

# The Phoney Island of the Mind

*Texts for Nothing*

Volume 4

The Phoney Island of the Mind

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roger connah

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**Sunbathing in  
Manitoba with  
Witold Gombrowicz**



Communicating by means of art is an amusing misunderstanding. A prose work mixed with poetry is not a mathematical model and is different in each head.

**Witold Gombrowicz** <sup>1</sup>

**The Phoney Island of the Mind**  
**Texts for Nothing 4**

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Roger Connah

*We must tell other stories. These 'other stories' are our 'other children; the educators of 'real children'. It isn't possible for 'real children' to exist without 'imaginary children'. Schizo-activism cannot exist without relentless investigation: this is where its imagination is being employed. We do not want to abandon the outside but to reclaim the interior's attention before it folds into its black hole. The hope of contact with the creative mystery is not a nostalgic hope of return. Strange mechanisms occupy the deserted centres now: we do not want to reinhabit them but we do not want them to dispose of us*

**Andrei Codrescu The Disappearance of the Outside.<sup>2</sup>**

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## **Into the Mystic 2**

## Into the Mystic

Scavenged materials

Unscattered minds

Drift is tangible.

urban strategies, activist architecture, rethinking conservation, disaster strategies to avoid the next inevitable disaster; all need an increased knowledge of the inner, adaptive haiku within our scavenged worlds.

We are all invaded and invading. Our personal infrastructure trembles. Today the imagination, the desire to be dynamic, lively, responsible, immediate and contemporary can close on itself – by program, by context, by agenda, by habit, by instruction. By violence. We all need vigilance.

How then might self-insight offer the challenge of the unknown, the necessary discomfort to upset personal infrastructures? Why do we succumb to delusion, why do we default to indifference? Who is the 'other' that is not us?

Fortunately we may have escaped such disinterest in the world today, but a detached ecstasy still invites us to understand why many return to the locked box of known secrets, known achievements and closed worlds.

Do we need more self-challenge? Move naturally, we tell ourselves, move into more meaning just at the moment we reduce the world to the least (architectural) meaning.

Don't settle then for the same lines applied to a more limited architecture or urbanism when the haiku of the future demands more contemporary, unknown reductions. Just exactly who is afraid of the architectural haiku?

And how inappropriate is this, strangers to our own reductions? Is there nothing in the already accepted representation of built form that invites ideas to be freed from known boundaries? The more fluid and errant we need to be between the syllables and the haiku, the more fluent we become in the oscillations and secrets of the scavenged and invaded world. Texts in the volume began for conference calls, abandoned lectures, and other re-adjustments that become pleasurable in life's re-writing. For increased content and a renewed position in architecture this is as good a beginning as any.



*Avant-garde art, especially, can only be consumed by those who have the right mental apparatus, the right schemes of appreciation, the right codes to decipher it.*

**Garry Stevens<sup>3</sup>**

## 1

**SAVAGE TITILLATION****Wide Open on The Perfect Fence**

Savage titillation of a nerve in the dark.  
 Images as responses. Images as energies.  
 Images as skin-pricks. **Henri Michaux** <sup>4</sup>

On the closing of the architectural mind, of the narrowing of the functional, conserved world where capital flow meets software and the imagination, perhaps there is really only one truly philosophical position: if we don't commit suicide, or allow architecture to commit suicide, where do we stand? New models of organization will not be held back for much longer, nor will the ownership of the derailed world be ours and ours alone. Architecture will replicate the fence, the perfect fence, by internal copying, by becoming more about the manufacturing of the work, its process, pitth and production rather than the actual work. Condemning us once more to blame this wanton condition on the digital un-being in us all.

*Where Do We Stand* (ACSA, 2011) is an attractive conference call to arms but it might – paradoxically - be doomed from the outset. However, paradox upon paradox, this might then well be its winning formula. For within this tacit framing of the catastrophic in architecture over the last 2 or 3 decades lie the seeds of architecture's own dulled perpetuity. To ask this critical reflection of educators, architects, practitioners, historians or critics wishing to declare

a responsibility to the chosen field, is to assume a position not quite as challenging and as rigorous as we imagine. We might, unbeknownst to the re-tooled and constantly re-adjusting world, be residing in a more permanent inert condition than any reality recognized today.

*Trial by Google: death by architecture!* Resistance or redemption? Is this not the moment we ask the same question over and over again – *where do we stand?* – in order to cease these questions? In an expanding, self-confessed world of an architecture losing pace with the urban and political present, how are we to talk now? What position are we to put the tongue in?<sup>5</sup> What then might this grievous but creative position present to designers, critics, architects, urbanists and investors? We need only consider architects, conference goers and organisers, hosts, guests and instructors over the last 30 to 40 years. We can discover in publication after publication how some talk the architectural text but don't always walk the architecture.<sup>6</sup> Some talk very well, comfortable with a new *archobabble* that funds professorial careers, research positions and publishers. Others do it less well, scraping around for the poetry in lost forms, in the lonely cities and abandoned pedagogies of the skier Martin Heidegger's late 'turn'. In many schools and universities the research engine has come unattached from the project engine. Vacant prescriptions but clever poetics allow a subtle series of derailing and re-couplings to pass for the future. Universities scramble to re-structure their funding programs with professional sponsors, clinical professors, instant research programs and re-invented curricula.<sup>7</sup>

*Where Do We stand?* Is this the perfect fence? Mimesis and poesis: the face-off of the late 20th century? Does this condition invite us to ask, recklessly against scholarly pretence, how intimate is the stance taken? What responsibility is

demonstrated in critical terms in relation to a partial and at all times constantly de-stabilizing and dislocated architecture? If we are to heed this call for responsibility, the subsequent agonised avowals might not be enough. Cleverness has become architecture's inner sanctum. To state which side one is on, where one stands (on anything!) may appease critical urgency but in all likelihood will continue to remain disconnected from the creative instability and ambiguity of daily education or practice. Isn't that how it should be to emancipate education from the perfect fence sitters?

Discomfort is more obvious. If we shift our own red dwarfs and worm-holes, thinkers, historians and architects of other eras, including the teaching profession, will find themselves re-charged by realising that their own engaged and committed worlds are slowly returning to relevance. The trick is of course in the language: to know how to trip between techno-utopias, spatial ghosts, tripped switches and social inequalities. From that position on the perfect fence, this begs another question: if change, constant fluidity and expediency are prevalent, albeit untidy positions, does this make the ability to take a stance less effective?

For years architecture is no exception. It has talked in spirals of the expanded interdisciplinary and communicating world but hardly walked that world. Many younger architects, instructors and students would be the first to demonstrate that they actually revel in the shifting strands of a partial architecture. Many are drunk on multiplicity and – with no small opinion – would fight to avoid situating themselves in the gradient between the extremes of optimism and the apprehension that attends this call for reflective thinking and responsive architecture. Sentences are not finished today; they are left hanging for the imagination to complete. How

quickly, and at what moment, do we rush – for example - to interpret this call as one for the reconstitution of the foundations of this discipline called ‘architecture’?

Few, on either side or any side of the perfect fence, will admit to the phoney island of the mind though many, like the poet Laurence Ferlinghetti, are sponged with clues to an expanding territory which will ultimately reach that vision defined by a useful inverse; an expanded architecture without the burden of expansion?<sup>8</sup> Are we thus to insert a measured critical frame implied in taking a stand? Or are we offered a new challenge: and by so doing acknowledge critical stances are not, or have never been, as fixed as ideology wars, icon-crushers, conference-positioners and paradigm-shifters claim. It should not then surely be a stretch to imagine the ideal stance to be taken. Is this not one of extreme commitment and responsibility whilst sitting on the absolute or wide open fence?

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*The Perfect Fence?* There is no question architects reveal themselves and their dissonant world through un-hidden doubt. Doubt is of course a brave call, made even braver as it atomises into its expanded territories of after-text, post-occupancy, post-disciplinary reversals, the age of uncertainty and response. Even those moves to put architecture back into the box risk the hinged factor of openness. We may then, in the rigour of recklessness, have to wonder whether expecting architects and their agents to announce their position, to partake of this re-take of the agenda of architecture, is not a failed aftermath of the trapped political and cultural programs implied in the architectural profession from the last century. For to respond to this, to alight upon this expanded architecture and another re-founding

of the discipline, would not the pedagogy and profession need to introduce radically new curricula, or a double period of sabotage every Thursday for two hours. And this to ensure we eventually veer away from much of the current pre-scripted, boot-camp and prison house language indoctrination of architecture schools?

We stand together often creatively cursed, sounding as if we can, in this case, use the insightful media critic to indicate our futures, this potential “next step on the evolutionary chain” of architecture. What is this evolutionary chain? And how do we unweave that rainbow? The lip service paid to the inter-disciplinary, a parallel and plagued condition of an expanded architecture, has been for some years simultaneously miraculous and delinquent. It is useful here to use the momentary to define the condition of eternity, for this is often acknowledged by those able to contest knowledge with fallibility theories. In this way we assert the *via negativa* to call out to contemporary beliefs, to that wondrous condition of a human and humane architecture that “must somehow embrace seemingly contradictory values.”

Naturally these self-contained language utopias are not ours and ours alone. But as if to acknowledge the dream state of our own epistemology, we would need to pass beyond the cliché of the in-between, beyond the in-and-out focus of dream-like reality. Is this the disappearance of any outside? And yet we are asked to turn to the media as prompt for the critical in criticality, for the pedagogy in pedagogies and for the structure in infra-structuralism. Is this the re-awakened agenda?

To set the terms of this re-awakened agenda, we turn not to the novelist, not to the poet, nor the chemist or mathematician. We wish instead to be dynamic instead of static. We



invent this rather novel condition for our urgency, wiping away as we do, centuries of similar urge and élan. In so doing, we are also doomed to ask our new language to meet its old language and respond to the politicization of architectural education which itself is unbattered and un-yeasted, un-risen in the tacit condition of this imagined chain?<sup>10</sup> Is this not the very tool that goes hand in hand with only certain kinds of architecture and, along with agreed pedagogies and schools of thought, is used to re-tool a commitment from the outside: amongst academics, critics, students and architects. Does this really stack up?

