

The Lonely Archive

Reima Pietilä, his partnership with Raili, the office, his teaching and lecturing always appeared to be an existence where life and architecture were inseparable. Architecture provided the boundaries for any life lived outside architecture and for everything that happened within architecture. For Reima Pietilä, architecture was 24-7; it was non-stop thinking and drawing through language and 'being'. At this precise moment I am trying to think what it means to speak of Pietilä as my master, or as your master, or indeed any master. I also have to keep reminding myself I wrote a huge brick of a book – *Writing Architecture* - that maps Reima Pietilä and his work in great detail. Though I am not keen on playing up the 'maestro' in Pietilä, I do understand however - from the Finnish frame of mind - that this notion of the 'master' was, and still is, very important in Finnish architecture and culture. Though I would welcome an opportunity to share an academic argument for Pietilä as anti-heroic, as a counter-modernist and a somewhat inconvenient Finn, I quite understand this is not the time to do that. I would like however to venture into questioning this concept of the *master trope*; does Pietilä truly fit this unmeasurable meaning? He was mostly anti-heroic, certainly self-effacing and had an understated sense of humour. He was introspective. This did not make him unapproachable or more memorable, or even more 'legendary'. More important today is how the society and culture approach this reluctant master and what shape should Pietilä studies take in the future. Pietilä read landscape and language morphologically as if a book was laid out in front of him. And he did this to imagine an unsettled form. He was constantly 'forming' architecture into one unsettled form after another.

Self-Contest as Method

Reim Pietilä contested every line he wrote as if it was a landscape. Self-contest was a method; he could cut and paste texts into space, and space into landscaped form. All could be transformed into diagrams. Drawings emerged evenly and unevenly. In conversations, always endless, the exchange of knowledge went back and forth between us. The learning I received from being close to Pietilä was immense. It increased because of our different backgrounds and age. We also exchanged a range of issues beyond architecture. These involved literature, theatre, art, music and film. I would like to use the terms 'monologic' and 'dialogic' to describe the way he would use any 'trace' (from a huge diversity of interests) to shape his thinking. From the line, the meander to the sketch, Pietilä was a talking line. Just like the anthropologist Michael Taussig (*I Swear I Saw This*) Pietilä was making field notes from everything he encountered. Up to the last days we were still planning yet one more collaboration. He would slip thin strips of paper into the book he happened to be reading. For example, reading Tuan's book. On these slips of paper, he would write the initials R and S. R would be his questions. S would be my answers. He knew he couldn't write what I was thinking, but for various purposes he used this method. I would happily suspend my own self. I enjoyed the way he took me as 'fictional'. He could use the S to answer his own questions. I would then re-write his answer. By tidying his use of English, I could introduce other prompts. He would wait for the first clean version in English and then proceed to write over it often in coloured pens. And so, our discussions developed, back and forth. It didn't really matter who had written the initial line of enquiry or question. Pietilä was always in flux, we were always in flux, and ideas always in movement. But this was not a method he would use to teach others, rather he used it to interpret Pietilä to others. He would conduct an interview with a journalist, an architect or a tv crew as a way to think. Then he would re-script his thinking. All interviews were both monologue and dialogue. The questions were usually secondary if not irrelevant. Answers often varied depending on who was the interviewer, what time of day, what mood he was in and in what stage of his life he conducted these. Some interviews were open, some were obscure, some were light, some were dark. These varied from the mid-1970s to the last years when he inevitably displayed a physical tiredness. We talked about this tiredness (in and with architecture) constantly. It was an intellectual fatigue. Possibly a reaction to the over-interpretive anti-theory stubbornness of the Finnish architects and culture. Possibly not!

