# aalto-ego

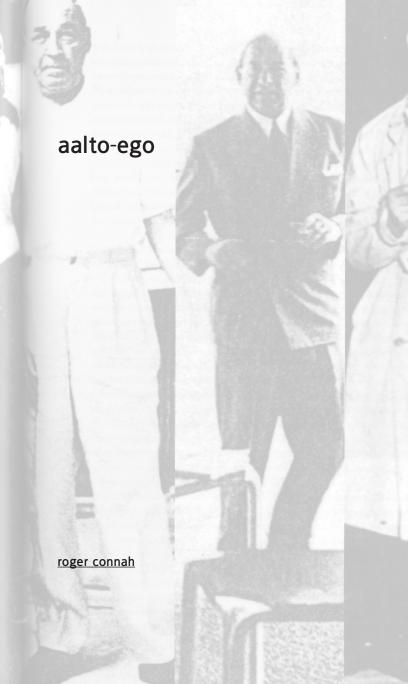
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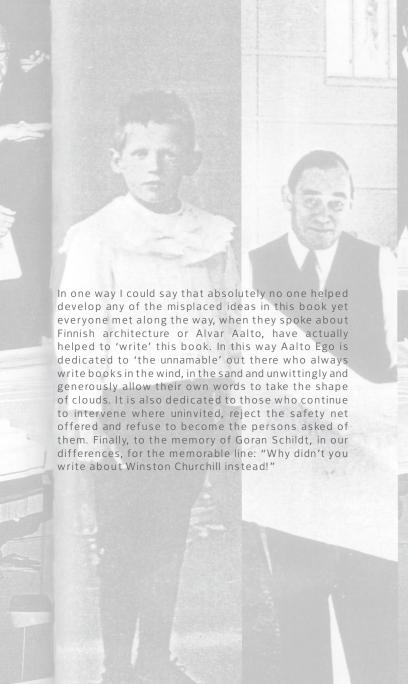














You people who read books, don't give a damn about German philosophers and the decline of various parts of the world. When I go home to the country, I go up to the attic and get out a pile of detective stories. Nick Carter is a great detective. He manages to keep a monocle in his eye while Chinamen are using him as a shooting target. I shall ask him for help when Oswald Spengler starts seriously threatening Europe.

Alvar Aalto 1921 1

So, I remember to forget most of what I should have written to make writing at all the full, expressive record I wanted it to be. As with the stories of adventure in building I left out those I should have liked best to write, so these pages lack the faces and names and places, the times and circumstances that would be most revealing, really more significant than any I have recalled. But that mutability, is it not the charm of life, alive?"

Frank Lloyd Wright <sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Goran Schildt, <u>Alvar Aalto In His Own Words</u>, Ottava, Helsinki, p.13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, An Autobiography, p. 324.

## commedia dell'aalto

## the human factor

a critical drama

## act 1

prologue

the white table - the modern room - the indigo room
the great pretender - mock turtle soup - shark's teeth
the thrill is gone

#### act 2

prologue

the red room - it's now or never - boom boom
saving my love for you - what a difference a day makes
poor little fool - the great pretenders

epilogue
a karaoke bar called heaven

## l'uomo sublime

optional epilogue in a karaoke bar called heaven

## postscript

when the well runs dry no small talk

We see this tendency to reduce everything to a formula everywhere, from regional plans to extreme architectural details. l† brings together a specified number of people and a specified planning method such that x+z+11+180 will automatically lead to the right result. I have seen it in Helsinki, I have seen it in every town in Finland....they are all infected. There's no need to go to Berkeley or anywhere else to see it begin with students and see how the professors resist it. It has the danger of transforming pedagogics, of altering the atmosphere in our towns and countryside. Indeed, town and country are almost one already.

Alvar Aalto 1972

# preface

commedia dell'aalto

Steady old Väinämöinen makes to lift his head. He uttered a word, spoke thus: 'Now I know it too: yes, I am in a strange land utterly unknown. In my land I was better at home loftier'.

The Kalevala Canto 7

Interested in the work of Borromini, ripping off from others, stealing or rather borrowing gladly and creatively from Brunelleschi and Asplund, joining the Functionalist gang in 1929, thinking of leaving his own country for the land of the brave, saving the world from Industrialisation and inevitable robotisation, looking at the world as a land surveyor, seeing his country as a model laboratory, seeing architecture as the cheapest game and the greatest mission, nearer in life's tragedy to Kropotkin and Chaplin than Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, preferring the song Mack the Knife to Sibelius, dancing fleet-footed, drinking

less secretly than an MI5 character from a Graham Greene novel, obsessed finally by the only obsessions that matter, Heaven and the human factor, and always looking over his shoulder in a forest that was his own country...

## The Famous Architect!

"Famous men who need their fame", Nietzsche wrote in The Gay Science, "like all politicians, for example never choose allies and friends without ulterior motives." Chameleons, these famous men desire reflected splendour, they steal reputations and inspire fear in others and they opt for that which can serve their own purposes. Influence is not denied, it is disguised. Appearing whimsical, inattentive, brilliant and capricious, the famous men who need their fame need their own control. Nietzsche is merciless: "now they need a dreamer near them, now an expert, now a thinker, now a pedant, as if he were their alter ego; but soon they do not need them any more."

As the reputation of famous men keeps changing they become, according to Nietzsche, like great cities, everybody pushing to get near them, impress them and befriend them. At the same time these famous men wish to make friends with kings, princes, presidents; they occupy fame by default. Eventually reputation itself keeps changing as it is pulled by this or that real or fictitious quality, until friends, allies, hangers-on perform to the qualities we associate with the stage. Hence, as Nietzsche rightly indicates, what these friends wish, what the court wishes from the famed

being must stand "much more firmly and unmoved" with a splendour visible from a distance. This too, Nietzsche says finishing his fragment, "occasionally requires a comedy and stage play."

Aalto-Ego is that stage play.

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During the Renaissance, theatre goers were addressed by a troupe of wandering players, swaggerers, drunks, lechers, servants, masked fools and fooled masked professors; all given an insight which we generally have no problem in accepting, even from such dubious characters. Before commedia dell'arte, however, there was a tradition called the 'guillari', wandering performers from the Middle-Ages who showed their disrespect for authorities. It was obviously an important and unmistakable attempt to remain in control of decisions. It was also a 'mappa mundi' - a way of seeing the world which, despite injustice and chaos, could sustain some semblance of personal control.

Aalto-Ego draws on these two theatrical traditions at the same time as loaning the authority or, as some would say, 'ripping it off' from the work of Dario Fo. Always on the edge of farce, reversing the scholarly arrogance and hubris shown by the actors, such reversals cannot however be dismissed as slapstick. To retain a scholarly tone familiar to the Renaissance and yet to suggest a subversive reading of Alvar Aalto, the Finnish architect, seems to be not only topical but essential, if we are to keep the man and his architecture in perspective. Just as Fo suggested a subversive reading of the scriptures, this approach proposes a critical drama as a subversive reading of Aalto as an architect, and also - by implication - the accepted notions of his architecture and his position in 20th century Modern Architecture.

Though the confusion of identity is always part of 'farce', confusion also offers us a chance to re-script Aalto's achievement. Whether his is a tragic nature depends very much on the culture's attitude to the architect, just as accepting Aalto's treatment of women depends on the culture's attitude to women. Drama offers us a broader sweep, of which biography must offer some clues. Laughter can also open up, as well as question, ideas that might otherwise never be voiced.

The idea of a dramatic text that is open to alteration has similarities to criticism and critical ideas about Alvar Aalto and architecture. Just as a travelling troupe would play and perform to different audiences, use different accents, tones, levels of humour, the performance would always produce a different critical effect wherever it was played. Confusion, in this case critical reception, means that its concern would remain alive, that it would have to be re-discussed, forced to be re-questioned.

The open work, the undoing of critical histories and

archives, invites us to prepare new forms to understand both our achievements and also the 'monstrous' pressure we put on our heroes to live up to those achievements. Hallucination then becomes reality here as much as it did to Aalto. Hence comic business is critical business is commedia dell'Aalto.

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Aalto-Ego is a critical drama presenting the thoughts of the legendary Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, as if there was a moment in his life when he stepped out of his own skin, out of his own ego, beyond his own being. How do we know Alvar Aalto was like this? We don't, which is precisely the point. But wouldn't we all like to be invited in?

nirror has been cleaned and polished. More 'truths' about little alvaaaar, the Finnish vagabond, who became one of the world's greatest architects of the 20th Century, appeared. If, to Picasso, women were both his survival and his tragedy, what material offered Aalto survival? If biography is not a legitimate source of critical enquiry, if some are accused of over-emphasising biography, this does not make biography redundant. Within biography is the study of indulgence; how and why things work and look the way they do? How they function in a community? And what makes fame, fame?

It is possible that the critical industry has conveniently edited out Aalto's biography or what we are allowed to know of that biography. In the same way it is common practice to edit out what does not quite fit the critical schemes searched. Cue the immortal karaoke song: "a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest!"

Biography is naturally a broad map which drama can draw in. The very fictional aspect of a subversive reading can and must undo known scenarios ensuring Alvar Aalto is opened not closed. By so doing, does this not ensure the architecture remains relevant to the public understanding of it, as much as architecture's misunderstanding and underestimation of that public? What, then, might Modern architecture have left out? According to some, the agendas of Modernism and Humanism are about to be re-scripted in the 21st Century to accommodate present chaos, uncertainty, plurality and undoing in architecture. By so rescripting history, Aalto has not only been interpreted as the greatest Modern architect of all time but the quintessential critical humanist of the Twentieth Century. And while this cultivates fame and its own friends, we should remember that Aalto the person, Aalto the unpredictable poser, oracle, shaman and artist, is continually about to be lost. Underneath the poeticizing, the theoretical rehabilitation, the lavish liturgies, the hagiographic floss and the national razzamatazz, we are in danger of losing something invaluable. The man! The genius! The clown! The designer!

### The architect!

Does this not present us with a critical and fictional duty to dig Aalto out of such an ignominious grave? His spirit, clowning and creativity, his peccadilloes, pride and panache deserve nothing less. And if we do not do this, if we do not reinvent Alvar Aalto, surely he will remain lost in increasingly flattened versions of his work as an architectural missionary. Versions of his life as a social reformer and his country as the perfect site for an architectural laboratory will once again emerge.

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Commedia dell'Aalto? It is important to reinvent this figure called Alvar Aalto, a figure that caused so much commotion, who was attacked for designing elitist monuments and brilliant 'knick-knacks' in glass and plywood. A larger-than-life figure attacked for his bombastic bull and, toward the end of his life, considered a capitalist's lackey in his own country. This dresser in plusfours, the cultivated but boorish Finn, friend of Kings and Presidents, above and below the table!

To preserve something of the man, must we not ignore Aalto's own words when he said to his amanuensis Göran Schildt, "write about problems of architecture not mine"? Aalto, according to Goran Schildt, claimed to possess no ego. Does it go without saying then that he also had no

alter ego?

Just who was this man?

An 'alter ego' is, according to the accepted definition, an inseparable friend who shares one's pursuits, a confidential representative. It is also that side of someone's character that is different from their usual character. Literally, in Latin, 'another'!

To invent the Aalto-Ego would be to imagine what it was like in the early sixties for the Grand Architect, on the edge of acute loneliness, to be so famous and so misunderstood at the same time. How did it feel to be from a country so near the political and robotic edge as to step back from it with each vermouth or whisky? Primarily a monologue, a conversation, an inner speech, this Aalto-ego is an imaginary diario silenzio, punctuated and ruptured with (popular?) music, choreographed like a music hall review.

Music unerringly structures the 20th Century's emotion and no doubt influenced Aalto's loneliness and pessimism. Music also possesses its alter ego which allows us to suggest quite 'another' soundtrack to life. In this invention music would also enable Aalto to hold onto the unreality of Fame, the tragedy of his Chaplinesque little man. But it is the pathos though, not the tragedy, of the popular song lines that may bear an uncanny resemblance to the situation in 'modern' architecture and his own life.

When I first saw you... with your smile so tender...my

heart was captured my soul surrendered...I spent a lifetime waiting for the right time... now that you're near the time is here at last. . it's now or never... come hold me tight.

Aalto dances alone.

It's now or never.. just like a willow...we would cry... your forms excite me... let your space invite me... for who knows when... we'll meet again this way...

Oh sole mio.

\*

Aalto-Ego is part memory, part fantasy, part songlines and part plain lies. This diario silenzioso takes us back to childhood in Finland, the 1920s in Turku and Stockholm, the 1930s in New York, London and Paris, the war, MIT in Cambridge Massachusetts in the 1940s and on into the future, the impending mechanisation of culture and architecture, the criminal dogma of Marxist-Leninist hooligans and on to Aalto's death in 1976, and the imagined sanctification and resurrection in 1998 at his Centenary and the emergence of the Aalto Academy.

Invented and inventive, like Aalto himself, this is a self-parody, both tribute and trial. It offers an invisible picture of an Alvar Aalto as EVERYFINN, beginning from Alvar Aalto's own parody of the claims made for him and about him, nationally and internationally. He discusses his own fear and resistance to theory. He would make fun often

as he did, especially of the nonsense around his simple paraphrased sentence: Architect's words don't mean a damn thing. Slowly, in a music-hall way, the commedia dell'Aalto opens up the unpredictability of the dapper world famous architect.

As a pioneer of last century's Modernism, as one of the most famous Finns, Aalto was about to enter the most lonely period of his life. The drama locates this moment in the early 1960s, a period of naive politicisation and the trivialisation of architecture; a period which was to attack and reduce this man to an enemy, a curse, a traitor to democracy and architecture. In telling this story we follow an after-dinner style much like Aalto would himself. As if disrespect itself must always be off the cuff! One moment very witty, raconteurish, the next moment plunged into despair and disappointment. The moods Aalto goes through are echoed through the music he listens to. Aalto according to his close friends, including Dr. Schildt, was a man who felt he never existed out of the presence of others. He was, in effect, a chameleon, a man who altered his personality to suit occasion, people, intimacy and moods.

Just as the 'jongleurs' were excellent at imitating the style of professorial wit, priestly hypocrisy, a paternalism or a seductive charisma, Aalto-Ego uses at least four main modes; these are accents of a character that we know Aalto possessed. First, the vulnerable, solitary architect known to be secretly meditative, frail, even inebriated.

This is an on-the-edge style disguised by his bonhomie. A man sadly vulnerable beneath the mask! The second self Aalto displayed was the dapper, Dionysian figure. Famous, pioneering, a dandy and a blustering if shy media star Aalto seems to have emulated Frank Lloyd Wright and George Bernard Shaw. Here the cry is: "Danger: Charisma!" This is the man of the world, a showman, a poser with reformist zeal able to enter a meeting of world architects with ribald stories of adventures with air stewardesses 'on the flight over'. A third self is accented by Aalto's comic side, as unpredictable as it is entertaining. Here is Aalto the famous architect just as he must have appeared to many, just as he must have aged like one of those fading music hall artists. He was the 'little man' and 'star' with signs of childlike mischief and innocence. Like Chaplin, he could also be crude, earthy, triumphant; an informal chauvinistic clown and an anarchist plunged into the absurd coincidences of wealth and fame.

The fourth self which we identify is the more problematic self, the self that raged against mediocrity, the self that raged against aging, the self that would make his second wife run along the water's edge to measure how much he had swum that day, or the self that could hide in a restaurant cubicle when his wife was sent to unearth him from the bucolic. Or the self who could send himself up and meet journalists in his atelier dressed in football gear. This is the bull of a man, the megalomaniac that believed

the dictator was a person necessary at a particular time in society. Lonely, tragic, this is the raging and aging 'Lear' where he went from top man to old man, often alienating the very friends and colleagues that longed to be held close by him. Was Alvar Aalto a lost Shakespearean, with innocence and wild intuition, open to dictatorship and democracy but ultimately, like Strindberg, confusing both?

\*

Arlecchino (Harlequin), Inamorato (the Lover), Pedrolino (or Pierrot), Pantalone (Pantaloon): to claim to be free of any ego allows us to consider an Aalto beneath the skin or behind a mask. However distorted this may be from what this famous architect claimed for himself, it has to have some resonance on the level of the individual. Krishnamurti might be nearer our goal than Strindberg: I question this whole concept that I am an individual - which does not mean that I am the collective, for there is a difference. I am not the collective. I am humanity.

The Aalto of Aalto Ego could claim similarly. Whatever his mood this Aalto is in control of the whole show. With the use of the monologue and the pathos of song which obviously varies according to place and direction, the drama unwinds towards a quiet, meditative, solitary but not bitter end. Everyone may indeed be trying to get to the bar called 'Heaven' as Jimmy Scott sings. But as with

everything Alvar Aalto did, one suspects 'l'uomo sublime' got there first too!

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, <u>The Gay Science</u>, Transl. Kaufman, 1974, p.102. The Comedy Played by The Famous.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> In a private correspondence with the author.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For this and other stories see Alvar Aalto: <u>Ex Intimo</u>, Louna Lahti, RTS, 2001 (Transl: Roger Connah & Tomi Snellman)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> From The Notebooks Of Krishnamurti.



# the human factor

## a critical drama

## prologue

AA, a dapper man in his late fifties, enters. He is dressed in a white flannel shirt, silk scarf, wide oxford trousers and sporting a pair of flying goggles. He approaches and begins to walk around a huge white table, which covers the whole stage. It can be designed to emphasise perspective and distortion. He walks around and appears at a child's height to this table whilst the chorus begins:

Chorus Leader: Are we ready

Chorus: Yes we are

Chorus Leader: Is this a book, is this a play,

Can it be critical in any way?

Can it rise and fall and manage to say,

Things that haven't seen the light of day?

Are we ready?

Chorus: Yes we are!

CL: Alvar Aalto Ha ha ha!

Is it any wonder, they continually promote your name In this grand confusion at the cultural role of fame Could they accept, with a knowing Vermouth grin

C: To loan from Good Count Gombrowicz, the healthy

### Anti-Finn?

- CL: In respect to this, Alvar Aalto's Hundred & Tenth year Should not alternative agendas be made quite clear? Long passed the time for this loving Top-Man froth
- C: The tapper dancing dandy, cut from such strange cloth.
- CL: Hugo Alvar Henrik Aalto, into your archives they will delve,
  - Not a single loyal Judas, amongst the faithless twelve. Schoolboy pranks, philandering, all that youthful bubble,
- *C*: Anything to get professors out of critical trouble.
- CL: Oh respect him, as a gentleman do, his demoniac force And Gentleman, do not pretend history, as a matter of course,
  - Needs such crutches, for this contemporary moment bent
- C: On removing yet more life from one already sadly spent.
- CL: Le manie d'Aalto will increase, another stone's throw

  Into that small lake, preventing natural ripple flow

  If you take yourself seriously, then yes, fools fulminate
- C: Before sclerosis tightens at the entry to the Golden Gate.

## (music)...exit chorus

# act 1

the white table

AA: The white table is big. Enormous. Possibly the biggest table in the world! At least in the world I know. It is strongly built (feels it). The top, three inches thick. It stands in the biggest room in my parent's home. The reason it is so big? (pause) There must be room for at least twelve... twelve apprentices who can all work on it at the same time, as often happened, when I was a child. Disciples? Twelve? Hardly! (laughs) These apprentices are graduate engineers instructed by my father, The Surveyor... (drifts off) Ah, The Surveyor... my father J.H. (returns) There are two storeys to this big table. Like cake layers! And in the middle - in the filling - that's where the precision instruments are kept. Long, three-metre steel rulers, huge compasses, and scale

gauges... I loved them all! I loved touching them (caresses one)... Reminded me of my grandfather, Hugo H. Ah, The Inventor... (walks around the table and eventually returns) Around the table besides these young engineers there are ladies (pauses and smiles coquettishly) Ladies with academic degrees. Ladies you couldn't dream of. Ladies you couldn't love. Ladies that you wouldn't see in paintings. Ladies you couldn't touch. But ladies you could smell, ladies you could feel... ladies to be close to...

## (changes mood and becomes mischievous)

The lower level of the white table was where I lived. From the moment I learnt to crawl... on all fours... this was a market place, a souk, a bazaar where I was (flourish) the Emperor of Swampland, where I ruled all by myself until... until I was ready to be moved up... To the top storey! Onto the white table itself... (he tries to climb up, succeeds and sits cross-legged).

Up here on the top of the white table, maps are drawn. Up here are the problems I am unable to understand. Problems not easy to solve. Up here, all the assistants are not always present. Sometimes they are out surveying the vast forests, those eternal wildernesses that make up my country, (flourish) Swampland. Up here, I remember planning how one day I would tell my father J.H that I was

(coughs) a hell of a liberal. Papa, I'd say, listen Papa, listen, I'm an opportunist in theory, a great hunter and forester, even a helluva rebel. But in practise Papa, in reality Papa, I'm none of these. I'm an architect and generally Top Man. (stands up) Papa would be proud of me. He'd come out from behind his mask. He'd stop for a moment walking like General Mannerheim... Then he'd say: Alvar, always remember you're a gentleman.

(Goes to sit again) Up here also there was a small space for me. A space where I could do my own drawing. (pause) I had arrived! (takes out from his shirt pocket a few small pencils) Up here - I learned - at the age of four, the philosophy of pen and paper... I can still remember the hard, sharp, brown pencils called Eagle. The soft ones called Koh-i-noor. I loved the names on the pencils. Kohi-noor! Koh-i-noor! Names which I could not understand but which I tasted in my mouth. Up here I was surrounded by inks and washes, by all the maps... Up here I began with Red Indian stories before I discovered Nick Carter. That was it then. If any blockhead said Nat Pinkerton was the best detective in the world, I would brain the delinquent. You see if I don't. You don't believe me. Try me... Up here, I told my Papa that Nick Carter was the cleverest. He was the only one who could keep his monocle on whilst the chinkies tried to kill him. Up here I once told Papa that I wouldn't need his help when Oswald Spengler threatened Europe.

You see Papa, I'll call on Nick Carter... (laughs) Later I would remember Nick Carter and the white table when I realised how unreasonable I was to others. When I realised how I deceived myself, locked inside the generosity of my own arrogance. I had no monocle to keep on when attacked.

## (starts to climb down)

My kindness and superiority were finally, I realised, in my imagination only... (climbs off and walks, looking back)... Up there I knew what I wanted to be... (flourish) an architect. I'd tell my Papa so. You see, I knew architecture was the cheapest and richest game that could bring satisfaction to man. Up there I told him of this mission. I told him how I thought our hands were often faster than our brains. Faster than our own country, he'd answer. Build naturally, the rest will follow, he said. Alvaro, he sometimes called me Alvaro, Alvaro he'd say, the superfluous becomes ugly sooner than you realise. It was Papa who warned me about our idiotic forest dreams. When we don't see enough pure nature Alvaro, he said, just be careful you don't make the mistake of bringing the wilderness to our very door. I'd try and answer him. I'd try and talk of love but he'd have none of it. There's no room for love in the other arts, I'd tell him. And you can't love a beautiful woman in a painting. But in architecture, in my architecture Papa, you can, you will, people will... he'd look at me oddly. Then I'd realise too. No other way to receive beauty except, with an innocent, childish delight.

AA winks at the audience cheekily. He begins a long slow walk around the table

Up there, on the white table... I imagined my two passions... architecture and women. Up there I was making love to a woman... the world's cheapest game and the world's most beautiful one... coming together in a concentrated wish for everlasting life on earth. (to audience) Ladies and Gentlemen, what is a white table? A neutral plane? A sacred room? A thin echo that collides with man? So neutral is this white table it can become anything. Depending on imagination, depending on skill, a white table can become all you want it to become. A white table is as white as white can be. It has no recipe. Nothing in its whiteness obliges Man to do this or that. But with it, on it, man has a strange and unique relationship. Receptive, sensuous, the white table inspires all. All desire, all flame. Nothing else allows the will, the skill and the opportunity to make the imaginary come true...

(stops)

The white table of my childhood was a big table. It kept on growing. I have done my life's work on that table... You can't love a beautiful woman in a painting but on that table, in architecture, in my architecture you can, you certainly can...

AA smiles and realises the innuendo in his words: stage hands come in and begin to dismantle the white table. In the background a neon light - Heaven - comes on and blinks. Light changes, darkening slowly from the bright whiteness. AA is in the shadows, seated at a dressing table and mirror. He is changing himself into his next character:

I would gladly have you all think that I have been nothing more than a starry-eyed idealist. Yes, I believed in the synthetic unity of the arts. Yes, I believed nothing old can be reborn. And to be modern? Nothing more than a special freemasonry. For architects too! (whispers) The best club of the twentieth century. But my problem is not unlike the century's. I have become human (pause) too late. In the solitude of smashed ideals, I've woken up with nothing to support my thinking anymore. As if the world's fate depended on my buildings! My architecture...I'm free of all this now... (starts to leave, comes back) Oh I never really had to cultivate an ego, like August, like Strindberg. My father did it for me. My language did it for me. My country did it for me. The century did it for me. Modern Architecture did it for me...

