the irresponsible self

FANTÔMAS FRAG

AN ARCHITECTURAL JOURNEY T

MENTS FICTIONS
THROUGH THE 20TH CENTURY

the irresponsible self

A NOVEL IN THE LEGENDARY FANTÔMAS SERIES

The Silent Executioner

MARCEL ALLAIN & PIERRE SOUVESTRE

roger connah

For all those who interview as a verb of disquiet,

to those who step out of the prison house of language + architecture,

to those who escape the boot camps too often provided for them,

and to those who deschool at every moment of their lives.

And if he should happen to write a worthless silly book, he would say to himself: well, I have written some rubbish, but I have signed no contract with anyone to write a clever or perfect book. I expressed my stupidity, and I am glad of it, for I am fumed and fashioned by the severity of the human judgments which I have called down on my head, and it is as if I were being reborn.

Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke* [1]

What is a man like in all his actions? The suggestion readily comes to him that is like an artificer who constructs things according to an idea and for the sake of an end. Can we not apply to the active life as a whole the image we take from our technical working in which we construct wheels and arrows, clothes and houses and ships and books and societies?

H.R.Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self.* [6]

This morning
 Being rather young and foolish
 I borrowed a machine gun my father
 had left hidden since the war, went out
 and eliminated a number of small enemies.
 Since then I have not returned home.

This morning
 Swarms of police with trackerdogs
 wander about the city
 with my description printed
 on their minds, asking:
 Have you seen him?
 He is seven years old,
 Like Pluto, Mighty Mouse
 and Biffo the Bear
 Have you seen him, anywhere?

This morning
 Sitting alone in a strange playground
 muttering you've blundered, you've blundered
 over and over to myself.
 I work out my next move
 but cannot move.
 The trackerdogs will sniff me out,
 they have my lollipops.

prologue

to a lecture on irresponsibility

You perhaps know that I like to open my lectures or faculty meetings with a poem, and not usually one of my own. Well, before I do tonight, I would like to explain the idea I wish to put forward in what I call a confessional lecture. The idea is a simple one, a simple paradox in fact. It may not, however, have simple consequences. It is this. In our bid to take architecture forward, in an engaged, committed and responsible manner, in our constant agony and calls for re-engagement in what appears to be a confused if not lost discipline, we may be required to call on our *irresponsible self*. What does that mean? How contradictory can this be, especially when we have seen the production of spectacular buildings in the first decade of the 21st Century, some of immense wonder, others of immense embarrassment, whilst the financial world invites economic meltdown and

communication breakdown. Initially we might try a little cleverness and see this as exploring ways to go beyond the diagram, beyond the dominant trends that distort our visions, beyond the desktop icons, and beyond the software that is already controlling us with no return to GO. The portal has appeared! Theories are now written on our journeys as if there is no way back. We were not even asked whether we would take on this threshold, and we pass through with little preparation in our reason and academic training to look back with skilful forwardness! Why should we? Is this not anxiety but an invitation to talk about irresponsibility? Is this not also a venture that emerges in timely moments when we go against dominant trends, arranged patterns and the holding forces within the society and the architectural profession and within current thinking? Thus you will probably have no difficulty in agreeing with me that it is a paradox: to be responsible and contemporary we may need to be 'urgently' irresponsible. Now to the poem.

This is a poem that has stayed with me since I first read it, probably in 1971 whilst at Jesus College Cambridge, and is called *Little Johnny's Confession*. It was written by the Liverpool-born poet Brian Patten.[2] At the time, published in 1967, along with the Mersey Sound Poets that included Roger McGough and the painter Adrian Henri, this poem was considered a classic, merging dream, outrage, dissent, pathos and love; all in the short sequence of poems about Little Johnny. In the title poem *Little Johnny's Confession*, Johnny finds a wartime souvenir of his father, a machine gun, and in a series of not-so-small, not-always–so-literary steps, he 'eliminates' a number of his 'small enemies'. He has to run away of course. Eventually the police, the *rozzers* in Liverpudlian slang, are after him.

The police ask:

Have you seen him,
He is seven years old,
Likes Pluto, Mighty Mouse
And Biffo the bear,
Have you seen him, anywhere?

The game is up, as it is with many of us who become the 'babas' of architecture, only when we realize the trail we have left leads to infelicities, to betrayals, to irresponsibilities and to those little-but-expanding transgressions against ourselves. Our innocence recedes and our day dreaming turns into responsibilities. Even the architect Peter Eisenman's recently well-publicized, and not all-wrong, rant of 6 points where architecture is going wrong, surely invites a confession from the man himself. For was this not an architect who brilliantly tilted at windmills, turned deep structures into simulacra and who theatrically hoodwinked architectural theory from linguistics to semiotics, from structuralism to post-structuralism, from total football to deconstructivism, and all delivered with devastating brio, elegance and obscurantism. But we are talking about Little Johnny not Little Peter.[3]

The tenderness of the age, the dissent of the late 1960s, prefigured the turn toward the bizarre. The pathos became our own. The world wanted tenderness at the moment it was about to question so much. The masters became cruel and were then cruelly treated as martyrs. Utopia led to dystopia led to the Dysinternet! Architecture had long slipped out of the control of Peter Blake's Masters: Corb, Mies and Wright. Morally confused, excited to burn, burn, burn after the 1960s, architecture began to look for a new tenderness, even a new social contract. Not so simply we wished to return to a once forgotten promise: architecture's urgent presence and seductive inner coil could again mean more than it possibly could. But in our

case, in Liverpool, not far from where I went to school on the edge of the River Mersey, Little Johnny – unlike Little Peter - realized all too clearly the trail he had left. He knew he would be eventually trapped. He would be caught. He would be surrounded. And why? Because the tracker dogs would, of course, pick up the scent of his lollipops. How some of us wish Peter Eisenman's lollipop scent had been picked up long ago! And how many of us still sit in a strange architectural playground – professional or educational - that we can no longer call our own, muttering to ourselves: *we've blundered, we've blundered.* Meanwhile we try and work out our next moves. In architecture, as it oscillates between calls for engagement and re-engagement, for renewed commitment and agency, there are always next moves.

part one

the irresponsible self

> Intelligence, in any absolute sense, is not a major factor in the production of distinguished architecture. Arrogance, coupled with a sense of competition and a pleasure in the fashionable and exotic, are much more important.
>
> A Balfour [4]

How much do we do in ignorance of our brave or good intentions? Are we condemned to hoodwink ourselves and others, in order to get away with what we do not know, or do we 'fess up' as they say, to our limitations – and irritations – and try harder? For every book I read today, I try and read a forgotten one. Recently I came across the *Book Den* on MacLaren Street in Ottawa. An elderly gentleman was wheeling out a cart and his look dared me to find a book in the $2 basket. I did. I found five. One was Michael Young's book, an unusual essay published in 1958 but set in the future 1982, which of course is now well in our past: *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. One was Alan Bullock's study of *Hitler*, which I had never read. The third was a book by Stanley Fish, called *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech*. The fourth was *A Manual for Writers* (of

term papers, theses and dissertations). The fifth book was an old, spine-breaking, glue-disappearing yet relatively unopened version of '*The Courage to Be*' by the theologian Paul Tillich.

I wondered, a pure hunch! No, a reflex: could some of the best measurements of our contemporary condition emerge out of the chance words of lost books, lost pedagogies? What constitutes the *courage to be*, today? What critical learning, adventures, new and old technologies, what inter-disciplinary methods, understanding and networks do we need to explore to make our work more responsive today? And responsive to what: the loss of sensuality and tactility, the saturation of the media, the expanded agenda in architecture, or the fear of software as it takes command of our souls and our children?

If we tolerate this, the Manic Street Preachers sing, our children will be next. Or then responsive to the meltdown, the credit crunch, the trader's greed and hedge fund vultures, the failure of ambition or regulation, the quiet passive indifference, the spectacle on its way down, like the banks? We exist in the pedagogy of the fatigued. What then are the conditions that make decisions not only possible but effective? What, we might ask, are the conditions for responsibility today, for students, professors and practitioners? And how, if we agree to the need for change, can we understand, participate within and shape those structures for change within architecture?

Of course it is possible to retreat, with some winged responsibility, within the coded world we accept as Architecture. But in this almost godless position, once more trailing Nietzsche, Camus, Tillich, Havel and others, the architect, the student and the planet all have to re-think what it means to 'live the truth'. What is the courage to

be today, when we are in the middle of things, when we need to understand the loss of sense daily, when we are not longer either able to begin again or to conclude? Surely the confession comes first: I can no longer be the educator or researcher required of me, or offer the words that simply confirm what I set out to explore.

The random is more responsible to the moment itself and, as Paul Tillich said, 'it is not the solution of the problem of radical doubt.' Instead, and here the words become less random as Tillich continues, "it gives the courage to be to those who are converted but it does not answer the question of how such a courage is possible in itself." This uncertainty frames our current request for more engagement in an architecture already converted to one of our own preference, straitjacketed in our own tolerant visions. "The answer", Tillich outlined in 1951, "must accept as its precondition, the state of meaninglessness."[5] If Paul Valery could announce Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* 'admirable', if Reyner Banham could announce of the same book, "the only piece of architectural writing that will be classed among the 'essential' literature of the 20th century'", I wonder really how many people writing in the last century ever realised that, when reaching the point where language ends and architecture begins, it would mean re-writing the whole history of Modernism in architecture as literature, as critical fiction and as forced or unforced narrative. In other words: as 'meaninglessness'. Re-writing is of course our most valuable asset. Ultimately, it is possible to use our skill to render lies reality and the narrative fallacies we apply to architecture become the hoodwink we have always suspected.

❋

How much do these random densities, lost texts and

lost pedagogies hold us to agendas that call for restraint? We struggle with this restraint as we wish to pass on the significance of our own positions. The world we often think fit to teach students may not always of course represent the world the students live in; our visions might not even be anything like the world they will inhabit. Is this our essential resistance, as pedagogues and teachers, as we find ourselves unable to bridge the exhausted profession with the myth of vision and beauty? Is this our responsible self-framing, a nostalgia that asks only for answers within this condition? Do we understand the conditions that make architecture possible only if these conform to the conditions we recognise? This cannot ever be a repetition or a replication of worlds past, but surely it can be interrupted by the useful notion that ideas hit us all at different time scales, and with different goals, ensuring that the infinite cross-community of ideas will always struggle for any common repertoire. I, irresponsible raider of the inarticulate, take Tillich and bring him back for us, only slightly re-worded: *Architecture is indefinable, since everything is dissolved by doubt and meaninglessness*.

What then, we must ask ourselves, are the potential connections from all this between architects and educators, students and scholars? Since architects have been involved with planning, especially in the 20th Century, they have always had the potential of widening their knowledge, working with and across various other disciplines. Along with this widening comes exaggeration; faked realities speak often of the void and in many ways continue to build it. This was always a program about to happen, introducing a wider inter-disciplinary approach and understanding in the profession and in the education of an architect. Yet research, invention and randomness are not traditionally areas pursued by the practicing architect. Often the grand gesture is their aim, the ideal grasp of the poetic magic that flies in the software face of disaster and the tsunami.

