

El Gaucho *the masked architectural hero*

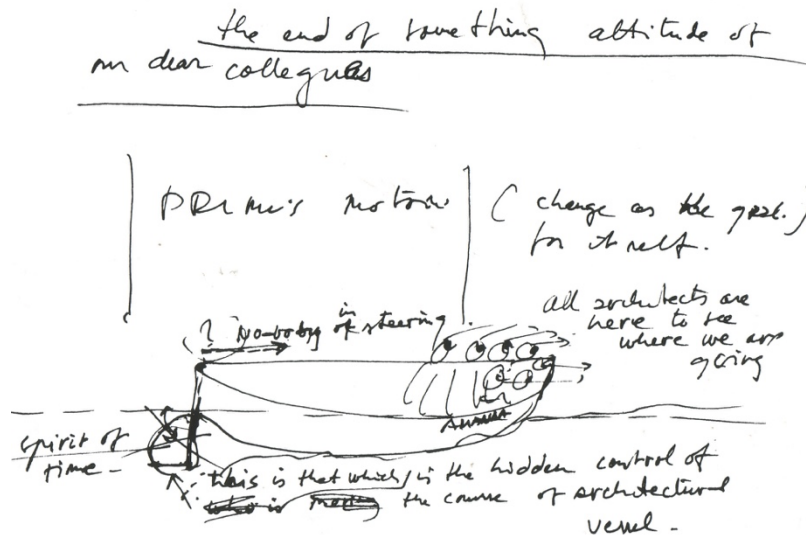
On Malcolm Quantrill

The ARK of Architecture - Selected Writings of Malcolm Quantrill
Ed. Roger Connah Rakennustieto 2008



To Q: *the inventor of the teetotalling words that will always flow from the lips of the imbibers – may we be allowed into the next library that is already forming by the energy and vibrancy of this one.*

The Reader *roger connah*



the ark of architecture – sketch Reima Pietilä*

On reading a selection of Malcolm Quantrill's texts that have appeared over some thirty years during a long career in research and architectural education, it is clear his contribution to architectural writing has always been architectural *and* literary. Often engaging, there is an intriguing and seductive medusa-like drift to the texts. Sometimes the scholar hits the nail on the head, so to speak, as he lays down a well-argued and acute analysis and critical approach to architecture's processes, or 'juices' as he likes to call them; at other times the subtle, apparently arcane references begin to return to relevant but often lost bodies of knowledge; the mind is significantly stretched. Combining this with a deft style means Quantrill achieves a rare mix; pure and impure description with anecdote and, often, humour. The puns may appear to go around the houses only to return with a serious punch!

Quantrill has consistently demonstrated a wide set of aesthetic and fine art reference which is why we might recall Summerson or Betjeman. Search for the psychological input in the dialogues he has with the architects he writes about, and no further existential reference might be necessary. Where a dialogue might appear to date such writing is not a question of being 'out-of-date' but acts more as a reminder to us of what has been erased in the recent past from critical writing. To ask the scholar to write new texts at this stage may miss the point of trying to understand the energies of sustaining an architectural and critical journey. If some contemporary work is engagingly open, ambiguous and hermetic, Quantrill turns this back on those that have opted for the more fashionable discourse. When he explores the buildings of architects like Pietilä, Leiviskä, MacKay-Lyons and Foster, the texts appear controlled and bounded, but beware. When he begins to delve into the person, the texts begin to raise unusually clear and pertinent issues about being an architect today.

Quantrill's personal relationship with significant, talented architects (Pietilä, Leiviska, MacKay Lyons and Norman Foster) indicate the type of innovative and investigative architectural analysis which reveals part of the architect's thinking often unexplored in monograph and memoir. In a publishing world of the arranged and orchestrated monograph, there is a delight in these conversational methods. Some of the more unusual writing on Pietilä and MacKay Lyons demonstrates his awkward even disarming honesty and self-questioning methods; epistolary, dialogic and essayistic texts reveal a sharp stubbornness to persist along his own path with a kind of 'plain modern' theory.

Later books echo earlier more theoretical work and critical conjectures – *the environmental memory* – but also demonstrate how he works as both a listening critic and a fabulist. All architects, according to Pietilä, were at the stern of the boat trying to see where they were going. Meanwhile nobody had taken the wheel. What began as an idiosyncratic sketch by the architect Reima Pietilä, the Ark of Architecture, rebounds here with interest.