## (turns again catching the light)

Back then though, I was about to make the biggest mistake in my life. I was about to seek unity in this modern world. A unity where there is, and was, none. If it wasn't Strindberg, it was George Bernard Shaw. I can't think of Shaw now without thinking of a fighting man. For us, fighting and art coincided. They belonged together. And in my mind, in my imagination, after Heaven, there was always only one other journey, one other place in the world. Italy. I've never travelled anywhere else. Whichever city I've been in. It didn't matter... (flourish and prepares to leave the stage) It was always Italy. Now watch me. Now watch me very carefully. Watch The Emperor of Swampland project dead Renaissance ideals onto this barren land of ours. A land that won't know what to do with them. In a world full of decorators and mediocre architects, I'll be famous... (pause) I promise. And for what? For mistakes on view? For balconies flying in winter storms? For crumbling marble? For libraries in abandoned countries? Or for making stage-sets for our savaged modern minds?

# (pause)

I once thought architecture too complicated and clever to be taught to children. I think it's the other way round. Who was it who said the old times always smile gently at the barbarians of our day? Nietzsche? No. No! Only men of the dark look back, that was what Nietzsche said. He was wrong. He should have said, only men IN the dark... only men IN the dark look back!

AA exits slowly, slyly smiling. The sound of an aeroplane drowns out everything.

#### the modern room

A closed room, dark, thin trails of smoke and sounds of shuffling. Two men enter. They are TURBO and WONDER BOY. Once Professors, now down on their luck. Their clothes are respectable but worn. We overhear the following conversation and as it continues in mock venom, the audience slowly catches sight of a man, going back and forth, bringing in some things to place on a small cocktail trolley. The cocktail trolley is familiar: black leather and birch wheeled trolley, a modernist icon (Artek). There is no distinct view of the man at first.

Turbo: You go and stand there. (He draws Wonder Boy to extreme right and places him with his back to the audience). There, don't move. And watch out! (Wonder Boy scans the stage, screening his eyes from the light with a book in his hand. Turbo runs and takes up the same position, extreme left. He shields his eyes with a copy of the same book, a thin playscript. They turn their heads and look at each other) Ah, back to back, like in the good old hooligan days of Marxist-Leninism! (They continue to look at each other for a moment, then resume their watch. Long silence) Do you see anyone coming, Woe-Boy?

Wonder Boy: (turning his head) What?

Turbo: (louder) Do you see anyone coming?

The Man, AA, dressed in a heavy, slightly shabby overcoat, shuffles right past Wonder Boy wheeling in the cocktail trolley.

Wonder Boy: No.

Turbo: Nor I.

Wonder Boy: But you had a vision surely?

Turbo: (irritated) What?

Wonder Boy: (louder) You must have had a vision. Once!

Turbo: What?

Wonder Boy: Once. Surely?

Turbo: What?

Wonder Boy: A vision for Christ's sake. The blossoms on an apple tree are standardised and all different. (shouting) Revolution is no picnic. Violence is allowed.

That sort of vision!

Turbo: No need to fuckin' shout.

AA shuffles across again in front of Turbo this time with a whisky bottle. They look as if they see something. He fingers the whisky bottle with fingerless gloves.

Turbo/Wonder Boy: (simultaneously) Do you? Did you...

Wonder Boy: Oh, pardon!

Turbo: After you!

Wonder Boy: No after you!

Turbo: I interrupted you!

Wonder Boy: On the contrary!

They glare at each other angrily. AA enters again with a CD music box (ghetto-blaster) and sets it on the table. Wonder Boy glances at the book he holds as if checking something. He studies it, looks up and then re-checks it. He shakes his head; this is not in the script they are rehearsing. Throwing the book down:

Wonder Boy: Ceremonious sloth!

Turbo: Metaphysical moron!

Wonder Boy: Finish your phrase (pause) - Professor!

Turbo: Finish your own - Maggot!

AA looks up. Silence. Wonder Boy and Turbo draw closer. Heads meet. They address each other as in a duel.

Wonder Boy: Axe-head. Piss-brain.

Turbo: That's it. The Grand Idea. The one we've been waiting for all our lives. Let's abuse each other. Let's pretend to be actors. Let's live the modern century all over again - Moose-balls!

Wonder Boy: Ooh can we. Just to keep that bit further from rural isolation. You mean... you

Turbo: It won't be the first time, Scum-boy!

Wonder Boy: You mean people have abused each other before?

Turbo: In stage sets, in films, Christ, Woe-Boy, where were you in the last century? You - Violated Vermin!

Wonder Boy: You (reluctant) Forester!

Turbo: (mocks) Ow!

Wonder Boy: Ow! (pause - hesitant then gets the idea)
Hard Disk Whore! Console Cretin!

Turbo: That's it. Imbecile! (shouts) Digital Nose-picker!

Wonder Boy: (less hesitant) Mushroom picker!

Turbo: Oohh. Nasty! - Muff diver! - Skirt chaser!

Wonder Boy: (pause and huge childish smile) Mother's boy!

Turbo: Ouch. (pause, crouches and then jumps like a bullfrog and raises voice into immense scream) Marxist!

AA passes with glasses, stops at this, looks and drops one of them. He places the others on the cocktail trolley. He takes out a pocket book. It is The Communist Manifesto (pocket version). He looks in it, glances across, then puts it on the trolley. He goes out and gets a brush and pan and enters to clear up the fragments. He looks at the ribbed glass as he sweeps it up. It is of course the glass designed by his first wife. Caresses it and expresses approval at the shape and form.

Wonder Boy: (pause, then jumps as Turbo did and returns scream) Post-Modernist!

Turbo: (picks up the book and wags it at him, they circle each other) Turdy Trotsky Taoist!

Wonder Boy: (with finality, grabbing and throwing the book away, long muffled, kneeling and stomach pain howl) De--de--de--Deconstructivist!

Long silence.

Turbo: (meek but leaning forward) Phenomenologist!

Wonder Boy: (pause, and then with serious venom)

Modernist!

Turbo: Ooh. (summons all energy and final venom which shakes the roof) Architect!

They appear to collapse on the floor. Hurt and laughter. Loud applause. Sounds of marching and protest song. AA has by now assembled his evening trolley bar. He finds a disc and puts it on. He smiles when it begins, The Platter's song The Great Pretender. We are not entirely sure if this is not a mistake.

Lights fade.

### the indigo room

The Indigo Room, another closed room. On the cocktail trolley is a bottle of expensive whisky, a box of expensive cigars (Montecristo, for example) a smaller box of cigars (Villiger Export Gross Format, for example) a glass ashtray and a turbo-type CD player. There is an easy chair (Paimio chair type) in bright blue fabric. Throughout the play wherever music is used, AA listens, reacts, stops and pauses. He will occasionally continue the song, speaking the lines, using it to punctuate the rhythm of speech.

It is night-time, a blue light-time; blue being washed off the stage walls. Throughout, the play goes through a colour range - the progression is from a depth of colour, a density, even darkness, which slowly washes away toward the end and the lightness of early morning.

AA re-enters. He is dapper and impeccably dressed in a double-breasted suit and tie and is caught in the slight light. He goes off stage whilst the music continues to play. He then returns with an ice tray. He pours himself a whisky. Looks at it, sniffs it, tastes it, agrees with it. Then he begins by sitting in the easy chair, whisky nearby.

By the end of the play though a sort of drunkenness is suggested through a series of drinking bouts, caution is necessary so as not to overbalance the effect of a century and a small artistic society where drinking belonged to the period. Brutal some of this behaviour might seem in the present day, but we must remember it was normal, if not entirely expected of modern architects and artists. Along with revolutionary misdemeanours it was often forgiven. In all this the character AA remains in control of his speech, even if nothing is remembered the next day.

AA: (dapper) We were in Venice. On the Lido. Relaxing.

I can't remember why he was there. The most famous architect in the world. And I? Unlike him I was an accidental

messiah. Oh, at first I couldn't stand all that missionary zeal, that change-the-world-through-architecture dribble. Modernism was just a game. Revolution or architecture! Most architecture for me was either too thin or too utopian to make any human difference. I was always more primitive, more practical in my thinking. He was doctrinaire. He couldn't look up a woman's skirt without seeing the dialectic potential. Should I or should I not? (laughs) Then I got caught in it all myself. (pause) No. Not that! I would never impose my views on anyone. I'd just listen. It didn't take long to realise the blossom on any apple tree was standardised, yet all different. An insight, if you knew how to use, (taps his nose) which could make you legendary... listen - it could make you rip the insides out of a dying liver.

### (drinks)

He! Corbu, old owl glasses, he knew. He knew all this. He knew it before anyone else in the century. He was born knowing it. The cuckoo clocks taught him. And he taught us all how to dress. Monsieur Charles Jeanneret, alias Le Corbusier. He taught us how to make a salad, caress concrete and hunt a woman. He taught us how to drink whisky, hate bourbon and manipulate the press. Just like the rest of the modern architects did. Only better! (pause) There was a time, true, when I too put the airplane and turbo on a par with classical temples. I don't deny it. All

was real art, whether it came out of a factory or a farm. But Modernism was so simple back then. All you had to do to succeed was jump scale. That's my secret. (smiles) Well, one of them... You see I could always jump scale. From a prawn to a pike, from a shrimp to a salmon, and in younger days (looks around furtively) from a wife to a whore! He couldn't do that. Not the most famous architect of the twentieth century. Not the most famous architect in the world...

### (drinks)

...and there we were, on The Lido, Monsieur Jeanneret and me, little Alvaro, sitting on deckchairs. Eyeing the women (pause)... and were they beautiful... those very modern women. You know the type. Legs up to the mantelpiece! (smiles) Mystery and immortality emerging from the dark cave... like Magritte's locomotive, in a hurry to leave the scene. Women with their Latin clarity of thought! Women with ideas! Women with the Meditteranean between their legs! Women with Lapp-blood in their veins! Women with underwear the shape of laced glass vases. Women with the eyes of a runaway express train... I shared a lot with the world's most famous architect, though his taste was never mine. And, despite what others think, it never has been...

(pause)

... I once wrote a particularly impressive and, of course, ambiguous obituary. I'm not sure I invented it before he died or dreamt it when he forgot the ocean was so deep... I threw out a few choice phrases. Respect heightened... Sources from classical roots... Strength derived from a Meditteranean character... all this counterbalancing his versatility etcetera etcetera... could have been speaking about myself really. But Corbu was - how should I put it - so flame-licking combative. He wanted to win every game, every women, every contest. Oh, I certainly paid homage to his character. But our friendship? An accident of the pitiful century. I couldn't have been less interested. Of course he hadn't decided to walk into the sea then...

# (pause)

We did agree on one thing though. The clarity of architecture resembled the seduction of women. And women, all absolute, all impenetrable darkness. In the end, though, the darkness should not, never, and here we were delinquent, be confused with architecture... It was only later really...I realised that these Modernists I was part of, that worshipped this man, made paintings which were travesties. I never did like all those painting of machine parts. You couldn't love a woman in these paintings. You wouldn't even bother. Machines were alibis for robotism.

Oh Corbu didn't get off so lightly either. All those elegantly drawn, uncivilised skyscrapers. Nothing madder than his ideas of putting them in a desert called Paris. Thank God the Luftwaffe got their first...

### (whispers)

I've even heard said that between him and me you'll find all you need to know about art and architecture. Well, Good God of the Arctic, if you believe that you probably limped through the 20th century... (He starts fiddling with the CD machine) But you see, I did have a reason to be there. In Venice... which is more than can be said for him. Like me he was no practising anarchist. This was the grand watchmaker from Switzerland, the grandest manipulator of this century we would ever see... (lowers voice even more) Charles Edouard Jeanneret. (recites) Corbu, Corbeau, Corbusier... Good, Better, Best!

(links glass against bottle - looks over his shoulder - change of mood - music)

We were in Venice. We were on the Lido. That much is true. We still cut a decent figure in those days. And we were obsessed with fame. Well he was. Well yes, I was a little. Yes alright, both of us. I don't know who started it. Corbu. Those damn watchmakers are all alike. (gets out of Paimio

chair - walks a little; lecture style - very elegant) Fame, the watchmaker said, fame - he liked repetition - (looks into the glass) it cloys, it palls, it wounds. Take you for example Alvaro...he always called me that after I told him my father used the name. Alvaro, take you. You're known. You drink and are drunk. You're recognised. You're sought after. You're almost human. You're almost civilised. You're wined and dined. You flirt and are flirted by. You fuck with, and are fucked by, some of the most beautiful women in the world but....but - he took hold of some sand and slowly let it drift and slide through his fingers - then he looked straight out of those owl eyes of his - eyes crazier than Strindberg's - Alvaro, he said, coming too close for any comfort - Alvaro you're not famous, NOT REALLY famous. He laughed as he stressed the words. Not as famous as me!

(Takes a bow tie from his pocket and starts replacing his ordinary tie with the bow-tie)

Corb was already sixty something, the age I am now. Alvaro, he repeated, and I turned to him and saw his laughter... Alvaro, he wouldn't let it go: you'll toy with ideas, you'll create one or two masterpieces, you'll bring the wilderness into draughty piazzas better off in Italy, you'll jump scale better than me, and you'll have more women than me, but - you'll remain unchanged. He stopped and the eyes looked crazier than ever Ibsen imagined. Then he

said: You'll always be like a dog with a child's rag doll in its mouth. You'll froth and then it will all die on you... I didn't know whether to hit him or pity him...

(stops walking - looks straight into the audience)

...It takes twenty years for a single idea to be recognised, he said. Thirty for it to be implemented, by which time Alvaro, we all know it will have been superceded. And then, only then, the plaudits, eulogies and commemorative plaques start raining down. It's too late then, Alvaro. It's too late to be more human then. As the sand slipped through his hand I remember the last words he ever said to me: Alvaro... Me, famous, You sand!

(long pause)

I knew then he'd take his own life in the Meditterranean. I knew then the most famous architect in the world would walk into the ocean and not stop.

(fiddles with CD player)

# the great pretender

The Great Pretender by The Platters now re-emerges from the ghetto blaster as AA turns it up. AA sits at the dressing table and changes. He then exits and returns during the music with a cigar box. The light is increased a fraction. He switches off the disk. He has changed from double breasted suit into a 'penguin' suit. He is even more dapper, more world famous and more careful about his movements. He looks the sort of man, even in the dark, that wouldn't ever run to catch a bus. Yet he is a comedian. He is 'chaplinesque'. He puts the cigar box on the cocktail trolley with a clean sound. He looks at the trolley for more than a second. Clearly it is recognisable as something he may have designed years ago. He begins to look around. He is clearly enjoying this.

AA: (comic) Fame? Suits! Shirts! Cigars! A cigar is as good as a fine leather-bound book, as a fine-limbed tall, athletic woman. (sniffs a cigar) The smell and shape of a woman's undergarments? A good Havana! Moisten it, as Churchill said, you always have Cuba in your mouth... A cigar always reminds you that it has been laid out across a woman's thighs. A cigar smoker like the perfect lover, like the architect, like the Freemason, must be a calm man. A poser possibly! A superman perhaps? A man even near insanity! But above all, a calm man...a man able to outdo the mediocre with modern words. You see, a cigar gets us

out of the forest just in time. You get everything from a cigar. In that it parallels Modern Architecture. It even outdoes the skill of a clown drinking his own tears...

A good Havana? What makes it as special as architecture? (Takes cigar and moistens it, begins to unpeel its layers) A unique blend of sun, soil and skill, unflagging attention to detail... unwavering quality control... (more of the cigar revealed) A refusal, absolutely a refusal, to rush or cut corners. And on top of everything else, luck and brilliance at all steps along the way... (the cigar is merely leaves now) Only the calm man is determined but sure of his own wind. That very special Modern wind. (picks up the other cigar and blows smoke away pleasurably: picking up on song words, mouthing and smiling) Oh yes, I'm the great pretender. Adrift in a world of my own. I play the game, but to my real shame, you've left me to dream all alone. Fame?

# (turns a touch hostile: shift to vulnerable)

Fame! Make believe! It cloys at you. It doesn't leave you alone. Until you are in control of it. And when you're in control of fame, it cloys again. It never lets go. Try and ignore it. Try and say it doesn't matter. Like cheese going off but never really going off, just a slow, slow decay. Fame plays according to its own rules. (takes a drink) Nobody

in this small country knows what fame is. Knowing how far too far to go, this country never ever gets that far.

#### (pause)

Fame doesn't allow headaches, migraine. Fame doesn't allow failure. Fame isn't interested in human longing. Fame isn't a source of human enjoyment. Fame is a grandfather who hunted. Fame is a grandfather who drew sketches for a rotating steam engine before his time. Fame is an invention lost to dreams. A sewing machine with simplified crankpin and shuttle. A machine driven by a poodle running on a sloping surface. (laughs uncomfortably - then calms down, remembering)... fame? A woman running alongside on the shore as you swim.

### (pause)

When my grandfather took his sewing machine to St.Petersburg. What a day! Czarina Dagmar gave her handkerchief to him. Embroider the Imperial monogram, she said. With the poodle. And with the poodle's help my grandfather Hugo H. became famous. (laughs again and imitates sewing machine and poodle)

#### (pause, mood change)

Fame is an alibi. Fame is a neurosis. Fame is so silent in the end that it comes out the other side. (pause) Just like architecture. (The music fades in and underlines the following) Oh yes. I lived on another ten years since that day on the Lido. But no one would have guessed. The Awards dribbled in at first. Then they gushed in. Then they wouldn't stop, just as Corbu predicted. I began to play up to fame itself. How tiring to pretend to be a genius. How tiring to have no psychology but that picked up in the forest. How tiring to be Mecca for 3 months in a year. The Emperor of Swampland! Hands worn out from shaking the unknown. Corbu was right when he let the sand slip through his hands. You don't die when you stop breathing, Alvaro... he said. You die when more of you fails to get through...

Corb! Corbu! Corbusier! (lifts up the glass of whisky to the light) Corb. Corbeau. Courvoisier. You die when the majority of you remains on the inside. You die when an insane man praises you when he sees his own talent mirrored. You die when others lock you out. You die when women take the wrong side of the road. You die when woman stop the express train racing towards you in the middle of the night. He was right. Old owl-glasses knew it. Fame allows you to talk and dream of a woman in a 300SL Gull Wing Mercedes. (pause) Then it destroys you.

(AA stops the music. Puts the disc away. Calm to raging,

#### drinks again)

You die when, after so many years, alcohol struggles to make you feel good. (laughs) But it's still better than welfare. You die when left-wing Hegelians take your country on the wrong path. You die when idiotic revolutionaries with bad haircuts chant vulgarities at your window late at night. You die when Marxist-Leninists release pigs in your lecture. A lecture you never wanted to give anyway...

(calm again and returns to anecdotal mood: takes cigar.

During this the indigo light turns slowly to an all yellow floodlit modern space)

We were in Stockholm. In the Scandia Cinema. Just before it opened. I don't remember which year now. It even seems another century. Asplund was with me. Of all the greats I respected him most. Older, he taught me all I needed about cigars, women, architecture and jumping scale. We were in the auditorium, watching a test run of Chaplin's film 'The Gold Rush'. He walked toward the yellow room, chewing on a cigar. When designing this, Asplund said, I thought of autumn nights and yellow leaves. Dead leaves? I replied. "No, Alvar," Gunnar replied. No! He had a gentle way about him. Like my grandfather's poodle. No Alvar, not dead leaves, but leaves in a state of unrest, leaves looking for the yellow floodlights, leaves trying to exit the forest. I

didn't understand a word he said. I had little patience for words. I was much more superficial. I had to be. Just look at what swamps we've pulled ourselves through... (walks around)... as I sat there in the yellow room, I realised this was no ordinary architecture based on no ordinary scale system. Everything begins and ends with people, Alvar. We sat in silence. Asplund and me! I was spellbound by the beauty of his room, the space. Architecture, you see Alvar, is like a cigar just lit, Gunnar said, always on fire at its first encounter? And the architect? I asked. Like a cigar at the end of its journey, he replied, no need to put the architect out brutally. Like this - and he lay the cigar on the ashtray - just lay me to rest. Some dignity remaining. I will go out quietly, all by myself. He did. I loved Asplund...

The yellow light fades and slowly we return to the Indigo Room lighting. He remains sitting. Dreamily like a music hall entertainer, smiling outrageously, he takes off his tail coat. In braces and bow tie he now looks like Fred Astaire. The stage has darkened, the cocktail trolley remains. A fitting mirror has been brought on. He recites as he finds the song he has been looking for in the collection box:

AA: Is it an earthquake, or simply a shock? Is it the good turtle soup or merely the mock? Is it the cocktail this feeling of...

He exits and re-enters with a large volume. It is an International Compendium of Architects. Initially he reads seriously but soon begins to interrupt himself. His language can be inventive, mixed English, Finnish and Swedish, wherever this suits. He recounts the following with the enthusiasm of a choreographer going through new steps... comic!

Alvar Aalto. Architect. Born 1898. Kuortane. No? (smiles) Somewhere in Finland? No, Swampland! Studied at the Technical University of Helsinki, No? Somewhere else in Swampland. Graduated - just! - 1921. Awarded all possible honours, Aalto is the singular figure that established Modernity in Finnish Architecture. Ha ha... what did I say? Little Alvaro... the singular figure (looks at himself preening comically: resumes reading mock seriously) Though his early work showed the familiar signs of a developing neo-classicism... Aalto... Aalto (stutters) rrrrruptured the architectural scene in 1929 with his internationalist-inspired entry for Paimio Sanatorium (rhapsodises) Ruptured....what a lovely word...ruptured, ruptured, ruptured. Imagine me, little Alvaro rupturing... (laughs to himself, then reads again) The obvious reference to Le Corbusier ... here we go again, never get rid of the damn watchmaker...the obvious reference to Corb's use of modernist iconography - what an awful word... and the functionalist (jumps to the word) leap in scale from the domestic-constructivist blah pooh blah of the Turun pooh Sanomat pooh Building in 1927 makes Paimio.... whoa hold on there listen to this ... makes Paimio seminal in world architecture... (he looks up from the book, walks away, pleased at this little jesting. Checks his dress in the mirror) Seminal in world architecture, ugh?

(walks after attempting to light the book with a match)

How can encyclopaedias know this? It's always more simple than they make out. I abandoned artistic visions and started to analyse every detail like my father. I knew as well as Strindberg's Olof that to succeed, one must be an apostate. The best visions are always opportunistic. I just had to put them in an odd way. Gentlemen, I told them in New York, and I wasn't drunk, Gentleman, my buildings are extremely odd. They are uncomfortable. They don't fit. If they were clothes they'd be ungainly, unstylish. But Gentleman, how these buildings can dance. Then I'd talk about the asylum I designed. I wasn't even thirty years old. Best thing I ever did. Seminal? All a matter of fiddle and itch. Gentleman! Ah but what's the point. I could speak, I could drink, I could dance. It was always enough in New York...

(looks hard)

I always preferred detective stories as a child. Still do. I loved the Book of Inventions. Wonderful drawings and machines. Machines for sneezing control. Machines for assessing a woman's curve, at the delicate points! Machines for sugar lump conveyors. Appealed to the ordering of my mind. Or my father's mind. Or (smiles) my grandfather's mind. He always said, Dimension, Alvar, life's only ever about dimension... He'd repeat it. Dimension and precision. Alvar. He'd explain it all whilst measuring the stamina of the poodle, life is either resisting it or accepting it.

#### (pause)

Then my papa would have his own say. Alvaro! He always spoke like a General. Alvaro, remember. After architecture, Land Surveying is the nearest profession that will get you to God's door. It is the smell of the earth, the contour of paradise. Papa was right. I became an architect not a land surveyor. And it was in that book of inventions that I discovered an emotion that would save us this century. Oh we never had our Athens up here in Finland. We've never had a Florence either. But the book of inventions taught me how nature could compensate... you know for the Sienna we don't have in Swampland. From then on I knew what I had to do.

(looks around: dances a little to imaginary steps, looks

# remarkably like Fred Astaire again)

I know now what I didn't know back then. I'd be all things to all men (pause and smile) and women! Instead of what I really was. A hit-and-run architect!

### mock turtle soup

As he taps out a few steps, as dapper as ever, he reaches inside his tail coat jacket. He extracts a piece of paper. His voice trails off as he folds the paper up. He looks older. He turns and puts on Frank Sinatra's "At long last love". He begins to light a cigar. The light reveals a little more of the space. In the darkness there is still the elegant Paimio cow-hide chair from the 1930s. During the music he cuts, dresses and lights a Montecristo cigar quite lovingly. Slowly he becomes more vulnerable, more melancholy. He is the same person but visibly looks older. Gone is the vigorous step. The tail coat is now slightly unkempt. He goes back to sit in the cow-hide chair. There are long pauses between his sentences, as long as can be held.