One of our tasks in education today might just be to begin widening the research methods and skills of students in undergraduate and graduate levels and their links to, and understanding of, other disciplines, including new strategic models, deeper critical thinking and the impact of this on their own discipline. Indeed there are signs that as architects call other architects to account through their conference and colloquia, the responsibility to take on an embodied and expanded agenda for architecture is more urgent. And if there is such an imperative for a humane, sustainable and ethical engagement, where might we look for some guidance in this, if we are to avoid the internal games of architects themselves?

2

> What is implicit in the idea of responsibility is the image
> of man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man
> acting in response to action upon him.
>
> H R Niebuhr [5]

   What then are the conditions for our responsibility
today? Such challenging questions echo the conditions
that the American Theologian-Philosopher H R Niebuhr
addressed in his book *The Responsible Self* published
in 1963. "What is a man like in all his actions?" Niebuhr
wrote: "The suggestion readily comes to him that he is like
an artificer who constructs things according to an idea
and for the sake of an end. Can we not apply," Niebuhr
continues, "to the active life as a whole, the image we take
from our technical working in which we construct wheels
and arrows, clothes and houses and ships and books
and societies?" What is this self-image we take from our
surroundings? Self-knowledge, Niebuhr felt must always
be contested with the other: the *existentialist* will wage
that contract with the one for the one; the *essentialist*

will veer toward collective gain from shared experience, and take on a universalist position. When Tillich took this debate on about the 'courage to be', delivered in 1951 at Yale, the existential paradigm was later to be sketched out by R D Laing in 1961 with his book *Self and Others*. Yet, if Paul Tillich's 'courage to be' is relevant today, we must first realize how we necessarily distort almost everything we receive through the filters of our present age, crisis or not. We must ask ourselves the obvious and pointed question: does the mask remain essential to our being?

Architecture is alive and well certainly, and yet the corpse goes on dying. Architecture is most definitely (creatively) being directed, even shaped, beyond the control of architects themselves. Whilst the profession in different continents tries new measures using integrative practice methods, building informational modelling and transfer, extending bioethics, biomimetics, neuro-science, protocells and immersive media techniques, the accreditation committees responsible for professional education in both the US and Europe wish to introduce more ethical and critical thinking into the curriculum. At the same time though, students often consider their curricula to have become ambiguous and narrowed, often mirroring the lack of the ethical and critical thinking in the very instructors and teachers who demand it of their students. Too often, students are intimidated and hoodwinked into believing architecture can do more than offered, reach into worlds others can't reach.

How does this paradox arise? A self-confessed 22 year old disgruntled Egyptian student replied to Peter Eisenman's rant about the failure of current architecture, of which he too I suspect must share some responsibility, in the following way: "this is just the frivolous babble of a pompous old man... in a sense, what theorists like him

were doing was playing word games... twisting reality through linguistic manipulation... It is always easier to point out the negative impact today's issues have inflicted than the positive... the computer, as 'Peter' so disgustingly puts it, has aided us in ways unthinkable to minds like his, although surprisingly his 100+ employee firm use every technological means available to win his Highness those self-glorifying competitions he always enters..."[7]

Is the Egyptian student right: adapt to our times and help us with positive reinforcement or do not say anything at all? Ground zero becomes degree zero becomes post-zero – all language, all post-theory, all post-critical, and all impossible of course except as a philosophical starting point. No chance departure, rigged import or filched resonance guarantees great architecture, strong feelings and memorable experiences. Nor can language games rescue the architecture meant to go deeper than intended. Its beginning cannot redeem its solution. In this way the democracy of the sprawled housing estate or new urban pleasures with social narrowness, armed response and computerised water-nozzle matrix, exist to demonstrate against the luxury of spectacle and the latest computer generated morphed Formula-1 building. But are there starting points anymore; nothing begins again, as the French film-maker Jean Luc Godard told us about film; no ends, no beginning only middles - which is possibly the best way to characterize our current condition.

Then again the crucial question – at what stage does one decide to, even imagine resisting certain trends, even inevitabilities? Cocoon, go inside, stay inside – like the poet Paul Celan said, 'the ores aid bare, the crystals, the geodes. Unwritten things, hardened into language, lay bare, a sky.' At what stage does our apparent weakness turn into strength, take up a socially engaged position and

become a workable attitude? Using weakness as strength, using ignorance itself might be the hook. And starting in the middle our greatest opportunity. But at what stage is this just coy idealism to be easily dismissed by that cynical reason of those architects and teachers once tempted but now dry, disenchanted and fatigued?

3

> If the capacity to fail consists in the fragility of the mediation that man effects in the object, in his idea of humanity, and in his own heart, the question arises concerning the sense in which this fragility is a capacity to fail. What capacity is this?

Paul Ricouer [8]

What does it mean then to fall short, to resist building or even designing? To take the Chuang Tzu way of no action? There is talk of de-skilling, perhaps a future strategy whereby young architects and students refuse, or then fail, to build or erect edifices and constructions that can but embarrass future generations. And then the network strikes back, with final fantasy vengeance, tablet and touch-screen coquetry. But what does it mean to propose a city of networks, a meta-city, data-town or bit-village; those reminders to a lost world, cities of organic urban villages? What remains uncontaminated in the pure zones and residual spaces that have become myths in our cities, yet by default to the market condition, unsuitable materials can be used, unacceptable and unsustainable environments created, as the developing world contracts

and the contractors develop. The pull toward sleepwalking is ever near.

"A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences – sewage systems, elevators, bathrooms, washing machines." It doesn't matter any longer if we know the source of that comment. It could return us to the 1920s and tenement living in Glasgow, it could be speaking of the 1950s in Paris, the 1970s in St Petersburg, the 1980s in Helsinki, the 1990s in Tallinn, the year 2000 in Havana and the next decade or two in Ljubliana or Tripoli. Authorship has been destabilized by the very seamless nature of not knowing how to start again. Appropriation is about to de-skill our very nerve. At one of those never-ending apocalyptic conferences on American education in Houston about the re-education of architects, the showman - another Peter, this time the Cook - castigated the thinker-professor on the panel for 'farting French theory'. This was, of course, an attractive but cheap throwaway line and the audience laughed. But whilst the showman architect confessed to making neither head nor tail of Heidegger, Bergson, Wittgenstein or Derrida this was enough superficially once again to put the audience in a spin. *No one was really talkin' human anymore*, as William Gibson would say. There was that hint once more, that delicate trap. The seductive desktop icon and attractively superficial reasoning put forward by the showman could produce carnival architecture to relieve the gloom of modern existence. If only momentarily! We have always known shallow thinking can lead to deep architecture and vice versa; the fence is barbed with broken bottle tops. What's wrong with you, the showman shouted at the audience like Elton John pumping out one of his best songs *Benny and The Jets*: are you afraid to dream? Are you afraid to imagine?

The showman shouted even more: are you afraid to jump? What the audience did not sense but which was becoming clear; as the spectacles grow from chance imagery and wayward reasoning, this sort of architecture, useful as a therapy session, may have little if anything to say today to the real conditions of the homeless, to disaster, to enriching our environments and urban crowding. Should we even ask this of it? But even more alarming perhaps - the issues which remain untouched by these privileged debates and coded exchanges may be about to disappear. Should we be alarmed? How can we be alarmed today? Do we know how to be alarmed? Would we even recognize agitation if we saw it?

The result, one result, is that our uncertainties are becoming more certain than we imagined. The question of engagement and commitment – even responsibility - fades into an agenda of uncertainty and reminds us of the words of the British professor Terry Eagleton in his recent book called *After Theory*: "In this remorselessly up-beat climate, feeling negative becomes a thought-crime, and satire a form of political treason. Everyone is urged to feel good about themselves, whereas the problem is that some of them don't feel anything like bad enough."[9] Well, I guess many of us in architecture and education, are coming to realize, without quite grasping its significance, that we don't have to feel anything like bad enough today, because circumstances do it for us. *Bring on the Apocalypse* the British environmentalist George Monbiot writes, and the title of his book is enough – a desktop icon - without anyone having to read his critical argument and essays.

❧

Some years back whilst in Karachi, discussing with Professor Arif Hasan Head of the Orangi Project, he spoke

about how he felt he had to re-school students after an architectural education. "They had," he said, "received a good education in many cases in the West, but they spoke a privileged architectural discourse, they knew all the codes, but this was of little use to us here in Karachi." Many could navigate the most complex gaming strategies but cannot communicate he went on to explain. Many could not even begin to know what the issues might be or were in a city like Karachi. Many could not program themselves out of a paper bag. Thus students, Professor Hasan went on to say, found themselves let down by the very privilege of education that should have spurred their responsibility and actions in the future. Like many students and graduates, they had been encouraged to wait obediently to be told the conditions within which they would work. Then they could respond. They redraw their portfolios daily to keep up with change.

"We don't need this here, we have constant fragmentation and dispirited erosion, disruption of systems in the middle of rapid instability and mesmerizing population growth," Hasan said, "we need those who can work in the situation, who can work out the conditions for themselves to change these conditions. We need agents of change, people who understand the actions of an architect are as urgent as ever to invite structures to change. So we begin at this school to re-tool them for the real conditions of a challenging, thrilling and expanded architecture in an unsafe Karachi. This is our contemporary issue." Hasan was not only speaking of Karachi, he was speaking of an operative mode that education can offer, a radical integration of interdisciplinary thinking that often exists already within schools and colleges of architecture but perhaps remains disconnected. An active urbanism, community design and growth strategies all concern the young graduate out in the field whether trained singularly

in architecture, landscape or urban planning. Perhaps we should add, respecting the specific conditions that make up a city caught up in the alertness of constant terror like Karachi, Beirut or Tripoli, this is only one of many contemporary issues, which we must deal with urgently. But the loss of any agitation blinds us; we slowly lower the expectations and aspirations that have already been lost.

4

If direction in a look, montage is a heart-beat.
To foresee is the characteristic of both –
but what one seeks to foresee in space,
the other seeks in time.

Jean Luc Godard [10]

In 1967 Jean Luc Godard ended the film *Weekend* with
the title cards: *End of Film/ End of Cinema*. Is it possible
to re-phrase this and wish we could say the same of this
wasteful, superficial profession known as Architecture as
it performs today? Alarming, provocative, disturbing –
whichever way you look at it today, I don't see why anyone
can dispute we are in a serious situation. However, can
anyone offer a reasonable defense for doing nothing; and
would that imply under the circumstances of daily collapse
and meltdown (and it's not just the recent events we are
speaking about here), the need to rebel? If so, how could
this – rebellious position - be possible under circumstances
that can condemn the rebel – the rogue outlier or edge-
thinker - before the sentences are uttered, the actions

taken and the graffiti is up on the walls? Whichever way we dress it up, whichever language we choose – it doesn't look good: global warming, the toxic environment, shock riots, reducing the carbon footprint or locking carbon down. Read William Gibson's latest novel *Spook Country* and notice how it is virtually unreadable except to those who live – sometimes thrillingly - in the argot of games, those who dream of slang and coded sanctuaries, virtualities and social networks. Dissidence itself has to begin again, but where?

