

THE FLOOR

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The floor

The floor is an arrogant obviousness. More precisely, it is a surface obviousness, an obviousness of presence. This presence, this contingency to the existence of the world, has given the ground its evidence; and like all evidence, its indecent blindness, its stubborn persistence sweeps away any denial of its being with a disdainful wave of the hand that gives it this haughty attitude and prefigures its sickly arrogance. The floor is a diva, a honeyed and suave night queen who towers over the crowd in a crystalline burst of laughter and the latter hovers in echoes under her stilettos. The floor swoons, arches its hips and whispers with its tip of the lips to dance on its curves.

Primary, primitive, pre-conceived surface, the diva of the given arches is an evidence

of disposition. Always disposed to “external commerce”¹ as Gaston Bachelard would say, like the common meaning of words, she exercises her primitive and intuitive presence «on the same level with others». After all, the world had to be placed on something. As the original goddess of the refusal of emptiness, the ground exposes its body to give the world the existence of a support that shelters the living as well as the dead. It is a welcoming surface, the first level of an inhabitable surface. There is no house - or at least not yet - without a floor, no neighborhood, no road, no city and no country without a floor. We have always fought to appropriate it, to proclaim the body of this muse of the world as our own, on the pretext that we were the first to have trodden it, on the pretext that it was ours ‘by right’, on the pretext that we had requisitioned it or taken it from someone else who supposedly did not deserve it. The ground, this feminized body, this body promoted to the rank of receptacle, the virile conquerors have turned it into a battleground. As if this body of ground, this primacy of surface, were a possession that could be disposed of, a territory that one should make one’s own, the first question that one asks of the ground is that of its belonging. Global culture has made us believe that land should be claimed, owned, and exist under the governance of someone - no matter if it is a moral or a physical person - ; land should be owned.

It is a strange notion to think of land as property. Why can’t it belong to everyone, and at the same time, to no one ? Perhaps because

¹ Bachelard, Gaston. *“Les coins” in La poésie de l’espace.* (“The corners” in *“The Poetics of Space”*) Paris : Les Presses universitaires de France, 1957 (1st critical edition « Quadrige » : May 2020), 404 p. (Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine)

land is inhabited and humans have always fought for the right to live somewhere. It’s true that it seems difficult to live nowhere, because we are forced - at least until further notice - to inhabit the Earth. To define ourselves as living, we have to exist somewhere. And the first place that allows us to exist is the Earth. The consequence of existence is the obligation to inhabit the world; and for that, we need a place, or at least a space, or a surface, a ground, where we can put the luggage of our existence. So you put yourself somewhere, and you make it your territory. We evaluate the strategic advantages and disadvantages of the place we have chosen to inhabit and we defend it tooth and nail when someone tries to dislodge us from it.

The ground is a doorway, a threshold to the world, and gravity imprisons us in it. It’s a good thing it’s vast, otherwise we’d get bored very quickly and we wouldn’t have waited nearly two thousand years after the year 0 of our Gregorian calendar to try our luck elsewhere by slaughtering the moon.

On this conquered territory, we laid the foundations of a society; a shaky society, but a society nonetheless. We put up fences to delimit our pieces of land and repel invaders; and when that wasn’t enough, we built more. With fences, walls and roadblocks, we segmented the land. The segments soon became borders. More or less hermetic, these borders marked the earth by making it grow deep roots that suffocate the soil that we wanted to protect. Thus, the soil becomes the place that we make.

Bitumen, asphalt, earth, pasture, concrete, grass, parquet, tiles, the ground almost always wears the cloak we have imposed on it to allow us to walk on it. The floor is crowded, supporting our bodies without flinching. It has no say in the covering we give it, we don’t ask it.

Sometimes it rebels, moody diva who screams and decrees that its coat is too old, too tight, too out of fashion or too inappropriate for its feverish body; and she lets it know. She starts to roar to break the rigid chain with which she has been wrapped. Then the ground cracks open and we discover that it can destroy in a few seconds all the efforts we had put into building our habitats on top of its skull.

The floor is capricious.

Magnanimous, it supports our complex structures without saying a word, and from one day to the next one, it decrees that enough is enough, that we have gone too far, and that our manufactured lives have become too heavy. And all this because we have had the unfortunate tendency to forget that the floor has three dimensions and that, in addition to being a habitable surface, it is also a surface to be walked over and over again. The ground is the place of movement, of mobility and nomadism. Our sedentarisation has made us forget that the ground can also be used as a support for travel and that nothing forces us to stay put if we choose to experience the world as a journey and not as an anchorage. Anchoring ourselves and belonging to a piece of land has led us to blindness and oblivion of the rest of the world, which always seems far away and inaccessible, even almost intangible and unreal. All the lands we have never been to appear as imaginary countries told by the most reckless among us who have dared to venture there or by the immense heap of fragments of images of these distant worlds that reach us.

Perhaps the strangest thing is that we are beginning to realise that we live as far from these unknown lands as we do from our own. By always trying to rise above the prison of our ground, we no longer even notice what lies beneath our feet. By dint of climbing so high

towards the sky, in a delirium of grandness, in a madness of elevation, we forget a weary ground that supports the steps of our buildings. The diva bends her back in a disillusioned sigh. And the higher we are, the more reason we have to fear the fall. So, with a fearful and dizzy look, we prefer to raise our heads until the ground fades under the clouds and the rain falls under our bodies, feeding the earth without reaching us.

