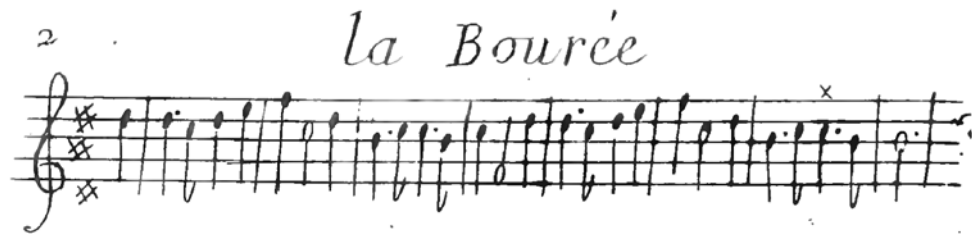
Image by the Author

Act 1

Standing at the back door I entered the Bungalow, determined to secure every detail to memory before it was gone. My right hand reflexively reached towards the cold laminated kitchen tops, steadying myself as I took off my shoes and deposited them underneath the breakfast counter.

Areas of timber floor were worn down around the kitchen and dining room — becoming part of the threshold, working around the dining chairs and below the countertops — life now read as a sequence of these recessed steps. I followed its notation, my feet falling into this dance macabre, replaying scenes from the past. Contact with the floor became smells of Christmas cooking from when my head was the same height as the dining table, and the warmth underfoot contrasted the cold countryside air that would pour through as gatherings began. Running atop the sink and kitchen counters, a series of horizontal windows¹² followed alongside the fields — I imagined what moments these frames must have captured for my Mamgu and the comfort knowing that she was watching.

Connected to the dining room, the conservatory had become a greenhouse in the last decade. Tomato plants crawled through Rattan furniture like vines around branches, running up the stone walls as if they had been there for centuries. Now cleared, it returned to a key room of my childhood, I reminisced on times spent reading and looking out to the adjacent fields of sheep.



18th Century Dance Notation,
I wonder how the kitchen could have been traced?

(Feuillet and Pécour, 1700, p.2)

Act 1

Each step sang with subtle creaking as my weight then shifted towards the hallway. I wondered if the melody of this space was different for each of us and as we changed with age, would we have been able to recognise it?¹³ Above the bedroom doorways, windows too high to see through were lighthouses¹⁴ in the dark corridors that stretched across the hallway, protecting their occupants from a disturbed sleep. I had always felt reassured and safe by this light, often looking out into the dark from inside and knowing who was up by the fading light diffusing across it. Accompanying calls of “Goodnight James bach!” echoing between the closely spaced corridor from Mamgu’s room at the other end.

The living room, as with the dining table, had its own associated rituals. Every seat belonged to someone, their owner confirmed by age and the history of playful sibling rivalries, I was the youngest and so it was difficult to forget. Over time, these chairs and settees moved very little and changed only to provide more room for visitors. Their original positions were indicated by small indentations in the carpet, after being compressed down during our many visits. Similar to people, every object had a space. Above the fireplace, the mantelpiece stretched across the longest wall, with a sequence of framed photos on top for most of the year; until Christmas time where they would be covered by ornately crafted cards that my Mamgu would admire from her chair.

Throughout the Bungalow, brass fittings and tile floors seemed to absorb all cold. The warmth reserved to carpets, rugs and timber. Each room would radiate differently, their distinct character inherent to their use and the objects they contained, as if each room had their own colour without being painted, tones blending between the corridors. A palette now preserved only in memory and photo albums.

Bungalow



Owning a Seat,
Photo of one of my sisters, taken using my Tadcu's SLR after finding it
hidden away while clearing the Bungalow

Image by the Author

Act 1

Now back at the Bungalow's entrance, I left.

It was later sold for the market price of any other house from any other street in the village. It was unlikely that I would ever return to it, though I wondered:

Inaccessible to me, will these rooms continue to store the same memories?

Are they now resigned to their displaced objects, displayed in bookshelves or left in storage?

