

A space for falling in love

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am
Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich**

Band (Jahr): - **(2018)**

Heft 32

PDF erstellt am: **05.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-919038>

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A space for falling in love

Martyna Marciniak

Paul E. Phylo's Palace was meant to be a space that makes love possible, a building that used love as a design methodology, which would in turn hopefully be reflected and apparent in the architecture itself as a quality inspiring the visitor to fall in love.

Prologue

Paul E. Phylo's Palace is unfinished. Its walls are punctured by holes, permeated by moss and ivy that crawls in from the marshy landscape outside. There are fragments of disconnected handrails, staircases, frames and oxidised mirrors that retain the memory of shadows from the past (the very short period when the building was actually inhabited). Some fixtures and finishes are haphazardly put together, their form completed with cheap wood (mdf, bits of plywood and sometimes even cardboard). Other fragments are almost too rich and opulent. Their disjointed acontextual presence reads somewhat kitsch. The palace likes to be touched, and when it's touched in the right manner, it lets you in to the next chamber allowing to explore the next chapter of the love story. A reconfigurable group of cryptically-inscribed jewellery pieces allows this interior world to connect directly with the touch of the visitor. These fragments are slotted into mechanisms along the palatial journey, triggering wall-embedded apparatus to open doors, pour out liquid or ignite fireplaces. Depending on the sequence of spaces that one choses to enter, the story unfolds differently.

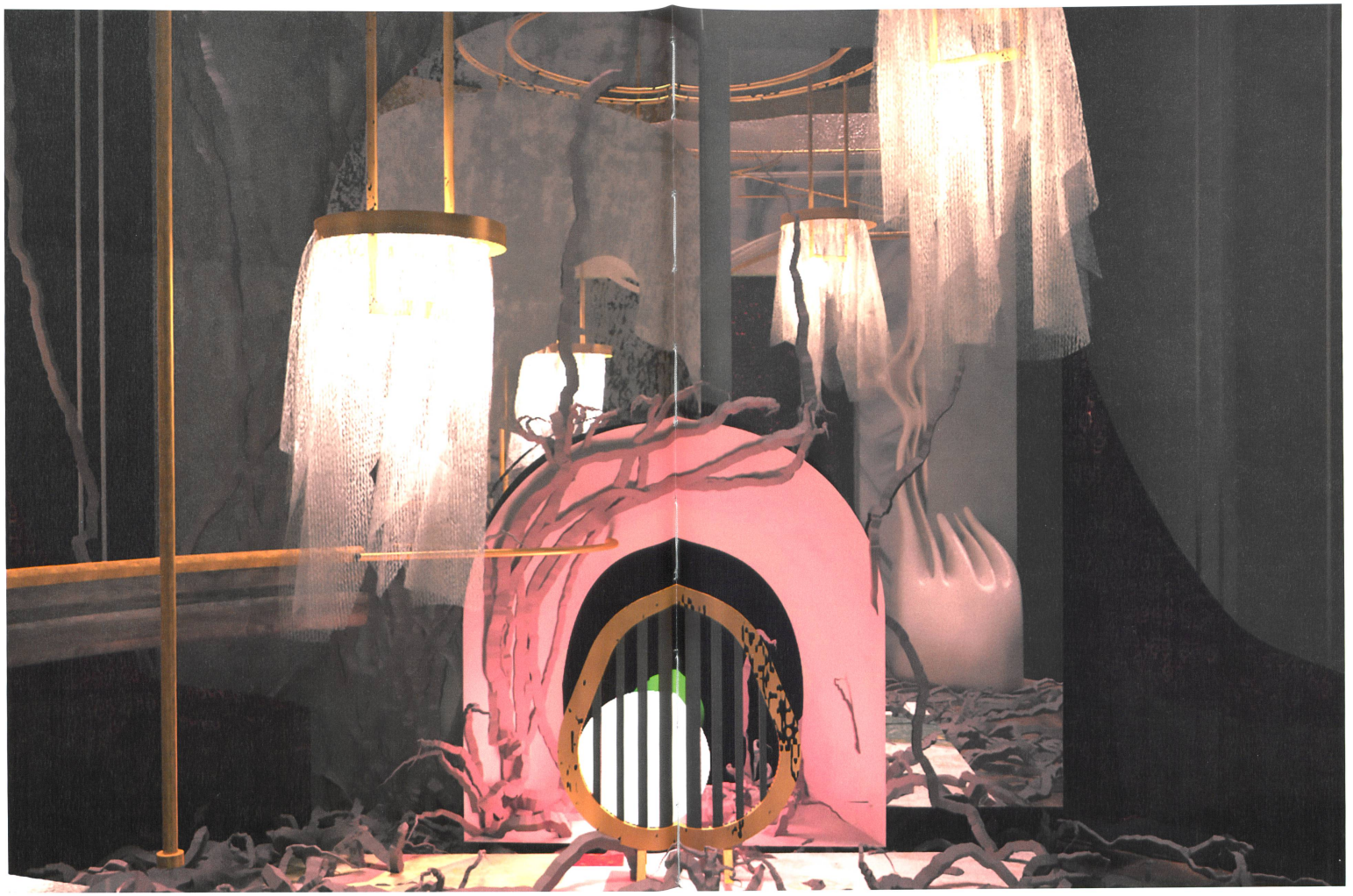
Once in the Palace, you will find yourself immersed in the dark, gloomy threshold connected to the slow and dusty «Lounge of Anticipation» to one side and the life-less, cold, still (almost frozen) «Hall of Indifference» to the other. The Palace doesn't want you to go there. If you choose to do so, the love story will end. Or perhaps, even worse, it would progress in an unbearably mundane manner. What the Palace wants you to do is to succumb to its courtship dance. It is almost impossible not to fall into the building's orchestrated «trap»—no matter which route you choose, you will ultimately end up right where the Palace wanted you. In order to do that, it will manipulate you with light and heat... The heat in the Palace spreads from the main fireplace nested in the walls of «The Boudoir of Ultimate Excitement» all the way out to its extremities. It travels through a network

