



Delft University of Technology

## Reading(s) and Writing(s)

### Unfolding Processes of Transversal Writing

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#### DOI

[10.7480/writingplace.3](https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.3)

#### Publication date

2019

#### Document Version

Final published version

#### Published in

Writingplace: Journal for Architecture and Literature

#### Citation (APA)

Gabrielsson, C., Frichot, H., Havik, K. M., & Jobst, M. (Eds.) (2019). Reading(s) and Writing(s): Unfolding Processes of Transversal Writing. *Writingplace: Journal for Architecture and Literature*, (3), 156.  
<https://doi.org/10.7480/writingplace.3>

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Journal for Architecture and Literature

Writing place



**journal issue #3**

Reading(s) and Writing(s)

Unfolding Processes of Transversal Writing



Journal for Architecture and Literature



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# Reading(s) and Writing(s)

## Unfolding Processes of Transversal Writing

**Catharina Gabrielsson, Hélène Frichot, Klaske Havik, Marko Jobst**

*'In these constructions, reading and writing approach identity'*

*Jennifer Bloomer<sup>1</sup>*

This issue of *Writingplace Journal*, *Reading(s) and Writing(s)*, focuses on the complex process of writing itself, and in particular on the question of reading and responding to texts. By presenting not only resulting texts, but discreet readings of works in process integrated with the discussions that unfold, the issue reveals complex modes of writing that move between the scholarly and the fictional. It draws attention to the questions of authorial voice, the voice of the reader, and the voice of the possible protagonists of the text, even if this as an object, space or indeed, place. If the authors could be said to engage in various acts of 'writing place', as per this journal's general thematic focus, what kinds of places do they bring into existence? Furthermore, which modes of writing are deemed most appropriate in order to create both evocative and critical accounts of places?

Driven by a concern to reinvigorate space-related research through the means of writing, the texts in this issue have evolved through the collaborations of a group of affiliated thinkers and practitioners, within a series of reading and writing workshops in the context of the project *Transversal Writing*.<sup>2</sup> Challenging the means and formats of conventional academic writing, this project sets out to transgress the hierarchies between academic and non-academic knowledge, theory and practice, discipline and profession. Contesting the reification of architecture that maintains that the building is a discrete object – whose values are materialized through real

estate, limits defined by property borders and agency reduced to profit-making – what we call ‘transversal writing’ traces the lines of connection between architectural conceptions and their effects, between decisions and materializations, forms and affordances. The project acknowledges how architecture is shaped by words, imagery and ideas long before it is transformed into bricks and mortar. Recognizing architecture as a product of the collective imaginary – an act of human creation – is to identify the potentiality in how words, images and physical entities have a capacity to proliferate, spread and generate unforeseeable effects, far beyond the intentions of the architect.

Architectural research, at this time, cannot stay immune from the serious challenges that threaten societies today and that, one way or other, are caught up in the entrenchment of science and epistemology that hitherto have been part of their making. The methods, and the objects, of research need to be revised. We frequently forget, for instance, that architecture is a cultural concept that shifts depending on the context. It is not just an aesthetic object, a materialized accomplishment or fact that is possible to evaluate and measure in various registers, depending on the actors involved. Nor can it be reduced to practice, based on a set of tools for concrete environmental intervention – specifications, contracts, drawings, sketches, models and so forth. Architecture must also be recognized as a critical lens for investigating the built environment; a form of knowledge and a means for reflection that is uniquely able to address ‘building’ as both verb and noun. The operative use of this lens allows us to see how architectural practice is productive of affective relations amid specific environments, relations that are contingent and open-ended. The development of the method and politicoethical issues that are implicit in ‘transversal writing’ – drawing in particular on Félix Guattari’s thinking – comes from the group’s insistence on the importance of writing to creatively as well as critically bring forth and *situate* knowledge.

### Writing(s)

The contributions in this issue can thus be seen as attempts to write *with* local environments, ranging from an obscure British forest reserve to the politically sensitive environment of the island of Cyprus, from places of historical colonial life to the author's memories of a city. Robin Wilson (with photographer Nigel Green) traces an encounter with landscape delivered through a practice that marries the creative essay with photography, and is based on a series of walks in the areas of Darwell and Powdermill Reservoirs in East Sussex, England. Anne Kockelkorn's diary, written during a research and teaching stint in Cyprus, takes in the island landscape, politics and underlying economic forces that dramatically shape the environment in order to reveal a complex picture across a variety of scales and analytical registers. The contribution of Klaske Havik offers a series of lyrically framed observations of an architectural educator on repeated visits to the city of Skopje. It reflects on the complex histories and processes that shape the city, from the remnants of the Metabolist city to the neoclassical vocabulary of a reconstituted national identity. Marko Jobst's text, composed of two layers, brings together queer auto-fictions with the architecture histories of an illusive Serbian Baroque in the city of Belgrade. Hélène Frichot's contribution offers an approach to decolonizing through fiction, where cross-generational memories of family life in the Seychelles are used to critically illuminate the colonial histories. Kim Gurney's text closely follows the making of a film set in an artisanal workshop in Cape Town, and its onward journeys, to offer an offscreen perspective on the labour of the imagination. Finally, Naomi Stead pursues a theoretical inquiry into the relationship between writing and walking based on her previous fictocritical texts based in Stockholm, Sydney and Brisbane.

In each of these writings of places, the writing approaches have gone beyond mere architectural description, and have included enfolding narrative strategies with discourse analysis, archival research, *in situ* observations, field research and fictional speculation. The texts may include the

voices of protagonists: real or fictive characters, human or non-human inhabitants, even objects. The position of the author is challenged: is the author an insider, participant or an external observer? And is it possible, at times, for the positions of researcher, author and experiencing subject to merge?

### **Reading(s)**

This collection challenges the notion that writing is produced as a mere aftereffect, a means of writing-up, or a report on what has come to pass in a research project. It further challenges the idea that the written word is a transparent medium, available for the transport or communication of clear and distinct voices and distinctive ideas, without the interference of noise, nonsense, material sensations of individual and collective bodies, struggling amid existential territories. Instead, we locate writing in the midst of things, in profound contact with the daily problems we encounter. Approached as a mode of knowledge production, writing foregrounds how the challenges for seeking knowledge in architecture are intimately intertwined with a recognition that 'method' is not only about investigating, but also about pre-empting and staging the world. Writing means searching, losing and finding again, looking for sources and deciding to identify them as such, seeking paths in the undergrowth of everyday experience and the mountain of books, catching a glimpse of a swiftly disappearing precursor. Writing constructs an itinerary that criss-crosses a terrain. It carries resemblances to narratives, because we need to have stories to tell, and stories to tell stories, in order to transform the way we continue to relate with and alter our locations of existence. Understood as a writing methodology, what we call 'transversal writing' engages realigned knowledge practices in architecture through critical, embodied, reflective and situated approaches to research.

In this collection we specifically explore emergent relations between writing and reading, thereby addressing the control system that upholds the paradigmatic notion of 'scientific proof': peer review. Rather than a blind,

hierarchically organized and nevertheless arbitrary function of passing and receiving judgement, for this issue of *Writingplace* we demonstrate an alternative method: one based on sharing and discussing our discreet writing practices, always and delicately acknowledged as works in process. The texts presented here derive from a specific milieu composed around writing experiments, centred on two intense workshops where the emphasis was placed on reading each other's work in an open and associative way, rather than in a conventionally critical or even agonistic fashion. In 2016 and 2018, the Transversal Writing Group took part in workshops whose aim was to discuss writing 'across the registers of disciplines, practices, scales and spatio-temporalities, straddling ethnography (slow) and journalism (fast)'. In a series of writing and reading workshops, the group of eight authors functioned as each other's 'peer readers' (rather than reviewers), responding to the drafts circulated in advance. As a result, every text was read and commented on by seven readers, compared with the usual two in standard academic practice, and rounded off by group discussions.

In this issue of *Writingplace*, selected parts of the essays are presented along with selected readings. While all the readings have been signed by a specific author – the designated reader of the original text in our workshop scenarios – they are influenced by and incorporate elements of the responses of the group as a whole. In preparation for this publication, readings have been treated with equal importance as the samples of writing, elevating the intricacies of transversal relations in and through processes of knowledge production.

The readings function as introductions to the main texts, raising certain issues of writing: structure, voice, perspectives, introducing thematics and suggesting contexts – they offer a primer, a fertile ground for the understanding of the main text. By putting reading and writing on par, we acknowledge them as equally dependent on our skills, attention and care, making the author dissolve into the reader and vice versa, thus muddling

the outlines of identity. As noted by Michel Foucault:

*Writing unfolds like a game that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.*<sup>3</sup>

'Writingplace', then, becomes the place of writing, reading and responding. This mode of working offers an alternative to the conventional production of academic texts and the conventional role disinterested peer-reviewing practices play within it. While academic journals generally employ a procedure in which a draft is reviewed by anonymous experts, whose comments are then addressed by the author and lead to a revised, final version of the text, this issue of *Writingplace* explores alternative ways of reading, reviewing and developing texts: not as acts of authoritative judgement, but as collective, non-hierarchical and deeply open-ended processes. Ultimately, by exposing the various aspects of the process of writing, reading and then redressing the reading in further acts of writing, this issue of *Writingplace* hopes to ignite a discussion regarding reviewing practices. It proposes a more intimate, collective way of learning from peers – all with the aim of further developing architectural knowledge.

- 1 Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)cripts of Joyce and Piranesi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 146.
- 2 The *Transversal Writing* project has been supported by Vetenskapsrådet (Swedish Research Council) through its funds for artistic research, led by Catharina Gabrielsson with Hélène Frichot as a co-researcher at the School of Architecture KTH. This issue of *Writingplace* presents only part of the work, a book about the *Transversal Writing* project, addressing more specifically the notion of transversality, is expected to appear at a later stage.
- 3 Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in: Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113-138.

# *Foray in a Modern Reserve*

An Impounding Portrait of Land Use

Robin Wilson

Introductory reading compiled by Klaske Havik



# Reading of Robin Wilson's *Foray in a Modern Reserve*

Compiled by Klaske Havik

The beauty of landscape can be measured in units, the instructions of this land-use survey seem to suggest. But behind the scientific reports and the instructions that at first sight make the text appear to be neutral, lies another layer. As if the water, the buzzard and the woodpecker, the fences and the signposts become characters, indicating that the terrain is alive, as in the books of Dutch author Toon Tellegen:

*The sun was shining and the squirrel and the ant were sitting in the grass on the river-bank. Above them the willow rustled, in front of them the water bubbled, and in the distance the thrush was singing. 'In my opinion,' said the squirrel, 'I am happy now.' The ant said nothing and chewed at a blade of grass.'*

In this case, however, the landscape does not seem so friendly, it seems to have a dark tone. There is a sense of something forbidden, something hidden, some boundaries to be transgressed, explored or violated. Is the closed off land a site of crime, does the landscape carry a lingering violence and trauma,

due to the infliction of the reservoir (an artificial dam?).

