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File Under Buddhism and Architecture
Architectures of Thought
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Canadian Centre for Mindful Habitats (Not-for-profit)
5801 Old Richmond Road, Ottawa, Ontario K0A 2ZO Canada
Website: mindfulhabitats.ca
Email: info@mindfulhabitats.ca
Tel: +1 613 617 1770

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File Under Buddhism
and Architecture

To all those who still think of meeting the Buddha on the road or in those smart cities to come

File Under Buddhism and Architecture

Architectures of Thought

Roger Connah

You and I realise that we are conditioned. If you say, as somepeople do, that conditioning is inevitable, then there is noproblem, you are a slave, and that is the end of it. But if youbegin to ask yourself whether it is possible to break down thislimitation, this conditioning, then there is a problem; so you willhave to inquire into the whole process of thinking, will you not?

J Krishnamurti [1]

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FILE UNDER BUDDHISM AND ARCHITECTURE

Introduction

'If you think Buddha comes close to this book, deflect!' The conjecture that began as an 'architecture of thought' was neither worked out at the onset of this book, nor had any clear destination, that is apart from colliding with the Buddha in the final chapter. These 'architectures of thought' emerged as the world was going through lockdowns that offered various exiles of anxiety, solitude, reflection and of course, death, or should we say re-birth? A reckoning and re-structuring was predicted post-Covid. Selected bias, inequality, injustices of all sorts and a diverse if skewed 'wokism' are now gathered together with climatic and political warnings about what has been called *The Sixth Extinction*.[2] Re-structuring is the word to hold onto, yet its insistence and impatience may defer the acknowledged need for urgent action and change. "If we postpone our action until we have full knowledge of the catastrophe," Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek wrote in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009), "we will have acquired that knowledge only when it is too late."[3] Late knowledge creeps up on us when we least expect it. To some of us, this late knowledge signifies our failure to reach an age that can speak of being prepared for something as calamitous as a virus, extinction, unexpected war or a nuclear meltdown. Some of us even believe we still have experiences to call on that can steer our journey out. Today that has been put in question; our selected biases in education and architecture are becoming all too clear. Expertise must participate in an uncertainty and

instability that has become un-challengingly normal. “Cancel Culture” lurks dangerously to right some practices and to bury others.[4] Previous follies, even our own narcissism and political naiveties, have to take on new realities in order to contain us. Exiles produced by enforced lockdown should, we think, have questioned the realities and validities that we have taken for granted, locally and globally. In a crude echo to Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) perhaps, what we do not trust we can only validate ourselves.[5]

It is too often only faintly acknowledged that modern architecture and that which has been spawned from its heroes, theories and ideologies has often proceeded without shattering the illusion that it really did not always know what it was thinking. How does this creeping realization selectively upset those architectures of thought that made up our modern world? – a world we once thought critically stable and positively comforting. How unsteady were those ideas that confirm our previous thinking; what makes them biased, privileged, even immutable? Most will acknowledge that the discipline of architecture selectively uses formed and formless meditations and contemplations that still seduce us with the myth of clarity and obviousness.[6] Labyrinths certainly pull us away, whilst laudable, if sometimes embarrassing icons, tempt us towards those moments of acute comprehension.[7] Is there any surprise that the twentieth-century still keeps rebounding with dissonance and dissolution in this the twenty-first-century? The contemporary architectural labyrinth of built form, its icons of lost community and city, offer what are now considered on the Internet, the

coolest memes. Neuroscience has now joined in to trigger trauma and mess with our inner thoughts.[8] We might even find ourselves confusing Descartes' error here with Buddha's error.[9] Yet we do not quite know how and why architecture itself can oppress in oppressive times. Faced with this, there is a tendency for us to go further inside, bury ourselves, climb within, until the drama and crisis have passed. The Polish Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) gets this inner journey just about right: "hence the regret that we will remain sillier in human memory than we were at the moment of our acutest comprehension."[10] A constant element of incomprehension and change does not always suit the discipline of architecture. The conventions and codes required in the architectural world expect and require new vigilance.

How do we note moments and writing where new thoughts constantly alter or add to ideas already invented and expressed? Never meant as essays, presentations and lectures in any conventional academic sense, we will recall here the notion of an inner speech, first formulated by the Russian linguist Lev Vygotsky.[11] As we select what we often think fits and suits our narrative and direction, we imagine thought and language colliding in these architectures of thought. Stilled, but ever so reluctantly, this resembles a game of (inner) Jenga. In such a game we trace those thoughts – stresses and biases – that are refined, removed, un-invented and re-inserted as they are written out. How are we warned of those blocks of thoughts inserted and re-inserted into the toppled and toppling tower, the thoughts

we think make up our world? Writing out here is not the clean sheet in architecture we begin with nor the creation of a world out of nothing. Nor is it necessarily "like climbing up a steep and forbidding mountain without any mountaineering equipment," as Vitali Vitaliev writes in *Life as a Literary Device*, "using just your bare hands and feet."[12] Shared sessions around what we are calling here architectures of thought are writings that re-assemble lectures, presentations and dialogues that had no destination. Surely, we cannot fail to recognize the voids in the writing out process that help create other futures? New ideas and discoveries emerge; new journeys that the original words, ideas or inner thought had not imagined. An inner speech of shaping is primarily an entertainment, as this book sets out to explore and invite new morphologies. It can be filed both under Buddhism and Architecture. It presents the pleasure of reading 'writings' which upset the selected biases and inner thoughts they were built upon. This suggests the useful double bind; no need to justify ourselves anymore, this close we have come to collapse. As we re-appropriate the harmony of collapse all around us, this is a new twilight age. Going to the dark side has now become reality. The recent global exile has offered us, is still offering us refuge, solitude and of course a fair share of anxiety. The architecture of (our) thoughts and our warm erring can be positively accomplished. It may even be delicious. That is why

there is an unavoidable element of 'I Ching - We all Ching' in these writings,[13] in everything we face today as we select and edit our journey through it.

♥

We must close on a new, quite different book of changes where language cannot fall back on scaffolded folly. Instead, a whole set of other words, new glossaries, may be needed to situate this changing and deflecting universe. Caught between a "non-practical spirituality and non-spiritual pragmatism, each as unbalanced as the other" as Richard Wilhelm writes in the *Pocket I Ching*, we tremble at our selected bias whilst defending the right to speak out.[14] In my daily afternoon riverside reading during Covid lockdown sitting on a near-circle of stones in North Wales, I should have predicted Dostoevsky would return. Idiotic of me not to think so! In *This is Not a Drill (Extinction Rebellion)* Jem Bendell writes: "I'm hardly the first to notice this phenomenon. The Russian author Dostoevsky described the delicious intensity of the last moments before his false execution."[15] Last moments? Extinction? Death? Only something you think, and no one else, something carefully selected to become your own thinking. Something which makes sense to no one else – that moment of seeing the world differently. As the Chinese say, it makes you. *File under Buddhism and Architecture* certainly, and if the koan is the answer, to echo Mumon in the 'Gateless Gate' (*Zen Flesh, Zen Bones)*, by the time there is any right answer architecture is dead.[16] To some, this newness and re-thinking today is clear, to others it may convey little or no sense as we discard nonbeing

and accept the sillier and nostalgic moments in our exile. In this selected bias of a life, in these architectures of thought, can we extricate ourselves in the time available? Or do we discover the necessity of an imaginative energy and a fiction we may no longer have left us? In which case, if you see the Buddha; at an unsafe distance, still offer him your mask!

♠

ENDNOTES

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7. Czeslaw Milosz, *Unattainable Earth* (New York: Ecco Press, 1986).

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10. Milosz, *Unattainable Earth,* 29.

11. Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

12. Vitali Vitaliev, *Life as a Literary Device, A Writer’s Manual of Survival* (London: Beautiful Books, 2009), 9.

13. “Originally discovered around 3,000 BCE, the I Ching is a collection of symbols that explain how patterns in the universe change and shift. These sixty-four symbols contain within them one of the most powerful keys to understanding the world around us.” Joseph K. Kim, Dr. David S. Lee, *The Secrets of the I Ching: Ancient Wisdom and New Science* (New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2023).

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15. Jem Bendell, “Doom and Bloom: Adapting to Collapse,” *This is Not a Drill – An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (London: Penguin, 2019), 73-80.

16. Compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1957) 91. cf. “The Gateless Gate” by Ekai, called Mu-mon.

Part 01

Departures sets up the notion of an architecture of thought, acknowledging the "inner speech" first described by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, Thought and Language (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 1962/ 1934, Originally in Russian).

1
DEPARTURES

(1)

"The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought," wrote Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934).[1] Departures sets up the notion of an architecture of thought, acknowledging the inner speech first described by Vygotsky, in *Thought and Language* (MIT Press 1962/1934, originally in Russian) as he explored the psychology of children in relation to the thinking of Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget(1896-1980): "To sum up," Vygotsky writes, "autism is seen as the original, earliest form of thought; logic appears relatively late; and egocentric thought is the genetic link between them."[2]

This was a question addressed to American professor and intellectual, Noam Chomsky after his lecture, 'Language and its Design,' had been delivered in Delhi in 1996.[3] Was this a koan, was it all a joke? Many in the audience felt as much. How was the language and the riddle to be navigated, especially after the twentieth-century when under a black sun, language and the systems imagined for coherence and clarity had been constantly re-designed? It was then the thought of Noam Chomsky sitting with Jacques Lacan came to me. Chomsky and Lacan were discussing all sorts of selections, framings, dissonances and dissolutions. Sharing a drink, they were anchoring themselves at some distance to each other. Both were heavily involved in

performing their own architectures of thought, both were in some way selectively re-designing the human brain. Throw in a jocularly labyrinthine but creatively dis-ordered psychoanalysis and you would probably get the picture. It is an image of the twentieth-century and the modern minds that belong there.

There are apparently many right answers to a koan, and also none. Koans are tempting and unsolvable enigmas, stories, dialogues often used in other practices and meditative disciplines, besides Zen Buddhism, to provoke doubt. Doubt can offer and open us up to a cleaner and clearer space to test our own thoughts. Koans remind us of daily speech; inner notions of an imprecise, intuitive language that struggle to answer questions that could make us feel secure about our self-deception. Selected and entertaining bias is deep within us. Chomsky felt so! "I knew Lacan personally," Chomsky replied, "and I never understood a word he was talking about, so I can't answer the question." The audience laughed. Chomsky is good at this; opening a destiny for impossible language and then asking if it is really worth framing the issue and anchoring it that way. For a moment the audience felt there was more in this linguist's architecture. "In fact, I have a rather strong feeling that he (Lacan) was playing jokes," Chomsky continued, "that he was trying to see how crazy he could be and still get people to take him seriously."[4]

Was this also a terrible twentieth-century legacy, a legacy of Modernism; seeing how crazy it could be in language and architecture and still be taken seriously? There might have been a delusional but coherent architecture in all the language systems

invented in and through Modernism, but to many there in the audience, there was no entrance to this thinking, no way in, and certainly no exit. The world had long ignored the fictions scripted from French literary and philosophical theory in the twentieth-century, fictions that had invaded sociology and the literary devices that had saturated architecture – fictions we now live in. There was no real gasp or astonishment in the audience. Most sitting there felt they were swimming in jelly.

With their polarizing backgrounds and deep structures, there is probably little doubt that Chomsky not only wished 'not' to understand Lacan but realized that Lacan would forever play truant on such language that could, for him, go nowhere. If we could be miraculously teleported into the seduction of such language and performance, and could recognize the tantalizing delight of our own shallow thinking in those deep structures beyond us, could we see where Chomsky was coming from?

You could well imagine the laughter in Delhi of these two 'gurus' sharing a drink and shooting the intellectual breeze. Of course, Chomsky could not prove Lacan's clownery, just as the physicist Alan Sokal couldn't quite stem the fraudulence and the 'fashionable nonsense' in literary philosophical thinking which became known as Sokal's hoax.[5] We are reminded of the hermeneutic ontology and phenomenology of language that had saturated and biased architecture in the 1980s. Sokal's 'sham' was supposed to break the snobbery and hubris of the academy and was framed as 'the postmodern intellectual's abuse of science.'[6] The hoax revealed merely became that; a transgression

that didn't break these divisions as much as serve to re-configure membership and new coding against 'science.' Architecture became an orphan in this battle.

Our imagined cocktail event might help us test the seriousness in the way theories of thought, mind and language fictionalized architectural thinking and theorizing in the twentieth-century. Considering how far some thinkers have hoodwinked others would also surely be part of this exchange. Another 'imagined' conversation between Chomsky and Claude Lévi-Strauss, would broaden this into a series of *tristes tropiques* shared over a very expensive Bourbon.[7] 'We got along fine,' Chomsky said of Lacan, 'we talked about all sorts of topics, but we never talked about these things.' None of this is closer, of course, to any truth we can hold onto about these two thinkers, but probably tickles the biases we already hold. Our imagined exchange offers some reward. It offers us a way to consider architecture as a literary device. It poses an unsolvable question; how long has architecture remained 'autistic,'even inarticulate, as it has developed and propagated critical theories of visualization and communication.

Slightly shifting this, we can move to the idea, notion and our cognitive shapes – architectures of thought – not in terms of constant slippage, but constant selection, bias and deferral. Charged, significant but never quite reaching any destination, the inner movement in our thoughts and ideas often presents us with a consistent way of being wrong. Neuroscience has yet to penetrate the feeling and inner joy of error and confusion. How

many of us feel the constant, joyful upset of indecision, that unreliable but rewarding unease in our thoughts and ambiguities? Absurdly perhaps, we can tremble when our inner thinking becomes separated from language itself. Where, then, do we find and acknowledge our own architecture of thought; where do we find that plane which is thought itself, as Lev Vygotsky writes in *Thought and Language*?

In Vygotsky's use of the term 'inner speech,' whilst discussing Piaget's *Theory of Child Language and Thought,* we find a clarifying link: "inner speech is the interior aspect of external speech; it is a function in itself." Here we have both the architecture of thought and the autism we strongly hold onto; "in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought."[8] We assemble by dismantling. Any tower we imagine building in our 'Jenga' game with language and architecture is always tottering.

(2)

If words can and do die on us, and questions can be re-framed, thoughts and ideas can be selected to suit our moment. What do we think of contemporary architecture today? Is a European or Western history of architecture still the ungraspable hinge to the 'modern mind' and the Western intellectual project? If a diasporic Modernism became the founding and faltering perspective for theory in the twentieth-century, how much are we still trawling from that century, how much is this an informed and unconscious bias for contemporary architecture today? Though a total picture is often denied, a total picture is often encouraged by default.

With the current ‘woke’ debates and conversations about equity, agency, inequality and injustice do we know how, using our own urgency and awareness, to disagree today? Why do we speak of a continental philosophy, a philosophy of pragmatism, an analytical or a speculative philosophy and how do these turn our theoretical perspectives into actionable pedagogies? Axed on the spectacular, how is architecture gaining increased vertigo through online saturation. Might we not speak of and interrogate this as a ‘woke futurism?’

We have marveled at the development of advertising seeping into shock presentations until it has become a political and critical practice. Image and icon visualize excess and neutrality. In the fast language games played, re-adjusted in institute or academy, this can both dislodge and comfort narratives already held. Thinking literally or laterally often provides us with alarming transcriptions of futures which we struggle against, as if we can be relieved of the power and dominance architecture naively and openly wields.

Our modern thoughts, once intuitive, engaged and secure, now fumble. We all recognize those moments where we now stutter into making sense. Can we identify the cognitive delusions played on us by those architectures of thought we imagine ours and ours only? Disjunction and fragmentation became favored ideas in the second half of the ‘modern’ century. Narratives to comfort uneasy cognitive development were equally at home on the Interstate and the Interface. We have seen how confusing it

can be to applaud scholars or architects who wish to tap into ideas bigger than architecture, ideas voiced by Chomsky, Edward Said, Martin Heidegger or Richard Dawkins.

To articulate narratives of an architecture freed from and fleeing past suffering, we are beginning to see how ideas hold onto fragility and disjunction. Suppressed history, hidden tragedies and blatant injustice awake in us. Yet words of course keep dying, replaced by visual triggers and fragments of experience. This is a contemporary condition close to being in constant movement, constant change, constant unrest. We shudder at the language that frames both our seriousness and silliness. The huge advances in digital imaging engage us and also pass us by. Fabrications and modeling that already challenged architecture and society in ways unimaginable twenty or thirty years ago now threaten any presence we have. The narrow world that sometimes closes in on our prejudices inspires more thinness. We learn about new 'scatter' theories spreading into neuro-architectures, that speak of redemptive, restorative programmes, as if our minds and thoughts can follow the logic of recovery disks in the computer world.[9]

New media has done so much to show us how to perform more effectively, but it has also altered our thinking into a formatting confused with forgetting. The architecture of 'software' and digital imaging systems implies, by its very pace of change, privilege toward the young. Then the young grow old. AI, computer programming and games affect and alter wider structures, from family to fantasy. Prototyping, mapping,

sampling and looping, robotics and artificial intelligence suggest new, impermanent resolutions. These mixed and multiple realities can dissolve instantly. Realities no longer contained within the virtual are contained inside us, left without communication. Words are not the only thing that are dying on us daily.

(3)

Once when walking through an exhibition on Scandinavian works called *Border Art* in London in the late 1980s, I found myself fighting the presence of Swedish writer and painter Johan August Strindberg (1849-1912) and his contemporary, Swedish painter and draftsman, Carl Fredrik Hill (1849-1911). Why we fight some things more than others, why we exist to resist, seems to be wedged deep inside our inner architecture. Drawn to both artists, Strindberg and Hill in unknown, ambiguous ways, I wondered however, what it was I needed to understand in Strindberg and connect this to Hill's apocalypse and 'figurativism.' How had I sustained such a learned ignorance up to this stage in my life, hijacked by the critical comforts of intuitions, art, asides and shared witticism?

It was around this time, in *The Archeology of the Frivolous*, that Jacques Derrida was warning how "the ease there is in copying defects soon persuades men of indifferent capacities, that they shall acquire the same degree of reputation."[10] Nothing established validity in this show, and I needed to understand how to see the vague clearly. The notion of 'border' must surely contain flight or lines of flight, but when 'flight' reveals itself in the title of a painting it appears too easy, like in another

artist Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval's *Yearning for Flight*.[11] This was a painted bleakness encouraged by a nether region of the world that I was drawn towards. It spoke of muteness clearly, of darkness brightly. What was this architecture of thought that was struggling to emerge? To counter this intuitive vagueness, I was pulled towards one of Strindberg's paintings, *The Shore*.[12] I stared at it for some time. How, I found myself thinking, would these paintings be used in Scandinavia, in schools, in culture and society? For if 'border' means anything today in this context of painting out a life, it must mean what it did then – life beyond the shore, life beyond the defects that will lift pleasure from pretense. It must also mean the unknown and eternity, erasure and death and, of course, it must mean continuity.

We can always do this. Ignorance is powerful; it ignores its own seduction but wrapped up in a style it becomes an architecture of thought leading to a logical and acceptable frivolity. Words die to bring forth new thoughts. I began to fight for my own theme in the exhibition. Why should I rely on any catalog? Why rely on a thinker doing my thinking for me, when that of course is unavoidable?

I imagined this flight from Iceland might have taken so long, so many years. Or then perhaps the artist achieved flight through the act of painting this canvas for twenty years. This thinker, whichever vagueness I was then swimming in, became the murderer critic. In my inner world I was writing a thesis on Witold Gombrowicz (1904-1969) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) from the perspective of Magritte's *Holiday*.[13]

Letting the music of chance and our inner speech take over – was this how our architecture of thought takes such? How do we depart to arrive at destinations using thoughts and language which can then be constantly shifted? Is this so internal that it is nothing like speech but a performed brain? We map theory, culture and philosophical musing onto building or painting as if we can score the bark from trees we never touch. We scan art and the canvasses for thematic consistency, for deconstructed anxiety, for grunge and hermeneutic ontology. There has always been a semiotic urgency embedded in a solitude we struggle to communicate. Truths and methods intersect to make up an aesthetic consciousness weakly grasped.

We over-interpret the anxiety of five or six countries we know so little of and we blame a pagan attitude, an idol or a God for never turning up. At least that is what I was doing. Self-congratulation like luck can be studied. Chance in history and theory can agonize over its own ambiguity. Yet as the regularities seem to invite recognition, internal mechanisms of source, intuition and reference keep us alive in the academy and, more than occasionally, keep us blind. The therapy in our thoughts enters us, it turns the street into a forest we never had. We careen as in a reckless drive into the clearing of a forest we no longer plant. Then we crash at the traffic lights of culture or architecture. I watched one of the regular critics circulate the gallery. In and out, round in a matter of minutes. I thought I heard the critic's comment; "Not essential viewing! Not essential reading!" A note here and a note there, it was like turning the pages of a book, this book, finished and remaindered.

I, myself, never really had to run out into the sunshine to shake off a seriousness in architecture which has become all too oppressive. I might dream of sunbathing with Witold Gombrowicz in Manitoba and consider it a Buddhist exercise of some abandon. I might discuss the novelist Bruno Schulz but this would only be another momentary recovery from the collapse we need to acknowledge for our own good. Add to this, sitting with the *Sangha* would surely bring enough happiness.

Are we all still seeking out idols, while the twilight has changed but a fraction. As words die on us, works beget new works, new departures. Writing begets new writing, forms beget new forms, parametric shifting and algorithmic architecture replaces sketching and the rendering of architectural lines. The money shot both seduces and appalls. Much in the visualization of new architecture has been brilliant, much is also predictable. If in the twentieth-century, an image repertoire in architecture not only mimicked the design of the masters, it passed seamlessly for decades into architectural currency and education. Architects taught each other and students to read and then design small repetitions of master forms and spatial recognitions. Like pattern recognition and machine learning, back then the image repertoire was a process that turned recognizable versions of an architecture into new versions of history before they too became recognizable and predictable. How long before disenchantment set in was not always clear. From the many card-carrying architects out to pinwheel in the middle of the twentieth-century, there was the seduction of unraveling good intentions in architecture for personal, social and human progress. Each

with their own architecture of thought married versions of a pragmatic or fanciful theory with longed-for relevance. Ezra Pound or T.S.Eliot, immaturity and maturity?

(4)

Intertextuality, a word, a mouthful, a history of plagiarism, was also clever appropriation extended both to image and text. In the twentieth-century symptoms of aging architectural helplessness could be turned towards new adventures. Educational programs were very good at re-branding ways of thinking in architecture to suit accepted clusters of happy or unhappy language. The twentieth-century then caught up with itself, as conceptual frameworks appeared sufficiently branded, and then naturally encouraged their own proliferation. What would design for Louis Vuitton mean for example? If we think this only affects the profiled architects (starchitects is irrelevant to this) we would be wrong. Whether the result is called 'the spectacle,' 'synthetic,' 'tourist porn' or then showy 'nothingness,' it does not matter. Whether it involves architects in Statecraft or Extra-Statecraft, it keeps the critical carnival going!

The internet, the dark web, real fakes and the internet of things; all refuge, escape and virus! Words thankfully die because they are programmed to collapse. Architects have long entered these voids of their own making – autistically keeping the score – using a vocabulary, an architecture of thought that supports their own inner speech. Combine this with intuitive academic and professional steering and we can see the results. It is true that

many have been more confident in exploring and resisting an architecture which creates nothing more than serviceable fictions with admirable but blind ambitions.

"What shocks me," the architect and writer Max Frisch wrote in *Montauk*, "is rather the discovery that I have been concealing my life from myself. I have been serving up stories to some sort of public, and in these stories I have, I know, laid myself bare – to the point of non-recognition. I live, not with my own story, but those parts of it that I have been able to put to literary use. Whole areas are missing."[14]

Many architects over the last decades have been caught with modern minds wedged between practice and theory, design and reading, desire and language. How many recognize that missing out on whole areas of debate leaves but voids to exploit? Without any malice, architects have often found themselves bystanders to the deeper debate. Whole discourses whether they are believed or not, condition the way they are designing. This may explain the way thinking moves our inner thought and insight into charmed areas, even resulting in cognitive distortions still called 'architecture.'

More recently we have seen bodies and minds rushing to promotion, podium and publication. There is valiancy here in trying to understand repetition and difference, whilst social media re-shapes architectural repertoires beyond immutable logic or reason. It is not that we forget the works and words of Richard Dawkins, or the invention and idea of a cultural meme.

It is not that we suffer from imprecise understanding of Susan Blackmore's extension, *The Meme Machine*.[15] For, after all, what is more useful to architectural thinking today than understanding the viral machine as internet-online memes replicate and disseminate new stories and narratives-to-get-by.

The viral meme is becoming acceptable commentary, just as Twitter, Instagram and TikTok have their moments. It is not an idle observation. If we put in the word memetics into Google we are redirected to the Ancient Greek mimesis, "to imitate." Paired with poesis/poetics, 'mimesis' is often used to discuss and blur issues around imitation and representation, originality and mimicry.[16] This connects us with 'imitator actor.' Our koans are now trembling. Memes infect our language until they invade our architectures of thought, both critically and philosophically. If we then best consider this part of our presentation of self, we must see architecture descending a staircase. Words die and architectures too take on their own collapse.

(5)

What does it mean to speak of a cultured image of architecture? The authorship of architecture and the debate around it has remained restless for decades since the language games of the 1970s. It is not only the public who may misunderstand architecture, controlled as it is by professional codes where individual credit and signature often mask greater diversity and merit. Some architects closer than others to their own intuitions and preferences know how misconceptions and confusions are difficult to dislodge in a conservative profession. Many

have doubtless spent hours realizing the imaginative structural engineer could work to expand the boundaries of any design solution. Neither need take credit for what is in essence an architectural solution impossible alone.

Architects can still consider an army of students, interns and sub-contractors, using the jargon common in the past as 'slaves' (in Alvar Aalto's office).[17] Many assistant architects throughout Finland and Scandinavia in the post-war development of Modern Architecture, referred to themselves humorously as 'slaves.' There was an unwritten rule that such 'slaves' could be paid a pittance by the leading architecture stars to work 'down in the mines' and/or up the metaphorical chimneys,[18] learning the masters' trade. This was an unwritten, unacknowledged situation sadly still part of the architecture profession. The assistant young architect-slave can in part be responsible for solving issues whilst by virtue of that talent become a *persona non grata*! Instead of this leading to the more generous realization that other levels of knowledge and competence are available and can solve issues, usually individual architects close up, cross horns and the profession generally goes quiet on such essential collaborations.

In 2007, The *Guardian* newspaper (UK) produced an edited, personally selected series of twelve great buildings.[19] Each building was accompanied by drawings and an essay – often intuitively and subjectively brilliant by an 'informed' non-architect. This was a welcome openness which got close to demonstrating the hold that a cultured modern mind thinking, but

somewhat arbitrary journalism, had over architecture. The telling images and drawings would eventually converge on the one and only figure responsible for these 'visions,' the architect(s).

One such building was the Pompidou Centre in Central Paris. Call it what you will, a refinery or warehouse, of all the buildings perhaps chosen this was a building of clear significant history and merit. It was the work of the 'auteurs' Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. The 'evolving spatial diagram' that became the guiding structure and envelope was a palimpsest of architectural and technological ideas around London and other cities at the time.

In more contemporary language, the Pompidou Centre was intertextual, that ambiguous idea that emerged later in the twentieth century. It was a palimpsest, a recognition that all buildings would eventually be about all other buildings. Ideas were not so much appropriated by these two young 'slaves' from pedagogues like Cedric Price or architects like *Archigram* but were filtered through what we can call architectural brain-maps.[20] Such maps, neither territory nor terrain, communicated a developing architectural repertoire through education, practice and travel. The vision of architecture became not so much a revision as a re-configuration. Emblem, and later 'icon' of course, the Pompidou Centre was a building that re-wrote (architectural) history - for a while!

Consider a few figures from the building and how we understand them: 10 floors of 7500 m2 each; over 12000 m2

for the National Art Museum; almost 6000 m2 for temporary pop-up exhibitions; a performance space for nearly 400 people; a couple of cinemas (300+/140+) and a lecture theater for about 150; a large 10,000 m2 public reading library which could take over 2000 users and another research library. In the twenty-first-century one would imagine any editor presenting such significance might have taken a new look at the labor of such architecture. Opening those 'brain-maps' that have become other structures and other envelopes across both time and space might have been more than a literary option.

There is no doubt that the hundreds, thousands of invisible hands that went to make up this building were not always so invisible. The trace of the hand in the robust engineering which set this building apart, belonged primarily it appears to the engineer Peter Rice. Yet Rice is barely given a mention in this revision. An essay from the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy offered a seductive and entertaining commentary. It branded the building, deflected the architecture and kept the critical tradition of architecture well and truly backdated and anachronistic.[21] If any building could have offered a chance for a new critical index about practice, labor and the architectural repertoire this was the one.

Why then, we might ask, did one of the many minds and hands responsible for the building, Peter Rice, slip under the radar? Rice's role on this building was probably as influential as that of the architects. Yet the building, seen as a novel or a piece of music, is primarily considered the work of the architects. If we

were considering architectural journalism of the late twentieth-century or earlier, this might be expected if not acceptable. To be still marginalizing the interactive teamwork, collaborations and diversity required for such a building today seems more than unacceptable.

Kieran and Heidi Rice wrote in response: "to realize that if any building is to be truly great, all the elements of its design – both architectural and engineered – must work well and work together."[22] They did of course have a serious point to make. Not only were they clearly disappointed to discover that the credit for the design and look of the finished building had been given to the architects, Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, but virtually no mention was made of their father, Peter Rice, the project's structural engineer. They went on to make the valid point and question the editorial claim that this was a style created and appropriated by the signature team of that infamous British high-tech quartet, Piano, Rogers, Foster and Hopkins.

"It wasn't just a new architectural language," they wrote, "it was new engineering language that created these buildings. On Pompidou for example, the innovative use of external cast-steel 'gerberettes' was an engineer's response to the architects' aim of a column-free interior floor space."[23] Perhaps then it was natural for the son and daughter of Peter Rice to have to bring attention to this in a response to the newspaper. For just as the siblings of Rice ask why their father was not really mentioned, they might ask after so many years why the architects Piano and Rogers

also could not have pioneered the obvious; that if any building needed to exist without deifying the architect, then Pompidou Centre was it!

(6)

We have to believe there is 'life after architecture.' Architecture as a literary device probably got closer to fulfilling a permanent ephemeral promise, in the last two or three decades of the twentieth-century, as it followed fiction and the fallen forms of language. We saw improbable personal architectures emerge from a cyberspace menu; those early hybrid 'showy' buildings that are now visualized all over the globe. It was not so much that architecture demonstrated the anxiety of language, it was the blindness of its wish fulfillment. In *From Bauhaus to Our House*, Tom Wolfe wittily anticipated that little 'hop, skip and jump' through the semantic and philosophical scaffolds that literary endeavors applied to architecture.[24] Architecture, eventually redundant from one decade, one ideology to the next, was paid off.

But there was no gold watch or signed cheque in the post, as each decade began to re-structure its own brief. Finally, architecture: famous, enigmatic and spectacular to come, madness to others! A madness which we now suspect acts as a liberating role for architecture to continue to prove itself redundant to the political and social forces that control the profession and shape and destroy our environment. Reframing was not only a tectonic metaphor; architectural practice and education has continually spiraled and re-invented itself within and after Postmodernism.

What to say that has not been said before of the fashionable trends of linguistic-philosophic applications in architecture? What to say to those who think architecture could achieve meaning and legibility if only it was 'read' correctly?[25] The 'super' in super-rational was uplifting but it would be some time before architects began to understand the intuitive and selfish decisions they might make. We need not only refer to behavioral economics to recognise architecture is complicated by the very psychology architects use for the good of others. Personality, ego and emotions, so often concealed inside intentions, are often mismanaged for achievements. Procrastination, risks and misjudgment can be disguised as loaning and learning from others to validate the grand architectural repertoire.

Is it so strange to imagine these brain maps circulating the globe like satellites? Intertextuality? It has never been that simple, but when was the narrative embedded in our thinking that architects know what is best for architecture? The paradoxical legacy of the last century might lie in very messy irrational thought processes coupled with the necessity of learning how to design. Building well might conceivably have become secondary to a life lived after architecture. Is this a visualization of a life in continuous computer-generated combat and drone-migrancy? A visualization only to represent inner notions of an imprecise, intuitive language that fail to challenge our self-deception?

Provoking ideas that have neither script nor narrative to keep to can be a relief. We close with a few pointers which might help setting up how an architecture of thought emerges

and continually re-thinks itself throughout this book of essays. It is possible to show how far off we might go when we write about architecture, or then how on message we seem to be. If we question the grounded thoughts we are cautious of, should we contest and doubt these and let those words die on us naturally? If we wish to read the critical histories we have already dissolved, what alchemies do we resort to, what disorders do we correct, what koans do we cancel or conceal?

We are close here to what philosophers struggle with every day, what Zen Buddhism continually hints at – more than one belief must be tossed aside daily. It is true that what is still accepted as 'modernity' in architectural circles might be an emotional and irrational series of errors we could well do without, framed and discussed as it is by Gianni Vattimo in his influential volume *The End of Modernity* (1987). It is also true that any lingering hope in returning or restoring those selected meanings, rational decisions and belief systems that maintained modernity's logic might be well-formed intuitions considered well and truly in the past.[26]

However, that is not how ideas and ideals fail and get re-configured as new stories. Nothing is as fixed as that wording suggests and we invent narratives-to-get-by in place of other narratives. Though we might point to the shifting map of culture, critical theory and architectural agency, this "westernization of the world" (to use Reino Guidari's phrase), has neither run its course nor ceased the deception played across global institutions and organizations.[27] The questionable master scenarios implied in bringing the past into the present in architecture still see

programs offering compelling reasons to teach and communicate what was already emotionally confirmed and intuitively fragile almost a century ago.

If Samuel Beckett gave us the endgames in a rough theater beyond language, his words can still capture the immutable and ineffable that has been dragged, kicking and screaming into this century. Our inner nihilism, extinction and collapse are more accessible and understandable today when we witness events challenging the imaginative energy we – erroneously – thought was available to all in the last century. What is our new vocabulary that accepts dissolution, error and the selected bias we inhabit but for a brief moment?

The decade begun in lockdown is already accelerating in ways unimaginable. The coming years will see ethics and production re-armed, best practice and leadership strategies will be re-written, and learning outcomes will match a 'woke futurism.' Thoughts will struggle to advance 'nudge' strategies and behavioral economics might then engage us all as 'bias' and futurism become our main educational programme. All will have something to offer in getting us beyond consolations and going creatively to the dark side. As post-lockdown continues in a sort of apocalypse-creep, there will likely be no end to metaphysics, only new words and torrents from the semiosphere to the phenomenology of more and more ends.

There is no orgy to come after, only words dying and action re-forming. This we should celebrate and all this,

fought out between Nietzsche and Heidegger, or Adorno and Wittgenstein, surely brings a smile to our faces. We look up at Giorgio Agamben's window near Campo Santa Barnaba in Venice and then we move on. How are we to catch up with un-grasped ideas, with realities that tell us to take our leave, especially of our cherished meanings? We are not so much in need of accepting these ever-present fictionalized experiences of reality, for nothing is as it seems. Instead, we work on ourselves to exact more significance from a group of ideas that are not only fluctuating but might be uncannily already extinct? If these still define the grounding our institutions protect in architecture, what is that brief time we can take outside all? Nothing is written here as loss, as a lament, which is why we suggest filing it under Buddhism and Architecture. As we re-appropriate the harmony of collapse all around us, this is a new twilight age. Going to the dark side has now become reality. The architecture of (our) thought and our warm understanding of error and personal bias can be positively accomplished.

Copycats ripped off my soul
Copycats ripped off my words
Copycats ripped off my melody
It doesn't matter what they say
It doesn't matter what they do
All that matters is my relationship to you

Van Morrison [28]

2
DENIALS

(1)

Denials was originally delivered as the J. K. Chowdhury Memorial Lecture, 'Talk to the Finger,' organized by Vibhuti Sachdev and U. Bhanu at Sushant School of Art and Architecture/SSAA, Gurgaon, India (2018).[29] The talk took its departure from the image of Frank Gehry giving his Spanish audience the 'finger' in 2013.[30] It is quite possible that there is an entirely different essay within this chapter still to be written. In 2013, the architect Frank Gehry was to collect the Prince of Asturias Award for the Arts, to be presented by King Felipe of Spain. Originally covered by El Mundo, an awkward confrontation occurred at the press conference in Oviedo, Spain. Emotions, it was felt, may have been running high, considering the week before Gehry had celebrated the opening of the new Fondation Louis Vuitton building. This building was an assemblage that some critics had already claimed to be little more than a 'spectacle.' Unfair, but this new building did look like a set of coloured jewelry boxes of the type you could buy on the streets in India. To many others, the colorful shapes looked as if they belonged to an anachronistic Expo site. This of course was nothing the architect Frank Gehry had not met with before. The public understanding of architecture reduced buildings to diagrams and a default gossip. A diagrammatic process that curiously enough architects may have achieved now for almost two decades. There really was nothing unusual in someone probing the architect by suggesting

the building was nothing if not 'showy.' Whatever vocabulary chosen, this 'showiness' was what Frank Gehry was best known for over the last two decades. Gehry certainly had had his share of such critical sniping. But the story goes deeper.

Sometimes politics, ego games and turf wars exist such that journalists wish they would all miraculously go away. A recent publication out of North America, *Architecture is all Over,* edited by Esther Choi and Marrikka Trotter, restates an ever-present dilemma.[31] In language that we all recognize, students also often express similar feelings. Refreshingly and frustratingly, they can announce: "Architecture is so totally over" whilst in their studies they learn to mimic, render and turn out the most hyper-realistic digital images of an architecture-to-come. After six years of schooling, some students don't realize how long they have waited for that moment. They can go as far continuing their own language games and announce that architecture 'might never return!' Ahead of many others, these students can imagine architecture turning out more and more viral memes. Remembering something, anything, reminds them only of the last time they remembered that thought. For what reason have we been educated and why, they ask; why do we even bother to remember some things and not others; some buildings, some places, some events? Some architects and buildings are seared into the students' inner thoughts, never to disappear. Histories and theories are blurred, centuries are blurred and the archaic trembles. Many students appear to drift further and further away

from new formations that challenge the nostalgia of the accepted. The statement, ‘certainly, we have been educated’ becomes their subtext.

At one time we might have imagined this frustration redefines, ever so lightly, progress in architecture. In the middle of press briefings many have come to accept public exchanges are not only becoming ruder and more confrontationally ‘woke’ but their immediacy holds nothing sacred. Both the public and architecture are obviously considered inseparable from today’s spectacle. Thoughts and ideas are polarized into intolerance and rage. Images too can sumptuously signal an architecture often already dead before it emerges. Images – online and offline, are read by journalists and the public by repertoire not narrative. Worlds and realities come and go and can be denied, dissolved or deflected the minute they pass.

What happened? The journalist had asked the prize-winning architect what he thought of people who considered his buildings showy. ‘Showy’ was the word used. It was an aching moment in the audience. There was a nanosecond where you saw the architect thinking how he might respond to this question. It was as if Gehry was thinking to himself, is that a real question, and could he actually be asked that?

The passive-aggressive moment was electric. In what lasted no longer than an itch, Gehry’s middle finger came up. Nothing like a titter. And then the finger disappeared just a little too quickly for effect. In an image that became an instant meme,

Frank Gehry paused, grimaced, and slowly raised that middle finger. The result was suspended embarrassment. The architect's body language was interesting. When he heard the question, he paused. He took some time resisting, and his shifting facial muscles told its own story before lifting his middle finger. A tiredness in his face expressed agony without quite showing it. It all looked rather tame as he raised the finger and then took it away almost as quickly as it emerged. It lacked timing.

Various press reports put it this way: "Frank Gehry gives journalists the finger."[32] Another said the architect had given a journalist the middle finger salute.[33] The middle finger salute, really? Is that the politically correct way to describe it? Another slightly more nuanced report described the press conference "getting off to a bad start when a journalist asked whether Gehry's own architecture was only about 'spectacle.'"[34] So up came the finger with a pained facial expression as brief as it was surprising.

Are we really surprised? Of course, it was a shock but then it really wasn't. Was it such a bad start for a press conference? Clearly Gehry was not Earnest Hemingway, but one might have imagined a little more nuancing from the famed architect. It was a gesture that had forgotten how to include the comedic. It should have been funny but became an itch that may have indicated decades of weariness in architecture.

(2)

The quickly raised and lowered middle finger left a vacuum which had to be filled. A comedian might have used it and worked it. But Gehry is not a stand-up comedian. Did the architect instantly regret this gesture? Apparently, a long silence followed.Then, another reporter, possibly sensing the elephant in the room, rephrased the question. Instead of using the by now corrupted word 'iconic' or 'showy,' he asked whether "emblematic buildings" such as those in Gehry's repertoire would continue to be a feature of modern cities? Subtler certainly was the use of the word 'emblematic.' There was a critical opening here. It was a question with echo. For a fall guy in comedy, the question begged the informative and entertaining response.

Was Gehry's finger merely faux rudeness? Or is that even possible anymore? Certainly, it was the sort of gesture expected from someone like Van Morrison, but not the man known everywhere as 'Frank'! Was this, as many have suggested, pure frustration and chronic irritation by Frank, as he is often called even by those who do not know him. Or was it simpler than this? Was this the fatigue of fame and the weariness of this game called architecture? Did the architect feel compelled to continue and offer some sort of explanation as to why he used the finger and what it might mean?

