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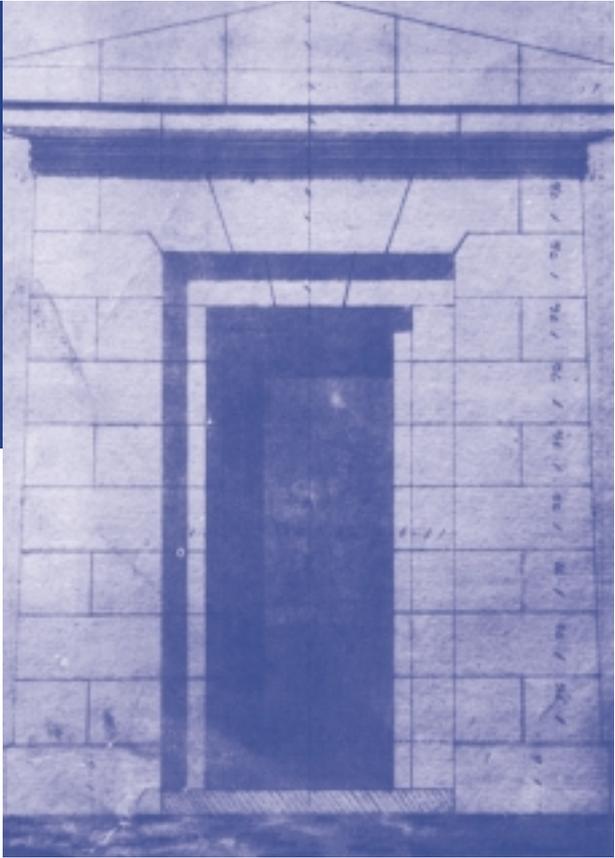
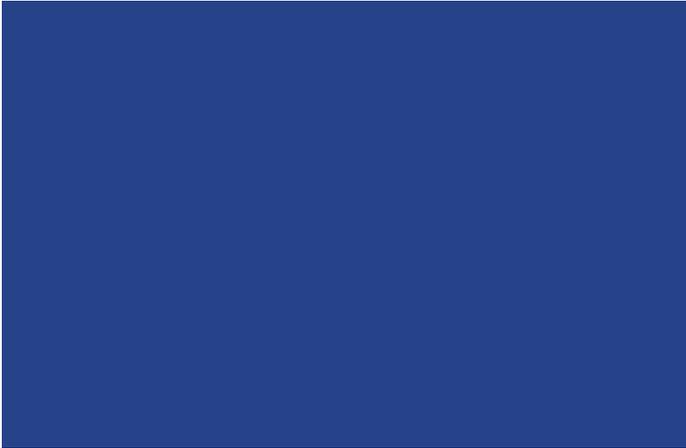
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Editorial

GARY BOYD

In 1977, David Watkin published a book entitled *Morality and Architecture*, which was essentially an attack on the contemporary hegemony of a modernist style of architecture. In brief, he argued that modernism sought legitimation by appealing to the notion of *zeitgeist*, that it alone could represent the spirit of the time and convey a truth and honesty in materials and form which was ultimately lacking in any sort of historicist, revisionist or even contextual approach. Watkin went on to destroy this thesis by attacking the notion of *zeitgeist*, unraveling its roots in the philosophies of G. F. W. Hegel, before finally attacking the motives and prejudices of those who advocated it. The book was considered controversial in its time and provoked a series of debates and heated arguments amongst the architectural profession. What is striking today, however, is that Watkin's critique and the ensuing discussion remained generally at the level of aesthetics. With only an oblique mention of the social costs and more dehumanizing aspects of some of the excesses of 1960's modernism, the controversy concerning morality and architecture was, in essence, focused on the nature of style. It was, therefore, at once narrow, introspective, exclusive and, when placed in a wider context, largely irrelevant.



In contrast when, 27 years later, the contributors to this volume were asked to write on the same theme, they produced a series of responses which reflect a broadening and deepening of the concerns of architecture. Here, the nature of aesthetics and form represents only one aspect of how architecture and morality has been interrogated. Indeed, much of this journal focuses on the contexts and social conditions within which architecture is produced and contains considerations of how architecture can facilitate or prohibit types of behaviour; of sensuality, sexuality and the notion of a subversive architecture; of buildings' lives as commodities; of the working conditions of the producers of architecture; and of the environmental and social costs of building. As the concerns of architecture become more extensive, the discipline must inevitably become more relevant and vital. This empowering prospect also, however, places a renewed sense of responsibility on the architect and architectural discourse. No longer can we content ourselves merely with the narrow caprices of form and aesthetics but must strive instead to understand and engage more fully with the forces that shape the built environment. In this way architecture may become an inherently moral discipline.

1

The city of small things

IRENÉE SCALBERT

For now twenty years, architects have lived in a city where things are big. They have struggled to come to terms with parking lots, shopping malls, theme parks: with all the things which together define the new landscape. They fought to make sense, in the wake of Rem Koolhaas, of New York, of Atlanta and Tokyo, of Singapore, Shengzen and Beijing. They tried to make their peace with the greater powers which, we now understand, are those of modern cities. Humbled but liberated, they sought, as Venturi and Scott-Brown put it in the context of Las Vegas, to learn rather than to control.

The experience was salutary. For more than a hundred years, architects and intellectuals have idealized the European city. Ruskin praised its stones, Sitte imitated its squares, Mumford relished its history, and Sennett defends, still, its publicness. And yet for every new square, there has been twenty new parking lots. For every little Venice, for every new Campo, for every Seaside and Poundbury, there has have been tens if not hundreds of new non-places. Attempts at urban reconstruction had little impact on the city, the conservation of old town centres excepted. The model of the European city has collapsed.

In this, Koolhaas shares a large responsibility for which he is rightly admired. He achieved a kind of *tabula rasa* of the architect's unconscious. Italian *piazze*, Georgian terraces and *Mietkasernes* have been levelled. The city which remains perfectly reflects Francis Fukayama's thesis on the end of history. In the same way Capitalism appears to have won a definitive victory upon Communism, in the same way big issues in politics are subsumed in the workings of the economy, and the city seems no longer to admit ideological impositions on its form. Instead, it presents itself as pure economic activity, as office buildings rising and falling on the skyline in unison with fluctuations in land values.

And yet, the face of capitalism today is not the same as what it was in the 1920's. Koolhaas is not Raymond Hood, and Euralille shares almost nothing with the Rockefeller Centre or even with New York. In one fundamental way, the city at the end of history has failed us. It is big certainly, but it has failed to deliver what Koolhaas called - in his eulogy of bigness published in *S,M,L,XL.*, - a regime of complexity. Big architecture - big sheds, big shopping malls, big hotels ... - does indeed 'fuck context' externally, but compensates with little internally, except 'junk space'. More and more, the place to which it belongs most naturally is a city of big, amoral intentions.





This looks increasingly like yesterday's wisdom. MVRDV's book, *FARMAX*, (in many ways the offspring of *S,M,L,XL*.) was a sign of change. The title, it is well-known, means maximum density and the book is in many ways a further contribution to the culture of congestion described by Koolhaas. But density is not presented in *FARMAX* as a means to achieve a critical mass, hence a specific, New York-like quality in public life. Rather it supports a green argument, advanced to save the natural world from the greyness of suburbia. At one end of the urban spectrum rises the city of increasing massiveness. At the other (assuming that nature should at all become urbanized), emerges a *Lite* urbanism. In this last optimistic vision, ecology approximates economy, and grass roads lead to private houses surrounded by trees and meadows, without foundations, services or infrastructures.

This *Lite* urbanism has many antecedents. For centuries, architects have dreamt of country retreats free of worldly cares. Aalto, Le Corbusier, Erskine, together, with millions of people from almost every class in society have prided themselves on having a cottage, a *cabanon* or a boat in the wild. There even exists planned collective demonstrations of these utopias, among them the plotlands of southern England, lovingly described by Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward, which closely resemble MVRDV's *Lite* urbanism.

But these alternatives to metropolitan life are more complementary than contrary to the world of Koolhaas. The terms within which they are discussed - lightness, temporariness, mobility - are complementary to bigness in the sense that holidays and leisure are complementary to work. To obtain a correct sense of perspective, bigness must be matched with its opposite, with smallness, so that like can be compared with like, as well as with unlike. In this way, the city of big intentions can be set against the city of small things (and not merely next to it).

The enduring seduction of bigness is matched by the low esteem in which smallness continues to be held. One of the most damaging criticisms that can be made today about a building is that it is over-designed. Propriety (or is it taste?) now demands that, below a certain distance, architecture must know how to disappear, that there should be nothing to see, as if to divert attention back to the whole, back to bigness. Small things, whether urban furniture, external works or garden design (all of which were once proper subjects for the exercise of talent) are dismissed with a yawn and a slight of hand. Planting on a roundabout is no match for land art next to the highway.



Historians have shown that for several centuries parks have been laboratories for urban planning. Koolhaas's competition entry for the *Parc de la Villette* is one such example. The city of small things can also be compared with a park, with a small park or better still, with a garden. A garden is seldom planned. Its form comes from a multitude of actions (tilling, seeding, weeding, grafting, trimming...) for which the word 'design' seems too formal. One does not say of a garden that it has a beautiful form, but that it is in good shape. This points to a remarkable fact about gardens, namely that maintenance determines their appearance. Sometimes useful, sometimes frivolous, occasionally overgrown and deserted, they have no form except the one which memorable events lend to our lived experience: a conversation with a guest, breakfast under a tree, a rare cover of snow, the burying of a dog... Likewise, the city of small things obtains its shape from an ongoing process of maintenance, from cleaning, repairing, upgrading and renewing.

The argument for the rehabilitation of smallness is not an invitation to make everything cute or domestic, to transform our homes into doll's houses and our cities into NIMBY celebrations of themselves. To the contrary, the city of small things is vast and infinite. It is vast in direct proportion with our ability to grasp smaller and smaller elements in the field of experience. The ideology of bigness has impoverished townscapes, making them diagrammatic and cartoon-like. Strong on machismo, the city of big intentions is conceived at the scale of 1/500 or 1/5000, at a scale appropriate - so it was at Euralille - for the planning of motorways.

The city of small things on the other hand is an invitation to imagine space not as a diagram but as a concrete entity, to turn scale on its head and to visualize



the townscape not merely at 1:1 but, as it were, at 2:1, at 500:1. If modern commercial development seems to repel by its lack of detail, by its shallowness, the city of small things is, to the contrary, absorbent like a sponge. It has a zoom factor: the closer you get, the more you see. Like in the film by Charles and Ray Eames, *Powers of Ten*, every place, every still has the power to yield an infinity. Like in a Situationist *dérive*, every moment marks the threshold of a new labyrinth. In place of what Rem Koolhaas called 'the problem of large' (the subtitle of his text on *Bigness*), one might reconsider instead the innumerable advantages of small.

Irenée Scalbert is course master for General Studies at the Architectural Association, London. His book 'A Right to Difference', on the architecture of Jean Renaudie, was published by the AA in February 2004.

Photograph: *Dublin from Liberty Hall* with kind permission of fantasyjackpalace.com

2

The History of the New

TONY FRETTON

Newness is a preoccupation of these times. In a broader sense it has been an aspect of progress in the modern age that has supplemented custom and habit with enquiry and experiment. And it is progress that I find most interesting because it depends on relations between innovation and past events, between individual and collective activity. Foster Associates' Swiss Re tower in London (2003) provides an image of newness, of the accommodation of the 1990s' culture of money, with human and ecological concerns. The cladding of the building is organic in shape and its glazing system incorporates ideas of responsible environmental control. The building is the culmination of incremental technical developments made over the last 30 years, a result of Foster Associates' responses to how their buildings have been received, as well as their and other practices' symbiotic relationship with industry.

The tower's form is not totally their own invention. Prototypes for curved glass buildings can be seen in the visionary projects of Bruno Taut, Mies van der Rohe and in the realised work of Buckminster Fuller. Projects such as these were made possible by 19th century constructors like Joseph Paxton, in whose work metal and glass structures became a symbol of modernity. Paxton realised Crystal Palace - a public building of enormous scale made in a very short time - by applying new techniques to the established practices of greenhouse building. Greenhouse building relied on the assembly of window glass into large panels, a practice first seen in mediaeval stained glass windows and later developed in secular renaissance and baroque buildings. Window glass, the most emblematic material in modern architecture, therefore, developed from the manufacture of vessels and containers in the ancient world. So, what appears to be new, an innovation by an individual artist relating to the present, in fact has relations with things from the recent and distant past and is the product of longer and more collective processes.

This way of understanding buildings, as cultural artefacts, is at the base of how I design in my own practice. When designing, for creative material I often recall buildings and places, or perhaps more accurately parts of them, that not only have emotional and social resonances for me, but can also be recognised by other people. In the Lisson Gallery the façade is constructed out of windows that could be found in any motor showroom and yet they mimic, in a ghostly way, the arrangement of the 19th century shop fronts on either side and rhyme with elements in the distant surroundings. The windows sit like a drawing, framing the views of the activity inside the building and reflections of the surrounding world, both of which are the real content of the façade. The ground floor of the gallery is 90 cm below the level of the street, principally so that it can align with an earlier building, but this pragmatic decision brings the first floor gallery into closer contact with the street, makes the ground floor gallery feel enclosed and allows people in the street to look into the gallery above the heads of those inside. Each group is aware of the other but their eye levels are different. Degrees of eye contact and the obscuring effect of reflections on the glass are things that we barely notice but use consistently to establish personal space in public places.



Red House (Photo: Hélène Binet)



Lisson Gallery (Photo: Lorenzo Elbaz)

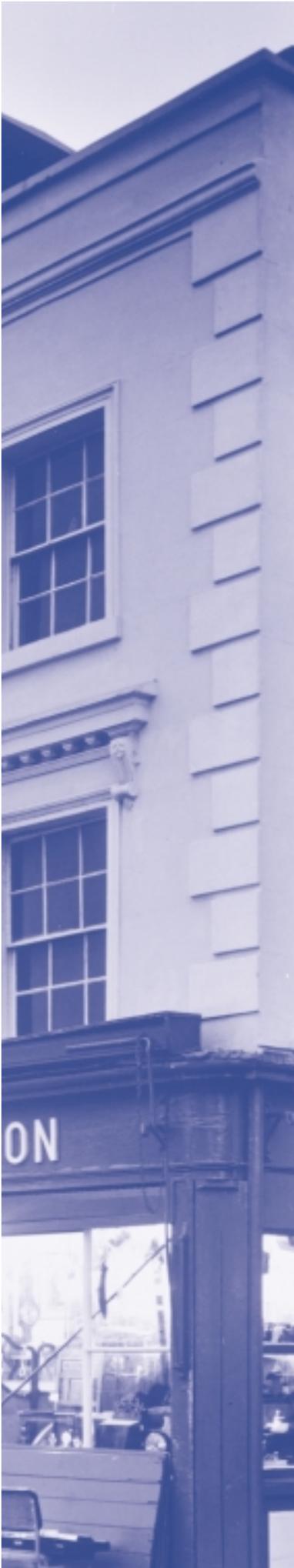


Red House (Photo: H el ene Binet)



Red House (Photo: H el ene Binet)





Buildings, in my experience, can make it possible for people to engage productively with each other. They inevitably embody social and political values because the framework in which architects work is the continuing development of a scientific, industrial, mass democratic society. For this they provide both the images and ideas that make sense of it and the critical alternatives that offset its failings. In this respect, the modern movement remains a source of ideas and objects of artistic richness and social responsibility - especially in those areas of individual freedom, conceptualising and environmentalism that have developed in the second half of the 20th century. This has occurred as much in music, writing, visual arts, film and theatre as in architecture.

Our design for the Red House in London (2001) draws on other buildings from the present and the distant past, and makes a contemporary statement with them along the lines opened up by Picasso, Stravinsky and Joyce. Chance and contingency are allowed to disrupt the formality of this scheme and open up the unexpected beauty of chance relationships and non-aesthetical arrangements in ways that were pioneered by Duchamp and Rauschenberg. Conceptual art, especially the writing and artworks of Dan Graham, allows us to situate our buildings for the British Embassy and Residence in Warsaw within a much broader range of objects and ideas than just architecture and to recognise their political and social components.

Above all, we rely on the residual humanism of architecture that seeks value and goodness in human beings and rational ways of solving human problems. I do not think that it is idealistic to talk of humanism or for that matter social democracy in architecture at this time. The work of architects such as Frank O. Gehry, OMA and Herzog and de Meuron - despite coming to prominence in a world defined by radical self interest and an almost mystical faith in commerce for the definition of attitudes and values - shows genuine social responsibility. The interior concourse in Herzog and De Meuron's Tate Modern is a space sketched out in the geometries of the city with no purpose other than to allow the public to be itself in it. The open-air ramp in OMA's Kunsthal in Rotterdam embodies the transgressive freedom of a public right of way through an official place of culture. Experienced close up when walking from the bridge to the river, the curving fabric of Gehry's Guggenheim building is a sensuous statement about civic and collective identity. These large scale public gestures mean something because the architects are engaging with shared cultural experience - something which is larger than their own practice - and reworking it with their individual talent. In effect, taking history and making 'new'.

Tony Fretton is principal of Tony Fretton Architects in London and Professor in Architectural Design and Interiors at the TU Delft, the Netherlands.

3

SHINY, or is new always better?

SUSANNAH HAGAN

Neither architects nor their clients are in the habit of asking whether a proposed building is necessary in the first place. For both groups, a new building is the *sine qua non* of architecture (Fig. 1). Environmentalists, on the other hand, feel free to ask the unaskable in the interests of reducing the enormous environmental impact of the building industry - the built environment accounts for 50% of all greenhouse gas emissions if one includes manufacture of building materials, construction and operation of buildings. Indeed, certain environmentalists declare that all new building must cease. Yes and no. The running of a new building may in fact be vastly more efficient than that of an older one, and require much less fossil energy to operate. What is really in question in the 'nothing new' approach is 'embodied energy', the energy already invested, and the pollution already caused, in the construction of an existing building. The longer a building's life, the less new energy needs to be spent and the less new pollution caused. If a building can be refurbished, and is instead torn down in the interests of 'newness', then that invested energy is to some degree 'wasted'.

This presents us with a 'new' way of viewing the new, a way that doesn't necessarily and automatically subscribe to the convention that new = good. Within this environmental view, renewed = as good, and often better, than the new. This is because the environmental sciences are on the way to reconfiguring the built environment, in fact all material culture, so that it operates as much as possible like the 'natural' one: man-made ecosystems imitating natural ecosystems, a circular model of consumption in which the waste of one process is the raw material of another, and entropy is

reduced to a minimum. In the interests of minimising entropy, we are now being asked to think twice before demolishing older buildings to make way for new ones.

This sticks in the majority of architectural throats. 21st century architecture is the child of 20th century architectural modernism, however much post-modernists sought to undercut or overthrow its value system. Explicitly or implicitly, most of us still carry this value system in us, even if we've rejected it: the architect is a hero, and this heroism is found in a formal originality that reflects, or even anticipates, the *zeitgeist*; the architect is an innovator, and this innovation is found in technical and/or social invention (Fig. 2). Furthermore, the past is a country best left behind, because the future is where we're going, and architecture (ever hopeful) is to embody it. To those spluttering over this caricature: examine yourselves in the mirror and remember your architectural education. Unless you were in the hands of a particularly rabid historicist, did anyone ever praise you for imitating an older architecture, or for refusing to intervene in an existing context? Of course not. Architects, if not architecture, are about making a mark, piercing the veils of the future with a keen eye, not hiding behind what went before. The architectural plan, after all, is entirely future-oriented - that which will be built as a result of the architect's ability to foresee. The modernist idea of reflecting the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, is so embedded in architectural thinking, it's second nature to view design as a reflection, even an acceleration, of that spirit. Small wonder, then, that historicism is so disturbing to so many architects: it denies architecture's perceived duty towards the future.



Fig. 1, Siza, Portuguese Pavilion, Lisbon

Architectural modernism could be said to have started in the 17th century, with Claude Perrault's scandalous pronouncements on the arbitrariness of the rules of classicism (i.e. they were not divinely ordained). By the early 20th century, architectural modernism was superheating. The *zeitgeist* was 'The New' of the Machine Age and the avant-garde architects were its celebrants. Filippo Marinetti, the 'caffeine of Europe', poet and leader of the Italian Futurists, declared that each generation must destroy the cities of their parents and begin again in order to preserve humankind from history. The old must be bulldozed away for the new, and the new in art must reflect the new in the rest of material culture: a violent, repudiative, man-made new, the 'second nature' celebrated by Marx, forged by us to provide for us where the 'first nature' doesn't.

So the celebration of the new is an old idea, just as modernism is old - old and well in most architecture schools, where modernist ideas of individuality and a paper architecture of novelty carry no environmental price. The call to think of the environmental as well as the aesthetic impact of a design still seems, to many teaching staff in these schools, an intolerable intrusion into aesthetic autonomy, and to many practitioners, an intolerable extra burden on a profession already overburdened with strictures. Need this 'new' environmental perspective be seen as an impediment to creativity and innovation? Is there any way of reconciling the nature-based paradigm of the new-as-renewed – new substance in recycled forms, recycled substance in new forms (Fig. 3) – with the culture-based paradigm of the new-as-novelty – new substance in new forms? (Fig. 4). Is there any way in which environmentalism can avoid being seen as nothing but a return – to the stasis and conservatism of pre-modern culture? Yes, and in more than one way.

Unless one is a particularly psychotic Futurist, both the new and the renewed are culturally and emotionally meaningful to us. Most of us have a deep attachment to renewal-as-continuity – the indefinite continuation of cultural memory through the indefinite continuation of its material embodiments – cities, houses, designed landscapes (Fig. 5). At the same time, we have a deep need for the new-as-different. Until the 19th century, change in architecture was almost as gradual as change in nature. As a result, there was no dramatic difference formally between the new and the re-newed, as the transfer of new building materials into new buildings resulted so often in the renewal of old forms (Figs. 6 and 7). Sometimes even this evolution ground to a halt as in the practice of refurbishment where new building materials are transferred into old buildings. Here, the old form is preserved, wholly or in part, through the renewal of the fabric.



Fig. 2, Calatrava Science Park, Valencia



Fig. 3, Potsdam, Berlin



Fig. 4, Foster, Nimes



Fig. 6, Parthenon



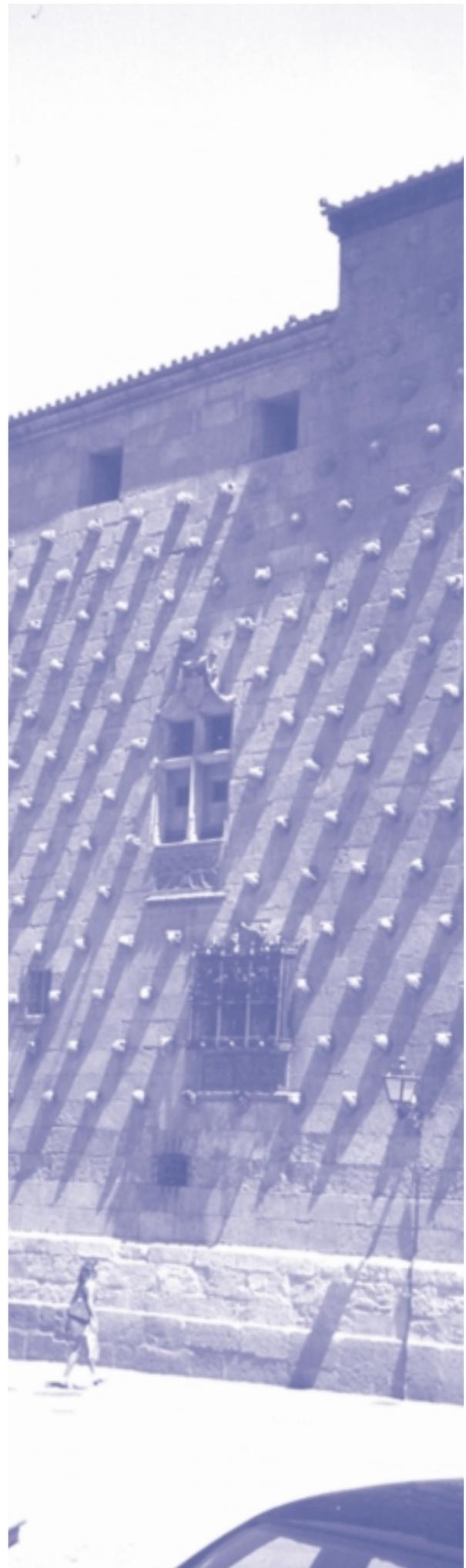
Fig. 7, Schinkel, Altes Museum, Berlin

The cult of continuity (new-as-renewed) was never entirely supplanted by the cult of originality (new-as-novelty). It merely went underground, waiting to be renewed. Environmentalism has resurrected it to counter the collapse of the new into novelty. Today, so-called 'late capitalism' has reduced the modernist project for ceaseless revolution to rampant consumerism: novel objects in novel forms in ever-increasing numbers, flowing from arrival into obsolescence with increasing speed, to promote increased consumption and profit. As the distance between sites of production and sites of consumption continues to increase, so too does the consumer's inability to see the human and environmental consequences of this production. It is easy to believe in a completely unproblematic 'second nature', more bountiful than the first, if one knows nothing of the material processes that drive it.

