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ON BEING A DREAMING VESSEL

Site-writing and embodied Denkräume

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Abstract

This creative-critical paper attempts to plot the sensitive connections between shared and personal history, and the way these reverberate in space. It does so by combining site-writing (Rendell), hagiography, and cultural theory (Didi-Huberman, de Certeau), and applying performative, iconological, and ekphrastic devices. Together, these become a sort of written atlas (a term borrowed and bastardised from art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929)) that helps navigate several different reflective spaces (Denkräume, another Warburgian term). These spaces are at times pictorial (the frescoes by Fra Angelico in San Marco in Florence, a dimly lit room in a Kendrick Lamar music video), architectural (San Marco itself, Warburg's library, a church in Senegal), bodily (the representations of Mary as the Church), or even, oneiric, connecting them with the red thread of intimate, embodied experience.

ON BEING A DREAMING VESSEL: SITE-WRITING AND EMBODIED DENKRÄUME

Maria Gil Ulldemolins

0. Preamble(s)

0.1 San Marco (before the visit)

'The New is in the Old Concealed, the Old is in the New Revealed'
(St Augustine in Schmeling, 2001)

*'If the theory is correct that feeling is not located in the head,
that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree
not in our brains but, rather in the place where we see it,
then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves'*
(Benjamin, 1979)

The cell is a simple, white-washed cube. It is small, and squat, although the vaulted ceiling offers some lifting. Opposite the door, a wooden window with another, smaller window in it. On the same wall, next to the door, your beloved: *The Mocking of Christ* by Fra Angelico. It is framed by a trompe-l'oeil arch, the top of which brushes the actual curve of the ceiling, fusing with it. This throws the eye off balance, as it creates an asymmetry in the real space.

Within the painted arch, the 'avowedly fictional' (Harbison 1991: 131) space of the fresco becomes three-dimensional. On the foreground, two seated figures, a woman, on the left, and a man, on the right. Despite their close proximity, they do not seem to sit together. Each is turned inwards to their respective, inner elsewhere. She looks pensive, preoccupied. Her gaze is lowered to her right, left palm rested on her cheek, staring into a corner of nothingness. This woman is the Virgin Mary. The man, as the bright red asterisk bobbing on his forehead reveals, is St Dominic. He is reading, invested in the holy book on his lap. His right hand grazes his chin – mirroring Mary's – in a display of thoughtfulness. His left hand is about to turn the page.

Behind them lies a differentiated space with a terracotta floor. This may be outdoors – the cover of this area is either a dramatic black ceiling or a night sky. It is delimited with a plain, plastered wall. On the terracotta floor, pushed against the wall, a raised platform, a stage, sharp and off-white. On it, another volume with perfect edges in a particularly exquisite, ever so slightly rusty red. This contrasts against a great, smooth cloth, coloured an anachronistically modernist turquoise, pinned on the wall – a background on the background.

A blindfolded man is sitting on the red box. He is wearing a loose, billowy white robe, like a sheet. This man is, unequivocally, Christ. Except he is not really here. He is a figuration of what St Dominic, in the foreground, is so intently reading ('the cell frescoes should be understood as representations of intellectual visions' (Hood 1986: 201)). We know that because, if nothing else, Christ is surrounded by a few dismembered hands and a spare head. These are synthetic representations of the scene in the text, rather than a literal butchery.

So – Christ is not quite there, in the reality of the painting. And the two saintly figures are not really present, either. They represent pathways, guides, drawn from a prodigious monk's imagination. He is long gone, and so are the other monks that lived and slept in this very cell,

one after the other, in a quick succession of lifetimes. You are not here either, but in your own home, looking at the same painting in different photographs, in varying angles and decades, from the virtual comfort of your work-issued computer.

This fresco means that you are a ghost, too, just like everyone else.