Frank Gehry went on to answer the second journalist. "Let me tell you one thing," he replied, with something just short of menace. "In this world we are living in, 98% of everything that is built and designed today is pure shit. There's no sense of design, no respect for humanity or for anything else. They are damn

buildings and that's it."[35] The audience must have felt as if they had been pistol-whipped: They are damn buildings and that's it. But Gehry was not letting it drop. "Once in a while, however, a group of people do something special. Very few, but God, leave us alone. We are dedicated to our work. I don't ask for work … I work with clients who respect the art of architecture. Therefore, please don't ask questions as stupid as that one."[36]

The wailing emerged out of a cloud; it inserted the architect somewhere between pathos and exhaustion. You could see the speech bubbles in the audience.They reworded the insult immediately inside their own skulls: God, leave them (architects) alone. They have done something special, just go away and let them be. Poor guys, yes guys, they are architects, come on! Don't even try to understand what they are doing. We'll never be able to understand them. For God's sake, go away. Of course, some of them are so special, they don't even ask for work. They do what they feel like, and it looks great, and we should be happy. We should be so lucky! They get the prizes. Leave it at that. The rest is utter garbage.

Gehry was sloganeering, the audience was speech bubbling. The brevity in his response left a huge chasm of misunderstanding. It reminded me of an entertaining but wearying exchange in the Venice Biennale on Giudecca some two decades ago. Frank Gehry and Allen Ginsburg traded mantras in front of a fawning audience, drooling over the humor of the meaningless. They were stand-up comics albeit sitting down. Frank Gehry made the joke that he had seventy computers but did not know how to

start them. The informed cultural audience had heard it many times. The charm was wearing off. Gehry was like English actor John Gielgud (1904-2000) in British dramatist and screenwriter Terence Rattigan's (1911-1977) "The Entertainer" from 1960. This was not entertaining; if Gehry was not Hemingway, he was no Gielgud either.

I had seen Frank Gehry in more entertaining better days where he would go rogue around the other leading paper architects in the 1990s. He was a relief then, good value as they say. He gave no tongue for theory and his hang-dog self-deprecation worked well. At that time, Gehry was dreaming he was Canadian ice hockey player Wayne Gretzky. He knew he would look good in an ice hockey shirt, oversized and unformed. Usually, the applause went all around events like this whilst others tittered: Oh! come on Frank! As a one liner in Venice, it was limited but not bad. But these were the early years of the meme machine. Bilbao Guggenheim completed in 1995 - from doodle to double curve - was a scramble of lines about to become a brilliantly engineered double-curved geometry. Bilbao would become the spectacle in contemporary architecture that gave Gehry the glamor of an astronaut and 'rock star.' Titanium could be used for buildings as well as Armani spectacle frames. What do you meme, Mr Gehry? someone might have asked. They didn't. The Venice Biennale atmosphere was located in its art-marquee with English musician John Lennon's painted Rolls Royce situated in the audience.[37] The meme machine had started. Architects give everyone the finger! Who exactly was the walrus of contemporary architecture?

(3)

Back to the future, the press briefing in 2013 was T-shirt message time. In front of those Spanish journalists Frank Gehry might have been wearing the well-known T-shirt meme: I'm an Architect. To save time, let's just assume that I'm never wrong. In our extension of this little encounter with the middle finger there lies huge hubris. Is this the hubris of famous architects, thinking their architectures of thought become master models for the artist- architect? Gehry's Luis Vuitton building continued a familiar open, formless visual coding with carnival seduction. Was it the result of napkin doodles on a 747, then soft-wared from viral meme into architecture, photoshopped to be online everywhere? Doesn't online mean everywhere? To take on such an enigmatic and clearly unusual building was brave; Gehry's courage is not one of vindictiveness or internal carping. It is not even one of frustration or weariness. It is even more serious than that.

The finger question was one of conditioned language and how architects communicate. It was not the loss of accuracy which then affects the architect, this moment recalls the plundering of the semiotic project in architecture in the 1980s. Methodologically and ideologically, the profession of architecture has never quite acknowledged how much it has brilliantly appropriated but suffered from the language games it played on itself. Sophisticated imaging systems offered the illusions necessary to applaud architecture for its contemporary exile. Using the word 'showy' or 'emblematic' about the Vuitton building today allows journalists to imply urgent issues like

sustainability and global warming are somehow side-lined. Journalists and critics seek quite another activist space which might rightly de-limit architecture. Asking the question invited a fusion between a civic and moral conscience. But press conferences don't do that; nothing there could be re-invented in order to re-shape architecture.

We might consider the subtext. The privileges imagined lying within Gehry's work – 'emblem' as metonym for the bijou – share the same ambiguity with fashion and advertising. A serious application of linguistics back in the 1970s and 1980s saw the same methods of persuasion hijacked by critical thinking and theory in architecture. To read a painting, a film or a building was considered enough for full, unequivocal communication. In advertising it produced ambivalent by-pass strategies whilst Royalty could hijack it as default criticism of everything 'modern.' Architectures of thought shaped with consummate inner anxiety became impossible to re-stage architecture of past glory. Without acknowledging this blind spot, architects realized they would be trapping themselves again. Used to interpret architecture, a new legibility emerged where architects told the stories they would tell themselves through their buildings. It might be that at times our understanding is too limited for the frameworks and work architects think they can invent. If the twentieth-century was the 'reading century' the solutions for progress and democracy through architecture struggled for their own literacy. Theories and ideologies were in constant competition and consumption.

Naive desires would have to dissolve. Players in the game of an expanded and appropriated theory, architecture was re-packaged according to fluid theories of collapse and human resource.

Frank Gehry sat in the middle of all this like a Buddha. Other architects were like novelists who no longer seemed to need clinching denials that theory respects the architecture or literature it creates. Critical fictions kept this thing called architecture going for so many years. Gehry was in the slipstream of his own world, his architectures of thought were sketched and realized with 'genius.' In the 1990s, architects' drawings and papers were like Tibetan prayer flags. They presented issues of urgency and failure in a contemporary condition. They lost no power to respond to urgency as inner thoughts unfurled in the wind. It was the era where grand naivety began de-limiting the potential in architecture whilst architecture itself exploded.

Work-in-progress has no end, no 'drawn' or 'projected' future. The past itself lived on in a splendidly ambiguous 'modern' present and the architecture that emerged, Gehry's some of the best, was eternally structured to allow change. But to many external to architecture's privileges, this reduced architecture to a video game. This was 'score architecture!' Advertising was always just off the shoulder. The choice of this or that training shoe, this or that high-rise tilting patterned metal or glass shard and colour-assembly building blurred sign, signifier, code and culture.

We can laugh at this now but we would be wise not to. The meme machine has since inserted itself into culture and society. An online search for the middle finger meme immediately replicated the machine itself. There they were. I. M. Pei, Le Corbusier, Mies van Der Rohe and others all found online, all using the photo-shopped finger. All in support, or in resonance, with the great Frank Owen Goldberg, aka Frank Gehry. Oh Lord, leave us architects alone, we have the finger, and we have photo-shop!

Can we redeem some intelligence from this? Why should architects be left alone? Why should they not be asked questions by a public that does not always understand their works? Why should there not be dialogues with clients that have difficulties with their intentions? Why can architects not be questioned by students who not only don't understand their prejudices but disagree with their motives? Were the journalists confused by the Vuitton building? Could they care less? Or did they see a privileged artist-architect produce the spectacular and seek uncontested praise for it? The award of even yet another prize? Or has Frank Gehry like many other late twentieth-century architects faced so much opposition in their lives that the frustration rises like the head on top of a glass of Guinness. Have architects ever been understood? And then it spills over.

Why should Frank Gehry not be asked that question, as stupid as he thinks it may be? Or should architects be able to choose the questions they would like to answer? Was it really a stupid question? What if we re-framed the question into

another level of stupidity: ‘Mr. Architect, do you think architects wrapped up in their hermetic world are sometimes responsible for buildings that we cannot understand? Mr. Architect, are there buildings which use too much material, that are too heavy and may become embarrassing in some years’ time? Do we think they would have replied? Or would they give the finger as well.

(4)

Frank Gehry has to his enormous credit never been a talker, the voluble architect. If he could take a lesson from Bob Dylan in gendering untruth to appropriate new fiction about an old life, we might begin to know something more about this professional weariness. However, Frank Gehry is not Bob Dylan. He is not Van Morrison. He is not Allen Ginsburg, Ernest Hemingway, John Gielgud or Thomas Bernard. Why would we ever think he would have given the audience insight into the privileged and coded Western world of architecture that he represented? There is a lesson for us all here.

Recent moments forced upon us by contemporary events invite us to re-define everything that has gone before. Stupidity – exponential like a virus – may have a role in this. We must perhaps choose our outrages more carefully. Instead of a calm, even measured humorous response to the ambiguity of any word like ‘showy,’ ‘spectacle,’ ‘emblematic,’ ‘iconic,’ Gehry showed an irritation. This was unlike him. Or was it? How did I know? He is usually someone who can sit in a hotel armchair oozing avuncular charm, tempting us to imagine the missing spirits of the last century. He reacted – we might say – predictably.

Whenever anyone reacts like this though, we are usually not let into the back story. The finger response had as much frustration about it as alertness. It perhaps spoke of tiredness, a fatigue. The exhaustion of architecture? Is there more to this trope than the simple middle finger? Why and was this called for? In Gehry's case I would surmise this must be the general sum of many years since the early 1990s of being chased by the grand and the good of architecture. He has been lauded and attacked, goaded and mocked, for an architecture of sculptural force and, eventually, spectacle. But is this fair?

Frank Gehry is demonized in schools of architecture as if the gymnastics of the last thirty years in world architecture are his and his alone. But has fairness got anything to do with this? Gehry was always ahead of the 'double' curve offering art, wit and spectacle that certainly 'entertained,' from the early buildings in the 1980s through to the present. As timid as the gesture seemed, Gehry was doing what Vladimir and Estragon do in Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*.[38] As they exchange their hats in the music hall routine, so architecture goes in and out of being grasped, lost and found. It bemuses our time. De-limiting architecture is not a new concept. Nor are the personal motives and existential underpinning some architects use to eradicate the boundaries between life and architecture. Whilst there has been a huge advance in readily accessible software and imaging systems, there has also been an equivalent movement to de-limit architecture. Eyes have learnt to skin new architectures beyond

theory. Already in the early 1980s with the emergence of Postmodernism, notions like pluralism and multiplicity ensured increased non-hierarchical systems.

The fashionable fondness for terms like deterritorialization or dis-integration did not however affect the professional strategies that began to co-opt this Postmodern condition for more graspable and even fluid agendas. It is possible to see now, as also then, how often the architectural profession used vague critical notions to re-assert a formal repertoire. In architect's speak, the interpretive meddled with the operative and abused a literacy available to some, not all. To others, this was Gadamer jousting with Wittgenstein. New design methodology and structure could assume, misleadingly, shared symbolic desire. By doing so the necessity to avoid theoretical underpinning for architecture that appeared to stem from critical theory led to the profession losing contact with its own pedagogies. We can situate Gehry in the middle of this underpinning. Art and architecture approaching from different directions began to converge. Artists explored space and imagery, siting and re-siting their art through the use of the moving image. Digital imaging systems increased the development of installation art and the contest of relational activities. Artists began encroaching on areas considered the privileged domain of architects. By doing so, roles were questioned though not always reversed. Was the artist or architect closest to re-shaping public and private space through the increase in new technology and imaging systems?

Architects and artists often merged, and strategies and buildings offered fluid, event spaces. It was not so much that architectural practices confused theoretical constructs with the methodology of design, rather a wayward theory collided with marketing strategies and advertising techniques. The death of one – architect or artist – would lead to the re-birth of the other, and vice versa. A soft profession of image management and control, along with event management, used architects, designers, artists and graphic artists to shape or design transitional environments. Results were fluid. The profession encountered all sorts of difficulties in dealing with a fused condition where critical theorists called it architecture of the provisional or the ephemeral. An architecture changing and evolving constantly, technologically often thrilling, ultimately with no destination, no arrival, no author even, would become a programmable and programmatic event by the turn of the millennium. But the 'formless' was abandoned. Eyes cataracted architecture after Bachelard; more Buñuel fashion. Gehry was one architect-artist who could straddle both fields and did so unlike any other.

(5)

Those with some knowledge of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) and Roland Barthes' seminal essay "Writing Degree Zero" (1953) or "Elements in Semiology" (1967), might well recognize the effect language and linguistics had in the twentieth-century and still has on architecture. Such fetish for coding, de-coding, cynical or ironic trans-coding, can be traced to the pivotal 1950s and the appearance of what became the enigmatic French movement, structuralism. In the sense of

American anthropologist-linguist, Edward Sapir (1834-1939) the visual codes of architectural communities began predisposing certain choices of interpretation, thereby scripting reading patterns of architecture's promise, protest and achievement. An aesthetic consciousness and conditioning was born.

The study of the use of language in and about architecture and the way language has interacted with the discipline is as serious today as is the development of digital imaging systems. Though we might think of the semiotic exercise now in the past, another 'left-orientated notion dead in the water,' we would be unwise to ignore that the hermeneutic and ontological traps are still very much part of the architect's dilemma.

Fit for purpose, yes, but as purpose changes, architectures of inner thought may only come to rest long after the settlement has been built, long after more immediate function and semiotics have been served. Architecture so uninflected, architecture of the 'lower rank,' to differentiate it from the more generalized romantic, re-invented 'intellectual modernisms,' expresses a commitment first to process, knowledge, building and technique, second to culture and thirdly, effectively over time, to stubborn revelation and eventual indifference. The alchemies created are only indirectly involved with the cultured imagery that now passes for the spectacle.

Why then, and how did it happen? What does it signify? How can we link this middle finger salute to today's anxiety about learning, education and the rampant virus-challenged

global developmental strategies? Does this middle finger gesture go further than a frustrated, more-than-famous First World architect wishing to retain their eminence? If the architectural world mostly – to quote Mr Gehry – is 'pure shit' what value does such a momentary outrage serve? We might see it as the grand union of global architects now steering the ship from what we could call Desolation Row. Forget Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot fighting in the Captain's Tower, this middle finger salute reminded me of an evening in Gaudi's house in Barcelona in the early 1990s. Peter (Eisenman) and Frank (Gehry) were making arrangements for their offices to play ice hockey; gaming for architectural bragging rights. There was a lot of that in the 1990s.

The result of this little Spanish encounter in 2013 must have amused many during the press conference. It pre-empted things to come, things more urgent. The map of global architectural production and prejudice, the collision of artist and architects, marketer and advertiser have all shifted dramatically. They have also remained the same. Registering the awkwardness of language games in architecture has proved difficult as global architects have trawled the Southern Hemisphere to turn out projects that begin to make all cities, everywhere, look like the Northern Hemisphere.

When did the world stop thinking that buildings could be both expensively showy and serious works of art whether in Los Angeles or Almaty? There is a ruder corollary to this; which other works of art and architecture will prove in the coming years expensively showy and possibly pure shit? When did this

reversal happen, if indeed it is a reversal? Is the world full of what might be called, according to Gehry, architecture of the lowest rank? I doubt this, and I also doubt whether measuring it in such emotional ways is really important.

Sadly, this momentary bleating does not suggest reasons why architects should be heard? When Frank Gehry took umbrage at the Spanish reporter who had hinted at his 'showy' architecture, he responded with the middle finger. Forgetting the work of previous architects is a way architecture continues. Devouring previous works is another way. Gehry will be no different, and he is far from the first architect to use intuition, art and brilliant fidgeting – sometimes known as the creative process – to design buildings that can, even without squinting too much, appear versions of other works. Sometimes these works resemble his own works, sometimes the work of others. Sometimes they brand fragments to re-brand other fragments. Sometimes archaic or fantastic, nothing however takes away from the clever sophistication of these versions. The juggling of parametric software and algorithmic delight does of course have the potential of re-producing its own internalized architecture, an infinite and replicated space. In many ways, this becomes the sum of our own juggling, and the architecture of our own thoughts as someone else's language.

With such new drivers for global change and survival required, why do architects still struggle to be taken seriously? Signs are that this is changing. But who is asking us not to ask questions? How long and why, for instance, have buildings like

Bilbao Guggenheim and the Disney Concert Hall been enough to re-brand a city for the investors, market tradesmen and hedge fund specialists? These buildings tell the stories we wish to tell ourselves as tourists. In suitable fashion, in such brevity, we can exaggerate this middle finger action as a disguised call for action against surveillance capitalism.

(6)

What times are these? It is of course dangerous to use the middle finger in the wrong situation. Only some years ago a woman who was cycling as the US President's Motorcade passed, put up her middle finger. She was tracked, warned, vilified, lost her job and crushed.[39] Do we know even half of what goes on in these murky middle finger processes? Since Frank Gehry used the finger in 2013, we have seen bewildering developments and the result of fiscal short termism in architecture. Can we understand this as a way that speaks more to ambiguity and an ethical conflict in architecture? Is the subtext a future embarrassment of this rather synthetic, showy global architecture? In this critical wasteland, there is an emerging lament for the lack of necessary resistance. This middle finger is not only telling us to say 'no' but asking us to redefine just why we are saying no, and what we are saying no to?

Much media speculation has continued to put the tropes of a 'weak' architecture and endgames together over the last two decades. Architecture may no longer be about what it has for so long pretended to be about. Despite ever-changing critical carnivals and conferences, most students already now work and

accept some sort of endgame. The enigma of form, the software gigolo work supported by watercolor, frame diagram, cartoon, Instagram, TikTok or Pinterest does not necessarily imply any radical agenda. Nor do the grand gestures necessarily serve the green, sustainable, buzz-word responsibility of the moment. These can become merely the alibis of displaced privilege, market fudging and economic inequality. They can also offer the civic eye, a sublime but forbidden jewelry. Buildings to be seen and not read; Buñuel not Bachelard! Architecture, as we know it, or think we know it, may be so totally over, as the young architects hint at, that it surely has to be on the way back.

"The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that which it is torn," T. S. Eliot wrote, "the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion."[40] Was this Frank Gehry's point in 2013. "98% of architecture is pure shit!" He had held up his middle finger to Spanish journalists who he felt had insulted him. If architecture is thrown into something which has no cohesion, namely the market, this would not be the first time. Or was Gehry on the side of the good poet, the good architect? "A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest."[41]

Today we have interminable internet models, prejudices and precedents. Some architects claim autobiography creates the architecture of their thought which becomes refuge, built or not. It has taken much longer than imagined, to note how architecture has long been an image repertoire without the pull

of internet aesthetics. If this was the type of image repertoire that architects and students gleaned in the twentieth-century from print, photographic record and archives, it is now compounded by digital layers of further distrust and suspicion.

Libraries in the last century may have presented slower processes but their deeper presence was always there. Today, instead, the scaremongering about image treachery and theft in architecture has reached far beyond Instagram,™ Pinterest,™ TikTok,™ the Twittersphere™ and Blogosphere™.Closely related to artificial intelligence and machine learning, does not image mining and space discovery work the same way today as it did back then in the twentieth-century? Pattern recognition can be applied to architecture without much mystery. Today this repertoire of 'grand-theft-archo' and intertext is more obvious, more explicit. Viruses in the mind and of the mind exist at a click. Eyes can be inserted anywhere to scratch the virtual surface and depending on how we respond to artificial intelligence, they will become shortcuts to any number of thoughts, architectures, any number of buildings with any number of forms, solutions and anti-solutions. As far as we can tell this open source, this new repertoire, will never exhaust itself.

Was not the Modernism taught in the twentieth-century literally punched out with such inexhaustive belief and pattern recognition through a series of transferable moves, however crude this may seem now. The regularities and accessible patterns in the modern mind have been noted for years. Not merely a cultivated manipulation of codes, architects taught each

other the automatic recognition of patterns and design invariants. Pinterest, TikTok and Instagram merely rehearse and research this repetition of difference. References to Deleuze and Guattari may be long gone or fading, but they can still take researchers so far inside their own skulls and brain-maps as to totter disarmingly. Today, even if data stands in for the image, even if the image becomes 'strangely' intertextual, this does not erase the shared visual language. Comms and surveillance will shift to image-recognition not face-recognition. Pinterest works this way. Insert a piano key façade from recent years and literally hundreds of the same patterned façade will emerge from the search engine. There is a story in Zen spiritual teacher, Paul Reps' (1895-1990) collection *Zen Flesh Zen Bones* called "Gutei's Finger." Gutei would raise his finger whenever he was asked about Zen. A young boy asked about what his master had preached, began to imitate his master and with mischief raised his own finger. Gutei cut off the boy's finger and then raised his own finger. The boy was apparently enlightened. To his monks, Gutei said "I attained my finger-Zen from my teacher…and in my whole life I could not exhaust it."[42] Of course, such enlightenment, Mumon tells us in a commentary on the story, has nothing to do with the finger. Emancipating the boy with a knife, Old Gutei was a poor imitator. Anyone clinging to the finger will be annihilated. Finger-Zen or not, Gehry is no poor imitator.

Thinking of this finger-Zen, I was completing Paul Scott's third novel in his *Raj Quartet*, *The Towers of Silence* when a line expanded what I had been feeling about all this middle finger nonsense. Scott was speaking of Barbie, Miss Batchelor, and

described how she suddenly felt drained of that ‘imaginative energy’ she once had.[43] I had the same inkling of Frank Gehry’s use of the middle finger. His architecture is much better than all this. But when Paul Scott described how the rain fell on the dead butterflies of Miss Batchelor’s face, this finger gesture had been all along a clue to something else entirely.

Frank Gehry has an imaginative energy in architecture never captured in words. In this way he is closer to American journalist and author Hunter Thompson (1937-2005) and American painter and graphic artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008). At a stretch he is even closer to American actor Johnny Depp and his portrayal of Captain Jack Sparrow. And, as if to be ahead of me in all this, surely Frank Gehry would have the last laugh. I once more searched online for confirmation of this absurdity. And there it was, the meme of memes, the meta meme. I had typed in Gehry and Johnny Depp. Up it came. The altered image of Frank Gehry as Captain Jack Sparrow. Somehow it fit. It did not explain the middle finger, the finger-Zen did. Those dead butterflies still dance beautifully all over his face.

Endgames *emerged out of a conference participation in* ***The End of Architecture*** *staged in Houston (2008), organized by D. Froehlich as a fringe event of the ACSA conference sessions called* ***Seeking the City.*** *In the fringe event a panel of unlikely suspects began a kind of architectural cockfighting. The* ***end of architecture*** *was particularly acted out by the architect Peter Cook, ever duded up as the Elton John of Pop Architecture, taking on and verbally jousting with the academician Alberto Perez-Gomez. Hostilities flew, and Bruce Stirling the novelist was caught bemused somewhere in the crossfire.*

3

ENDGAMES

Clov: Putting things in order...
I'm going to clear everything 'away
Hamm: Order!
Clov: I love order. It's my dream. A world
where all would be silent and still and each
thing in its last place, under the last dust.
Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*.[44]

(1)

The end of architecture – a figure, a trope – had a period in critical conference vogue in architecture around the turn of the Millennium. For a decade on either side, this was a topic discussed, debated, derided and dismissed. Was it programmatic or autobiographical, did it become method or idiom? Or was it a crossover in search of a new analytical tool to re-position theory and metaphysics in architecture and articulate new positions in practice? This trope was not so much the end of metaphysics as a fiction which architectural thinking put into circulation for some years. Perhaps it echoed St. Augustine's fifth-century pronouncement on the end of history,[45] but it became an interval game that fell between the institutional tension within architecture and a series of wonderfully engaging, uncritical adventures. Most would probably consider, in hindsight, this endgame nailed architects to their own dry walled minorities.

Held tightly by 'modern minds' this endgame was a serious flow chart. To recall László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), some wished to see the twentieth-century and modern architecture

for what it was, a narrative of progress and growth. This was a narrative constantly echoing the beginning of the impossible end for architecture. "We are now in danger of becoming what we as revolutionaries opposed," Moholy-Nagy wrote, "a vocational training school which evaluates only the final achievement and overlooks the development of the whole man. For him there remains no time, no money, no space, no concession…it remains to be seen how efficient will be the decision to work only for efficient results. Perhaps there will be a new fruitful period. Perhaps it is the beginning of the end." [46]

There were many beginnings of this end. There was a sense by the first decade of the new millennium that architecture certainly had become something the revolutionaries opposed. Rampant theoretical anxiety with Tibetan prayer flag architecture had upset both pedagogy and program. Schools were flirting with estranged theories losing critical hold; clinical strategies were introduced more akin to vocational training. Professional anxiety opted for early signs of smart business and media training. Neo-liberal fiscal trends were threatening to turn university and college institutions into recruitment centres and investment ventures. The 'end of architecture' was at the time both far-fetched and relevant. It would prove stubbornly resistant. To fit the post-structural mood, it all depended on who spoke and who listened.

(2)

What conceit then to think architects are always at the beginning and end of meaning something else. During an ACSA conference in Houston (2008), there was, along with the main deliberations,

a fringe event called *The End of Architecture Revisited*. The very nature of staging a revisiting suggested a double figure, a double trope. It smacked of frustration and stock-taking. Just as the first wave of critical endgames at the end of the twentieth-century imagined one 'end to architecture,' this double trope allowed quite another 'end of architecture' to be re-imagined. Groundhog philosophy was just starting to emerge from the unstiffened ground.

This doubletroping was a period where selected architects lamented theory's over reach and theorists revelled in a special – for architects – phenomenology of nothingness. Replaying a decade or so of literary devices and an 'archobabble' of some invention, both parties would fight over a coded glory, revisiting yet another set of architectures that could test convention, break narrative and upset tacit response.[47] This, we can identify, as the endgame.

Periodically we notice such endgame conditions were explored in architecture mainly through language. The articulations made from our thoughts and the priorities that shape them can reach the impasse, the cul-de-sac, the dead-end! No coincidence that Samuel Beckett's own play *Endgame* comes to mind. Where these were endgames of the architects' own making they began to demonstrate a cavalier indifference to language and thought. Usually if architects agreed about this endgame, it was a literary trope of some irrelevance or garbage. To others it could be a critical device ready to contest architecture's theoretical perspectives, bias and intellectual pretence.

These endgames were not of the politicians' nor administrators' making but existed within the architectures of thought that set out to topple already wavering structures. This was the slow acknowledgment at the end of the twentieth-century of the privacy of academic juggling and privileged, though internal, ontologies. Which side of the Gadamer-Heidegger split did you lie, where did your Husserl meet Jacques the Fatalist?

Endgaming had providence in the latter half of the last century and not only in architecture. To some extent these were endgames of a wavering Western Modernism played out earlier with film-makers, poets and novelists, and those other auteurs that had begun to fall like comets from the sky. "The death of the author" was replaced by the death of the auteur.[48] Some would remember the end of cinema, Pierrot Le Fou, Jean-Luc Godard's re-scripting of the American classic. Some could cite the end of theatre in Poland, Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) or then Tadeusz Kantor's (1915-1990) re-scripting of Witold Gombrowicz in *The Dead Class* (1975). Others could talk elegantly of the end of literature as interpreted from the meta-games of John Barth (1930-2024) in *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968). All this charted, in a book before its time in Ihab Hassan's (1925-2015) *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1971, 1982).[49]

These various end-scenarios blurred swimmingly with methodologies and literary devices that eventually went viral. These were also hallucinated brilliantly by the French cultural critic Roland Barthes (1915-1980) with his 'writing degree

zero' from the 1950s.[50] At one stage, almost everyone, including architects, were lost in a funhouse of their own making. This theoretical gaming was bracketed by two important texts from either side of the millennium: the notion of exhaustion and weak thinking explored and expressed by the Spanish historian and critic Ignasi de Solà-Morales (1942-2001) in *Differences: Topographies of Contemporary Architecture* (1997), and the very real theoretical anxiety drafted out by José Rafael Moneo Vallés on eight contemporary architectural practices, *Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects* (2004).

A 'weak architecture' as proposed by Solà-Morales acknowledged and nudged further the thinking of Gianni Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* (1988) where nihilism and hermeneutics in Postmodern culture framed the debate. "Weak architecture," de Morales wrote, "evokes, from the outset an allusion (not difficult to apprehend) to the terms *weak thought* and *weak ontology* that Gianni Vattimo and subsequently other Italians, as well as French and German, thinkers have put into circulation in recent years."[51] It was a self-grounding in the architecture of thought that removed both the linearity of any past architecture and the plural 'relativist' meta-games where architects eventually found their own funhouses.

Solà-Morales was highlighting Nietzsche's grounding without ground, no system nor the (modernist) illusion of any new system; this was one summation of twentieth-century thinking that appealed. Such a thinker could connect seamlessly

to the 'difficulty' that George Steiner wrote about in *On Difficulty* (1978); the design and *dasein* in and for the void.[52] This was not though an era that architects used only to entertain themselves. The seriousness was crippling. The internal critical wrangling of the time, both spectacle and silliness, can be seen to have anticipated the critical void often voiced about architecture today. To understand such voids would have needed more lonely signifiers to register more seriousness but the semiotic worlds lost out to architectural mythologies of some invention. The void was 'imaging' the end of something exhausted, something played out; an endgame situation. The crucial question might be one which architects and their modern minds could only pose to themselves – to recall Slavoj Žižek in *Living in the End Times*, "how we are to read the collapse of these hopes."[53]

(3)

In chess, the 'endgame' usually refers to the stage when there are few pieces left on the board and any outcome is diminishing rapidly. Have architects always felt the need to convince themselves that there is some serious intuition behind the directions they take? Engaged in the endgame, how then could architects display the cognitive constraints necessary to proceed towards that end? Would it help to be a chess player of some talent, one who understands the openings, the middle game and the endgame? Follow Bobby Fischer vs. Boris Spassky in the infamous world chess championships in Reykjavik (1972) and one can see how the impasse – the onset of the endgame and the draw, became part of the Russian strategy to avoid Fischer's

unusual and unpredictable moves. That is, if we believe in the reduction of all this activity to the Cold War narrative in history, novel or film.[54]

In architecture, it would be an inflation to speak about a Cold War but the line between the middlegame and endgame was never clear. There was an ambiguity within the critical anxiety that tested many of its protagonists. This had become 'ambiguously' clear during the Postmodern movement and the 'paperchase' that resulted in the last decade of the century. Talk of the end of metaphysics in architecture was never as clearly 'ambiguous' as it may have been in Nietzsche, but it became common debate when many felt architecture was sliding towards a digital mannerism, leading to intrinsic architectural spectacle.

The talk of ends was understated but present; 'modern minds' and architectural thinkers were starting to recognise ungrounded replications of architecture's own history as another stage of the carnival. Critical, digital and operative exhaustion appeared understated but ubiquitous. A general apprehension is key here. The players – in this case the architects, practitioners, critics, historians and educators – staged their different strategic concerns. Endgame architectures and anxiety could find support for any suggested argument and position. This endgame thinking – a thrill in itself – was triumphant for a period because it revealed the very constraints and selected rationality shared about architecture. Here we would possibly agree with the behavioural economists with the caveat that architects struggled to lock thoughts in place long enough to be awarded validity.

If in chess, endgames see the game's potential dried up in sacrificing or promoting a pawn by advancing it to the eighth rank, in our 'doubletrope' – the end of the end – the King, architecture itself, had to be both re-visited and protected at all costs. This does not happen suddenly. The King remains protected in the earlier parts of the game, whilst the pawn becomes a stronger piece than imagined. Architecture itself, always treading water, always apprehensive, was once more brought like the pawn into the centre of the board which is of course already an abandoned ideological battlefield. In this way, a cleverness and brilliance fools the grounding, as this pawn-architecture becomes a useful even hostile attacking piece.

What is a revisited condition of the end? What is important here: The end of architecture or the 'end' and 'exhaustion' so regularly revisited, the beginning of yet another end? There is no big advantage to support either of these statements with cunning source or more subjective validity. 'Collective fetishistic disavowal,' Žižek offers both the mouthful and mutiny that architectural thinkers had to navigate towards the end of the twentieth-century: "we know very well that this will happen at some point, but nevertheless we cannot bring ourselves to really believe that it will."[55]

There are many endgame studies in chess. These explore endgame positions solved by finding a win when there is no obvious way of winning. Or then a draw is achieved when it seems the situation is hopelessly mimicked by cold war politics or truculent intrinsic motivational behaviour. In architecture

however, instead of moving the few pieces across the chessboard, fiddling with evidence indeed offers new evasive tactics. Evaluation, assessment and market strategies took over a world considered separate from risk taking, the world of social and personal influence.

In the first decade of the new millennium an architectural pragmatism met digital wizardry. Un-sited urban embarrassments and clinical practice began to suggest this end – this time – was serious. Meanwhile architect and academy begin exchanging their pieces cunningly, until the professional and critical game could start over. This kept at bay that continuous self-deception that theorists and architects could play on themselves. To ask whether all this could be summed up as systematic bias in agreed architectural discourses, we would have to expand the notion of 'behavioural pedagogies'. There were of course some who knew that Phenomenology in spite of its philosophical relevance was wayward and self-perpetuating. It defined a new perception, an epistemological teasing, which could still take on the latest crisis in science and meaning.

There is still some resistance to a recognition that architecture has long been a field operating subjectively, yes perceptively, and yes at times recklessly. To some this recklessness became quite another architecture of the funhouse, trapped in Post-Deleuze and Guattari deterritorializations and reterritorializations.[56] A nihilism in architecture began to be thrilled in language and performance but stranded in metaphysics.

(4)

This theoretical end-gaming became a paradox to all those thinkers and architects who ever thought of staying at the Hotel Architecture and getting out of it: "you can check out anytime you like," The Eagles sang, "but you can never leave."[57] No such luck, architects were still stuck inside of mobile, whilst entertaining critical theorists and commentators transposed and re-scripted digital agendas, being and spectacular voids. This was air guitar and strings time for those who remembered Led Zeppelin's signature song *Kashmir* (1975) and beckoned yet another end to architecture's inner pretence. Committee educators and criteria formulators did their best to tackle this anxiety. Architects, influencers or critics tried to use their inner speech to walk the walk, after they had talked the talk. Education was a lonely site of executive meetings, senate hearings, professional tribunes and graduation ceremonies. Full of procrastination and manipulated consent, pedagogies were still pre-occupied in being sensible and rational. Whilst they were anything but. Lost in the funhouse? Creative frustration, a weariness or privilege for the marginal or misfit discourse in architecture, as it used to be called it in the 1960s, shifted towards the 'end.'

Permanently living in those end times became a reality as the end of architecture passed out of its funhouse. It moved – critically – from the Frankfurt School to other resistances that held on ever so lightly to the lost reality of a 'modern mind.' Clearly Modernity was on endless trial and a phenomenology of collapse could and would be written out. We can liken this to the dance of pawns; grumbling ideas were tolerated to remain only fringe activities in an educational conference. Yet down the

hotel corridors the architectural convention discussed real-world issues of use value or exchange value, market practice and image consumption. Latest sustainable and building information management, best-practice leadership, spiffy digital technology displayed all sorts of delinquent sensibilities. Multi-tasking, 3D printers or laser cutters, firm-based graduate surgeries, health care studios, developer sessions and those franchised studio ateliers were all set up to design the real-world revamp of Chipotle or Radio Shack in this Texas of the mind. No one quite spoke of an architecture tottering, dissolved with fewer and fewer resources; an architecture open to increasingly wicked, irrational and unreliable economic strategies.

In these endgames, problems were only momentarily solved. Housekeeping had long begun to sit in for higher administration in universities and instruction was programmed as guided learning from above. Architects didn't differ that much from administrators. Both had problems with critical method, losing any grounding for clean assessment strategies, psychological interference and theory-free zones. The end was anticipated but was it coming closer? A devaluation of teaching, practice and criticality appeared in endgame mode. Claims were made about how the fall of faculty and professional practice had collapsed into one. With learning exchanged for instruction, charisma bypassed, there was a professional enthusiasm for the vocational. The craft of architecture flapped around in this weariness.

Whether this covers all bases or not, there was a general agreement in policy-speak that times were uncertain, and the future had to be quite different from the past which was, in fact, pretty obvious. Delegates in these endless conferences spoke about how schools would be turned into recruitment centres and fulfil the professional promise of improvement and design. The end of architecture merely kept the conversation going; was architecture more seriously adrift than imagined? The future was scripted by these endgame-models, momentarily or not. A fatigue of language and image saturated discourse led to a lost tension. When a Dean, Deanling or Director turned around and announced anyone can teach what you teach, you knew the ship was going down, the game was over, and the King re-grouping. That is, the pawn in the architectural game was waving and drowning.

The pen or pencil – remember these implements – were no longer even used in tick-box multiple-choice activity. Apprehensiveness and fatigue undermined development. Benchmarks were diminished and lower expectations in architecture school became a new ambition for survival. According to various educational directives and policy formulations issued over these two decades, especially in North America, educators were required again to re-learn to walk the walk after they had talked the talk. Mandatory laptop requirements had long ago confused learning with instruction, and architectural studio with laboratory; architecture seemed bereft without new ways to ground the groundless thinking. The emojis had yet to reach architectural rendered drawings, but they would come.

At the same time, in this Texas of the Mind, down those corridors in the Houston Doubletree, Holiday Inn, Big Western, the professionals were seeking the city whilst the other misfits in architectural conjecture air guitared and endtroped. Houston Vice! Implied in the small print given out for the conference program was the notion that the visionaries are on or in the margins. The visionaries in this case were the architects, or let's say those who belonged to the design profession. The problems listed out in the programme, those connected with blurred boundaries and cities out of control, were those best solved by the design profession. Was this one more 'final' recognition of architecture's essential position: weak and on the margin of all? Alarm offered no space to move into and acts could only mimic a 'terminal illness.'

But revelations followed. The margins were really the only place for the visionary until they too found a way to 'evolve' and remove themselves to the centre? And if they did not like the centre, too bad! Worse, the end times questioned all; why would anyone want to be visionary any more if they were likely to be hacked to death by evolutionary administrators, contracting consortia and funding bodies?

Functionally operating for the privileged, but redundant to the development of just about everything else, the margins in architecture took on an ugly displacement and disinvestment. Cities, disasters, politics, affairs, lives and dreams were all groundless. Even subtexts were lost in this end of architecture. Could architecture be faced with its own admission of

'secondariness'? Could architects be operating in such highly subjective practices on a terminal patient without quite knowing why this had happened?

(5)

Endgames collided with zero-histories; the craft of architecture slowly continued – bizarrely in reverse mode – to erase an architecture culture. The critics and architects were right. Architecture had to be let out of the funhouse for practice to take back control. This was no destination architecture but not in a jubilant sense. Later, the endgame would catch up with the urgent agenda of an uninhabitable world. Distortions and delusions that administer architecture and building well and truly beyond the control of the profession was the end that never came up. Cleverness tricks no one and when the end is near (God, Modernity, Truth) the sophistication rehearses a selected playlist and life is enjoyed as a pawn. A modern legacy has often instructed itself to confirm precedents and existing models to tell the stories already told. Challenging those stories has only recently seriously been loosened by software configurations able to hack the future as much as the past.

We would be deflecting our concern however if we consider the end of architecture to be the end of a veiled and coded cleverness. There is something rewarding for a profession to create its own darkness and then talk to it. But watching and also being part of such endgames comes close to ecstasy at times.

Isolating truths so that they work for ourselves, comforted with a little external generosity, is an attractive methodology. It plays with but extends our role as marginal beings. Game over?

If architecture can be a diagram of everything – such claims could be heard – everything did not sit happily within that diagram. Perhaps as visionaries on the margins with a darkness in mind, these endgamers were more likely to gain from the 'accomplished nihilism' that Vattimo brings up in his discussion of Nietzsche and Heidegger. "The accomplished nihilist has understood that nihilism is his or her sole opportunity. What is happening to us in regard to nihilism today, is this: we begin to be, or to be able to be, accomplished nihilists."[58] Many architects would agree with Vattimo at both the scattered nature and incoherence of the last two decades of the twentieth-century. We must remember Vattimo was taking on and making a fist of incoherence, where commitment was expressed through language and dialogue whilst overreach was often ignored. To dismiss 'post-modernity' without matching it with serious philosophical intuitions is the reason we may see today more and more thinkers returning to this period.

After the spate of endgames and endtropes in the first decade of the twenty-first-century, a new term gained attention: Team Architecture. Integrate practice, model information transfer, see architecture as manipulated data not building, Team Architecture would need to embrace extinction as students learnt behavioural economics, business, investment strategy, and radical organisational strategies. Students already gaming with

hedge fund experts could take on the venture capitalists, running online cities like football teams. Ready all players? The results are unknown: Virgin architecture, Wiki-architecture, Google-architecture, or Woke Futurism?

We should not even need to resort to the I Ching or citations from the dance of change or other such learning models. The Buddhist mantra having no head answers to this cultivated darkness as much as Nietzsche's maxims from Twilight of the Idols. The underlying 'nihilism' implied in any continuing end scenario pitted disruption and dissent against managed education. In politics, the question asked of the politicians responsible for the theatre of war is often – what is the endgame? This means, in their parlance, what is the exit strategy? But, as we identified, an endgame in chess actually has no clear exit strategy. It is not simply a question of moving the pieces back and forth into various spaces. This prevarication, cunning tactics to save the King, can go on infinitely until no one wins. Of course, there have to be better names for this cultivated dark energy, where indifference becomes sovereign. The best entrepreneurs apparently over the last twenty years are those who took on business itself and undermined it to re-shape it. Google, Amazon, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Wikipedia will end architecture as we know it.

