

TEREZIN

(a Counter-Institute)

Prague/Terezin

Roger Connah (2002).

Part 1 **The Terezin Within:** a work in progress

Part 2 **Partial Destinies** programming architectural strategies

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Part 1

The Terezin Within

The Terezin Within

The title of the first part of this presentation is very simple, *The Terezin Within: a work in progress*. I wish to suggest some open ideas that could frame this. Later I will discuss two notions, the ‘bull’ and the ‘bardo’, which might help us understand the apparent incongruity of our contemporary age, whilst allowing us to live in and celebrate the unrest and impermanence all around us.

Whether we speak of an Institute of Contemporary Ideas here in the heart of Europe, or whether we speak of preserving and noting the historic significance and tragedy of Terezin’s past, we surely need to do so with caution. We are all aware of the traps of organisation and bureaucracy. If this is indeed to be the location of an unconventional Institute on the way to becoming a bigger, more important institute for both Terezin and the Czech Republic, we must beware of dispersing hasty and hazy information.

If however, talk turns to ‘museumification’ of the past, a World Heritage Site for example, we must be similarly cautious about recording a history caught in the unspeakable. In other word, we are invited to dwell – however briefly – either in Vaclav Havel’s castle or in Bluebeard’s castle. This is a particularly contemporary dilemma.

Postpone hasty ideas for grand schemes, whilst simultaneously exploring the nature of a quieter, grander scheme for Terezin? The immediate question is more obvious: how to resist the structure necessary to put such an organisation together, whilst accepting the structure necessary to allow development and contemporary progress?

How then to distinguish one Terezin from another Terezin? What is the Terezin that has an unfortunate reputation from the ghetto period (1941-45)? What is the Terezin of 'I never saw another butterfly'? What is the Terezin which demonstrates the art of darkness? Where and how do the children's drawings of Terezin become the Holocaust readings of term papers in American schools? Where does the Museum of the Holocaust become the Museum of its own obviousness? Who amongst us, responsible and dissenting, will not go quietly into this dark? And what can distinguish the contemporary dark that is all around us today from the dark anguish of memory, myth and history?

Though I had little idea how to speak of an Institute that refuses to become an Institute, it was whilst I was in Tokyo recently that I began thinking clearly about it. We know how easy it is to express ideas in language: an institute that refuses to become an institute. I liken this to a sushi restaurant, one that I ate in Yurakucho, Tokyo. It was a new sushi concept, ill-defined though by the term fast-sushi. It was one of those no destination feeding centres, as they are called.

Of course, these 'centres' no longer have a centre. The space is small, miniature, even a no-space! The food goes round on small plates on a small conveyor belt in front of your eyes. The emphasis is always changing. As you sit and watch the cinema in front of you, you choose this or that raw fish, wrapped delicately over a nub of sweetened rice. In a way you eat without arriving anywhere. No sooner have you chosen your dishes, made your own green tea in front of your own eyes, you are ready to leave. This was somewhere, a place where you didn't have to arrive to think you had been there. This reminded me of the *Terezin within* which I did not know. The Terezin within which belongs to all.

Another Empire of Signs?

Some of you may know the little book that the French thinker Roland Barthes wrote about Japan. It has always intrigued me and upon my return from Tokyo I realised this was the fifth time I had read the book. What have I learnt in this flux? When Roland Barthes wrote 'Empire of Signs' in 1970 he was as clear as he could be about the Japan he was inventing. Japan, this country we call Japan, was a fiction of the reality he was attempting to read.

At home in both linguistics and literature, Barthes was fond of *reading out* a culture. He could tease out the limits of a culture, until he reached what he termed, the *acultural*. In his search for an unheard-of symbolic system, one detached from our own, Barthes spoke not of any loving gaze toward Japan as part of the Orient. This was not only a matter of indifference to him; it was a cliché that he had to negotiate.

Barthes preferred to speak of a system, a gentle system, something which could inspire generosity, something that showed itself, gave itself, without hysteria, without looking for something in return. It was to be something vulnerable, displaying the wit, poetics and the *erotica* even of a mask. Yet finally it was to have nothing to hide. It was to invite us into another world outside our own.

Whilst not claiming to represent or analyse reality, Barthes wished to isolate a certain number of features within this place, this site, which he called *Japan*. Anyone familiar with Roland Barthes' work from the 1950s, to 1980 when he died, will recognise this gentle postponement. Barthes had the ability of putting thinking on hold. As if he recognised, as we all do sometimes, how we might say or claim things too hastily, things we cannot achieve.

This was a methodology Barthes used time and time again. It was not, as some might claim, prevarication. To defer meaning was not to deny it, but to be cautious about its use and abuse. From features observed on a seminar trip, Barthes deliberately formed a system. "It is this system which I shall call," Barthes said, "Japan."

When we discuss *Terezin*, when we use it as short-cut to the city of Theresienstadt, when we think of it as a duelling fortress to Prague Castle, when we consider its privilege and position, in the centre of the centre of Europe, as an interdisciplinary cultural institute possibly, are we not presented with a similar move? Are we not invited to postpone a hasty imagination? Are we not able to warn ourselves about any grandiose scheme for a contemporary interdisciplinary cultural centre?