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*Architectural nemesis is upon us.* Periodically we are returned and must return to the self-contest in our own language. It is the thrill of this reverse world, the irreversible in the backward glance that tempts this, that pinpricks the architectural skin to declare precisely the angle and coordinates of the position on the fence. We might ask ourselves to go even further. If we are brave enough to recognise that this 21<sup>st</sup> century need not be more re-heats of the last, then we begin to dwell in the spaces where we move in and out of sense daily, by the hour, by the minute. Perhaps our clue should be in the self-definition of the word ‘crisis’; the necessity of the rubbed edge that does our editing for us, that erases the issues in front of us as if to re-write events and realities that cannot confirm to the imagined, taught and promoted world. Whether this sounds like a crisis once more may matter less than the gathered definitions that pull at this self-contained evolutionary chain we call critical thinking. And there is one such chain to which we give special eminence; that of the tokens and urgencies that emerge from sustainability, and sustainable design.<sup>11</sup>

The perfect fence becomes sustainable. Wider agendas are attributed to each stage whether, like the often misread and abused Postmodernism or Phenomenology, they leave the discipline of architecture open, or wide open. Connecting this evolutionary chain to the claim for the architect's *raison d'être* ignores the ambiguity that will not free us from the universalist, utopian, clichéd confines of a Modernism which has always been self-defined by architects at odds with the more vibrant and challenging notions of Modernism in literature, cinema and culture. If we are to read between the lines of this nemesis, there is no eminence in our current occupation of the agenda, or the tendency towards a pompous, self-righteous condition that sees us workers in an intellectual context trying desperately to embrace a more complex conception of contemporary reality that others live daily.

*So where do we stand?* This questionable reality is summed up by the invention and critical fiction explored in the novel, *Disinternet* 451.<sup>12</sup> If architects are now not only free but required to interpret and, indeed, choose their position relative to this expanded field, then they are free also to burn their references, sources, their books. And with a nod to Ray Bradbury, along with the burning of the books comes the responsibility to ask: Which do we save? In this inner auditing, it is suggested we avoid this tremulous evolutionary chain of chosen and self-selected and self-justifying critics calling for yet another avowal. This tempts the fraudulent soul of the committed individual. This also entices us to believe in the removal of the architect's self-doubt, and the return of the wondrous *raison d'être* as a way to pretend to redress the runaway condition that many architects and educators have brought on themselves.

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*So where do you stand?* Where and how would we best occupy this invited responsibility and freedom if we have not already declared it in our everyday lives? Do we write, speak or design the protest that invites ambiguity into our souls? Or do we then award ourselves this responsibility and not only move in and out of sense by the minute, but extend this to ask defiantly where we stand on our own thinking and doing in architecture? It doesn't take a genius to see that architecture continually keeps coming round to try and over-reach itself. There is despair in this insistence that keeps the marginal discourse, the minority report, so utterly contained by its own imagined centrality. This may be a desirable dynamic that keeps architecture reaching for the unknown agenda, this time within a human architecture or the humane.

The question this poses is not as simple as we may think. If we can pose questions so recklessly and internally, how do we untie architecture from the notion of the aging and the aged? Here we tread ever so gingerly along this passage from the educational establishment, which all but designs the 'disconnect' to the profession that then all but re-scripts the 'disconnect' to the schools. It is not an easy ride and as faculties in our universities age, as selective scholars and historians pass by the heroes and partners of the leading firms, are those that re-tread architecture as a magic ritual, the (gentle) redeemers, saviours, content-hounds or miracle micro-managers that now occupy the fence?

There is a fanatical hoodwink in all this that is consistently ignored, consistently bypassed by the talk-and-walk processions, presentations, Ted-talk legacy and the rapid architectural promenades in conference catwalks and colloquia.

Young students begin actively to engage to undermine this hoodwink but are often turned back to the fold of architectural repertoire and the theatre of the cultured, architectural image.<sup>13</sup> Conferences continually run this into the ground, causing practitioners to sport with academics, and dream once more of this futile but ever so entertaining *end of architecture*. This sees us convinced that architecture can periodically return to the start, re-boot and return to that golden moment when it could scratch the skin of dinosaur excrement, this smallest sample looking a little like a piece of hard-baked Play-doh.

This is the *end of the affair*. And as with all affairs, we can and must \_ if we are to rediscover our *raison d'être* \_ dream of starting over. This is naturally easier said or written than done, and easier talked than walked. To remove the emotional, ontological, phenomenological and philosophical baggage, the poetics of upset and discomfort that constantly drive architects into their own cul-de-sac, must ask the obvious: will there ever be that first touch or even kiss again? There is no centre to enter today!

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Meanwhile in this dream we are all subject – though many of us do not quite realise this – to what we think architecture can achieve. This is the critical fiction we all occupy. This is the fiction that allows us not to recognize what architecture might achieve if it let go. Nor does it allow us to accept the necessary condition of detachment that architecture should and has started to bring on itself.<sup>14</sup> A de-schooling or de-architecturization is not too far away from what is implied in penetrating this ambiguity of the expanded world, this wider lens and richer humane experience.

Self-doubt lifts momentarily, and the condition of richness, the pull to life and freedom would in all likelihood transgress any serious program outlined in schools of architecture, so heavily have they become embedded in the tacit condition of a known and accepted architectural narrowness and narratives. This is the savage titillation architecture plays on itself. This is where de-architecturization could play a crucial role and allow some to take the committed stand required. This asks for more than reversal and re-assessment – this places the soul in a condition necessarily divided, implying the inter-disciplinary as a fragmented thinking process itself. Even; if we absail down the perfect fence, into the realm of non-knowledge.

This de-architecturization implies the use of a language that we may all be able to participate within but has yet to be discovered. Even the simplest transfer from Industrial Design to an Architecture Department offers huge disparity but potential in ‘re-thinking’ design. Doing and representing this thought sets up the everyday, frees the confined senses of the past, cripples the structures that are too easily obeyed, broaches the economic unwellness and sickness of institute and information and goes, against all odds, for a more flexible, uncertain system.

*So where do I stand?* This is not an architecture call; this is a life call. This is to live in the scorched world of ambiguity and freedom inviting multiple parallel actions and agencies. Only those who wish to announce this condition will probably take responsibility without the expanded world being part of that framing. Pedagogically, too, this would need addressing. The narrowness of architecture and its tacit world embedded in architectural schools would be the first to go.<sup>15</sup> In many schools, due to demography and wondrous medicine, there are aging faculties, educators and researchers;

never spoken is tantamount to asking architecture to go and play in the Dinosaur 'poo' again.

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Let us continue to take the contrarian position for a little longer. It is quite possible that far from skewing where we stand – a traditional call to arms to re-situate ourselves as educators, critics, architects and our codes – we may need to understand the hopelessness of this request. Whilst it appears so ethically sound, so delinquently sensible to ask this of architects, students and instructors and other agents of change, we might put alongside this request an open renunciation of the evidence that shifts the level of interest in the notion itself. Does this call for responsibility actually translate into the agents for change that it invites? It is quite possible that asking for this call and acknowledgment of commitment (which many architects and educators would say they never relinquished) in the face of an apparent closed architectural mind would have the desired affect. But what is the desired affect? A wider lens, a humane architecture, an open ambiguity: or that sheltered interdisciplinary?

Has this road not been travelled eternally and will we not be forced to travel it once more as we re-negotiate stasis and collapse. As we re-negotiate the apparent actions of those that take architecture into realms we wish not to have been taken, into an activism or anarchism that we find unable to support in our pedagogies? Up there on our perfect fence is this likely to perpetuate the codes of a limited professional and pedagogical class who wish for the wider agenda without having the critical self, the cultural role or the economic 'nous' to effect change. The wider lens may indeed offer wider management for the architect but it may also be determined by a competence to live within its own re-evaluation of past glory, implicit closure, and the architect



inserting himself or herself into an era of unending vulnerability and – dare we say it under these conditions of the enigma of energy and capital - irrelevance.

One has to wonder today whether any other proclamations and ethical positions coming out of the blackball clubs and discourse centres in the profession and education of architecture could achieve more than this? If it did this however, if we achieved this sort of irrelevance, if we could speak of the agents of change making more sense than the call for change itself, might this not remove the space on which it stands (where do we stand?), the fence upon which we perch, and open up the wider call to a more radical process of effacement, obscurity and ambiguity? Here the key to such change may not be commitment in the traditional sense of the word change, but ‘generosity’. Here we veer towards realising our *raison d’être* is a self-effacing one; the art of leaving with everything but the architecture completed. And if we leave ourselves open to our own recklessness, where might we direct this responsibility if not to ‘generosity’ itself?

Responsibility becomes a political issue when it has long lost its self-governing role, the inner utopias, or the codes that obey the phoney island of the mind. Anaesthesia for an artificially induced sensibility! This may attempt to combat narrowness or even an (un)adaptive consciousness but there is nothing but language to distinguish it from an artificially induced engagement. This avowal – in whatever form it takes – will of course make us feel good, may even embrace supporting programs, research and strategies that confirm ‘the committed individual’. However we might also just be better off pausing all sessions and papers at the conference and considering the politics and phenomenology of engagement itself. <sup>16</sup>

*Where do you stand?* When we come across the phenomenology of engagement, the contours of commitment within the responsible self, the shifting unreachable centres, all valid but wind-blown phrases it is the condition of the absolute fence that should interest us here. To conclude we are reminded of the poem written by the scientist Miroslav Holub called *Brief Reflection on a Fence* <sup>17</sup>

A fence  
     begins nowhere  
     ends nowhere  
 and  
     separates the place where it is  
     from the place where it isn't.

Unfortunately, however,  
     every fence is relatively  
     permeable, some for small  
     others for large things, so that  
 the fence actually  
     does not separate but indicates  
     that something should be separated.  
     And that trespassers will be prosecuted.

In this sense  
     the fence can  
     perfectly well be replaced  
     with an angry word, or sometimes even  
     a kind word, but that as a rule  
     does not occur to anyone

In this sense therefore  
     a truly perfect fence  
     is one  
     that separates nothing from nothing,  
     a place where there is nothing.  
     from a place where there's also nothing.

That is the absolute fence, similar to the poet's words.