Game over is an agreement to end the game but not win the war. It is an agreement to begin all over. It is extinction and as a nuanced end presents architecture with its challenge. Like chess, same rules, new game, new gambits! Is the King

asking for the system to renew itself, like dating? Or is the pawn to be given equal opportunities? Is this a unique moment to re-structure diversity and the whole profession of architecture, by restructuring the architecture of its own thought?

Pluralising and diversifying Modernity into modern movements was only one way of many that began to loosen those holds of a linear, accepted and unitary history. This was the flattened curve of a twentieth-century that eventually belonged to Mr Johnson, Mr Moore and Mr Graves. The anatomy of a new anxiety might have been the air-bridge necessary to vault the inner gaming but re-inventing architecture's brief to contribute to social reform, human value and human habitation naturally coincided with the misguided 'end of history.' The endgamers followed this to dissolve the hold history and selective validities had over the practice and study of architecture. And the endgamers, still around today, are those new beings in this darkness which would eventually tempt architecture to be released from these dreadful ends.

(6)

'What is the role of contemporary architecture in our increasingly complex society, what relation does it have to history, to tradition and what architectural programme or urban concepts can meet the demands of our age?' Clearly none of these questions posed by the Houston Conference actually prefigured the implied conclusion, the end of architecture. Why then should we attend once more to such a double trope when the end architecture has

fitfully passed and regularly ushers in the next fatality? We might reasonably respond with Josef Albers' words in 1958 from his Poems and Drawings,[59]

Calm down

What happens

Happens mostly

Without you.

Francis Fukuyama's book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) led to a whole array of endtroping.[60] If history had truly come to the end then any dialectical interplay and contest of idea could henceforth be narrowed; architecture in the conventional sense of a set of embedded narratives could also come to an end. In 1993, the Mak in Vienna, under the editorship of Peter Noever, produced a set of conference documents and manifestos under the same title *The end of architecture*. In 1994, Jean Baudrillard produced *The Illusion of the End*, and, according to the book copy, which we are not really trained to believe, was "compelling, diabolically clever, outrageous, wounded, ironic, refreshing and certainly controversial."[61] Words already cancel out what we might have learnt from such volume. What we might now see as the usual guerrilla suspects in the re-scripted conference in Vienna were about to shift the pawn to the King. Architects like Hadid, Gehry, Libeskind, Mayne and Woods suddenly entered that cathedral of critical misery by self-framing their own demise. This wasn't only 'air guitar', this was thrilling

stuff. A more than cursory glance at the architects involved in 1993 might, however, suggest this was not the end of architecture at all, but a useful trope to fill in time before or between wars, unemployment and restaurant hopping. This all fell short of the end of metaphysics and an accomplished nihilism, but there was clearly an architecture if not poetry of thought wonderfully re-invented. Eventually, apart from one or two architects who remained consistently seeking a positive deconstruction of architectural thinking (Lebbeus Woods) the work came along for these architects.

In spite of a dazzling array of future work that would occupy the next decade, the endgamers' contribution though to any 'end' was interpreted cynically – unfairly – by many, as a self-perpetuating and internal cry for work from the paper-chasers, the unemployable. But the darkness was ecstatic. They became employable, and how so! Architects proved once again that they could de-frame their own world and the stories they wished to spin about that world. A discontinuous architecture was re-grounded. The funhouse went beyond junkspace, surrealism became surmoderne, and everyone was dreaming of Yves Klein's jump from a second floor window.[62]

It is worth abusing the words of George Steiner: serious architecture is also linguistic. It may be that only our inner speech defies predictability. Put against *The Falling Man* of Don DeLillo,[63] and pivoting around Martin Amis's *The Second Plane*,[64] the result during this decade was a new enigmatic architecture; spectacles and esperanto-architecture took on business,

advertising and branding. The end of course was always only a serious beginning echoing T. S. Eliot in *The Four Quartets*.[65] Multiplicity and globalization gave rise to a search for identity in a world of blurred boundaries. A self-defining movement crossed integrated practice strategies within architecture with the lost Jazz-Bauhaus age of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Some of the work has since confirmed the Debordian 'society of the spectacle.' Meanwhile architecture as a literary device was still silently re-writing the architectural discourse; some played with Philip Roth before the world passed over to Jonathan Lethem. Any titles of Roth would suggest new architectural worlds: *Exit Ghost, Everyman, The Professor of Desire* and *The Dying Animal*.[66] Any titles from Lethem would suggest the endgame undone: *Motherless Brooklyn, The Ecstasy of Influence, The Disappointment Artist!*[67]

Nothing of this reached within; motherless architecture would have to wait a while longer. Thereupon Jonathan Lethem's *The Ecstasy of Influence* would be the architects' playbook and *The Disappointment Architect* might prove a useful invention to describe such gaming. But for other architects and thinkers it was quite the reverse. The beginning was a serious end on the way towards a positive, accomplished nihilism. A disabled profession would have to meet the crisis of spectacle and commerce with a Debordian dance still being rehearsed to this day. No one orphaned in the real world wrote the classic novel which might have appeared in the first decade: Why Are We Still Here?

(7)

The fictions every conference and spectacle produce will go on. Collapse is written into the thinking. Diversity is drained away by the lost citizens who have no chance any more of finding their place in the economic and social milieu of any metropolis. The pawn is now moving to challenge globalizing forces with underfoot pressure. Remember the play by Slawomir Mrozek (1930–2013) *Tango* (1964)? So sharp on the jack boot crudities in Poland it has never aged. It was always a drama that could play both sides of any fence, where melodrama was laced in every boot and baton. The question will be thrown back: what critical stamina is needed to get us out of the blur? Cognitively or spatially this teeming agglomeration of exile and words, ideas and software may reinforce the density which the endgamers took on. Corporations who capture architecture and see the city as feckless commodities will continue their darkness. There will be a race for the next useful endtrope: the end of communication (as we knew it) and extinction. And for a while the ubiquity of electronic communications will re-create an impoverished face-to-face contact.

Extinction and collapse slowly rewrite the phrases set out by the Houston conference organisers: architects and planners play only marginal roles of corrective interventions.[68] Think about it hard: if architects are to play out marginal roles of corrective interventions, woke interference, surely they may be forced to become more than air guitarists and once again rediscover their own resistance, their own nihilism. Hacked and sabotaged, futures will always need to be entertained rather than the desired futures of administrators.

"The provocative statement is constantly annulled by chequebook and cocktail party," Moholy Nagy wrote to his wife in 1945 after he saw the 1945 exhibition on the celebration of the Container Corporation Modern art in Advertising as nightmarish. "Am I on the same way?" he went on to ask.[69] Are not we all in the same way: architects, educators, historians, visionaries – professors of desire, disappointment architects and other dying animals? All presented with the same revolutionary nihilism constantly annulled by chequebook and cocktail party. If so, how is King-architecture to respond to the extinction-trope avoiding new systems yet to be released from uncritical measures? This can work two ways: from the past or from the future. The first scenario tends to use the past and all its accepted history and experience. Here the ruling King-architecture creates a policy and structurally re-groups around the fixed canon, able to tell the stories, re-script the narratives that once worked so well in modern architecture. This is a necessarily safe, conservative strategy where anxiety and crisis are disguised by programmes of pragmatism and protocol.

These policies serve to strengthen what educators term the vocational calling and re-invent the architectural education of a professional training school. Fear for the fall of King-architecture sees many small strategies trying to get the remaining single pawn to the eighth rank, where it then can be crowned King. The end of the endgame!

And the second? We hunger for the future where new strategies teach the young to correct these heroic failings of a

bigger professional world, and a Modernity that still tells its stories as systematic bias. In this desire to steer students back to lost horizons and ethical positions, we can even go as far as wanting an education structure that teaches students to be more or less good at following the rules set up for them. Whilst the endgamers defeat their own inner thought; the world outside architecture must no longer be freed to frame the patterns and structures that control architecture. The endgame, any endgame, mirrors the impending but often understated catastrophe. This is living with extinction, living in end-times. The King has less and less squares into which to move. The damage to visual discernment and critical thinking is extreme and so it should be. There is no cultured image to return to, only cathedrals of critical misery. This then is another beginning of another end, that last dust!

Consolations was originally published as Why Architects Can't Just be Happy, ***Architecture & Ideas****, (eds. K. Crossman & S. Fai, Toronto 2014).*[70] *It began with nothing more than a selected statement by Boethius from his Consolations of Philosophy and a 'personal' hunch about happiness. Thinking of both Oscar and Czeslaw Milosz, the essay began to probe into whether this notion of happiness for architects was a habit or subversion or both.*[71]

4

CONSOLATIONS

or Why Can't Architects be Happy?
Does any individual enjoy such total blessedness
that he does not find fault in some respect with
the nature of his condition.
Boethius[72]

(1)

Let us put aside the bias expressed earlier as an 'accomplished nihilism' and replace it with the question posed here: 'Why Can't Architects be Happy?' Today, almost two decades on from the endgamers, we have the agendas for the new conferences on extinction, diversity, equity and injustice. We see new phenomenologies of the end acknowledging how we have always lived in end times whilst rumour has it Dante is in for a re-run this century. If not Dante, then Dostoevsky, Cervantes or Borges. We don't talk about re-wording as much today. It is as if the words used now are floating above us, dislodged by every outrageous, obscene event. This all hints at a woke futurism as relentless spectacles and icons continue to saturate our online architectural archive.

It is possible words will turn on themselves, as more words die. If architecture exists only in this collision of forces of power, epistemology will be shaken not stirred, as another lifted but clever discourse is momentarily discovered. In these tales of half-existence and the end-days of architecture, we slide over to a phrase from Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. "But I can't put up with your dilly-dallying and the dramatization

of your care-worn grief-stricken complaints that something is lacking from your happiness."[73] Could happiness as used here by Boethius be subversive? Contentment and conditioning are often taken as alibis for the acceptable route to invention in a practice like architecture, so heavily predicated it is on collaboration.

Our conjecture about architectures of thought, the cognitive blocks we imagine from our inner (autistic stage) to our outer (performative stage) might immediately lead us to ask whether architects pursue a habit of happiness, whilst self-definition, selected bias and subjectivity all but control the discipline, practice and education? Younger architects and students can feel that many architects and educators – modern minds all – are not only internally bound to their own soundtracks, but can be seductive self-deceivers and self-justifiers. Even without any knowledge of behavioural economics and selected rationality, insights and immaturities can become architectures masked by cunning re-appropriation and limited experience.[74] Overly concerned with their singular journeys and narratives, the notion that architecture or architects could be happy presents us with a serious, albeit inner, challenge.

Does the question not ask us to meditate on the maladies of the architectural soul, and the architect's capacity to offer friendship and happiness? Before we consider whether a new collective energy in architecture could extend from the last century into a more ambiguous mindfulness, we may need to caution and exempt ourselves from any speculative discourse on the future architecture of wellbeing. Uncertainty generally

freezes architects, so we would be well advised to stay away from any avant-garde teasing. Transience and the ephemeral when turned into a theory of fit and narrative makes most architects about as happy as they can get. Happiness can be demonstrated when architects survive an interrogation that wishes to challenge ideas so lightly held.

Let's make a jump here. There could well be a grand deception in architecture, inherited from the literary devices and cultural studies picked up in the twentieth-century. Such deception can be communicated through agreed narratives, accepted histories and shared subjective theories. Certainly, self-definition and self-justification has served to fool many into thinking architecture if not architects could be happy. The consolation of Boethius we might assume fits well here.

(2)

One way, out of the many ways in Buddhism, to acquire this habit of happiness according to Vietnamese Thiền Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022), is to associate with wise beings. It is true, architects generally attempt to associate themselves with wise beings, fellow souls; this has long become a politics of friendship that supports selected narratives. Considered as a train of thought we might however be better served posing the question as the attractive negative: can't architects (not) just be happy?

It is then surely the word 'just' that bugs us. Can't architects just be happy? There's a sense of panic about this, a sense of

frustration, a sense of feeling that if only the folds, fabrications, illuminated surfaces and facadism, the endtropes, blobs, boxes and digital icons would just (there's that word again) settle themselves and not chase their own tail/tale, architecture and architects might (just) conceivably be happy. But that's out of the question usually.

In wishing to meditate on this happiness habit we could continue like this, with more or less inventively biased and framed sentences. Making a case for architects to be happy is certainly a stretch given the codes, ideologies, egos and the hubris that can mask clear thinking. It might even be more of a stretch considering the various institutional agendas promoted and the signalled privileges of institute and discipline that an architectural education usually supports. How much did the late, card-carrying twentieth-century Communist architect or closet existentialist, or the legacy of the beatnik, Gitanes and black polo neck sweaters seduce the 'modern mind?' How much this shapes the unnecessary agony and pain of this twenty-first-century is hard to unravel. Even when young students shout out today in their own anxiety: 'Please, no existentialism here, none of that nihilist stuff here.' These students probably do not realise that they continue the same trepidation with 'nothingness;' 'you see,' they say, "it's all here, there and nowhere!'

Leaning on Buddhism, if we accept that the mind is not local and cannot die, then it must only transform and keep transforming. In architectural education, the schools of thought and education paths depend very much on which thoughts keep

returning, and which school becomes a model of another school. This nothingness could not be more relevant, more subversive for this moment. We continue from our inner speech out into the environment and back again. Life goes both ways. Any movement(s) of ideas depends on which movement and whether architecture does actually move at all outside the language we give it. How then do we take care of our thoughts, our speech and our actions?

We may rejoice, accepting that "it is not true that the genes determine everything," as Thich Nath Hanh proclaims in *Buddha Mind, Buddha Body*. "Through producing your thoughts, speech and action," the monk says "you create your environment." In this way we situate ourselves continuously, we transform endlessly. "You always have the opportunity to arrange yourself and arrange your environment in such a way as to water the positive seeds in yourself. This. according to Thich Nath Han, is the secret to happiness."[75]

(3)

In responding to the opening statement about lamentable happiness from Boethius, there may indeed be more than a hint of panic about this call for happiness. Many architects might not see the watering of positive seeds in the same way. Yet accepting at the same time it is impossible to become 'nothing,' we should not be put off by confused thinking. There is a joy in holding off any coherence, as though the 'something' which must take place in our thinking can be forestalled. This we owe to our inner thoughts. Inner thought is a gentle spectrum, an interiority

which allows us to pursue, or rather meditate on this debate that architects could be considered happy. It is useful here to play the reverse and ask whether architects are worthy of happiness? And if so, is this happiness a condition, a subversive habit, or a dream state scaffolded by inner architectural thinking?

There is talk of a bullishness that architects recreate in rare circles through the politics of friendship. This rarely lifts above a secret accord; it has an autistic edge about it, the edge of reaching out once more to reach within. It is an internal spiral that explains one's thinking, interprets one's work, and rebuts unacceptable readings. If this is not quite the happiness of watered seed, there is a consolation, to echo Boethius, from that activity that allows architects to oscillate between random metaphors for the unrealizable and the pragmatics of the impossible. Architects might agree with one another but certainly they have no prior call to feeling happy. As saints or sinners, they can shift design moves and discourses around as if playing shuffleboard on the Titanic. Vattimo was not the first to identify the challenge to modern European thought posed by Nietzsche and Heidegger. An unsteadying emerging out of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism in the second half of the twentieth-century did lead to deep structures connecting language to architecture. Researchers this century are beginning, however, to re-trace how an embedded hermeneutic philosophy influences and 'waters' the seeds of new architectural thinking.

Leading from the endtropes encountered at the turn of the millennium, instability and disorder can be mistreated as a

wayward, sometimes 'formless' turn in architecture. Nihilism was never quite given the credit for attempting to do what many architects wished for. And though moving discourse around so cleverly takes years to reappear, the hidden questions remain. As a curing of the alleged modernist disease and bias, many architects were certainly not going to be happy with that.

Dharma bums in their own way, these architects began to realize the happiness of a tangled mind. 'If I give you too many ideas,' the Buddha is purported to have said in one of his stories, 'you get stuck in them, and then you have no chance to receive your own insights.' The same could be said of the architects' dilemma as modern minds tangled with the world post-1989 and moved into the last decade of the twentieth-century. Chasing paper and propaganda, a search for new critical foundations gained currency later in the twentieth-century emerging form of hermeneutic philosophy. Architects were convinced theory could be resituated in many ways and some contentment attained. Much energy was spent swerving from, if not dismissing, the postmodern condition as it began to test the grand theories and boundaries so long taken for granted. The result was indecipherable but paradoxically plain for all to see; happy and unhappy architects flattened most of the nuances that existed in the original discourse. To be happy in the sense of a fulfillment, architects were then forced to ask themselves the consolatory question: where in the realm of human experience had they now slotted themselves and their work? What then were the consequences of their work leaving one century for the next?

(4)

To situate this consolatory sequence, in our ongoing discussion, let us slip into another inner speech and consider Darwin and Freud, the earthworms and the death instinct which Adam Phillips discusses in his two essays in *Darwin's Worms*.[76] "I cannot face with comfort the idea of life without work," Freud wrote in a letter around 1900 to Oscar Pfister. "Work and the free play of the imagination are for me the same things; I take no pleasure in anything else."[77] Architects, at least in the second half of the twentieth-century, took this to heart as they began to question – some internally – the master narratives of Western, European modernity. If this work and play offered a recipe for an internal, longer-lasting improvement and happiness emerging from self-debate, we should also consider Freud's next sentence: "(T)hat would be a recipe for happiness but for the appalling thought that productivity is entirely dependent on a sensitive disposition."[78] A sensitive disposition allows us much contingency. What if we continue by leaving out Freud's line after that? Marshalling and editing our thoughts in a sovereign manner like this, confirms only what we wish to write. Freud is used then wilfully to invent this happiness and confirm its loss to architecture. Similarly, passing from sense to non-sense, this confirms what we imagine built and how we then see an architecture of thought imagined through the built.

I am minded to link architects to the way Raymond Williams writes about all the great men in cupboards in his novel *Border Country*: "Behind every screen, in every cupboard, sat all the great men, everybody...If you went out of your own

cupboard, to see a man in another cupboard still you must wait for the cupboard door to be opened, with proper ceremony, and by a proper attendant."[79] Existing in their own 'cupboards,' with language lining the interiors, what architects wish to imagine built of course might be very different. "What would one do," Freud asks crucially, "when ideas fail or words refuse to come?"[80] Words die on us, we know that but the shudder at this thought is neither one of confusion nor one shared with Freud; architects and architecture might just be relieved if ideas failed more and words refused to come. As we said, it is the 'just' that concerns us here. Would architecture be better off without the consolation of philosophy, or without the hand reaching out of the cupboard for the passing word 'just?' Would architecture survive whilst holding on with the other hand to the driftwood that sweetly allows the survivor to float? "If you don't respect another man's cupboard, what right had you, really, to expect him to respect yours? Since proper men lived in cupboards, you could hardly insult your host by implying that he did not."[81]

'Can't Architects Just Be Happy?' We are beginning to realise just what nonsense such a question invites, as we sink in the metaphysics and emotions we try to get beyond. Can we seriously attempt to get under the skin of architects, to tease out the maladies of the architectural soul? We know how we can reasonably consider this more than a sophisticated flippancy; but are we merely entering the realm of consolation by framing our discourse in such a 'coherent' way, when all we do is dream of coming out of our cupboards.

This soft-shoe shuffle turns us back to Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* when he speaks of the 'tacit.' We may recall that Polanyi's book from 1958 was subtitled T*owards a Post-critical Philosophy*. By so saying "even so my attempt to speak of the ineffable may be thought to be logically meaningless," Polanyi anticipated the semantic and powerful use of fragment and aphorism. What he called the ineffable, he says, "may simply mean something that I know and can describe even less precisely than usual, or even only very vaguely."[82] Just quite when this tacit discipline sent architecture into its own hermit crab, just quite when it filled architectural discourse with the meaningless, is open to debate. But such happy discourses, these architectures of ineffable thought, surely allowed generations of supremely creative architects and thinkers to enter the "prison house of language" from their own cupboards.[83] Only sometimes," Williams writes, "if your approach was right, the cupboard door would be opened with a flourish."[84]

Freedom and self-confirming dogmas we know have a habit of coming unstuck. No one is so completely happy, Boethius writes, that something somewhere does not clash with their condition. But if your approach is wrong, "then you could wait for a while, looking up at the cupboard door, getting yourself – and why not? – into a proper state of mind."[85] This proper state of mind, as upsetting as it is, questions the happiness posed to aesthetics and hermeneutic philosophy. From our safe cupboards how can we possibly use 'vague notions' - imprecise thoughts - to challenge the contribution of philosophy to architecture?

"When we have two explanations of something," Oscar Milosz writes, "caution advises us to keep the simpler one for ourselves; for the least clear explanation is, at times, more persuasive to an uninitiated mind, i.e., a mind still naively fond of so called profound thoughts."[86] There is some consensus, cleverly concealed within architectural circles, that the cognitive deceptions practiced by architects on architecture, using philosophy and language, are a big part of a concealing act, an act hidden in plain sight. So-called profound thoughts still seduce and it is possible we coincide here 'clumsily' with Gianni Vattimo as he shifts to speak in a similar way about the development of art as Thomas Kuhn did in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Architecture's own struggle with truth and validity does not so much pre-date scientific activity, but it has always offered a different type of cataloguing verificability.

"All this seems to me," Vattimo writes, "to signal the emergence in contemporary epistemology of an aesthetic model of historicity opposed to the notion of a process of cumulative development."[87] More importantly here, it is the cumulative that offers so much unhappiness to architectural thinking, where responsibility can be scuppered or then brought back to support the centrality and operative choices already acknowledged. "Furthermore, it leads to the acknowledgment of a particular 'responsibility' for the aesthetic itself."[88]

This may well be argued in architecture as a practice that appears to develop freely, diffusing coding and taste to conform to accepted forms of life. A practice then that is subversively

happy in that it still places a singular and heroic architecture-narrative well embedded in the 'historicity' of the last century, whilst shaping the synthetic, unstable icons of this century. In this marketplace of idea and icon, in this 'continuum' and the bullying of European modernity against the cumulative, might lie the legacy of architects and thinkers hijacking philosophy (French, East Coast, Yale or Zen). The link here to Boethius's consolation is whether this forms a contentment, a consolation, or a blindness. Now we really are approaching a 'proper state of mind!'

(5)

Re-capitulating to the legacy of repeated and favoured references and aesthetic genius that slip out of currency in architectural discourse with such fickle regularity, could already have seriously reduced the revolutionary contest in the twentieth-century. Does this argue for an over-reliance on an aesthetic, hermeneutic, or rhetorical assimilation? An emptiness in this sense, from those "mechanical heads" Kant talks about,[89] and Vattimo slides under, would be spewed out as meaningless. That works like Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,*[90] or Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* have been interpreted, exaggerated and abused outside our own cupboards - architectures of thought - is of little importance here. Anything as fluid as an 'accomplished nihilism' in architecture looks as remote as ever. We take what we can, existing in our cupboards. The Polish poet and writer Cseslaw Milosz identifies life as an unidentified prejudice project in *Native Realm*, "I took from them what I needed…the

conclusion I drew," Milosz writes "was not the pragmatic one; as long as things assured happiness and energy, the true-false criteria is useless."[91]

How do we keep this happiness up whilst our energy fades? Many architects and critics would confess to such loyalty to energy and prejudice whilst deceived by the true-false criteria laid out in front of them. When Milosz announces that the "language of literature in the twentieth-century has been steeped in unbelief,"[92] we need not take a giant leap to see this as architecture's fate. Happy untruths in architecture have surrendered to diagramming, where philosophy and language clamp onto the souls of worried and less-worried architectural thinkers. Milosz shares that untruth we all face, "I was able to show only a small bit of my believing temperament."[93] Our believing temperament remains within, internal and 'inner.' How many architects, unable to step out of their cupboards, have ever shown more than but a smidgen of their believing temperament?

Inner speech seems to shine when happiness collides with energy and untruth. "Nothing could stifle my inner certainty," Milosz writes, "that a shining point exists where all lines intersect."[94] And intersect all our inner thoughts on architecture do, as they go in and out of the metaphors we build. Advocacy is confused with analysis and let's get critical is a dance floor hit rather than a serious call to debate. Discernment continues to fade, replaced by fresh, brittle nuance. The evaluation of evidence and retrieval become major strategies. Judgement can be left forlorn and anecdotal. Contemporary architecture then

appears so slickly predictable and unhappy that it holds little critical reason for many to believe in. The inner jenga towers topple in our mind, fall and then die on us, to produce, if we are lucky, new gifts, new inner thoughts.

Is all this – in the sense of architecture being on parole – meaningless? We can still talk about seduction even if who was seduced and who did the seducing is still not clear. It

is quite possible that an active nostalgia has embedded within it a desire for a new master discourse. Nostalgia plays a strong role here as it comfortably misses the very pointlessness of the century that has passed. We are invited to understand forces and patterns that are not only beyond our understanding but do nothing to our inner speech. Power relations and organizational directives may be exposed so mercilessly by market forces and other self-interested and genteel misdemeanours, but what does this do to architects? These offer little happiness to architects of the 'modern mind' and even less energy. Driven further inside, there may even be no-return destination for architecture. Critical theory so lamented today has become such a drag on a system that can no longer arm the untruths it once thought it offered. Triumphant, a dead good architecture coincides with the literature that Milosz speaks about in the last century: "for we had crossed a certain borderline separating us from another literature, somewhat old-fashioned, deserving respect but artistically inferior."[95]

Architects like many others struggle in the face of intelligent conspiracy theories that calm anxieties, whilst happiness in this essay becomes a double-edged Boethius-dialogue with unworthiness and energy. It 'just' may be too late to suggest philosophy could address if not overhaul the power relations and organizational structures that stretch now well beyond the architect and the profession. "Time opened out before like a fog. If I was worthy enough, I would penetrate it, and then I would understand."[96] Today, not in Milosz's 1968, the fog may be all we have. And what then of those believing temperaments that architecture continues to get away with, defying experts who appear 'expert' in areas agreed upon by experts?

Though the last thirty years may have opened architectural appreciation towards wider and wider philosophical sources, to eco-philosophies and sustainable theories, to agency, activism and anarchism, this may paradoxically not only have hindered the critical process itself but eliminated it. How strongly do we feel about this? Do we need to rescue a new form of critical adventures in architecture, those emerging from a relational talent of unending contest, untruths and contradiction? Here issues and concerns would be modelled for their after-effect, a relation to nihilism with new insights into apparent collapse. Here we would be forced to re-position urgencies and prejudices for a happiness and contentment that previously would not have existed together.

(6)

Climate change, pandemics or discontent may be re-shaping our critical responsibility as we speak and read. Inner speech will build new high-rise towers to totter, balance gingerly the 'super-Cannes' voids that are now more permanent. Our tolerance towards what we should know is often matched by our anxiety to have and to know, and we constantly find ways to re-confirm this. Yet can we still state architects remain safely 'happy' within an inner thinking, their cupboards safely locked 'open.'

Let's temper our consolations here as if we too can play air guitar. Architectural criticism was always to so many a type of self-portraiture. In architectural terms philosophy is literature, it is fiction; it is foreplay and it is making over from the vague to the ineffable. Architecture as a literary device? To recognize this, one needs only to note how much buildings and architecture are talked up to occupy untenable positions in the marketplace, culture and society. This is achieved by using codes that remain – for the most part – beyond the public and safely within the control of the architectural academy and profession. Talk of critical shenanigans of various hermeneutic talk of practicing cabals is not merely an internal, redundant game.

Happiness comes often rather easily when works validate and solidify ideas already embedded within the work. Of course, for a variation on this happiness, we might idle with Wittgenstein for a while and the continuing discomfort he ekes out through affirmation of logic and aphorism. Architects working under conditions of uncertainty today may meet this provisional condition with actions and interpretations that wish for stronger,

more solid times. Many have spent their lives thinking architecture is not hoodwinked by its own experts and masters. Many wish to distance themselves from those who write the texts that support the moves that now bemuse students.

A fragment of Vattimo might solidify but also carnivalize this academic feint: "but this very dissolution occurs through a reduction of the 'cumulative' historicity to the historicity produced by genius."[97] We could add a middle finger salute to that and laugh at our own confusion. Will it matter to the education of architecture if the marketplace can elegantly crush the obscure, invade the language, and turn over to the anti-library? But this is not the happiness we wish to engage, nor does it have even a sniff of the subversive, whistleblowing activities that might now be overdue in the profession of architecture and schools.

Perhaps it really is time to see things differently, through another lens (if we can even trust our metaphors any longer). Can architects achieve a new relational thinking, challenging their inner 'autisms' and abandon any lament for untruths of the last century and attempt the 'happiness' of nihilism? Whether this means, to some architects, writing out a life, or architecture writing out its own life, it still seems worth taking on. The cat is, so to speak, out of the critical and consolatory bag! The world of the profession, the world of education, its societies, its small potato world of ego wars, academic juggling and therapeutic cabals are all open to chance. And today – the biggest progress – is that randomness once more being viral will continue to invade these conditions.

Is this all going too far, all too clinical, settling an unhappy architectural language in happy nonsense? Consolation is merely an idle epistemology knowing it must include both laughter and the paraphrase. To be meaningless in our own architectures of thought is the moment the words stay long enough to be saved. Writing out the edge of architecture by its own admission can take language to an extreme to bring out its redundancy. Trains of thought pass onto architectures of thought; all eventually going nowhere.

Time's arrow continues to reverse the last century to become this century. Sometimes it seems unnecessary to put off saying what has been said between the lines. Too long in the fog, the re-emergence of new resistances in architecture serves – momentarily – to challenge the careerists, prevent them locking the anti-library. New resistances and relational thinking might also deliver the troubadour thinker fresh evidence for new critical narratives, the untruths told in fables. Architecture may have fooled itself for some time and enjoyed doing it but is time really up? Actually time has been up for so long now. Architecture has taken the drinks before the dinner, taken the duck or lamb during the feast (the linguine or black pudding) and then opted for a postprandial colloquium in all niceties. There may be happiness there! But that's mistaken too, as Nietzsche tells us, "Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that."[98] Hyper-individualism and image motivation may already have led to an autistic architecture; compulsive, intelligent and closed. Words that have nothing to do with architecture and the

built projects inspire punters to spin the world from insecure and untested conditions. Instead of dying, these words gain new order.

Communication has become self-portraiture, fraught with anxiety and social signalling. Meanwhile the post-lockdown world is far from consoled in its new empire of signs. It will go on struggling for a new phrase to take over from the 'libidinal economy.' "It is the nature of human affairs to be fraught with anxiety," Boethius writes in the version we were presented with at the outset of this essay, "they never prosper perfectly, and they never remain constant."[99] The search is on for a new critical scaffold for the imaginary. Urgencies keep recycling ways of pulling back from this uninhabitable and 'unattainable' earth. Perhaps this is what makes living so rich and uncertain. Sure, architects can be happy. Sure, anxiety and nihilism scripts architecture as much as the goal of happiness may ruin it but always in these end times, the 'beyond' is never reachable. Our anecdotes can be turned into aphorisms and selected audiences will applaud. Can architectural theory and a renewed intellectual project to save the collapsing world make architects happier? Appropriate, then, to conclude on this happiness thing with a return to Boethius.

(7)

Who, in their cleverness and critical thinking, pretends to abandon the dilly-dallying and the dramatization of our care-worn grief-stricken complaints? Where, if consolation is so desired by architects today, would they turn to re-establish their positions

and codes? Do they turn to renewed seduction, re-evaluating the world of language via the worldbuilding of young students, or the word-worlds of Virilio and Badiou, Harman and Meillassoux, Guattari, Žižek and Bifardi? The existential solution is to put Joseph Beuys, for example, alongside Duchamp; architects perform for themselves. Of course, there is always something lacking from our happiness, but the issue is how it continues to sneak up on us and whether philosophy and architecture serve only to rub the snail's traces in the carpet on the following morning, after a cold night in a 600 year-old timber-framed Hall Building. Crucially flippant, architects ask what to do with these consolations of philosophy? Especially those that emerged out of the critical seduction of French theory, Late Marxism, Post-Modernism, Post-Colonialism, Post-Humanist Theory.

The snail's trail goes on as architects leave their cupboards to build, out of trial and error, the void so joyously up ahead. And the inner autistic speech both collapses whilst keeping them sane. Members of this Consolation Club attend to a renewed satire of ignorance, skepticism, speculation and replication. The horizon of extinction awaits us all when we have the vaccine, whilst the virus – just like language – will continue to mutate. Meta-memes now pass for the signs and the symbolic order that has densified and drowned the morphologies of our over-familiar cities. The answer is not in architecture or momentarily in the internal jokes of Slavoj Žižek; if the architects' enquiry is reduced to consolation, how big is the role played by the deformation of the inner language used about architecture?

This must be both where we start and end. So close to failure if only architects would accept that! *Forward and backward, abyss on abyss*, to recall The Abysmal in the IChing, "When in a bog, pause at first and wait."[100] *I Ching and we all Ching*. Happily redundant and anxiously important at the same time, as the Manic Street Preachers, that joyful Welsh rock band put it: we are all sometimes happy being sad. However, to conclude imperfectly these consolations, anticipating the definitive volume still to be written on the meaningless and the 'maladies of the architectural soul,' it seemed important to re-identify the Boethius words cited in the opening.

The edition, or volume, was not offered in the original call for papers; there was only "Page 62" to go on. Turning to the Oxford Classics volume, perhaps a later translation, I had a feeling that identifying these words would reinforce this 'happy' journey. From translation to translation, the words could of course never be the same with Boethius' words so lightly structured into English. But it seemed like a useful exercise. Could the words used at the opening of the essay be found? Or a version of them. What would that change? Could we thereby re-create the lost pleasure of the text?

But I can't put up with your dilly-dallying and the dramatization of your care-worn grief-stricken complaints that something is lacking from your happiness. How would we identify similar phrasing? What could we learn by this double talk? As if to emphasize this odd journey after Babel into consolation and happiness, it suddenly became difficult to identify the words that

opened this essay with the ‘same’ words in another translation. At first it seemed impossible to find this section in the translation by P. G. Walsh. This became a struggle. I thought of timing myself but after some time, it was located.

The ‘difference’ in the different text was not so much shocking, rather the uncertainty was rewarding. But I find your self-indulgence hard to bear when you complain so mournfully and neurotically that something is lacking to your happiness ... Walsh’s translation goes on: “Does any individual enjoy such total blessedness that he does not find fault in some respect with the nature of his condition. Human welfare is a cause for worry, for it never wholly prospers, and it never remains constant.”[101] I paused at first, considering the shock of this difference and then recalled Oscar Milosz. When we have two explanations of something, what is it that advises us to keep the simpler one for ourselves? And which would be the simpler one? Does the last, clearer explanation become more persuasive to the uninitiated but happy mind?

We bear witness not history. We are the apocalyptic transformers and translators; we are moral slaves and the guardian angels of critical traditions and the prison house of language. We, the architects, educators, historians, critics are consoling and consoled. We are the rhetoricians for war and revolution and must choose the comforting words of doubt over doubt itself. We resist accomplishing that nihilism we utter. Our liaisons are dangerous. The cumulative was phoney. From abyss to abyss when praxis thrashes ‘theoria’ or vice versa, historicity dies. Yet

we may be doomed too. If our unthoughtful contemplations invite unsophisticated speculation, what then passes for philosophy's continuing consolation of architecture?

Would philosophy be better off then without this consolation of architecture? That is no longer too delicate a question. What happens to their inner speech if architects attend to a new writing and critical resistance outside all discourses attempting to console? Can architects affirm without impunity: architectural theory makes architects happier? Certainly, at times! But it also makes them solitary. Maybe it comes down to the graffiti scrawled on the walls in Paris in 1968 – those who lack imagination cannot imagine what is lacking.[102] There we go again, not so meaningless and happy being sad!

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But the game is not yet over. We can count on fierce resistance from the moral creatures that we are, a resistance that springs out of the depths of the species, its vital exigency, its refusal of any final solution. This refusal is not a matter of human rights; it is a matter of life and death.

Jean Baudrillard, The Vital Illusion (2000)[1]

Part 02

Intersections emerged from a seminar on Architecture and Literature (Nottingham University 2012).[2] *Oulipo and Georges Perec just had to come up once again,*[3] *as did Denis Hollier's book on Georges Bataille's works, Against Architecture.*[4] *The writing may have gone on to make more of David Spur's book Architecture and Modern Literature (2012),*[5] *and even Michel Houllebecq's essay "Contemporary Architecture as a Vector of Accelerated Movement."*[6] *But this offered a form of (infinitely) reading architecture which was not our study here.*

5

INTERSECTIONS

It is necessary that I open myself to knowledge
and refuse
to isolate myself within the circle of my own truth
or reject
all that Is different from it or from me.

Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Heart.[7]

It appears the twentieth-century left a curious seduction for so many who have wished to sail between architecture and literature. If we accept that architecture is intersectional, we must agree that it often fails to be as intersectional as it could be. The contrarian falls back and questions the self-confidence of such diversity. An intersection, where two or more things meet, cross, interweave is, in mathematics, the set of elements common to two sets. It is also the process by which this set is established. Intersections is not such a topic of high theory today that we can ignore its development in the twentieth-century. As we continue unravelling inner speech and architectures of thought, we need only consider tracing the work of Philippe Sollers in *Writing and the Experience of Limits* (1983) to more recent intersections in *Writing and Seeing Architecture* (2008) where Sollers the novelist, and the architect Christian de Portzamparc, establish some things essential to writing and seeing; many of which seem to get lost along the way, between architecture and thought, language and literature.[8]

Thereof, of so much thinking – to sport with both Wittgenstein and Polanyi – one must be silent. So much nonsense may have been written on architecture which has never quite given us the surprise architects seek, nor that attends the wanderings architects make from their inner thoughts. To take conventions and wrest them out of shape suggests the raw material of witness and reverie. Many architects have recognised this but seen writing and literature as an indulgence. It is to many the act of waving a white flag and accepting the impromptu hanky-panky knowhow. Many architects would probably feel better confessing to sharing an affinity with Bruce Chatwin by asking, "*What am I doing here*?"[9]

For some architects to climb out of their inner thoughts, it is not difficult to see the twinning between architecture and literature and think of the playwright Edward Bond (the firing squad shoots in the back of the neck),[10] whilst agreeing with the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard that most of what is written about architecture is nonsense.[11] Does this not bring us into some sort of grey zone, a cross-hatched outrage between architecture and the language used about it? Does this demand from architects a correction; everything written about architecture is of course both meaningful and redundant and 'fascist' to echo Roland Barthes.[12]

"We should have the courage to say that though the spectacle was horrible, it was also extraordinarily beautiful."[13] Very beautiful, Sollers adds, speaking about the twin towers in New York. He could equally have been speaking of the Notre

Dame fire.[14] Reading between the lines it is not only Bin Laden who is the figure of the 'great criminal' but implied here is the architect. Language can speculate on the differences between caves and towers, a smartness where architecture gains both authenticity and authority, but is in fact a shorthand for more fanciful truths. It might be more appropriate in response to the sparring intersections created between writing and seeing, between thought and the language used on architecture, to consider all this leading to what we can call 'critical fiction.' Where fiction, closer to any reality we think we hold in our imaginations, falls so richly into the crack, between the fold, into the intersection.

(2)

Anyone familiar with playing the woods in Crown Bowls knows there are many ways of delicately using the bias. Asked to meditate on architecture and literature for a university seminar it was not long before a title suggested itself : "The Thrilling Imprecision of the Intersection between Architecture & Literature." As if to undermine such a thought, another title suggested itself quickly, "An Architect's Library." Too much Peter Greenaway and Prospero's Books in the latter, it was easily abandoned.[15] The abbreviation seemed appropriate: intersections. And as an immediate framing, the words of David Spurr from *Architecture and Modern Literature* should have offered serious departure: "Architecture, as the art of building, gives concrete form to the external world according to the structures of imagination; whereas literature, as the art of written language, gives symbolic form to that same world."[16]

The precise character of the relationship between concrete and symbolic forms, rhetoric and metaphor, in constructing modern spaces, certainly deserves more detailed and nuanced investigation. This and other academic narratives that may imagine the social transformation carried out by architectural forms was however not the intersection I had in mind. Reading literature to read architecture was useful, brilliant even in the ontological and hermeneutic drifts it might offer to architects and academics but this to me was, perhaps unwisely, interpretive not operative. As perceptive and generalising as these and other reading exercises suggested by Spurr could be, provocative 'structures of the imagination' were likely to leave us somewhere near the manageable truth only if we spoke of perceived and assumed relations between architecture and literature. These two disciplines would have much to offer if we could begin operating and opening to what Rumi called a "listening intelligence."[17] There had to be another path, an alternative enquiry into these intersections.

Architects could certainly offer literature a hermeneutic tripping of some intrigue if they read (as they often do) Italo Calvino, Georges Perec, Jean Rhys, Italo Calvino, Virginia Woolf, Philippe Sollers or James Joyce. Critical enquiries might not only differ with readings of William James, Walter Benjamin or Martin Heidegger but create lost intersections. What then could alternative intersections – from the twentieth-century into this century – offer architects, thinkers and students? Were we to assume there was an architecture of literature, comparable to the literature of and within architecture? The written world

does indeed seem to offer a symbolic form to that same world; and if we tell stories to confirm that same world from word to world, we have a tautological exercise. Cautioned to avoid reducing these two fields in any simple manner, a comparative hypothesis interweaving architecture and literature – the owl and the pussycat – could be attractive.