Are we able to create a site which can give back to the city once lost, its history and suffering? Faced with the 'holocaust-obvious' about Terezin, must we not put our thinking on hold? And prevaricate if we must, should we not do this with a personal responsibility which we owe to each victim, survivor, each stranger or tourist? And if we speak of a parallel exercise, how might we do this before we rush headlong into ideas for a counter-institute?

Liminal Space(s)

Right now, as I speak, is it one million or two million massing on the Kashmir borders of Pakistan and India? Troops pulled from one border, the Kyber Pass, to another, the Himalayan foothills. Obviously, I use the plural 'borders'. For even the border, that sacred zone which we occupy to move from one world to another, has become inhabitable. This is that *liminal space* which the British anthropologist Edmund Leach spoke about.

So many of us no longer pass from these worlds to the other, we live within them. Everywhere, in Europe, in the Middle East, in Asia, in the Americas, people have begun living in these liminal spaces. Everywhere, what was provisional, transitional for some has become permanence for others. Europe, for example, has become one of the largest liminal spaces in the world. It is beginning to live in a constant unrest, constant unpredictability, constant movement, and constant commerce.

Fluxus is no longer an art movement privileged to disrupt art gallery practice, it is closer, much closer to home. *Situationism* is no longer a movement charting the economy and culture of the spectacle, we already began living this spectacular catastrophe in the last century. *Deconstruction* is no longer a movement in literature shifted into architecture, it has begun to undress thinking itself.

Spectacular and speculative, art and architecture are now responding to the movement of capital and culture, leaving little in between. Inhabiting these transitional spaces, inhabiting countries which are already formed or are still to form; this is no longer only a temporary or transitional existence. These places are not only 'virtual' they have become as real as the space one departs. Like the refugee centre in Calais where nightly hundreds try to storm onto the trains leaving for the UK, arrival is no longer guaranteed.

So how if we are to engage our own responsibility should we talk of a dissenting centre for Terezin; a centre which de-centres as it proceeds? Could this be a centre which charts the history of political indifference and the paradox of the paradise ghetto, as well as it charts the sovereignty of the contemporary mind. What is the most contemporary movement alive today?

Does it not resemble a kind of de-radicalism; a movement that is all around us, everywhere, remaining silent but silently atomising a world further than we ever imagined? Must we not be aware of the short-cut that we can put on the desktop of our computers; that little Terezin icon which we click to lead to the abbreviated world?

A Town which Disappeared from the Map

Whilst thinking of this presentation, trying to frame words which I wished were not so frameable, I turned to the library in *The Hotel Architecture*. The Hotel Architecture is a fictional world I inhabit. A four to five--hundred-year-old cottage in North Wales where I write, it is made up of three workers' cottages built in between 1580 and 1730. Flooded by the local river over a year ago, it is now renovated, now lined with books collected from lives lived in various cultures.

For some reason, though I could find Czech books, books by Czech poets like Nezval, Bartusek, Nazlik and Holub, books by Kundera, Havel, Capek, I was slightly ashamed that there were not more. Just when I thought I needed them, the library was so poor. So forgive me, but for some reason it was to the Polish poet Tadeusz Rozewicz that I was pulled.

We all have that feeling. Somewhere I knew Rosewicz had written something which I needed. I found the volume I was looking for on the shelf between the volumes of Fernando Pessoa and Octavio Paz and Wallace Stevens. Locating the poem *Yendaran*, a town which disappeared from the Map of Malay, I thought I knew which Terezin, which voice, which space we might begin to occupy. The poem is not punctuated, has no question marks. Yet it punctuates our discussion, it questions all, this Terezin within:

Yendaran vanished
from the face of the earth

Yendaran
is it the name of a plant
or a gleam of light
on a trembling leaf

Yendaran is it the name
of a small wretch
unsought by his parents

Yendaran is it the name
Of a strolling circus
which docks at the shore
of the town and vanishes at dawn

Yendaran is it a bird
that's perched on a branch

Yendaran is it a leaf

Yendaran is it the name of a wretch
or the name of a strolling circus
or the wing of a passing bird

Yendaran vanished
from the face of the earth

Yendaran
is it a stream
that's hid in the rock
or a one-day butterfly
or a girl that ran
through trees
is it a smile or a tear

Yendaran Yendaran
is it light or shade
they stuck severed heads
in rubber plantations
black heads
silent lips
They stuck severed heads
in tin mines
silent lips
They stuck severed heads to frighten off freedom

About which
this silence speaks

A Work-in-Progress

How are we to continue to formulate this *Terezin within*, this Terezin as a ‘work in progress’ within but beyond history? Surely Terezin cannot be another representation, another wisdom, another set of ideals and proposals that can take the name ‘war-machine’? What do we bring to it if we speak of it as a ‘revived corpse’? What do we achieve by negotiating contemporary philosophy and considering Terezin, a ‘pertinent mechanism for the distribution of tendencies’?