Not everyone has remained ignorant, however. The ever-accelerating flow of matter, off the production line and onto the tip - briefly by way of the consumer - has led many to reflect not only upon the social costs of consumerism, but also on the environmental ones. These transform an industry's financial gains into a nation's financial losses - from pollution, ill health and over-exploited resources. In other words, the power to transform matter at will, with ease, in the service of a profitable novelty, carries material consequences. While primary energy and building materials are produced in such problematic ways, the making of objects is burdened with these environmental and social consequences. A 'second nature' consumerism driven by novelty has proved unsustainable by the 'first nature'. Worldwide, there is too much extraction, too much throughput, and too much waste for slow natural processes to either provide raw materials or absorb wastes quickly enough. Our linear pattern of consumption exists nowhere in nature, and, before the Industrial Revolution, wasn't found to any extent in culture either. The desire for it may have been there, but the sheer time and effort of the handmade gave pause for thought. It was much easier to re-use than to throw out and start again.

Buildings move much more slowly through the production/consumption cycle. They take a great deal of energy and material to make. The energy embodied in them, and the environmental damage of one kind or another this represents, are irrecoverable and irreparable. The deed is done. So the aim is now to reduce the environmental impact of the act of building by re-framing the perception of the new: the new and the renewed are to be seen as equally valuable interacting conditions within our material culture, and specifically within architectural practice.

This 'both/and' approach is very evident in environmental architecture, which is as happy to cherry-pick from recycled materials as it is from newly minted ones, and from traditional vernacular techniques as state-of-the-art technology. The 'new' in environmentalism includes environmental sciences capable of understanding our dependence on ecosystems and measuring our damage of them.





Environmental technologies like photovoltaics and wind power enable us to extract what we need from nature without destroying it, while environmental methodologies allow us to design buildings – new or renewed – whose materiality is less a rupture with the natural matter from which it springs, and yet isn't all wattle and daub.

For those unconvinced by this model of the new and the renewed valued equally, the day will arrive when the old no longer needs to be recycled for environmental reasons, and architecture's devotion to novelty can hold up its head again, though ringed about with caveats. In the not-too-distant future, we will be growing building materials, not manufacturing them. They may well be animate as well as inanimate, engineered from living matter, or at the very least, endowed with some of the same properties. Such processes will carry their own, perhaps worse, environmental dangers, and will have to be negotiated as carefully as they should be now. Nevertheless, the prospect is startling:

Scientists in the chemical industry are talking about replacing petroleum, which for years has been the primary raw material for the production of plastics, with renewable resources produced by micro-organisms and plants. A British firm, ICI, has developed strains of bacteria capable of producing plastics with a range of properties, including variant degrees of elasticity. The plastic is 100% biodegradable and can be used in much the same way as petrochemical-based plastic resins. In 1993, Dr Chris Sommerville, the director of plant biology at the Carnegie Institute of Washington, inserted a plastic-making gene into a mustard plant. The gene transforms the plant into a plastics factory. (Rifkin, *The Biotech Century*, 1998, p. 16)

This is both 'natural' and unnatural, new and renewed. We have always grown things; we've always selectively bred them so that they little resemble what we started with in nature. Biotechnology is a faster, more radical form of selection that, if we're more lucky than wise, will make material production less damaging to nature. We've always built things, and if we can 'grow' buildings, then we really will be standing on the precipice of a consequence-free newness. Simply positing such a future brings on vertigo. The social consequences of the cult of the architect-as-innovator may still pertain in this future, but the environmental ones will have gone. This, though, is an aside, and perhaps a wishful one, as biotechnology may create more problems than it solves. In the meantime, the acts of constructing and running buildings are environmentally damaging, and remedying this is pushing us towards new and renewed solutions.

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Fig. 5. Salamanca, Spain

4

Slow Architecture: Linger, Savour, Touch

BRIAN O'BRIEN

Stop! What is the one thing that you want more of in your work, right now? Tell me quickly. It's probably not more projects, or more fees, or more clients, it's more than likely, if you are anything like myself, more time. Ask a craftsman or quality builder and the answer will probably be the same. In fact, like most people, many of us architects work on the brink of exhaustion, always seeking to jump the bullets of deadline and demand, always wondering how time got so short. We long for another hour to examine that concept further, a moment to refine a detail, more time to allow the best, instead of the fastest, craftsman complete the job. The world is fast. Acceleration, in temporal terms (speed) and in material terms (growth) is the orthodoxy of our age and progress has become synonymous with speed. Indeed, speed itself has evolved from noun to adjective and, because speed (i.e. fastness) always implies progress, slow seems to imply stagnation and inertia. We live in accelerating times and architecture no longer stands still. Architecture (both design and construction) exists at the intersection of culture, finance and technology and is as influenced by time as they are. The fastness in architecture seems more irresistible both due to the push of economics and to the pull of technology. Financial backing for most projects almost always arrives with some form of time constraint attached. Interest rates and the rise in site prices ascribe a value to each moment and our buildings must respond. We are also pulled toward speediness because it is possible. Technology speeds up tasks and, in theory at least, increases precision - but still our designing produces buildings that lack grip, lack traction in time.

Speed infiltrated architecture when the eye became dominant, when space, as seen and photographed rather than felt, rose to epitomise a new architecture - the modern. Concern for the visual experience of space is by definition less haptic than other architectural concerns. Being most appreciable by the eye it tends to the instantaneous and inclines away from the layering of time that addressing the other senses allows. In fact, the dominance of the visual in architecture disconnects us from the passage of time and fulfils its own prophecy - that our buildings will not stand its test. Wooed by the charm of increasing speed, we overlook the inherent slowness required for design and craft, and become reactive. Constantly harried, we lack the intellectual space for reflection and perspective and the temporal space for experience and skill-building. Lack of time during the 'creative phase' of design and building harms not just the architecture but also impoverishes the 'experience time' of the user. If the building has not been built up slowly, layered in thought and craft, it lacks weight and denies the ability to mark time, to deepen experience. Pallasmaa writes that 'architecture must acknowledge and respond to the ... archaic dimensions of the human psyche' - it must slow down, perhaps.



In his book *In Praise of Slowness*, Carl Honore examines the consequences of our antagonistic relationship with time and highlights the benefits of slowing down, pointing to the fact that in Italy the voraciousness of fast food and loud cities are being countered with slow food and slow city initiatives. Slowness is a progressive revolution, a philosophy that optimises both the advantages of technology and the pleasure of reflection. It finds new resources, new energy and efficiency, unexpectedly, in slowing down. Slow architecture is the enchantment of form born of a process; where the site has been explored intimately, where dialogue with users and neighbours has been carried out with patience, where the design has flowered slowly and where construction has executed at the pace of human skill. Its effect is that the building is enjoyed not just inhabited and that the passage of time adds a sense of delight, not decay, to the architecture. Slow architecture re-awakens our sense of wonder and heightens our sense of the eternal. Pallasmaa, in his 'Six Memos' essay, quotes Karsten Harries on the importance of aesthetics, a pre-occupation that has never been far from genuine architectural pursuit but is even more important in slow architecture where fashion must be rejected in favour of specificity and the revealing of the essentialness of craft and construction – 'the language of beauty is the language of timeless reality' he argues. *Wabi Sabi*, the Japanese notion of tarnished beauty, the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and even incomplete, may hint at how slowness and beauty can intertwine.

So much of design is about pace, about investigating and understanding the question, about following intuitive as well as logical paths of enquiry. Time is needed to make mistakes and to recover from them. It is needed to allow for the reflection, awareness and contemplation that is at the heart of the design process, for the pro-activeness and clarity (Buckminster Fuller's 'comprehensive anticipatory decision making') that is so vital to generating a lasting work. Alain Findeli, who has written on slow architecture, argues that designers must become pro-active and that, to do so, must reject the Bauhaus model of design and embrace a model that balances visual intelligence (perception), action (technological, infused with a moral awareness) and an aesthetic logic, in what might be described as a reflective rather than a deductive process. The reward for slowness in designing is sometimes inspiration, a seemingly instant and timeless (fast, one might think) insight that 'solves' the 'problem'. In fact, real inspiration is the outcome of reflection and investment over time in curiosity, open-mindedness and refinement. And even after an answer presents itself, design still requires reiteration and improvement, in a cycle of decision and reflection. In fact, architects make between 5 and 10 thousand decisions on a project, the vast majority become convincing to ourselves (and give us the conviction to champion them), only when we allow ourselves the mental space (time) to reflect on them.

My own favourite slow design experience occurred when I worked for the design section of a poverty relief organisation in San Salvador in the mid 1990's. I took a year to design an 8 classroom kindergarten. From today's perspective this seems ridiculous until I remind myself that it took 2 days to get a black and white photocopy, one phone line was shared between 150 people (applications in duplicate in by 9 am) and that the office had to be vacated by 4.30 pm since the neighbourhood was dangerous after twilight. The constraints on doing did not militate against thinking, though, and the outcome was a gloriously long design period where I was able to consider, reconsider and come to conclusions, on every aspect of the building. The advantage to the user was that - through the luxury of having the time to really experience the site, talk to the users (in slow, broken Spanish!) and meet the international funders - the building evolved into a community centre and sports hall (as well as serving it's original purpose), survived the recent earthquakes and was constructed exactly as drawn without one architect's site visit (I had impatiently left the organisation prior to commencement, but visited after completion).

There is also slowness of making - the slowness of doing. Most of the buildings that we may consider slow, for example, the Victorian pubs of Dublin or Le Corbusier's *La Tourette*, are so because they continue to weather but show few signs of wear. They may evoke a timeless emotion in us, it's true, but slowness is enshrined because their form, material and detail are crafted, not just constructed, and made to weather, not proofed against it. Slow things are made slowly. One thinks of the first grandfather clock which took two years to make, or cathedrals such as Chartres which took 100, not to mention Gaudi's - still under construction - Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, perhaps the very epitome of slowness and stillness. To engender this care, society has to accept as a necessity the long investment in time that is apprenticeship. Time is needed to allow for the repetition, refinement and the deepening of experience that increases skill and fosters craft. It takes time to achieve mastery, to embed the touch and rhythm of expertise in the craftsman's body. And even after mastery, the building-makers need time to apply this skill to each building, to give them the substance needed to address the passage of time and the complexity of use.

Some of the emphasis on this comes down to the dependence for slowness on materiality. Materiality is the architectural aspect that does 'enslow'. It is more bound into time and memory than space and form. Surface can stimulate the ear as well as the sense of touch, while materiality may tickle our sense of smell and trigger the anticipation or memory of taste. The substance, especially the thickness, of a material creates echo, the memory of sounds past and the anticipation, or dread, of sounds in the future. Form, made of substance, suggests shadow, the permanence of solidity and drama. It allows age to be registered in crack and scratch, in stain and streak. The erosion and deposition that marks seasons and weather are registered as much by hand and nose as by the eye.

Slowness is interconnected with uniqueness - the specificity that comes from improvisation, repetition and ongoing response to context. Christopher Alexander's 'timeless way of building' strives to both universalise the typology of experience and to contextualise the setting for it. He has tried to develop contractual arrangements with builders that enshrine the flexibility to change the design during construction in response to new opportunities that emerge from the site, the season and the construction process itself. Bespoke solutions grow both from reflection in intention (design) and flexibility in execution (craft), and are the backbone of architecture. Slowness accepts change and uncertainty. Since slow architecture must concern itself with the specific and the local, there is much overlap with sustainable design. Many aspects of sustainability, like architecture itself, evolve from age old concern with place, and are rooted (often through lack of money) in the use of local, natural materials; stone, earth, lime - materials that, incidentally, wear uniformly and warmly. Another aspect of sustainability is of course the design of structures to fit their climate. A street in Naples is narrow and tall for shade, while a long house in the Pacific islands is tall to encourage ventilation. While tempering the internal conditions, these approaches also prevent the building decaying so quickly, again providing some of the durability and slow change that our sense of time calls out for.

In fact, like most people, many of us architects work on the brink of exhaustion, always seeking to jump the bullets of deadline and demand, always wondering how time got so short.

And there is the slowness in occupying and experiencing the building, the slowness of being. A building that is designed slowly and envisaged specifically for its situation and that is made with care, using materials that have substance, can deepen our sense of being here. It can decelerate our sense of time, stretching moments and making experiences more special, more ritualistic and delightful. The user inhabits such a building and over time comes to regard it as another layer of himself, revealing or adorning its detail and substance, apologising for its patina or wearing its changes proudly. Over time the user responds to the slow building, appreciating its subtlety, detail and even personality, the very ingredients the slow design stage sought to imbue. The user experiences the slowness of the silent note hanging after a sonata, the echo that outstays the cry.

Finally, there must be a slowness of development, or perhaps a more appropriate pace of change, an evolution rather than a revolution. The desire to constantly reinvent and overturn bodes as ill for person as for planet and abrades against our mind's clock. On leaving Amsterdam's central station on a winter's evening, one is struck by two conditions, quietness and darkness. The city traffic, boat, cycle, tram, is mostly silent and the street lighting shines downwards emphasising the ephemeral canopy of twilight - indicating rather than illuminating. It also appears to be at least 50 years old. Because the lighting works and because it was high quality when first made, it remains, resisting fashion and, in this, redefining it. The slow development encourages harmonious change; the acclimatised plant emerging from the patient cultivation of the gardener, not the mono-functional hybrid that's modified by the geneticist. Contentment is the tendency to be satisfied with what is and what works - the resistance to change simply for the sake of change. Slow architecture must engender contentment.

Slow architecture might then be summed up by the principles of patience, craft, sensuality and materiality, specificity, delight and contentment. It would be the creation, appreciation, and enjoyment of all that is careful, that is textured and that which stimulates the senses and the sense of time, in buildings. Slow architecture would enslow our senses, our thoughts, our movements and actions. It would add to the delight of our day by deepening a sense of being here; being present and being grounded, through the way the building has been created, is used, and ages. So, if the preceding examines how slow architecture may emerge, is there also a question as to how it might endure? Perhaps the discipline of architecture and its brother fields of construction and craft can redefine how we are remunerated, aligning our future with that of our creations a little more - slow fees. Slow fees would take the building's fate and fortune into account, sharing the risk and expressing confidence in it. They might be structured so that parts of the architect's reward comes as a commission on each re-selling of the building, sharing its rise in value, or perhaps structured as royalties levied on any savings on the regular costs of its maintenance. In this way, our interest and involvement in the buildings we design would endure in time.

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The New Apprentice

EOGHAN O'SHEA

INDENTURE

Indenture was the contract used to bond apprentice to master. It outlined the duties of the apprentice, the length of time for which they were tied to such duties and the conditions under which he or she was entitled to leave. The term itself derives from the method used to ensure that the two copies of the contract (one for the master and the other for the parents of the apprentice) replicated each other. After the copies were drafted they were held tightly together and a strip was torn, ensuring a matching indenture on both. The duties and responsibilities could be severe but the agreement was legally binding and unquestionable.

In modern times such severity in working conditions cannot be enforced and employees are pampered with certain statutory rights. For instance, the maximum average working week is forty-eight hours, balanced out over a four-month period. While this allows bouts of productivity within an office, it will also force periods of calm in between. Employees are also entitled to eleven consecutive hours rest in a twenty-four hour period and, if work takes place on a Sunday, then premium payment or paid time in lieu are due. However, there is great value in the ability to drive one's workforce to extremes and to do so economically, without emptying the purse into employees' pockets. The twin rewards of education and experience can be offered instead and history has shown both the evidence and benefits of such a practice.

MORE TO LIFE THAN MONEY

Education as a reward for work was instituted at least 4,000 years ago amongst Egyptian scribes, when rules governing apprenticeships were included in the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi's laws were placed in the Temple of Shamash in 2,100 BC and the sacred quality of this early legislation suggests how, within a modern architectural practice, the commitment demanded of ancient apprentices can be expected from today's staff. Religions are often based around a cult figure about whom a mythos arises, which, in turn, creates a sense of awe. In the case of the Master Architect, the delicious wisdom held and potentially offered by this figure can draw hungry and tireless staff irresistibly towards it. The young and inexperienced best ingest this mythos; stories, whether true or fabricated, of the achievements and formative experiences of the Master Architect, can feed this sense of awe and leave a necessary distance between employer and workforce. Suggestions as to how staff should apply themselves to their work can thus be received with due reverence.



RECYCLING WASTE TIME

Nights full of sleep and mornings full of wake are comforts easily forfeited with no evident result beyond sunken eyes and throbbing head. An excess of free time can often lead to a deceleration in tempo. It is thus unproductive to offer rest periods of eleven hours to one's employees. Sixty hours or more at a sitting are possible, although this can lead to episodes of hallucination. To get workers to perform for such periods can be difficult, given the frivolous pursuits with which many choose to fill their time and their tendency to extend their sleeping hours well beyond what is strictly necessary. The drive to encourage such efforts, however, is very much worth it and can create a reinforcing cycle; once one begins to chip away at the spare hours of one's staff, their goals and aims in life become their goals and aims at work. Abraham Maslow's pronouncement, given in his hierarchy of human needs, to '[A]ssume in all people the impulse for achievement', begins, therefore, to work for the employer. Slowly, the employees' valuation of their own needs will change.

BOUNDARIES OF THE NEW WORLD

During the Middle Ages, the apprenticeship system became widespread across Europe as the skills and tools required in craft became more complex. Parents could not teach their children enough to guarantee them a living so they paid a fee to have them apprenticed to Master-artisans. The children received no pay during the lengthy period of apprenticeship - often between two and seven years - but were given basic food and lodging, often beneath the shop counter. They effectively lived their work for the period of indenture. It might be considered a cruelty, but to be trapped so tightly within the universe of work is not as restrictive as it might first appear. Indeed, a life spent solely within an office need not necessarily be an isolated or disadvantaged existence. Essential needs are easily satisfied; food can be prepared in well-equipped office kitchens or be delivered ready-made. Highly stacked libraries are full of reading: periodicals, monographs, weighty books of theory - therein lie all the merits of the world, carefully filtered for all conditions of human habitation. Exercise can be maintained by placing plotters a good distance from the main working area. Having their operation needlessly complicated maintains frantic movement.

As we have seen, spirituality is also accommodated within these walls. The Master Architect at the centre of this work/life cult - he who provides work and thus gives life - can be admired as a true deity. The Master Architect becomes the demiurge, the *Ein Sof*, the Alpha, from whose genius emerges this mechanistic office and from which in turn, whole worlds can emerge: a city, visible but unseen, will burst forth. Devotion to this deity can be most efficiently expressed through labour, according to the maxim advocated by St. Bernard, '*Laborare est orare*': to work is to pray. Echoes of religion can also be heard in the sequence of the design project which begins its life within the office then disappears into the increasingly abstract outside world, before finally achieving resurrection in the Architectural Periodical as flesh once again becomes word.

BLIND FAITH

Medieval Arab artists copied landscapes onto grains of rice, even detailing each leaf on each tree because they believed Allah read the world like a flat page with all things perceived at once. These miniaturists give example in terms of commitment, even to the indentured apprentice. According to the master Seyyit Mirek, the blindness that all in his profession feared, and most succumbed to, was a blessing. The art of illustrating was the miniaturist's search for Allah's vision of his earthly realm and could only be attained through recollection *after* the colourless veil of darkness had descended; only, in other words, after both eyes of the miniaturist had been expended. When he could see the world solely through memory and darkness, then he would realise his destiny.

Likewise, the young architect can, from memory of the world foregone, seek to improve it. And, he can draw on that memory day and night in a quest for a type of blindness. The designs created can be intricately represented and detailed, even if the worth of this work isn't apparent to client or contractor. No hour will be wasted in the infinity of time the staff can offer. Each drawing can be requested as a microcosm of every other on the project, with the beauty of the whole scheme screaming from every single page. More detail than the eye can see can be demanded. When the feeling and sense of the design does not talk directly to the soul and if a single contradiction can be felt - even if not observed - then the work must be re-done.

THE NEW BABYLON

When apprentices were taken from house to workshop, which became their home, the boundary between work and home-life was dissolved. The collapse of this boundary in a new age would modify Le Corbusier's claim. It is not the house but the office that is the machine for living in, where life is honed to precise and continuous production. Think of it. Our humming offices filled day and night with toiling employees. The need for housing will pass; our offices will fill cities and factories their peripheries; shops will remain open twenty-four hours in support, with tireless workers and fleets of delivery vehicles; the new apprentices with indentured souls will sign away their lives with pens sharpened to compass points to draw blood from their own veins and will work tirelessly through the new working day which now becomes a beginningless and endless *mélange* of successive periods of light and dark – a day broken solely by the music of the dawn chorus, when birdsong is drowned by the drumming of the Kango hammers prophesying new edifices; the trumpet of traffic delivering potential clients and the deep bass notes of trucks filled with building material to create potential photographs in magazines.

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EXODUS, XXIX.

48 And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they come in unto the tabernacle of the congregation, or when they come near unto the altar to minister in the holy place;⁴ that they ⁵bear not iniquity, and die. *It shall be* ⁶a statute for ever unto him, and his seed after him.

CHAPTER XXIX

2 The sacrifice and ceremonies of the circulation. 33 The

AND this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them, to hallow them



2 And circulation in the kitchen; and a space required for a person working at the work top and for person passing and passing with a tray.

3

4

, and thou shalt wash them with water.

5 And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breast plate, and gird him with the curious girdle of ephod:

6 And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre.

7 Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him.

8 And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them.

9 And thou shalt gird them with girdles, (Aaron and his sons) and put the bonnets on them; and the priest's office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.

10 And thou shalt cause a bullock to be brought before the tabernacle of the congregation; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the bullock.

CHAPTER XXIX

Ex 18:21

The sacrifice and ceremonies of the circulation procedure:

- 1. The Ideal The unobtainable.
- 2. It shall be done in a measured fashion, dictated by numbers and directions.

11 And thou shalt kill the bullock before the lord, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

12 And thou shalt take of ¹the blood of the bullock, and put it upon ²the horns of the altar with thy finger, and ³pour all the blood beside the bottom of the altar.

13 And thou shalt take ⁴all the fat that covereth the inwards, ⁵and the ⁶caul that is above the liver, ⁷and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, and ⁸burn these upon the altar.

14 But ⁹the flesh of the bullock, and his skin, and his dung, shalt thou burn with fire without the camp: ¹⁰it is a sin-offering.

15 ¹¹Thou shalt also take ¹²one ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram.

16 And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar.¹³

17 And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and ¹⁴wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put ¹⁵these unto his pieces, and unto his head.

18 And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is ¹⁶a burnt-offering unto the Lord: it is ¹⁷a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the Lord.