The text evokes the heuristic sense of excitement in transgressing borders, exploring a forbidden terrain, of trespassing, alchemy and science. Everything becomes a sign, a piece of writing, serving to confirm a deep and mysterious meaningfulness; the alchemy of a world of correspondences. The text is about trespassing, and as readers we follow its directions, stumble upon obstacles, step aside, transgress a boundary. Do we follow completely the structure that was set out for us? Where do we obey, or become disobedient to the writer? To find what is hidden, this fragmentary reading follows the lead given at the beginning of the text: 'Witness, record, return.'

## **Witness: Objects, Writer, Reader**

Who is a witness, and of what?

The researcher as a witness, of acts imposed on the territory; of spatial practices, transgressive

practices: rambling, riding, constructing?  
 of traces;  
 of a crime? Traces of a crime?  
 Blood spots on a plastic sleeve.  
 of plans, not realized;  
 of acts of appropriation;  
 of the imposition of rules;  
 of acts of ownership, imposed.

The reader as a witness,  
 of the author's investigations;  
 of the mismatch between the instructions and the reality of the territory  
 of transgression of boundaries  
 of the author's reading of the territory  
 of the frustration of being sent off track,  
 of power imposed on you  
 of one 'we' who becomes two  
 separate researchers.

This portrait is about the related issues  
 of the gaze – or who is doing the looking. The question of who is doing the mapping or viewing comes up in the text. It uses the inclusive address, 'we'. And at the end, it intriguingly tells us of a break in this commonality during the interlude of masses of thicket, when this collaborative duo, presumably, breaks into Researcher Text and Researcher Image.

There is something the protagonists want to sample that is *beyond the right of way*, and this piece may be testing such a notion of transgression, going beyond what is polite roaming while at the same time not taking itself too seri-

ously. Making our way through the text, we even start to think that perhaps it's this very aspect of ease with serendipity that allows for new and chance discoveries. This freedom is kept in tension throughout the text with repeated references to rules, orders, notices, telling-off and boundaries or claims to space that must not be traversed.

***Cross an earth causeway, diverge very gradually from the right field-edge. Go straight ahead here on a faint, unsigned path which crosses a hump where you have a choice of two paths ahead, over to your right.***

The instructional nature of these fragments makes the project feel like a map without an object, or an object that can never be mapped, or the absence of the very possibility of mapping, penetrating, understanding. It makes us wonder about the unknown and unknowable of the landscape, not because of the human traces, though they are part of it, but perhaps because of the very limits of knowledge?

The seeming mismatch between instructions and the actual particularities of the terrain itself causes instances of conflict, and at times it is a misshapen tree that points the researcher in other directions: 'We sympathized with the directional traumas expressed here, and lacking any other navigational inspiration, decided to submit to its divination

and set our course according to the angle of the tree's lateral section of growth.' Divination might be the key concept.

### **Record: Impressions, Images**

How to record and what to record?

The old records:

Date 1958; bore holes, pits of puddle core, trenches

the person who wrote that record was 'someone who knew where to look'; the recommendations  
their method: teamwork, field walk, topographical descriptions

The instructions:

'Keep to the marked paths'

'area is patrolled'

'now veer half-left to climb steadily up a grassy slope'

'there is no legal right to public access'

The objects:

A stone pile *chantier*; a tank tomb; bridges; signs; gates; steps, without a building; poles, without a fence; logs.

The creatures:

Ramblers; a horse with rider; the adder 'reaffirming direction'; the woodpecker, 'reaffirming direction' as well; the buzzard; the trees 'the beech tree that dramatically diverted from its natural habitat'

The sounds:

The sonic landscape. But not many sounds have been recorded.

Data:

Landscape values on a scale of 1 to 20?

The things not recorded:

The departure of the researchers. What did they take with them, how did they prepare? Who are they?

The layers in the text:

Indications given by the ordnance, maps, and signs;

Observations of the researchers as written in the survey, between quotation marks, or are these quotes of the earlier records?

Description of the walks

The water: the ways in which it structures, appears, reappears, directs the territory. The water tank, a straight shadow – something in this (textual) image feels key, emblematic of the process. The mind is in search of that straight-edged, man-made surface that would order everything, explain everything (the world) away.

The images work as triptychs that offer portals through which the reader can enter into some other domain. These images suggest an animation, or stereo images, or even those cards you have in which Jesus winks at you depending on the angle of looking. As if the

landscape, in this case, reveals hidden, and perhaps uncanny, sentience. Is this landscape, this territory, uncanny in any way? Is the author's aim to depict it as such? The images and the descriptions of the reserve evoke a discussion about representation and the yearning for immersion. The landscape is mediated through different sources and means of representation, such as reports, maps, photographs. Even though we cannot identify this texts as a phenomenological description, it is striving to reach that impossible immediate encounter with the environment the researcher is investigating – in another way. In that sense, it may be seen as a counterproject to the Romantic poets and their immersion in the British landscape by which the self dissolves and unites with a greater whole.

### Return: Resonances

The journey through an unknown, slightly mysterious landscape brings resonances of other literary (and cinematographic) works. The entry into the reservoir reserve seems to resonate with the gloomy 'zone' in Tarkovsky's movie *Stalker* (1979), and the scenes described in the original novel *Roadside Picnic*, by the brothers Strugatsky, on which the movie was based.<sup>2</sup> The encounter with landscape wants to reveal more than meets the eye.

The tone of the scientific mission is reminiscent of *Annihilation*, the film after Jeff Vandermeer's novel,<sup>3</sup> in which a small group of selected researchers is sent into a forest that seems radiant and gloomy, and from which no one has ever returned; or the research expedition described in Willem Frederik Hermans's *Beyond Sleep*, in which a geologist looks for meteorites in the deserted territory of Northern Lapland.<sup>4</sup> In Reif Larsen's *The Selected Works of TS Spivet*,<sup>5</sup> a genius 12-year-old cartographer is mapping his world. In this text, he goes on a wild cross-country adventure from his family ranch just north of Divide, Montana, to the Smithsonian Museum. But his journey is more than geographical. It's about how to map the lessons learned about family and communicates the ebbs and flows of heartbreak, loneliness and love. These texts have a sense of adventure about them.

Wilson's text plays with the idea of wilfully getting lost, as in Rebecca Solnit's *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.<sup>6</sup> Solnit believes in getting lost in order to find that thing you cannot otherwise know. The key question posed in her book is: 'How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?' – a question first posed by a philosopher. Solnit says the thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you is usually what you need to find, and that finding it is a matter of getting lost.

The Art of the project lies in setting up the rules, making use of the tone of pseudo-science. It plays with inventing a method and following it slavishly precisely to *escape* the force of habit that renders us blind to most of our surroundings.<sup>7</sup> What is the thought that encounters its limit by encountering landscape? What sentence is forged in the relation between self-reflection and the world, and the outside of thought, whatever that might be?

One author, one survey team, two researchers, who seek to make sense of the world . . . but the world forever eludes their grasp.

To return is to turn around, to go back to the beginning, to change perspective. Let's return to the water, as one of these characters in the text that seems to crave to have a say. Let's make it speak, and let it become the main character, leading the journey.

*I am the water. I appear and reappear,  
I hide and I flow, I offer reflection,  
I organize the territory.*

*They try to capture me, in their words  
and their maps, they trace my streams  
and dissect me in definitions. The cut  
me in parts: puddle, stream, reservoir.  
They can direct me in gutters and  
collect me in tanks, but in the end it is  
me directing their walk, confusing them,  
raising their curiosity, steering their  
perception of the territory.*

*I cool the air, I feed the flows, I hide  
under the ground, I appear in puddles  
I enter objects, and objects have been  
made to capture me. But I can go past  
them, divert, or flood them.*

*The men, they follow me, they step on  
me, cross me, look at their reflection in  
my surface. They see me disappear and  
look for me again. They approach my  
open waters, but where there is most of  
me, they are not allowed to enter. No one  
knows my depths exactly, no one dares  
to dive inside.*

- 1 Toon Tellegen, *Maybe They Were Nowhere* (*Misschien waren zij nergens*) (Amsterdam: Querido, 1991).
- 2 Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1977), original in Russian (1972).
- 3 Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).
- 4 Willem Frederik Hermans, *Beyond Sleep* (*Nooit meer slapen*) (Amsterdam: de Bezige Bij, 1966). Recently transcribed into a movie, [www.imdb.com/title/tt4075458/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4075458/).
- 5 Reif Larsen, *The Selected Works of TS Spivet* (London/New York: Penguin Press, 2009).
- 6 Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (London/New York: Penguin Putnam Inc, 2005).
- 7 See, for instance, Guattari's discussion on transversality and his analogy to the removal of blinkers on horses; see also Robert Smithson: 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic' and 'Hotel Palenque' (originally a lecture held for architecture students).



# *Foray in a Modern Reserve*

An Impounding Portrait of Land Use

**Robin Wilson**

Photographs by Nigel Green

## **The Terms of a Premature Inspection**

Needs must! The contract for the Inspection Report arrived by courier. Bearing the stamp of Corporation Southern (les Eaux), it instructed: 'Southern Impounding Reservoir and Gathering Grounds. Witness, record, return. Visual evidence to accompany written report. Fee to be agreed on receipt of findings.'

Attached to the contract were clumsy facsimiles of two earlier reports and a graph representing regional 'Landscape Value Units'.

The first report was signed by the 'Borough and Water Engineer' and dated 'this day of the 12th Day of November 1958'. This was a succinct survey by someone who knew where to look. It mentioned 'bore holes', 'pits of puddle core', 'cut-off trenches', a 'concrete draw-off valve tower with overflow pass', a footbridge with 'moveable bearings', and a 'site outside the water limits'. It recorded the use of 'baffles that prevent vortexes'. It advised as to the functioning of the 'scour or emptying valve' and was adamant about the



'ample freeboard between the overflow level and the top of the dam'. It concluded: 'An inspection in less than one hundred years is not recommended.'

(We were being sent to inspect prematurely by forty years.)

The second report was an unsigned and undated document of the 'Wealdon Field Research Unit'. The account began in the first person – 'I again went out to the Southern Reservoir on a hurried visit on the request of the Divisional Planner' – but quickly went on to record a method of survey based on teamwork: 'Pairs of fieldwalkers were given a convenient block of landscape which they searched intensively.' The survey recorded 'a neat and tidy embankment and crest', the presence of 'burnt soil' and the 'limits of a deer park'. The author states that at the conclusion of the search some fieldwalkers attempted to 'exercise the right to freewarren', while others spent extended periods of 'leisurely communion' and strayed from the public rights of way. Mention is made of encounters with a 'four-man Forestry Gang' and a mounted 'Land Bailif'. It recommends that all future fieldworkers 'have their papers in order', and that they pay close attention to the codes of conduct and rights to access stipulated by the CADAC.

This second report concluded with a recommendation that a 'watching brief take place', and a list of geographical coordinates with their essential topographic description was provided: 'area of raised ground 7154 2083', 'scoop in a scarp slope 7137 2074', 'bank (causeway) 7051 2082'.



