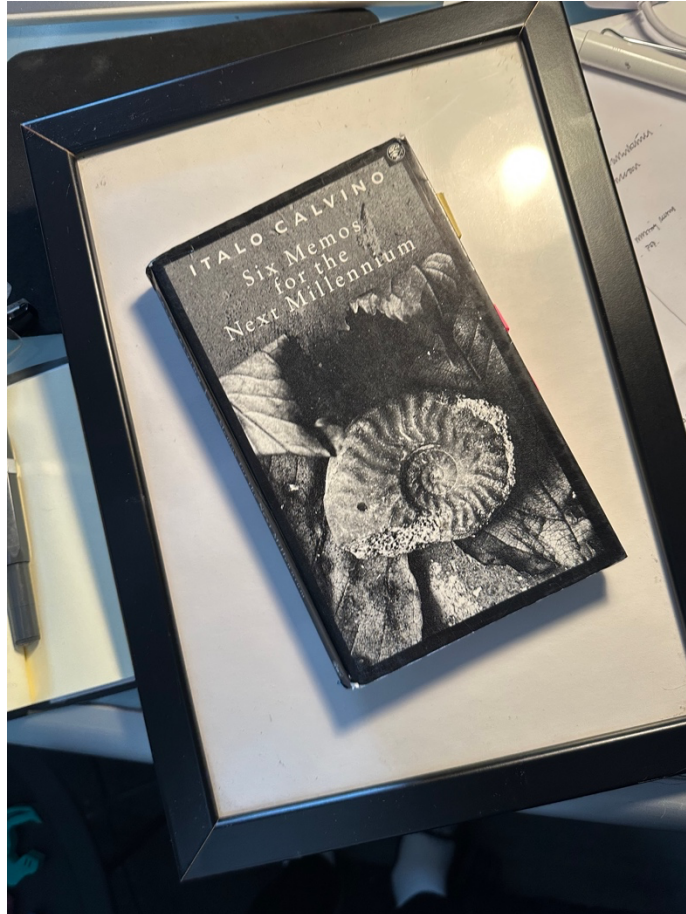


THE MISSING MEMO

Rogert Connah

1993



Located somewhere in Casa Wagner (Venezia) is a paperback volume of Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. The visitor need search for this volume for its location is not obvious. On its cover, in black and white, a shell. Just before he died Italo Calvino was working on a series of texts for the Charles Eliot Norton lectures in 1984 which he titled 'Six Memos for The Next Millenium'. Amongst the memos Calvino discussed were - *lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity*.

Italo Calvino got as far as the fifth memo, leaving only notes for the sixth memo. The word 'consistency' was written faintly in Calvino's own hand. Consistency might have only been a sketch for the sixth memo but if indeed the sixth memo was consistency, what would we make of it in the light of the previous five memos? And if the missing memo wasn't to be 'consistency', what would we invent as the final memo to help us through to the next millennium?

In 1993 I conducted an architectural workshop for the school of architecture in a satellite building (Kaapelitehdas) with the name 'The Missing Memo'. This sixth memo is what each of those participating in the workshop would make of Calvino's 'absence'. No more clues were given the mostly international students, no more steering implied. There was nothing to teach except the intensity of exchange and enquiry. The search was on for the lost memo as each student had the liberty to agree with Calvino and interpret 'consistency' in their own way or then take the opportunity to disagree, introduce disruption and volatility, and alter the sixth memo into another necessity for the next millennium.

The students were to take as given the first five memos. The form of the workshop was interdisciplinary and open; it included typography, video, installation, writing, music, drawing. As an architectural project – an eventually installation - it might construct words or time or then leave words and time well alone.

Resonating with Calvino's thread the students were to invent parallel narratives, unwinding as Calvino did in his memos, using literature as an existential function. Our thread was to unwind architecture as an existential function. In amongst all the logics of dissolution and reunion, we could not begin better than with the search for lightness as an initial reaction to the weight of current living and World-not-Finnish architecture. But that was just a beginning. That was the first memo. And we wanted the sixth, the *missing memo*.

Assessment was ongoing, derailed and unending as the workshop took the form of a theatre-critique. Gone was the lecture-based or tutorial-based critique. We discussed the death of the seminar, the inevitable hubris voiced by the professors and professional architects. Brevity required the necessity to develop clearly, within a wide range of options, the divergent discipline to arrive at a concept. Then light it as if a fire waiting to emerge.

Crucial then was the ability to be on the move as the critical concepts developed and produced a disruptive and volatile thinking, Students discovered the necessity to dissolve or transform their thinking into a chance-coherence that suggested itself. Trimming, redefining and reformulating their own thinking was as necessary as much as the liberty and licence of expanding and diverging into unknown areas and media. There was no need to say more. Everything could remain missing!



Gareth Griffith © 1993

An installation-studio run by Roger Connah

Kaapelitehdas, Helsinki(1993)