

See Bechtown and Die!

**Izaak Mizrahi for Target, Brad Pitt for Bechtown
and Albert Camus for Suicide**



Bechtown Galveston (early 2008)

architectural scripts, narratives and fictions



The reality architects of Bechtown

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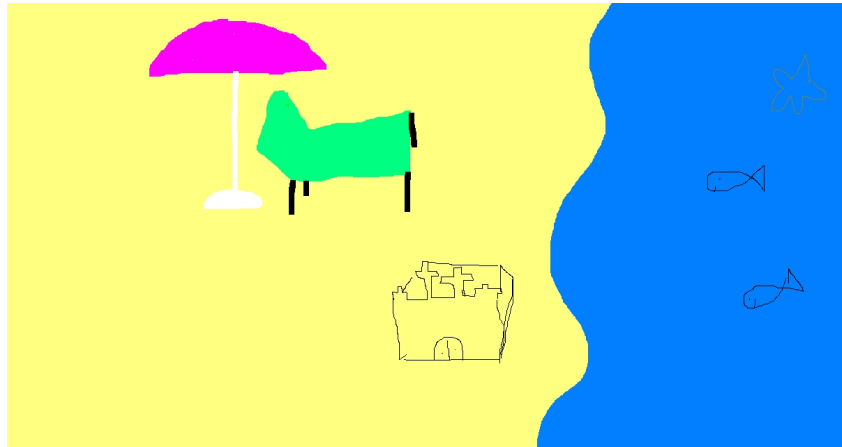
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From Frangocastello to Beachtown



n alice challinor – from frangocastello to beachtown (2008)

May the best meme lose, may competition tumble, may the chreode pass over to the monode and back to the geode, may the talking heads stutter until finally coming to a rest in another utopia of their own making, of interest only to those who think the big ideas in life are answered by big ideas in architecture.

Surely it is time to recognize that architecture has not only survived what could be written about it, but what has never been written about it. There has to be some lament that the ‘new journalism’ (or the ‘new new journalism’) failed to derail architects from their privileged centers of no further communication.

From the Plato scholars to the life-science peddlers, from the vehement anti-French theorists to the post-Marxist mumblers, from the Vth Principalists to the self-branders, from the baroque-dissolvers to the D&G fold fashionistas, from the New Urban Guild to the Pattern Recognizers, the solipsistic reverie in architecture is both alive and unwell.

Nothing in the separation amongst those who practice and theorize about architecture has been able to dent the hubris and circus of architectural discourse. These are the open sustainable solutions emerging from the pizza and espresso academies.

The academies that reach deep into studios turning out - from Vienna to Vancouver, from Harvard to Houston, from Graz to Galveston - delinquent free-running strategies attempting to take architecture wider than the agenda it keeps setting for itself.

What language do we use to assess an achievement as yet unachieved; a vision as yet un-visions but potentially dehumanized by the Rover control centre? Rover? Remember rover: the menacing robotic surveillance system in *The Village*, the white balloon that could follow your every step and even walk on water.

Smoke in this script will drift back into the fake chimneys as the weather balloon passes by. And the architect in this script will fulfil a lifelong dream belonging to someone else, when coloured-wash buildings are filled in between the statues of Godzilla, Jesus and Homer Simpson which become the curiosities on the flooded peninsula.

The avatar community is up and running, the voids already built into the system, the fantasies embedded within the rendered drawing, the flaws in the masks of cardboard constructions, no less real for being unreal. No less unreal for being a diagram that will be constructed in front of tinted lens.

We can change names where irrelevant physical realities take us back under the headphones as we hurry along the sidewalks that have no sidewalk for walkers. The real home for fallen buildings will be created and indeed, when the storm comes, there will be a contingency plan to disassemble parts of the houses, put them onto trucks and race to safety, away over the sea wall and way from the advancing weather balloon.

In this script, that which we used to call *architecture* must be re-invented each week to prevent the authorities knowing exactly where the residents are at one time. Reality is the nature we set inside us, and the real nature outside is scripted for catastrophe as residents of these revenge communities live their iDeath on their iPhones, Palm Tops, Blackberries, Facebooks and brown-paper versions of MySpace.