Quantrill is refreshingly unaware of the notion of critical fictions and the self-reflexive which might be a good thing. He skips through genres but not in the usual way today: he uses architectural theory, travel writing, after-dinner speaking, aesthetic ad-libbing and personal jibes. And in a way, we need to understand, this is all texture within the writing which is always more than a curio-critical exercise, always more than any nostalgia for the *plain modern*. Against the odds and the fickle changes over the years in general critical theory, and the influence it has had on architectural writing, Quantrill manages to offer sustained insights that might and should return the new reader (and the re-reader) to core issues in architecture.

The unreaderly and estranged aspect of much recent writing on architecture has not always helped the contemporary student. Repetitive, heavy thinking and no small amount of jargon can lead students to turn away from the flow of witty and challenging essays. In place of the witty and literary we have often seen an uncontrolled language appear in architectural writing, over-familiarised with tortured syntax and unmentionable mimicry.

To read and re-read essays written over a period of 30 years not only questions the merit of such writing but allows the reader to re-assess the merits of current writing in relation to past writing. This is not an issue of who is right but how a text is written, when it was written, what is written and what remakes the conditions for a re-reading. Architecture which can only perform to some sort of symbolic value, the indiscriminate and uncharted consequence of a narrowed writing field, can turn back on itself by the (silent) status of the architect's signature of 'distortion' and 'experiment'. The reader must always be on guard to tackle the present from what it hides from the past. No more so than in contemporary architecture.

We must know where the role of provocation within research must and should present us with a daunting task if it is to achieve its upsetting value. We must not shy away from the critic as investigative scholar, even provocateur. The selection of essays and the subdivision in the structure of this book demonstrate the critical form of Quantrill's scholarship, and how his pedagogy is so often tied to his unusual persona, his journeying and his experience, from the intimacy within some of the texts to the rigorous analytical tone in others. The choice of approach, emphasis and style are and remain open: sometimes pithiness conveys the nuance and provocative nature of Quantrill's ideas whereas letters, dialogues and other extracts show his rigorous methodology as a researcher. A memoir can spark new returns into other texts. Reading this diverse set of essays leaves no one in doubt about the scholarship. A chance detail or diversion allows the re-reader or the first time reader a way to respond to the writings that can often take unusual turns and call on surprising, not always architectural, reference. Even a personal story, note or memoir at times can be expanded and offers a more general clue to his architectural repertoire.

Can we legitimately attempt a wider yet more innocent agenda today? Imagine the consequences of writing in architecture which remains solely in the realm of the 'unwritten' and 'unreadable' architects. Undoubtedly this affects historians and critics too, and a re-print of these essays could signal a significant exercise in the re-mapping of lost writing in architecture. This also takes us as readers and re-readers into the realm of critical generosity and unselfishness. Where we now see a concern in the unselfishness of 'practice' we must try and understand how critics and scholars are to re-define themselves in the 21st century. It might be that this involves us in an exercise to work against the notion of the selfish and seek new areas of provocation and resistance, exemplified by some of these writings. Re-reading exercises may be more important than we realise to the understanding of how critical histories and architectural writing have changed over the years and recognising this might allow students, scholars and others to understand their own changing attitudes and ideals within architectural writing.

We begin to get a new picture of the scholar's writing over the years and the way these have remained consistent whilst responding to various developments in architecture, whether Postmodernism, Deconstruction or even Post-Structuralist 'errings' and meanderings. Quantrill has bravely resisted the fashionable discourse of the day which is why such *re-reader* becomes important in today's educational institutions. The wider notion, even genre, of *Reading* and *Re-Reading Architecture* may begin to demonstrate a kind of lost subjectivity we no longer see in architectural writing and research. The changes in style and tone are personal but never less than valid, as Kenneth Frampton's note points out in the reprint of *Alvar Aalto Critical Study* (1987):

“This is a much needed and lively study of the still insufficiently known Finnish modern Master Alvar Aalto, whose sensitive and increasingly relevant architectural legacy will surely only increase in stature as the years unfold. One is struck at once by the refreshing incisiveness of the text by the way the author enters without pedantry into the heart of his subject, disclosing, as if they were the reader’s own discoveries, the essential and revealing features of Aalto’s background and development. Quantrill’s fluid account is a scholarly mosaic where what is invariably of the greatest interest is often the seemingly inadvertent details or the more precise demonstration of a well-known fact.