To occupy this absolute fence in architectural terms – in conference terms – is neither as irresponsible, as reckless or as uncommitted as it might at first appear. The contrarian proves able to run either side of the fence, see the gaps, glide back and forth in the shifting realities abutting any fence that creates a world of separation. This is a world we cannot escape; the slow, creeping idiocy of mindlessness not the necessary move towards kenosis, or that over-anticipated desire for generosity in the world of architecture, the world of a lesser self. The absolute fence will help us through the zero, take us beyond the un-bearableness of those who may lack generosity, for these are the soul-tenders tempting to right their own world with the ashes of a defeat initiated so many years ago.

Here is the unshaped (un)space of the future world. Even here we forget the rhythm of researchers and historians of worlds. Those knights of the word-worlds, when put to the test of mindlessness, unappetizing as it may be, unglamorous as this directed life has become, explode through the hinged world to reach life's only refuge. In *Disinternet* 451 the novel by Anton Zurmeyer, the books were not only burnt, but they began the awakening all over again without having to pretend anymore that the books were read, and the special one offering a new life, offering (un)space, became the next forbidden book under the pillow. What we do not read has become the issue. What stays untouched that could have altered our world? What remains a risk to a soul too easily calmed?

But sitting on or ranged along the absolute fence we'll not ask for help any longer, nor will love of architecture turn to lost virtue, where the loneliness of insight, still guilty,

is free to be entered once more giving us a chance through the inhabited worlds of staying alive. This is the architecture similar to the poet's world, the rhymed, hymned world of the unsung. We turn not to new worlds but to new duties. We remind ourselves that a memo on randomness can never be random, and a call for engagement can never be announced.

The ideas taught generously in the Disinternet world do not frighten us but might be more generous to architecture than we have imagined. This, against the bullying of the reason found, the intimidation of planned, known motives. A generous move could well offer itself: support the presentation of reading into what we hold to be true to ourselves. What chance do we give the random encounter if we have never looked over our shoulders? *Disinternet 451*, oblique, not quite the lucidity expected, invites a more 'efficient rapid judgement with the intensity of collapse and unimaginable disaster. On the perfect fence, in the shifting requests for commitment and responsibility a change of mind, an inch here or there on the fence, changes architecture.

## 2

**AN IMAGINARY MUSEUM****A Lecture for Nothing <sup>18</sup>**

Words too have spun out of control, more so in the last century than this? Not sure, give this century more time. But is it really possible to go back on our own words, to take back everything we've written, and still claim that an inordinate amount of time has been spent in the last 50 years hijacking serious architecture with an applied language, an *archobabble* of thin theory, image making, advertising copy, digital fidgetry and philosophical drift? Fashionable and seductive architecture merges critical talent and redefines history only to redefine itself out of existence. If you were not a Marxist before thirty, there was something wrong with you the cocktail party jibe had it. If you were still a Marxist after thirty, there was even more wrong with you. It is hardly a surprise to note no discourse lasts long under the conditions of professional survival, sponsorship and corporate intervention. Yet we might do ourselves even a bigger favour if we recognised that nothing serious would come out of any serious compatibility with Marxism. But this is far too harsh!

Architects still believing in social reform and a humane contribution to wider issue, enriching surroundings, supposedly keep their Marxist leanings within whilst trying to find new ways of being an architect. Czeslaw Milosz's comment from his *Native Realm* is a gentle jibe at those of us in short trousers changing the world through Scouting: "Many years later I understood that Baden-Powell had been

a remarkable prophet of social centralization. Communism then sounds like scouting raised to the nth power.”<sup>19</sup> To be rumbled as a Marxist (even now a Late-Marxist) certainly after the fashionable phase of extremism and Maoism in the 1970s, was hardly ever going to be compatible with developing as an architect. Some architects have held on for much longer than others of course, seeking a new language within which to place their existential concerns for a lost radicalism; an anarchism with latent political dimension. Or some such phrase!

Do we need to consider that split once more: *Architecture or Revolution*? We might of course not go that far, we may not even have the luxury of such excess or be that melodramatic today, but as we get our feet under the table and enjoy the comforts of personal certainty, an increasing global, political, ecological, economic and environmental uncertainty privately dislodges our ideals. This begs the question. Has architecture managed to trivialize the structure of thought and feeling behind a layered, privileged and echoed world whilst other disciplines like law and urban geography continue, for example, to expand our experiences and – at times – enrich our understanding of buildings, cities and urban space? Retaining a moral conscience, a committed stance whilst navigating the affluent society hasn’t always been easy; the charges of innocence and naivety emerge rather quickly.

Yet the contemporary student has little of this comfort and, to go by some, little of this hope. I wonder why. I am often struck when I see detailed websites online, how we consider interaction and inter-disciplinarity to be in place, well understood and second nature, whereas in many institutes this isn’t quite the case. Many of us, too, prefer the linearity of the printed medium to the discontinuity and seamlessness

of digital media; yet there are indications that we are still not integrating or even communicating where we can. We hear talk of re-programming, re-branding or re-structuring, even trans-programming; we use a new jargon and different terminology to describe our applied creativity whether in psychology, architecture, urban planning or environmental design. We hover around ways of thinking, ways of ethical behavior or moral action whilst outdated concepts of beauty hit scientific and technological developments asking for a responsibility today that we struggle to define. Yet our interfaces are often weak, unable to engage the more contemporary interfaces, even those our students navigate.

Anachronistic, it is likely that having turned this century we are critically impoverished. It is *more and more* obvious that it is *less and less* easy to make big remarks about architecture, so quickly do they fall into oscillating chaos and critical uncertainty. The trap of this was put succinctly years ago in the 1960s by many writers including amongst them, perhaps surprisingly, the activist- writer, the Trappist monk Thomas Merton. Critical visions we thought we understood - vernacular, functionalist, organic, regionalist, brutalist, realist for example - have become unstable. Why is it that we still forget one of the most obvious post-war lessons from the 1950s; that the observer is always part of the observed, the critic part of the commentary, and the historian part of the history?

From the theorizing of the last three decades, extend this to architecture; the building could remain part of a knowledge known only by those who choose to be part of it. At the same time contemporary popular commentaries on building and architecture seem to make us too obedient to a future we do not yet perceive or understand. Freed from attachment to principles that are not quite applicable to the present leaves

us emptied and vulnerable. To analyse and accept innovation, even when there may not be any, we need new critical visions.

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Buildings can be served sentence by instant critical commentary and popular journalism. A building can be found subtly discordant, offer even a brilliant but failed resolution. Or then its historical trajectory can be traced to the precedent of all precedents as if artistic influence is to condemn any innovation the work offers. Even the symbolic register of buildings with a little fidgeting can be traced back to Hispano-Islamic projections into the low North, or Germano-Slavic Byzantine resonances. And so on. Why do we find sentences that still use the phrase - *in the final analysis* - when there is and can be no final analysis? Is there not only ever a running analysis, lasting for weeks, months, years possibly decades. But hardly centuries!

Is it necessary or even reasonable to call the architect to critical and philosophical answerability? Why do critical and historical pronouncements appear so terminal, so arrogant? Have we learnt so little from uncertainty, from indeterminacy, from ambiguity and undecidability? Or do we need to struggle so continuously against it? Our own time is not privileged. We should take no eminence from this. Most buildings survive the language that is put on them. Besides agendas of practical criticism or popular journalism, besides the functional, symbolic and tectonic weight of the edifices we construct, critical language and commentary often ask buildings to perform to unexpected even obscene agendas. Reasonably or not, the building's success can be prejudged already at the outset without any occupation. Whether this has always been true is less clear, but today



the instantaneous loading on buildings is often irrevocable and naive. Is there no ultimate hospitality in our criticism, no generosity in our different visions, no dissolution in our hubris? Falling short of committed answerability has never been a sin in a discipline always out to offer silent reverence. Most architects remembered from the 20th century are likely to be those that swerved from any language put on them.

The very consistency and framing of critical history can provide a momentary weight that a building should not waste time struggling against. Buildings are asked to be part of a history they will evade tomorrow or later. What critical or popular commentary then for a building that is merely in its first few months? What else but a hospitable commentary for a building that must and will alter, that must and will redefine its own space, and that of the people who make up the public space? Wherefrom this eminence given only to our time, only to our experience of something that will outlast us? Take lighting. Lighting varies over decades and through eras. Acceptable levels change, psycho-socially, though we have few ways of charting this. Levels in buildings like museums are altered for the space, the time of day, the time of year, the climate and the exhibitions shown. Unlike meat, it is difficult to serve sentence on a fresh museum. What is dark *now*, may not be dark in the future, may not have been dark *then*. Chosen tactics, critical scenarios, are always only one amongst many different discourses, ways of seeing, experiencing and interpreting the architecture.

So much do we now need architecture to perform for failures of its own promise that it seems contemporary architecture is asked to over-perform. After all the talking up or talking down, walking around many new buildings you have to wonder why, after all the spectacle and stardust has fallen, they can seem so ordinary and yet, at the same

time, might be so special. Is this illusory? Is this the inconsistent accommodation of an architect who knows when to swerve and when to serve? Are we already predisposed by the language used about building and the pragmatism the ordinariness invites? And just what are the tectonic characteristics that elevate this ordinariness? Space? Structure? Detail? Material? Is this an ordinariness defined by a critical terminology outside the reach of the ordinary user or - in the case of the imaginary contemporary museums - the art goer? Is this a success or is this a paradox still beyond us?

If a building satisfies Auguste Perret's ideal of banality, does profoundness follow? Art itself - the art that is conceptualised and framed up for contemporary redemptive or resistant agendas - may be as far off the canvas as possible, but the museum building provides a strange solidity and solidarity that may now only be attributed to the 20th century. By this I mean a solid, modern and modernising experience. By this I also mean a stage in an Eternal Modernism (defined by some as Late Modernism and now Modernism 2.0) that no longer offers shock or surprise, but instead offers discretion, invisibility, digital brio and quiet redemption. Its quietness may be discretion to the point of invisibility. To some this is the ultimate redemptive and utopian strategy. A responsible act in an irresponsible time; this will seem to many a welcome retreat for architecture.

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Buildings can touch then lose the sublime. Eternal Modernism has come home to stay. This historicism of Modernism is further reinforced in some of the more contemporary art museums. The architecture is put in tension by the fact that the most successful spaces (as in much vernacular work) seem to be the ones that do not, could not, should not, display art. The varying width corridors, the side spaces, the

passing spaces, the booths, the full-length alcoves punched out, may reluctantly break the blank walls where you breathe the whole site. Then there are the half-only spaces between the death of one exhibition and the beginning of another, the foyers, the squeezed spaces against which a chair is pressed (*No Entry*) whilst children introduce and are introduced to art in workshops held in some of the best harbour-or-desert facing spaces the building might offer.