Welcome to Beachtown, Galveston: the celebrity TV game to design your own life, without of course the necessity of the television.



The Village, Portmeiron, North Wales - location for *The Prisoner*

1

iDeath®



World conditions do not usually dictate our living as much as the fictions made from them, which is why fear designs architecture today as much as bio-ethical patterning and life-science aesthetics.

Plasma screen fictions, virtual lives and other untouchables of the digital world are starting to allow different measured freedoms to fit within the narrowed visions.

Architecture, no longer frankly a tacit dimension, has struggled for years to defer or then merely ignore the cognitive delusions it continues to play on itself.

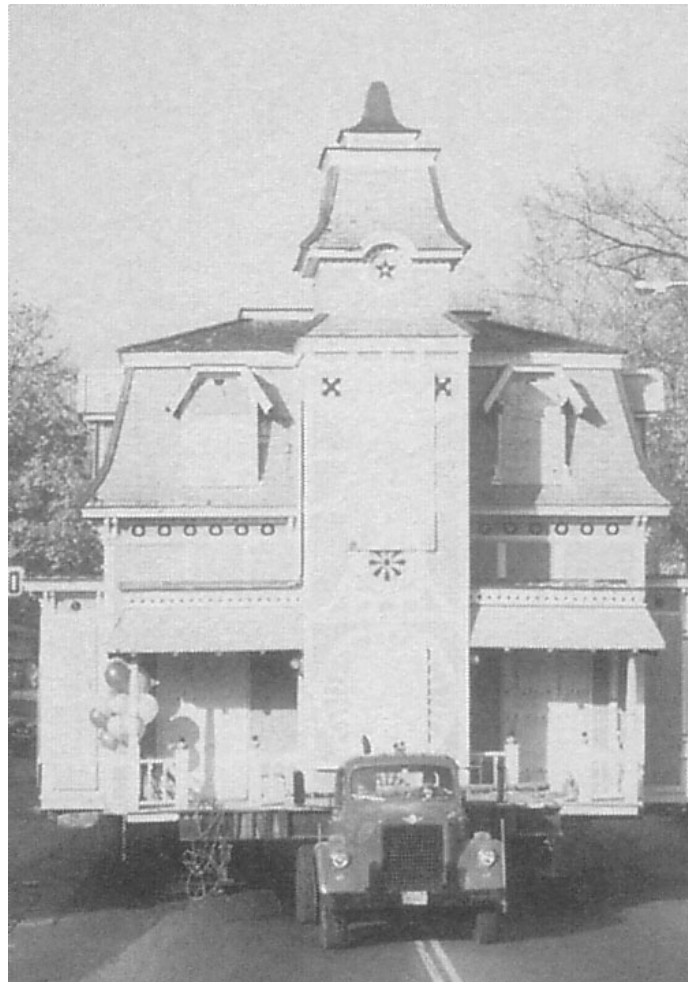
Conferences and symposia are organized with just this delusion in mind; talking heads thrash out the light-bulb idea or the delicately desperate and nuanced returns to Aristotle or Plato, whilst others struggle to measure the things they know against the growing things they will never know.

Language used about architecture often demonstrates a thoroughly privileged position that will see architecture kept to its own slim devices of professional hubris and strategies of no further communication.

It's time to put the breathing mask on instead of just holding the nose. Language can neither fight the architecture we or others wish to design or prevent the architecture we or others lament. No amount of intellectual horseplay and engaging banter will alter the various conditions that invite narrower and narrower visions.

2

the abuses of disorder



What are the abuses of disorder that must rescue such a development as Bechtown Galveston? And must we really move in so quickly and speak about ‘rescue’?

Can we fitfully suggest this pattern-book approach to new urbanism is seaside fascism, or might it represent the milk-float language of a *carnivalism* necessitated today by current homeland security strategies: architecture not so much designed by nostalgia but patterned by fearmongering?

The surveillance today reaches right into rock candy land or saltwater taffy town. Anyone currently passing through passport controls, from country to country, and re-entering the US knows that to discipline a system might mean to render them harmless for other systems to fragment and rupture; the pattern language of such dictates might also require a user’s manual.