Literary scholars would probably question the sly use of hermeneutics and the directions architects took in the last century when leading, as it did to some, to a post-Husserlian phenomenology of some density and, ultimately, obscurity. One of our literary scholars might even go off message and cite those Edward Bond lines from his theatre notes: "Remember the firing squad shoots in the back. Whole nations have been caught looking the wrong way."[18] To extend Bond, could we say without much exaggeration, whole schools, whole disciplines, may have caught architecture out, may have caught it looking the wrong way?

To help us then proceed with these intersections, we could digress in a Burtonian manner and consider what it means to talk of a structure of preferences, the love of learning and over-much study. "Many men' (saith Rhasis) come to this malady by continual study, and night- walking, and of all other men scholars (and architects) are most subject to it."[19] How do architects select their material and which references do they think serve best? What would preferences offer – sensitive, systematic and smooth – in this duelling between architecture and literature?

How do architects create from the references they so love and the fictions they resist; what hint of theoretical, even operative, implications?

What gives architecture the graphic authority held by nonsense drawings and the over-wrought hand for example? How do imagined contents and narratives support ideas already found or become part of what Czeslaw Milosz calls a 'believing temperament?'[20] Which references serve to disrupt our familiarities? One preference here, and this is based on a series of obsessive and developed prejudices, would be to recall the little known (to some) and almost forgotten (to some others) Polish writers or playwrights like Stanislaw Witkiewicz, Bruno Schulz, Tadeusz Kantor, Witold Gombrowicz, Tadeusz Kantor, Tadeusz Rozewicz, Czeslaw Milosz and Tadeusz Konwicki. A Polish complex indeed!

Accepting these as cautionary tales, would it help us take one intersection between architecture and modern literature and consider the way our memory is inscribed, enacted and expressed in the critical fictions we turn out? Of course, we should not forget that seminars organized by architecture schools would dier from how any literature department would organize the same; intersections become more thrilling and imprecise but from which side, which field, which discourse? In Burton's terms the attraction is clear: "I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy."[21] Do architects similarly write of architecture?

(3)

We question whether there is such an impossible and possibly redundant zone that we can frame as a literary measure of architecture? Architectural criticism mostly encourages an internal historical interpretation of buildings-as-texts, confined for most of the twentieth-century to a European context. An internal criticism of singularity and agreed architectural quality often collides with any sense of an external critique which could conceive of architectural space as a global repertoire, a worldwide reality accounting for, and situating, architecture within the historical and political conditions under which architecture is a world of rivalry, inequality and economic production. And a world of memes.

In The *World Republic of Letters,* Pascale Casanovna proposes an international literary criticism which becomes "necessary to situate writers and their works in this immense territory which may be thought of as a spatialised history."9[22] This may suggest a change of perspective to describe the architectural world. In studio, in the strategies opened for architectural departure and an accepted aesthetic, the more usual suspects that crop up in Eurocentric architecture studios when this pairing – architecture and literature is brought up might be: Milan Kundera and Italo Calvino, James Joyce and Georges Perec, Paul Auster and Martin Amis, William Gibson and Neil Stephenson, or recently David Shields and Jonathan Lethem. There has also been a growing interest in the architectural space and props produced by J. G. Ballard, China Miéville, Stephen

Hall (*The Raw Shark Texts*), Dave Eggers (*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*) and Mark Z. Danielewski (*The House of Leaves*).[23]

What then would be the reward in endless transcriptions and cunning crossovers between architecture and literature? Inventive criticality and the study of newer modes of writing surely rebound, resonate and are re-scripted within architecture but how? Always aside but not disconnected, it is quite likely critical history could be destabilized and refreshed in similar slow-motion ways, taking on global-architectural, low motion slashing of the drawing. Then the motion of a nonsense taking shape will have its reversal in literature. Crossed-enquiries, readings always re-readings; such moves would always be architecture of the fragile and discontinuous. Current re-reading volumes or exercises clearly offer the architecture student different shapes to the literature student…

Literature re-assesses critical codes and frames of learning whether it is now considered too late, in the UK at least, to recall the oppositions between Leavis, Williams and Eagleton, the pragmatism of Lodge and Rorty or the hermetic difficulty of George Steiner. Re-reading operates as an aesthetic and a structure of production in and across both disciplines. Architecture studies constantly re-read assumptions and precedents; experience vies with empiricism to offer primacies of ‘validity’ and ‘narrative.’ When these disciplines intersect architecture can be seen in education and studio to be enacted through revised works. Rivalry and prejudice, competing modes of production and prescription

do not necessarily share differences but form an architectural 'literacy' which are then called 'projects.' Whatever direction is taken, whatever difference shared or struggled against, there is a common assumption that there is some ground from which to read, from which to acknowledge the swerves and mutations that can produce architecture.

We might recall Terry Eagleton here in *After Theory* (2006). Given the pace of change, the traffic of postmodernism, relativism and undecidability, it is taken for granted that any re-interpretations are never here to stay. We are passing through them; we can never settle. In a way, as Eagleton says, "we should forget about any legitimations: depth is just what we put there ourselves, and then find ourselves predictably awestruck by." Inside architecture or literature, inside our own worlds made from them, we wouldn't even contemplate justifying our practices in any full-blooded metaphysical way. In fact, it is made clearer by Eagleton, "as far as deep talk goes, we might as well call a truce."[24] Surprisingly or not, in many ways a Deconstruction quarantined between architecture and literature at the end of the twentieth-century became that truce.

Architects and educators have long attributed blame to an ambiguously and flimsily applied Deconstruction (in architecture and literature) for a shared aesthetic instability. The constant inventiveness of re-reading architecture produced unsettling and spectacular works. But architecture often finds some of its serious cardinals of critical architectural history constantly re-visiting and re-reading this world and its connections to the

'aesthetics of human understanding.' Without putting too fine a gloss on it, this has probably skewed the twentieth-century. Architects and scholars now even offer arguments for, and find themselves going along with, those 'fictionalised experiences of reality' as their only possibility for freedom.[25] This is a closed world.

Deconstruction was never quite the undoing it started out as, neither in literature nor architecture. And at some point (always in the future) architects' references, fragments, their slow-motion memory and re-reading may fly once more. Then these architectures of thought embedded within, take off. This has predictable critical merit until new claims naturally erase previous claims. In this way Eagleton makes a not unreasonable case for the weak condition of the marginal culture and the strength architects continually take from it. This, in the memory of a memory from the last century, echoes weak ontology (Gianni Vattimo) and weak thinking (Ignasi Sola de Morales). For reasons circling around the 'end of modernity,' this may act more interestingly on architecture than it does on literature. That is not certain.

(4)

Returning to what may once arguably have been considered the 'critical' and 'structural' decade of the last century (the 1950s), what is it that we might wish to re-identify in that particularly exciting, unfinished, early rock n' roll decade? Was this a time when the intersections between these two fields were indeed more thrilling and imprecise? Did those intersections between

language and advertising, or the cross-hatched zones made between space, linguistics and semiotics, remain so significant and influential in architecture because of the last four decades of the twentieth-century? Any economy of space was often held back by the language used, and the struggle to be free of determinations and managed expectations. Here the intersections became collisions: fruitful, productive and ultimately providing a set of runaway seductively critical conditions for architecture.

Scholarship that explained literature, culture and life as a changing experience passed into anthropology that began to re-structure Modernism and architecture as culture, an ambushed aesthetic and ultimately an indissoluble way of life. The decade can be bracketed by The Festival of Britain in London (1951) which can still be seen as an ambiguous collision between engaged architects and an agreed 'project.' And closed by Raymond Williams who in *The Long Revolution* (1961) set the scene for the 1960s and wild disagreements and polemics on language, Marxist formations, materiality and an indissolubility of social life of struggle rather than class conflict.[26] Objections could always be found for any language used and positions taken.

The spiral created out of architects' commitment, politics and culture was converging on formations of intolerance. Any shared difference that modernists might have held, began to loosen. Extended studies of linguistics within semiotics during the 1960s leaked into more serious studies when translations became available into the 1970s and 1980s. This was ultimately linked back to the "semiosphere" (Lotman 1984) and collided

with the required props needed by architecture's expanding visual marketplace.[27] By the 1970s, endlessly thrilling and ambiguous studies on the mechanics of advertising, the semiotics of economics, politics, art, law and architecture produced dazzling new critical strategies and methodologies; strategies of persuasion became softly critical, aggressively polemic.

From a discussion of how modern writing and rhetorical devices attempted to control the thoughts and desires to believe in (or be relieved of), the fictions we are offered, to a study of how advertising attempted to manipulate thoughts and desires in order to believe more and engage more modes of production or buy more. Nothing much to do with believing in a product, or even a building, it would not be a great leap to see post-truth beginning somewhere amongst those mythologies, mechanisms and propaganda persuading us to buy bread and machines. How many today remember the collision between Roland Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) and Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders* (1957),[28] only encountered when translation (1967) offered architecture access to national debates already rehearsed in France in the 1950s.

Consumer motivational research became part of the architects' calculations. Other psychological techniques became shared understanding which included depth psychology and subliminal tactics. Reading Barthes and Packard would demonstrate how the manipulation of expectations, seductions in new formations and structures of architectural thought could begin to shift Modernism's transnational hold on architecture.

Architecture which had always been a product became more so; it became a narrative. The dazzling imprecision in these volumes could be seen to help any students today assess the difference between the alleged tasteless works of Nicolei Caucescu in Romania and, for example, the grand spiral modernist gesturing and suprematist geometries of Zaha Hadid's work for Beko in Belgrade. The edge of a very special literary tyranny was exposed here and echoes back in those two volumes: Barthes and Packard.

Nowhere better is such tyranny and randomness between architecture and literature lifted out and into new fictional contexts than in the recent novel by Laurent Binet, *The Seventh Function of Language* (2017): "Barthes opens his madman's eyes, grabs Bayard by the back of the neck and declares, in an anguished, breathless voice: The tutor signifier will be cut up into a series of short, contiguous fragments. Which we shall call lexias, since they are units of reading."[29] The French author Binet steers some tasty collisions between architecture and literature and – as a novelist – plays them off new epistemological misdemeanours.

In the 1950s and 1960s, and on into the deep structure years of the 1970s, the fun-cut-up began and spread to smaller and smaller circles. Ripples of the skimmed stone kind emerged when hermeneutics scaffolded more of those churches of easy meaning in architecture. Here was the time when a radical militancy could scrape the screen, a new airbrush could remove both the aesthetic and scene. "This cutting up, it must be said," Binet has his Roland Barthes say, "will be arbitrary in the

extreme; it will imply no methodological responsibility, because it will be carried out only on the signifier, while the proposed analysis will be carried out on the signified."[30]

(5)

The resulting intersections that followed such methodological and creative irresponsibility impacted on architecture to produce brilliant signalling diagrams from those brutal warriors of resistance. Who could not lament the journey from the radical brutalism, the clockwork orangery of the nacreous concrete emporia, the diagrammatic buildings of SITE fronted by James Wines,[31] to the latent semiology-dripping Disney fiction and its grave-yard symbolism? An architecture of thought shaped out of and gaining from collision and cut-up was a temptation to see many objects and projects, including architecture, as text. Find the text and Easter-bunny hunts were set in motion in many schools of architecture for a near-decade in the 1980s. Conferences in Centre Pompidou, or in Berlin or Boston, were framed around the deep structure of language and the question: *Is Architecture a Text?*

At this time the thrillingly imprecise and problematic worlds of critical theory became something else in architecture entirely. Noam Chomsky was turning in a grave someone else had made for him. Lacan re-structured yet another unconscious. Buildings started wrapping semantic voids, libidinal volumes of languages throbbed with meaning; words were fun before building and architectural production, and its marketplace could catch up with this fever. The textual and intertextual

reading devices that emerged out of a strong period of literary theory (centred in the US from Yale) were not only extended into architecture. Oppositions felt the wrong language was used and too loosely. Any hint of 'architecture as a literary device' flattened and skimmed any original verve.

Meanwhile a cross-hatched cultural theory offered an architectural pre-thinking, waiving autism and prescriptions for – literally – built forms of plasma architecture. Aesthetics were trimmed for a new consciousness; the economic space for architecture became for the professional a professional bourse. The cultural theory emerging out of structural anthropology and the tristes tropiques of Claude Levi-Strauss began to take on wider nuance. Intertextuality raged even more as Roland Barthes was hit by a laundry truck off Rue Des Écoles in 1980. The diaspora of architectural thinking began to pick off like vultures French literary writers, post-Barthes and Levi-Strauss.

Literary-spatial thinking began faming architectural morphology; structural experiments in education and the academy that so thrilled the literature establishment in the 1950s and 1960s from the Nouveau Roman, took off through film into space. The film *L'Année Dernière à Marianbad* had to be – impossibly – 'seen' in French. No one quite knew what that meant. "The text is comparable in its mass to a sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks," says Barthes.[32] Is it unreasonable to take the novelist Binet's words in 2017 to slant fiction to betray linguistics once again and leave architecture scraping its nails on surfaces scarred with immateriality?[33] No

Greimas, no matter, no nonsense! As the commentator-architect traces certain zones of reading which become design intentions, narratives of winged symbolic forms and structural experiments from literature to architecture were wedded to spatial form and turned back into re-constructed architecture. For a few, all this would eventually be bounced off the works of the likes of French novelists Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor.

Meanwhile, always of closer seduction for architects, Roland Barthes championed the novels of Philippe Sollers (H, Nombres, Lois, Drame, Le Parc) and brain-scape analyses of the Nouveau Roman were carried out by Jean Ricardou. The diagrams these writers used for their novels were straight out of the notebooks of a policier, a detective sergeant, or a page from 'principia mathematica,' where Russel and Whitehead turned an A on its head to include an architectural logic all its own. Architecture like novels could be structured, 'function' diagrammed into new departures, a new mysticism and mode of production. Students with a formative knowledge of Marx or Adorno, and a grounding in architectural codes and 'lexia,' could see the advantage of 'reading' architecture, a smirked architecture as a text!

Space and symbol, separated by academy and profession, loaned meaning from elsewhere, beyond these diagrams. For a time, these diagrams of space became a form of literal architecture until they became – literally – architectures constructed in space and narrative. Not meant as determinations, they began to determine architecture as methodology and device. This was the

space as page and could become in education, the written void of an architectural student's canvas. Games between signifier and signified crashed into Roland Barthes and even further back to Greimas and the Sapir-Whorf cluster. Architecture became a literary device; shuffled like textual analysis does with various forms of interpretation theory (from Ricoeur to Eco) architecture was as intertextual as literature for a period. Perhaps it always was, perhaps it still is.

It is probably no exaggeration that stemming out of the Nouveau Roman, for about two decades in the 1970s and 1980s, a formal enquiry into the un-informed, ill-formed and formless became the 'grand intersection' between architecture and modern French literature. Architects using paper, film, music and drawing re-appropriated such enquiries brilliantly. From diagram to movement to structure, there was an enticing dance that could invite and determine disjunction. To structure space and symbolic form offered buildings the memories and structures of feeling that architects imagined could be embedded within their work.

Cross the spatializing and pace of the film *Last Year in Marienbad* with the mystical literary imprecision and ambiguity of *India Song* or Hiroshima *Mon Amour*.[34] The camera was cursor as well as pen. This dancing with formalism emerged from, influenced by, some of the more theoretical philosophers, like Bergson, whilst the 'new post-scientific spirit' of Bachelard was paralleled by the exercises written out by the mathematician

Raymond Queneau (*Exercises in Style*).[35] All this opened even more an architecture of brilliantly quirky – for a time unchallenged – methodologies in the last two decades of the twentieth-century.

Architecture was pulped, through the influential group Oulipo founded in 1960. Translated as the *Workshop for Potential Literature,* constraints, established systems, chess procedures, mathematical riddles released writers like Calvino, Perec, Matthews and Queneau as architects of their own thought.[36] Stepping inside determined systems they could pre-determine change and upset with unequal measures. They produced innovative novels, where formal proposals were exhilaratingly out of reach. The group briefly explored and generated a series of new operative techniques to write out architecture as a potentially new literature. *The Void*, a 300-page novel by Georges Perec, operated by leaving the 'e' out of use, and was even more remarkably translated into English (One has to wonder why?).[37] A mystery takes over where the absence of the letter itself becomes a driving thematic constraint.

Semiotics and the language used in architecture gained much favour in the following decades not only for its seriousness of signifier and signified, but it proved – for a period – fun. In fact, it was the fun before and after John Barth's Funhouse.[38] Architecture, later somewhat behind and preoccupied with Deconstruction, would see all this as a truce; a 'vogue' and 'rogue' for new operative techniques colliding with digital software in architectural schools either side of the millennial turn. Often heavily and creatively misunderstood when they appeared,

the ‘architectural’ rigour and stringency of such constraints and gaming have become staple studies in architecture school in the last three decades. Operations were talked up. Students were attracted to having meaning injected into formal moves; a building could shear, peel, layer or agonise before software appropriated the language.

Constant rumour in the academy and schools trickled out. A truce was declared which both fed the lament that serious architectural criticism had become adrift, whilst new futures were lodged somewhere between dwindling narratives of Modernism or Late Modernism and a restorative (palliative?) critical history. The resulting fictions architecture played on itself had to be accepted as entertaining but eventually, to so few, those powerful in the production of architectural discourse. In those workshops for potential architecture, an intersection of mathematics and poetics, the owl and the pussycat, or the edifice versus print, echoed Victor Hugo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* where Hugo has the priest narrating how the book sets out to kill the edifice. “The great accident of an architect of genius may happen in the twentieth century, like that of Dante in the thirteenth,” Hugo writes. “But architecture will no longer be the social art, the collective art, the dominating art. The grand poem, the grand edifice, the grand work of humanity will no longer be built: it will be printed.”[39] In the twenty-first-century, Hugo forewarns, one kills the other, architecture as literary devices will be printed, and an instant open, reproductive architecture was born.

To conclude these intersections on architecture and literature, it would be wise to recall how the intense attention given architectural 'criticality,' as it emerged from literary and cultural theory in the late twentieth-century, often emerged from writers, thinkers and philosophers who were embedded within literature itself. This goes for those thinkers often linked to architecture by their work or their allegiances: Barthes, Derrida, Lyotard, Irigaray, Cixous, Sollers and others. To appall the French, the new genre of various degree zero conditions they theorised and anticipated, dissolved the moment it seeped into architectural discourse.

This literary carnival in architectural studies was not a (post-Saussure linguistic) science set free by post-structuralism, it was more significant than that. Hallucinations, fictions, critical theories – all appropriately called critical fictions – were neither philosophy nor literature, neither poetry nor scholarship. They were imaginations seeking their own space in both literature and architecture. Here were the thrilling imprecisions at work – the owl and the pussy cat – that certainly have not quite disappeared today. Some might be remembering the memories of these times with acute nostalgia, but these two practices and theoretical fields today still represent a muted intellectual project we call architecture. An architecture of thought so immutably intertwined as to become formidably complex literature!

Unknowings was first delivered as "Uncertainty and Architecture" at The Mackintosh School, Glasgow (2019).[40] *It coincided with reading Ray Monk's biography of Wittgenstein and tracing the philosopher's sojourn to Norway. There is always a sense of a failure of scholarship if one does not make from Wittgenstein's ladders a decent link to 'the public understanding of the architecture of language.' That, similar to Vitaly Vitaliev's "unwritten book inside an unwritten book" (Life as a Literary Device) places us in The Library of Unwritten Books.*

6

UNKNOWINGS

On uncertainty and architecture
Your question once again draws me into
that same darkness, that same
cloud of unknowing in which I want you to be.

The Cloud of Unknowing.[41]

(1)

Uncertainty and architecture; this was a simple challenge to consider exercising unconditional thinking, an element of confusion and trained thought. Where better to turn when considering 'uncertainty' than to the set of texts from the Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chodron's *Comfortable with Uncertainty?*[42] If we accept mapping and life management go hand in hand, we might not only echo Vattimo's twinning suggestion but put together Buddhism and Architecture. Uncertainty is not only accepted as the bread and butter of Buddhism, it is the feast too! Curiously comforting clichés in Buddhism can actually get better than this. "A warrior accepts that we can never know what will happen to us next," Chödrön writes. "We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty. This not knowing is part of the adventure. It's also what makes us afraid."[43]

How many times can we entertain these clouds of unknowing wrapped in uncertainty? Is such thinking both obvious to our well-being and crippling to the fears we imagine? De-colonizing

pedagogies seem to be gaining ground today as re-structuring protest and direct action starts to become a reality. As histories are questioned, denial is limited and 'cancel' becomes a culture so heavily unstable. It is quite possible we should even consider for a period not delivering lectures anymore. Along with the systematic revisions of our own selves, we must find innovative ways to expose the prejudices we use to challenge each other. Is this the 'woke futurism' we are beginning to speak about? At least this has become a consistent response to the fluidity of post-truth, and the self-protection and individualism brought to counter it.

It is also quite possible before we are all cancelled out, we should take back ideas that established our misunderstanding of culture and career. Maps or models offering destinations unprescribed can, we are persuaded, dislodge treasure seeking and sentimental confirmations of past narratives. Perhaps our exchanges should be re-thought in terms of maps and models of new relational ideas. Maps for a reason not exactly clear, appear to offer and gain more cognitive edge if they represent the territory of our thinking as it reacts to increasing epistemological instability. A 'relational' thinking might suit us here, in the sense that Vattimo suggested when he spoke of the exercise to "place these two fields of thought (Nietzsche and Heidegger) in direct contact with each other…(as a) a means to discover in them both new and richer aspects of truth."[44]

Mapping, modelling or meddling – the metaphors that not only contain images, brain maps or pictures of worlds within

us – became part of the language and language games Ludwig Wittgenstein explored. Are these brain-maps, according to Antonio Damasio, the types of mind-making images that have yet to be understood as architectures of thought? "Mapping," Damasio writes "is essential for sophisticated management, mapping and life management going hand in hand."[45] A sniff of soul dust and neuro-babble perhaps but maps ultimately are relational; they invite us inside the other. By climbing out of ourselves we must then understand our experience as much as the other. Understanding prejudice and preference, colliding with our own hubris can only be a good thing.

The Cloud of Unknowing is an anonymous text dating from the latter half of the fourteenth-century when the Great Plague had spread through England and the Church seemed more and more divorced from the people. It offers us cautionary words that can helpfully steer both our inner speech and the architecture we make out of this speech. "I can tell you this for sure: anyone who sets little store by that first, apparently innocent, thought, and doesn't weigh up its implications, will not be able to stop himself from carelessly slipping into venial sin." [46]

Carelessly – or carefully – slipping into venial sin in our confused thoughts may be going a little too far. Such anonymity demands an unconditionality that we may not be capable of. Source credibility is a term used in communications and media theory commonly implying the positive make-up and characteristics that shape any acceptance of a message. But we

are so advised by the cloud: “if it is a pleasant thought, and you experience a fleeting delight whenever it recurs, then you will want to stay with it.”[47]

Whilst it would be churlish to accuse architecture with more migrations of impossible meaning, we must persist with this idea of how our thoughts are as much in flux today as the society it tries to still. Does this invite us to be critically correct for selected occasions? Are we so sure we would know what to do if we are presented with a map of uncertainty, when our maps are sets of images, even uncertain spaces, and hold within them formations of nothingness that are changing all the time?

Uncertainty has a vitality that consistently baffles us. Steering away from it as far as possible, we tend not to know how to utilize or possibly even appreciate it. Any truth we alight on in these newly discovered Buddhist lines is not so much shocking as restless. If we wish to discover new ‘realities’ but always dwell in fragile truths, how can we explore the thoughts and rewards of this restlessness? How can we celebrate uncertainty, not lament it? Buddhism and Architecture? Such impermanence we may possibly attribute to loss becomes another mark of our reality.

Samskara, in Sanskrit, is a notion that invites us to recognise all the parts in the whole, and the whole that is only partial. Thinking of architecture, this partial ‘whole’ has all the positive elements of danger, the benefits of fragility, the edginess of risk and the creativity of the unpredictable. How useful is this cognitive uncertainty across learning, thinking and experiencing?

We might not even feel comfortable with the term ‘uncertain.’ How many of us recognise the diurnal juggling we do in our thinking, from impermanence to permanence, from the partial to the total?

Groundless, we go from sense to nonsense and back, endless times a day. Spiritual guides will warn that such thinking challenges innocence, illusion and any certainty so far held onto. A groundless condition begs for formation to dress this concern just as architecture re-structures and fabricates its endless readings and re-readings.[48] As all these processes include aspects of belief and self-belief; each student as much as each professor faces this in the instability of performance, the misunderstanding of communication, and certainly the ambiguity and the uncertainty – in architecture – of the drawn and the represented.

If instability, misunderstanding and ambiguity are useful and accurate terms for us to use as much as ‘source credibility,’ then recommendations have to be re-thought. Our ordinary awareness must be directed towards an awareness and recognition of the direction of any applause that comes our way. Many facing the pedagogy of the heart and the oppressed, the pedagogy of injustice and racial inequalities, have no option but to define uncertainty in relation to what is not taught, what is not learnt.

(2)

Let us continue this original twinning, uncertainty and architecture. Can we see this as a proposition, a mere hunch

before letting our thoughts go to work on further ambiguities and incongruities? Certainly, it is complex. We are forewarned again by that ominous cloud of unknowing: "but give all these thoughts houseroom instead of marching orders, and they will in the end take root in your inmost soul, at the centre of your will, becoming (and did we not see thing coming?) deadly sins."[49]

Uncertainty is also the *Samskara* 'within and without' of this awareness; self-understanding will be constantly shifting. Whether our idea of rogue Jenga works metaphorically to capture the architecture of our thoughts, we might leave aside. The tower of small blocks definitely totters, but who in fact builds the first tower as we take time to realise how we model our learning and knowledge against that which we might also never come to know; the unknowing.

To help here we might turn to Ludwig Wittgenstein's collection *On Certainty*, drafted in the last years of his life, between 1949 and 1951. "I act with complete certainty," Wittgenstein wrote, "but this certainty is my own."[50] With only a passing thought to Kurt Gödel, Wittgenstein's statement reminds us that it too is also uncertain. The game of rigorous doubting, Wittgenstein suggests, presupposes limited certainty.

We must proceed to a 2nd extract from Wittgenstein though if we are to explore this instability. "From its 'seeming' to me – or to everyone – to be so, it doesn't follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it."[51] Can this certainty, any certainty, make so much sense that we can

doubt it? It might be acceptable to take that I Ching pause before entering the Wittgensteinian abyss. Read the extract again and swear it is not repetition.

"From its 'seeming' to me – or to everyone – to be so, it doesn't follow that it is so. Wittgenstein writes, "What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it."[52] How then might such a proposition of 'uncertainty,' twinned within and between architecture, make sense if we can doubt even the relationship as a proposition? "Whether a proposition can turn out false," Wittgenstein continues in fragment 5, "after all, depends on what I make count as the determinants of that proposition."[53]

To understand this, to understand and map uncertainty and architecture as a relational proposition, we might make a stab at the determinants of that proposition. By doing so could we add to this a model of self-understanding which may help shape our doubt and prejudice? In other words, could we risk not only upsetting our inner speech but taking back the architecture of our thoughts, even jettisoning them. This is not a neuro-scientist's model, rather a model that helps identify the fluctuating determinants of thinking, thoughts given marching orders or thoughts fleetingly delightful.

Let us call this the Four Points model as it hovers usefully around the four words: Infancy, Fluency, Truancy and Absence. Consider this a diagram of uncertainty, a type of rhomboid. The four notions are those which we propose to make up our own flux, an architecture in thought's progress and change. Infancy can

be seen as a condition that always invites us to learn more; and more importantly to be open to this learning. It is an invitation to extend, to break out; but being dissimilar to immaturity. It is an Infancy that can go both ways; back to the womb or onwards to more complex models. Fluency is that condition seen as seducing us into thinking we already have achieved more advanced thoughts, reached a further stage in our thinking. We sometimes have to pull these thoughts back, shift them or discard them. This is a knowing that tries but does not always succeed in resisting the hubris it masks. In Vygotsky's identification of Piaget's thinking this is the 3rd stage, 'egocentricity.' Truancy though is our third condition, one we are familiar with at school where we play truant. We choose not to attend school or particular classes. Missing in action we not only don't turn up for school or the learning implied, we miss out on worlds we never catch up with. This, in our inner world, makes up the many areas of knowledge we resist. This implies a blindness, areas always partial, incomplete.

The absent, the fourth and final term in our model, represents areas of learning left aside. These are the blind spots of a knowledge un-gained but not un-grasped. Here learning hovers, and knowledge is malleable. This is not exactly a loss but the 'absent' is a world of thought and thinking which will always elude us. This might manifest itself in the ways we sometimes wish to think against ourselves, or – in our case – against architecture.

As a constantly changing model, this is more than a simple relational way to understand the 'unknowings' and the fluidity of the maps and images made from our language games. Here, a fluidity in place of uncertainty becomes a proposition for vitality. If we lean towards a vitality in our thoughts, how could we be certain when our thoughts are uncertain? How do we then find ourselves acting out this uncertainty?

It would be useful at this point to put this 4-point cognitive model alongside the words of the psychologist Liam Hudson in *The Cult of the Fact*: "The possibility that incongruity and inconsistency can act as a source of vitality does not spring naturally to the empirical mind. Yet it is some such model that students of the human order seem to me to need. And they need it not merely in coming to terms with their subject-matter; but in making sense of the body of thought they themselves produce."[54] Is this 'body' similar to these architectures of thought we are developing here? Do we produce maps in constant flux that determine our own subject-matter? And is it this subject-matter which then determines our vitality?

Whether written in 1975, as Hudson mapped the barricading in universities between what he termed a hard and soft science, it seems this is as urgent now as it was then. If we act as we often think we do with complete certainty, how is this certainty our own? If I then cite here – for example, Albert Camus or Rumi, Nietzsche or Wittgenstein, do these emerge because they rotate around my own architecture of thought-as-body, an axis that for some time we think we can hold fast. These are not part of any

evidence; they are part of doubting, part of a preference for the language game which is never only in the background. They make up our own beautifully blinded, prejudiced project.

(3)

There are interesting and doubtless infinite meanings we can make from the term uncertainty; that is without doubt! Even more infinite might be the ways we can invent for it to collide with architecture. And if we share this language game endlessly during the day without at least tossing away one belief, if we tried to doubt everything, we would, according to Wittgenstein "not get as far as doubting anything."[55] The question for us here as we collide these two notions with vitality – uncertainty and architecture: does this game of doubting ourselves and our propositions presuppose an unreachable certainty? If we accept this proposition as another 'uncertainty,' can we ask how it becomes a theme in the architecture we invent? And what might this mean? Any re-thinking or re-structuring meets its own will and limit. And in this case, we can also extend it to selected fields: politics, the environment, the social and built fabric. To avoid instant sermonizing indoctrination, opinions or 'prospect' narratives, what do we do then? How do we proceed, how does our architecture meander into new thoughts, meander towards seriousness, extracting a piece here and there, inserting another one, all in an attempt to keep the edifice of our thoughts 'standing?'

Do we retain these set points, the reference points that will direct the little risk we take with our knowledge? Do we chance

upon another source, another text immediately, adjust our safe point with something on our own library shelf but perhaps not of others? Something connected to Buddhism not architecture, coincidentally then, Pema Chödrön's book *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings?*[56] Do we share all this as an inner speech, take a risk with an un-knowing in architecture or do we look for security, a way of righting the insecurity of our uncertainty? How does this become relational within our brain-mapping?

Accepting this, might we also see ourselves as warriors all, *'bodhisattvas*?' According to this we recall Chodron's words, "a (Buddhist) warrior accepts that we can never know what will happen to us next. We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty. This not knowing is part of the adventure. It's also what makes us afraid."[57] Is 'warrior' the appropriate metaphor for the condition we must use in unknowing the twenty-first-century and dismantling the twentieth-century? How then should we use this 'Buddhist' fragment and contemplate how architects consider their adventurous thoughts ones of uncertainty or of security and predictability?

Is this type of fragment-as-proposition as useful for us as the words of Wittgenstein? Why do we choose to go towards one not the other? Or can we consider both? We can, if we understand our propositions, research uncertainty as vitality and chaos, whilst accepting it will always represent an accepted

piece of unfathomable self-belief. Uncertainty then becomes that welcome groundless condition – the unknowing – a temperament that rides with us, testing our certainties. For some of us this might be existential and/or cognitively dissonant where life and warriorship (to continue the metaphor) is preferable to death. In other words, we not only believe in uncertainty, but we act on it. Our condition and thinking then works through and alongside uncertainty, an essential part of our belief.

For others this might only represent a special form of nihilism; a nonsense distinguished from any language game. This uncertainty might then offer no adventure at all, but coincide with the constant desire many people have of wishing to remain within a status quo believing this sets the record straight? But what does that mean – to set the record straight? To redact society, to black out documents given too much 'certainty?' To be certain about our judgments which might merely confirm the biases we have 'designed' as self-ideological in order to become our own prejudice project!

(4)

For a moment let's leave the Buddha hanging. If we are considering uncertainty and the obvious movement and instability it invites in our own 'architecture' then we might be rewarded by considering how we discover the 'unknown' propositions that guide us. We take a lesson from Nietzsche's style guide prepared for his sister before we return to Wittgenstein: "It is not good manners or clever to deprive one's reader of the most obvious

objections. It is very good manners and very clever to leave it to one's reader alone to pronounce on the ultimate quintessence of our wisdom."[58]

In fragment 149, Wittgenstein puts it this way: "My judgments themselves characterize the way I judge, characterize the nature of judgment."[59] Truly comprehensible only to the devilishly possessed was the unforgettable phrase used by Wagner to describe Nietzsche's 'Untimely Meditation: Schopenhauer as Educator.'[60] Characterising the nature of judgment or 'de-souling' language, we exist in the cloud today, as much as centuries ago. Not imitators of the certainty of others, nor succumbing to the romance of positivism but when the fleeting delights of more and more emotional fragments thrill us as they make up an architecture of our thought. Wittgenstein again: "I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can discover them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the moment around it determines its immobility." [61]

Is it these propositions that stand fast for a moment, propositions that pique our interest when we speak about uncertainty? How do we recognize them, hold onto them, act on them? We must remember this is Wittgenstein 3.0. Diagrammatically, the first Wittgenstein saw a development of logic and language in Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus somewhat obliquely emerging out of Russell and Whitehead's 'Principia Mathematica.' The second Wittgenstein evidenced a development of more phenomenological leaning in Philosophical

Investigations, but would no doubt have warned against the devilishly critical fictions and sensual hermeneutic fantasies that saw architects and architecture hitch onto the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Wittgenstein 3.0 – the mystic, the magus, the alchemist – was the obvious re-souled realization that was also embedded in Wittgenstein 1.0 and 2.0. Here language, flux and movement are what shape and re-shape our words, worlds and the emotional maps and images we make from them.

Perhaps we've got it all wrong then about this language game. It was not so much the Structuralist legacy of the 1960s and 1970s that dislodged architectural meaning in the twentieth-century, but – more stealthily – Wittgenstein's aphorisms. These unscientific techniques offered more alchemical attempts at the logical proof of unknowing. In varying forms these would eventually become a launch pad for architectural conjectures late twentieth-century. Just where and how they crept through was an alchemy twentieth-century architectural theory and history have yet to capture. Not far from "fortune-cookie mottoes" (Prideaux)[62] architecture was awash with decipherings to fit the narratives in mind.

This was the otherwise fantasy of *The Seventh Function of Language* fictionalised by the French author Laurent Binet.[63] This was the alchemical stage, the performative act eventually double-gamed in architecture. "You can't really consider it a separate function," Binet has his character Simon Herzog say after reading Roman Jakobson. At most, this Seventh Function of Language "is a slightly crazy use of the conative function

for an essentially cathartic effect, poetic at best, but completely ineffective; the magical invocation works only in fairy tales by definition."[64] Finally, the magic and incantatory Wittgenstein became the warrior as architecture became a fairy tale.

(5)

Architecture as a fairy tale, by definition? The 'magical and incantatory' function? Architectures of thought drop in out of sense, drop in and out of the two clouds, the known and unknown! How do we choose then within this fantasy of unknowing and what further evidence do we bring to our thoughts? What experience can we use and what learning helps the relational grasp, momentarily or not, between uncertainty and architecture? Far from being uncertain our word-worlds are worldbuilding; like brain plasticity they have the capacity to change structure and function depending on stimulation. And feeling! If we accept this as part of an entertaining unknowing, it is quite possible that uncertainty – in terms of movement and plasticity – is a primary mechanism of both learning and memory. In other words, it's alright to be uncertain with Wittgenstein, Nietzsche or Camus!

Neither uncertain nor certain, Buddhism, the warriors seek the propositions and thoughts which 'stand fast for architecture,' if momentarily. It is not so much that we wish to use uncertainty to define life as an absurd confrontation, a life between hard and soft science or between rational beings in an irrational universe, between the intuitive and the empirical. The question might be re-framed: do we still consider ourselves rational beings

constantly searching for the truth in a meaning that closes in on our emotions, biases and prejudices? One that also closes in on nothingness, and then dies on us, so to speak?

If so, we are in a particularly very sticky period right now. Ideas are dying on us too quickly. As Albert Camus wrote in The Myth of Sisyphus, "This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction."[65] We extend these constructions daily until it is possible to assert that the twentieth-century in architecture became an axis around which certainty and variously constructed objectivity rotated. Do we agree? If the rest is all construction, and language has been the vehicle of these constructions, then where might we be today in relation to uncertainty and architecture; what is the axis around which our bodies rotate, and our inner speech stays still?

We asked earlier if the twinned fields, Buddhism and Architecture, might be more than a chance theme? And if so how do we treat it relationally? Is it an idea, a notion, a source to rediscover the fragility of any reference, doubled up and played off each other? Inner Jenga might not quite be the metaphor we require for these architectures of thought. For the tower has to exist before extracting and re-inserting takes place. Perhaps another experience can be used, another way of looking at the fragility of our thinking. It's not that intertwining Buddhism with Architecture would be equivalent to the various stages say, in rock climbing. But perhaps climbing helps us hold open this contract within our own flux and uncertainty.

From the roughness of a surface called positivity we find that condition when the grip is made easier, where other thoughts can take off. This suffices until we reach stages when our thoughts need more grip; resembling those more difficult rock-climbing holds, pinches and crimps. Thoughts pinch and crimp. What else is it but the surface of rock which crutches our idea, touches the skin, when the fingers have eyes? As if thoughts, when momentarily befuddled, now turn to the Cloud or the Internet.

Easy and positive digressions on uncertainty for example will trap us into the seduction of fake propositions. Unless we are explorers or pilgrims, we generally do not set out in an uncertain way. Madness is not a consequence of uncertainty, according to Nietzsche, but of certainty. And then choosing a favourite rock, a favourite landscape, the architecture of such thoughts becomes of course infinite. If those shapes 'against architecture' had not emerged in the 1980s, they would have been invented in the eternal returns of the critical fictions made about architecture. The surrealism or self-divination of rock climbing would marry the 'madness' of George Bataille and Friedrich Nietzsche as they took architecture down; all ropes and holds, and deadly sins. We look forward to seeing you here, in 'woke' futures we already recognise!

Whatever uncertainty we face, our efforts intellectually and cognitively often shoot for transcendence. Results – in whatever form we talk of results – that appear more certain hold us ransom. Uncertainty is usually the one destination that

cannot have that name, one hold on the rock that is not about to hold. Towards the end of the novel *Narziss und Goldmund* by Herman Hesse (1959), Narziss says to Goldmund: "What you really mean is that thought itself seems useless to you, but not the application of thought to the visible and practical world." Goldmund, the profligate Dionysian, the vagabond to Narziss' ascetic, has returned to the monastery he left in search of love and earthly experience, and is now setting up his workshop: "I can answer you there," Narziss continues, "we shall never lack chances, nor yet the will, to apply our thinking."[66]

Was Hesse jousting with 'constructions' of thought whilst his own version of Buddhism was seeking the fragile certainty of uncertainty? What then, if we follow Hesse, are the chances to apply our own limited thinking to this nothingness? Is uncertainty and architecture a good pairing, a useful theme, an open theme? Or a comfortable and predictable theme that re-tells the stories we wish for it?

We rarely announce that we have arrived uncertainly (a virus not withstanding). And we certainly usually do not announce with some triumph that we reach that positivity though uncertain destinations, taking on the roughness of surfaces which the virus announces. Everything in our schooling, upbringing, further education, research tends to suggest that we should move away from uncertainty.

Many thought of the twentieth-century as a duel between a hard science and a soft science, one which soft science won.

Ambiguity crept into white-skinned, white-coated metaphors but the white mythologies have remained. Professions and institutes have begun a disabling that knows at present no end. Decolonizing now reaches into our pedagogies, de-schooling challenges the learning we thought fixed by better wiser souls. Today we hear politicians numbingly claim to 'follow the science'. Yearning for certainty, ironing out any diversity and difference implies a trembling expertise. But never too certain, thought deflates, failure is forced to pinch the hold for a grip. Woke futurism will produce new 'constructions,' new 'architectures.'

Is there always so much nonsense in the unpredictable pairing of two fields? In this case the fanciful 'relational' thoughts in between Buddhism and Architecture could turn our uncertainty into a vital, unending force. Of course, it is a stretch, to grip onto uncertainty as a vital even unavoidable process within infinity. Laughter might be our only release if we think we can extend these ideas by sharing maps of uncertainty with each other? And how comic and useful would be the synonyms of uncertainty to help understand yet another modelling, yet another architecture of thought: Indeterminacy – ambiguity – partiality – impermanence – redundancy? What more could we add to suggest uncertainty as a re-assessment of the 'open work' in and against any architecture we make from these thoughts?