1. Hold (introduction)

1.1 Vessels and stories

Journalist and critic Noah Richler, in the audio documentary *A Short History of Story* (2011), speculates over the implications of considering humans ‘vessels of stories’. This would position said stories as ‘higher beings’. In this scenario, human survival ultimately matters for the sake of perpetuating culture-building narratives. Here, their potential impact is scaled beyond the limitations of human time. The provocation in Richler’s thought experiment is as existential as spatial, for it emphasises the more collective aspect of *what* we hold, rather than the individualism of *who* we are. This vessel conception of the self is further complicated by the need to contain the container: we too need to dwell somewhere.

In this light, Richler’s vessels are an interesting perspective from where to practice site-writing. Site-writing, coined by Jane Rendell, is an effort towards a critique of ‘equivalence and analogy’ (Rendell 2011: 7). With it, one *writes architecture*, rather than ‘write about’ it (7). Site-writing, necessarily performative in that it enacts space, presupposes in an explicit fashion the interiority of the writer. It generates a ‘double movement to and fro between inside and outside: works can take critics outside themselves, offering new geographies, new possibilities, but they can also return critics to their own interiors, their own biographies’ (Rendell 2011: 14). In other words, site-writing aims to pour the self in and out of the vessel, spill a bit in the process, let it touch the floor of the site, scoop it up and drop it back into the vessel, contaminating its contained stories with the place.

The next few pages are a personal take on being a spilling, dreaming vessel in multiple locations. The San Marco monastery will become a central location from where to communicate with other pictorial, narrative, oneiric, and digital spaces. Inspired by art historian Aby Warburg’s atlas and thinking room (more on this later), the text is a cluster of relations between site-specific embodied and psychic experience, and the narratives of cultural, historical, religious, and artistic entanglements.

2. Architectural ekphrasis

2. 1 Field notes (I): San Marco (the visit)

It is early in the morning in Florence, a Thursday in the very last remnants of August. Crowds are making their way through the city, following a raised arm with a handkerchief, an umbrella, a book, tuned into the headphones of their audio guides. But you are already *here*, in the San Marco monastery (‘The walker, in relation to his position, creates a near and a far, a here and a there’, nods Jesuit and philosopher Michel de Certeau (1985: 130)).

You are early, eager, earnest. As you climb the stairs to the first floor, a realisation dawns on you: San Marco is a book. The upper floor’s high, beamed ceiling, its spine, each cell an illuminated page. You walk the corridors and read it like a spread. You are not a neutral reader. You are awaiting a turquoise meeting. You approach each room carefully, aware of the velvet rope that bars further access.

You want to barge in each of them, pour yourself all over the walls, crash into the plaster like a wave in a storm. But you do not, you wait. You slow down your intrusion. You savour the other images revealed from each doorway, because they are a thing of pure beauty, and because they are not the one you are waiting to see. You delay your gratification.

You do not get to pretend this serenity for too long. To your left, half-way through the corridor, the fresco you have been anticipating is simply *there*. As you stand before it, it has always been *there*. It will remain *there*, too. It has met so many of you, even on a day like today, still quiet. The other tourists will arrive in a few minutes. For now, though, you are *here*, the image is *here*. You just want to kneel.

If anything could convert you, it would be this. The privilege of this quiet. The sunlight through the window-in-the-window, the terracotta floors, these frescoes. These frescoes where space turns inwards and invents itself anew, and you lack the words to explain what it feels to know, for a moment, that the division between soul and flesh is fiction.

You are here precisely for this, to read this image, breathe it in, lick it, if you could (like a wound, a plate, a new-born dog). As you stand in the threshold of cell seven, something gives way. Maybe it is the shortness of sleep (you wanted to be first, find the place as empty as possible in high season); maybe it is the climax of fulfilled anticipation; or maybe it is simply love. Whatever it is, you cry quietly, like sensitive people in movies, enough to water either a big aloe, or a small pine. You cry enough that now that other tourists start to arrive, the one advancing in this first corridor, head straight, arm pushing a camera into each door once, clicking without stopping nor looking, decides to skip cell seven altogether, and leave you to it.