There are flaws in the system but not quite the flaws we are used to; we know now not to attempt humour with the Border guard or convince the salesman in the golf buggy that a turquoise house, unfinished and exciting might not only be preferable to the finished product, but contain more potential for living as it is now, than the completed town.

To do this is to risk being shown the door in the ferocious twenty-minute storm that hits the emerging already de-constructed site called Bechtown on the tip of Galveston near April fool’s Day 2008.

3

Who wants a Hitchcock, Texas postcode?



The older dude said, faded, wrinkled wash, blue t-shirted Sunday shorts, greying hair, furrowed skin, leaning on the white railings of the Dune Walk already erected in Beachtown, Galveston.

The site, at present ghostly and adventurous, could - just – be as exciting at this moment as it will ever be. When the Renderers move in and the density is achieved, chained to pattern-book order and dimension, the void will not be the open plots for sale currently on show, but the milk-float and *brightonrock* environment up ahead in the distance.

Is that so unfair in these days of everyday alchemy and the desire for each inhabitant to design the dragon that eats its own tail? ‘We thought about it, buying one,’ the younger curly-haired dude said, ‘but you know, guys, I mean look at it, guys, you’d be living in shanty-land, and,’ he paused to make an effect he didn’t need, “when the wind blows...poof it’s gone...driftwood city, baby...”

“No thank you,” his partner added, “we thought about it, really we thought about it. There’s even another development like this in Hitchcock Texas, but guys, guys, who wants a Hitchcock Texas postal address?”

Postal address architecture wasn’t really a new idea nor was designing a community to look instantly freeze-dried, a new one either. But the sound of Hitchcock or Keaton, Texas appeals rather than Beachtown, Galveston.

Nearby an assemblage that had to be called architecture for reasons beyond me, had its cladding up and its blue-wood deep turquoise colour looked the exciting solution for one's own colour palette. The matching wardrobe it suggested would annoy even the most patient alchemist.

A small buggy was approaching, not it seemed in search of the golf course, but pausing to show the prospective buyer called Tracy the 'turquoise' house. He stopped and noticing the visitor looking up and photographing the rather Gordon Matta-Clarkish effect of the de-constructed pile of wood and building board said: "are you interested?"

"Well, yes," the visitor replied, "I'd kind of like the turquoise one. Great colour! Great gashes in the building, super contradiction, superimposition!"

"What?" the salesman replied, "Oh, you can't have that colour; that's the under cladding. You can only have certain colours. But sure, come by the Control Office before the tidal wave hits this afternoon and I'll show you the pattern book."

With this, Tracy's daughter pointed and said "look Mummy an albatross' and the golf buggy shot off to show Tracy the other beginnings of Beachtown.

4

Home-land Security



The drama of our existence today is cyclical, from the dream of nature to the fear of that nature. The idea of resisting terrifying futures on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico is a gamble most homeowners would ignore.

Insurance companies will not and in a country that cannot sneeze for fear of litigation against the victim, the stakes for this sort of dream are high.

When the art of happiness is narrowed to philosophers' sound-bites, Feng Shui, high-definition television and anti-cholesterol medicine, architecture shifts to offer the type of society and the imagined community missing in other parts of life.

A *beachtown* can be more visions in one; not only the fortified structures to avoid nature's advance it can become the theatre for organized life.

Six for one, this is also the locked condition for open minds, the narrative for adventure within the willed community of candy-floss charms.

The patterns for this nostalgia are provided by the forms of Classical Dementia where the façade consultant is Buster Keaton rather than Brad Pitt or George Clooney.

We can accept the rhetoric of course. It's as useful as speaking highly of someone speaking highly of you; it's a spiral of the willed kneeling in front of the willing and praying for life to be safer, calmer and less bothersome elsewhere.

The contrarian can spin the yarn and reverse the agony of high architecture: "I love Bechtown, it's so...contrary!" And the fingers too fat for the Blackberry and PDAs to *txt* back to ground control, wear T-shirts instead.

Keep it Funky, reads one of them and whilst the Professor of Architecture sports one for the fun of the edge of what he calls iDisaster, the future owners sport them to scaffold their literal dream.