of veins of the radiators and connecting handrails. Once you arrive at the «Dining Room of Awakening», there will be a softly burning fireplace at the end of the room, a set of bizarre glass chandeliers, oval revolving mirrors and sugar sculptures hanging from the ceiling. The jewellery-keys would slot into a series of mechanisms in the soft, heated walls. The palace would respond to your touch with igniting the fireplace even more and illuminating the room with a strong red-hued glow. The heat would spread to every corner of the room, the sugar sculptures would melt, the handrails would burn up almost unbearably. The heat would make you dizzy... almost delirious. For a split second you might feel physically completed and connected to the palatial body. Then, just when you are about to enter «The Boudoir of Ultimate Excitement», offering you the promise of resolution to this love affair.... just when you will be ready to fall into its red-hot velvety womb.... and just when you'll be connecting the final piece of jewellery to the Boudoir's lock, the room will start falling apart; the wallpaper will slowly bellow out and curl up, the mirrors will become misty... they might even crack and shatter... From beneath the wallpaper, a network of meticulous veins of radiators will reveal themselves. Finally after all the rocking, and swelling, and burning... the fire will die out... the lights will shut down. The Palace will turn quiet, still... The cold light of day will step in and with it the fantasy of love will evaporate. That's where the love will end.









Architectural allegories of love

The story of Paul E. Phylo and his Palace began about two years ago, when I first took the journey through the allegorical and eclectic landscape of the 15th century book by Francesco Colonna entitled *‘Hypnerotomachia Poliphyli’* (the tongue twisting title was quite honestly one of the key features that had initially drawn me to it).

The book, considered one of the first examples of architectural allegories, describes the main protagonist’s (Poliphylo) longing for the loved one (Polia), and his exhausting and elaborate journey to be reunited with her. Poliphylo follows a series of peculiar courtyards, gardens and rooms that are meant to be leading to her chamber.

During the excruciating journey, in which his anticipation is constantly being built up and subsequently subverted it seems that he starts falling in love with the buildings themselves. The rooms and objects begin to reflect and reinforce his desires. The fragmented romantic ruins in particular represent the *‘incomplete’* sense of falling in love and longing. The allegorical corridors and multiple doors he needs to choose literally turn into parallel images of his confusion and anxiety that accompany the state of falling in love. This particular language of qualities, materials and architectural elements builds a typology of desire and falling in love.

The final revelation of the book is that the story actually took place in Poliphylo’s dream. It was him who was the architect of these peculiar forms and spaces! This realisation is key. It means that Poliphylo orchestrated this mental image, this landscape of love, as a way to further his fantasy, to explore and nurture his desire and love for Polia.

Inspired by this discovery and by the potential of architecture as a means of confronting oneself with the fantasy of Love, a vision of a space intended just for falling in love developed in my mind. I continued formalising it during my subsequent *‘visits’* to the libertine interior of Francois Bastide’s *‘Little House’* and especially during the multiple viewings of Resnais’ and Grillet’ *Marienbad Palace*.