Aalto’s most significant achievements are sensitively analyzed and this evident respect for the work itself is well elucidated by carefully selected illustrations. Indeed, that which often seems to be of consequence here is the overlooked unfamiliar detail; the importance of Saarinen in the National Romantic Movement, Aalto’s Muurame Church of 1926, his early week-end houses and an unknown design for a hospital in Zagreb. All such items will surely enrich whatever the specialist already knows of Aalto’s life and work, while the general reader will find himself graciously introduced to what is certainly one of the most fertile landscapes in twentieth century cultural history.”

The *Reader* of course meets the *Re-reader* and charts the way of working and writing architecture which not only relates to the past (Quantrill's history goes back to Hitchcock) but is clearly also in the present (he tackles his school colleague like Norman Foster some fifty years on). Is Malcolm Quantrill the last modernist critic of this type? Is this a lost architectural writing? And if so, why? Surely, we do not need to reach the 21st century to realise the kind of delinquent irresponsibility necessary in the critic's serenading of architecture through writing; one which we know Summerson, Betjeman and Banham all achieved.

"For this purpose," Quantrill wrote in 'Architecture as a Balthusian Dilemma', "we shall consider Pandora's 'box of tricks' as the archetype of all provocation and manipulative seduction, of all artifice and simulation of aesthetic attraction."¹ The *Re-reader* immediately presents the *Reader* with this idea of research and provocation whereby Quantrill uses an investigative method, sometimes quirky, sometimes off the wall, always acute, and always prompted by a number of stimuli, both real and abstract, which involve re-framing. Some new entities of course emerge for the critic and writer over time; do they cause the critic to change direction in pursuit of what he considers 'architecture's contradictory hypotheses'? We don't know unless we read these texts over time and through time.

"Can we translate this metaphor (Pandora's Box) effectively to the realm of architecture," Quantrill asks "and towards a better understanding of its presence as a 'box' or an 'instrument'?" In other words, does its formal configuration simply take the shape of some minimalist container; or does it have a formal expression more like that of a guitar, offering the potential of performance through an instrument that can be strummed, plucked and drummed in pursuit of engaging harmonics and their appropriate variations?" The Reader has no option but to engage the Re-reader on this: we must entertain a dialogue between ideas on memory and architectural history, between critical theory and fashionable discourse.

The Ark of Architecture sets out to allow new readers, scholars and, significantly, re-readers to assess Quantrill's contribution to architectural writing and research in general. This is not only a way to salute the scholar's 60 years in architecture but to introduce the notion of re-reading, something urgently needed at present in architecture. This has steered the volume toward a new form; to reflect and re-assess issues in the present and in the past from an unusual and sustained contribution to architectural scholarship. The re-print is never just a re-print; it is re-scripted by the time past since its original date of publication, and it is also re-written by the current state of architectural discourse today. Any re-print of texts must face the charge that previously published work is not what might be considered topical and vital scholarship, but by re-reading these essays it is clear to see how Quantrill's underlying concerns and research were developed early on his career and he has used interviews, letters and dialogues persistently and rigorously to test many of them out. The reader then passes over to the re-reader which must always present and invite the unsuspecting student or scholar, senior professor or younger instructor, the chance and even irritation to take on more irresponsibility with their reading than imagined.

the re-reader *You've always been wrong*

roger connah



Edvard Munch knew a thing or two about obsequies and the necessity to avoid the lash of the praised tongues that grasp too lightly the achievement. When he reached the age of 60 Munch did his best to avoid the custom to celebrate the birthday of the great and the good in Norway by torchlight processions. “A torchlight procession? Me standing on a balcony waving? I don’t think so,” was Munch’s reply. Come that evening, he hired a taxi and rode around town until the danger was over. Wishing to control just about everything in his toughened anxiety, Munch set another precedent by refusing an interview on the day by *Aftenposten*, but proceeded to offer the young journalist who had called on the off chance, a glass of wine. At the end of his life, despite all his protestation, even that control was beyond Munch, as one of his biographers Sue Prideaux tells us. Twenty years later, in 1944, with Norway occupied by the Germans and Himmler who had taken a shine to his work, Munch was taken, wrongly, as a Nazi sympathizer. “Comprehensively hijacked to the last” Prideaux writes, “Munch was not buried with his mother and father and Sophie in the modest family grave in Krist cemetery. Instead, his ashes were interred in the glade of splendid tombs reserved for the great and the good, the Grove of Honour in our Saviour’s Graveyard.” 2

