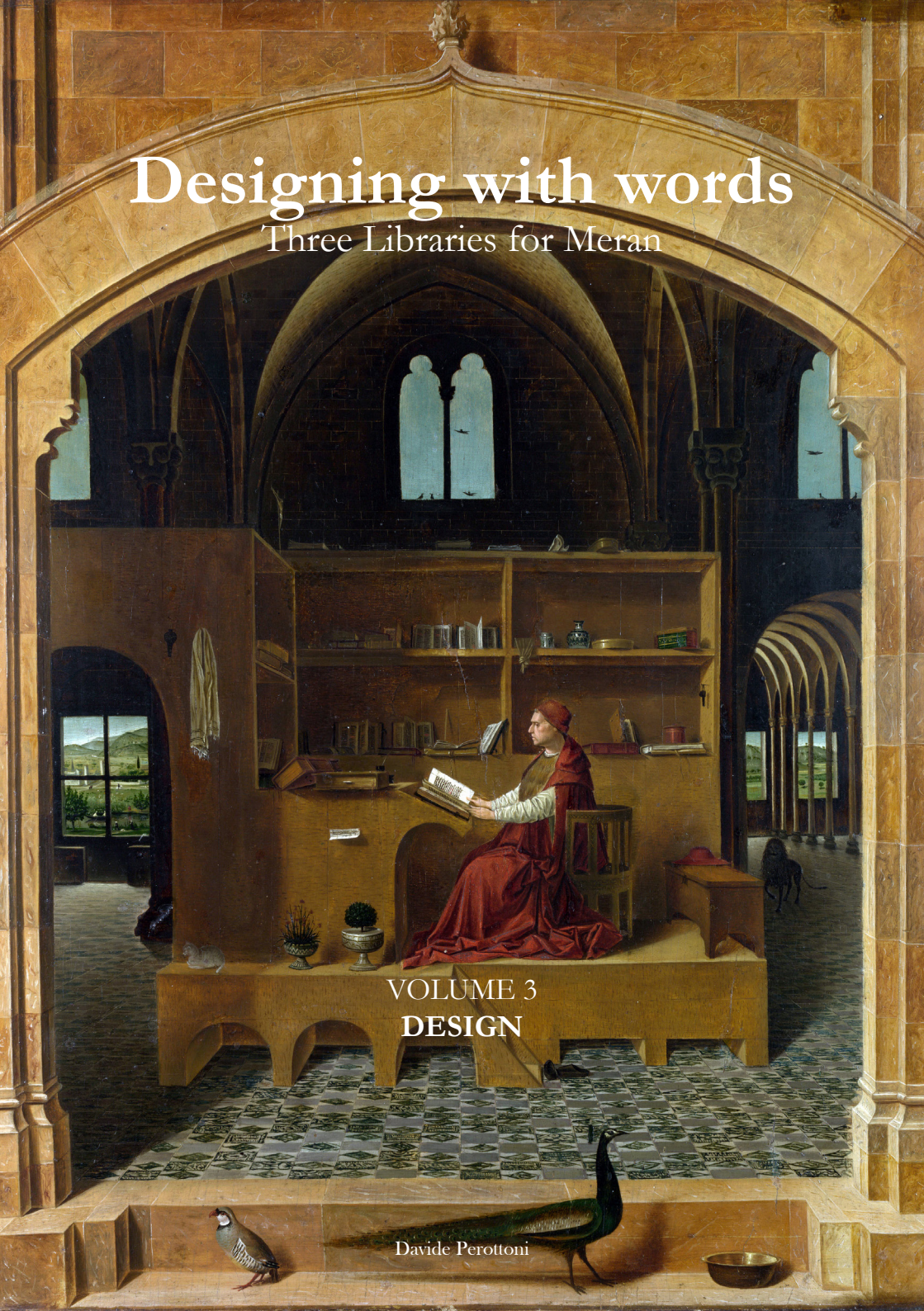


# Designing with words

Three Libraries for Meran

VOLUME 3  
DESIGN

Davide Perotoni





# Designing with Words

Volume 3: ANALYSIS

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**Walking around Meran**  
*Looking for three libraries with Antonio Manfredi*



*Ecco l'ultima salita  
poi la discesa, e  
si chiude il cerchio  
del tuo quotidiano  
cammino verso  
una meta, che quanto  
più sembra avvicinarsi  
più s'allontana - perchè  
quel quotidiano cammino  
è il tuo destino.*

A. Manfredi, from *Itinera*

*Nature is a temple in which living pillars  
Sometimes give voice to confused words;  
Man passes there through forests of symbols  
Which look at him with understanding eyes.*

*Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance  
In a deep and tenebrous unity,  
Vast as the dark of night and as the light of day,  
Perfumes, sounds, and colours correspond.*

*There are perfumes as cool as the flesh of chil-  
dren,  
Sweet as oboes, green as meadows  
And others are corrupt, and rich, triumphant,*

*With power to expand into infinity,  
Like amber and incense, musk, benzoin,  
That sing the ecstasy of the soul and senses.*

C. Baudelarie, *Correspondences*

Antonio arrives in Bozen in the early morning, the sun is just starting to light the mountains on the west of the wide valley, covered in fields and small towns. Until here, the valley of the Adige drives you onward since its start, north of Verona. The perspective of the mountains and their almost tunnel-like presence is felt all along the road running beside the river. In Bozen tough, the road divides, continuing north toward the pass of Brenner to Austria and steering westward, following the river towards the snow covered mountains and the city of Meran. That is his direction. He stops in Bozen only briefly, as if deciding on the possibilities that this crossroad of valleys offers, even though he has made up his mind already; his decision has been taken on the seaside in Viareggio, in a country that does not seem to be the same one he is in now, but then how much does a political division matter to a poet and painter? He knows too well the difference between a map and what it represents; he's been studying these places on paper for long enough, now he has to feel them, feet on the road and eyes gazing.

He steers his car westward, passing by the southern neighbourhoods of Bozen, to go and visit the place so many before him have found inspiring and relaxing. As he follows the course of the Adige river he thinks of the people whose course he is following now. Franz Kafka and Stephan Zweig are the firsts to come to his mind, Empress Elisabeth is in the background, a figure

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for the concept of the crossroad of valleys in Meran, see  
Volume 2, p.44

the literature about the site informs the way in which it is  
observed and experienced

which colours these recollections of a light that is no more part of this world.

On the sides of the mountain, bulky and covered in thick forests, the castles look down on him, or at least they seem to do so to him. They are like the figures he is thinking of, still powerful and impressive in their image but part of a time and an empire that is no longer, living only in memories and books.

As the car slowly proceeds along the valley, following the gentle course of the river and its tree covered banks – the water is barely visible or not at all, it is the banks and the vegetation growing on both sides that reveal its presence – the eye moves from one castle to the other, sometimes confusing them for sheer formations of rock amongst the forest and vice versa. Soon enough what he was looking for appears, he has had views of them before on his trip and even more he has felt their presence, but now it is different. At the end of the valley, straight to the north - or so it seems thanks to the absolute directionality of road - river and foothills conspire to push him forward as if their effect on his mind was as strong a propeller as the engine quietly humming beneath the hood of the car. What he is looking for has finally appeared. Appear, it is a fortunate word to express this particular phenomenon because it is with almost religious awe and excitement that Antonio finally witnesses what he has dreamed of for so long.

The mountains are there. Like a wall at the end of the





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valley, their presence so clear and striking, so simple and magnificent, that he can finally think “I am there, almost”.

That is one of the many tricks the mountains can play on you, seeming so close and yet being so distant, as if you could cover hours of strenuous walking by reaching out with your hand. Instead the road goes on, almost straight towards that jagged wall illuminated by the morning sun and melted into a single entity by the mist in the air and its bluish hue, gradually changing from the valley to the sky.

The mountains, this ethereal and yet so real presence. They are, in his mind, both an idea and a physical thing; they are the reason, at least the main one, for which he decided to abandon his native place on the seaside and travel north. North, such a powerful word. To the poet and painter it is much more than a geographical indication; it is colours and meanings, a sort of poetic covered in blue hues and grey rocks, the cold of the snow and the warmth of the candle light behind a cottage window. *Window with falling snow is arrayed, long tolls the vesper bell...*

The north and the mountains, that is what he has come here to look for, that is what lays in front of him in the sheer presence of an apparition, embodied in a wall of woods and rock topped with the first snows. Yes, he has reached his goal; the signs of the landscape appear as clear and readable as the road signs announcing Mer-

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the mountain, along with the book, is the crucial element around which this whole work is carried out; see Volume 2, p.102 for an analysis of the mountain

see R. Daumal, *The Analogue Mountain*

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quote from G. Trakl, *A winter evening*; the poem has had a huge influence in the definition of the idea of homeliness in the mountains

an. He pushes harder on the pedal, more mentally than physically, and a sort of euphoria seems to be growing in him, recognising for the first time something he had only thought of, transfigured in the work of nature and that of man following it.

North and mountains, they are synonyms in his mind, the mind of an Italian. For Italy that is what the North is, at least in the strictest sense; the majestic crown of the Alps, separating continent and peninsula, the Italian province from the others of an empire that although long dead still survives in the memory and culture of its inhabitants. But just like the mountains, which are part of the earth and contemporaneously beyond it, the north, the border, is part of the country in a way that surpasses the mere geographical understanding. Antonio has come to look for this as well, and it is easy to recognise this alterity not many kilometres north of Trento – the last really Italian city as the Roman Church once confirmed – in the double language, German first, of the street signs marking its progression toward his goal.

As the city gets nearer, the mountains, which at first seemed to be a compact and vertical wall, now start to stand out and gain more definition. Valleys and minor ridges begin to appear out of the blue hue, giving place to the greens and yellows of the late autumn woods and the whites and greys of the rock mixed with snow, still too far to be able to tell them apart. The ideal di-

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mensionless entity of the mountain seen some minutes before, now slowly gains depth and detail, colours and shapes. Out of it, bathed in the cold and clear sun that so often brightens up this valley, a sort of hill grows towards the south, marking the centre of Meran.

The city is right at the feet of this peninsular hill, marking the joining of two valleys and their river. When Antonio gets close enough – now he can clearly see the buildings on the hill over Meran and even recognise the white of the mountain farms above him – he can see that what he thought was a wall marking is arrival is more of a crossing, giving way to two narrow valleys mysteriously and sensuously moving respectively towards the east and the west.

He can stop in this place, he may even spend more time than he thought, but it is too soon to worry about that now. Nevertheless, while he is crossing the southern neighbourhoods of the city, along the banks of the Adige, he is now convinced that coming here was the right choice. He can stay at least for a while, in a place that looks both like arrival and departure, whose background looks like an invite to both stop beneath and continue along it.

The city itself is quite small, although there are signs of settlement as far as the eye can see, from the bottom of the valley among the vineyards up to the limits of the woods in the mountains. He has parked his car at what seems to be the border of the city; the agglomeration

this will be the site for the Foothill Library; see Volume 2, p.128

on dwelling in the mountains see Volume 2, p.114

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of buildings of the last decades has started to sprawl along the main roads, making it difficult, at least from the point of view of the car, to tell the borders between city, outskirts and nearby towns.

The historical centre though, is very clear. You can hear it before actually seeing it; from the parking close to the hippodrome the Passirio guides you toward the centre of Meran and the sound of the water flowing follows you until you reach it. Both sides of the banks are shaded by huge beautiful trees.

Antonio is looking for a library in Meran, a way to know the place through the experience of others but especially, a place to work. He knows there are actually three of them, one in each of the mountain realms; valley, foothill and mountains. He knows their number and that their disposition is in relation to the peaks and their foothills, like so many other things here. One is in the valley, one on the foothills and one on the higher slopes of the mountain, where the forest gives way to the sheer rock and the perennial glaciers. He knows where they are but he actually doesn't, not in the true sense; he will have to look for them, one at a time.

He'll try an experiment on serendipity then, starting from the bottom and slowly climbing to the top, looking for the library and for his work, merged in this way by a metaphor that is abstract and physical at the same time. These libraries are one of the reasons he chose to come to Meran, he wanted to see how this thing

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for the relation between the city and the river see, Volume 2, p.36 and p.54

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this short story about Antonio is an open description of how the site visits were carried out and the modes by which the sites for the three libraries were identified

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see Volume 4, p.30





worked. The application of a metaphor - the different levels of learning and thinking - was applied to the actual landscape; somehow like Warburg's project, extended from the scale of a building to that of the territory. He is a lover of landscapes and it plays a central role in his whole work as an artist; colours and shapes, metaphors and analogies, or simply a way of attunement that allows him to employ its features and meanings to convey the ineffable of art and poetry. It may be interesting then, so he thought, to experience a mix of this, an embodiment of this process into a mark on the landscape, in the most solid of expressions of man that is architecture.

He will start from the valley, of course; he is just now walking along the banks of the Passirio, getting close to the centre of the city, marked by the bell tower emerging among rooftops and the canopies of trees. It looks as if many of the buildings he is passing by could be the one he is looking for, sober but playful palaces in the middle of well-kept gardens, parading along the walks that so many before him have strolled by in search of the same thing. Who knows, maybe one day they will make a little statue for him as well, underneath these white trees that are now shading him from the midday sun; not that shading is needed at this latitude and this time of year, it is more an aesthetic appreciation than a physical one. The river with its sound adds to the atmosphere created by buildings and trees, suspending the path and its wan-



derer among his thoughts while his eyes are prying left and right, in search of the right building; he knows that he'll recognise it as soon as he sees it.

Even though he is trying to keep his concentration on the level of the city it seems as if the trees and the buildings, in their lines and perspective, are guiding his eyes towards the sky, following that thin line where the cliffs of the mountains meet with the clear sky above; or maybe it is them, the mountains and the sky, that are attracting him, as if they had some kind of magnetic power on the gaze.

Among this thoughts, swift and confused like the water in the river bellows, his steps bring him closer to the centre of the city, to the bridge and the Kurhaus, cultural centre and symbol of the golden age of Meran. He had a glimpse of something before arriving there, on the previous bridge with the road leading into a perspective that was going straight to the mountains beyond, pulled by the golden lights of the fields on the foothills outside the city. That may lead to his first stop, what he calls the city library for lack of a better term, but the river and the buildings are guiding him along their path as if it was already too soon to enter the narrow medieval streets of the centre.

Like before, when he was approaching his goal at the much higher speed of the car, he has the sensation that the perspective is not changing, that the mountains are there at a distance that cannot be measured and there-





fore cannot change; but at the same time every time, he thinks about it and confront his reference points in his memory, he realises that the view continues to change. In the city this effect can be found everywhere once one starts noticing it; he thinks it may be a sort of ever-changing stillness – he likes to think in oxymoron and this place seems to lend itself particularly well to this rhetoric exercise - that seems to be even stronger because of the richness of relations between buildings, trees and mountains. What seemed to him at first as the highest and most important of the peaks around him is now hidden by a much lower mountain in front of it, the gothic steeple he passed by a few moments before, perfectly aligned to its rocky counterpart 3000 meters above, is now marking the entrance of the narrow valley in the west.

Finally, he has to enter the city centre, the path continues along the river into a park that seems to lead into the hills in the east; a very appealing stroll but he will have time for that later. He has arrived now at the junction between the city centre and its natural surroundings, properly marked by a larger park at the end of the path he was following. Here the city and the river meet and it is time to finally enter the historical centre.

The bell tower he was pointing to is now just a couple of rooftops away and a Roman arch into the compact mass of the buildings seems to be leading straight to it. If until now the feeling of estrangement, of having left

the Italy of his mind and youth, was conveyed to him by the landscape, now it is the turn of the buildings to tell the same story. There is no doubt that the culture which shaped this bulky structures with thick walls and small windows, steep roofs and bow-windows, is not the same that he has grown up in. The shapes, the colours, the dispositions and the decorations are like that of Innsbruck and Bozen; full of that medieval character that can properly be expressed and thought of only with the German language. The cathedral and its square are a clear example of this and so is the long street that seems to cut in half the thick fabric of the medieval centre, followed on both sides by low arcades sustained by thick pillars like trunks of plaster covered trees, roughly shaped like the volts they sustain.

Again, be it because of his goal of finding the library or because of the place itself – though it is probably a mix of both – he feels like being pulled along the inner street to a destination he cannot yet see. In these days of autumn the sun is reaching the stone pavement of the street for the last time before spring. The light from the store fronts and the windows above will be the only direct one for months to come, but the light colour of the plaster on the sober buildings will hopefully avoid the sense of darkness and oppression you could find in other medieval streets like this. The mountains are almost invisible now, the buildings are too high and their rooftops is cropping out a small path of sky, leading

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to the end of the street and a wide square that he has almost reached.

He is now on the street he looked down before, mid-way between the river and the hill covered in fields and scattered with lonely buildings and clusters of trees. There will be time for climbing later, he turns left towards the sun which has passed the zenith and heads towards the point where he thought he saw the library.

On his right, a white washed building with a high steeple tower seems to indicate his destination; before that, where the building joins with the one next to it, a low and thick arch like the one he has passed previously leads into a tunnel, the other side of which suggests more than it shows something like a cloister, or an internal courtyard. He has reached the library. He can hear the quite chatter of people having a break and the smell of coffee and cigarettes in the air, the light coming from the end of the short tunnel is filtered in a way he cannot yet decipher. It feels like those ice caves he has read about, where one enters through dark tunnels towards a source of light that seems to come from out of this world, filtered and mirrored by a thousand facets of ice.