Today we might hear directly about issues and developments in fields like communications, systems and networks, urban geography, or sustainable development, humanitarianism or history yet the backlash against the liberal is deafening. To many, the liberals took a wrong turn; they threw Molotov cocktails and believed in their action, they eliminated a few small enemies and burned cities and had nothing to put back? They smashed the McBanks and McOffices thinking they were breaking up the party. Now we re-group, but in the shadow of the committees: and all done with perfect killing machines and union regulations under the auspices of Health and Safety measures.

Architecture today, or one version of it, is free running and the free radicals need to re-group. Nothing can any longer be tied to precision as architecture tries to lift itself out of the depth of feeling frustrated and fatigued in order to prove that nothing deeper lies in the aesthetic of a thousand hands. Architecture is now about to become what it warned itself against, what it has threatened for a whole century: an open source. And creeping alongside this whispered world of shared thinking, we have a new dilemma. The humorous way to dismiss this shared world is nowhere better seen than in the debilitating sociability and ego-games that pass for serious debate in the architectural profession. We dribble

and tinker with program and software instead of realising
the open source will return to take over the humanitarian,
the pragmatic, the political and the sustainable. Would we
be so reluctant to bring on the apocalypse then? Whether
this could demonstrate the conditions of being an architect
and the constant inter-change of professional, technical,
personal and private knowledge, whether this is what is
meant when we hear talk of the anthropological dimension,
there is one obvious point: it wouldn't necessarily get the
student or the architect more work, but it might just begin
to *deschool* some of the ideas from the last century that
might be holding us back in this century.

Perhaps I am allowed what Joseph Brodsky calls in
his book on Venice *(Watermark)* a little sidetrack. The
urgency of this responsibility, though still clouded, was
revealed in the cult American TV-series called *Heroes*. An
older colleague of mine decided to look at the program
and then switched it off after some 15 minutes. "I couldn't
work it out, seemed superficial," he said. I spoke about
the multiple sites within this show, the narrative shifts,
the 'architecture' of the filming, the way novelists and
architects also operate in multiple sites and cognitive
variations as they approach different tasks, often in
different teams, cultures and societies. Take for example
the two markets usually connected to Immersive Media –
shifting situational awareness and geographic information
systems (GIS) mapping. *Heroes* re-tooled both for the
entertainment world. I spoke about William Gibson and
Bruce Sterling, of Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett,
none of whom my friend and colleague knew. I spoke about
architects hitching a lift and living their para-science as
new ways to authenticate old myths. I wonder where then
we are to get our impulses to bridge the gap between the
essential grounding, the linearity of our solid foundational
thought, the basis of a sound Modernism in architecture,

and the way thinking systems and contemporary patterns of engagement have demanded a redefinition of our own roles and responsibility. Even methodologies within research take on this aspect whether we tie this back to the shifting scientific paradigms or come up, post-Godel, Heisenberg, Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend with new adventures within which to lodge our commitment and ambitions. Surely integration, all calls for any integration, if we are to approach a new understanding of responsibility this century (which differs from the last), must eventually fall back on the *self* and the need in all of us to monitor our own actions.

5

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

Garry Stevens [11]

Words too have spun out of control in architecture more than most other disciplines. And more so in the last century than this? Not sure. But is it really possible to claim that an inordinate amount of time has been spent in the last 40 years hijacking serious architecture with an applied language, an *archobabble* of thin theory, creative literature and philosophical drift? Con artists, architects and critics have moved closer over the last few years. Fashionable and seductive architecture merges critical talent and redefines history only to redefine architecture out of existence. If you were not a Marxist before thirty, there was something wrong with you, the cocktail party jibe had it. If you were still a Marxist after thirty, there was even more wrong with you. It is hardly a surprise to note no discourse lasts long under the conditions of professional survival,

educational meltdown and corporate intervention. Yet we might do ourselves even a bigger favour if we recognised that nothing serious would come out of any committed compatibility with Marxism. But this is harsh! Architects still believing in social reform and a humane contribution to wider issue, enriching surroundings, supposedly keep their Marxist leanings within whilst trying to find new ways of being an architect. Czeslaw Milosz's comment is a gentle jibe at those of us in short trousers changing the world through Scouting: "Many years later I understood that Baden-Powell had been a remarkable prophet of social centralisation. Communism then sounds like scouting raised to the nth power."[12]

To be rumbled as a Marxist (even now a Late-Marxist), certainly after the fashionable phase of extremism and Maoism in the 1970s, was hardly ever going to be compatible with developing as an architect. Some architects have held on for much longer than others of course, seeking a new language within which to place their concerns for a lost radicalism or a latent political dimension. How then have we managed to trivialize the structure of thought and feeling behind our layered and echoed world whilst other disciplines like law and urban geography continue, for example, to expand our experiences and enrich our social understanding of cities and the agendas of ambiguous and threatened urban space and dwelling?

Retaining a moral conscience, a committed stance, whilst navigating the affluent society hasn't always been easy; the charges of innocence and naivety emerge rather quickly. Do we need to consider that split once more: *Architecture or Revolution*? We might of course not go that far, we may not even have the luxury of such excess or be that melodramatic today, but as we get out feet under the table and enjoy the comforts of personal certainty,

an increasing global, political, ecological, economic and environmental uncertainty privately dislodges our ideals. Yet the contemporary student has little of this comfort and, to go by some, little of this hope. I wonder why. I am often struck, when I see detailed websites online, how we consider interaction and inter-disciplinarity to be in place, well understood and second nature, whereas in many institutes this isn't always quite the case. Many of us, too, perhaps prefer the linearity of the printed medium to the discontinuity and seamlessness of the digital form; yet there are indications that we are still not integrating where we can.

Education programs and the policy speak of curricula introduce re-programming or re-structuring, even trans-programming; they use different jargon and terminology to describe an applied creativity whether in psychology, architecture, urban planning or environmental design. These agendas bravely conceal their cul-de-sac, hovering around belated ways of thinking, ethical behavior or moral action whilst outdated concepts of beauty hit scientific and technological developments and ask of us a responsibility today that we struggle to define. Yet our interfaces are often weak, unable to engage the more contemporary interfaces, even those our students navigate.

6

In the crossways of kisses
The years pass by too quickly
Beware beware beware
Shattered memories

Louis Aragon

A year before Paul Tillich wrote his book *The Courage to Be*, in one of the 1962 editions of *Cahiers du Cinema*, Francois Truffaut attacked his friend Jean-Luc Godard: "If one plays with sound and image in a too-unconventional way, people yell – it's an automatic reaction." However Godard's own depiction of the critical failure of the *new wave* in cinema was probably nearer the reality we now have in contemporary architecture: "a regret," Godard said, "nostalgia for the cinema that no longer exists". More significantly Godard unwittingly captured the dilemma that has also stripped some of the latest contemporary architecture spectacle of its rigour – call it *starchitecture* if you like though I personally find that label devastatingly unhelpful. "At the moment we can do cinema," Godard

wrote in 1962 "we can no longer do the cinema that gave us the desire to do it." Think about it – this is the Hollywood turn: at the moment we can now do architecture we can no longer do the architecture that gave us the passion and desire to do it. The paradox is intimate, even challenging and slides inside like an ice cube between skin and fabric.

Much of the brave spectacular new architecture of the last two decades has been produced with an ambition and ego that has seen the stars and controlled personalities of architecture continually raise the stakes. The shift from smaller, radical 'beyond architecture' practices to the award of larger commissions is usually followed by insistent remarks that these practitioners have not sold out. In the meantime architecture increasingly is guided out of the hands of architects themselves. Apart from the few strong entrepreneurial talents who can joust with investors, developers and bankers, the rest are, or seem to be, propping up a tired, exhausted and privileged profession. This causes an inflated competition amongst architects within an ever-narrowing agenda. Worse, it stands in for all architectural development and commitment, which is far from accurate.

The result is obvious, inciting us to *get critical*, as the art critics say. There is now a palpable urge to find some way to take a responsible position, to make a difference, to operate in ways that perhaps don't always call for obedience to the chosen route, the paradigms presented in architecture or the programs already scripted. This goes for cities as much as graduates. Many students adore the experiments of some of the bigger architects. They watch in awe as small practices win a competition, expand, and then go for the big software statements, like that Emmental-cheese building with holes pioneered by Vito Aconci after 9/11; the notion that if there are holes in the building the aeroplanes can

fly through. Nice ruse Vito! Architecture using advanced symbolic imagery, probing unreachable worlds. Of course it's an ironic political statement; but soon enough the laser cutters are busy at work, the programs are stenciled up and cut out fabricated patterned surfaces, double-spiral volumes and buildings DNA their way to urban intrigue and the big urban statement. From school to street to scaffold to Beijing!

These big experiments are admired yet at the same time this 'look at me' architecture of spectacles, the *moi-architecture* of intricate software, surface and structure, the group-think architecture appropriated by individuals as if these are artistic experiments, may begin to look like an international hoax, just like the football takeover by oil-wealthy Russian oligarchs. Image, detail and provocation are exchanged from building to building, city to city; no wonder we speak of meta-cities, cities of networks which will exist outside the built fabric of these cities. These buildings are the real walking city that Ron Heron of Archigram dreamt of in the late 1960s, as these DNA structures migrate from Dubai, to Abu Dhabi, from there to here, from anywhere but here to Paris or Islamabad. A new architectural genome: a repertoire of world architecture as a system? Is this the timelessness we seek? Or the timelessness we cannot avoid? Who, the headlines scream, would want to live or work in a building that looks like torture or fly your Cessna through the gap?

7

A feeling that there must be a set of words in which the essence, so to speak, of the horror discovered in this century would be captured. Readings in memoires, reminiscences, reports, novels, poems, always with hope and always with the same result: "not quite." Only timidly did the thought emerge that the trust about the fate of man on earth is different form the one we were taught. Yet we recoil form giving it a name.