19 And thou shalt take ¹⁸the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram.

20 Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and ¹⁹put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and ²⁰sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about.

21 And thou shalt take of ²¹the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him: and he ²²shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him.

22 Also ²³thou shalt take of the ram the fat, and

CHAP. XXIX. The sacrifice and ceremonies of the circulation. Ceremonial laws and subjects. (3) Opposing subject of inner.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

The Drilling of the Bible.

And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto the book. Take three large G-clamps and position around the book in its entirety.

And the book shall be marked at the place where it will be drilled, and the book will be drilled as it were a piece of wood.

And thou shalt take a (flat headed) drill bit, it shall be equal in diameter to the object that will be inserted (and the book will be positioned) under the drill bit at the place where it is right to cut into and in an inclined manner, facing upwards.

It shall be well clamped and sturdy.

And the drill bit shall be lowered onto the top of the book in a precise manner.

When the drill touches the book it shall be pushed in with care and in small portions.

And there will be parts of the book arising from the drilled hole in the form of dust. And some of the dust will be brown in colour and some will be black in the black dust is the sign of the continued heat of the drilling.

And the saw will be extracted in a perfect portion.

And as the drill is pushed further into the book; Thou shalt see smoke arising from the drill and this is the particles of the text being extracted by the drill.

And the drill bit shall be removed from the book.

even: he also that beareth the carcase of it shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even.
41 And every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten.

42 Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination.

43 Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby.

44 For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

45 For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy; for I am holy.

46 This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth;

47 To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.

CHAPTER XII.

1 Women's purifications, 4 and offerings.

AND the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying,



for her infirmity shall she be unclean

3

4 And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days



5 then she shall be in average dimensions, unclean seven days; according to the dimensions of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean.

CHAPTER XI

The law shall be unchangeable. She shall be of the measure and be appropriated. She has designed members in man, and she shall be the feature of her being. She is the measure for your case you will repeat a standard of perfection.

SCRIPTS vs. 2

5 Planning fig 1 12

6 And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle dove, for a sin-offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest:

7 Who shall offer it before the Name, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female.

8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt-offering, and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.

CHAPTER XIII.

1 To show to discern the leprosy.

AND the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying,

2 When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh like the plague of leprosy; then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests.

3 And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a plague of leprosy: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him unclean.

4 If the bright spot be whole in the skin of his flesh, and in sight be not deeper than the skin, and the hair thereof be not turned white; then the priest shall shut up him that hath the plague seven days.

5 And the priest shall look on him the seventh day: and, behold, if the plague in his sight be at a stay, and the plague spread not in the skin; then the priest shall shut him up seven days more.

6 And the priest shall look on him again the seventh day: and, behold, if the plague be somewhat dark, and the plague spread not in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean: it is but a scab: and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean.

7 But if the scab spread much abroad in the skin, after that he hath been seen of the priest for his cleansing, he shall be seen of the priest again.

CHAP. XII. Of women's purifications, and to you, my brethren and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do. (The Jerusalem Mass Sheet)
Designated measurements in dimensional uncleanliness. Six inches (Two Feet) Wings for your dimensions.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

And within the dotted line inside the length of the bible, there shall be an exact space for the insertion of a glass tube. And the insertion of the glass tube shall provide a space for the new text within the covers of the old. And it shall be of a solid formula.

Including the Glass Tube

7

On the Morality of Building Schools

AOIFE CLEARY

Like the disagreeable customer, the teacher is always right. Where better to start discussing how buildings and morality are intertwined than with schools, the ultimate bastions of learning and correct behaviour. This essay investigates the evolving relationship between architectural form and educational philosophy using some examples from the history of schools before finally focussing on the alternative ideas of the Steiner Foundation and some of their built projects in Ireland.

Sunday Schools

Categorisation of architecture by function is largely a 20th century construct. As Philip Ariès explains in *Centuries of Childhood*, before the 18th century, rooms in European houses had no fixed function. Within one room all manner of activities could take place; cooking, sleeping, washing. This premature open-plan architecture meant there was certainly no such thing as dedicated schools for children. The concept did not exist.

Sunday Schools formed the precursor to day schools as we know them. Started by zealous Methodists in England in the late 1700s, they taught the virtues of discipline and order with an overriding connection to the Bible. Indeed, the Bible was used as a means to learn to read and reading, in turn, was used as a means to learn the Bible. Meanwhile, other texts were shunned fearing they could lead to independently minded children. Two typical examples of Sunday School design are to be found in Stockport and Macclesfield, south of Manchester. They each have the same characteristics, for example, two entrances – one for girls and one for boys. Separation of the sexes was of fundamental importance and usually took the decisive form of a floor for boys and a floor for girls. The upper two floors were combined to form the galleried *large room* which was so-named by Sunday Schools as a way to avoid linking themselves too overtly with the church. The outside of the buildings did not disclose the presence of this surprisingly large space and instead, the façade continued upward across the first two floors indiscriminately.

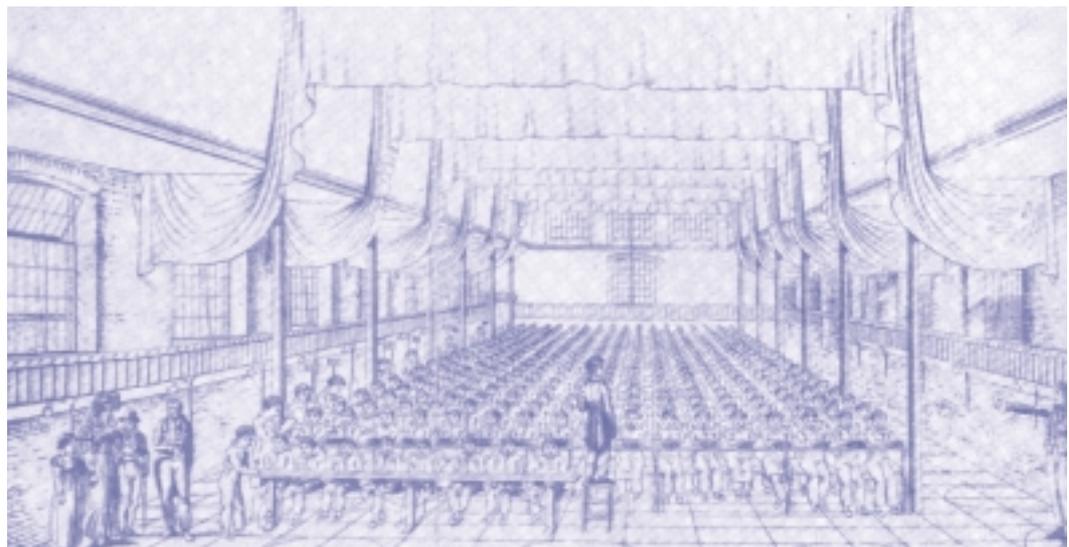
Ireland was home to the first multi-denominational Sunday school, a substantial 3-storey building built in 1798 on School Street in St. Catherine's Parish in Dublin and sponsored collectively by the Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland and the Quakers. The plan has many of the same features as the English schools; separate access for boys and girls via staircases at either end of the building and two large school rooms on the first floor, one for boys and one for girls. It is significant that the teachers entered from the central street entrance and rose up through building on the central staircase, entering the classroom from the central hall. The children, therefore, could not see the teacher before he entered the classroom, keeping a firm line of separation and authority intact. As Markus Thomas suggests in his treatise on the origin of modern building types - *Buildings and Power* - in teaching at this time, 'everything was designed for surveillance' (Markus, 1993, p. 50).

E.R. Robson.

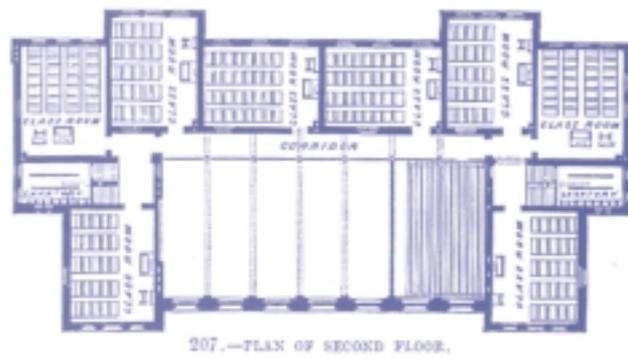
In the design of day schools, the surveyor, E. R. Robson, played a very important role. Appointed in 1870 by the London School Board, he integrated his knowledge both of the educational and architectural aspects of school design, to set about reforming the system. It was in this year also that the *Elementary Education Act* was introduced, making school compulsory for 6 – 11 year olds and specifying a requirement for individual classrooms. Before the Act most schools did not have separate classrooms and instead, they had one big single volume in which to teach all the children. Contemporary educational values are summarised somewhat tellingly by Dr. Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby School in the 19th Century, who ranked issues of morality above the pursuit of knowledge:



Macclesfield, Sunday School

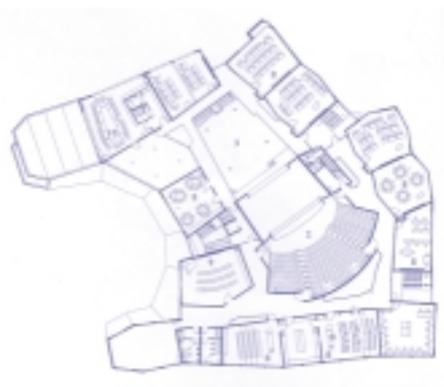


19th century single volume schoolhouse



207.—PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR.

2nd Floor plan of a typical Robson school, 1911



2nd Floor plan, Steiner Big School, Kircheim



Raheen Wood, Map 2

'What we must look for here is first religious and moral principles, second gentlemanly conduct, and thirdly intellectual ability'.

In 1874, Robson published a very influential book entitled, *School Architecture: Practical Remarks on the Planning, Designing, Building & Furnishing of School Houses*. Its guidelines, noted below, became widely adopted in London and other cities in the British Isles:

Children should be kept well ventilated in lofty spaces; proportionately relating plan width to height
Lighting was of prime importance; direct sunlight was never to come from the south or southwest.

30 square inches of glass (on the north façade) was to be provided for every square foot of floor space.
The overall shape of schools was determined largely by the layout of the classrooms and the number of pupils.

Overall he felt that the vast single volumes were not conducive to the individual education of the children and instead recommended a classroom arrangement of 5 rows of double desks, 11ft from front to back, and determined, rather anecdotally, on the distance a teacher's voice will travel. With this layout, the master could walk around the class behind each desk to observe each child independently. Pupils meanwhile could easily get out from their desks during class and there was ample space at the front of the class for teaching, display and general circulation. There were 40-60 pupils recommended per class (a number not too far away from primary education today) but there were other, overly-prescriptive guidelines too - for example, that windows should begin 6ft above floor level presumably to stop children from being distracted by looking through the window to the outside world. In fact, in Robson's schools, outside areas appear to have been considered secondary and

often remained as marginal, leftover spaces. The buildings themselves, however, were robust and many are still in use today. His legacy, moreover, as the first designer to marry educational theory and architectural practice in any meaningful way, lives on and his architecture forms the skeletal models for conservative schools even up to the present day.

Hans Scharoun

While E. R. Robson believed in separating age-groups into different classrooms, in the 20th century, Hans Scharoun took this concept one step forward. In his unrealised design for a primary school at Darmstadt in 1951, Scharoun provided separate clusters of buildings for each age-group - for the upper, middle and lower schools - with varying buffer zones in between. The clusters take on different forms and aspects according to the degree of sunlight and shelter deemed necessary for the pupils. For example, the activity area for the children aged 1-3 faces south, as he believed this age group needed plenty of sunlight for physical and spiritual growth. The second unit, for 4-6 year olds, was orientated east-west and engaged in what Scharoun defined as, 'recognising, understanding and experiencing interest in lessons and independent activities'. Finally, in the upper school, the major issue for 7-9 year olds was the development of self within the community. Their buildings faced north for cool modulated light. Scharoun clearly designed every part of the school comprehensively and integrated much of the pedagogical theories of the time. In this way he is a functionalist but not a modernist. Often criticised for inflexible and overly specific designs, Scharoun's defence is what he believed to be the crucial social role of the school: he saw it as a microcosm of the city with each classroom a house along a communal internal street.

The Steiner Foundation

The Steiner Foundation values similar principles. Born in Austria in 1861, its founder, Rudolph Steiner studied philosophy and founded a new science of the spirit called *Anthroposophy*. As well as conceiving his new educational philosophy, setting up a series of schools and writing prodigiously, he also occasionally worked as an architect and most notably designed an arts and cultural centre in Basel, called the *Goetheanum*. The Steiner school system places an emphasis on the whole development of the child; that is, the child's spiritual, physical and moral well-being, as well as their academic progress. Social inclusion is also a very important idea. Accordingly, the curriculum is designed to develop faculties rather than merely deliver prescribed information and practical life skills such as mechanics and finances are taught alongside artistic activities like painting and music.

'In a world where traditional cultures, community and religious values are at a turning point, young people increasingly need help to establish qualities such as trust, compassion, an inner moral sense and the ability to discriminate between good and evil'. (www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk)

Given the connection between education and architecture suggested above, does, then, the architecture of the Steiner schools manage to embody their teachings and reflect and reinforce their ethos?

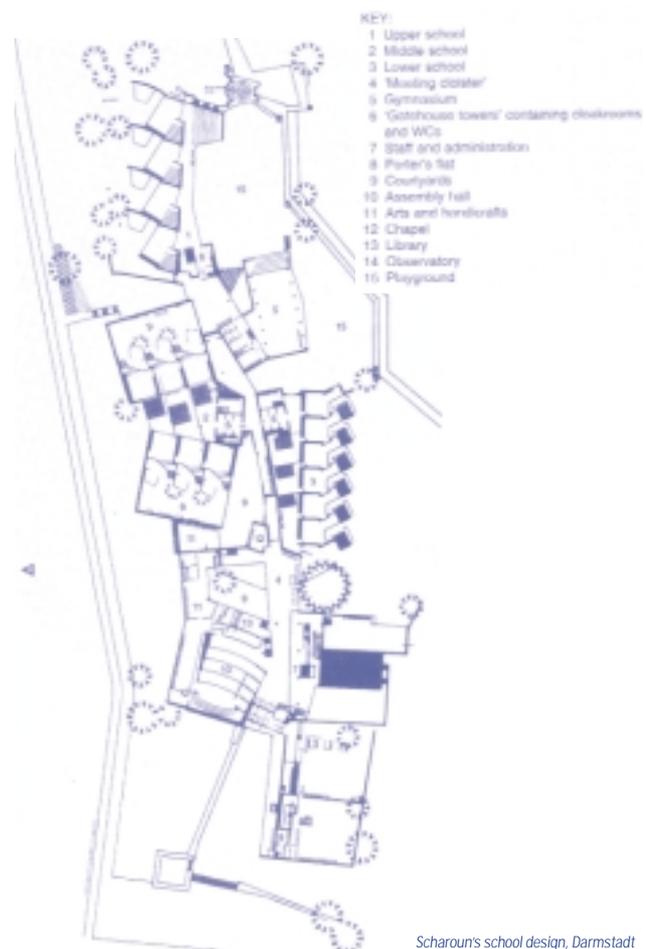
The Kirchheim Steiner School in Germany was established in 1994 and, after 3 years, obtained funding from the government to build a new school. Peter Hubner was the architect appointed by the board of parents and teachers due to his previous experience with school projects. He gave lectures to the board about his work and methods and advised that they build a new classroom a year. It is worthwhile noting here, that Steiner schools operate in a democratic way and have no head teacher. Hubner and his team worked communally on the design with teachers, parents, and even children by conducting workshops. Firstly, the children made 1:10 models of themselves, then the classroom furniture and then wall and the roof. After that, they designed ideal classroom sizes together. At this point the design team explained the principles of building with timber and about spanning and timber sizes. The children then came up with the idea of internal columns, an idea which persisted into the final building.

Perhaps the most architecturally conspicuous feature is that most Steiner schools centre on a theatre. The first 'little school' they built had an atrium with a theatre area below in its centre. Only two years after the completion of the first

school, its success guaranteed funding for a bigger school on the adjacent site. An additional thirteen classrooms were needed, which again were to centre around a theatre area. Only this time there was a disagreement about the type of theatre to build. One group wanted a traditional Greek theatre and another wanted a more Shakespearean market-place type of theatre space. Hubner decided to please everyone, and built both. The market place is like an extension of the entrance area and makes an informal gathering point, while on the other side of the entrance area is the tiered seating of the Greek theatre.

Steiner Schools in Ireland

In Ireland there are Steiner schools in Kildare and Clare. Visiting the Raheen Wood Steiner School near Tuamgraney, Co. Clare on their rainy fair day was enlightening. Children running free indoors in the communal area and outdoors in the lush overgrown surroundings with teachers and parents almost blending into the background is a far cry from the typical Irish education. Here, the child enjoys significant freedom and the traditional power dynamic of a school seems dissipated. This is reinforced by the Foundation's website,



'Class Eight is a revolution, an end to authority and the beginning of a new relationship with the world where independent assessment determines truth and in truth is all authority'.
www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk

From the site map we can see that the school is made up of a scattering of various types of buildings over a 4.5 acre site. Although the school was founded in 1986, they made do with prefabricated buildings until 1999 when their first permanent building, the Kindergarten, was opened. Now, they are in the process of designing another permanent building for the site and its 120 children. This time it is more ambitious than before and will accommodate; all nine classrooms, an office, a library, a handwork room, a kitchen, a woodwork room, a laboratory, a eurythmy and meeting room, and various ancillary services. But it is the process of design that is perhaps the building's most compelling aspect

Building Steiner Schools

In conversation with Anne Rasehorn, the financial administrator of the school, the design process was outlined to me. She reiterated the communal nature of Steiner schools where parents, teachers and staff all work together to solve issues and plan for the future. Teachers carry full responsibility for all matters directly related to teaching while parents carry the responsibility for providing the resources and support necessary to run the school

effectively. It is this communal principle that led to the 'Conversational Co-Design' of their new building. The process of this co-design seems to go as follows:

Site Analysis: They view the site as a 'living organism' and wish to build in the 'spirit of the site'. They analyse the history and feeling from the surroundings and try to bring this into their designs.

Ideas Drawings: Many of the teachers and parents walked the site and drew sketches of ideas and feelings they were having as they walked. Many of these gestural line-drawings elicited the same central theme, that of a semi-circular embracing shape.

Clay Models: Sketches were compared and some further development of these ideas came in the form of interior sketches, ideas for the roof line, and clay models.

Placement of Necessary Spaces: Next, the parents and teachers *became* the individual required spaces and walked the site until they found where they wanted to be. Map 1 was then drawn up according to where individuals had chosen their location.

Refining the Layout: Map 2 was produced with the spaces grouped together in a more coherent logical manner.

In the minutes of one of their June meetings, it is stated that, '[t]he key word for our future school buildings is simplicity'. Another important factor is environmentally sensitive materials and passive solar design. All are very respectable principles. But the Steiner Foundation also has some more idiosyncratic desires for its buildings too. A distrust of rectangularity, for



example, means that classrooms are normally irregularly shaped, often hexagonal. This is partly to allow light to enter from many sides but is also an attempt to eliminate corners in both plan and section which, they say, is because such places are 'harsh', particularly for children and thus do not contribute to their ideal of a more nurturing, enveloping space. One might wonder, however, if this architectural manifestation of a feeling is too literal. The schools' particular philosophies and operation also means the board often opt for a more modular building programme. This leads to classrooms and even entire schools being added incrementally, on a yearly basis.

Some of the other guidelines specify: that priority should be given to teaching spaces which need to be harmonious and light, that individual rooms/teaching spaces need to be interchangeable, local resources should be used, and that health values for children are paramount. Comparing to E. R. Robson's recommendations in the 19th century, these guidelines are not totally dissimilar. Robson could be said to have had some of the same ideals, but a different social structure and building technology constrained him. The fundamental difference, however, is that, rather than 19th century surveillance techniques, Steiner schools are designed to facilitate freedom of spirit.

A shape that continuously emerged from the Raheen Wood sketches is the incomplete semi-circle in plan. Many people came up with this idea and found it an enveloping embracing shape that would create useful and inviting indoor and outdoor spaces. In section, the concept of a 'rise in consciousness' gave life to an undulating roofline, rationalised later to a combination of curved and stepped roofs. It is difficult to assess the success or failure of the scheme overall until it progresses to the next stage, when they apply for planning permission in December of this year (2004). Their process to this point has been inclusive, progressive and aspirational; rather like the school itself.

Conclusion

Winston Churchill succinctly paraphrased our reciprocal relationship with architecture when he said, 'we shape our buildings and they shape us'. Nowhere is this more poignant than in the design of schools. We have come a long way from the repressive capsules of drudgery of the 19th century. With 20th century advances in psychology and pedagogy, we now have some shining examples of alternative schooling as demonstrated in Raheen Wood. Architecture assumes a humbling community cloak here, but what predominates is the mini-society facilitated by their buildings.

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Thanks to Anne Rasehorn of the Raheen Wood Steiner School for all her help.

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8

A Model Prison

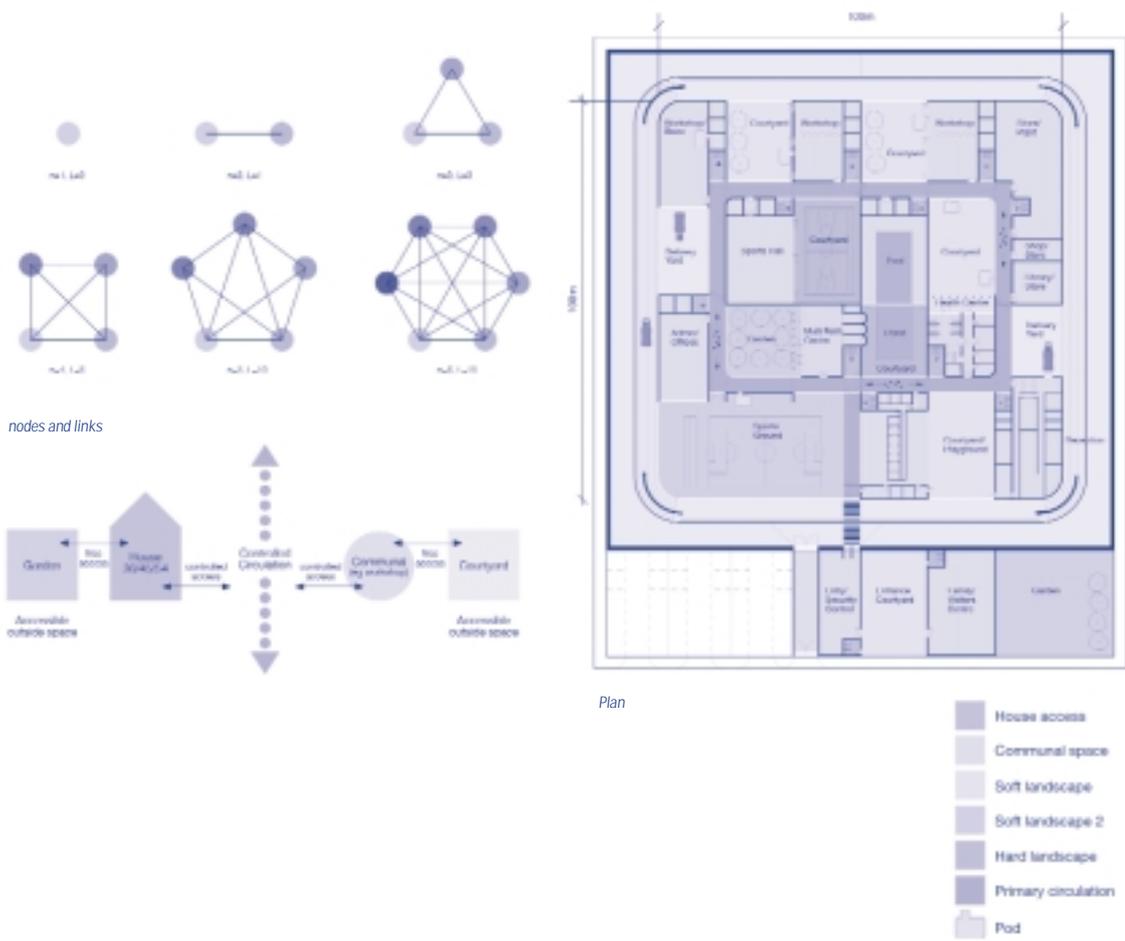
SIMON HENLEY

In 2001, I visited Reading Young Offenders Institute (YOI), a structure that, as Reading Jail, dates back to 1844. The purpose of our visit was to meet the people (prison officers and young offenders), see the environment and get a feel for the regime. The intention being that we redesign and refit the education wing to seek demonstrable improvements in learning in an attempt to reduce recidivism (repeat offending) through changes to the environment

A heavy stone perimeter wall encloses the Victorian buildings and the entrance is marked by an imposing gate, the ensemble being more akin to a medieval castle or walled city. Just by walking around this great structure one gets a sense of foreboding and the mind begins to conjure up images of life on the inside. But nothing prepared me for the world I could only imagine from outside but encountered on the inside. Given the physical size of the YOI, the visitors' entrance is mean. We stepped from the pavement through a doorway in the perimeter wall, into a small room, lined on one side with armoured glass-fronted counters and on the other with beaten up metal lockers. Here, we handed over our phones and had our bags checked before we were ushered towards a heavy steel door. It slid open, at which point we entered another world as it closed and locked behind us with a heavy thud. We were inside.