2.2 Note to self

These images were contemplative tools, not just beautiful scenes. A contemporary visitor cannot activate these tools: they are lost in the translation of tradition into time. It is not only the lack of training, but the way ideas inevitably evolve. These tools have become art, and we have thus lost them. Like faith (at least, mine).

2.3. Perception vs representation

Ekphrasis is typically explained as the writerly description of artwork, a sort of medial translation. Nonetheless, Renate Brosch questions the utility of the binary nature of this definition, text and image understood as discrete, separate entities, particularly in the Digital Age (2018: 226). For Brosch, ekphrastic practices engage the perception, rather than the representation, of an image (226). Brosch's emphasis is thus in the *experience* of the work, and in its reception and transmission. This makes it a 'performative gesture' (226) that meets the reciprocity of site-writing's own 'double movement' (Rendell 2011: 14). If site-writing generates the aforementioned 'to and fro between inside and outside' (2011: 14), Brosch's ekphrasis 'understands culture not as a container of works and texts but as a fluid network of processes and events made up of embodied practices that impact on society' (2018: 226). Here too one can find spilling, and nested spatialities.

In a time and place where images are so readily pervasive, it is this responsive, performative, fluid dynamic that offers an added value: the ability to defamiliarise images (Brosch 2018: 227). The reframing renews their relevance, meaning, and even affect. What is more, Brosch's opening of the term can also be potentially read as an invitation for media expansion. In this

light, site-writing can be a form of architectural ekphrastic writing, used not to describe a site (writing *about*), but performing a site and its perception in writing (writing architecture).

3. A digital break

3.1 Humble

From my living room (space 1), I open a new tab (space 2) into the screen (space 3) of my university (space beyond)-sponsored laptop. I open Youtube (space 4). I search for Kendrick Lamar's 'Humble' (2017) video, and it appears in its own window (space 5). 2:20 minutes in, Lamar appears all dressed in roomy white, contained by a window that lets us see inside a living room (space 6, in house number 3638). We see red laser points reflected on the window's pane, floating about his body, revealing the presence of (numerous) armed police on the street (space 7), which is dark.

The scene is a commentary on fatal, racially-motivated shootings by the police in the US, which bled into mainstream media after teenager Trayvon Martin's death in 2012. The violence in the clip is metonymic, a part evoking a whole. The innocent white is intentional (not unlike Goya's main character's shirt in *The Third of May 1808*, 1814). The disembodied violence and the layered framing and spatiality of the still is strikingly like that of *The Mocking of Christ*.

While all of 'Humble' is bathed in Christian imagery (a gold-embroidered white liturgical cloak, a sharp ray of light from above, tongues of fire on his and his crew's heads, a small last supper scene), I cannot be sure whether the link to Fra Angelico is intentional here, not even with the blueish rectangular background, or the white window frame. But sometimes time collapses within an image and intention stops being relevant. The survival of an image, and that of the story it contains, depends on our willingness to tell it over and over. And the willingness comes down to need: the Italian Quattrocento survives in the rapper's video because the Christian archetype of unjust (and politically tainted) human suffering is still very much a reality. It is this reality that influences both the video and the fresco: they commune.

4. Space to think

4.1 reflection

Rendell summarises criticism's ultimate endeavour as the pursuit of relating to an 'other' (2011: 7). This encounter can only happen in a contested space shared between the two (a well-established concern for psychoanalytical and feminist practitioners), which is why site-writing turns this question explicitly to spatiality (2011: 11).

The frescoes in San Marco are uniquely well-suited to this discussion. They are simultaneously site and artwork. They appeal directly to the beholder, who uses them to connect to a greater presence. They mediate across interior and interiority, real space and pictorial space, present and past, tangible and intangible, faith and fact, one and other.

These spaces are rooms for reflection, in the three meanings of the word – thinking, mirroring, and bending:

The space is designed for contemplation.

The space throws the beholder's self back to them.

The space is actually a plurality of spaces, folded into each other, creating pockets where stories can thrive.

A reflective site is a mirror, a bridge, and a punch-hole.