That the building – any building – by its cultural ordering refuses to be a labyrinth may be one of its successes. For it surely then suits the nation's temperament, exemplified by the horrified look on a bank assistant's face when you ask if there is a toilet where your child can go quickly. And now! In this imaginary museum that is trying to free the architect from ignorance, there is no wild inflection of the straight line or binary shift upsetting the echelon of an Alvar Aalto or an Alvaro Siza. Here the ordering is ordered, only gently ruptured and brought back again as in a circle. There are architectural phrases for this; a terminology which would lose us all in the delicacy of the architect's deflating exercise, terminology which we do not need, terminology which makes us think this is precisely the building some people seek to close the last century forever.

For it looks likely that this imaginary building may shake off the name of the architect as fast as the claims and rhetoric for the building close in on themselves. There is an abdication here, prospering the political restraint and loss of nerve in architecture. Seen as a partial resolution, as an idea disallowed to take flight, this interpretation of the imaginary museum flatters the professional compromise. Gentle un-inflection, subtle discordance and wilful ambiguity may see off the popular star critics flown into pay their critical dues to this redemption of architecture. Must architecture then perform to those over-written claims as much

as the under-written – sometimes uninformed - claims of politicians, insurance brokers and ordinary art-goers?

Even salvage as a critical operation today may be beyond redemption, as architecture struggles against a public resistance to hold it back to known and accepted versions of what (modern-contemporary) architecture should now look like. Redemption though will become resistance, as the imaginary museum's architecture and space will slowly be radicalised by the ordinary, and the ordinary will be de-radicalised and re-framed by contemporary art and possible terror. But the triumph of the building will be to shake off the critical narratives thrust on it. Which leaves us where?

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It leaves us surely in a small pavilion on the island on the edge of infinity which is also in the city, in the sea. It leaves a public hugging the transparency of the *cantina* trying to feel both inside and outside at the same time, in the hope that art will never capture their souls even if it has dragged them that far. The map is not the territory. In this type of imaginary building the firing squad doesn't shoot in the back of the neck. The firing squad doesn't even arrive. Terror has taken care of that. Instead it passes, thankfully for the politicians, misdirected by that sign out in the centre of the city turned the wrong way by a hooligan, or video artist. We might never have imagined that a building need not surprise, need not really astonish anymore and by so achieving this, be so rewarded in the first two decades of what might be the most critically turbulent century for architecture. Let us be careful that the philosopher Gilles Deleuze has not got there long before us, inventing however fantastic and contrived, a way of talking about something without someone having to ask whether we are qualified to talk or write like this.

Are buildings ever more than the language written about them? To those outside history, outside this terminology, architecture is that which language deems responsible; a discourse that allows the moment to predominate. A bull more familiar to us from someone like Samuel Beckett is, as we know, a gentle literary figure. It is a statement made ludicrous by some inconsistency or contradiction which it contains, suitable for what we might call this Oxymoronic Age. The architectural bull is a blunder in speech and conduct. For why shouldn't we undo ourselves, however fantastic and contrived, why shouldn't we invent a way to reject or ignore knowledge without having to be qualified for this ignorance? And freed from this ignorance, the success of this imaginary building will be that none of the language used on it will stick. Even this essay! Why should we seek 'unremitting chaos shot through with pure genius'? It is quite possible that we should not even bother to look for this in this imaginary building or indeed any architecture.

Do we not ask too much of what buildings might achieve as failure? If we really stick to our words as closely as we might, is this a way to define the redemption of architecture? What then of words and an imaginary museum that stands in for a profession's social and cultural dream? The architecture's quiet triumph is likely to be partnered by a quiet terror as it ages, matures and the art inside radicalises more than the ordinary until architecture itself is dead!

## 3

**If You Tolerate This  
Your Children Will Be Next<sup>20</sup>**

Architecture reads across its own ambiguous history. It always has done. This indicates something that seems to arise again and again. Getting older we reach a stage where we assume something we have already done, written or thought because in the past (our own past) neither needs no further communication nor needs reinforcing in another way. We think knowledge already held needs no subtle re-tooling of ideas once thought in the past. We struggle with this as we wish to pass on the arrogance of our own positions. Sovereignty flutters. The world we sometimes think fit to teach students may not represent the world the students live in. It might not even be anything like the world they will inherit. Is this our essential resistance or nostalgia? Do we understand the conditions that make architecture possible only if these conform to the conditions we recognise? This cannot ever be a repetition or a replication but the useful notion that ideas hit us at different time scales ensure that infinite cross-community of ideas will always struggle for any common repertoire.

How often does architecture discover once again the necessity to *read across* other figures? Not in the sense of an original and then an influence, but how ideas are and always were a re-expression of something beyond us. When do we awake and realise that we need but our own gentle re-occupation of these ideas to award ourselves relevance once more? We have gradually come to give this wandering

within the mind a special term belonging to the French language, the *flâneur*? It absolves us of embarrassing thinking; it tidies up our ambiguities and uncertainties. The flâneur, more recently that psycho-geographer, might be said to possess an imagination and represent an architecture closer to those of us who can take the long and seemingly aimless walks which are never ever truly 'aimless'.

Imagine if students once more were allowed to deal seriously with the whole notion of a structured aimlessness instead of inviting and coercing resolutions where resolutions might not be necessary. Architecture where architecture might not be the answer, projects where a project might not be appropriate. Whether this could demonstrate the conditions of being an architect and the constant inter-change of professional, technical, personal and private knowledge, whether this is what is meant when we hear talk of the anthropological dimension, there is one obvious point: it wouldn't necessarily get the student or the architect more work but it might just begin to *deschool* some of the ideas from the last century that might still be holding us back in this century.

The Manic Street Preachers, the Welsh rock band, not so young anymore but still timely put it like this in 1998: *The future teaches you to be alone, The present to be afraid and cold, 'so if I can shoot rabbits then I can shoot fascists*. You would be forgiven if looking around schools of architecture today there would be some cause for alarm; it is not only the future that is teaching students to be alone, and it is not only the present that invites fear and coldness. It is the past, which isn't so clearly in the past as we think. The snipers sit it out on the balconies and galleries. The street is cold, the Brutalist appreciation society is only on Facebook at the moment. Here a new-old avant-garde is emerging but very

few know anymore how to recognise it, how to slow it down enough to hitch a ride. Unassailable, it is likely to insinuate itself into our indifference, and the clever amongst us will realize a post-passive position inciting evasion will carry us along.

But even evasion will no longer suffice: “writing or drawing,” Gunter Grass writes in *Peeling the Onion*, “I practiced the art of evasion with all the skill I’d picked up along the way; I delicately circumvented obvious abysses, had no qualms about making excuses, and chose material that celebrated stasis.” Inside the onion, architecture too has circumvented the obvious abysses and at times, despite the adventure internally occupying architecture’s own heartlands, has selected, orchestrated and built alibis for futures that celebrated stasis before they arrive. Grass’s own confession would take us even further: “fiction nurtured on Kafka and suffering from anorexia, drama revelling in hide-and-seek language, wordplay that led merely to more wordplay.” <sup>21</sup>

There are more warnings that are sliding us into a sleepwalking position. The rebel, the link to passion for the savage or unbounded condition even the lawless condition, is so thoroughly suspect that the young rock band know where these too will end up: *Bullets for your brain today, But we’ll forget it all again, Monuments put from pen to paper turns me into a gutless wonder*. The gutless wonders simmer. We could all be part of the awkward squad if only we knew how to register our autobiographies wider than the fragments we make up of each other. We can no longer marry the words with unselected images and feel compelled to remain silent as others recapture our lives before us. The absence of the past turns into our future, the apolitical launches its own website, writes its own submissive novels. The disintegration of the street is ahead of us. It



has become unnecessary to escape our childhood or lament the rock stars who announced it well ahead of us all, we remain mixed up. In many ways saved if only we recognise the control of education based on the intimidating tactics of fear. We have begun to see ourselves as fear, using words to nurture new suffering, but never relieved of the wordplay, the metaphor of lost experience.

At the opening of the art world's new art world, it has become usual to struggle to find any art, unless we opt for the hotel room on the attic floor. Our selfishness as educators may have demonstrated our vulnerability; if we acknowledge the ugliness of this deceit we may just be there when the school bell goes once more. If architecture is always for others, then its unselfishness asks of the schools a new direction, a *deschooling* to arrive in this century already almost 2 decades in. We play out the ideas in teams certainly, but the open source will drag us further than we ever imagined. The stability in much of the stability around today asks for the selfless act in an imagined world lifted above the rewards of creativity. Meanwhile the authorities are looking into further ways of blocking release of their prized worlds, and images are now being locked open with no hint at the future they could bring. If you tolerate this, then your children will be next. The Manic Street Preachers had just about got it right:

*gravity keeps my head down or is  
it maybe shame at being so young  
and being so vain holes in your  
head today but I'm a pacifist I've  
walked la ramblas but not with real intent*

*To walk the ramblas with no real intent* does not quite mean what it perhaps was meant to mean. For no one knows today when you have no real intent; no one knows when the

sniper slips into position, when the belt is strapped to the body, or the package left on the underground train.

*and in the street tonight –  
an old man plays with newspaper  
cuttings of his glory days<sub>22</sub>*

We now know Major Tom's a junkie and "written words and images are entirely different creatures" according to Leonard Schlain. "Each calls for a complementary but opposing perceptual strategy." So what have we been doing for so many years trying to marry our texts with exquisite images? We have struggled with these creatures for some decades now, no more so than in architecture, theory and education. So much so that we are about to believe once more that the rush of enigmatic architecture, self-indulgently brilliant, is beginning to offer us the way out of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>. Finally. And it's only 2016 or is it 2051!