What if we wish for this Terezin, no ambition, no hegemony and no ideology to speak about in the ideological sense of the word? What, if we are already the living dead, do we do about the need to understand a death always out of our reach? We speak of giving children another lease of life when, in fact, to believe the nihilism shaping around us, perhaps we desperately need another lease of death?

But where better to contemplate these issues than in this *work in progress* we have so named, *Terezin*. Obviously, there is little coherence in the way we may wish to close the images that make up these *Terezins*. If we are to obey our own logic, then we must speak in riddle, we must speak of locking the images open. In literary terms such a riddle is known as a bull and, according to the critic Christopher Ricks, there is no better, finer example of the bull than in Samuel Beckett's work: "Nothing is more real than nothing.... I know those little phrases that seem so innocuous," Beckett wrote, and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech.... They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark."

A *bull*, in modern use, is an expression containing an obvious contradiction in terms. To recall Samuel Johnson the bull is a creative blunder, all the more powerful today for allowing the blind to see, the dissident to exist and the dictator to fail. However, if as Professor Ricks says, the *bull* may also be busy sawing off the branch we are sitting on, is it as all modern playwrights know a risky comic turn? Is it creepily factitious, is it such a sham, if down below there are flunkies with cushions to break our fall?

Today, I would suggest, there are no longer any servants with cushions. Today, the fall cannot be broken. Today, the risk is no longer just comic. The *bull* is not just theatre it can never be. Professor Ricks might also have cited Miroslav Holub's "Brief Reflection on a Fence":

*A fence
begins nowhere
end nowhere
and
separates the place where it is
from the place where it isn't.*

Nothing we say here about *Terezin*, nothing we can invent is to be entertained to leave so little to be discussed. To make things so explicit, once more to be counted as data in a history that is no longer ours would be, in the words of one of Paul Celan's celebrated poems, 'almost a crime'. Just as we now know, and yet need to remind ourselves, so much of our political activity and change takes place prior to, or even beyond the political, so much of our opposition remains powerful when not explicit. *A Leaf, treeless* was the title of the poem by Paul Celan:

*What times are these
when a conversation
is almost a crime
because it includes
so much made explicit?*

The Obvious

I have used the word 'obviously' at least three times in this presentation so far. What is it about this moment that has become so obvious to us? What is it about *Terezin* that I may have arrogantly assumed is so obvious to us here today? What contributes toward the political endgame we begin to see all around us? In Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq, Northern Ireland, in refugee camps all around the world? The obvious; what is so obvious about the obvious?

Like many perhaps here I was, during the 1960s and 1970s, fascinated with the idea of opposition. I knew detachment implied living a truth which often only I could see. Yet I behaved as if this was transparent. I behaved as if this existential anguish and truth were shared by all. It was obvious to me; therefore it had to be obvious to everyone else. Of course it wasn't, and I must have waited thirty years to discover this for myself.

Yet we dropped out, I dropped out, not as a style of radical will, though it was this for many. We dropped out as a response to unknown repression, to repression that went on outside of our own privileges as university students. Counter-institutes combined with the developing languages of madness. Anti-psychiatry, for example, was not only fashionable it was doomed to its own seductive seriousness. Linked to the work of both Ronald Laing and David Cooper, this became a seduction which some of us, including myself, are yet to explain to ourselves.

Though I was possibly a little too young, I remember a congress in London in 1967 called "The Dialectics of Liberation". Held in 1967 it was an expression of modern dissent and featured amongst others: Gregory Bateson, Jules Henry, Paul Goodman, Lucian Goldman, Stokely Carmichael, Herbert Marcuse, David Cooper and Ronald Laing. At the congress, and later in a publication of the same name, Ronald Laing spoke about The Obvious:

"To state the obvious is to share with you what (in your view) my misconceptions might be. The obvious can be dangerous. The deluded man frequently finds his delusions so obvious that he can hardly credit the good faith of those who do not share them..." Laing spoke of a truth that would eventually destroy the integrity with which he held that truth. Indeed, it was a difficult contract, for Laing was busy sawing off the branch he was sitting on. He was right though: "What is obvious to me might not be obvious to anyone else. The obvious is literally that which stands in one's way, in front of or against oneself. One has to begin by recognizing that it exists for oneself."

Perhaps now we should state the obvious. Should we not, can we not, begin only in the middle of this system called *Terezin*, by recognising that it exists not for itself, but for everyone outside our own selves? An old Tibetan saying has it that *no matter how much you squeeze a handful of sand, you will never get oil out of it*. The obvious uncertainty today in political and cultural circles is the opportunity and redundancy that arises from each dazzling metaphor which, when transformed into our daily lives, slips us back into its own unreality.

Laing taught us how to insinuate ourselves within the ideas of others, within ideas that are always in serial production, that are always part of other books, other lives. Ideas that are always in movement, ideas which are themselves works-in-progress which invite us once more into that liminal space, encouraging us to think of never quite arriving, to think of believing – however dangerously - in partial destinies.