This was to be the first of a number of visits to prisons that took us to, amongst others, HMP Wormwood Scrubs and HMP Wandsworth - all of which made us acutely aware of our liberty and frighteningly aware of a prisoner's sense of incarceration and isolation. The capital budget allocated by the Home Office to modify the education department at Reading YOI was withdrawn before the project could get under way. But by this point the idea of thinking about prison buildings and the space of incarceration had become compelling. Any moral concerns about our involvement in their design had been extinguished by that very first visit and by the realization that whatever the misdemeanor, the reality of a prison sentence was very unpleasant and evidently intimidating and un-reformative. One felt quite acutely the visceral aspects of incarceration, the inhumanity of it and in particular the negative contribution that the space made to that lack of humanity.

Left with nothing more than a small research budget, we offered to design a new model prison where we could develop a project which would not be compromised by the constraints of an existing architecture. In conjunction with the model building, we could develop a wholly new regime predicated on learning to reduce inmate recidivism. In choosing to design a prison, we had no choice but to recognize the orthodoxy and legitimacy of confining certain criminals. Whatever we designed, our work was not going to challenge the principle of a prison sentence. The brief we created for the team was straightforward, taking its cue from the Woolf Report (1990) that recommended the construction of small prisons for 400 inmates. The report suggested that smaller prisons could be situated locally in towns and cities to cope with those on remand being taken to and from court daily and to keep both convicted prisoners and those on remand close to their families and friends and thus ease resettlement. At the time this was contrary to government policy which sought super-prisons for 1500+ inmates. Unlike conventional UK prisons, ours was not to be classified to house A, B, C or D category prisoners. Instead, the regime and building were to be designed intentionally to accommodate a broad spectrum of inmates to improve reform.



It became evident that a conventional prison is a complex building, i.e. its organization exhibits a complex morphology. As one of a number of building types developed to accommodate large organizations, the prison's purpose is to centralize services and hardware in order to achieve economies of scale - a logic that remains the convention in the design of new UK prisons. Inside a prison, activities are centralized and a dispersed population moves to and from them only when required. What we recognized was that this model assumes that moving the majority to and from the serving minority (i.e. people and hardware) is the cheapest option. In the case of the prison, however, this does not seem to apply.

Currently, the role of the prison officer is to manage the prison population and maintain security. Much of their time is spent moving prisoners between wings and shuttling them to and from workshops, education, library and association spaces, back and forth from reception, and across to healthcare, counseling and sports facilities. This entails numerous security checks, employs many staff and consumes much of the day, resulting in a regime which leaves little useful time. In the event of a delay a prisoner will be forced to shorten or forego the activity. When there are staff shortages, prisoners are restricted to the wing and, in extreme cases, may be locked in their cells for up to 23 hours a day.

In a simple study we have shown that with an increase

in the number of location-based activities (nodes), there is a multiplying effect on the number of links or possible connections between these nodes. For example, when an organization consists of a single node there are no links, for 2 there is 1, for 3 there are 3, for 4 there are 6, for 5 there are 10 and so on. With 100 nodes there are 4950 possible links. This observation is formalized in the arithmetic series $L = n(n-1)/2$ where n is the number of nodes and L the number of links. The management of each link employs staff time and therefore cost.

In this way, we had argued for a morphologically simple prison; a prison made up of a series of semi-autonomous structures. Not a great monolithic organization like a factory conveying goods from place to place, but the space of inhabitation. These buildings and spaces would play host to learning, working and living and would each accommodate nominally 36 people. However, the arithmetic series that gave rise to this idea gave no further clues to the organization of the prison. Instead, it was the Prison Service's obligation to provide each prisoner with time in the open air that began to suggest a type or form of architecture with real humanity, where every interior was coupled to an exterior, mitigating the need to manage movement from inside to outside. This was to be decisive in making the architecture. The outside had to become an integral part of the autonomous structure, as a house has a garden. The next question was, could the structures be used to frame the outside spaces and as such control

access to, and contain activity within, outside space? The result is a plan organized like a chessboard consisting of interiors (black squares) paired up with exteriors (white squares). With this live-work-learn model, we concluded that the prisoner under a new regime would normally be expected to spend 50-90% of the day in what came to be known as the House, and 10-50% in communal spaces such as the workshops, sports hall, multi-faith centre, health centre, reception and visitors' areas. These, like the Houses above, were coupled to courtyards, where the communal facilities formed a socle (plinth) on which to construct the Houses.

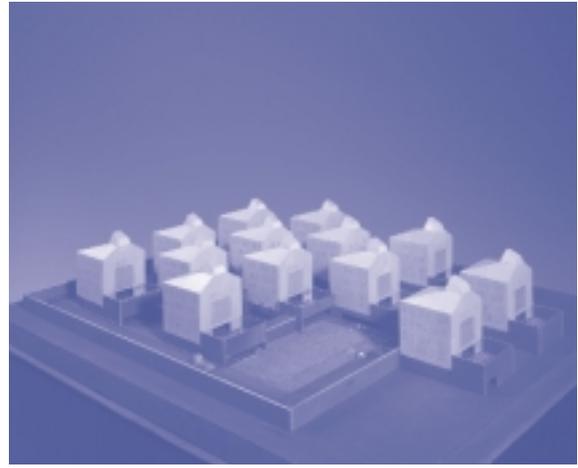
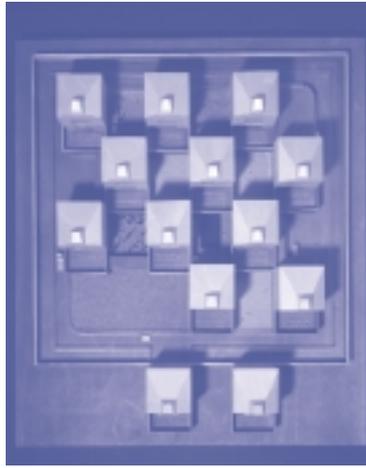
The design makes a courtyard architecture - an architecture, which we more readily associate with religious, educational and domestic buildings. Outside, the season is framed and pictured. Inside, space is enriched by that outside, by the landscape, by the season, by light and by colour. Logic had enabled us to reject the conventional and define a new paradigm for humane confinement, if such a thing exists. The interiors within the socle face north, south, east and west, their orientation giving particular diurnal character to each. Above, the Houses are phototropic and all face south. For each House and communal space (or black square) in the model, the exterior (or white square) provides a visual focus and is directly accessible. Our model reverses the extremes of isolation between inside and out formalized and spatialised in a typical 19th or 20th Century prison - where the sky is often only visible either from a small cell through a small, often high window or from deep plan top lit spaces (in the wings). Both are distanced by the morphological complexity the building imposes between inside and out. This phenomenon of 19th Century prison typology seems to reinforce the absolute condition of incarceration imposed by the perimeter wall and

describes imprisonment as the dislocation of a prisoner from the natural realm, creating an internal architecture with no meaningful external reference.

Our mix of logic and intuition made for a sensibility applicable to any type of architecture which we began to apply to the cell design, to construction and to the material and visceral nature of the place. In our model each semi-autonomous structure (or House) brings together, around a single congregating space used for association and eating, a series of smaller rooms, in which to sleep, work, learn and retreat. Here, people can live perhaps in paired 'buddying' cells to counter the effects of institutionalization through activation of choice. Along with a classroom, there is a further study room, counseling and group rooms, a kitchen, a house office, a laundry and toilets. This is an architecture of small, medium, large and extra large internal and external rooms.

It is a question of morality whether a prison is a machine-institution processing inmates on a continuous loop of perpetual, frequently purposeless journeys, or if it is instead, most significantly, a building to simply inhabit with real purpose. It is evident that a prison can be a model of good or indeed even great architecture on a par with private domestic space and buildings dedicated to the arts - both of which address the idea of dwelling. In fact, the prison typology becomes an amalgam of existing types which here become sub-types including; residential, workplace, assembly, religious, leisure, health, education and public building - all of which contribute richness. However, it is, perhaps as it may have always been, hard to explain to the average voter and politician why a prison should be 'good'. Why its typological roots, though derived for completely different practical reasons,





may be shared with the ecclesiastical, the academic and domestic. The dilemma of appropriate typology presents itself. Most prisons are planned to store and move inmates, not create the conditions for an active life inside - as if their organization and frequent illegibility goes hand in hand with the pejorative and punitive aspects of incarceration.

Whilst this is not the way to communicate the virtues of a model prison to a Home Office official, it highlights the legitimacy of an architecture not just predicated on the quantitative but also, in equal measure, on the qualitative. The 19th Century produced prisons by eminent architects such as Alfred Waterhouse. These were heroic and, in their time, philanthropic buildings but were based on a wholly different regime which employed silence or separation and which saw the prisoner confined largely to their cell while the prison wing itself may have been open to the public. Our model prison building recognizes just how much the prison regime has changed and how radically it needs to continue to change if it can really tackle issues such as bullying, drug abuse, self-harm and suicide, resettlement and crucially recidivism. The long-term goal is gradually to reduce the prison population to a significantly smaller core group of offenders.

Simon Henley is a Director of London architects Buschow Henley. He studied in Liverpool and Oregon, USA.

References:

A more comprehensive technical description of the model is given in Chapter 2 of *Learning Works: The 21st Century Prison*, published by The Do Tank, 2002.

Another description of the reasoning behind the Model Prison was presented in a paper given at the *Space Syntax Symposium* in London in 2003 where a rigorous case is made for its spatial logic by comparison to other late twentieth-century prison models.

Architectural Review Issue 1280: Building for Authority, 'Penal Progress' by Catherine Slessor, October, 2003, pp. 78-81.



9

Michelangelo Extans: Sonnet 89 and the Medici Chapel as Works of Subversion

KEVIN DONOVAN

'Of course this life of ours is entirely new - neither of us knows a parallel case. We stand in the middle of an uncharted, uninhabited country. That there have been other unions like ours is obvious, but we are unable to draw on their experience. We must create everything for ourselves. And creation is never easy.'

Colm Toibin, *Love in a Dark Time*

Michelangelo Buonarroti has long represented for many the tortured artist. From all biographical indications it seems that he too inhabited an uncharted country, obliquely engaging with Renaissance society through a screen of artistic *difficultà*.¹ He lived within a society with which he had passionate encounters, yet from which he progressively detached himself over the course of his life.² As with many artists his work is janus-faced; it is as much a guarded means of public interface as it is an ambiguous form of self-expression. It represents a way of becoming a part of something whilst remaining apart from it, a seeming engagement but actual detachment.

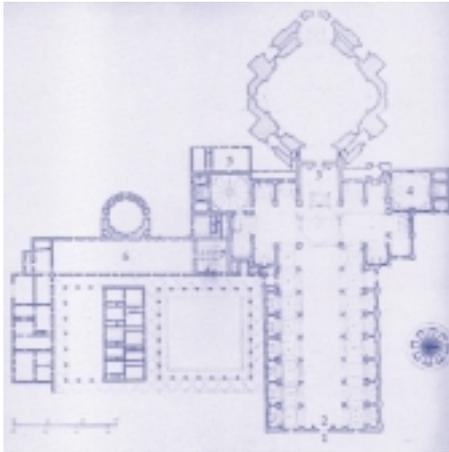
This essay attempts, by using a specific example of both his poetry and his architecture, to re-chart Michelangelo's creative territory as a morally evasive space in which he might somehow make himself. The compulsion towards such self-realisation, one might suppose, must be an essential motivation for an artist such as our subject, for whom work and life were largely one. Such compulsion is paralleled, however, by simultaneous, unconscious drives to resolve sublimated issues of unresolved conflict which result largely from moral dichotomies; how much of what I

know to be true about myself does the social contract allow me to present? In treating this question from a point somewhat outside traditional poetic and art-historical analysis, I hope to argue for Michelangelo's conscious (though deliberately ambiguous) and unconscious engagement of his work being a vehicle for the creation of his private identity.

Michelangelo Architetto

Officially known as the New Sacristy, the Medici Chapel at the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence was initiated by Pope Leo X in 1519 with the original intention of providing a complementary counterpart to Brunelleschi's existing sacristy (1421-1429) in the same building. The death of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, in 1519, however, reinterpreted the project as a mausoleum for four members of the Medici family; Lorenzo the Magnificent, his brother Giuliano, Giuliano, Duke of Nemours and Lorenzo of Urbino. Only two of the tombs (those of Nemours and Urbino) were executed and neither was completed. Each supports only three of the seven intended sculptures.

The room is, on one level, a reinterpretation of Brunelleschi's precedent; the plan is of roughly the same dimensions, the fluted Corinthian order for the pilasters is retained and the grey Tuscan *pietra serena* and white Carrara marble are re-employed. At an early stage in the design, the tombs were free-standing in the centre of the plan, as is the case in Brunelleschi's room. In character, however, the relationship between the two is essentially one of tension, as Vasari points out:



Plan of San Lorenzo: Brunelleschi's Chapel is below 5, Michelangelo's is at 4



Brunelleschi's old sacristy



Corner of West Wall: door, Aedicula and window

And because he wanted to make it in imitation of the old sacristy which Filippo Brunelleschi had made, but with a different order of ornaments, he made on the interior an ornament composed in a manner more varied and novel than ancient or modern masters had been able to achieve at any time; because in the innovation of beautiful cornices, capitals and bases, doors, tabernacles and tombs, he proceeded quite differently in proportion, composition and rules from what others had done following common practice, Vitruvius and antiquity, fearing to add anything of their own.ⁱⁱⁱ

Though Brunelleschi's three-bay system, used on the wall of his choir, reoccurs on all four internal elevations of Michelangelo's scheme, the proportions employed in the New Sacristy are quite different. Pilasters are shifted nearer to the corners and *pietra serena* piers are inserted in the resultant gap. A further invention was the addition of a storey between the entrance level and the dome. This intermediate zone with arches and flanking windows causes the raising of the pendentives (on the entablature of the first order in Brunelleschi's scheme) to a higher level. The coffered dome and fantastic lantern elevated on these are not at all in keeping with those of the mother chapel. The window frames in this third level diminish in breadth towards the lantern exaggerating the perspectival effect. The coffering of the cupola, reminiscent of the Pantheon but with a profusion of coffers much smaller than was usual for the time, contributes to the impression of upwards movement.

It is principally to the reasons for this violation of the classical canon that we shall return after consideration

of the artist's poetry.

Michelangelo Poeta

Michelangelo composed over 300 poems. Mostly in sonnet or madrigal form, his *Rime* treat universal themes (love, time, death, art, salvation etc.) almost always in relation to his own experience of these subjects. They offer, in effect, a self-portrait that is unprecedented in the history of western art. No plastic artist before had left such a large body of complex and personally charged writing - Leonardo's by comparison being distinguished by an almost complete lack of emotional investment.

Michelangelo's own attitude to his poetry is ambiguous, referring as he does to his writing as *polizini* (scribbles), *cose goffe* (clumsy things) or *scombicchieri* (jottings).^{iv} In the light of similar comments made about his plastic art we can be allowed, I feel, to regard these comments as an expression of his frustration at his inability to unfailingly meet his highest of expectations, rather than as a true criticism of his artistic ability.^v

However we choose to accept his poetry, it undeniably allows us a way into the personal life of Michelangelo. Though revised throughout the poet's life and the subject of public lectures and eventual publication after his death, they were conceived as essentially private pieces. Whilst ever-mindful that seeming revelation is often deviously dissimulating, particularly in the case of poetry, we might still legitimately regard the poems as an alternative lens with which to view / review the private aspects of the author's more public work.



West Wall

Within the *canzoniere*, a sequence of 6 love poems, I have singled out one, No. 89, which seems particularly well-achieved in poetic terms, thus bearing comparison to the artist's plastic work. In the words of Glauco Cambon it constitutes :

a dramatic autobiographical narrative that mobilizes the best resources of this secretive poet in the very act of unmasking / reinventing himself.^{vi}

The text is given in full below

<p>Veggio co' be' vostr' occhi un dolce lume Che co' mie ciechi già veder non posso; Porto co' vostri piedi in pondo addosso, Che de' mie zoppi non è già costume.</p>	<p>1 4</p>	<p>I see, with your beautiful eyes, a sweet light That with my blind ones I could never see; I bear with your feet, a burden upon me To which my lame ones are no longer accustomed.</p>	<p> 4</p>
<p>Volo con le vostr'ale senza piume; Col vostro ingegno al ciel sempre son mosso; Dal vostro arbitrio son pallido e rosso Freddo al sol, caldo alle più fredde brume.</p>	<p> 8</p>	<p>I fly, though lacking feathers, with your wings; With your mind I'm constantly impelled towards heaven; Depending on your whim I'm pale or red, Cold in the sun, hot in winter's coldest depths.</p>	<p> 8</p>
<p>Nel voler vostro è sol la voglia mia, I miei pensier, nel vostro cor si fanno, Nel vostro fiato son le mie parole.</p>	<p> 11</p>	<p>Within your will alone is my desire, My thoughts are created in your heart, And within your breath are my own words.</p>	<p> 11</p>
<p>Come luna da se sol par ch'io sia, Che gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non sanno Se non quel tanto che nasce il sole.</p>	<p> 14</p>	<p>Alone, I seem as the moon is, by itself: For our eyes are only able to see in heaven As much of it as the sun illuminates.^{vii}</p>	<p> 14</p>

In this work, Michelangelo inscribes himself within an existing tradition, if only as an antithesis to his own invention. The sonnet, since its first appearance in Italy in the 13th century, had been a tight poetic form which Michelangelo manipulates here to his own effect. He accepts the hendecasyllabic length, though not in each line, as he does the form of double quatrain and double tercet. He also chooses the typical *rima incrociata* for the octet (abba), but the sestet, rather than adopting the usual *rima ripetuta* (cde) takes us back into the rhyme of the quatrains (cba) as if to ensure the poem's independent unity. In terms of rhyme and metre, then, the poem's place is not quite in the tradition but tending toward the wings of the canonical stage; *ob scenum*.

At the outset, the poet places himself rather more directly in a position of power than is usual for the Petrarchan sonnet; we find ourselves in a scopic regime at the centre of which is Michelangelo (*Veggio / I see*). By the end of the first two lines, however, his vision has been rendered impotent (*veder non posso / I am unable to see*) by the light from his beloved's eyes. His own eyes are represented only by the adjective *ciechi / blind*; to understand what is meant by this word, which, being a qualifier for a non-expressed noun, has no independent existence, we are obliged to refer to the eyes of the other. Thus the opening lines are defined by an elaborate play on a variously empowered gaze.

Lines three and four continue to further exploit this power play with a transposition of the focus to the other extremity of the body; the *zoppi* (lame ones) also depend for their meaning on their empowered equivalent (*piedi / feet*) in the object of the poet's affection. The phonic quality of the lines echoes the plodding of the poet's persona under the burden of his own self (the plosive labial alliteration of *zoppi, porto* and *pondo*); the ventilated dental 'v' sounds of *nel voler vostro e sol la voglia mia*, (see translation) occur later in the poem where the self begins to be consumed and fade.

The first quatrain also begins a play of gender which accompanies the shifting of power between the subject and object. The end rhyme of the quatrain is achieved by surrounding the broad, masculine vowel 'o' (*posso, addosso*) with the leaner feminine 'e' (*Iume, costume*), and all within an essentially feminine (i.e. bisyllabic) rhyming scheme. Thus the subject and object

each adopts a gender within the poem's linguistic construction, irrespective of biological sex. With gender in language come hierarchies of strength, power and control; thus the first quatrain.

The second quatrain continues the theme of centrality displaced; *volo* and *sono* (1st person of the verbs 'to fly' and 'to be'), give way to the *ingegno* and *arbitrio* ('will' and 'whim', respectively) of the other. The paradox of line eight reinforces the symbiosis within which the relationship of the subject to the other is conceived.

The sestet marks a change. No longer introduced by the first person of the persona, it inscribes the poet's feminine *voglia* (desire) within the masculine *voler* (will) of the other. Control is now more explicitly and absolutely invested in the other. The poet's thoughts (*pensier*) in line 10 derive from the emotional seat of the other. The passive grammatical conjugation of the verb *fare* in this line (*si fanno*; they are made) underlines the poet's undoing, his powerlessness. He, the maker of words, is rendered voiceless by the very grammar which should be his vocal support. In the extraordinary line 11, in an act of generation analogous to the creation story in Genesis where the breath in the void is the origin of all things, his (feminine) words are born of the other's (masculine) breath.

Whereas the actions described in the octet employ prepositions such as *con* and *da* to qualify the requirement of an agent, the reliance in the sestet is on the preposition *nel*; the speaker does not merely derive his strength from the addressee - he actually dwells within the source, his Unmoved Mover.

The sun and moon in juxtaposition close the poem, the one depending for its light on the other. The subjunctive *sia* (that it might be) lends a swooning quality to line 12; the poet is no longer capable of judging the reality of the situation (ordinarily represented in the indicative mode), such is his separation from it. The poem concludes in an uneasy marriage; though the individualistic possessive adjectives *mia* (mine) and *vostro* (yours) have become *nostri* (ours), the repetition of *sol*, meaning 'sun', but also an elided form of *sole*, (alone), as well as the ambiguous *luna* (*l'una*, the one) leaves the reader unsure whether the poet and his object are all one, or whether Michelangelo is, as the final word in the poem, alone.

For me, however, the single most remarkable aspect of the poem is that the gender of the love-object never having been established, it is presumed to have been composed strictly in the tradition of the late courtly love poem. The beloved is only ever represented by a series of attributes and, as such, remains abstract and desexualised. Thus the object is composed of eyes, feet, wings, mind, will, heart and breath, all of which have their own gender but say nothing of the gender of the whole. When we read, then, that the recipient of the poem was Tomasso di Cavalliere (a young, Roman patrician whom Michelangelo first met in 1532 and with whom he remained intimate until his death in 1564) and that the canzone marks the first significant body of love poetry in a modern European vernacular addressed by one man to another, we are somewhat undone ourselves. The delicacy of his creation becomes apparent to us and the play of ambiguity and inversion in the text takes on a greater significance. Rather than inventing a new form for this new type of love in literature (something of which he, no doubt, would have been capable), he corrupts an existing one. He chooses to adopt a sort of 'transgressive reinscription'; he decides, or is compelled, to reengage with his society's constructions of sex and gender and to establish himself within them.^{viii}

The bitter-sweet and progressive undoing of Michelangelo by a younger man over the course of the poem is one that we can now readily inscribe within an historical text of creative homosexual hubris; the case, in the common imagination would be that of Oscar Wilde. There is a canon of gay writing and gay art; Michelangelo's sexuality notwithstanding, the subject-matter and dying-with-a-dying-fall camp appeal of the Dying Slave and David, have assured them an iconographical gay status. Ghirardi's edition of the *Rime* of 1960 devotes a large section to the symbiosis between his sexuality and the poems.^{ix} Michelangelo's homosexuality is, of course, not peculiar to his poetry; it is general within his identity. And if identity in general is reflected in the work of creation, then why not sexuality in particular? Where delicacy, moral proscription or the traditional rigour of the form have precluded blatant reference, Michelangelo the poet has responded with delicate dissimulation. Why not then Michelangelo the architect?