Architecture will begin to automatically write itself out. It's the 500-year commemoration of Palladio and outside the basilica in Vicenza. You'd be forgiven for thinking the maestro had not quite made it. The basilica is mostly covered up, under wraps: architecture has left the building. "The renovations are taking longer than expected, but what do you expect," my Italian colleague says, "it's Italy after all, we control time in this country, time does not control us. Even given Italian working methods," he continues, which notoriously fail to meet the expected standards. Apparently the copper swathes taken from the roof for preservation had significant holes. The structure was to replace the roof with a new upper barrel, one on which the carefully removed existing copper would be re-applied to the new roof. The idea of glinting copper emerging from the replaced roof offers a completely new texture, another way to tell the time.

“Though it is doubtful,” the architect says, “it will be allowed such spectacle.” Meanwhile James Ackerman is making a spectacular and long overdue return to Venice for the Palladio celebrations and Frank Gehry is being awarded the Golden Lion of Venice for services to architecture.

I cannot quite make the connections anymore but it is illiteracy that interests me and has done for some years now. I do not seem to ever get away from any place, university, town, college, café, seminar or conference where the young are not generally chastised for being illiterate and the times as lamentably dislocated. The youth, the versions go, are either deficient in 1 history 2 theory 3 the 20th century 4 time itself. This suggests a reversal. Should we not see ourselves as Grass saw himself: ‘too little can be nailed down...I even see myself as only one of many sketches, each as far as the last from the original.’<sup>23</sup> Some have said that Grass should have stuck to storytelling rather than running through his life piece by piece. But that’s unfair. Automatic writing will do for architecture what dislocation did for surrealism. It will write itself back into the record books; only the record books will not be written in the way we think if we begin the task right now.

It cannot be you speaking; you do not know the word hoodwinking, you had to ask what it meant. Never has it been so much fun writing about architecture that has survived all critique, all market forces and wild global self-interest. What could be better than this? Is it ethical to go on writing like this, the automatic slippage of each unit making up the game that’s called ‘literature’ and then transferred into the elegant hidden persuasive force that transfers itself so often into architecture. “What better time,” the Italian said, “to be pessimistic about architecture and yet celebrate Palladio?” Just at a time too when the present eats the past, the

media sucks up itself and is hoodwinking the cities of the world with lookalike icons which in a decade or so will ever so disastrously decline, disfigure, decay.

But that's not all. How to think as an architect when – as the joke goes - an architect is not known for thinking? How to install an ethical note into a field when the administrators call on the youth of today to take more responsibility of the disciplines they enter? A case of China calling the kettle black and kettles being designed for no purpose whatsoever! What place then the texts of the last century, the automatic writing that will be re-printed, re-read and re-shaped for our rampant aesthetic urge? What poetics will re-place the texts of the last century into this and how will we insert the history of mankind into one that translated such promise into such brutality? When does your history start is no longer a serious question; when did it go wrong is more interesting.

In the infinite corridors of the schools of architecture, therapy is crawled into the throat. Despite the arrivals and brave re-structuring of different programs, of movements after theory or before theory architecture is in an end-game situation. Studios often pin poetics to cognitive dreams and delusions with a pleasant but totally dysfunctional agenda. Hedonism will strike the anarchistic drive, the nihilism that we call to witness. The Nietzschean re-readers of our own lives will steady the indifference and thrill of this melancholy age. Either architecture becomes the remedy for the squalor and distress of the past – providing a resistance - or then architecture becomes an indicator of democratic sign – celebrating infinity. Either way, the barricades are set up, warring ideologies have faded and the journals have brought in the next rock-star architects. Marginalized, the awkward, reprehensible squad, those used to plain speak-

ing in a world bereft of the plain speakers, champion an architecture looking unlike any other architecture. Whilst professors and students edit out what doesn't fit into their picture of contemporary architecture, redundancy and a strand of active nihilism is beginning to bring it back.

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Whilst blundering over the Preston H. Thomas Memorial Lectures (Cornell) in 1995 which became the core of another book called 'How Architecture Got its Hump', I received a parcel from a soon-to-be-more-than-famous Promising World Architect I had met in Barcelona. I trembled in case inside was yet another invitation to another seminar, meeting, conference or biennale. I delayed a full day before opening it. And when I did, instead I found within an architectural magazine, *Blueprint*. The architect's face occupied the whole cover. Relieved at not having to prepare any more lectures, I looked into the issue. Inside was a witty, acute journalistic piece of writing outlining the 'Hitchcockian architecture' of this architectural duo. The architect himself was described journalistically and, to some, dressed 'appropriately' like an undertaker. There was also a postcard and on it my colleague had written a simple message: "Thank you for your book. I don't read much these days, especially in architecture and couldn't find our name inside...but anyway, see you one day in the jungle."

I am finishing this in the jungle of Laos. From my hammock, I imagine a Chinook helicopter screaming down the Nam Khan River and spraying napalm and venom to all who gratefully do not choose to receive it. If there is not a repressed complaint against architects for their deconstructed poetics, or their agonizing poetics of displacement, their anti-humanism and an interpretation (not always wrong)

of dispassion and disengagement, then there is that other continuous complaint that architects avoid the serious public and social dimension of their profession and perform acrobatic feats. They opt for John Hejduk's first category in *The Pathognomic* and seek attention. Egos gnaw away at stylistic tropes constructing their own hypnotic worlds as if nothing ever really changes. The public (if it is at all possible to speak of such anymore) is alarmed by what appear as desperate strategies to keep up with others and desperate carnival tactics to compete with others.

Mostly however, the 'public' pays little attention until architecture is scandalized into something beyond print: a mega-museum or a spiraling mega-architecture. This puts us into a hallucinatory state which leaves the aftertaste of architectural voodoo as a race before time. The American poet, John Ashbery, gives us a clue to this inhuman race:

*It would be tragic to fit  
 Into the space created by our not having arrived yet,  
 To utter the speech that belongs there  
 For progress occurs through re-inventing  
 These words from a dim recollection of them.  
 In violating that space in such a way as  
 To leave it intact. Yet we do after all  
 Belong here, and have moved a considerable  
 Distance; our passing is a facade.  
 But our understanding of it is justified."* <sup>24</sup>

The vocabulary of unquestioned disciplines might offer useful dogma for a profession like architecture but to learn from failure needs the errors to be attractive. What happens when an architect claims the mistakes made are compounded by the uncritical attitude of 'others'? Much of the success of contemporary architecture, unlike that attributed to the 'modern code', might ultimately – if we have the courage to admit it – be due to the attractiveness of its errors, its

ignorance, its mask and its misrepresentations. The entire architectural field is flooded with litanies and an increasingly endless proliferation and manipulation of images.

Architecture read this way, seen from the view of the serious public, has become a cul-de-sac exercise. Too much, too many, too far, architecture is, if not partially annihilated, about to become a redundant discipline. Reduced to dinner party voodoo its heroes barely suffice for *Trivial Pursuit* answers any longer. The game has changed to *Affordable Paradise* where generosity and selflessness is the rare tactic left to move one person ahead of another.

There is more upset than ever today in architecture. Chaos, uncertainty, and more than a gentle redundancy, teased out of that loathing of indeterminacy that John Updike spoke of, is shifting architecture's agenda in front of our very eyes.<sup>25</sup> The architects of Punk, the architects of War and the architects of Cities and Suburbs are beginning to collide. There is surely only one question worth leaving: has our misunderstanding of architecture been justified? And faced with this there is only one reasonable response; if architects are not courageous enough to pull the pin on some of their own buildings then at least we might say: "I think I know what you tried to do". Should we be satisfied with just that: Architecture knows what it is trying to do?

Often when you speak some words, when you have spoken them aloud during a lecture, you think you know just what you have said. Or at least have some idea of the range of what you have said. This applies to all of us. Today, however, there is a crisp correctness in any applause. Response is polite. Maybe it has always been polite. The lecture is instantly forgotten. Yet there are some amongst us surely who believe the aplomb, the occasional wit and brief courage of the words may outlive theoretical anxiety, sterility and self-

cancellation. Perhaps words survive their fall and see out the dry comfort that architecture, continually falling within language itself, will become 'dead good architecture'. And if you tolerate this, then certainly your children will be next.

*The future teaches you to be alone  
The present to be afraid and cold  
'so if I can shoot rabbits then I can shoot fascists*

*Bullets for your brain today  
But we'll forget it all again  
Monuments put from pen to paper  
turns me into a gutless wonder*

*and if you tolerate this then your children will be next  
and if you tolerate this then your children will be next,  
will be next, will be next, will be next*

*gravity keeps my head down or is  
it maybe shame at being so young  
and being so vain holes in your*

*head today but I'm a pacifist I've  
walked la ramblas but not with real intent*

*and if you tolerate this then your children will be next.....*

*and in the street tonight –  
an old man plays with newspaper  
cuttings of his glory days*

*and if you tolerate this then your children will be next . 26*



## 4

**Sunbathing in Manitoba with Witold****Gombrowicz <sup>27</sup>**

At a moment in life when you are supposed to be more professional and responsible it sometimes goes belly up. You want to put your tongue way before you even start. You had planned to do that before your 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. So, now on Route 66 and the deadline long gone, you make a last gasp effort. Recently an invitation came to visit one of the coldest cities in Canada for a presentation at a symposium called 'Atmosphere'. The request asked for a fuller picture of the work and world. This prompts nausea and hysteria before the words are even out. It was time though you felt to rebuild your own mind. As usual you then wonder how to start any lecture or presentation and quickly find yourself in that rather pathetic but practiced mode of deferring any title, idea or text until almost the last moment. You hope it would all go away. Sometimes it doesn't.

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I received an email from a university bureaucrat the other day, now that I have joined the ranks of executive faculty at the University. Apart from the unnecessary request to hold yet another meeting to decide about the next meeting and the one after that, it had a citation from John Donne at the bottom. The citation read: "The University is a paradise... into which the rivers of knowledge flow.' What a cheek I thought: insinuating into my brain such seductively numbing procedures, and then calling on John Donne to get me out of it. What fakery, what mimicry! The amount of faking going seems staggeringly on the increase, the more ranticles and satire emerge to re-script conservative agendas. Even

in architecture we are certainly not immune; a form of fakery seems to spread from first year boot camp and pulling all-nighters through to graduate years, from prescription to instruction and then from instruction to interpretation. Maybe though, as navigation takes over, it is only at graduate level that an awareness of mimicry and fakery emerge. The question is then posed to the student: What is it you have learnt and what have you been led into believing? Mostly, any serious education, in architecture or not, begins at this *deschooling* moment.

