

life after architecture

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*dedicated to all readers of books of dubious origin*

**life  
after  
architecture**

several pre-texts & obscene short-cuts

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## ***Pre-text***

ANY WRITING OF COURSE can be used in any manner by any critics in order to best fit the thesis. We no longer wish to participate in the critical destruction of one event in order to replace it by the hubris of another. Any pretexts have further stories and will always introduce other examples of 'resistance'. Remember though, any talk of after-ideology is not the end of ideology just a more flexible approach which is likely to devour itself, out of a sense of the exhaustion all around. Provocation is not only gradual but inevitable; within it are the answers only if these are accepted and read. Language itself is part of this 'movement'. Otherwise we would be guilty of sophisticated yet grandly deceptive counter-strategies utilizing the same language and procedures so heavily dashed and disliked. The very condition to 'combat' any limitations in the current condition of spectacular, potential and splendidly redundant contemporary architecture can only be part of the multiple strategies that work in 'combat'. Success cannot be defined in advance.

*It is in fact impossible* to partake in such rhetoric as 'the success of'. And nothing is central anymore to the architects' foregrounding of the entire work. Even failure can be success as it shifts the very conditions for combat in architecture: in education, practice and production. The more frayed this world remains the more impact it will offer. The more frayed the resistance is,

the less it can be subsumed and re-appropriated within the architectural education and profession. Call this a post-ideological urgency? It is too late. We have already arrived in the wrong place. We are in the midst of a war. Ideas cannot be strengthened by responding to such a privileged and redundant condition. And if we are to be hoodwinked again, are we to believe these notions related to larger cultural changes? Or see the gradual emergence of 'resistance' turn into *sympathy for the devil*. Authorial control itself should be challenged even in architecture: the end of the Architect? Life after architecture? Certainly!

## Frank Heron, Architect

He was one of the best architects this country has ever produced.  
 He began to answer the demands of the masses.  
 He was absolutely brilliant in every way.  
 And he was a good man too, a man with wealthy humour.  
 He joined the Special Forces and after that his ideas  
 and methods became... well, unsound.

- A. Zurmeyer, *Arc-e-Text*

If you knew who I was, how famous I am, you won't believe what I am about to tell you, so you'll understand why I prefer to remain anonymous. Buildings from the last century are beginning to disappear. Buildings imagined in the last century are now being built in this century. There is now what is called a star-architect circuit. Don't be fooled by this. Modern architecture has always been a sham, run by the few star architects for the many who still do not understand. It was only when I started to get a chance to build my own architecture of such thinness and superficiality that self-destruction offered itself. Feted for an architecture that disgusted me, I wanted to create nothing, communicate nothing and assert nothing. The more famous I became the more I felt like an endangered species.

Up until that moment in my self-effacing and diminishing career, this despair and destruction had only shown itself during my lectures on the star circuit.

Hundreds even thousands occasionally would turn up for the words that dribbled out of my mouth. It was unstoppable. Only when the twenty second or twenty third medal I received had been awarded, and I was stepping up to what had become a dreaded place, the podium, I realized I was getting further and further away from my ambition. Idiotically, it must appear now to anyone who has read my obituary that, according to that loose but very useful French phrase, *j'ai toujours le vertige*.

From this point onwards I decided to rectify the immense dishonesty perpetrated by my colleagues and by modern architecture by organizing a network. With great deliberation and the utmost cunning, we decided to remove any record of our work as architects. This not only included the destruction of all drawings and records but a far more chilling plan of removing the actual buildings designed, those which were still standing. We now work as an architectural combat team. Our concerns are demolition, erasure, illegal settlements and squatter infrastructures. In this we are now in competition and combat with the perpetual war on terrorism. I do not see any point in servicing a critical thesis that is applauded for insight and brilliance. Even coherence has to be sacrificed sometimes for any new but naive radicalism, in order to offer at least an unscripted response to the exhaustion of the contemporary spectacle.

Besides carrying out conventional architectural work, urban and environmental planning, we perform this anti-architecture as the Directors and Chiefs of Operations of the International Special Architectural Service; *les archite(c)tes sans frontieres*. Our most recent mission, Matrix 2050, a post-ideological meditation factory, will be

completed in the next year or two. It will occur wherever the next humanitarian urgency arises, and when the next city is not only targeted but about to be removed the map: Yenderan, Beirut or Baghdad for example!

Like Max Frisch's 'fire raisers' we now sit in on the world of our own architecture, with our own drums of petrol, laying elaborate plans for setting them all alight. Voids will appear overnight in cities. Deconstruction, in the literal sense of the word, will occur at the dead of night. Towns and cities will disappear off the map. In the morning there will be nothing left.

*Frank Heron, Venice 2008*

## Life after Architecture

### A shorter critique of redundancy

#### 1

Detournement? Architecture and redundancy?  
Architecture fulfilling the permanent ephemeral promise!  
Architecture following fiction and the fallen form of language. Or improbable personal architectures from a cyberspace menu. Architecture as the anxiety of language and wishfulfillment. Finally architecture in evidence and practice meeting the uncertain promise of its own redundancy. The guileless and the blameless; the power of grand naivety. The Twenty First century still awaits.

#### 2

A little hop skip and jump through the semantic and philosophical scaffolds in architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century invites us into the only sustainable notion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 'redundancy'. Architecture, redundant, is paid off: given a gold watch or the signed cheque in the post. Then it has various options. Take on the last century, the Twentieth, and redefine it in this. Possible but unexciting! Re-structure its own brief with some digitally tectonic games. Plausible but predictable! Re-frame itself until it moves only when the profession isn't looking. Interesting but doomed! Continually re-invent itself until no possible turns take on a new turn. Perpetual combat!

#### 3

Finally architecture: famous, enigmatic and spectacular. Madness! A madness which suspects such a liberating role for architecture will continue to prove itself redundant to the political and social forces that control, shape and destroy our environment. What to say then that hasn't already been said of the fashionable trends of linguistic-philosophic applications in architecture? What to say to those who think architecture has never had it so good? The skepticism rises from the back of the throat. The paradoxical legacy of the last century and the process and necessity of building - learning how to design and build well - may have become secondary to a life lived after architecture, a life in continuous combat.

#### 4

When the vulnerability of architecture assumes a greater role we begin again to acknowledge our own fallibility. There is likely to be a perpetual war in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a war not of our own making but a war in proxy. What role is there for architecture when destruction and destitution await to re-order it? What role architecture when the architect has taken over the role of the auteur and lost authority? What role architecture when it mirrors attention deficit disorder? Project management becomes product development becomes sensual packaging. Cinema showed the way and ran into the buffers.

#### 5

Curiously enough this promise of a turning architecture now attracts us to the errors of the major thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century through the thinking of the commentators.



Architecture has finally taken the next exit. No one accepts a period which carries more alarm than is really possible for architecture to sustain. Stuttering along like this for the last thirty years, if not more, architecture has finally entered the inspired naivety of the spectacular; it marries war and production. Its fame is world wide and expanding. Attention wavering.

## 6

Invisible theories produce the Invisible world of Impressionable Architecture. It was clear, even already in the early 1980s, that language could intend, and attend to, its own results. A set of “invisible” theories demanded its own swerve and deflection. Everything could be post-rationalized; the meaning of meaning took on Prague and Paris and ended up in New York. The architect could become agent, collaborator, producer, executive director and choreographer. Fire-raiser!

## 7

Architecture spoken about and theorized so often in unmitigating haste eventually yearns for an urgency of failed messages; insistent but inescapable travesties. Such redundancy must invite us to consider anew how meaning is tacked onto architecture. Is it to distract us, to distress us or then to ask us to move on? Will architecture always be scaffolded by architects with their metaphysical aching and asked to perform more?