C. Milosz [13]

We are now gladiatorial. We are masquerading. We are hallucinating. We are fantasizing. It has to be stated from the outset. A firework, a barricade, a bombardment: architecture, and whatever is made of it, from it, for it, can emerge from the most brilliant, enigmatic departures. It can also just as well emerge from the most mundane, sincere, dull and mediocre beginnings. The dead metaphors for architecture are all around us: architecture, sculpture or personal ashtray? Is it enough to announce the bubble has burst as Esther Zandberg did recently on Haaretz.com? "Just months ago the year was looking like a peak year of a decade-long glamorous party," she writes. "Professional journals and architecture columns were starting to pull out the superlatives to summarize the year. Then the financial

crisis hit and scrambled the cards. The architecture bubble burst. In view of the fragments, who wants to choose some blob as building of the year? Architecture," Zandberg concluded her paragraph "has its own sense of humour."[14]

Does it really? Does architecture really have a sense of humour? I doubt. Outside the rants of a duded-up Peter Cook, in black waistcoat and British dandy style, or Reyner Banham in pop-professorial style, architecture has rarely had a sense of humour. Instead it has probably been devastatingly shackled to the seriousness of organized epistemes and discourses. Woody Allen can make a film called *Crimes and Misdemeanors*; yet we long for someone to turn that critical eye and wit onto the architecture profession itself. Is there nothing humorous out there today? The panic moves seen in the financial meltdown is a panic move recognizable but not talked about in other realms: Architecture? Planning? Law? War? To put liquidity into the system is to make ideas flow again – only this time the ideas are limited, the moneymaking ruder by the day. The appalling logic is to make spending and growth possible again, not to lock down greed or overreach. As society, and the relationships we hold with it, appear to collapse we often turn within; we protect, as in any crisis, and the ground zero eventually hits back.

But how do we announce that we do not need to go on like this? How do we share our desire, in a critical way, to not go on like this? How do we seek a responsibility in all this? In our work, in our ideas, in our dreams of the impossible once again made possible – if briefly, if tantalizingly close to…and then we drift off…spreading it thinly more and more, changing computer, car, cell phone, house as often as encouraged to do so. You know the advertisement: there are some things money can't buy and for everything else there's Mastercard. Well, the news is bad. Even Mastercard

won't buy the things money can't buy. And then there's architecture; Mastercarded and credited to build safe response Dubai lifestyles that are now threatening to wend their way from the Middle East and Asia – from Dubai to Shanghai - into cities like Paris, Barcelona, Vancouver, London and Seattle. If we needed a financial meltdown to burst the *starchitecture* bubble then we are more in trouble than we thought. No, the scrambling of such architecture was already unraveling, already forcing more committed architects to re-group. In the backrooms, serious work was going on, is going on, has always been going on. Many were waiting for the changeover. Only the signs haven't quite got through yet. There is a simmering which has not yet turned into a roar. But it will.

8

Eisenman represents a desire to embrace an avant-aesthetic, to stake out the margins of culture in a defiant expression of independence, while simultaneously enjoying all the benefits of being a centrist cultural icon.

D Ghirardo [15]

A simmering, a roar, the protest implied: is any of this even possible today in our desire to be responsible? I am sure you are smiling. Can we speak of a new rebel, the new rebel, without being mocked? Can we even talk of the rebellious in today's climate where everything slightly wayward is cynically attacked, where arguments are so-locked down and regulated? So fearful and indifferent our anxieties and populism have become, is Peter Eisenman right when he claims once more that, stuck in media-land, students have become passive? If the viewing subject has become increasingly passive and people, according to the architect from Princeton, demand more and more visual and aural information, then it is hardly only students controlled by the media. This is an old argument and is more about

repressive tolerance than it is about students' indifference. And if this is sedation, if we are comatosed, then we must ask just who and what caused this? "To move students to act or to protest for or against anything today is impossible," Eisenman asserts, perhaps mourning the days when he, too, in short-trousers could eliminate a few enemies with a borrowed machine gun whilst sucking on a lollipop.

We have gradually come to misread all this and re-award this wandering within our minds using a special term belonging to the French language, the *flaneur*? It absolves us of embarrassing thinking; it tidies up our ambiguities and uncertainties. The flaneur, more recently that psycho-geographer, the glorious absolver-on-the-run might be said to possess an imagination and represent an architecture closer to those who can take the long and seemingly aimless walks which are never ever truly 'aimless'. Imagine: if students once more were allowed to deal seriously with the whole notion of a structured aimlessness, instead of inviting and coercing resolutions where resolutions might not be necessary? Fooled or thrilled by randomness? Architecture where architecture might not be the answer, projects where a project might not be appropriate?

Yet we must continue if but to interview for professorial posts we are unsure of, to join worlds unstuck and rudderless. We are forced into an honesty that is instantly ignored. Yet we still have to ask surely – even in our lunch hour, on our own time - what makes up this new rebel in today's climate? Who is this person in the state of a world that is asking us to coalesce, close in, to come together in the face of all kinds of external threats (and conspiracies)? In this case, when peripheries only burn then die, does it all blur. Terrorism has been trivialized and made fearful and led to fundamentalisms of all kinds. Architecture is still put alongside, at the edge of everything else, as if we

can resuscitate still more outlying worlds. Denial gives way to hoodwink. So much so that even to say 'no' has become unsubtle, uncouth, and clearly at times 'plain stupid'.

How absurd it seems to talk of philosophies or even the practice of revolution today, yet as it plays across our screens in real time, tweeted from the Middle East, whether Egypt, Libya or Yemen, it has an urgency which few of us could deny. If the French writer and activist Albert Camus considered us to be the only species who refuses to be what we are, we have to ask whether we can, even with some temerity yet still confident, assert our refusal again. To say 'no' is our right, essential at certain times. But - with so much around today to say 'no' to - do we really know what we are saying no to? Even to speak of rebellion – more so in architecture - can meet with a numb and cynical reason condemning it as an irresponsible act. This cynical reason can provide all the reasons not to continue, as if the thinker eventually understands that there is no point in rebelling. It will then dismiss the person cruelly as a crank!

But any state of ennui is ours, as instructors and architects, to deal with and not lay it at the students' door. And to do that, let's be cranky, let's get critical on ourselves and let's go along with the crankiest intellectual I know from the last century, the Rumanian thinker Emil Cioran who found infinite ways to describe that essential problem, the *trouble with being born* - always balanced by that delicious temptation to exist.

9

As the years pass, the number of those we can communicate with diminishes. When there is no longer anyone to talk to, at last we will be as we were before stooping to a name.

E Cioran [16]

Alright, accepting we may wish to make a personal case for the rebel today, how can we help each other define this new rebel, and how might it help us, or those of us who wish to say 'no'? And to say 'no' to what? Is this an ethical condition? How does it differ from an ontological one – and how possible is it in everyday reality, in architectural education for example, to practice such position? The adversarial manner of TV debates, journalism and media echoes the disaster of short selling on the market. The weakest link culture produces brevity and critical jousting of little seriousness. This brevity suggests that we would be wise to avoid confrontations of this sort as we recognize how often serious debate is cancelled by constant gaming, banter and triviality.

Today more and more moments arise when the call is fragile, and we recognize it by the hair on the back of our hands, or that rises up our necks. Circumstances introduce frustration, they always do, in divisive cells, in the pits closed to the real miners of the past. The real call, and this is serious, might be to invite *irresponsibility* rather than responsibility, backroom cunning not the award podium, critical thinking not desktop iconography. Surely our options are more dynamic – we can critically re-script ideas and the imaginations that make it possible to work differently from those of the prevailing conditions. We can, surely it's our duty, re-define and re-position ourselves.

Architecture reads across its own ambiguous history. It always has done. This indicates something that seems to arise again and again. Getting older we reach a stage where we assume something we have already done, written or thought because in the past (our own past) neither needs no further communication, nor needs reinforcing in another way. We think knowledge already held needs not any subtle re-tooling of ideas; ideas once thought through in the past. Yet there are ways out, ways forward. Architecture discovers once again the necessity to *read across* other figures. Not in the sense of an original and then an influence, but how ideas are and always were a re-expression of something behind us, beyond us and within us. When do we awake and realise that we need but our own gentle re-occupation of these ideas to award ourselves relevance once more?

Perhaps in a follow up to this lecture it would be possible to suggest ways we might do this, ways to go beyond the diagram, beyond the desktop icon, beyond the software that, according to Lev Manovich, is now taking command.[17] This would not necessarily indicate a return to a previous control but a way to exist alongside the forces that appear

to prove resistant, whether new media, difficult social engagement, passive behavioural systems, or disavowed development for example in bioethics and sustainability. Forces that can be re-tooled for our own benefit, where critical engagement might take back the actions that have seduced us - the hardware, camera systems, data collection services. Then we might parallel this irresponsibility surely with that responsibility that never lets us go, even if at times we wish it to, of reading - the book, the saddle bound, perfect stitched, shrink-wrapped first edition of a book you never thought you would read.

10

Because of its emphasis on creativity, the hacker ethic must ultimately be considered distinct from both the Protestant and the pre-Protestant ethics. According to the hacker ethic, the meaning of life is not Friday, but it is not Sunday, either. Hackers locate themselves between the Friday and the Sunday cultures and thus represent a genuinely new spirit. We have only just begun to understand its significance.

Pekka Himanen [18]

Our interests, passions and developments over the years involve ideas and programs which might well be integrated within existing infrastructure. Many of the issues we need to understand in one discipline are handled in another discipline in a different way: we slip from a privileged discourse in architecture to another operative language and mode of thinking in construction science, a practice that often considers the architects full of 'archibabble'; then we move to quite another operative language within urban, environmental and even landscape planning which, if it binds itself with the literal landscape, misses the opportunity to redefine land and economic geographies with inventive growth management systems. Then we see the control of resources and other ecological

developments possibly crucial to countries like, amongst others, Mexico, Guatemala, Pakistan or Ukraine slip out of agendas. This is not to ignore the way landscape and economic modeling and mapping, for example, are collapsing work done in urban planning, within landscape and the architectural field. An active (new) urbanism is emerging which has to be researched along with the public (mis)understanding of architecture.

Some of us talk knowingly, engagingly, reassuringly to students within the ambiguity that still manages to produce architecture; yet as the same time the amount of architecture produced beyond the control of architects punishes us, turns us inwards, celebrating the brilliance of our own inner souls and critical thinking. We celebrate the outlying brilliance of unmerited architecture, whilst the footsoldiers bring us back to reality. And we yawn unable to hide our desire for spirited failure. Spatial products of the sort we do not like: airports, container ports, golf courses, new urban schemes, dubai-lifestyle malls, invite us to take architecture out of itself, and if not, then beyond, stutteringly beyond. But so few of us know what it means to think of this beyond, this life after architecture. We hear talk of the obtuse or then those ends of architecture that repeatedly collide with us each decade. Our conferences are rewarded by stars, secondary architects and visiting literati, or those famed with dangerous ideas. Some pen incendiary papers, rejected as too volatile. Others play air guitar and fire rockets into the fragile atmosphere!