Let that be a warning to us all. Malcolm Quantrill's writings speak for themselves. A career spanning 60 years also speaks for itself. We do not ask have we done enough but how can we gently invite a world rushing to dwell in the fragment and short-term memory, to re-read the labor and invention of an earlier and engaged mind. "To have lived in the cultivation of an intimacy with such works," Hazlitt wrote in 1821 in *The Plain Speaker*, "and to have relished such names, is not to have lived quite in vain."³

Our tasks, in vain or not, hover over us. We are well aware today, that often very little of what we write in books or essays is in fact read. And if read, we are also well aware little is retained except in narratives that re-connect with our own identities and selves, or then the identity of the reader. The generalised 'other' is the response that then must be, awkward or not, responded to. In fact, is it only recently that we have realised how the critical condition uses colourful options, fictions and conjectures in order to offer interpretations that can be accepted, contested, or even erased? This re-reading contract, a bit like editing within the mind, is a condition of plurality which must also allow the (re)reader to consider the conditions that make such ideas, and architecture in this case, meaningful to the interpreter. The re-reader becomes the redeemer of the critical, if you like!

This is not to see meaningful architecture in the abstract or from an idealist position narrowed to accepted pasts and known futures, but the critical lies in the condition of response itself: as language, as writing, as architecture. The scholar-critic's duty under these conditions surely is to re-write architecture as he or she sees fit.

Responsibly in that the career is inevitably a contest; by this we mean the critic proceeds to ambush his or her own work and by looking back begins to realize why one moment appeared more important than another, only to realize once again the critic moves off, seeking the next contest against the becalmed self. And irresponsibly, if this means seeking answer and enquiries which others do not seek. Today, we are in a period when texts are produced so quickly that the idea of a re-print has become somewhat labored, as if we need coaxing into returning to last year let alone ten, twenty or thirty years ago. Our contemporary incomplete souls need to re-discover for ourselves what may have been hinted at previously suggesting we may have lost the art and interest for re-reading.

Even if I chance upon a set of selected essays by Hazlitt, I struggle to share this triumph and have to do so by writing in a contemporary seductive way. We are no longer looking in the rear-view mirror for those who have come up behind us. The GPS system directs us to roads that have never been used. Some systems, slightly awry, tell us to head for the fjord, the cul-de-sac or the lake. We find ourselves unluckily but perhaps excitingly driving into and through the river! All of which can lead us to a closed circuit of our own making.

Why does someone write the way they do? And how does it change over the years, seeking to bury some bodies of knowledge in favour of others? What remains constant and what makes the writer construct an identity from the history and context of their own upbringing, which almost always begin to take revenge on the language prescribed. We come up against the obvious; within language there is of course the selfless agility to move within the competence of that language.

A command of vocabulary, grammar, the turn of fluency offers a way to bring poetry into our texts perhaps where we should not. What puts a pun inside a relatively smooth paragraph? We are tempted to hijack the strict with the smallest meander that can turn into a sidetrack. And from that sidetrack comes the strong realization that the argument could take on the unpredictable. The flow turns into a story; and the raconteur turns the narrative back to question itself.

Some writers and scholars respond to metaphor in an un-enticing way, obedient to dry form. Here the chance is lost for a giddy understanding and enquiry that goes that bit further. Other scholars, not content with agreed dissent, play the metaphor like the squash ball in Real Tennis as it goes off the wall in unusual ways. The ball somehow, usually, always returns into play. Malcolm Quantrill's writings over a period of many decades have done that. At moments they appear to go out of play, only for the stroke, the wit and unlikely meander to bring the reader back into play. Quantrill, favouring interruption and rupture, will set the reader up to lower the tone, invite shared question as he too re-reads as he progresses through his life. We do not get repetitions, we get the ruptures that will transcribe lecture and presentation, lift the after dinner tone into academic analysis. Does this not hint at a lost flourish, the vanishing of such humour, or will there be a renaissance in this century of the lost wit of the last? Hard to say, but the deep subjectivity of some of these texts might indicate the riposte to lost promise, the objectivity of known seduction.