## 8

Let's not be over pessimistic about this redundant condition in architectural thinking. A subtle avoidance

of the obvious solutions opens the gate for a spate of acceptable theories of little relation to architecture itself. In combat we are finally ecstatic. Deradicalized, we venture beyond the architecture we have come to expect from the urgent melodrama and deep unease of recent architectural (anti-) theory. We enter a restless ecstasy where architecture can never quite be so narrowly defined by the war we witness on cable, internet and satellite television.

## 9

Theory here is discursive, frivolous and a narrative pleasure; a serious frivolity that enjoys not quite knowing everything of the journey it takes us on. In a novel this allows the reader to imagine an investigation the author might not have anticipated. In architecture this allows something else entirely. Though Adorno tells us that every ecstasy prefers to take the path of recommunication rather than sin against its own concept by realizing itself, it is ‘recommunication’ itself which today is suspect and becomes architecture.

## 10

Architecture never stopped meaning something it could not sustain: the higher art, supported by metaphysical elegance or arrogance, or the lower art, nearer the ground, less of the heavenly about it, dignified by the passion of building and construction. Architecture must open itself again to its own conceits. Was it only the last century that gave us an architecture glancingly approached, seemingly whimsical, sometimes collapsing on new meaning instead of old?

**11**

If Adolf Loos actually did succeed in pulling the rug out from under architecture, in so limiting architecture to the monument and the tomb, then we should not be surprised by the de-radicalism around today. We need new ways to upset the old, if we are to accept but not be duped by architecture's hallucinatory scope.

**12**

How much of architecture can we turn safely over to the imagination? How much can we use its uncertainty in language and the eternity within critical thinking? How much has architecture failed as the constructed word which is now responsible for the current fame and popularity of the discipline? No longer afraid to disrupt a safer architectural writing the author-architect organises the investigation by the seductive hallucinatory power of contemporary architecture. And sneezes!

**13**

There is no hidden agenda to Aristotle, Plato, Vitruvius and Alberti. We have reached the fame of mimicry and language itself. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be one of pre-texts. Suggestive, digressive and ruminating are the strategies necessary to throw out hints. We can only allow mental explorations to go wherever they lead. Themed living is doomed; nothing could be tighter, hotter than this uncertainty.

**14**

Naïve yes, to speak of an architecture that refuses to become its own form. Where are we, in which city about

to disappear off the map can we begin thinking clearly about it? We know how easy it is to express ideas in language: an architecture that refuses to become its own form. Architecture with an attention deficit?

**15**

Likening this to a sushi restaurant, Yurakucho, Tokyo – ill defined though by the term *fast-sushi*. One of those no-destination feeding centres which actually no longer has any centre. The space is small, miniature: an un-space not a non-space! The food circulates on small plates, on a small conveyor belt in front of your eyes. The emphasis is always changing.

**16**

You sit and watch the war, the opera, the cinema, in front of you. You choose this or that raw fish, wrapped delicately over a nub of sweetened rice. In a way you eat without arriving anywhere. No sooner have you chosen your dishes, made your own green tea in front of your own eyes, you are ready to leave blinded by a destination you could never imagine, a place where you didn't actually have to arrive - to think you had been there. This un-space!

**17**

Some know the critical fictions the French thinker Roland Barthes wrote about Japan. When Barthes wrote *Empire of Signs* in 1970 he was as clear as he could be about the Japan he was inventing. Japan, this country known as Japan, was a fiction of the reality he was attempting to read. At home in both linguistics and literature, Barthes

was fond of reading a culture. He could tease out the limits of a culture, until he reached what he termed, the acultural. Life was in combat with culture.

## 18

In his search for an unheard-of symbolic system, one detached from our own, Barthes spoke not of any loving gaze toward Japan as part of the Orient. This was not only a matter of indifference, it was a cliché negotiated. Barthes preferred to speak of a system, a gentle system, something which could inspire generosity, something that showed itself, gave itself, without hysteria, without looking for something in return. It was to be something vulnerable, displaying the wit, poetics and erotics even of a mask. Yet finally it was to have nothing to hide. It was to invite us into another world outside our own.

## 19

No longer claiming to represent or analyze reality, Barthes isolated a certain number of features within this place, this site, which he called Japan. Anyone familiar with the writer's work from 1950s to 1980 when he died will recognize this eternal and gentle postponement. Barthes had the ability of putting thinking, including death, on hold. As if he recognized, as we all do sometimes, how we might say or claim things too hastily, things we cannot achieve. A methodology we use time and time again.

## 20

It was not, as some might claim, prevarication. To defer meaning was not to deny it, but to be cautious about its use and abuse. From features observed randomly,

Barthes deliberately formed a system. "It is this system which I shall call," Barthes said, "Japan." Are we not invited to postpone again any hasty imagination we call 'architecture'?

## 21

Are we not able to warn ourselves about any grandiose scheme for a contemporary architecture based on images of the past and models already achieved elsewhere? Are we really able to create sites which can give back to the city once lost, its history, its suffering and its future? And if we speak of a parallel exercise, how might we do this before we rush headlong into unrealizable ideas for another counter/combat architecture?

## Yendaran - disappearing live

WE TURN TO FRAME WORDS and architecture which we wish were not so frame-able. We turn to the library in the House for de Kooning's friend, that fictional world we all inhabit, that utopia of the lost. In the small literature machines the architect imagined for the client, for some reason it was to the Polish poet Tadeusz Rozewicz that our attention was drawn.

We all have that feeling. Somewhere we know it has been written before, somewhere we know the great thinkers, those from other ages and centuries, have got there before us. We knew that Rozewicz had written something we needed. And there it was, that volume on the shelf, between the volumes of Fernando Pessoa and Octavio Paz and Wallace Stevens.

Locating the poem Yendaran, a town which disappeared from the Map of Malay, we imagined the lost architecture of uncertainty, we imagined the voice and the lost spaces we might begin to occupy. The poem is not punctuated, has no question marks yet it punctuates our discussion and it questions all that we ever thought architecture could achieve.

*Yendaran vanished  
from the face of the earth*

*Yendaran  
is it the name of a plant  
or a gleam of light  
on a trembling leaf  
Yendaran is it the name  
of a small wretch  
unsought by his parents  
Yendaran is it the name  
Of a strolling circus  
which docks at the shore  
of the town and vanishes at dawn*

*Yendaran is it a bird  
that's perched on a branch  
Yendaran is it a leaf  
Yendaran is it the name of a wretch  
or the name of a strolling circus  
or the wing of a passing bird?*

*Yendaran vanished  
from the face of the earth  
Yendaran  
is it a stream  
that's hid in the rock  
or a one-day butterfly  
or a girl that ran  
through trees  
is it a smile or a tear?*

*Yendaran Yendaran  
is it light or shade  
they stuck severed heads*

*in rubber plantations  
black heads  
silent lips*

*They stuck severed heads  
in tin mines  
silent lips*

*They stuck severed heads to frighten off freedom  
About which  
this silence speaks*

(Tadeusz Rozewicz, *Selected Poems*, London 1976)

How, if we suggest a city, an idea, a combat architecture, a system we are giving the name Yendaran, are we to live and constantly postpone any arrival? As a work-in-progress we will subject our naivety, deceptions, illusions, preferences, prejudices and uncertainty to more unusual international projects, beyond any architecture as we know it.

Yendaran - everywhere - what was provisional, transitional for some has become permanence for others. The Post-Soviet States have become one of the largest liminal zones in the world. The Dead Sea is deader than ever and about to be resuscitated. But how? Countries, whole nations, are beginning to live in a constant unrest, constant unpredictability, constant movement, and constant commerce. Disorder is no longer a deficit; attention is no longer a lack. Eventually, in a meritless condition, there will be a perpetual war against architecture, perpetual combat.

*Fluxus* is no longer an art movement privileged to disrupt art gallery practice it is closer, much closer to home. *Situationism* is no longer a movement charting the economy and culture of the spectacle; architecture has begun to live out the spectacular promise of the last century. Deconstruction is no longer a movement in philosophy and literature shifted into architecture it has begun to undress all thinking without delay.