Meanwhile, as there is some urgency to define the wider context of any collective moment, we struggle even more to define or even recognise what is a collective moment? 9/11 has two sides: the triumph and the evil. The Iraq War represents global lies. Global warming is in denial. And sustainability is a token we play on our profession

unless we realise some architects and thinkers have been sustainable all along. And what constitutes a collective moment for architects? The Olympic Games? A green city in the desert? An opera house, an icon, homeless housing or a cancer centre? Or the Imaginary Museum of the Future in Kandahar, Kabul or Baghdad? There's got to be more than this you say. There's got to be a way to get beyond this condition to begin somewhere in the middle and become honest to ourselves once more, however ridiculous and naive that may sound. "I am not selling a cat in a sack," Witold Gombrowicz wrote in his Second Diary, "Feet and cards on the table, if you please – you have me just as I am, I am not promising the merchandise – if my existence can be of some use to you, use it in any way you wish."[19]

How familiar that sounds, how similar I feel. In his unusual autobiography, Native Realm, a search for a self-definition, Milosz wrote: "One should appreciate, after all, the advantages of one's origin. Its worth lies in the power it gives one to detach oneself from the present moment." Probably our greatest responsibility today is to detach ourselves from the present moment without losing sight and understanding of it. When Milosz read St Augustine or William James 'Varieties of Religious Experience' he knew exactly what was happening. There was no fooling oneself into greater wisdom: "How these books have been interpreted," he wrote, "or what they are in themselves is not of great importance. I took from them what I needed."[20]

Are we not doing the same at every moment without always realizing, as we did at the outset, how much do we do in ignorance of our brave or good intentions? Yes, we seem to have to hoodwink to get away with what we do not know, to understand the essential frauds which are always played on ourselves. Radicalized by some of the leading architects like Peter, Michael, Frank or Bernard,

telephone directories used to be produced as quick as the digital press could create them - *content* actually becomes 'literally' content. At what cost? The blur might not be one of our creating but it is one we must respond to, students and faculty alike. Publishing, promotion, new media and re-branding – all these are issues that can define work, gain commissions and allow architects to pitch for works which were not always imagined by the officials or deciding bodies. We have seen leading architects exploit this not only to define their works but to propel them into leading positions. There is nothing magic about this; much of it is hard work, clear strategies that link the profession – often dubiously – to advertising techniques. Yet we must master these to work within them, re-occupy them and encourage the students to develop their positions from within. We must strip away the mystery of this process and reduce it to hard work. We must understand the contract between ambition, risk and opportunism that has often formed contemporary architecture and its complex inter-relationships with systems of management, administration and funding. Of course our task is not made easier by its ethical challenge today, but it is undoubtedly an important challenge and one which returns us to Tillich who wrote so elegantly about this in his lecture on courage in Yale. "Courage united with wisdom, includes temperance in relation to oneself as well as justice in relation to others." In a period when Tillich called for a god above God, in the existential 1950s, we might reasonably call today for *an architecture above architecture*.

coda

A call for a new rebellion in some form, you say! How quaint and foggy, you must think, how charming the language sounds today. "My non-conformism" the Polish Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz wrote in Native Realm, "rested on foggy socialist impulse, but above all in something that I could not have named then, so submerged was it in my own subconscious."[21] Yet to feel this is not to yearn for the lost revolutionary times in response to another mechanistic version of the world. What exactly has changed for the architect? Less deterministic, 'undecidable' ideas have seen little change in the generalised ways architecture attempted to communicate with its users, its public and its society at large. Nor is this to yearn for an errant Liberalism and non-conformism to take us from the 20th Century in all its thunder, naivety and destruction into this century

in all its uncertainty and unrest. So is it somewhat goofy to want to take some responsibility today without actually knowing where to start, given that we can no longer start over, but must occupy everything in the middle? In the middle of sense and non-sense? Many graduates continue their studies or then return to school after a brief spell out in the so-called market. Some slightly disillusioned, others sharpened by the experience; all know that slowly, ever so slowly, the ethical issue is beginning to appear again. The notion of being a responsible self is the flip side of meltdown and boredom. Not how we introduce liquidity into the market once again to get the market back to its free flowing greed - all buy-all never-never credit land - but to introduce critical ideas and the imagination as the true liquidity of our survival. It is within this context – highlighted by the crack where the light gets through (Leonard Cohen), highlighted by the students' desire to find a method to express an ethic and a responsibility where we might begin. It is then that we can be in the middle of the contemporary market and speak in echo of Tillich of our essential condition today - the courage to be. There are alternatives – and it is up to us – irresponsibly - to find them. We need new beginnings today, but they never start there, at the beginning; they start in the middle of what we have now. It is our courage that must take them elsewhere; only occasionally – no, more than occasionally - it is essential to have the courage to take the mask off.

part two

the irresponsibility of writing architecture

In a way we all have to explain ourselves. We are forced to. Where, into an infinite richness turned back on us producing such searing indictments of progress, a wounded development? I doubt if these studies succeed in answering these questions. But I have no excuse. I must try. I am writing architecture in India after spending over a decade working, collaborating and `writing architecture' with the subject of this book

Reima Pietila (or the object as he liked to call himself).

Some years ago, just over 20 in fact, I wrote a volume called *Writing Architecture*. Subtext: *Fragments, Fictions, Fantomas – an architectural journey through the 20th century*. By exploring the work of the Finnish architect Reima Pietila I managed to construct critical realities, truths, fragments and fantom(a)s from a remarkable oeuvre; one engaged within the thinking of the 20th Century. Within the multi-layered book, especially in its footnotes on each page, lay also an alternative critical history of Finnish architecture. The footnotes were the writing of an impossible book; a book that would deschool the educational institutes, the professional codes and the media control that had all but marginalised the work of the Finnish architect during his life. These involved the blind and blinded scenarios that conformed to how architects,

the educational establishments and the profession desired to read and position Finnish architecture.

Recently I returned to look at some of the issues surrounding Finnish Architecture and the continuing marginalization yet strange small-scale canonisation of the architect Reima Pietila. I started to explore, openly and generously, what I imagined as a *soothing memo*. Was it possible to ignore the cultural forgetting of this architect and suggest valid new ways of approaching the working methods and changes within the architect's mind (assuming one might know a little of this) whilst at the same time indicating issues about interpretation and critical (ir)responsibility? In other words what is our individual, responsible role when we embark upon a critical action in relation to an archive?

But something was more pressing at the time, 16 years after the architect's death in 1993. I had been contemplating for some time the notion of *The Irresponsible Self* in reference to our critical actions and any truths we may wish to award them. I wondered how to engage in a running collaboration with the architect's archive, much of which I had also been intimately involved with for a period of 20 years. At this time the Museum of Finnish Architecture had instigated a re-assessment of the architect's work through the archive made available. What became obvious were the critical fictions that would be inevitable by the limitations of extracting and selecting pieces and fragments of the work. Interested scholars would be seduced to appear to support un-supportable ideas, even conjectures about the architect's mind and work. Interestingly it was just this aspect of the seduced critical fictions and the options that were open to us that I had attempted to write out in *Writing Architecture*. The idea was to set out specific logical reasons for options – in the form of a critical field

which became a series of critical routes embedded in the aforementioned parallel narrative of footnotes. It matters little now whether many of these issues were read, aired or even noticed, but by doing this was I inviting or preventing a necessary and responsible stage of refutation by discourse, debate, or paper?

Many architects and critics at the time in Finland (circa 1980s/1990s), those with the background and experience (often first-hand) to trace these issues and determine whether they were conjectures, inventions or fictions, did not however engage. Pietila remained well off the map as far as most of them were concerned. Whether anyone now agrees with this critical strategy or not also matters little but the main (post)structural idea embedded in the book was to offer critical options and information that could have been of profit to various interested parties in the Finnish society. If these were then encountered with the same spirit of conjecture and refutation as they were written, another critical history could have emerged from the book. In other words my irresponsible self, the way of treating this material, might have been seen as critically more responsible than perhaps the usual book that might have emerged on the architect Pietilä.

However nothing of the sort happened. There is always that something in *Homo fennicus* that finds it difficult to be Homo dialogicus, and it seems any critically reflexive work like *Writing Architecture* would reveal the dilemma and conundrum of any intellectual production of this sort. To suggest that a lost critical history and pedagogy might be embedded within a book is now less important than the more obvious point that critical circles found no opportunity to take on a fluid critical condition. It was in fact seen as a method of incoherence, which allowed most Finns to remain comfortably protected

by this notion and silently condemn Pietila's work once more. However, there were other voices. The Dutch critic Wortman, for example, could identify the book's method more succinctly: "according to the author, this anti-method of incoherence is the appropriate way to approach Pietilä as his architecture signals fragmentation, unendingness, incompletion, openness, deferment. And one has to say the author succeeds majestically to reveal these aspects through the book itself... this book is not yet a book, the author is not the author and the reader is not the reader... he has assembled a book full of noise from which the reader must make a book."

This was apt. To talk of critical repetition and any 'truth' it might have projected at the time, any return to a book previously published often deflects the process. The generalised apartheid and critical closing out of Pietila as an architect conformed to the first of the steps recognised in response-analysis as defined by Niebuhr. The familiar steps in this process are usually three fold: firstly a stage of ignoring something, pretending it does not exist, and disavowing it gently, thereby eventually killing it softly. Secondly, fighting the situation by raising some issues that may or may not have any relevance but serve to channel the fight. Thirdly, a form of appeasement becomes critical reconciliation. It is quite possible to use this to trace the critical histories and such wilful adventures on the work of many architects. Aalto's reception in Finland and abroad, for example, follows precisely these stages. To ignore, the condition of recognition but silence, is usually the opening attitude in any unreconciled critical condition that disagrees in some way with the text(s) or work(s). Silence is sociologically recognised; defensiveness which, if allowed to go unchecked, appear a righteous response to loyalty. When we speak of the Finnish society however we might leave that aside for the moment, for the whole 'culture of

silence' is itself a domain often protected within and by the ethics of (un)critical action.

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   We are well aware today that very little of what we write in books or essays is in fact read, or then retained except in narratives that re-connect with our own identities and selfishly-responsible (and critical) selves. The generalised *other* is the response that itself then must be responded to. In fact, in all the books I have written (even those not on Finnish Architecture) this condition where critical options and conjectures offer interpretations that can be accepted or then erased has been one of the main drivers. This contract, like editing within the mind, is a condition of plurality which can also allow the reader to consider the conditions and conjectures that make such ideas, and architecture in this case, meaningful to the interpreter, the reader (the redeemer, if you like!). Not meaningful architecture in the abstract or from an idealist position, which is narrowed to accepted pasts and known futures, but the condition of response itself, whether as language (including writing) or in this case as 'architecture'.

   Truth, and this has been reinforced from the events of the last 20 years in the recently coined *starchitecture*, takes second place to the options scripted for or against different forms of normative or trans-normative architecture and even architects. Often value and any originality can only be appreciated by historicising context and conjecture; otherwise there is a dangerous emphasis on the lone genius, the sacred or enchanted charmer who is simply unique. Is this still critically acceptable? Even a considered and measured exercise to re-appraise Eero Saarinen, for example, will offer plenty of opportunity to show how interpretations become variations, conjectures, reversals

shaped by the 'accepted critical' response to the moment. Lapsing into what we can see perhaps as a reductionist subjectivism offers no real advance on the agreed fields of the professional classifiers (in this case certain critics, professionals and academics). The response/responsibility we might look for then is only one made up of both the personal and institutional exchange; one which does not and cannot only anchor itself in the present. From *zero to hero* (and back again) is a critical narrative littered throughout the history of the 20th century, and not only in architecture. It may well be one repeated this century too.