Meanwhile, several metres below our feet, under the asphalt and the parquet, the ground absorbs the rainy storms of our desires for greatness. The floor breathes and sweats. It is a living surface that feeds on our disorders to keep itself in balance. It is the bedrock of a world that it has become accustomed to slowly digesting, nonchalantly ruminating on the indigestible waste we have left behind in our frenetic ascent. The diva oozes from every pore and drinks until she is sick, unable to distinguish between the nutrients beneficial to her survival and the poisons that litter her surface. She drinks all forms indiscriminately and gorges herself of the world like a hungry and insatiable ogress, even swallowing the dead we bury. Voracious indeed, but patient, or almost devious, the intemperate ogress also knows how to wait placidly for the decomposition and decrepitude of the living and the non-living alike; knowing that whatever happens, the things that have risen from its surface will eventually collapse one day or another into the moist corner of her open jaw. Each elevation generating its own hollow presence; somewhere else in the ground, our dwellings leave the shape of their body in negative that exposes itself as blind cracks. One day, these hollow dwellings will



return to their gaping holes, hollowed out for too long. Things will have lived breathlessly, tirelessly trying to avoid that fateful moment, and seeking to keep themselves at all costs out of the craters they have created. Our homes, these beings concerned and anxious to keep as far away from ruin as possible, are awaited by the ground. This monstrous diva with sharp and dusty claws, silently broods and covets the forms it lends us, before greedily swallowing the memories of these dull residences.

Tirelessly, the ground contains the memories of the world. They pile up like layers, strata of compact and protean materials that are superimposed in sticky and crumbly heaps. The contours of the memories of these dead forms create an opaque fabric made from the seams that bind them together. But this sheet covering the floor mattress is not completely waterproof and rain sometimes trickles down between the cracks. So the floor also contains the tears of the world, and when the rain seeps into the crevices of forgotten forms, the floor drowns in its own memory. It sinks and slips quietly towards its last chamber, towards the underground caverns nestled in the heart of the world and settles delicately in the water tables, the last homes of the poetry of solid water.

These natural cisterns are the densest cellars in the world. Precious tanks, they contain the limpid liquor that nourishes it to keep it alive. The silent waters sleep in the beds of these magnanimous lakes, guardians of the world that boils under the earth. The water tables are pools of sedimentary deposits where particles of forgotten memories are laid down by the agitations of the surface and the ground protects them like a skin protects the flesh that holds it in place. It lays traps that make progress in its subsoil difficult and uneven. It litters its surface with swamps, quicksand and



Former Nantes School of Fine Arts, second floor stairs of the right wing, Nantes city centre, France. 2017

time-hardened monoliths that do their best to hold back the pipes and greedy drills that seek to burrow into it. The ground is an impenetrable surface, a sulfurous diva that rightly refuses us its favors and seems to have no bottom, a surface where one would like to dig always further to reach the heart of the Earth.

By seeking to go ever higher or ever lower in the curves and boundaries of the ground, one forgets to live in the middle and to see the torpor of banal forms that also compete for a place in the sun.

About floor-ceilings

We have forgotten the wanderings contained in the uncertainty of the places we inhabit. We have made maps, we have named places so that they can be read on our maps, and we look at them from the ground hoping that they will give us the same pleasure as being where we have never been. We have become experts at couch wandering, more capable of wandering our flats than wandering the world. In the end, the only places that have not yet been precisely mapped are our private spaces, the portions of land that we pay to keep secret and ours alone. So we wander around these spaces, looking for their boundaries and the landforms they contain, hoping one day to map them accurately.

The floor is the pillar of these spaces designed to make us feel at home. In these places superimposed in layers that cluster on top of each other, the floor is the link that allows us to cross them. It is both floor and ceiling,

depending on the level you are on and the point of view you are living from. If you are on the first floor, you live on the ceiling of those on the ground floor, but you also live on the floor of those on the second floor. You live in the spatial interstice of two other spaces, and if you live in a building, you live in an interstice between two unknown spaces, two spaces that have not been mapped. So when the ceiling looks up to the sky, it observes for you the unknown shapes that criss-cross the invisible shelter above your head, and the floor does the same, bending its spine to look at the shelter below.

It has to be said that floor-ceilings are indecisive decoys that like to think they are sky and earth, often disappointed that they are in fact only horizontal partitions that we forget to list when we try to make an inventory of them. They are the most discreet walls in the house, hidden walls, turned upside down at right angles, and on which we lay a few rugs to make sure they don't catch a cold in their hiding place. Between these two surfaces, which are perfectly dilated so that we can stand on them, rise the creaking cuddles of our daily adventures, and the walls keep these parcels of shelter at arm's length. On top of their skulls, the top floor winks at its trampled double. The lower floor looks at it with envy, eager to join it, always ready to take flight. Between the two, in the lively interstice that they brood over with their large open eyes, their sighs diffuse and mingle with the air we breathe; and their breaths cover with a fine layer of dust the objects that are heaped between their arms.

In the intimacy of our familiar spaces, we sometimes find treasure maps for invisible forms, those that we pass by without seeing them. These blind shapes are the remains of earlier curves, like a mark left by the feet of the coffee table on the carpet. The sound of the shutters opening and closing, the shape of the shadow of

the lampshade on the ceiling and the color of the polished metal of the sink are signs of the thinness of the space we inhabit.

The floor is both the base and the cover of those little things that make spaces come alive, it is a place of events and inertia that always seems to be waiting for someone to come and put something on it. The floor is the tidy compartment of a theatre stage on which takes place the silent adventure of forms that wander in the interstice it grants us. It is a virgin space that waits with hope and desire for something new to come along, even if it is almost nothing.

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