(6)

To close this unfortunate brain map, I think we might re-visit Camus' notion of absurdity. Not as that sovereign condition so accepted for a period in the twentieth-century but whether its

hold is one which remains sovereign for so many today, like those monks in search of a clean mind and cloth slippers: "But I should like to speak here of a work in which the temptation to explain remains greatest, in which illusion oers itself automatically, in which conclusion is almost inevitable. I mean fictional creation. I propose to enquire whether or not the absurd can hold its own there."[67]

We join Camus as Sisyphus. Are we destabilizing the knowing, by knowing the movement of our thinking as it navigates constant uncertainty? Just what critical fictions have been made out of architecture's vital role, in which the temptations to explain have been so formidable? Are conclusions just as inevitable when we begin to re-evaluate our own privacy, the propositions, processes and prejudices that offer holds that we cannot sustain. Naïve then to speak of relational change, or thrillingly uncertain to offer such fantasies through language? "For 'I know' seems to describe a state of affairs which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact," Wittgenstein writes: "One always forgets the expression 'I thought I knew.'"[68]

We might add to Wittgenstein's upset for a moment longer and consider our own private pedagogies. How long has education relied on an institutionalized 'Modernity' and a bewildering range of indoctrinating formats? If there are now regular and repeated calls for the disabling of the architecture profession, how then to de-colonize pedagogy that embeds questionable authority and pleads for the restoration of the canon? What do

we 'know,' doubting any guarantees by the thoughts we once knew? And if we once knew, then what now of our unknowings when uncertainty becomes its own uncertainty?

Does the brain make maps to model change and uncertainty in order to double bind us, bringing back its narrative hold in a double manner? Let us end such unknowings with Hesse's description of Narziss: "he has used the results of his thought a hundred times over, on behalf of Goldmund, his friend, and on that of each of his monks, and does every hour. But how, Narziss asked, does any thinker apply anything, unless he has learned it, and practiced it first?"[69] In order to apply and live within uncertainty, if we so choose, how do we learn it, how do we practice it? A person can only be sure of an uncertain existence in the existence of certainty. The climbing holds offer only a way to move to the next hold. On the rock face the pause is fatal.

"Between the certainty I have of my existence," Camus writes "and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled."[70] If the existence of self and environment is all that one can safely assume to be true yet is itself in flux, one must reject all other truths for the flux to be real. As an existentialist, since one can't depend upon the predetermined truths of others, one must realize that no knowledge can be certain and that any meaning we may bring to it is of our own making. It is relational and in flux. It is then that we are always 'inner'; that which reaches outside us is construction. It is an architecture of 'inner speech' never rested, except possibly in collision with a Buddhism where

perhaps none of our uncertainties can make sense to each other. Unless that is, we understand the pinched axis and the crimped propositions which we use to think and hold onto uncertainty.

Many of us may agree that nothing we have done in life and architecture survives without the poetics, or the driving force of divinity, somewhere lodged between uncertainty and vitality. Some will look back today at the cigarette chain-smoking pedagogues who educated students whilst realising being an architect had no chance or even future for them. Putting Architecture and Buddhism together and always oscillating between these two activities and actions: how did they do this?

Architects have no other choice but to wrap the sticks of dynamite around their heads, like Jean-Paul Belmondo in Godard's Pierrot le Fou. 'Merde,' Belmondo says, architects have no other choice but to invent the uncertainty of the future. "This possibility of satisfying oneself is part of the language-game," Wittgenstein writes, "one of its' essential features."[71] 'Cloud-hidden, whereabouts unknown,' foolhardy, stubborn dullards of the surreal act, what did we know, if we never became architects?[72]

Alchemies began as 'Organic Architecture Revisited' delivered in Budapest (2008) at a conference around the work of the Hungarian architect Imre Makovecz, an architect met in the early 1980s in Finland. One word - Verbunkos - found in a book on Bartok by Kenneth Chalmers began the ideas in this essay. "Verbunkos itself a sequence of slow (lassú) and fast (friss) sections, was superseded by the faster csardás dance which became all the rage in Vienna in the 1840s." Eventually this became the selected bias of an essay trying to avoid developing this word.

7

ALCHEMIES

Verbunkos, Bartok and Organic Architecture

(1)

We are still unclear as to whether our architectures of thought, as they seek connections and coherences, are about constructing a consciousness which 'looks over' the shoulder. This essay began with the 'organic' in the sense of organic architecture at a conference in Budapest. The idea was to contemplate a revised reference world and offer a critique for revisiting the organic. The critical use of 'organic architecture' represented a world readily available if not unequivocally shared for much of the twentieth-century. Verbunkos is the word that appears 'accidentally' after some pages and does nothing but further disrupt the thought of this essay. An act of some critical fraudulence perhaps, but let's give it a chance.

As John Fowles writes in The Magus, "I am whatever meaning the coincidence has."[73] Coincidences might help here and for a start I search in the index of Antonio Damasio's work, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, for the term 'coincidence.'[74] Nothing appears. Yet I imagine the structure, not to mention the science of coincidence, might be part of Damasio's 'autobiographical self' as it collides with his own inner speech. Many of us will recognise that situation whereby a statement is prepared well before we are aware of the way the thoughts will connect. A line from Commissaire

Adamsberg in Fred Vargas's crime fiction *A Climate of Fear* reminds us of our dilemma: "I used to look for thoughts I've had and that I've forgotten to think."[75] Whoever enjoys this riddle may never know how much is internal, 'autistic' and 'spiritual.' Then coincidences begin to make up – we imagine – nothing like the text or essay planned.

"To recognise, then, is not the same as an initial introduction," Amitav Ghosh writes in *The Derangement*, "Nor does recognition require an exchange of words: more often than not we recognize mutely."[76] This muteness fascinates, often appalling the sense and impatient coherences we can too hastily make. George Steiner turns to the agonistic in *Heraclitus* to identify "the terrible power of language to deceive, to demean, to mock, to plunge deserved renown into the dark of oblivion." [77]

How do coincidences help us in these constructions and what do they offer our critical task here? Will this help re-shape the future of the 'organic' as a mystical renown, and if so how do we validate these thoughts? Was the 'organic' a way of seeing architecture in the twentieth-century as an excess in form and space? Was it a philosophy and a mode of being? In more accessible terms was the 'organic' considered a way of life on the way to becoming another 'mindful' life?

(2)

The aim of a coincidence at all stages in our writing, even in our thoughts, might be a simple one; to keep the conversation going. Opening lines and statements do not always appear later in our

thoughts and texts as they were initially imagined. It was no different in Budapest where this essay called "Alchemies" began from the word 'verbunkos.' Taking off from this coincidence, it would be important to acknowledge that any conference could only skim the accepted codes and interpretations of the 'organic' whilst offering perhaps something for the future. Organic was interpreted as both traditional and radical, with that teasing tendency to move towards geomancy. Out of this coincidence a subtitle emerged: promised infancy and a new alchemy.

A revisiting of organic architecture tempts us to frame something much more fragile. Could we open the thoughts – the architecture – to a lost field, and not only lead into the 'organic' of the twenty-first-century? There was a time mainly emerging from Frank Lloyd Wright from the first decade of the last century that 'organic' implied the design and structure of buildings supposedly tailored within the 'natural' surroundings. It was not so much that the structure or buildings melded with the environment or even within the landscape. 'Organic' was not meant to be a riddle to sky and earth with matching geomancy. Organic architects were felt to have sited their works as if emerging naturally from the surroundings.

If we could critically re-frame the 'organic' and what has passed for organic architecture, might we not bend backwards and forwards at the same time, invoking both new, that is, old alchemies. There was within any organic play, a healthy conspiracy and coincidence, a little Tolkein architecture we might call it. Organic could hint at the not-so random images

and patterns made from it, passing somewhere between a slow and fast culture. Could we see the 'organic' as a series of alchemies? Could the organic also take on whatever meaning the coincidence held? Was there a promise within the infancy of 'organic architecture' which did not exhaust its appeal to a kind of fantasy or even hysteria? How long did the 'organic' yearn for the natural, whilst being used to promote the cultural? This then would lead us towards other alchemies, a labyrinth of thought, where 'organicism' might close the gap between a reality in architecture and whatever we define as the spiritual. What could be the first steps in this architecture of thought?

Coincidence would have to steer us here through this master with a name right out of Harry Potter, Titus Burckhardt. This could also steer us toward the alchemy of Burckhardt's mystification. In this way the organic was Burckhardtian, it "made use of an unavoidable misunderstanding to keep unqualified persons at a distance."[78] We could continue to develop Burckhardt's idea that 'nature could overcome nature' and connect this to an architecture thinking against architecture. "In the world of forms, Nature's mode of operations" Burckhardt writes in Alchemy, "consists of a continuous rhythm of 'dissolutions' and coagulations, or of disintegrations and formations."[79] How could this not appeal to us today? The dissolution of any formal entity in order to make new conjunctions between a *forma* and its *materia*? This becomes particularly seductive as an idea when Burckhardt turns to Penelope: "Nature acts like Penelope who, to rid herself of unworthy suitors, unwound at night the wedding garment which she had woven during the day."[80]Accepting the development of

coincidence, this collides with an architecture of thought about to jettison more than one idea a day. Favouring continuous thought, our thinking reforms and our writing constantly coagulates. Who could resist the idea of ridding oneself of unworthy suitors, aimless thoughts that had nowhere to go? From this, imagine proceeding from Burckhardt through to the poetry of the Syrian born poet Adonis; those new-old alchemies and visions of the Sufi scholar from the fifth-century Mohammed Ibn Al Niffari?

(3)

However much new discoveries might shape our thinking, we should not doubt that the moving, unending twists in language attract us. Is there not a huddled and protective translation of our inner thoughts as they try to extend coincidence? Adonis has a feeling that putting Sufism and Surrealism would arouse controversy if not disgust. But we could agree with Adonis that many of the intellectual issues embedded in Sufism and Surrealism are similar to, and intersect with, each other. "So truth does not lie in what we are able to explain because elucidation is based on reason," Adonis tells us, "but rather in what we are unable to explain or in what we are unable to experience."[81]

This is familiar territory; explanations or the silence of experience can demean or mock our reasoning. Anyone who tries to wrest reason from the heart will pose discomforts that never quite reveal. We can let an inner speech celebrate and move this reference world away from the expected. It remains then for us to see in this, the significance of our dance, our inner 'cognitive' chaos. The tacit agreement between nature and culture, often

referred to as ‘organic’ has now been left aside. Our thinking wavers as Ibn Arabi says: “my heart became a receptacle for every image.”[82]

A receptacle for every image and thought, what then of this torrent, this internal debate we have with our thoughts? It was here, at this stage of preparing this presentation that the notion of ‘promised infancy’ emerged from Adonis’ commentary on the visionary poetry of the Sufi scholar Al Niffari: “The words also appear to be having an internal debate about what the world is discussing;” Adonis writes, “it is as if Al-Niffari has seen them, then unravelled them stitch by stitch, then re-stitched them.”[83]

Adonis considers how Al Niffari’s writing takes us into a world of ‘promised infancy.’ It is this world linked with the organic I began to see revealed in the works and words of the Hungarian architect Imre Makovecz.[84] “I believe that the original intention of our architecture was to create an architectural connection between the sky and the earth,” Makovecz writes, “a connection which enlightens and expresses man’s movement and position, to create a magic, weaving an invisible spell on its surroundings.”[85] Here the architect Makovecz becomes a cross between Burckhardt and Harry Potter: “We try to summon up the architecture of a mythical era. Our aim is to counteract the sub-sensible spell of technical civilization using super-sensible imaginative power.”[86] From the sub-sensible to the super-sensible; whatever words Makovecz uses this mystery will remain well into the twenty-first-century. There was however a period when this wasn’t the case.

In the 1980s when Imre Makovecz's mythical organic architecture was being published, it would be more common to overhear the comment: Ban this architecture! The divination of these works, architecture colliding with Hungarian mythology and the Game of Thrones long before the TV series, was to many a cliché of lost but bewildered spirituality. It was a cosmology and geomancy all but erased from twentieth-century architectural thinking; it was simply beyond 'mindful' reason. Makovecz though was giving everybody a chance. Whatever definitions Makovezc might have wished to anchor for our discussions in organic architecture, he recognised everyone was in charge of their own story. This was what his architecture said, and it was, he implied, up to us to make our subject interesting. It was nothing to do with being contemporary, it was archaic. It could light so many souls that could not, would not fly. And this was, to the Hungarian architect, the narrative open to all.

Today when language and vocabulary change so fast, we might find ourselves tempted to hold onto our definitions. Makovecz was telling the audience that between language and how we abuse it, between a life and how we mistreat it, we have only one choice. Edit in or out whatever mythology and fantasies we wish to suit our story. If we don't, our language will do it for us with mocking laughter.

(4)

All was going well. I had a coincidence, some ideas, a critical notion, and an architect straight out of Azkaban. I was clearly more involved in the unsayable than I thought; that zone more

familiar to novelists perhaps than architects. “The unsayable! It was mysteriously linked, I now understand,” Andreï Makine writes in Le Testament Francais, “to the essential. The essential was unsayable. Incommunicable.”[87] Everything that needed no words seemed to be essential. Makine was showing us how to short-circuit our critical fictions into workable truths as thoughts continue to build without quite knowing the journey.

I was beginning to find coincidence ‘essential.’ From reading about Bela Bartok, two worlds emerged and were put together naively, perhaps awkwardly, side by side: Organic and Bartok. This didn’t mean to imply that Bartok was organic. This was merely the collision identified earlier as a chance, a relational act. It was not so much mysteriously linked but set up two fields of thought which struggled for attention. We were still, mechanically adrift; I had no agenda, no narrative. And I was yet to discover the coincidence, Verbunkos.

Inextricable from Makine’s ‘unsayable,’ these thoughts around ‘the organic’ were now veering into the sub-sensible, something to do with the way my knowledge was a discovery of not what is said, but a prediction of what is left to say. I was recognizing how thoughts continually refused to go forward. They were refusing to enter that space we think we wish to discover. Our impatience perhaps guides this bias towards clarity. I recalled a poem by the chemist, Miroslav Holub called a Brief Reflection on the Theory of Relativity. It seemed perfect for what may seem another random, awkward and blind juxtaposition of

two notions – the organic and Bela Bartok. Two worlds that may or may not collide. Holub's poem from 1984 was more than an interruption.

Albert Einstein, in conversation -

(Knowledge is discovering

what to say) - in conversation one day

with Paul Valery

was asked:

Mr Einstein, how do you work

with your ideas? Do you note them down

the moment they strike you? Or only

at night? Or the morning?

Albert Einstein replied:

Monsieur Valery, in our business

ideas are so rare that

if a man hits upon one

he certainly won't forget it.

Not in a year.

Mr Einstein, how do you work with your ideas? Do you note them down the moment they strike you? Ideas so rare! Could I hit upon one idea, something which might take this journey on, something which would make from this architecture of thought, a morphology if not an explanation? Then it happened, in the work on Bartok by Kenneth Chalmers I fell upon the word Verbunkos.[88] This was a Hungarian notion – in music and architecture - which I had no knowledge of at all.

Misguided perhaps yet seeking a coincidence to intervene in this essay on 'alchemies,' how would I explore it, taste it, even attend to the sound of this 'verbunkos?' And even if I mispronounced it, it was the word verbunkos that would leave this essay unmarked, unshaped and naked. The word already meant more to those in a Hungarian audience than to others. But it forced me with no apparent reason to think of Einstein and Holub. What are these ideas that are so rare that if a man, or a woman, hits upon one, he – or she – certainly won't forget it? It forces me to think of structured coincidence and the one idea so rare that it cannot be forgotten.

Here perhaps we should warn ourselves. Such rarity in language freezes us, thoughts take other unknown shapes, learning can go in circles. This is a rhythm nowhere more

illuminated than in the contemporary search engine. What moves us on, what pieces do we pull out from online sources to find this organic architecture nothing but a "chaotic torrent of internalized flotsam" (Steiner) unable to gain constructed form?[89]

From a note must another thought form. Must we stutter into theory which takes our inner thinking on? Google 'organic architecture' and what do we trawl. Well, quite a lot of course, but how is it of use and how much is it of use? What recognition do we have to acknowledge a wisdom of redundancy, an excess in language that is both infinite maxim and manifesto? We can paraphrase our trawling: Organic Architecture is an architectural philosophy that seeks to create harmony between human living spaces and the natural environment through design methods. This approach—sometimes described as a philosophy—integrates buildings seamlessly with their surroundings, making the constructed environment a coherent part of the natural landscape. When combined with local cultural traditions, it often aims to deliberately shape and enhance the social environment. How does our thinking rescue coincidence? How do we stop sliding into the mud of a fashionable nonsense that only words achieve?

Distorting the past, seeking out clichés and misunderstandings offers little. An unguided faith in the organic in the last century and correcting exercises of internalized brio are both suspect. We can observe in various encyclopaedias and anthologies how the following names would appear linked to this 'organic' architecture: Gustav Stickley, Antonio Gaudi, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Hugo Haring, Hans Scharoun,

John Lautner, Herbe Greene, Eero Saarinen, Bruce Goff, Rudolf Steiner, Gunther Domenig, Reima Pietilä, Hundertwasser, Imre Makovecz and, even, Laurie Baker. There are others in world architecture and the scattered collection can offer its own litany. To think this is a story we have failed to tell only underscores what was imagined in the past.

Critical approaches are not merely participatory, and more fragile for being so. As a learning arrangement released from our inner hold, they are contingent on what we know individually and how much of that is known and becomes an agreed (or not) relation between us, every one of us. This includes our ignorance. We might call it relational to start with, or we might not. We might invent new words for what we claim, but at the same time we must understand the vocabulary and language that has been used and abused such that it is no longer useful.

Internalised constructions may have allowed architecture to appear as if such critical games offered validity where work did not need to be understood, only celebrated. This is not so much the architecture of language, a title given a collection of Noam Chomsky's talks in Delhi, when he spoke of 'language and its design.' Always torn between topics, the temptation we have to write out our scratchings and seek coincidences might well be part of both the unsayable and the unrevealed.

(5)

Constructing a mind and then re-visiting it through neuroscience for example has an uncanny mystery about it, celebrating that

'prison house of language.' And just as new temptations keep gathering before we speak, just as I gingerly explore 'verbunkos' here with very little interest to take it forward, Bela Bartok comes to mind. We mention Bartok almost wilfully, a musician, according to Kenneth Chalmers, who "could produce a series of works in various genres without abruptly changing style or pausing to absorb outside influences."[90] Knowing that language does not set out to say what it cannot reveal, it may have been a mistake to claim anything more for this coincidence, 'verbunkos.'

If everything speaks (without always wanting to) – objects, buildings, music, history, animals, subculture – all can fall for a seductive narrative that shines brighter and looser. Legibility in the meantime returns us to nature! Was this why coincidence structures the coincidence, verbunkos? Eventually this must weigh heavily on our pride, our hubris until we ask once again of ourselves, what is worth knowing and why are we speaking?

Architecture for a while, certainly in the period of Organic Architecture, repaid the attention given both to legibility and nature, site and culture. The interpreting machine did its best to resist deep ontology, deep subjectivity and deep structure, holding out for the pragmatic, phenomenological and sensual. Landscapes could be scarred, and surfaces stroked to offer what the eyes already imagined. There was a feeling that signs were being built and embedded in nature in front of our eyes. In a joke that was around during that time: Schoenberg was not out to conquer nature, architecture was.

Makovecz knew why some people would wish to erase or ban his architecture. Speaking at the Nadasdy Academy in 2001 he always re-thought his own inner speech: “To me, in the time I have spent among you, everything that has been said about architecture, everything that people held to be important or special about architecture, was understandable. At the same time the things I have done were neither understood, nor loved. Many chose to hate my work and me as well.”[91] There is an imagined alchemy between the avowed, unrevealed philosophy of the architect Imre Makovecz and Bela Bartok! I enter this pairing again tangentially, fearfully. “Thought,” George Steiner writes, “may indeed be in exile. But if so, we do not know or, more precisely, we cannot say from what.”[92] I am now in exile with this idea of ‘organic architecture’ and Bartok’s ‘verbunkos.’

The coincidence continues to derail, and we look for the options to spin out the ‘organic.’ Our inner speech moves to outer forms, our flotsam moves to outer seriousness. Is there in some sense, George Steiner asks, “a poetry, a music of thought deeper than that which attaches to the external uses of language, to style?”[93] To bring back ‘thought’ into some fold, I caution myself with the words of the Sufi Al Niffari, “unchanging knowledge is unchanging ignorance.”[94] No longer worried about references and coincidences, how then do truths shift to be replaced by manageable realities? When do our architectures of thought become litigious as we desperately seek to clarify the argument? Tempted not to hold to one argument over another, is this the state of coincidence and dissolution we have been writing out

here? If we confess to some state of ignorance, crossing risk with experience might be a hidden strength to accomplish what is always approximate.

From our original coincidence, without confusing inaccuracy with approximation, we exist in a constantly changing condition. There is always a promised infancy in our own thought, rarely an explanation or a conclusion. It is as if we arrange Einstein to step in here, with Buddhism in our rear-view mirror: "If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism."[95] We are extending the same relief to architecture. Addressing this further we could take off from Vaclav Havel and a small text written in 1984 called *Six Asides about Culture*. Havel's opening paragraph describes both the thrill of re-assessments and re-classification, and the unknown that must and should occur when we return to live our ideas, theories and concepts anew. "While I consider it highly unlikely," Havel writes, "I cannot exclude the theoretical possibility that tomorrow I shall have some fabulous idea and that, within the week, I shall have written my best play yet. It is equally possible that I shall never write anything again."[96] This is a dilemma of commitment. Any committed and engaged thinker or practice that has developed even a single idea has long faced the agonizing shift of its dissolution. Earlier work and thinking, chosen vocabulary and selected meaning are all overtaken and – as we have seen here – eventually erased. To see this as refinement or maturity is a trick we play on ourselves.

There's no such thing as a coincidence, we say. It is a useful reminder to remember how 'coincidence' comes when we are caught between journeying to the centre of the page or the essay. If we are led to the mirror to see the Buddha looking back at us, momentarily we see ourselves, but the temptation is to wipe it clean, clear the misted and mystic frame as soon as we can. "Don't play the butter notes," Miles Davis once said to Herbie Hancock.[97] Don't fall for the obvious, he implied, remove the thirds and sevenths. Out of practice, out of the rehearsal of our thinking, make something else happen.

Words of warning also fluctuate as if preventing our awakening. Critically noted and often misunderstood, the 'organic' has had to constantly reassess itself whilst the organic notion today is held responsible for free trade coffee, meat and bread, the organic against the genetic debate, sustainability and various more or less save the planet movements, agendas and prognostications. "If there is a sphere whose very nature precludes all prognostication," Havel writes. "it is that of culture, and especially of the arts and humanities."[98] How, if we attempt to re-define our once familiar ideologies, even the unprecedented significance we awarded them, might we not do well to remain free from uneasy prognostications.

Prognostication in (self) critical terms means that we must go backward to go forwards. We must live gingerly in the present to dissolve the untidy hold we put on ourselves. "We keep expanding our body into the world," Michael Polanyi wrote, "by assimilating to it sets of particulars which we integrate into

reasonable entities."[99] Whenever we embark on new critical paths, we must advise ourselves against arriving at or confirming the easy entities we have already interiorized. That little known, sufficiently obscure but highly significant Sufi scholar, Al-Niffari may well be right: if the unchanging remains unchanged, ignorance travels to occupy its next niche.

How can we still aspire to occupy an unreachable and hidden 'organic' truth in all its discomfort? Buddhism invites us to be the one and other where we all write the same book and in architecture we make the same uncanny link, making all buildings to be about all other buildings. Never really represented by words alone or any theory, we might suggest we close our eyes in this new spirituality. All we have left in Burckhardt's terms is prayer: "Alchemy acts like a science or art of nature, because all its states of inward consciousness are but ways of the one and only 'Nature,' which encompasses both the wayward, visible and corporeal forms, and the inward and invisible forms of the soul."[100]

Are we able to challenge the unchanging within our internalised thought? It's not that we ever come full circle back to our alchemies, it is the spiral which is more enticing. If we return to the Sufis, Surrealism, Adonis and Al Niffari, to Titus Burck hardt we might understand our fragility: "If alchemy were nothing but a sham," Burck hardt writes, "its form of expression would betray arbitrariness and folly at every turn; but in fact it can be seen to possess all the signs of a genuine 'tradition',

that is to say, an organic and consistent – though not necessarily systematic – doctrine, and a clear-cut corpus of rules laid down and persistently expounded by its adepts."[101]

What with all these coincidences have we presented ourselves with here? This must recall that promised infancy that Adonis glimpses in the poetry of al-Niffari. "It is the text of happiness," Adonis writes. And if we think this happiness trite, we look again with closed eyes to test Adonis' thesis. "As we read it, we feel that we are escaping our tense conditions, since it closes the gap between the real world and the metaphysical, between man and the sacred, and dissolves the differences between man and God."[102]

Perhaps that's it – closing the gap between the real world and the other world, beyond metaphysics, where God and Modernism are not dead but killed time and time again. Alchemies, architectures of thought, are a precious internalised writing that remind us that truth is a longing that can exist only in that inaccessible or incomplete clarity which, to al-Niffari, is the complete obscurity in language.

By language, we mean here of course, the alchemy that exists beyond language in both the poetry and the architecture of thought itself. By language we also mean going back to the future and the Sufi tradition in fourth and fifth-century Iraq. Back to the mute and mutely. These early centuries of Islam saw the development of Sufism as one of the world's major mystical traditions. Although the later Sufi writings by mystics such as

Jalaluddin Rumi are known and available in translation, access to the crucial early period of Islamic mysticism has been far more limited. Little is known about the life of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn al-Hasan an-Niffari. An early Sufi, his name does not formally appear in any of the Sufi lineage charts. In other words, he is ‘absent’ but never erased. He wrote in Arabic not Persian and died in Egypt.

Al Niffari’s Book of Standings (*Kitab al-Mawaqif*) is a collection of what is known as ‘visionary’ poems. The “standings” are a subtle echo to our alchemies. Each poem or chapter refers and returns to a unique way in which we are made to bear witness: God, Modernism, Progress, Death. We have done the same in this essay, siding unwisely towards that mirror, from Nietzsche to al Niffari, and only ever hovering around an unwieldy term like ‘verbunkos.’ These poets, visionaries of their own dissolution, one too distant to God and difficult to grasp, the other too distant to the God made present. Both ask what we make and think to be present, lucid and alive in the Real.

Archives are interpreted, re-appropriated, re-visited and resuscitated; we could include the ‘organic’ in this. Hermeneutics still dances with epistemology and the soft phenomenology eyes up its own skin. Myopia burns its own ash ring. “In you is something that cannot be relinquished that cannot be turned away.” Al Niffari writes, “when you are silent of yourself the proclaimer must speak.”[103] Surely, we are not so far away from that point where we make ourselves real beyond the unreadable

community of proclaimers? How the Sufi and the Surrealist collide! We burn the archive, ban architecture and substitute it with new stories, new fictions for this century not the last.

Our alchemies and animated visions peg us to the wayward talent of the misfit, to the migrant thinker and absent dissident within us. Against architecture, our disquiet should no doubt have stayed away from such imaginary virtual worlds. The invisible now returns with no redefinition of the grand, divergent designs imagined and envisioned in the last century. When did this architectural divine take the other fork in the road? Are we as saddened as those before us, to see the public understanding of architecture as remote as it is today?

Even if infancy is always part of this narrative, how do we take charge of our own story, in charge of a life worth living? Risking familiarity, we reject the masterly control of scenarios already asking us to be still, to be calmed into a life already lived. Uneasy prognostications perhaps, a new alchemy will emerge. We leave the last word to Titus Burckhardt – "alchemy is neither a hybrid nor a haphazard product of human history, but on the contrary represents a profound possibility of the spirit and the soul."[104] That's our pointer, that's our story, that's our narrative, that was our coincidence. Wounded souls know the hard work is still to come. So Verbunkos! A redundant coincidence, rejected by its imperfection and journey out of the centre of this essay? There is no delinquency in any Buddhist remnant. In music, 'verbunkos' is a sequence of slow (lassu) and fast (friss) sections.[105] Slow and fast thinking?[106] By turns melancholic,

sensitive: by turns frantic, excitable. The music, poetry, and the architecture of thought. Never, never, in the pounding rhythms and varying repetitions, quaintly folkloristic, is this enough to erase this architecture. Verbunkos! we would like to shout.

Dissolutions is adapted from Think Gonzo, originally presented at an international conference called The Place of Theory, organized by David Leatherbarrow and Paul Emmons held at Silpakorn University, Bangkok (2013). It was given another form as The Gonzo Studio at Strelka School of Architecture, Design and Media, Moscow (2015) organised by Y. Grigoryan and M. Slavnova and, again, another version at the University of Alicante Polytechnic, Spain (2016) in association with Javier Sanchez Merina.

8

DISSOLUTIONS

Think Gonzo and then Apply it!

(1)

There is, at the end of Jean Luc Godard's film *Pierrot le Fou*, a situation where Jean-Paul Belmondo has wrapped his head with dynamite sticks. He lights a match and struggles to find the fuse. "Merde," he says, and the camera pulls out as the explosion takes place. Infinity, the sea, waves! If the conjecture that we are all subject to our infinite architectures of thought is to be useful, we might consider how if "every thought begins with a poem,"[107] (Alain) every thought must have an architecture lying in wait? Is this a form for our thinking somewhat at the side, brought in slowly or quickly, and not always having a logic to its seductive patterning?

After the endgames, the consolations, the intersections and alchemies around the turn of the Millennium, architects had once again climbed inside themselves. Architectural thinking, perspectives on theories and histories, had to go both ways; life was in reverse for some, life was still to come for others. Manfredo Tafuri became a ghost-writer, as inner speech was refuge and reading about architecture offered brief redemption.

Perhaps something else happened around the turn of the millennium. Less of a reminder of the construction of the mind, the consciousness of spent theory and writing machines, but

an understanding that this architecture might have, as Sartre says of philosophy, a hidden literary prose which would then include the ambiguity of any terms used. There were new avant-gardes that suggested architectural thinkers did not necessarily wish to escape any bondage that language held over their work. Instead, they wished language to support critical activities and theoretical operations that could be creatively deceived into adventurous architectural form. Architecture rapidly moved into a terrain which was not all about reading. Drawings and imagining architecture became a new thesis resonating with the choreographer Robert Wilson's approach to his work.

"I started working with different pictures that were arranged in a certain way. Later I added words, but words weren't used to tell a story. They were used more architecturally, for the length of the word or the sentence. They were constructed like music."[108] A dance could choreograph line, architecture could be visual theatre. It even became possible to think writing, theory and language could be drawn. Similarly, drawing offered a different way of patterning to create visual graphic effects that had content implied with it. "I wanted to put these different rhythms, these different ways of speaking in order to create a vocal effect." Wilson says, "I wasn't primarily concerned with the content. At the same time, it was there."[109]

Architecture may never have been primarily about content. Lines break apart, dissolve, morph and transform. Like a rock breaking apart, nothing dead in this language, architectural drawing is but a constant re-thinking of drawing codes. Some

imagine this as ploys to allay ambiguity, others use lines to clear the muddle of an internalised chaos. Creative deception is not lying, distortions are not always arbitrary. "Things aren't necessarily arbitrary," Wilson says, "but I can't say exactly why they seem to be so. I think it would probably have a logic of its own if you spend enough time to figure it out."[110]

If we spend enough time to figure it out! Around this time, to be invited to a conference on the *Place of Theory* it felt reasonable to jettison any text where a short film might be more appropriate. Thinking fast and furious, how could we generate and then situate theory in architecture and re-think our internalised muddle? Re-using Belmondo's predicament in Pierrot Le Fou there was an obvious title: *Existentialists can never be architects*. *They agonize too much!* The short film would make a serious point and would echo Hunter Thompson thoughts on 'gonzo' writing and what became known as 'gonzo literature.' Ultimately these thoughts would probably have very little to do with theory, or even with architecture, but it would resonate alarm, dissolve gloom and – echoing Thompson – shoot the speaker in the foot.

The third decade in this twenty-first-century was beginning to anticipate a new academic and conference game in education. Whatever the request, the urgency of many conference calls invites the language game. Each conference frames itself as if only this conference, this call, is the one that matters to architecture. Papers and essays juggle to be accepted by peer review as they contribute to varying architectural concerns and academic career

tables. There are of course – and this isn't merely a cynical note – those academics or participants merely wishing to tick off conference requirements for university careers. The earnest calls for more reflection usually suggests – knowingly or not – shared architectural discourse, ideology, bias and practice.

The language produced supporting theories and thoughts in these conferences often holds within it tacit assumptions. Double edged requests for a paper or idea produce a babble, the architecture of thoughts is fast and furious. Often carried out in haste with a mechanical stodginess, many papers offer infinite ambiguity couched in the wearying terms and critical vocabulary used. With the unknown deep within, there is always the dream in conference writing which becomes the dribble of an origin never quite present. Even without looking too deep, critical fictions and autobiographies shout from these wagers with words; this produces architectural theories with dusted forms. A world, then, to many 'beyond theory'? Sporting with the idea of an original thought and appropriation, unsurprisingly some critical wags have started to refer to all this as 'conference porn.'

(2)

Is it such a bad thing to gather together as academics and faculty, historians and critics, once more to trade insight and whimsy in the service of often rather tired and lustreless academies and practices? This is all of course 'merde,' but there is often an immediate filter to all these calls. We enter architecture's own meta-game described variously as 'after theory,' 'post-truth' or

even, more bewildering, 'post-criticality.' This trifecta offers professors, researchers, historians and instructors a fiction inevitably shared as education.

Where teaching has become performance, what then can we make of this 'beyond theory or better: 'merde' theory?' Is it a trap we create from our own inner speech, our own pasts and experiences amidst a world of accepted and expected knowledge? Instability has become to some a joyous contemporary immediacy, contributions re-think our prejudices and confirm our biases. Most of us have a disquieted, archaic soul. We were, still are, faced with unaltered realities in architecture that need to be re-written decade to decade. Many will be familiar with the idea of the grand scenario accelerated before it can even be written out. We could call this architecture's Prejudice Project.

Given that we often tell students that they must learn how to situate their own learning, thinking and experience, however immature or belated it might be, a conference invitation on the *Place of Theory* immediately registered. Recognising the aimlessness and collapse in our thoughts we might accomplish something more; as if theory and everything connected can be turned into a dissolved architecture, a thinking act of immediacy. As instability in the form of fake news or post-truth has become institutionalised, it proved more attractive to go off message and see how long this thinking could remain there.

The idea then around *Gonzo Theory and Architecture* was invented and appropriated on the run, on the fly, and yes, fast and

furious. Theoretical fireworks and dissolutions, a Gonzo thinking would connect to New Media, the Twittersphere, Blogosphere, Snapchat, Pinterest and Instagram. Not yet TikTok, but time was passing. An instant architecture would be designed only after it had existed elsewhere. This was not meant to hijack a serious architectural research conference that posed questions about theory, its role, relationship and fictions. Instead 'theory' here would be a constant shape shifter and it began to emerge during two airplane flights one summer a few years ago. The first from Venice to Manchester and the second from Frankfurt to Moscow. This was to become a 'feral architecture' of some wilding, an architecture of thought to dwell within, one which fictionalized the very best of our critical engagement. It was a theory set out to attract the best minds for the scholar's journey and reject any return journey. From the film Argo: 'if bad options are all that are available today, what is this the best bad option?' In other words, the journey out meets Mrs Dalloway. At least that was the plan!

With the triumphant loss of recognized and consistent critical voices in architecture over the last two or three decades, we have seen theory writing architecture and architecture writing theory. If life-writing is now considered theory, then was it not inevitable that critical writing would become world-building fictions? 'Message' is precisely what is grasped, blinked and jettisoned. Autobiographies or purple scented novels form a literature always straying away from the creative realm of the theories and histories of architecture. Has this really been as troubling as some claim?

It was impossible not to have Sartre's words in mind: "There is always in philosophy a hidden literary prose, an ambiguity in the terms used."[111] In the shadow of a delirious visit to the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design in Moscow, the conference beckoned. It was the time to invent something blindly; an idea, a subject, a title that was not only unknown but unpredictable. Gonzo! But as if sense intervenes immediately, in another way it became enjoyable to sport with George Steiner and re-word Martha Nussbaum from *The Therapy of Desire*; the content of the form (architecture) of this thought had to call in question the allegedly whimsical but no less, simpler thesis contained within it.[112]

What was the engagement here? Caprice builds up this thought; a wealth of phrases stubbornly researched offer the whimsy of a 'jargon-to-come.' Gonzo also coincided with the recent death of Hunter Thompson. Johnny Depp had prepared and eventually fired his ashes via a cannon into the air in the Nevada Desert. It was Depp who had acted the figure of Thompson in the filmed version of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) and remained friends until Thompson's death in 2005. The ashes launch idea was planned and drawn by Thompson who also supervised the drawing out of the architecture of the funeral. Staging the event cost about $3m:

"All I'm doing," Depp said, "is trying to make sure his last wish comes true, I just want to send my pal out the way he wants to go out."[113] Hunter Thompson, the one attributed to Gonzo Journalism, wanted his work to be read as it was being

written.[114] Immediacy scripted everything. Narrative busting, cross genre, whichever way you looked at it, this was fireworks; dissolution in practice. Selectively explosive, spectacular and redundant to some nations and countries, architecture used to be refreshing. In *Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas*, Thompson writes: "The only way to prepare for a trip like this, I felt, was to dress up like human peacocks and get crazy, then screech off across the desert and cover the story. Never lose sight of the primary responsibility. But what was the story? Nobody had bothered to say, so we would have to drum it up on our own. Free enterprise. The American dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it now: pure Gonzo journalism."[115]

We cannot help collide this with the explosive fireworks in these architectures of thought which we are trying to resist. So, what is the story? Thompson asks. Are we as delinquently subjective with architecture as we imagine the writer of *Fear and Loathing* to be with his own life-writing? Think Gonzo and then apply it; see it become thinking on the run, architecture on the run. Thoughts dissolve, and theory never still, never arrested, always liquid, always delinquent. Pull language out of the hat but which rabbit is revealed? Five years to invent complexity, map it and then watch a limiting academic venture dampen and then fade. The taper refusing to light.

Not quite having lived as close as Thompson to the dynamite fuse, what would it be to postulate a *Gonzo Theory of Architectural Immediacy*? Perhaps that's what we have now. An architecture so much on the run, traded through Surveillance

Capitalism, Post-truth, Extinction, Software suites, Photoshop and CAD? Wasn't the whole Twittersphere, TikTok, Pinterest and Instagram doing just this? Architecture, long an open source, now had its daily therapy, desire and delinquency. With a nod to Godard and Thompson, and thinking of the blessed modernity of late academics, wasn't that actually where Modern Architecture started, always in the middle of something else?

If the first task of philosophy, outside suicide, is always thinking on the run, we think architecture to think the world. And we think the world to think we can let our architectures of thought dissolve blissfully. In order to 'blast open the continuum of history,' to cite Benjamin, we might have to blast 'a specific life out of the era.' Gonzo would become a constant re-framing of theory and anti-theory. In an attempt to gain a sense of the world and our imaginary architecture, this deformed world delighted by deception sets the desert on fire. The limits and fireworks of critical thinking could but end up making the critical fictions we see in architectural education and practice today.[116] This, then, is our fireworks project; putting our own prejudice and redundancy before us and firing the ashes of all our modern education and gullibility into the Nevada desert.

Whether we speak of theory, in the widest even ambiguous sense of the word, whether we speak of situating our learning and knowledge, should we not also blast open this continuum? In the twenty-first-century, this has become the double life of architecture, those icons and fireworks that last less than required, more than designed, always dissolving. As the charge paper is

lit, should we not speak of dismembering any claims we might make for one belief over another, for one ideology over the next, or for one world view at the expense of another? In this era of 'post-truth' – the endlessly sliding, pluralising silky signifiers of 'woke futurism' – leads to a situation where architects keep insisting – often without speaking to each other – that they still have something 'original' to say. And if that indulgence is not enough for architecture, why do we still maintain that theory could do some of this speaking for us?

(3)

Theory, or any sniff of it in contemporary guise – whether unpacking Alain Badiou or Slavoj Žižek or returning to Jean Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni – seems to do us a favour we don't recognize. To think Gonzo might just help us realize how much we need to dislodge the reverie and reverence still awarded this or that selected theory. If we are in doubt at this explosion, we need only note the fallout and collapse of theory that enters architecture and the academy around the latest thinkers for architects. Whilst we all go in and out of a shared resistance to philosophies, we must also recognise how close we are to re-writing ourselves out in these lost and found traditions.[117]

The extent to how and why architects have persisted in creatively hijacking, re-appropriating and re-framing other thinkers for their métier has to be of interest to others besides architects. Most will know how the small series called Thinkers for Architects published by Routledge (London) has expanded. We have the thematic fallout of modernism – postmodernism

– post-structuralism – deconstruction – post-humanism – post-colonialism – post-feminism and so on. This is the diaspora of desired and undesired theory as therapy, writing as machine, as it collides with constructions so close to the brain that it hurts. Various eminent architectural educators and theorists (not many practitioners we add) translate – or as it is more common to say today – 'unpack' the works of Benjamin, Gadamer, Heidegger, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Bourdieu, Bhabha, Deleuze & Guattari and Luce Irigaray. A few other thinkers must already be on their way; why not Badiou, Žižek, Harman, Moret?