❀

Writing Architecture began for me an interest in the relations between moral philosophy and critical writing. The notion of critical options, ethical actions within criticism and the realm of critical fictions were part of the precise, yet purposefully multiple messages embedded in the book. The interminable interpretations that were offered, invited obvious deflections. Disclaimers disclaimed both truth and untruth. The inventions and conjectures, personal, academic and fictional all set up the work as a narrative. Even the title, with its graphic hint at difference, immediately set out the potential oppositions and collusion between these two activities that we are faced with, when using language on something like 'architecture'. In other words **Writing/***Architecture!* The title mirrored the process of *Homo faber*, man-the-maker, moving to man-the-proposer (not answerer); in this case it slashed into the movement of experience and interpretations just as the architect too gathers source, any source, to interpret, transfer experience and shape/slash into architecture. The book progressed procedurally, yet spiralled, obeying a logic of invention that entertained, of course, the arbitrary, the accepted, the known and unknown conjecture(s), even the

'apparent' falsity or untruth (and thus whatever defines that other side – the non-false, the truth!).

Writing Architecture tried to represent the dimensions of existence that make up the architect's life in all its contradiction, coherence seeking and, of course, incoherence. This also resonated with many of the discussions and exchanges of ideas that I had shared with the architect Reima Pietilä, for various periods over nearly two decades, many of which naturally remained unfinished, unresolved, indeterminate yet not without their use in forming architecture. It was thus unnecessary to invent a dialogue or a monologue at the time; anyone who knew Pietilä was aware of this, and anyone who knew me was also aware of the interminable journals I kept about this process. Indeed the sub-title of the book announced this 'infinity': *Fantomas, Fragments Fictions: an architectural journey through the 20th Century*.

One of the first chapters was called *The Spidership* and explained the inter-connected world of fantasy, fragment and fiction within the history of ideas, the clash of juxtaposition within an interpretation of Pietilä's own history and reception to ideas, and also within the writer's. That was why the survey of the biographical data was treated visually too and called a *Fortunate Chronology*. 'Fortunate' because, for the time, it had to establish its position in the 20th Century, and fortunate too, it had to be able to ride many disciplines and epochs like the 1930s and 1950s which opened up to other arts besides architecture. The introductory citations – one by Paul Feyerabend[25] - indicated this approach to a series of options, as did the graphic layout. The graphics played an important role in this process, inviting those who wished to sense (at the time unusual in book design - not so unusual in today's web-influenced designs) the menu within it all.

So invention (inventive conjecture) engaged within a critical world – which in essence is always a response to a response - was the very basis of the book. In this way considering this writing full of conjectures would be an accurate response. These conjectures differ however from traces of any bitterness, gossip or anecdote. It was the 'difficulty' of pinning these down like a butterfly's wing on card, which unwittingly re-identifies the book's strongest, yet paradoxically, weakest link. The fragility and inventive movement of ideas, the tripartite structure (f-f-f), especially the inventions, became the opening gambit to the reader (or redeemer). This was the point of the book as it steered its way through this, at the time, unknown and relatively ignored field (meaning an architect's scrambled and mined position within the ideas of the 20th Century, however detailed or thinly these ideas entered architecture).

Was this an irresponsible move within critical writing at the time? Despite an exhibition, a couple of previous studies, and the furore over recent projects, Pietilä's work had already been approximated and generalised to the various easy critical terms applied, some appreciative, others derisory. Thus it was important to participate in this debate and climate with a book about the writing and irresponsibility of critical framing at the same time as showing the work. It was then logical to take this a step further and consider how this framing could make, rebuke or deny certain claims and interpretations rather than others. In another way it was an invitation to reflexive thinking within 'writing' and 'architecture', but it was also a signal to the reflexivity that Pietilä himself also discussed and adopted.

Claims about this or that architect as they veer toward critically accepted interpretations depend, as any scholar knows navigating critical fields, often on the source,

the previous knowledge, the response and the way these aspects are freighted and valued. Naturally, to take this further, the menu in *Writing Architecture* set up a process which in itself represented another archive. That these are conjectures set up in this way allows them to be refuted, re-scripted, denied or further supported. That was the very nature of the journey, epistemologically fragile at the same time as navigating what we consider facts. For the nature of critical invention could, if it so wished, cancel its own knowledge and authenticity at any stage.

This fragility was the aspect which the Finnish writer and poet Jukka Kemppinen understood and identified within *Writing Architecture* in his piece in the Finnish national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, as its (welcome and challenging) 'irresponsibility'. It was a book he said in 1990, if I remember correctly, that he would have liked to have tried to write but could not, would not, dare under the circumstances. By 'under the circumstances' he was, I sensed, implying the 'over-responsible, at times repressive' Finnish society. Perhaps the writer still stands by that statement, I have no idea: "I suspect the book will awaken some malice because it is irresponsibly fine."

Irresponsibly fine. I would never have dared go that far. But one day some four years later in the Palace Hotel in Helsinki when Bruno Zevi picked up the book *Writing Architecture*, he said to me: "Why don't I know this book? It has to be in my library." Whether it ever reached his library I have no idea. One or two other Finnish commentators got this 'irresponsibility' and understood the delinquent 'invention' and its relation to the inverted critical, possibly fictional world, which was not a term or field of study then seen in many architectural circles, though it did exist in literary, cinematic and anthropology studies of reflexivity and meta-history. Besides Jukka Kemppinen, the poet

Paavo Haavikko and architect Antti Veltheim sensed this (Veltheim, as far as I remember, wrote acutely about the Book as the Writing of another Book, or the Architecture of the Book inside the Work). Some outside Finland did or didn't get this or pick up on it, though the MIT editor and poet Roger Conover did; one professor in Edinburgh understood the notion of critical options and, remaining passive to be receptive, accepted the circus mayhem working within the critical paradox. Late in his life Bruno Zevi however told me he had re-discovered the book and said he hadn't understood it at first, found it difficult (and irresponsible), only later when something else was revealed entirely to him could he approach it. Perhaps the impending Millennium changed Zevi's reading habits too.

As mentioned the Dutch critic Wortmann understood and discussed the impossibility of the fragment and how within the book, fragments (another word for 'conjecture') re-stated the labyrinth whilst appearing to offer conventional architectural and cultural analecta and interpretations. Many of course, and I knew this, would see obfuscation, difficulty, collusion, incoherence and deferral. That was a risk which had to be taken. When *Writing Architecture* appeared, the architect knew this too. Pietilä constantly recognised the slippery danger, thrill and potential of thinking in and writing about and against architecture. He also knew well the danger of falling short of the clarity often required by accepted patterns and discourse. It reminds me of Cioran's point: "Lucidity is the only vice which makes us free – free in a desert."[23] For me there had been a natural and clear sense of serious irresponsibility in this aspect of critical invention and the logic behind the conjectures. It was the nature of an ethical position taken inside the critical act that had to be revealed.

❅

There was another aspect of the 'irresponsible self' in relation to *Writing Architecture*. Part of the exercise too was to navigate a condition I had got used to from the inside, and familiar to anyone who is given the request for their work to be read, checked and, possibly, censored. The architect (like many others) wished to read and, if he could, correct wherever possible that which was written about him or his work. This is more widespread probably than we imagine as journals over the years face the necessity to run texts by the architects for approval. Anyone can imagine the restriction this places on critical thinking itself. This was a problematic that emerged time and time again in Finnish critical writing and seminars. Recently sharing this in London with a Finnish scholar researching Classical Greek, the difficulty of contesting ideas outside the deference to group solidarity (professional, academic, institutional, local or national) came up once more. Scholars are somewhat embarrassed to have to explain the fear of offence (and being offended) that belongs to a small, academically turf-defined society. Many besides architects have reiterated this difficulty and some at the turn of the century went as far as hinting at the 'closing of the Finnish mind'.

I would be unqualified to go that far, but it is an issue worth debating and appearing on the seminar circuit and is not seriously negated by suggesting those existing outside the 'mental frames' of a country or society ultimately may hold to or support implausible and irresponsible ideas. The interesting pattern is how the 'closing' (of the architectural mind?) may appear just when the process itself appeals to openness and generosity. This 'deference' (a word popular with many editors) was often considered professionally reasonable and usually proceeded unchallenged. Useful as a means to an end for those who wished to employ it, it was often a confused notion leading to confused

critical thinking; ideas often hung in the balance, between deference (often demanded by one's position of authority) and respect.

Though deference could lead to an unbalanced critical thinking there was of course and always is another way. Respect was something other than loyalty and deference which could both collapse behind a fear and defensiveness. Over the years I saw many texts red-lined, erased, re-phrased, just as I too have done that at times as an editor myself in various countries over the years. But I saw no point in existing in some sort of critical deference when writing this book, *Writing Architecture*. Discussed in the 20th Century as the so called 'intentional fallacy', the author's, artist's or architect's words, opinions or explanations must always be adhered to as the starting point of interpretations made.

Of course this leads to the trap the writer can then fall into. For why would one set out to outline critical boundaries, retain critical independence, if the written interpretations were fictions, conjectures and even, possibly, lies? Why then believe the critical frame that cancels out ideas? This, too, is a common reflexive trap but one which I was aware I had to play inside if I was to write a book like *Writing Architecture*. Hence this notion of 'irresponsibility' emerged sharply once more. The book had to reveal the obvious acceptance that if an architect like Pietilä could knowingly set up plural narratives, alternating methodologies, a descriptive practice and interpretations to gain space and mind, what effect would this have on his mind and architecture? What would he gain by this and why? Would this inevitably result in the inner dialogue and a kind of disclaimer to the self, to avoid any network ruled by critical fear and prejudice? Reconciliation may always be part of the critical process but is never quite

totally achieved; but if so, then lifeless? This meant the architect could naturally do that to those close to him too, of course. If we call this being *thrown off the scent*, which the architect often spoke about, then why would the person not throw off the scent even someone trusted with a private dialogue? Naturally we have to leave open here the idea of possible cynical calculations, but in Pietilä's situation I know which way I would fall. There was not a 'scent' of cynicism in his body or mind; but he did understand the reflexive condition he was often put in as an *outsider on the inside* of Finnish architecture.

So the Book tried to establish a series of critical fictions within the dynamic workings of memory and recollection and then dispute it. Even the past could then be put up to the latest bid from contemporary discourse and weight. Hence this brought me to another aspect of the irresponsible self: irresponsibility risks appearing to become responsible when it takes into consideration the gentle survival techniques, something similar to the relations between the hunter and the hunted. And despite the metaphorical sense of the word, the architect did talk more than once of hunting for clues, and contemplated his position in Finnish architecture (not so much World architecture) of being the 'hunted'. Whether this is an unwise choice of words is surely less important than the sense of what he was trying to convey. Why would one attempt to correct him for an 'incorrect' metaphor, and why would others, those close to him perhaps, wish to disbelieve that he ever used the word/metaphor because he appeared so gentle and would never have thought in that way?