4.2 *To live and do / endure no harm*

This reflective, mediating spatiality brings us to art historian Aby Warburg. Despite feeling Florentine in spirit (Bing 2014: 25), Warburg is not in San Marco, but in his library in Hamburg – grand, oval, richly stocked. This is where Warburg negotiates the space between himself and images. Warburg, whose sensitivity is ‘exacerbated’ (Stimilli 2007: 59), has a complicated, intimate relationship with the images he studies and their power. In the late 1920s, he resorts to creating panels covered in black cloth, on which he pins reproductions of artworks, creating constellations or clusters of images. These juxtapositions attempt to plot and reveal the way embodied emotion has been represented through time, demonstrating the survival of specific formulas of pathos.

The mediation of the panels is multiple. He can gather these images in reproductions, and regard them collected and from a distance, here, in the safe space of the library. He can also observe the charged interval between the different reproductions, which simultaneously separate and associate the recurring gestures. He has thus found a way to mediate the world he contains, the outer world, and the world in the pictures. Comforted, before them, he proclaims: ‘You live and do me no harm’ (Johnson 2012: 28). This is in Warburg’s terms, a *Denkraum*, ‘the space required for devotion and reflection’ (Warburg 2016: unpaginated). It is literally a ‘thought-space’ (Johnson 2012: 17), ‘a mutable, utopian space of contemplation’ (2012: 19).

4.3 *The embodied Denkraum*

In the Warburgian tradition, the *Denkraum* is multiple.

There is the literal, three-dimensional space of the library, a physical space to think.

There are also the spaces with other names, like the interval between images, and the panels that hold them, which can become part of the physical apparatus of the atlas in the *Denkraum*.

Then, there is Warburg’s inner space, his vessel-being.

And significantly, there is the dynamic, metaphorical *Denkraum*, the space negotiated in-between, a safe place, cognitively and historically speaking (Johnson, 2012: 27).

Warburg’s presence in the *Denkraum*, though, from a contemporary perspective influenced by autotheoretical and performative practices, begs the question of embodiment in the *Denkraum*. While the spatiality of his interiority, and the emotional and intellectual safety are considered, the flesh and its materiality are less so.

The embodied *Denkraum* attempts to tackle this by formalising the presence of the body in the multiple spaces of the *Denkraum*. It brings together the architectural, literal thinking space of the library and atlas; the mediating space between Warburg and the image; the world in the image; Warburg’s interiority, as a psychic space as well as an embodied being - and still recognises and emphasises the beholder as an essential activator of the space. The bodily highlight invites the senses, and the idiosyncrasies of each one’s physicality.

In doing so, the embodied Denkraum claims that the position of the beholder (or that of the reader, the visitor, the researcher) is not, cannot ever be, neutral. Its subjective nuances have a direct repercussion within the model – as a relational system and space, each element is changed by the singular presence of a body.

The acknowledgement of this variability also invites the model to be exported outside the historical Warburgian Denkraum. What occurs in the early 20th century in Hamburg may *survive*, in yet another performative turn, in what occurs almost a hundred years later in the seventh cell of San Marco.

5. Field notes (II): olfactory ekphrasis

You make a point of noticing the smell of San Marco, which turns out to be a pointless exercise. As much as you would like it to, the cell does not smell. There is no lingering wool, nor beeswax, nor soup, nor orange flowers from an outside garden. You push your nose forward, past the limit of the velvet rope at the door, impersonate a hound, sniff with exaggeration, but it does not even smell of plaster, nor sunshine. All olfactory traces are gone.

Back in the airbnb, you have sprayed on some perfume, a sample of something niche, thinking you could use it as a memory prompt later ('Notes of dates and dry raisins that lie at the heart of this fragrance are accompanied by incense and exotic, rare woods, reinforced with notes of smokey birchwood and Javanese vetiver' (Heeley, n.d.)). Now that you are here and resigned to the absence of local smell, you dutifully lift the inner wrist to your face and inhale.