AA: From Top Man to Old Man via Modernism! Who am I? Whose life is it? Fame is like unreliable history. It foregoes the right to have your real existence noticed. You have no choice but to become all the people you meet. You don't exist on your own. At least I never have done. I always needed someone else around to be someone. To be anyone. Just like Strindberg, solitude was always impossible for me. Not that I was as capable as Strindberg. He could decide exactly how he wanted to be understood. He knew exactly how people should think about him. Talent I had, but not one that could deliberately create a persona. I could

make others believe what I wanted them to believe. Up to a point, yes, but me? I changed faster than a chameleon... whoever I met, wherever I was. One moment I had Lapp blood coursing through my veins, the next moment I was Nietszche on the edge of insanity, on fire with architecture's promise. A moment later I'd be Caesar until the demon took hold, slipped down the gullet... (looks into whisky glass) Then a beautiful woman would walk in and I was Casanova.

#### (pause)

Heaven help any biographer who takes me on. In one thing though, I did outdo even Strindberg. You see, I have reinvented my life continuously. In such a small country it's easy. All I had to do... adjust architecture to suit successive phases. Radical anarchist in some things, as conservative as the next man in most others... but then, if I've sold my soul, to whom did I sell? (pauses, then looks into the glass) Who am I? Do I exist? Do I really have to die to find so many friends there at the end of the modern century waiting to sanctify me? No pangs of conscience? Only in that bar called Heaven will all this be answered. (hums to music and then says coldly and clearly) The good turtle soup or merely the mock... (music intervenes and underscores the following: AA plays at inebriation) Retreat? Why didn't I? It's the beginning of it. I can feel it in my hands. (puts his hands out front and tries to steady them. He notices them trembling ever so slightly) See, look at the tremor! Is it an earthquake or simply a shock? (looks up) Fame. It dies in you. Never lets you live again. It kills the thrill. It murders that frantic irreverence you have when you're young... that irreverence towards everything and everyone. And it brings in gentle, gentle sorrow, like spring rain, like wine dripping into a sponge called the liver. (Sinatra continues low...)

You want to know what made me famous? Simple! I just got there first...architecture as human longing... architecture as a source of human enjoyment. Pure luck... perkele... pure fuckin' luck. I hit on a few identifiable elements. The fewer the better. I knew already from that white table. I just wanted to be an expert at something. I wanted to be precise like my grandfather, and I wanted to measure the forest like my father. Just to know the forest's exits. Just to know the lie of the land. Just to smell the Meditteranean at the edge of the deep dark Northern forests... Gunnar... you've already heard of him... Asplund had to die for me to understand him. And how many others now will have to see out my death. (pause) Dimension and measurement, that's all that ever interested me. That's the only intellect that matters in the forest. And the only romance I ever desired, (picks up as cigar) unless I smelled a woman's perfume. Between a woman and cigar? (sniffs a cigar again, lying back) Well, I don't agree with Groucho Marx.

(pause - thinks of the music - suddenly picks up in a bullish, locquacious tone)

Only one architect could outdo me! Frank! Frankie boy. Frank. Lloyd. Wright. Only Frank could pose as a superman without any effort. He was a natural. The oracle of the modern century. And without any unnecessary words. But I could never speak like him. My jokes were better, but I could never do what he did. Frank permitted no competition. He pronounced me a genius precisely because I was far enough away in the Swamps as to make no difference to his Empire. And just as Frank said: Forget all this bull about the grand source for architecture, Alvar. Forget the grandness of the past... forget all this bull about genius, about Borromini, Brunelleschi and all that crap... Forget the 1920s as soon as you get into the 1930s. Then forget the 1930s as soon as you get into the 1940s. (AA is flying now remembering his drinking days)

Frankly all I remember about the 1920s was how quickly I could learn from the Swedes. Ostberg. Asplund. Even their wives. And then leave them behind! Scurrilous? Bah! Heathen games and Benvenuto's Christmas Eve, it was no more complicated than that. I know it looks as if I have been engaged in a struggle for genius. But I played it. All the time I played it. (drinks) Like Chaplin, I've never

had an ego. Couldn't afford one... hasn't anyone ever told you? Utopians don't have egos. And secrets... I've never had secrets. Barbarians never have secrets. I don't, god forbid, even have an 'aalto-ego'... (he laughs and drinks and wanders around the stage)

Someone asked me the other day whether I have progressed. Whether I had any faith left in progress? Whether I had lost my innocence? What an insult! Of course I haven't progressed. From 18th century Rationalism to 19th century Darwinism to 20th century Robotism...from the early years to the decisive years to the mature years! Whatever the books say, we all know how the general story goes. We are born. We get lucky. We meet a woman with great legs. Then we wake up one morning without the whisky hangover... We're dead! (comes to a standstill, teeters)

What was it Picasso said? We're supposed to be mature. We're supposed to know where to get our suits tailored. We're supposed to know how to cut a cigar and which shoes to sport. We're supposed to know which women are dangerous and which to leave alone completely. We're supposed to know the way into their dark tunnel. Listen. Let me give you some advice... (leans towards audience in chair as if in confidence) There's no evolution or progress. Penetration. Punkt. Slut! Loneliness is not

progress. Childhood is not progress. Adulthood is not progress. Architecture is not progress. Fucking is not progress. I didn't progress. I never needed to... you've got to remember. At the beginning of this century we were lucky. All the ideas in the world were just waiting to be used. I didn't steal them. I merely liberated them. What else does one do in youth anyway? I took everything I could from Brunelleschi and Asplund. I brought it all back to this little potato field of a country and it looked big. Like a new Renaissance, oh it looked big and The Emperor of Swampland lived like Strindberg not Le Corbusier... (adjusts his dress, fiddles with his nails)

I loathed the missionary models real architects offered. I played more tricks on my colleagues than Filippo played on Lorenzo. All that is except Frank. Frank taught me how to make use of the wild line. In a modern way, of course. To Frank I owe all the psychological insight I could squeeze out of myself in between the whisky. Just like his buildings, mine too don't spring up rootless. They had a social background. It's always there even though I did my damned best to disguise it. Why I don't know. Perhaps I got so sick and tired of performing for the little man. Tired of being decent. But Frank taught me to forget resolving contradictions. Incorporate them, Alvar, he said. Incorporate your contradictions into architecture. Frank could speak as if Architecture had Christmas lights on the

word. Frank plundered and plundered majestically. He took Japan, Chinese philosophy, the Yucatan natives and his clients' wives. He swathed through them all like the Grand Emperor he was. Cape, hat and cane, he was more like Bernard Shaw than Bernard Shaw himself. After Frank it was relatively easy to merge my gentle social rationalism with Italy, Greece with a few mystic Lappish inventions. And Frank was the reason why I almost went to America.

(enjoying these unreliable mémoires he affords himself a wry smile, exits and leaves the stage in the dark for some moments – he emerges reading a magazine, then holds it up)

The New Yorker used to be my favourite magazine... I dreamt of being Chaplin. And Frank? Well, Frank was America. There's no prejudices here like there are in Europe, Alvar. No stuffy watchmakers. And women! Oh the women Alvar, they'll drive you back to Swampland before you look at them. He was right. So free of complexes. No artificial national aspirations kept them from making love on a white table. America like Frank took everything like a sponge. And like its women still come back for more. Every civilised person has two homelands, Frank told me. But you can forget France, you can forget Corbusier, he said. Architects only have two realities, two homelands today... their own and America. This is going to be the American

century, Alvar, he said... Which is why, if you don't get rid of Communism in Swampland you'll suffer for the rest of the century...

#### (pause)

He was right. Frank was always right. Our spontaneous distrust of the individual was like death warmed up. The Red Room was advancing on our cities and countryside. The obligation to plan collectively, the unthinking that followed, came not from America. Nor did it come from Russia. It came from our own naivety. Frank warned me about allowing other architects to be consulted. I soon realised none of them could solve the issues our century offered us. I of course thought I could. The ass was architecture and I was Don Quixote. (silence then rapid fire) I became a star but I wanted to be a Prince. Like Kropotkin! Look at his life not his theories. Listen carefully, comrades...what a politician says means nothing...what an anarchist says means even less...what an architect says means less than ever... Ladies and Gentleman (He crouches as if expecting an attack. He looks afraid.) Doubt everything. Doubt again. Then take the pin out of the grenade!

(He mimes that action of throwing a grenade. There is a huge puff of smoke. All lights go out).

#### shark's teeth

When the lights come on gradually, the scene has changed. Translucent white sheets used for mourning hang like washing forming vertical planes from the front of the stage to the back. They blow gently as in a wind. A ghost figure, Strix, is seen in some indefinite form and carries out a conversation with AA who goes to the CD machine. Mack the Knife underscores this scene. AA is dressed all in summer white, oxfords, shirt and scarf.

- AA (to himself) Luck? Genius? You don't believe me. I can see from the whites in your eyes. Is it so impossible that genius is all luck. I believed none of it.
- STRIX: Of course you developed an idea here and there.

  But you had no real patience except for anarchy.
- AA: (looks around confused) From time to time, I got lucky you might say! I admit.
- STRIX: Alvaaar, they whispered to you. You're famous.

  You've met Kings and Queens. You've drunk the best
  whisky and champagne. You've submitted to the force.

  What was it like?
- AA: (Takes a drink) You mean the force? The spirit...

  (attempts to get up and tries to find the figure addressing him. Gets entwined in the mourning

sheets.)

STRIX: Frankly walking on water took 'me' a long time to perfect. What about you? Remember Oscar Wilde. "The only people with enough experience to understand me now are the youth." (kicks off) Oh the shark teeth has such sharp teeth... continues words from the song.

AA: Mother died when I was five. Grandfather stitched the Czarina's monogram with a poodle-treading sewing machine. Father mapped out Swampland. Son believed architecture would save the world. Well our world! Try making a case for my deprivation from that. Nothing is simple in life but it doesn't make it more difficult. Yet I'm accused of all simplicity.

STRIX: Well, you skipped out of the War, you were a coward.

AA: (angry) I stayed as far away from World War 2 as I could. If I'd had to dodge the Korean War I would have done that too. My politics were attacked for being simplistic. They were. We are simple... bloody simple... in these Swamplands. You, of all legends should realise that. Up here wedged between a bear and a skunk, we've never been members of Europe long enough to understand the rules of the game. Oh that's not quite right. Of course, we know the rules of the game. We're good students. But we don't know how to alter the rules of the game. Always someone else does that for us? Someone, somewhere in Europe's capitals. In Berlin.

In Paris. In London. In Prague. In Vienna. In Athens.

In New York. Even in your city, Stockholm But never in

our own cities.

STRIX: You should have known that. You never succeed

unless you invent your own rules and know how to play

them. That's why I got into the Club. That's why you

got into the Club.

AA: You're right. Little Alvaro, they thought. The noble,

noble, savage, look at him run. Climb the trees Alvar they said, and show us how you come down. Show us

how you fall. And they've been waiting for that fall ever

now you ran. This they we been waiting for that ran ever

since.

STRIX: Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall. Humpty Dumpty

had a great fall (the ghost continues this and goes into

English nursery rhyme) this old man this old man...

he played one.. he played nick nack on his drum.. with

a nick nack paddy wack give a dog a bone... this old

man came rolling home...this old man he played two he

played nick nack with my shoe... (pause) and vomited.

AA: oh the shark teeth has such sharp teeth... (still can't

quite locate the ghost: grabs white sheets and looks

like a ghost himself) I am beginning to suspect the

whole century. Its promise?

STRIX: What of it?

AA: Oh you're still here. Its dogma?

STRIX: How much of it?

AA: Its expectation?

STRIX: How little to get less! (pause) We are closer than you imagine.

AA: How so?

STRIX: You were as fond of the little man as I. You represented popular, decent, protected views.

AA: Well, they do exist everywhere, at all times.

STRIX: And you hit out just like me. Wild, bawdy and enraged, you struck at everything unnatural.

AA: You think?

STRIX: I know. Anything unnatural was therefore not right. You can't deny it. Animals we may both have been under the influence but we knew how decent, how bloody decent we could be, by coming from where we came from.

AA: You mean the Swamplands?

STRIX: Swampland. Greenland. Karelia. Eestland. Sweden. Finland. It doesn't matter that Emperor we hid behind, what women's skirts we lifted, or what blasphemies and bawdiness we thought so clever. We were our own worst enemies. We were the wild men of the North and we played to it.

AA: True. But women misunderstood you more than me.

STRIX: Yes, but they also stopped me going off the rails

AA: Until they got in the way of your art...

STRIX: And your architecture!

AA: And we abandoned them.

STRIX: Intoxicated by creative sperm we were animals,

admit it! We were incomplete beings out to fire the souls of lesser animals who couldn't, who wouldn't, dare to be mad...We were never adult but always out to sire beings of our own imagination...

(momentarily the ghost disappears and AA appears to be questioning his own reality - has he invented this ghost? He tries to feel through the sheets but can grab nothing. After a pause, he continues, apparently alone)

AA: (contemplative) Was I an animal? Did I use this wild behaviour? Was it so insolent at the table of Presidents and Kings? Or is there a soul out there that can still claim a wider berth than others? In the morning, drunken without shame, nothing remembered, the lines were smooth, the buildings were drawn. He's right. Neither of us were ever so elevated that we forget the lower regions, the cruder landscapes of this life. I was always happier there. And if 'his' words could reach the world at large, if August's plays could impregnate an audience in Paris, then so could my buildings, so could my architecture..

(pause: the voice of the ghost appears but not the ghost itself. Throughout AA listens to this and walks as if trying to find out where the voice is coming from) Strix: You did the same as me. You sired images behind which other realities would never be glimpsed. You never managed to get out from behind your father's mask. Unable to face yourself alone, you constructed a world that could turn anything around to your own benefit. And by definition this benefited the small man...the decent human that shouted, ranted and raved all alone in the forest. That little, not quite modern, being that tore out his own heart, in order to display emotion to the world. That little man who played with a toy balloon the size of the world. There are endless ways of showing that we're insane, Alvar. I never denied that. But I was in control at all times. All whims, all caprice, all madness, all turned to a self-portrait that everyone could recognise but which would never be me. Don't you see, I saved myself from insanity and tragedy by a self-portrait that was forever on the edge of that insanity? At what stage alcohol entered this picture is irrelevant. You could go to Switzerland to dry out, you had that luxury. I didn't even want it. I wanted more pain to feel part of a community I never belonged to. I would impregnate a woman with the wrong sperm. I was poisoned and poisoned others not out of hate but out of sheer love. Of course, love in a critical sense. And I had the luxury of reticence which meant I could refuse no woman. I turned into a showman, intercoursed with Dionysios, I even corresponded with Nietsche, Ceasar

#### and Superman!

### (laughs)

Why do you think I even tried to measure the length of my own penis, if I wasn't man enough to remain responsible in an age that didn't deserve our responsibility? I was a born actor, Alvar. Eyes like a clown, evil and seductive, and when I brutalised a woman with such impossible love, I was a child brutalising the whole century that would never understand my pain. Which was love, tenderness and compassion. I pretended to have no sentiment and as a brainless animal, as a constructed genius, as the wild man of the North, I could make myself believe - literally - anything. Even murder. (pause) So what's your alibi, Alvar fuckin' Aalto?

(Long silence. The light fades.)

## the thrill is gone

Slowly, AA returns to 'normal' as does the stage. He wears the same trousers and shirt but no tail coat. He puts a sheet around his head.. He feels cold. He finds the flying goggles on the trolley and slips them over the sheet. He looks like an Arab. During this the stage returns to the lighting of the Indigo Room but with expressive shadows. The cocktail trolley and Paimio chair are revealed intact. He goes to pour himself a whisky. He takes a cigar. He is a world architect in control of guiding his country and architecture. But he is forewarned. A spectre approaches, a spectre he realises he can do nothing about.

AA: I have no alibi. The radicals will see to that. The barbarians of the day will take care of it all. They don't discuss anything anymore in this country, they never did. They throw knives between outstretched feet. The more honesty they demand of you, the more misunderstood you become. And the more 'outside' you are made to feel. But don't think I worry about all this artistic genius. I just happened to stumble upon a way to stop the world robotising. I thought architecture could do it. And they appointed me Academician to try and do it. That was my first death. Now I know already. I'll be ignored.

(dances in a shuffle without his usual elegance but not undiquified)

How much is that doggy in the window, the one with the waggly tail... I must have that doggy... I do hope that doggy's for sale... (as he resumes speaking two indistinct figures enter the stage and start snooping around) I can see why we love such shadows up here in Swampland. Shadows occupy fighting positions. Shadows take the pin out of the grenade. Shadows crouch behind you and snipe at your achievement. To contradict the shadow is an heretical act. To walk on the shadow is a crime worse than rape...

(begins to whisper, realising that they are seeking him)

Safer it is to have one's own ideas but never allow them to be heard publically. Never, never I advise you, be overheard... But I'll be damned if I remain that silent. I used to think Strix was more balanced. I even thought the first decades of the modern century were a better time. But that's an old man's projection, forwards backwards. An old man always hoping it was healthier then than now.

(looks at the two prowlers who have come on stage)

How they'll fight when I've gone. How they'll dance

when the old dog has snuffed it...

(the two characters continue snooping around)

A decade from now they'll wheel me out in Stockholm. I'll not be able to walk. I'll probably be inebriated as it takes away the pain. Always better than morphine, my Swiss Doctor says, just as long as you bale out when you hear the pumps inside are no longer working. I'll be drugged up to the eyeballs. Red wine and camembert will be my only joys left. The queue will reach right around the corner and out onto the Stockholm harbour. All for a few words! They'll slate me for a 60 minute lecture...the sniggering will be indistinguishable from the admiration. But I'll be damned if I give them more than 8 minutes. Remember 8 minutes to a dying man is a lifetime to a young radical. But in those 8 minutes, I'll still say a thing or two... (the prowlers begin to look menacing and AA follows them from behind - they don't notice him) And in twenty years from now, the shadows will take over. Not because they should, but because everyone else has got so tired of the lies and gone to the bar. The bar called Heaven. (They all kneel looking for something) Of course our knees are cushioned up here in the wild, tender North. And you think we don't know how it feels to get up after a long time? Wasn't Kafka's alter ego a surveyor? You still think we belong to the Modern world.

(slowly, they are all crawling on their hands and knees now)

Ha ha ha! We've never belonged to the modern world. Despite the whisky and cigars, the gift of the gab, you and me, we're all doomed. The robots are coming. (Stand and taps out a song on his thigh) You'll find no one admitting to this... not even our dear President. The thrill is gone. He'll die lonely too. unloved, after fighting with other bald men over a comb.

(Jigs off again-smiling as if saying - you believe me?)

This old man he plays nine, he plays nick nack right in time... here this old man... haha... too much obsequiousness kills the soul, too much obedience dulls poor Alvar's brain.

Loud noises off. The Chet Baker song is played quietly: The Thrill is Gone. It is the melancholy moment before the 'revolution'. Now we see the two invaders clearer. Dressed in black corduroy suits, they are two young anarchists-of-the-day. Both have longish pudding-basin haircuts. They look remarkably like Turbo and Wonder Boy, this being their hooligan revolution youth, their formative unthinking years. After having snooped around and inspected the scene, they know what to do. They set

about destroying the few props around. They turn over the cocktail trolley, and 'deconstruct' it in less favourable terms than theorists. They succeed in generally causing irresponsible mayhem on the stage and fear pervades... AA is invisible to them, but he sees them at all times. They bring in beer and swig it consistently. One of them goes to the back of the stage and urinates. The other begins to destroy the trolley. First the wheels, then the rest of it. The chair is next as they slash it, throw the stuffing around and at each other. They both take a chair leg/arm and fence with them. They take pieces of the trolley and the chair and fix them on the stage-wall like a relief. These will remain as decor in the next act. They mock the relief and fall about laughing... The music stops. They begin hitting the recorder, eventually smashing it to smithereens as the Baker song comes to an end... AA continues to look on:

ULIGANO 1: Oh, you don't need ten weeks in Swampland to see the darkness. (looking at Aalto) Ah the quintessential little man who maintains integrity and lifestyle no matter what trips him up. The capitalist's lackey who does not change when the absurdities of life make him a millionaire. He knew the Russians were waiting. (pause) He couldn't wait to get out to that horrid civilised place called America. To him we were all delightfully primitive. Listen Max, I

told you... as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to... alright?... yes?... the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to... Why can't you understand? It's simple, Dumbo.

## (hits the other hooligan around the ears)

To centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State... our time has come, sweetie...we must smash individualism... we must collectivise and socialise. Everything is under our spell no? No one, no one, will be spared. Certainly not the scumbag architect who plans our future, our towns, our houses, and who maintains dignity whatever trips him up. We must smash this sterility and replace it with our own. His hospital wards must be destroyed and replaced with our own hygiene. This furniture is symptomatic of bourgeois individualism. It is our duty to destroy it. Remember: Revolution is no picnic. Violence is allowed. And all will be then be a wonder, Boy! (laughs) Got it, Boy!

ULIGANO 2 (discovering the recorder): Turbo. What's this? What's a Turbo button? (puts his foot through the machine at the same time. Bits fly everywhere. Then he discovers the chair) Hello... hello... Christ, when will they get the means of production right? I hate easy chairs. It's always difficult to get angry in easy chairs. You can't talk

of revolution sitting in chairs like this. Fuck! Can't anyone increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible to save us from this fucked up technology... hello... what is this... shit...

The Paimio chair comes away after his boot has been applied to it. AA watches as the hooligans eventually collapse. As he wanders around the two bodies lying exhausted on the floor amidst the smashed trolley and chair he thinks of speaking. He thinks better of it, lifts off the goggles, and pulls back the sheet. He looks down and finds on the floor an American Indian's headdress with feathers... he puts it on and whoops around, a little dance... music plays out.

\*





# act 2

#### the red room

#### prologue

During the following scene, the stage is being constructed 'red'. A child wriggles and begins to open a box. Inside red bricks and wooden blocks fall out The child begins to construct, eventually making, a huge square on the floor. AA is aware of the square being constructed and occasionally pushes aside one or two blocks in an attempt to upset the rigidity of the child's vision. The child will have none of it and pushes him back inside the square. AA picks up one of the red blocks, looks at it, studies it. The child repairs the damage to the square. Finally as the scene ends AA is completely surrounded and sits down inside the red square. The Child and AA end up looking straight into each other's face

Chorus Leader: Are we ready?

Chorus: Yes we are

Chorus Leader: Is this a book, is this a play

Can it be arkkiteccia in any way?

Are we ready?

Chorus: Yes we are

CL: Since Lenin, Marx and Engels
pulled the slippery plug
Enterprise begins to close

- C: On the killing pace, I suppose.
- CL: So, to the silent picture architects have gladly turned

  To realise once more that the rejected, the spurned

  Are treated with suspicion, no different anywhere
- C: Without respect, honesty, integrity and care.
- CL: If ever we build again, we must happily ignore time
  And Modernism's sycophantic, unhappy clime.

  Constructing fake redness, a more-than-major
  concern
- C: Letting others down, enough rope to hang or even burn.
- CL: Soon the newest building will to trumpets appear

  The paparazzi roped into Alvar's special year.

  But no photograph will ever quite manage to tell
- *C*: The scale of the architect's lonely Living Arctic hell.

#### it's now or never

The set is now cleared of all broken furniture. The fragments and remains of Aalto-Artek type Modern chairs are now on the walls as reliefs. The stage is all Red: floor, ceiling, walls (can be created by lighting). In the middle of the stage is a pneumatic chair of transparent plastic. There is a window light and somewhere suspended, but accessible, a large balloon globe. Dressed more casually, a touch raffish, AA enters and goes back and forth, bringing on red wine and assorted cheeses. The box of cigars is unopened. On the walls there are three separate posters of the three beards: Marx, Lenin and Engels. AA finds the ghetto blaster again (miraculously repaired) and chooses Elvis Presley 'It's now or never' (O Sole Mio). He leans back, smiles and listens at the introduction and the first lines, this leads into:

... O Sole Mio... Horrid was a word they used for everything. Heat was horrid. Cold was horrid. The industrial revolution was horrid. The Crystal Palace was horrid. Bow ties were horrid. The steam locomotive was horrid. The Eiffel Tower was horrid. The new coffee machines were horrid. Anarchists were horrid. Jews were horrid. Beggers were horrid. Marx was - eventually - horrid. Swampland was horrid. They did horrid things to each other and horrid things to the native. Everything was horrid. Revolution, technology, romance. All horrid. And bourgeois! Even their

mothertongue, (pause) and their haircuts! All equal souls, though some more equal than others. And they hated fame. Some, naturally, more famous than others...