The library is fitted into the urban fabric of the city, like many other modern buildings he has passed by, in a way that declares its presence and age but without stepping back in front of the historical neighbours. It is well integrated with the other buildings in the area, its mass quite compact, rising towards the sky with the

see A. Sifer, *Kok Crystal*. This was one of the first attempts of merging reading and observation towards design

see the final design in Volume 4, p.34 and the first design indications on Volume 2, p.166

paraphrase of the first two lines of a poem by A. Manfredi, "This daily / nook of my coffee"

same stereometry of the mountains around. Like them, it seems as if the library wants to be very physical but elemental at the same time; its materials and windows, many facets of the same thing. At the base it welds itself to the rest of the city via its system of arcades and courtyard, which seem to form a secondary public space, more intimate and scarcely visited by tourists or foreigners who do not quite understand if they are still on the street or if they are entering someone's backyard. Antonio thinks of a map of Rome a friend once showed him in which the engraver marked as black the public space of the city and included into it the accessible spaces of churches and courtyard. The image was that of a city very different from the one you could see by walking through it or by consulting a standard map; it is like the many gardens of Venice which no one can see behind their high walls. A city - and a building in the end is but a part of it - needs more levels of publicness, it needs the square as well as the courtyard, the boulevard and the alley; Antonio has come to love those kind of in-between spaces, like the one where he takes his coffee.

see *Piazza Grande di Roma* by G. Nollè

The light, trapped by the decorations of the building and the imposing stone arch of the tunnel barely penetrates the entrance of the old library. Just like the light, air and sound seem to be dampened as well, or rather to gain a quality completely different from that of





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the street outside. Along the street, the building, white-washed in fine white plaster, gypsum and finely polished stone, stands almost ethereal; a model built in real scale, an estranged remain of the city's past. Its windows are mute among the stuccoes and stone carvings shining in matte white, as if the building were just a stage set or, and this is much closer to the truth, as if its exterior were just the skin of an interior that was kept apart from the city by this ephemeral yet very real barrier. It seems as if, while the white building reflects the light, its few doors at ground floor are sucking it in. Antonio stepped into one of these openings, being attracted as the light is into the depth of this decorated box.

Silence, and after two heavy doors, even more silence. It takes a moment for the eyes to adjust to the new situation, the air is pleasantly cool although quite still. The atmosphere has already enveloped him, the walls are thick and he feels their presence as he steps through doors whose threshold is a solid plate of brass, large enough for a person to move around it. We consider walls in many ways in our spatial life, but it is by walking through an opening or leaning over a window sill that we feel the wall, its bodily presence next to ours, its surface appearance turned into weight and mass.

As Antonio steps through the second door his hand passes over the side of the wall, partly feeling its presence, partly feeling his own in response. The room has a high ceiling whose beams are almost invisible in the

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the picture of the previous page shows the existing building in its present conditions, the texts portrays it according to the design decisions

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the merging of real and ideal, fuelled by the reading of Daumal's *Ymaginaire* Mountain and fuelled by a poetic gaze is a constant theme throughout these texts

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the threshold is an important architectural device that has been declined in many ways



dim, low lights. Antonio looks instead at the floor, a smooth and lucid dark surface that has flooded the room, reflecting the low and scarce lamps while guiding his gaze towards what seems to be a huge block of wood. It is so big and seemingly rough that it looks alien in this setting, abandoned and self standing like an object trouvè amidst the regularity of the geometrical floor and the soberness of the masonry walls.

As he walks through the entrance, his eyes and all of his senses adjust to the new setting; he has left the city behind and now it seems to him to have stepped into a suspended place, out of time and weather, protected from decay and people. This sensation is only reinforced by the “liquid” pavement and the solid desk raising out of it in the diffused light of the windows. Even those are white, a milky white that seems to glow, pulverising the light coming from the outside into an ethereal presence. A similar presence seems to have enveloped the man sitting at the desk in front of him, he has raised his eyes when Antonio entered and then went back to the books scattered on the mahogany surface. His figure is so strikingly similar to the painting on the wall at his back that, for a moment, Antonio expects to find a lion crouching beneath the dark mahogany desk.

“I am not looking for anything specific”, Antonio says, “but I would like to visit the library”.

With a smile the librarian stands, making a soft noise over the polished floor, and he shows Antonio to the

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the painting is St. Jerome in his study by Antonello da Messina, a very important reference, it embodies the idea of library that is pursued in these volumes (see cover of this volume)

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the theme of the object trouvè, borrowed from LeCorbusier, G. Bachelard (*The Poetics of Space*) and P. Valéry (*Man and the Sashiki*) is very important in allowing to deal with objects under a poetic gaze

door on his right. As they cross that threshold, marked by stone lintel and pillar, the thickness of the walls becomes evident and Antonio can again feel it next to his body, the walls are larger than himself and he lets his hand slide over their surface, picturing in his mind their weight and sheer presence. There is no actual door between the first room and the one they entered now, there does not need to be one, the threshold itself marks the passage as efficiently as a triumphal arch. The new space is darker, Antonio greedily looks around to find the books he so longed for. The room, or at least the part of it he can perceive, is much bigger than the one he was in before; he can see milky white windows at the opposite wall, acting as the focal point for long perspective of shelves pin pointed by low lights aimed at the floor. The shelves are washed by a dim light coming from the top shelf, making them seem as if emerging from the reflecting floor. The ceiling is invisible at first, making Antonio wonder about its height. From the outside the building looked like many other historical ones he passed by in the centre of the town, its pure white colour, modulated only by its shape and mouldings, gave it an alien feeling that didn't estrange it from the other buildings though. In here, instead, it seems to Antonio as if he just walked into a different world; a shiny cave with windows whose lights he can't recognise, a world without a ceiling, where things repeat themselves upward book after book, shelf after shelf.

some words have a deeper meaning than their immediate significance, swoon in this case comes from a short story by E.A. Poe, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, see p.133

Nonetheless, his eagerness drags him on, guided by the librarian, his Virgil in this dark forest. The heavy shelves of wrought iron repeat themselves, one after the other, always a blank window punctuating their long perspectives, like a series of corridors leading nowhere.

Still, Antonio can't help but think that each corridor leads to hundreds of different places; he can feel their road signs on the back of the books his fingers lazily slide over. He would only need to pick one, open it, and his mind would project its content on the blank slate of the window at the end of the shelving. Only the thought of it is enough for him now, wondering about the incredible amount of possibilities, an attraction in itself for someone like him. The potential of a library is enough to make him swoon even before starting to exploit it. So he keeps moving along these shelves, until in what may be the middle of the building, a space wider and higher opens and Antonio can see and feel himself surrounded by the books. The thick walls open onto corridors of shelves and small dark rooms, their arches bend around the room he entered, as if under the incredible weight that surrounds them.

This, the librarian explains, is where the visitors can access the catalogue. There are computers, large tables for browsing, a few armchairs and, under the high windows from which the silhouette of the mountains can be seen, an old wooden filing cabinet. Drawers after drawers covered in letters, filled with cards and annotations.

see in Volume 2 the analysis on the libraries for the origin of these concepts

the coffer is an object whose idea has been declined in many ways in these texts, see the analysis of libraries in Volume 2

The computer is faster and easier to use of course, Antonio doesn't deny its many utilities, but he can't avoid thinking that this cabinet is a treasure in itself. It seems to him like the model of the library, a coffer full of paper keys to the library's secret.

With these thoughts intertwining with his perceptions, the librarian leaves Antonio in the heart of the building to go back to his post. The main library is about to open and people will start to ask for books to be brought out of this white grotto. Indeed, as the librarian had explained during his brief tour, the part of the library Antonio had entered through the white building is officially the archive. What used to be the old library is now a protected and secluded part of it where many of its volumes are stored for safety, cataloguing, lack of space or other reasons. The library itself was expanded around the time when the other two he is looking for where built, freeing the old building for the most protected and delicate functions.

archival spaces, their accessibility and architectural definition is always considered as much as other spaces of the library

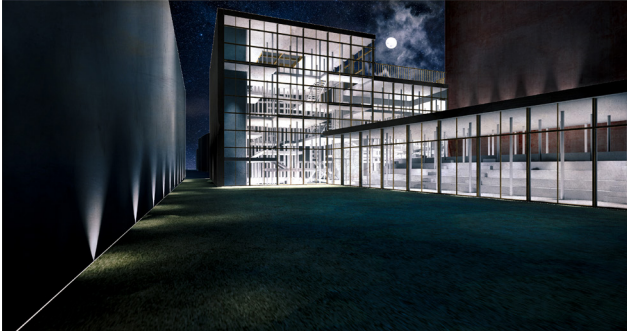
Following the indications of the librarian Antonio makes its way towards an heavy door at the end of a line of shelves and suddenly finds himself outside. This must be the place he perceived on the other side of the tunnel he found on the street shortly before; the old white library at his back, in front of him a towering black volume raises towards the sky and mountain peaks behind while the garden he finds himself in is surrounded on the right side by an arcade building and

for the definition of the various parts of the library see the poem on page 54

on the left and underneath the tower by a more modern construction glazed in glass. Although he just got out it seems to Antonio to be in the middle of the city library, sitting on the grass and stone pavement are people reading and chatting, someone is having breakfast at the tables on his right and he can see the activity going on inside the main library building. This piece of city, this inner courtyard, is showing him the life of the library and its connection with the city itself; after a brief stroll around the well-kept garden he enters through the bar, buzzing with its usual morning activity. Next to it he can see a wide flight of steps leading to a computer area where people are browsing newspapers and magazines, what strikes him most at this point is how varied the users are, from old people with regional newspapers whose names he can't recognise to youngsters browsing the computers and university students browsing magazines and books on display at the base of the stairs.

For sure this seems like a much more lively part of the library than the one he was in before; if the previous space was one of order, a meek place where everything quietly takes its place, this one he just entered is much more lively and varied, things as well as people seem to move around and adapt themselves to the place rather than tidily finding a fixed place. Thinking about this and looking around in a curious and exploratory way, Antonio climbs the stairs reaching a ramp that leads him to the main part of the building. Here the image that was





see the library analysis on Volume 2 for the pull of the books  
and the connection between physical and mental space that  
is described here

forming in his mind is reflected in what stands in front of him, a forest of pillars and planes without discernible order or logic punctuates the dense space he is facing. Even more than in the archive, Antonio now feels the pull of the books, hovering over and around him on many platforms of different height and dimensions; people and books are moving about, high shelves make space for reading tables and study spaces. From the height of the platform he is standing on he can see the ground floor and the main entrance, where librarians in their desks welcome the morning visitors and different areas emerge from the homogeneous floor and white structure. Without space for thoughts, Antonio starts climbing up ramps and stairs, moving around this aerial world from one place to the other, from one appealing shelf below him to a nice row of armchairs above. Apparently that is how you are supposed to use this space, or so he thinks judging from other people that seem to move at ease from one platform to the other, looking for a book or taking one to a reading area. Although today he just came to visit, Antonio plays this game of going around looking for shelves, of finding a table in the right light and then an armchair in a more quiet area; sometimes he can see quite widely around and upward and downward as well, giving him some kind of vertigo from the perspective of the many pillars and shelves playing around him; but in other cases the shelves themselves or the arrangement of the nearby planes hide the



rest of the building, thus creating a continuous play of open and closed.

Antonio could probably lose hours just by playing this game of hide and seek between himself and the library, although he believes that a library should create quiet and screen distracting influences this setting may work in creating a more engaging relation between the books and the readers. He may not like it after a while, after all he is no longer a student looking for excitement and engagement, but he definitely got pulled into it right away and started playing its game before even realising he was doing so. As he starts descending a long ramp underneath a light well running the whole length of the volume, his gaze and his mind goes back to the black tower he saw from the outside. He is now walking along its outer wall, facing the deep dark plaster washed by the light coming from the skylight above. Of course this must be the third part of the library the librarian told him about; they have an archive, which he visited before, the main library, with all its standard functions which he just finished playing with and a more particular space, the black tower. This, the librarian said, is the heart of the library, where the most important books are catalogued to find their place and where the essence of Meran takes place through its collection. What he meant by that was that in the tower there was a specific part of the library, a place where the relation between Italian and German culture was studied and given a spe-



cific place.

This is exactly what Antonio was looking for and as he makes his way along the corridor piercing the dark volume he wonders what that might look like exactly. As he reaches the end of the dark tunnel though, his thoughts stop abruptly, muted by the impact of the space he just walked in. At first he can see only light and books, coming from the dark corridor it takes him a few seconds to adjust its perceptions, to perceive the light coming from a glass ceiling high above and the walls of shining books surrounding him. For some reason the first image that flashes through Antonio's mind is that of a painting he once saw in Rotterdam, a beautiful depiction of the Tower of Babel by Bruegel, with its many layers and warm colours. This isn't the same thing though, he is looking at the tower from the inside and its layers, marked by railings, grow wider and wider as they get higher thus exalting the overpowering presence of all the books growing around him. Letting his senses adapt to the new place, Antonio moves closer to the shelves and understands why the books looked so shining; indeed they are kept in a very particular kind of shelves that seem to him like a beehive, or like many glass tabernacles stacked on top of each other. Each niche containing a few books is closed by a panel of amber coloured glass, giving them a sacral feeling, besides protecting them from the harmful effect of natural light, as the librarian had explained in the archive.

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for the architectural definition of this similarity with  
Bruegel's painting see Volume 4, p.58

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the choice of the word tabernacle is not by chance, indeed the library is  
seen as the temple of books (see Volume 2 on the libraries)



On each side of this square well of light an opening stands among the books at each level; entering the one opposite him, Antonio reaches a staircase and climbs a couple of floors. Although less imposing, the view from here is wider and he can easily gaze up and down, left and right, over the encased books washed by the light which is showering down almost vertical at this point. Doing so, he moves along the walkway and crosses one of the thresholds in the wall of books reaching a wide room. Normal shelves this time are all along the walls, encircling a series of tables where a few people are reading and writing underneath their own lamp. The atmosphere here is much more quiet than in the main library, sounds and light are very subdued and no external influence can be perceived in this space. Continuing his exploration Antonio moves around this room and the others it connects with. He soon finds out that each floor around the central well is organized in a symmetrical sequence of bigger and smaller rooms, all equipped for studying, reading and writing; common tables and small sofas, single desks and armchairs define the spaces along with the books, ever present on the walls. It is clear also, that each room has its own topic, Antonio starts to understand it by reading some of the titles and authors he passes by. In the same way, each floor is a bigger category of knowledge. Indeed it may be true what the librarian proudly told him, that this structure gives body to the essence of Meran, to its being at the





### 3. DESIGN

same time southern and northern, Italian and German. It is thus with a smile that Antonio makes its way down the staircase, anticipating the coming days when he could make use of this place and start discovering it; he can already see himself sitting somewhere in here with a few titles that teased his mind already during this brief survey.



these friends are not the normal kind but books that inform Antonio's visit as the alter ego of the designer: in this case the book is P. B. Valente's *Leggendari Meranesi*

As Antonio exits the library, the mountains in the west start to cast their shadows; it is time to follow the sun and climb above the valley, as some friends have explained, to reach the “terrace” of Meran. From the medieval centre of the city one can take almost any road towards the north and the mountains above and end up on one of the promenades running along the hill of Meran. These are very comfortable paths, paved in ochre packed-ground, that run through exotic and autochthonous vegetation. From the base of the hill at the end of the city, Antonio, with the inevitable book and notebook under his arm, climbs over the many terraces covered in trees and bushes, all carefully labelled by the municipal gardeners. It takes just a few minutes of easy strolling to surpass the height of the buildings below and be level with the steeples rising above the maze of roofs and alleys. As he turns south to measure his progress the valley opens up to him, this time it is the fields and the foothills appearing in front of his eyes in the lushness of colours and lights given by the autumn sun. His gaze, made more active by the physical exercise, keeps turning from the mountaintops to the valley and back again, from a realm to the other. He really does feel, even more than he did before, as if this place marks a passage between a world and another. There's the valley in the south, with its towns and fields, the river and the gentle shadows of the moraine hills; opposite that, in the north, are the steep valleys covered in woods



with only few isolated buildings underneath the snowy peaks. Antonio enjoys taking all this in, following the rhythm of his breathing, pristine air feeding his muscles and fresh views for his eyes.

The fields follow him on his ascent, passing by a few villas and farm buildings, some of which have a room and a terrace to stop and enjoy the view with a glass of wine and a sandwich. The road follows the inclination of the hill, gently climbing it without opposing it; when it seems to be pointing straight towards Castle Tyrol in the distance, it turns back to the south, aiming at the top of the promontory overlooking the city. There are other paths climbing this hill and even a cable ride bringing you straight to the top, but Antonio wanted to experience the place and breathe its air, hence taking the longest and most panoramic one. He is seeing this walk as part of the work he intends to do in the library on the top of the hill, it seems right to access in this way a place of retirement, suspended between valley and mountain.

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this introduces a fourth project, that of the path connecting the libraries and its importance in the definition of the libraries themselves and the choice of their site

Approaching from the west, Antonio makes his way towards the tip of the promontory. The road is less steep now and it follows the inclination of the slope cutting perpendicular to it, along the lines of the vineyards. The vines are indeed what gives structure to this place; along with the apple orchards they draw their lines everywhere there is no woods, covering the whole valley up to the forest line. Their presence guides An-

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see the analysis of the field on Volume 2, p.82



tonio and gives rhythm to his steps, framing and hiding the landscape around him as he walks. Soon the now flat road veers smoothly to the left and the library appears around the corner. There's no doubt here that this is the end of the road, it veers towards a tower as high as the slopes it leans to, standing on a wide platform encircled by water. The building is overlooking the valley from an incredibly advantageous point, this is the tip of the promontory connecting Meran with its mountains; the whole city unfolds at Antonio's feet, his gaze taking turns between the valley beneath and the tower opposite it.