Architectural criticism, however, would seem to eschew such concerns. Discussion among the critics of Michelangelo's architecture relating to his sexuality and its built influence, if it exists, is not general. And yet, may we really ignore the fact that Sonnet 89 was composed, like many of his other poems, on the back of a sheet of drawings for architectural blocks? Evidence of economy, perhaps, but also of the complex interconnection of his creation which makes it impossible, I believe, to separate his art-forms one from the other, and his sexuality from any of them.

Ut Pictura Poesis ?

Work on the Medici Chapel finally came to its unresolved end in 1593. This was also the year of Michelangelo's first meeting with Tomasso in Rome and the year of the composition of Sonnet 89. Does the co-incidence in time imply a co-incidence of agenda between the two?

The Medici Chapel shares a further distinguishing feature with Sonnet 89. Though executed within a canon, and therefore a structure and vocabulary, they both subvert the given. In the case of the Sonnet, we have read the work as a deliberately subversive exploitation which half-tells a new story. The Chapel, certainly, is an unexpected departure from the Brunelleschian original; can we read this in the same way as the poem? What does the new order communicate? To what extent is Michelangelo being deliberately ambiguous? Or is it rather the case of an unconscious public expression of a repressed agenda?

The ambiguities inherent in both the individual elements of the design and in the combination of elements reveal themselves on even a cursory examination of the corners of the room. Here the doors are sometimes false, sometimes real. Tabernacles raised above the doorways are blind. The one horizontal member shared by both doorway and tabernacle might be read as an integration of lintel and sill, though it lacks the definition of either. As the pilasters lack capitals, their order and hence the gender ascribed to them, are called into question. The pediment breaks perversely forward over the recession of the niche. The moulding works its way into the pediment in a manner uncharacteristic of the period and perverse in terms of the craft from which the making of this architecture derives. The niche contains a block to support a sculpture for which it is obviously too shallow. The windows in the upper storey diminish in breadth as they ascend. Unusual collections of elements of diverse classical origin are squeezed together on the wall, slurring the architectural language as understood by Michelangelo's contemporaries.



109. Dusk. Tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici, Medici Chapel

Dusk and Dawn



110. Dawn. Tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici, Medici Chapel

The result is what John Sherman calls a 'deliberately incoherent spatial experience' - correctly in my view. The room is not the immortalised measure of a Renaissance man, as one might expect of such a funerary chapel. It is rather one in which the subject is categorically alienated, where he has no reflection. No longer a carefully proportioned inert plane, as in Brunelleschi's example, the wall is modeled into a vital, many-layered skin containing the fragments of another body against which the subject is obliged to react. This 'other' is monstrous, misshapen and possessed of an energy which is omni-directional and struggles with unified expression. It erupts into the perceptual field of the subject in the Chapel and returns an empowered *regard-en-arrière* (in Lacanian terms) to challenge the authenticity of the subject's self. The viewing subject now no longer stands at the centre of a perceptual horizon but sees on 'the field of the other' as Lacan says; he sees under the other's gaze. He is interdependent with the place.^X

The strength of this opposing gaze is most aptly expressed in the organs of sight. The Chapel has eyes, though, like Michelangelo's in Sonnet 89, they are blind. On the walls opposite each other, and set into the modeled stone skin, are arranged the commemorative statues of the two *capitani* flanked by *Day* and *Night* (in the case of Giuliano) and *Dawn* and *Dusk* (for Lorenzo). In a gesture unique in Michaelangelo's sculptural work, they are all carved without pupils in their (otherwise

finished) eyes. Thus the seeming gaze to which the observer and the enclosed space is subjected is ultimately barren, dead as befits a mausoleum.

In contrast to the impotent eyes, the bodies of the *capitani* are carefully made idealisations of the perfection of male youth. Their forms, and those of the four times of day, derive from antique statuary but are endowed with a new and dynamic quality. The oblique lines of the arrangement of their limbs set up an energy across the Chapel which charges the space above the viewing subject. They are raised on pedestals, unattainable in their classical perfection, casting the space that covers those below.

The body of the statue of *Day* is modeled after the Belvedere Torso, the 1st century Roman ideal masculine form. The face of *Day* is left unfinished but the forehead and flattened nose are, as Liebert points out, those of the face of Nicodemus in the Florence *Pietà*, known to be an explicit self-portrait.^{XI} Michelangelo was understood to have represented himself in many of his paintings and sculptures; why not then in this work on which he spent so many years?^{XII} It is the fate of *Day*, or Man in essence, to lie in this arrangement in unfinished form below the god-figure, subservient to his troublesome gaze; if we choose to accept this as a potential likeness of Michelangelo, how close the connection with the Sonnet.

Day and Night





Blind Giuliano



Engraving after Michelangelo's Leda and the Swan by Cornelius Bos



The body of Giuliano

A similar argument may be made for *Night* which, says Liebert, appears to have been modelled from a relief on a Roman sarcophagus in which Leda is in the act of being deliciously seduced by Zeus dressed as a swan.^{XIII} Indeed an examination of an engraving after a *Leda and Swan* painted by Michelangelo, since disappeared, reveals an undeniable likeness with *Night*. The swan recalls the story of Ganymede and consequently the Sonnet; the suggestion of flight without feathers in line 5 being a reference to the abduction / rape of the beautiful youth by Zeus as eagle. Night and Day being complementary aspects of the same unity, perhaps if Day is Michelangelo, then so too is *Night*; *anima* to Day's *animus*.

In the engraving, we find Leda represented beside the fruit of her engagement with Zeus; the *Dioscuri*: Castor and Pollux. These brothers, whose excellence in athletics and mutual devotion are their defining characteristics, are prominent in many mythological portrayals of sublimated homosexual relationships. Do Lorenzo and Giuliano not then suggest the heavenly twins, bounding the higher space of the Chapel, as do their stellar counterparts the firmament, making of it a figurative higher space of homosexual love?

This universe (for that is what this room is; off the stage of the church-proper, a place with its own story to tell) of the Chapel is, in fact, almost exclusively, if inexplicitly, homosocial. John Berger, in reference to the Sistine Ceiling writes that *the Sibyls are women, but not really, not when you get close: they are men in drag*.^{XIV} The same is true of the New Sacristy; instead of a true female body, both *Night* and her ostensibly female counterpart *Dusk*, have the doctored bodies of men. It is Man's lovingly drawn body which is the measure of all things here.

Though the Chapel is the sum of its parts, the parts do not constitute a unified, ordered whole, at least not within the prescriptions of the High Renaissance preoccupation with the recovery of the latent order of *kosmos*. As in the Sonnet, the one factor that unifies the otherwise fragmented and dissonant elements is its consistent evasion of resolution. In the Sonnet, I have suggested that this represents a deliberate provision of an albeit oblique insight into an morally critical position. May we say the same of the Chapel; is it, in fact, such a conscious act?

The homosocial, homosexual space in the Renaissance is itself a fractured entity. Much formal discussion of homosexuality in the Renaissance is so insistently polemical that it fails to recognise what Foucault points out in his *History of Sexuality*: that it was not until the 19th Century that the notion of an aberrant type of human being, the homosexual, was constructed.^{XV} In the 16th Century, though specific (homo)sexual practices such as sodomy were condemned by the church and prohibited by law, they were fundamentally regarded as individual, aberrant and subversive acts. Homosexuality, *per se*, did not exist. It therefore had no identity, no self. Neither, then, did the homosexual.

Michelangelo's sexuality caused him great personal difficulty, caught as he was in the unstable confluence of Humanist and Christian attitudes to the subject which existed in his time. Despite having grown up at the court of Lorenzo under the liberal tutelage of the neo-Platonist philosopher Marsilio Ficino (*the reproductive drive of the soul, being without cognition, it makes no difference between the sexes*),^{XVI} it seems that he was drawn in equal measure to the teaching of Savonarola, who prevailed upon Florence to *abandon that unspeakable vice* of sodomy. If the vice was unspeakable, it was also unspeaking, deprived of a voice. As it had no identity, its expression could only be based in lack.

'Lack' is a key term in Lacan's discussion of identity. As the subject is always defined by the other (the name of the father being the means by which the child represents himself), the necessary distance between the two constitutes a lack on the part of the subject. Life becomes the attempt to make up this lack; the will to oneness. The work of Michelangelo reads to me on this unconscious level as just such an impulse - to make up the lack which his homosexual self was bound to endure given the moral proscription on its expression. Both consciously and unconsciously the work strives to close the gap of desire that has the dual nature of being fundamental to his being, yet fundamentally inexistent in the conventional world.

Perhaps this provides a clue to the eccentric modelling of the Chapel walls. They are ecstatic in a way that prefigures the raptures of Bernini's *St. Teresa*. To be ecstatic is literally to be apart (Latin *ex stasis*, standing outside). Had Michelangelo had a more comfortable self to stand inside, might his drive have been tempered?

Michelangelo's concern, I maintain, is desire. The Chapel, we must not forget, is a house for death, a *momento mori*, albeit a strange one. Since the time of Plato, death and desire, Eros and Thanatos have been inextricably linked, never more formally than in the neo-Platonic Renaissance. Wind reminds us that *the idea of Eros as a power that loosens or breaks the chains that bind the soul to the body is identified with Death itself, in its painful no less than its joyous aspect.*^{xvii} Freud divided the mind into two sets of instincts which he called *Eros* (the life instinct) and *Thanatos* (the drive towards death). For him, it is the fundamental conflict between life-enforcing sexuality and sex as death (*la petite mort* of Lacan) which is one of the deepest sources of anxiety in the individual. The Chapel, it seems to me, plays out this anxiety.

Lacan maintains that desire is, in fact, for the lack rather than the object, the lack being proof of life; Freud, in the 'Fort - Da' game, demonstrates how the object that is longed for comes into existence only when it is lost to the infant.^{xviii} For Michelangelo, because of his own moral ambivalence towards the playing out of his instinct, desire for the other is insatiable, and it is the striving to make up this gap that fuels his work.

This, then, is surely the solution to the question of the gaze that would be vigorous but that ultimately cannot penetrate. It is in the tension engendered by the impotence of the gaze, the connection which may not be,

the unbreachable gap of desire that Michelangelo can make the work that is his life.

It is in death that desire finds its end, its fulfilment. Attainment of an object satisfies demand, but does not attenuate desire, which is the perpetual human condition, extinguished only on our demise. Here in this place of last end, Michelangelo rages against easeful death, the death of his desire without which, though it undoes him and provides no vindication, he is nothing.

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References:

ⁱ One of the key tropes of Mannerism, of which Michelangelo was considered one of the chief exponents. It refers to a complexity of composition and technique engendered by the tortuous character of the artist.

ⁱⁱ These are documented in any good biography of Michelangelo e.g. de Tolnay, *Michelangelo; Sculptor, Painter, Architect*, Princeton (PUP), 1975.

ⁱⁱⁱ Vasari G., *Vita de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, 1550, trans. Foster, J., New York, Hermitage Press, 1967.

^{iv} See Michelangelo's own notes to poems 142 and 274, any edition.

^v *Idem*, poem 267.

^{vi} Cambon, G., *Michelangelo's Poetry: Fury of Form*, Princeton, PUP, 1985.

^{vii} Translation, Saslow, J. *The Poetry of Michelangelo; an annotated translation*, New Haven, 1991.

^{viii} A term used by Jonathan Dollimore (*Subjectivity, Sexuality and Transgression; the Jacobean Connection in Renaissance Drama* n. 17, 1986), to suggest that a violation of an existing conceptual framework whilst accepting the framework *per se* ultimately reinforces existing categories of thought.

^{ix} Ghirardi, E. N., *Studi sulle Rime di Michelangelo*, Florence, 1960.

^x Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, recounted by Bryson, N., *Vision and Visuality*, New Haven, YUP, 1986.

^{xi} Liebert, R., *Michelangelo; A Psychoanalytic Study of his Life and Images*, New Haven, YUP, 1983, p. 244.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 245.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, p. 249.

^{xiv} Berger, J., *The Shape of a Pocket*, London, Bloomsbury, 2001, p.8.

^{xv} Foucault, M., *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, An Introduction*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

^{xvi} Ficino, M., *El Libro del Amor*, a cura di Sandra Niccoli, Florence, 1987.

^{xvii} Wind, E., *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, New York, 1958, p.60.

^{xviii} The child does not notice its toy until he has dropped it and it is out of reach.

10

Zumthor's Baths – a sensual guide

ORLA MURPHY



1. Sight (and blindness)

Still clothed on entrance, 4 doorways on the bathers' left are described in the wall by deep reveals of reflective red lacquer. Glimpsed bodies, limbs, reflections of skin and curves are part revealed and part concealed by black leather curtains across the entrances and exits. A threshold is established between the world of the bather and that which belongs to the outside world. By catching glimpses of bodies in states of undress this threshold confronts the expectant bather and tempts them beyond the curtain. Mystery renders the space of the private world beyond tantalising; erotic, intriguing. In the words of Francis Bacon, "*the sensation doesn't come straight out at you but slides slowly and gently through the gaps.*"ⁱ The mood of the building is set.

*the mahogany in the changing rooms
looks a little bit sexy, like an ocean liner,
or a bit like a brothel for a second,
perhaps.*ⁱⁱ

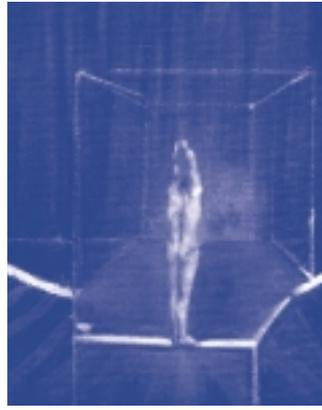
Parting a black leather curtain in the centre; clammy leather touches the cold body. The Turkish baths (42°C) consist of 2 suites of 3 rooms, each the same dimension, approximately 2.5 metres in depth, width and height. Darkness. The eyes begin to adjust and two black beds of stone reveal themselves, one to either side of the entrance axis. The body begins to acclimatise to the heat. It sweats. Lie down. The limits of the space can be barely understood in the darkness. Are there other bodies beyond the next curtain? Go and part the next curtains and investigate. Go further into the blackness, the increasing heat and humidity. Sweat more. Re-adjust the senses. Lie down and let the heat take over. A black hose in the corner invites discovery. Turn the valve and cold water pours relief and shock. Cool the feet, the stone. Watch as the water finds its level and flows to the channel in the black floor, the sound of water draining through a tiny hole. The third black curtain leads to the final room of two more black stone beds. Bodies lie there enjoying the heat and intimacy in the knowledge that this is a public space but also an intensely private moment. The heat is just bearable; the humidity is choking, but cleansing.

The second suite of steam rooms is for the unclothed body and differs only in the line of clothes pegs added to the vestibule wall.

Blackness and darkness in the Turkish baths are materials to be manipulated, reinforcing the atmosphere of mystery already hinted at in the changing rooms. By controlling darkness and by carefully lighting blackness, movements and rhythm of the bodies moving in the building are slowed. Walking, wading, showering – all motion is slow and deliberate. Eyes need time to adjust to the half-light. Fill in and elaborate the details not visible.

The main internal space of the building contains the indoor pool (32°C). Here bathers move past, appearing and disappearing around and emerging from the other pools located within the massive stone clad columns in the central space. Blue square roof lights are pieces of artificial sky and slender handrails effortlessly descend into the water. Bathers become voyeurs and actors. Everyone watches each other as they stroll or float by. Peter Zumthor says of the baths that everyone looks nice in them. Old and young, fat and thin, wrinkly, everyone somehow looks *nice*. Not gorgeous, not glamorous, but nice. This too is what Peter Salter means when he speaks of the beauty in our ugliness.ⁱⁱⁱ At peace. Moving in rhythm with the building - clear alpine light pouring through the deep wall facing across the valley.

Swim through the façade to the outdoor pool (36°C). A tall glazed screen separates the indoor pool from the outside. One glazed panel has been omitted and water flows to three quarters of its height. The remainder of the opening is filled with clear plastic hanging sheets like the kind in supermarkets. The body adjusts to the change in the air temperature. Head and shoulders over the meniscus are cool; body and limbs below are warm. Steam rises off the water. The mountains are an arm's length away and are capped in snow. Between them and the bathers, the building rises to frame a vertical plane of mountain and huts. The spa waters of Vals are extremely high in iron. This iron oxidises on contact with air forming a red tide mark at the point where the stone meets the top of the water. The rear wall of the outside pool is provided with a shelf about 350mm below the water level - the dimension of a body lying. Bathers recline here concealed by water, suspended just below the surface. At the other end of the pool huge curved brass spouts shoot water under pressure onto pleased backs. A tiny but high niche provides a cubby-hole for lovers, who disappear out of sight.



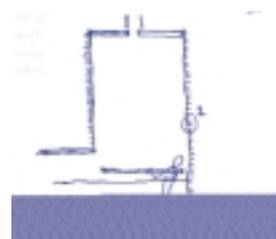
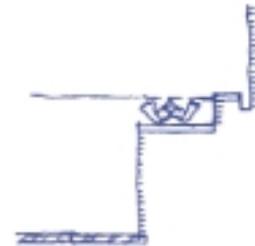
2. Hearing & tasting.

Back indoors the bather swims into the fountain grotto, (36°C) turning through ninety degrees and finally turns again through a low narrow passage, no wider or higher than one body, into a square chamber, lined with rough-cut stone on walls, floor and ceiling. A single thin bronze rail runs around the edge of the bath just above water level, inviting bathers to recline in the corners and spread their arms out. Bather after bather does this. Chanting seems to come from the stone itself, or from the core of the earth, channelled through the rock to this space. Distant sounds are muffled through the stone all around, reverberating on the hardness of the surfaces. The sounds within the building are all enjoyable, the sound of water mainly; gently splashing as a body enters the pools, the sound of a bather emerging from water, the sound of the giant showers splashing water on the stone surfaces. The far off sound of the powering of the baths is a little like a distant ship engine. This sound is the only perceptible clue to any servicing of the building, which otherwise seems to be lit, heated and serviced by the nothing but the mountain itself. In a world too full of signs and unnecessary directions there are no distractions here: no instructions, no information other than tiny beautiful bronze figures indicating the temperature of each bath. This is all the bather needs to know.

The sounding stone is a tiny chamber containing two narrow black leather beds in separate niches. Lie down. Have a rest. Two bodies doze in one another's arms, listening. In another tiny chamber an older couple stands around the drinking stone watching the water appear to bubble up from the mountain. A brass cup hangs by a chain from the guardrail, allowing a sample taste of the spa waters. Bitter oxide. Voices echo around the small space. Smiling at one another the couple try to make out the distance to the source of the spa water below.

3. Smell

The flower bath (30°C) is entered up steps and then down again. This bath and the fire bath share a similar type of space within the stone caves. Longer than wide, the concrete along one long wall and the back wall is profiled to form a seat. Feet on the floor, bottom on the seat, head and shoulders are above the water. A channel separates the back of the seat from the wall of the bath. Fragrance fills the air, in the water hover thousands of petals. Catch one if you can. Breathe. Laugh.



4. Touch

The fire bath (42°C) is stepped into like a bath (or broth?). Red concrete walls and seat, black floor, the only relief here is the backrest, just wide enough to support a body suspended out of the hot water for a moment. Hands reach up from the water to leave a wet print of the surface of the concrete. It dries and fades away within seconds. Out and plunge into the blue ice bath (12°C). Pores close. Bring the body temperature down. And out.

Everything the body comes in contact with is luxurious in its materiality and meticulous in its detail. The ironmongery in the hand, stone under the foot, terrazzo to sit on. Bathers leave small traces of their presence throughout the building; wet footprints thread their way around the central space and discarded towels hang from slender rails.

You can have a lot of sexy things with stone, stone and naked skin; the feel of it when you walk barefoot, and how it feels if you go over it with your hands. Pleasant for the body comes first.^{IV}

There is a subtle quality at Vals that anticipates the sensuous actions of the bather and celebrates the primal simplicity of the body in contact with water and stone. Entering the baths, the bather embarks on a journey, during the course of which all the senses are tested and re-charged; he becomes acutely aware of his body and how it experiences space, texture and sound. This process also signals an intensification of the relationships between all of the bodies in the building and a harmony of movement emerges. As a mother wades by, supporting a child on her shoulders, couples young and old embrace, holding one another's bodies made light in the water. Pairs of bathers float together hand in hand, or lie side by side on the heated terrazzo bed, chatting in the heat.

Vals is a building that demands the bather relate to it. In return, it provides the bather with a renewed awareness of the power of the senses and beauty of the human body.

It is only through the figure that we really see the space and, in turn, it is only through the space that we learn to see the individual human body.^V

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References:

ⁱ Quoted in *Francis Bacon in Dublin*, Hugh Lane Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, p. 53. Bacon termed the use of the curtain as a device in his paintings as 'shuttering'.

ⁱⁱ Peter Zumthor in Spier, S., 'Place, Authorship and the Concrete: Three Conversations with Peter Zumthor,' *Architectural Research Quarterly*, Volume 5, No. 1, 2001, pp. 15-36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Salter P. in *Building Material 8*, 2002, p.24.

^{iv} Peter Zumthor in Spier, *op. cit.*

^v Schmeid, W. - *Francis Bacon: Commitment and Conflict*, Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1996, p.31.