The Finnish architect Reima Pietilä had an inimitable mischief, which worked inside his own irresponsible self. On Sundays, when we worked supposedly ordering the archive, he was always layering both clues and alibis

as to why he would remain so enigmatic, pagan even, primitive if you wish such words. The irresponsibility was matched by laughter, and the smile on his face often told of the careful, and I mean careful, Dadaist. Almost as if he could be like Arthur Craven (the poet-pugilist, the 'literal' irresponsible self, who committed a Dadaist suicide) and disappear inside ideas which he knew could never truly be transferred into architecture. Perhaps that is the best compliment; the architect brought out the 'irresponsible self' in me tempting to exist within the seemingly endlessly interesting possibilities to interpret and understand his own work and mind. Infinite for obvious reasons, it was the framing - each time he was catalogued and analysed - that he upset; a critical and ethical condition which made this or that interpretation no more fitting than others.

For Pietilä also knew: the condition of 'fitting' changed and would change again when he was no longer around. We spoke about it at some depth. It is this labyrinth that interested him just as it interested me in *Writing Architecture*; a labyrinth that both supports an archive which seeks some closure and at the same time is compelled to go against any archive in planting clues for a future that is not known. Ultimately part of an *Irresponsible Self* that seeks another part, unmentionable and unrevealed within the dimensions of existence in the critical act. It is more than tempting to end for the moment with our duty posed by Niebuhr which "is infinitely responsible in an infinite universe to the hidden yet manifest principle of its being and its salvation."

the confession

I never had an exceptional mind

> I reach first of all the extreme limit of knowledge (for example, I mimic - MIME - absolute knowledge, in whichever way, but that assumes an infinite effort of the mind wanting knowledge). I know then that I know nothing.
>
> George Bataille

James Watson who won the Nobel Prize for his DNA work with Francis Crick says: "I never had an exceptional mind. I was just very focused and impatient." If a lecture or book begins with confusion, becomes extremely bored with itself and ends possibly with the same confusion that it had when it set out, is it an irresponsible lecture or book? If architecture operated similarly would it be irresponsible architecture? Around the time in India when I finished the rather big book called *Writing Architecture* and I began thinking about irresponsibility, various events seemed to go together. Something in the insistence and persistent relativism of these events in the early 1990s invited in me an expression of absolute disinterest with architecture, particularly its so-called trends, movements, its court kings and queens, its royal discourses and anti-discourses,

its failing pedagogy, its seminar circuits, its illuminati and cogniscenti, its peters, franks and michaels. To continue in some way to be part of the discourse, or participate in architecture, writing and critical thinking, it was essential I felt to mime my own knowledge especially, as one was told, in order to make any serious contribution to architecture you had to be on the circuit. In the language of the street, which in architecture is the language of the conference corridors, you had to learn to talk a good game. The game was over as far as I was concerned.

But tempted to learn how to talk a good game, personally I still found myself increasingly indifferent to architecture's progress. Around the world in various situations I watched many architects more or less talk a good game; whether there was any intellectual grounding or critical generosity in their ideas was of course less clear. And all the time I did what Georges Bataille spoke about, eventually reaching the extreme limit of my own knowledge. Having done so, it was inevitable. I became a mimic. I began to mime absolute knowledge in many different ways. Restless, I was involved in an infinite effort of that type of mind that wanted knowledge. But to what end? Finally, I suppose like Bataille, I knew then that I knew nothing. Redundancy struck with a vengeance. I became continually depressed with architecture's circus. It was not hard to be insulted by the self-advertisement of architects, and amused by the superfluous graphics and visual carnivals in the journals and institutions. Despite the wonderful, zany intellectual developments emanating from France and the 'fashionable abuse' of Postmodernism and Deconstruction, despite the promise of electronic spaces redefining a dematerialised architecture, very little seemed to be opening beyond the mechanistic. The architect as an intellectual figure became suspect; and the public grew suspicious and crankily opinionated about all development.

I had however long felt that my life up until that moment had done little more than mime the knowledge it had picked up. Was this merely disenchantment, the inevitable return of the 'black dog' or the inevitable result of intense opposition? If I continued this way, I was on a hiding to nothing. If I voiced it, it would probably put an end to any claim I may have had to serious thinking in this discipline. There was comfort in this disenchantment however. And to voice it seemed a risk worth taking. Since then, between 1990 and 2010, I have managed twenty books mostly on or around architecture, all of which now seem to me to be inadequate. Though for what reason I cannot say. Communication is never anything but these generalized ideas about architecture's own weakness, hopes and vulnerability. But why was I so shy except in print, I was asked. Perhaps it was me, not architecture that was all talked up!

However much knowledge was mimed and contested, this condition meant I gained more joy in delaying any lecture, in trying to oversleep, in taking the espresso before, and the cigar and whisky after, the lecture. I couldn't wait to get away from the lecture hall, the institution, the university, indeed any situation. Inside I felt I had all the wisdom and answers to this mechanistic world. Inside, of course, I thought I was a responsible self. Outside I couldn't care less when I saw the professors and assistants, the administration and the cleaning staff, all obeying health and safety measures and scurrying around to get the place clear for the next visitor, the next speaker, the next almost-professor. During one series of lectures in the 1990s I met a teacher from Harvard, full of the architectural tension of teaching and practice. She spoke like a Formula 1 racing driver. Instead of putting our tongues away, we recommended to each other books and books and books. I was given references and in obedience to the scholarly

instinct I duly noted them down. John Cage *Composed in America*, Sadie Plant *The Most Radical Act*, Joan Ockman's *Architecture and Culture*. If these weren't the titles, I knew I could just as easily – irresponsibly? - invent others in their place. Just where were we in relation to the knowledge floating around in architecture? We had no time to think, so racy was the moment and decade, so important was it to remain abreast with theory and academia.

In my increasing melancholia, I felt like one of those incomplete beings who had not seen Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle*, Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* or *Singing in the Rain* though I had seen them all. How much in ignorance were we of architecture's lost issues, whilst we were so aware of the main themes, the smart ideas floating around? What extra meaning could we cleverly squeeze from architecture's errant and redundant dream of organizing a higher life for mankind? How much were we in ignorance of the production of architecture, its practice, its translations to and from other cultures, whilst we discussed how the 'spatial figures of Deleuze' were being gratuitously grafted onto architectural form? Where did we stand in all this fashionable nonsense? Were we still too strictly involved in a parochial discipline when architecture itself was becoming achingly redundant and irresponsible? And how did we become those creatures actually replacing words like 'discourse', 'paradigm' and 'production' with words like 'commensuration', 'trope' and 'dis-figuration'?

Were we hallucinating on the only drug left after 1968, theory? Theory had not done a whole lot to architecture recently though it claimed the world. If anything, theory had absolved itself from touching the core of the radical act. Fashion made sure of that. So much so that the most radical theory would be called *Deradicalism*! It was now obvious, as fast as trends changed, architecture could

triumphantly emerge and dissolve from just about any trace - be it a biscuit, a haiku, an anguish, a hair-dryer, a software programme called Alibi, Heidegger or Samuel Beckett. This is precisely what the Finnish architect Reima Pietilä had shared with me for so many years. Had he been 'exactly wrong' for so many years? I was implicated in all this hallucination too. As if still charting insight into teenage outrage, I had not only lectured making such claims for architecture, I had even written texts irresponsibly trying to make the same claims, admittedly with a little more organized wisdom and fairly acceptable poetry.

We finished our espresso and flapjack. We parted. I promised to look at the books and put my tongue away for another year or two. Or three. No letters. No correspondence. No further communication. What ecstasy! In that year, the year of nearly becoming a professor, I felt as though to speak one more word would be committing critical and professional suicide. To speak, to be so explicit at such a time, under the present circumstances, seemed - once again to echo Paul Celan in response to Bertolt Brecht - the crime it always has been.

What times are these
when a conversation
is almost a crime
because it includes
so much made explicit?

Paul Celan[24]

How to write? How to build? How to speak? How to absolve oneself of that crime? Not long after, I arrived in San Francisco via Stockholm, London and Helsinki. My hosts, an architectural school, were concerned that I didn't really know where I lived. To them coming from Europe, I

was always on the move. To answer the question 'do you know where you live?' with the answer, 'you don't need to, you carry your home here inside' made no sense to them. Architecture had become inseparable from life for them too. No amount of Zen-Sufism was going to alter the obvious: the home carried inside was also firmly placed on the outside. I felt like a snail or a hermit crab out there in the surroundings of industrial fly-over, earthquake-amputated San Francisco. But a ready cynicism made sure my answer had no chance. It was flat-tongued, flat-earth, flat-planet time! I was informed (*in their words*) that I was a 'surfer'. Someone else called me a 'contemporary nomad'. In no uncertain terms it became obvious that my fitness for possible professorial service was in question. There was itching and embarrassment, polite attention and wandering eyes. The result was predictable. The way we spoke to each other got looser and looser the longer I remained there. Very quickly, without prompting, vague expressions were used as initiatory rites between us. Ignorance seemed the main drawback: *Ah, philosophy in architecture... yes! Ah theory, you're a theory man! Ah, existence... we have little time for that here...* And so on. Quickly the phrase 'Postmodernism' was erased and another one entered; Transmodernism or was it Supermodernism or even Hypermodernism? It came as if from a prepared pre-scripted voice: *Trans-modernism can remove the humanistic concern with its exercise of trace, subjecthood and capital production.*

Cleft-palates, voices, still leaves and all the words went dead the moment they came out. There in San Francisco, I became St. Exupery's *Little Prince*. I didn't know what these grown ups were saying nor what they wanted. I longed for an escape to the hotel I was staying at, The Hotel Griffon. And suddenly the symbol of such a bird like the 'griffon' seemed appropriate for someone like me spending a year or two nearly becoming a professor. You see, if the

griffon wasn't really of the vulture family, I could live with the hallucination. Once back in the hotel jacuzzi, in conversation with a Californian schoolteacher, she raised the alarm of illiteracy in the state. *No one speaks anymore*, she said, *in school it is hard to encourage a conversation. Forget any exchange.* It sounded familiar. The night before I had heard an architectural student trying to defend decisions for an architectural solution so carelessly thought-out, so arbitrarily constructed, that I wondered why Philip K. Dick was not reincarnated and heading the School of Architecture. The future was certainly being represented in the suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area. The problem was: I wasn't about to be part of that future.