Perfectly round and clad in polished stone, the tower seems to offer itself to the south sun playing with its surface, as if the tower were the figurehead of a huge boat headed south down the green canal of the valley. Its high, narrow windows don't allow to see its interior from the outside, they remind Antonio of those slits you find in castles and fortifications. This military character though is one of observation, not control; the tower stands without imposing itself, its character very introvert if it weren't for the platform, it gives a sense of retire and balance from and with the components of this landscape. Antonio can't help but look at the tower and then and the valley, back and forth in a kind of oscillatory motion that swings from north to south, up and down, while swiping from east to west in a spiral movement that covers all he has in front without

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for the definition of this design see in this volume the chapter on the Foothill Library

these kind of metaphors are very important in the definition of the character of the building, see Volume 1, p.77

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see in the Foothill Library section the text Suspension and Balance





for an architectural elaboration of these movements and their influence on composition see Volume 4, p.92

fixing on anything. In doing so he has moved around the wide platform on which the tower stands, again the feeling is that of a deep interrelation between landscape and place, between the valley of Meran and this tower library; a relation without which the valley wouldn't be seen as this and without which there would be no tower at all, just like with the castles you can see from here. The mountain it clings to and the valley it looks onto seem to be the two elements that create this place, in his movements it seems to Antonio as if the tower plays as the pivot of this balance. He moves towards the border of the platform, the water doesn't allow him to reach it, cropping out the foreground from this detached view. As he gets there, though, the shape of the platform and the wide angle of the view make him turn around again towards the tower and the mountain peaks barely visible above, crowning its top.

The sound of the water and the general quietness of the place, along with the slight strain of walking up there, has put Antonio in a quiet and reflective state. He tries more than once this spiral dance on the platform, trying his gaze all around; for the first time since he reached Meran he is able to order its elements and build them into a bigger picture. Now he can clearly see the difference between North and South, incredibly strong, but East and West as well. From here, the mountains and their peaks are less mystical presences and start to acquire detail, depth, scale. In a similar

for the sound of the water and its effects on the atmosphere see Volume 2, p.36, the idea of water as something more than an element can be traced back to J. Brodsky, *Warenmark*

manner, the city is visible as a whole, its relation to the mountains, the fields surrounding it and the river. The Adige river shows its nature from here, a silver ribbon at once backbone and artery of all that is visible from this panoramic view; a metallic snake coming from the north-west and going south, more alive than anything else from Antonio's point of view, surrounded by the same water that feeds the river down there.

The tower has a large opening at its base, spanned by a jaw shaped beam carved underneath what seems to be the weight of the whole mountain. The inside is clad in dark wood, covering scratched steel and polished concrete. This is a small bar connecting the life of the library with that of its surroundings; scholars with their books and glasses are enjoying a coffee next to tourist families and locals on their daily stroll. At the back of this low and wide room, a door opens in a curved wall. Antonio makes straight for it after a brief look around, he has taken in the place on the platform outside, now it's time for him to explore its inner secrets.

The door opens on a spiral staircase whose rough walls drip light from an unseen source above, it climbs around a crystal tube that must be the elevator's shaft. Antonio slowly makes his way over the steel steps, the sound of his ascent echoes around him as he grips firmly the wooden handrail protruding from the wall. It takes him little to climb the first flight of stairs but as he reaches the landing the view in front of him has

one of the results of understanding the building as a character is its humanisation so that its door becomes a mouth, shaped like a jaw

radically changed. A threshold of steel and stone makes a sound as he steps on it, introducing Antonio to a circular room. All around him are books on shelves, the smell of wood mixes with that of paper as he takes it all in. In front of him, a circular desk mirrors the shape of the tower; heavy and decorated, like the one he found in the library in the city, a different librarian sits behind its mahogany carvings. Around him, steel shelves are arranged in circles, opening into rooms and niches created by the shelves themselves. Through them, Antonio can glimpse the windows of the tower, high slits of lights hosting books and sometimes a desk and a chair. The shelves are not so packed, giving a sense of filtered transparency to the space, allowing the light to filter through and the gaze to wonder. Even so, Antonio doesn't understand at first why the light gets brighter towards the centre, as if the librarian's desk was attracting it from all around. Following the light he rises his gaze and the secret of the library is revealed. It isn't the solid tower of stone he thought of from outside, an empty well runs through its core, from the desk to the sky above. All around it, iron shelves and golden railings shine in the zenithal light, Antonio can almost hear the pages rushing from a gust flowing inside this well of light and books. He is still too low to clearly make out what's at the top of the tower, beside a lot of light, that is.

As he climbs upward, floor after floor, the library

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the shelves themselves, that is to say the books are the ones that shape the space (see the library analysis on Volume 2)

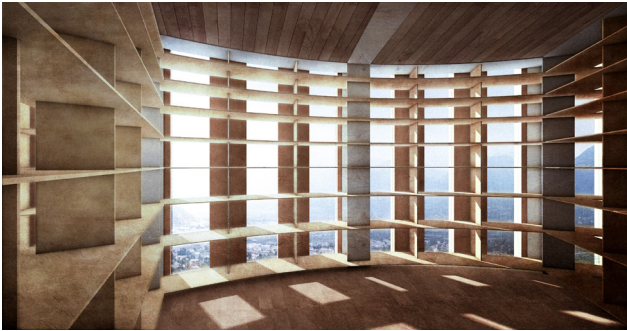


see the text *Living the Library* for the definition of the internal spaces of the tower

reveals itself to him. Its steel skeleton is visible from the inside, penetrating the tower like the rays of light through its vertical windows. It becomes the shelves and the floors, shaping light and space; each floor is organised differently in a play of circles and lines, of small nooks and wider spaces. A few times Antonio crosses path with another visitor who simply nods at him, no human sound can be heard inside this machine of metal and wood. When he sees somebody sitting in front of a window, at a desk that is part of the shelving and structure, for a moment he doesn't even realise that it is a person he's looking at, lost as he is in the reveries the library has stimulated in him. During his ascent he has already noticed a couple of nooks he'll like to try himself, the afternoon light caressing the mahogany surface and the reddish stone bleeding its colour over the pages on the desk. The labels and titles on the shelves have struck something in him as well, there must be some kind of order he unconsciously recognises, but in the excitement of the discovery he hasn't yet been able to work it out. On the last flight of stairs he can see the origin of the light in the staircase, a glass roof crossed by metal beams which hold the elevator and stairs; the light coming from the tower's inner core seems to get brighter as well, floor by floor.

Light and books. He was thinking that as he was trying to give a name to the visit, but now, Antonio's mind is practically screaming it, as is the room in which he

here again the idea of Warburg's library makes a subtle appearance



see Volume 2, p.130 for the relation between the design indications arising from the analysis and the final results described here and illustrated in Volume 4, p.94

stands. The last floor is free of shelves but for its outer walls, the high windows aren't screened by them either and the ceiling is a large elliptical surface of sky, veined like a leaf by steel beams. The surface of the roof is pitched towards the north, framing the mountain peaks above and opening the room towards the southern valley in front. People are enjoying the light to browse books on the plain tables arranged neatly around the opening in the pavement encircled by a simple railing. Leaning onto it, Antonio can swiftly see the librarian at his desk five floors below him encircled in a perspective of shelves before a fit of vertigo forces him to step back.

Satisfied of his first exploration, Antonio goes back to the first floor where he meets the librarian still at his desk. He had made arrangements for a small apartment in the tower, although it isn't clear to him where that may be, since he has crossed the whole library from bottom to top without seeing anything but books, shelves and desks. The librarian smiles at his remark and leads him back towards the stairs; one floor below they see the bar and keep descending. They are now underground, artificial light marks the top sides of a curving corridor and in front of them an arch of polished concrete opens onto a descending staircase. At each step it seems to Antonio that they are getting deeper and deeper into the mountain, he slides his hand over the marble handrail carved into the rough wall, feeling for dew he cannot





from the idea of *mens sana in corpore sano* this library shapes  
itself in two main elements, one for the mind - the tower -  
and one for the body - the basement

find. Another polished arch stands at the end of the staircase, opening into a room lit from above, although either by sun or electricity, he cannot tell. A desk stands in the middle in a similar fashion of the one in the tower; the librarian writes Antonio's name in a ledger and gives him a key, saying something with a smile about shelving books above and people below.

The tower basement is a simple and quiet place, furnished for the living of the researchers who study here and to take care of their bodies as much as the library above takes care of their minds. Indeed, as Antonio notes the daily activities and observations at the desk in his room, looking over the lights of the valley around him, a sense of repose takes over him. *Mens sana in corpore sano* he thinks, and indeed, it seems to him that his thoughts as well as his muscles have reached a quiet satisfaction. After the climb from the city to here, the excitement of the library has been followed by the steam and water of the baths. Dark and clad in wood and stone as much as vapour and misty light, the baths are the core of the basement and the counterpart of the library above. Here the space itself seems to block thoughts, as if one was to overwhelmed by the heat and vapour, or by the lack of sounds or sights, both impeded by the low light and the atmosphere of the air. In here one does not think with one's mind, it rather is the body itself that starts to think. In the dark and damp spaces, filled with silence and water, Antonio abandoned itself,



along with a few other guests, to the sound of the water echoing and the feeling that body and mind are relaxing in unison.

This whole place seems to play a lot with light and to construct its spaces according to it. The living quarters, along the outer wall of the circular basement, have direct access on a garden overlooking the vineyards and the whole valley; windows from pavement to ceiling frame big pieces of landscape and follow the course of the sun. The inner spaces of the basement instead are illuminated through the water of the pool above, thus creating a space that although well lit keeps its distance from the outside world; a distance that only increases as one goes towards the centre of the basement. Here heavy doors lead to a cold space, completely dark if not for many thin rays of light escaping a steel hemisphere hanging from the ceiling. The room is cold and damp and underneath the steel bowl a spiral staircase climbs to a lower level. As he climbs down, making his way in the beams of light, it seems to Antonio as if he is stepping in some odd kind of cave; artificial, for sure, but alien nonetheless, as if it weren't actually meant for people.

Indeed, as he reaches the bottom of the stairs to a cold room, echoing the drops of dew falling from the ceiling above, he can see the archive of the library through glass doors. They glow of a warm suffused light, as if the stairs just transported him somewhere deep into the

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for the definition of these spaces see the text *Living the library* in the Foothill Library section of this volume

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similarly to the City Library the archive spaces are important and receive their own atmospheric definition



mountain, a place for fairy tales and pagan myths. A curved enfilade of concrete arches and pillar unfolds on both sides of him, strained as if they were indeed holding the weight of the mountains above; low and cold light punctuate the arches, fading to the left and right. Among the concrete structure, heavy cast iron shelves - just like those in the city library's archive - are laden with books of all kinds. This is the deep core of the library, the magma chamber feeding the crater above. Except for a table with chairs at the entrance, the space is completely reserved to books. Modern editions show off their colourful backs in the first rows of shelves; books with custom bindings are huddled in groups of leather and canvass colours; older books and even a few manuscripts rest on shelves covered by glass panels. Satisfied of his first exploration, Antonio climbs the spiral staircase again, feeling the air on his skin as the exact opposite of the baths where he was shortly before, and he makes for the dining room. The valley's light are shining through the many windows framing the landscape all along the big room, warm light mixes with soft chatter and the smell of food as Antonio makes of the sofas and armchair to introduce himself to his fellow guests.



From the belvedere on the hill over Meran where the second library is located the road continues climbing towards the mountains. Having already climbed at the top of the peninsular hill, the road in front of Antonio looks plane enough and the hill feels like a terrace overlooking three valleys, the largest one to the south and the two alpine ones to the east and west. A few scattered houses are visible from the road and from them the eye gazes on and on, following the sinuous bends of the rivers, the lines of the fields on the hills and the woods which seem to cover everything between the bottom of the valley and the rocky peaks above. Castel Tyrol towards the east is standing on its throne of rock, and getting closer to it, Antonio starts to wonder where does the rock stop and the building begin. It is not a philosophical question, although the atmosphere of the clear autumn day and the easy path are fuelling all sort of abstract thoughts. Now he has entered the town of Tyrol and he immediately finds a path that runs next to it, much better than the asphalt one passing through the centre. From here the castle is very close, getting more clear and detailed almost at every step, and yet he cannot really see where is the line marking the border between the work of man and that of nature. Maybe there is some truth in the legends he read in the library about giants building castles and churches in this part of the Alps.

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regarding the woods see Volume 2, p.88

from P.B. Valence, *Legende Meranesi*

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From Tyrol a path leads straight to the castle which is





just a few minutes away, Antonio has a different goal for today though and his steps bring him closer to where the hill gives way to the actual mountain; a border that's quite easy to trace, even for someone used to the sea side. The gentle hill covered in fields, meadow and spacious woods starts climbing steeper and steeper, the woods are more thick and there are no more fields. Soon enough Antonio has to adjust his pace as his breathing threatens to get out of control; if you do not see where the mountain start, be assured, it will make you notice it when you meet it.

The steeper path requires more concentration and Antonio needs to stop to enjoy the view which he gains meter by meter. Compared to the hill he was on before, the view has completely changed now, and that is not only in terms of how far he can see or how small the houses are. If before he was overlooking the city, as if enjoying its presence from a retired spot, now it is the whole valley he is looking at and the height and the distance makes the experience very different. Going on the hill is like stepping back from a subject in order to get the bigger picture, to see things more clearly while still being part of their environment. Now instead, the city and the valley are something far away; even though he can recognise the most characteristic buildings, it is as if the height has put an invisible barrier between him and them. Antonio takes out his monocular which he has brought to observe the wildlife and starts looking at the

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these considerations are very important in the definition of the three mountain realms of valley, foothill and mountain from which the three libraries stem. see Volume 2, p.19



people in the city.

The path continues and after the last town it has become a real mountain path, excluding the inhabitants of the hof this is a road that you can do only by foot. The time of the mountain and all of its constraint is imposing on the visitor who is obliged to adapt himself to it. Steady pace and breathing in sync, the thoughts following the rhythm dictated by feet and terrain, the path in its unfolding and dwindling along fields and through woods guides mind and body, thought and gaze. The valley below is now seen as something other, unfolded in a panoramic perspective that merges all its elements into a single big picture, roofs and trees giving texture to the same effect, only the Adige with its silver stream remains a clear element, distinct from the rest.

After a couple of hours of easy trekking through all the autumn colours the Alps can muster, Antonio reaches a crossing of the path; on the left it continues towards the peaks above, barely visible through the thick canopies of the beech trees, while on the right it follows the ridge south in the thick of the forest. He knows that following that path which seems to lead nowhere he will find the last library he is looking for; at dinner in the library yesterday they spoke about this curious house, owned by a founder of the libraries in the city. A lover of mountains and books who built his own personal retire in the middle of both; or rather, this is the impression Antonio got, he built an homage

again, the path is no mere infrastructure but a constituent part of the buildings and their experience

the time of the mountain is a very important concept in the definition of the state of retire of the mountain library and in general in the definition of the building characters the mountain imposes itself in many ways other than the morphological one



this is another example of the use of the alter ego or of personifying ideas and goals

to both, a little chapel to books and mountains perched on the Mutkopf.

Tired by the climb and influenced by the muffled atmosphere of the wood, Antonio makes his way along the path as in a procession; he realised when he stopped at the crossing that this trip is turning out to be a sort of pilgrimage. The sound of his steps, muffled by the dead leaves on the ground, the light filtered by the canopies that seems to come from all directions, the smell of wood and the breeze ascending from the deep valleys on both sides of the path all contribute to this feelings. He has left the path marked by the comforting red and white of the alpine tracks and he is now following one that is barely visible, a trace of animal life crossing through this vegetable realm. Indeed, Antonio is so absorbed in this calm presence of the place around him that as he reaches the clearing with the house he has almost forgotten about the wide valley he came from.

the religious feeling of the procession is a mix of the concept of the library as a temple and the observations on the lives of the mountain farms: see Volume 2

In front of him a small clearing opens, descending in front of his feet with the slope of the ridge. It feels at first like a window out of the forest into another realm, the valley below is bright with the midday sun and suffused by the haze of the light. The middle ground is obscured by the woods around the clearing and the city of Meran with its valley and the Adige look like an apparition, a mountain mirage. On his left, emerging from the sloping ground, a copper roof shines in the light,



marking the end of Antonio's hike. The whole house itself seems to be emerging from the ground, growing out of it like a boulder unearthed by spring torrents. Its volume is solid and simple; plaster and wood are the main materials, like in all the buildings along the path to get here. A tree, plant counterpart to the house, stands over a small clear pond on the opposite side of the clearing. Little things, like the subtle care of the path, or the way in which the house is set in relation with the tree, the clearing and the small sheds on its border, speak to Antonio as something out of an image, a *topos*. Indeed - although last night's readings may have an influence here - it feels as if he just stepped into one of Stifter's mountain stories, albeit one translated into modern times, no keen eye would exchange this setting for a vernacular one, what once was dictated by necessity here seems to be the result of sensibility and attunement to the place itself.

Inside the house, the feeling is similar. Large wood surfaces and thick plaster, wooden beams and the ever present majolica stove are all composed in a way that doesn't speak of technical requirements, rather of sensibility to space and one's mind of it. Antonio's host shows him the house with pride and affection, speaking at the same time of its construction and the memories and ideas that were part of it. Each space is simple but imbued with its own character; be it for the view over the surrounding landscape, the way in which its furnished or

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the idea of a strong connection with the ground present here and in the Foothill library comes from the deep interest on the landscape and its influences on the design and found a poetic resonance in Yeats poem *The Tower*, see Volume 1, p.26.

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see A. Perez-Gomez, *Attunement*

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the *topos*, a literary category is a very valuable tool in the definition of atmospheres, characters and settings





simply how the same materials of the whole house are used - materials which seem to repeat themselves not only here, but throughout all three libraries as well. It takes little for Antonio to understand that space here is never merely a container; the house has been built in all its parts to shape that or that other idea, or rather state of being. It is its owner, if you could image him made of rooms and nooks, chairs and windows. From the deep cuts in the east wall, to the staircase acting as the backbone of the house; from the wooden clad loggias to the shiny golden window frames of the south facade; so many times now in this trip Antonio has thought of Bachelard's reading of the house and its topoanalysis. At the same time a being in itself and the architectural representation of the being of its owner - although builder is a much more meaningful way of putting it - the house embodies the meanings of reflection, shelter, contemplation, calm. It seems to Antonio as if it was built to give place to those feelings, to those ways of being in the world, as the poet-philosopher would say.