By now, the corridor is quite a bit busier. As the morning progresses, more visitors find themselves upstairs. You pass by a group of women. One of them is surrounded by the most delicious air. It is sweet, like a bakery, and spicy. It's vanilla, and milk, and maybe lemon peel. It is an amnesic madeleine. You try and enjoy it while it lasts – you could never summon the courage to ask out loud what it is she is wearing. You proceed through the rest of the cells, and eventually make your way to what used to be the library. There it is again, the smell. You turn around. The lady is nowhere to be seen. You must have been mistaken, it must have been the other women. They walk together, two of them. You cannot be sure they are the same people you saw earlier, but they must be. You leave them behind and learn about vellum, pigment, and leather bindings in the library exhibition that celebrates Fra Angelico's Bible illuminations.

You go back to cell number seven, *your* cell – yours even if no one else knows it belongs to you. You were here first, alone, and claimed it (or reclaimed it, rather, since you had already done so years ago, online). But between the Annunciation and the staircase, there it is again. The smell. It truly is fantastic. Like a consolation. Like a cheesecloth mother. Like a Tuscan cliché of goodness. It is nourishing, farm fresh, recipe-from-your-grandma wholesome. You look ahead and see yet another woman. It starts to become evident that the smell source is none of these women, it cannot be. The smell, despite your original impression, must belong to this place, or this time, or a combination of both.

Then you remember it – the fancy sample. If the smell keeps on chasing you, is it possible that it is you who smells? Is it the dates and raisins mixed with the mystical sweetness of labdanum and sandalwood that feels like you can be forgiven, swaddled, cradled to sleep forever? You lift your wrist again. From up close the perfume is darker, dirtier, more human, more market, more musty cupboard. The vetiver burrows at the bottom of it, a reminder of all things wet

and dark. You are too unholy to be the source. Still, you cannot bring yourself to believe in the saintly smell of a painter's ghost.

6. Fire (hagiography)

6.1 Juana's dream of fire

Domingo, or in English, Dominic's mother, Juana, named him after her preferred holy patron. Dominic would eventually become a saint himself, founder of the Dominican order, no less. When Juana was pregnant with him, she had a prophetic dream. In it, she gave birth to a pyromaniac dog, a beast carrying a torch, ready to set the world on fire (Stracke 2015). Fire, she thought, fire walk with me, giving in to divine will, and mistaking Kanye West for David Lynch.

After Dominic's baptism, his Godmother could swear she had seen a star blooming in his forehead as she held him in her arms (Stracke 2015). A portal must have cracked open in the boy's skull, already ajar, newborn's crown gap and all. In flooded love, light, zeal. By the time the skull bone was hard enough to solidify into a zipped jigsaw, the fire had been burning for a while. He remained alight with its licks and unbearably bright embers until his death, fifty years later, when ashes finally came to ashes.

Life is what happens while your brain is being consumed with desire.

6.2 Terrains

Juana's dream of a dog brandishing a lit torch associates fire with her son Dominic, and also ignites the saint's hagiographical narrative. This narrative starting point is at the same time that of a topography: the hindsight locks birth and death together, demarcating a territory. This enclosure seals the saint's gifts: 'the end reiterates the beginning. From the adult we go back to the saint's childhood, which already bears the signs of the posthumous effigy. Saints are individuals who lose nothing of what was initially given to them' (de Certeau 1988: 277). De Certeau further asserts this collection-like perception by writing that '[t]he life of a Saint is a composition of places' (1988: 281). As chosen vessels, these saintly lives become not just site-specific, but site-like.

Elsewhere, de Certeau writes that places are made inhabitable through the openings generated through narratives 'leaving and re-entering' (1985: 142). Site narratives are then 'made of fragments of world' (1985: 142), while sites themselves are 'fragmented and convoluted stories' (1985: 143).

6.3 Relics

To try and condense it all together: hagiographies are the narrations of exemplary lives – stories about vessels particularly good in their holding of a greater story. These hyperbolic biographies are a collection of sites – and sites can only be made accessible through the cavities made by the permeation and percolation of stories. In fact, sites may simply be tales in themselves. And tales are just earthly shards – verbal relics (de Certeau, 1985: 142). Hagiographies are an accumulation of broken pieces. Saints are the vessels that embrace the breakage.