‘Last Year in Marienbad’, similarly to *‘Hypnerotomachia Poliphyli’*, suggests a taxonomy of interiors and architectural forms that help tell a story of love and desire between the main protagonists—X and A.

The filmic Palace itself is a construct created as an assemblage of particular features of three palaces (Schloss Nymphenburg, Amalienburg and Schloss Schleissheim). The seemingly never-ending corridors and halls build up anticipation. While linearly growing in opulence they assist in facilitating and feeding the feeling of desire of the main protagonists. The staircases on the other hand, while eroticising the figures and the gaze of the onlookers are also a physical demarcation of an important step in the progress of the relationship between A and X (it is there that they have one of their longer private conversations). Furthermore, the

Marienbad gardens and courtyards seem to be revealing the truth about the carnal passions of the characters while the boudoirs represent innocence and intimacy. Therefore, when the ornaments of the bedroom seem to progressively intensify and *‘grow’* into a kind of wild ivy during subsequent scenes, so is the desire of X towards A. By fabricating these particular architectural features, Resnais created his own language and architecture of Love. The story of *‘Last Year in Marienbad’* would not exist without the Palace. Architecture is therefore necessary for propelling this story forward.

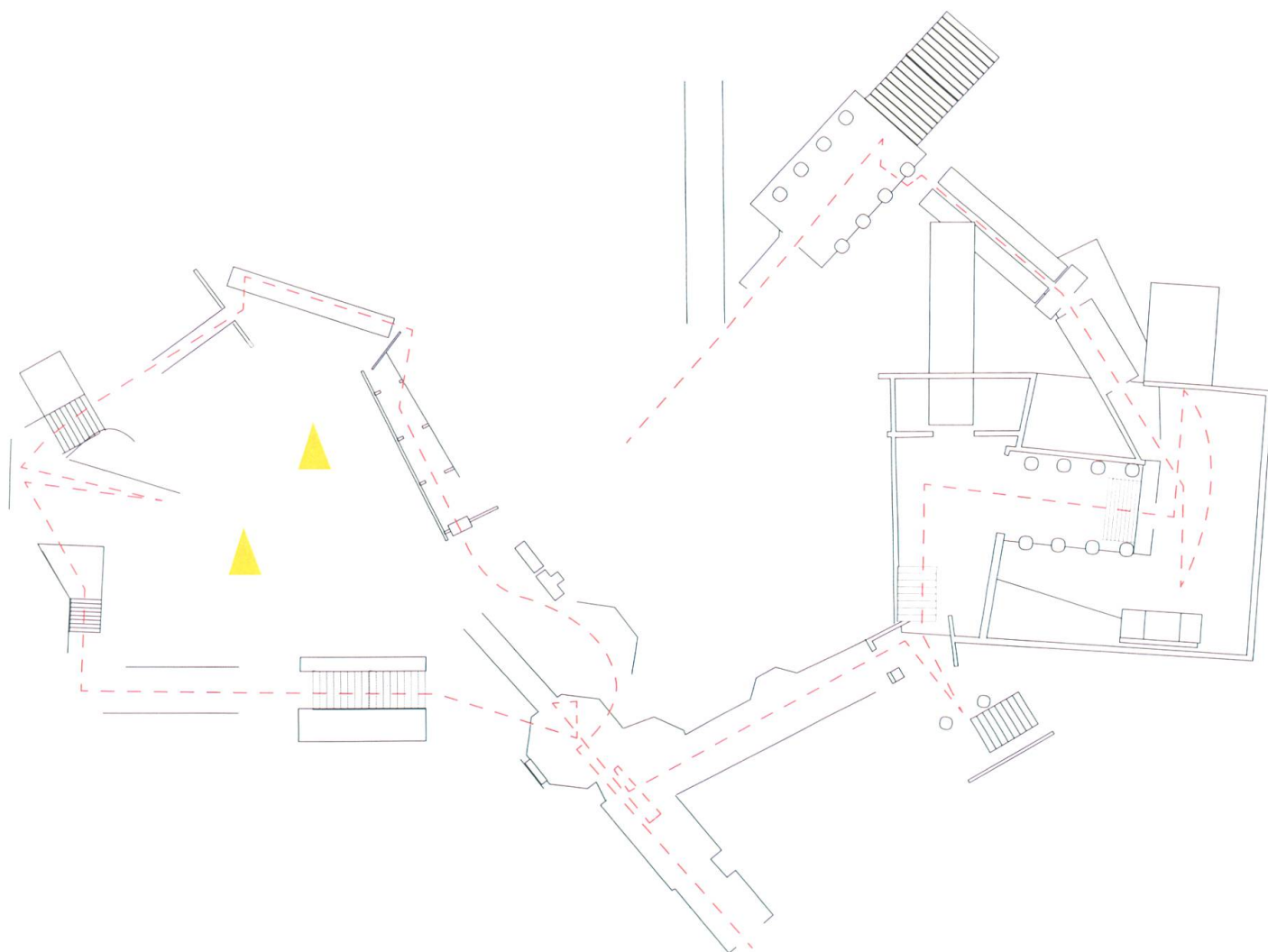
When one tries to grasp the complexity of the Marienbad building, it becomes apparent that it is a purely mental, cinematic space—one that often closes in on itself, bends irrationally and thus endlessly confuses its protagonists and the viewer. This relationship becomes apparent in one of my spatio temporal drawings of *‘Last Year in Marienbad’*.