Thanks to the openness of his host, Antonio is free to explore the little house and play the game of topoanalysis. Indeed an exploration it is, because the scale is not the matter here, the house being small does not mean that it can't be explored. In fact, its design is so that it modulates the little space through levels, passages, stairs and openings in a way that makes it seem bigger, or at least more "explorable", according to Antonio's percep-

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this is the most obvious, although effective, characterisation of a buildings

see Volume 4, p.126

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see *A Walk in the Alps and A Mountain Library* for the elaboration of these concepts

tion of it. From the small entrance, a threshold that has become a room in itself - it has turned to stone - one leaves the natural world behind - along with wet coats and heavy shoes - and immediately finds the homeliness that was looked for in entering the refuge. A table, made from thick planks of oak, stands in the middle of a small room overlooking the meadow on the west and the perspective of the peaks running to their goal. The thick pillars of the outer wall and the concrete cylinder of the staircase, protruding from the timber cladding, are the only elements that stand out from a world of wood. From the coffered ceiling to the pavement, everything is timber, of all the different kinds this region offers and some exotic ones as well. A wooden nest, huddled between earth and concrete, lit by a single lamp standing over the table. Here one can safely listen to the thundering of storms outside while comfortably enjoying the play of clouds and peaks. The deep pillars of the wall create a screen between inside and outside, so that Antonio almost immediately felt his muscles relax in the newly gained warmth and the perspective over what seemed pure wilderness just a few minutes before. It is indeed impressive how much the sound of a door closing behind us and the presence of a window can do in making us look at things. The proper place to enjoy this in the house, as they have been doing in these mountains for about a thousand years, is in the stube, the “living room” of the house in the mountain farms

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the Zschepitz name roughly translates into “target peak”

<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Stube>

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of Tyrol. The stube being the core of the house, its core is the hearth, in the architectural presence of the traditional majolica stove. The big round furnace is at the base of the cylinder that pierces through the whole house, emerging from the roof; it contains the stairs and distributes the heat throughout the different rooms. Since the building follows the slope of the ground, the living room is at a lower level and as Antonio walks down the stairs from the dining room, the valley of Meran again appears in front of him, this time framed not by forest but by timber and glass. Descending those stairs one feels what it is like to live in the mountains, to react to their presence every time, even in little steps, not only in terms of direction but in terms of height as well; orientation here follows two planes. Like entering a canyon, coming out of a forest, stepping on the border of a sheer drop; that is how space, in the mountain realms is characterised and felt. Antonio plays this game with the windows scattered in the west wall, every time seeing a different lintel tree in the meadow below; he moves around the room, admiring the play of shadows on the ceiling which is the same of the dining room but much higher here, more formal. As he climbs up the stairs to reach his host in the kitchen, he cannot help but slide his hand over the cylinder of the stairs that he has now circled completely. Very warm to the touch and polished in that irregular way that only real Venetian plaster can have, he plays with the reflexes of the sun on



the plaster, distorted by the curved surface of the wall and the timber lace work on the south facade.

The library, on the floor above, works with the same principle. Climbing the austere spiral staircase in the concrete cylinder lit from above, Antonio finds himself underneath a large wooden roof whose exposed beams play with the light of the sun in repeating geometrical patterns. As he steps towards the light and the big glass facade in front, the space becomes bigger again. The library is on two levels and is accessed on the higher one of the mezzanine; what looks like a room similar to the stube becomes double the size as Antonio steps down to the lower level. Bookshelves are flooded by light coming from the south facade whose window frames are attached to the complex timber structure that decorates the main facade of the house. The bolts and joints of the structure act as a decoration, a steel knitting of the timber canvas pierced by the light. It is clear that this room, even more than the stube below, is the most important room of the house, the reason behind its construction and occupation. With curiosity, Antonio scans the shelves, trying to decipher through them the character of his host. A lot of the books are on mountains; climbing, trekking, expeditions, surveys, architecture, myths; many of them specifically about the region of Tyrol and the Alps in general. There's also a selection of classic literature, poems, fiction, art; without needing a full survey, Antonio starts to feel a certain affinity with



### 3. DESIGN

his host. As he sits down in one of the large armchairs in front of the big glass lozenges of the windows, a book in his hand more for the feeling of it than the will to read it, he starts thinking about his trip. About his home town and how far, and yet how close, he is from there. Indeed, there may be nothing like books to bridge space and time, culture and people. Such buildings like the ones he visited here in Meran, although scaled in a Palace, a Tower and a Mountain Refuge, are to him in the end all the same. Lighthouses in a sea of time and space, of words and worlds, of remembering and forgetting. Fixed points that ground the waves of time and guide the travellers of its waters. Looking down on Meran from here, while seeing the other two libraries from this top one, he can't help but feel that he is not only inside one of those lighthouses but that this room is its lamp room, his gaze its beacon; a feeble light made powerful by the many mirrors and lenses on the shelves behind him.

The plan was to retire back to the tower library in the afternoon, but a storm, and the warm hospitality of his host, made Antonio spend the night. Enjoying dinner in front of the sun setting behind the great mass of the Zielspitz and spending the evening in the living room, reading in a nook next to the big stove, hearth and heart of the house. Upstairs, underneath the pitched roof and the geometrical drawings of its beams, he spent the





first of what will be many nights in a small room where wood was as much present for the eyes as for the nose. Only a few steps from his room up the well of the staircase, caressing the smooth handrail which vibrates at his sliding touch, he can reach the library, the whole reason he came here.

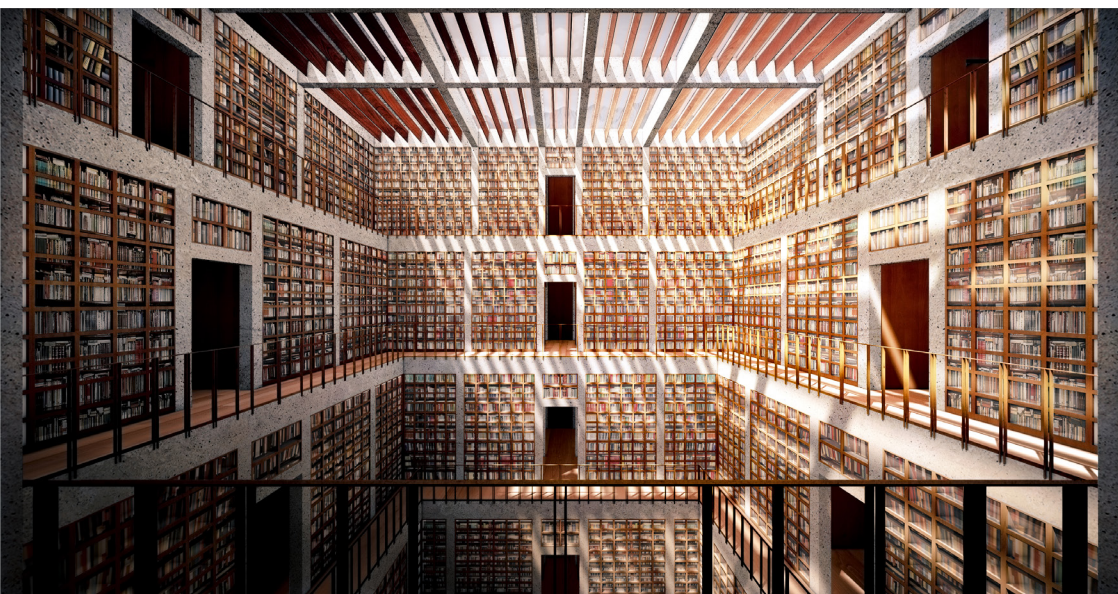
Looking down the meadow and the valley beyond, Antonio spends his days writing and reading about the place and what it does to him. What started out as a small trip to visit the north turned out to be a much bigger thing. These valleys enchanted and welcomed him, becoming a new home in balance between the Italian south and the German north, where one can read Hölderlin and Montale in the same way, as close to the Rhine as you are to the Mediterranean, a place where word and world meet. Not Italy, nor Germany or Austria, but Europe.





# City Library

*A cave, a forest, a crater*



## A Threefold Landscape

POEM

*There's a city in the Alps with two rivers,  
lush fields and snowy peaks,  
the Arab palm and the Alpine fir live together  
between white glaciers and purple grapes;  
each thing has two names,  
each head has two faces,  
in the abode of North and South.*

\*\*\*

*A cavern is in the city,  
it smells of paper and ink.  
A forest stands outside it,  
steel trunks and papery leaves.  
A crater towers above,  
black skinned and gilded belly.  
A threefold landscape, a machine for thought.*

*The cavern stores and safeguards,  
judges nothing, takes all in;  
people are guests of an alien world,  
scale's a memory of threshold and shelves.*

*The forest weaves and moulds,  
closes space without borders,  
to move is to wander  
through places of thought.*

*The crater defines and structures,*

For each design four texts have been written: a poem, a  
manifesto, a description and a short story

see Volume 4, p.34

see landscape analysis in Volume 2

*gives place to each thought;  
a world of many worlds  
where mountains are paper.*

*\*\*\**

*You walk among plaster and iron,  
a thousand names and many more  
like constellations in the sky;  
they call you forward, seeking  
life from my hands and eyes;  
they guide you like stars at sea.  
Footfalls echo in the shadows, wanderers  
looking for the stars in a cave.*

*Blind eyes of diffuse light  
look over shelves like stalagmites,  
books sleep in their iron bunks.  
Between slumber and life there's the touch  
of hand warmed by gaze;  
history becomes memory,  
memory turns to life.*

*\*\*\**

*A forest of metal birches, spotless white,  
sway in the light from many windows;  
your thoughts walk through canopies and branches,  
from koivu forests to Mediterranean gardens;  
You come out of the cave to walk in your mind,  
skipping from branch to branch  
for a balance briefly found.*

*Valley and mountain, civilised and wild,  
known and unknown meet among the metal fronds.*



### 3. DESIGN

*In the forest one climbs and wanders  
looking for meadows and springs  
in the thick of saplings and limes.  
White pillars sway against the light,  
scattered pieces of Ariadne's thread.*

\*\*\*

*A small tunnel enters the mountain  
just below a blade of light,  
one climbs from the inside to access another world.  
Light and wood melt in the ascent  
climbing in circles, to reach a point.  
Quiet and learning shape these inhabited walls,  
rooms in a fixed orbit that's never still.*

*An open coffer full of gleaming doors,  
a beehive of leather and wood;  
language has mass and culture's shape.  
The crater opens to rock and sky,  
scale and time: a mental play  
built of mortar and concrete,  
of rooms, corridors and a bright cave.*

\*\*\*

*There's a balance of mount and book,  
a threefold landscape, a machine for thought;  
cavern, forest and crater are found  
in the place where North meets South.*





## The Threshold Library

MANIFESTO

*the writer [...] speaks to the intellect of all mankind, to all in any age who can understand him.*

*That age will be rich indeed when those relics which we call the Classics, and the still older and more than classic but even less known Scriptures of the nations, shall have still further accumulated, when the Vatican shall be filled with Vedas and Zendavestas and Bibles, with Homers and Dantes and Shakespears, and all the centuries to come shall have successively deposited their trophies in the forum of the world. By such a pile we may hope to scale heaven at last.*

H. D. Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the woods*

*Always and only in the order of the Library we will be able to reconstruct a geography of architecture, unfolded in a circular time, made true each time by life.*

P. Zermani, *La strada per Ravenna in Oltre il muro di gomma*

The city of Meran stands where the valley of the Adige begins its course towards Verona. It looks to the south, to the Mediterranean hint of the fields which blossom out of the valley onto the foot of the mountains. At the same time it stands in the shadows of the high Alps, snowy peaks and thick forests that wash like

see Volume 4, p.58 and 74

the place and how it is reached is always the starting point of the discourse

waves down the lushness below.

In Meran, the rivers Adige and the Passirio meet in the outskirts of the city, their glacial valleys turn into the softer one that opens towards the southern sun.

These dualities are embedded in the city and its people. The sober German architecture is warmed by whimsical decorations and colourful flowers; the fir tree stands next to cypresses and even palms. All underneath a Mediterranean sun which is shadowed by Nordic mountains, cathedrals of rock and wood which mark the double threshold that in Meran takes place. The one between north and south and earth and sky. The buildings of Meran, huddled together, mark the threshold and give it a place to be, to become life, culture and building.

In the middle of the city, between the river and the historic centre, the library of Meran has its seat. The library is the custodian of the threshold; it mediates north and south - the Germanic and the Latin - and hosts both earth and sky - the City and the Mountain.

Like a triumphal arch of old times, the library marks a threshold and celebrates it. It gives it a place to be and collect, where people can study it and perpetuate it. This is not a metaphor or a play of words. The mental space of threshold and mediation, with all its facets and couplets, is reflected in the library and its shelves. The library represents the world and is a world itself; it

all the designs are carried out in a balance between the two  
antipodes defining this work, the mountain and the book

Thoreau's phrase becomes the program of the library

hosts the two poles of landscape and book, reality and knowledge, and in their balance the library unfolds. The city penetrates the library and the library in turn shapes the city. Like all the other palaces of the centre, it stands sober and ordered while pierced by the flow of arcades, courtyards and alleys.

The book structures the world by its narrative, it gives it place and meaning, perspective and relations. The library on the other side, structures the book in its world, through space, following the same principles. It is a universe to read the universe, the place where the space of thought and that of reality meet. Again, the library as a threshold gathers these dualities and gives them place and meaning. Like the Heideggerian bridge with the two banks of the river, the library merges opposite relations by building and giving shape to their threshold.

The library is a coffer whose boxes open and unfold around its hinges, ordering knowledge and users in a kaleidoscopic organisation of volumes and shelves. A Babel tower where the number of languages is richness instead of confusion, the staircase man has built to leave the other animals below and reach the gods in the sky. *By such a pile we may hope to scale heaven at last.*

The library, by bridging the world of matter with that of thought, creates a microcosm of its own. In it converges the sacred and the profane, beauty and ugliness. The library does not judge, it only remembers; thus man, freed of the burden of memory, can think

see Volume 4, p.40

the ways in which the library judges and remember are defined in its  
three parts, see Threefold Landscape poem, p.86

and evaluate. Books are the fuel of thought and culture and the library is the public stockpile, as important for thought as granaries are for food. For those who do not have their own stock and for those who like to find new ones. The library fuels a kid with a fairy tale in the same way it does an adult with philosophy; Catullo is on the same shelves of the Carmina Burana. The library does not judge, it orders and relates, collects and stores. The space of the library is manifold and meaningful, it has left Euclid's theories behind (well cared for on a shelf of the first floor). Through space, the library organizes books and knowledge, languages and cultures. An ordered labyrinth where getting lost is the goal, or at least the wish; in the maze of the library one does not need an Ariadne with thread but notebook and pen.

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the theme of the maze and Ariadne's thread comes back  
with an architectural definition, see p.88

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the collection and its disposition is closely related to concepts of  
movement and organisation of the library, following Warburg's concepts  
(S. Settis, *Alty Warburg il demone della forma*)

## A Palace of Books

### DESCRIPTION

*The Library is an architecture without walls and without borders with the landscape, which allows to see through. The Library is the universe, the incomprehensible book of which we are the words.*

P. Zermani, *La strada per Ravenna in Oltre il muro di gomma*

*What I later felt so often I somehow then suspected in advance: that one did not have the right to open one book without committing oneself to read them all. With every line one was cracking open the world. Before the books, and perhaps again after them, the world was whole.*

R.M. Rilke, *The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

The historical centre of Meran is huddled between the Passirio river and the foothills of the Mount of Meran. Three bridges, like cuts in the fabric of the city, open towards the south and each make a dent in the compactness of the medieval core of Meran. Like gates of the city whose walls side the river and its majestic trees, the bridges lead into the main parts of the historical centre - its beginning, middle and end. At the first bridge, coming from south-west, the old mundane centre of the city can be found. The neoclassical theatre opens

onto a square where the old and the new city meet, as well as the river and the mountains, through the cut in the urban fabric made by the bridge and its road.

In front of the bridge, where the old buildings meet with the new ones, where stone turns into concrete, a sober building absorbs and mediate the contrast. Its solid volume acts as a gradient between the 19th century building it is attached to and the contemporary ones behind and on the sides. The facade of the palace, a kind of concrete with the quality of stone, mediates horizontally the buildings and vertically the perspective, accentuated by the road, between the ground and the mountains, up until the blue of the sky reflected in its windows.

Similarly to other modern buildings in Meran and throughout the region, the Palace seems to be at the same time a product of the German austerity of forms and structures and an element of exception, one of the many testimony of the variegated culture and international influence in Meran; a city which at once has a strong identity tied to its place and a deep relation with both North and South. This must not be confused with the generality of something like the International Style, it is rather the embodiment of an oxymoronic way of thinking and looking at things that seems to pervade the atmosphere and culture of this place. A place that has turned the friction of the opposites that meet here in a source of richness and identity instead of being pulled

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this dual identity is what will define the program of the library as a place to study German-Italian relations in culture

see Volume 2, p.126

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the rhetoric figure of the oxymoron has been used many times in these volumes to explain a duality of opposites which do not clash

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the concept of Heimat, of unity of place and culture, is fundamental to understand such things as genius loci or the meaning and values of places; on a poetic level Hölderlin is the guide for this considerations

apart by them. Many times it got close to this rapture, for example during the Options<sup>1</sup> of nazi-fascism, whose complete failure proves the existence of an Heimat in which place, people and culture - especially language - are one and indivisible; as it is so clearly expressed in the minimum unit of landscape and culture of the region, the mountain farm.