The consequence is obvious. We should learn not to think we can resolve issues once and for all, issues which often need not the resolutions asked by politicians or administrators. In the cracks of the unconventional subjects, in the research and works of others it is our responsibility, not ambition which makes from such gifts, generosity. To attempt to make a unity from the contradictory we see all around us in art and culture is surely not the illusory elegance and institution we would wish for *Terezin*. Must not the word ‘obvious’ entice us to pose our questions differently?

What is and what is not so obvious about today? We could learn from the Tibetan concept of the 'bardo'? *Bardo* is the transitional stage, it is that zone between the completion, realised or not, of one situation and the onset of another. From the Tibetan word, 'bar' means in-between, and 'do' means 'suspended' or 'thrown'. If we can accept the concept of change, the provisional all around us, we might learn to accept the present, rather than any fictional or apocalyptic future. Instead of seeking the resolved state, we would recognise the edge. Instead of seeking the totality, we would seek the partial gifts.

I have written about this elsewhere but wish to repeat it: "the bardo would be that moment when we can step toward the so-called edge of the precipice without feeling the loss of the past, without confusing the nostalgia for the future." So far, I have defined two contemporary issues under the terms, 'bull' and 'bardo'. With the *bull*, we might learn to understand the apparent incongruity of our contemporary age. With the *bardo* we might help ourselves to live in and celebrate the impermanence all around us. It is with these in mind that I would like to go on to the second part and talk briefly of the architectural programming presented by this system we are calling Terezin.

Part 2 **Partial Destinies:**

Programming architectural Strategies

The *bull* is there busy sawing the branch off, the branch we are sitting on. The *bull* is the power, and not only the comic turn, of contradiction. The *bardo* is more gentle inviting us to remain in the present, forsake speculation and nostalgia for the future. Let us, with these two ideas, imagine the strategy of this system we are calling *Terezin* as architecture, without closing all too quickly on an institute of untried dimensions. Once more we shall put our thinking on hold whilst we consider programming options.

What do we think of contemporary architecture today? Is present architecture dictated by the spectacular buildings and system of star architects we see all around the globe? Has architecture lost the power it once so convincingly expressed? Or was this a cognitive delusion played on us by those privileged in the 20th Century? Should we accept the individual architect who wishes to prolong a memory of *Terezin*? Is this a hoax? An architect who may wish to articulate narratives into an architecture, a phenomenology attempting to map past suffering? An architecture articulating suppressed history, hidden tragedy, blatant injustice.

Though a total picture is often denied, a total picture is often encouraged by default. We are presented with multiple narratives of buildings and mappings. What we get often is a literal transcription, a scenario for an architecture already existing. This type of architecture is another form of contextualism; it carries within it a nostalgia for architecture to carry some meanings and not others. Helped by an obvious ethical impulse, we witness a tortured syntax.

It is of course a syntax which – unfortunately – the architect is able to self-perpetuate. I say ‘unfortunately’ but I wonder if the architect is to blame. Does not the historical situation, the trap of profession and institute demand such perpetuation? We are faced varying sets of complex and often over-reaching alibis. Unintentionally of course but ultimately it is close to a fraudulent act. Yet our cleverness excels. We can reuse and transform historically significant buildings into something more than they are, into museums of catastrophe or injustice, propaganda and influence. We can make more even of our own histories. Why today would we choose this, if not the fear that the town or Terezin will soon disappear like Yendaran?

Are we to believe those who say that art and architecture - like many movements in culture - come up against their own ‘cul-de-sacs’? They play out endgames, perhaps a little like The Guggenheim Museum today as its administration moves their spectacle from Bilbao to New York to Las Vegas or Helsinki? With such excess there is often the yearning and seduction of neutrality. We seek an architecture attempting neutral spaces relieved of the power and dominance it can so obviously wield. If we are to seek a contemporary condition close to being in constant movement, constant change, constant unrest, how are we to frame this de-limited architecture?

De-limiting Architecture

To help us understand the contemporary condition we might think of the current situation in schools of architecture. The huge advances in digital imaging are challenging architecture and society in ways we can turn to our own advantage.

Students attempt to put 'nomadism' into architecture, into practice. Disjunction and fragmentation have been favoured ideas, along with a pop-digital to come. They are equally at home on the interstate and the interface. They wish to tap into ideas bigger than architecture, ideas voiced by Chomsky, Said, Zizek or Dawkins. They even speak of recovery programmes following the logic of recovery disks in the computer world. A new pop-media begins to alter thinking.

After Paul Virilio has spoken so much about the 'information bomb', we have to recognise the digital platform. The architecture of 'software' and digital imaging systems implies, by its very pace of change, a privilege toward the young. Computer programming, games, and other areas where software is advanced influence and alter wider structures. The funding necessary for imaging systems development has seen other areas expand into culture, art and architecture.

We know how the program Nasa used called 'catia' influenced and made possible the production of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The development of Game systems for both mac and pc platforms is already altering design strategies. Prototyping, diagramming, mapping, sampling and looping are also beginning to suggest new, impermanent resolutions. Mixed realities are now spoken about which include but do not exhaust virtual realities.

One journalist I know sits during winter in Sweden 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 I heard that Sony might re-shape and re-locate the interface. Our personal electronic world looks now to be saturated with DVD facilities, mp3 players, portable hard disks, shared networks and re-writable, recoverable programmes.