The Editor

If Reima Pietilä did not want to answer a question, he wouldn't. I sensed his gest. He would go round the houses. The head went down, the eyes drifted, his mouth tightened, and he paused. If he wanted to continue before the interviewer changed the subject, he would do so. This *anti-method*, if we so call it, might emerge out of a strange use of Finnish, a word that intrigued him or a meander in language that would lead to quite another idea. Like many architects and artists, he also re-read and re-scripted interviews, corrected the answers to create the final text. He would alter the draft texts, work with them, edit them. We corrected together many texts. He would question the use of terms by critics like Malcolm Quantrill and Carmine Benincasa (for their respective books). He would alter and add to the longer essays like the Hejduk or Makovecz interviews. Then he'd pass the texts over to me for another re-write. Slippery many people thought this, but it was fluid. There was no resting place. He talked 'methodology' and then shifted the language into architecture. He moved in and out of any answer and could introduce new questions. And then, if he had further time, he would loosen it again by going deeper into language. He would often go and get his favourite big red dictionary. If you suddenly felt you'd got it, you understood him, that this was clear and simple, he'd likely insert another story, even a random moment from the day. You never quite had him! He could edit texts directly and in many cases he did. He also knew how to tighten a text. We'd talk about this endlessly in English. The archive is strewn with changing versions of texts, sketches of ideas, revisions, small manifestoes and lists. Words were never there to be owned or fixed. Reima Pietilä never thought of himself as the author. But he was of course. He slipped into another method the moment you thought you had him. The moment you thought there was nothing more to add!

No Guru, No Method No Teacher.

No Guru, no method, no teacher is a song by Van Morrison. Some may know it. In a way Pietilä skirted and avoided all gurus and masters. If anything, Pietilä was more like an Ustad, in the Urdu-Muslim sense of the word. Someone revered, perhaps considered an expert and highly skilled, but one who has a special aura, like the musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. But Reima Pietilä also drank the 'kool-aid' of his own unsettled or intermediate Modernism. He recognised this from other masters, Hans Scharoun and Hugo Haring, Frank Lloyd Wright and Bruce Goff. Not so much masters as deviators of 'modernism'. He suspected all teachers including his own, J S Siren, who passed his thesis diploma in the early 1950s. On the *re-structuring of architectural education*, it is difficult to know what Siren thought. Pietilä appeared quite early on in the fifties to reject all methods by sliding in between. As Aulis Blomstedt's 'bagman' for PTAH and CIAM meetings, he knew how he could use one master to pass onto the next. He was like Paul Feyerabend, the philosopher of science from Los Angeles. Both acknowledged an *against-method* thinking. Pietilä created his own *against-method* approach; it was systematic and rigorous and was never as random as some thought. When he speculated on the Finnish language, when he sketched the lines of landscape, when he turned word and image into a diagram, he turned his own appropriation of language and morphology into a method. In the 1950s, he began to distinguish intuitively between the 'interpretive act' and the 'operative act'; between the 'essence' and the 'appearance.'. He always appeared obsessed by how interpretations could alter everything and nothing in his architecture. This is the idiosyncratic method in Pietilä's work, the personal ways architecture could always be shaped! It was idiorrhhythmic; a self-regulating system acknowledged by monks and mystics.

Re-Imagining Pietilä

These matrix images (see attached) are ciphers, diagrams, pictograms and metaphors. Micro worlds, they need intuitive forensic analysis. Whether we speak about Reima Pietilä as the thinker, the admirable worrier of architecture, form and space, we cannot forget he was part of an everyday life and partnership, *Raili and Reima Pietilä Architects*. In the two decades I knew him, it was clear to me I went from being an intern, an employee, an assistant, a designer, a fellow traveller, a collaborator, a writer to a personal assistant, friend and confidant. From a secretary who wrote out letters, to an amanuensis who began to write the references requested from other Finnish architects. He was an inveterate letter writer in English, always situating himself in some - mostly international - discourse and dialogue. Over 20 years, this became a friendship. I would like to say this was a *scarce friendship* where poetry not architecture became the glue. I would also spend more than two decades making endless re-translations of Paavo Haavikko's *Talvipalatsi* (Winter Palace) a volume I found on Pietilä's shelf in 1974. I would show him various versions over the years. Translations were fluid; there was no resting place. Often if he was preparing a text or interpreting his work, he would write single or double lines. He would leave a space between, like poetry as in the following section.