Sunny, fit and with high energy, the proactive retro-fitting earthquake had done what the planners couldn't do to the fly over outside my window: amputate. Even here in the shadow of Alcatraz, I felt architecture had become irresponsible; it was redundant not only to the politicians who legislate for or against the environment, but redundant to itself as a recognisable, sustainable and responsible discipline. I sat on the hotel bed overlooking the Bay Bridge and Alcatraz Prison trying to polish a statement to introduce my lecture. The dilemma – was it my own? *There is a dilemma*, I began to write, *either architecture is called to responsibility or architecture calls each of us to answer for its wayward condition. Surf or de-rail?* I looked out of the window. *Even here in the shadow of Alcatraz, there is a very real likelihood that architecture has become redundant not only to the politicians who legislate for or against the environment, but redundant to itself as a recognizable, sustainable discipline.* I liked that line for some reason and, encouraged, tried something else: *Further, showing signs of critical fatigue, the endgame as it is now called, architecture becomes redundant to the public who then ignore the claims for an architecture*

in languages still to reach them. I paused. How could I end, I thought to myself. Can we blame the public for opting for a wistful remembrance, for locking themselves in mimesis? Can we blame the public for a nostalgia that seeks a public architecture from a past model? Is not the fragile eminence of what we heard spoken some twenty years ago replaced by the equally fragile eminence of what we speak now?

I was miming knowledge. I thought I understood what I had said. But would someone else? From the hotel window a jogger passed on the Embarcadero, reminding me that I was supposed to be more focussed. Brevity and the sound-byte were necessary in this world. I stared at Alcatraz and tried again: *Either architecture was called to responsibility or architecture calls each of us to answer for its wayward condition.* I smiled. This was critical fatigue. I knew Reima Pietilä would have laughed at these words. He would have liked the line and, encouraged, changed it. He might have spoken of the 'endgame' in chess and mentioned Samuel Beckett again. Or then not. He would have re-written my idea.

The lights dimmed over the Bay. I paused. How could we end all this? Was the architect like the public opting for a wistful remembrance, was the architect locked in mimesis? Can we blame ourselves for the nostalgia that seeks a public architecture from a past model and closes the architectural minds once more? *Wish fulfilment in architecture subsided in the 20th century when the political goal was compromised. But wish fulfilment did not disappear. A lost idealism began fellow-travelling until architecture also ended up surfing with the fallen promise of language.*

The words blurred. The wars of religions were recalled.

I stared at Alcatraz. Later during the lecture, trying and failing to talk a good game, I used neither statements nor words I had prepared. I erased them all. Instead, I thought of the French word, *aplatissement*. It means the flattening, the working and the beating down of a metal, especially copper. Did it not have particular resonance in architectural thinking? Had not the last thirty years ensured a relentless hijacking and beating down of ideas? Suddenly the major issue didn't seem to be architecture at all. If I was reading the signs correctly, being present in architecture seemed more about the necessity to keep one's voice alive. In the increasingly showmanship world of Architecture with a capital A, you were dead if you did not perform. If you didn't talk a good game, forget it!

❧

Some time later that year after I had returned from that trip to San Francisco, I received a request from the ANY Architectural Journal in New York orchestrated by Peter (Eisenman) and friends. They had even produced one of their first journals called Writing Architecture. The phrase was familiar; hadn't I spent years in India writing that? There was real concern, Peter's editor said, to keep your voice alive. The idea though that I would have to write something more on architecture or indeed speak more and more about it in order to keep my own voice alive frankly horrified me. I was in near panic. It was suicide time. So close to a vomit-moment, I hurriedly dispatched a note to New York describing that I had spent the last six months writing a children's book, in which I was doing everything I could to put my tongue away. It remained to be seen, of course, whether anyone would publish that book in which the main character, an Inaction Hero called Rodolfo was a fugitive from the opera La Boheme. Rodolfo came though from the 'wrong' century and was in love with a character

called Buffo. Just as I was! And Rodolfo would be trying to come to terms, not with all that dumb snow he had spent his winters under, not with all this dumb snow outside this lecture hall, but with all the wise men in the forest that seem to prevent us from acknowledging that as the Finnish poet Haavikko had said, ultimately there was and is not one stupid tree!

A paradox indeed! All those wise men in architecture over the years, yet not one stupid tree! It was around that time that I felt like disowning myself. What was this irresponsibility? Was this a realization that I had studied, learnt and been released into a world in architecture with such a poor critical and practical grasp of the knowledge of architecture itself? If over the years architects have attempted to use architecture as an alibi of emptiness and pretence, what then of our own melancholia and pretence? Is that why I could never be an architect, never build the darkness inside me? Was it not then, is it not now, the time to come out and welcome each other to our own irresponsible selves?

Of course it is possible to retreat within architecture, irresponsibly too, but in this almost godless position once more repeating and trailing Nietzsche, Camus, Havel and others, the architect, the student, the planet all have to re-think what it means to 'live the truth'. What is the courage to be today, when we are in the middle of things, neither able to begin again or to conclude? So finally, to salute our irresponsible selves, let us return to the poetry. In the same volume mentioned at the outset of this little book, Little Johnny's Confession, Brian Patten, the poet we began with, wrote Little Johnny's Final Letter[22] – perhaps this is our clue. Architecture today needs to write its final letter to get on with being not what it can no longer be, but what it should be, enriching a human and, if it has to be, an irresponsible future:

Mother,
I won't be home this evening, so
don't worry; don't hurry to report me missing.
Don't drain the canals to find me,
I've decided to stay alive, don't
search the woods, I'm not hiding,
simply gone to get myself classified.
Don't leave my shreddies out,
I've done with security.
Don't circulate my photograph to society
I've disguised myself as a man
and I am giving priority to obscurity.
It suits me fine;
I've taken off my short trousers
and put on long ones, and
now am going out into the city, so
don't worry; don't hurry to report me missing.
I've rented a room without curtains
and sit behind the windows growing cold,
heard your plea on the radio this morning,
you sounded sad and strangely old.

❋

Roger Connah © September 2011

1. Witold Gombrowicz, Ferdydurke, Calder & Boyars, London. 1967, p.83

2. Brian Patten, Little Johnny's Confession, Brian Patten, Allen & Unwin 1967

3. Peter Eisenman 6 Points, Lecture, RIA Scotland, (2007), also see 10 Canonical Buildings 1950-2000, Rizzoli (2008)

4. A.Balfour, On the Characteristic and Beliefs of the Architect, JAE40#2(1987) cited in The Favored Circle, The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction, Garry Stevens, MIT Press, 1998

5. Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be, New Haven, Yale University Press (1951); extract from 'Absolute Faith and the Courage to Be'.

6. H.R. Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, an essay in Christian Moral Philosophy, Harper & Row (1963). Westminster: John Knox Press (1999).

7. cf Eisenman, RIAS (Scotland) 2007.

8. Paul Ricoeur, Fallible Man, Henry Regnery Co. (1965); Fordham University Press (1986)

9. Terry Eagleton, After Theory, Penguin, London (2004).

10. Jean Luc Godard (14: Montage my fine care), Godard on Godard, critical writings, Cinema Two, Secker & Warburg (1972).

11. op.cit Garry Stevens, The Favored Circle, p.114

12. Czeslaw Miloz, Native Realm, A Search for Self-Definition, FSG, New York (2002) p.63.

13. Cseslaw Milosz, Roadside Dog FSG, New York (1998)

endnotes

14. cf. Ester Zandberg: www.haaretz.com.

15. D. Ghirardo, Eisenman's Bigus Avant-garde, op cit The Favored Circle: L'affaire Eisenman. p. 120-121.

16. Emil Cioran The Trouble with Being Born, Quartet, London (1993)

17. cf Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media, MIT Press, (2002) also Soft Cinema: Navigating the Database, Manovich & Kratky (VHS, 2005)

18. Pekka Himanen, The Hacker Ethic, Random House, new York 2001

19. Witold Gombrowicz, Diary, Vol.2 (1957-1961) Northwestern University Press, (1989) p.17.

20. op.cit. Milosz Native Realm, p.86

21. ibid Milosz, p.96

22. Knowledge so conceived is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to truth. It is rather an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible (and perhaps even incommensurable) alternatives, each single theory, each fairy tale each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition to the development of our consciousness. Nothing is ever settled, no view can ever be omitted from a comprehensive account. Paul Feyerabend Against Method.

23. op.cit, Cioran The Trouble with Being Born.

24. Paul Celan, Selected Poems, Penguin, London (1972).

25. op.cit., Patten, Little Johnny's Confession.

the
irresponsible
self
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design: **Cedric Boulet + Robert van Lin**

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 (now re-dated) 600 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. Though there were no traces of asbestos in this devilishly attractive 1970s finish, the recent reincarnation, helped on by a group of brilliantly flexible and creative builders from Wigan called Direct Building Solutions, headed by Danny R. has been made possible by the discovery of an immense oak beam framed interior which apparently dates the Hotel Architecture back to the late 14th early/15th Century and one of the finest examples of wattle and daub in the old town of Ruthin. It is quite possible, with the dressed plinth outside, that the Hotel Architecture, once imagined as a trivially butchered series of individual cottages, was in fact what was known as a Hall Building, with three large oak frames, a high pitch and a cavernous interior. Remnants of tar, sulfur and burnt residue in the roof space suggest fires would have been laid in the base of this void. With walls removed, the Hotel Architecture now moves into its next life as a loft dwelling and applications have been made to Unesco to make it a World Heritage Site. Step inside the triple paned, wide oak door and one enters the tardus of Dr Vertigo. For ten years he worked as the honorary male and text invader of the radical all-women relational art group from Sweden called The Rocket Girls and prepared various texts, installations and exhibitions with them, brought together in the volume called Frank Heron meets the Rocket Girls (N.Alice Challinor,

Raketa, Stockholm 2009). Herein we experience the projects: Utopia, whatever! There is a Visitor, Another Dada Suicide, The Rocket Science Laboratory and Beach, Frank Heron's Final Artscript prepared for the Rocket Girls before his disappearance. Currently picking up on his time in Peshawar and the North West Frontier Province and Lahore, he is now working on a new volume called House of Fiction. This kicked off when, in Peshawar at the wedding of the daughter of NWFP Minister of Education, a Khan amongst Khans, in the segregated dancing, he found himself boogieing with Muhammad Ibn Iftikhar Al-Niffari, the Head of Police, who had come down from Kabul, through the Khyber Pass, for the three day event and lamb-tail tasting. This retreat comes after the frighteningly pioneering and ignored volume on the murdered Pakistani artist Zahoor ul Akhlaq called The Rest is Silence (OUP 2011). Little did anyone know the title would be so prescient and as he was becoming a 'persona non grata' once more in his life, attention would now be paid to the particularly intriguing subtext in the book about exiles & danced furies. The next volume out of Vertigo Press could very well hijack this anti-library and cover a short period of filming with the Tunisian Couturier Azzedine Alaia in his Marais atelier, the filmscript that was abandoned producing the resulting text called The Solitude of Fashion. Still waving not drowning, in another life, he is Associate Director of Graduate Studies, Azrieli School of Architecture & Urbanism, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Having just translated the first volume of lost poetry by Sisyphus Montale (Project for a Hermitage, Trieste 2010) the biography of Montale is due in the next year or two. And as everyone should at least attempt to write one 'brautigan' in their life, this too will vie with The Solitude of Fashion for the next Vertigo volume.

A NOVEL IN THE LEGENDARY FANTÔMAS SERIES

The Silent Executioner

MARCEL ALLAIN & PIERRE SOUVESTRE