New software will overtake us. It is time to move the electronic production into 'buildings' rather than personal electronics. We might have thought the world of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson was virtual only. In the next five years it is likely to be superseded by buildings which become the interface. The architect will be manager, scientist, choreographer, programmer. Will this lead to a new profession of image management and content control, just as we have 'event management' and 'information management'?

The results are in our favour surely. By being closer to the developing imaging systems and software, by being closer to experiencing impermanence and provisional strategies, students, young architects, artists, filmmakers are poised not only to become part of new professions they are poised to re-shape those professions by their innovation. We meet the curious paradox, which might be a *bull* put to future good use.

Whilst existing faculty and professors around the world still teach students the grounded base for an architecture about to change, the students are proving an ability to think through that change and define it for themselves. As far as I can see this represents a transitional condition; students or graduates 'teach' others, including their own faculty and professors, the software and imaging systems. There is now a unique opportunity to re-shape architecture itself, and I think it is beginning to be obvious where *Terezin* might play a part in this.

Whilst these advances in imaging systems begin to influence thinking about architecture, space and cities, there has also been a parallel movement to de-limit architecture. The influence of other disciplines, not least post-war philosophy, has seen architecture take on language, media philosophy and capital. Beginning already in the early 1980s and Post Modernism, notions like pluralism and multiplicity have questioned concepts and issues once unmovable. We now occupy, if we are to use the jargon, *de-territorialised* spaces. Architectural theory is as fluid as the liquid spaces proposed, just as fluid as installations suggesting impermanence in previously permanent sites.

Artists likewise are exploring 'space' and imagery, siting and re-siting their art through the moving image, digital imaging systems and the increased development of installation and interactive art. Artists inevitably encroach on areas previously considered the (sole?) domain of architects. Does this not suggest that both architecture and art now approach the 'open work' debated in literature in the 1950s, stemming from Umberto Eco and others.

Art de-limits architecture as architecture begins to de-limit art. The idea of cross-over and fusion, the border condition, is a constant reminder of the fluidity of our thinking, the movement of space; the *transpolitical* as it is being called. These are the liminal spaces that are no longer transitional. These are active spaces, spaces which de-limit architecture whether architecture likes it or not. It is no longer a question of whether the artist or architect is closest to re-shaping public and private space, this is a fusion re-shaping architecture. It is a condition where space and thinking begins to de-limit our own existence. Under conditions where it is possible to see art and architecture fused in a new architecture of the provisional, the ephemeral, *Terezin* is presented with its greatest challenge and greatest future.

De-Centering 'Mecca'

Can we speak of something less “finished”, less persuasive, less “representative” as the ideal ‘fortified’ town *Terezin* once was? How and what could be done to imagine this work-in-progress? It is my understanding that the Middle European Colony of Contemporary Art would like to respond openly, to monitor tolerance and generosity as it seeks a difference and identity in representing *Terezin*. But hold on a moment. What do we make of the acronym Mecca? Would it not be advisable to ‘de-centre’ something so significantly connected with another meaning, another culture, another location: Mecca? If there is no true centre anymore, and we acknowledge the mechanics of ‘process’ itself, then how could we re-emphasise the significance of the fortress; all that it means, all that it can no longer hold?

If we wish to see a Counter Institute resist the conditions so many institutes fall into, how do we postpone such actions yet live within them? How do we reveal the lies that can ask us to be part of a world which so easily includes us? Some thinking could be directed to how both the ‘colony’ (itself not an unloaded term) and *Terezin* could operate without being over-historicised, over-institutionalised. How can we allow the historic condition of 'unrest', its 'creativity' and 'inventiveness' to continue, and find its own specific-to-Terezin form? We have already suggested that the identity of *Terezin*, both current and future, implies an identity in flux.

Any socially constructed entity would have difficulty surely if it became lodged in the inertia of buildings too stable, too spectacular, too sterile. Dominance and the scale of some recent notable buildings and architecture do not move us deeply, instead they so often intimidate, signifying control over the very openness achieved. And how, if we suggest a city, an idea, a parallel institute, a system we are giving the name *Terezin*, are we to live and constantly postpone any arrival?

I am aware of the implications of the parallel project and institute I am suggesting here. Especially when all sorts of other ideas have been put forward, and so many ideas are around. I am also deeply aware of the significance of such parallel thinking right here in Prague where ‘dissent’ has had more rigour and discipline applied to it than many other cities. I admit too to being less qualified to speak about the history of dissent or the parallelism of a shared community, but it is with this in mind, with this *living in truth* that is always a challenge for all of us, that I make these tentative suggestions, and sketch for a future *Terezin*, a future of partial destinies, a contemporary future not a nostalgic one.

Perhaps it is precisely this work-in-progress as an architectural strategy which must take on the authenticity/fake, stability/change, place/ideology; in fact all issues raised by Dovey in his book ‘Framing Places’. It is this work-in-progress which I would like to become subject to a more unusual international counter-project, possibly initiated by a competition. The following is a sketch of this process.

