

THE CEILING

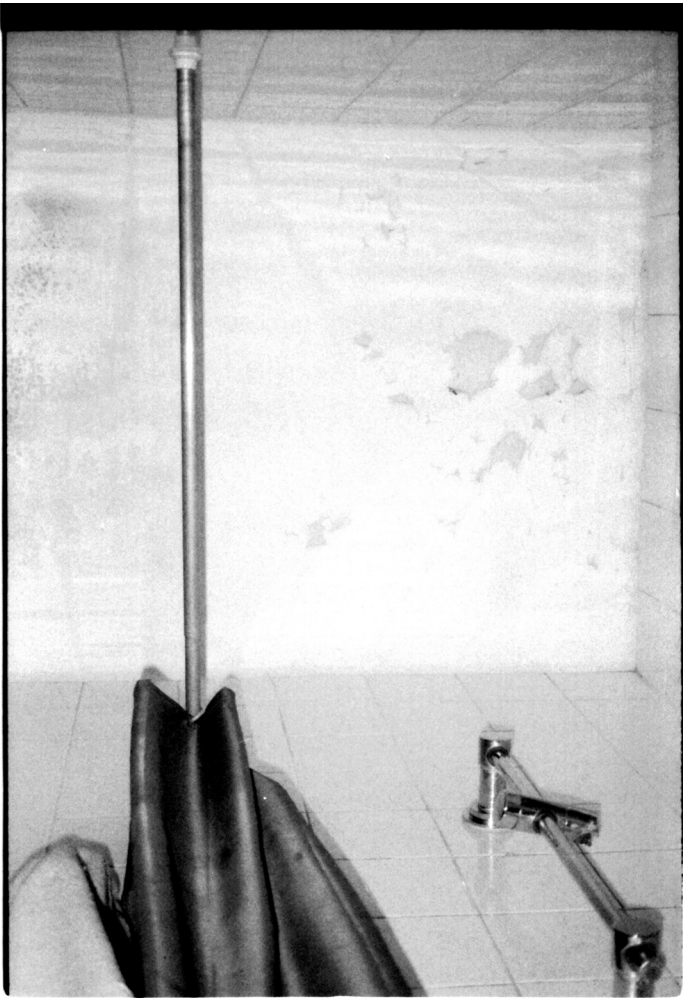
Extract from :

Elise Bergonzi. *INHABITING, The Ruins, The Things*.
Nantes : BLACK HOLE editions. 2021. 416 p.

In the book *The Things*. Nantes : BLACK HOLE editions.
2021. 224 p. pp.179-189

The ceiling

Originally, when it had not been discovered yet that living spaces could be stacked on top of each other in the same way that cans are stacked on top of each other on the shelves of the kitchen cupboard today, we can assume that what we now call a ceiling was only meant to be a roof. A roof is fine. It is a relatively crude form with the sole function of protecting what lies beneath. It is an effective survival device that allows us to hide from the rest of the world and to maintain autonomy. The ceiling, on the other hand, is already a more complex device. It can sometimes be confused with the roof, but as soon as there is an upper floor, all notion of a roof disappears to leave the way clear for the ceiling. Therefore, it is located right between two floors of a building, which leads to confusion as to whether it is still a ceiling or whether it would not suddenly become a floor.



In the shower of the flat on François II square, Nantes island, France. 2021



It's a bit like the illegitimate offspring of the house, it was originally meant to be a roof, and now it has been covered by a floor, and it no longer has any real function except to have become a partition like any other.

In the past, to prevent it from feeling aggrieved, a lot of time was spent decorating the ceilings, painting scenes that told the story of the world or covering the corners with cornices or capitals and the centre with rosettes, all of which were covered with prestigious ornaments. But now that society seems to be less concerned about being watched by higher beings from above and therefore having to look up to see if our actions seem to suit them, we spend much less time looking at the ceiling. So the only attribute it still seems entitled to claim is that it is the cradle of light. And on this point in particular, the evidence is irrefutable: all ceilings in all rooms of all interior spaces are supplied with light bulbs.