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Re-writing Architecture must involve re-reading architecture. Only on re-reading does one seek the nuances that were ignored first time around, as topical discourse and enquiry serve judgment on this or that essay. Not one to shy away from topical reference, a mention of Woody Allen, for example, sees Quantrill setting up a line of enquiry which he then expounds in his personal journey within these texts. The latter include lectures, speeches, essays, papers, dialogues, presentations, editorials, reviews. The work veers from the formally controlled observations and analysis to the intimacy of a close encounter with the most unusual Finnish architect Reima Pietilä. Indeed it is a shared contract with Pietilä that has not only brought me in and out of Malcolm Quantrill's life for over 30 years but led to a series of exchanges which concerned both the writing of architecture and its re-writing.

Besides a long and impressive set of texts dealing with architectural enquiry, memory, the labyrinth and practice, Quantrill has always returned to the country he found himself in, during the 1950s, Finland. His first stint with the Cary Grant of Finnish architecture Aarne Ervi, meant that he would be eventually introduced to all the young Turks of the late 1950s. This would be enough to see lake and lecture bring Quantrill back and forth to Finland from wherever he was in the world; whether London, Aman, Bozeman, Montana or College Station, Texas. Finland was no mean attraction, for when Quantrill renewed his interest in Aalto in the 1970s, it was a time when the master was proving too slippery and ambiguous for the ruling Rationalists of Finnish architecture.

This was a time heavily colored by a sauna-friendly solidarity and Neo-Marxism, when Finland defaulted on establishing any critical tradition of its own and saw, after the pioneering invasions of J M Richards, foreign visitors and scholars taking their place. Quantrill was one of the first, probably one of the most consistent ‘honorary Finns’, in his endeavors to trawl lake, library and countryside for his own versions of the awkward romance that some felt the Finnish society needed to uphold.

It was during this time I met Quantrill whilst working for, and traveling with, Pietilä. I had gone to Finland in 1974 with the intention of writing a doctorate and ended up in some convenient confusion and awkward intimacy with Pietilä, working on a project for 250,000 people: a master plan development for Deira Sea Corniche. From that moment onwards, 1974, Q, as we referred to him, kept coming in and out of the studio, especially later in the 1980s as he moved on from writing about Aalto to taking Pietilä as his subject. The subject, objectified and re-subjectivized, would be how Pietilä would put it. Of all the visitors over the two decades (1970s and 1980s) I had seen coming to the Pietilä studio in Viiskulma, Eira in South Helsinki, Quantrill was the one up to the task; he could give back to the punning Pietilä equal sorties into humour. Both *homo ludens* characters, neither really knew where language ended and architecture began. This was their adventure. Quantrill took this as no easy ambiguity, useful to write out a critical study beyond the convention then around. Pietilä took this adventure as the sign of necessary solidarity for his ideas allowing him a creative irresponsibility to take architecture to the subversive edge of Dadaism.

Quantrill's sparring with Pietilä, some of which is included in this book, remain fine examples of the unusual dialogue whereupon the critic is almost forced to re-write the sentences before they are dry. For Pietilä wrote out that sort of architecture, held that sort of mind, and upset that sort of cerebral ease which thought it all summed up in the driest of sun-dried sentences.

A recent exchange with the Museum of Finnish Architecture has encouraged me to make some further comments about 'Writing Architecture' a book on Pietila which I wrote in 1989 and the book which has seen Quantrill sparring with me on more than one occasion. There is little doubt that both of us would agree that the impending sanctification of Reima Pietilä in the Finnish establishment will follow known patterns, coherence and tradition. Loyalty and lightness will ensure a process whereby

Pietilä's contribution to Finnish architecture will be revealed and appropriated without the contradiction and contest with meaning that Pietilä set up. The crux of the recent exchange with the Museum held within it a sentimental sincerity which could not however hide the lingering frustration that those in Finland often felt with Pietilä. Origin, influence and tradition will however be duly re-slotted into the Pietilä oeuvre. Quantrill had seen this up close and personal, sometimes overstepping the awkward intimacy with the architect which was essential if one wanted to become the 'dog beneath the skin', if one wanted to observe the architect taunted by his own colleagues in Finland to become, in Quantrill's words, 'an alien presence in his native land'.