Fig. 1-3. LANDSCAPE VALUE UNITS SOUTH EAST ( $\alpha \neq \beta$  nor  $\gamma$ )

### Entry into the Reservoir Reserve

We drove along the northern borders of the Reservoir Reserve, back and forth in search of a convenient point to park and gain access. We crossed successively in and out of the limits of the Reserve and the margins of the 'Gathering Grounds'. Laybys and forestry car parks had been newly bared. Signs appeared on barriers: 'Corporation Southern (les Eaux).'

We paused the car at a point high to the northwest of the object of our commission and peered through a rusting, metal-barred, padlocked gate to observe a distant view of the Reservoir waters and its southwest shore. Deer made a fleeting appearance on the promontory of, what we noted from our Explorer Map 124 Ordnance Survey to be, 'Furnace Shaw', before disappearing back into woodland.

We made a mental note to rate this landscape view at a value of 22.0, four points higher than that 'taken to represent the highest to be obtained by a view in Great Britain', and ten points higher than that 'obtained by a view in lowland Britain, such as the prospect from Newlands Corner near Guildford over the Lower Greensand hills of Surrey and West Sussex'. On later reflection, we downgraded the view rating to 17.0, for we felt obliged to factor the appearance of the deer as an inadmissible enhancement of the view equivalent to 'transient atmospheric phenomena', and that knowledge of the name of the topographic feature, Furnace Shaw, had also affected our reception of the view, although in ways that we could not yet fully determine.



Fig. 4-6.

We eventually settled on a verdant verge near to a field entrance and, after placing possessions unnecessary for the fulfilment of the commission out of sight and locking the car, hurried along the narrow lane anxious to avoid speeding, cross-country traffic, for there was no place to retreat, other than the ditch and the hedge.

Bolted gates, the smell of faeces at every entrance, 'probability of adjacent contamination', 'evidence of polluting matters gaining access thereto'.

As we approached an entrance to Scaland wood we encountered a small group of ramblers. We paused to ask them the quickest route through the woods to the shores of the Reservoir. Their instructions were clearly stated, but proved too general to be of any assistance. Some of the group seemed reticent and a little shaken. We noticed a gash in the sleeve of one of the male ramblers and what appeared to be spots of blood on a plastic folder in which they kept their map.

'Go over a stile into the Reservoir Wood, where a friendly notice encourages public access, which you may be tempted to sample, as far as possible, to the right of way.'

## § 2 – FORÊTS DOMINIALES ET COMMUNALS.

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### **'NOTICE!**

CADAC strives to offer waters, exclusive waters, we do just that. Members must make sure they are aware of (and comply with) the rules for this water to the letter.

Ospreys and Buzzards overhead and superb specimens swimming in the water!

Under the canopy of Scaland a conflict quickly flared between our Explorer Map 124 and the intentions and articulations of the ground. A digital

compass offered little assistance, for no sooner had we set our trajectory, aligned our bearings with the Ordnance, than encounters with unmapped features, boundaries, pathways and signs of abandoned infrastructure would distract and disorient.



Fig. 7-9.

We decided to content ourselves with a lesser navigational ambition: to avoid roads and the sound of traffic.

### **Aquatic Features of the Lower 'Gathering Grounds'**



Fig. 10-12.

Intermittently, we encountered a network of watercourses and small-scale schemes of water management – sandbag and pipe bridges, open culverts – contributing to the 'impounding of certain stream waters'. We wandered in these 'various Gathering Grounds', 'clean and free', encountering 'no evidence of polluting matters gaining access thereto'.

In a shallow pool we inspected a hole, pitch-void-black against the clay

bed. We speculated that this was an old 'trial boring' from times when things had 'been worked out in a preliminary way'. Its suction was fierce, and seemed to extract from the pool at an unsustainable rate. We watched minnows struggle against its force and dodge a cascade of vegetation detached from the far bank. This micro landscape seemed in crisis. We considered lessening the outflow with stones, but suddenly the extraction slowed and reversed. A back-flow swelled and rippled out from the hole. The minnows were released from their vital efforts and the hole now seemed to establish a more balanced rate of extraction. We noted the possible observation of a 'pit of puddle core', and that we suspected the 'remote influence of a scour or emptying valve', yet to be located.



Fig. 13-15.

Shortly after resuming our journey we were halted by a guttural belch, deep, aquatic and distant. Sonically, it was no louder than the ambient shifting of wind and foliage. It nevertheless had a vibrational strength that sent tremors into tendons and organs. For its duration and for a few seconds after, the 'belch' communicated a sonic landscape perspective that compressed the anthropomorphic scale to the miniature. Its point of origin seemed to be to the south, on lower ground, towards the sea (and the current direction of travel).

'A path winds through scrub to join a wide sunken path where you turn right. At the bottom of the slope, a waypost indicates the start of a path ahead, which provides a worthwhile there-and-back detour to the edge of

the reservoir. However, turn left at the waypost along an uphill path. Some care is needed from here on in, as there is a lack of signs in places and many alternative paths.'

## 186 - CHARGES DES RIVERAINS - 1<sup>o</sup> Police et conservation des eaux -

### **'NOTICE!**

Keep to the marked paths.

No access to Hog Trough Bay and Shaw.

Area is patrolled 24hrs by CADAC Bailiffs.'



Fig. 16-18.

## EXEMPTIONS

### **Motifs et durée**

- dessèchement de marais : vingt ans,

Beyond the pool the stream fell in steeper descent and our expectation of arriving at the banks of the reservoir increased correspondingly. Expectant, a mirage of open air above a modern lake lay superimposed through every woodland vista. The stream's descent levelled and the woodland path made a series of playful crossings from bank to bank. Beneath us, the retarded stream appeared like a model system of lakes, with a topography



of 'cut-off trenches', 'over-flow levels' and 'sites outside the water limits' rendered to scale to either side. But the stream then seemed to meet an abrupt and muddy termination in a basin filled with logs. We noted this as a 'log-pile crossing', but were suspicious of its purpose, for the logs not only seemed to have suppressed the flow of the stream, but to have set another navigational conundrum. The logs were arrayed like a series of rafts set in deadlock after a dynamic collision, their divergent angles now offering multiple trajectories for the onward journey.

'At the track's southern terminal a series of waterlogged timber planks were found revetting the trackway . . . No additional timbers were found, their exact function remains unclear . . . further investigation was impossible without redirecting the adjacent stream.'

Our instinct was now to reach higher ground, to achieve an overview, and to reconnect with the logic of the Ordnance. We took the path of steepest ascent, although we were now moving away from the supposed position of the reservoir.

'Now veer half-left to climb steadily up a grassy slope. The path is a bit vague underfoot but takes a relatively straight course, crossing an intermediate stile in a fence.'

« . . . Nul n'est censé ignorer la Loi . . . »

### **Divination, Labour and Signs of Conflict**

The ascent was steep and increasingly highland in character. Bracken now dominated the borders of the path. The generic nature of the woodlands around us sapped our energy, and we trudged onward through 'sites outside the water limits', profoundly unsure of their relevance to our commissioners. On the verge of a reluctant return to the 'log-pile crossing', we

came across an object of extreme distortion: a young beech had dramatically diverted from its natural habit, seemingly enforced by a now absent object. It abruptly and extensively tracked at right angles at about a height of three-and-a-half feet from its base, before rising, doubling back on itself in a cork screw twist, and then returning to a more direct ascent into the woodland canopy.

We sympathized with the directional traumas expressed here and, lacking any other navigational inspiration, decided to submit to its divination and set our course according to the angle of the tree's lateral section of growth.

Now released from the logic of tracks and pathways, we entered into what seemed like a parallel realm: a 'room' of coppiced ash and hornbeam, running in well-spaced lines with wood banks interspersed between. We noted a series of improvised shelters, log piles and brushwood pilings, but the site seemed long abandoned as an active coppice. Impressed, however, by the signs of once diligent cultivation and order, we explored the coppice to its furthest limits.



Fig. 19-21.

We tracked along the lower edge of the coppice, bordered by a rhododendron thicket. We perceived that the thicket was shallow in depth, and that the ground beyond it fell abruptly. Moving through the thicket we confronted a sudden change in the humidity of the air, as a ravine of black rocks, lichen, moss and ferns opened below us, framing some modest cas-



cares of a now revitalized stream that had somehow survived or bypassed the log jam. Initially joyful at the prospect of a more direct reconnection with the land's watercourses, we soon began to suspect the role of artifice. We observed with distaste the meandering form of a prepared route down into the ravine, of compacted, sandy earth, with a border of rocks and pebbles: a Victorian conceit, we concluded, the haunt of amateur botanists, fern seekers.

As we moved along the line of the ridge, we discerned signs of conflict; the remains of a botanical foray littered the opposite bank of the ravine: items of clothing, plastic bags, bottles, vehicle parts, burnt and twisted metal rodding, plastic and wooden furniture, some broken and splintered into what seemed to be improvised weapons.

We quickly returned to the spaces of woodland labour and continued our exploration of the coppice, where we recorded an 'area of raised ground' 7150 1504, and the remains of a portable sawmill 7151 1002.



Fig. 22-24.

Emboldened to fulfil the terms of our commission, we pressed on, picking up a gently meandering path through the warm woodlands of what now seemed like a plateau.

'Cross an earth causeway, diverge very gradually from the right field edge. Go straight ahead here on a faint, unsigned path that crosses a hump where you have a choice of two paths ahead, over to your right.'

An adder moved sluggishly in the grass bank to our right, reaffirming the direction of travel.

### Regional Infrastructure

A sharper bend, a slight dip, an 'area of raised ground', 'shallow depressions', a subtle shift in the woodland's character – from the denser thicket of blackthorn and hawthorn, to young, more luxuriant groves to either side, growing vigorously but at variance to one another. Here, a sheer surface suddenly rendered the dappled forest shadows straight! A large, cuboid form, a matte surface which fixed light and shadow into oblique striation. There seemed no question as to the significance of the structure we had chanced upon, and immediately began documentation:



Fig. 25-27.

### Regional Infrastructure: Water Tank and Woodland Tomb

As we approached the form, the forest light intermittently picked out a myriad of incisions upon its flanks: an accumulation of cuts and abrasions, a sylvan text inscribed on this modern surface. The shifting forest thicket, clawed and toothed woodland creatures, ramblers, forest workers, lovers, exiles, invaders – all had left their mark here, none seeking hierarchy over another.

Being just a little higher than eye level, we could discern that the tank tomb was full but with 'freeboard between the overflow level' and the top of the tank. We struggled, though, to see into its depths. We could not make out if the tank was connected to hidden conduits, or confirm the existence of valves.

It was clear that this aquatic volume had attracted and supported a different character of luxuriant, broad-leafed forest growth around it. We surmised that the tank tomb signalled a point of re-entry to the 'water limits', perhaps at the 'highest point and limit of the gathering grounds', that this highland terrain represented the 'purchase and control of an adequate area of land in proximity', and that it was on 'land to be used as part of the undertaking'.

'After crossing the remains of a stile and a collapsed stream culvert, bear left along a field edge. Go through a gap and walk parallel to the right field edge to the left of an isolated cottage. Head out across pasture, onwards between the trees and then along the right edge of an open area to a gate. Once through this gate, with your first glimpse of the Reservoir over to your right, be tempted to sample, as far as possible, the right of way.'