Meanwhile fame turned us modern architects into escape artists and the hooligans into shadows. We are the first to be forgotten during our life, and the first to be remembered when we've gone. Is it any wonder I struggled for, how did they describe it, a dictatorship of common sense? Can't anybody see what's about to happen? Or do we all have to die to wake up to this nightmare?

(listens to the music, walks - chorus enters again, AA listens from the side)

Chorus Leader: You'd think the mobile phone, will

Think again Almighty Digital Lord, it will simply make

Dead Souls from the Government Service, itch and burn

Chorus: Until the Moscow net closes. And it was just their turn.

CL: Too much geography, landscape maps if you prefer

And not enough history, will forever continue to stir

In the hearts of nationalists, pantheists, critics and

pimps

- C: Those who stare, as home the drunk Architect limps.
- CL: There comes a point surely, after so many years
  When inferiority, low-esteem and fears,
  All this stubbornness, hubris and comatose
- C: Has no destination, but up the famous architect's
- CL: Be foreign forever, remain outside is the likely call

  To avoid damp parochialism's red leathery pall.

  And don't expect any miracles, not even those
- C: Events full of communism's weariness and woes.
- CL: This is a tad harsh, Architects, you'll hasten to add
  And jump right in, confirming worse than bad.
  But nothing will stop The World's slow dull decline
  C: As it plunges itself robotically, beneath the moronic
- C: As it plunges itself robotically, beneath the moronic line.

### (music...)

AA: Oh Sole Mio... A legendary character so powerful as to be so hated? A powerful personality... those that always provoke legend? Ha Ha... how did I attract such allegiance? Is this the result? (looks around as the child enters slowly

and starts constructing the wall without paying any attention to AA) Everybody fawning. Everyone moving about on their hands and knees. No one saying anything critical, except hooligans at my window in the dead of night. Have I managed to frighten them all? (speaks and sings)... This old man he played three, he played nick nack in the tree... with a nick nack paddy wack give a dog a bone, this old man came rolling home... (speaks) this old man came rolling home... he certainly did.. and I'll tell you, hooligans, all of you out there not knowing how to comb your hair, if you know nothing about 1918 in this part of the world, then you'll never understand my character... (change tone; rages to himself like Lear)

Little Alvaro... can't they see. After we got rid of the Swedes, after we pretended to get rid of the Russians, there was no one else left to trick. What happened then? You want to know. Are you ready for this? We could be honest to ourselves. Imagine it. Honesty. Almost as ridiculous as humanism. Everyone knows how disastrous it is for democracy. And for us. Oh so much worse. Why? Because... because we believed in it all. We believed it. (whispers goes to where the two hooligans had collapsed. In the dark their crumpled bodies are still there. He puts his foot at the same time on the body of one of the revolutionaries).

And now. Uncertainty and loneliness. So common

today that you best admit them in the privacy of your own bottle. Freeing ourselves from the Swedes and Russians! We got what? Another slavery. Nature! We became provincial in our desperate attempts to keep up with others. We did what my father warned us against. We brought the wilderness to our back door and called it culture. And I'm starting to realise... perhaps all I did was merely add to that?

### (pause)

...What then is the drama of Little Alvaro? A genius? A clown? The Emperor of Swampland? The maestro who could never look after his own interests? The capitalist's lackey who knew the absurdities of life could make him a millionaire? The quintessential little man who maintained integrity and lifestyle no matter what the hoodlums did? The alcoholic with a swiss bank account? The man who wanted to be Chaplin but took on modern architecture instead? The modern dictator who needed a private doctor in Swizerland in order to dry out..and what for? To drink is always human, all too human, Chaplin once told me. (the image of Chaplin re-occurs back projected)

... In our country, in Swampland, the error is to believe in the genius of it. Ha ha! what romance, look around. Humanism? The highest good, the happiness of man (pause) and bottle. Oh Alvaro, Corbu used to say, you've always been seduced by innocence and not experience. (mimics) Me famous, you sand. How sentimental! Forever young? You, Corbusier, soon dead! Me Aalto! Soon immortal!

(maudlin-slightly inebriated, language as inventive as it might have been with snatches of Swedish, English, German and Finnish)

... Never a riddle, never a modernist. Does it matter who will say this of me when I'm dead? As many pictures as a mirror offers. Tyrant, autocrat, cad, dictator. A drunk, a philanderer and a joker. Forester and fabulator. What I am was always more important than what I achieved. And right now each morning when I wake, I have lost interest in the building before it is finished. So I let others complete them...(dances to himself very slowly like an entertaining drunk on the French Metro) ... I never set out to seek genius or create paradoxes. Strindberg was right. Our problem as men of the North is that we lack natural nobility. We have to try so, so hard. This is why most of us, even The Emperor of Swampland, can never stop taking ourselves seriously. And until we learn this, we'll never be part of the Club. We'll never be truly cultured.

Pessimist? Not at all! When? When did I notice it you mean? When I was about to make the biggest human error of them all? Boom boom! When I said than an architect's words don't mean a damn thing. Think about it. Take the pin out! There's no way to know if I'm right. Impossible to know this without believing in your own words. Oh yes, I'm the great pretender. I was condemned to be the victim, trapped in the promise of modern words I didn't believe. What a difference a day made! To write a life with any genuine exactness and discrimination, Johnson said, you have to live with a man. Is he right? Don't you know that it's worth every treasure on earth. But few people who have lived with a man know what to remark about him. I never let anyone in. I knew if I did, they'd soon notice. They'd see me jumping around from one loose theory to another. (soft shoe shuffles as the Jimmy Durante song Young at Heart begins to play)

Oh if you should survive to one hundred and five.. look at all you derive from being alive..now here is the best part you have head start...if you are amongst the very young at heart... (the aging continues - this time more lucid without self-interruption) ... It didn't matter to me whether Vorticism came before Vitalism and Hegel came after. It didn't matter if Existentialism saved my life or Expressionism drew my wildest lines. This misses the point of our forest intellect. We need to learn to copy.

It's as simple as that. No models here in Swampland. No breeding, no decency, no subtletly. Thank God! We pick up from where we can. All of us born in restricted areas. Our four walls were always trees. We embraced a woman and were surprised their skin wasn't as rough as the pine, or as flaky as the birch. Trolls! All of us. Pure trolls. Born in a forest was enough silence for me. I couldn't get out of it fast enough. Couldn't get to a skirt fast enough. One eskimo woman's leather breeches to another. All sway and swerve right up to the mantlepiece and beyond. It may appall you now but back then in the 20s we couldn't get enough of women. Couldn't get to another man's wife fast enough. Everyone was doing it. ... Suppose that's the secret... Couldn't get to another architectural style fast enough. I was born running... until I realised I could save the world from technology.

#### the human factor

The human factor? Look around. The walls are closing in ever so gently. So gently that no one here notices anything. Everything I achieved was built on error. Bad mistakes and sympathetic mistakes. Mistakes anyway. Some benign, some acceptable. Others wild.

(Starts enjoying himself slowly. Walks in front of the gallery pictures of Marx, Lenin and Engels and says the word 'fool' as he passes each portrait...) ...Fool. Fool. Fool. I had no real passion for the wild. With Kings and Queens, Presidents and Prime Ministers, I wasn't drunk. I was under the table, groping for existence, trying to breathe. No one will speak of it now of course. I'll be sanitized like Larsson's twee paintings. It'll look as if I've been a saint all my life. Fool. Fool. Fool. Can't you see? I am no longer

a man who loved indigo instead of red. I am no longer the man whose language was as colourful as a Times Square whore. Stories I told are now attributed to someone else. For fear they'll damage my sainthood. (to Marx) You know all about this. Your work not your heart, not your loins, comes first...Fools fools fools. How much have I changed from what I once was? Who knows? How much am I still to change? Rousseau was right. There's a stage in life when the little man inside you would wish to stop. You reach that moment. You wonder what age you need to be for the whole species to stand still. Discontented with your present state you wish in all your power to go back. But it's too late. It's time to be human. Strindberg knew this in the last year of his life. Deep down in every human being, he said, whether he has been beaten down by life or not, there is, after all, a dark sense of unworthiness which falsifies his position at the moment of ovation, and thus he feels ashamed rather than arrogant... I could never put it as well as that

## (pause)

Am I to be blamed for this arrogance? For thinking I can solve the problems of the industrialised world? Personal glory... means nothing. I merely thought..I still do... that I had seen the future. The error I made? I thought you - everyone of you out there - shouldn't get there. No one should go there. No one deserves a future like that. (He

pauses. The music intervenes. It's now or never returns...) But it's too late... You can't save the world, you can only set it an example... for a moment. Oh I could tell a story, a good joke. I could seduce another man's wife and dance like Fred Astaire but I didn't exist without others. Alone I am nothing. Always people around. To listen to me. I could change character at any moment. I take on the person I feel I should be, with everyone I meet. I wanted fun and cinema and I got architecture. Worse, when I arrived at those international congresses on architecture in the thirties, with all those dull, earnest Germans and the Swiss watchmaker. I realised I couldn't philosophise myself out of a paper bag. I bent wood with as much impatience as I thought I could blow glass. I hadn't a clue how to do these things. But it didn't seem to matter back then. I could translate the language of fibres into building. I could jump scale and no one read me the riot act. No one took the pin out of the grenade. I could see shapes that would be everything and anything. And after that I was on a runaway. I just impovised. Buildings. Women. And Architecture! And that indispensable dill weed we put over every possible fish we catch in the lakes of Swampland. I was wild but only in my dreams, only abroad. Inside I was Chaplin. Always Chaplin rather than Brunelleschi. (pause) The Chaplin that walks away, in and out of the eternal sunset...

### boom boom

Lights dim a little. AA cowers again as the two revolutionaries arise from where they have been lying on the stage. They brush themselves down and give off a passable image of a 1960s Nordic Marxist-Leninist: all corduroy, lank hair, dark black-framed squarish glasses, young moustaches and beards like dill weed. On the low glass table there is bread, cheese and red wine. AA begins to whisper the following, the backdrop of the three beards re-appears larger than ever. AA plays this scene whilst the revolutionaries eat, drink and become merry.

AA: Watch them even now as I die. They'll make of me the most unique. The one modern architect who could get to the end of the century still intact. Still a virgin in the world of whores. Who really cares? If someone had asked me what it felt like to be a guru, to be a Maestro, I would have murdered them. If someone asked me what it was like to be an error in one's own lifetime, I'd have vomited over them. I'd have taken their wife and gone off in the Gull Wing Mercedes

## (pause)

Now? Now, the tiredness of fame, the pain of

misunderstanding exhausts me...and only now, only here alone with you (acknowledges the three beards)... oh I know it's my own fault. I did little, too little, to dispel the myth. I loved the sound of the word 'maestro'. Corbu was maestro of the Mediterranean. Mies was maestro to the Germans, Frank... well Frank was just Maestro. The best there's been. And I? I was the little maestro, the forest maestro, the maestro from the dull North! The others had more panache than I ever had, more culture than we ever know up here. But I learnt. Fast. The Emperor of Swampland! I learnt where to get my suits tailored. I learnt how to choose the best cuts of lamb. I knew the graceful trout was superior to the over-urgent salmon. I didn't have to wait until Graham Greene told me in Stockholm's Grand. I knew the dill plant was our indefatigable gourmet weed. I learnt where to dry out after a hard night. And I still know which women are worth seducing. That (pause) is genius... But for trolls like us. We have to try so hard... so so hard!

At that precise moment the two revolutionaries begin causing an interruption. One of them goes off and comes in chasing a small pig all over the stage. They attempt to disrupt the play. As they do so, AA turns back the disk and goes into humming, lyrical dancing mode with another version of 'It's Now or Never':

When I first saw you... with your smile so tender...

my heart was captured my soul surrendered ..I spent a liftetime waiting for the rightime.. now that you're near the time is here at last... it's now or never... come hold me tight (dances alone) it's now or never... just like a willow... we would cry... your forms excite me... let your space invite me... for who knows when... we'll meet again this way... (AA moves into the Italian version)

oh sole mio... come hold me tight... kiss me my darling... be mine tonight... tomorrow will be too late... it's now or never ... my love won't wait...

The music fades. There is an eerie silence over the Red Room. A pig squeel, loud and blood curdling, is heard off stage. AA turns. Vulnerable again, he now returns to the meditative. He goes to the table, breaks off a chunk of bread. Sits in the pneumatic chair. The revolutionaries re-group. Boom Boom starts up very lightly...as AA mouths the words as he speaks

It's now or never? Look. Don't bother asking around about me after I've gone. I'll just be everything they want me to be and more. I'll be responsible for all those heroic aspirations of modern architecture. (tears off a chunk of bread, downs some red wine) And they will play the same trick we played on ourselves. How we thought we could be honest to ourselves. (Gentle, knowing laughter). Everything we did was to be honest. Honest and direct.

And, of course, naive. Then stupidity took over our own little democracy just as it stumbled onto two legs. Boom. Boom. Even technocracy is mild compared to this stupidity. Boom, Boom. Gonna shoot you right down... insane and young again...

AA pulls at more bread, drinks, walks around. Checks for the exits in the Red Room. A red recording light can be on and shown. He returns in the silence and continues whilst searching for another disk. During this he becomes strangely animated, a performer even of his old self. Dapper again. He steps out to John Lee Hooker's Boom Boom as the volume rises... Raffishly dressed, he cuts a fine dancing, smooching figure. He speaks and performs rapidly as if addressing the Stalinists of the 1960s: like a stand-up comic.

... Boom. Boom. Gonna shoot you right down. The young barbarians. Bakunin. Anarchism. Marxist-Leninism. Have you noticed how they always rhyme these -isms? None of them can hold a candle to the Prince. Kropotkin! Boom Boom. Right off your feet. Take you home with me. Put you in my house.. I love to see you scrub up and down the flooor... Call themselves anarchists. Anarchists without a head. Kaput Kaput. Gonna shoot you right down (recites the words of the song) let us put our eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because you knock me out

right offa my feet... whoa whoa talk that talk... it is the unsearchable and eternally creative... the source of all like.. Boom Bakunin Boom Brunelleschi boom..(turning) How they love the aimlessness of their anarchism... they destroy to create, hah and even now, they miss the point of their energy.. what a difference a day makes... twenty four little hours...

### (pause)

Like chili peppers they thought everything could be violently oh so magnificently changed and all in one go, in twenty four little hours... Boom... Overnight... Boom Boom. (addressing Lenin's poster) The problem here, Didi. We're not Spaniards. We're not hot-blooded. We lack the passion of the latinos. Instead we have prunes for loins and sniff the bitch at the cocktail... we have the talent of... dreary slaves... we're all reindeer castrators... boom boom gonna shoot you right down... don't be fooled though. Only great naivety allows such idiocy. And only great innocence misses the point of its protest. But don't mistake it... (slows down, returns to the lonely solitary figure, heavier, vulnerable, older) Speak slower. Fool nobody. Believe nothing. Doubt everything. You can't save the world. You can't even set it an example. I more or less gave up on this a few years ago. I was accused of creaming someone else's milk. Why it took me so long to lose faith I'll never really know. My natural

innocence I suppose. Thin utopias. That's all they were...
(Dreamily rolls with the music, adjusting his dress)

Up here you see, we're all fantasy merchants. Our creativity serves others. And we have a talent to envy, a talent to loathe. The only difference at the end of our modern century is that the loathing will be further back in the throat. Let us not mince words. Ladies and Gentlemen. in an elegant appraisal of the very silence that perpetuates such farce, we stand open, agape! From now on, nothing is certain. Not even the lives we have lived. (pause) And our stubbornness destroys all. All this revolutionary energy... It becomes regressive. It did with Strindberg. It did with Picasso. It will with me. And it will with these Stalinists. They'll kill me in this decade (long pause for music...) And they'll kill me thirty years on. (drinks then whispers in mock rage which turns into a low scream) 100 years of solitude. That's all. But there's nothing primitive in the way I have lived...

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

Boom.

## saving my love for you

The John Lee Hooker music fades into silence. AA sits on the pneumatic chair. He does not get up to change the disk. He looks around at the redness of the Red Room in silence. The 'redness' is programmed to change intensity as it passes from lightness to heaviness. This is narrated as if a dream sequence.

AA: In front of us we see a town. Look at its towers, gates, houses, rooms, thoroughfares. What a fine picture of playfulness it shows us. What a flawless whole it seems to be. We rejoice to see a sight like this. Yet we know for sure that the people there are just as vile, ludicrous, clumsy, mean and false as our own company. These are rooms full of strife and deception. Corridors where whispering joins together to make a false sentence, a risky agenda. This is no harmonious community. It is a serpent's nest, just like all societies of men... a jealousy of architects!

...So what happens to change our minds? What will happen to fame when it has only your modernity to rest on? What happens when you lose interest in your own achievement? When the robots arrive? When the robots have haircuts? And when the hooligans find out what I

#### refused to tell them?

A molotov cocktail comes through the window. AA rises slowly. He picks it up. It fails to ignite. He continues to look around at the redness of The Red Room. He begins to give a small lecture.

AA: What else is there here? Any fool knows we miss out on the spoils of culture. We pretend it doesn't matter. We ape around convinced this is the way us Foresters should behave. Modern physics and science, function and process, the discovery of longitude, the secrets of French cuisine and wine...none of this ever really applies to us. We are either ready for a restless world or not. And we've never been ready. We've had no preparation... (indicates The Red Room)... And what, you might ask, makes us so joyful about this room? Surely something other than its quarrelsome and ungracious inhabitants. (indicates the two hooligans, drinking at the back of the stage) Something that has come from above (indicates the molotov cocktail) which atones for the imperfections of our comrades? You (to Marx's poster) not God laid down something which these hooligans had no intelligence to seek. But that is not what made this room so joyful. It needed a childish delight to make it permanent. And you saw in us an innocence... an innocence we had quite independently of any truth past down, from people and generations... you saw our primitive belief in everlasting life... and even worse... damn you... you thought you knew everything about the forms necessary to create it...

(walks away from the three beards: alters slightly)

I lie. Forget what I said earlier. Out with this gloom. Remember what I said. An architect's words never mean a damned thing (laughs). I never played the primitive. I didn't need to. Back in 1929, in the salons of Europe, no one knew me. No one knew what I was about, where I came from. I fell around. I seduced and was seduced. I aped it up, walked and talked like Chaplin... I fell under tables, drunk on hope and oh, of course, that balanced radicalism...Then I brought it all back home to the forest where I was the perfect gentleman (laughs: raises glass to Engels' portrait) Opportunistic? Always.. Me no less. Master at it...

(walks to window where the two hooligans are trying to climb out, failing out of drunkenness)

If only they, the anarchists beneath that window, knew how to blind themselves. Then we might advance this terribly poor, terribly undeveloped state. Steps backwards to go forwards... (picks up the International Compendium from the table. A huge tome. He opens it and as if having noticed something) If this is what it means in the encyclopaedias to be the "Maker of Modern Finland"

then fine. True, Sibelius and me, we've probably done more than most. True, the poets were right. We walked around the pond and marvelled at the stillness of the water. We saw the eyes floating under the Gulf. Fools. Fools Fools. But what, if after all our contribution to the enrichment of human experience, we should actually be faced with the truth? That we contributed not one iota to the welfare of any one person in particular... Grim but true... And like Sibelius, I never had much time for therapy. (laughs) I've never had an ego, let alone the other one. A failure to make satisfying human relationships. That's what they say about me.

### (Looks deeply towards the audience)

Sometimes the mask slips, that's all. (pause) And when it does. You'd better be there... (dances) Like Jack the Horner in the corner... I don't think any of us have developed our potential equally. What do I care? Personal relationships were always a game. Always have been in our family. The forest offered so little stability when you are forced to be so playful. Don't stay out late or the wolf will come... And the towns we flee to, what do they offer? The centres I've built, civil in some way, primitive copies in another. A sort of cheap magic. Dreamy renaissance ideals. The magic of Italy and Greece for all those people in Swampland not fortunate enough ever to get there.

Anything to avoid the worst of the winter here in the North.

(pause; changes music – puts on The Crew Cuts Sh-boom.)

Are you believing me now? Will you need to reach the end of the modern century to believe the words of a legend? Think, thirty or so years from now! What a dismal thought. People will change their names, reverse their coats. Whole countries will begin to wonder where they came from. Including mine... For thirty years there will be nothing but stories about little Alvaro and nothing to blame but a personality cult. A cult I denied but got condemned by nevertheless. Just saving my love for you. Someone claimed all I ever wanted to do was live elsewhere. Is that why I built theatrical sets of other worlds? Why deny it? True, I did once plan to leave this country. For ever. Think what storm that would have caused. And I still get asked whether I ever thought of leaving this country. Like Eliel? Saarinen? Remember? Another of Swampland's heroes. If the truth be known, he was actually chased out. And then brought back in an urn to be claimed Son of Swampland. America offered something more than exile to him. It offered oblivion. I even delivered the speech that sanctified him. Of course I did. Fame not genius guarantees my restlessness. Suddenly exempted all the usual struggle, fame then becomes an exile. (pause to take in the Red Room) The loneliest loneliness in the world... sh-boom... sh-boom...

## what a difference a day makes

Sh-boom plays on and down. The Hooligans have escaped through the window. They push the make-do ladder away. AA has wandered off to come back in as if ready to give a lecture. He now has a bow tie and looks like a Swiss watchmaker but much much older. He sits inside the Red Square, guru style. He picks up a brick, addresses it and then turns and addresses a number of children that have wandered onto the stage.

AA: Mild, mean, aggressive, wonderful. Did I believe in it? The show? the lectures? The prizes? The awards? My own words? That wasn't me talking. It's obvious. It was and always has been someone else. My language was always shaky. I was best in Swedish and German, two languages I didn't particularly like. They always seemed like the language of bankers or lawyers. But the mistakes I made became comic. Giving lectures bored me. So naive, at first I thought I needed a unifying theme. I soon realised I could talk as well as the next delinquent. It didn't take a jiffy before I learnt how to hang an audience from the chandeliers with bad language. Well not really bad language, let's say creative language, language with an edge, with a flourish. (The children start to leave, then come back)

It soon became an alibi. I could get away with blue, I mean, red murder. It was relatively easy. Any flippancy had the chance of becoming truth. And in modern architecture I learnt that to be the greatest use of language... (The children applaud) Did I survive? Survive what? No artist survives their own creativity. Braque was right. When he began a painting, he said the most interesting thing was that he had no idea where it would end. I was the same, I hadn't a clue. I hadn't the foggiest idea where I went in a lecture. I just followed my nose. Out there was an audience and a fog. I loved fogs. Always have done. Fogs in a forest, fogs in a city, fogs in a bar. Even the mystery of a woman is like a strong fog. You know, the only reason I liked to go to London was to walk in Portland Place and hope a good fog came down. The same in St. Petersburg. Then I could disappear into the nearest hostelry. Even out at sea I felt safest with a whisky, a woman and one of those rolling fogs that come in off the Korso Lighthouse or the Danish Sound. It was always easy to believe the architectural revolution was still going on in a fog. (Looks around at the redness, walks nearer the three beards as the children continue to surround him. AA addresses the beards again)

I believe you three know all about fogs. You want to crucify everything and triumph at the same time. Cake and eat it time. You see, these men have become the most famous and most infamous at the same time. Why? For

hoodwinking a whole world with an agenda so thin you could split hair with it... (The children applaud again, wilder) All revolutions begin with enthusiasm on the edge of criminality. They proceed through delinquency. They are helped along with a good dose of straight-boot hooliganism. And they end with dictatorship. Nick nack paddy wack and the revolution runs out of track. No one is out there like the Marx Brothers re-laying the track as fast as the film gets there. And when they wake up in their easy chairs, oh they may still be a group of well-organised creative people... they may even call themselves modern architects. And they may, if they're lucky, have a new direction, a new haircut even. But it won't be my direction. It won't be my illusion, my dream, my error. They won't be humanising technology anymore. Instead they'll reinvent the human being. They'll have to. You mark my words, nippers! (The children applaud – raucous now, making whoopee)

Important, it always is, for the victors to feel as if they invented technology just for themselves. By so doing their generous absolutism will finish off the revolution. And their haircut dictatorship will carry on where others just got exhausted. Lenin did so when he promoted Stalin. Stalin did so when he promoted Kruschev. Kruschev crouched and then took the pin out of the grenade too late. Breszhnev was in the wings veiled behind his own bushy eyebrows. Waiting for the world to blink. And Swampland,

dear little Swampland, was lost in that blinking. His eye lids smothered our last innocence. And the robots, those with the silly haircuts... they became their own human error. Technique sans ésprit... time warped world (comes face to face with one child) The modern century will be remembered for Communism certainly. Criminality also. But it will take decades to undo the biggest revolution foisted on an innocent community...