Part 3 **Terezin: The Parallel Institute**

If you tolerate this, your children will be next

Terezin? Total Object, complete with missing parts? Or whole scene, the rest is desolation. The first is Samuel Beckett’s on *Proust*, the second is the opening line from John Fowles’ novel *Daniel Martin*. Perhaps our idea of partial destinies is somewhere between these. There is of course no whole scene, and we would be a little unwise to imagine one. There is also no object complete with missing parts, for as Beckett then says, it is more a question of degree.

How could an architectural competition, for example, be organised around the concept of 'flux' and 'process', integrated within a system we call *Terezin*? Is it asking the impossible? I think not. But the invention is higher, more acute. If it is to be of contemporary resonance, must it not sit alongside contemporary culture, expressing as it does in so many of the arts, non-linear thinking, multiplicity, nomadism, nihilism, deconstruction, stratification, layering, looping and repetition? We need to explore processes that could avoid expected solutions, keep work and ideas open, remain tolerant, multiple and un-segregated?

Imagine a development that takes place not only in the fortifications of Terezin, the small 'holocaust' fortress or the riding school, in sites and buildings which enclose a memory still too recent to excavate. Imagine an architectural project that combines the impermanence of our contemporary situation – *the bardo* – with the incongruity of much that we face today – *the bull*. Imagine a building which is not a building but a series, say, of seven sites.

To imagine the de-limiting possibility of these ideas, I would like to recall the idea of the traditional Russian doll. We are all familiar with the process of talking out one doll and moving inside to the next, and so on. The one I have at home is a more contemporary one. It begins with an outsize Mr. Putin and ends with the tiniest Mr Lenin imaginable. Imagine seven sites, seven linkages, seven ambiguities, seven anguishes, seven impermanent conditions?

When I speak of seven sites, seven linkages, seven non-physical connections around Terezin, I am not likening this to, say, a project like the Jewish Museum of Berlin by Daniel Libeskind. Here the narratives are a sophisticated, sometimes closed, set of readings. The architecture is expected to commemorate a dehumanising agenda. It must articulate suffering, anguish, injustice and death.

I am not likening this to the spectacular either. One Guggenheim in Bilbao will never be enough. There will be versions of it, small or big, like the Russian doll, until perhaps the tiniest Bilbao Guggenheim is the Museum down the road, in a city near you! But can we transcribe such intended meaning, scripted memory and ethical impulse onto the façade of a building? Can architecture close pain in such a theatrical way, when theatre itself would demand more movement, more vulnerability?

The closure we can identify in many splendidly finished buildings around the globe, buildings from the 21st century, is not I think you have gathered by now, the closure I am suggesting for Terezin. Far, far from it! *The Manic Street Preachers*, a rock group from Wales have a song which is entitled: “If you tolerate this, then your children will be next.” It is, I would say, fair warning.

Seven Fragile Sites, Seven Pre-texts

What those seven sites are made up of, whether they are buildings, walls, gates, electronic sites, or whatever, whether they are complete or incomplete only depends how they form part of an imagined whole, a *Terezin* as a work-in-progress. I return here to the phrase by Samuel Beckett: “Total object, complete with missing parts, instead of partial object. Question of degree.” In a way we are talking here of a bull once more – Terezin as a partial totality.

We are all familiar with the obvious meaning of the word *pre-text*. This can be a false reason often given to disguise the real one. In this way it is usually an excuse, but not always! Pre-text is also that which comes before. From the past participle of the latin, *prae-texere*, it means to show, display. Literally in our case, in Terezin, it means to weave in front of, before the Terezin we imagine takes over. In a way we are entering a liminal space, we are occupying the city both past and present in a new way.

To conclude this discussion of a system we could call *Terezin*, I wish to suggest a way the above might be put into practice, a way it might become part of, take over, and re-define Terezin from the present. I wish to do this by suggesting a series of pre-texts. It is these pre-texts which I consider could become part of a programmatic sketch for *Terezin*, the seven sites, a way to set up an international competition. Such pre-texts allow us to frame Terezin, to draw up an architecture of its differences and contrasts to other systems. But they are only tentative, to be replaced by others more fitting, more appropriate. Naturally they themselves must be part of the work-in-progress.

It is not that I would wish to discover strategies that would eliminate the chronology of the 'place', nor its architectural/art-historical aspect, but an architectural programming along a more "random" journey which might offer us more openness at this stage. Whilst this is also a way to postpone Terezin just a little more, an international competition would be a way to open up Terezin for a unique development. Imagine this then as a programmed strategy that might take the Terezin we imagine beyond any finite solutions. It might de-limit its own position into an architecture that not only houses any institute imagined but houses the city's own contemporary (in)significance.

This is then what we might ask of an international competition. I am not suggesting that this is easy or simple to integrate into Terezin. But I am suggesting that the attempt to de-limit architecture would be here a step to de-limit Terezin; an attempt to deflect from the too easy politics of representation, an attempt to set up a process which by its very engagement would not naturalize or legitimize authority. A process which would hopefully avoid the illusions of progress we have so often seen from well-intentioned projects and endeavours.