So what do we do? I ask myself this often. Actually I have been asking this of myself ever since the age of 14 when I first read Albert Camus' book *The Outsider*, often translated in North America as *The Stranger*. Somehow, whatever I have done, created, designed, written, published, fudged, failed or faked, I have never left the condition described in that book. So, I repeat, what is it I do, and why would anyone want a full picture of me? Well let's take part in Umberto Eco's favourite pastime and make a list. When I am home in North Wales in a six hundred year old cottage, I am a carer for a mother who just turned 90 in the last two weeks. Navigating frailty and rage becomes delicate. More tolerance, more generosity is needed every day. It seems at times life is reserved into being a kindergarten teacher. There is a blinding necessity of continuity. We do not need Rumi or a Sufi manual to appreciate this. Then with a daughter of almost 16 going on 25, I am a minder, I am a snowboard-teenage worrying father asking the inevitable question: when will my daughter begin running with the dogs? Will she become an architect? Recently she scared me: "Papa. I have begun walking the streets of Stockholm and have now begun to look up and notice all the different buildings, the edges, the roofs and the windows. I am interested in architecture I think." I didn't know whether silence was the best ploy.

In Pakistan, for periods over the last decade, I am a man of the cloth listening to confessions from errant Muslims, tribal leaders and ex-public schoolboys. These are the public schoolboys trained and strained in an English model on the border of those badlands called the North West Frontier Province. Dangerous or not, the moment before coming to Ottawa to teach graduates I was off to Peshawar on the Afghan border, and a town called Mardan. Ostensibly, to write a book on the Pashtun warring tribes in the region. I had been present at a *jirga* some years back. I had travelled with a man with the wondrous name of Mohammad Iftikhar Mohmand Khan. His grandfather had been 'given' the Khan appellation by the British as a proxy strategy to control the badlands, his particular region, the Mohmand Province. I had an AK47 thrust into my hands. 'Pure suicide' I was told if I went there now.

So the angels chose Canada! Sometimes I have to say: I am not sure which side the angels are on. But before becoming a professor I had been a film maker, making outrageously wayward advertising films of limited invention, happy when we could insert one device that reminds someone else in the know, of Alfred Hitchcock or Francois Truffaut, names already lost to some. I remember doing an advertisement for a refrigerator and starting with the shadow of knife, and the screams from *Psycho*. Lintas, the ad agency loved it; the client binned it. In the fuller picture I have also been an art director in *The Times of India* in New Delhi where I learnt to witness the art of creative lying. I comprehended how marketing agendas changed from week to week and denying what you said last week for what you were about to say this week was called business administration. I was never sure whether this would be useful in the upper levels of the university. There are other lives, as other people: I have been Frank Heron working with a group of women called

The Rocket Girls and running an alternative architectural practice. I have been Willem de Cunha, Edward G. Speed and Will Challinor. And now finally, courtesy of the angels, 18 floors up in a corner balcony apartment in Ottawa, nicknamed by the students, I am Professor James Vertigo.

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I don't know why this happens, why names, events, selves continually re-appear. Do these become the encounters that unmake the narratives we attempt to put into some of our work? How do such events and experiences knit together? I am tempted to find an extract from the Czech novelist now living in Paris, Milan Kundera, but prefer not to. We use the idea of coincidence as if this settles on another narrative that has been waiting for us to discover. Suddenly I am going, or coming to Winnipeg, and I receive an email from a colleague running university admissions, telling me that it is the suicide capital of Canada. The writer added a little 'hah hah' after the message. If there was a small emoticon of a skull available or a silhouette of the reaper, I am sure that would have been used. "But we need your fuller picture?"

Fuller pictures? I must admit I have been intrigued about suicide for many years and once thought I would try and research *suicide and architecture*. I have not done this so far but that's not to say it might not happen. I used to live in Helsinki where I was known as Severi Panicz, Sev for short. Helsinki is the capital of a country which, I was led to believe was one of the major suicide countries. To go by the dark despondency and silence in three languages in that country – Finnish, Swedish and Tourism - it wasn't hard to see why. I had also heard that Hungary had some symbiotic Fenno-Ugrian relationship to Finland, not only in language though, but in suicide figures. Curiously I found

myself some years back visiting Budapest these days and a woman called Katushka who stepped straight out of a Bela Hamvas story. Actually it would be more appropriate to see her emerge from a Witold Gombrowicz novel.

When I failed at Cambridge, or rather before I made a sideways move to parallel architecture with literature and pedagogy, my bedder Mrs Buxton or Mrs Bennett (those ladies who look after your bed, room, life and death at Cambridge colleges) told me that she thought the way I had been treated at the school of architecture would have led me to suicide. "I've seen young men commit suicide for less," she said one day, with a wicked smile. "You see Sir, some gentlemen are just not meant to make it!" I had to wonder. Mrs Buxton or Mrs Bennett was probably right. And I suppose that is partly why I have never completed my research on suicide and architecture, and why the opening lines of Camus' other book *The Myth of Sisyphus* continually haunt me: "There is only one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide." The *phoney island of the mind* has well and truly developed over the intervening years.

\*

So I found myself in Winnipeg, for which I have to thank, according to a mutual colleague, Mr Weird Shit. Though I don't think I really need to expand on the 'weird shit' reference at this school, I do wish to share an encounter with our mutual colleague and friend of Manitoba, Sir Peter Cook. It was in Houston a couple of years ago, and I was introducing and co-chairing a panel named, rather predictably: 'the end of architecture'. The room was empty. Other educators were sauntering down the corridors of the Doubletree Hotel debating curriculum, administration and lunch. The name tags were out on the table. Bruce Sterling, the novelist, hov-

ered in the corner on his own, so I went up to chat with him. I'd always liked his writing and wanted to ask about his collaboration with William Gibson. As we were talking Sir Peter came in, duded to the max. He began to look down at the name tags through the usual green owl glasses. As I was standing near mine, he looked at it, looked up at me, looked at it again and then said: "Ah, so you are the one who writes that weird shit!" It was not a question. He smiled. "Yes, I guess that's me." "Good stuff, but weird, weird shit."

Naturally, as you might imagine, I thought this was a genuine critical comment from someone who looked straight out of a film made from the Elton John song called 'Benny and The Jets.' So imagine my surprise: it was only when I was given a copy of *Warehouse*, the Manitoba School of Architecture Yearbook that I realized this was part of a movement. In the book, in discussing his friendship with Nat Chard, Sir Peter mentioned the weird shit drawings of Mark West. What the Halifax, I realized I was suddenly part of this new, at present undiscovered movement called *Weird Shit*. On reflection however, I am not sure whether, as Groucho Marx says, I wanted to belong to a club that would have me as a member. Still it seemed suitable then to begin this presentation in Manitoba with a reflection on weird shit.

\*

To follow up with a reference in the past to weird shit I opened the presentation with the master of weird shit – Mr Witold Gombrowicz. In discussing his novel *Cosmos* Gombrowicz explains in Volume 3, on page 160, of his journals, how he established the starting points of the novel: "I am establishing two starting points, two anomalies, very distant from one another: (a) a hanged sparrow, (b) the association of Katasia's lips with Lena's." Actually Gombrowicz wrote a

quite remarkable series of journals of his life in Buenos Aires, his fakeries in Café Rex where he was the most famous unknown Polish writer, and then when he moved back to Europe and became the most-famous Polish writer living in Paris and Berlin. But our departure is set, and the weird shit can now continue precisely because, as Gombrowicz says, it “demands sense”.

“These two puzzles will begin to demand sense,” he writes, “One will permeate the other in striving to create a whole. A process of conjectures, associations, circumstantial evidence, something will begin to create itself but,” and Gombrowicz knew exactly what he had created, although critics took many, many years to realize this, “it is a rather monstrous embryo...and this murky, incomprehensible, charade will call for its solution...it will search for an explanatory, ordering idea....” Much of what we work on as educators and architects might be rather monstrous embryos, much of it might appear monstrous too, but at some moment it will demand sense. Not always in the way we imagine, but that sense begins to creep in, to find a way through. This is part of the wonderfully weird shit all around us and of Witold Gombrowicz, author of *Ferdydurke*, *Pornografia*, *Kosmos*, more than three extraordinary journals, a series of plays and a quite beguiling, probably the first short text message philosophy course called *A Guide to Philosophy in 6 hours and fifteen minutes*.

Still intrigued by this collision between suicide and architecture, it was not the subject of the presentation in Manitoba. Once again life’s research will have to be deferred. Instead I spent some time discussing the maladies of the architectural soul, sunbathing in Manitoba before finishing with a confession. There can never be a fuller picture than this. Since leaving architecture school in Cambridge under a para-cloud, and not committing suicide, life has

taken its departure from two starting points, two anomalies perhaps; writing and architecture! Do they demand sense? Have they always demanded sense? Are they not very distant from each other? Whatever we think of these two however, they always begin to demand sense. Even if one permeates the other in striving to create a whole, the whole is one of wonderful conjectures, associations and constant re-adjustments. The vertigo looms. Writing is architecture of circumstantial evidence as it begins to create and contest itself. And architecture is writing of wonderful contingent evidence as it too begins to create itself, even against itself..

### A Suicidal Confession Vertigo Acts

A coincidence perhaps but after chancing upon the title of this series of books “The Phoney Island of the Mind’ in conversation with the owner of a small bookshop on Rideau Street in Ottawa. After picking up yet another copy of Ferlinghetti’s *A Coney Island of the Mind*, I arrived home to my 18th floor paradise. As I opened the door wide, and looked across the apartment to the full length glass balcony door overlooking Ottawa and the University of Ottawa, I saw a figure leaning against my balcony. The door being locked, and the door to the balcony also locked, it seemed odd indeed. The man was not small. In fact, in silhouette he looked huge, as huge as Hagrid. The hoodie that he had drawn up around him in the wind made him look even more formidable.

It was -15 outside. At first I thought, well, I don’t know what I thought – perhaps a jumper, a possessor of Ottawan angst, or a construction worker up to his neck in weird shit and about to commit suicide. I pulled back the patio door and asked, in the most casual way I could: what’s going down here? I am not sure he got the pun intended. “Oh God am



I glad to see you. I was working upstairs on the roof, got lowered down and we ran out of rope. I can't get back." He was in quite a state. "I'll give you 50 dollars, take my shoes off, if I can walk through your apartment and out." "No way, jump," I said. "You're not coming in here!" He looked at me aghast. "Is this some sort of weird shit? No way am I going to jump." "No, joking, of course you can," I replied. "And you don't need to pay me fifty dollars." I thought he was going to give me one of those man-hugs.