*Will I roam by one day and see painted over chips on letterboxes,
gates removed and people free to walk through that front door?*

*Peering in, will these timber floors be sanded down, brass fittings replaced by plastic
and the lighthouse doorways blocked from view?*

Could there even be a whole new floor?

Am I to mourn the Bungalow too?

*'to think that the place of their earthly abode,
which had seen, and seemed almost to sympathise
in, all their honour, their gladness, or their
suffering — that this, with all the record it bare
of them, and of all material things that they
had loved and ruled over, and set the stamp of
themselves upon—was to be swept away, as soon as
there was room made for them in the grave... [and]
though there was a monument in the church, there
was no warm monument in the hearth and house
to them'*

*Lamp of Memory,
The Seven Lamps of Architecture by
John Ruskin (1849, p.226)*

Act 2

Crematorium

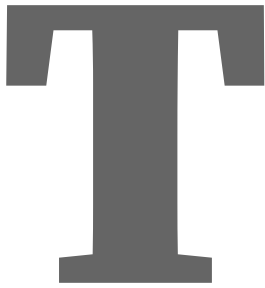
Inhabiting unwanted memories,
misremembered in grief.

A brief reaction to traditions
of death in Architecture from a
personal perspective.

Solitude in Grief

Image by the Author





he car departed from the house, inside I mourned for Mamgu.

Later realising what she had created and provided for me from childhood to adulthood, I grieved for the Bungalow too.

A blurred building — slightly larger than the Bungalow — was loomed over by the valley, its form and surroundings can only be described as blocks of colour. The hills were green, the town grey and the Crematorium blended between them.

Attempting to remember, the Crematorium's interior now comes as fragments instead of rooms. Incomprehensive in moments, and overwhelming in others. I was last there for Tadcu, remembering the space very differently before Mamgu died. Rows of benches have become single chairs and there is a floor-to-ceiling window at the end of the room; opening out to the landscape. The cremation void at its corner and the deep crimson curtain that will later cover it, had cemented itself to memory.

Uncaring for the emotional resonance that this space attempted to provide through its design, and unnerved by the traditions and rituals accompanying death, past readings on Gunnar Apslund, Lewerentz and Fehn seemed perverse in this moment.

I refused to think about the Crematorium any further.

Act 3

Castle

Recommended to be re-read
against Act 1 by Author.

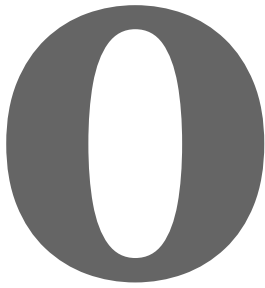
Reflections in historical ruins;
finding echoes of the Bungalow
and Crematorium through
patterns traced among
Carreg Cennen Castle.

Concluding this story.