Could we not ask for a competition with more unusual interdisciplinary participation? A competition which would open itself to teams of architects, artists, biologists, historians, economists, writers and so on? To propose an architectural programme, to hint at structural connections, even constructions would in fact need a serious and innovative invitation to explore pre-architectural ideas, pre-political, non-physical solutions.

Pre-texts to me are what should come before Terezin, what we should wave in front of us to engage the contemporary in Terezin. These really are a locus, of site, of mood, of thinking; scattered around the existing town of Terezin. They might form an invisible network, one in which the centre for interdisciplinary culture and the arts would engage architecture in a way unlike that of any single spectacular, or fixed site building.

The seven sites are as follows with thinkers, artists and writers, part of the interface-to-come. As they are only my suggestions, these should be taken as prompts, gentle sketches of a direction, seven sites for a parallel institute.

Site 1: Retreat or the Emptying of Meaning (Barthes & Steiner)

Site 2: Ignorance & Misreading

(a partial institute for re-establishing our ignorance) (Jabes & Finkelkraut)

Site 3: Exile & The Other (Said & Gombrowicz)

Site 4: The Endgame and Temptation (Beckett & Ionesco)

Site 5: Weeping and De-humanism (Merton & Akhlaq)

Site 6: Fragility & Indifference (Mandela and Havel)

Site 7: Joke Knowledge & Suppressed Histories (Naipaul and Pessoa)

Terezin as Interface

Art de-limits itself whilst it de-limits its location. Architecture cannot but fail to be challenged and questioned under such circumstances. Perhaps the closest model for this is – at present – is something along the lines of Documenta, held at Kassel every four years. But *Documenta* is only a hint. The interacting programmes which we hear so much about today in the media need more personal, more local involvement. Where better than Terezin? Much of today's art we may still call art, but it has already entered the liminal space. It is on the way to becoming something else. We can perhaps be thankful it is yet undefined. Long may it remain so!

We could sketch a little more. The competition might seek an innovative interface. Those familiar with such digital interfaces know today we have the technology available to make the digital real, and the interface become a city, a town itself. A town like *Theresienstadt*, for example. Here virtual ideas would not only meet the real in construction, in theatre, a (de-)centre for speed and ignorance, a children's art college or a kindergarten for architecture.

The competition would of course need the serious planning and backing of organisations courageous enough to take this on. The European Union is beginning to show such courage; the Czech Republic is without doubt a culture within which such a work in progress would have greatest resonance. Even here, as I speak, there are many examples of Czech artists who would, could, eminently guide such a venture, many who have contributed to the seriousness of international ideas, thinking and truth.

I have discussed at length a system I suggested we call *Terezin*. It is possibly awesome in scale, but not impossible. Only such a venture would correspond and answer the tragedy we wish to avoid in the future. It is with this in mind, that I would like to close with wiser words than my own. There must be, in such an open scheme, a fidelity to failure as much as a generosity to seek success. But we must remember, in honour to a *Terezin* re-defined by absence, that – as Samuel Beckett wrote - ‘death has not required us to keep a day free.’ This means we have to act now.

Part Four

Culture or Life?

Is it so obvious *Terezin* must take on the very notion of unrest and undoing in our political and cultural lives? Culture or life? Philosophy or Life? Theatre of Life? Literature or life? Which are we forced to choose to become better people? And why? We know the answer given by Jorge Semprun.

When reading Jorge Semprun’s book ‘Literature or Life’, I was struck by many lines, many pages and many observations. One line has stayed with me ever since, even as the pages fade and the things we find significant are replaced with the next significance. Even though I may possibly get the line wrong, I still remember it for its power. It was 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. The corpse went on dying. I have brought the book with me to search for the line, but I feel that is not as important as the way ideas remain with us, move on, re-shape themselves in our own minds, and become other ideas. They are what makes choice for us, what offers us responsibility, what invites us to act, or remain apathetic.

All the suggestions I have made – and I am sure others have many more – present us with an enigma of sizable proportion. Few of us, despite the philosophy of undoing and nomadism that has saturated European thinking over the last 30 years, would accept we can live so calmly, so continuously, within an enigma. Is it not important to 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 at this cold. We set out from a position of ignorance.

It has been from this point that I have wished to frame a discussion of Terezin as a work-in-progress. If we speak of a Counter-Institute, we do so wishing its institutionalism could be postponed. And yet like the curious term used in the early 1970s, *Anti-Psychiatry*, the very opposition to a convention frames opposition itself. Most of us would wish not to belong to a club that could so easily take us in as members, and yet how many of us still knock on the window with a sponge only?

What is the 'corpse' of Terezin? Instead of artificially re-tracing and confirming its history or trying to renovate (as in some of the recent Berlin type projects where memory and the past are re-traced and re-told) *partial architectures* are not only possible but urgent. Am I wrong to think or hope that both 'Mecca'. and Terezin could operate without being over-institutionalized? Am I misguided in thinking we might allow history to meet the more pressing condition of 'unrest'?