### **Land and Its Determinations**

The 'first glimpse' of the Reservoir brought sky and water together with a violence that abruptly expelled the intimate and canopied topographies through which we had previously travelled. We walked for a short distance along the ridgeway of a vast, modern landscape, subject to exposure from modern winds.

'A second reservation, by no means distinct . . . : according to the formula, the relative value of a tract varies only with the intervening variables of settlement population and the inverse square of distance.'

A little further to the east beyond 'an isolated cottage' and still on high ground was an inactive construction site, with footings extensive enough to provide for a 'completely new, very large house', or a 'new manor house and associated structures', such as an 'orangery and garages', a 'giant cupola and a bell tower with hourly striking bells', lodgings for the 'temporary grooms' of 'Hanoverian horses', and the 'alteration of machine store/office to include temporary accommodation for personal use'. 'There is no allowance for a full-time groom to live on site. The plan does allow for a shepherd who will cost about four times more than the annual gross profit from the sheep. There is also an allowance for a gardener.'

Within the intended viewshed of this 'new manor house', we re-coordinated our direction of travel to the Ordnance, and now understood that the Head of the Reservoir and the concentration of modern, regional infrastructure was further to the east. We were content to descend once more and soon reached a gravel track and fencing on the margins of the forbidden areas of Hog Trough Bay and Shaw. Here, paths had been re-laid, culvert crossings widened and indeterminate stiles replaced with determinate ones. Land, its boundaries and the routes designated for crossing the land, had been subject to a new regime of management and definition.

## **169 - OUVERTURE, REDRESSEMENT ET SUPPRESSION DES CHEMINS RURAUX –**

Aux termes de l'article 13 de la loi de 1881, l'ouverture, le redressement ou l'élargissement d'un chemin rural sont soumis aux formalités prévues par l'article 4 de la même loi.

Confident that we were now travelling within the epicentre of the 'Gathering Grounds' for which 'Bye Laws had been sought' on behalf of Corporation Southern (les Eaux), our commissioners, we were 'tempted to sample, as far as possible' beyond 'the right of way' . . .

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# *Real Estates in Cyprus. A Diary.*

Anne Kockelkorn

Introductory reading compiled by Hélène Frichot

# *Reading of Anne Kockelkorn's Real Estates in Cyprus. A Diary.*

Compiled by H       Frichot

Diaries, being open-ended diurnal constructions, do not usually include pages of contents, but this one does. The page of contents here offers a preparatory journey for the reader, an advance itinerary, letting them know towards what destinations they are about to set off. The diary as journey form becomes a travelogue that takes us to the divided island of Cyprus in order to introduce us to a number of characters, not all of them human, and material entanglements. The diary 'presents the double faces of the city by means of fragments, moments of experience and reflection upon these experiences'.<sup>1</sup> There is much that is implied by the diary form, 'who is being addressed? Who writes? Shouldn't the diary remain a secret? Or is this a document that was lost and then found?'<sup>2</sup> What unfolds is an exemplary instance of transversal writing-reading, with acknowledgment offered to F       Guattari's important essay *The Three Ecologies*.<sup>3</sup>

A critique of the geopolitics and economics of infrastructures in the context of Cyprus is extended, revealed in a sequence of glimpses, the far away, the close up: from tears ritually shed to plastic washed up as flotsam and jetsam, from Saharan sand registered as the material index of the threatened 'desertification of Cyprus' to the point of view of parents rendered as hapless tourists. There is the colonial past that runs through this account of a split island state where displacements are procured via language and place; via ethnic, political, and class identity; and via troubled processes of subjectification. What we come to understand is that 'Cyprus is a *microcosm* of the Middle East'.<sup>4</sup>

A focus on an expanded understanding of infrastructures, failing, flailing, falling apart, challenges any assumption about architecture as the autonomous art of form-making. Infrastructures here concern territory and set the scene of real-estate reconceptualized as infra-



structural space. The infrastructure of EU citizenship is presented as a sociopolitical problematic. The infrastructure of the special economic zone or tax haven is drawn to our attention.

Again and again, the failure of such infrastructures is described through minor encounters: bank cards that do not work, which send us on a journey (with the diarist) through town, a transversal journey revealing the proximity of dilapidated streets just one block away from a luxury shopping strip. Centrally, the destructive role of real-estate as one of the most insidious infrastructures dedicated to the capture of spatial commodity takes hold. In all, a generalized failure of architectural infrastructures is witnessed through the eyes of the diarist, who presents 'a world being produced, made from mountains, deserts, the sea'<sup>5</sup> entangled with human modes of settlement and their devastating aftereffects.

Anthropos-scenic infrastructures composed of waste create the monsters that will continue to haunt the generations to follow. Plastics, plastics everywhere, and not a drop to drink. The post-Anthropocene Mariner must cope with a plastic-damaged planet suffused on every level and across even the most isolated territories with microplastics. Plastic trash is encountered everywhere, evidence of the failure of global waste management infrastructures and habits of production and consumption. The global flows of

plastic arrive on these shores to further demonstrate the embedded location of Cyprus, its conflicted histories both political and environmental. The collection and storage of flotsam becomes a project for the diarist. The promise of a possible project in collaboration: A 'to do' list, an ambition to make a change before the hopelessness of such an activity sets in. The anxiety of collecting one's own store of plastic water bottles, one's own plastic debris. Like the Wertheim sisters in Los Angeles who collect their own plastics to weave a distributed coral reef, a project that gathers over 10,000 people from all over the world, an enormous collaborative project, explains Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*.<sup>6</sup> The empty plastic water bottles that the diarist guiltily collects further speak to the failed infrastructures of the availability, on Cyprus, of potable tap water.

All this talk of infrastructure draws attention to the question of who should look after the infrastructure, for infrastructure always requires maintenance (a theme developed by Catharina Gabrielsson in *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies*, 2018). Maintenance, it requires a manifesto (Mierle Ukeles), and an ethics of care (Maria Puig de la Bellacasa; Carol Gilligan; Joan Tronto; Virginia Held).

In contrast with these failed infrastructures, global and local, maintenance and an ethics of care emerge in the depicted

scene of Olga's garden. By contrast to the multi-residential development called *The One*, the new, empty, part object, part finished high-rise pushing people out of the city, Olga's garden is a refuge. An ecology of plants: 'Plants as expressions of geopolitical forces as "beings" subject to migration/translocation through physically being introduced to alter the existing landscape or being subject, in-situ, to a shifting climate.'<sup>7</sup>

The voice of the writer through understated asides, and non-intrusive descriptions, and even a quiet lament, a small worry. The voice of the diarist and her intimate observations, she is an 'informed outsider',<sup>8</sup> informing us of the goings on of the divided state, she offers 'an "open" mode of attention'.<sup>9</sup> The delicate, non-intrusive way in which a writer's own cultural background is brought into this geopolitical situation where sometimes the violence of her own political milieu is exposed: 'On April 24th 2018, the Bavarian Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, Markus Söder, adopts a paragraph to the general rules of procedure for public authorities of the Free State of Bavaria, "to install a cross in the entrance area of each official service building".' Simply: 'Crosses in the entrance of about 1100 public office buildings.' The horror of dogmatic Christianity, the fervor. This becomes a variant of a violent imposition of identities, revealing a subterranean yet strong current of racism in what she bears witness to. The cultural

context of an image of German forests flashes up, a dialectical image in contrast to the desert, in contrast to the Cypriot landscape and its histories of appropriation and transformation.

The duration of the diarist's stay in Cyprus is enunciated simply: 'So that's Spring.' An economy of language places us in the vicinity of the coast, in a somewhere else, with an immediacy and concision of language. Some of the diary fragments are but a few lines long. 'Life', for instance, becomes some exigency apprehended by architects and planners, this impossibly difficult concept-experience is given but two lines: life, survival, vital. Concepts emptied, one wonders, on account of their marketability.

The aim is to allow the transversal relations of architectural objects to emerge, populated by characters, conversations, histories and controversies. The backdrop of postcolonial conflicts and ethnic differences is crucial, seeping into all the combined infrastructures. These broader geopolitical themes are cut through with everyday stories and conversations through which characters begin to emerge. Processes of subjectivation tied up amid social relations amid environmental issues of territorial development, and again, the brute insistence of a real-estate urban economic logic.

The cast of characters that play their parts, the subjectivities in process, in

and out of relation, from these characters we can chart a cartography of their matters of concern: the diarist's parents, who take a travel deal advertised in *Tagesspiegel* or *Zeit*, offer us an insight into tourist infrastructures. Tourists, we are told, outnumber cats and people; Maria the artist, who recalls a visit to a northern Greek village in the 1980s, reflects on the social reproduction of crying that eludes commodification, a caesura where resistance persists, a possibility; Olga's house and garden are now entangled amid the new real estate development called *The One*; A colleague, Chrysanthé talks of the Saharan sands and the associated atmospherics that suffuse the environmental milieu; the two administrative officers G. and N. in the planning office might be associated with the many gatekeepers of Kafka's novels; A. the memorable CEO of *happyhouse developers* (yes, there is a sense of sarcasm in that fictional name) a property developer millionaire, who has his doubts about socio-demographically mixed residential development: what a bad idea, he says, to mix affluence with poverty. Social housing tenants can happily live on another plot, that is to say, preferably elsewhere, and yes, development means further social segregation, and what of it, says A. In contrast, the diarist's conversation with the planners already alluded to those built projects that are no project at all, ghost projects left incomplete, secured sufficiently for other purposes: tax evasion and citizenship.

Non-humans emerge alongside these human characters. The street cats, for instance, venture back and forth across the UN buffer zone claiming no political allegiance.

Then, in conclusion, a small wonder, even hope. A moment of redemption, 'a disobedient and redemptive creature':<sup>10</sup>

'Suddenly a hedgehog . . . drama of a hedgehog.'

Here we conclude as though with a parable. A small hedgehog, lost, vulnerable, momentarily seeks shelter beneath Petrus's chair before escaping across the border into the buffer zone. Petrus, you see, stands in for those who come and go, the ex-patriot, whose liberty is one of movement. The hedgehog is a refugee from Northern Cyprus. Those gathered for yet another going away party are decided on this fact of the refugee hedgehog, they laugh together. A minor event, an encounter that expresses 'pathos without sentimentality'.<sup>11</sup>

I am compelled by this sudden appearance of a small hedgehog. I have it in my head that there must be a Kafka parable that depicts a Hedgehog, perhaps a Hedgehog who sings, or else one that offers a report to an academy, or one who tells of the cares of being a family man? Minoritarian voices. I go in search of more hedgehogs, and find some other clues:

From Friedrich Schlegel: 'Ein Fragment muss gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel.' (A fragment should be like a little work of art, complete in itself and separated from the rest of the universe like a hedgehog.)<sup>12</sup>

Or, from Gustave Flaubert: 'The soul was entirely folded in on itself, like a hedgehog wounding itself with its own quills.'<sup>13</sup>

On the contrary, neither a fragment separated from a world, nor an infolded entity, but a creature in the miniature that reports of the local and global tangle of self-harming worlds.