Zumthor's Trousers - a critical guide

HUGH CAMPBELL

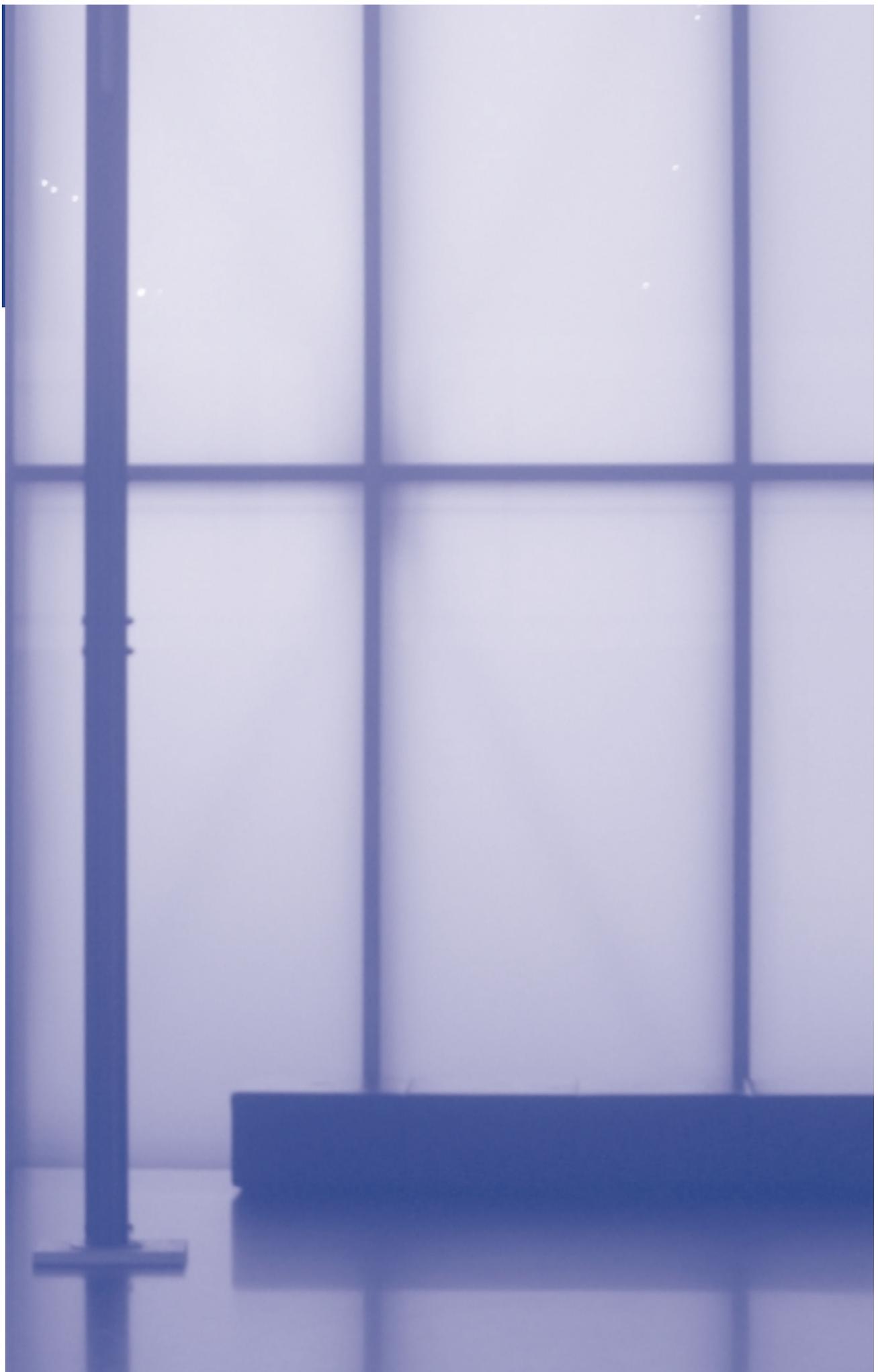
What's the problem with Peter Zumthor? He is, after all, one of the most widely revered architects of the last decade: creator of seminal works at Chur, at Vals, at Bregenz, renowned teacher, source of a thousand student projects, deployer of delicious details, transcender of fashion and taste, champion of architecture's enduring value. Everything about Zumthor exudes an unassailable rectitude. And yet despite all this, and despite the undoubted accomplishment and beauty of the architecture, there remains, for me, something fundamentally unsatisfactory about Zumthor's work.

After a recent visit to the Kunsthhaus at Bregenz, the reasons for this became a little clearer. On a side excursion from a college trip, four of us arrive, slightly bleary-eyed, in Bregenz on a grey Sunday morning. When, replenished by black coffee in the black café, we finally enter the gallery building, a slowly unwinding joke is set in motion. We're greeted by a scattering of acroprops spanning floor to ceiling. A moment of doubt (is Zumthor falling down?) is followed by a flicker of Schadenfreude (Zumthor has failed!) before it becomes clear that the current exhibition, by the Spanish artist Sebastiao Sierra, is called 300 TONNES, which presumably means there's something very big and heavy upstairs that needs to be supported down here. Accordingly, as we mount from floor to floor, we find each space disrupted by a field of props. Glass panels from the suspended ceiling are removed and leant against the side walls to allow the props uninterrupted passage. The serenity of the spaces is rudely interrupted. The crude, roughly painted metal of the props jars with the exquisite perfection of the spaces' finishes - the jointless *terrazzo* floor, the chromed doorframes. And after this long set-up, on the top floor, the punchline. We emerge from the stairs to find that the whole space is occupied by large stacks of concrete blocks, sitting on plastic sheeting. Builders' debris is scattered across the floor. In one corner, a table

is laden with hardhats, tabloids and teacups. The effect is uncanny – a builders' yard stacked with the base materials of construction is secreted within a lovingly crafted casket. The raw meets the cooked.

While most of the impressive roster of artists who have inhabited the Kunsthhaus - from James Turrell to Olafur Eliasson – have seemed content to work with its serenely precious atmosphere, Sierra's witty installation is determined to challenge the architecture's self-importance. 300 tonnes - the combined weight of the blocks and a maximum 100 visitors (there's a counter at the entrance, keeping tally) – is apparently the safe limit of the building's structure, but what Sierra is really testing are the limits of Zumthor's architectural thinking.

For Zumthor, architecture is fundamentally concerned with making: 'Construction is the art of making a meaningful whole out of many parts. Buildings are witnesses to the human ability to construct concrete things. I believe that the real core of all architectural work lies in the act of construction.'¹ Hence, his buildings are presented as constructs – as elements and components joined together carefully and systematically. The 'feathered' glass skin of the Kunsthhaus is an obvious example: it reveals its own construction; the constituent parts are evident in the finished product. There is an interest in tectonic truth-telling here which can be traced back through Kahn and Mies to Perret and Viollet-le-Duc. And for Zumthor, as for many of these figures, construction, truth and morality are fundamentally linked. The attention paid to construction and, maybe more importantly, to the presentation of construction allows architecture to become coherent and comprehensible. This comprehensibility in turn begins to acquire - in Zumthor's view – an ontological status. The constructed object – the made thing – stands as a quiet sentinel of truth in a world devoid of 'the real'. Here's a passage that typifies this thinking:





'Arbitrariness prevails.

Post-modern life could be described as a state in which everything beyond our own personal biography seems vague, blurred and somehow unreal. The world is full of signs and information which stand for things which no-one fully understands because they, too, turn out to be mere signs for other things. The real thing remains hidden. No-one ever gets to see it.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that real things do exist, however endangered they may be. There are earth and water, the light of the sun, landscapes and vegetation; and there are objects, made by man, such as machines, tools or musical instruments which are what they are, which are not mere vehicles for an artistic message, whose presence is self-evident.

When we look at objects or buildings which seem to be at peace within themselves, our perception becomes calm and dulled. The objects we perceive have no message for us, they are simply there. Our perceptive faculties grow quiet, unprejudiced and unacquisitive. They reach beyond signs and symbols, they are open, empty. Here, in this perceptual vacuum, a memory may surface, a memory which seems to issue from the depths of time. Now, our observation of the object embraces a presentiment of the world in all its whole ness, because there is nothing that cannot be understood.ⁱⁱ

Even as it drifts into mystical obfuscation, the argument here remains clear - clear to the point of banality. Contemporary life bad – confusing, you see. No truth anymore. If only things could just...eh... be what they are. Like in the old days, you know - way back. (Needless to say, the childhood memories of the aunt's kitchen have already been wheeled out earlier in the essay.) All the usual characteristics of Zumthor's writing are present: the preachy tone, the peremptory dismissal of contemporary society, the nostalgia for simple, 'true' things, the appeal to some prelapsarian state of grace (to be found, presumably, somewhere in 'the depths of time'.) To the arbitrariness of 'post-modern life' is opposed the certainty of the 'real' object, the supposed value of the latter completely dependent on the supposed bankruptcy of the former. Well, if postmodernism revealed anything to us, it was precisely the inadequacy of thinking through such binary oppositions. If the achievement of true 'meaning' and understanding is made possible only through an outright rejection of the 'mere signs' of the contemporary world, then it seems a fairly hollow achievement. But this is exactly the premise embodied in Zumthor's architecture: it sets itself in opposition to what, for him, are the unmanageable complexities of our contemporary existence. It turns its back on the world and in so doing, actually admits its own weakness. The unalloyed reverence for craft and construction now begins to seem suspiciously like a substitute for any real engagement with the world. Within the bounds of the building, a resplendent perfection reigns. Beyond its limits ... well, there's nothing to be done. There is a joke told in Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame* about a man who goes to a tailor for a pair of trousers. After weeks of innumerable fittings, adjustments and refinements, the trousers are still not ready, and the man eventually explodes with exasperation: "God damn you to hell, Sir, no, its indecent, there are limits! In six days, do you hear me, six days, God made the world. Yes Sir, no less Sir, the WORLD! And you are not bloody well capable of making me a pair of trousers in three months! [*Tailor's voice, scandalised*] 'But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look – [*disdainful gesture, disgustedly*] – at the world – [*pause*] – and look – [*loving gesture, proudly*] – at my TROUSERS!"ⁱⁱⁱ



Of course, caring about tailoring doesn't mean not caring about the world. Mies van der Rohe, for instance, who pursued purity and perfection in steel for thirty years, always did so out of a desire that his architecture might quietly reconstitute the relationship between people and the world. He quoted Schinkel on the subject: 'A work of architecture must not stand as a finished and self-sufficient object. True and pure imagination, having once entered the stream of the idea that it expresses, has to expand forever beyond this work, and it must venture out, leading ultimately to the infinite. It must be regarded as the point at which one can make an orderly entry into the unbreakable chain of the universe.' Architecture is required to open itself out, rather than closing itself off. It should be a point of entry, rather than a dead end.



In very obvious ways, the Kunsthaus at Bregenz epitomises the closed nature of Zumthor's thinking. From the inside, the outside world is completely absent. There are no views out. Even the light has to be modulated and filtered before being allowed entry. From outside, the building seems an alien presence along the lakefront. It is in the world, but not of it. Its evanescent glass shroud is akin to the transparent mac worn by Gene Hackman in Francis Ford Coppola's brilliant 1973 film *The Conversation*. Hackman played Harry Caul, a sound surveillance expert who preferred to experience the world at one remove, who avoided direct engagement at all costs. But if Caul comes across as reticent and withdrawn, he is also remarkably self-absorbed. In Zumthor, we find a similar solipsism. What is most problematic about his work is not really its narrow focus, and certainly not its interest in materials and construction, but rather his conviction of the absolute moral superiority of these concerns. His architecture claims for itself a position outside the relativism and the 'arbitrariness' of contemporary society. But in fact Zumthor's position is just as arbitrary, just as ideologically loaded, just as much a cultural construct as any other. The potency of Sebastiao Sierra's installation lies in the way it draws attention to this piece of misdirection. The raw power of those dense stacks of rough concrete blocks points up the extreme self-consciousness of the gallery's construction. It's the blocks which, to use Zumthor's words, 'are not mere vehicles for an artistic message, whose presence is self-evident', while the building becomes a 'mere sign for something else.' This role reversal is then further complicated by the knowledge that the stacks of blocks themselves are, in fact, the vehicle for an artistic message. Suddenly nothing seems absolute or certain; nothing seems pure or simple. By upsetting the insistent equilibrium of Zumthor's architecture, Sierra reveals the narrowness, and the precariousness, of its ideological foundations.



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Drawing by Catherine de Groot, 3rd Year, School of Architecture, University College Dublin.

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ⁱ Zumthor, P. - *A Way of Looking at Things*, Architecture and Urbanism, February 1998 extra edition, p. 8.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

ⁱⁱⁱ Beckett S. - *Endgame*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, London: Faber and Faber, 1990, p. 103.

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House

AOIBHEANN NI MHEARAIN

In Federico Garcia Lorca's play *'The House of Bernarda Alba'*, the playwright confines a family of women in their house to play out the drama of their destruction. Bernarda, the mother of five daughters, recently widowed, rules over her family with relentless tyranny and with an adherence to the social codes of her time that is equally unyielding. Bernarda's daughters are trapped in this house; by their mother, by the strictures of their society, by their servants' surveillance, by the walls themselves. This house manifests control.

It is revealing that Lorca chose to title his play *'house of ...'*. By doing so, he pursues the idea that the home is the container of all things essential to reveal a moment in time of a particular society. The term 'house' in the title encompasses the idea of family in its broadest sense - to include the women, their servants, their property, the structure - while, at the same time evoking the family's values, traditions and position in society. This 'house' can also be seen as a metaphor for Spain. Written as it was at the beginning of the civil war, it is not surprising that it becomes tragically torn apart by division, rivalry and a struggle against repression. This house is folding in on itself and collapsing.

A play's narrative, unlike a novel or film, unfolds for us in real time, in a real place; the scene is, literally, 'set'. A play then, is a most interesting vehicle for a story of confinement, of claustrophobia, of people enclosed. Within the construct of a study of a family, Lorca depicts their living place as a symbol of their subjugation to society's mores and, by extension, propounds a criticism of contemporary rural Spanish society. If, however, you were to invert this approach and begin instead with a study of the place, the house, what would this tell us of the families that inhabit it; what would this reveal of a particular society, at a particular point in time?

house + family

In article 41 of the Irish constitution - a structural document for our emerging nation, ushered in under Éamon de Valera's guidance in 1937 (a year after the first publication of *'The House of Bernarda Alba'*) - the family is recognised 'as the natural and fundamental unit group of society' and 'as the necessary basis of social order'. Parents are conceived as the providers of religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children. For de Valera, the role the family should play in the shaping of our society was fundamental and unambiguous.



form follows Σ ?

Philippe Ariès, in his study of comparative attitudes and approaches to child rearing in medieval and modern times, relates the shape of the modern house to the changing roles of family members and function of family. He links the spatial organization of the house itself to the diversification in family roles, 'for the rooms of the mediaeval houses were not specialized in function; the same room could serve as dining hall, sitting room and bedroom'. A relationship, therefore, can be discerned between an increased demarcation in the roles and function within the family and an increase in functionally defined (and often physically separate) spatial compartments. Indeed, this is often evident even in the way such houses are represented. The suburban house, for example, is designed to be developed and sold on a small number of criteria. Shorthand codes like 3bd 2rec GFCH not only demarcate the house's compartmentalised functions in a manner convenient to advertising in a newspaper column but are also (slightly bizarrely) readily understandable to almost everyone. But perhaps it is not just the changing shape of the family that has increased the spatial separation of functions in our houses. Perhaps there is also a desire for this as part of our moral improvement. Indeed, in the slum clearance policies of the early twentieth century, the one-room tenement was seen to be at the root of all the problems. And the council set about a policy of building two, three, four and five room houses in their attempt to re-house the poor of Dublin's inner city.

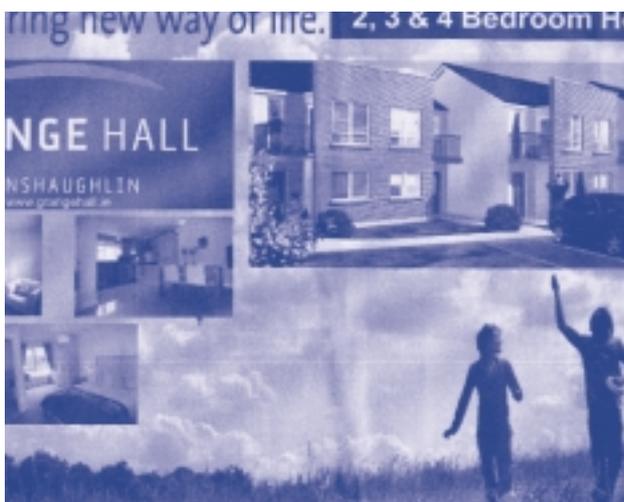
The importance of the stability (and perhaps rigidity) of the family as the formative basis of our society was well appreciated by Éamon de Valera. Lorca, meanwhile, portrayed the rigidity of the family in its most extreme

form, depicting a family entirely controlled by its matriarch and her desire that her daughters behaved (and were seen to behave) within the rules and roles of their society. A tightly defined family form is a simpler, less complex and more stable unit to accommodate. The family, under our constitution, is set apart; it is empowered as 'a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law'. Its separateness is not challenged but engendered. Legally, morally, physically it stands alone.

Aoibheann ní Mhearáin is an architect.

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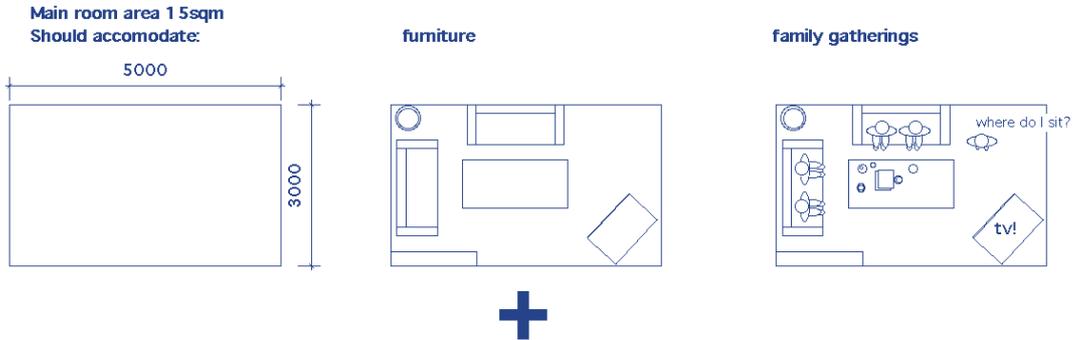
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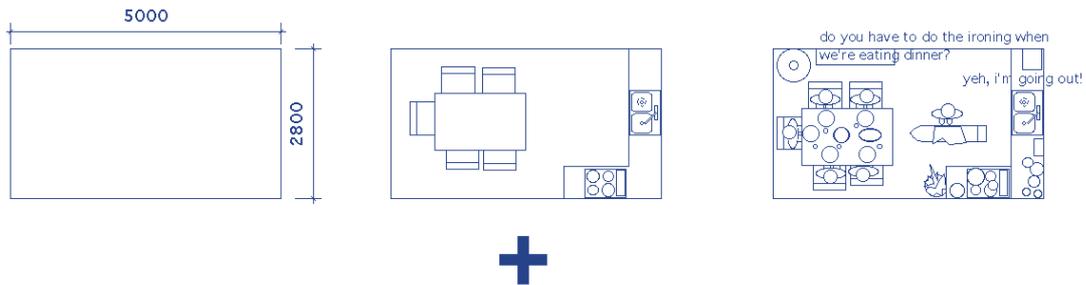
EXISTENZ MINIMUM

The dimensions and requirements illustrated below are based on the Department of the Environments Social Housing Design Guidelines. While they are expressed as the minimums allowable, they are also the maximum areas for which government funding will be approved. The example below illustrates the requirements for a 3 bedroom 5 person single storey dwelling unit

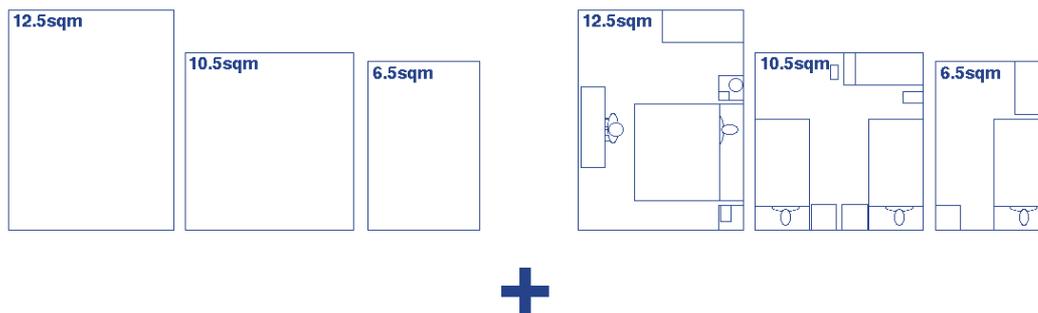
5 persons =  = 72sqm gross target area



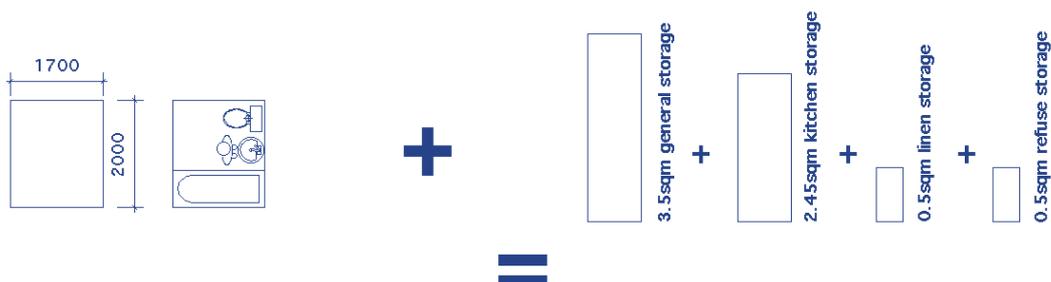
Kitchen and dining room area 14sqm
Should provide: adequate space for clothes washing & ironing, adequate storage space for food, cutlery, small appliances & worktop space for preparation & handling of food. There should be direct routes from the kitchen to the front and rear doors. The sink should be located under a window. The cooker should be located away from internal and external doors, should not be under or immediately adjacent to a window and should be clear of circulation routes within the kitchen.



Bedrooms - aggregate area 29sqm
Main bedroom 12.5sqm; double bedroom 10.5sqm; single bedroom 6.5sqm.
Should accommodate: southerly or easterly aspects, dimensions should allow reasonable choice for the occupants in relation to the location of additional storage facilities.



Bathroom
Should accommodate: space for normal activities associated with bathing, use of WC etc.; space for shelving & storage presses, space for secure medical cabinet.



69.55sqm, which leaves 2.45sqm for internal walls, circulation and.....NO ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE

Housing: A Home or a Commodity? The Challenge for Policy

P.J. DRUDY

Introduction.

In recent years, housing analysis and policy has been under-pinned by a dominant paradigm and philosophy which has proclaimed the efficiency and effectiveness of market provision and downgraded the relevance of social equity and the role of the state in relation to Irish housing. In the process, many low and middle-income families and individuals have suffered. The housing problem has very often been seen by those aspiring to purchase a home as one of high and unaffordable house prices in most parts of the country and particularly in the main urban centres. In addition, however, rapidly rising house prices have been accompanied by escalating rents for private rented housing. At the same time, the record in the provision of 'social' housing for those who can neither purchase or rent in the private market has been very poor.

Owning a Home amid Escalating Prices.

The Irish housing system is dominated by owner occupation. Over 77 per cent of households now own their own homes. The main factor influencing a high rate of owner-occupation has been a whole range of government incentives aimed almost exclusively at homeowners over the last four decades. In addition, accommodation in the private rented sector is widely seen to be unsatisfactory in relation to security of tenure, level of rents and standards of provision. Furthermore, many people are not eligible for social housing and, even if they were, they would join a long waiting list. Most therefore see owner-occupation as the only viable option.

The proportion of accommodation provided for rent either by private landlords or Local Authorities has declined significantly over recent decades. The privately rented sector had declined to about 8 per cent of the total by 1991 (from 42 per cent in 1946). However, this tenure expanded to almost 142,000 households by 2002 (an increase of 60,000 in a ten-year period), increasing to 11 per cent of the total. The number of houses being rented from Local Authorities has dropped consistently between 1961 and 2002 - from 125,000 to 88,000 - and now represents a mere 7 per cent of total housing.

In recent years accelerating house prices have created a major difficulty of 'affordability', especially for young first-time buyers and house purchase is now simply beyond the reach of a significant number of people, even those on relatively high incomes. Couples with two average incomes are unable to bridge the gap between the recommended loan maximum (2.5 times the first income plus the second income) and the house price. The recommended loan/income guidelines are therefore consistently ignored as lending agencies receive 'comfort' from parents or other relations who provide deposits and 'guarantee' payments in the event of default. Unfortunately, these actions contribute to continued price inflation and potentially unsustainable borrowing.



The escalation in house prices has continued unabated since 1994. Up to 1994, new house prices increased broadly in line with the Consumer Price Index, house building costs (labour and material costs) and average industrial earnings. Since 1994, however, house prices have diverged significantly from these other indices. Using a base of 1991 = 100, house building costs (labour and materials) increased from 111 in 1994 to 179 in March 2004 or 61 per cent. The Consumer Price Index increased from 108 to 145 or 32 per cent. Over the same period, the index for new house prices for the country as a whole increased from 109 to 355, or 225 per cent. In other words, since 1994, new house prices have increased almost four times faster than house building costs and over seven times faster than the consumer price index. It is not surprising then to learn that 33 per cent of new national households over the period 2001-06 will not be able to afford to purchase, or 42 per cent in urban areas. In much of the Dublin area, it is estimated that up to half the households will be unable to purchase a home.