To be so close to a corpse, to use Jorge Semprun's words, that keeps on dying? Depending on how we intend to understand it, is this such an unsuitable notion for the *Terezin* I have been speaking about? I am not sure; just as I am not sure whether we should ever close stories that can only close themselves, in their own time.

The town, the counter-institute, Terezin could be an architecture changing and evolving constantly, ultimately with no destination, no arrival. The transit 'holocaust' station it once was would be re-defined. Is not this the system we are thinking about, *Terezin, a work-in-progress*? Is this the 'endgame' we see in so many political situations today? Are we merely mirroring the political as a cultural privilege?

When I have to begin a new presentation or text, think around it, hoping not to condemn it hastily to any form, I do so by writing small pieces of paper within the books I happen to read as I travel. Usually, these pieces of paper multiply and I end up with something we might call a text. In this case however, in thinking of Terezin, I found I created more small texts than previously. But I also found a difficulty in putting them in any order. They all seemed to present issues of urgency in a contemporary condition which was losing its own power to respond to this urgency.

It was no coincidence that I felt in some sort of 'endgame' situation with the world, with myself. Nor was it any coincidence that Beckett's own play *Endgame* would come to mind. But if we can agree about this endgame, has it been an endgame of our own making? Not of the politicians' making, nor the administrators' making but us, each of us?

What is the metaphor 'endgame' under these circumstances? Just as Winnie the Pooh does from honey, could we turn a minus into a plus? Turning the endgame into a plus is when I really began to think of *Terezin* and what it could be; the way forward, its role and our responsibility. And from this Terezin may not only become a World heritage site, but become something more contemporary, like the town it must become that does not disappear. A work-in-progress with no end, no 'drawn' or 'projected' future.

The past itself might live on in a kind of continuous present which is structured to allow change. If I can again freely 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 become another place to remain contemporary.

Culture or Life is the wrong question. Culture and Life! The 'bull' may be busy sawing off the branch we are all sitting on. But the 'bardo' is telling us that there is no easy fall, there is no rehearsal. It is now we must act. Not later, not in a future of someone else's making.

Terezin: a user's manual

If I had more time to entertain this system *Terezin*, I fancy we could go on and suggest a *User's Manual*. It would be fragile and provisional. It would also embrace the 'obvious' whilst understanding our own nihilism, apathy and indifference. If we are to remain detached from the very system we can invent, it would also require the talent of putting one's tongue away. It would ask of us to find another way to talk of retreat or the emptying of meanings we no longer wish to give.

If that be not enough, it would require of us a stricter vision of our own ignorance. It would require of us to test our own unrest, testing the exile we offer ourselves in such political endgames all around. Weep certainly at this and yet the corpse must go on dying.

Our fragility would then be strong, and it would necessitate us considering once more the words of Samuel Beckett when speaking in 1949 about the painters Tal Coat, Masson and Bram van Velde. Beckett was not speaking about these painters at all he was framing a predicament that invites us all in, a predicament that is the task before this 'system' we are calling *Terezin*. Then only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is a certain order on the plane of the feasible, Beckett says.

Beckett is asked by Georges Duthuit, "what other plane can there be for the maker?" "Logically none," Beckett replied. "Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road." Beyond this plane of the feasible: is not this the task we set which we have been calling *Terezin*?

Our retreat could never be so sovereign, and we might emerge from this better people, more responsible. Our user's manual would have to end, if but to move on. Doubtless the idea of a User's Manual for our invented 'fiction' is limitless. And we would be well advised to consider as a model for such creative unrest the city Benares. On one side of the city, intense, feverish, unending, re-forming life and activity. On the other side of the river, an emptiness, a sand quarry, a policeman's tent. You have to pay if you happen to venture to the other side. But in between, quite the biggest and mysterious liminal space in the world: the River Ganges!

Naturally all of us could furnish other pre-texts which we consider important for a European Centre of such import, a centre we wish to call Terezin. That is why we had to consider the phrase 'pre-text'. That is why we would have to consider them as departures, a sketch for something to come, something which is inevitably defined by the process it must go through. Just as Terezin is defined by its history it has gone through and the resistance necessary to ward off uncertainty and stasis.

But this uncertainty, the possibility of not giving Terezin any final shape, is in fact the very impulse that must motivate this project. It is the impulse which motivates much of our living in a contemporary condition of unrest, in the transit spaces that become homes for many of us, in the movement that encourages is to move on from one world to another. That there is no final shape, yet most political staging and re-staging today - whether in Afghanistan, Palestine or Kashmir - concerns itself with the idea of a final shape, final solution, must alarm us.

Putting ourselves open to this, to the provisional in the political, should also warn us in our cultural endeavour. But it should not mean we fall short of solutions, merely that solutions themselves should be seen as part of a flux, part of a changing scene. Topical today we hear talk of a new nihilism, in literature, in film, in art. Where and why does such nihilism gain its naming, its 'coherence'? Is it not also a critical consequence of failing to find a 'final' solution once more, as if final solutions can still be found?

So should not our User's Manual close more gently, more openly. Should we not prefer Becket's lines? Instead of the totality of the whole site, should we not go for a partial whole, complete with missing parts. And are we not - personally and individually - responsible for those missing parts?

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