- 1 Klaske Havik, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018. Throughout this reading the voices of the other readers at the Transversal Writing workshop will occasionally be inserted as quotes.
- 1 Catharina Gabrielson, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 3 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000).
- 4 Kim Gurney, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 5 Marko Jobst, Transversal Writing

- workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 6 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 133.
- 7 Robin Wilson, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 8 Klaske Havik, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 9 Robin Wilson, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 10 Kim Gurney, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 11 Naomi Stead, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 12 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragmente und andere Schriften* (Berlin: Holzinger, 2016), 53.
- 13 Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: 1830-1857* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), fn 1, 22. Kim Gurney also draws attention to another hedgehog reference: Muriel Barbery, *L'Élegance du hérisson* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), published in English as *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. Gurney describes the story briefly: 'The concierge of an apartment block who is secretly an art and culture lover and more sophisticated and knowledgeable than the wealthy inhabitants of that block. Nobody pays her much attention except for one resident who notices this fact.' Kim Gurney, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.

# *Real Estates in Cyprus. A Diary.*

Anne Kockelkorn

Cyprus, the third-biggest island of the Mediterranean, situated in close proximity to southern Turkey and Syria, is home to a little more than 1 million inhabitants. Its geography is fragmented into the fertile Mesaoria plains of Nicosia district, the Troodos mountains in the south, the Pentadaktylos mountains in the north, and 650 kilometres of coastline. Its political history is a micro-version of the conflicted histories of the Middle East. After the end of the British rule in 1960, the young independent state was torn by conflicts; and since the Greek coup d'état in 1974, which was followed by the Turkish invasion of the northern part of the island, Cyprus is divided into a Turkish-speaking North and Greek-speaking South Side.<sup>1</sup> The most important consequence of what is known as the 'Cyprus dispute' however, is not only the longest UN-mandate in the world, but also the de facto expropriation of a third of the island's population in 1974, meaning 162,000 Greek Cypriots and 48,000 Turkish Cypriots.<sup>2</sup> The unresolved postcolonial conflict is a conflict about property, as about a third of the land seems to have two legal owners, one from a bygone past and one from the present.<sup>3</sup> The conflicted imaginaries of North and South, Muslim and Christian prevail not least because the wealth of the island is grounded in the real estate sector and its mobilization as capital under the guise of 'development'. First, the development as a global tourist destination in the 1960s, then the development as a global tax paradise in the 1990s, and finally as a shopping destination for EU citizens since 2014.



Karnayio, Limassol, Foto: Kaye Geipel.

We had planned our stay in Cyprus in the spring of 2018 years in advance. Once I had finished my PhD, I would take the invitation as a guest professor from the department of architecture, while Kaye would take a three-month sabbatical from his work as an editor of the German architectural magazine *Bauwelt*. The theme we sought to investigate was the recent processes of financialised urbanism in Cyprus's coastal cities. After the banking crisis in 2013, the government of the Republic of Cyprus launched a combined sale of EU citizenship in tandem with luxury real estate to boost the economy. An investment of 2 million euros in a luxury apartment by the sea ensures a European passport along with discrete opportunities of tax evasion, the imaginary of sunshine, a sea view, and relative political stability.<sup>4</sup>

If an architectural design studio and the processes of financialization constituted the official framework and leitmotif of our stay, the oral histories of colleagues and friends, everyday routines and touristic visits drew a different picture. They uncovered the relations within which climate change, the commodification of the coastline, global real estate transactions and Cyprus's violent postcolonial conflict are inseparably imbricated into one another. Instead of investigating the sale of EU passports, I attempted to approach those relations between territories, environments and imaginaries through the chance collection of a diary. Following up on Guattari's ecology between processes of subjectivation, the relation to others and the environment, I left the clear-cut history of the political economy of territorial development behind and followed the detours.<sup>5</sup>

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*Forest and Desert – Preliminary Visit, November 8th; First Class Citizens, January 13th; The Return from the Petrol Station, January 20th; Rich and Poor, February 23rd; Buffer Zone, March 3rd; Springtime, March 4th; Easter Promenade, April 6th; All Inclusive, April 7th; Bread, April 9th; Tears, April 9th; Crosses, April 24th; Sand, April 25th; The Garden, April 28th; Planning Department, May 8th; Life, May 8th; Urbanism, May 29th, Church Fiction, May 29th; The Little Hedgehog, May 30th; Real Estates, Berlin, December 20th.*

### **Forest and Desert – Preliminary Visit. November 8th**

Driving from Larnaka Airport to Nicosia takes half an hour. Thirty-seven kilometres of highway follow softly sloping hills bordering the fertile Mesoria plain.<sup>6</sup> I carry a German forest in my mind and I see a desert in front of me. A desert with billboards advertising luxury real estate along the shore. I don't recognize the preciousness and coherence of the quirky few stumps, bushes and pines growing out of the yellow soil. Cypriot and colonial governments have repeatedly transformed this landscape. In the Middle Ages, the forest was cut down for ship production. At the beginning of the twentieth century, British colonizers planted acacia and eucalyptus to dry out the marshy plains. There is no desert and the vegetation is man-made.

### **First Class Citizens, January 13th**

When we descend to the baggage claim area to await our luggage for the next months, the advertising boards for luxury real estate finally catch our eye. Women in white interiors light up and disappear on LED screens, brochures offer 'EU Citizenship by Investment', praise 'First Class Homes' or the 'ONE – Iconic Addresses'. The airport dream of a life whose only concern is better investment. Security for future generations. Estranging architecture. A passport for a 2-million-euro apartment that opens the gate to Europe. 'Se-cure-i-ty'. A word that grabs me by the throat and claims my self-responsibility.

### **The Return from the Petrol Station, January 20th**

Dropped Kaye off at the airport in Larnaka. When paying at the gas station back in Nicosia my cards don't work. None of them. No more than five euros in my pocket to fill up the tank of the rental car. I walk back home through the night from the motorway feeder to the city centre. To the buffer zone. Four kilometres. About 40 minutes. Faster than I expected. Only my hands grow numb with cold. Until the borders of Nicosia municipality, I walk across the island urbanism of an unspecified periphery with commercial buildings, parks and hotels. Sidewalks, but no pedestrian traffic lights. Every traffic light crossing in left-hand traffic is another shot of adrenalin. Once I reach the city limits, pedestrian lights and street names appear. I get my bearings.

As I cross the Venetian fortification of the sixteenth century, I discover that the central areas of the old town are rather run down. Quite unlike the Starbucks and Yves Rochers of Ledra Street a few streets further. There are kebabs for €1.60, Indian food stores, Turkish men's hair salons, motorcycles and broken windows. I realize now why Ledra Street, 'a very famous street', as the car rental employee commented upon my address indication, is so special and unique. Something which doesn't exist anywhere like that in Cyprus. A medieval corridor street as a salesroom, reserved for the exclusive purposes of pedestrians and shoppers.

### **Rich and Poor, February 23rd**

Real estate activity in Limassol, the biggest coastal city in the South, had increased by 27 per cent in 2017. The city attracts about half of all transactions in the high-end residential property segment<sup>7</sup> in the Republic of Cyprus, its skyline will soon be marked by empty luxury towers. The commodification of the seashore as an all-inclusive product introduces the incentivized urbanism of 'infrastructure space' (a definition coined by Keller



Easterling) into the heart of the city.<sup>8</sup> Our studio at Cyprus University in Nicosia proposed a programmed fissure in this type of spatial product: we asked students to project one of those luxury seafront high-rises in Limassol but to reserve 30 per cent of the gross floor area for social housing and collective facilities – the latter to be used by the luxury flat owners, social housing tenants and general public alike. In other words, we asked the students to articulate a political conflict with architectural means. Thinking about flats that will remain empty and flats that will be used; thinking about investment, marketing and maintenance strategies, and about an institution that might negotiate conflict. ‘Rich’ and ‘poor’ start to populate the studio critiques, uncomfortably and awkwardly. Terms that some shy away from like a prohibition sign.

### **Buffer Zone, March 3rd**

No Southern Cypriot will accompany us on our week-end tours to the North. Of course, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is accessible for citizens of the Republic of Cyprus. At least on paper. But instead of a weekend trip to the seaside they would undertake a journey into their 40-year-old memories and an estranging present. Nobody volunteers for such an effort. The only ones able to switch freely between North and South are the street cats who use the specially prepared holes in the barbed wire fence of the buffer-zone. The 1.5 million cats outnumber the humans on the island.

### **Springtime, March 4th**

The dew on the flower meadows during a morning walk in Karpaz. Cyprus’s panhandle in the northeast, a nature reserve. Titans could lift the island from here and turn it over. Yellow and red spots of wild fennel, dog daisies and poppy, the yellows and greens of endemic island plants and succulents. Behind the meadows the sea. Towards the coast, a rugged lunar landscape of sloping flat lava rocks. Small saltwater pools where algae and

jellyfish swing back and forth. The sea is rustling. The salty air settles on the skin and softens it. The ruggedness of the rocks is still reminiscent of nature's lethality; a gentle reminder of her power. So that's spring.

What is hard to express is the bewilderment over the garbage. Plastic waste. Actually, you can't really see landscape, because it is hidden beneath shredded pieces of plastic. To dive into this landscape also means to dive into the plastic waste. As manifold as the flowers. It arrives with the high tide, strands on the rocks, and is blown across some hundred metres of coastal meadows. Plastic bottles of all sizes and generations. For water, sunscreen, shampoo, shower gel, soft drinks, body lotion. Petrol cans, plastic bags, plastic sandals, toothbrushes, packaging remnants, foam pieces of car seats. 'It comes from the Turkish cruise ships,' Alihan and Maschallah explain. Every morning, the two hotel operators collect the new alluvial flotsam in the bay of their six-room hotel and store it in tons behind their house. The desire to pick up the garbage together with them; the desire to correct the image, to undo this disturbance of paradise. The disgust of touching things as if plastic molecules could penetrate my skin. They are already there of course. Why am I not afraid of the plastic bottles in my apartment. Every day two more plastic bottles of drinking water, piling up as a plastic mountain towards the end of the week. The call for an universal order who says 'no' to this. A 'no' to plastic bottles, a 'no' to ships dumping garbage into the sea, a 'yes' to plastic recycling, a 'yes' to drinking water out of a plumbing system.

### **Easter Promenade, April 6th**

The Easter celebrations last four days. On Holy Thursday, the flower canopies above the tomb of Christ – a wooden panel and linen cloth – are set up; on Good Friday, they are sung of, carried around the neighbourhood of the church and taken apart again after the death-hour of Christ, when the icons in the church are abruptly covered with a black cloth. White

callas, soft pink roses and flesh-coloured flamingo flowers reminiscent of the beige lingerie in the shop windows of Ledra Street. By kissing icons, tomb and shroud, parishioners transmit the miracle of resurrection into their body's cells. In front of the Phaneromenis church in the city centre, soldiers with army boots and white neckties hold the tomb of Christ on wooden bars while the people dive beneath the virtual corpse-in-resurrection-process to receive the blessings for the next year to come. Impassive faces that I usually meet in Café Nero. This public space we walk across from church to church through the old town of Nicosia traverses all social strata; a space that tightly intersects the ecclesiastic, the public and private. Gradually, I understand why so many people we encounter insist and reaffirm that the power of the Church in Cyprus is greater than in Greece. 'Pastoral power is a power of care,'<sup>9</sup> wrote Michel Foucault in his lectures on governance. If pastoral power supposedly precedes nineteenth-century governmentality, they coexist in Cyprus until today. It's not just a question of land ownership and political power; it's a power that keeps the pores of family structure together.