Approaching the Castle

Image by the Author





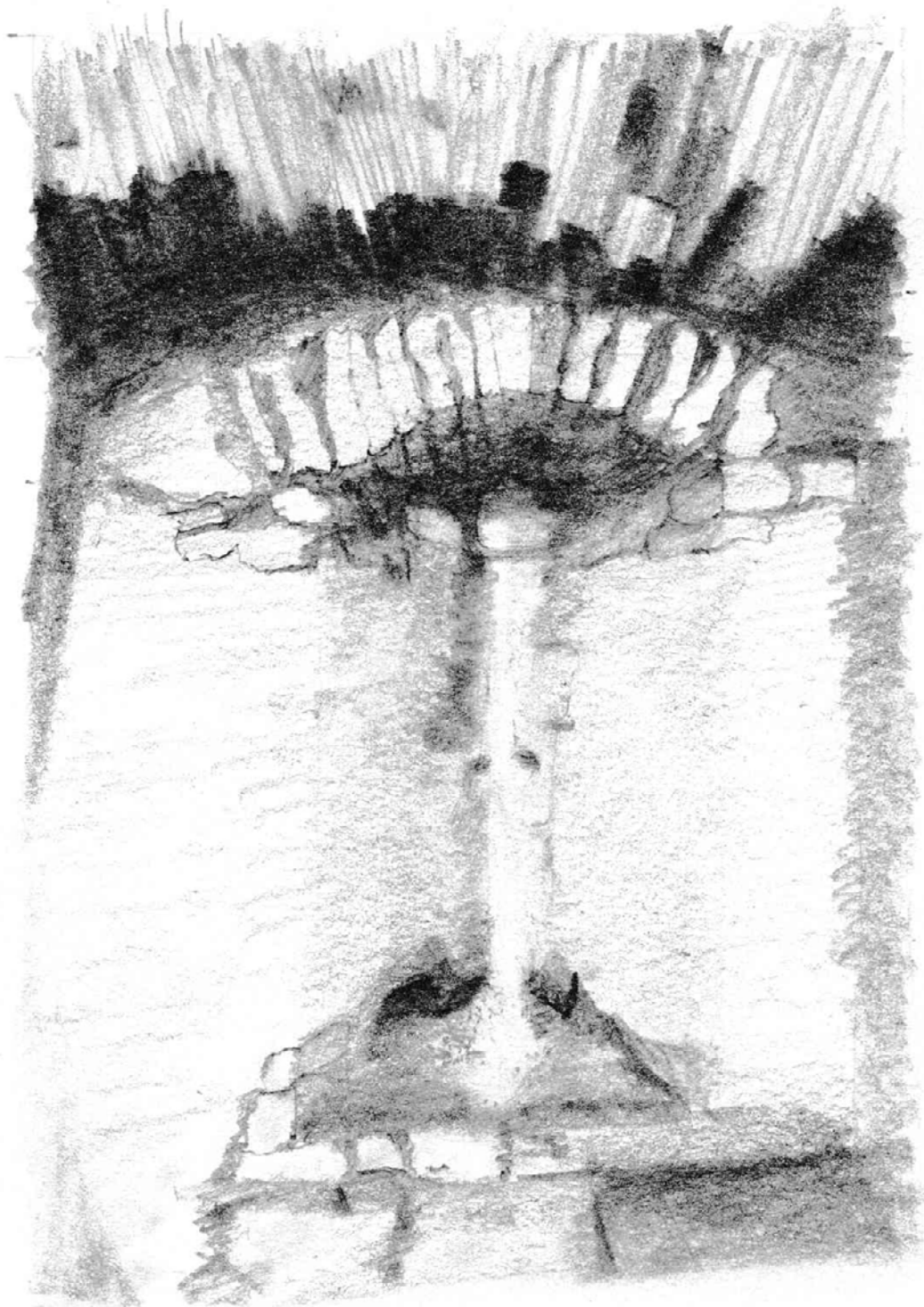
n a hill in the Welsh countryside there lies Carreg Cennen
(ka-reg + ken-nen) Castle.

It had been nearly a year since the Crematorium, the Bungalow was now
sold and it was the first visit to Wales without it.

On Boxing Day morning I decided to go for a walk to Carreg Cennen Castle, having never been
there before.

The converted farmstead at its base opened out onto a pebbled path, encircling up and around the
Castle. Inside, groups of families and friends gather below the century's old timber frame, while free
roaming sheep and other livestock graze in the fields. In the distance, ruined rows of wall run across
like roughcast houses — following the flat face of the hill and contrasting against the winter¹⁵ clouds.
The broken rhythm of archer's crenels appeared as thin edges to the Castle's face — disappearing into
the stone as people walked behind, blocking out the sky.

On the path, crushed stone parted with each step, moving under my weight, and responding with
a cacophony of cracks and scraping until I reached the cattle grid. These spaced steel tubes blocked
the threshold between Castle and farmstead, so I entered through the pair of gates by its side.
From this height you could see that even during the day the grey mist was visible, meandering through
the valley basin. The white lime-washed walls of the farmstead seemed to dissolve into it.
While that familiar orange glow pulsed from the barn's openings, saturating the fog.