Over the last decade the house price increases have been so significant that they suggest a monopoly-type situation among developers. With various constraints affecting supply in the short term (e.g. lack of serviced land, water, sewage and other facilities), a relatively small number of developer-speculators can hoard serviced land and release it slowly, thus exerting control over prices and profits from housing. The significant difference between building costs and the price of housing suggests that exceptional, 'supernormal' profits are being made. Apart at all from equity considerations which must concern us, this represents a diminution of competition and a serious inefficiency in the system.

Why House Prices have Increased.

The factors accounting for these large price increases may be summarised briefly. Various demographic, economic and social influences have resulted in significant increases in the demand for housing. At the same time, the supply of housing has been inadequate to meet this demand. When supply of housing is inadequate to meet demand, the inevitable result is an increase in prices, with developers being in a strong position to charge 'what the market will bear'. In this situation the buyer has little or no bargaining power and within a short space of time the price of a further block of housing can increase significantly, despite no increase in cost to the developer. This is, in effect, what has happened over the last decade – the market has failed to supply sufficient housing to meet demand and to stabilise prices. From a consumer viewpoint, this is a fundamental flaw in the market mechanism.



Demand is influenced by a number of central factors. These include low interest rates and the ready availability of significant funding (often in breach of Central Bank guidelines) which have encouraged large-scale borrowing, thus contributing to further price increases and dangerous indebtedness. Secondly, a considerable number of people have been viewing housing as an investment or speculative opportunity, even on a short-term basis, due partly to the stock market slump in recent years and a move away from investment in equities to housing. This has placed further upward pressure on house prices and has resulted in a significant displacement of first-time buyers in recent years. In the current environment, such buyers can purchase for speculative purposes on the assumption of accruing large capital gains, modest capital gains tax payments, high rents and little regulation during the period the property is held.

A supply factor of central importance is the availability and price of land suitable for housing. Despite protestations to the contrary, the price of land is a major determinant of the rise in house prices. Recent land sales indicate that the proportion of the total house price taken up by the price of land is up to 50 per cent. These exceptional increases in the price of land are invariably passed on to the end-users in the form of higher house prices.

Misguided Policies?

A whole range of 'tenure-biased' government policies in Ireland have, over many years, strongly favoured market and speculative provision for ownership, while limiting the role of non-market and non-speculative approaches. Housing has also long enjoyed very generous tax treatment relating to capital gains and the reduction in this tax to 20 per cent in the November 1997 Budget for second homes exacerbated the situation in relation to house prices. The abolition of the residential property tax in 1997 has also played a significant role in house price inflation. Furthermore, a variety of tax relief schemes provided to investors in inner city areas, seaside resorts and in many towns throughout the country, while bringing about much-needed physical renewal, has also contributed to rising house prices. In any event, tax incentive schemes such as these are inherently regressive since they can only benefit those with sufficient incomes to incur tax liability. This problem has generated conflict in recent years both in the inner city areas and in seaside towns, where the local populations find themselves excluded from the benefits and even 'displaced' as the escalating land and property prices make it impossible for their children to house themselves in the local area.

The Private Rented Sector

Despite an increase in the provision of private-rented accommodation in recent years (much of it influenced by the availability of tax incentives), significant difficulties remain, especially for private tenants. The sector is almost completely unregulated and this has engendered many problems for tenants and is partly responsible for a generally negative perception of the rental option. In effect, individuals and households are encouraged to get out of this sector and into home ownership if at all possible. Tenants regularly experience difficulties through high and uncertain rents, illegal evictions, deposit retention, low quality and even unfit dwellings in terms of fire and safety. Although minimum standards, registration requirements and rent books have been in place for a number of years, levels of compliance have remained poor.

Unbalanced Policies

People who rent in the private rented sector have received less favourable treatment than home-owners in Ireland and, in comparison with other European countries, no serious efforts have been made to develop this sector to cater for the obvious needs of tenants. The introduction of tax relief for landlords and owner-occupiers from the early 1980s under several Finance Acts encouraged the provision of considerable numbers of apartments, especially in the Designated Areas of Irish cities and towns as well as in seaside resorts. Such tax relief was of particular benefit to developers, landlords and owner-occupiers rather than to private rented tenants. Indeed, the tax relief eventually afforded to private tenants was very modest indeed in comparison with the other groups mentioned above. The needs of the sector, and especially those of tenants, have thus been largely neglected. This is in stark contrast to the situation in a range of European countries where privately rented accommodation plays a central and honourable role.



A new Private Residential Tenancies Act has recently passed through the Dáil and Seanad. Two elements of this Bill deserve particular mention. Firstly, the provisions on rent levels are based on the central concept of 'market rent' i.e. 'the rent which a willing tenant not already in occupation would give, and a willing landlord would take for the dwelling'. The failure to propose any form of rent regulation, even in an environment where rents are at very high levels, is one of the most fundamental flaws in the Bill. Most EU countries have moved towards a system that allows some type of rent indexation to consumer price inflation. The typical rental contract in the EU includes an indexation clause that refers to the consumer price index. In Denmark, Sweden and France, indexation is linked to housing costs. Germany has an adjustment mechanism that allows increases in rents of sitting tenants up to a maximum of 20 per cent over three years.

Secondly, although there are provisions to improve security of tenure, there are a number of weaknesses. The tenant has no security for an initial six month period during which a 'no fault notice to quit' can be issued. After this probationary period the tenant becomes entitled to a three and a half year tenancy, but can still be evicted for a number of reasons, including the sale of the premises, refurbishment, use required by the landlord or his relations or alleged anti-social behaviour. At the end of each tenancy the occupant is once again subject to a six month probationary period. How the new Residential Tenancies Board will deal with these difficulties remains to be seen.

Non-Market Provision: Social Housing

One of the most striking characteristics of the Irish housing system over recent years is that it is dominated by market provision while the non-market components have been strongly marginalised. Market provision increased from 67 per cent of the total in 1975 to 89 per cent in 2002 while non-market provision (e.g. by Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Co-operatives) declined to only 11 per cent over the same period (see Table 1). It should be noted that in earlier periods (e.g. from the 1930s to the 1950s), public provision played a much more central role. Indeed, some local authorities were key players in the provision of housing in Dublin and other urban centres, producing a range of good-quality residential environments. Since the late 1950s, however, private provision, normally with state assistance, increased significantly.

Table 1. Provision of Housing in Ireland

	"Market"	"Non-Market"
1975	18,000	8,800
%	67%	33%
2003	62,686	6,133
%	89%	11%

Source: Annual Housing Statistics Bulletins

Furthermore, the stock of public housing has been significantly reduced by a sales policy at significant discounts to tenants of about 240,000 units (out of a stock of approximately 330,000) over the last 70 years. Recent trends highlight this continuing active policy of privatisation. The net national gain in the social-housing stock provided by Local Authorities during the eight year period between 1995 and 2002 (taking new completions, acquisitions and sales into account) was only 16,845 or 2,100 per annum. In Dublin, where housing need remains most acute, the net annual gain over the same period was only 447. In this context, it is even more alarming to note that Dublin City Council's stated housing policy is now to reduce its housing stock further and to move away from its traditional important role as a social landlord.

The net gain to the Local Authority housing stock was completely inadequate in the light of the increasing needs. This is an unacceptably low level of progress for the country as a whole in the light of an estimated 48,000 households in need of social housing (estimated by Focus Ireland to represent about 140,000 people). There are also many people living in insecure privately rented accommodation (subsidised by the state via Supplementary Welfare Allowances at a cost of €340 million per annum). Furthermore, the homeless population consists of over 5,000 people. Many practitioners on the ground dispute the accuracy of this figure, however. For example, in some rural counties, an official homeless figure of zero is recorded in the assessments, yet their relevant homeless action plans set out a requirement for considerable accommodation and service provision. Recent evidence suggests that there were more homeless people in Ireland in 2003 and that they were homeless for longer periods than at the commencement of the Government's *Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy* in 1999. It should be stressed that these figures do not include a whole range of people who live in inadequate and unsuitable accommodation, whether in institutions or on the side of the road. Travellers and people with disabilities are among those who suffer most of all.

Conclusion

In recent decades, a philosophy and ideology has emerged in Ireland which emphasises market provision and downgrades the relevance of social equity and access to housing for all, leading instead to its increased 'commodification'. This unbalanced policy emphasis has created significant difficulties for many people and the almost exclusive reliance on 'the market' with government support as a provider has influenced the relatively well off to see housing as a means of speculation and wealth creation rather than a shelter and a home. The current housing system has thus created a group of well-off 'winners' who laud the market since they are able to play and win in the game. It has, however, also resulted in a significant group of 'losers' who have not the resources to speculate and gain from housing. These are unlikely to ever own a home in the future and large numbers will continue to struggle in the private rented sector or on Local Authority waiting lists. The market simply does not cater for those in housing need. Although there have been minor policy changes in recent years, none of these depart from this dominant philosophy which encourages inequality and segregation.

In my view, housing can no longer be treated simply as a market commodity or as an investment or speculation like stocks and shares. Rather it should be seen, like other critical social requirements such as health and education, as a 'social need' and a fundamental right, to be enjoyed by all. In order to achieve this, policies must be implemented to ensure that every person has affordable, secure, good quality accommodation appropriate to their needs. Surely this must be the hallmark of any civilized and developed society.

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A coastal plain covered by a vast expanse of 'quality urban sprawl', bungalows and villas independently-built to high specification: not Leinster, but Accra, capital city of Ghana, West Africa.



The city has more than doubled in area and population in 30 years, and this expansion has mostly been incremental and at the very smallest scale, house by house.



The construction of each house might in turn last up to a decade or more, often financed by working abroad for a number of years and managing the job at long distance. Suburban Accra is a permanent low-activity building site where rising walls, stockpiled building materials, and roof-less or window-less shells (often inhabited by a 'caretaker' family) flank completed, occupied houses.



The traditional typology in urban Ghana is the multi-family urban 'compound' or courtyard house, single or two-storey, which is flexible, accommodates interlocking households and shared spaces, but is rarely built today.



Private developers market to this extended Ghanaian community through regular Ghanaian cultural and commercial exhibitions in North America and Europe, websites and community portals, church and social networks.



Emigrants commonly wish to invest in property in Ghana, but in Accra rather than in their home village, and in housing at a level of specification and design comparable to that expected in their adopted country.



This form of housing production is restructuring the residential geography of Accra, and already a whole district has emerged as a laboratory for new urban forms and lifestyles.



The 'Spintex triangle', undeveloped before the mid-1990s, now accommodates a series of almost fifty formal housing states within a sprawling field of informal residential development. The estates are generally well-planned but discontinuous, sometimes unserved, only occasionally gated, and, surprisingly, often more modestly built than the informal housing that surrounds it.



The extended family structure has found new expression in the suburban 'monster villa', an air-conditioned monolith with six or more bedrooms, capable of fulfilling family obligations in some comfort.



Often however, the suburban ideal stops at the front door: most of suburban Accra is serviced by hopelessly inadequate infrastructure: potholed and undulating dirt roads (a sea of mud in the rainy season), tilting power lines, no sewers. Individual builders are prepared to build here in anticipation of a future infrastructural retro-fit.



Meanwhile, in the wake of neo-liberal economic restructuring, private housing developers have entered the market. Tract housing has arrived in Ghana, providing modest and not-so-modest single-family housing in serviced estates.



This sector is marketing directly to the extensive and prosperous Ghanaian diaspora. With economic restructuring, emigration from Ghana has intensified and residence abroad appears less periodic, more permanent.



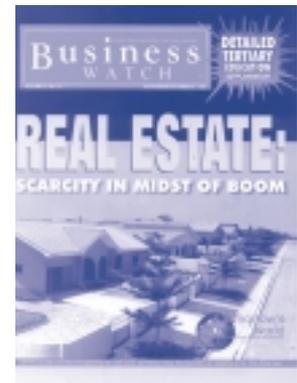
While housing attracts a large proportion of foreign direct investment in Ghana, as in other sub-Saharan African countries this constitutes an investment in the personal consumption of fixed assets rather than in the flexible assets of (industrial) production.



Furthermore, the modesty of the typology – two and three bedroom housing – is less an indication of wider access to housing, than a signifier of family nuclearization. In a country where housing typology (the compound or the villa) is an expression of the capacity of the extended family, the single-family house declares its independence.



In one estate surveyed, more than a quarter of the houses were unoccupied. Indeed of the 65% of owners who were resident abroad when they purchased houses (before 1997), seven years later only one was actually resident in the estate. These absentee landlords have now glutted the market with luxury rental housing, but prefer to leave the houses empty rather than lower rent levels and popularize estate housing.



This phenomenon, in a country with an acute housing crisis, could be described as the export of housing. It demonstrates how the interaction of different scales of activity (i.e. from that of the individual migration of individuals, to that of the transnationalization of the local real-estate industry) runs counter to the simplifying thesis of globalization.

16

BANG: more than meets the eye

STEPHEN MUSIOL



This is the best-selling mug in the world – BANG - by IKEA. An estimated 25 million of these mugs are purchased each year, in over 180 IKEA stores in over 30 countries. In the details of how it is designed, where it is produced, who produces it, where it is purchased, how it gets there, who buys it and for how much, it is very much a representative IKEA product. In fact, it is a showpiece product, as IKEA have featured it on their website as an example of how their low prices are created.

The design of BANG responds to a tightly defined brief. IKEA's product developers send out the same set of parameters to a core of staff designers and a much larger number of freelancers, who all compete to have their proposal chosen for refinement and production. In the development of all IKEA products a number of key decisions have been made before a conventional designer ever gets involved. The first decision made about any new product is its retail price. The second concerns who will produce it and with which materials. Details of the allowable price, the material, the manufacturer, the production facilities, and the function of the product form the core of the designer's brief. Only after this is consideration given to what form the product will take – to what many might refer to as the design.

BANG is now in its third incarnation. Successive redesigns raised the number of mugs that could fit on a standard pallet from 864 to 1280 (by the introduction of the flower-pot-like rim), and from 1280 to the current 2024 (by the shorter handle and a reduction in overall size). The minute particulars of this mug all stem from the imperative towards cheapness in the store. The flower-pot rim and the short circular handle allow the mugs to be stacked straight without jamming. The relatively small size maximises numbers in transportation. Even the colours are considered in the context of cost: pale blue, green, yellow and white are cheaper to produce than deeper colours such as red or black.

The handle that allows such efficiency in transportation, however, also means a full BANG rotates under load, bringing the hot surface of the mug into contact with the outsides of the fingers. An appreciation of IKEA's internal efficiency may not be enough to distract the user from the fact that, in volume terms, the mug may be better classified as a cup.

Whatever about the implications of the design in use, the implications for transportation are significant. IKEA's transport costs for BANG have fallen by 60% over the three redesigns. Flat-pack furniture, vacuum-packed cushions and stackable mugs make a lot of sense when the distances they need to travel are so great - BANG is produced in Romania and China and sold in all IKEA stores worldwide. The obsession with efficient transport is a continuing theme for IKEA. From the first use of flat-packing in the early sixties the company has consistently strived for efficient transportation of its products. IKEA's truck, ship, and railway containers are currently averaging a 65% 'fill-rate' (two-thirds product to one-third air). They aim for 75% by 2006. If the products were not flat-packed this figure would be hovering somewhere around 10%.



Vast distances link the global retail network to an equally global network of production. IKEA's foreign product sourcing began in the early 1960's. A boycott by Swedish furniture producers (under pressure from IKEA's Swedish retail competitors) led to a search outside the country for an alternative, and to Poland, on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Poland was for a long time second only to Sweden in its share of production, but China recently eclipsed both with other developing countries following closely behind.

There is a network of trading offices, predominantly in the developing world, whose job it is to oversee and organise production. These offices compete with each other to offer the most attractive production package, which is itself found by competition between the producers tendering for the contracts. Another link in the low-cost chain is the size of the production run - large volumes for long periods are designed in from the very start. These large orders are linked to investment in production facilities by the manufacturer. This investment is often funded by IKEA themselves in the form of a loan. A curious situation can therefore arise where IKEA is at the same time, client and investor. Machinery is sourced by IKEA, bought by the producer (with IKEA's money) and used to manufacture IKEA products. Needless to say this practice leaves IKEA in the stronger bargaining position. In addition, the rational, component-based designs of IKEA's products lend themselves to production by simple processes, further adding to the low price as producers necessarily operate as close to the margins as possible in order to be competitive.

At the same time as they arrange the contracts, the trading offices also implement IKEA's Code of Conduct, introduced in 2000/2001. The Code of Conduct sets out minimum standards on labour conditions and child labour. Its introduction followed a period of pressure from international trades unions backed by public opinion after a number of allegations in the press about workers' rights in the production of IKEA's products. IKEA doesn't publish the results of its audits for compliance with its Code of Conduct - a commitment to publish in 2002 was revised to early 2004 but as yet nothing has come to light. Non-compliant producers must prepare a plan on how they will comply, and implement it within two years, under the threat of their orders being cancelled. There have been some notable breaches, involving the use of bonded labour in India, and one (temporary) use of prison labour by a producer in Bulgaria. However, there are more persistent breaches. In an independent survey of ten factories producing for IKEA (in India, Bulgaria, and Vietnam) it was found that none of the workers were aware of the existence of the Code of Conduct. Concerns still exist over the use of bonded and child labour by sub-contractors not directly engaged by IKEA (in India), over the obstacles to organisation among workers, over low wages, and over forced overtime.

Ultimately all the effort - policies, formulae, etc. - is geared towards one thing: the bottom line. The BANG mug costs 50 cents in any IKEA store in the world. The retail cost of an IKEA product, the most considered and the most attractive part of its design, sticks to a set formula: find comparable products sold by others, and reduce their price by 30% to 50%. The draw of low prices has shown itself to be more than enough to entice the consumer to travel the large distances to the store. It is estimated, for example, that 20,000 people a year travel from Ireland to stores in the UK. The consumer tends not to factor the cost of his/her own transport into the price (IKEA does operate a home-delivery service but it certainly isn't free). IKEA wants the customer to come to them - their carefully designed website makes the process for online buying torturous. Add to this the fact that, by supplying their products in flat-packs, IKEA also shifts the costs of assembly on to the consumer.

The pallet loads of BANG mugs sit at the entrance to the Market Hall - the area where small items are both displayed and stored. In stores whose layout is as formulaic as it is manipulative, this position is significant. BANG sits under a large banner proclaiming its price at the first point in the store at which the customer can actually pick an item up and put it in a trolley. Coming as it does after the serpentine route through the mocked-up living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms, where customers have to note the location numbers of items they intend to haul down from the warehouse shelves, the relief of being able to actually pick up a purchase can be a powerful draw. Or it could be the sheer cheapness that entices, or maybe even the attraction of the design. Whatever the reasons are, this mug is doing something right. How can 25 million BANGs a year be wrong?

Stephen Musiol is a recently qualified architect.

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Holy Morality, Batman!

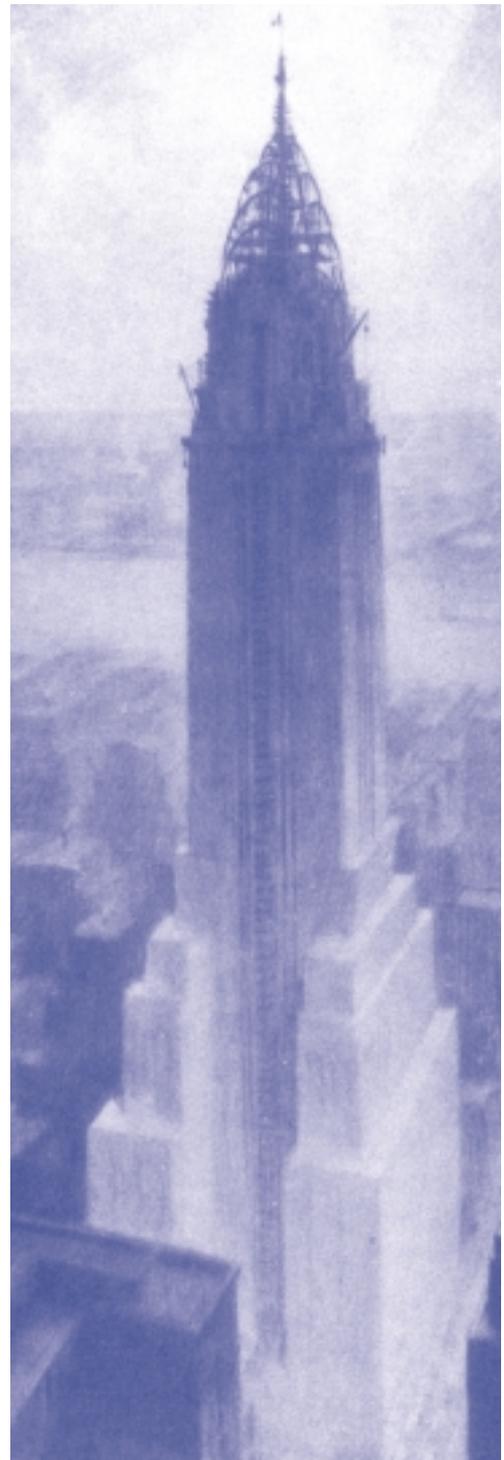
SIOBHAN FITZGERALD

'The urban planners now think the future lies in sprawling suburbs and satellite cities. But no superhero has ever come from suburbia.' (The Economist May 18th 2002: 55).

Perhaps this is not exactly a fair or in-depth assessment of current urban planning but it is hard to imagine a quiet, leafy suburban neighbourhood spawning a man dressed as a Bat to fight crime. 'Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible ... A ... A Bat!' (DC, # 33, November 1939. A terrifying creature of the night somehow loses its conviction amongst neatly clipped hedges. As for methods of pursuit, swinging from bungalow to bungalow by rope and grapple hook or scaling a garden wall with suction cups looking for a stolen bicycle is not only ridiculous, it is a completely different genre of entertainment. The city provides the impetus and the environment in which extreme characters can form and action can take place.

The vertiginous skyline, cliff-like skyscrapers and glamorous penthouses visible within the first thirty stories ever told about the Bat (in *Detective Comics* (DC) as 'The Batman meets Doctor Death' (July 1939) and evinced more than a decade later in 'The Riddler' (October 1948), demonstrate the importance of Gotham's mountain and chasm like architecture to Batman's very existence. As this quotation (first published in anticipation of the 1939 World's Fair in New York) suggests, Gotham is a thinly veiled New York: '[i]n these canyons fortunes are daily won and lost. Nestling in the shadows of tall cliffs and fringing the waters of the harbour are Battery Park and the Aquarium' while, '[i]mprisoned in the offices of midtown Manhattan's masses of cubes and towering shafts men and women work and scheme and telephone...' (Whalen, G., 1937, p. 4). The city provides the arena in which action takes place. The city is a vital character, without it, this drama is inconceivable.

The specificity of Gotham to New York cannot be denied. Yet there is a marked dichotomy between Gotham and Metropolis (the city of that other hero, Superman), two sides of the same coin that crudely represent the polar extremes of perception of American cities but are both based on New York. 'Gotham is Manhattan below Fourteenth Street at 3 a.m., November 28 in a cold year. Metropolis is Manhattan between Fourteenth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets on the brightest, sunniest July day of the year' (Boichel in Pearson and Uricchio (Eds.) 1991, p. 9). Gotham is a brooding, dark and crime infested city; the fight against crime is a constant battle that cannot be won, Metropolis is sunny, clean and the anomaly of crime is easily detected (by supersonic hearing) and order returned with supernatural ease.



The Gotham-like forms of the Chrysler Building

Two different cities defined by two very different heroes. The super powers of Superman will always be unobtainable to mere mortals such as ourselves but, conceivably anyone could adopt the cape of Batman assuming, like him, your parents had been brutally murdered in front of you at the tender age of 11, you developed a mad thirst for preventing meaningless crime and last but not least, you have access to an unquantifiable fortune and a never ending supply of fantastic toys. Batman unlike Superman is not good in a Boy Scout, unquestionable way.