Tending your seedbed has shifted the alchemical menu; the necessary path is paradoxically long yet instant. It's not clear just who is adrift in this exchange: Bechtown: Ruskin Heights, Byron Plains, Dawkins Flats!

5

Not for Public Use!



The last time I found myself on a beach was in Karachi. To the left, as you approach McDonald's and the pizza academy buildings, Clifton Beach is by day, a touch festive, a touch fearsome.

To the right, long promenade, riding school and the hold-your-noise stretch where pollution reaches its own heights. Clifton Beach to the left is a touch unbalanced, lost as it is in the history of its imperial name, its position in the politics and fear of that city.

An unfortified space, it suspends its British history and enters the personal history of its evening strollers. At night, the fear is stranded, the anxiety closes off and moves to other parts of the fortified city of Karachi as the huge lights floodlight the beach.

There, glistening the rippled sand, catching the retreated water a hundred and fifty meters from the promenade, the beach becomes magic, otherworld, and – if you wish to use the word, the moment when the ordinary architecture of the city meets the *soul*.

Hawkers, strollers, scavengers, Afghani refugees and all sorts of other beach-drifters pass. The sounds are muted by joyous activity; ingenious small worlds become larger than life at these moments.

A curious psycho acoustics at work at the edge of the Arabian Sea makes the unfortified space democratic in a strange, always welcoming way.

The camels are led by young Afghan refugees. The horses too!

You can observe the beach activity from the horse you take, to the immense delight of the young Afghan boy; the families run around, the young girls cruise in the semidarkness, unseen by parents, elderly ladies walk the littoral and children thread in and out with sweets, rock, candy.

You cannot help realizz that in the immense constraints given by such a difficult community, such a difficult part of the world where the surprise attack or bomb might just about go off anywhere in the city, whether meant or not, this is designed for life.

When the constraints hem us in even more, our imagination needs to rise; our design needs to excel beyond pattern recognition.

When trying to find an image of this beach from the internet, the most obvious picture of the fading light on the glistening sands comes up; the censored script slashed across the image was meant to render the image unusable, un-copyable.

That very slash is – for Beachtown – our unavoidable condition:
not for public use.

6

Enter the Renderers



It is quite possible that even this *kandy-kolored tangerine flake streamline* existence cannot be controlled in the way the New Urban Guild require.

The patterns may be all stretched out as far as the eye can see in the buggy-driver's wallpaper book back on the white cabin, but the user's manual is not given.

No script exists for living in the prison of the freed ghetto. The disorder necessary to make this existence tolerable will be unforeseen and not only provided by latch-key parents.

Though we meet many situations today where language is not given a chance, and we are keen to short-circuit to our prejudices, must we not however at least listen to words that may or may not ever reach their destination.

Beachtown, Galveston ultimately may not be a *beachtown* at all but pattern-land, but we need to see why. Under the claims of a branded, registered, fortified program, we are invited to listen to the claims of ensuring high standards for Beachtown homes:

“Beachtown is the first community in Galveston to apply the Fortified...for safer living® program to home construction.

This national inspection-based initiative has been developed by the Institute for Business and Home Safety and sets exacting standards to make homes better able to resist natural hazards such as wind and water.

...Fortified homes are rated to withstand 130-mile-per-hour winds as well as water penetration. The program has been adapted to the Galveston environment for use at Beachtown, where certified fortified East Village beachfront homes in the base zone have robust concrete framing and massive foundations.

They are also built at least two feet above FEMA's flood elevation standard."

Two feet is small potatoes frankly when the unpredictable hits; two feet is knee high to the grasshopper which becomes a hurricane as it approaches the shore. The houses will not only tumble. Nature's image will shatter into slow-motion cinema.

7

Blue-stained skies

for all intents and porpoises



And yet, a useful Yiddish phrase I am told, there are more ‘firsts’ on the way: “Another first for Beachtown is the BluWood® “green” building material....

Several homes at Beachtown are being constructed using BluWood, a state of the art, two-part wood treatment product with a distinctive blue hue. It is decidedly green – safe for the environment and sustainable for the life of the home.

BluWood resists uncontrolled moisture absorption, mould fungus growth, rot fungi, and wood-eating insects like termites.”