AA slowly steps out of the Red Square which the children surround. Throughout the following as he walks around looking at the square, the children pick up a brick each and replace them into the box. The sound of clapping which started at the end of the address to the beards momentarily increases and then fades... The silence is deafening. After some while, AA begins in comic vein. He puts on Dinah Washington, 'What a difference a day makes'. He starts playing with the children as they collect the blocks. AA takes them out of the box and re-builds the Red Square..they laugh and joke. He addresses the children again.

... Like jack the horner in the corner don't go nowhere what do I care... what a difference a day makes (*looks*) That's why I liked P.G.Wodehouse. The only books I ever re-read after Nick Carter, Strindberg and Kroptkin. What a world!

No violence, no hatred, no sex, no emotion. Everything buried underneath and so, so deliciously ambiguous. Nothing else left but architecture. How I wished to succeed without profound emotion. How playful I always wanted to be, like a delinquent out for a night on the tiles... in Hamburg, in Amsterdam, in New York. The Stalinists didn't understand this. They never will. They can never get up and leave at the drop of a hat. They couldn't find their way into a woman's underclothes without dialectical reasoning. No wonder it will take them another thirty years to put me on their agenda. The time it takes to become 100 years old. Little Alvaro, the Modern Inaction Hero!

They all run around the stage like Red Indians. The play continues... and slowly the light deepens on the redness and we hear Dinah Washington's 'What a difference a day makes' rise in volume.

... Do you want to know what will happen. You endure injustice in silence, you become unjust yourself. The blind obedience they demand will create slaves and tyrants. Albeit dressed in chinos, blue blazers and silk ties, they'll claim more for my work than is possible. I'll give nostalgia a good name. And it will be unstoppable. Our national anxiety will overwhelm us... The flattering will become absurd. They'll refloat my boat. They'll re-build the outside toilet. They'll speak to everyone and his brother and they'll all give their

little ha'pence about little Alvaro. They'll find women whose legs I carressed. They'll say what a wag I was. They'll frame cigars that were never smoked. I'll be identified with everything this century achieves. And everything it didn't achieve. Nothing will change. Architecture will go on forever promising what words can never live up to. These delinquents will still expect the forest to come to us instead of us going to the forest. Our towns and cities will become labyrinths. But of the worst, inhuman sort. A country of humanists. A country of reasonable men. Forget it. We're all as stubborn as goats. And watch the Stalinists become professors. Watch them. They'll cut their hair, grease it up and comb it backwards. They'll rediscover Brylcreem and they'll smoke cigars without knowing how they were rolled on the thighs of women. They'll have no idea that the Torcedores, the rollers who roll up to 120 cigars a day are read to as they work. Anything. Newspaper stories. Classics. Dostoevsky. Tolstoy. Cervantes. Fairy Tales. The Communist Manifesto. Mao's Little Red Book. Anything to keep them amused, to keep them concentrated as they roll the best cigars in the world. Watch them. These will be the new hoodwinkers taking you into the 21st century. They'll buy chinos and double-breasted blue blazers. They'll wear brogues, Lloyds or Church's. They'll even beg someone to invite them to the Garrick Club or the Century Club so that they can wear a tie coloured cucumber and salmon...

The play with the children stops. They all stand frozen. The music plays on for a moment. Then almost as a dummy AA continues in mime action, face whitened from chalk in his pocket.

Then these hooligans will award themselves points for changing their minds. What little mind they had, of course. They'll begin lecturing about me. To me. What little Alvaro, the modern architect, ought to have done. What the Great Architect should have done. What mannerisms I ought to have avoided. Why I shouldn't have drunk so much. What contradictions I could resolve. What a paradigm I made of the fence... What tragedy finally befell the Maestro - little Alvaro.

Laughs and goes towards a huge globe balloon that one child has brought on by rolling on top of it. He sits on his back and begins to play with it like Chaplin from The Great Dictator as he says the following

Tragedy is unavoidable. See if my words lie. All of you who outlive this redness? Whenever anyone has too much said of them, they are remembered for the least likely, the most trivial, thing. The pencil skirted women, a grass roof on a sauna or a perimeter fence. (juggles the balloon like Chaplin) Let me tell you. I've never really been interested in nature. I've never needed to. It was inescapable. I never

chased it all the way to the drawing board. You see I came before nature. (laughs & continues juggling) They think I'm highly cultured. A member of the Academy. Sweden. France. England. America. The honours string out. They think we're not a gay people? Up here, in the North. (comes down and takes globe in hands - walks to the front of the stage) We have a gaiety certainly but gaiety isn't quite the word. We have a stubbornness that precedes, how should I put it, a stubbornness that comes before knowledge... it's a modern stubbornness. You see in Swampland, man and forest are still undifferentiated. We are primitive, yes. We embrace trees, yes. Trees are loyal, trees are faithful. Nothing else can be trusted. No one else. So don't let the odd Vietnamese restaurant fool you. No one wants to come and live in this part of the world... (indicates his clothes) Culture, these clothes, this suit, these cigars, have never been a necessity here. If we had no ideas we'd be happier. Just enough to make things work. But we want more. We are educated to be afraid. We chase theory faster than we chase skirt. Always a bit archaic, we jump through hoops for anything new. I know I did. Strindberg did. And my best work was done when I was jumping highest, when I wasn't even 30 years old. And now out there, what can you see. The streets are on fire. Huge balls are crushing the streets we thought we needed to live in. Poets are writing poems we thought meant something. Outside, all you see are corduroy-Fascists jumping through their own flaming hoops. No one will say they are ridiculous. Until someone is killed or maimed. By then it's too late. The coats are reversed and they're going to my tailor and tobacconist, they're smoking my cigars, and drinking my whisky before the century is out... And as they stagger out of the ballroom, little Alvaro will be forgiven all his megalomania, his arrogant, vile dictatorship. Even their limited words, their pathetic vocabulary will kill me once more...

AA and the children sit looking out, the balloon globe rolls off stage, slowly... music distant then off...

# poor little fool

Light dims.Only the Lonely by Roy Orbison plays during this change. AA goes off stage and re-enters in an Indian Headdress. He walks around; after a while he goes to sit on the pneumatic chair. 'Cowboy' stage hands enter and begin dismantling the Red Room just as the children have put all the red bricks back in the box-trolley. The posters go, the redness starts transforming slowly. AA continues to sit, drinks and cuts a camembert. He used to enjoy this but there is a lacklustre glint in his eyes. He lights a cigar again but without real loving interest. He moves into a deep melancholy, he speaks slowly, getting slower. His words are slow and careful. The whole stage continues to be dismantled whilst he talks. Only the Lonely fades...

AA: Dig deep enough, the researchers will be rewarded. They'll find enough deprivation in my early life to explain away a life on the run. I wasn't really born, let's face it, I just hit the forest running. And I've never stopped. So try and make a thesis out of that. And if this explains my lack of intimate attachments then put that down to bloody loneliness. As emotional as a set of bagpipes. (takes off the headdress, looks at it) Architecture, the more serious you want to play it, no room for anything else. No time for imagination, the imaginary escape. The purest coping mechanism there is. The best way of exercising control you

have invented for yourself. Ask Corbu, ask Frankie, ask the German Banker... all of them will tell you. Any space left over from modern architecture is filled by anxiety, by failure... (plucks the feathers one by one)

Right now I can't agree with the pysychologists, but who knows. At sixty four, I'm about to enter the so called third stage of my life. Loneliness. Solitude. Slowness. Ah, and of course, repetition... (Momentarily hears Dinah Washington's What a Difference... AA listens and interrupts)... Then there's that stupid line I'm supposed to have said. I don't write, I build. Or words to that effect. I've forgotten the exact words. What did Picasso say? "To search means nothing in painting, to find is the thing." But why believe a clown with a monkey's skill? Modernism taught us one thing, and one thing only. We must all learn to speak as if words die on us. And the words of any song are better than any theory...

## (listening then as parts of the Great Pretender return)

Of course I bluffed with the best of them. But I hated reasoning. I despised the change of ideas as long as they weren't my own. And there's nothing democratic in that. Conversations are always one-sided. It's best to make them so. If you don't know everything begins from the ordinary, then you have no right to be a member. But ordinariness is

never so ordinary when you happen to get there first. And spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder... I play the game but to my real shame you've left me to be alone... so where, you are going to ask, from here? Does anyone read psychology books anymore? I seem to be what I am not you see... Apparently creative people like me are supposed to have three stages in life. The first period, my first period, gallavanting around Stockholm, lifting the skirt of this or that architect's wife, is supposed to be characterised by work - and I quote (puffs cigar and weakly laughs) of undoubted genius. Paimio. Ha. Turun Sanomat. Ha Ha. Viipuri Library. Ha Ha Ha. There wasn't quite an individual voice in there yet. But boy, did I learn to dispose of those parts of the past that were useless to me... faster than Georges Simenon changed women. And that was fast!

Johnny is joker, he's a bird... what a dog... a bird dog... (goes in and out of words of the Everly Brothers song, Bird Dog) Modernism became the spirit level of the age. And it wasn't courage or genius that made me scuttle faster than the man next to me, it was sheer panic to get to the master's table. Bird dog, you better find a chicken to love... Then when I got there, I was as scared as a child. Architecture offered the mask I needed. So, in a way, you could say a sort of panic got me through to the second part of my life. He wants what he can get now...what a dog... a bird dog...

supposedly the greatest part of an artist's life... both Corbu and Frankie got there before me. So I piled it on. Electric eel par excellence, that was me. Mairea, Ha. (the Ha increases in irony) The New York Pavilion, Ha Ha... MIT Dormitory... Ha Ha Ha. What'd I say... (pretends to play the pinao like Ray Charles, puts on dark glasses) see the girl with diamond ring she knows how to shake that thing alright..hey hey... The Pensions Institute in Helsinki. Ha Ha Ha Ha ... and finally (flourish) The House of Culture, Ha Ha Ha Ha... (pause) tell you mama tell you popa i'm going to send you back to arkansaw... this is the period in our lives when we need to communicate with the widest public just because we smell death. I did that alright and more. When you see me in misery come on baby... I smoked the best cigars, bought the finest shoes, was dressed by the finest tailors, ate wonderful food with that indefatigable dill weed that we put on everything up here. I behaved abominably and was inebriated at the finest tables. Tell me I wanna know... oh come on... see the girl with the red dress on...one more time... just one more time... I stroked the thighs of some of the finest women in the world. And suddenly I wake up here. Now... huh hoh make me feel so good... make me feel so good... yeah... (words the end of the Ray Charles song) baby it's alright...

Baby it's alright... Nineteen sixty two or three or...

Guilty of building the ugliest building in Helsinki. A sugar

cube... a palace for the Medicis of today, I called it...Some joke..only I'm not laughing. (slowly) baby shake that thing...feel alright now... make me feel alright... can you feel alright...It's just finished. (Johnny and the Hurricanes 'Red River Rock' starts playing under the following) Go see for yourself. Down by the waterfront. I'll be crucified for this one. How could I have been so blind? Suddenly when I need to hold onto play in my life, I lost sight of it. I came to treat the theory of play over seriously...

(shivers, looks older) I suddenly feel very very cold. Too much Mr.Hyde and not enough Mr.Jekyl. They'll take me to the cleaners on this one. Even this morning I woke up and realised that God and I played dice in the night. God won... Half jokingly, I said it was the Doge's Palace... (stops)

How ridiculous. You can't half-joke in this country... Didn't anyone ever tell you? How could I have been so stupid? This is a country that wouldn't even let Buster Keaton sneeze. (He listens to the music... He prepares himself for departure during the next part. Mario Lanza's O Sole Mio plays in the distance.) So are the psychologists right? Am I washed up and entering the loneliest period of my life? And what with? No alter ego! Ideas dressed up in cheap marble and white plaster? I can feel it coming on. Only one real drama left in life now and that's repetition. How tired can one really get? (hears a noise). They're knocking trying to get in. But there's no real desire to

reach any audience anymore. They've made sure of that. Independence confused us. It has made us sentimental. So all I ask now is that you deal with me less harshly later than you are about to. But don't clean me up to much. Don't pretend I made no mistakes. Don't renovate buildings for the sake of this. Don't use your own uncertainty to falsify my past. For your past has been my life. Don't gag me with tales of how easy it was to charm an audience. And please, don't mimic the performance of a tamed forester... (The phrases start breaking up, fragmenting as he mimics what he will become to other people)

Go on Alvaro, Emperor of Swampland, give it to them. Right between their eyes. How they love this sort of thing in Paris and New York...Watch the Finn climb the tables. Watch the Finn drink himself to oblivion and be first up the next morning for a breakfast of beer and herring! Watch him grope under the tables and not remember a thing the next day. How tiring. How tiring. And how welcome. No longer need to hold anyone's interest. (pause) What is it? To become a legend too early? Too near your own illusion of reality, and then it's harder and harder to let it go. Beethoven didn't manage it. Sibelius didn't manage it. Nor Richard Strauss. Nor Strindberg. Not even Kropotkin or Brahms. And look at Chaplin. This magic moment... sweeter than wine, softer than the summertime... everything I want... whenever I hold you tight... this magic moment

while your lips are close to mine lasts forever forever to the end of time... Genius is nothing more than knowing just what toll, what effect, a good burgundy is going to have on the soul. Forget the liver, that's already washed out. But the soul. The soul can die before its time. If we cannot live beautifully, let us at least die beautifully... as Aunt Helmi used to say.

He drinks again. Old, aged and damaged but still remarkably dignified. The Red Room is clear now. A blinding light shines in through the window. He begins to sort out things on the table. Putting the music away neatly in a small box. Eventually he discovers a song, the simple upbeat little pop song, Ricky Nelson's Poor Little Fool. As it plays he cannot help smiling wickedly at the obvious incongruence of the Maker of Modern Finland, the Grand Architect and the popular songlines. Suddenly he reverts back to the music hall clown though he is older and the movements are somewhat out of step.

...Manners informal. Self-abnegation byzantine. Boom Boom as they cut you right down. Don't ever think you have me in so many words. Don't go asking about me when I've gone. Don't go gagging me with the saintliness of a priest. Don't ram me down your throats until I have no way back. And I have to tell you this even if I spoil the rest of the

century for you. (indicates himself) This isn't the loneliness of a lunatic. The suit is real. The cigars are real. The scent of a woman has been more than real. The show's real. The talking was real. The balloon was real. There is no clown and monkey here. If you don't believe this, then you're in trouble. If you reach the end of this century believing that we have all been so modern then you're in for a real shock. We are peripheral, we are insignificant. We are wounded. We are begging for legends... (He turns to the Compendium and thinks of reading. Finds another place and reads lucidly, mockingly) Listen to this: Often at work on multiple projects, the great Aalto intermingles ideas and details, an activity that might be seen to have led to less rigour in later buildings. It is of course no surprise that the legendary Aalto will remain the admired master of many different types of architects. He will survive all critics. He will become critic-proof. (He smiles). He died in 1976 at the age of 78.

Me... me... I'll never die... (He hurls the book out of the stage. Huge crash is heard. Looks peculiar at first and then smiles)

Have I died then? Oh, Little Alvaro... poor little fool...

14 years of loneliness to go. Little Alvaro did this. Little
Alvaro did that. Little Alvaro was never schematic. Little
Alvaro was cunning. Little Alvaro was never theoretical.

Little Alvaro knew the blur made of everything meant to be precise. Little Alvaro never felt complete communication possible. Little Alvaro stayed young because he couldn't develop consistently. Little Alvaro invented places anywhere but here. Little Alvaro was savage... and noble... and sentimental... and promiscuous... Little Alvaro never wrote about architecture... Little Alvaro was a genius... poor little fool oh yeah I was a fool ah hah... Have I died then? To design the good life for a regional world... poor little fool oh yeah I was a fool ah hah... No longer will I exist but in theses, in stories, in anecdotes, in lies, in fiction, in guidebooks, in testaments, in wills. (pause) How long will it take before I become a postage stamp? How long before God forbid I become banknote? (Slowly a projection of thepre-Euro fiftyFinn mark banknote appears in giant scale at the back of the stage. He looks back.)

Damn it. And a fifty mark one at that. Watch Sibelius get the 100 mark note. What sort of achievement is that? What does it feel like having money with your face on? Having fingers all over you for eternity? Half a life. Half a one hundred marks. Half a Sibelius. Enough to turn a man to drink... (Ricky Nelson's song fades out)

# the great pretenders

AA sits in exactly the same position, the huge image of the great architect on the banknote fades but remains in the background. A darkness takes over the stage. We see someone enter the stage and notice something on the floor. It is Wonder Boy. Bending down hoping for a disgarded stogie, Wonder Boy finds a particularly filthy 50 Fmk. banknote. Wonder Boy and Turbo now live in this city called Solitude. Hardly recognisable, both extremely unkempt, old with straggly beards, both carry plastic bags. One of the bags chinks with bottles. They scavenge. The other bag is full of discarded computer hard-disks which they try and sell along with random software. The cocktail trolley they use to push things around the city is derelict but vaguely recognisable. (It is the reconstructed version of the trolley they destroyed in Act 1.) It has a drip feed connected to it and a pig tied on a lead trailing from it. AA remains unmoving. They stare at the banknote. Wonder Boy holds it up to the light.

Wonder Boy: Turbo, look.

Turbo: Who's the geezer?

Wonder Boy: Christ knows!

Turbo: And he's not telling (digs Wonder Boy in the ribs and coughs. Wonder Boy looks disgusted at this jape)
Sorry, your Lordship.

Wonder Boy: No pray dear Sir, finish the sarcasm you began. Add more cynicism. Change your mind even more. It becomes you, (looks at the piq tied up) Pig!

Turbo: Oh your majesty (with a flourish) 'professeur', do beg pardon if my words no longer countenance a smile, if my hair is no longer ready to go, and my chinos no longer look pressed. Perhaps you majesty would like the conversation changing.

Wonder Boy: (ignoring this and looking at the banknote)

It's familiar.

Turbo: Let us talk of the critical downfall of Modernism!

Wonder Boy: (still looking at the picture) I know him. I mean we knew him. He's famous. Or was.

Turbo: (now his turn to ignore) and we could rewrite our theses. We could also pretend we were back at University. You remember lecturing to all those able bodied female architecture students (lets out a lecherous cry). You know. The ones you took into the store room, the ones whose thighs you stroked and then stonked before the lecture. By the way how was your last paternity suit?

Wonder Boy: What are you dribbling on about? You'll go back on the drip soon if you're not careful. You know that the doctor said.

Turbo: (still ignoring this) Modernism! That's what I'm talking about.

Wonder Boy: What?

Turbo: (professorially) An intellectual movement in the arts ensuring that repetition in all other movements comes to an end. Got it, ass-brain. Everything stands

still. Everything is from hence onwards, always and forever (flourish) Modern. Punkt. Slut!

Wonder Boy: Metatwaddle, Turbo. How many times have I told you. You'll be back inside the sanatorium if you persist in talking dirty. (returns to banknote, then looks around) Christ, if only we could get out of here.

Turbo: I only asked who's the geezer.

They make up and hug.

Wonder Boy: Ah Turbo, mon ami!

Turbo: Ah Wonder-Boy, mon bonbon!

Wonder Boy: (returning to banknote) I can't quite place him. I should know him.

Turbo: Some freak.

Wonder Boy: Wife-molester perhaps.

Turbo: Yeah looks slick. Slick as steel. (They both look again harder) Can you remember anything?

Wonder Boy: No!

Turbo: Anyone?

Wonder Boy: No.

Turbo: Nor I since the hypnosis.

Wonder Boy: But you had the vision surely. The big one.

You met the man.

Turbo: What?

Wonder Boy: (shouts) You had a vision. Once! Surely? A dream. An idea. Architecture?

Remember? Revolution ain't no picnic! Violence is allowed. Ugh? Ugh? (he grunts crudely)

Turbo: No need to shout.

AA has got up and as a very old man shuffles across again in front of Turbo this time part humming, part singing The Great Pretender. In his hand a whisky bottle. As he encircles them almost invisibly Turbo and Wonder Boy look on and then as if recognising:

Turbo/Wonder Boy: (simultaneously) Isn't that? Don't you?

Wonder Boy: Oh, pardon.

Turbo: After you.

Wonder Boy: No, after you.

Turbo: I interrupted you, Swamp-face!

Wonder Boy: On the contrary, Dung-hole!

They glare at each other as angrily as they can manage without falling over. The old man finds the remains of a machine on the floor. It is a compact disk player and he sets about exploring it. He notices the pig and grunts at it. He discovers the trolley and stands back, slyly smiling, admiring its usefulness. He finds a book, the remnants of a compendium. He looks and then throws it away. The pig begins eating it. They return to look at the banknote. As if...

Wonder Boy: Ceremonious humanist looks like!

Turbo: Metaphysical Modernist to me!

Wonder Boy: Quintessential 20th Century man to me.

Turbo: Cunnilungus Humanist, Cretin!

Wonder Boy: Finish your phrase, Professor!

Turbo: Finish your own, Maggot-head!

They look at each other. AA looks up. Silence. Wonder Boy and Turbo draw closer. Their Heads meet. They stare at the banknote. They smile.

Wonder Boy: Axe-head. Piss-brain.

Turbo: That's it. (very loudly) The idea. Dialectics. How many years have we forgotten to abuse each other. Let's pretend to be alive again. Revolution is no picnic... (coughs appallingly and looks as if about to die)

Wonder Boy: Ooh, you mean, we can, we can be dialectic and dogmatic again. You ..you

Turbo: You - violated fragment.

Wonder Boy: (dismissive) Forester!

Turbo: Ow! (pause - hesitant) Absolutist!

Wonder-Boy: Hard disk whore.

Turbo: Mao-Boy!

Wonder-Boy: Console cretin!

Turbo: That's it. Drip-feed brain. (shouts)

Wonder-Boy: Digital nose-picker!

Turbo: Muff diver!

Wonder Boy: Skirt chaser!

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During this they have encircled the old man

unknowingly in a frenzy.

They announce the next words to each other whilst

hovering over him.

Wonder Boy: (pause and smile) Mother's boy!

Turbo: Ouch. (pause then raises voice into immense

scream) Post-Modernist!

Wonder Boy: Ooooh... (pause) Deconstructivist

Turbu: Ouch

The old man lifts his head. He manages a look at the

smashed cocktail trolley. Glint of recognition again

and a smile. From the floor, he begins to release the

pig as they continue to encircle him shouting at each

other. AA tries to get up and then sits down again as

if collapsed by their attack. He has now managed to

release the pig and is quietly triumphant.

Turbo and Wonder Boy: Ooh. (summoning all energy and

final venom) Architect!

The pig squeels. The two revolutionaries collapse on

themselves coughing and spluttering. In the dark the

feintest of smiles appears and grows triumphantly

on the old man's face as it shows it energy and youth

once more, and the dapper figure suddenly transforms

once more. Finally back-lit, cigarette smoke, the light grows on the huge banknote, and Jimmy Scott's song 'Heaven' plays out. All lights fade slowly whilst the neon sign 'Heaven' come back on.

#### a karaoke bar called heaven

#### epilogue

The Chorus enters, all hooded. Monk-like, the leader chants the following with a microphone, the chorus shouts each final lines.

Chorus Leader: Are we ready, is this it?

Do we allow him just to sit?

Is that his chair, the famous one?

Chorus: Still allowed a little fun?

CL: This, for the Undecided, rather more a lonely guideTo Planet Architecture, hands now so securely tied.And for clues from the suburbs, one need only standC: At the traffic lights, in the cold of an urban desert land.

CL: Some architects then, throw God's dice,

Disguise the source, reincarnate the mice

Whilst Men and Others have, for another galaxy,
already left

- C: To surf another universe, Planet Architecture bereft.
- CL: And what would he have done is more the pity

  If not discover Asplund in this cold water city?

  So donkies, give credit where credit's due.
- C: Search elsewhere, for that lonely lonely clue
- CL: Once a noble savage proud.

  Detached himself from the crowd,

  As the other pioneers frothed and fumed
- C: And the twentieth century lay doomed.
- CL: In excess, in shame, in guilt and pity,

  They searched every word for something witty.

  Turned him over, like a kebab in his grave,
- C: Nothing sacred left to save.
- CL: To get away with such heathen game

  Is to know how genius must handle fame.

  And to be treated like a child, is something we must

  own
- C: So afraid of the dark, so afraid to be alone.
- CL: Yet how little of the Architect do we really know
  From Leino's diaries to call girls in the snow
  From MIT Cambridge, as if only for a while
- C: Little Alvaro needed this creeping architectural exile.