Here we can read how a nuanced or not-so nuanced re-appropriation of ideas and theory from elsewhere is slipped into architectural discourse, whilst practice and academy continue – something we still do not understand entirely – to speak more or less only to each other. Can we only feel part of anything like this if there is some agreed disagreement over basic philosophical issues and the fireworks that are packed ever so tightly for the performance? Some might consider this lamentable in that architecture struggles against continuity. Is there cause for alarm here? The very call to situate theory in architecture and use the more or less 'fashionable nonsense' of philosophers – some might agree with Alan Sokal here – might be merely another essential siren to a dismembered architectural profession. Does this not unreasonably take a swipe at the constant claims for the loss of proper theory, where 'proper' can of course never be so proper?

Is there a relevant theory, adapted theory, revised theory, immediate theory, you-name-it theory? Or does this rehearse the Thomas Kuhn versus Karl Popper battle from the last century! We might be more successful in resorting to the 'I Ching;' placing oneself in the changing universe, recognising aimless but continuous transformation without any need for justification. Here the I Ching would be our original architecture of thought, enriched from any source we give it. "In essence, the I Ching standpoint is," according to Richard Wilhelm, where "that non-practical spirituality and non-spiritual pragmatism are each as unbalanced as the other."[118]

When the Royal Institute of British Architects periodically set up debate on the future of the profession, education and practice, the Institute often situates their collective lament about architecture in a fast-paced capital-driven world. Generally, this can be interpreted as a catch-up gesture, where architecture lags behind the technology, neo-liberalism and other 'influencers' that are changing it. The *Age of Disabling Professions*, according to Ivan Illich, was "an age when people had problems, experts had solutions and scientists measured imponderables such as 'abilities' and 'needs.'"[119] Speaking about the end of an age of energy in the 1970s, Illich was predicting how much our needs would go on being met by illusions and professional design. Speaking of non-ideological minorities who may try to turn once again into a political force, Illich set out our future: "The age of Disabling Professions may very well close when these silent minorities can clarify the philosophical and legal character of what in common they do not want." [120]

Constant divination, oscillating between chance and the Western mind's reluctance to accept the aimless and the invisible, are always exposed in architecture. As indelicate balances are achieved between practice and education, institutes generally tremble at the nerve ends. North America continually sets the accreditation menu for tighter control on an architectural profession that has splintered and continues to splinter. Laments invoke China, both devil and saint, saving architectural practices in the West from collapse. Russia apparently offers a fast-paced new inter-disciplinary participation after the New Normal but will probably dissolve before the war they embarked upon is even documented. Africa offers new highways back to ghost modern cities and what some call a colonizing 'zombie' urbanism. Even worrying about architecture's lost privilege of those white imaginations can be theorized into the fireworks of immediacy where all this represents the polarity between light and dark, strong and weak, movement and rest.

If this anxiety and alarmism about theory continues ignoring the degrees of change, architects are likely to be in need of serious therapy and analysis. There is political, cultural, social and even personal trembling at the world's thinness. The virus chooses the language of recovery not transformation. Some consider this as evidence that things happen far too quickly for our political and educational institutes to be able to control. Even theories of delay and prevarication see other theories of deferral and procrastination catch alight.

Thinness, to some, has apparently become normalized, making out of us the belated, celebrated modern souls that will never catch up to the progress once imagined. The intolerance of intimacy, of too much information, is now consumed by words like spectacle, consumption, icon and fame. Fame, soon the only ambition, superficiality the deepest achievement! The skimpiness of garment and game is matched by a somewhat skimpier approach to theory, or so we are told by one or other of these eminent thinkers for architects. *Thinkers for Architects* is a series for architects and we assume students of architecture. The introductory copy from the publishers goes as follows: "Architects have often looked to philosophers and theorists from beyond the discipline for design inspiration or in search of a critical framework for practice. This notion of key thinkers holds both seduction and resistance. Yielding insight, some of these thinkers having already written albeit obliquely about architecture. The series works on the principle that there are significant texts, terms which need decoding and another expert who provides quick reference steps for further reading."[121]

The invitation could not be clearer: If you find theoretical writing on architecture difficult, or simply don't know where to begin, this series will be indispensable. In the spirit of *Gonzo*, a response to this cognitive invitation should tantalize us. Architects need all the help they can get! Perhaps yes, with a little more mischief added from beyond the grave! To feed this mischief, let us propose a thinker who might well never be included in the Routledge collection. The unlikelihood should not diminish our experiment.

(4)

In the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz we might set literature alongside a space and theory of immaturity. It is rather easy when reading Gombrowicz to see how other language games are re-inserted into the veins. Useful for us here, briefly, would be the thoughts and words of Gombrowicz in correspondence with the French painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet. These two men, an artist and a writer, are exchanging thoughts on art, writing, theory and culture from the mid twentieth-century. They both shared what can be termed 'low art,' both eschewing Modernist conventions in art and pretence in literature. They were trying to tease out quite another authenticity, adventures in form with a structured aimlessness.

Gombrowicz's work on 'immaturity' was weak thinking before *weak thinking* emerged in the 1980s. Dubuffet's 'art brut' tore into art too easily accepted for its extremity. Gombrowicz – as we would know from the future book *Gombrowicz for Architects* – had an ability to subvert all forms into patterns of instability, dissolution and shock. In *Correspondence*, he appears to be sparring with the Grand Dubuffet. It is Gombrowicz's response about the convention of painting, the tableaux, theories on the canvas, the nail in the wall and the manipulated art vocabulary and weak theory used about art in the twentieth-century that should interest us. As if a matador with a bull, Gombrowicz is grasping at the horns.

We should put exploding rockets around the next piece: « *Si j'étais M Malraux je lancerai un grand SOS, francais,*

francais: Méfiez-vous! Notre grand jeu de la penture devient trop encombant. Trop de peintres, de tableau, de musées, de connaissances, de critiques, de merchands, d'analyses, de discussion, de grandeur, de glorie etc. Trop. Halte. Assez »[122] If we allow ourselves a rapid Gonzo translation and re-appropriation for the thought being dissolved in front of our eyes, with a banal architectural licence, we might get the following.

"If I was Monsieur or Madame (insert here your architect), I send them a huge SOS. Architects, professors, critics, theoreticians, historians, scholars and gamers: don't lie! Our grand game of architecture and theory has become too heavy. Too many architects, buildings, museums, theories, connoisseurs, critiques, analyses, discussions, too much grandeur and glory for the few. Too much. Stop. Enough."

We might have as much fun as Gombrowicz used to have if we try to imagine pure Gonzo here. Should we ask again – as Hunter Thompson did, as Walter Benjamin implied – what is the story in theory and architecture, theory and education and theory and practice? Would this be wildly personal, the delinquency of folly not inexperience; a response to the subjective and punishing unsustainable spectacles we see in our emerging metropolises? What fireworks should we send up to explode and blast the continuum? Or do we have to drum it up on our own, so isolated have we become in the twenty-first-century?

The immediate and wildly personal – the middle finger salute? – recognises the danger of standing still. Does this

notion of immediacy in architectural consumption imply a return to fundamentals? Or is this a working re-definition of the fundamentals of the very present and subversion of form that Gombrowicz hails: Monsieur Koolhaas, Monsieur Gehry, Madame Hadid, Monsieur Ingels (to name but a few). Too much, halt, enough? Gombrowicz would undoubtedly support us in being hopelessly naïve and immature yet wish for a radical break from all the petulance in theories, reveries and theologies. Indispensable to architects (a new title for the publishing series?), Gombrowicz's subversion of the fragile modern literary codes might offer a provisional scheme for a continually re-situated theory. We are anticipating here the joyous understanding of epistemological and cognitive bias. Gombrowicz questions why we should ever hold onto theory, why embrace it, why caress this or that ideology? Why hold to banal reverie or negative or positive theology without being immature?

Revenge is never as easy as this language suggests but it may be possible to make a serious argument to guide our contemporary anxieties. The comfort of Gombrowicz is the consolation of immaturity not theory. Stemming mostly from the last century, we would be the first to understand the language games which still threaten to hold untold seductions for this century. We would be advised however not to put theory, theology and reverie together. The rapidity of any model we propose must suggest some danger and restlessness. If we adapt Gombrowicz's scheme as presented to Jean Dubuffet, we can imagine – as cheekily as Count Gombrowicz would have it – a *Gonzo Theory of Cognitive Bias.* For this, here are the two proposals and five

suggestions for the Prejudice Project in architecture according to Witold Gombrowicz. Alternatively, these might be the *Stop, Halt, Enough Proposals for a Theory of Immediacy in Architecture.*

The first proposal would emerge naturally from Gombrowicz's suspension of all studies in painting and above all the fabrication of more doctors and professors. We must acknowledge this as a 'deschooling' option. School may not be dead, but theory might be a corpse continuing to die in an architecture so dissolved. In this, the delicious comfort of disruption lies where there is life both before and after theory! Secondly, following on from this 'deschooling option,' Gombrowicz suggests 'institutes of verification.' These would be bodies of unsteady measurement not surveillance. Following Gombrowicz's hints, this would set up models to ascertain to what extent our admiration of architecture is fake and could not exist without signature. In the case of hi-end architecture, for the 2% production, this is the authenticity option. What makes it more authentic than the 98% that we know Mr Gehry has called 'pure shit?' To answer this, Gombrowicz would no doubt recommend cavorting with the tennis-playing modern girl, probably accepting the idea of inner Jenga whilst quoting Hegel and his thought of the day, "philosophy always comes on the scene too late?"

Without actuality, theory in architecture might always just be playing catch up to infinity. This might be its role where infinity is decoded for insights that lie between weak thinking and 'perception brut;' a Kristevan 'transfinity,' the polylogue

of desire and architecture. Categorizing these two directions offered by Gombrowicz as our new thinker in architecture – deschooling and authenticity – we might immediately answer back with our own insights recognizing an echo to two major theoretical thinkers from the twentieth-century: Ivan Illich, already mentioned and Theodor Adorno.

Gombrowicz, in his Grand-Dubuffet exchange, offers five ways to help re-situate theory in architecture and education. Further cues could emerge from the fiction offering the contemporary reader more understanding of architecture's fictional world. Deeper reading of Gombrowicz's subversion of form in the three major novels (Ferdydurke – Pornograpia – Kosmos) would pick at a new architectural landscape. In other words, picking at the sore of the inner thinking and deep structure behind 'immaturity.' We paraphrase and adapt Gombrowicz's five ways to continue this disruption:

> 1 The percentage of – pure and simple – snobbism. How much architecture could gain by this is obvious.
>
> 2 The deformation of education still carried out to the glorification of a very small amount of architecture; 2-4% of built production being accounted for by architects and/or professional bodies.
>
> 3 The deformation of enthusiasm – a clearer view of where the applause is coming from in architecture, and why?
>
> 4 The embedded, cognitive bias in architectural theory and critical thinking that continues – decade by

> decade, discourse to discourse – the imposition of the known, accepted and tacit theories and theologies in architecture. And finally:
>
> 5 To create – and this should resonate with all in this century not the last - an inventive poetics of distrust, suspicion, immediacy and uncertainty. In other words, using Gombrowicz as a crutch for an "accomplished nihilism.'

We'd be cautioned against thinking this fun and fireworks of little value. Hunter Thompson's ashes are now flying. Witold Gombrowicz ends his suggestion to Jean Dubuffet, *c'est à peine une esquisse* – it's just a sketch – but a rapid one. A thinker like Gombrowicz would naturally invite us to question our objective subject; words would be put into a spin nowhere better seen in the structure of Gombrowicz's plays and – especially – his immense Diary. Siding with Nietzsche, Gombrowicz was really talking about the inner game of tennis during the frankly embarrassing years of early Modernism.[123]

It would not be disastrous to suggest once more that any objectivity in architecture today is still that deep-subjectivity myth that it always has been. The non-representation theories that occupied the 1930s into the 1950s would be the disrespect necessary to take this forward. Gombrowicz would undoubtedly enjoy a short excursion into the world of Speculative Architectural Realism, jousting beyond the grave with Graham Harman and Olivier Meillissoux. He'd play his own Escher-like game with Gilles Deleuze. But *merde*, Gombrowicz would have said, "I'd

rather tie sticks of dynamite around my skull and collapse." Pfui…fireworks! Let Godard be the next in the series *Thinkers for Architects.*

Tell me your narrative and I'll tell you mine. Consider the opening of Vitali Vitaliev's *Life as a Literary Device*: "Nothing sort of death can stop me from telling this story. Books like theories remain unwritten for different reasons. "They can also be aborted,"[124] Vitaliev affirms. We've had our fun. There are only ashes now. We are in an era of the unwritten and the unreadable, as well as the un-reading community. It is hard to deny this. And it would be a mistake to think that any intensity in publishing over the last twenty years has meant a retrieved readership for the architectures of thought. How does it matter whether collective thoughts in our universities or institutes narrow into a controlling media discourse or an internal scholasticism? If there are untimely discourses on fashionable architecture, how much have we accepted that reading lightly is part of our thin soul on a fragile planet?

Let us remember this 'thinker for architects' Witold Gombrowicz conducted his private fieldwork in Paris in the 1960s. One experiment he took on with some humour was to find out if any of his acquaintances had read Sartre's Being and Nothingness. "By steering the conversation toward Sartre," Gombrowicz writes, "I would discreetly plumb writers and non-writers on their familiarity with Being and Nothingness."[125] Perhaps nothing the 'monstrous' Count Gombrowicz could do was done with discretion, but he was relentless in cutting through

the cant. “My research had startling results. First of all, it turned out (and this was not a surprise to me) that these ideas bounced around and meandered in French heads, but in a larval state, drawn from wherever they could get them but mainly from his novels and the theatre, absolutely murky, fragmentary, still having to do mainly with the ‘absurd’, ‘freedom’, ‘responsibility’, but it was clear that in France Being and Nothingness is practically an unknown work.”[126]

Absolutely murky! In the intertextual age this may be nothing new, and is periodically re-stated over the decades. But it is clear, so many of the accepted, listed and critical writings on architecture are becoming actually unknown, unread works. Even unwritten! Despite the brouhaha around spectacular architecture and any critical resistance to it, it is unsurprising that the architectural profession is often charged with the failure to be ‘contemporary?’

We begin to understand why, when architecture remains undervalued and in a larval state, ideas are endlessly fragmented and dissipated, scholarship weaves its own stories, and images are thrashed around until they are re-shaped for an architecture for sale. Link this with an arguable drift if not loss of serious critical vision, we begin to understand the concern then, in 1960s Paris, and now in the Third Millennium. If Modern Architecture (and all that goes with that notion, like Modern Literature or Modern History) still invites beguiling nostalgia, it still does not do what it says on the book covers; the ‘murk’ is immense.

Why then invoke the unserious within the serious – Hunter Thompson, Homer Simpson, Witold Gombrowicz and architecture? It used to be said some years back that it wasn't quite the time to panic but Gombrowicz would have understood this. It is time to panic, openly so, and to do this we may be helped by understanding the maladies of the architectural soul. It might not be that the place of theory is irrelevant to architectural practice and education today; it is far from irrelevant. It is what we do with the relevance, how we strike up ideologies like committees, and in our immaturity hand down unerring, aimless beliefs.

Beliefs, in a discipline always in anxious need of re-defining itself, are all well and good, but who are we in the shadows of that which came from the last century? Who are we to speak of a resilience to theory when we were running as fast as we could in that century, when we were digging holes and imagining wildly resistant ways to swerve from prejudice and bias. We might of course still be able to celebrate deep subjectivity and immediacy theory in other surprising ways. And we might, yes, again ask whether we need these thinkers from the grave as we yearn for resistant theories supporting a critical but immediate practice in architecture?

An architecture of thought in the world and of the world! We may have to take back what we have done. Gombrowicz hinted at this. We do not necessarily need to apologize for ill-spent time but rather acknowledge the games we have played on ourselves through language. Can we use Hunter Thompson's

Gonzo or Witold Gombrowicz and invent the next architecture after the one before? “To replace existence, with half-existence, or with the appearance of existence,” Gombrowicz writes. He is speaking here of Bruno Schulz, the author of *The Street of Crocodiles*. Must we again drum this aimless existence up for ourselves? We invent, hint at language that may offer us more power in ideas, whilst the swelling in the brain and that clinching of proof would defeat any novelist.

Architects have long looked to philosophers and theorists from beyond the discipline and grave for design inspiration, in search of that critical framework – the silver bullet – for their practice, academic or professional. Of course, there is much scholarship that tops and tails academic issues which is often accepted the more obscurity is decoded and re-scripted for architects. It has long been felt that serious architectural criticism has become adrift, lodged somewhere between respectable critical history and fiction. There is bemusement at magazines and journals and a search for signs of authenticity. Search the journals on architectural education and the titles are engaging, the essays often brilliant whilst the indexing and academic frippery are exhausting. But – and Gombrowicz could help us here too – something is disappearing in the dialogues we seem to continue to have with ourselves. Dark alleys come to mind! Machines offer us automatic writing. A lament for an abdicated critical responsibility or a useful alibi to appreciate image over text, places instinct over insight.

There aren't too many words, there are just too many ways of manipulating them, too many ways they remain unread and unreadable. Words have become secondary. Essential reading no longer exists as it shuffles between the executioner and the poet. In much writing about architecture, in spite of the critical brilliance that appeared in the last century, and the literature it truly emulated, there is a tendency now to rely only on the intuitive, an emotional blindness that can still announce a good building over a bad, a coherent city over an incoherent city, a grand utopia over the utopias of small things going on all around us.

"I shouted that I was neither a writer nor a member of anything, neither a metaphysician nor an essayist," Gombrowicz writes in Volume 3 of The Diary. "I was me – free, unencumbered, living… Ah yes, they said, so you are an existentialist."[127] What is that knack necessary to turn the thinker into one for architects, and the thought into architecture. Is it then left to our *Thinkers for Architects* to alter our relationship with language, thought and building? Are these unlikely suspects the ones to find the utopias of small things, disable the profession and improve our contemporary condition and lives?

The culture of the image and the repertoire of data and fragments suggests there is an inevitable tragic dimension to today's architecture. Paradoxically, intolerably murky this might be a malady that deepens when our tragic side coincides with the loss of vision in a culture surprisingly still seduced by 'image.' "Tragedy is the most closely theorised literary form of all,"

Stuart Walton writes in *Humanity*, "Life is indeed tragic, but we need to learn to let the specific occasions of our distress recede securely, one after the other, into temporal distance. Or as Homer Simpson more succinctly puts it, 'everything looks bad if you remember it.'" [128]

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96. Václav Havel, “Six Asides about Culture.” *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature 2*, no. 1 (1990): 43–52. https://doi.org/10.2307/743544. Jan Vladislav, ed., *Vaclav Havel or Living in Truth: 22 Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Vaclav Havel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990),123-135, Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane, intro. Steven Lukes, trans. Paul Wilson (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

97. Hoshswender and Morino, *The Buddha in Your Mirror*, Herbie Hancock “No Butter Notes (Foreword).”

98. Václav Havel, “Six Asides about Culture,” Václav Havel, *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965–1990* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 272.

99. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

100. Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, 27

101. Ibid, 29

102. Adonis, *Sufism & Surrealism*.

103. Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdi ‘l-Jabbar Al-Niffari, *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat of Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdi ‘l-Jabbar Al-Niffari with Other Fragments*, trans. Arthur John Arberry (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1978).

104. Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, p.9

105. Chalmers, *Béla Bartók*, 28, 70, 143, 154, 156, 183.

106. cf Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2011); Georges Bataille, *The Unfinished System of Non-Knowledge*, trans. Michelle Kendall, Stuart Kendall, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

DISSOLUTIONS

107. George Steiner, *The Poetry of Thought: From Hellenism to Celan* (New York: New Directions, 2014).

108. Sylvère Lotringer, "Interview with Robert Wilson," in *Schizo-Culture, Semiotext*(e) 3, no. 2 (1978): 20.

109. Ibid, 21.

110. Ibid, 23.

111. Sartre quoted in George Steiner, *The Poetry of Thought*.

112. Ibid. Both Sartre and Nussbaum form part of George Steiner's framing statements in *The Poetry of Thought*. Unnecessary to conceal this, but essential to enjoy the re-wording.

113. "Johnny Depp Spent £3 m Blasting Hunter S. Thompson's Ashes from Cannon, Ex-Manager Claims," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/feb/01/johnny-depp-spent-3mblasting-hunter-s-thompson-ashes-from-cannon-ex-managers-claim. The claim that Depp bankrolled the ceremony, which involved hoisting the cannon to the top of a 47m tower on Thompson's Colorado farm, had not been widely publicized until now. Other attendees included John Kerry, Jack Nicholson, John Cusack, Bill Murray, Benicio del Toro, Sean Penn, Josh Hartnett and Ralph Steadman. Yes surely that was the impulse. I wanted to collide this with as much abandon as I could muster to the place of theory in architecture. It was to be a trip, in all senses of the word delirious, adventurous, insane. It could not have any destination.

114. Michael Roberts, "Bobby Kennedy III to Shoot Hunter S. Thompson Movie in Colorado," *Westword*, December 15, 2016, https://www.westword.com/news/bobby-kennedy-iii-to-shoot-hunter-s-thompson-movie-in-colorado-8600233, accessed July 7, 2025.

115. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1971).

116. George Baird, "Criticality and Its Discontents," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 21 (Fall 2004/Winter 2005).

117. Robin James Mackay, ed., *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development, Volume III: Unknown Deleuze / Speculative Realism* (Oxford: Urbanomic, 2007).

118. *The Pocket I Ching: The Richard Wilhelm Translation*, ed. W. S. Boardman (London: Arkana, 1984).

119. Illich, Ivan. *Disabling Professions*. Ideas in Progress. London: Marion Boyars; Toronto: Burns & MacEachern, 1977.

120. Ibid.

121. *Thinkers for Architects*. . Book series edited by Adam Sharr (London: Routledge, 2007–2025).

122. Witold Gombrowicz and Jean Dubuffet, *Correspondance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

123. W. Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Tennis: The Classic Guide to the Mental Side of Peak Performance* (New York: Random House, 1974).

124. Vitali Vitaliev, *Life as a Literary Device* (London: Beautiful Books, 2009).

125. Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 3 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 91.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

128. Stuart Walton, *Humanity: An Emotional History* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), 7, 143, 160.

Part 03

Dissonances emerged from the paper Retention Deficit Disorder (RDD) delivered at IPAC International Conference, Sushant School of Art and Architecture, Gurgaon (2019).[1] *It was published in a revised form in Veranda, Journal of Art and Architecture, SSAA (2020).*[2] *RDD is an invented condition yet to appear in the latest edition of Millon's Disorders of Personality.*[3] *The text began from a morning meeting with a university librarian discussing the bewildering ways young students were treating the library. It was possible we should have been talking of the Library of Unwritten Books, but the dialogue fell somewhere between Richard Brautigan and Dr Johnson. Librarian and professor proved unable to communicate or retain (in) comprehension.*

9

DISSONANCES

Cognitive Shifts and the Cult of the Fact

(1)

Returning to something read almost 40 years ago, the relevance and redundancy seems to slide into the thrill of strange recognition. We become strangers to ourselves, in order to reveal readings and obsessions we once thought so highly of. We ask ourselves how much did we get right in the ideals of reading our future through the words of others? What are the books we misunderstood to arrive here, what are the dissonances and deficits of life reading? This is the reading forwards and backwards that Vitaly Vitaliev describes (*Life as a Literary Device*) from the Russian writer Yuri Olesha. "He says that when he was young he was reading forwards meaning that most of the literary heroes were older than him…whereas when he grew older, he started reading backwards, for he had become older than most of the protagonists and was subconsciously comparing their experiences with his own."[4] How does this remind us of the conceptual shifts in our thoughts that dreamt the future when young, and dreamt the future past when not so young?

Speaking of a 'conceptual shift,' we wonder now where to place them in our life. The Scottish psychologist Liam Hudson comes to mind and a book probably creatively misunderstood so many years ago, *The Cult of the Fact* published in 1972. "The causes of the conceptual shift must lie," Hudson wrote "... not

primarily within psychology, nor in the catalytic influence of neighbouring disciplines, but in the more general cultural shift in our attitudes to authoritative knowledge."[5] It was – albeit misguided – the assumed authenticity of these conceptual shifts as authoritative knowledge that probably stayed inside me whether travelling or teaching for over 40 years.

More recently, recognised now as dissonances and deficits, these shifts seem to return when I found myself in an early morning meeting with the Head Librarian of a Canadian university. I had gone there to discuss what I thought were the shortcomings, selective bias and limitations of an online survey. The survey was seeking to find how students were – or not – using the library. Like teaching performance surveys, these surveys were generally only as good as the reductive questions proposed. These definitely worked as tick boxes, multiple choice answers that could then be computerised. They also served as vague cognitive fragments that passed as fast as students blinked. But blink they would.

Generally, when faced with these surveys, I would tell my students to answer in any way they liked. I even suggested that if they so wished they could challenge the survey by inventing their own questions. They could even spoil their online form as if it was ballot paper. Most students never did. Possibly there was just a huge indifference to such questionnaires which recognised the results would be interpreted from the data in whichever way the researchers preferred. But each year with tiny variations, on the way to a tamed, authoritative knowledge, one of the questions

would be: “Did the professor provide an easy, simple way for the student to understand the issue presented?” Another question reinforced this and picked up on this age of immediacy: “Did the instructor make it easy for the student to learn and retain their learning? Was it presented clearly without ambiguity?” And so on.

It was the phrase ‘easy to learn’ which struck me as I became more and more interested in accessibility and the implied retention of knowledge. Given that in class I often discussed ambiguity, clarity, instability and uncertainty with first year students of architecture, engineering and design, retention clearly was not quite as simple or as reductive as an online survey might suggest. The students often laughed, realising this was only one of many surveys they would be completing in the next four years of their university life.

(2)

I began to talk to the librarian about these surveys and wanted to know what use the institute or university might wish to make of them. What questions was the institute asking and why? How many times do you visit the library? How many books do you loan out? Not we might add: how many books have you downloaded from Russian or Ukrainian internet sites? How many books have you scanned and shared with others? How many books did you buy this semester? Given the difficulty in spreading the value of a personal library that has been a major concern in the last two or three decades for teachers and universities alike, I was

particularly interested in the reading habits of students today. What was, is, the role of libraries, in their immediate access online world?

As we engaged each other, professor and librarian, the latter mostly listened and jotted down things. I began to sense 'drift' and I quickly began to shift my concern to what ideas he might be jotting down? It seemed the wrong time to speak of the librarian's 'architecture of thought.' But what topics or questions could take us forward; how in our conversation were we moving on from idea to idea, discarding or re-introducing? In relation to reading habits, I mentioned Late Reading, which seemed important though I had yet to pin it down. This was not reading or re-reading books, which has become a luxury for some students and an irrelevance for others.

Late Reading was what I imagined as stuttering on a book which 'got through' despite the students' difficulty to engage, despite the deficiencies we bring to contents far beyond us. Was this not a useful stuttering through learning into knowledge, I suggested to the librarian. Had it not always been like this? Do we, I prompted, access and (re)select some material, ideas, theories at a late or later stage in our lives? What would this actually mean especially to the teaching of architecture and design? And was this lateness (or belatedness) an invention of my own or was it something shared in a more general sense? After all, how could a student who had not been introduced to certain texts or ideas – seminal, canonical or not – be considered late to them? Were they hacking knowledge for their own 'ease?'

Given that I knew there were all sorts of devious and inventive ways students got hold of books, source material and resources, I was interested in the librarian's view of the 'hacker.' I introduced the idea of "the hacker ethic;" an idea that was nearly two decades old. *The Hacker Ethic* was the title of a book from a Finnish philosopher Pekka Himanen from 2001.[6] It had a foreword from his close friend Linus Torvalds, the inventor of Linux, the Open Source operating system. The writers were discussing the spirit of the information age. Thinking back, not backwards, I should have prepared the librarian with the summary.

For example, the unspeakable one provided on Amazon – surely that would have been sufficient? Where a fragment of scattered knowledge becomes authoritative without further questions asked?[7] Was it worth paraphrasing this, and stretching connections into strangeness? As we went into this in a little more depth, the librarian seemed to be unaware – or underplayed – the idea of the hacker ethic. That this might already have led to ambiguous developments in relation to knowledge, source and access seemed to be ignored. Issues of appropriation, sampling, plagiarism, replication and creative stealing surely were older ethical issues and not merely applicable to us or our students as digital beings.

As we continued to converse, I drifted. Our meeting was mutual but terminal. The trouble with being digital, I began to think back though E.M. Cioran's aphorisms and fragments, *The Trouble with Being Born*. "Buddhism calls anger the 'corruption

of the mind', manicheism 'root of the tree of death.'" "I know this,' Cioran writes, "but what good does it do me to know?"[8] I was tempted to continue with the librarian and move onto Jonathan Lethem's essay on 'The Ecstasy of Influence' but it didn't feel like the right moment.[9] Why I was not sure! Was there no right moment in this estranged knowingness?

In the void between the book, the journey to the edge of the page and source, the librarian and I were now precariously out of control. In an 'Open Source' world that we denied daily. What was happening to us, the library, in this digital void? Is it even correct to call it that? What would any 'woke futurism' have to do with this? Perhaps the librarian thought, like many, that the Internet only makes deficiencies and re-appropriation easier, rampant even.

Whatever the librarian was thinking about in the underworld of libraries and informational systems, for me the sampling and appropriation of ideas, theories or stories was not new. And it wasn't new in architecture school nor in Modernism still taught as the authoritative narrative structure for students. Collage, montage, loaning, trawling, surfing, cut and paste – whatever new vocabulary we hijack – are passed off as part of our cognitive struggles and reach deep into the design process. Ideas in architecture school are and have always been invented, tweaked, plagiarised. Capturing the imagination and mimetic deployment they may have done so, as Jonathan Lethem writes, "without compensating the source."[10]

Precedents or existing models offer inspiration, deficit and departure for sensitive analysis, re-thinking, appropriation and adaptive design. Ultimately, clever or not, many designs are served up as a new cuisine and coupled with the meme machine of architecture, identified almost two decades ago. But as the university library still had endless shelves of books, still had people ordering coffee and tending them as in a battery farm, re-placing, re-stacking and re-ordering them, it was to that I turned.

Where were these meme warriors, these students, these non-aggressive *Bodshisattvas* inside their head? I asked if he knew how students worked with books today? What did I mean, he asked? I went on to discuss the notion of working with a book, annotating a book, dialoguing with the book, inserting oneself in the pages and voids of the book. I positively frothed at the excitement of lost marginalia, a dating backward to go forwards. And so on.

Undoing the book! I thought this would be what librarians might know about. How do these young student-warriors really work with a book today? Did they loan them, scan them, took photos of them with their smart phones? Not only that, how did they actually work with or against a text which had become an image? Does serendipity meet smartphones? How do we map our reading, skimming or non-reading? Do we have any narrative within us to connect present reading with past reading? Or has such activity almost disappeared? “It all seems so brief today, so immediate,” he said. I thought he was going to blink and

say it has all gone! As if brevity was all our conversation could manage. What happens to content then, I asked, not expecting an answer as we had become strangers to our own communication.

(3)

Strangers to our own communication! Why were we meeting, why were we speaking? I had long given up the idea that meetings at the university offered any succour, such was the murk between academy and housekeeping. If there was a measurement of dissonance between the two, a 'glum' or 'murk' would do. 50 murk, 100 murk, or more. Murk would surely be a more precise word for the ambivalence and darkness that slides across these two activities.[11]

But there was something surely to share with this librarian. If so, what was I sharing? How was I going to retain our conversation? Afterwards, after an hour together, I immediately jotted down the nature of our discussion. These were merely notes in a notebook. Illegible to anyone but myself, but this was my retention system. These notes become a recalling device. They were a list, at first, not yet a spatial mapping. Anyone could see from the notes, the headings were in boxes and other texts alongside. Listed out as an aide mémoire, these were perhaps moving toward what is now called a listicle.

Entering the Oxford EnglishDictionary in 2016, from publishing, journalism and blogging, 'listicle' is a term to describe the short and shorter form of writing out that we see everywhere. The list as a thematic structure differs from a list. A

listicle is usually expanded or fleshed out with hardly sufficient writing – or copy as they say in journalism – to be accepted as an article. 1000 places to visit before you die; 1000 Must-See films; 50 buildings that you must know; 30 Second Architecture; 10 Ways to Survive a Rhinoceros Attack; Existentialism with 10 Espressos. And so on. This was my meeting listicle:

1. The Optimistic Pessimist
2. Retention Deficit Disorder
3. A Space of Reference
4. Late Reading
5. The Hacker / Ethic
6. How to Work a Book
7. The Liminal Model / Space
8. Authenticity
9. Accessibility / Source
10. Plagiarism

Of all these, the nature of an optimistic pessimist seemed more relevant and important at this moment. Was I just gaming with a ridiculous idea that we have in our brains, besides our inner speech which is never really communicated? Was this yet another fragile architecture of thought? And climbing back into ourselves, are we constantly assembling and dismantling

cognitive structures in our cherished 'semiosphere?' And do all these thoughts inside us remain a comforted autism, making up what I was ridiculously calling an inner Jenga.

Here for me, lost in conversation, was both the opening and darkness of the world today – the uncertainty with or without a virus. "If disgust for the world conferred the sanctity of itself, I fail to see how I could avoid canonisation."[12] But this is less Cioran's disgust and more a glorious lightness. We were in the *Steppenwolf* of contemporary gloom. Redefined by Hermann Hesse in 1961, in a prologue to his well-read novel, Hesse pleads ever so gently with the reader. "In most cases the author is not the right authority to decide on where the reader ceases to understand and the misunderstanding begins." Hesse was talking in terms of the 'murk,' the dissonances between grief and needs. He begs the lightness to be read in the darkness, happier if we realise the story of Steppenwolf "pictures a disease and a crisis – but not one leading to death and destruction, on the contrary: to healing."[13]

Perhaps this expression was the vitality in the present between the librarian and the professor, one that we do not know how to interpret. It was somewhat easy to be obsessed today by this negative positivity. The word Corona for example has been all that is needed to plunge us into delinquent alarm and become inglorious exiles. But this is nothing like canonisation! All this fallen inner Jenga and inner speech was not shared with the librarian.

I felt the meeting was lost, my autism sovereign. With nothing to say, intimidation and silence became passive. New playbooks had taken over. Certainly, we could probably link this warrior darkness to negative theology or the invitation to a new global hospitality. Keats certainly comes to mind, and I do not know why I didn't mention it to the librarian: "I mean negative capability," Keats wrote in a letter in 1818 to his brothers George and Tom, "that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties. mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[14]

Could we not recognize the joy – occasionally – of our thoughts having no destination? That invitation to speak with a lightness about what cannot be spoken about. This could have revealed that we too – librarian and professor – were not immune to these precious and disastrous conditions of post-truth, and the troubling post-critical we find in this 'misinformation age.' But the librarian and the professor couldn't find anything like an ecstasy to share.

In the whim to go even more internal, I was reminded how another reluctant philosopher, Winnie the Pooh, might have suited our moment, possibly a more appropriate and, to our students if not librarians, accessible reference. This is the way Pooh speaks of turning all negatives into a plus. How do we do this? We take the honey. And we also learn to play in the puddles. When life throws you a rainy day, Pooh offers, don't mock the Buddha, play in the puddles.

We don't lament the rain; we live in both Koan and Haiku! We turn fruitful the grief of the present, the needs of the past, and wonder when the matters of spirit will catch up with our own dissolution. The librarian hinted about what was happening for many students faced with a digital world. Born into this, teddy bear and tablet, nothing is new, he said, when most things are all available online. Things – *les choses* – via Google or any other search engine occupy all available headspace, he suggested, but do they even know what and how they wish to check, and why?

For me we are already born attached, in media res, a scandal that Emil Cioran would scratch through and try to erase: "Detachment then should apply itself to getting rid of the traces of this scandal, the most serious and intolerable of all."[15] Do we teach students to set out on this journey, or have our curricula become random patterns from the teddy bear to tablet of an authoritative knowledge? How is this both a positive and negative space, I declined to ask. And how do we learn to swim in these uncertainties and frailties without lamenting the negative so often? Was this not a space, when opened, has us navigate through all sorts of other, often dangerous, second hand information?

(4)

What is this space that has replaced the books many teachers still try to use? Is this a space of danger, dissonance and reference? We guard our cherished second-hand information, as they represent traces, gossip and advertisements for other souls. How, I asked the librarian, could there be a reference space

when for most today, especially students, the world of reference is instant, and immediately accessible? And what of reference turned into experience? Do we still have a role in this fragile transfer? And if that is accurate, and a near addiction, how do we choose what we refer to? Do we take what our own instructors said years back, do students take what we say? Do we believe our curricula, programs, outlines, friends and peers? And if so, how do we recall what we think we have learnt, or been taught? And what of our inner Jenga, all those curious incidents that make up our own autistic narratives?

The librarian and the professor had become detached; they were in the jargon of failed philosophy, post-narrative and intolerable to each other. We would only have to recall the archdeacon's words in Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*: "The Nile rat kills the crocodile, the swordfish kills the whale, the book will kill the edifice."[16] How, then, do we recall anything today? How do we remember what we have read, seen or witnessed? Even if we wish to take back a distorted history, take it inside our thinking, what of these distortions which will re-frame new inequalities? How do we know what we have forgotten? To hijack Viktor Hugo, engagement could stymy us, whilst the warrior memes will now kill architecture, just as the digital will kill the book!

The riddle is enticing as always. How does this build experience on our existing experience; how do we layer our lives, editing in and out all sorts of relevant and irrelevant material? How do students retain what they receive in class? Who becomes

their voice and why are we still speaking on behalf of them? Does our addictive digital world lead, as many claim, to new addictions, new disorders?

We will always have the newest words creeping into the Oxford Dictionary (2018). Take Nomophobia: meaning the phobia, the fear of losing one's smartphone and the panic that ensues. It is official. Oxford says so!! No Mobile? No-Mo-Phobia! Of course, by the time this essay is published it will no longer be a phobia! Just as Virus Urbanism or Quarantine Urbanism will soon be set in place in new but deferred Post Covid worlds. If our world of reference is instant and accessible – online – how then, do we choose what we refer to? Does print now follow online density, hysteria and conspiracy theories? It is worth repeating: do students take what their instructors say, or believe their friends or peers?

(5)

Sensing this as an issue in education and practice, I coined the term Retention Deficit Disorder. In trying to break through in the meeting, I found myself asserting to the librarian that this was an actual disorder. I don't know why but I was trying to break the ice. "You know the disorder that is now being defined?" I said,, "You know, the one trying to understand the lack of retention in education today. The one soon to be in the next edition of Theodore Millon's *Disorders of Personality*." I paused. "It's called Retention Deficit Disorder."

He nodded as if he knew all about it. He was probably nodding to agree that it should exist if it didn't. I felt somewhat disingenuous and wanted to apologise immediately that I may have duped him. This was an appalling 'architecture of thought,' a disgrace! Reprehensible! I accepted dishonesty but convinced myself that this was a serious disorder that should exist. Even if it had not been defined or reached a public consciousness, I felt it should.

Was this a fragile invention for a future reality where retention and recalling – or taking back ideas – would become flimsy and eventually unrecognisable? Perhaps our brains needed what is designed into many cars today: an advance collision warning. A device that digitally takes over car or brain and literally drives it out of any impending collision. How would we do this with information and learning, with virus, inequality and catastrophe? A device that intervenes in the smartphone and prevents disorder? Or prevents abuse, misuse, fraudulence and distortion? Artificial intelligence! Fantasy? Not so sure! Corona Governance might get us there faster than we ever thought.

There was something Zen about this too, getting old and forgetting to be ashamed about one's errors, or alarmed about a lifetime of misreading. A monk apparently asked Ummon: "What is Buddha?" Ummon replied ''Dried Dung." In the Gateless Gate, Ummon tried to hold his school with dried dung. And his teaching, we are told, was just as useless. Nothing to hold onto, no deficit or dissonance where none intended. Retention Deficit Disorder, was nothing if not new 'old' blindness?

Of course, I wasn't really coining a new term, I was merely taking off here from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Defined as a behavioural disorder, ADHD includes symptoms such as inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness. We think we know about the lack of being able to concentrate or stay in one area, yet this probably affects more of us than we like to accept. And do we not usually deny this, thinking – as adults, as parents, teachers – that it does not affect us quite as much as it did. Because we have grown out of it! This is misleading.

Many of us naturally fall into the comforts of thinking we grow out of instability to find the logic that guides us. Many think that it is only the teenage-student brain that is rampant and more open to this lack of concentration, to the scattered mind and the serious instability of daily living. We think we know all about the scattered mind, yet neuroscientists are now busily trying to re-frame this divergence. They are undoing our autism and building our new inner Jengas. A recent study by Dr Frances E Jensen and Amy Ellis Nutt called *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults,* might give us clues about this hardly-new disorder.[17] Even if we think there may be a connection to something like ADHD there is no intention here to consider 'retention' (in the educative and cognitive sense) something more liable to affect the young.