Once when walking through an exhibition on Scandinavian works called *Border Art* in London in the late 1980s, I found myself fighting the presence of Strindberg and his contemporary Carl Frederick Hill. Drawn to both as artists I wondered what it was I needed to understand Hill's apocalypse and figurativism. How had I sustained such a learned ignorance of such art up to this stage in my life? The notion of border must surely contain flight. But then when it reveals itself in the title of a painting it appears too easy, like Kjarval's "Yearning for Flight".

This was a painted bleakness encouraged by this nether region of the world. To counter this I was pulled towards one of Strindberg's paintings, "The Shore". I stared at it for some time. How, I found myself thinking, would these paintings be used in Scandinavia, in schools, in cultural societies? For if *border* means anything today in this context of *painting out* a life it must mean what it did then; life beyond the shore. It must also mean the unknown, eternity. It must mean death.

We can always do this. Ignorance is so powerful it ignores its own seduction. I began to fight for my own theme in the exhibition. Why should I rely on a catalogue? I imagined this flight from Iceland might have taken so long, or then perhaps the artist achieved flight through the act of painting

this canvas for 20 years. I was a murderer writing a thesis on Hegel from Magritte's holiday. I decided to become the *murderer-critic* and let the music of chance take over yet again. We map cultures onto the painting as if we can score the bark from trees we never touch. Nature! We scan the canvasses for thematic anxiety, for deconstructed anxiety, for grunge anxiety or semiotic anxiety, from a solitude we cannot communicate. We over-interpret the anxiety of five countries we know so little of and blame a pagan attitude and a God for never turning up. The therapy that enters us turns the street into a forest we never had, and we career as in a reckless drive into the clearing of a forest we no longer plant. Then we crash at the traffic lights of culture. I watched one of the regular critics circulate the gallery. In and out, round in a matter of minutes. A note here and a note there, it was like turning the pages of a book. I thought I heard the murderer critic's comment: "Unhappy, unconsoling, not essential viewing!"

## 5

**The Phoney Island of the Mind : Redux**

## Text for Nothing IV

I think I have lost it, in the contemporary sense of *losing the plot* that is, the mind. Systematically so, this might be the epilogue to the common hymn to irresponsibility that has become the life lived of many of us. I am close to ending my first and probably last position of any academic permanence that I have ever contemplated, that of a professor. But the closer it becomes a reality the more illusory it appears, or then the more illusory I feel. It is said, at this stage of life, sixty years plus of age, that we are close to the best years of any pedagogical life. Things should come easy now. They should trip off the tongue. One should be able to teach new bodies of knowledge to students and allow them to learn how to analyze their learning, situate their knowledge and think critically. This act should release us. It should prepare us for the inevitable. When the tongue dies, we are effaced and become – if we are lucky - selfless. But we are all aware how, at times, we are careful to avoid the honesty of our teaching; the deception and fraudulence played on ourselves and on our students are then crushingly disguised. Our acts can become unkind, often intolerant. The world does not listen to us and our impatience often masquerades as pedagogical forthrightness. A repellent honesty gets us into hot water. This is a condition which would, in another world, another time, and even another profession be dismissed as injustice, abuse, irresponsibility, even reprehensibility. However this is more simply explained. This is the cruelty of lost souls who happen to remain educators for longer than their worlds allow, for longer than their learn-

worlds allow, for longer than their learning ever invites. Passed our sell by date, we can become the professors who will condemn a student to failure for inviting the other students in class to change the program. Contemporary rage in the academy is all too clear. After all the fraudulence, envy and conspiracy – the critical fictions - that has passed for theory and re-thinking in architecture over the last 50 years, elegant cruelty is still on the tip of our tongues. The phoney island of the mind has never been more relevant.

It felt like the right phrase. It was Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. I had been preparing for years, basically since 1991 on Silverlake Boulevard in Los Angeles, for this moment to put the tongue away. I had left all sorts of clues to this committed retreat in my writings, both published and unpublished. I had used phrases like the ‘ecstasy of no further communication’, a particular condition I knew I was heading towards. I knew exactly what I meant by it but it had never raised any eyebrows, never caused a comment, and certainly never stirred any wondrous colleague or wounded soul to take it up. But it was in Manitoba, Canada that this condition became much clearer. The title of my presentation was framed specifically for this part of the world. It seemed obvious to me, though probably not obvious to anyone else at all, why it should be called “Sunbathing in Manitoba with Witold Gombrowicz’. And as I had actually vomited once again (as I had done for many years) before a lecture, in the CNR Hotel Fort Garry, I felt this time that *time* was ‘really’ up. The moment had arrived when the title of this book and series somehow loomed as clear as it could ever be: the *phoney island of the mind*.

Later, when it was all over, as I was leaving the Hotel Fort Garry an American professor sitting opposite at breakfast watched me poke at the bacon and eggs with no interest at

ing ever invites. Passed our sell by date, we can become the professors who will condemn a student to failure for inviting the other students in class to change the program. Contemporary rage in the academy is all too clear. After all the fraudulence, envy and conspiracy – the critical fictions – that has passed for theory and re-thinking in architecture over the last 50 years, elegant cruelty is still on the tip of our tongues. The phoney island of the mind has never been more relevant.

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Later, when it was all over, as I was leaving the Hotel Fort Garry an American professor sitting opposite at breakfast watched me poke at the bacon and eggs with no interest at

all. "You're honest," he said. He didn't wait for any preamble or response. "In your presentation you reminded us just what we have to do. How vigilant we need to be and more... not just use our own interpretations and cleverness to see architecture the way we wish to see it, but how critical we need to be to our own self." Perhaps he was right. He was talking of the presentation. He hadn't spoken to me, or I to him. We were strangers to our own architectural selves wandering the corridors of the university and the foyer of Hotel Garry, Winnipeg.

Looking back, I don't think I had ever given a talk or presented whilst not suffering from all the combined symptoms of nausea and depression. I had always difficulty considering what this state of mind was; it was nausea of sorts of course, but it had never been a clinical depression because I could fortunately lift myself out of it - momentarily, ecstatically, even for long periods. And a fantastic, erotic will to passion, poetry and literature would always seduce me to believe such moments would never arrive again. But they did. It was, on that day in Winnipeg, a depression nevertheless; brief, closed, and debilitating. And it was only when I was departing and got back to the airport, saw the unruly creations from the taxi of a low-grade landscape and the environs of Winnipeg that this fog, if I can call it that, began to lift.

Is it always like this, has it always been like this? I would often ask these questions earlier. Now I no longer ask them. Waiting for the Westjet boarding call the usual, or what I thought would be the usual, came up. "We are pre-boarding at present. We welcome to board first all those who need assistance or those with small children, or those privileged frequent flyer passengers or – there was a pause - anyone who wants to be a kid now just for one day. Kindly come

up for boarding” I jumped at the chance. I took my lollipop out of my mouth, put away the machine gun I’d found lying about in a stray poem from my earlier life near Liverpool and decided I would try and write my final letter to architecture for what it was worth.

“You did say anyone who wanted to be a kid,” I said to the stewardess, “just for one day.” “Definitely” she said, checking my passport photo though she didn’t really need to do it. This time I used the one with a picture of Professor James Vertigo inside. “Ok professor, you’re good to go! And you can change back into short trousers on the flight. The stewardess will bring the lollipops” We laughed. Depression, the black sun, black dog, black cloud, that malady of grief at a world that is not to your shape and liking, a world unjust, unlistening and fatigued, lifted and continues to lift at such moments. Winnipeg was left behind. The Sunbathing was over.

On the plane I looked at myself in the window looking back at myself. There was a cartoon book and in it a character called Professor Vertigo was lecturing to 150 young students from all over the world. The cartoon series resembled those images drawn by Chris Garrett and Mick Kidd. This was The Biff Series from England in the early 1980s, but this time in colour. I was dressed in black, a remnant evening dinner jacket from the Hietaniemi flea market in Helsinki in the 1980s. In the breast pocket there was the barest hint of a fuschia handkerchief given me by a colleague in India who left for Vancouver many moons ago. There was a scarf (there’s always a scarf); this time a Vuokko Finnish cotton scarf of Liverpool Football Club Red. The dinner jacket trousers had no side streams. But they were heavy, wool. The roll-neck sweater was smoky grey and cotton, easy for conference-wear and three day sojourns. No need for a tie; there had never been a need for a tie!

In the cartoon, the formal informal Professor Vertigo seemed to be addressing the students: *of course one day, all this will stop, the chattering will stop, the words will stop. It will be your turn.* It should have been funnier than that, but it wasn't. Even cartoons have to fight their moment. The red scarf pulled at the assemblage, a word the students didn't know. The scarf peeled away from the rest of Professor Vertigo's body, a holy not deadly gesture but in that way, momentarily, an architectural gesture. The world folded on itself and abused philosophy one more time. And the clincher, in the cartoon, was a small orange jelly rat broach that was a tie clip slipped over the lapel of the jacket; the left side. Seemingly edible when it caught the sun, the rat had been a present given to me by my daughter (by her mother) when she was born in 1995. The orange jelly rat had never left Professor Vertigo's jacket. It had never left this *phoney island of the mind*. Right then, I knew the missing line that the cartoon needed. A line which had been there in the original series: *Professor Vertigo had become the person he'd warned himself against.*<sup>28</sup>



1 Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*. Vol.2 1957/1961-Northwestern University Press (p.19) also Witold Gombrowicz *Diary*, Yale University Press (2012)

2 Andrei Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside - a manifesto of escape* (2001)

3 Garry Stevens, *The Favored Circle, The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, MIT Press (2002) p.114 manifesto of escape (2001)

4 Henri Michaux, *Emergences/ Resurgences*, Skira (2000). This text began its still-life as a paper proposal for a conference called 'Where Do You Stand' 99th ACSA Annual Meeting, March 3-6 2011, Montreal. Reviews were fairly polite though one reviewer did consider the text 'incendiary' and felt it could only succeed at a conference if performed well. In other words, the content depended on the delivery. Sadly an offer to do that was not extended. ( <https://www.acsa-arch.org/programs-events/conferences>)

5 This is a question posed in N.Alice Challinor, *Frank Heron meets the Rocket Girls*, Raketa Stockholm (2008) – a story of the relationship between art, the tongue and uncontrolled scripts.