Continuing with this multiplicity of conditions, the building can be approached from different points of the city - its “fly tower” standing as high as the steeples around, is visible almost from everywhere in Meran and its valley. The building in fact is overlaid on the ground floor of the city, integrating and connecting with its characteristic system of arcades, alleys and courtyards. An “official” opening dug into the mass of the building on the south side declares its orientation towards the theatre and the bridge mentioned before, while a more subtle entrance can be found in the old library which has been assimilated by the new, bigger one. Here the matter is not that of monumentality or official presence of the south side but the subtlety with which the historical fuses with the modern. Indeed thanks to the

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see Volume 2, p.92

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1 During the fascist regime in Italy, Mussolini was allied with Hitler's Germany but wanted to “purify” the country of anything that was not “italic”. This led to an agreement, the “options”, between Mussolini and Hitler. People from South Tyrol could either remain of German culture and move to Germany where they were promised land and jobs - the option chosen by the high majority - or remain in South Tyrol and “become” Italian, in name, culture and language. In a matter of years after the second World War, almost all returned in South Tyrol and the “options” have been since considered as a great scam which robbed them of either country or culture.



old building and its arcades and courtyards, the passage through the stone framed door, via a vaulted arcade, to the glass framed courtyard happens in a seamless way. Two buildings with their own styles and atmospheres fuse into each other, making a clear point of contact between the two difficult to trace; the threshold is here transformed into a gradient. This attention to both threshold and gradient, the connection and continuity between two elements, is replicated throughout the whole building in different ways and scales. From the joint between new and old materials to the composition of the facade, the connection of the spaces or the organisation of the views inside and outside the building.

The building balances many forces and opposing poles in its mass and interior spaces. The historical city and the modern one, the perspective of the river with that of the mountains. In the same way its interior spaces and functions balance different poles in an arrangement that dialogues with each other and out of whose friction the activity of the library arises. On one side the existing library with its 19th Century stone palace, soberly connected with the city fabric. On the other the “fly tower” that rises opaque and silent over the other buildings, its volume seeming to absorb lights and shadows.

The old library is the storage. Floor after floor of shelves and books, a place where man is a visitor; made for books to dwell in and rest, waiting to be called to light and life in the reading rooms of the new library.

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here the text gives indications to the design, as these decisions were taken first here in writing and then shaped graphically

here the atmosphere comes before the design which follows its indications

As any storage and place of memory, the place is dimly lit and somehow mysterious. The light coming through the shaded windows - in order to protect the most precious and fragile books - can scarcely reach the central corridor, absorbed by the heavy books on their dark shelves of wrought iron. Moving through these rooms and enfilades one is almost startled by the presence of another person amidst such wealth of inanimate knowledge and the names of authors and facts long gone. In the old library the books repose awaiting to be needed, knowledge is stored and accumulated, just like wood in autumn, preparing for the cold and dark winter.

these metaphors prove to be very useful in understanding the essence of the space beyond its formal qualities

On the other side of the central courtyard, framed by arcades old and new, another stack of books arises out of stone. The “fly tower” of a theatre whose play is performed by many actors, made of flesh and paper, who are also spectators themselves. Inside, a coffer of treasures unfolds around a pivotal axis that connects earth and sky. Galleries laden with books grow outward and upward under a glass ceiling whose light washes down the back of books, making their authors and titles glimmer, finally reaching the librarians desks down below. Like an opened toolbox, this core of galleries opens on two opposite sides on a symmetrical arrangement of rooms and nooks, shelves and reading tables. Symmetrical because in here the most important balance of Meran takes place both in the architecture and in the books it holds. Pivoted around the vertical axis where the light

see Volume 4, p.74

of the sky, shadowed by the mountains above, reaches the shiny stone floor below, one side of the tower reflect on the other, connected by side galleries. On one side the Italian, on the other the German. South and North are balanced and meet in the axis of earth and sky, up and down. The same books, the same topics, even the same authors, are found in German on one side and Italian on the other. Some rooms are stacked with books from floor to ceiling in German and miserably empty in Italian and vice versa. The library translates into place the relation of this two cultures - which takes place and becomes a culture in itself in Meran and in the South Tyrol region. It doesn't only give place and space to this presence but unveils its balance and unbalance, its evolution and partiality.

But if that were so, the storage would have been sufficient. The library is not only a place where to keep books and make them accessible; the library is the place out of which new books are created. The people, another pole in the cosmic system of the library, are those who fill the gap between storage and library and between German and Italian. As the "fly tower" fills with books, its German and Italian shelves will become more balanced; the storage will have more eyes giving life to its forgotten books. So it is that the third element of the library is unveiled, between the old library and the "fly tower", old and new. Here the library receives the people before the books. Its volume is lower than the

see Volume 4, p.30 and 56

other two, so that the whole building frames and measures the mountain behind, both in still and dynamic perspectives. It is the main access to the library, its fulcrum and most alive part. In direct contact with the square of the theatre, the building opens to the space of the city that floods the library and reaches its internal courtyard. Behind the sober facade the space opens in a more fluid way, giving identity to this space through it being a threshold between the old library and the theatre of books inside the “fly tower”, between the city public space and the internal courtyard.

The accessory functions of the library are found here, freely organized; info points and services, children’s areas and magazine stands, medial collections and relax zones. An auditorium going from underground to the second floor, opens the view between the street and the courtyard while keeping their realm separated by its large hollow volume. A window into the more private publicness where a café livens the space with sounds and smells. The whole volume consisting of three levels, is an open sequence of stacked floors open onto each other and communicating in section, a porous and fluid space tying the library together both horizontally and vertically. In there the study rooms for groups and meetings are freely arranged among low shelves, reading tables and private nooks. The offices are on these floors as well, in direct contact with the old library and the storage of which they are the custodians.

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see Volume 4, p.40, 48, 52, and 54

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the auditorium is no longer present in the final design, indeed the elaboration presented here is not a linear one and some inconsistencies are bound to arise

On the top of this lower volume the final moment of the library takes place. A roof garden with high walls from which only sky and mountains are visible, along with the steeples pinpointing the city. Protected from the sounds of the city and its presence, it is an artificial meadow to be in the mountains while looking at them from below.

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this is another partial inconsistency between elaboration and final design. these texts are the generative part of the design, not its final expression which can be find in the first text of this volume

## The librarian of Meran

NARRATIVE

...I am learning to see. I don't know why, everything penetrates me more deeply, and does not stop at the place where it always used to end. There is a place in me I know nothing about. Everything goes on there now, I didn't know what goes on there...

...for it is not the memories themselves. Only when they become blood in us, glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves, only then can it happen that in a very rare hour the first word of line arises in their midst and strides out of them...

R.M. Rilke, *The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

As I write these first lines on paper, I think how many before me have, for one reason or another, felt the Latin phrase *verba volant, scripta manent*. I think of who, before and after me, feels the need to translate his thoughts into something more tangible. Never, I thought, there would come a day when my arrogance would surpass my modesty. Never, I thought, could I produce something worthy of a library. Maybe a few lines of a love letter, the failed attempts of youth in memoirs or diaries; those were, I thought, the peaks of my non-existent literary production. Secret and private; hidden and somehow shameful.

this book by Rilke was one of the main references followed during the work presented here, its insights on matters of perception, poetics, space, memory and so on are too many to be listed here

the use of the first person - through an alter ego or an unspecified narrator - is a very powerful tool of identification which allows to inhabit the spaces that have to be designed. see Volume 1, p.79

And yet, here I am. Fountain pen, notebook, lamp and all; playing the writer like children play doctor, with innocence mixed with malice and an undefined sense of guilt.

You see, there is a reason why I thought of these things many times and why now I can't seem to face writing without reflecting on them. I don't judge my writing itself, I am judging writing next to writing; I am wondering what is the meaning of putting a memoir of mine next to Byron's and Caesar's. What will a reader think when he finds my book on a shelf with its code and my name printed in clear bold characters. I think of this because, if I am lucky enough, I'll put this book on the shelves myself, I'll decide - or rather calculate - its catalogue code; I'll define its theme and sub-theme. I will be the one, provided I manage to carry these lines to the length of a book, to give it a place in culture and in the place of culture, the library. A library, my library.

Yes, my library. You see, as I said, there's a reason why I think of books and titles, shelves and categorisation. I am a librarian, and a librarian who writes is a bit of an odd thing, at least in his eyes, that is, in mine. Being a librarian, I cannot help but think of my library now that I finally found the courage, or the shamelessness, to become a part of its collection. That is because, in the mind of any sane librarian - that is, any that thinks like I do - the collection and the library are the same thing. This is no mere metaphor, although the normal read-

given the great personal care for matters such as books and library, this private interest comes across, more or less explicitly, in the way the theme is approached

by employing the figure of the librarian not only the spaces were addressed but also more general concepts of collecting and storing crucial to the library

this concept has both abstract and formal considerations, from the spaces being closely tied to the collection they hold to the structure of the library merging with its shelves

er could intend it as such and wouldn't be completely wrong. For a librarian catalogue and library are the same thing just like for other people a certain memory is embedded in a place, a particular sound, taste or smell. For each book is connected with the room it stands in, the other books it shares the shelf with and the other shelves I have to pass to reach it. I am guessing this may be because the architect did a good job with my library in particular, but I do not know; I met him only once and we talked of literature and mountains, not architecture. Then again, I may be blinded by my own vision of things, although I have spoken with colleagues who have said the same about other libraries. One of them, from Buenos Aires, has even built himself a library in the same manner in which I am talking to you about mine.

As a librarian I see books and their temple differently from the readers. You could wander through these spaces and enjoy the collection they hold, the materials that keep them together, the social life or simply the quietness. I don't simply use the library, I live it and, in a way, make it. Every book I see as a character, a shelf as a clan and a room as a country. Space and mind are inevitably interlocked, when you do my work, or better yet, when you feel my vocation.

Once I read this book, from the architectural section - or it may have been the philosophical, or the psychological one - you may already start to notice one of the

J.L. Borges built himself the most famous of literary libraries (*The Library of Babel*) in the same way this one is built, that is through literature, but he was also at the end of his life the librarian of Argentina's National Library

the use of metaphor, characters and other rhetorical tools is here made explicit: see Volume 1, p.77



biggest issues my kind has to deal with: dreaded cataloguing. The book dealt with space but in a very curious way; it talked about a psychoanalysis of the house, or something like that. That is how I am going to try to describe my library. When one cares for books the way I do, be it because of passion, profession or both, the books themselves and the place they take in the physical world establish a peculiar relation that cannot be ignored. That is why a library is not the same thing as the storage of a publishing house. Accessibility of course has plenty to do with it, but although necessary it is not sufficient to define the difference.

I think of my library as a landscape. With hills and rivers, canyons and words, grottos and peaks. This mental and physical landscape I divide into the three main parts of the library; the crater, the forest and the caverns - I even tried to write a poem on it. The reader, and the books with him, slowly gain the light of the sky through the inverted mountain inside the tower; first though, one has to find his way through the cavern, the basement of this topoanalysis - that is how that book on space called it - eventually reaching the forest, a particular maze in itself, and finally enter the crater to climb to the top from the inside, like a volcano. Its colour for that matter, suggests this charred character.

But forgive my eagerness and let me start from the beginning again, I'll walk you through a day in this library of mine; I'll try as best as I can to tell you about this

probably THE reference of this whole work, G. Bachelard's  
*The Poetics of Space*

see A *Threefold Landscape* on p.86

see Volume 21, p.26

small and yet infinite realm of mine.

It's barely morning and it's my day to open the library. The rising sun plays with the main facade, making it glimmer with shadows and reflections. The lights in the building are still off as I make my way along the Freiheitsstraße, its cafés about to open, except for the top of the tower, whose lights will soon switch off as the sun rises above the Ifinger peak. The glass surfaces reflect the rising sun and appear like mirrors without depth, as if beyond the facade of the building there were another world - maybe that's not how somebody else sees it, but allow me some poetic licence. That facade glimmering in the sun holds something that doesn't completely belong to this quiet alpine town. I look at it and I think of the drawers and chests of my childhood; doors and hinges that seemed to hold all matter of unexpected things, in these reveries scale plays no part.

The palace is still asleep as I make my way through the entrance and the book filled rooms to reach my office. As I walk through the wrought iron shelves of the archive, I feel like an official inspecting the troupes, waking up the books from their night on the iron bunk beds. Here the books seem to be the owners of the place and I a guest, the host of a world that isn't mine. It is maybe for this reason that as part of my ritual morning walk through the shelves I never switch on the light, satisfying myself with the faint morning light filtered by the

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see Volume 4, p36 and 80, for childhood drawers connecting with the topical idea of the coffin, see G. Bachlard, *The Poetics of Space*

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the relation between book and reader is one of the crucial elements in defining the character of a space in the library

milky film on the windows.

I share my office with a few of my colleagues; their desks, lumpy islands of hardwood and paper, seem to float above the Venetian pavement shimmering in the low light. At this hour of the morning the sun is still very low and it cuts like a blade through the arched windows. The thick plaster of the wall seems to drink in the light and then reflect it transformed into the room, caressing the back of the books temporarily on shelves here, playing with relief and embossing. This room, along with the entrance, is the only place where natural light is allowed to enter this part of the library - alas, books don't like light as much as we do. I pick up the list of yesterday's late requests and I prepare myself to do a bit of treasure hunting. You see, here in Meran we are proud to say that every book we hold is accessible to the public - with due rules and restrictions, of course - but even so, it is difficult to negotiate the archive and one who doesn't know the books as much as I do will have difficulties in finding anything. Here we keep the oldest and most precious books, double copies and old editions along with the shame of any librarian: uncatalogued books.

When I go around the archive looking for requests, even though I've been doing this for a long time, I always find the child-like pleasure of treasure hunting. The space is dark, the way the oldest books like it, and with a deep atmosphere. The only light is a milky white

these memories and apparently tangential consideration are an important tool to inhabit these spaces through writing

this obsession with the archive and its accessibility comes from real life frustration in the gap between the collection of a library and the actual use one can make of it: see for example Volume 2, p.222

the library as a constellation comes from a consideration  
 which can be summed up in this form:  
 sky : universe = library : history, the sky is to the universe what  
 the library is to history

glow filtered through the screened windows, punctuated by tiny LED lights; which compose a constellation over each shelf and reflect on the dark quasi-mirrored ceiling. Their function is to illuminate the back of the books for me to be able to read them, to me though, they show the real nature of this place. You see, to my eyes this dark grotto filled with books is a universe, filled with constellations and galaxies, each book a world gravitating with all the others. I move through them like a stargazer crosses the heavens, with awe and fascination, happy when finally finding the horoscope figure I was looking for. I follow the engraved letters on the wrought iron shelves as much with my eyes as with my fingers until I find the books I am looking for. Now it is time to take them to the other part of my library, where others are waiting for me to find their treasures in the dark shelves of the archive.

I walk down the stairs only to ascend again shortly after into the light and noise - from the archive even the soft sounds of a normal library sound like noise - in the heart of the library, although guts would be a less poetic but more precise metaphor. Here is where most of the users and the books are, an open space filled with pillars that move through a slightly distorted perspective throughout the whole space. People, light, voices, air; after the archive it is as if I stepped back into the city which is now completely awake. The floor here, not the ceiling, is made of a polished concrete that reminds me

of that salt lake in Chile, except that it doesn't reflect sky and clouds but a forest of planes, pillars and people; and books, of course books. A forest, as I said, and that is no casual metaphor; this is the buffer between the cave and the mountain, the place where people and books - the animals of this particular jungle - meet. If the archive is the strongbox of knowledge, the dark universe one has to gaze into to find its secrets, here another aspect of the world of books is shown. Each plane in this big volume is a "clan" of books, each shelf a "family" and each area a "culture". The interrelation of books - the problem of classification I was talking about at the beginning - achieves here material shape. When I walk this three-dimensional maze it feels as if I am "walking my thoughts". Moving up, down and across, gives shape to what is usually only an activity of the mind. It fills me with pride when readers tell me that while looking for a book they found ten other more while gaining their path through this aerial world. You see, the architect may have given us the space, but it is us librarians who put the meat on the bone - I mean the books on the shelves of course, although the whiteness and shape of the structure does remind me of a skeleton of sorts.

It isn't only the disposition of the books - of which I am very proud - that characterises this space, the architecture is the base on which the whole forest metaphor rests. So you find, like in all forests - and similarly in the fields - around here, different qualities of space

of course in this case librarian and architect are the same person, the use of alter eggs though allows to separate these considerations and thus to address them and observe them from different point of views

the landscape seen in the analysis becomes now part of the building, see Volume 2, p.88

indeed on a compositional level the objective of this space is to materialise the structure of thought, see the analysis of libraries in Volume 2 and Volume 4, p.60

sharing the same atmosphere. While the smell of books is everywhere like pine needles in a real forest, meadows are found among bushes of saplings and centuries old trees. Here, open spaces with tables alternate thick shelving and half shelves for expositions; there is a computer area and a noise insulated one for kids, the main accesses welcome visitors in a clearing of pillars where the librarians desks stand like wood islands. Sometimes I come out here - as I said, my office is in the archive, us librarians are the Charon of the world of the books - only to walk up and down these stairs and planes, it feels in tune with my thoughts and although I may not be thinking about anything at the beginning, be sure, I'll have a beehive swirling in my brain by the time I am back in the darkness of the archive. All those covers, shelves, connections made of stairs and thoughts alike, I dare you to walk through it and to out without a stimulus, an idea, a new link between things; or simply, a book you didn't know you wanted to read.

Indeed, this is not the archive where books rest waiting to be awoken by light and eyes, nor the tower - I'll get to it soon - where the volumes have found their place in the physical episteme. Here books are as alive as people, and through people I might add; the two dialogue with and influence each other. As I said in a not very poetic way, these are the guts of the library, where external and internal elements react to create the life of the body.

In the background of these white pillars and planes of

people and books, a dark wall is washed in light coming from above. Its material, matte and reflective at the same time - I think it is some particular treatment of concrete - functions as a contrasting backdrop of the white forest I just described. I often think of it as a black-box, different from the archive where books of all kinds are stored and kept safe, here each book finds its proper place in an organized universe that works like the mind of the librarian. It is, in fact, our proudest achievement here in Meran; in this black box knowledge has a shape, the books have found their place inside the epistemic palace, the black box that stores and processes data. Just like the black box you can find on a plane, this one has a controlled access - input and output - that is the only direct contact of the box with the outside. Its walls are completely opaque and again, here as well, even more so than in the archive, one feels to have stepped out of the outside world into a suspended place where the time is that of books. Unlike the archive though, where people are visitors and the books the real “owners” of the space, here there is a much more mutual relationship. Follow me as I make my way into the corridor opened in the coal black wall.