The leader-monk slowly exits as The Real Alvar Aalto enters. Not the invented one. Not the Aalto-Ego, but the real one! He is impeccably dressed as he would have been in the early sixties Double-breasted suit just signs of slightly popping at the buttons. With great presence, he surveys the scene, walks around the residue and the revolutionaries as if the ruins of a life unlived, untold. He is imperious, mischievous, wicked, seductive and dangerously charismatic. He sits in a deep chair, and takes up the microphone left by the chorus leader. The neon light 'Heaven' continues to blink on and off. Great dignity, immense elegance.

AA: The Real Alvar Aalto... is that what you want? You know what Picasso's mother's reaction was when she heard her son had taken to the pen? They tell me you are writing, Mrs Picasso said to her son. Well, Pablo, I believe for you everything is possible. If one day they tell me you have said mass, I will believe that too. Now tell me, what other truths or anecdotes do you need to make this connection? I guess, Picasso once said, I'll die without ever having loved. I could have said the same words. Why? Well, the loss of my first wife Aino to cancer in 1942 meant the end of things as I had known them. She was much more than a wife. And nobody has clome close to realising how important she was. I admit I have led a few people astray but it is clear to anyone who

delves just a little deeper. I became more and less human at that moment. How can I support this statement? I can't really. But the forbidden in our lives we easily disguise. They draw us to arguments that will appear at first ridiculous. You see there is no such thing as an accurate picture of the real Aalto, me, here and now. You remember that time, it must have been the fifties, everything was plain sailing then, I was on top of the world, building things I never imagined I would. Modern architecture was saving the world. Oh the clouds were gathering but I didn't care. I had a good young friend who promised to write down everything about my life. What did I care for such accuracy? So I told him to forget about me and just write about my architecture. Clever in a way you see. I opted for anonymity, that ego-less curve that some of the monsters in twentieth century art have been able to throw back at their critics. You see, I knew those clouds were gathering. I knew one decade on I would be dining out with Kings and Queens, the next I would be vilified. I didn't mean it to backfire of course, but I can see now it made me more arrogant and yes, generous. The subtlety wasn't mine, I just chanced upon it. The era did the rest. So, of course you will need to re-consider my triumph. Some of you will want to make of me a monster. Go ahead. It doesn't take much shuffling around my life and the things I have said to do this. And the more you will think it possible, the more you will become fashioned by the image of a monster. And here Picasso won't save you, or me. Oh, you may not compare the acts of a monster like Picasso with mine, but you will be drawn to the parallels. It is inescapable. By the end of this century you will be convinced that the whole hundred years of Modernism has been guided by such monsters. Freud, Duschamp, Picasso, Strindberg, Sibelius, Dali. You kill the woman, Picasso said, and you wipe out the past she represents. How wrong Picasso was. But then monsters know very little about themselves...they complain at the dregs of a life they don't realise they have lived. They are bewildered at the lip service paid to their work and forget their little life's ambiguities. The books come and go, even the theatre will attempt something. One-hand clapping, that sort of thing?

(pause, puts the microphone down and pours a drink)

Did I deserve all this? Was I the only game in town? Did I deserve to reach this age, buttons slightly popping on my tailored suit, alone but impeccably dressed? Are you now wondering after all this whether my architecture was really so skilful as to be considered a mere joke? Was I rescued at the end of the last century? Am I now a saint to go with the legend I always was? Is that what you think? And how you muse, some of you sitting on chairs I designed; can a country turn on one of its own so?

He gets up and meanders around the stage, pausing, thinking of speaking and addressing the audience, then wandering again. Ad-lib time, stand-up comedy time, as he delivers his lines in all the 'Aaltos' he has become.

AA: Here, let me tell you something. Come closer. Frankie knew this. Miserable Mies knew this. El Cee knew this. When loneliness becomes so common, when it is impossible to escape it, it is also impossible to admit to it. The tragedy is not in being misunderstood. The tragedy comes when you try to right those misunderstandings....How did I get all those commissions, you're thinking. How did I get to build so many buildings? How did I turn Modernism on its head? You'd like to know? Luck? Remember the old saying: 'Danger, charisma up ahead.' Beware the fox! Remember too, those without it, without charisma, end up in oblivion, ignored, building 95% of the architecture that goes unnoticed. An error you say, an almighty error? Hah, you should be with Augusto up there in his Blue Tower in Stockholm. All our lives are based on error anyway. Some just happen to be more fortunate. And some of us just happen to have others around, to interpret our life on the contrary. It's like an Alter-ego.

(dreams to Dinah Washington again...)

...what a difference a day makes... there's a rainbow before... it's heaven when you find romance on your menu... what a difference a day made... No, look around you. The tragedy is simpler. The language only confuses us. I, the real Alvar Aalto, by consenting to the theatrical, by dressing up in football gear, have contributed to a fake history. And my future? Listen, and listen carefully: I will be written off in this century as a fake version of the last century. Mark my words! (He starts trying to tidy up as a stage hand but when other stage hands begin entering, he realises it is futile)

...You know all those plywood chairs, the three legged stools, the wavy lines and that vase like an eskimo woman's nickers? Well, it all came to me one day when I was out driving with my old friend Lasse. Back then he was our driver. Back then, around 1917, I was drawing in a small sauna building, I was dreaming of architecture. That was my first office, a little shed by the road near Mammula. Mammula was our family house. Nice house, ghostly, but nice. Lasse used to pick me and my brothers up in a horse and carriage and off we went to chase skirt. You wouldn't have recognised me then. I was, well, so damn ordinary. I had funny ears that stuck out. And you certainly couldn't imagine me as an architect. I was, how shall I put it, rather vacant, stupid-looking even I suppose. I was always in my own world, wherever that really was. I had no real idea.

And though we had a blue Chevy, this was only used by the family. Instead Lasse would pick me up in a Ford. Once I remember, must have been mid-twenties when we went to Pylkönmäki. I'll pronounce it because I know you can't. Pylkönmaki. We had to go and look at the church there. It was one of my first works. We arrived. We sat. We both looked at the church. Then we sat there again, as Finns do, in a pew for a while. A long while. We said nothing, as us Finns do, and then we went home, as us Finns do. I hadn't even enough money for a cup of coffee in those days. It was Lasse who used to fork out for them at a kiosk in Alajärvi. Coffee and a cinnamon bun. The buns were usually stale, and Lasse always said without fail, each time we had those buns, "these buns must have been run over by a train". "Run over by a train" always killed me, and we'd laugh all the way home...

## (he is dreamily disappearing now)

...On another trip to Kuortane, I remember noticing those long houses with nine windows, all facing the road. Handsome houses, they were, and all in good condition too. No room at all, though. You had to sleep with your toes sticking out of the window. Lasse found that funny. Lasse would drive for miles and miles, weaving and meandering around the countryside. We had nowhere to go and I just couldn't help thinking that I'd got to get out of this place.

I was interested in women first, then architecture. I got to thinking of these curvy movements as the car swerved and threw us all over the place. I just kept muttering under my breath! Then it dawned on me. I turned to Lasse and asked: "Can you bend wood as soft as a woman's thigh?" Lasse looked at me as if I was a sandwich short of a picnic. Kind of stupid like. Then after a good long time he said: "Course you can, stupid. How do you think they make skiis! Idiot." Lasse usually spoke like that. "In Vimpeli there are eight ski factories!" He said shouting at me. "When you soak wood in hot water, you can bend it any which way!" That was it, you see. That was the breakthrough... Everything followed from that moment. The chair thing. The lake thing. The glass thing. The woman thing. The wavy architecture thing. The modern thing. I knew it then. I was out. I was gone. I had no need to go back. And it was Lasse who solved it all, not me. It was him who was driving and swerving all over the road, slalom like for a bit of fun. And it was Lasse who knew about bending wood. He gave me the inspiration for all that, for all my architecture! For everything.

The neon Heaven sign keeps blinking on and off for some moments. Then stops. The very last image of Aalto appears, then long fade.





## l'uomo sublime

## optional epilogue in the karaoke bar called heaven

This is Solitude City, circa 2018, a kareoke bar called Heaven. The room is circular. AA remains sitting in the position he was at the end of the play. Lighting alters his profile and he looks just as dapper as he used to be. He is the victor not the vanquished, a proud profile. There is a, Japanese feel to the room but it is done in a somewhat neon luxury-liner over-kill. There is a large screen upon which the words of songs are shown up against a backdrop. The backdrop is an image, the same image of Alvar Aalto in profile as is used on the old pre-Euro 50 Finmark note.

Around the bar sit various 21st century 'pilgrims', Aaltomaniacs, critics, professors, seekers and groupies. People who travel and take back their images, their memories of the architect and edit them into a picture of the country or those that confirm what they have always thought about Modern Architecture and Alvar Aalto. Some pilgrims get up and attempt to take a verse each of the karaoke song. One, a Japanese Student, sits in reverence and then with Zen-awe approaches the machine, presses a number, and the following song comes on the Karaoke - the melody is a synthesised version of the Simon and Garfunkel song Mrs Robinson. AA continues to sit in what is left of the Aalto chair and still appears unmoved.

As the words of the song appear it is not sure whether he listens or not, whether he is alive still or not. The microphone is passed to the hands of one of the pilgrims, a Visiting Professor for example who returns to Little Rock University to lecture on Aalto and apply for tenure. Throughout the epilogue the microphone is passed on to various pilgrims like a baton in a relay race. They stand but none of them sing. The Chorus enters and exits one last time looking like singing monks.

Professor 1: Are we ready, is this it?

Do we allow him just to sit?

Is that his chair, the famous one?

Chorus: Still allowed a little fun?

Aaltomaniac: And there's Alvar again, in the corner, without opinion

In double-breasted suit, losing yet another religion Oh Alvar, Gent sublime, if only you knew,

Chorus: What this century will do to you.

Professor 2: Leader: Your childhood, your women, your shoes, your boat

Even your birthday suit, photographs, your coat,

All into the modern wash

Chorus: Everyone murmuring: Oh my gosh!

Critical Historian: Sent to Viipuri on a very, very slow train

To recite a thousand times just to relieve the pain

Nemo propheta in Patria! Sadly just a game!

Chorus: So Architect, to what do we owe your fame?

Student: If not the ability to dip and swerve.

Throw Arkkiteccia one final curve

Don't wait and see just what predictability invent

Chorus: Lifetime Legend, National Project, Functionalist spent?

Bridegroom: For if you do

You will be buried once again.

A Dead Soul brought out,

Chorus: Just for the champagne.

(music begins to become louder)

Dee deee deee deee... Doo Do DooooDooo...
And here's to you dearest Alvar Dear
Critics love you more than you will know

Whoa whoa whoa

The microphone is passed to a European who sketches, photographs and traces Aalto's penchant for Italianate and Mediterranean influences yet again.

God Bless you please, L'Uomo Sublime Immortal is the place for those who pray Hey hey hey hey hey

The microphone is shared by a young Scholar who will always find something 'new' in Aalto.

We'd like to know a little more about you for our files
We'd like to help you learn to help yourself
Look around you all you see are simulated eyes
Stroll around the world until you feel at home

And here's to you Mister Aalto, Sir Modernists love you more than you know Whoa whoa whoa

The Genius Loci freak seeing Genius Loci in everything Finnish joins in for the chorus.

God Bless you please, Mister Aalto, Sir Architecture holds a place for those who play Hey hey hey Hey hey hey

They pass on the microphone to an Architect who remember the Fifties and how they accused Aalto of 'skimming cream from Le Corbusier's milk'.

Form is a hiding place where no one ever goes

Put in the monograph all your mistakes

It's a little secret just the Aaltonen's affair Most of all you must hid it from the kids

> He is joined by an Architect who visits Aalto works not knowing what it means to say "Aalto skimmed the cream off Le Corbusier's milk."

Koo koo kachoo Dearest Alvar Do Rousseau loves you more than you will know Whoa whoa whoa

God Bless you please, dearest Alvar do

Millenniums hold a place for those who play

Hey hey hey Hey hey hey

A Symbolist looking for symbolism takes over!

Sitting on a sofa in the Savoy's morning light Lying on the floor can be such a Bauhaus delight

Laugh about it, shout about it, it's they who have to choose Anywhichway you look at it you lose

The Symbolist is joined by a pilgrim who sees the dapper dressed man and the ability to charm just about every elegant woman in the room.

Where have you gone Charlie Jeanneret?
Nations turn their lonely eyes to you
Whoa whoa whoa
What's that you say dearest Alvar dear
Corbu went to swim and sailed away
Hey hey hey hey hey hey

They are joined for the chorus by a photographer who wonders at the man who could mix with the best of the world and yet tell bawdy jokes to his carpenters.

Do do do do do do De de de de de de DoDe DoDe DoDe DoDe

So here's to you dearest Alvar Dear
Architecture loves you more than you know
Whoa whoa whoa
Entropy is clear, dearest Alvar friend
Chaos holds a place for those who bend
Hey hey hey hey hey hey

They relinquish the microphone to a Fullbright Scholar searching Aalto for those attractive fundamental principles expressed in a few words. (Always only a few words!)

We'd like to learn to tilt the axis for a little while
We'd like to help the robot help itself
Turn it around and all you see are simulated eyes
Roll it across the screens until it feels at home

And here's to you, dearest Alvar Dear Theorists love you more than you ever knew Whoa whoa whoa

Repress with ease, dearest Alvar Dear

Cusping always holds a key for those who say

Hey hey hey Hey hey hey

Joined by an Architect now dressed in chinos and a blue blazer who forgets ever having attacked Aalto's type of modernism.

Drag the cursor, watch it go where no one ever goes

Erase the space as twilight unmasks your foes

It's a little secret just the computer's own affair

How genius arrives whilst Others sit and stare

Trio completed by the theorist looking for the heterogenic in Aalto and his abilty to waver within a normative model.

Koo koo kachoo, dearest Alvar Dear Finland loves you still, though you don't know Whoa whoa whoa

> They are pushed out of the way by a graffiti artist who wonders what is left out of the picture in order to be a hero.

After one hundred years, Dearest Alvar dear
The Hotel holds a place for those who pay
Hey hey hey Hey hey hey

Artist is joined by young schoolchildren sent on a school project to write an essay about heroes.

Sitting on the Lido with Le Corbusier's gels
Discussing cuckoo clocks with Orson Welles
Laugh about him until you have nothing left to choose
Anywhichway they looked at you, You lose

Where has it gone, this chic dis-figuring
Nations turned their shoulders far too late
Whoa Whoa Whoa
What's that you say dearest Alvar, dear
Don't stop the joke, don't ever let it go away
Hey hey hey hey hey hey

The rest - Born-Again Modernists who cursed Aalto for getting so much right - The Finnish Scholar who knows Aalto to be tyrannical, autocratic, censoring an architectural discourse in the 1950s, but sees this necessary to succeed - The Finnish professor pouring over Aalto's words, lectures and interviews for the aphoristic gem - The Finnish Professor on Sabbatical looking for a strict allegiance to a select modern code - and the Visitor who feels it a duty to 'see' Aalto but cannot understand all the fuss, all the inflation - sit around the room. All pilgrims at some time or other have been in a bar called Heaven.

AA has followed this though no one realises. The music is loud and the words go continuously,

unstoppable. At the end he sits and the lights fade. We see just cigar smoke, a chink, and then darkness. The image of Aalto remains on the huge karaoke screen as the music finishes and the pilgrims have left. It now looks as if designed as part of the room. The stage becomes brutally Hiroshima-white. There are no details or corners anywhere. On the floor are scattered remnants of computers, hard disks and assorted syringes and bottle empties.

## postscript

when the well runs dry

As Jimmy Scott puts it, you never miss the water 'till the well runs dry'. Joy and melancholy, mischief and brilliance, the uncouth and the charismatic, and an unapproachable aspect of 'wonder'! There is a story about the Jazz singer Jimmy Scott. A friend called Christian was travelling in Greece. The bus driver had put on some music, Jimmy Scott. After a very bumpy ride, ravines and cliffs, sheer drops and hairpin bends, it was time to get off the bus. Christian turned to the bus driver and said: 'Great music! The guy's great?' The bus driver looked at him. Christian looked back again. His look became menacing. 'Guy? Guy?'

the driver shouted, 'that's a woman!' With this he chased Christian off the bus. Over the years it never occurred to me to write much more about Alvar Aalto. But I was always hearing things about him, about his work, and it was always on the edge. There were the stories, the claims, the praise and the envy. There were the exaggerations, the intimacies and the silences. Misunderstanding and misreading grew. In Finland, in between the lines where colleagues or friends didn't say anything about Aalto they were of course always saying something 'indirectly' about Aalto. And anything about Aalto was about architecture! Alvar Aalto became a mirror to Finland, a mirror to Modern Architecture, to architectural promise and to just about everything. He was the same yet different person to everyone. And for different reasons! Aalto was also a convenient cipher for the international community: Robert Venturi and others could claim professional and intellectual support via Aalto for their own agendas. If Venturi spread the rumour that Aalto never wrote, Norman Foster could reiterate it as late as 1998. Aalto can be seen to represent the history of the hubris within the Modern Movement, whilst also representing Modernism's other tradition, a tradition that went hand in hand with a general disenchantment of Internationalism. During the Aalto Centenary (1998) Aalto studies offered an agenda of resistance and critical rehabilitation.

In a previous volume 'Aaltomania' (Helsinki 2000), I suggested that the critical density of work on Aalto toward the end of the 20th Century produced an 'over-writing' whereupon a threshold was reached. A sentimental desire to read the new century through Alvar Aalto in some way validated yet compensated the losses of the previous century. Just as in the times when Aalto was literally ostracised in his own society, once more a privileged politeness passed for scholarship. This politeness was dangerous, traces of an unqualified praise made it important to move on critically and question other ideas. That was when I decided to draw together completely different strands on Aalto in an attempt to set up quite 'another' Aalto discourse. I had begun them earlier. With the umpteen books, exhibitions and other paraphernalia emerging at the end of the 20th century and on into the 21st century, a generous and hospitable counter-discourse now seems more than timely.

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As most of the events in this play are invented, it goes without saying that this is a fictional work. But that is as far as it goes. Everything after is true, or as true as the alter ego feels it. Aalto Ego- Commedia dell'Aalto began in 1995 when I wrote to Gorän Schildt in Leros, Greece. For a year I had been exhibiting an installation on Aino and Alvar Aalto's glassware which I had called Aaltomania. The

show had begun in London, and was possibly on its way to Edinburgh School of Architecture. Though ostensibly to celebrate the 60 years of the well known Aalto 'amoebic' vase I proposed to vary each exhibition, hoping to bring a detached, somewhat fresh view whilst exploring new unrevealed aspects. I was seeking a way of displaying (in some visual form or another) the critical journey in relation to the way Alvar Aalto as an architect, hero, enemy and womaniser had been 'read', 'misread', 'interpreted' and 're-interpreted' in the 20th century. This was the pretext. I was not though out to defame Aalto in any way; I was more interested in what might have gone – and continued to this day - unrevealed in Finland itself.

Well aware of the blind hostility and unruly antagonism from the younger generation of architects in the 1960s towards Aalto, I expressed to Dr. Schildt the idea that the 'excesses' of those architects most vocal, hubristic and 'arrogant' in the 1960s and 1970s merely 'fronted' a whole misjudgement and opportunism around Aalto. These were also now many of the same architects responsible for a devastating turn towards a neo-conservative agenda at the end of the century and a quite stupendous re-occupation and rehabilitation of the architect they once so casually and irresponsibly trashed. I was sure Dr Schildt was the person to guide me in what seemed to be fickle changes and approaches to Aalto. Surely a man so close to the 'maestro'

as he was called would know only too well the ongoing desire to co-opt theory, practice and profession via his work and persona. Aalto was to become in the last two decades of the 20th century, nationally and internationally, more than a useful cipher. He would, I felt, be canonised and carnivalised until nothing recognisable remained. Therein a new Aalto would be born, the Saint of Contemporary Finnish architecture.

Perhaps greatness rides all this and survives, but the blindness of the behaviour of those in the 60s and 70s. and the 'cultural forgetting' that subsequently emerged indicated a desire to bend and even falsify the past to suit their own ideologies. Nothing wrong in that, Aalto would no doubt have said. Had he not done the same in his eclectic approach to architecture? But it did seem this needed approaching in a special way. Otherwise the results of this cultural and critical amnesia would be all around: professional opportunism in the present would succeed in falsifying a whole period, and then ultimately whole eras. Allowed to go on without cultural interrogation and self-critical processes, this would then falsify not only the architectural achievement of the era, the 20th century but of Alvar Aalto himself. This issue is wider than the Saint of Contemporary Finnish Architecture. This was not a question of getting the 'picture' of Aalto right but a serious question of re-dressing the balance of exaggeration and claim. Aalto as a cipher would be closed off to those powerful few that had positions. A critical weakness, an alibi of silence and an agenda of thinness and confusion would once again echo the 1960s and 1970s and become useful but highly damaging self-censorship.

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In London in 1995 I continued the journey. I installed all Aalto's glass as a chess set. I wanted two actors to play chess with them: dressed in raffish clothes and white gloves they would perform the game in mimic moves. They would become 'mimic men'. At the time installations in semipermanent art galleries could not also become theatre. The idea was shelved in favour of a static show. Beautiful photographs were taken by a leading British photographer and then stolen by someone from Orefors in Sweden who promised to return them. They never came back. History loses itself. In London we ran a seminar on Cultural Myth and Design. I wanted to invite Dr Schildt to lecture on the Critical Misreadings of Aalto over the century; but I resisted as I felt it put him under undue strain. I knew he had not been so well and that he would be busy and may have little time to help. I felt however that in all his books and writings on Aalto there was something that hadn't been passed on. I was not sure what it was, but I felt it important that the knowledge about Aalto as a person remained somewhat sketchy or then a little too controlled for my liking. In a country where real friendship is so often scarce, a brief response from Dr.Schildt led me to send a second letter.

My assessment of the Aalto readings was becoming more and more pessimistic, the more critics and writers wanted to write him down and write him out. I felt. especially outsiders - which of course included me - either ended up wilfully misunderstanding the man and his architecture or then, in a way to remain sane, patronised the man and his architecture with hollow, sometimes clever, interpretations and dubious privilege. I read through the cleverness of critics like Colin St.John Wilson, Porphyrios, Frampton, Weston, Quantrill, Curtis and others feeling no longer any interest in the merry-go-round of the Finnish architectural myth. So much was closed by familiarity, rivalry and history. I could only see total lack of exchange and serious debate. A lack of exchange I felt the society was somehow comfortable with; strangely pleased that no one really could penetrate the culture. Thus myths became useful strategies to prolong other myths. Critically Finnish architecture was in a total mess. Around the same time I was asked to write a piece for an American University Press with the loose title of 'Silence in Architecture.' It seemed to me another demonstration of critical and cultural imposition from 'beyond'. It could only be self-justifying and in that way was not a long way from the issues I wanted to look at in relation to Aalto.

As I completed this working essay on silence, as the text came so fluently, so rapidly, I felt I was merely miming the knowledge I had gained so far about Finland and Finnish architecture. It was a kind of re-working of all that knowledge that I had gained. But it was nothing more, when in fact I wanted to go deeper, somewhere else. I was merely rehearsing some ridiculous notions of privilege in relation to the subject (architecture) and the culture (Finnish). It was hollow, but cleverly hollow. It was thin, but cleverly thickened. Naturally I was aware of insight amidst the error. In fact I put generalisation into error purposely to make the point of estranged knowledge. V.S. Naipaul refers to this somewhere as 'joke knowledge' in his meditative novel The Enigma of Arrival. This latter, the estrangement of knowledge, seemed to me to be the clue I needed for the Aalto work. But why do we mimic knowledge? It felt wondrous to race through the text like Samuel Johnson did for his writings in The Idler. I seemed to be disgusted at the limits of this knowledge whilst at the same time elated. Yet, I believed there was something worth saying even if it would face instant rejection. Perhaps this was the last illusion; beyond this the reality of architectural power begins. If the so called Archive is so predisposed in Finland to remain closed to Alvar Aalto, then I now wished to make one last attempt.

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At this stage the 'project' was still a series of essays about the state of knowledge in Finnish architecture, about the archive itself. It was also about privilege, fraudulence and rivalry in the architectural world. I proposed extending this essay into a small book with the working title, Repressive Silence. Suddenly I could write about the Salad Days of Marxism-Leninisim (The Politicization of Architecture). Aalto as Cipher and all those misreadings. I could do all this in relation to the privilege and organisation of knowledge and favoured and fashionable architectural discourse(s) that the Finnish architects pretended not to know. I felt I was onto something. This mimicry would be invaluable help towards re-inventing Alvar Aalto and at the same time open a closed archive. I thought Dr Schildt could and might correct some of the generalisations, myths and 'true lies' about Aalto. I though he could provide further insight into what was becoming a self-correcting exercise. This exercise would allow the reader to see how generalisation and cliche, how favour and mystery, have conditioned the discourse on Alvar Aalto. I even enclosed a working synopsis of the book called TENDER IS THE NORTH, A Critique of Repressive Silence: I Shadowlands (The Centre of the Periphery) 2 The Archive Strikes Back - Reading Emptiness /Constructing Silence - (The Journey of Self) 3
The Dance Hall Days (The Politicisation of Architecture) 4
Waving not Drowning (Aalto as Cipher-Misreading Aalto)
5 Repressive Silence(Lost Urbanism & Myths of Clarity ).
The Finnish publisher with whom I had previously worked continued to show scant interest in anything outside the normative production on Aalto. I deflated, lost interest and went silent on myself.