*Yendaran* would be incomplete and unfinished, embarrassingly so as it remains open whilst projects change as they are realized. No longer is there a linear process of waiting until all funds and ideas are in place before work begins. Various cities like Yerevan or Beirut offer themselves as perfect models for processes that avoid pre-scripted architectures. Ideas remain tolerant, multiple and unfinished. Procedures are un-segregated whilst efficiently organizing work itself.

*Yendaran* is the model of uncertainty itself as it sets out to de-limit any permanence in architecture. This it does by deflecting from the over-attractive politics of representation to a more fluid politics of deferral and implementation. Change itself is a process avoiding the illusions of progress often seen in well-intentioned but shortsighted projects and endeavours.

*Yendaran* is a research with no more than the usual interdisciplinary participation but an institute of rapid attack groups opening themselves to solve issues in various parts of the world. Separate small teams of the Uncertain Institute, students, architects, artists, biologists, historians, economists, writers and so on form these attack groups. To be of contemporary resonance – culturally and economically – *Yendaran* must sit alongside contemporary

culture and society, expressing as it does in all its naivety and hubris what is happening in so many of the arts: non-linear thinking, multiplicity, nomadism, nihilism, deconstruction, stratification, layerings, loopings and repetitions.

Ultimately Yendaran's secret is its own uncertain fragile state a fragility that becomes architecture. Spectacular and speculative, architecture now responds to the uneven movement of capital and culture, leaving little in between. Inhabiting these transitional spaces, inhabiting countries which are already formed or are still to form; this is no longer only a temporary or transitional existence.

These places are not only 'virtual' they have become as real as the space one departs. Like the refugee centre in Calais where nightly hundreds tried to storm onto the trains leaving for the UK, arrival is no longer guaranteed. So how, if we are to engage architecture's naivety should we talk again of a dissenting movement?

How do we de-centre as we proceed charting the history of political indifference and the paradox of the post-terror world? How do we chart the sovereignty of the contemporary mind? Or are these more clichés we need to avoid? What is the most contemporary idea that disappears live?

This de-radicalism is all around us, everywhere, remaining silent but silently atomizing a world further than we ever imagined. Must we not be aware of the obscene shortcuts that we can put on the desktop of our computers, of our schools of architecture, of our worlds; that little *Yendaran* icon which we click to lead to all the abbreviated deficit worlds imaginable?

Yendaran? *Total Object, complete with missing parts? Or whole scene, the rest is desolation.* The first is Samuel Beckett on *Proust*, the second is the opening line from John Fowles' novel *Daniel Martin*. An architecture of partial destinies lies somewhere between these. There is of course no whole scene, and we would be a little unwise to imagine one. There is also no object complete with missing parts, for as Beckett then says, it is more a question of degree. How can we see everything we do as nothing more but the poetics of uncertainty, the notion of a 'work in progress'? Surely *Yendaran* cannot be another representation, another wisdom, another set of ideals and proposals that can take the name 'war-machine'?

What do we bring to architecture if we speak of a 'revived-corpse' or of a post-terror world? What if we wish for this project, this architecture, no ambition, no hegemony and no ideology to speak about in the ideological sense of the word? What, if we are already the living dead, do we do about the need to understand death? And to rehearse it daily, ecstatically!

We speak of giving children another lease of life when, in fact, to believe the nihilism shaping around us during this age of perpetual war and suspicion, we desperately need another lease of death. Where better to contemplate these issues than in this work in progress – in a redundant world we associate with architecture, in a world we have so named, for its critical fiction, *Yendaran? Yendaran* scripts architecture as the naïve catalyst for new urban structures, for new planning methodologies, contracting procedures, development and economic models. Using architecture's questionable skepticism and fluid relationships with society, investment, contracting and

power we explore the conditions necessary to live in the conditions of perpetual war, injustice and terror.

Architecture can no longer transcribe intended meaning, scripted memory and ethical impulse onto the façades of buildings. Nor can it close pain in such a theatrical way, when theatre itself would demand more movement, more vulnerability. The architectural closure we identify in many splendidly finished buildings around the globe, buildings from the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is not the closure we are suggesting. The age of perpetual terror and suspicion demands a completely new *modus operandi* as countries are caught in the unspeakable.

Do we postpone hasty ideas for grand schemes, whilst half the world is involved in a 'war on terror'? Existing professional models restrict us. All research is predicated on constant terror, surveillance and suspicion. There is no research for research sake or conditions for the end of atrocities or aggression. The new conditions for the built environment are continually extended by the notion of attack, the hand propelled missile.

Topical today: talk of a new nihilism, in literature, in film, in art. Where and why does such nihilism gain its naming, its 'coherence' if not a critical consequence of failing to find those 'final' solutions once more, as if final solutions can still be found? Should we not prefer Beckett's lines? Instead of the totality of the whole site, should we not go for a partial whole, complete with missing parts. And are we not - personally and individually - collaborators and text invaders - responsible for those missing parts?

## To each their own bubble?

Yes, it is possible we have been here before. We have tried. We have reconstituted those lost civilizations through the fragments of the library left us. We have once more stumbled across writings and images that make little sense to us, but which nevertheless assume such great importance. Now they move ever onwards, outwards; the reference library becomes the street pattern, the world's award winning photographs for Human Rights projected over sports fields, arenas. An airport runway is the next installation of just or unjust images, side by side. Some time ago we were told we no longer partake in the drama of alienation. Gone is our potential for creative illness and shared grief. Gone is our daily anxiety. We entered the ecstasy of communication and the age of information without quite knowing it. And that communication, according to Jean Baudrillard who warned us of this almost 20 years ago, is obscene.

For many years I thought I understood what I studied, the writings I researched, the images I came across. I might have stumbled across those simulations which were to make of us lonely travelers in someone else's world, but today I am less sure. Is it not possible as our technological imaging becomes so accessible, so instantaneous, we are once more in the domain of the obscene? With one difference; there is now in this advance, in this progress, in this deficit, the greatest chance that we reach a new

ecstasy, an ecstasy that reaches across airports, arenas and, eventually, astro-domes. This is perhaps staring us in the face; the ecstasy of no further communication.

After the 'information bomb', greater more fluid minds told us, things must change. Not unlike the concept of the 'open work' debated in literature in the 1950s, both architecture and art encountered this ecstasy. Huge events, neither public nor private, neither art nor architecture, revealed the unrest constantly featured in daily events. Anyone witnessing the huge image spectacle at the closing ceremony of the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, or later in Beijing and London would not have failed to see the obvious: both image and text became de-territorialized. The consequence cannot be exaggerated, the ecstasy obvious: any space, any surface, any void, any un-space can carry any image, any narrative. It is highly likely however that this is no transitional space. Nor is this a zone we enter only to leave when the event is over. Instead, this is a permanent condition which we occupy. Events have become continuous and active spaces. They de-limit architecture, art and the public body itself.

### *To each their own bubble?*

Whilst art has done its best to keep ahead of such ecstasy, even promoting it, architecture has remained spectacular and fixed. But the huge advance on readily accessible software and imaging systems has seen an equivalent movement to de-limit architecture. From the late 1970s and the emergence of Post Modernism, notions like 'pluralism' and 'multiplicity' ensured increased non-

hierarchy, 'plural validities' if you like. Or, to use another jargon, the de-territorialization of concepts and issues! Along with this came unique opportunities to re-shape architecture itself. The finance demanded for 'imaging development' saw other areas expand what eventually reached into art and architecture. For example we know now only too well the type of programmes used by NASA for flight development and simulation enabled an architect like Gehry to use the 'CATIA software' to realize the Guggenheim Bilbao.

The nature of the development of 'software' and digital imaging systems implied - by its very pace of change - that it favoured the young. This has long been the case in the development of computer programming, gaming, and areas where software is advanced. Students, younger architects, by being closer to the developing imaging systems and software, are poised to become part of the shaping of the profession. A transitional condition arose whereby students or graduates 'teach' faculty the software and imaging systems, whilst faculty teach students the grounded base for an architecture about to change.