At first, as one is used to the diffuse light of the central area, the corridor feels like a dark tunnel with a dim light shining ahead. As your eyes adjust to the new light, your hands reach for the walls of the corridor. The feeling of the hardwood panelling on the wall is felt simultane-

### 3. DESIGN

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all materials are considered phenomenologically, that is in both their perceptive and existential qualities

ously with its smell and dark colour, which absorbs the light that comes from the far end of the corridor. Soon, because the corridor is not so long, I have reached the light and the vision that comes after always strikes me - I know, I sound a bit sentimental, but I told you about my passion for books and my pride in this library. The light of the early afternoon comes down from a glass pyramid high above and all around are books; shelves, stories of books, all encased in small glass cabinets to be protected by the light that exalts them so much. It raises for four floors on all sides of the square plan, each floor stepped back a couple of meters to create a balcony that runs along the whole floor; like an inverted ziggurat, the walls of books climb vertiginously towards the glass roof. A desk in the middle with a computer is the key to access this strongbox of knowledge, like an altar it stands in the middle of the temple of books...

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see Volume 4, p.50 and 74







**Foothill Library**  
*A mountain lighthouse*



# The Tower

POEM

*Where mountains and valley meet  
out of ground towards the light,  
a stone gnomon with papery hearth  
reaches for the high peaks, bright.*

*Like a castle it grounds  
like a bridge it connects,  
where darkness meets light  
the body thinks and the mind rests.*

*From cave to battlements  
up and down are kept in check  
by the roundness of a wall,  
by the spine of its back.*

*Where the river is a torrent  
and the valley rises as a wall,  
the air is sparkling and cold  
but the light is still warm.*

*A tower marks the site  
where south turns into north,  
a pillar of steel, concrete and stone  
to gather thoughts and send them forth.*

*A place of balance,  
of quiet and repose;  
to delve and search*

in this poem, as in the design it expresses, rhythm and order are the guiding elements which shape the content; in both cases this has been pushed to its limits, looking for the possibilities of this "formally poetic" approach

for the concept of gathering see Volume 2, p.72

see Volume 2, p.70

these are Yeat's battlements from his poem The Tower see Volume 1, p.26

the tower is a gnomon, that is through a synecdoche a sun dial; this not only defines its shape and orientation but the essence of what it is and does

*through the mind's abode.*

*It shuffles in its structure  
the maps of mind and land;  
scanning a landscape of thought,  
thinking with your hand.*

*You move up and down  
in circles and across  
on this unmoving pivot  
where mind and body cross.*

*Listen closely and you'll hear  
the breathing of the sea,  
smell the saltiness in the air,  
feel the things you cannot see.*

*Pay attention to the wrinkled voices  
of Romans and Saxons in discussion,  
or catch a glimpse of the elephant's tusk  
coming from the north to bring destruction.*

*Watch the ice carving the stone  
and the sun piercing its canyons,  
valleys and glens of wood and light  
coloured by the mind's crayons.*

*They say the land is a great book  
for those with the eyes to read,  
people, places, Gods and things,  
visit the tower and give them heed.*

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as a beacon, a lighthouse overlooking the valley to the south, the tower projects towards the south which cannot be seen but felt in the landscape. see Volume 2, p.82

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as for the City Library, the meeting of north and south in Meran is a very important concept

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following a phenomenological approach (see Volume 1, Introduction) body and mind are always mixed and considered under Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the thinking body

3. DESIGN

*Of steep valleys and high thrones  
of lush fields with silver tongues,  
you know all from this tower of stone  
you feel it down to every bone.*

*Deep the spire goes in the ground  
wide its belly opens round,  
standing like a mast amidst the waves  
of language and reveries, on the hyperborean maze.*

*Come visit, with your mind and feet,  
it hosts within those who wish  
to read time in the sun's rays  
to write down anything it says.*

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see Volume 4, p.94



## Suspension and Balance

MANIFESTO

*If tired of trees I seek again mankind,  
Well I know where to hie me—in the dawn,  
To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.  
There amid lolling juniper reclined,  
Myself unseen, I see in white defined  
Far off the homes of men, and farther still  
The graves of men on an opposing hill,  
Living or dead, whichever are to mind.*

*And if by noon I have too much of these,  
I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,  
The sunburned hillside sets my face aglow,  
My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,  
I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,  
I look into the crater of the ant.*

R. Frost, *The Vantage Point*

*I had reached (or so I thought) the spring of every poetic activity, which I could have defined in this way: struggle to render as a sufficient whole a complex of fantastic relations in which resides one's own perception of reality.*

C. Pavese, *The poet's craft*

Above the city of Meran a promontory extends from the feet of the mountains towards the open valley of the Adige River. Its sides are covered in woods and vineyards, gleaming in the light of the sun long after the

this poem perfectly describes the setting of the foothill  
Library and the different scales it deals with



shadows of the mountains have reached the city below.

This place is a place of observation. Almost virtual in its explicit reaching from the mountain towards the valley, it is a terrace between the two realms; a place of balance between the two forces of mountain and valley, the fulcrum in which the two realms meet. This balance is what characterises the place, both valley and mountains are felt here, while neither one overpowers the other. On the mountains you have the complete retire, the sky is stronger than the earth; like in the desert, it is the place of the individual. In the valley, instead, the situation is the opposite. It is the place of social, shared, life; the sky, like the mountain, is looked upon as something far and other, like the valley and its towns when seen from the peaks above.

The two conditions meet in the buffer that is the green sea of the woods, punctuated by “islands”, like the promontory above Meran, where a third context is created by the encounter of mountain and valley; a middle area that links them while defining itself. In the course of history this mid-area has been the place of control, this stepping back while maintaining the connection is the action of castles and fortifications. We reach thus a first architectural understanding of this middle realm: the castle is the main typological reference – like the mountain farm on the mountain – which can easily be translated, through some metaphorical application, into a lighthouse or a Greek temple. All three cases are a

see Volume 2, p.114

the idea of pivot or fulcrum is declined both conceptually – being the middle project – and formally, with the definition of the building as a sundial; see P.116 and Volume 4, p.92

see Volume 2, p.79 and 92

### 3. DESIGN

physical presence and a symbol for something other; they mark a threshold, be it military, geographic or transcendental.

The key word here is suspension. The building is suspended between two realms which are balanced through it. Going to the foothills is taking a step back in order to see the bigger picture, it is exiting the flow in order to observe it from a static standpoint, a suspension that doesn't exclude what's outside but frames and observes it. The building, hanging on the tip of the promontory towards the south, is both castle and lighthouse, it looks over the valley and marks the beginning of the mountain balanced between the two forces and realms of the landscape. In this suspension, observation can take place. Close enough to things to relate to them but still far enough to be able to observe and judge them. This is a place where stillness is not quietness but the balanced clashing of forces; it is start as well as end, arrival and departure. It embodies the forces it balances and makes them explicit, part of an organic whole. The building in this act of balancing has no orientation, the suspension it strives to embody is a result of forces coming from everywhere. It gathers the landscape around itself, a neutral point where forces meet in a striving balance.

The building is a tower with a platform at its top – a plateau for the sky, a theatre for the mountains – and a cave at its base – digging into the mountain to emerge in the sky. The tower is a place to observe; up and down,

taking a step back is the action that leads the composition based on two off-centred circles. see Volume 4, p.92

see Volume 4, p.94

see Volume 2, p.131 and Volume 4, p.98

this striving balance is what guides the composition of the building. see Volume 4, p.92

see Volume 2, p.119 for the spherical perspective of the mountains

north and south, east and west. In the building every orientation is absorbed and suspended; through it the reality outside is reorganized. The tower is a mediator, a stairwell between the two realms; it marks their point of contact and orders them into a bigger system. It is a place to mediate, which is to observe and meditate. Many people visit the building, coming from above and below, by foot and by car, or hanging from a steel cable suspended between the hill and the city. People come to the tower to seek distraction, to enjoy its view, to leave the city, even if only for an hour. Some of those people stay there longer; it is a particular place this tower. One can feel out of this world while still keeping an eye over it. Be it a mum with her stroller or a poet with his books, the tower is a beacon for those walking the hill's paths. It is a place where the forces of the landscape converge in balance like the focal point of a spherical perspective.

see Volume 2, p.62

The tower mediates. The mountains and the valleys as well as north and south. It looks down on the valleys and rivers going south along the lush field and it looks up at the silvery mountain tops and the dark woods. In the same way its inhabitants visit it to do the same. From the tower, one can travel with the waters of the Adige until they reach Venice, or turn towards the mountains and their Germanic realms. The tower is both a mental and a physical threshold; it is oriented without having a direction. Through its floors one negotiates the levels of the landscape and takes its measure, from its win-

dows one looks upon lush field and perennial glaciers simultaneously. Like a tree turned into stone it anchors itself in the ground and strives for the sky; its body is like the landscape outside, from the dark closed valley to the open and far-reaching peak.

The tower stands strong and still among the forces of the landscape; its interior is suspended from it. Through its shape and orientation – or lack of it – the tower creates a state of suspension; detaching itself from experience it takes on observation. That is what its inhabitants come here to seek; not its many visitors but the ones whose books are waiting for them in front of one of the many windows. The tower in its many floors and infinite faces hosts all kind of thoughts and people, it looks without judging. Through the tower the landscape is neutralized, that is not eliminated but balanced. Its many forces are all present here in equal strength, reaching a restless calm which is reflected in both building and people. This is the place for observation, for long thought and sense making. In the steps of the mind – mirrored in the landscape – the tower stands between the activity of experience and the passivity of reflection.

The tower reveals the structure of the landscape and embodies that of thought. When one has found its materials in experience – in the city in the valley – one comes here to order and categorize them, before retiring to conclude and reflect on them.

The tower has two poles – up and down, earth and

see Volume 4, p.96

see the character definition of the three libraries in Volume 2, p.124, 128 and 132

here the program of the library - as a research library with private study and living spaces - starts to be defined

although this reached its highest definition in the forest part of the City Library, giving shape to the space of thought is an objective of all designs

sky – and all directions. It observes everything but takes no part. The tower hosts a library, the castle of thought of these valleys; all controlling but separated, visible yet unreachable, like the beacon of the lighthouse in the midst of a tempest.

## A Tower on the Foothills

### DESCRIPTION

*The site of a building is more than a mere ingredient in its conception. It is its physical and metaphorical foundation.*

*Building transcends physical and functional requirements by fusing with a place, by gathering the meaning of a situation. Architecture does not so much intrude on a landscape as it serves to explain it.*

S. Holl, *Anchoring*

From the centre of the city you can see the Mount of Meran overlooking both buildings and fields. Most of the many paths that lead out of the city into the surrounding nature - a nature that is both tamed wilderness and cultivated garden - climb its sides and terraces, slowly gaining height, and through that, light and view. It is for these three elements - nature, light and view - that most of the people stroll on these paths throughout the whole year. It is very easy, taking one of these earth paved paths, to exit the city and find oneself in a completely changed situation. Only a few minutes of easy walking and the eyes are level with the roofs of the city, the mountains become less towering and the view opens up to the whole landscape, encompassing both north and south. Meran is a city at a crossroad; in

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this is roughly the theoretical expression of the previous text,  
*Suspension and Balance*

see Volume 7, page 1

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many ways that is, culturally, morphologically and so on. The Mount of Meran is the fulcrum of this crossroad, the point where the different situations meet and are balanced, it is the place where the power of both valleys and mountains is equal, where south meets north.

The Mount is covered in fields and woods among which isolated buildings stick out, protruding towards the sun, each one oriented according to light and terrain, like birds on a tree. At the bottom of the Mount, where the city touches its foothills, there is a terraced garden filled with plants of every kind and permeated by the smell of aromatic trees and bushes. Walking through it, the change between city and nature is divided into as many moments as the terraces and the turns of the dwindling road. Step by step, moment by moment, the city below recedes and the landscape around gains its prominence. The noises are muffled as the view extends inside the valleys that depart from the foot of the hill. As if in a children play, the road forces you to turn one moment towards the hill, with its fields and woods and the towering mountains above, and the other towards the opposite valleys and the silvery gleam of their rivers, extending in all directions and melting in the blue haze of the afternoon air. Every step climbing up the hill is a change in the view of the surroundings and in the relations between the road and the landscape, in a strange and enticing way the view seems to remain the same while it changes at every step. Negotiating the

steep terrain, the road climbs up among vineyards and light woods, every once in a while a gate appears and the house behind it seems like a human encounter, somebody who like us was climbing this hill and decided to catch some breath, or that the view was good enough and the earth warm underneath the southern sun. There are many of this silent individuals along the paths that lead up the Mount, they stand still and silent overlooking their valleys, they keep company to the traveller and punctuate his climb.

When even the steeples of the churches in the city below are looked upon from above, the road turns towards the south once more in its snake-like climbing of the hill. The top of it is almost visible now over the vineyards and the road reaches a clearing in the middle of the fields. A tower of limestone, round and massive, stands out of the ground at the border of the clearing. Its crown rises above the hill, playing the same perspective game of the mountains around. Its walls seems to grow out of the hill itself, like an ancient tree grown out of stone and glass. The tangent light of the sun, gleaming through the valley and the clear air of these high altitudes, accentuates its roundness and envelopes it, playing with its surface and colours; it seems as if the tower was built to catch and attract this light. It plays with it as if the building was emanating the light instead of receiving it, its round wall making it slide along its surface, its windows reflecting it into white beams.

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again, the path to reach the building is an integral part of the definition of the building itself. see Volume 2, p.130

see Volume 4, p.104

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The same way in which the building plays with the light seems to apply to its visitors as well. As one approaches it from the road, appearing beyond the vine leaves and the concrete poles, one seems to fall into the same trick that applies to the light, encircling the tower with both gaze and movement so that one does not approach it in a straight line but as if the building was a planet and the visitor an asteroid caught in its orbit, slowly bending its trajectory towards its eternal circling.

The clearing in front of the tower is very simple, like a basement or a pedestal for the tower itself, it lifts the place out of the surroundings and suspends the visitor between earth and sky. The view is open to all sides, the surrounding trees hidden by the height of the platform, everything is at an indefinite distance. The tower poses itself as the only reference in the landscape which becomes as something other, looked upon but untouchable, suspended, and yet so close that one is almost tempted to reach out for it with his hands. Just like the building itself, this suspension and the platform which embodies it have a circular quality to them. It is not a geometrical quality but a spatial one, the geometry of the building is translated into an experience of circularity. From the movement of the head while first looking at the tower to the unconscious steps one takes in looking at the landscape, everything is done in circularity, turning around the tower and along the landscape, merging north with south, up with down. There is no

fixed direction and the tower which plays as the only tangible reference in this suspended observation reflects the circularity of the outside in the inside, it does not fix the gaze but instead keeps it moving. A surface of water flows over the border of the platform in all directions, melting its limits with the reflection of the sky above and flowing into the landscape beyond. The reflections of the water and its flow, its ever-changing surface and the strong white noise it makes by falling down the walls of the platform, creates an atmosphere of suspension that is a prelude to the tower itself. The platform is the realm of the tower, separated from everything else by a stream of water that hides every middle ground between this place and the landscape it overlooks.

When the visitor has concluded his circular dance between the tower and the landscape, he can finally turn back to the tower itself and its big mouth opening at its feet, dark and deep as if it was opening straight into the hearth of the mountain beyond. The entrance is recessed from the line of the walls and the whole tower looms over as one enters, suspended by a huge concrete beam that seems like the jaw of the building because of its organic shape and the place it takes. The base floor of the tower is clad in rough wood and illuminated by the light which reflects on the platform outside. Circularity reigns inside as well as outside, from the main walls to the hardwood floor, everything is circular, no main direction or favourite exposition. A circular stair-

case on the back is illuminated from above, inviting to climb up into an unknown light that appears in the dark and heavy space as a calling, an invite. The light dramatically increases climbing the stair, so much that one has to wait a few moments for the eyes to adapt to the new situation once the first floor is reached. Out of the darkness of the floor below and the blindness of the bright light a wide circular room appears, bathed in the light coming from the wide windows encircling the external walls. The landscape outside looks like a painting hanged from the walls in its immediacy and clearness; again, distances appear to trick the eye, as if the circular walls of the tower were acting like a lens or a projector. The rest of the space is filled with books, the stone walls seen from the outside are turned inside into a beehive of shelves and nooks, suspended corridors and long ladders that climb the hollow trunk of the tower towards the light washing down from the high ceiling above.

The building is a tower of books and light, of shelves and views; it is like a miniature universe whose windows open into all directions and dimensions. Although it lacks directions because of its circular shape, the tower has its own hierarchies; from the centre to the perimeter, from top to bottom, the sequence of spaces and shelves, opening and nooks, is ordered throughout the building by the light and the relations with the exterior. The books at the core extend to the outside, making

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see Volume 4, p.108 and 110

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see Volume 4, p.106

place for reading spaces and writing nooks, one moment introverted in a well of light and books, the other projected towards the horizon behind the mountains outside. Just like on the platform below, the building and its surrounding - played in this case by the light penetrating the building in different ways - guide the visitor along the rooms and ladders, letting him find his place in this intertwining of inside and outside, of the space of the book and that of reality. Everyone can find his own place in this ascending beehive of books and views, carve his own nooks closest to the best books and the most pleasing view. Time reaches only the outermost spaces of the tower, whose core is ruled by the books and their never changing time. The building is a threshold between the ground beneath and the sky above, a place that is neither here nor there, a vertical bridge that suspends the visitor and binds its two banks.

So it is that one can climb the staircase all the way to the top of the building, following the diffuse light washing down its walls and shelves, emerging underneath the dome of the sky. The tower is no more and the landscape is perceivable only via quick glances through the gaps in the white walls. It is not a tower any more but a room domed by the sky and surrounded by white steps, dissolving in the circular perspective towards the sky.

A wider gap opens in the steps of the theatre, its shadows cleanly projected into a dark passage. In there, or out there, another world awaits, it may be the one left

at the base of the tower or it may be something completely other.