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After almost another year and a reply from Dr. Schildt, the project continued. It was rather obvious by the silence I encountered - when presented to various people in Finland – that the concerns and issues I was trying to bring up on Alvar Aalto were unfashionable at best, unwanted at worst. I came to the conclusion that my own singular research and writing was hardly desirable especially as we were now approaching the zero year, the year 1998, Alvar Aalto's centenary. Signs were that an over-promotional period of national coherence and identity was about to start. Talking up the celebratory in Aalto at the expense of things serious and critical I felt would be a huge mistake that the Finnish culture was continuing to make. But the mimicry went on. Aalto-sightings and research anticipated the cultural re-habilitation of Aalto and began to look decidedly distasteful. Though some insight might result, I was convinced this appropriation of Aalto as cipher, cultural property, national identity and general man for all seasons - the Saint of Critical Humanism - would become more than alarming. It looked as if it was likely to miss the point of Aalto´s real significance and contribution to this century, to architecture, to the country. I sensed the Centenary would produce a re-invented image of the man as an intended image of the work. The rest of Alvar Aalto, whatever remained, would be lost sight of.

It soon became obvious that the aspects I was interested in were complimented by a statement made by Dr. Schildt in one of his letters where he claimed that Aalto in fact possessed no ego. It seemed impossible to me that the happy go lucky man-about-town, the waggish Alvar Aalto could not, in his quietest moments, have had that other side where he faced his own destiny, where he talked to his own soul. Dr Schildt insisted that Aalto rarely interrogated himself and would not, until possibly the last years, have ever entertained the 'ego'. Aalto-ego! I had my study instantly. But it was nothing that could be expressed in an exhibition. Events coincided. Having worked tirelessly on a television script (Hotelli Suovesi) that was eventually rejected after being encouraged by the Finnish television, I suggested something with no idea how it would develop, or how it would even be written. I suggested a Musical called Aalto-Ego. The silence was deafening! Television offered the possibility of the careful relationship to scale and detail (through editing and the juxtaposition) of the actor's gesture and silence. With the use of close up to balance drama, it could gain in intimacy as the piece proceeded. That it could also gain intensity and quietness towards the end seemed obvious. I had little time to prepare any papers and introduced it rather simply, off the cuff, in a meeting with television producers and managers. I invented quickly. The lighting begins dark, almost black. The only thing visible at first is the smoke rising from the cigar. The darkness progresses gradually and indiscernibly until the end of the drama it is a full white image with the man almost blanched out. Right up until the end, this man is in total control of his own show. The man is Alvar Aalto. Mostly monologues.

The monologues include ideas from the following: Fame, disappointment, opportunism, the 20th C, Le Corbusier, the jealousy of architects, the (un)bearable Nordic darkness, misunderstanding the language of architecture, philandering, humanism, Jean Arp, Leger, Sibelius, cigars and architecture, Chaplin, Kropotkin, Brunelleschi, Borromini, the wrong pioneers, Asplund, Ostberg and Markelius, shyness, failure, errors, legends... the death of a ladies man and loneliness, the Politicisation of Architecture, the Salad Days of Marxism-Leninism, the Necessity of Tyranny, Misunderstood Dictatorship,

analyses of Aalto's reviewers and buildings by Aalto himself... and so on. Whatever his mood, he is in control of the whole show. With the use of the pause button and his monologues the drama unwinds towards a quiet - not bitter - meditative and solitary, lonely end. There were blank faces in the meeting. The idea of a musical on someone like Alvar Aalto clearly bewildered the television producers. Even Sibelius or Paavo Nurmi had not been turned into a musical. How could Aalto possibly be the subject of a musical, let alone a TV drama? Initial comments were cautious. As is often the case they expressed continued interest without any intention of carrying on with the project. You get used to this mimicry of support. But Aalto-Ego? Was this not the impossible project worth attempting?

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I pressed on and wrote a reply to Dr Schildt the following, hinting at the failure of serious critical exchange in Finland: "In the light of the above and finding no real support or funding for my own work I am directing my concerns into a more 'impossible' project. I cannot see myself participating in this celebratory mode on Aalto. Instead I am writing a television drama on Aalto called AALTO-EGO. As I have worked in television and in film this suits the approach. I stress the idea is fictional. Set circa

1962 it 'maps out', in monologue form, the lost, forbidden even lonely inner speech of the other Aalto. Aalto-Ego might be way off the mark, and certainly those bent on only the uncritical celebratory will not appreciate it at all, but I do believe it has a form that can pose relevant questions. It is such questions and their exchange that can keep critical merit and achievement alive. Fiction or hyperbole, parody and humour can, I believe, point up and indicate areas in Aalto research and understanding that could remain forever buried if no one turns to the 'other' side. In your letter, your mention of error and misunderstanding, the paradox of skipping from theory to theory with scant understanding and a roguish wit was somewhat along the lines of how I had read Aalto and his approach to theory. That he made achievements and genius from such unrest is what I think we should study, and not the coherence and agenda into which he will be fitted by this or that expert or professor, visiting or otherwise. I also begin from the erroneous, and hope Aalto-Ego may stutter upon some hidden chance truth-fictions, as I like to call them. I feel it is exciting and un-burdensome to work this way and can only complement the critical approach rather than 'bury' Aalto once more as the hooligans did in the early 60s. Could I be that far off reality to see it from the other - Aalto-Ego - side?

"I wonder if you feel the same. I think now that only you are left with the 'real' contact to a measured and critical understanding of Aalto, his psychology, his gaming and error. I am convinced these latter aspects (amongst others) are as important as the meta-history and the grand narratives that Aalto is supposed to fit. I would like to send you the piece in working form later in the Autumn if you feel you'd like to see it and would be open to the 'impossible' in Aalto. You would have a lot to offer I am sure but I quite understand the pressure of your own work may exempt this. I am also indebted and humbled by your reply in English and am convinced your language skills outshine my own Finnish and French. Thus I apologise for replying again in English. I am, though, looking forward to your newest work and hope you get the chance to bring forward aspects of Aalto that will appear too paradoxical if the 'official' lines are allowed to run too deep. I will do my best in all the languages you have worked in to follow your references."

The letter ended there. In the meantime in the mid1990s I had approached the Italian critic and historian
Bruno Zevi about the possibility of writing a book on Aalto.
I had stressed that in the event of all the hagiography about
to appear in the Aalto Centenary would it not be useful to
have a new critical essay on Aalto. I imagined it along the
lines of the book I had already sketched out. Zevi agreed
and began suggesting a revision of the outline. He had only
one proviso: it should be an Anti-Aalto book. By this he

meant a form of parallel criticism not a form of negative criticism. I was well into developing the idea of Aalto Ego as an 'anti-Aalto' book when suddenly I received a fax from Italy. Aalto was put on hold. The series already had a book on Aalto and the Anti-Aalto diario silenzioso that I posed to Zevi, he felt, was either too brilliant to work, or too awful to entertain. The project was off.

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My letters to Dr Schildt got longer. The more I tried to work out Aalto's Ego the more I hoped Dr Schildt would come up with more clues to the persona. Whilst he offered nuggets which I expanded, I just asked more and more questions. By now a drama of sorts was in mind and was sketched in the next two long letters: "Your reply to my letter was encouraging and delightful. I am also very happy you have a chance to continue your own work and we may share - from different angles - this intriguing aspect of Aalto's ego. This pretence at objectivity is interesting and though I cannot fully explain it (or wouldn't wish to) I sense there is a consistent enigma within Aalto's understanding of his own self. Could it be something to do with the different and rapidly changing stages of his creative life? I do not know if you know the work of Anthony Storr but I have been reading his theories on solitude and creativity (Solitude & The Dynamics of Creation). In Solitude, Storr speaks of a typically creative artist's development as follows. I paraphrase: a first period of rare and genuine creativity where the artist does not quite find his/her own voice but develops ideas of great originality in different guises; by chance, through opportunism, desire and even genius. (Turun Sanomat, Paimio, Viipuri?) Then comes a second period when the maturity is 'fully' expressed. Here an individual contribution and 'voice' is discovered. In this case a signature, an originality belonging to the master/ maestro period. Usually this means reaching a wider audience and embraces everything that fame and success offers. (Mairea, New York Pavilion, MIT, even onto The Culture House & Vuoksenniska?) A third stage can follow where tiredness and repetition set in, where the audience is no longer reached nor desired. (Enso Gutzeit? Finlandia? Seinajoki?) Communication closes off. A detachment develops. This is accompanied by solitude, even despair and acute loneliness. In many writers (not architects?) it has often led to suicide. Of course, not all artists go through these stages though many that live longer can be seen to follow something like this pattern. Isolation results, passion is disposable, and a divine discontent and genius can even approach a slight madness. K. R. Eissler speaking of Leonardo de Vinci talks about the possibility of the 'genius', the maestro being able to make up and live by their own rules. These 'maestros' detach themselves even more and assume they can live beyond the usual criteria.

Surrounded by a court, protected by a form of intense flattery, it leads to a critical blindness to their work. In an architect's case this third stage might mean a production of less consistent, less masterly quality which - because of disinterest, jealousy and ostracism - can diminish the significance of the earlier masterly work. Thus it confuses the history of the artist and blurs the contribution and achievement.

"Is this not what may have happened to Aalto's contribution to the 20th Century? And why we begin to see such (uncritical) hero-worship in Finland? In a way this is the period (an imaginary third stage) I have set Aalto Ego - around 1962 when we might consider the third stage to begin, especially also when he was maligned so severely over the Enso-Gutzeit building. Does this have any resonance at all? I also think Aalto's Ego must have developed in a dualistic way. Was he not (as you have shown well in your books) the dapper gentleman at home in Finland and more often than not the (wild/untamed) 'Finn' abroad? Was he not able to manipulate and play up to these characters, thereby ensuring a mystery and enigma? And might this not be a mystery and space essential for him to get on with his own work? Reima Pietilä, for example, never played the gentleman. He was far too wrapped up in the enigma of the Finn, the backwoodsman. Though he too, played up to this 'wildness' both at home in Finland and abroad, with his mystic, shamanic lecturing and monologues; his own wandering approach. But Pietilä's mysticism came more obviously through his muttering rhetoric style and general 'erring' way of stumbling upon ideas and theory and then developing them according to his own language and neo-philosophical interests. He could change ideas and theory as fast as it seems Aalto changed persona with the people he encountered. But Pietilä was more infatuated by language and error than I think Aalto. And – possibly - more innocently playful?

"I agree with you that changing the ego with each person sets us a particular challenge to understand Aalto's own 'privacy'. I would like to think he wanted to preserve an inner world, away from the modish world which he got involved with (through CIAM) quite early on in his career. This might be only my invention. But I imagine performance and showmanship became something he had to play up to in order to survive. Did this come natural to him? Or did the son of the Surveyor learn quickly to adapt personality and character in service to this architectural world? Was Aalto ever able to detach himself from this 'circus'? Did he ever discuss such things with you? I found Pietilä able to do this, at least with me, through our various travels together when we were alone. A supreme confidence often gave way in Pietilä to tiredness, a fatigue at the necessity to 'perform' and - naturally - be misunderstood. Pietilä shared much of Aalto's wandering through theory and ideas though he seemed to enjoy it in a more cerebral playful way. It might also be why he turned out so few projects whilst trying to remain in control of every unfinished detail and idea in the buildings. I see Pietilä as a more tragic figure than classical genius; time might show that he could never lift himself quite to the greatness that his architectural thinking aspired to. This might also have a lot to do with the enormous presence of Aalto's shadow. Pietilä, though occasionally brought down to earth, seemed to enjoy remaining in this exciting, difficult (even highly ambiguous) misunderstood space of myth and (pre-) history.

"Perhaps Aalto was fortunately brought down to earth by his father's (objective) shadow; the no-nonsense surveyor and the 'assumed' accuracy and objectivity of dimension and measurement? Could this be why Aalto changed tack on theory to suit the enigma of never being identified? Did he speak of this or was he always dodging the psychological insights just as Pietilä did? Flicking from theory to theory suggests a restless mind. It also allows an apparent but superficial expertise. Sometime to get caught in ideas proves futile; did not Aalto have an intellect that knew he could only stay as long as fascination lasted? To acquire and apply in architecture more lasting philosophical test with the theories would have demanded a completely different schooling. Pietilä attempted to

invent it. Aalto seems to have had the sense to move on quickly and profitably for his actual architectural projects. Hence his production also is so much larger.

"I can see why Aalto loved historic life. Is there not something of the innocence and genuineness of a child discovering more and more in such places and worlds? Is it not also an alibi, a surrogate for what one seeks to find elsewhere than at home? Collage in architecture, massing and montage can be seen to provide a fabric, a way of including history and time as a patchwork within architectural projects. Such historic 'elsewhere' fascination seems normal, especially when we remember Aalto's beginnings. I would even follow Anthony Storr's clue and consider that Aalto's creativity and ego is so closely bound up with what Storr calls, 'the dynamic of the normal' rather than any extraordinary psychopathology. At home Aalto could identify himself precisely from his ability to be abroad and away from home. Perhaps also in the historic is this dream of the anonymous, of the need NOT to explain anything, not to theorize - but I am only guessing here. I would need to develop some of these ideas further. Stubbornness I think was necessary for Aalto's survival but how exactly did it manifest itself, in character, psychologically? We must remember how difficult it is to be heroic and famous in the extremely small-minded and rather envious Finnish society. How much of a split did Aalto's fame abroad cause in his mind? At what stage could Aalto turn this 'shyness' (?) into a performance and reach the maturity of the second stage of his life, I do not know. Did he do this by being a touch coquettish, an architect's architect, a ladies' man, a man who could also talk and tell brutal stories to the site workmen, or whisper in the ear of a Princess or President?

"And yet we must beware of explaining creative content and motive in terms of an artist's infantile past. This surely misses the point that all pasts are infantile to some extent, some more or less. Architecture like art can be a neurosis certainly or an activity sublimating other desires and repression. Perhaps we should look not at the catalogue of infantile disorder but at what stage, if any, this infantilism is left behind. Too much is made of an artist's peccadilloes, but that does not mean one can say they have no relevance at all. Coquetry and seduction, in relation to an audience, to women, played what role in Aalto's character and self-esteem? I feel the questions and motives of this way of living and surviving in and out of fame must have been questioned by Aalto - even indirectly - in the third stage of his life. Is this right? Was it not a lonely period, the last 10+ years of his life, despite being feted and revered? Or was he never able to explore this? Did he use his fame and reputation to keep himself in ignorance of the brutality of fame and achievement? I think you are much closer to the psyche that allowed Aalto to reach the top internationally and feel low and abused 'nationally' and I would like to hear your ideas on this.

"What sort of pressures and tension this puts on the architecture I cannot say but I think it important to write and talk about such things. I hope we can continue our exchange in whatever form it can take. I will try and get hold of the English/Finnish typescript of your book 'Aalto Speaks'. Could you tell me who your editor is at Otava so that I can contact directly and ask for this use? May I mention that you suggested it? I would also appreciate a copy of your lecture, even in Swedish as my wife can help me go through it. And you can be sure I will respect your ideas and later, if and when the TV drama goes ahead, will acknowledge your help. Once again I'm delighted to have this exchange with you and look forward to some lines if you feel you have some time."

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By this time I had begun reading and writing in a notebook imagined monologues of Aalto. I returned to Dr Schildt's books and also other books. Music suddenly became important and 'impossible'. I imagined a 60 year old Alvar Aalto sitting in the evenings drinking whisky, Vermouth or red wine and listening to Chet Baker or Frank

Sinatra. Anything but Sibelius! The set and scenography of the drama were forming. Dr Schildt had replied and expressed some reservation about the psychological drift I had expressed. He felt it explained little and I was left in a quandary as if Aalto either existed pre-psychologically, or then was beyond the domain of psychology itself. Impossible surely! "You are right," I replied, "and I also am wary of the personal genius scenario that psychologists like to see. The creative genius seems too trite to explain Aalto's stamina, range and contradictions. Your last letter mentioning Chaplin and a vagabondish spirit seems much more interesting dramatically. And I am also very interested in this aspect of disappointment."

I could not help but send back more and more question which must have been tiring to Dr Schildt. "To what extent was Aalto able to understand this 'misunderstanding' that you speak about? How much innocence remained in the genuine desire for architecture to correct a world sliding towards industrialised madness? And how did he register this disappointment to others? You suggested also that he seemed to exist only in the presence of others. Did this mean he sought company at all times? Was he ever able to be alone with himself, or did he seek solitude in other ways? Could an innocence or (comic-cinematic?) naivety have allowed Aalto to resist any artistic ego? Or can this be explained by his background, by the way he could alter

himself with anyone in any company? To alter so, suggests confidence, insecurity or restlessness. Or all three!"

Something inside me told me I would no longer get any further insight into these issues. If Dr Schildt knew, then it was his privilege to remain silent. I tried one last time about solitude. "I am again wary of making any parallels with Pietilä as I find his own solitude something very different from Aalto's. Yet, was there never a shyness with Aalto? Or was he able to adapt to each person he met even from the 1920s in Stockholm and before he joined up with the Functionalist 'gang'. I am aware that I must now re-read your book 'The Early Years'. I will do so." It was obvious also that I only had a lot of wonderful loose ends and really merely general traces. However it was from these that I realised I had to make the drama. Entirely fictional I felt was the only way to test the boundaries of our knowledge of Aalto in relation to all the litanies and inevitable critical rehabilitation. This was the mimicry that had to be tested. I had no idea what I would achieve (if anything) but fictionalising an Aalto-ego would also allow the inexpressible, even the unimaginable, to be expressed differently. Suddenly it was that very part of Aalto that would not be expressed, that would never find an outer speech. I was after an imaginary, impossible inner speech which was probably so far from the truth as to posit some truth from another direction. An Alter-ego after all is

that inseparable other who shares one's pursuits, who is a confidential representative. We slide away from truths about each other every moment.

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It was this that became the departure for the play. Now I knew it could be more like a music hall review (with music) and seemed to fit somewhat the Chaplinesque trace and pathos Dr.Schildt mentioned. I expected to have a draft ready by winter and promised to send it to Greece. Dr Schildt again replied from Leros and we met briefly in Helsinki without any time to discuss anything. His comments were immensely helpful in approaching the enigma that seemed to be Aalto. Dr schildt described Aalto's wanton, almost amnesiac behaviour and though it does not seem so unusual it intrigued me. It seemed to increase a mystery already mysterious and yet fitted the pattern of an allowable (artistic?) delinquency. I suddenly felt I was going further than anyone would want to go but alcoholism clearly might be important. I asked more questions: "Alcoholism surely plays a role in this (tragic?) behaviour but at what stage this occurred and at what stage it might have got out of control (if it did go out of control) only perhaps you and a few others know. Is it unreasonable, though, for an outsider detached as I would wish to be, to want to research this? Is it unreasonable to continue delving into what becomes some sort of 'secret life'? Should research let sleeping giants lie, misunderstood and maligned? And what can a personal understanding provide that a professional interpretation misses? Should we accept the so called genius/maestro that condones such behaviour whilst at the same time trying to understand Aalto's denial of any artistic ego? I cannot reconcile this paradox, and feel somewhat helpless in front of it. Perhaps one should not even try. I only have more and more questions to myself which I must find a way of handling. How Aalto's sovereign confidence was supported by a denial of the ego, by the envy, then consensus, of a small society and by his charisma seems key to this creation of a figure 'larger than life', plus all that this metaphor 'carries' with it."

In Dr Schildt's vagueness I saw precise hints. I was now already into the monologues and writing them out and down by letter. "Never being alone with oneself: reading this psychologically from a 'conventional' view suggests demons, fears and obsessions? I am not sure, though, if Aalto fits any conventional readings and what would they be anyway? Could Aalto have seen the real and hallucinatory in his promise for architecture change places? The hints you have given of 'insomnia' suggest a tragic end, a loneliness that even I had never imagined. I have always been reluctant to believe stories told by others but I wonder now just what happened in the last ten years

or so? Is it ridiculous to speak of a prolonged (interrupted/ arrested?) adolescence in parts of his character? Arrested parts that some psychologists think return later in life to haunt the character, especially in artistic endeavour where one assesses hopes, failures and achievements?" I was obviously not going to get any deeper without imagining another life. I had to invent. "And are such 'larger than life' figures encouraged, unstoppable or indulged more in smaller closed societies? (Iso Mies - Lauri Viita?) As I write the play I have wondered whether music had any role in Aalto's aesthetics? There seems no mention of it in any serious way. Could this mean there were no moments outside architecture, no moments alone (or with Aino, Elissa, children?) where music was listened to? Though Pietilä listened - and importantly made the time - to music, I always had the feeling that his brain was working all the time architecturally. Nothing outside architecture meant that he 'bent' everything to fit an architectural vision however wide or unfitting this vision might have been for the task involved."

I wondered whether Dr Schildt was picking up the tragic side of what was developing. Or had he already given up on my idea and was allowing me to dig my own critical and fictional grave? I addressed this issue so: "An attention to detail seems to have been crucial and yet unpredictable, even adventurous, with Aalto. Was this extended to clothes

(double breasted - tailored? suits, shoes etc.) the type of drinks (whisky, gin or other favourites?) and, even, cigars? Or is the cigar and a taste for certain whisky merely a fantasy expected of such larger than life big-worldly figures? I wonder how much energy Aalto devoted to such things; was it obsessive or was it taken care of by others? You probably realise now each new angle brings up for me a myriad 'fictional' and exciting possibilities. I am stumbling towards an understanding without getting there, which isn't I feel a bad way of proceeding with someone as interesting as Aalto. As I must get on with other work for my income I cannot proceed with Aalto-Ego as fast as I would like. I will however make my own guess and error at this question of the ego."

Let me also mention 'Writing Architecture'. The book by intention was open-ended. But I intend redressing comments I made in it in relation to Aalto and Pietilä. I am aware of the incompletion and inadequacy of my reading, also of my scant attention to your own work in this respect. For various reasons, I couldn't give it due proportion at the time. Since Pietilä's death and the passing years a new assessment of his role can I think be made. And it must also take on his own 'shadow' position (invented or not) to Aalto. I have finished 'The Mature Years', re-read 'The Early Years' and am now re-reading 'The Decisive Years'. The latter essays at the end of TEY - The Central

Themes in Aalto's Work - impressed me immensely on re-reading, culminating in Anarchism as an Architectural Principle. I am surprised that these points are not referred to more often or debated. As I go through other essays and anecdotes published after 1977 I find many of them already set off on their own track. This has continued up to the present often ignoring very clear signals from your own work. If I am at fault in this respect I intend also to address this error in later writing. Can I ask the following: has your own work and reception of it suffered similarly as Aalto's own critical acceptance went in and out of favour, only really to be respected in the last 10 years or so?

"I received the first four chapters of Alvar Aalto in His Own Words and read them with a fanaticism the very evening I received them. I will get the rest from Otava by the end of October. I was particularly impressed with some of the writing from the 20s and 30s. This type of clear writing on architecture is sadly missing today. Instead we have too often a type of loose, normative phenomenology writing. Aalto clearly does not write normative texts that claim to know dogmatically what architecture is, should do, should achieve etc. He is much more flexible, nearer the experimental and pragmatic 'touch' that a common sense phenomenology should invite. Nor did he claim for architecture experiences it cannot uphold or sustain; something he seemed clear about from the very beginning.

'In His Own Words' is a strong complementary volume to your other four volumes and I think it allows a reassessment of the work you have done and achieved. Some serious attention should be brought to it for indicating directions to re-read Aalto both for the present moment and in the historical context. I hope someone takes this on and gives the five volumes due critical attention. I appreciate having this exchange with you but I do not expect replies each time. I know your own time and work is precious. I am happy to be able to throw out some of my own errors before they might get published. I leave for India on Tuesday and return at the end of October. I send my best wishes for your Autumn in Greece. It must be wonderful."