At the same time, artists explored 'space' and imagery, events and non-space; siting and re-siting their art through the use of the moving image, digital imaging systems and the increased development of installation art. Artists, naturally, encroached on areas previously considered the (sole?) domain of architects. Together it became possible to re-shape public and private space; a fusion which started to re-shape architecture, just as we learnt Sony were re-shaping the interface, moving their production into intelligent 'buildings' and 'spaces' to compensate for the saturated field of personal electronics.



*To each their own bubble?*

This led to a new profession of image management and control just as – today - we now have ‘event management’ which brings in architects, designers, artists and graphic artists to shape or design event environments. Architects and artists designed spaces and buildings that offered themselves as fluid, event spaces. Art and architecture fused in a new architecture of the provisional, the ephemeral. Images in public space implied and still do potential, provisional architectures. These are architectures in transition. These are architectures we recognize only for the partial destiny they offer. Using software and imaging systems themselves in transition, everything became accessible to transition. We reached a condition whereby - as teachers, students, artists, architects, filmmakers etc. - we occupied this transitional space without desiring to leave or arrive somewhere else. We observed a shift from defining ideas and using computer aided design to a thinking shaped by digital imaging systems, scripting and tooling. Previously the computer acted as an ‘aid’ - a tool - to enable the architect or designer to shape and represent their work and ‘arrive’ faster. Today, these imaging systems and software are no longer only aids, but actually shape the work, the strategies, the programs that re-program architecture. They will continue to shape future thinking. In this way these systems in constant movement have become ‘commerce’; a traffic in new thinking and re-thinking architecture and art. Implied by this is the potential for fused art and architectures not yet realized, (un)spaces not yet achieved but every bit possible.

*To each their own bubble?*

Moving images began to de-limit architecture, art and public space itself, as a city like Tokyo or an event like the 2002 Commonwealth Games exemplified. An art and architecture changing and evolving constantly, ultimately with no destination, no arrival, would be a programmable architecture combined with the art of the programmed event. Even meat in one UK supermarket was recently sold under the campaign ‘random price’. What does all this mean?

Talk of alternative narratives makes sense surely if the content itself could be consistently questioned. Who, for example, owns the space within which the just or unjust image can be projected? With file sharing on the edge of legality and the hacker ethic about to re-engage politics and art, architecture will take over art and art will take over architecture. They will both become that liminal space, the place where the water comes in and meets the ground; never permanently wet and never permanently dry. The space in between!

*To each their own bubble?*

Perhaps we are already ‘there’ without recognizing this condition? Liminal spaces are spaces we have begun to occupy: stadiums, mountainsides, airports, gardens, zoos. The nomadic existence is no longer exotic, it is implied in permanent refugee status or permanent unemployment. The latest slang is *NEET* = no education, employment,

training. It is a poetics of unrest but not restlessness that we have begun to recognize as art and architecture has already moved us from the constant complaint of restlessness to a serious unrest. Here in cities we occupy this space. Today in this ecstasy we don't have to reach more and always try to go further. Gertrude Stein is credited with the phrase; there is no 'there' there. Contrary to that today, there is a 'there' there; it is everywhere. And we are already 'there'!

## Naively de-limiting architecture

Let us summarize and state the obvious. Whilst advances in imaging systems have begun to influence thinking about architecture, space and cities, there has also been a parallel movement to de-limit architecture. The influence of other disciplines, not least post-war philosophy, has seen architecture take on language, media philosophy and capital. Beginning already in the early 1980s and Post Modernism, notions like pluralism and multiplicity have questioned concepts and issues once unmovable. We now occupy, if we are to use the jargon, de-territorialised spaces. Architectural theory is as fluid as the liquid spaces proposed, just as fluid as installations suggesting impermanence in previously permanent sites. All determinism is off, all meaning suspended but our own. Art de-limits architecture as architecture begins to de-limit art.

The idea of cross-over and fusion, the border condition, is a constant reminder of the fluidity of our thinking, the movement of space; the 'transpolitical' as it is called. These are the inhabitable, liminal spaces that are no longer transitional. These are active spaces, spaces which de-limit architecture whether architecture likes it or not. It is no longer a question of whether the artist or architect is closest to re-shaping public and private space, this is a fusion re-shaping architecture. Just as war and recent bombing, unreasonably shapes the past into the present.

This is a condition where space and thinking begins to de-limit our own existence. Under these conditions it is possible to see the 21<sup>st</sup> century fuse with all that is provisional, uncertain and ephemeral. The comic turn of contradiction will arrive but we will be dead. Unless the gentle moment invites us to remain in the present, forsake speculation and any nostalgia for the future, we will close again all too quickly on an institute of untried dimensions. We now design and develop whilst our thinking, like war, is permanently on hold.

What do we think of contemporary architecture today? Is present architecture dictated by the spectacular buildings and system of star architects, we see advertised all around the globe? Has architecture lost the power it once so convincingly expressed? Or was this all a cognitive delusion played on us by those privileged in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? Should we accept the individual architect who wishes to prolong a memory of a lost architecture? An architect who may wish to articulate narratives into an architecture attempting to map past suffering? Or an architecture articulating suppressed history, hidden tragedy and blatant injustice? All nonsense?

Though a total picture is often denied, a total picture is often encouraged by default. We are presented with multiple narratives of buildings and mappings. What we get often is a literal transcription. This is another form of empty so-last-century contextualism which carries within it nostalgia for architecture to carry some meanings and not others. Helped by an obvious ethical impulse, we witness a tortured syntax aided or not by digital fidgeting. A syntax which – unfortunately – the architect is able to self-perpetuate.

We say ‘unfortunately’ but we have to wonder if the architect is to blame. Does not the historical situation, the trap of profession and institute demand such perpetuation? We are faced with varying sets of complex and often over-reaching alibis. Unintentionally of course but ultimately it is close to a fraudulent act. Yet our cleverness excels. We can reuse and transform historically significant buildings into something more than they are, into museums of catastrophe or injustice, propaganda and influence. We can make more even of our own histories. Why today would we choose this, if not the fear that the architecture so enigmatically created will all soon disappear like Yendaran?

Are we to believe some who say that art and architecture - like many movements in culture - come up against their own ‘cul-de-sacs’? They play out endgames, perhaps a little like The Guggenheim as its administration moves their spectacle from Bilbao to New York to Las Vegas, to Abu Dhabi, to Karachi or Helsinki? With such excess comes the yearning and seduction of neutrality.

We seek an architecture attempting neutral spaces relieved of the power and dominance it so naively and obviously wields. If we are to seek a contemporary condition close to being in constant movement, constant change, constant unrest, how are we to frame this de-limited architecture? The huge advances in digital imaging, fabrications and modeling have already challenged architecture and society in ways unimaginable 20 years ago. The narrow world inspires more thinness however.

We attempt to put ‘scatter’ into architecture, into practice. Disjunction and fragmentation become favoured

ideas, equally at home on the Interstate and the interface. We wish to tap into ideas bigger than architecture, ideas voiced by Chomsky, Said or Dawkins. They speak of recovery programs following the logic of recovery disks in the computer world. The new media alter thinking into forgetting.

After Paul Virilio has spoken so much about the 'information bomb', we have to recognize the digital platform. The architecture of 'software' and digital imaging systems implies, by its very pace of change, a privilege toward the young. Computer programming and games affect and alter wider structures. Prototyping, mapping, sampling and looping suggest new, impermanent resolutions, mixed and multiple realities. Realities no longer contained within the virtual, but contained and tested within war.

A journalist in Sweden sits in front of a huge screen erected in his living room to show a real time digital film of the journey from Marco Polo airport to San Marco Piazza in Venice. Just last week in Tokyo – which week, when? – Sony announced it would re-shape and re-locate the Interface. Our personal electronic worlds look now to be saturated with DVD facilities, MP3 players, portable hard disks, shared social networks and re-writable, recoverable programs. New development packages in architecture have moved electronic production into 'buildings' rather than personal electronics. The worlds of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson are superseded by building the Interface.