## Living the Library

NARRATIVE

*To see the world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour*

...

W. Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

*I am learning to see. I don't know why, everything penetrates me more deeply, and doesn't stop at the place where it always used to end. There is a place in me I knew nothing about. Everything goes there now. I don't know what goes on there.*

R.M. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

I must have lived here for a year or so, even though it could have been only a week between my arrival and these confused notes. The place has a particular way of suspending you between time and place, as if crossing that small channel of water was stepping into a dimensional bubble.

It must have been a year though, because the clothes I am wearing now, on the few walks I take, are the same ones I was wearing when I first climbed up this hill, looking for a place to collect my thoughts. Even here, the calendar doesn't lie. Still, time passes in a way of

this is a translation in experience of the tower as a sundial  
suspended out of time and place

the need to embody this sense of time and life connected  
to the library lead to the programmatic definition of the  
research library with living spaces

its own. Of course I didn't know at the time that what started as a long weekend would end up becoming a whole year; as I said, the place seems to have a will of its own that influences my choices. One whole year I spent on these mountains, collecting my thoughts for fifty weeks instead of one, and still the time I spent here slips through my fingers as I try to recollect it on these pages. When I think of the time I spent on this hill, among the Alps, I can only conjure a single, multicoloured and multifaceted image, a mesh of thoughts and recollections, memories and impressions. I could speak of my year here as a single day, where seasons last a few hours and dawn blends into dusk.

Nevertheless, I want to try and tell you about this place. I knew very little of it when I first came here, following mainly curiosities sparked by friends over coffee and cigarettes. I want to say I know everything of it now, but at the same time I feel like I know no more than I did the first night I spent here; after an intense and excited exploration that brought me back to childhood holiday houses and new schools. Resting in my simple room, at the base of the tower carved into the mountain, I had absorbed so much from that first long day, that I abandoned myself on the armchair in front of the window, staring out at everything and nothing. It was probably then that this place took hold of me, overwhelmed by it and its surroundings. I was not able to process the effect that long day had on me - and I am doubting I

the inspiration for this distortion of time created by the mountain realm  
comes from T. Mann's *Magic Mountain*, where the protagonist plans  
to spend a few weeks on the mountain and up passing ten years there.

can do it now - but I could nonetheless feel it. My mind, a buzzing white noise of thoughts and impressions, my body relaxed and tried, I let myself be held and cradled by this place.

I was looking for a place where I could collect my thoughts about a book I was about to write. I had done most of the research and the preparatory studies and I needed to find a place, or better a state, in which I could compose the book. Some friends suggested to come to Meran, following the steps of many better writers before me, where I could find the right place to give myself to my task completely.

The building is a stone tower of clean, almost elemental design, resting on a built plateau encircled by a stream of water. It took me half an hour to reach it from the centre of the city over nice and easy paths; crossing gardens, fields, light woods and hearing the sound of the stream soon before seeing the tower appear in its sheer presence, towering over the observer and the landscape.

I stepped on the plateau, amidst the sound of water, under a clear sky in a sunny day. It was as if I was walking on a stage, where the sheer presence of the landscape unrolling around me was like a powerful set. Without even realising it, I started moving around the platform in a sort of orbit, between the landscape and the tower, negotiating through my position the relation between the landscape and this place, between the power of the tower and the world around me; two poles

place and mental state are all declined as a whole in the libraries, see Volume 2, p.124,128 and 132

the elemental design, that is, trying to achieve a formal essence, is something all three libraries strive to but the foothill one does so to the extreme

for the concept of the plateau see J. Utzon, *Platforms and Plateaus*



that my movement was trying to balance. This put me in a sort of agitated rest, I was excited and reposed at the same time, wanting but satisfied. It came to me more and more after this first experience - and I can find it quite easily in my writings - a way of thinking in oxymorons that was definitely influenced by the atmosphere of this place. Duality here is not contrasting and opposites can easily coexist; I felt then that this place was the right one to collect my thoughts and I tried to apply the same dialectic process to my work.

The basement plateau hosts the living spaces, small individual rooms for sleep and rest are aligned along its water-washed perimeter. Informal living spaces, including small baths carved in the stone of the mountains, occupy the centre of the wide platform. Time does not seem to enter these almost subterranean spaces; the light, even the one from the outside, is filtered and constant; the spaces are designed in a minimal way over which the gaze slides without finding an anchoring point. The life here is made of silence and dim light, of small conversations and the steamy quietness of the dark baths. Every day, after the work on the tower above, I would retire in my simple room to collect myself, happy to let the muteness of the place take over my senses and dull them after the high excitement of the day's work. It was like retiring in a cave after a day's hunt - or so I thought many a time while walking down the dark and rough stairs - and letting the earth quiet

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see Volume 4, p.96

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Duality and oxymorons are underlying concepts of all the libraries

your excitement and take care of your body while night approaches.

The spaces in the basement are very simple and the uncertain symmetry that you can notice in the whole building helps you in exploring these hypogeal spaces. The core of it are the communal spaces; the baths, the dining room and the living room spaces whose light is filtered through the basement by water or other half-hidden openings. The whole situation is a sort of detachment from reality, like that of a cave - and indeed that is the archetype one thinks of when descending into these dimly lit spaces. In a way these spaces with their atmosphere balance the tower above; I spent many an hour relaxing my senses in the steamy darkness of the baths or listening to music in those spaces where the senses are almost muted. The whole excitement and richness of stimuli and impressions of the tower above is put to rest and dealt with in the basement below. I felt as if I could balance my thought as well as my body through this routine, it was as if the spaces are made to accommodate and balance the life of thought.

Sometimes I would go to Meran or somewhere else for an evening event or a day trip, but always in the back of my mind the tower and my room would be waiting for me, a safe place to return to. It happened during a particularly boring evening or a steep climb up the sides of the mountains that I would look for the tower over the Mount of Meran and rest my eyes on it, a fixed

point, a reference to hold on to and orient myself both in thought and space.

The most important part though, the one I came all this way across Italy for, was the library. The library in the tower, the castle of thought suspended between the mountains and the sky in which a day is as long as a year, where north and south are both present, where the mountains covered in snow meet the lush fields. The first days in it were spent in trying to understand this curious building, so simple on the outside and yet so entangled in the inside. It seemed as if the architect had tried to materialize the world of the books and their connections, to shape through ledges and ladders the ways of thought. It was impossible at first not to get lost into it, not because of the confusion of connections, the circular plan of the building made so that you could always orient yourself inside it; the reason why I kept getting lost at first was my inability to resist the library itself. I would climb a certain ladder to get a book just to find out that that section was connected by a ledge to a different one I didn't expect. I spent my first few weeks like a leaf blown around by the wind; up, down and across the hollow trunk of the tower and its irresistible secrets.

In doing so I was learning how to use this place almost by instinct; moving over its ledges, finding the closest nook in which to skim through the latest finding, recognising a connection I could pursue from a misleading

the final design is much more clean and simple than this description where the concept of the vertical maze was explored to the excess. see Volume 4, p.92

in this as well the library follows the double archetype of castle and church. see Volume 2, p.70 and 76

one. One had to adapt himself to the library in order for it to adapt to him, it was almost a symbiotic relation that I established in the end. The whirlwind of its forces, both inside and outside, had completely caught me; I was lost and completely abandoned to this place as soon as I let it grow on me. And so it was that I am writing about it now, one year later, as if it were yesterday.

As I established this relation with the library, I started to find my own place inside it. I wouldn't settle for the nearest nook as I felt like writing or reading but I would go for a particular one; I slowly started to find my own places, according to the activity, the mood or the time of day. As the library absorbed me I absorbed it; I still can't say if it was the building that led me to find and prefer some particular spots or if it was some kind of instinct of mine. What I am sure of is that I started to cultivate an extremely intimate relation between what I was doing and the place I was doing it in. I could not be writing these lines, or at least they wouldn't be the same, if I wasn't now in front of this particular window overlooking the Zielspitz to the west and hidden from the centre of the library by a shelf of tales and myths of these valleys. This place is so much an embodiment of thought itself - or at least it did work that way for me - that I cannot separate my work from the place where I carried it through now that I think about it, the images of certain authors are forever welded with a certain spring dawn over the golden mountains or the

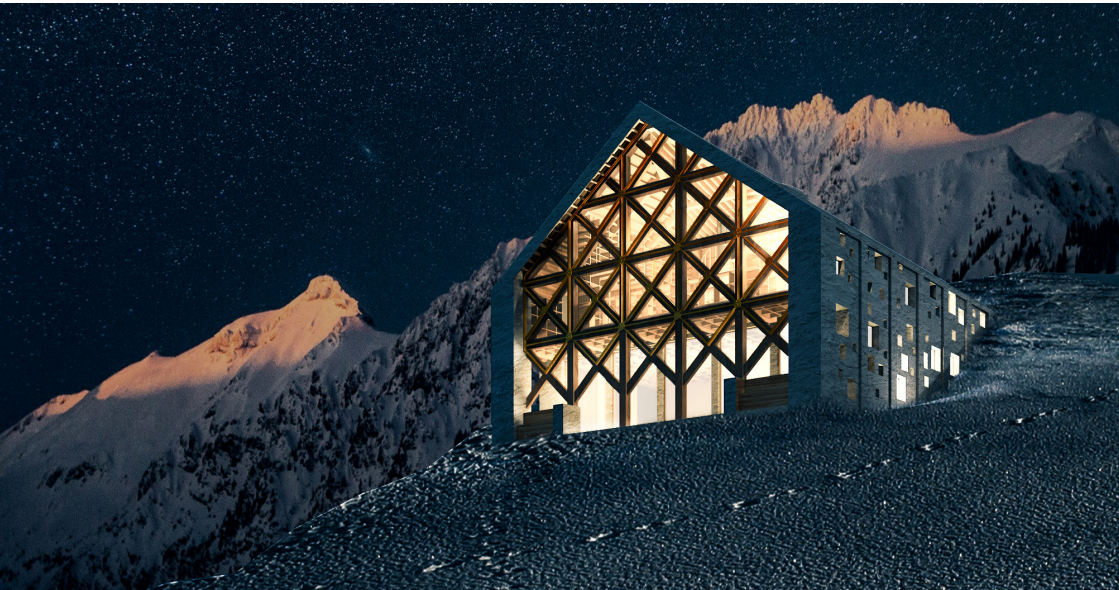
smell of wood, stone and paper that permeates this well  
of books.

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regarding the relation between certain readings and space  
see Volume 2, p.9



**Foothill Library**  
*A mountain lighthouse*



## Four Walls

POEM

this poem was the first one written and the text out of which the design was created after scraping a previous unsatisfactory one. see Volume 4, p.122

*A wall to the east  
to catch the new sun  
through the jagged peaks.  
Thick plaster and deep windows  
to bathe in the light  
and suck it in.*

*A wall to the north  
to hold the mountain  
and grasp the ground.  
Humid concrete and shiny rock  
to feel the earth  
and ground the house.*

*A wall to the west  
to salute the last sun  
looking over the abyss.  
Grass, wood and polished stone  
to merge house and land  
mirroring mountain and sky.*

*A wall to the south  
looking over the valley  
from a mountain throne.  
Wood bathes in the sun  
grass grows into plaster  
being house and place.*

the characterisation of building elements is here brought to the extreme; in the first half of the stanza it defines the essence of it whereas the second part defines its consistence



*A highlight above shimmers,  
coppery glow pointing upward,  
the house touches the sky.*

## The Nook in the Alps

### MANIFESTO

*Innocence, you the holy, dearest and nearest  
Both to men and to gods! In the house or  
Out of door alike to sit at the ancients'  
Feet it behoves you,*

*Ever contended wisdom of yours; for men know  
Much that's good, yet like animals often  
Scan the heavens perplexed; to you, though, how pure are  
All things, you pure one!*

*Look, the rough grassland beast is glad to serve and  
Trust you; mute though it be, yet the forest  
Now as ever yields its oracles up, the  
Mountains still teach you*

*God-hallowed laws, and that which even now the  
Mighty Father desires to make known to  
Us the much experience, you, and you only  
Clearly may tell us.*

*Being alone with heavenly powers, and when the  
Light begins to pass by, and swiftly river,  
Wind and time seek out the place, with a constant  
Eye to face them –*

*Nothing more blessed I know, nor want, as long as  
Not like willows me too the flood sweeps on, and  
Well looked after, sleeping, down I must travel,*

*Waves for my bedding;*

*Gladly, though, he will stay at home who harbours  
Things divine in his hearth; and you, all Heaven's  
Languages, freely, as long as I may, I'll  
Sing and interpret.*

F. Hölderlin, *Sung Beneath The Alps*

*Down slopes the forest  
And, bud-like, inward  
Hang the leaves, for which  
Down below a ground blossoms forth,  
Quite able to speak for itself.  
For there Ulrich  
Once walked; and often, over the footprint,  
A great destiny ponders,  
Made ready, on the residual site.*

F. Hölderlin, *The Nook At Hardt*

Up in the mountains over Meran, there is a house filled with books and warmed by sun and fire. It is a nook among the high peaks and the perennial forests, a place of quietness and retire. It is a place where one closes himself in in order to look out. It is a small and hidden island in the middle of the forest, among the earthly waves of peaks and ridges, paths and torrents.

This nook is a refuge, like the ones mountaineers find in their travels along the Alps. It is a simple and solid

the idea of the island comes from the analysis of the hofs (Volume 2, p.92) but was enriched and made poetic by Yeats' poem *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* (see p.152). The mountains as a sea comes from *The Tower* poem (see p.102)

this is Hölderlin's nook from the poem above: it is a word that has proliferated throughout many of the texts present here after being read in Hölderlin.

the beacon of the window for travellers comes both from Trakl's poem "A winter evening" (see p.158) and from Bachelard's "penetrating gaze of the little window" in *The Poetics of Space* (see Volume 1, p.9). these two references compose the essence of the Mountain Library

place, grounded deep in the mountain and opened to the valley and the sky. Although it is open to everybody, it is a particular kind of mountaineers that look for this particular refuge. Of course it provides shelter from wind and rain, it has a rock hearth that is lit throughout every hour of the day, a beacon through the windows for the weary traveller and the curious deer. Simple rooms clad in light wood are smaller nooks inside the building itself, like a mountain monastery or a bee-hive. The place is in fact a monument to two things that it gathers around its fire, the mountains and the books. The mountaineers that look for this place are in fact a particular kind, they come to the mountain as if it were a mental travel as well as a physical one. In the nook over Meran walking and thinking take turn in opening the road ahead.

This nook is a place to retire and to expand, to relax in order to think and speculate, to reduce the gaze and concentrate it. Although its character of isolation and retreat makes it very similar to a hermit place its mode of retire is of a different kind. The place is not created by the act of retiring into an inaccessible place, closing off the outside world, but by the interplay between place and space, between the building and nature. The architecture therefore, is the act of engaging the landscape in the creation of the place. Building is the act of revealing the nature of this mountains and their relation to human thought. The building unveils and grounds

the complex composition of the Library has its origin in this action of retirement and expansion, see Volume 4, p.126

the meaning of the space into a place. It marks the place and clears its space out of the forest and the slope. It reveals the plan and its relations to the sky, the peaks and the valleys. It grounds all of these ideas and many others into perceptible forms and materials. It embodies the meanings of its two opposite poles, the mountain and the book, wilderness and artificiality, man and nature.

The nook is a place of stillness like a lighthouse in the tempest, its light the inhabitants who keep the fire lit and the walls warm.

As such the building is a shrine to its two gods, the mountain and the book, nature and knowledge. Like every temple or shrine, its physical presence is a representation and embodiment of its faculties but it does not stop there, the temple is inhabited by that which makes its two gods emerge, man with his thoughts and words.

The sacrifices are made of ink and paper, the processions are carried out as much by the movement of the body among the trees as by that of thought and gaze. Through this act a building blossoms forth out of the ground, a place of solidity and simplicity, straining toward the sky, like the majestic trees that surround it, with its roots firmly grounded in the earth.

Meadow, path, building and trees are not contiguous elements of a landscape but part of a single organism, space is turned into place by the attunement of artificial and natural notes. This is the muteness of architecture

the theme of the library as a temple comes here explicitly  
to the fore

see C. Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci* and S. Holl, *Anchoring*

that reflects the quietness of the wise. It isn't quietness out of simplicity or stupidity but, on the contrary, it reflects a state of arrival, a stillness that is not lack of forces but balance of them.

Mental space and physical space are made to combine, to reflect and host each other like two overlapping and coincident realities. From the scale of the landscape to that of the rooms, space hosts and embodies thought and its relations with the physical world.

This house belongs to a twofold realm, that of the mountain and that of the book. The house – with all the elements it implies, from path to window – is what brings this two elements together. Nature and thought, landscape and mind, are merged by the building which gathers their qualities. Through the path – physical and ideal at the same time – the retire from the valley to the mountain is made without losing the connection; instead it embodies it in the physical presence of the path, the house and the act of reaching it.

The mental act of retire for which the house is built is embodied in the site and the path to reach it. The architectural embodiment gives ground to abstract thoughts to be fixed in physical reality. Just like the highest peak the mountaineer fights to conquer is at the same time a physical presence and an ideal, abstract, idea.

The architecture is like the mountain peak, a physical presence that allows an idea to grasp it and own it, reaching the ideal through the real. Peaks and architec-

the muteness of architecture is one of the key elements taken from A. Rossi's *Scientific Autobiography*

on the theme of the gathering see Volume 2, p.72

also in this library materialising the space of thought is one of the objectives

see Volume 2, p.102

ture can be inhabited in space, they don't only occupy space but they make it and imbue it with their concepts.

## A Mountain Library

### DESCRIPTION

...  
*I pace upon the battlements and stare  
On the foundation of a hose, or where  
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;  
And send imagination forth  
Under the day declining beam, and call  
Images and memories  
From ruin to ancient trees,  
For I would ask a question of them all.*

...