And from here we return to holding and a topographical sense of space, and in a way, to Warburg's atlas and thinking space. De Certeauian fragments 'are juxtaposed in a collage ... articulated by lacunae' (1985: 143). The narrative composition becomes an ambiguous landscape, gathers

into meaning, and creates opportunities to subvert linearity: 'Within the structured space of the text, they produce anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and fugue, opportunities for passage through to other landscapes, like cellars and copses' (1985: 143). The swampy geography of fragmented narratives presents intervals not only for thought, but for new ways to live. Like in San Marco, one can encounter fugitive transcendence.

6.3 Archipelago

San Marco is an archipelago, its imaginary 'related to the imaginable reality of the places of the world, and vice versa' (Glissant 2009: 47) – each cell an island, an escape, an arrival, fire in water; each of them a fragment, a relic, a tooth, a metacarpal bone, a nail clipping. Tiny things, minimal common denominators of bodies, of being, all pieces of something once whole, maybe greater – 'necessary in its totality, fragile or eventual in its unity, passing and remaining, it is a state of the world' (Glissant 2009: 47).

Inside each cell, each fresco is both a wet and dry cluster of meaning in itself. Mise en abyme, space inside story inside space inside story inside space inside story inside space. Face to face with *The Mocking of Christ*, I sense the prodding of my own relics, a familiar nag kept under wraps and layers of bodily tissue and inherited plot lines. Virtual, disembodied tiny hands gesture animatedly. Pieces looking for connection, sparking off each other, making do, and in the process, making space.

7. Field notes (III): Joal-Fadiouth

7.1 Shell Island

On a Senegalese island built out of shells, Joal-Fadiouth, there is a polyhedric church (how a Catholic Church settled here, of course, goes back to pious lives being a collection of places). Vast, it is topped with a simple, corrugated metal roof. It is held by bare, metallic beams, brimming with birds that go in and out of the nave, its doors wide open. They are sparrows or swallows or something of the small, nervous, chirpy sort. Right above us, one hangs upside down, one of its legs tied with string to a beam, wings fanned into an elegant curve. It sways ('I sway - in place - to a slow - disco', sings St Vincent (Williams and Clark, 2017), who is a different kind of saint than the ones de Certeau wrote about). It swirls. I wonder how long it has been dead. I think its eyes are closed. Its feathers seem, from where I stand, intact.

It is so perfectly poised, hanging upside down in this church, a miniature Saint Peter. I try to imagine how the bird could have gotten itself tangled with the string, and maybe exhausted itself to death, but I come up short.

Little bird above, open winged before the cross, dreaming eternal dreams of flying. So much sadness unfolded into its grace.

We are all animist here, says one of the compulsory guides, after the church visit (or is it before? Memory, like sight, fails me at a distance). Christians, Muslims, all of us – we all carry a bit of magic in a bag, some grigri, no matter what. Each dream, we say, is a sacrifice. We bring forward a ribbon, some sugar, a cock. Whatever, no matter how small. Whether it is a good dream or a nightmare, though, well – that does change things.

7.2 Anti malaria pill dream

In a dark room, the ghost of little people, childlike but not children, appear around me. The way they close their eyes makes me wonder if they are blind. I must tap their eyelids very, very gently, absorbing any sadness they may have dragged into the afterlife. The tapping needs to be just so, otherwise I absorb too much at once, and it hurts. I am not scared, which surprises me in the dream itself. This is simply something I am able to do, a job – a power, but not a gift.

8. Body-site (iconography)

8.1 Cloth

Back in San Marco, in the fresco in cell 7, Saint Dominic reads his book, red star ablaze. Mary looks vaguely onwards. Dominic's legend is a European zigzag, outer motion shaping the self. But as much as hagiographical lives may be places, the difference between a holy man's, and a holy woman's is salient. The default male saint described by de Certeau inhabits history with a spatial largesse not afforded to her. Her story and gift are confined to the space of her body.