‘The Spatio-Temporal Analysis of The Filmic Palace’ revealing its labyrinthine quality. Inspired by the potential of constructing an architectural language where love is the main goal and objective, I decided to explore the idea of a space for falling in love through my own architectural allegory—a story of the main character, the architect and builder of the Palace Paul E. Phylo (named as a tongue in-cheek homage to the original—*‘Hypnerotomachia’s Poliphylo’*).

In my project I explored and assumed that particular spatial allegories and taxonomies do stem from the modern cinematic vernacular. It is important to me to highlight that what differentiates a spatial allegory from metaphor is the employment of referential qualities rather than literal forms or figures. My project is therefore employing these proto-cinematic and cinematic constructs to define the programmatic spaces and features. In addition, the highly detailed background to the formative love story would become a tool of its own in defining the architectural details, features of desire and materiality.

Architectural syntax—spatial storytelling

Falling in love is a process. That is why architecturally Paul E. Phylo’s Palace is on the large scale a journey, a collonade—a spatial progression through chambers and thresholds that suggest an emotional sequence—either expressed explicitly through the very names of the chambers or through their atmospheric qualities and physical transformations. The visitor is encouraged to take various routes through the building. However, the route offering the most gradual escalation of desire would lead from the cold, empty *‘Lounge of Anticipation’* bathing in the indifferent light of a rainy day, past the frozen, lifeless and uninviting *‘Hall of Indifference’*, to the *‘Dining Room of Awakening’* that warms up and lights up softly. Finally the visitor would enter the overtly warm *‘Boudoir of Ultimate Excitement’* that has the capacity to heat up beyond control—to melt, swell up and finally—disintegrate. There is, however, no one right way to travel through the building. Love is not, after all, a recipe, nor is it a



The Spatio-Temporal Analysis of The Filmic Palace revealing its labyrinthine quality, *‘Last Year in Marienbad’*, Alain Resnais, 1961

calculated prescribed process. The allegorically named spaces are therefore secretly interconnected with a series of hidden passages and their walls are perforated with alcoves.

The method of projecting and assigning stages of falling in love and courtship onto space and landscape is most notably manifested in the 18th century matrimonial maps. These elaborate and beautifully crafted illustrations were using fictionalised landscapes to represent various stages of falling in love, courting and developing a relationship. By taking fictional journeys through these maps one could fantasize about falling in love, reflect upon their own relationship or even consider and devise the various ‘strategies’ for courtship.

One could start analysing the correlation between particular qualities and stages of love with their spatial counterparts. To me these links are less interesting and valid than the sole rigour of translation which is establishing its own spatial syntax and moreover enabling the space to tell a story.

Similarly, in the case of Paul E. Phylo’s Palace, the physical journey can be likened to an emotional one. The spatial progression through various chambers of the building, paired with the immediate experience—the intensification of light and heat (partially caused by

the visitor’s interaction with the Palace) becomes a physicalised augmentation, the recording and reflection of a body falling in love.

Palace—body

Even though I rarely explain it explicitly, the design method for the Palace was an experiment in letting the architecture reflect a fictional yet deeply personal background story—it included a series of fictional diaries written by the main protagonist, in which he archives, dates, specifies and explains how various pieces of the Palace represent different stages of his love for Polia, of their history.

After Paul’s love was rejected (in case of most notable examples of love stories in architecture and art, the loss and unhappiness always yields most productive results) he continued working on it as a way of immortalising his feeling towards Polia. He intended to communicate his affection through the architecture, partially to reflect upon his love and partially in order to make the visitors experience what he himself felt.