A small exception that proves the rule: the ceiling of my bathroom has chosen to refuse its bulbs. It has been stripped of its light globe to better reveal the cracking paint above the shower. A whole book could be written about the peeling desert relief of my shower ceiling. In any case, unlike all other ceilings, my bathroom's is probably the most naked of its kind, and it is the wall that houses the doorframe that has been granted the privilege of awkwardly supporting the hollow light that licks the room outlines. Clinging with all its strength to its twisted and distorted perch, the light bulb sways in a constant dizziness. Its head tilts dangerously to the right in a grin that would make you seasick on dry land. And the modest ceiling looks at it with eyes full of oozing tears, regretting having left it behind.

Apart from this exceptional situation,

the ceiling has become a cheap space that is carelessly left bare and untouched, or that is overloaded with the obscene carcass of the buildings. So-called exposed beams, crude pipes, ventilation ducts and other electrical cables crowd its surface, pretending to dress it up. But when the space is left untouched by all these forms, it is eagerly filled with rows of epileptic neon lights that spit out their gloomy illumination in an attempt to shape an all-encompassing light. The ceiling thus presents itself today as a brutal space. By becoming the pre-established place of light, it has eliminated any possibility of staging. By granting the chandelier the monopoly of lighting, the ceiling has plunged us into the long decades of the master plan and the nomenclature mapping of the most collective and intimate spaces. It has dissolved the mystical values attributed to point light as if to distance the world and humans from the potentiality of existence of plural narratives.

Thus, the ceiling tends more and more to become the only recommended place for light and by superimposing kilometres of neon tubes on its already monotonous surface, the ceiling has ended up forgetting the reliefs and colours of the living. It has failed to remember that forms are made of shadows as much as of light and that they will lose all flavor if they are smothered under the sterile lights that it nonchalantly hangs from its body.

The neon trial

Neon is cold and sad. It is a lonely, monotonous light that balances the contours of forms so much that it ends up flattening them completely, reducing their ability to live or survive in the environment they have been given.



In the construction site of the new Nantes School of Fine Arts, second floor, Nantes Island, France, 2016

Neon is a light without a soul. A bland light deliberately submitted to a total absence of point of view. It is an overall light, which always seeks a kind of total legibility of forms at the expense of their history. This is what we might call the 'hospital effect'. Neon creates aseptic and hollow spaces, spaces with no crannies to hide in, places without surprises where everything is indicated in very large letters and in all languages, like luminescent signs in airports. It evokes falsely clean and smooth places where the exchange and the crowd are only business platforms with a market value.

Hospitals then, but also waiting rooms, airports, train stations, public transport, malls, supermarkets, pharmacies, museums, galleries, schools, public swimming pools, gyms, fitness centres, open spaces, factories, construction sites; today, almost all the common spaces we walk through are shaped by neon light. Our collective living spaces are full of these tubes of white light that generate a radical standardisation of spaces. Thus, we move from one place to another without necessarily immediately perceiving a luminous systematism that is nonetheless very present and that tends to desperately want to harmonise autonomous spaces and forms. Neon seems to be part of our lives precisely in order to erase as much as possible the differences between a hospital corridor and that of a shopping centre. It seems to want to erase the frightening nuances that make up a population. Under the cover of arguing for the equivocality of forms, neon suppresses them in an attempt to bring everyone into agreement. Under its domination, whites become paler, blacks become dirty and turn into dull grey while other colors fade into the background. Ash grey becomes

Hereinafter: Studio of the former École des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, France. 2017



the new chic, the model to follow if you want to be taken seriously. In the same way that you are advised not to wear an apple-green suit to a job interview, the intention was to eliminate the warm, yellow, personal desk lamps and to replace them with neon ceiling lights of clean design, reflecting the order of the collective in the chaos of the individual.

The desire for neutrality reflected in neon, its attributes of standardisation and the aseptic, platonic value it brings to spaces, ultimately contribute to revealing the alienation of a generalized systematism on the scale of forms and individuals. And all this is found in a single central point, crystallized in a bar of light suspended from the ceiling.

April 26, 2020



Entrance of a warehouse in front of the Cent Quatre in the northeastern of Paris, France. 2017