Here we revisit the re-appropriation of Aalto, Eliel and Eero Saarinen: and now Saint Pietilä. How P and Q would have laughed at that! But what Quantrill recognized in his insistent narratives about the Finnish national search for 'Finnish architecture' was the taunt faced by Pietilä which he turned back on his colleagues in a bewildering, soothing, devastating and sometimes delinquent way.

Both Quantrill and Pietilä met their match; they both taunted words into architecture, sentences into non-sentences, and like the homo ludens *runed* the pun around; this would be like a game of critical Real Tennis. Ultimately it punished those who only got half of the spoken language, because the other half was just as likely to contain the key. More than his book on Aalto, Quantrill when writing on Pietilä was not only writing architecture but attempting to write the man, the architect and the work.

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Malcolm Quantrill has written in many ways, has approached his subjects with an irresponsibility that suits the *métier*. As we move toward the relational in architecture, where collaboration may upset signature, where the scholar-critic is arm-twisted into media play and spectacle, reflexive criticism and contest with the self may become more urgent. This will see theory relativized, losing the sovereignty of safe words and re-scripting itself against the imposition of old menaces and tired ideologies.

But it is not so much these I wish to bring attention to in Quantrill's long career it is the intimacy – an *erotics* would be slightly too far! - which he takes with his architectural subjects. Even Hazlitt was there before us in his essay *On Reading Old Books*: “It is true, we form dear friendships with such ideal guests – dearer, alas! and more lasting, than those without most intimate acquaintances.’ It is from the relationship of intimacy that Quantrill offers not only an approach to writing architecture but by re-reading we also become the re-writers of architecture.

Unlike the Post-Structuralists, meaning when no meaning intended, Quantrill sends the ball around the Real Tennis court, picking up meaning where meaning is clearly intended. It is our choice how we read this in a period when we are momentarily happy to have no critical truths but critical trends. How does the scholar know where the trends end, and scholarship takes over? Quantrill has always resisted any fashionable outrage to the Modernism he shares with many writers of the 20th century.

We should also not look for this or that resistance to Postmodernism or Deconstruction; this work sets itself up as writing of a quiet restraint and resistance, distanced from the trends of Lacanian psychology, Marxism and Deconstruction, listing instead toward Eliot, Leavis, Empson and the aesthetic of what Quantrill would call *good writing*. Nor should the reader feel slighted if a writer and scholar like Quantrill steers clear of the latest ideas, like bio-memetics or genetics; no mention here of the grand narratives because Quantrill stays true to the grandest narrative of all, Modernism itself.

Given the seduction of a modern architecture, his role is to dislodge it enough to be entertaining and learned. He undoubtedly shared with his mentor Pietilä, that *intermediate space* in modern architecture which could include the ideas and theories that had not always formed themselves into the canonic.

A more ingenious clue to (re)reading Quantrill now and not then when these texts were written, is to observe the way he re-inserts his language and ruptures, observe his love for the anecdote, metaphor and humorous aside that can throw us off the scent of an accepted Modernist scholarship. Who is to say the critical exercises over the last 30 years serves to render previous language or writing irrelevant? No one has this right, especially when the avant-garde is potentially kitsch and our false consciousness has to answer to its own cynical reason as soon as our texts are produced. But more re-reading and it becomes obvious Quantrill takes as sovereign ideas that many today don't. These are ideas which remain within the values associated with modern stability, if it were not for the ball sent around the court and returning in a way we don't expect it to.

What is the innocence we witness here, if indeed a scholar can be described to hold such structured innocence? There is no deep conspiracy here. First and foremost, hidden in insistent rigor is Quantrill's desire to entertain, for if language cannot spin out the yarns that others resist then surely we'd always be wrong and told to go and sit in the corner of the classroom. All of us writing today reading the past, or writing the past and reading today, know that to be out of time is a matter of timing and luck. Luck is underrated within scholarship. It is a trick of the light and language, and the crack where the light gets through can come at any moment.