The architect will be manager, scientist, choreographer, therapist, criminal and programmer – never falling for the attraction of any new profession. The results are in our favour surely. By being closer to the developing imaging

systems and software, by being closer to experiencing impermanence and provisional strategies, students, young architects, artists, film-makers are poised not only to become part of new professions, they are poised to re-shape those professions by their innovation. By their 'sass'!

The auteur abandoned in the last century in cinema looks likely to be re-invented in this century by the architect. To whose advantage? Whilst existing faculty and professors around the world still teach students the grounded base for an architecture about to change, students and young architects are proving an ability to think through that change and define it for themselves: a transitional condition with disorder so definite, deficit and defunct.

Students or graduates 'teach' others, including their own faculty and professors, the software and imaging systems: they imagine with all the grand naivety of immense thinness, the de-limiting possibility of architecture. But what chance do they really get? If we wish to see architecture resist the professional conditions played out for it, how do we postpone such actions yet live within them? How do we reveal the lies that ask us to be part of a world so easily excluding us? Without being over-historicized, over-institutionalized, how do we allow the historic condition of unrest, uncertainty and fragility to live in the diasporic? In the jargon of sneeze, sass and sex!

Any socially constructed entity must have difficulty if it attempts to lodge itself in the inertia of buildings too stable, too spectacular and too sterile. Dominance and the scale of some recent notable buildings and architectural enigmas do not move us deeply; instead

they so often intimidate, signifying control over the very openness achieved.

Art de-limits itself whilst it de-limits its location. Architecture cannot but fail to be challenged and questioned under such circumstances. Perhaps the closest model for this occurs at Kassel every four years. The interacting programs become more personal, invite more local involvement. We can be thankful it is as yet undefined.

Right now, is it one million or two million massing on the Kashmir borders of Pakistan and India? Right now, how many missiles are falling on Homs or Tripoli where they fell on Beirut, how many troops pulled from one border, the Khyber Pass, to another, the Himalayan foothills? We use the plural 'borders'. For even the border, that sacred zone which we occupy to move from one world to another has become inhabitable. How many of us no longer pass from these worlds to the other, but live within them? Everywhere, in Europe, in the Middle East, in Asia, in the Americas, we have begun living these spaces. The self de-limited!

## The Corpse goes on Dying

IS IT SO OBVIOUS that architecture must take on the very notion of unrest and undoing in our political and cultural lives? Culture or life? Philosophy or Life? This theatre of life within injustice and terror? Which are we forced to choose in order to become better people? We know the answer given by Jorge Semprun in his book *Literature or Life*. Struck by many lines, many pages and many observations, one line stays over others. As the pages fade and the things we find significant are replaced with the next significance we recall the line, 'but the corpse went on dying'.

Semprun spoke of those dying in Buchenwald. They didn't just die. No one ever just dies. The corpse went on dying. Architecture enters other books, invades other texts and other lines as it seeks to understand why ideas remain with us, move on, re-shape themselves in our own minds, and become other ideas. They are what make choices for us, what offers us responsibility, what invites us to act, or remain apathetic, even redundant. Architecture goes on dying.

Today we have enigmas of sizable proportions that have become architecture. Few of us, despite the philosophy of undoing and de-radicalism that has saturated European thinking over the last 40 years, would accept we can live so calmly, so continuously, and so uncertainly within an enigma. We acknowledge from the outset: despite our

different histories, our different experiences, despite some of us appearing closer to the so-called realities of the age than others, we possess no sovereignty. Despite the history or micro-histories we can all hide behind, we come at this cold. We set out from a position of ignorance. Always uncertain we are at our best when life is fragile.

Again, if we speak of a work-in-progress, if we wish for an architecture continually postponed, how can we achieve this? Like the term used in the early 1970s, anti-psychiatry, the very opposition to a conventional architecture frames opposition itself. Most of us would wish not to belong to a club that could so easily take us in as members, and yet how many of us still knock on the window with a sponge only? Perhaps we must learn in this century not to close stories that can only close on themselves, in their own time.

This is life after architecture when the corpse goes on dying. The town, the city, institute, *Yendaran* is an architecture changing and evolving constantly, with no destination, no arrival. The transit station architecture once occupied is re-defined not by the hand but by the rocket-propelled grenade. Is not this the system we are thinking about, Yendaran, a work-in-progress? Is this the 'endgame' we see in so many politically fragile and redundant situations today? Are we merely mirroring the political as a cultural privilege and redundancy?

Those in unending cities like Beirut, Peshawar, Homs no longer want to support this or that faction. Tiredness, fatigue has taken over yet cannot allow any hold on the day. No one cares any longer who started what yet death is inexcusable. The corpse of the city goes on dying whilst people need to live again. We are left with only

one destination: not to hastily condemn anything like architecture to a form and function it cannot sustain. We do this by writing small pieces of paper within the books we happen to read. Usually these pieces of paper multiply and we end up with something we might call a text. But it is a pre-text and we find a difficulty in putting these in any order. That is as it should be today.

Our papers are Tibetan prayer flags. They present issues of urgency in a contemporary condition losing its own power to respond to this urgency. It is not coincidence that we are in some sort of 'endgame' situation with the world, with ourselves. Nor is it any coincidence that Samuel Beckett's own play *Endgame* would come to mind. If we can agree about this endgame, has it been an endgame of our own making? Not of the politicians' making, nor the administrators' making but us, each of us? Of the architects, the filmmakers, the author's - and those other auteurs - that have recently fallen like comets from the sky.

What is the metaphor 'endgame' under these circumstances of war, terror, poverty and injustice? Just as Winnie the Pooh does from honey, could we turn a minus into a plus? Is this obscene? Turning the endgame into a plus is when Yendaran becomes what it could be. We advocate then an architecture so completely against itself as to come out the other side. Are we aware of this absurdity? Of course, but we allow this work-in-progress to have no end, no 'drawn' or 'projected' future. The past itself might live on in a kind of continuous present which is eternally structured to allow change.

We freely – and guiltily – abuse and adapt Jorge Semprun's words from his book 'Literature and Life';

it is also the necessity to become a different entity (person) in order to remain living, the necessity to become another place in order to remain contemporary. Culture or Life is the wrong question. We may be busy sawing off the branch we are all sitting on, but there is no easy fall, there is no rehearsal. The time for rehearsals is over. It is now we must act. Not later, not in a future of someone else's making.

## The Collaborator

THE COLLABORATOR PROMOTES the fragile and provisional, embracing the 'obvious' whilst understanding nihilism, apathy and indifference. If we are to remain detached from the very systems we can invent, it also requires the talent of putting our tongue away. It should ask of us to find another way to talk of retreat or the emptying of meanings we no longer wish to give to architecture.

Architectural theory is now the enemy of all architectural ideology and knows it. The collaborator is a text invader always in ignorance of the mime. We take what we wish not to give back. Just when was the time when we could say this: "What used to be terrorist has become a laughing matter, but this laughing matter can maintain itself only by preserving, as a last resort, the terrorism it would like to be rid of."

Whoever said that architecture never had it so good, is not to be believed. The flourish is thin, the spectacle sovereign, the enigma predictable and the propaganda self-perpetuating. There is no latent hostility between architects and the public when the public has all along been denied the intelligence they surely have in order to take over buildings themselves. What appears the world-over as same-day globalism is the time of media production cut up into equal, advertising fragments. Unified as an irreversible time the world market has produced the corollary, the local spectacle

delivered by punch drunk architects penning their own narcissistic excess.

The collaborator works for a discipline that he/she longs to bring down. If that not be enough, the collaborator requires a stricter vision of architecture's own ignorance, requesting all of us to test the naivety of our own unrest. This is the result of an epoch that has occupied and displays its own time. It tests the exile offered in the political endgames all around but finds nothing but cyclical time, as architects participate in the luxurious expenditure of a life without a community.