An Archer's Crenel,
A point of focus

Image by the Author

Castle

Carreg Cennen Castle appeared embedded into the hill's crest. The surrounding forest of the valley below reaches up towards it, plants crawling out of shadows within the rock face. Coating the stone and darkening it as if submerged, moss and dew collect on every surface.

Attached to stainless steel gangways, brass balustrades are polished from contact with weather and visitors alike. They intertwine through the remaining structure, continuing this promenade from the pebbled path through to Carreg Cennen, while floating above the earth, walls and floors. Buffeted by the chilling winds from the valley, I grasped tightly to the balustrade, moving onwards and towards the remaining rooms. Any enclosure became an alcove to rest behind while decimated walls acted as windbreaks.

Silence from the valley seemed to fill in these gaps, entering each room. Every visitor walked around with an unusual reverence for the space — as if in a church or Crematorium — determined not to break it further by speaking. Hesitating even to take a photo in case it produced virtual noise, I got out my sketchbook, the sound of soft charcoal on paper quietly echoing through the room as I drew the valley.

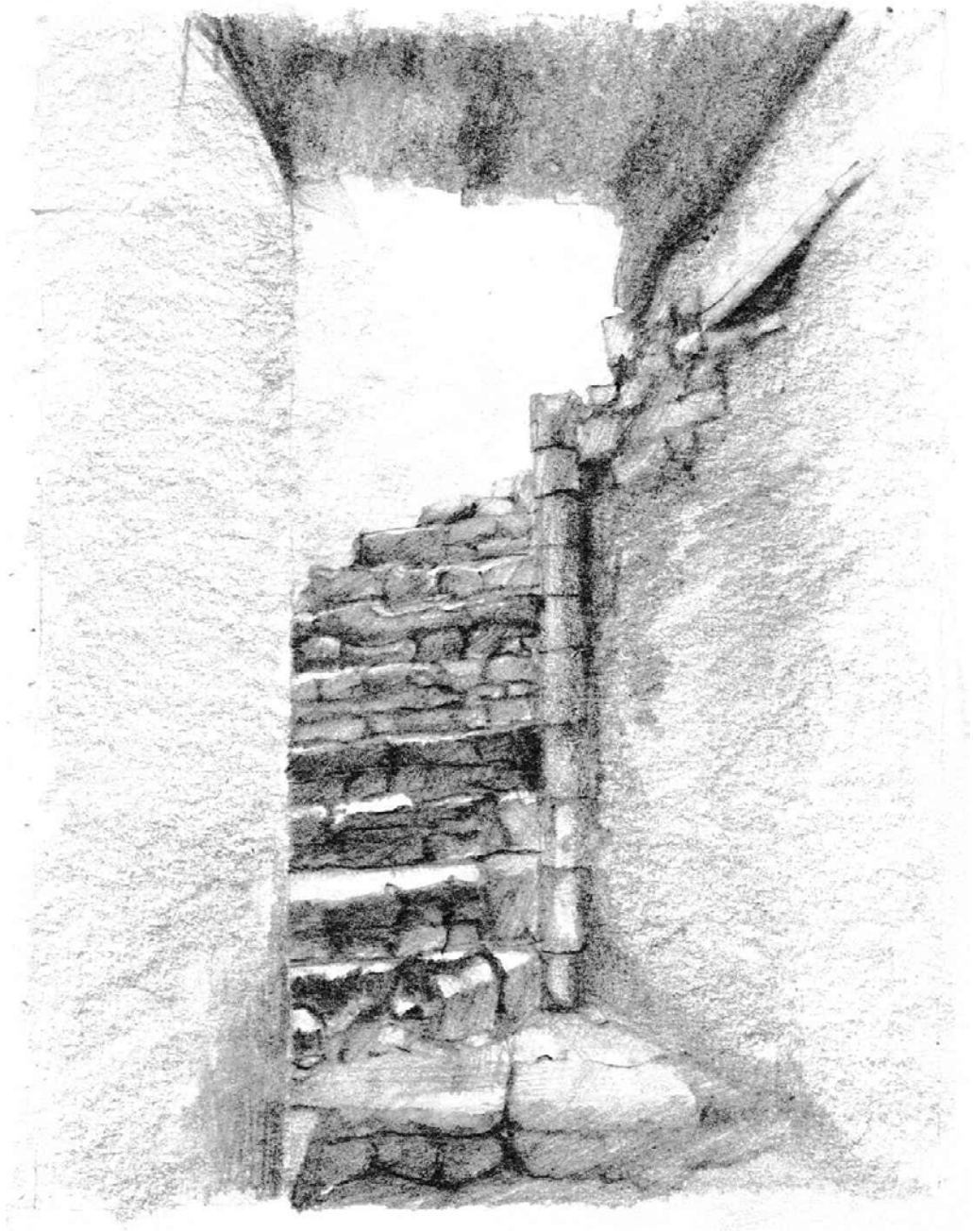
Act 3



A Castle Corridor,
Leading to the broken stairway

Image by the Author

Castle



A Broken Stairway,
Is the Castle now a Bungalow?

Image by the Author

Act 3

Imagined memories embedded into the ruined walls of Carreg Cennen Castle — the battles, celebrations and occupants — failed to form in my imagination as my eyes wandered across the landscape.

Instead, I find myself in the Bungalow's kitchen; staring out, steam from an array of bubbling pots escape through the open windows in front of me, leaving a light breeze against my face as the monotonous whir of an oven wafts the smell of Christmas cooking, wishing I could never leave.

Castle



View from Carreg Cennen Castle

Image by the Author

Conclusion

Mamgu's Bungalow; the Crematorium and the surrounding villages, valleys, and Castles; will not appear in any theoretical journal. Its Architects — if there were any — will not be awarded a Stirling Prize or studied in University syllabuses. Those who never experienced it would describe the Bungalow as too ordinary for celebration, labelled as absent of "language" or "raison d'être" by critics. Reduced to something innate in literature or purely orthographic in drawings.