W. B. Yeats, *The Tower*

*I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee;  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.*

*And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping  
- slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket  
- sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnets' wings.*

*I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,*



*I hear it in the deep heart's core.*

W. B. Yeats, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*

The path climbs up the mountain beneath the thick canopy of the trees. It dwindles like a snake, sometimes following the inclination of the terrain and sometimes climbing perpendicular to it. Walking this path, one takes part and, in a certain way, plays for himself the counterpointed musical composition of the mountain realms.

Between the valley and the highest peak, in that middle region that is the realm of the mountain and the woods, the path reaches an opening in the canopies of the trees. It leads, like an arcade street, to a sort of promontory on the ridge of the mountain, a small gardened terrace overlooking the mountains and their valleys. This area is cleared of trees and only a single lime tree stands in the clearing shadowing a pool of crystal water. This green and ancient wise and the patch of reflected sky at his feet are the two remains of a nature that here has been clearly, although gently, domesticated by men to suit his needs and reflect his spirit. It is a garden on the mountain, like these recounted in tales and myths of this valley – just as much as the lime tree in the middle of it. A small canal made of wood barks brings the water to the pond and then leads it down the hill to return to the torrent whose waters have fed the garden and whose

see Volume 2, p.100

this tree comes from Yeats' poem on the previous page

### 3. DESIGN

sound can be heard, like that of a quiet and industrious neighbour.

The canal is not the only subtle sign of man active presence in this place. The clearing itself, and the garden-like state of the grounds, reveals at first sight a master overseeing and shaping this nook between the mountains and the sky. As one enters the clearing a threshold has been passed and the view is oriented toward those things that shape and characterize this place. The lime tree and its pool of silver water, streaming from the high border of the forest to the lower one. A few beehives, close to where the stream goes back into the forest are huddled together with their matte colour and the tireless noise of their inhabitants which accompany the visitor in his exploration.

Finally the building, for which the clearing has been made and this place connected to the path. It is a solid construction, firmly grounded into the earth and soberly rising toward the sun and the peaks above. Its compactness speaks of solidity and soberness, set slightly aside from the axis of the path it plays as one in the composition of the clearing with the forest, tree, pond and meadow. As it happens sometimes with inanimate objects or landscapes, it seems to have an almost human character. As the visitor can perceive the atmosphere of the clearing as separate from that of the whole mountain, although integral to it, in the same way the house – but it is the same for the lime tree – takes on human

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these features come from the book about the mountain farms by A. Gorfert, *Gli eredi della solitudine*, see Volume 2, p.92

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the tool of seeing the building as a character is here tentatively explored for the first time, see Volume 1, p.77

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in the first stages of the design, when a building is not yet present, the features of the site and its conditions help in finding out the missing piece, that is, the building that needs to be returned to them

features and characters. It sits in a somehow pensive and quite state, retired from the centre of the clearing, it looks onto its small mountain realm with a sense of quite reflection, like an old man sits on a bench watching kids play.

The house is not a normal house, it is a mountain library. Now, this is a kind of typology that is invented here to express an intention that hasn't been made clear yet. The house is a refuge, like any and every building on the mountains. It means that it is first of all a shelter and a place where the wanderer may come in, find a laid table and a burning fire. But the house is also a library. Not a library like the ones you find in cities, with students doing homework and clerks checking books and loan cards. It is a library in the sense that books are stored and accessible to those who may want to consult them, be it because they are confined inside by a snow-storm or because they travelled days to find that copy of a mountaineer memoirs.

These are the two cores of this place which shelters men and books alike, both here because of some connection with the mountains they are all hosted by. The house is in fact a mountain library for many reasons. It is a library in the mountains, which is crucial when employing the conviction that reading, studying, writing are all influenced by the place in which we "leave our body" while our mind travels in those mental realms. Without the mountains there would be no clearing,

the house which the wanderer can enter and where there is a laid table comes from G. Trakl's *A winter evening*, see p.158 and Volume 4, p.140

for the library as a place where to live, your body as the mind travels see Volume 2, p.8

here the text explicitly shows its exploratory character

see Volume 4, p.130 where the core though is no longer the dining room but the stove

there would be no stream, pond or lime tree; without the mountains there would be no house and therefore no library. The library is a mountain library because it employs the mountains in its being both a house and a library. It exploits the qualities and characters of the mountains to enhance and enrich its functions and its use. It becomes one with the atmosphere while shaping it to its own needs and requirements.

For this reason the house is a mountain library, there are city libraries and country ones, university and state libraries; this one is defined by the mountains. The influence though does not stop here, although it would be enough to define it as such. The house is a mountain library because the mountain is not only that which characterises its being and setting, it is also what defines the books that the library collects and offers. The house is a mountain library because the mountain is the criteria for the books to enter it.



## Visiting the Library

NARRATIVE

*...He who has never swooned is not he who finds strange places and wildly familiar faces in coals that glow; is not he who beholds floating in mid-air the sad vision that the many may not view; is not he who ponders the perfume of some novel flower; is not he whose brain grows bewildered with the meaning of some musical cadence which has never before arrested his attention...*

E. A. Poe, *The Pit and the Pendulum*

*Window with falling snow is arrayed,  
Long tolls the vesper bell,  
The house is provided well,  
The table is for many laid.*

*Wandering ones, more than a few,  
Come to the door on darksome courses.  
Golden blooms the tree of graces  
Drawing up the earth's cool dew.*

*Wanderer quietly steps within;  
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.  
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,  
Upon the table bread and wine.*

G. Trakl, *A winter evening*

swimming, to use Poe's word, is necessary to abandon oneself to the text and to be able to fully inhabit it, to see the visions that the many may not view, one has to abandon oneself to the experience of the text in order to make it meaningful

this poem by Trakl, quoted many times in these volumes, holds the essence of the Mountain Library and of what it means to dwell in the mountain. In this poem Norberg-Schulz genius loci coexists with Heidegger's phenomenology and Bachelard's poetic gaze.

this text is the first narrative that shows the exploratory way in which this mode of writing has been employed: the first person of an unspecified narrator allows to merge personal considerations with ones gathered from texts and his first person perspective allows to use him as a tool, a magnifying lens, to explore a field that is yet unknown.

the environmental settings – in this case the foul weather – as well as the mental state of a character have no direct connection with a design but are very important in defining the mood, and thus the atmosphere and the point of view from which certain things are considered and therefore generated as well

I reached the library at twilight in a late spring evening, forced onward on the path by a stormy weather that had been assailing me since I left the last hof, half an hour walk from here. At first I wasn't sure I could trust my eyes, the beacon of warm light filtered by the trees and the wet snow seemed like a mirage. A warm fire sheltered between solid walls and a wide roof is to the traveller of the mountains like the sight of an oasis for his desert counterpart; a goal that is present before the mind much sooner than it is perceived by the eyes. This striving, accentuated by the foul weather and the approaching darkness, made me think that I could well be imagining that clearing ahead of me. A house was visible, its windows were brightly lit; I could almost perceive the warmth emanating from it by the colour of the light and the solidity of the figure, standing firm in the midst of what was now turning out to be a violent storm. A lightning briefly illuminated the whole clearing where the house was standing, allowing me for a spell to perceive its location and the clearing separating it from the forest I just came from; the huge lime tree standing in the meadow as a counterpoint to the house was illuminated like in a staged set. Being able to see my surroundings only in flashes through the out worldly light of the lightnings, I made for the door, feeling as if I had become the unwilling protagonist of one of those Germanic tales so common in these parts.

Sheltered by the roof hanging wide over the house,

Trakl's poem already makes an apparition, mixed with considerations of real and ideal and mirages from Derrida's *Analogue Mountain*

see P.R. Valente, *Leggende Meravigliose* and A. Gortler, *Gli archi della solitudine*

the threshold, a fundamental concept of these volumes both in theory and design, is here explored in its most elemental and symbolic of elements, the entrance door

with a lamp looming over me, I knocked on the door. It was solid wood, with somehow elaborate brass features marking the handle, the knock and a small window; it wasn't a merely functional opening between inside and outside. This door was really an entrance, a threshold, it indicated a barrier between what seemed to be two different realms. It may have been my eagerness to gain warmth and shelter that suggested this character, separating me from my goal and marking it. The light of the lamp hanging above cast thick shadows on the dark wood of the door, making it seem like a niche or the entrance of a cave. The stone work of its frame finally, made me feel like I was in front of some kind of portal and my spirit rejoiced from the luck I had in finding such a gate in the middle of a storm in these mountains I did not know.

Briefly after I knocked, the door quietly opened with a slow and silent motion that added to the sense of solidity and weight I felt moments before. I was invited in by my host in a dimly lit room whose shape and dimensions I could not immediately grasp. The warmth of the house and its homely smells immediately hit me as I entered. As I laid down my backpack and hung my dripping coat I was taken in by the house in an embrace of warmth and security. The struggles of the day and straining of the muscles swiftly took over putting me in a quite state of satisfaction and relaxation.

I'm afraid that my account of the first night spent in

the act of sheltering, fundamental in the definition of the character of the Mountain Library, is here explored by employing a particularly adverse weather in order to bring it to the extreme see also previous page



again, non architectural - or even spatial - considerations are employed in order to better construct a mood and atmosphere which will inform the image that is looked for; in this case that of a place of refuge

Yents' tree appears in this text as well, see p.152-153

the house is mixed with unfiltered perceptions, tiredness, satisfaction and a quite sense of reposed accomplishment that led me to passively take in the place in an instinctive way. The description I am now attempting is therefore a mix of all this; the warmth of the wood and the colour of the light is one with my own emotions and perceptions.

My host was a silent middle aged man who showed me the house, offering warm clothes and food. Luckily he realized the state of mind I was in and didn't aggravate it with questions or unpleasant conversation. After warming up we ate a simple supper together, talking of walking and reading, of the pleasure of solitude and the need, so difficult to achieve, to share it.

It was with a misty and tired mind that I was shown upstairs to my room that night. Not even trying to put down some lines in my notebook I got into bed, lulled by the tempest outside and the warm and heavy blankets. The lime tree in the clearing was visible from my window and I finally fell asleep watching it sway in the wind, its branches entailed in a crazy dance with the elements and its trunk firmly rooted to the ground.

The morning after, I was awakened by the light penetrating in the room. I could still see the lime tree outside, a still sentinel saluting the new day, showing no signs of last night's struggle with the elements. Reposed and refreshed, I could now take in my room which I had only unconsciously perceived the previous evening, dulled by

because this text was written before any design was defined the text is ambiguous and deals with different characters of space and atmosphere in order to materialise out of them an image; in a way it is like someone walking in the dark with their hand outstretched

my tiredness and the emotion of having reached a shelter. Yesterday I had abandoned myself and my senses to the house, taking it in as the warmth that it held in its rooms. Now it was time to reorganize my perception and to begin the discovery of this curious refuge, because it had been obvious to me that it was not a normal hof or a mountain refuge that I had reached the night before. My room wasn't very large, just enough to accommodate a bed, a desk, a few shelves and a small wardrobe. Wood was the main material, from the furniture to the cladding of the walls. The ceiling was wooden as well and I could see from the big beams and their inclination that I was staying on the upper floor of the house, right underneath the wide roof I so gladly noticed when I reached the house in the night.

Overall the size of the room was very similar to those of the hofs and mountain refuges I had been in but the dimensions were in this case carefully considered to accommodate what was deemed necessary to such a room – namely bed, desk, wardrobe and some free space with an armchair. A door opened to an outside terrace, accentuating the sense of retreat that the whole room conveyed. It seemed to me like the human equivalent of a bird nest, or some other construction of the animal world where the walls and the inhabitant have a direct relation, accommodating and shaping each other. As a result I somehow felt safe and at home in this place which I didn't even know existed a mere twelve hours

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see Volume 4, p.150 for the final definition of this space

for the bird nest see G. Bachard, *The Poetics of Space* where a whole chapter deals with this theme; this image also comes back in a more general part of this thesis, see Volume 1, p.93

before. The books on the shelves and the handmade furniture gave me a sense of homeliness that followed me out of the room as I exited to continue the exploration of the house.

As I exited the room I found myself in a corridor with other doors similar to the one I came from on one side and a long line of bookshelves on the other. A diffused light whose source I didn't notice permeated the space and I made straight for the staircase which I saw at the end of the hall.

Downstairs my host greeted me and led me to a dining room in which a fire was already burning in the big fireplace. I couldn't help but think of the *lari*, the Roman gods of the fire and the house that were the symbol and embodiment of the household itself, and for a moment I wandered if my host was some kind of demigod, like the ones met by Ulysses in his travels.

The dining room was very much different from the room I slept in. The former was much larger, with a more public atmosphere; the big fireplace and the long table opposite it were the main features of this room. Although it was quite long and wide, the ceiling was low, so much so that I thought I could have touched it if I only raised my hands. That gave the room a very horizontal direction, the eye taking in the room as a big visual breath. From the fireplace the accentuated perspective led through the dining area to the wide openings on the opposite side, where a large glass cut through the body

the fire, the hearth is the heart of the house and the centre of its construction in all sense. see Volume 4, p.126

the Mountain Library is the one that presents more inconsistencies between the plans and the final design; that is because its first design was scrapped in the middle of the process and a new one was started with the writing of the Four Walls poem (see p.144). nonetheless, the images and the essence of the house identified here come back in the final design.

these two spaces can be seen in their final definition in  
Volume 4, p. 140 and 142

of the house that covered the whole length of the room and spanned from floor to ceiling. The opening was recessed from the volume of the house so that the upper floor was overhanging a few meters over the opening, making place for a covered outside terrace accentuating the horizontal perspective of the room; projecting the gaze as if out of a cave or a telescope. I stood there for a while, letting my eyes wonder as they pleased, taking in the morning light and the landscape outside. Thanks to the storm of the previous night the atmosphere was as clear as ever and the view undisturbed towards the surrounding mountains and valleys. I could now see the lime tree leaning over a silvery surface of water, fed by a small stream crossing the meadow. The forest at its borders was sloping downwards on all sides and now I could truly appreciate the place I had reached. The house and its meadows appeared to be set on a promontory, a ridge that was sided by two deep valleys. It was somehow a natural terrace, a perfect spot to stop and take in the surroundings. It felt like a quiet island in the middle of the wooden sea covering almost every surface between here and the valley down below.

see Volume 4, p. 148

Going out on the terrace I noticed that the house adapted itself to the terrain; like the castles I saw in this area, the house seemed to accommodate two drives, that of rooting itself to the steep ground and that of projecting towards the open landscape. Just like its neighbour, the lime tree, the house rooted itself in the

ground in order to reach out to the valley and the sky.

I wanted to go out in the meadow, to see the house from outside and gain an understanding of its dimensions and settings, I was especially curious to see what this podium looked like since I was only able to describe it from standing on it. Having had breakfast though, my host wanted to show me the house. There were no other guests he said, the snow was still plentiful on the mountains this time of year and few outsiders dared to venture on the paths when storms like yesterdays could happen at any time. He was free then to give me a proper tour of his little refuge, of which he spoke as if some kind of willing being instead of an inert assemblage of materials that formed a building. This didn't seem so strange to me though; as I have already hinted more than once in these pages, the house had a similar effect on me as well.

The building was not so big, I remembered its silhouette lit by lightnings the night before and it was like the other hofs turned into hotels that I passed by on this trip. Here it was different though, the perception of the space was enhanced by the care of details and material, each room a microcosm with its own character in the bigger whole of the house. The opening to the outside and the connections between the interior spaces were organized in such a way that one could never see both the outside and the inside of a different room, which made the navigation of the space a continuous discov-

see Volume 4, p.152

see Volume 4, p.126

again this is Yeats' poem, see p.152

more than the other designs, the Mountain Library is a human character, here this tool is brought to the extreme consequences of identifying the house with its owner, or builder, see p.74

ery through various glances, in and out of the house. The different perceptions and views organized in this way created a fragmented unity in the perception of the house. Forgive the oxymoron but I find that it may well be the best way to express my exploration of this peculiar place.

It was clear to me that this was neither a hof-hotel like many I had slept in on this trip, nor a private house whose hospitality I could exploit because of the weather I was running from yesterday. At first I didn't think much of the amount of books, being an avid reader and a lover of the object myself, I found it pleasant and I felt some affinity with my taciturn host. I had just started to realize that such an abundance of books, all or most of them somehow related to mountains – or so I guessed from the titles and authors I glanced passing by – could not be here by chance and that my host had to be a serious collector indeed to have filled his house to the brim with books. It was then that, with excitement and reverence, he showed me to what he said was the main room of the house. Actually, I believe he called it the heart of the house. Indeed, if you could conceive books as blood, this room could have been nothing else than the heart of this strange organism, pumping the books through shelves and rooms, getting them back after they have reached the cells they have to feed.

As I said, I am a lover of books. Not just reading, but the books themselves. The shelves and books in the

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this is one of the spatial definitions that was abandoned along with the first design for the Mountain Library, looking for a more simple definition of this archetype

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although the idea of the books being central to the house is still present, this space is substructured in the final design by the hearth and the staircase

the overpowering presence of the lights combined with the books is solved in a different way in the final design. see Volume 4, p.146

rest of the house did not prepare me for the vision unfolding in front of me, with my host gently smiling and trying to decipher the emotions surfacing on my face. I was in a very big room that seemed to reach for the sky bathed in hues of blue from an opening high up. The walls were all covered in books of various kinds, climbing up to the light washing down from above. It was like one of those ice caves or crevasses that are formed in glaciers, with the exception that instead of stalactites and stalagmites one could only see books on all sides. A black iron structure of stairs and ladders gave access to this unexpected wealth of writing, inviting to explore the library and travel through it with both mind and body.

I have said before that I didn't know this place before reaching it in the midst of the storm. That is only partly true. I knew this place and finding it was one of the main objectives of this mountain trip of mine. I didn't know yesterday that I was so close and it wasn't until entering that room that I realized that I had inadvertently reached it. Without looking for it I had found the Mountain Library.

see A. Sfirter, Rock Crystal

this is a hint of how this next works: it starts without knowing what it will find but it knows that it will find something, because that is its objective, and that there is something to be found.