The moment of rejection, the distance between complete unity of lovers and the ‘halved’ state of unrequited love is physically manifested in the Palace through unfinished symmetry and

fragmentation. There are ruins of mirrored partners to subsequent chambers. It becomes even more apparent through drawings that the spaces are incomplete and have been adapted to allow this new circumstantial, 'single', incomplete design.

This architectural fragmentation is expressive of longing, the feeling of one body missing the other, but it also allows the visitor to imagine, project and complete the forms and in a way construct their personal image or narrative of falling in love. Paul E. Phyllo's Palace itself is a character (partially a reflection of the character of Paul, and partially the fantastic reflection of his fantasy of the loved one—Polia). As a character and a body it reacts to the presence of the visitor, it seduces him and invites him further and further in. This strategy was borrowed from the Marienbad Hotel where the building is gradually more illuminated as the story progresses and X's and A's desire towards each other escalates. The light also seemingly seduces X and draws him in deeper into the palatial maze. In addition to using light, the building seems to be enticing the character of X with its elaborate beauty. Over time one can observe that the manner in which the hotel is 'dressed' bears a striking resemblance to A's dresses. This feature establishes the hotel as a fetishised object that relates to A's beauty. Towards the end of the film A's gown and the furnishing of her bedroom are so similar, they seem to blend into each other.

The aspect of fetishisation of architecture is also present in my project. The building is constructed with a loved one in mind. The Palace is filled with qualities reflective of the feminine beauty of Polia—particularly evident in the forms of furniture and cutlery in the dining room, the shape of the handrail and in the design of the features controlling release of light and heat, intended solely to seduce and entice the visitor.

These carefully designed pieces of jewellery in particular quite literally connect the body of the visitor with the palatial body and encourage particular gestures in a way engaging the visitor in a very peculiar 'courtship dance'.

Just like Poliphyllo in 'Hypnerotomachia' touching the pieces of the buildings and pressing himself against fragments of moldings on his journey, all the while thinking of his loved one, these pieces become fetishised and eroticised. They are reinforcing the loving connection between the user and the Palace.

One of the ring combinations opens up a secret passage, the other one lights up the space of the 'Dining Room' and when rotated fully, switches on the fireplace that in turn spreads the heat to the rest of the building through a series of pipes embedded in the walls. The walls (made out of encapsulated wax-based phase change material) get warmer, soften up and relax their otherwise orthogonal form. A ring consisting of three parts (to be found and assembled subsequently along the journey through Paul E. Phyllo's Palace) is slotted in various configurations into a series of locks and openings of the Palace.

The space does not become 'loving' without the presence of the visitor. Without them participating in the architectural courtship dance and falling in love with the Palace, the building remains cold, damp and disintegrates under the stress of the outside agents. In its love-less state it gets overgrown with mold, ivy and dampened by rain and water.

Ending a love story

The Palace is a space for falling in love—that in itself is its main function. The final space along the journey ('The Boudoir of Ultimate Excitement'), the last episode of falling in love is expected to reveal some truth and resolution. This is the moment when one is meant to be confronted with the fantasy, learn about what love really means, see its true face. Most novels and films have traditionally resorted to the celebrated and silently accepted ultimate 'happily ever after' scenario. Architectural love allegories however seem to have taken a slightly different approach: Poliphyllo's love journey in a dream is abruptly interrupted just as he is about to embrace Polia. Final scenes

and spaces of 'Last Year in Marienbad' and the 'Little House' signify entrapment, violence and despair¹.

There is no fortuitous resolution to the longing, no release of the unmanageable growing desire. Therefore in the case of Paul E. Phyllo's Palace the final chamber—'The Boudoir of Ultimate Excitement' overheats, disintegrates and fades away.

The 'Space for Falling in Love' is characterised by the feeling of incompleteness, paired with longing and physical desire. It is a space for waiting and a space that needs and encourages physical touch. It uses multiple architectural thresholds, gradation of opulence and increasing physical levels of intimacy to control the users' desires. The 'Space for Falling in Love' reveals it as a gradual process that is different for everyone. It exposes it as anticipation marked with alternating moments of despair and wonder.

This evasive, somewhat disappointing ending reveals a kind of truth about love. Love is something that is first built up in the mind as a fantasy. The fantasy of love is often impossible to be handled and sustained by brittle reality.

¹ Basile Jean-François, 'The Little House: An Architectural Seduction', preface by Anthony Vidler/translation and introduction by Rodolphe el-Khoury, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1879.

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