### **All Inclusive, April 7th**

The all-inclusive trip of my parents to 'Cyprus', advertised for €169 in the German newspapers Tagesspiegel and Zeit as a gift to their readers, is organized and carried out by a travel agency of the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, which holds subsidiaries all over Europe. The journey leads into a hermetic circle of tourist infrastructures on the North side with a shopping afternoon on Ledras Street on the South side. Each day, three planes arrive at Ercan airport, each carrying 200 people who are then, for a week, fed in restaurants, put to sleep in 3- or 4-star hotels, guided around selected sites and animated to buy carpets, jewellery, leather goods and organic foods. Salad leaves shrivel under cling film in a restaurant in Karpaz that serves 600 people at a time. The industrial processing guarantees the discount. My parents talk about the difficulties of ducking out of the marketing proce-



Asterias Beach Hotel, Agia Napa.

dures. In the end, they travel home with a 1,800-euro carpet and the guilt of having resisted the 2,000-euro jewellery.

On the site of the large-scale 4-star hotel complexes Noah's Arc, Pine Bay, Grand Colosseum and Kaya Artemis, the aerial photo of Google Earth from 2003 shows nothing but coastal strip. Fields, sand and water. The real estate boom in the North began in 2004, after the referendum on reunification was rejected by the South, thus granting confidence to Turkish users of Greek Cypriot land regarding their usage rights on buildings. The boom in luxury tourism real estate began immediately, sales and developments being carried out on the quiet. 'What do you think our President and his North Cypriot counterpart discuss at their meetings.' And: 'Such incentiv-

ized spatial products are in a certain way a model for the reconstruction of the island after unification.’<sup>10</sup> The consolidation of the status quo and the real estate gold rush go hand in hand. Threats in the South, shootings in the North. Reports of Russian mafia on the doorstep of North Cypriot activists. We assume that the manufactured products of the tourism circuits in North Cyprus originate from Turkey and suspect that they barely benefit the locals except for salaries for hotel staff and construction jobs. If 200,000 tourists travel each year to the North, 3 million travel to the South part of the island. Tourists outnumber both cats and people.

### **Bread, April 9th**

The Cypriot Easter bread Flaouna is a yeast pastry made out of several layers of dough; outside the crust, inside a cheese-herb mixture with mint and raisins. This year there was a Flaouna crisis. A furious call from a Cypriot grandmother to her daughter: ‘You didn’t tell me yesterday that my Flaouna went wrong.’ The criterion for failure is the incorrect proportion of air bubbles inside the Flaouna dough. Too tight. The quality of a Flaouna is defined not only according to the colour and shape of its crust or its taste, but also according to the texture of the first cut. The baking of flaouna bread used to be a collective affair. Women stayed awake through the night of Holy Thursday to together watch out for the right moment when the dough reached baking stage. This moment is dictated by the fermentation of the dough and not by the baker’s time management. Women compete for the best dough.

### **Tears, April 9th**

Maria tells us about her journey to a village in northern Greece in the 1980s where women met to cry over each family’s dead on Good Friday.<sup>11</sup> First, mothers cry over their dead children since that is the worst pain. Then the deceased spouses, then the other relatives. She has never seen such real

tears. 'It's an emotional culture that is transmitted over generations.' I think of the lonely tears of the modern movie-goers Franz Kafka or Peter Härtling's Hubert Windisch and what separates them from the ritualized collective tears of this female public. There is a dimension in Maria's contemplation on social reproduction that eludes commodification. A world in which the art of making Flaounas and performing tears gives people as much importance as the height of their income. I try to figure out the distance that separates this practice and the poetry of this practice from Maria's art work and the value that her work generates on the art market. Layered transparencies of metal mesh or paper, powerful and fragile, that cover unspeakable violence underneath. I suddenly recall those embroidery lessons my mother taught me – a class on meditative repetition, precision, and failure – that my architectural education in France taught me to despise. Disconnected and interconnected realities.

### **Crosses, April 24th**

On April 24th 2018, Markus Söder, the Prime Minister of Bavaria – a state of the Federal Republic of Germany – adopts a paragraph to the general rules of procedure for public authorities of the Free State of Bavaria, 'to install a cross in the entrance area of each official service building . . . as an expression of the cultural character of Bavaria'. Crosses in the entrance of about 1,100 public office buildings.

### **Sand, April 25th**

'It's not cloudy today. It's the sand in the air,' explains my colleague Chrysanthé. 'Last summer, there were days where you could just see a couple of metres ahead.' On summer nights in the seaside town of Paphos, the evening sun wraps the city into a pink cloud of sand, like a cloud installation by Olafur Eliasson. 'When I was a kid in the 1980s, this would be an event that happened once a year; now it's becoming a permanent weather condition



Arsinois Street, Nicosia

during summer.' Sahara dust, which I sweep out of the apartment the next morning after mopping the floor the previous night.

### **The Garden, April 28th**

The city administration of Limassol has attached a caution sign at the housing estate next to Olga's house: danger of collapse. But the six-storey apartment blocks are inhabited. The grey concrete blocks were built after the 1974 Turkish Invasion by real estate developers for those refugees from the North who could afford their own flat. The concrete on the parking lot columns of the ground floor is crumbling. Opposite Olga's house towards the sea tower the cranes of the construction site of 'The One', one of Limassol's latest residential luxury high-rises, erected at 100 metres

distance from the sea. Maria explains the sign: 'The construction site of "The One" caused vibrations of the magnitude of an earthquake. When the jolting threatened to cause the collapse of this apartment block, the city's administration simply advised my mother to sleep in the other side of her house.' The problem of sea water pushing into the excavation is still unresolved. Foundations for 35 floors. Bodies and properties of retirees and ex-refugees are secondary. What matters is the profit generated by 'The One', which in this case also goes into the pocket of the president's son-in-law, one of the project's shareholders.

Olga's house prevails between the apartment blocks, the construction site a dumpster battery moved inside the plot. Like a Chinese nail house. When she moved here with her family in the mid-1960s, they lived on the outskirts of the town. Ocean waves. Summer on the beach. What prevails together with the one-storey house is the garden. A system of plant pots that Olga pushes through the garden several times a day following the angle of the sun. A mobile sun-garden made of flower pots or plastic buckets with geraniums, datura, cacti, aloe vera and endemic plants whose names I remain ignorant of. On the right is a tree nursery for the hedge that Olga intends to plant for visual and noise protection from the construction site. The only non-mobile plants are the bitter orange tree in the centre and the walnut tree on the left, which Olga grew from a walnut. The shady chill of green leaves containing the order and essence of a life.

### **Planning Department, May 8th**

We visit the administrative officers G. and N. in a municipal planning department. A tidy office with architectural drawings on the walls and urban studies literature on the desk. G. and N. speak about pressure arising from survival issues in a country that places its priorities solely on economic and financial issues. Urban planning was evidently not at stake when it became an emergency measure to attract investors and construction



developers after the economic crisis in 2013. Today, developers have turned into a very strong lobby group, supported by architects and engineers, lawyers and sometimes financial advisers, all justifying the need – even if it is in the end only a small minority that benefits from this type of high-rise development. I mention the sale of EU citizenship and the murder in October 2017 of Daphne Caruana Galizia, who had investigated the trade of EU passports and real estate in Malta.<sup>12</sup> An awkward silence. Who has the money to buy 2-million-euro apartments but doesn't live in it? As the conversation ensues, G. and N. talk about control, or the lack thereof; they describe a situation where no one can control land and property prices as well as thorough maintenance regulations. What happens afterwards to these projects is entirely unclear. (Maria's words on the discrepancy between the narrowness of the streets and the dimensions of fire trucks; the discrepancy between building heights and rescue ladders.) What we are sure of by now: these projects aren't made to be inhabited.

### **Life, May 8th**

'Life', 'survival' or 'vital' are terms that, in the everyday language of planning professionals and architects, seem to be the exclusive reserve of economic transactions.

### **Urbanism, May 29th**

'Keller Easterling speculates in her recent publications about what would happen if these new spatial products of industrial and agricultural zones are introduced into what is commonly referred to as "city". That's exactly what happens here in Cyprus; decontextualized spatial products are inserted on top of a medieval city, with small plots and narrow streets. You want to investigate real estate? Real estate is already in the government. Political decisions are directly related to choices of the real estate sector.'<sup>13</sup>



Street gardens in North Nicosia

### Church Fiction, May 29th

A., the well-trained CEO of Happyhouse Developers,<sup>14</sup> is a millionaire. He advocates a universal, enlightened concept for urban development on government land since the proximity to cultural and other facilities raises property values. But placing different income groups on the same plot – a crucial part of the brief of our design studio – is another story. He politely dismisses the mix of different income groups on the same plot as whole-sale nonsense. Over a salad lunch with avocado and grenadine seeds, he explains to me the need for a governmental order for urban planning: ‘Real estate is the prime driver of the economy of this country. Cyprus has ten

billion euros of public debt; it's GDP is 16 billion; and the land of the church is worth 13 billion. The church is the biggest land owner in this country. But the church is not only corrupt. They are mad. The power gets into their heads. They are also happy to cooperate with the mafia or porn producers if that's beneficial to their real estate investment strategy. We should be governed by the European Union.' A demand for colonization by an enlightened Troika, which might increase land value through public infrastructures and, why not, also increase social inequality.