Weep certainly at this, at Beirut, at Karachi, at Baghdad, at Kandahar and yet the corpse must go on dying. The meta-buildings, the vulgarized extensions of trade fair images and punch-drunk buildings become parodies of the architectural gift. The secondary emotions of the thin architecture all around, lead only to invasions of the wrong mind, a deception always compensated by the promise and realization of a new deception.

In the spectacle of the digital world, reverse engineering takes on something else. Fragility must be strong, necessitating us to consider once more the words of Samuel Beckett when speaking, this time in 1949, about the painters Tal Coat, Masson and Bram van Velde. Actually Beckett was not speaking about these painters at all, he was framing a predicament that invades us all. The thinner our own survival, the more serious we take ourselves, the more highly our own nonsense is exalted. The reality of architecture today has been replaced by the advertisement of its own performance.

According to Beckett, the only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is *a certain order*

*on the plane of the feasible.* Beckett is asked by Georges Duthuit: what other plane can there be for the maker? "Logically none," Beckett replied. "Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road."

Beyond this plane of the feasible: is not this the task we set ourselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Our retreat could never be so sovereign that we imagine emerging from this better, happier people, more responsible. The collaborator is well advised to attend to the deception of belonging to a world which cannot accept his or her dissent. In this we meet once more the alleged alienation that occupied so many for so long in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The new environment, this unspace - that which one realizes oneself by losing oneself - where he/she become the other to become truly himself or herself, has become laughable. Unless you happen to be standing on the edge of the city in Benares; on one side of the city, intense, feverish, unending, re-forming life and activity. On the other side of the river, an emptiness, a sand quarry, a policeman's tent. You have to pay, if you happen to venture to the other side. But in between, quite the biggest and mysterious liminal space in the world: the River Ganges!

Naturally the collaborator could furnish other pre-texts important for urban re-structuring. But all this is banalization. Digital production has unified unspace which is no longer controlled by the individual or the community. The accumulation of images, the impossibility of writing and representing anything



new at the same time, offers us a century of constantly eliminated geographical and internal distance.

The text invader is right and wrong at the same time. Architecture can only become the modern – or the one after the one before – fulfillment of the uninterrupted and unfinished task. That is why the collaborator can only consider this discipline as a one-way world, loaned rhetoric to the empty and emptying revolution, isolated individual narcissism and intense ambiguity.

For the first and last time, any new architecture which is always aimed at the poor will always bounce back. The formal poverty of our own richness comes from the global character of tourism and advertising. Nothing is at the heart of modern construction anymore except a suitable faux-terrain for those unimaginable existences, for those acts that must 'go beyond the plane of the feasible'. Consider no threshold, no movement, no direction. Consider the collaboration in departures which sketch something to come, the unknown with no arrival, with products no one can call architecture, with space which is inevitably deferred and re-defined, with language that is skidding on the oil patches of the very process gone through.

This uncertainty, the possibility of not giving architecture any final shape, will be the impulse that motivates our unrest, or grand deceptive naivety for yet another fifty years. It is the transit space that becomes home, in the movement that takes us on from one world to another thus bringing back the reality of the voyage and life understood as a voyage, which was so heroically imagined to contain its entire meaning within itself.

That there is no final shape whilst most political staging and re-staging today, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine or Kashmir, concerns itself with the idea of a final shape, final solution, must alarm us. And go on alarming us. The collaborator is open to this just as the text invader is open to the provisional in the political. Yet it should not mean the collaborator or the text invader fall short of 'solutions'; solutions as part of the voyage which contain only our own entire meaning, and no one else's. Architecture finally becomes what it has always sustained: the ecstasy of no further communication.

## The Meritless Condition

WAR AND ARCHITECTURE - It is with some regret that today we must begin almost any presentation, lecture or seminar with the apology of ignorance and unlistening. It surely comes as no surprise; we live today in a meritless condition if not world, which has deprived us of the reason within our own reason. This is why we are asked for more discipline, and why we must turn that discipline on ourselves. It is this condition wrapped around a considerable uncertainty and fragility today that begs us to speak and even write as carefully as we can. For this we do in moments when brevity is so prevalent, when little more than lasting sentences no longer last, when ideas shared do not endure even beyond symposium, seminar or séance.

If you have failed to notice, though it's hard not to, the now hyphenated word 'paradigm-shift' is returning since that time in the 1970s and 1980s when after Thomas Kuhn we learnt how supposedly paradigms passed over. One set of dominant conditions would be eventually questioned to such an extent that the next set of dominant positions could take over. That's a crass way of putting it but we now all get the drift; so much so that we begin to look in advance for the changes that are about to come. This instability leaves us momentarily stable only if we find ways of accepting one set of ideas without unsettling all. In architecture 'Postmodernism' was considered one version of that shift, only to be replaced in the discourse

classes by a revitalized Phenomenology and a hijacked Deconstruction. An unfortunate loss of reason and an increase in indulgence in architectural argument has meant the same chattering classes can now legitimate space and spectacle, digital wizardry and formula-one architecture.

Today, the term paradigm-shift, though still an intellectual idea, is necessarily more general, more uncertain yet more accessible. Shifts in the paradigm like the attack of September 11<sup>th</sup>, as Martin Amis puts it in his collection of essays called *The Second Plane*: "Paradigm-shifts open a window; and," Amis continues, "once opened, the window will close." Is that correct? We shift to hunker down and resist the next forces about to change us? And if so, what have we closed on in the last 10 years and counting? Is this the meritless condition that sees instant celebrity, mediocrity and uncertainty fogging over any rational we wish to bring to events? Calls for understanding one side lead to charges of chicken; calls to understand the other side, whoever they are, lead to charges of pragmatism. Is it any surprise we are starting to feel comfortable when we no longer need to listen in any detail, so repetitive, so agonizing has our uncertainty become?

Those who live with the reality of a stable instability, in regions of conflict, post-war, under war, under siege or insurgency, know this probably better than we do. No more so also when it comes to the architect's role for example in a city, as Gunter Grass used to say about Berlin, nearer the realities of the age. And which might these be? And if we were to ask that of our own lives, ask that of our own cities, which would they be? Which city

would be considered nearer the realities of the age today: Baghdad, New York, Kandahar, Beirut, Ottawa, Montreal or Peshawar? And which age: the age of unreason, the age of meltdown, the age of awakening, the age of boredom, indifference and solitude? And what are those realities that if we lived in these cities we would be nearer: the pulse, the nerve, the rhythm and the momentum of the age? Or the agony of reason saying farewell to itself?

If we put together the words war and architecture, the search engine will reply with much that we could research; books, papers, ideas would lead to other books papers and ideas. The links, like all links, would have to become infinite. Yet there is something more alarming and closer to the reality of the age in just this one word 'architect'. Whenever talk is of the Iraq war it turns often to a man who became famous for turns of phrase that mocked language with serious points. Donald Rumsfeld was and still is known and often talked of as the architect of the Iraq War. Martin Amis in his essay *Terror and Boredom: the Dependent Mind* begins one paragraph in the following way: "I will soon come to Donald Rumsfeld, the architect and guarantor of the cataclysm in Iraq..." Like Amis, I was always fascinated with the underlying reason in this the most famous Rumsfeldism:

The message: there are known 'knowns'. There are things that we know that we know. There are unknown knowns.

That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know.

But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.

Things we don't know we don't know? Is this our meritless condition, or is it only such if we accept the mask that attempts to hide this fact that we don't even

know what we don't even know? We may not know - in this moment of deep unreason, in this stable instability - that to lose sight of reason may reduce us all to fictions played on and across each other?