We re-read at our own risk. That is at it should be, and should we be tempted to put a stop to the enquiries, to consider the pre-structuralist tracking the poststructuralist only to be crushed by the structuralist retiring, then we'd be better to ask ourselves the same question as the French Surrealist poet Rene Daumal (1908-44) asked when organizing *Le Grand Jeu*. "You've always been wrong," was a collection of prose and poetic works by Daumal. Here we have another revenge, the revenge of the interloper. Where you think strict forms will appear, they loosen in the very next sentence. When the reader faces different certainties that have so often enslaved international thinking, here the aside, the non-sequitur, the meander for a glass of calvados or Cognac, the quirky tone, liberates us. So, re-read at your own leisure and risk, but remember Daumal's words: 'these cadavers of thought must be met with stories of doubt, blasphemes, and kerosene for the triumph.'

Look for the kerosene in Dr Quantrill: it will not be in the way you expect it. Look for the other fire raisers to hijack Poststructuralism and, as in *Real Tennis*, played off floors, walls, roofs, edges, windows, watch the ball always return off the writings which write on the walls. Think the worst and return to the best. See the spirits fly and draw back; do not be satisfied that writing in the past can really offer us no further invitations into a future so fraught with delicious uncertainty.

Richard Brautigan wrote a set of stories called *The Revenge of the Lawn* and more recently Quantrill, with probably no echo to this form, approaching his 80th year like Munch, is continuing his writing career-so-far with the idea of the 'revenge of the archives'. It remains to be seen just what form this revenge takes, just what critical fictions appear deliciously to link chains in our conscious being, and just what is revealed by this oral history. And, finally, whether any of us on re-reading are prepared to look into our own rear-view mirrors and say with more delicious humor; "you've always been wrong."

El Gaucho *the masked architectural hero*

I remember Malcolm Quantrill was writing one of his more personal books 'One man's Odyssey in Search of Finnish Architecture' in 1988. In Helsinki, I was writing in some secrecy and irresponsibility a book called *Writing Architecture*. Quantrill was right up there when he sparred with the labyrinthine in Reima Pietilä. The talking cure came out of the mouths that talked at cross purposes at the same time; this was exciting indeed! And Quantrill was also right up there with Flaubert who, at the end of *Bouvard et Pecuchet*, offers a few scenarios for consideration: After copying papers, everything, newspapers tickets, tobacco pouches, you name it and they answer back with the need for taxonomy: "They make tables, antithetical oppositions such as crime of the kings and crimes of the people...however they have real problems putting each thing in its proper place and suffer great anxieties over it."

Only Dr. Quantrill didn't suffer; he knew Pietilä revelled in the antithetical, in the punning and punishing oppositions in architectural thought, and he knew enough to guide himself through to the end. "Onward! Enough speculation! Keep on, copying! The page must be filled. Everything is equal, the good and the evil. The farcical and the sublime – the beautiful and the ugly – the indignant and the typical, they all become the exaltation of the statistical. There are nothing but facts – and phenomena. Final bliss," Flaubert wrote. And both Pietilä and Quantrill knew this. Malcolm Quantrill, el gaucho, nomad, ranch romantic and one-time camel rider knew, there in front of him, was a leading architect doing the same, imagining the infinite compendium, the dictionary of received ideas offered in some mischief to the young scholars who now two decades on sanctify the saint by squeezing our more tables of antithetical oppositions, and those tables of tables Pietilä loved creating and negating.

Final bliss? Well not quite! I remember a moment of high critical drama when Reima Pietilä, lightly capped and head-stitched entered with a kitchen knife in his hand. It may have been for curing the meat, cutting the bread or shaving the sausage. In one swift moment, Pietilä turned it from the hold of a chef to the hold of a woodsman and brought it down with a flash into the floor of the kitchen. The Critic looked on, ready to re-write the scenario of the critic's task. And the silent bystander also looked on; ready to re-write that moment some 25 years later in the closing words to that final bliss that can never quite be held within the irresponsible festschrift.

Asked to edit this volume of texts, somewhat interspersed with the comments of colleagues of the protagonist, I immediately thought of the inventor in the James Bond series of books and films, known to us all as Q. Without these outrageous, little devices, without the imagination that sometimes drags our own imagination over the top, without daring to be irresponsible in saving the double 0 agent, James Bond would not be saved from predicament after predicament. We would not have a series, we would not have a double 0 licensed-to-kill agent still alive, and we would not be onto the fifth or is it sixth Bond actor. Malcolm Quantrill's career out-spans all the Bonds so far and up to what will soon be his 80th birthday is still going strong.