In many ways Beachtown, Galveston is sited on what is for all intents and purposes is a flood plain; it is one of the unnatural zones in the Gulf of Mexico where nature may eventually take its revenge on the land.

We have seen many examples of this recently throughout the world as parts of the land are overwhelmed by forces beyond us; our regulations can ensure standards, but this cannot ensure conditions will not change.

Our desire to meet requirements might promise a controlled community but there is no authority wishing to announce that global warming will not send waves bigger than those imagined in 100year or 200year strategies.

Insurance companies have shifted their own regulations; where previously a 1-100 flood condition would ensure insurance, today no longer. We hang onto our insurance agreements for dear life. If we happen to move agents, no one would henceforth insure against acts of God.

8

Fearmongering



Is this unnecessary fear mongering, dampening the dream of those who wish to live in a *beachtown* on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico? Fear mongering goes two ways; it bounces back from the mirror of the optimism of a designed life and secure existence.

It is quite possible Beachtown, Galveston is the ultimate route to one of those *funkifications* of architecture today.

Does this pattern language not fit in with other funky schemes; where the architects of walking blobs, animals and stretched chreode-scatter digital architecture produce the Esperanto that can no longer speak its name: *architecture*.

We are no clearer about this being an irreversible direction in architecture and the engagement of architects to the society. All this is likely to reverse as fashion scripts the fall-out of form and existence.

It's changing of course and the New Urbanists are convinced the double-breasted suit and Wallace and Gromit cuff links make up for the ever-changing three stooges that run world architecture for the magazines and pattern-languaged world.

The result is one of more ordinary and everyday alchemy; contemporary architecture no longer concerns the people for whom the profession might expect it to concern.

Decisions that affect and script architecture (Beachtown included) may be irreversibly beyond the control of the architects themselves.

The issue is unclear; there is no longer an authentic architecture (was there ever?). If we wish to understand the choices taken by the architects and those likely to live in Beachtown we must consider who might be doing what.

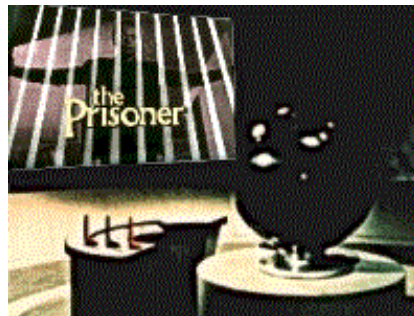
We must once again begin by starting in the middle. We proceed today from misrepresentation to misrepresentation. The only thing we know about communication studies in *iDeath*, is that there is no further communication.

Information transfer turns the new kids on the seaside block into pattern-recognisers; the real architects are the black-suited white shirted, no bling developers and bankers keen to safeguard lives and promise the security of faintly resolved lives.

The reality architects are the cast of *Ocean's Thirteen*. In their brief; this is home-land security. The gun running, drug running and general essential disorder to the city is elsewhere and the echoed spectre is of District B13, when the Lexuses and the BeeEms have to run the gauntlet of the sea wall to get to Houston airport. And to go where?

The gift of architecture

This is not a film-script



Beachtown is also social therapy, where makeover strategies meet reality television and become the weakest link architecture. It's a seductive trend and readily plausible, comforted as the future inhabitants will be by the word 'fortified'.

A fortified existence is flood-proof, critic-proof, ethnic proof; fortified by multi-vitamin tablets and ginseng, the medicine is slipped in between the iPhone and *iDeath*.

Richard Brautigan would know all about this potential when the gun is always available in case of intruders, when the clock on the wall suddenly shifts and the barometer warns of impending disaster. Where do you go? Pack the car, take the lift to the top of the lookout tower?

And the picket fence: any picket fence? "No, it cannot be any picket fence," the salesman in the white Control Centre informs the prospective buyer "it must be one of the picket fences from the pattern book, look, here see."

Such a weight to turn the pages; "I can only let you have one of these pattern books if you buy a house."

The gift of such architecture is the gift of the displaced; revered by the worried well individuals who wish for the same fortified privilege, pay for it, run from it, laugh at it and die from it.

In the meantime, each owner will be given a special key to access each of the dune walks that lead to the open beach. In the immortal words of the old rock and rollers, this is not architecture, this is suicide.