Superman was invented by two Jewish high-school buddies from Cleveland, Ohio, Jerry Siegal and Joe Shuster as a direct response to the Nazi's Arian *Übermensch*: an ideal, superior man. Perhaps it is not surprising that he is so unquestioningly and depressingly indefatigable and undefeatable - a true weapon of mass destruction that Georges W. Bush would surely love to have in his arsenal. As a child Clark Kent (a.k.a. Superman) is adopted and brought up by a doting, elderly couple who never had any children of their own. The version of America that is his home epitomises the American Dream. Kent is the boy from the small town who made good by becoming a successful, principled journalist in the big city. It is the Republican, rural America of Mom and Pop, apple pie and the homestead often typified, in reality, by rednecks and their dearly held, 'right to bear arms'. Superman's sense of morality can be quite condescending, he does what he knows to be best according to the strict moral code within which he was raised. To drive home the point, Clark Kent hails from Smallville U.S.A. and his alter ego struts his stuff patriotically

clothed from head to toe in red, white and blue lycra (with pants on the outside of course).

Superman respects authority, believes cops and politicians to be good, working for them with little thought for their motives or their master plan. He assumes the moral high ground and there is an implicit judgment that he is 'good' and right to fight evil 'baddies.' Like Bush castigating the 'Axis of Evil,' and 'illegal combatants', the possibility that there may be room for argument within this black and white judgment is too nonsensical to broach. Superman, capable of crossing the world in a single bound is superhuman and, not unlike Bush in some senses, doesn't have to think, scheme or plan. The rescuer, who solves all through miraculous feats makes sense out of the disorder through power alone.

Bruce Wayne (a.k.a. Batman) is more complex. His enormous home and unexplained wealth hints at corruption from his father's connection to the Mafia. By day he fuffs about as a wealthy, attractive playboy, under cover of darkness he transforms himself into a masked vigilante. Batman is a human capable of mistakes and of feeling pain; he is intrinsically part of the disorder of his city and, by extension, his own nemeses. It is part of his controversy as a character that his critics believe he is as responsible for the creation of his panoply of bizarre enemies as the city is for creating him: 'Batman has always assumed that the city made him what he is ... But tonight he wonders ... Did Gotham City create him? Or did he create it?' (Gale and Grayson, 1999, pp. 112-113).





Imprisoned in the offices of Midtown Manhattan



Metropolis



Retribution for the corrupt city

As Batman has mutated and adapted over the past sixty years, his architectural environment has necessarily evolved too, directly reflecting and affecting the mood, style and gravity of appearance and meaning in both static and moving images of the character. He must be the most famous vigilante never to have lived. By taking the law into his own hands he seeks to right wrongs one at a time. It is harder to judge who is the 'good guy' and who is the 'bad' in the corrupt world of Gotham. Batman works from the premise that everyone is suspect and he alone is capable of judging the best way to proceed. Although arrogant, he is well aware that he is despised by many in Gotham who judge him as being as amoral as the criminals he strives to incarcerate.

The possibility of moral superiority, or super-powers that no-one else can be aware of when they look at you, is a stark reaction to the sensation of the faceless face amongst the crowd. Who doesn't dream of what they could, should, want to be (albeit probably with less spandex)? Why is the possibility for transformation so strongly linked with the city? Is it not only the possibility of success, but the atmosphere a city generates that engenders success? In that sense the city is liberating, and both Batman and Superman play with the idea of duality; both have alter egos, lives, personalities, homes, names and appearances that hide their true selves. The city perpetuates their disguise and makes transformation possible. Indeed, Clark Kent only moved to the city when it became impossible for him to hide his true nature in Smallville while Batman was arguably created by the city and its peculiar form of faceless, unidentifiable violence.

I believe Superman and Batman represent two extreme examples of how city dwellers deal with fear. The optimistic viewpoint of Metropolis, sometimes sullied by criminals and villains who deviate from the normal, perfect state of things, contrasts with Batman's attempts to attain justice in an imperfect world. From Metropolis' saccharine, sunny world view, with its inherent denial of what may move beneath, to Gothams' dark, corrupt, crime-ridden streets, each hero fights the same fears from a different standpoint. Batman is motivated by revenge and injustice; Superman just can't help being so good. Comic book culture can lead to a gross simplification of complex issues but the transmutation of pictures and stories to 'fact' is something the modern media is also adept at.

The spaces within this almost entirely fictional world are drenched with colour, darkness and shadow. Every scene is emotionally heightened through the manipulation of colour, politicising almost every space, every scene. I believe this unreality is a heightened reality reflecting the emotive perception of the city. How people in general - as opposed to architects - view architecture, the city and their immediate environment is more readily legible and comprehensible in the moving image and comics than almost anywhere else. Here you will find fears of the dark, random violence, loneliness, immigration, technology, pollution - even fear of modern architecture! Superheroes show how many wish they could deal with these fears POW! WHACK! THUD! Morality is simplified; the anonymity offered by the city and ascribed to the individual within it, is transformed to advantage.

It is far easier to be judgmental of criminals, murderers and villains than the more obvious perpetrators of crime, the destitute, the mentally ill and the people we know best. The artificial emotional distance of the 'story' - promulgated from Batman to the likes of Rupert Murdoch - sensationalises the 'baddies' by denying the reality that, statistically speaking, most violent crimes are perpetrated by those closest to us, not random maniacs in the street. In that sense, Metropolis and Gotham provide an easy vehicle in which to deal with our worst fears and greatest hopes for living in the city. I would argue that the fictional worlds displayed in graphic novels and comics are as important to many as the screen city and its emotive representation. The domains of Batman and Superman respectively, Gotham and Metropolis, represent two diametrically opposed views of both New York and the city. From the Republican politics of the Bush administration to romanticising vigilantism, the comic culture of DC alone has much to say on the question of morals and morality within the city. The artifice of these worlds provides security, whilst the visual familiarity of the environment portrayed gives it gravitas, legibility and relevance. The breadth of experience that comics and graphic novels cover is vast and the insight they offer, in terms of day to day perception of the city, is refreshing, funny, shocking, informative and intelligent. The question of moral autonomy is just one of the questions Batman and Superman are empowered to answer.



Smallville

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Notes on Niemeyer

BRIAN WARD

Although his buildings differ in form, the space that Niemeyer makes has a compelling homogeneity to it. This became particularly clear at Dr. Claudio Queiroz's lecture during which he presented a large amount of projects from across the 96-year-old's career. Indeed, so many were discussed that it became difficult to focus on the individual works; what emerged instead was Niemeyer's individual sense of space.

It is a sense of space that is continuously reinforced by the way in which his architecture is represented. The buildings seem to be best understood at a distance and hence there is a particular manner in which they are presented in architectural literature. A narrow range of material is used - an architect's initial sketch, drawings at a large scale, and some photographs of the building (usually carefully framed shots from a distance). There are few, if any, representations of details. It was predominantly in this way that Dr. Queiroz presented the work. Although it was probably not the aim of the lecture, the repetition of such images emphasised the 2-dimensional qualities of the architecture. It may not be as evident in the built reality but what is thrown into sharp focus when the work is presented in this manner is the close relationship between the space of Niemeyer's drawings and sketches and the space of the finished work. This relationship is particularly apparent in his work from the late fifties on, when he began to create a flatter, more reduced world.

His own house in Canoas, outside Rio de Janeiro, built in 1953, is an essay in the spatial complexities which he chose to forgo in order to create this world. Spatially, the house is defined by a subtle play of reflections and transparencies between the curving glazed screen, the polished tile floor, and the pool. This is complemented by the deep shade provided by the surrounding planting and the projecting roof slab above. The glazing traverses a granite rock, allowing it into the house. The polished floor extends into the garden and there are copious amounts of planting within the envelope of the building. All of which achieves what appears to be a

genuinely ambiguous relationship between the interior and the exterior. Conversely, it is a curious lack of ambiguity which defines Niemeyer's later works. This is not to say that they do not provide as spatially rich an experience as one travels through them, but that surface complexity is not used to create this richness. His later use of glass demonstrates this. The subtle reflections and transparencies are lost as glass is tinted or treated to reflect like a mirror. Walls, too, are either conceived as flat planes or large swathes of simple pattern. This allows buildings to be simplified to repetitive structural systems, curtain walling and/or simple enigmatic forms, diminishing the gap between the drawing on paper and the building in real space.

The first step towards reducing this gap is the setting up of the ground and the creation, where possible, of a blank page. In the Communist Party Headquarters in Paris, this means using the main slab of accommodation to hide an ugly urban context and to create a background for the dome of the assembly hall. Generally the strategy implies the creation of a flat ground plane - a podium, a lawn or a shallow pond - against which the forms will be read. This simplification of the context allows Niemeyer to play with the relationship between figure and ground. We are given large amounts of ground, leading to one of the stranger characteristics of his work - that not unpleasant sense that there is too much space. One is reminded of early renaissance painting where, compared to high renaissance art, there often seems to be too much blank wall. It may be because of this that there is a certain naive quality to much of his work.

Once he has created the blank page for himself he begins to draw. The clearing of ground and the use of simple planes puts a lot of emphasis on the line of the architecture. This line can present itself on a planar façade as the rigid thin edge of a concrete slab or frame; it can be manifest as a curve in section or plan; or most excitingly, it can curve in three dimensions as in the ramp of the recent Museum of Contemporary Art in Niterói. It is the manipulation of this line that gives



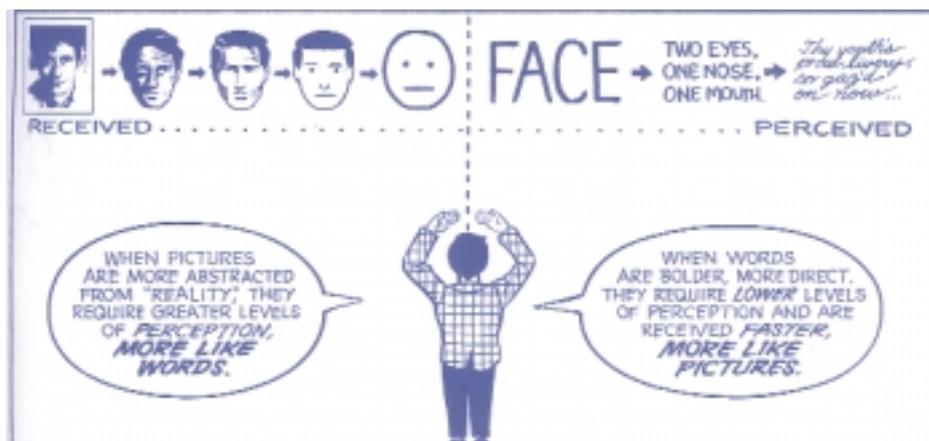
the architecture its customary lightness. One senses that it is the line of an architect that trusts his sketches – Niemeyer builds curves that another architect would adjudge too weak to take beyond the drawing board stage. The difference could be that he knows that he can build the curve that he has sketched. The weakness inherent to a freeform curved line in a built work draws attention to the hand of the architect. It does not have the seemingly natural authority of a straight line and one is thus more aware of its creator. The curved lines that get built also tend to emphasise the awkwardness of drawing a curve accurately on a drawing board and then bringing it right through the building process. They generally end up clunky, turning corners in stages. In contrast, Niemeyer's curves flow relatively freely and look like they have bypassed the difficult stages and been built directly from the sketch. The weakness of the curve can then become a positive quality, comparable to the delicacy characteristic of a single line drawn on a page. Niemeyer is confident enough to draw attention to himself in this way, allowing the spirit of the sketch to be more apparent in his buildings than is usual in architecture.

This congruence between the space created on the page and that created by the buildings, creates a situation where arguably the closest references to the architectural space come from the 2-dimensional arts. In particular, Niemeyer's architecture reminds one of the flat, abstracted world of the comic book. Of course, the briefs Niemeyer gets to work with seem to step straight off the page of a comic – the Communist Party headquarters, a capital city, a meteor museum etc. But there are also clear analogies between his work and that of comic artists; it would be hard to believe that there is not a symbiotic relationship between the two (eg. the Alvorada Palace from Brasilia can be spotted in the fictional city of Tapiocapolis in *Tintin and the Picaros*). The scale and simplicity of his moves reduces everything to the cartoon. He has the comic artist's urge to create an impact and uses the same means to do so - a line and flat planes. His use of colour, most evident in the green and yellow carpets chosen for the Communist Headquarters is bold and basic, resembling that associated with comic strips. In all of this, he is perhaps closest to the clear line style of cartoon drawing, exemplified by Hergé and characterised by simple lines, no hatches and flat colours.

It is useful to think about Niemeyer in this way because it highlights what may be a limitation in his work. In his seminal book, *Understanding Comics* (Kitchen Sink Press, Northampton, MA, 1993), Scott McCloud attempts to understand the allure of comics. He suggests that it may lie in their use of 'iconic abstraction' whereby comics abstract people, places, things or ideas into easily recognisable icons. His belief is that there are close analogies between this way of representing the world and how we think about things when we are not looking directly at them. The flat colours used in comics also contribute to viewer involvement in that they emphasize the shape of objects so that 'the world takes on the childhood reality of the playground and recalls a time when shape preceded meaning'. There are sufficient parallels between comics and Niemeyer's work to suggest that McCloud's theories could go some way to explaining the strength of the architecture. But he also outlines a difficulty that comics have. The abstraction of the images has a strange effect on the text with which they share the page. The desire for a unified medium requires that the language utilised with the graphics tends towards the simple and direct. Thus, the simplicity of the visual language, upon which comics rely for their power, limits the vocabulary that can be used. McCloud acknowledges that, although it can be done, it is therefore difficult to discuss more nuanced ideas through the medium of comics.

Without having visited any of the buildings, a similar limitation would appear to permeate Niemeyer's architecture. While there is enjoyment to be derived from the simplicity and peculiar lack of ambiguity in the work, there is also the sense that it limits his architecture and puts constraints on what can be expressed through it. Or so it seems when the work is presented in the customary way. During the lecture, we got an occasional glimpse of a building in its context. This was mainly when Dr. Queiroz was discussing a lesser known work and seemed to be using his own photographs. These images were not as tightly framed and the wider landscape could be seen leaking in around the edges. One sensed that it was here that the real expressive potential in the work lay – along the edges where the comic-book world played against a more complex reality.

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Sancho Madridejos

BRENDAN MONEY

China Fever

Sancho Madridejos Architects began their lecture with three ongoing projects in China. They join the world's elite - Rem Koolhaas, Lord Foster, S.O.M. - to name but a few, who are churning out buildings for what is fast becoming the world's largest economy. Foreign architects and urban planners are sought by the Chinese largely for their expertise and prestige. In this way they seem to be following how the Japanese modernised: cut and paste whatever the West can offer. The results have been uneven to say the least and Shanghai's skyline is a jostling procession of flashy and often gaudy architecture. In China, there seems to be a desire for monumental buildings and ideally ones loaded with symbolism. Witness how Herzog and de Meuron's stadium for the 2008 Olympics has become commonly known as The Bird's Nest, cosy imagery their complex work in Europe has resisted. The architectural magazine *Archis* featured an article on the trials of Dutch urban planners working in China, who, struggling to elucidate the complexities of their scheme to their confused clients, pointed out that the plan resembled the blades of a windmill. This delighted the clients and they accepted it.

But China is not quite the El Dorado of the architectural world it first seems. Firms sometimes have their plans stolen, have difficulty getting their fees and, by law, are not permitted to complete the design of the building. This means detailing often falls to local firms which can change the outcome considerably. So what is attracting so many famous architects? Echoing the thoughts of many with their sights on China, Zaha Hadid cited the vast opportunities to be found there, '[the country] is an incredible empty canvas for innovation'. There are undertones of colonialism here, an empty map with limitless possibilities. In Sancho Madridejo's case we can see how great this opportunity is. Their work in Spain is limited to single buildings but in China encompasses swathes of city. Evidently, this leap in scale is also an attraction for Western practices.

The three projects Juan Carlos Sancho Osinaga presented all seem to be at an early design stage - the presentation consisted largely of computer generated 3D images. The first consisted of a mixed-use tower with offices, a museum and other amenities. The tower continued into a long block which wrapped around the upper part of a large area of housing. Sancho rejected the *tabula rasa* approach and explained how the second urban project would 'knit' into the existing fabric of the city. Images of smaller scale blocks with residential units above a commercial ground floor were shown. The formal qualities of these projects were emphasised but the context barely touched on and how exactly this stitching would happen was left unsaid. All the images were also free from anything Chinese, even the Gucci-clad consumers pasted into the urban spaces were decidedly European. The third project shown was particularly vague on context. In one image a few shoppers gravitate towards a commercial block while to the right a giant empty public space gapes wide. What happens in public space in a totalitarian regime? Clearly the architects don't know.

The current Chinese leadership consolidated its power in Tianamen Square 15 years ago and the Communist Party continues to thrive. Recently we have witnessed the brutal crackdown on *Falun Gong* and human rights abuses in China are as widespread as ever. But the world has moved on. Since July 2001 entrepreneurs have been allowed join the party, indeed membership or close alliance is seen as essential to do business. Capitalism is flourishing and the world has quietly forgotten China is communist. Unfortunately, all this capitalism will not necessarily lead to democracy. An elite may be getting very rich but about 900 million Chinese still subsist as peasant farmers.

Architecture is the image of China's new prosperity and architects have been seduced by their own illusion. In our minds we link capitalism with democracy just as sophisticated architecture goes with a liberal and open society. But in the rush to build, the mistakes of the west are appearing again. There is the wholesale destruction of old neighbourhoods such as the Shanghai *hutongs* in ancient alleys filled with courtyard houses. Then there is the huge-scale urban planning and the rejection of historical development.



Arrixaca Teaching Pavilion

Granted there are many conscientious architects working there, but the message usually seen in the media tends to reiterate the views of Zaha Hadid. Architects have remained largely silent about the destruction and unsustainable development and the fact their principle client is an oppressive regime. Instead, they chose to sing of the incredible opportunities and Sancho Madrideojos are no exception.

Void, Tone, Fold

This stout trio form the basis of a yearlong course the architects teach in Madrid. After presenting the Chinese projects, Sancho gave a brief outline of the sources for these three concepts. He hails from San Sebastian, home to two prominent Basque sculptors – Jorge Orteiza (1908-2003) and Eduardo Chillida (1924-2002). Although he only mentioned them briefly in the lecture, it is worth pausing as their art has major resonance with

these three ideas.

Sancho stated that Jorge Orteiza's work has particular relevance to modern architecture as it concerns the generation of space from planes. As the story goes, Orteiza, as a child would tunnel through heaps of sand on the beach, testing how much space he could create before collapse. This became the mission of his work; it is the space sculpture creates which counts, not the sculpture itself. Gradually Orteiza reduced the material in his sculpture needed to frame a space. In 1959 he officially retired, having, in his words, 'ended up with a purely receptive empty space, without a sculpture in my hands'. Eduardo Chillida also molded space but was more engaged with the properties of the materials he used. He worked with, among others, iron, steel, alabaster and paper, teasing out their essences and exposing them in new ways. Stone can seem heavy yet translucent and iron, massive yet powerless.

In Sancho Madrideo's Arrixaca hospital teaching-pavilion in Murcia, we can see the concepts of void, tone and fold at work. Here, a series of voids project into the building. The volume is created as if it were a folding plane, 'cuts' are then made perpendicular to the folds and these are pushed in to create the voids. But void seems paradoxical for these spaces which have such distinct presences. Partly it is the power of the fold that creates these cubic spaces with the sheer stone clad walls outside and the strip of stone at roof level inside the void emphasizing the idea of a folded plane. In the words of Chillida, in a fold 'the concept of unity is always there'. But also at work is *tone*, voids have their own material qualities, colour and opacity.

Sancho Madrideo's architecture is highly sculptural and Chillida and Orteiza have been powerful sources of inspiration. This glance into their theory also reveals the formalism at the heart of their architecture. This provides a theoretical basis for generating objects but what of social ideology and urbanism? This brings us back to China. Are these projects then simply large-scale exercises in formalism? They either haven't developed a theoretical position or didn't feel it was important to state it. It is worrying that it appears the only tools they bring to China are those of void, tone and fold.

Having introduced the theoretical background to their work, Sancho explored a number of recent projects in detail. His commentary focused on the formal qualities of the design and the materials used. The first project was a civic office and town hall built into the ruins of a baroque palace where only part of the façade

remains. The volume of the new building is the same as the old but the cross section varies through the building dividing the baroque ground floor into two levels on one side. One of their architectural tricks that appear in many of their projects is a vertical relationship established through a *kick* in the section. In this project one of the floors that project into a void folds upwards to form a one-storey high wall. This disrupts the dominating horizontal planes and introduces more complex internal volumes and relations - turning the simple baroque volume into a dynamic internal space. The rear façade is dominated by heavy stone cladding except where a cubic void is cut into the volume. Its walls are of small pieces of onyx, cut thin enough to allow a warm sensual light inside to the civil marriage room. From the imposing exterior it is as if a bite has been taken and a rich ornate interior is exposed - a nod to the baroque? Probably not, historical allusions are not what their architecture is about.

Textures and filtered light - *tone* in their language - are also a theme of the Arrixaca hospital teaching pavilion (referred to above). Here, the glass has a gold screen-print in a dappled pattern. This filters the light and the texture created is somewhere between the grain of the stone on the building and that of surrounding trees. The white minimal interior spaces speckled in shadow look cool and calm. This is a building that delicately balances textures, masses and voids. The Alicante Museum of Modern Art also filters light, this time down through narrow voids into the adjacent exhibition spaces. Large mobiles of the artist Eugenio Sempere will hang in these spaces creating playful

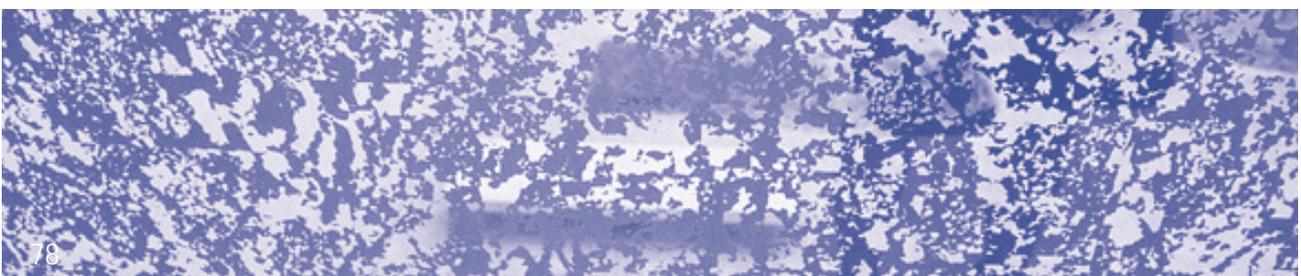
shadows. Once again the building is a closed stone clad volume with a series of voids allowing light to enter.

The final project discussed was the chapel and house for the captain of Real Madrid. Sancho described how the client came across a table laden with conceptual models based on folds and decided he wanted one built. Out of this came the chapel at Valleacaron. It is essentially a box punctuated with a complex succession of folds. This forms a space of bewildering sections. As the anecdote suggests, this is an exercise in pure formalism, the only symbolic references are attached afterwards.

Like much contemporary Spanish architecture, that of Sancho Madrideo is driven by formal concerns and the bulk of the lecture too, was given over to this. It is certainly beautiful architecture that manages to keep overbearing monumentalism at bay with a delicate balance of voids, volumes and varied textures. There was, however, a telling disparity in the lecture between the Chinese projects and their work in Spain - it is as if they haven't yet resolved how it fits into their oeuvre. Their architecture in Spain has chosen to preoccupy itself largely with itself, in the production of exquisite objects. But China demands more than this. What is at stake here is the possibility of a free and democratic society; can architecture offer more than the illusion?

Brendan Money is a student of architecture.

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