The paradigm shift is of course closer to home for all of us. It is in our daily life, our work, our ideas and our ways of understanding our ideas. The rhetoric answers itself and all forms of argumentation are circular. Because of this these arguments can be successful in the terms of those that define the success, and failure in terms of those that also define the failure. There is no listening space, no zone into which our current reason can go. Going under the name of for example, an affordable paradise, it is not the first time we have heard paradise thrown around by architects over the last decade or so. One paradise is another's suicide belt, though again such juxtaposition appears crudely miscalculated. When the art of plain speaking has itself suffered, then plain speaking takes a vacation and we get useful, though not always incorrect generalizations. Hence Amis will link, of course, to make his own point: Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and Osama. Yet why not Bin Laden; even in this slip to familiarity of 'Osama' is a loss. And guided by the mumjo jumbo of market rhetoric, adam smith and mantras which never pass out of their own cul-de-sac, planners and architects are defiled for not making client-ready result orientated projects and the world outside these projects is pulling back, finding way to restructure that very hubris that calls for such new suburban geographies of nowhere.

And then what of that other paradise deferred until the calamity affects us all? Like many young students working or listening to such ideas, I do not know why

we are still contemplating ideas and plans like this, under such circumstances today, and thereby learning to play the necessary political games with those who do not listen. The one advantage of such soulless enthusiasm in these uncurious conditions is that it forces us to listen with even more acute minds. For we cannot become one more part of the unlistening community thereby adding to the meritless condition. For perhaps, like every city which is closest to the reality of the age, every reality of the age is our own to make.

In this current condition, the anarchist calls and we take it upon ourselves to re-write our own lives. Even the paradigm-shift is ours to define, whether we think it collectively occurred in 1989, or on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2008 when the first African American got to be president-elect. Meanwhile, more cities are targeted, and the biggest ambiguity around at the moment is the one that is represented by an area of the globe that is soon to become, like Basra and Helmand Province before it, common knowledge. We soon get to know the names of the towns and cities of the North West Frontier Province; we soon learnt of Waziristan, or the Mohmand District; we will later learn of Mardan, of the Buddhist shrine in Takt-i-bhai. For in the current interregnum, the ambiguity is clear. This is also the stable instability.

It is worth paraphrasing: if America learned from their intelligence that Osama Bin Laden was situated in one of these towns or cities in NWFP, and if Pakistan in terms of its government and intelligence does not agree or respond to America's intelligence and wishes not to attack, then America will attack once more. African American President or not, no one now knows what is right in this

condition; the droned world will drone on unguarded and unchecked. It is not a meritless condition but it is a wager with the world itself. If this man is taken out, one part of the world is heroically triumphant, and for a short time, some will sleep better in their beds. But if this man is taken out, in another part of the world, it is not only AK47s that will be used as a call to arms once more but a more unknown and unlikely but deadly response. Rumsfeld is right: there are unknown unknowns and they are likely to be catastrophic. And the man was of course taken out!

Stable instability or a life after architecture? Perhaps that's our job; in all humility, with as much plain speaking as we can turn into elegance, to allow ourselves to explore the unknown unknowns instead of the existing conditions and these meritless attempts to offer paradise to people who do not really want our paradise. The towns that begin to come into our world, Garmsir in Helmand Province, Lashkar Gar and Musa Qala. We hear the most commonly uttered phrase today by all those inside the sphere of the US and the Nato alliance: we can only leave Afghanistan and leave Afghans to the Afghans when the country is no longer a strategic threat to this country (US or UK). The reporters then report about Afghan soldiers or Taliban fighters keeping gruesome trophies like a flak jacket besmattered with an englishman's blood. We hear nothing about the trophies kept by the Nato troops or the US troops; trophies we know which are collected in war after war. A turbine is brought to Helmand Province at great cost to the soldiers protecting its arrival and transport. There is some joy at the turbine being put in place at the dam in the province. Then someone soberly adds when

asked why the Taliban do not destroy the troops bringing the turbine or even try to delay the turbine. Why should they, the local official adds, they need the power and they control almost every place in the province which will receive power from the turbine!

The paradigm shift is more crucial, more meritless and urgent. This may mean that architects are also part of the team that recognises that talking is a way out of war but a way to the future too. Does that mean re-training, a split in the education of the architects or a realisation of the limits of the privileged and diluted codes students are taught. To call for wider ethical responsibility and awareness in education is not necessarily to condemn or wish to narrow the grounded aspects of any architectural education. It may be to acknowledge the 21<sup>st</sup> century condition rather than the 20<sup>th</sup> century's condition. Is this not also the paradigm shift, post 9/11?

There is a sobering note: for every book the American author Philip Roth sells, the author Tima Lahaye sells five. And what is that series? It is the left behind series, writings and books about the end of times, even a child's guide to understanding bible prophecy and end-time theology; various summaries of the earth's last days. Thankfully, for those about to enter a life after architecture, it is by no means agreed that the world is going to end in the same way for the same groups of people.

## Several Pre-texts and Obscene Short-cuts

PRE-TEXTS: SITES, WALLS, GATES, ELECTRONIC SITES, or whatever - whether they are complete or incomplete - depend how they form part of an imagined whole, an architecture of uncertainty, a work-in-progress. We are familiar with the obvious meaning of the word pre-text. This is a false reason often given to disguise the real one. In this way it is usually an excuse, but not always! Pre-text is also that which comes before. From the past participle of the latin, *prae-texere* means to show, display. Literally in our case, in this architecture, it means to weave in front of, before the architecture we imagine takes over. Pre-texts allow us to frame this parallel exercise whilst researching and drawing up a partial architecture of its differences and contrasts to other systems.

We can no longer accept the discovery of strategies that eliminate the chronology of the place, nor its architectural/art-historical aspect, but we insinuate into existence an architectural programming along a more "random" journey. Wherever that randomness takes us, even to the death of the architect.

We accept the building-site would take us beyond any finite solutions and thereby de-limit our own position in an architecture that not only houses dwelling but must also house uncertainty, suspicion and terror.

Pre-texts should come before any architecture imagined. They should wave in front of us a locus of site, of mood,

of thinking; scattered around any existing town or city, even one as recently ravaged and senselessly destroyed as Beirut. Pre-texts form an invisible network of Seven Sites. Recall the traditional Russian doll, the process of taking out one doll and moving inside to the next, and so on. Today these are more contemporary. They begin with an outsize Mr. Putin and end with the tiniest Mr. Lenin imaginable.

Imagine seven sites, seven linkages, seven ambiguities, seven anguishes, seven impermanent conditions in anything that resists being named architecture. We are entering Yendaran, we occupy the city both past and present in a strangely comforting uncertainty in an attempt to put these partial architectures into practice, a programmatic sketch for the Seven Sites.

The seven sites are as follows: these should be taken as prompts, gentle sketches of a direction, seven sites for a parallel exercise that resists being called architecture. We do all this aware of our own naivety and cognitive deception.

Site 1: Society - Retreat or the Emptying of Meaning  
(*Barthes & Steiner*)

Site 2: Finance - Ignorance & Misreading (re-establishing our ignorance)  
(*Jabes & Finkelkraut*)

Site 3: Leisure: Exile & The Other  
(*Edward Said & Witold Gombrowicz*)

Site 4: Post-Terror - The Endgame and Temptation  
(*Beckett & Ionesco*)

Site 5: Post-USSR - Weeping and De-humanism  
(*Merton & Cioran*)

Site 6: Poverty - Fragility & Indifference  
(*Mandela and Havel*)

Site 7: History - Joke Knowledge & Suppressed Histories  
(*Naipaul and Pessoa*)

Of course architecture can no longer hold to this intention. It is but an innovative interface. But whether we have the technology available to make the digital real, and the interface become a city, a town itself matters little anymore. Here these pre-texts would not only meet the real in construction, in theatre, a (de-)centre for speed and ignorance, a children's art college or a kindergarten for architecture.

Shall we discuss at length a system we call Yendaran? No. It is awesome in scale, but not impossible. The present global environment, uncertain and shaky, the conditions of perpetual war and terror, demands an urgent response in post-critical terms. Only pre-texts correspond and answer the tragedies we wish to avoid in the future.

These pre-texts include a fidelity to failure as much as a generosity to seek success. We must remember, in honour to all cities removed from the map, to all people not allowed to co-exist, that – as Samuel Beckett wrote - 'death has not required us to keep a day free.' This means, we have to act now in all uncertainty.