Lefebvre (2014) argued that the everyday is to be read in everyday language — possessing only one meaning. However, as The History of a Bungalow illustrates, the landscapes of the everyday are not just monotonous retellings of vernacular narratives in need of fictional exaggeration. The "products" of Architecture do not embody a singular meaning, they 'recall flashes of daydreams' and compounded in grief, greatly 'illuminate the synthesis of the immemorial and the recollected' (Bachelard, 2014, p.27).

A door can be a lighthouse,
a kitchen can be written in dance notation,
a Castle can feel like a Bungalow.

Architecture's 'revivifying sense of the past' is made 'mightier' by poetry (Ruskin, 1849, p.224). Existing beyond the physical world and reinhabited within our imagination, the phenomenology of the Bungalow, the Crematorium and the Castle has been understood as if translated from memory

The Bungalow, a childhood home; explored the ‘profound [and primal] reality [that] attached’ me to this ‘corner of the world’ (Bachelard, 2014, p.26) and how it remains embodied within me.

Tragedy brought this understanding ‘beyond [only] positive recollections’ (p.50) and revealed through ‘empathic imagination’ the ‘lived, multi-sensory and integrated experiences’ (Pallasmaa, 2014, p.82) told within the fabric of its landscape. Otherwise abandoned through a complacency with place, a nihilism to the everyday.

The Crematorium, a place to forget; contrasted against the Bungalow. Nihilism in a place of death blurred difficult memories.

The Castle, a ruin at rest; would ‘force us to reminisce and imagine...the fate [and] lives of [former] occupants’ (Pallasmaa, 2008, p.191). Instead I remembered Mamgu and her Bungalow, family and ‘dwelling [inseparable]’ through time (Pallasmaa, 2014, p.82). Bungalow and Castle becoming inseparable too. Pebble dashed walls on village roads were indecipherable to the rubble of Carreg Cennen’s battlements, running along their shared promenade and encircling the valley’s hills, both standing in solitude amid their peaks. Read as ‘traces of patterns’ from the ‘shared [culture and memories]’ of the Valleys (Lyndon, 2009).

And so now rests the Bungalow on the hill.