Whenever I am in touch with Q the heat is on and we are always about to organize a meeting, a lecture or then a trip to Mama Nimfa's in Houston only to be put on hold whilst Malcolm Q. emails@fiftypaces and then goes off to Mexico, Cuba, Canada, Finland or Australasia. Talk amongst yourselves, Quantrill would say and many of us here have done that in between our friendship with this extraordinary, indefatigable scholar-critic and educator of architecture. So once again Norman Foster, Bruce Webb, Kenneth Frampton, Marco Frascari, Stanford Anderson, Brian Mackay Lyons, Matti K Mäkinen, Brian Dougan, Bijan Youssefzadeh and Weiling He have done just that, talked amongst themselves, come up with a few lines and put forward their own versions of re-writing architecture in between those of Q. I thank them all.

We cannot leave it here though without mentioning CASA, *The Center for the Advancement of Studies in Architecture* which was founded in 1989 by Quantrill after he was promoted to become the first Distinguished Professor of Architecture at Texas A&M. With start-up funds from Texas A&M and the University of Houston Quantrill and his other founding partner Bruce Webb from Houston set about collecting, editing and publishing a series of pioneering volumes. In 1999 the emphasis, however, was changed as Quantrill set out to promote the study of Latin American architecture, and with a major grant from the Graham Foundation further volumes were edited and published as the *CASA Latin American Architecture* series.

It is to Quantrill's credit that, as Director of Casa, he has succeeded in this publishing venture and in bringing the work of this region to the attention of scholars, students and architects. One or two other mentions: to Marco Frascari for his continued support whilst preparing this volume and the afore mentioned Bruce Webb for his editing skills, friendship and generosity in offering advice in the last 9 months to what we hope has become an unusual return to texts that deserve re-reading. And finally, to the Finnish publishers Rakennustieto (Helsinki): Tiina Helomaa, Kristiina Lehtimäki and Mina Jokivirta who have steered this into the handsome but accessible volume it is.

HOLD FAST CRITIC!



Strange things are happening; Hazlitt advises us to stick to re-reading the old and familiar texts but cannot stop the slide. Hold fast, Critic, when the governing committees change personnel, when they begin reversing known truths for other conjectures. Hold fast to the eminence given, to a quiet reflection when another turned their backs, looked another way. Hold fast Critic, when the wandering scholar is denounced for never quite getting into the mentality of the country; this only seeks the applause of the smoothed visitor. Hold fast too, Critic, when you yourself become an alien presence in your own profession, university or country for it is then that exile is the reward, and self-definition the coy prize. Hold fast again Critic, as the current saints reverse momentarily the scholarly work of others. Remember you entered the Saint's office in 1974, 1979, 1983 and 1988, at all times steeping into the quiet dread of opposition.

Hold fast Critic to your sincere interest, to the irresponsible self that re-writes architecture from the other way, to look through and beyond, despite awards and recognition, despite the vol-au-vent academy. And hold on Critic, to the moment you write yourself out of one life to enter another. It is then that the words continue their journey; irresistibly tied to thinking, irresponsibly freed to the wind. Hold fast then to the talking man, to the inventor, to the wristwatch that has a small spring capable of winding back and forward, up and down, until no ... stop there! Hold to the interruption, Critic, where George Bernard Shaw is just as likely to punctuate the conversation as Evelyn Waugh or Jorge Luis Borges, and woe betide those who think this needs cultural shredding. Desist Critic, stay for the final countdown when the references pile up and the re-reading returns to the words originally used, for in that is the triumph of a writer who over 60 years has turned from one to the other and knew what Laurence Sterne knew. Hemingway crossed with Colombo, add a fedora. You've always been right, Malcolm!

(Roger Connah 2008)

¹ Malcolm Quantrill, Architecture as a Balthusian Dilemma, from *The Unmade Bed of Architecture*, Rakennustieto, Helsinki 2004, pp. 29-35.

² Sue Prideaux, *Edvard Munch, Behind the Scream*, Yale 2005, p.308.

³ William Hazlitt, *On Reading Old Books; Hazlitt Selected Essays*, ed. George Sampson, Cambridge University press, 1937.