As the ideal Christian woman, Mary is a perfect theological and biological vessel for one of the most successful stories ever told. Devoid of her own secret, oneiric fire, or private interiority, she is all womb. It does not take much to construct her as architecture. It comes so naturally, indeed, that the Marian tradition is full of it. Georges Didi-Huberman, in his book about Fra Angelico, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, calls the Virgin a 'figure-place' (1995: 68), further developing it into 'the place par excellence, that is, the receptacle, the throne, the chair, the nest, the dwelling, the temple, etc.' (68).

Her life-as-place is inwards, and literal. Mary is the mother of the capital c Church, and the embodiment of a temple, low cap c church: an embrace made of brick, mortar, stone, clay, glass, marble. She is a p(a)lace of cloth, too ('architecture is soft like a body if you undo it' (Rendell 2011: 31)). Mary contains the story and its embodiment, shrouded. Architecture becomes the dressing and undressing of a shared cultural body.

8.2 Mercy

This tradition is clearly materialised in the Virgin of Mercy. Iconographically, her perennial blue cloak is shown lifted, either by herself or, occasionally, by a handful of obliging angels. This reveals without failure a tiny crowd grabbing at her skirts. The examples are numerous across Europe, Marys looking anywhere between proud and bored; humans either crawling and needy, or static in blind, unblinking faith.

Mercy's iconology tells a story about womanly bodies that has been told since the beginning of time. In its stretch, the Ancient Egyptian goddess Nut spreads her blue wings; or acrobatically performs a bridge, making her the vault of the sky, framing a vignette of human or divine activity with her legs, torso, and arms. Depictions make her skin starry, colour it cerulean blue or golden yellow. She swallows and births the sun God Ra every day – sometimes burning red spheres describe the cycle in her body, too. Her physical boundaries are atmosphere, her positive space defines the human negative space.

All the way across time, Francesca Woodman looks similarly upwards from a bent self-portrait, *On Being an Angel* (1977). Echoes of Mercy and Nut are still brightly resonant in an untitled still from the same period, where a young woman hangs from the massive door frame of a Roman

flat with hexagonal tiles. Selves that hold stories, places made via holding stories, and bodies made site by the stories they hold.

Look even further, two decades later, Tracey Emin's *Everyone I have ever slept with* (1995). a ready-made camping tent (blue and yellow), stands for Emin's embodied self. In it, carefully sewn letters, naming, as the title informs, everyone she had slept with from 1963 to 1995. The notion of sleeping with is literal, spatial. In the tent, inside the protective blue, a visitor could find the name of the artist's lovers as well as her grandmother's, or her unborn foetuses'. Far from saintly, Emin lifts her cloak and reveals herself as the architect of her own story, of her own space.

9. Give (conclusion)

Despite being in conversation with Christian imagery and locations, this text is not faithful. Nonetheless, it still is a collection of places, from San Marco to Joal-Fadiouth, with stints into virtual, oneiric, and pictorial sites, a non-disclosed homebase elsewhere. While there is no gift to lock within the personal terrain defined by these fragments, the sui generis itinerary reveals a singular interiority as the only common thread. Through the spilling, 'double movement' of site-writing a connection is established between the intimate, embodied experience, and the 'higher beings' of culture. By creating unexpected de Certeauian passages that make it inhabitable, ekphrastic architecture defamiliarises imagery and narratives. This way, too, this written architecture becomes an embodied Denkraum, a thinking space with an actual, physical subject palpably in it. The presence of this figure, in this case my autotheoretical self, does not aim to attach the experience of the site to one particular being, but rather, to act as a mediator, or even a surrogate for the reader and the stories they may contain, creating further connections beyond the terrain and scope of the text. The self given up in the process is a willing vessel, a site-figure devoid of its own iconography, holding as a way of giving, and pouring as a way of dwelling. A body quietly swaying, arms stretched, to a slow song played elsewhere, centuries ago, which does it no harm.

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