### **The Little Hedgehog, May 30th**

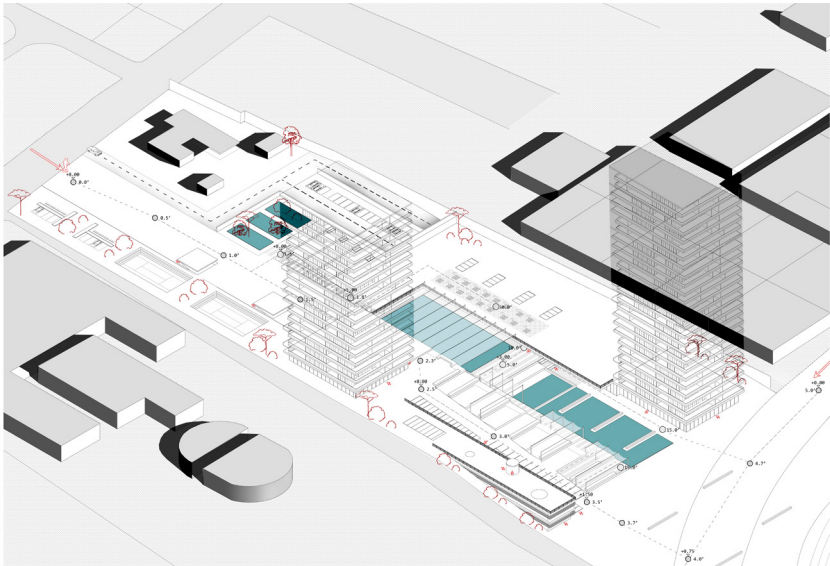
Farewell to Petros in a bar on the edge of the buffer-zone. Six people sitting on wooden chairs with wickerwork underneath a street-lamp in the leftover space of a barricaded street drinking brandy sours. Somewhere in the dark, a wall of metal barrels with barbed wire. In front of us, a street corner where a car passes at a leisurely pace about every half an hour; flashing headlights. The corrugated iron roof in the house opposite is lifted by the wind at regular intervals and crashes down on the gable. A blind cat sweeps around the chairs. Echoes. Suddenly, a hedgehog. What is he doing in this labyrinth of corridor streets? No corner for the hedgehog to hide, except a pile of cardboard boxes. Drama about the hedgehog. If the cat will find him. If he will get runover by a car. A tentative definition: 'He is North Cypriot.' Laughter. After half an hour, the hedgehog emerges from the cardboard pile, crosses the street, comes up to our group. Always running along the wall, he finds his way underneath Petros's chair and disappears into the cracks of the buffer-zone shed. 'Finally, he is back home.'

### **Real Estates, Berlin, December 20th**

Invitation to an urban design mid-term jury. 'Berlin is totally sold out to investors,' jokes Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, guest professor at the TU Berlin, somewhat triumphantly. She asked students to trace projects and

ownership situations of current construction sites in the formerly divided city and to propose alternatives to the ongoing projects. While I looked at Cypriot luxury investments like an exotic curiosity of something that takes place elsewhere, I now get the degree of financialization of Berlin straight to my face. Townhouses, skyscrapers and other types of speculative urbanisms whose gross shapes simply delineate the silhouette of building regulations will soon occupy prime real estate locations of the city, next to rivers, parks, popular neighbourhoods or tourist hotspots. Places I have known for decades will disappear in favour of façades that I imagine now to remain dark at night. Cyprus isn't at the edge of Europe. The buffer zone's hedgehog occupies its centre.

### The Urban Pool



The Urban Pool – 4th year architecture project by Marina Antoniou and Mikaella Raspa, Studio Property Plus by Anne Kockelkorn, Kaye Geipel and Chrysanthé Constantinou, Cyprus University, Spring term 2018.

On a narrow a seafront plot between a new luxury development ("Limassol Marina") and the active Limassol port, the "Urban Pool" offers an alternative to conventional luxury high-rises in Limassol. The project is run as a joint-venture between the municipality and a private developer and consists of two private residential towers (one as a luxury development, one for middle class residents) and two large public pools (one indoor, one open air). Conceived as arena for different publics, the pools counter the privatisation of the site and its urban ground floor. Their position, accesses and circulation follow the gentle slope of the site towards the sea and lead the visitors to a new seaside promenade, offering multiple viewpoints and possibilities of encounters.

- 1 The fight for independence against a century of British colonialism and its end in 1960 was superseded by the conflict between Turkish and Greek Cypriots; a conflict that was spurred on by the British colonial government, who sought to exploit ethnic tension as a forceful argument to remain in power by securing control.
- 2 Ayla Gürel: 'Wohn- und Bevölkerungsfragen im geteilten Zypern', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no 12 (2009), 14-18, online: [www.bpb.de/apuz/32120/eigentums-und-bevoelkerungsfragen-im-geteilten-zypern](http://www.bpb.de/apuz/32120/eigentums-und-bevoelkerungsfragen-im-geteilten-zypern), accessed 18 July 2019.
- 3 What added up to this conflict were Turkish settlements policies which officially sought to settle Turkish citizens in North Cyprus until 1980, which was answered by circa 20,000 Turks (see *ibid.*, 17); In 2004, the rejected Annan-Plan for the unification of the island intended to grant citizenship to more than 45,000 Turkish immigrants, see Hubert Faustmann: 'Die Verhandlungen zur Wiedervereinigung Zyperns: 1974-2008', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no 12 (2009), 9-13. The result of official and unofficial settlement policies by Turkey remain a core issue of dispute between South and North Cyprus, see Socrates Stratis: 'Unseeing in the Cypriot Contested Cities', *Architectuul – the Blog, Foma 25 (Forgotten Masterpieces)*, 31 January 2019, online: <https://blog.architectuul.com/post/182444278052/foma-25-unseeing-in-the-cypriot-contested-cities>, accessed 18 July 2019.
- 4 The programme, launched in 2013, is more complex and more diversified than just the 2-million-euro formula, there is also the option of permanent residency for 300,000 euros and other offers for letter-box companies.
- 5 Félix Guattari. *The Three Ecologies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014 [1989]).
- 6 In my mental geography, the highway crosses the Mesaoria plain, which would be the direct connection between Larnaka and Nicosia; however, the motorway takes a right-angle detour following the buffer zone, the actual Mesaoria plain lies to the northeast of the Nicosia-Larnaka motorway.
- 7 'Cyprus Real Estate Market', published by PricewaterhouseCoopers Cyprus in March 2018, 27 pages, 13, 4, online: [www.pwc.com.cy/en/industries/assets/real-estate-march2018.pdf](http://www.pwc.com.cy/en/industries/assets/real-estate-march2018.pdf), accessed 28 June 2018.

- 8 Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London/New York: Verso, 2014), 11-12: 'Far removed from familiar legislative processes, dynamic systems of space, information, and power generate de facto forms of polity faster than even quasi-official forms of governance can legislate them.'
- 9 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (Hampshire, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [2004]), lecture five, 8 February 1978.
- 10 See the 'Laissez-Faire Private Gated City', in Socrates Stratis: 'Architecture as Urban Practice in Contested Space', in: Socrates Stratis (ed.), *Guide to Common Urban Imaginaries in Contested Spaces* (Berlin: Jovis, 2016), 13-33: 32.
- 11 Maria Loizidou figures among Cyprus's most prominent artists. For an introduction to her work, see, for instance: Maria Loizidou et al. (eds.), *Maria Loizidou: A Transfer. Kerameikos Archaeological Site and Museum, City Project 2015* (Athens: Agra Publications, 2015); Efthymia Alphas, Eftychia Zachariou-Kaila and Maria Loizidou, *The Body: Lived Experiences in Ancient Cyprus* (Nicosia: Department of Antiquities, 2015); and Rachel Spence: 'Greece's Neon foundation', *The Financial Times*, 30 October 2015, [www.ft.com/content/9d12e640-7d65-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e](http://www.ft.com/content/9d12e640-7d65-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e), accessed 12 July 2019.
- 12 'Das Daphne-Projekt: Das Milliarden-Geschäft mit Pässen aus Malta', *SZ*, 18 April 2018, [www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/das-daphne-projekt-das-milliarden-geschaeft-mit-paessen-aus-malta-1.3949570](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/das-daphne-projekt-das-milliarden-geschaeft-mit-paessen-aus-malta-1.3949570), accessed 28 June 2018.
- 13 See Stratis: 'Architecture as Urban Practice in Contested Spaces', op. cit. (note 11), 13-33: 32. Similar considerations were also discussed during the Workshop 'We need to talk about our coasts! The Hands-on Famagusta Project. Towards Cypriot Coastlines as Commons', organized by AA & U, Imaginary Famagusta, Laboratory of Urbanism, University of Cyprus (LUCY), 28 June – 2 July 2017.
- 14 Fictional name.

# *Skopje The Multiple Faces of the City*

Klaske Havik

Introductory reading compiled by Marko Jobst



# *Reading of Klaske Havik's Skopje: The Multiple Faces of the City*

Compiled by Marko Jobst

'The question this contribution poses,' Marko says, 'is how to write about politically charged material.'

'I share Naomi's position,' Kim says. 'It's a context in which I know nothing except through the author. Probably as a result, there were a lot of resonances for me with the guided walk we went on yesterday.'

'A mixing of writerly genres,' Robin says. 'Travelogue, autobiography – including accounts of professional liaison, as well as the more personal – but also interwoven with a hint of a more familiar architecture history writing.'

'A description as of a tourist or traveller venturing into a city,' Hélène says. 'Perhaps written as a city guide. An architect and a critic, whose glance is deeply interested. A series of architectural tectonic moves and moments.'

'You truly dispose of the art of rendering spatial and architectural qualities tangible,' Anne says, 'which is very different to architecture critique, because it is embedded in the storyline of your auctorial voice.'

'There is a lightness, gentleness perhaps, to your approach to critique, and to the writerly voice, which would be a shame to lose,' Marko says. 'At the same time, the position regarding the material would need to be more clearly defined, if it isn't to come across as lacking in attitude and produce a depoliticized result with politically charged material. The discussion – maybe here, maybe with Anne's, perhaps with both – suggested the notion of "highly flammable" material. How do we, as writers, deal with flammable material?'

'Also, the nature of incomplete projects,' Kim says. 'Like the platform that was never built at the train station. This happens in all sorts of places. In Cape Town,

we have an incomplete highway that the local City government ran a recent competition to redevelop. The winner? The bidder with the least social housing.'

'This suggests an impressionistic encounter,' Robin says, 'with the promise of deep research to follow – a sketching out of a field of concern, the surface registering of underlying forces.'

'A fleeting account where moments of controversy emerge, but are curtly circumnavigated,' Hélène says. 'Leaving the impression of simmering controversies just beneath the surface waiting to erupt. Hints at a series of controversies, through which we pass: each one begging yet another story to be told.'

'Your economy of wording and rhythm create a very clear image,' Anne says, 'held together by the voice of the "I" as a delicate background thread; neither in the fore-, nor in the background, but as a leading thread that holds the story together.'

'I was interested in the uniqueness of your position, particularly as a teacher,' Naomi says.

'Metabolism,' Marko says. 'It would have been good to know more about it, and in relation to Skopje specifically. And also: the mutations that the style, or movement, undergoes. They mirror the mutations of Classical vocabulary, in a

different way, with a different aim. Both have been transformed in the context of Skopje, undergone a series of transformations beyond recognition. So, what is

to be made of it? Skopje as a laboratory of mutations.'

'It is again a text about Time, and time travel,' Kim says. 'Like the existing station and the plans that are discussed at the table about a new public building. Past, present and future conflated.'

'Again, an issue of subjectivity,' Robin says. 'Although to a degree distanced, abstracted, this is still recognizably an architect's and academic's account. How important is the presence of that identity to the piece?'

'The earthquake is mentioned, but not really situated,' Hélène says. 'Waiting to erupt again?'

'I could relate to the admiration you have for the people living there,' Anne says. 'In a certain way I found it easier to follow than Kim's, and I guess that that is strongly related to the question of personal experience.'

'Directing your student's eyes, their design thinking,' Naomi says. 'What kind of designs would your students do?'

'There is the premise, and promise, of a future that never materialized,' Marko

says. 'But also, a yearning for a past that never existed, with Skopje suspended between the two. And then, Yugoslavia: a project that can be read in similarly utopic terms. Perhaps.'