He lived in a meta-world before this world was saturated by Postmodernism and Facebook.

Unusual for a Finnish architect, he wrote Intensely, using text as contest and exploration.

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Architecture could be artificial and contrived. But he knew what he meant by this.

He was fond of the word 'fiction.'

He was fond of speaking of himself in the third person.

In our conversations he would often slip in and out of himself as 'Pietilä'.

This third-person world was a relief from unacceptable familiarity and convention.



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'Pietilä' was the name of a joint practice along with his wife Raili.

But Pietilä would also be the name on an envelope,

The name on an account or the name on a large, detailed drawing.

When Charles Jencks started those drawings called the *Evolutionary Tree* (1971) Pietilä would reproduce them on the copy machine.

He would take a copy. I remember him cutting and removing the name Pietilä

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Why has Jencks put me there? He would re-insert his own name in different places.

He would point to it on the page and say: "there's Pietilä".

He would re-situate himself amongst the world architects.

Whether Jencks put him next to the architect Hugo Haring or Erich Mendelsohn he would insist on moving himself.

He enjoyed de-stabilizing Jencks' mapping.



He would move to see if he fitted 'better' next to Archigram or
Johansson and the Mummer's Theatre.

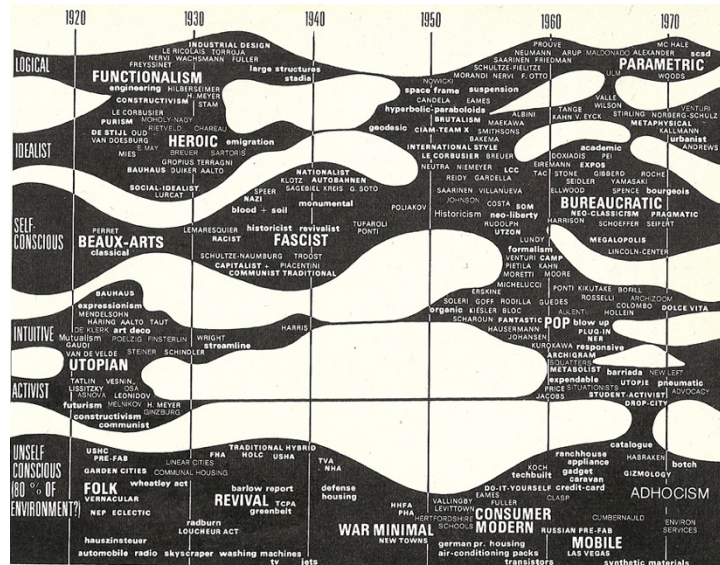
If he saw the names of Venturi or Moore, Ambasz or Wines' SITE,
he would tempt the connections by placing his name next to these.

This game was neither as ridiculous nor as irrelevant as it may have seemed.

To those who knew only the picture of the man not the work, they saw the charm,

They saw a low-voiced mysticism turn poetic. He was irresistible, and unsettling.

What's wrong with this picture?



Where does Pietilä fit? Cutting out his name. Re-situating himself amongst world architects. It was only partly a game. He was as undecidable as the works. He took his own wanderings into architecture from a life lived inseparably, almost in exile sometimes.. For those who knew him personally, they would see his energy later lessen. It had to. He would grow tired, but you had to know him to see it. A mischief however remained up until the end. Pietilä was too good an architect, and too much prowling the borders of architecture and philosophy not to know that nature, landscape and language were but alibis for the architectural sequence, for artificiality and contrivance. Any method was always *against method*. His alertness to mythology and metaphor, anthropology and analogy, made him reassuringly playful before someone else could get there. Yet, in a way he remains unrevealed. He may never have felt this aspect of his work, his originality, had been truly recognized in Finland. He didn't need to say this directly. He would pause, linger just at that moment of thinking of correcting something. Then he would place his name next to St Elia or Kurt Schwitters. *There's Pietilä!*