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By December 1997 I had finished the draft of the play, Aalto Ego. I did not know what I imagined it to be nor what its final version and production form could be, but it began to suggest its own structure. But the idea of a Commedia dell'Aalto also formed as I wrote the introduction. The more I researched, the more people I spoke to, those who refused to speak about Aalto or insisted on having their own 'truths' to tell, the more the fictional approach was the only one possible. I was in no doubt that Dr Schildt and others were in possession of details about Alvar Aalto that would either invalidate some of my ideas or

then - possibly - echo them in an accidental, indirect way. Suddenly I imagined those coming after might lose sight of the forceful stamina, the humour, generous ambiguity and charismatic energy that Aalto must have had to create such an extraordinary oeuvre. To be unpredictable and achieve so much was no mean achievement in the century. To this end I wrote Aalto Ego as a Commedia dell'Aalto, as a series of exercises around this gentle dictator. I hoped, too, the mask and imperfections in the play not only revealed the fun and seriousness but also revealed the 'hooligans' that in part caused as much critical pain then in the 1960s and they would do again as they excavated Aalto once again in the 1990s for critical import. I intended the critical TV drama as a sympathetic picture of a great man's awakening to human error, but at the back of my mind I felt and knew Dr. Schildt would think I had gone too far.

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I was right in my suspicion. Knowing how far is too far and then continuing to go too far. That is what Dr. Schildt must have thought. He had read in my celebratory, tragedy, in the solitude, anxiety, and in all the innocence one thing only, death. Instead I read it more in the Sufi way, revelation. I sent him my last letter in Spring during the catastrophic Aalto Centenary Year:

"I must again thank you for your letter and your persistence with me. I am glad too that the Aalto-Ego playscript might have offered something, even in the way your own view of Aalto's Ego can be assessed. Our approaches are clearly different, inevitably and positively so. But I must stress I am not trying to capture Aalto's Ego but his alter ego. This is I feel something more problematic, more evasive and ultimately more impossible. Which, however, does not make it invalid! In as far as my text produces extreme, even fraudulent claims or truth-fictions, this is to me of interest especially with a Centenary doing more than its fair share to caress Aalto to yet another death. To the extent that my text is way off, wrong and inaccurate for me is represented by a more literal reading of it. I have attempted - albeit possibly failed - something else entirely.

"I feel this strongly - and I have said it before - only someone like you could approach the man and that nobody within Aalto (that 'nothingness' of the man without company). Without such a serious study much will be lost. Aalto will be subject to more and more in-exactitude. It will be fine to accept that he wanted only the work to be written about, the problems of architecture and not himself. But later, at a greater distance from source, these aspects will come. And they will I fear come from those who are more and more ambiguous, ambitious and producing more and more cloudiness. In a way my own Aalto-Ego demonstrates

this. It was not meant to follow more than the rudimentary of Aalto's known characteristics. By a form of distortion that moves towards the tragic, the nostalgic, even the chaotic struggle, I wanted to suggest the 'furious' loss of the inner-speech, the further-I, in our knowledge of Aalto. Take the cigar. For me by writing the impossible, by writing this from blindness, in-exactitude becomes the main thematic of the play. The drama then provides an inner speech (predisposed possibly by culture and nature); a speech forever lost, a speech in between the unpretentious space of the simple Klubi 7 cigar and the mimed knowledge of the other-worldly cigar fancier. Through this there is a link to epistemology, to the way architecture is mimed or not. I am afraid I become boring by repeating it - and I am sure in many ways you feel you have done your contribution which indeed is immense - but the ego and psyche of Aalto from your deeper knowledge would be invaluable.

"I do not intend pursuing this much further. The climate needs to settle from this immense critical admiration and in-exactitude. A new critical and intellectual life must be excavated for Aalto. You ask me, rhetorically, how I would explain that Aalto is prized so eagerly within both Europe and America. Without wanting to denigrate this admiration or Aalto's contribution, I suspect this has much to do with some extremely sophisticated and well-prepared salvage scenarios. Do we not see many redemptive critical

tactics that would not be part of Aalto's own energy if he were alive today, or indeed if he were trying to establish an architectural network in the middle of such contemporary uncertainty? Lifted out of this too-immediate history, Aalto's significance is to me greater than this. Which is why this is not a long way from what Herbert Muschamp said in The New York Times when reviewing the exhibition in MOMA in 1998: In retrospect it should be clearer that nationality was only part of what set him (Aalto) apart. His true distinction is that his architecture was ahead of its time. His work was an assault on binary thinking. the tendency to see things as either-or. This objective was similar to that undertaken in recent years by Robert Venturi, Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas. Regrettably this show fails to clarify the critical importance of this ambition, to Aalto and to ourselves.

"This is only one valid point amongst many. And you may not agree with me but the paradox is acute. Those in charge of guiding this critical ship into harbour, those connected with the Museum of Finnish Architecture, are the least likely to realise Aalto's greater significance. There is simply too much murkiness in their past and too much personal need to exonerate themselves from that past. The humanizing agenda, which you made clear in your own books, has not been extended by the writing in the MoMA catalogue. Instead we have a series of sophisticated and

somewhat laboured critical fidgetting. It is disappointing to see critical admiration reworking ideas and commenting on hints that you yourself have already made (take the Anarchy discussion you had in The Early Years. For me this has in it the basis of an extremely good and strong essay on Aalto's way of thinking and solving often contradictory problems). What I have read so far - and I have been through most of the texts now out - is merely a critical rehabilitation, some of it better than others, of your own material. All except Korvenmaa, Anderson and Curtis to some extent, provide known scenarios. Korvenmaa at least explores, in an elegant critical tradition, Aalto's industrial network and the relationship of this to his architectural possibility, talent and ambition."

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"The assault on the binary, the way Aalto fought the rationality of the cigar box, makes his strategies unique and extremely contemporary, both architecturally and professionally. The similarity to the professionalism and networking of some contemporary radicals is clear even if their agendas differ. Sadly the generation that has held these murky relationships to Aalto and those it brings along (like Frampton) for me will not lead us to greater insight or relevance for Aalto. It is not everyday that we can see history taking place. By history here I mean the narrowing

of events, coincidences, truths and untruths until they become inexact. I have no doubt that this is the course, the running line, of history itself. But rarely do we see it up front. Rarely do we see it acted out before our eyes. This year - 1998 - will I think prove such a narrowing on Aalto. From this time onwards I think, unless we are careful, it will only be possible to speak of Aalto as a phenomenon. (Perhaps it was this already some years ago). Aalto will become, if not already, that singular phenomenon that George Steiner speaks of when he discusses Wittgenstein's readings against Shakespeare. It is a bleak warning:

When the works pass out of the realm of normal valuation and become what modern physicists call 'a singularity': a

When the works pass out of the realm of normal valuation and become what modern physicists call 'a singularity'; a law and phenomenalism unto themselves. Much of this fascinating story remains opaque. A cluster of secondary figures seems to have played a crucial role.

"As a singular phenomenon is there any way back? Is there any way we can unlearn this imposition put on Aalto? Is there a way to undo the critical straitjacket applied? Do we even need to? Or will this collective, earnest and, of course, sincere critical admiration, paradoxically give more and more information for us ultimately to know less of the man and the work. Aalto becomes gift-wrapped. An intellectual critical shifting makes him singularly responsible for more collective efforts within the century. I sense how much this must tire you as well as perhaps intrigue you at the same

time. You witness people (like myself and others) engaged on the Aalto you were much closer to, saw more of, lived nearer to and have much deeper knowledge of. Though this does not invalidate my own approach, I expect it is near to doing that. Invalidation also results precisely because there have not been enough wider, more contemporary critical approaches applied to viewing Aalto's work as an architect and a professional. This year has made it clearer to me that Aalto needs to be rescued from the immediacy of historiography. I would beg you - though I know it is not my place nor have I any right to be so impertinent and stress this - but a personal study of the intellect, ego and attitude to architecture, life, people etc. - not of any titillating kind which I know you would not accept - would hold lasting keys to the future understanding of Aalto's 'radicality', conventionality and brilliance. This would lift him out of history at the same time as giving him a greater role in history. The gain would be intellectual and professional at a time when architects are so easily shunned and accused of elitist strategies. Would this not be the true reward of such a personal study and respect?

"For me personally, I will move elsewhere. Response is so minimal and inistently uninspiring in Finland except for the rare minds still willing to exchange ideas. I am tired, too, of the cluster of secondary figures. My new book Welcome to The Hotel Architecture (MIT Press, May 1998)

deals - in poetry - with the frauds we play on ourselves through philosophy and language. It is not unconnected with what I have said above. To stay outside the circles remains increasingly difficult but I am convinced I will do so, at whatever cost. I do not need to be instantly charitable to Aalto when I feel the greater charity and his contribution are being missed. The generation now in control of this critical ship as I said will fail to bring Aalto into harbour. This will be Aalto's saving. For his talent will be free to be re-assessed beyond these restricting agendas, both personal and professional. But it begins to look like any critical writing like this will be considered more radical that it is, even blasphemy, precisely because of the tameness of critical import so far produced. Critical discrimination is blurred.

"I hope to bring out a revised expanded edition, called Sa(l)vaged Modernism of my book The End of Finnish Architecture as, of all the books in that small series, it is the only one sold out. I will also further my own enquiry into the tricks we play on ourselves with our knowledge, mimed, assimilated or hijacked. To do this I must continue with myself and understand my own projections, my own problems - as you intimate - in the ego and social relations. I will investigate this further possibly in Harvard where I have been nominated to apply for a Loeb Fellowship. Who knows whether I will get it and what results from it. A study

– a text or a novel this time? - on how we use knowledge to reward our own selves, our own egos, to deflect our social relations inadequate as they may be. And to admit, like Thomas Merton, to the liar in ourselves is also to admit the grace in others. My best wishes for your spring. Please do not feel obliged to reply when I know you have much work to do. I am happy to have had this exchange and a note at any time will always be a delight."

Aalto Ego is a series of texts resulting from a set of parallel ventures into the world of Alvar Aalto, For anyone writing on and about Finnish architecture, Aalto is an unavoidable persona and in the last 20 years has been consistently critically gift-wrapped. His energy, contribution, useful contradictions have all been slowly 'stalinised' - if the word is acceptable - into a singularly self-closing critical interpretation, controlled within his own country by those architects and thinkers who showed little or no tolerance towards Aalto and his architecture throughout his life. Aalto also offers to critics abroad an attractive scenario picking up on his varyingly agonising romanticism, creative eclecticism and embarrassing monumentalism. Critics re-wording past insight ensured Aalto's critical rehabilitation in 1998 culminating in the MoMA Aalto Restrospective, Between Materialism and Humanism. The dynamics, the unpredictability and sheer ambiguous brilliance of Aalto were lost underneath the orchestrated critical praise, ultimately detaching an architectural community even further from Aalto's architect's serious contribution to 20th century architecture. An unsurprising but still alarming continuation of this unqualified critical drama has seen history 'unmade'. Within the umpteen books, critical texts, lectures, exhibitions and other paraphernalia emerging in the last 20 years on Aalto, a provocatively generous and hospitable counter-discourse is more than timely.

Through the introduction of this critical drama called Aalto Ego, we can also test out the sentences used on Aalto's work, life and architecture. 'Aalto-Ego' may not offer a different direction for future Aalto studies but it might just open up a crack. There is a more general point. Of course not all ideas may bear fruit but unless the 'myths' surrounding architects are revealed, unless the genius is less stroked, the lasting merits of an architect like Aalto and his contribution to 20th Century architecture may have already been lost in unnecessary sentiment and misleading critical schemes. In one way I could say that absolutely no one helped develop any of these ideas in this book yet everyone met along the way, when they spoke about Finnish architecture, have actually helped to 'write' this book. In this way Aalto Ego is scripted by 'the unnamable' out there, who always write books in the wind, in the sand and unwittingly and generously – helped on by a drink or two- allow their own words to take the shape of clouds. And so to the 'liltle man' in us all, the commedia dell'Aalto! The indefatigable and generous scholar Goran Schildt died this year (2009) on 24 March and I dedicate this to his memory in celebration of our direct, imperfect and unfinished conversation.

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Roger Connah 1995 - 1998 - 2004 - 2006 - 2009 - 2011

### no small talk

The Americans had an architect who was like a saint to them, Frank Lloyd Wright. I was over there and Frank thought we'd go out to eat in a fancy restaurant. They never dressed in anything less than a tuxedo and we had just our summer clothes. So Frank said we should just turn up our collars and they would let us in! And so we turned them up and marched in and the doormen just bowed to us.

Alvar Aalto

That kind of multi-faceted person is like an onion. You get to know his outer skin, peel it away, and then the next and the one after that... there are always new layers but in the end you never know the entire person. In Aalto you could sense the things he left unsaid. I remember how his extremely sensitive face would twitch, later when he was so old it wasn't a thick skin but a thin husk even more prone to twitching, as it were...

Kaarlo Leppanen

There was always talk, no small talk though. There was always a topic and everyone would contribute. Never any empty banter. The subject was discussed. No slow meandering, discussion always led somewhere.

Hamilkar Aalto (Aalto's son)

He never involved himself in things that had no significance. There was no one else like him. He treated everyone as a human, even children... by the way Alvar was very strict about beards. When Itkonen grew a beard and was very proud of his thick, black beard, he couldn't understand why Alvar had said to Heikki: "Either the beard or the man!"

Ulla-Leena Kari (Aalto's niece)

During the war, in the 1940s, he painted a lot. Alvar, you see, was just unable to do nothing. When we arrived at Muuratsalo, for the next two days you could hardly get him out of bed. Then he would start sketching or painting.

Elissa Aalto (Aalto's second wife)

No theatre, no opera, all he wanted was to meet friends and go out to dinner... the same books over and over again, off in his own world, thinking only his own things. He wasn't interested in anything else and never valued anything else... the same stories changing according to the mood he was in. And we were always supposed to be astonished...

they lived in a grandiose way... always stayed in the same expensive hotels, travelled well and kept taxis waiting. Alvar wanted to show how rich he was...

Sisko Härmälä (Elissa Aalto's sister)

Alvar was so ordinary, he wasn't orderly at all. You just couldn't imagine him as an architect. We were equals in every way, and both just as stupid-looking. Always thinking he was, and odd too!.. He lived in his own world

Lauri Viitaniemi (Early friend)

Very radical... he wasn't. He wasn't interested in politics. He focussed on creating things. Sometimes he'd pass a remark on world event, and very intelligently so... Once we were sitting in the Kämp Restaurant and an architect, who was also an officer, got very enthusiastic: Now we're going all the way to the Ural Mountains. Alvar said Good! I don't know if he meant it, because the day before he expressed the opposite opinion... he was a wonderful actor. There's been no one like him in Finland, at least not among architects. He enjoyed it. It was both spontaneous and calculated.

Professor Nils Erik Wickberg

Contacts were important for him. He amounted to nothing if he had no company. Alvar always needed someone in whose eyes he could prove himself... he was a teller of fables. When researchers asked things, he either didn't reply or gave false answers.

Dr. Göran Schildt

Towards the end he had difficulty walking and sometimes ended up in the street... my last image of him is somehow very sad. He was waiting for a taxi and it was raining. He wasn't wearing his mackintosh. He was carrying it behind and it was dragging along the pavement...

Tapani Nironen (Architect and neighbour)

He used that expression: to make mischief! Alvar always had some prank in his mind. And he knew how to give you a rap on your knuckles at work. He kept all strings in his hands.

Veli Paatela

All you could hear was swearing... it was really extreme. Not the ordinary 'damn' and 'hell', no he went for genitalia... he was a brilliant actor and had an excellent grip of the situation, and he used vulgar expressions with great elegance... We used to chat for an hour or two. Cultural gossip, you know. Small talk amongst civilised people! I learnt his type of humour very quickly. Your stories had to be full of suggestive innuendoes... his body language was so intense... even when he didn't have anything to say, he could create an illusion.

Professor Kristian Gullichsen

You know Aalto only invented the shapes and then it was up to other people to work out how these things could be done... Alvar once joked: You're like the Pope's legates'. He thought of himself as the Pope when he sent us to Berlin and other places. Alvar would have made a good Pope!

Jaakko Kontio (Assistant architect and engineer)

He wasn't very musical... sang ribald songs about girls from Alajärvi when competitions were made... he even said he didn't belong to this society. He never expressed his political views, never revealed his relationship to God, but he felt it a natural part of democracy that all people are different... the secretaries at the office said Good Morning Maestro! But 'maestro' was a flexible concept... conversation was mainly a monologue. Alvar would tell his stories... Alvar didn't draw very much. Architects don't draw all their houses, and Alvar was no exception! It was mental strength that kept it all together.

Kaarlo Leppanen (Assistant)

Alvar was brilliant and charismatic. He also had his human weaknesses and one of them was that he always wanted to show off his knowledge of languages...

Mariatta Nava

A liberating obscenity could hit the mark. But we worked really hard. Heikki Tarkka (Architect, nephew)

Actually Alvar didn't make any revolutions, he never refuted classical architecture, he just treated the entire concept of building in a broader way... In a mysterious way, there's always a directing principle, but it was not always easy to find. He had a need to do things rationally, that was important for him... I've attended lectures... absolutely brilliant, but when you read the printed text, it was nothing like the lecture. Alvar's bravura came during the lecture, his gestures, pauses, smiles, his entire personality.

Mikko Merckling (Swiss architect assistant)

I feel Aalto preferred above all to design for Finland... He didn't like designing things abroad. He always said he'd rather build in his own country. It's beautiful the way he has loved Finland. No other architect is quite so famous in his own country.

Alfred Roth

He played situations for all they were worth... Once he gave a lecture at Auditorium Maximum to a large audience and he was quite drunk. I was so distressed. But his presentation was good and held together quite freely... Monotony is the worst thing, he said, and advised students against it.

Lisbeth Sachs (Swiss architect assistant)

I've never seen Aalto like that. He took a knife and lunged at the secretary. Us architects had to separate them... she bit me and I shouted: 'Give respect to architecture and the project to Aalto'. You can kill for architecture! He's a mixture you can't define... Alvar would have been insufferable without Aino and Elissa.

Ull Stucki (Swiss architect assistant)

People always assume that creative people are dictatorial. And they think that explains Aalto. But Aalto wasn't, he just always wanted to have the last word!

Karl Fleig

He had good bearing and all his clothes were made to measure in Stockholm. I've been there to pay for his suits. And the bills weren't small. He wanted to dress like a gentleman. Apparently he also chose the clothes of his wives too. When Elissa married him, she started wearing the same kind of clothes and accessories Aino had worn...

Sinikka Killinen (Artek Store Manager)

After Alvar died, the young ones turned tail. Those very people who made Alvar so bitter are now his best advocates. There was much hostility in the press against the Aalto cult...

Severi Parko

A great little man like Aalto shouldn't have had the need to boast in his cups about his mother's education, his family or his language skills.

Maria-Liisa Parko

When he went to Paris to give a lecture, he practised it in front of a mirror. Those theatrical gestures. He probably loved himself more than any other.

Jari Jetsonen (Photographer & model-maker)

Well Alvar arrives a quarter of an hour late in that ragged woollen sweater... his hair was dishevelled, but that didn't detract from the occasion, he shone out from the crowd. He was different to other Finnish men, even though he'd had three double Vermouths he never turned slobbish. You didn't have to support him and he wouldn't have wanted that either. He carried his drunkenness to the end!

Sauli Sundqvist (Barman)

Extracts for Small Talk are taken from Alvar Aalto: Ex Intimo, Louna Lahti, The Building Information Centre, Helsinki, 2001

(Translators: Roger Connah & Tomi Snellman)

pp: 16, 18,22, 26, 32-36, 39, 44, 46, 52, 71, 83, 91-93, 99, 104, 111, 113-117, 120, 125, 137, 139, 141, 144, 146, 150, 152, 155-156, 162, 169-170, 184, 188, 190.

# aalto-ego

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#### The Vertigo Anti-Library

Book 1 Architecture Degree Zero (2008)

Book 2 Pulp Architecture (2009)

Book 3 The House for de Kooning's Friend (2009)

Book 4 Aalto-Ego (2011)
Book 5 The Irresponsible Self (forthcoming)

design: Cedric Boulet + Robert van Lin

After Aalto Ego was so very nearly performed in Viipuri Public Library, (Russia) in 1996, the play and other documents disappeared. Many were feared lost in the flood at the Hotel Architecture. However most of the papers brought together in this selection (including those from Dagens Nyheter, The Finnish Design Museum, an litala Online Website, and sundry small publications) were discovered misfiled in a buff-coloured archive box labeled 'The Psychology of the Other'. They were found in the Thriller section at Ruthin Public Library.

### production note

These are exercises for the play called Aalto-Ego, about the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto: scenes from the gentle dictator. The scale of the production, the emphasis towards the musichall, the use of monologue and stand up comedy depends on the directions chosen by the director. Some hints at the varied moods and dress the Finnish architect assumed are indicated in some of the accompanying images taken from Aaltomanina (Connah, Helsinki 2000). It is possible to vary some of the fragments and scenes and play these across these characters. We know the Finnish architect was fond of the caper, demonstrating the caddish creativity of the forest gent, and veering towards the tipple of Vermouth or a particularly silky dry Schnapps. Scenes can be treated separately, linked or played at full length where production and budget allow this. The play can be developed through workshops. Reading sessions will also offer different ways of producing and directing the play at various lengths. As the song by Jimmy Scott has it, everyone is trying to get to the Bar. The name of the bar called Heaven. It is quite likely the band in Heaven now plays Aalto's favourite song whatever that was. And doubtlessly they play it over and over again. all night long. The music in the drama operates as a re-mix. where various samples are open to the director's emphasis. The pieces as sample and fragments are played for their lyrical strength as much as their musical presence. Other versions can also be considered besides the following: The Great Pretender - The Platters (or Queen): At Long Last Love - Frank Sinatra: Mack the Knife - Bobby Darin (or Frank Sinatra): The Thrill is Gone - Chet Baker: O Sole Mio/It's Now or Never - Elvis Preslev: Boom Boom - John Lee Hooker: Sh-boom - The Crew Cuts: What a Difference a Day Makes -Dinah Washington: Only the Lonely - Roy Orbsion: Poor Little Fool - Ricky Nelson: Heaven - Jimmy Scott: Mrs Robinson -Simon & Garfunkel



## roger connah

Founder of the Dysinternet, lives (when possible and in whichever room is dry and habitable) in The Hotel Architecture, Ruthin, North Wales, a Retreat & Resistance centre currently undergoing its second severe disturbance in ten years, due apparently to climate change; lath and plaster down, water cascading through the 250 year old oak beams and Health & Safety now determining whether there are ugly traces of asbestos in the artex-pizzeria finish in the upper rooms. Travelled for over 4 decades. Exhibitions include: 'KHAM' (Delhi. 1986), SHELTER (Dehi 1987), NEXUS (Ahmedabad 1987), The exhibition Seven Famous Raincoats and a Moygashel toured in Finland and in Paris (Les Fous de L'ile 1985) before being buried under a catafalque of salt in the exhibition Don't Go So Fast You'll Crash into Martin Wagstaff (Taidehalli, Helsinki 1985). Others: Waving Not Drowning: playing chess and Zen with Alvar Aalto (1995-7); Zen and the Art of the Fluorescent Tube (Medici 2000). Architectural publications include: Pulp Architecture (2009), Architecture Degree Zero (2008), A House for De Kooning's Friend (2006), I am Architecture (ed. 2006) Finland (2005); 40 Young Architects from Finland (ed. 2002); Aaltomania (2000); How Architecture Got its Hump (2001); Welcome to the Hotel Architecture (1998): Writing Architecture (1989). Films include: Take Five (1992). 27 Minute Lies (1993), Drive (1994), Aaltomania (1995); (films with Jan Mazy): Involuntary Architecture (2005), The Bystander in Calgary (2008): Existentialists can't be Architects (2009): Sunbathing with Witold Gombrowicz in Manitoba (2010): The Black Walrus (2011). Heron-Mazy Studio (architecture, altered media and pedagogies with J.Mazy): Chromotopia (Unbuilt Architecture Design Award, Boston Society of Architects, 2003); Interface, Animall and Brautigan (Finalist, Dead Malls International Competition, L.A. Forum for Architecture/Urban Design, 2003); Revenge of the Lawn (First Prize: White House Redux, Storefront, New York 2008); Rapid Theory for Walls 1-3 (2008); Take off - kite-running architecture (Bangalore 2009). Has just translated the first volume of lost poetry by Sisyphus Montale (Trieste 2010) and is at work on the biography of Montale. Forthcoming is a volume on the murdered Pakistani artist Zahoor ul Akhlag called The Rest is Silence - on art, society and unrest in Pakistan with a particularly intriguing subtext about exiles & danced furies, (Oxford University Press, Karachi 2011). Being: an Architect (with Ian Ritchie) is forthcoming from the Royal Academy (UK) 2012. Recently appeared as Ifti Ali Kahn in the hit black comedy "Little Professor on the Prairie". Currently Associate Director of Graduate Studies, Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada,