How, if we agree that Yendaran holds significance, are we to agree on that significance? Does the architecture possess its own unique awareness, a special gift of guilt which must remain as testimony? Or can we be even more extreme? Is there anything beyond abandonment? Is destruction and oblivion a viable manner in which to deal

with a place of trauma? Which memories deserve a place in the public arena and which don't?

It does not take us much to ask whether we can talk about an anti-architecture, a partial architecture, a resisted architecture as the expression of a conscience that is itself a work in progress? Many things are forbidden to us today yet we can still voice them. Recently our operative languages have failed us once more. There was a cleverness in which statements announced 911, the apocalyptic nature of it, as if our lives would simply change forever. The simple brevity of 911, an American brevity we might add, serves to remind us of how obscene short-cuts can be.

Now recyclable events have re-entered the arena of everyday discourse, entered drama, tragedy and comedy. The stand-up comics begin saying what no one could have said for the last 10 years. Any event itself, its effect on us all, in fact reminds us of the obvious: how changes and responsibility remain with us at the personal level.

Much is spoken today of our nomadic lives. The obvious becomes our own mantra. Of course we are nomadic. But how much is impermanence and uncertainty our own answer to this impossible condition? How much is a life in flux, in movement, the only answer to that other life we cannot sustain?

Why and with what consequence have we remained in awe of recent philosophy? Why should its own undoing put our own world in restless movement? Nietzsche via Foucault! We are all familiar with these little exercises that go through the writing of others. The writer considered that Foucault read Nietzsche out of context. A highly subjective reading of Nietzsche was often, the writer

stressed, "highly insensitive to Nietzsche's subtle feints and dodges."

The writer? The writer outlined the notion of butchery, an active interpretation that was both violent and willful. Yet how can we ignore that fact that for fifty years at least the French writers and philosophers have creatively butchered everything they base their words on.

We are of course all guilty of the fictions we make of each other's world. And we all go out of someone's else's context into our own reality. If we didn't we would not probably survive the current unrest everywhere in the world. It is impossible not to do so. But we are not concerned here with whether Foucault or Nietzsche actively interpreted the works of others, we are interested in the final words of the writer he closed in order not to butcher Foucault. A paradox beyond us today?

Why should he not butcher Foucault, as Foucault has butchered others? Why when the philosophy of the last thirty years has given reason to celebrate un-decidability, erring and indeterminacy, within texts and thinking, do we remain in awe of such ideas? Why do we not apply more butchery to the thinking which itself was a butchery of previous thinking? Why are we not writing to destroy that which is already written and holds us in its chains? What is this deradicalism thrust on us that prevents us from destroying the sovereignty ideas and thinking hold over us?

Multiplicity and plurality might invite this resistance to open itself to areas beyond art and architecture. Does it not depend on how much in flux our own thinking is, and the generosity and responsibility we invite to allow it to settle for a brief moment? The 'corpse of architecture

goes on dying inside us.’ Instead of artificially re-tracing and confirming architecture’s dubious history, or trying to retell memory, partial architectures are possible: no ‘drawn’ or ‘projected’ future. What then is the metaphor ‘endgame’ under these circumstances?

Dr. Laing – do we not forget the ‘doctor’ - turned disinterested observation of other people’s behaviour back into himself with, many have considered, devastating and at times disappointing consequences. Yet how many of us looted his thinking. If Laing was guilty of idealizing the ‘mad’, elevating opposition into its own system, and hinting at the schizophrenia within normalcy, then more than a generation flirted with the ‘death of the family’ and idealized the “radical other” from theories and mantras that could hardly lend sufficient support.

Are we guilty now of a de-radicalism that was born in the last century? Are we not all responsible for the loose thinking that appeals to the obvious, yet leaves us inadequately disowning any radical will? Is it not obvious: this de-radicalism now makes genuine thought difficult to distinguish from the superficial, from the potentially immediate, abbreviated and enlightening mantras we hear all around us? These were the mantras useful for the counterculture which saw liberation in inter-disciplinarity, held together by a social fantasy. That unscience now, however, is no less important than the feeling we have left all this immaturity behind.

It has taken some years before the fraudulence has come back home. It is likely now that this new century will see us trailing thinkers from the last century. Not in awe of their knowledge or visions, but in trying to understand the privilege we gave them and the privilege they once had.

## Bring on the Apocalypse!

A GENERAL IMPRESSION that life has already been earned and experienced is an alibi for the serious listening ear. The humanist and benevolent parachutist do well as they reinforce experience with reputation. The enthusiasm to turn this experience into philanthropy turns into the imagined world of a flawless plan for our future. Once more we parachute in the smiles of benevolence, the agony of death. Unaware of the disasters that have occurred over the last half-century, our contemporary action must set about disavowing history. The confusion of nostalgia with the heavy triumph of the past produces another paradise, the nuclear family and the world are once more crossed by Philip K. Dick and J. G. Ballard. There is no ridicule left in an unstable condition. All styles, mockery and fakes, all presentations are possible. The diagram of a plan for the future will sell well to those who know it is unlikely to see any serious thought put into it. As the ideologues gain validity from the sampling of past solutions, the young ridiculers and new parachutists believe in the ways we can all jump screen and re-montage life. This works because we can never be taken seriously, ensuring that the present is always a smuggled and mediocre version of the future. The anti-ideologues then decide on another plan. They slip constantly and partially and in their bid to take seriously what has yet to be taken seriously in life they must never arrive at the destination. These anti-ideologues



adapt, swing and re-surface the road outside and the path up the mountain. Showing little tolerance toward the impatience of the new generation, however, boredom and fatigue condemn the future to sedation. Students and explorers in this lost situation get low marks for getting out of bed in the morning. Meanwhile the ideologues keep telling the audience to answer back, but whenever they do the necessary knowledge and right questions are flashed on the screen behind them, in advance of them. The ideologues continue the big wheel of fortune, too deeply and superficially embedded in the scheme called life that tragedy becomes inescapable. Altering a little of it would destroy its neatness and lucidity. The interviewer meanwhile intends to ask serious questions about this plan to save the world (in more detail of course), which would either reveal that there is no real plan or that this plan could never have any real resonance. The language is tacit, closed and inapplicable, and the answers come thick and fast. Oddly triumphal and undemocratic, bullish and bullying, we are insured against the insistence of our own experience, ideas and terminology. We learn to play it safe to retain our own safety. Some, the parachutists amongst us, have no baggage and dream out the answers before they flash on the screen. In that moment the future arrives and defers that soft dictatorship which will arrive in the name of the new company establishing itself on the Stock Exchange. The challenge deflected is then taken as an affront rather than an exchange. Surely it is irresponsible to remain safe in one part of the world in the hope that this safety works like the butterfly effect. Bring on the apocalypse, exclamation mark.

# life after architecture

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- 8 Deschooling Architecture (2012)
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- 10 iDeath (2013)

Roger Connah



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***what is to be said can never be said again and if so,  
then differently – the same goes with biographies***

For ten years he worked as the honorary male and text invader of the radical all-women relational art group from Sweden called The Rocket Girls preparing various texts, installations and exhibitions, brought together in the volume called *Frank Heron & The Rocket Girls* (N.Alice Challinor, Stockholm 2009). Currently picking up on his time in Peshawar and the North West Frontier Province and also Lahore, he is now working on a new volume called House of Fiction. This kicked off when, in Peshawar at the wedding of the daughter of NWFP Minister of Education, a Khan amongst Khans, in the segregated dancing, he found himself boogieing with Muhammad Ibn Iftikhar-Al-Niffari, the Head of Police, who had come down from Kabul, through the Khyber Pass, for the three day event and lamb-tail tasting. Still waving not drowning, in another half-life, he is Associate Director of Graduate Studies, Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Having just translated the first volume of lost poetry by Sisyphus Montale (*Project for a Hermitage*, Trieste 2010) the biography of Montale is due in the next year or two if he can invent it fast enough!