Make no mistake: District BG will, like a good film, not avoid its fair share of gunplay and car chases.

The elaborate police action may take place elsewhere, beyond the barricades but BG's real magic will come from the casual *parkour* sequences that the future children of BG will invent.

Parkours/parcours is (according to parkkour.net) "an art to help you pass any obstacle; to go from point A to point B using only the possibilities of the human body".

To the unbeliever this is no longer done in cars, this is up running.

These are rapid leaps across impossible crevices and voids, using only the spring in the body, scaling seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Faced with the explosive movements of nature life becomes comprehensible once more.

If BG slows actions down enough to be seen, the lightning-fast movements of Beachtown children will look like they're happening much slower than normal speed.

The grace for this designed life is going to come from the remnants of Beachtown. *If you tolerate this*, The Manic Street Preachers sing, *your children will be next*.

This is vigilance; this is the city world of luggage-lost and baggage-missing consoles, the troubled comforts of world surveillance and home-land security when everything else is controlled by Homeland Security and FEMA.

The New Urbanists with their prescriptions and classical detailed dementia have become vigilantes, a brown-shirted control that relieves the owner of serious thinking about their own houses and offers constraints wonderful enough to call a community.

All well and good? All directed but not quite; the disorder will need the crevices and residues which creep in any unachieved in a system of entertained and ambiguous restraints.

Finally, the children of Beachtown Galveston will take their life beyond the diagram of life itself.

See Bechtown & Die!



If we realise that advertising language cannot really convince us, then the media circus may still attempt this for us. “The Coastal Living Magazine 2008 Idea House, under construction at Beachtown, is being built using BluWood...

... In addition to the almost 4,000-square-foot Idea House, BluWood is being used for beachfront and lagoon-front homes and townhomes.”

And if the media circus does not quite convince us then the celebrity might: “Recently, Brad Pitt and his team of architects chose BluWood for his green housing project in New Orleans, and ABC’s Extreme Makeover Home Edition used BluWood for a new home constructed in South Carolina. Now Beachtown is introducing BluWood to Texas.”

I like Brad Pitt and I am sure he is doing invaluable work in a branch we might call makeover studies, but how much weight this holds for Beachtown living and future architecture is entirely unmeasured.

Perhaps that is just its point – an extreme makeover achieves its result but at the same time erases more history however slightly we attempt to hold onto it. And yet, our language does nothing.

Our howl, our kandy-kolored tangerine-flake streamline architecture will continue to attract the game-show world of private lives and public fear. Just another sucker on the vine?

The indefensible becomes defensible space; to which however perhaps the only other solution for such Beachtown is the trailer solution.

To put the house back on the wheels, before those same wheels come off.

Six wheels on my wagon...and so on...the feeling of emptiness, the grand theatre we can make of such small architecture will not help those going to live there, or those crying in years to come for the catastrophic tsunami up ahead.

Have the architects understood the irresponsibility embedded within their own controlled conditions; do they perceive their own responsibility in such sites or can they finally withdraw and allow the control of architecture to go beyond the profession, but not beyond the diagram of the sketch, the rendered pre-digital paradise of Ruskin Heights?

There is a very real existential errand here. The voids that appear now, glimpsed through the skeleton legs of half constructions and columns hitting nothingness, have more spunk and fullness than anything achieved when the site is silver-topped and skimmed full of designed houses.

The void of this planning will appear when it is more complete than the architects ever imagined. If Stewart Brand tells us brilliantly how to learn from buildings, we might also recommend this learning from those not quite yet built.

If we tolerate this our children will be next

Read the t-shirts: stay funky



The answer is brutal. Our responsibilities are high. This might be a narrowed vision designed by fear, but it might be seen as the flip side of the expected advances in the life sciences.

Our continuous understanding of life sits uncomfortable along the constant misrepresentations we make of it.

Whether this parallels the software patterning that is making up other more seductive architectures remains open to various strategies which we now call 'navigation'.

The necessary path may be reduced for our purposes; and the milk-float architecture might be the constraint necessary for the wireless freedom allowed us.

It is in fact however nearer the *iDeath* that Brautigan imagined in his novel *In Watermelon Sugar*.