Zen Buddhism had to intervene at some stage. Students are not the only ones struggling to retain aspects of what they are

taught and what they forget. They are not the only ones failing to link their learning to what we call bodies of knowledge. But is it only teens who, as often claimed, are not thinking things through? Are they the only ones absorbing and consuming information at such a pace to receive Zen gratification: "in the blink of your eyes you have missed something."[18]

"The chief predictor of adolescent behaviour, studies show, is not the perception of risk, but the anticipation of the reward despite the risk," Dr Jensen writes. "In other words, gratification is at the heart of an adolescent's impulsivity."[19] Anyone who has witnessed the grade fetish, bullying and hysteria around in education today knows what we are speaking about here. Is (instant) gratification only an impediment for the young? Are teachers so sure about what they have retained themselves and what they have forgotten? Methods of retention and teaching which need revising during class and after class certainly require new pedagogies, new models. Do we know what makes up our own bodies – architectures of thought – if not some form of deep autistic gratification? Online or not, are we sharing or indoctrinating?

Perhaps this coined condition called Retention Deficit Disorder will eventually be validated along with other disorders on a spectrum of dis-attention and de-motivation. Perhaps it will be a disorder wider than any serious loss of focus only amongst children and young adults. The deficits though may not only belong to the students. Many of us recognise this loss of

retention. It is not a privilege or curse only of the young. Nor is loss of retention only subject to the irrationalities and risk-taking of the teenage brain. It is present in each one of us.

Each of us answers a call on the smart phone, listens to someone speaking, even the Government, and selectively chooses what to take in, what to listen to, whether this is called multi-tasking or not. It goes on many times in the day, as studies show. Daily checking smartphones has become an almost seamless activity. For the teenage brain, apparently the figure is somewhere near 300 times a day and climbing. For the student in their 20s slightly less at 250, and for those in the mid-range of life, 150. For the elderly maybe less, 50 times a day. But these figures are unreliable, and we would be cautioned to think they merely confirm the thesis: the young retain less of what they are taught today.

(6)

Elders of all types, with their dress and comb-overs, announce that those coming after them have no theory, no anti-theory, no post-theory, no wild theory. They also have no history, it is claimed. One question remained. How can we – or our students – exist ‘after theory’ for example, when we or they haven’t even experienced or learnt to practice theory? At what point has this essay gone ‘gonzo’ and become redundant to the very words it is employing? Novelists face this stage and respond to it within their narrative. In other words, let the birds pick the words clean.

In this general alarm and fatigue, it is somehow the thinness of today's youth which takes the brunt. From generation X, generation Y to the Millennials and Z Generation, to the Covid Generation; all those with damaged thumbs, eyes for sale, SMS mind sets, Snapchat and Instagram. And those Twitter philosophies of the instant? The younger they are it is rumoured, the easier they fall for the seduction of a president or celebrity playbook. Are we so sure about the warriors? Contrary to what the elders think, the Damaged Thumbs do have theories, they do possess a critical immediacy, and will re-write this century however much we do not understand this. This might be Gonzo in essence and it might be happening in front of our sim-extracted eyes.

Today these 'theorists' who say goodbye to things, who re-invent minimalism know they are as empty as we were. They search for clarity, they jettison and reduce, all the while hoping an entirely new and unique story presents itself. Kenosis, this might not be, but narrative becomes secondary as self-worth is re-discovered. It is easy to think that as fast as things change that there is no need for a narrative to pass over. But if this stage has not yet been reached, Artificial Intelligence is likely to get us there faster than we realize. For some, in the twenty-first-century, the story telling has finished. Is this a vitriolic vision or a realization that any meaning where once intended and arrested will have to drift?

Psychology is relevant to us here to the extent it examines the nature of retention and tests the validity of the assumptions

used in making sense of the world about us. Let us close this small invention called Retention Deficit Disorder with one coined by the psychologist Liam Hudson. You have to love a psychologist who gets there before many others, and then sees the re-writing and appropriation of ideas once held return in another form. In *The Cult of the Fact* (1972) the psychologist created Hudson's own law of Selective Attention to Data. Selective attention to data? Haven't we always resisted what Hudson outlined in his assessment of research in psychology in the 1970s? To follow Hudson,[20]

> The greater the ideological relevance of research, the greater the likelihood the researcher pays selective attention to the evidence collected.
>
> The greater the ideological involvement, the more an extreme posture is adopted and the more strenuously is the appeal to external authority
>
> Research not only reflects political stress but contributes to it
>
> A psychology which is both relevant and dispassionate is only possible when preoccupations are included as part of the psychologist's explanation.

We rarely test the validity of our own assumptions, and we seem to hang on dearly to the selective evidence we choose for our body of knowledge, these architectures of thought that tremble with rectitude. All of this we may recognise contributes to the culminating wisdom of education and maturity. If it is indeed a culmination. The Corona virus has blown this out of

the water. Extreme positions contribute to political, cultural and global distress. We have clever ways of skirting our own preoccupations which we call selective editing. Political playbooks are the weakest form of retention today. This is the seduction of being right, unstable and then re-editing our own brain to confirm what we already think.

Coming closer to home, in education, what might this disorder represent? Are the deficits obvious when we put Retention Deficit Disorder alongside Hudson's Law of Selective Attention to Data? Both seem to be subject to what management consultants call Confirmation Bias. In other words, we select that which will confirm our thinking as it is already, whether in an alert or forgotten state. How do we do this, live with this, in a personal or global crisis? How do we retain only that which we think confirms the patterns, ideologies, beliefs and 'right-thinking' ideologies already accepted, embedded in high school patterns, or in the university? Does this follow Hudson's Law?

Here we close by bringing attention to the patterns, assumptions, preoccupations and ideologies of our teachers. For our purpose here we will define RDD as follows: the consistent ability to attend to, receive knowledge with little or no retention and absorption. Is this an ability, a gain or a loss, the deficit of distraction? Is absorption possible and what sort of absorption existed in schools in the last century when Modernity just could not be shaken off? I suspect there was similar selective learning where assumptions, appropriations and preoccupations guided

the ideologies of the day and guided our endnotes; endnotes to the future, research outlines, publishing schemes, seminar themes, insinuations and deficits. Listicles.

The library too will become part of the healing references that can insinuate themselves back into the abandoned and forgotten study of architecture for example. At any stage, dissonances will provide the necessary meander to redact, take this or that out, or leave this or that in. Dissonances will collapse architecture onto writing and writing will re-script architecture. Inner Jenga, did we say? For such irresponsible meanders in architecture and writing, no better reference than Joseph Brodsky in Watermark, where Venice, the city that has constantly disappeared and re-appeared in maps, must be considered one long negation, one long meander.

"Somewhere along the line," Brodksy writes about hotel mirrors, "I even developed a theory of excessive redundancy of the mirror absorbing the body absorbing the city." The net results, Brodsky concludes, is obvious, "mutual negation". Dissonances could also guide us to lost narratives; a tempered thinking and writing that could deflect readers away from the normative volumes that allow our universities to award Masters, Doctorates and Tenure; the types of volumes that measure research and meander by endnotes not endgames.

The university like Brodsky's city, "is narcissistic enough to turn your mind into an amalgam, unburdening of its depths."[21] Who then neuro-maps, draws, speaks of retaining architecture?

Will this disorder actually be verified within the next few years as digital learning and access saturates our educational spaces? As we move into this post-viral world, let's end with a drawing – 'drawing off' and 'drawing down' – where a 7-year old girl demonstrates the memory and fluency of her gymkhana horse ride on a Post-it, no more than 3" square.

This is a spatial text-drawing, whatever we want to call it. It relies on a model of knowledge and language that fluctuates continually between fluency, redundancy, absence and infancy. Hudson would smile at this. But the drawing captured by this young girl is the idea which always begins in the middle of something else. A gymkhana ride? In media res: memory, direction, deficit, required skill and narrative are all contained in the instant (un)thinking precision of this downhill drawing. Uphill writing, downhill drawing, an architecture of thought, dissonances so cunningly deployed as design.

10
IRRESPONSIBILITIES

(1)

Losing interest in word and world has to be given its place in any conjectures. Deciding how far is too far can lie beyond us when thought offers us respite from the ridiculous. What then pulls back the ridicule on the thoughts and consciousness built? Much hope is then put on conjectures transformed into architectures of thoughts, possibly even isolated but operative nonsense. Language eternally the victor in that war where losers win?[22] At least that has been our narrative so far. "What is a man like in all his actions?" Richard Niebuhr asks in *The Responsible Self*. "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?" [23]

Some three decades ago appeared *Writing Architecture* (MIT, 1989). The subtitle was *Fragments, Fictions, Fantomas – an architectural journey through the Twentieth Century*.[24] By exploring the work of the Finnish architect Reima Pietila, I attempted to construct changing critical realities; truths, fragments and phantoms that not only interpreted a remarkable oeuvre but engaged itself in the thinking – the architecture of thought – of the century itself. Within the multi-layered book, with

extended footnotes and endnotes, lay also an alternative critical history of Finnish architecture. The footnotes were the writing of an impossible book; a book that would deschool and dismantle the educational institutes, the professional codes and the media control that had – for some decades – all but marginalized 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 wished to read and position a singular narrative for 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 Pietilä. I started to explore, openly and generously, what I imagined as a soothing memo.[25] 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 thought and mind (assuming one might know a little of this) whilst at the same time indicating issues about interpretation, 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 else was more pressing.

I had been contemplating for some time the notion of *The Irresponsible Self* in reference to our critical actions, options and any truths we may wish to award the thoughts we keep shaping. Was it possible to engage in a running collaboration with the architect's archive, much of which I had also been intimately involved with myself.? At the time the Museum of Finnish

Architecture had instigated a re-assessment of the architect's work, through the archive made available. What became obvious in this exercise 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 – possibly – un-supportable ideas, even conjectures about the architect's thought, mind and work. It was precisely this aspect of seduced critical fictions and the optional interpretations which became the main narrative of *Writing Architecture*.

How could one set out specific but fluctuating logical reasons for these critical options? Any thought used in writing this book had to have a parallel adventure; nonsense was not so much footnoted but alternative word-worlds had to contest each page. No agreement for this critical strategy was sought. The main structural idea embedded in the book was to offer thought shaped into options; a restless and relevant reading of the architect in society Ultimately it mattered little whether many of these issues were read, aired or even noticed. Circumventing responsibility by refutations, responsibly or irresponsibly splitting conjectures into new deserts of meaning appealed much more. Many architects and critics at the time in Finland, 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. Impossible perhaps to ask a book to be encountered with the same spirit of conjecture and refutation as it was written. To assert another critical history could have emerged would be to attempt to become a victor amongst losers.

As an irresponsible self, treating the intense nonverbal worlds of this architect held another critical responsibility, one both unmeasured and unmeasurable. The architect presented an issue which Lev Vygotsky captures: “We are therefore forced to conclude the fusion of thought and speech…is a phenomenon limited to circumscribed area.” The architect thus occupied in deep nonverbal worlds, thought language, a shaped thinking, and wrote architecture. “Nonverbal thought and non-intellectual speech do not participate in this fusion and are affected only indirectly by the process of verbal thought.”[26] Speaking of inner thoughts as images in the mind, the architect would be

Damasio before Damasio: “the brain maps the world around it and maps its own doings.”[27] Not a remarkable statement unless – for the architect – the brain also maps its undoings. Images in minds mapped into their own undoing, this too could shape architecture. The nonverbal world married the society; there was always something homo fennicus in the architect Pietilä that found it difficult to be homo dialogicus. Any critically reflexive work like *Writing Architecture* would map these undoings, reveal the dilemmas of image and non-intellectual conundrums. To suggest though that a lost critical history and pedagogy might be embedded within an ‘unreadable’ book is clearly less important than the more obvious point that architects and their critical circles found no opportunity to take on a fluid critical condition.

The method of writing seen as one of scattered incoherence missed the structure laid out across thought, image and language. *Silence*, a master narrative in Finnish society, could turn into

protection and quietly muffle the work. However to some the framework interconnected between thought and mind, a new morphology resonated. A Dutch critic identified this method more succinctly: "according to the author, this antimethod 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 three 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."[28] Critical noise clearly has more frameworks to offer us this century. Nonsense is all re-scattered, recalibrated and hitching onto Damasio, "the maturation of neuron circuitries in each brain is also seen as subject to selection pressures resulting from the very activity of organisms and the process of learning."[29] Re-evaluations begin to accomplish new divergences, upset mind and self, thought and language. But – as commonly heard less and less flippantly – what do we 'know?'

To talk of critical repetition, and any 'truth' or 'post-truth' a book might have projected, may only serve to deflect a poor critical field. A more generalised apartheid and critical narrowing within the Finnish circles could be interpreted to have mirrored the response analysis process defined by Niebuhr.[30] 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 critical undoing 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 trace this in the critical histories and interpretations on the work of many architects. Alvar Aalto's reception in Finland and abroad follows precisely these stages. To ignore – the condition of recognition but silence – is usually the opening salvo in any unreconciled critical condition that disagrees in some way with the text(s) or work(s). In a society where the nonverbal becomes for some a 'culture of silence,' a domain is protected within and without, by the ethics of selected and manipulated consent. Agreement is familial, silence is then sociologically recognised as creative defensiveness, an accepted self-censorship. Allowed to go unchecked, accepted, untouchable narratives appear as uncritical rectitude.

We are well aware today that very little of what we write in books or essays on architecture 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. Thought shapes resistance and ridicule. All books writing out conjectures offer interpretations that can be accepted or then erased; reading drives and defines undoing that becomes our own. This contract, like editing within the mind, constantly shifting these architectures of thought, might be an early autism (Vygotsky/Piaget) where any logic is not deferred but fights to remain nonintellectual. This is a condition which fights for its infancy, promised only when resisted. Can a book invite this condition of plurality allowing the reader to consider the conditions and conjectures that make

up new conditions, new discoveries? Where the reader refuses to be narrowed to accepted pasts and known futures, but occupies the condition of response itself?

In *Writing Architecture*, language is considered a pre-writing, and the architect shapes architecture from thoughts which finds palpable ways to reject any verification. The architect bypasses any search for truth in the process that builds itself. Truth, and this has been reinforced in the recently-coined wearying term, 'starchitecture,' naturally takes second place to those options scripted for realities and validities awarded different forms of architecture and even architects. Often value and originality are juggled by historicising context and conjecture, with the lingering emphasis on the lone genius, the sacred or enchanted idol. It is futile contemplating whether this is still critically acceptable, as it continues to build mementos of built and buildable form. We might recall the measured exercise to re-appraise the Finnish-USA architect Eero Saarinen, once considered the joker in the Modernist pack. Gradually as the open condition emerged, where interpretations became variations, conjectures and critical reversals, the 'quintessential modernist' label could be shifted. Lapsing into a reductive subjectivism offers no real advance on the agreed fields of such professional classifiers. In this case the 'marked' critics, professionals and academics could turn and burn both ways with Saarinen. The responsibility we might look for then is only one made up of both the personal and institutional exchange. This response is 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 twentieth-century, and not only in architecture. If the believing backwards continues, it may well be one repeated this century too.

(2)

Recently researching Sufism in more depth it is difficult not to be attracted to the notions within Arab poetics – without much lateral thinking at all – that allows us a way to reenter Reima Pietilä's world once more. Adonis al Said in linking Sufism to Surrealism (al-Sufiyya wal Surriyaliyya) offers a caution. "I hasten to add that the intention of this research is not to say that Sufism is the same as Surrealism or that Sufism has had a direct influence on Surrealism because it has been longer established. The intention is, rather," Adonis says, "to confirm that an interior world exists, which is invisible, unknown and inaccessible by logical or rational means."[31] From this connection and caution by Adonis, how can we construct unreachable, if not incomprehensible, connections?

All of us have had that moment in a Search Engine when it answers back and does the thinking for us. Amazon, Google, Fnac, Abebooks, Alibris Books: our inner world is being interfered with. Variations on: 'we notice you have bought this or that book - other people have bought this or that book - which happens to be similar to the book you bought'. Therefore Amazon or Fnac or another 'recommend' this or that book. Ad infinitum, until you are returned to the very first book you bought. or consulted. And there, something in the search engine brings together 'sunlight'. Links made to the unknown archive of the architect who often

spoke of the surrealism of his architecture. Links made to the unknown archive of the Islamic world. In the recommended books, the figure Al Niffari jumps out: *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Quran, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (Classics of Western Spirituality) by Michael A. Sells. *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat of Muhammad Ibn 'Abdi 'L-Jabbar Al-Niffari with Other Fragments*.[32] The Search Engine is insistent. Surely you must want this connection. And just in case you are not sure, someone waves or flickers at the right of the website. Favourite booklists for your consideration are supposed to compare reader with readership with consumption.

The fever of the (Finnish) archive has turned back on itself. The future knowledge is there in front of us, automatically asking us to build up another archive in our thoughts after the archive we thought we had let go. This is Umberto Eco's library in waiting; all the connections and books we are yet to read. References are unpredictable, yet the accepted critical commentators are invoked and the ideas we began with are confirmed by our disciplined scholarship and surfing. This is the spiral, no longer uncanny, no longer reassuring. The 'new' word-worlds of Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou can be re-introduced into a study so achingly laboured that it invites us to close the very archive we open. So left field, so reprimanded we swerve and hazard more risk. Yes, this is the automatic archive we cannot deny any more - Muhammad Ibn 'Abdi 'L-Jabbar Al-Niffari and Reima Pietilä. Then Al Niffari's poem appears on the screen, "My Time Has Come" from the (recommended) *Book of Standings*, and from my own awkward intimacy with the

architect Pietilä I insert what he may have done had he lived to see the Internet take over the Archive. Undoubtedly grasping this poem as a trace, only to dwell within its language and thought, only to undo it once more.

Words were not sacred, original or untouchable to Pietilä, they were commodities, part of the impure exercise, those creative echoes to be re-incorporated into one's own corpus, to make an architecture of one's undoing. Here were the innocent hints turned into the unsteadiness called architecture. The architect-alchemist's motto is the Dadaist's motto too, just quietly falling short before criminal hysteria invites serious delinquency. How many times will we say this? Distortion is life-blood; myth is truth. There are always other stories, other narratives open to us. Surely it is our duty to mine these unknowings at our known risk, not that of careers or institutionalised delusion.

To upset the cerebral and the visionary that has already pre-scripted our future.[33] Undeniable and wanton connections to bring the architect into 'Arabic' focus from Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *Early Islamic Mysticism* to the *Poetic and Theological Writings of Al Niffari*. "The words also appear to be having an internal debate about what the world is discussing," Adonis writes, "it is as if Al-Niffari has seen them, then unraveled them stitch by stitch, then re-stitched them… Al Niffari's writing takes us into a world of promised infancy…"[34] This is no strange leap to promised infancy, anymore than it is linking the alchemies to architects undone by incantatory mysticism. Adonis' analysis of Sufism and Surrealism offers a direct link to the architect's

constant re-construction of an architecture of thought. That search within a changing yet infinite desire of the nonverbal, language before sense makes it nonsense. To speak in spirals allows one to make deafening jabs at re-constructing the cosmos from both nature and language. To lose sight of difference, to lose sight of civic courage, intimacy, vulnerability and strength would, I suggest, be a mistake. Pietilä lived architecture as life, seamlessly, to the extent it is perhaps difficult to recognise. He saw nature both blindly and clearly.

"It is not the fear of madness which will oblige us to leave the flag of imagination furled." We must remember Breton's words "It is enough to allow these questions to be asked to appreciate the fragility of the evidence of those who are no longer among us."[35] Pietilä's inner thought included unknowing and infancy; it veered towards the Sufi's pull and desire to explore the inner nature of thinking itself. Here the collision is: the seen, the unseen, the verbal, the non verbal. Here the imaginary constructs what of that which can become architecture. None of this should come as surprise to those who listened to Pietilä's own soothing memos about his architecture,[36] ranging from contemplations on the Pope, nature, the Finnish poet Paavo Haavikko, Wittgenstein, Schwitters and Frank Lloyd Wright. There is every reason to believe he wished to remain within this condition of constant unrest and uncertainty.[37] Resonating perhaps with the comforts of uncertainty, the open secret of Jalaluddin Rumi:

Today I'm out wandering, turning my skull

Into a cup for others to drink wine from.

In this town somewhere there sits a calm, Intelligent man,

Who doesn't know what he's about to do![38]

When Adonis writes about the Sufi Al-Niffari, he 'writes' the architect out. An architect never particularly interested in the concept of any exact dialogue or exchange. Approximation ensured that communication drifted always from inner to outer, and then returned. Such diversions should warn us against thinking we know the mind, even the 'architectures' that remain within the inner speech, only occasionally making an outside attempt at wider communication. It's an open secret! This is a Sufi direction, a thinker's direction; the flaneur, the Surrealist, the Situationist. There is architecture to re-thinking itself which became inseparable from movement, from the procedural aspects of thinking. Often transferred to the 'literal' notion – not necessarily a copy but a transfer to architecture – we see representations of instability, incompletion, and unrest. In Sufist terms, the architect can be as simple and as complex as this:

My light will reach the courtyards

and what is beyond

Eyes will gaze upon me,

hearts will gaze

Adonis writes on Al Niffari: “doubly estranged from both poetic writing of the time and the language in which it is written. It lies outside the norms of poetical and cultural practice. It practices other ways of seeing, writing and expression and forms different links between language and the thing, between the name and what is named, and thereby overturns the conventional literary system.”[39] Substitute architectural system for literary system. The text is doubly estranged. As the Sufi writes with no preconceived notions of the meanings of words or the concept of the word, the architect stuttered similarly and procedurally. In flux, his identity was created in an abstruse way; his architecture became part of the way thought gave expression to the ‘wild’, retrieving the identity of his own departure from any established system of signs. Here he consciously played into the hands of those who recognised only the mystic. Not only close to ‘alchemy’ then but the very intimate ecstasy of never quite being understood, there is a sense too that the ongoing difficulties created could be used to aid and abet any understanding of the mission set in architecture.[40]

Like Al Niffari’s writing this architecture “examines the movement that allows the separation from the field that the have already been exhausted and allows communication with what has not been named, with the unseen.”[41] We could go even further, a creativity which “lies in the manner in which he reveals the obscure relationship on the endless universe – which is infinitely obscure.”[42] Re-script the *Absolute, the Unity, The Seventh Function of Language*, the one with all, and the all in one, cross this with nature and its unsettling rhythms and we

have this architect's consistent exercise. This is not The Grand Code, not a religiosity, revelation or apocalypse, as much as faith, blind faith in the knowledge of the unseen crossed with internal adventure which has to be communicated if but to rehearse the incomprehensibility its architecture preserves. Ask from Pietilä – or any Sufi for that matter – more logic and reason than this and the 'infinite', incompletion and indeterminacy fails. The Magus never really spoke about anything that wasn't an allusion. His 'truth' (if we wish to consider the beguiling, detached 'truth' of a poetic manner) always lay in what was not said, or what could be said in another way. Condemned to unreachable language became a delight, always recognising the mantra from Wittgenstein could collide with Rumi and be re-translated endlessly: "What we cannot think; we cannot therefore say what we cannot think." The Open Secret?

Lovingly locked open, architecture as the infinite is narrowed for that moment of looking passed difficulty. This can last as long as creating and achieving a building from thought continues, 'thought-lessly.' But then it might not; in which case abandoned projects pile up, drawings remain and the achievement one of compromise, impurity and underachievement, instead of inner undoing and desire. The "standings" in Al Niffari's *Book of Standings* is subtle echo, one which any architect knows well, when each poem or chapter refers and returns to a unique way. That confronting way in which he is made to stand by God. Niffari, the poet, the visionary, the one too distant and difficult to grasp suggests God is made to be present, straight, alive in the Real. Not so far away surely does that place us from a

public loss in architecture, which gnawed at Pietilä's attempts at communicating his ideas beyond the unreadable community of architects. The death of God, Modernism and the Earth! What real use then we must ask is this puzzling critical game; how the Sufi and the Surrealist collide. Muhammad Al Niffari got it about right:

> In you is something
>
> that cannot be relinquished
>
> that cannot be turned away
>
> When you are silent of yourself
>
> the proclaimer must speak
>
> In everything is a trace of me
>
> If you speak of it, you change it
>
> Put remembrance of me behind you,
>
> Or you'll revert to the other-than-me,
>
> between you and it, nothing.[43]

(3)

Writing Architecture began as an interest in the relations between moral philosophy, undoing and critical writing. The notion of critical options, ethical actions within criticism and the realm of

unequal critical fictions in architecture, was part of the precise, yet purposeful multiple messages offered the reader. Interminable interpretations invited obvious deflections; inventions and conjectures, personal, academic and fictional set up both narrative and anti-narrative. Even the title, with its graphic hint at difference, immediately set out the potential oppositions and collusions faced between these two activities when writing down an architecture of thought. Writing/Architecture mirrored the process of homo faber, man-the-undower to man-the-maker, moving to man-the-proposer (not answerer). Or in this case this was the movement of experience and interpretations mirroring the way thoughts gather source, any source, to re-interpret, transfer experience and shape into architecture. Obeying a logic of invention that entertains, of course, the arbitrary, the accepted, the known and unknown conjecture(s), the 'apparent' falsity or untruth is contested. Dimensions of existence that may have made up the architect's life in all its contradiction, its coherence-seeking structured incoherence. Unnecessary to invent a dialogue or a monologue, anyone who knew the architect was aware of this.

The introductory citations in *Writing Architecture* – one by Paul Feyerabend – indicated this approach to a series of options. One of the early essays – *The Spidership* – explained this inter-connected world of fantasy, fragment and fiction with the history of ideas, mostly in the twentieth-century. The clash of juxtaposition within an interpretation of the architect's own history and reception to ideas collided then within the writer's world. This was reinforced by the visual titled *A Fortunate*

Chronology. 'Fortunate' for the time the architect had to establish his position and work in the twentieth-century, and 'fortunate' to be able to inhabit and undo many disciplines in the 1930s and 1950s which opened up to other arts besides architecture. Graphics too played an important role in this process where Invention (inventive conjecture) engaged within a critical world.

Always a response to a response, a writing full of conjectures and refutation would be an accurate response; one inviting that 'difficulty' of pinning down Like a butterfly's wing on a cabriolet. There was a fragility and vulnerability in the inventive movement of inner thoughts and ideas, where 'difficulty' was entertained on every page.[44] 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, the architect's work and writings had already been approximated and generalised to suit the various critical terms available, some appreciative, others mostly derisory. Writing could then not avoid the irresponsibility of critical framing; an invitation to reflexive thinking within 'writing' and 'architecture' had to be accepted. Taken a step further it was natural to consider how this framing could make, rebuke or steer any interpretations made. Narratives about this or that architect as they veer toward critically accepted interpretations depend, as any scholar knows navigating critical fields, on the source, previous knowledge and response and the way these aspects are freighted and valued. Naturally then to take this 'difficulty' further, the menu in *Writing Architecture* set up a process, which in itself represented another archive. Conjectures set up this way allow them to be refuted, re-scripted, denied

or further supported. That was the very nature of the journey, epistemologically fragile at the same time navigating what we consider facts. For the nature of critical invention could, if the book 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 in his critical piece in the Finnish national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. He describe it the book's 'welcome and challenging irresponsibility'. It was a book, he said in 1990, that he may 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 writing against the 'over-responsible, at times repressive' Finnish society. Perhaps the writer still stands by that statement: "I suspect the book will awaken some malice," he wrote "because it is irresponsibly fine." One or two other Finnish commentators 'clicked' and understood the irresponsible 'invention' and its relation to the invented critical, possibly fictional world at the time. Not a critical field of study then seen in architectural circles, it did however exist in literary, cinematic and anthropology studies of reflexivity and meta-history. Besides Kemppinen, the Finnish poet Paavo Haavikko and architect Antti Veltheim sensed this.[45] Another commentator in Edinburgh understood the notion of critical options and remaining passive to be receptive, accepting and working within the critical paradox.

Late in his life Bruno Zevi said he had re-discovered the book. He told me he hadn't understood *Writing Architecture* at

first. He found it difficult (and irresponsible)! Only later when something else, something random but direct, was revealed to him could he approach it. Perhaps the 1990s changed Zevi's reading habits too, he saw the familiar once again undressed. The Dutch critic Wortmann understood and discussed this undressing; the impossibility of the fragment (another word for 'conjecture') could restate the labyrinth whilst appearing to offer conventional analecta and interpretations. Many of course, and I knew this, would continue to see obfuscation and difficulty, incoherence and deferral. That was a risk necessary to take. When *Writing Architecture* appeared, the architect knew this too. Pietilä constantly recognised the slippery danger, the 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, reminding us of Cioran's point: "Lucidity is the only vice which makes us free – free in a desert."[46] From the outset there had been a natural and clear sense of serious irresponsibility in this critical invention and the logic behind the conjectures. It was nothing short of nihilistic. unethical position taken inside the critical act. 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 in the very critical frame that cancels out ideas? This, too, is a common reflexive trap but one which had to play within to become a book like *Writing Architecture*. Hence this notion of 'irresponsibility' emerged sharply once more. *Writing Architecture* had to reveal the obvious acceptance that if an architect could knowingly set up

plural narratives, self-correcting and alternating methodologies, how could any descriptive practice gain space and mind? What effect would this have on mind and architecture? Would this inevitably result in a formidable inner dialogue, a disclaimer to the self? Would this solipsism avoid any network ruled by critical fear and prejudice? Reconciliation may always be part of the critical process but is never totally achieved. If so, then it is often lifeless. This meant the architect could naturally play with 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 the writer. Open here to possible cynical calculations, there was however not a 'scent' of cynicism in the architect's body or mind. He saw an architecture of thought as constantly reflexive, constantly an outsider on the inside of any contention.

This was a labyrinth shared as *Writing Architecture* became another version of endless undoing. This flux supported an archive accepting some closure whilst compelling itself to go against any archive in planting clues for an unknown future. Ultimately the book then became part of the irresponsible self that seeks unmentionable and unrevealed dimensions of existence in the critical act. It is more than tempting to close with the following words from Niebuhr and challenge why the book is not "infinitely responsible in an infinite universe to the hidden yet manifest principle of its being and its salvation."[47]

Fallibilities continues to echo and refine some of the collisions and issues presented by the continuing endgames

and endtropes in architecture. These with Buddhist shadowing have emerged as new ‘phenomenologies of the end’; theories of post-truth and extinction. We now live in endgames which we selectively edit and navigate; we know the progress traps that make up these. We re-tell stories we are trying to feel good about again.

11

FALLIBILITIES

Stories we are trying to feel good about

(1)

"Do you believe in the life to come? Mine was always that."[48] From Beckett's *Endgame* to an architecture to come. It was always like this. To have no precise idea of an architecture to come – post-Covid – might be our strongest gambit. To join the professor of perhaps we might accept how the ellipsis designs any future for us to take back. In our architectures of thought may lie entangled folly but not humiliation. Sometimes we stumble across those who can be as generous to us as we think we can be to them. Some of these are known to us for short periods but that hardly matters. We recognise within them a quality which emerges from everything they do. When such people die, we attempt to go on with our lives as if nothing much has happened. But, in fact, the deception is great, and we adjust internally in more ways that we can recognise. To have no precise idea of something is not necessarily an undirected or unwanted thinking. It is not necessarily a thinking without any destination nor a thinking without value. Nor can it be said to be redundant thinking. In today's world – especially during war and after the pandemic – the possibility of reflecting on issues, personal, social, political and global, has become essential to anyone wishing to feel alive. Inequalities have never been more challenged and challenging. Nothing might be more essential to our survival than knowing how much we may have been tricked?

But how does this happen and why would we be interested in this cognitive minefield which we might be generously, if naively, calling the 'imprecise?' I say generously because the terms we are more used to hearing today – as a lament for master scenarios and a return to normal – are superficial, even inane.

The new normal may be the latest cognitive device to imagine, in this recovery language we have, a part to play in all this thinking. The laziness which this suggests does not give us much critical confidence, but it does – to go by recent alarm – let others once more take over our world. This we cannot allow. Only in this endgame of architecture if we consider the challenging echoes given the past, does such an impasse make sense. In this moratorium where thinking is individualised, there may be a natural nihilism to evade direction in our thinking. If only to buy some time! But why would we wish to postpone any direction our thinking might offer us? Why assuage inequality with defeat? What, in this contemporary architecture of misaligned markets, designs our future? Does this not fly in the face of almost everything we are taught to believe from childhood; think clearly, speak plainly, be concise and, at all times, be as lucid as possible.

"I use the words you taught me," Beckett writes, "If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent."[49] Education as it emerges out of the pandemic must be challenged with the same: teach us other words or let us be silent. Whole glossaries have to change. A fair contract? There is of course the contrary. We attempt to direct thinking towards

the preferences that comfort us, abandoning that uncertain or 'imprecise' life, to compensate with some behaviour that we think is far from delinquency. "Meanwhile," the Trappist monk Thomas Merton wrote, "the most wonderful moment of the day is that when creation in its innocence asks permission to 'be' once again, as it did on the first morning that ever was. All wisdom seeks to collect and manifest itself at that blind sweet point."[50] The pandemic offered that blind sweet point. If our undirected or imprecise thinking is not lazy, wasted thinking with no destination, we might better consult the architecture of our own uninflected thinking. For this we might turn to the film-maker and writer David Mamet's notion of juxtaposition in filmmaking: "The shots have nothing to do with each other. They are not a record of what the protagonist did. They are not a record of how the deer reacted to the bird. They're basically uninflected images. But they give the viewer the idea of 'alertness to danger' when they are juxtaposed. That's good filmmaking."[51]

Good thinking may be like good filmmaking. Juxtaposition of one thought against another – the relational act – might be key to any process that allows an undirected thinking that moment of calm when it comes to rest, when it achieves alertness in our minds. When it re-shapes inequalities to know new discoveries are possible! "When the intuitions are linked together, the mind believes it is thinking, even though it is moving from one metaphor to another." Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher was a thinker who worried the architecture of his own loose thinking into its own precise form. And he then gave us shelter in a language to live inside that form: "A psychoanalysis of

objective knowledge consists precisely of throwing light upon those loose transpositions. In our opinion, one has merely to place them beside one another to see that they have no real foundation, but simply rest upon one another. Much of our thinking has no right to exist when it has no real foundation, but it does simply rest inside us with nowhere to go."[52]

Much of our thinking has nowhere to go, though grasping this does not imply a dive into nothingness. Like Bachelard, we may have long mourned this psychoanalysis of objective knowledge, that lost enquiry which throws light upon loose transpositions. Is this a way out of the impasse that doesn't construct another illusion, is this the inequality of war, pandemic and extinction? This uncertain or imprecise thinking might be that necessary nihilism, that poetry of a calculated aside. It is neither as superficial nor as thin as is often claimed. Images have often taken the fall for language, as if there is less substance in the easily imagined and assembled. It's simpler than that. Either we trust that our rumours as stories are disposable, or we shift the truths to prevent our futures being equally fragile.

(2)

The endgame of course has by now become comfortable and repetitive. For some it is the only existence. There is no time, no history, no life outside the brink, outside the cliff-edge. Hyper-individualism invites people to act like countries where human thought narrates its own existence, and tell the stories it wishes to believe in. Flooding, a pandemic, war, climate change; can we imagine abandoning our narratives to fall back from potential

extinction? Racial inequalities and spectacularly wronged histories keep repeating the chokehold. Yet we freeze, thinking withdrawal allows us to remain without a story and survive. And architecture? How can we accept the looseness of our thinking when we do not expect the looseness in others, or then – worse - condemn others for stupidity? How do we, lovers of the danger in human thought, those of us seeking to abandon the agony of uncritical theory and political blindspot, understand the arrestingly new thinking that has no time to become authentic? Have we learnt anything from this century that is now clearly not the last, modern, twentieth-century? Is this about to usher in for us an endgame survival where we vampirize each other's thoughts, stories and narratives?

We struggle to take these narratives along with us whenever we travel. We have begun to leave the weather behind; our mental climate is responsibility enough. Places where our thinking does not arrive, as we resort to the paradoxical games asked of others to ensure our thinking lives on. These constant reminders that countries like India or China offer conditions that rarely reach a recognisable destination. The issues our countries may wish to take on are meaningful and human thought does its best to try and respect the integrity we think should be present. Meanwhile internally, personally the more incompetent and hyperbolic our thinking becomes, its architecture collapses, inequalities grow. Paradoxically, countries may reach a stage, just as we ourselves do, where undirected and imprecise thinking – supported by a

host of priests, philosophers, educators and experts – is forced to fall back on the logic and reason of noisier practice, messier thoughts. This we cannot allow.

"They are closer to a scream than a song." René Daumal writes in *You've Always Been Wrong*.[53] The French poet knows a thing or two about such imprecision: "They were valves opening to let off pressure while waiting for something better. I've found something better to release most of the torments which those outpourings could not completely soothe. Better and simpler."[54] Outpourings struggle to find a place in our lives, the murderous frustrations that are not understood, the messages that never reach, the love that always dies, the communication which will never succeed. "Perhaps only one of these torments cannot be reduced, because it doesn't come from without, and the traces of this torment, now still in the nascent state, are what can justify the publication of the others."[55] Nothing justifies our publications, Daumal insists, except that which we require should remain from our own thinking, that which has the dubious legacy of being our own. Yet the death of thoughts means just that; it's the architecture that dies not the words.

We unlearn to survive. "Unlearning, daydreaming, learning to think, unlearning philosophising, learning to express," Daumal puts it, "these things aren't done in a day. And yet we have so few days in which to do it."[56] Nothing is done in a day except the death that meets us, and the inequalities that meet such resistance. We realise there is no other end except that one day, undirected up until the very last moment. Then and only

then, thinking changes, whole worlds can shift. It is not only others who make coherent what has never soothed us ourselves. Instant notes, thinking-on-the-run and we are intrigued at this speed of this architecture in our brain, with which we shuffle ideas and invent the space for our own lack of direction. What our thoughts could be at that stage is never really known, but the door is opened, the journey set in motion. This reminds us of Leonard Woolf's autobiography of the years 1939 to 1969: the journey not the arrival matters.[57] Of course, the arrival matters too, for if we do not make some sense of our thoughts, how do we build on the previous ideas we had? But this is not the nihilism that warms us.

This is the journey of a thinking that only interests us when we realise how much we need to jettison just in time to hold us afloat. A note instantly thrusts us within a direction we do not always want to take. Moving within our own thinking is as difficult as it has always been. There is an impatience and urgency for innovation and a master critique in the neuro-architecture within; a suffering when our thinking can find no safety. We speak of a political thought, a personal thought, an idle thought. These are not fields, not zones, but theatre. Just as we speak of the theatre of architecture or war, so the theatre, the architecture of our thinking. Someone may become the colour of wind, and another might imagine a kind of ciné-sequence, slow-motion if possible of the sort the French film-maker Godard would script. Perhaps in unusual images many of which we can never understand, our

imprecision is sharpened. Another thinking takes shape, becomes acceptable. If we are lucky, we bring back astonishment for the briefest moment? And we change worlds!

(3)

"Here I address in particular sincere seekers of thought," Daumal writes, "Not scientists, philosophers, theologians, and artists who, consciously or not, uphold the bourgeois order through the individualism which motivates their endeavours."[58] Here we get the echo of Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morality*. "If you're really a seeker of thought, you've now understood that as long as one class oppresses the other, you will be a slave; that the realization of free thought is the same thing as the realization of a communist society. You can't think without willing the victory of the proletariat…You'll never be able to separate your thought from social struggles and, in the final analysis, from economic contradictions, as long as any two classes of society are fighting to death."[59] Daumal is inviting us into what we might term – contrary to Jean Baudrillard – an ecstasy, a thrill of no further communication. Here danger and imprecision could offer us a sharper, vibrant practice when nothing can return to what it was. When certain injustices and distorted histories have to be corrected, before image detection software falsifies even that.

We'd be accused of repetition to claim that within political and architectural interchange, exchanges occur but change little. Various kinds of bogus listening and un-listening communities bounce off each other into public culture. Public levels of sentimentality allow quasi-scientific anecdotes to be received as

fact. Aggravated by the screen world, images have never before had such potential to contain instant myth, instant disruption. Thin reading of the fashionable discourse(s) is another reading, it skims a new transfer of knowledge. There will soon no longer be any sham or conspiracy to be revealed as the vitality to society's well-being will no longer distinguish between fact and fiction, or between communication and discourse. In a hyper-individualist world – full of spin, hype and hyperbole – where the line between fact and fiction becomes the theatre, trust does not so much disappear as it leaves it solely to individuals to nurture. Serious engagements can cancel out replies, with no way to match accuracy. We are left to re-think our irresponsibility when endgame becomes a permanent condition. This, too, we cannot allow.

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 momentarily re-connect with our own identities before they are jettisoned. The generalised 'other' is the response that deceives us into thinking our own thinking remains close to us. We have become our own limitation. We ourselves are the reason that our thinking is so limited. "Trying to reconstruct the development of our own opinion brings us up against a difficulty very familiar to modern physics," Czeslaw Milosz wrote, "the instrument – which in this case is we ourselves, along with whatever accretions have grown up within us – transforms the object under investigation. Though we are close to ourselves, able to feel our old selves from the inside, we have already become inaccessible to ourselves."[60]

As we become inaccessible to ourselves, we will learn to read against the books, against falsified histories and unequal philosophies that hold us back. We can no longer respect the 'integrity of printed matter,' nor can we expect a deeper, personal record. There is no way to be more honest, personal, direct and communicative. No Camus, no Koestler, no Sartre, no need. In some years – if not already now within the pandemic of virus and race or just out of it, it will be revealed how much we have not only cut and pasted our lives and history, how much we have fooled ourselves by emphasising the experiences we have had to use to set any narratives we see for ourselves at the end of our lives. Pirate or Emperor? Slave or Prince? Why has it been necessary for us to do this? Why should it be necessary to airbrush out our own history as well as millions of others? The soft history likely to become a history of the last century is worthy of none of us, least of all those who work within the past to retrieve the nostalgia and innovation within the present.