The essay, a brief memento to Mamgu and her Bungalow.

In the future, I will continue these studies into the phenomenology of the everyday in order to understand the extra-ordinary relationship we have with the built environment. Overall coinciding with previous research into socially-responsible Architecture (Burkhalter, 2020), I hope to build up a corpus of published theoretical work that can provide a foundation to practice upon.

Appendix A:

Notes on Architecture

A companion of some academic reflections, this section supplements the *History of a Bungalow*, providing reason and precedent to literary decisions. As shown by the use of endnotes, e.g.: Architecture^x

My Notebook,
Observative studies in the
phenomenology of place and memory.
In this case, using *Atmospheres*
by Peter Zumthor (2006).

Image by the Author



1

Roads and bridges are not innate structures, exchanging with them our time and presence, they carry you. Embodied as force and mass in asphalt and stone, their turns and bumps are 'counter-muscles' (i.e. reactive) to our own (Bachelard, 2014, p.33).

2

Framed as continued daydreaming, I want the reader to enter into this shared environment and so to experience the phenomenology of their own landscapes (e.g. where this is being read) alongside the depicted landscape — as Bachelard (2014) suggests.

3

To Zumthor (2010, p.89), 'the light of the moon is a quiet reflection, large, even, and mild'. In adulthood, I continue to look at the Welsh countryside in awe under this light; as shadows and fog transform familiar surroundings. In excess of scale, as buildings continue to get taller and drones begin filling the midnight sky, will this light and silence be drowned out?

4

Factories line up against the coast as you enter Wales, smoke billowing from chimney towers, never seeming to stop; inhuman, they contrast against the valleys and rivers.

5

As constant a feature to any home as would be a window, door handle or brick; the urban realm is built up in conscious and subconscious markers. Available in a variety of form and scale, they guide us to the 'refuge' of home (Bachelard, 2014, p.30). Only once we truly recognise them do we appreciate their presence, like an old friend.

6

In its 'poverty', there are shared stories ('histories and memories') embodied within it, and so a vernacular of the street (Leatherbarrow and Mostafavi, 2002, p.207). How do neighbours see this monument? I imagine it will not be too dissimilar to what I've described.

7

The spectacle of monuments does not diminish the simple post-box, these are our national monuments — not sepulchres or statues.

8

A loved one's absence is visible in a home. Death reveals a fear of the unknown in unfamiliar shadows and spaces as experienced in the Crematorium.

9

In *The World of Silence*, Max Picard (1964) describes the environment as primal ('there first', p.130) and growing from silence. Forming 'solitude [in] mountains' (p.207) and the 'forests [as] reservoirs [of silence]' (p.132), Picard (1964) contrasts these to the city's echo chamber of noise.

10

Comparable to Bachelard's (2014) 'hut [of] refuge'.

11

An anchorage can be interpreted as both a place to anchor and an isolated place for contemplation; often religious.

12

The personification of Architecture as bodies or living entities is not new, as shown by the supposed femininity of the ionic column or X (literary link). Pallasmaa (2000, pp.8-9) summarises the 'window [as] fragile eyes' to 'inspect visitors' amid a 'tamed and domesticated world'.

However, agreeable in the case of 'protection' against 'fears' (robberies, weather, etc.) (ibid.), the window further provides a form of communication between the internal and external world. Reassurances in seeing a familiar face behind it or merely knowing where they are and that they're there (through light), powerfully resonates from childhood to adulthood.

13

Floorboard positions become almost traced to memory, even without visible wear, they can still be followed or avoided such as in the case of getting a late glass of water or sneaking out; not wanting to alert anyone.

14

Unsure how common these are, they've become ingrained to my memory. Furthermore, illustrating that a window is not just an idealised views as Pallasmaa (2000) believes but signals for both corridor and street.

15

Bachelard (2014) declares Winter to be the 'oldest of the seasons'; 'conferring age upon our memories... a child [can imagine] the year one thousand with it'. The ruin restored in our minds and so in Winter mist Bungalow and ruin are the same refuges on the same hill.

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Appendix C:

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