There is no reason really, why we should call this work architecture, when architecture itself struggles to speak wider than its profession.

Architects, it is true, often want to speak on the big issues, as if the discipline validates greater anxiety and expert opinion, but it is unlikely we will turn to the pattern-book makers of Beachtown for the future scenarios.

Simpson or Southpark cuff links may carnivalize our dress, but this slight flair, this one item of ‘snazz’ in the otherwise closed world can make little claims for serious architecture.

The greening of the strand designs life already defined by life under the headphones; the route is internal, the disorder necessary to shake the future cannot be reflected in the pattern book.

To live the Beachtown dream, a user’s manual might start with the following:

1 insert headphones, listen to the soundtrack of a world elsewhere and close eyes when passing through the liminal zones and the sea wall that leads to the edge of Galveston.

2 ignore the gunfire and open eyes to friendly nature

3 set up the picnic table in front of the huge virtual wall inside the house

4 celebrate life designed for another life

5 ignore the GPS for GB int’l airport and take the short cuts

6 watch Beachtown blaze on red letter days, have the blazers ready and the piping in Saltwater Taffy colours.

12

so afraid of dying

www.cowboylyrics.com



It is perhaps facile for us to demean vision by language that trips along the compound and the sea wall. But the very assemblage of tailored building can, in all seriousness, hijack vision elsewhere; it's the rat in the maze in Calcutta influencing the rat in the maze in Houston.

This architecture pre-empts headlines, offers a quantum of solace in the James Bond world of creating further titles for the ever-entertaining series.

Architecture has no real need to become a TV reality show; we have had the makeover shows, the hijacked and lost shows. We have had the weakest link which now conditions the hostility and untidiness in daily behaviour.

The result of such shows is this: the last one to remain speaking is not always the last one with something to say; it's often the last person accepted after all the filters applied. It might be the one wearing the Funky Beachtown T-shirt.

A walk to forever



Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea winds blowin'

I still see her dark eyes glowin'

She was 21 when I left Galveston

Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea waves
crashing

While I watch the cannons flashing

I clean my gun and dream of Galveston

I still see her standing by the water

Standing there lookin' out to sea

And is she waiting there for me?

On the beach where we used to run

Galveston, oh Galveston, I am so afraid of dying

Before I dry the tears she's crying

Before I watch your sea birds flying in the sun

At Galveston, at Galveston



And to anticipate the weather balloon out of sight but not
out of mind we check the near coastal forecasts for the day
after the day before:

MATAGORDA BAY-GALVESTON BAY- 500 AM CDT FRI APR 4
2008...SMALL CRAFT SHOULD EXERCISE CAUTION THROUGH
FRIDAY AFTERNOON...

TODAY... SOUTHERLY WINDS AROUND 15 TO 20 KNOTS
BECOMING WEST IN THE AFTERNOON.

BAY WATERS SLIGHTLY CHOPPY TO CHOPPY. A CHANCE OF
SHOWERS AND THUNDERSTORMS.

TONIGHT...NORTH WINDS 15 TO 20 KNOTS. BAY WATERS
CHOPPY. A CHANCE OF SHOWERS AND THUNDERSTORMS
EARLY IN THE EVENING. .

SATURDAY...NORTH WINDS 10 TO 15 KNOTS BECOMING EAST 5
TO 10 KNOTS IN THE AFTERNOON. BAY WATERS SLIGHTLY
CHOPPY DECREASING TO SMOOTH IN THE AFTERNOON.

SATURDAY NIGHT...SOUTHEAST WINDS 5 TO 10 KNOTS. BAY
WATERS SMOOTH

SUNDAY SOUTHEAST WINDS 5 TO 10 KNOTS. BAY WATERS
SMOOTH. SUNDAY NIGHT THROUGH TUESDAY...SOUTHEAST
WINDS 10 TO 15 KNOTS. BAY WATERS SLIGHTLY CHOPPY.
TUESDAY NIGHT...SOUTHEAST WINDS 5 TO 10 KNOTS. BAY
WATERS SMOOTH. ARCHITECTURE DOUBTFUL

Roger Connah April 2008 Fiesta Lane, Houston, Cite Rice, TX



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