We've heard the phrase the anti-intellectual thrown around. When thrust with wit and clever high-minded rapier unseriousness, deeper exchange mix with Goon Show wit (at least in Britain) and the agenda is narrowed. If our thought is never opened to such public contest or disagreement we will surely manage not to be of any great interest to the general public. How much architects may have continuously encouraged this privileged discourse, reinforced this in theory and praxis, in practice and education, is an exile many acknowledge freely. Professions have insider rules for insider games; meanwhile some architects have to and are forced to walk alone. Nothing

like the once-recent Martin Amis-Terry Eagleton spat about Muslim 'horrorism' would appear in architecture, or would it?[61] Is this a sign of the importance of the debate on 'horrorism' or the timed 9/11 coincidence of Islamophobia taking over from the pink wars waged against Communism in the last century? Perhaps race, architecture and inequality bring this into the present. Or perhaps we might see this for what it is and how it also affects the architect's being: the tendency to take the spat so far as to become a measure of cleverness, to remain trapped in endgames.

How do we write about someone and something that offers more than what has been previously archived? Without making it more than it is? Why do we ache for more articulate frameworks which refine our historical dimension? How many of us have a vision with a historical dimension, like Milosz, in which all phenomenon and all laws are part of Heraclitus' river? "The unpopular dialectical development. A foggy socialist impulse turns and hardens, into a control offered by the formative years in the 1960s decade. Most of us cannot name the drive that shapes us alter which it is more than present in the subconscious. You can be loyal to father, loyal to mother, loyal to country, loyal to the non-conformist principles or anarchism without knowing it as this all develops."[62]

"Even," as Milosz writes in his search for self-definition "loyal to my mother and loyal to Lithuania – a Lithuania haunted by the ghost of Swedenborg."[63] Here it's the inner certainty of Nietzsche not Swedenborg that develops through the fog of

reading, impulse and ambiguity. Our younger years are clear in their enthusiasm and error. But, along with Milosz, we all seem to aim for this shining point, "nothing could stifle my inner certainty that a shining point exists where all lines interested."[64] It is not that we have to fit everything outside into the picture we are forming, but we fit ourselves into the pictures we see. We read to learn, yes, but we also read to jettison what we no longer need for ourselves.

"No matter how far one tries to trace the question backwards through history, it is clear that society is not produced by man, but man by society, society understood as a given." Is Alain Finkielkraut correct? "Each man is constrained, on entering social life, to fit his own life in, just as he fits his words and thoughts into a language which was formed without and before him and which is impervious to his power."[65] Is this the architects' fate in these endgames; constrained, entering social life to fit in words and ideas into a language formed without and before them. Is it really impervious to power? Why would any one continue?

Take the two once-recent film versions on Truman Capote, Capote (2005) and Infamous (2006). They distort the 'history' of the murder, they even distort the book *In Cold Blood* that Capote has written in order to feature the 'personal' of Capote himself. Reading *In Cold Blood* is an entirely different, more rewarding experience, yet the films will stand in for this book sooner or later until it is forgotten. Does serious architecture of the mind produce work and suffer in a similar way? "Perhaps it will seem surprising that I had forgotten to give the history of

metaphysics, but that is because I do not know what this word means." Jacques Derrida mostly reminded us all of what words never meant, could never mean for us.[66] This, then, is the reason why the 'end of modernity' as Vattimo explored, was an arena beyond metaphysics, that science according to Derrida "which proposes to treat everything in general before having observed anything in particular, i.e., to speak about everything before having learnt anything: a vain science which bears on nothing and leads to nothing." [67]

To speak about everything before having learnt anything coincides with our 'new normal.' How many would agree: such a vain science which bears on nothing would also lead to nothing. But it's this nothing that is important; it holds revaluations. Is it too pretentious to speak of the relational in an architecture of thought; the clashed contest with incongruities and inequalities which raise some particular ideas to general notions and then become architecture? General notions raised back from the architecture of thought to the public to become notions of well-being, social inclusion and human generosity? To speak plainly?

(4)

Many people today, not only academics or practitioners, think of architecture as a joke played in and off the market. But though this is thrown out as a rather indifferent cry, it is by no means untrue. Debates like 'sustainability' and 'global warming.' 'biophilia' or the 'credit crunch' are considered serious jokes, communicated by way of numbers which many of us cannot and do not wish

to understand. Even if we accept the importance of something as serious as a 'pandemic' we triumph at the looseness of the statistics that prove or witness our impending downfall and even oblivion. These contemporary issues become the objects of serious jokes; a body of sliding professional knowledge manipulated into action. Paul Kingsnorth reminds us in his essay called "The Quants and the Poets" where he charts the journey of green awareness and action. That essential tension that failed parts of the twentieth-century such that it had to be rehearsed time and again. "The friction between the quant and the poet could be represented by focusing on a few bickering individuals, or by trying to divide the greens up into Two Cultures."[68]

Any charge of cynicism should however be put on hold: we come to recognize just when the architecture of our own thinking is not only a joke played on and by our idols, but it can defeat meaning. "But it could also," Kingsnorth continues "perhaps more honestly and productively be represented as a tension that is present within all of us. None of us is wholly or even primarily rational and analytical, and none of us is quite devoid of poetry either, though it is sometimes hard to find."[69]

Controlled by 'undirected thinking' whether by postponing any caricature or not, this might be the accomplishment of that necessary nihilism required to break through. This is why we might usefully call this temptation towards the intuitive end as an architecture for the terminal condition. The endgame is upon us, always has been, and we might well do ourselves a favour

by considering the topologies of disenchantment and collapse that some may see the ultimate condition of evasion. This, once again, we cannot allow.

Perhaps the architecture of our thought is not allowed suicide, cynicism, atheism, clinical depression. No one ever seems to talk of lives this way as thought contrives to defeat itself, admittedly with some intellectual bravado. The extreme condition of disenchantment is far from extreme and can contaminate the work, whilst architects and other champions of lost language get away with rebel nostalgia. Forked tongues and the aestheticians of what might be considered an unpleasant existence, might allow us to think back to the subtext of Sir John Soane's life here. Can our undirected thinking be directed and become clear enough – momentarily – to allow the work to be achieved, the architecture of thought to be built and the life therein implied by this sometimes monstrous act, rewarded? What then would be the reality and what would we be thinking about if we were not allowed the luxury of fraudulence on a huge scale?

The virus, whichever one we choose, offers us a tension requiring nothing less, nothing more than paradoxical directions and the sharpest thinking we've ever asked of ourselves. And within the paradox is the seduction of the organised pre-empted path. We stumble on this path often only to veer away from the comforts of what is being offered. Some years back in another life, in another century, we were informed that we could hold such thoughts, even write them down and out, and prepare what

might be considered a thesis for the future. But these thoughts turned into a script would never be published. There would be no validity for this process, no authenticity to give to these words and no significance to give this language system.

Perhaps these are the type of thoughts, the architecture, that need the authenticity of chance be it fame, repetition, or notoriety. Conditions that come with achievements in another part of life. It is this fame and celebrity that allows the undirected thought some direction, allowed the thinking to be thought relevant. If indeed we knew how to apply notoriety or weight to the words. Whatever one thought, whatever relevance applied could only then be read if the notoriety which followed the architecture of thought into words in a new sense. The impossibility expressed was this: that in the undirected thought is the freedom to evade all possible company that wishes to script life in the known world.

And it is then too, 'post-truth,' that we know all thinking must mask itself; the hidden journey means the ill-fated arrival would never be reached. Until of course the very last moment! No virus can achieve this. Culture or life, philosophy or life, all privileged in redundant moves in a theatre of life within terror. In these constant endgames, is it so obvious that architecture must take on the very notion of unrest and undoing in our political and cultural lives?

A Sufi heard a cry: "I've lost my key; If it's been found, please give it back to me – My door's locked fast; I wish to God I knew. How I could get back in. What can I do?"[70] The end

is in the beginning and yet architecture goes on. And yes, yes, "nothing is funnier than unhappiness." Which programs and what part of our histories are we forced to abandon in order to become better people? We know the answer given by Jorge Semprun in his book *Literature or Life*.[71] Struck by many lines, many pages and many observations, one line stays over others. As the pages fade and the things we find significant in Semprun's death camp experience are replaced with the next significance, we recall the line, 'but the corpse went on dying.' Semprun spoke of those dying in Buchenwald. They didn't just die. No one ever just dies. It was the corpse which went on dying.

If we could characterise the last few decades of some critical misery, we might say that architecture entered other books, invaded other texts and other lives as it attempted to understand, however weakly, why ideas remain with us, move on, or simply re-shape themselves in our own minds in order to become other ideas. Much of this is immutable. The moves often mask just what makes choices for us, what offers us responsibility, what invites us to act, or remain apathetic, even redundant. Simone de Beauvoir has a character respond to the various layers of refusal in her book *The Blood of Others*: you'll never be forced to write anything but what you think. "I want to write everything I think, or nothing" comes the reply.[72]

We are never able to write everything we think. Today we have enigmas of sizable proportions and ambiguities that have become architecture. Few of us, despite the philosophy of undoing and de-radicalism that has saturated European

thinking over the last thirty years, would accept we can live so calmly, so continuously, and so damningly within an enigma. We acknowledge from the outset: despite our different histories, our different experiences, despite some of us appearing closer to the so-called realities of the age than others, we possess no sovereignty. Despite the history which we can all hide behind, we come in this cold. We set out from a position of ignorance. Always uncertain we are at our best when life is fragile.

The 'endgame' we see in so many politically fragile and redundant situations mirrors political privilege and a redundancy that writes out new fictions. If we speak of a work-in-progress, if we wish for an architecture continually postponed or upset, how can we achieve this? Like anti-psychiatry, the very opposition to a conventional architecture frames opposition itself. Most of us would wish not to belong to a club that could so easily take us in as members. Yet how many still knock on the window with a sponge only? Perhaps we must learn in this century not to close stories that can only close on themselves, in their own time.

This is life after architecture when the corpse goes on dying. The town, the city, the institute all subject to an architecture changing and evolving constantly. Some deny the anarchy held within no destination, and no arrival. Is then Beauvoir right: "Better to accept everything, than to make an abortive effort, doomed in advance to failure!"[73] Tiredness, fatigue, the presence of the abortive effort have taken over all. Post-Narrative is easily the closest we come to this condition without quite understanding it. The corpse of the city, any city goes on dying whilst people

need to live again. We are left with only one destination: without condemning anything like architecture to an agenda, we see too many forms and narratives it cannot sustain.

Is this once more another compelling vision which sees the twenty-first-century fuse with all that is provisional, uncertain and ephemeral? What is the metaphor 'endgame' under these circumstances of war, pandemic, terror, fake news, scandal, crudity, poverty and injustice? We advocate an architecture so completely against itself as to come out the other side. There is an absurdity in this that belonged to the heroism of the last century. We can freely – and guiltily – adapt Jorge Semprun's words from his book *Literature and Life*. It is also the necessity to become a different entity (person) in order to remain living, the necessity to create he architecture of another place in order to remain contemporary in this century not the last. Redundant, demographically askew, have the white architects asked the wrong questions for too long? They may be busy sawing off the branch they are all sitting on, but there is no easy fall, there is no rehearsal.

We might be brave enough to claim the time for rehearsals is over. Unless the gentle invites us to remain in the present. We design and develop whilst our thinking, like war and conflict, race and inequality, is permanently on hold. The endtrope has become a refusal of dissolving ourselves. We must act. Not later, not in a future of someone else's making. Do we forsake speculation and any nostalgia for the future, as Ricouer says, "the myth of fallibility, in the chiaroscuro and ambiguity, turns into a myth of

fall."[74] Here we lean once again into our own Buddhas where we must lose ourselves to find ourselves. How many times do we have to do this without dissolving our own philosophy of will and fall away from our endpoint, our human limit?

Chiaroscuro and ambiguity indeed, is this another form of empty, so last-century contextualism which carries within it nostalgia for architecture to carry some meanings and not others. Helped by an obvious ethical impulse, we witness a tortured syntax aided by digital fidgeting. A syntax which – unfortunately – the architect is able to self-perpetuate. The comic turn, of contradiction, refusal and revolution will never be comic again. We will be dead:

> The Sufi said: "And why should you complain?
>
> You know where this door is: if you remain
>
> Outside it – even if it shut fast –
>
> Someone no doubt will open it at last.

A journalist in Sweden sits in front of a huge screen erected in his living room to show a real time digital film of the journey from Marco Polo airport to San Marco square in Venice. Just last week in Tokyo – which week, when? - Sony announced it would re-shape and re-locate the Interface. Our personal electronic worlds look now to be saturated with shared networks, sim-applications and re-writable, recoverable, programmes. New development packages in architecture have moved electronic

production into ‘buildings’ rather than personal electronics. The world of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson has been superseded by buildings as the Interface, blurred between cloud and droplet. It cannot stop there oh metaverse! The architect has become manager, scientist, contractor, choreographer and programmer never falling for the attraction of any new profession. The results are in our favour surely. By being closer to the developing imaging systems and software, by being closer to experiencing AI, robotics and permanent impermanence, who is it now so poised to re-shape our worlds? The auteur abandoned in the last century in cinema and literature looks is likely to be re-invented in this century. Architecture as a literary device. And then killed again.

> You make this fuss for nothing; how much more
>
> Should I complain, who’ve lost both key and door!”
>
> But if this Sufi presses on, he’ll find
>
> The closed or open door which haunts his mind.[75]

ENDNOTES

DISSONANCES

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2. Vibhuti Sachdev and Roger Connah eds., *Veranda, Journal of Art and Architecture, Vol.2*. (New Delhi: Sushant School of Art and Architecture, 2020).

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4. Vitali Vitaliev, *Life as a Literary Device* (London: Beautiful Books, 2009), 145.

5. Liam Hudson, *The Cult of the Fact,* 1972 (Jonathan Cape 1976). 128.

6. Pekka Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*, with Linus Torvalds and Manuel Castells (New York: Random House, 2001).

7. For example: "Nearly a century ago, Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism articulated the animating spirit of the industrial age, the Protestant ethic. Now, Pekka Himanen - together with Linus Torvalds and Manuel Castells -articulates how hackers represent a new, opposing ethos for the information age. Underlying hackers' technical creations - such as the Internet and the personal computer, which have become symbols of our time - are the hacker values that produced them and that challenge us all. These values promote passionate and freely-rhythmed work; the belief that individuals can create great things by joining forces in imaginative ways; and the need to maintain our existing ethical ideals, such as privacy and equality, in our new, increasingly technologized society. The Hacker Ethic takes us on a journey through fundamental questions about life in the information age - a trip of constant surprises, after which our time and our lives can be seen from unexpected perspectives. In the original meaning of the word, hackers are enthusiastic computer programmers who share their work with others, not computer criminals." https://www.amazon.ca/Hacker-Ethic-Spirit-New-Economy/dp/B072BP4XZY#:~:text=Description,be%20seen%20from%20unexpected%20perspectives., Pekka Himanen, *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*, with Linus Torvalds and Manuel Castells (New York: Random House, 2001).

8. E. M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Quartet Encounters, 1993), 51.

9. Jonathan Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence: Nonfictions*, Etc. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012).

10. Lethem, *The Ecstasy of Influence*, 99.

11. For the use of the word 'glum' as measurement see *Life as a Literary Device*, 173.

12. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, the opening aphorism.

13. Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, trans. Basil Creighton (London: Penguin Books, 1965), Author's Note (1961).

14. John Keats, letter to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 1817, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 193.

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16. Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood (London: Collins Classics, 2011).

17. Frances E. Jensen, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*, with Amy Ellis Nutt (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

18. Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1957), 111.

19. Jensen, *The Teenage Brain*, 107.

20. Hudson, *The Cult of the Fact*, 160-161.

21. Joseph Brodsky, *Watermark* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), 22.

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22. John Fowles, *The Magus* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), 616.: 'eternally a victor in that war where the losers win.'

23. Niebuhr, H. Richard. 1978. *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 48.

24. Roger Connah, *Writing Architecture: Fantomas Fragments Fictions: An Architectural Journey Through the 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

25. This hint towards a soothing memo was given by Raili Pietilä who always had an uncanny understanding of her husband's (Reima Pietilä) ability to think architecture through the meander or wandering thought. "Pietila's Other Half," *Aino Niskanen interview with Raili Pietila*; Pietilan Toinen Puoli, Arkkitehti 2004/6 see also, Hikes in the Terrain, (proceedings from the Pietila Conference Dipoli (2005); Taiteentutkija 4,(2007)

26. Vygotsky, Lev S. *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962), 48.

27. Damasio, Antonio R. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 18.

28. A. Wortman (1990).

29. Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 19.

30. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

31. Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism (al-Sufiyya wal Surriyaliyya)* (London: Saqi, 2005), 12. The first centuries of Islam saw the development of Sufism as one of the world's major mystical traditions. Although the later Sufi writings by mystics such as Jalaluddin Rumi are known and available in

translation, access to the crucial early period of Islamic mysticism has been far more limited. Little is known about the life of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn al-Hasan an-Niffari. Though considered to be an early Sufi, apparently his name does not formally appear in any of the Sufi lineage charts. In other words he is absent. Niffari wrote in Arabic not Persian and died in Egypt. His Book of Standings (Kitab al-Mawaqif) is a collection of what is known as ‘visionary’ poems.

32. Muhammad Ibn Abdi’l Jabbar al-Niffari, *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat, with other fragments*, ed. Arthur John Arberry (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935).

33. For more on this see Frank Heron, “The Upset of the Cerebral,” *Sisyphus* (London, 1998), 75–93. especially the chapter on “The Scholarship of Scholarship.” whereby Heron demonstrates how brilliant research and intellectual scholarship, by conforming to the accepted reference within the academic circuits, produces pioneering studies which actually begin closing the subject studied and further serving to ‘generalise’ the issues so detailingly and lovingly studied. An ingenious reversal of intended scholarship which is likely to become a serious issue in the twenty-first-century.

34. Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 161.

35. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 126.

36. For a reference to such ‘soothing’ see Raili Pietila’s comments –‘The obscurity was so clear that it was strangely soothing’ cf.Pietila’s Other Half, Aino Niskanen, Arkkitehti: 6:2004 (Helsinki), 28-35.

37. “In the first case seeing an object, we just happen, as we say, to think of something else; in the second, we consider the possibility and nature of the connection between the object seen and the object suggested. The seen thing is regarded as in some the ground or basis of belief in the suggested thing; it possesses the quality of evidence.” John Dewey, *How We Think* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), 7.

38. *Open Secret: Versions of Rumi*, trans. John Moyne and Coleman Barks (Putney, VT: Threshold, 1984), 17.

39. Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 155.

40. For an interpretation of this see Annegreth Nill, Decoding Merz: *An Interpretative Study of Kurt Schwitters’ Early Work, 1918–1922* (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990), University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI. For the transhistorical in Pietila see Literal Morphology text 1967, and Bruno Zevi’s writing(s) on Pietila From The Tenth to the 20th Century, cf. *Tango Mäntyniemi: The Architecture of the Official Residence of the President of Finland*, ed. Roger Connah (Helsinki: Painatuskeskus [for Edita], 1994).

41. Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 157.

42. Ibid.

43. Adonis, *Sufism and Surrealism*, 155.

44. Pietilä and I shared an interest in George Steiner, especially George Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Usually I read whilst Pietila – with less time – scanned.

45. Veltheim, as far as I remember, wrote acutely about the Book as the Writing of another Book, or the Writing of Another Book, or 'The Architecture of the Book Inside the Work,' *Arkkitehti,* (1991).

46. Cioran, Emil. *The Trouble with Being Born*. Translated by Richard Howard. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 9.

47. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*.

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48. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Faber & Faber/Grove Press, 1958), 39.

49. Ibid,88.

50. John McLuckie quoting Thomas Merton, "An Eastertide Meditation," *The Merton Journal*, 23, no. 1 (Eastertide 2016): 52.

51. David Mamet, *On Directing Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 9-54: "Where do you put the camera?"

52. Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C. M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 46.

53. René Daumal, *You've Always Been Wrong* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 4.

54. Ibid, 4.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Leonard Woolf, *Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939 to 1969* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989).

58. Daumal, *You've Always Been Wrong*, 86.

59. Ibid.

60. Czesław Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* (New York: Doubleday, 1968, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 112.

61. Martin Amis, "The Age of Horrorism," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/10/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety, accessed July 10, 2025..

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid, 87.

64. Ibid.

65. Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thought* (London: Claridge Press, 1988), 18

66. "..reminds us of Aristotle, thinking to create a science, took it upon himself to gather together all the general and abstract ideas, such as being,

substance, principles, causes, relations, and other resemblances. He will consider all these ideas in a preliminary treatise, which he called first wisdom, first philosophy, theology, and so on. After him, Theophrastus or some other peripatetic gave the name metaphysics to this collection of abstract ideas. This, then, is metaphysics: a science which proposes to treat everything in general before having observed anything in particular, ie., to speak about everything before having learnt anything: a vain science which bears on nothing and leads to nothing. Since we ourselves raise some particular ideas to general notions, general notions could not be the object of the first science." Jacques Derrida, *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980).

67. Ibid, 35.

68. Paul Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 2017), 49.

69. Ibid.

70. Farid Ud-din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984).

71. Jorge Semprún, *Literature or Life*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

72. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: Penguin Books, 1964),

73. Ibid, 15.

74. Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man: The Philosophy of the Will* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 11, discussing the pathétique of "misery."

75. Farid Ud-din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham

Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 201.

FILE UNDER BUDDHISM AND ARCHITECTURE

Aimlessness is a wonderful practice. It is so pleasant and refreshing. I believe scientists need this practice as much as meditators, to unclench their minds, to open up the possibilities beyond their imagination.

Thich Nhat Hanh[1]

There is a feeling that we still communicate. We do in many private ways, yet so often we feel – personally and politically – not much is getting through. And if it does get through, our thinking is misunderstood, manipulated and rejected. We now live in an internalized space. A sense of guided aimlessness might be more useful if we can think of our thoughts as a diaspora. We might see this as an 'autistic' space, no longer that liminal space we used to pass through to pass from one world to another. Uncertainty and mindful fragility now offers new exile, a new practice: Intuitive, forensic and confessional.

"The science of language is not mine," Chomsky writes, "it is anybody's who is working on it." How could it be otherwise? "People don't own a science" any more than they own an architectural thought!"[2] How do we operate in such an internalized space? Do we have to take back what we have thought, what we have written, what we have imagined? For such imperfections, I can only think of Buddha and Witold Gombrowicz.

Gombrowicz, the Polish writer, playwright and diarist hinted at this imperfection. “I was doomed to imperfection, there is no point in my grinning and bearing it, in my pretending, to myself and everybody else. That everything was getting better and better. To break, once and for all, with mystification, was a matter of honesty, dignity, lucidity and vitality.”[3] Gombrowicz reminds us that we do not necessarily need to apologize for ill-spent thought and worried time but rather acknowledge the game we have played on ourselves. We struggle against thoughts often not realising they are affixed to ideas we cannot jettison.

We know, whatever jargon we give it, that an architectural repertoire of soft-realism, rendered image and photo-managed-icon, is evident all over the world. Whether we are familiar with literary devices or not, whether we understand the term intertextuality or not, we now see how cities resemble other cities and each building becomes about all other building. Why read Orwell, Marx or Hugo today? Why read a book at all if our literary devices trap us so? Our memes and meta-memes replicate themselves in a chatter that is beginning to control us. That’s just what they do! In other words, let the birds pick the words clean.

Writing and architecture have taken new shapes from that which was originally planned. Different morphologies have been used to question the structure of thought and writing. At the beginning of this book, we introduced the idea that our thoughts might not only remain somewhat internal to our development and our external beliefs, but this might offer us a refuge; this might be

the necessary autism we have spoken about. Do we pass through an early autism as our thinking spirals towards expected logic, ego gaming and comforting narratives? How then do we write out lives so internally bound? This resonated with our 'inner speech' and Lev Vygotsky's discussion of thought and word in his psychological journey from the outermost to the innermost plane.

Autism – logic – egocentricity was a useful trifecta. Playfully, using the notion of 'inner Jenga' as a metaphor for the Buddha mind, this began to suggest how words and architecture die on us. We proceed to select and build on passable beliefs, contribute new ideas and contest the works of others in a language dangerously faltering. Do we really know how to slip out of those scholarly, collective narratives which architecture relies on to remain unchallenged and heroic? As we try to 'unthink' ourselves out of preoccupation, prejudice and delusion, we try to pull back from those awkward clarities and dissolutions in our own dark thinking. Faced with an intolerable immediacy, must we not learn to gamble with the clarity we are always asked for and ideals that are no longer sustained? What then is our own architecture of thought but a spectacular inner myth of clarity?

We suggested that we might think against the architecture already imagined in our programs, prejudice and perceptions. Supported by an academic prejudice project, architectural theory and criticality have become as fluid as the liquid spaces proposed. We know too well we can, at any moment in our thinking and

writing, hijack the words we use, the thoughts we offer, the ideals we hold onto. Once again, this presents us with the time to echo Adorno and blast ourselves out of any new continuum.

Then we talk to the finger. The genius in Frank Gehry may be 'epoch making,' to use Gianni Vattimo's phrase, one who opens up new paths and horizons, "more properly to be the basis of historicity in the strong sense of the term."[4] But we stray from the strong sense of that term in order to take Gehry's middle finger as nothing short of a cool meme and serious Zen truculence. Today there are new endgamers who say hello-goodbye to things, who re-invent minimalism, and know they are as empty as we were. They search for clarity, they jettison and reduce, all the while hoping an entirely new and unique story presents itself.[5] Kenosis this might not be, but narrative becomes secondary to a self-worth re-discovered.

Language is no longer part of shared membership; it is stand-up comedy! As fast as things change there is no need for a narrative to pass over. It is not language or the end of metaphysics that tempts speakers to go beyond the edge, it is performance. Endtrope games – this permacrisis – are still very much part of the fabric of architectural discourse. Choi and Trotter write in *Architecture is All Over* of architecture's creatively imaginative exhaustion: "architects have always constructed end games in response to this condition, ranging from Mies van der Rohe's emphasis on indefatigable programmatic flexibility to

Archigram's throwaway architecture."[6] Well-honed experts select and construct an architecture from unclear inner thought and an ambiguous role of history. Attempting to play a serious role becomes part of the oppression held over and comforted by such gatherings.

There is both a vitriolic vision and realization that any meaning where once intended and arrested will have to drift. For some, in the twenty-first-century, the story telling has finished. Our consolations tempted us to proceed through Francis Petrarch or Giovanni Leopardi. Such autism, of a very personal, existential sort of course collided instead with Michael Polanyi's *Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958).[7] But could we tempt quite another architectural folly. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* might have served as a better aid for such happiness: "I have thought fit, in this following section a little to digress (If at least it be to digress on this subject) to collect and glean a few remedies and comfortable speeches out of our best orators, philosophers, divines..."[8]

Intersectional all, we approach a woke futurism where ideas, collisions and divine selections offer our thinking an inner speech to become outer. We move gingerly from autism to logic. Chance or random collisions contest an architecture of thought made up by scant or fluent inner knowledge as one field is transferred to another. The ego steers our interpretive thinking to become operative. We then try to make language happen through cognitive struggles that produce what is – sometimes surprisingly – called 'new architecture.' There is always another theory for

architecture to be invented on the run. Any links made to Hunter Thompson may now appear damning and disappointingly inevitable.

There will be a time when it is more common to see scholars, decision-makers and politicians explore their own bias, prejudice and preconceptions. Whether this reveals more measured versions of a common history or an understanding of the shared narratives we choose to believe in remains to be seen. Dissonance and bias, so familiar today where nothing seems to stick, means we communicate through withdrawal and retreat. Choice architecture, nudge theory, selected bias and other developments will probably continue to turn us inwards. But there is cruelty and tyranny in our imagination which we protect, rejoice in and then spew out. Harry Potter CGI works on Hogwarts Academy might have been a better scholarly link to the alchemies of Imre Makovecz and Titus Burckhardt. Titus Burckhardt's Alchemy, his science of the cosmos and science of the soul, first published in German in 1960, should link us to Nicolas Flamel. A failure to follow through to this character, some may find naturally disappointing.

There is a blindness that can disrupt the cleverness of our solutions and language. All types of collisions with neuroscience and brain-maps, consciousness studies and the construction of the mind, began to reveal how auto-biographical our worlds are. Future investigations into this autism remind us of that area where, according to Vygotsky, "meaning and the whole inwards aspect of language, the side turned towards the person, not

toward the outer world, have been so far an almost unknown territory."[9] Following the science has never been more beautiful and obscure. Such narratives are echoed once more by Choi and Trotter: "if architecture is always both all over and all over, then its constitutive dimensions include both extinction and emergence, both crisis and conquest, and both evanescence and ubiquity."[10]

The Polish poet Cseslaw Milosz could not pull himself away from this tyranny which he felt so often existed in academia. In *Road-Side Dog*, written in his 80th year, he gets closest to describing what might be thought of as this phoney island of the mind. He pokes at it with inimitable seduction. "He could not control his thoughts. They wandered wherever they liked, and as he observed them, he grew uneasy. For they were not good thoughts, and if he were to judge himself by them, there was, deep within him, a lot of cruelty. He thought that the world was very painful and that human beings didn't deserve to exist. And he suspected that the cruelty of his imagination was somehow connected with his creative impulse."[11] How then do we take back such cruelty and silliness from our accepted histories to recognise the bias of our narratives? What is this inner Jenga that constantly re-situates our minds and brains, ideas and operations to become internal wonder?

This is not just a distorted view of our own life after theory. Would we know what it means to suggest we 'unthink'

ourselves as thinkers, as students, as professors? Are we already finding new, small strategies to fight this viral drift? There is no nonbeing here in the Buddhist sense, at least not yet, and we caution ourselves as so many did in the last century against those "avant-gardes mixed with blood."[12] Can we really use Gonzo or Gombrowicz and invent the next architecture after the one before: a weak architecture, a pulp architecture, an uninflected architecture, a poor architecture (l'architettura povera)? And what might that be as we begin to take on this uninhabitable earth? "To replace existence, with half-existence, or with the appearance of existence," Gombrowicz wrote of Bruno Schulz.[13] There is nothing to suggest as we age that we resist seduction or our mature hold on life or architecture becomes firmer. If theory has ever played a role, and we are prevented from looking back, how can we play a role in this listening century to come? How do we use our own pace and immediacy and take the plague within us outside?

We are close here to what philosophers struggle with; more than one belief must be tossed aside daily. It is true that what is still accepted as 'modernity' in architectural circles might be an emotional and irrational series of errors we could well do without, framed and discussed as they are by Gianni Vattimo in *The End of Modernity* (1987). It is also true that any lingering hope in returning or restoring those selected meanings, rational decisions and belief systems that maintained modernity's logic and ambiguity might be well-formed intuitions considered well and truly in the past.[14] But that's not how ideas and ideals fail and get re-configured as new stories.

Nothing is as fixed as that wording suggests and we invent narratives-to-get-by in place of other narratives. And though we might point to the shifting map of culture, critical theory and architectural agency, this "westernization of the world" (to use Remo Guidieri's phrase) has neither run its course nor ceased the deception played across global institutions and organizations.[15] The questionable master scenarios implied in bringing the past into the present still offer compelling reasons to teach and communicate what was already emotionally confirmed and intuitively rejected almost a century ago now. Enigmatic buildings now turn themselves digitally inside out. Recalling our re-imagined cocktail exchange between Chomsky and Lacan, we see too clearly how the tristesse of contemporary architecture and education is way beyond this.

Revolution, and all ways of talking about it, has always been both nostalgia and endgame. It is a beautiful sickness, according to the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, a 'non-gardening' of an extraordinary sort. "Those who hate gardening need a theory," Kolakowski writes. "Not to garden without a theory is a shallow, unworthy way of life."[16] And know what they are saying 'no' to. We now know how shallow and unworthy it can be if we embed our lives in both ambition and acquiescence. The cleverness practiced for structural change in architecture is supported only if enough people say no.

The influence of other disciplines has long seen architecture take on language, media philosophy, investment and 'surveillance capitalism.' Social breakdown, climate realities and global inequality all impact architecture. Pluralism, diversity and multiplicity have continued to destabilise concepts and issues once thought immutable. We now occupy, often from the armchair, a jargon of social construction and active concern we cannot escape. We are trapped in the most reasonable, the most decent, but frantic de-territorialised spaces and language.

Uncomfortable it might be to speak of 'post-narrative' or 'post-truth,' there is however an unstoppable knowledge that there are global solutions for some concerns already imagined but that will never be tried out. There are quite workable ideas that will never gain consensus even for the experiments that might fail. Exhausted, many seem to be by these global processes beyond our control; what then would we say to the Buddha app invading our screens? If we mirror architecture's journey to get out of the last century and the ideologies that trapped its progress, do we continue the headless journey of the Buddha? Would this take on that journey from the margin to the centre of the page?

If we tell ourselves new stories, we may find ways out of these endgames between collapse or global control. Though the old stories are the best, it is said. This new Buddha app helps us to find ourselves after losing ourselves. It's a familiar existential contact as we are attracted to koans that sound absurd on first

hearing. Apparently, the Buddha has already set the narrative for extinction. More recently the idea of regular lockdowns, scheduled retreats, fallow years to save the planet, have all been integrated into this app. More weeks of planet lockdown, virus deaths, zero oil prices and other 'shock-wars' could indicate more than global shock therapy. Life may indeed need re-scripting in order to fight the 'new normal' before it becomes a reclamation of nostalgia and identity.

In the *Extinction Rebellion (XR) Handbook,* Jem Bendell describes an inner process emanating from a world about to go out of control. "I believe we all need to go through such a process, individually and collectively. Putting all our hope in a better future allows us to make compromises in the present, whilst letting go of a better future can allow us to drop false hopes and live in the present with more integrity. It might even make our activism more effective."[17] These regular 'negative' laments seek from us all a positive shift before we disappear within. Where we situate ourselves in this blind sweet point beyond all previous blind spots is significant. Do we then have a ghost of a chance emerging from a global catastrophe and a pandemic that must ask of us the fewest lapses of attention in our future?

In the highly personal book *File Under Architecture* (1974), Herbert Muschamp went as rogue as he could for the time (1974), when Pompidou Centre was commencing its on-site journey, inaugurated as it was in 1977. "The experience

of architecture requires no training, no special knowledge, no grips to galleries, no admission tickets. It is the only historic form which has been continuously a public and a process art."[18] We've been trying to take what Muschamp said seriously for half a century. He predicted architecture's oscillations from education as indoctrination and privilege to production and practice for much of its painful day-to-day existence. Faced with crisis, with the shift from spiritual experience and religion to the intolerably exciting weight once more given science, Muschamp recognised – in the jargon of the day – meaning meant more back then.

Muschamp's small treatise demonstrated a world trapped in the prison house of language, where nothing was outside the text. A world beyond metaphysics was the only game in town. The time was up, Muschamp was saying. He was not to know. Time would continue to be up for architecture. For at least three decades and counting, architecture would become a meme-machine. Immaturity would be made safe by this machine. No models, no agenda, no destination! All was to become a deflection, in pursuit of useful, deeper emptiness! We live inside these paradoxical anecdotes that now take decisions for us. We inhabit riddles with no solutions without accepting the glorious inadequacy of logical reasoning. Koans calm us, but only momentarily.

Too much reality lies in front of us to attend to our interests. Muschamp implied architecture must become part of the collapse it has supported for so long. Provoking enlightenment, we live inside language more than we ever know. The riddle of Gehry's

middle finger of course would strike back. How far do we need to search to find the samadhi, Gehry's dharma, in all this? How do we maintain rogue moves and re-think our learning organizations to help sustain change? Current restorative agendas parallel Muschamp's celebration. But the rogue steps this century has taken may have not gone far enough. Even if architecture's open source begins to touch new fantastic and visionary architecture, an architecture open twenty-four hours a day, as Muschamp put it, "means opening doors, switching on the lights, making noises, scanning split-second flashes of blank wall, cleaning dust from the baseboards, swatting roaches, watching ceilings peel and while paint turn yellow – all the things you do and events you witness in transforming the space you inhabit into the plausible dimensions of day-to-day existence."[19]

Self-deceptions are available to all thinkers not only those who use deception to blind themselves. It matters little what language is used by the architects to say that the future really wasn't meant to come out this way, as we all now enter the same tunnel and dream away the exile of the control and authority available to us. Who were the architects speaking of restoring the canon whilst digging holes and imagining wildly resistant ways to swerve from prejudice and bias? The scarring of post-truth worlds will add to that 24-hour architecture. The high streets will be re-discovered, shopping emporia will re-clothe themselves and airports may become a necessary but limited version of both. Ghostlands and zombie urbanism – a feral architecture –

may not only be jokes investors play on themselves. Life, not architecture, was never intended to be so big, so full of junkspace, so hyperspatial, so 'surmoderne.'

Muschamp's words and thinking this far on still underlie a difficult but consistent logic of dissent. No amount of making presentations more entertaining, charismatic, or visually intriguing will mean architectural ideas communicate better. The conditions for change and re-evaluation must exist at the same time as the logic of any dissent finds an audience. Whether we know what it means to be in a post-image age or not, it may very well be that the nihilism implied in our growing resistance is already accomplished.

But who knows when we finally reach a stage where it is necessary to dissolve the very book being written or read. Passable passion offers itself. Never wishing to impose any uncontested knowledge on another person leaves us with two options. First, we encourage the other to find their own way to widen their access to knowledge. In other words, we encourage them to understand where that access comes from, where it is nurtured and how to situate their learning. Second, on having no head, we do as much as possible to provide 'as much as possible' to question the knowledge required from teachers and authority. Surely this cannot be another retreat to rival the retreat of the

word that so fascinated the twentieth-century? We can even enjoy a delusional celebration that this might be the way the book should develop and end.

Soaking up images and not grasping them intellectually. Playing with language and having no head! Diving into architectures of thought which make up our alternative geographies. Is this what our fictions are made of as they become diverse realities, as they step in for truths until the next story is offered? Who knows when all this begins and nothing but control is left us? And who knows when we are miming it all? This will happen naturally. We learn to slip in the riddle or the paradox. We think of something totally unsuitable or improper within the body of the material. This brings our inner Jenga down crashing. Our inner speech climbs back to go even more inside.

The book comes to an end. In Buddhism and other yogic traditions, *Samadhi* is taken as a state of meditative consciousness. The meditative finger is where the architects' *dharma* is absorbed in a sort of trance, pointing towards a truth. "It's like the finger pointing to the moon. The moon is so beautiful. And the finger is not the moon," the Buddhist monk and human rights activist Thich Nhat Hanh puts it. "If I point my finger and say, "Dear friend, this is the moon" and you catch this finger and say, "Oh this is the moon" – you don't' have the moon!" How do we speak to the finger, ignore the finger, or circumvent the finger? Is it merely pointing to the intuitive creativity within us all? Is the finger a delicate, prized sentiment shared by all who privilege the creative, mindful process within architecture? We are no longer

caught in the finger and cannot see the moon. But all is well if we file this under Buddhism and Architecture. Gehry's finger might have pointed the way: "The Dharma of the Buddha is the finger."[20]

Perhaps more than ever it is time to go rogue; go rogue on our universities, our institutions and our practices. Go rogue on our own thinking. Do we recall how much our lives and language begin in the middle of something else! And as we move into this post-truth world, uphill thinking, downhill writing will struggle against the images which navigate our architectures of thought. Who then maps, draws and thinks? If you see the Buddha on the road, don't ask about architecture. Don't even stop!

ENDNOTES

1. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Buddha Mind, Buddha Body* (Mumbai: Jaico, 2008), 1-21.

2. Noam Chomsky, *The Architecture of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press India, 2000), 42, See also 48-50.

3. Witold Gombrowicz, *A Kind of Testament* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973), 56.

4. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 36.

5. Endgamers constantly put forward variations on the following: "1 How can we understand the emerging city and mitigate cultural, economic and spatial conflict in the fluid and pluralistic society? 2 What roles can architecture and architects play? 3 What visions will emerge from the margins to nurture sustainable dwelling places and promote diversity of people, of ideas, and of possibilities?" ACSA, Houston (2008)

6. Esther Choi and Marrikka Trotter, eds., *Architecture Is All Over* (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2017).

7. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

8. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, with an introduction by William H. Gass (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), 126, "A Consolatory Digression Containing the Remedies of All Manner of Discontents."

9. Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962), 152.

10. Choi & Trotter, *Architecture Is All Over*.

11. Czesław Miłosz, *Road-Side Dog* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 6.

12. The poem "Winter" by Czeslaw Milosz "Avant-gardes mixed with blood/ The ashes of inconceivable arts/An omnium-gatherum of chaos."

13. Witold Gombrowicz, "On Bruno Schulz," trans. Lillian Vallee, in *A Kind of Testament* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973).

14. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 167.

15. Remo Guidieri, cf Vattimo,, *The End of Modernity*, 147, 151.

16. Leszek Kołakowski, "The General Theory of Non-Gardening," in *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 24.

17. Jem Bendell, "Extinction Rebellion and the Theory of Change," in This Is Not a Drill: *An Extinction Rebellion Handbook*, ed. Extinction Rebellion (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

18. Herbert Muschamp, *File Under Architecture* (New York: Fisical Book, 1974), 6.

19. Herbert Muschamp, *File Under Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974), 3.

20. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Buddha Mind, Buddha Body*, 89.