6 For a useful but relatively unknown exploration of this see the essay *Archobabble* in *How Architecture got its Hump*, Connah, MIT Press. 2001. The essay reminds us of what we keep having to do; kill and then revive the grieved architectural imagination through catastrophe and the application of what Michaux called the 'murk' – asking us at the same time how we

usefully stay away from that all too often over-used notion of 'ambiguity'.

7 Cf Sisyphus Montale, the notebooks of, Vertigo Press (2005) – Montale shows us how capitalist economies have created periods of expansion which exist only to be revived by being brought devastatingly low by the meltdown; the seduction of recessions and depressions. The fantasy about the death of architecture never quite meeting its agenda is no longer tied to ruins but the ruinous forms of life itself.

8 Willem de Cunha, *The Prejudice Project*, Penmaenmaur (2008). In the essay from this collection called *The Irresponsible Self*, de Cunha goes against present theory about economic contraction and finds in it the redemption of the built environment. The author also takes the view that most spectacular and expanded architecture of the present day are marginal projects open to what he calls the systematic embarrassment of architecture over the decades and centuries which erases itself in due course. As architecture emerged from the Postmodern era in which linguistic models and analogies infamously dominated design and theory, other cultural influences asserted - and in some cases re-asserted - themselves as productive forces. Although some theorists identify the current moment as cohesively Post-critical and/ or Supermodern, contemporary architectural culture is also characterized by a diverse, even sprawling,

cadre of projects and practices that posit potential alternatives to the linguistic paradigm that grounded architectural production of the past decades. Indeed, as the longstanding linguistic influence of poetics, semiotics, and deconstruction wanes, it is being replaced by a laundry list of agendas that variously celebrate: sustainable ecologies, digital bio-genetics, political economies of globalization, post-phenomenology, new (sub) urbanisms, synthetic materialism, market-based scenario planning, anti-form parametrics, mass customization, and so forth.

9 One of Glen Baxter's paintings shows us a school class preparing what looks like a miniature rocket in what appears to be the chemistry class, though it could well be an architecture seminar. We might return to Baxter and question the positive idealizations of survival and sustainability where, to the artist, catastrophe is not measured in terms of abandoned houses and blackened cities, but is measured in fruits in danger, or scenarios subject to deep architectural upset. Even, we might say, to diastolic extreme. Architecture will continue to imagine its own demise, frame it and then deny its reality as the architectural imagination becomes critical at one moment, uncritical the next, and super-critical the moment after. Where architecture, and popular culture intersect, the *via negativa* merges to close the gap; there are no more "non-places" except those in learning. Cf. *The Collected Blurtings of Baxter*, Little, Brown (1993); Glenn

Baxter: *Almost Complete Baxter; new & selected Blurtings*. New York Review of Book (2016) 10 Cf. Edward G. Speed, *The Malady of the Architectural Soul*, Hightop (2004). Speed takes on the clichés and repetitions in his analysis of architectural language and especially the conference circuit. Picking up where Garry Stevens left off, Speed identifies the obvious when we claim that the politicization of architectural education has had profound consequences. Of course it has but nothing in today's mediocrity gives us the eminence to claim that the resurgence of neo-liberalism did much to tame any radicalization of architectural pedagogy. The legacy of 1968 and its aftermath soon forgot about the role of the academy in relation to the profession; the aftermath was brutal and opportunistic. Speed cites interesting passages from *The Piglet Years*, Connah, Tampere (2005). The role of the architect and the ethical function of architecture in society was never quite as it seemed in Finland in spite of all its gloss. The book chronicles the short-lived militarism in Finnish architecture between 1969 -1972.

11 For a further assessment of this 'doubt' and the notion that the cloud of self-doubt in architects is periodically lifted when their eminence takes on greater political will and wish fulfillment. See the essays by W.Challinor called *After-Life, After-Architecture, After-All*, Jälki Press, (1996). Challinor questions whether this self-doubt ever lifts in architects who can

never be existentialists but who remain alienated from public discourse in spite of their efforts to connect to it. Conferences and teaching in schools of architecture always push the promise of a better, richer, and fuller life. The clichés about Postmodernism only focusing on the banality of everyday life and consumerism indicates less about Postmodernism and more about the architects failure to comprehend its own wider lens and their failure to communicate. Challinor also indicates how architects failed in their destruction of Deconstruction, thinking it merely a movement offering futile enquiry about the meanings of built objects. The author reverses this easy call where with little to praise architecture for, the society of the spectacle takes yet another hit. Challinor warns: when will architects smell the coffee and realize their opinions are just of little importance in the wider scheme of the things they assert? That architects have a *raison d'être* seems to be one of the biggest chestnuts around. Challinor's annotated bibliography is especially good on this.

12 The novel *Disinternet* 451 by Anton Zurmeyer Basel (2002) explores the fictional mechanisms that critically position disciplines (including architecture) within new world-worlds like superstructuralism, infrastructuralism. Setting the novel up it embraces infrastructural and systems research as a form of literary practice that moves the reader away from infrastructural sense and style to re-define the

morphology of the sentence structure itself. In city terms this is an ecological network. The writer re-occupies obsolete infrastructural texts and those grand-idea Modernist bumper-volumes. The links to the architect as this redundant but brave grand thinker rather than facilitator comes to mind.

13 The Enigma of Energy, Ryan O'Connor, Dublin (1999). On the eve of the new millennium O'Connor charts how this triad of energy, economy, and environment was at the forefront of change. The writer, a sociologist from Trinity College Dublin, studies the emergence of green energies and how they will be heralded as the token guarantor of sustainability, economic growth and political independence. The slip into the tacit, intrinsic just world is indicated by recent TV adverts about re-cycling – it's your world, don't throw it away. The low-carbon world is brave but mismanaged by the advertisers; O'Connor saw the *Mad-men* coming. The world as power plant was the final observation. Solaris was the final destination. But not the George Clooney version!

14 *Op cit*, Speed, Malady. Speed compares the introduction of computational technologies into architectural production and questions the constant use of the word 'representation'. Elegantly writing and researching the liminal zone between hand drawing and digital media, Speed suggests the 'murk' produced between these two forms have yet to produce their real gain to architecture. Digital media, like postmodernism

and deconstruction, is yet one more area misread into mimicry and misunderstood by most architects, especially in the teaching profession. It is not the case that hand-drawing persists, of course it persists but craftily so? Why are we so surprised? It is the insistence on new design paradigms after the last, this evolutionary chain driven by inertia which is a substitute for tradition. Speed indicates how when architects and educators say 'now is the time to really assess' how these media affect and define architecture's unique disciplinarity, they miss of the total and partial realities of architecture's uniqueness..Speed, like Connah in Archobbable, though he doesn't use the term suggests this will keep conferences afloat and hotel rooms occupied but not do a lot for the chasm between education and practice.

15 Whilst sociologists have identified a set of contemporary phenomena which frame a fiction called "second modernity", the writer Sev Panicz has taken this a step further and contrived to situate us within a re-reflexive modernism of the third kind. Here Panicz believes we are doomed to recreate these fictions in conference after conference which repeat the (lost) pedagogies of old. This re-contextualization of Modernism, Panicz links with the 'phoney island of the mind' (op cit., de Cunha), a lingering return to the social, political, cultural and aesthetic aspirations of the pre-modern movements with new tool. Once more a gay abandonment of and to utopia's seductions and

dangers! Re-reflexivity is key, Panicz says, cf. *Persona Lucida*, Terezin (2001).

16. The phenomenology of engagement and generosity are the themes of the forthcoming volume edited by James Vertigo, *No Longer Random* Frank Heron Press., Fort Worth (2019).

17 M.Holub, *Poems Before & After*, Bloodaxe (2006)

18 A text emerging from visits to Mecca, Terezin, 2001, <http://www.artfactories.net/M-E-C-C-A-Terezin,234.html>

19 Czeslaw Milosz *Native Realm*, a search for self-definition. FSG New York, (2002) p63

20 A text prepared for a seminar on Indifference & Architecture, Carleton University (2014).

21 Gunter Grass, *Peeling the Onion*. Vintage (2008) p.415

22 *The Manic Street Preachers* This is my Truth tell me Yours, Epic Record Label (1998)

23 *ibid* Grass, p. 302.

24 Ashbery, John, *Selected Poems* (Three poems) Carcanet (1998),

25 cf John Updike, *Roger's Version*, Penguin Modern Classics (2006)

26 *ibid*, *Manic Street Preachers*

27 A presentation prepared for the symposium *Atmosphere*, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg (2011) organized by Nat Chard - <https://umanitoba.ca/architecture/atmosphere>.

28 *The Essential Biff*, Chris Garratt & Mick Kidd, Pavement Press (1982)

The Phoney Island of the Mind

Texts for Nothing Volume 4

**SUNBATHING IN MANITOBA WITH WITOLD GOMBROWICZ**



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## INTO THE MYSTIC 2

The undoing of a project is the project itself;  
recognizing the creative tautologies of the storyteller.

Storytelling mimics, then empties what is required for ecstatic  
architecture; the doors close on their own hinges.

Architecture read this way can only mimic alleged mysticism  
like any good detective story; success by incompleteness and redundancy.

Architecture thus recuperated must laugh at itself; with or without  
necessary function, privilege and prejudice.

Some manoeuvres undressed in this way might recuperate architecture  
for the scandalous condition; aborted, narrative-less, ravished!

Contest the mystic and the unemployability of the system takes over;  
disclaimers tempt discourse to cancel out insight.

The ecstasy of reading architecture is the confabulation  
of un-alleged mysticism; the macaronic fights back!

The failure of any common experience is architecture's greatest asset;  
management is storytelling the nothingness of thrill.

Success is achieved when hermeneutics is doubled with operatics;  
to produce the 'opERRatics' of unknown systems.

Storytelling must lie and shatter itself to dissolve in architecture;  
re-imagined with such sovereignty.

We must attend to the poetics of sovereignty, where sovereignty just  
falls short of self-contestation; the project dissolves itself.