'Global flows of capital,' Kim says. 'Japanese architects of the Skopje railway station. Even this city, Kavala, where we are sitting for this reading, is linked with the tobacco industry. Again, the toggling between local and global – in who gets to define a rebuilt space and how.'

'The text implies critique of the discoveries,' Robin says, 'but ultimately holds off judgement and describes and, to a certain extent, offers an embodied experience. Tracing different ideological layers – like an archaeology performed as a linear journey/narrative. It has a "lightness" in this sense, in its tracing, rather than judging. But what about the lightness, insubstantiality, of being under the monolithic regimes of state and the global system, the weakness, fragility, of the subject?'

'Urban narratives as real and fake,' Hélène says. 'Facelifts, and the hiding of the authentic behind cardboard and polystyrene neoclassical façades . . . is this merely aesthetics and taste that is affronted?'

'I see the situation in front of my eyes,' Anne says, 'but I immediately see also the class relation that separates you from a person who didn't get the chance

to learn proper English. "Hip vine bars" versus "magical craft shops" trigger in me a similar reaction regarding exoticizing the oriental bazar as magical or genuine; possibly because I know precisely about the awe that you can feel in these instances and have learnt not to name them.'

'This staged authenticity of the city,' Naomi says.

'Gentrification, east-west, north-south,' Marko says. 'I wonder at these Western European eyes trained on this situation. And there is something in the east-west divide having been rotated in this city, taken at a right angle. Could we push it further?'

'The railway station with multiple faces, meaning different things in different times. This includes the phrase *I am a telluric membrane*. Beautiful!' Kim says. 'The author's writing style is also an interface to the city seen through a translucent veil. You, Klaske, take a deliberately light step, a kind of careful passage, which seems appropriate to your relationship to the place and its contesting claims.'

'The effect of a series of travelogue fragments,' Robin says. 'The text retains a certain fragmentary quality.'

'As time passes,' Hélène says. 'Layers of the past and present. A screen closes

down, a blind on which other identities are projected. A past that never existed, claiming Alexander the Great . . .'

'So, with very few words, you manage to evoke my own ambiguity about it,' Anne says.

'There is something really intriguing about the images,' Naomi says. 'They are just weird!'

'And what is the role of poetics,' Marko says, 'which is so clearly the writerly sensibility present in this text?'

'The consideration of past lives of objects, reincarnated,' Kim says.

'The use of images seems yet more fragmentary,' Robin says. 'I don't quite grasp a strategy. I want to ask how the production of this image-text relation might be thought about in relation to something like the Smithson's use of image and text in their *Primers*, or *As in DS*<sup>1</sup> for example?'

'Shifts in politics, the disturbing hint of more caution in 2014,' Hélène says. 'Self-censorship, the failed laboratory?'

'Bakema presents an interesting point of contact with the Netherlands,' Marko says, 'and I wonder what can be made of the Dutch woman through whose eyes all this is filtered. There is something of an image of benevolent alien beings

in all this, that might need acknowledging. The woman who had grown up in the Netherlands returned to Skopje: is it her daughter that plays with the Dutch girl? Are the two mothers each other's mirrors? Or does the Macedonian reveal to the Dutch something about her own engagements with the world, its architectural mutations?'

'The city, its faces,' Kim says. 'Accommodation of two worlds, Oriental and Western, connected by bridge, has faded to be replaced by a stage set. The text ends on this idea we just heard about – of play, the city as something that the next generation may be able to understand as a stage for their own performances.'

'The Netherlands in Macedonia; Japanese metabolism, Kenzo Tange; neoclassical facadism, its own postmodernism,' Hélène says. 'How can we instead take this seriously, beyond architectural taste? Jean-Luc Nancy, on the rising of the body, the return of the dead.<sup>2</sup> A zombie architecture. A hidden cancer at work in Skopje.'

1 Alison Smithson, *As in DS: An Eye on the Road* (Delft: Delft University Press, 1983).

2 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 2006).

# *Skopje The Multiple Faces of the City*

Klaske Havik

## **The Railway Station**

It was spring 2005 when I arrived in Skopje for the first time. We came from Thessaloniki, and while the journey did not cover such a big distance, the trip took hours. The train passed slowly through the dry landscape, stopping in villages and at undefined patches of land in the vicinity of the Greek-Macedonian border. At such stops, uniformed men demanded our passports and walked away, looking at our documents while standing in the dry grass next to the tracks while smoking and chatting with their colleagues. Eventually, we would get back our passports, the train would set to motion and then stop again, a few miles further, for the same ritual to be repeated. Finally, the train entered Skopje from the northeast, it crossed the River Vardar on an elevated bridge and then stopped in what seemed like a transparent tunnel – the roof of the platform. Except from a few families who got off our train with bags and suitcases, the station seemed deserted. Our Macedonian friend who came to pick us up seemed surprised by the mode of transport we had chosen to come to Macedonia, as if travelling by train was something from the past. In the time of Yugoslavia, cities across the territory had been well-connected by train, but after the country had

fallen apart into different nation states, not much was left of the public transport system. The station seemed grey and dilapidated, the space under the bridge merely accommodated some cars, while a few vendors tried to sell their candies and cigarettes to the sparse travellers.

Skopje's railway station, designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, was once the centrepiece of the reconstruction of the city after an earthquake in 1963 harshly damaged most of Skopje's city centre, including the old railway station. The new station, located to the east of the city centre, was a brutal concrete bridge, with transparent tubes above the platforms. Tange, the leader of the Japanese team that won the international competition for the reconstruction plan of Skopje, imagined the station to be the starting point of a large multilevel platform that would have entered the city, providing access for pedestrians above the roads that would be reserved for motorized traffic. The structure would be flanked by concrete towers and enter the city centre at the new 'city wall': a halfmoon-shaped chain of concrete multi-storey apartment buildings, embracing the south part of the city centre up to the riverfront. The latter was realized, as was the station, but the platform connecting the two interventions was never built. This



Fig 1. Skopje city wall, part of the reconstruction of Skopje after the 1963 earthquake, by Kenzo Tange (1965).

gap in the project has always left the station as a kind of alien creature somewhat outside of the city's urban life.

The railway station, at first sight a mute and deserted piece of concrete, appeared to have different faces. It stood for an ambitious city vision, a modern project with international allure, it served the Yugoslavian era, when cities all over the territory were collaborating and thriving. And as I arrived in Skopje that April day in 2005, it stood for the loss of that era, for neglect and decay. Later, one of the students with whom I visited Skopje in 2012 understood the railway station as a creature with multiple personalities. *I am a bridge*, she wrote, *I cross over the elements, I separate and unify*. And she continued: *I am a stranger, I am restless. People see through me*. The state of decay the building was in, gave life to yet another personality: *I am a telluric membrane. I am a place of habit, a place for survival. Animals live here. Animals die here*.<sup>1</sup>

We enter the city.

### **The Table and the Bridge**

We were sitting at a wooden table on the first floor of a bar called Piazza Liberta that was located just at the modern city wall, on the corner of an apartment block. It had dark wooden panelling on the walls with bookshelves, and bowls with shelled peanuts on the wooden tables. The peanuts were to accompany the beer, and one could drop the peanut shells on the wooden floor – the shells actually helped to soak up moisture and keep the wooden floors in good shape. Our friend had opened that bar in the year 2000. I knew her from my high school in the north of the Netherlands. She was born in Skopje but in the late 1970s her parents moved to the Netherlands, where they ran a Yugoslavian restaurant in a small provincial town. After her studies in the Netherlands she decided to move to Skopje and immerse herself in the local life of the city that was struggling to find itself again after the fall of Yugoslavia.

On the other side of the table sat the two local architects that our friend happened to know and that she wanted us to meet. Between our beers and peanuts, they balanced their words carefully, speaking attentively about the city that was both their home and their laboratory. One of the men drew a section of the historical bridge over the River Vardar. The new pavement of the main city square, he argued, had changed the section of the bridge, it was no longer a fluent connection between the northern (and culturally more oriental) part of the city, and the more modern Christian part on the southern side of the river.

After our beers, we accompanied the architects on a walk through the city centre. We stood on the old stone bridge and looked at the river beneath us. Even though it was way into the evening, children were playing actively on the low banks of the bridge, running along and in the shallow water. We contemplated the two different worlds that Skopje accommodated, and that the stone bridge brought together. Even in the darkness of the evening, we could distinguish the two faces on each side of the river: the commercial city centre on the south side, against the backdrop the Vodna mountain with an illuminated cross; on the north a low-rise roofscape of small houses, punctuated with minarets.

### **The Other Side**

Hidden from the hustle and bustle of the bazar, we sat in the shade of the old birch tree in the courtyard of Kapan An. This typical *han* from the fifteenth century was a traditional inn, which used to accommodate travelers in rooms on the first floor around the courtyard, and their cattle and caravans on the ground floor below. The walls on the ground floor were made of masonry in a lively pattern of irregular local stones and bricks combined. Along the courtyard wall, the continuous balcony of the first floor offered a wooden ceiling where nowadays restaurant tables stood in the shade. On the first floor, behind the wood-carved railing of the balcony, the walls were covered in white plaster, and dark wooden doors gave access to the former guest rooms. The roof was pitched, with red tiles.



Water from a fake fountain in the *han's* courtyard drowned out the sounds of the city. Today, cafe An is one of the *high-end* venues, where waiters bring the menu in a leather cover, and the same dishes are served as those at the little bars at the bazar, but for twice the price. There, at the small square in front of Kapan An, along the bazar, tables with red paper table clothes are loosely arranged. Stray dogs and cats scramble around and under the tables seeking leftovers or endeared tourists willing to share a part of their meal. The menus, if at all present, are simple A4 prints listing the names of some dishes. The waiters at the table illustrate the redundancy of these menus and simply tell their guest what is available at the moment. Both in the restaurant at the Kapan An and at the outdoor tables, the dishes are the same: spicy lamb sausages, grilled meat, stuffed wine leaves and *shopska* salad made of tomatoes, cucumber and grated goat's cheese. This is the oriental part of Skopje, which survived the earthquake to



Fig 2. Skopje Bazar.

a large extent. The bazar consists of narrow paved streets with small craft shops: leather tanners, sewing shops, shoemakers and potters.

Ever since my first visit in 2005, I have come back to this part of the city, enjoying a meal at the messy tables or seeking shade in the Kapan An. Steadily, gentrification has hit this part of Skopje. The experience of entering into another world when crossing the stone bridge to the other side of the river has lost some of its magic now that many of craft shops have been renovated and replaced by hip wine bars that are frequented by the inhabitants of the 'Westernized' part of the city.

### **The City Trade Centre**

At the time of our first visit, our friend was planning to open a second bar, in the base of the modern shopping mall on the riverfront and she asked us for some architectural advice regarding the renovation. The façade of the new café would be built up of two rows of doors above one another. These came from a batch of hard wooden doors from a demolition project in the Netherlands and had been brought to Skopje for the project. On warm summer days, the complete façade could be opened to let the breeze from the river enter the interior space. It was one of the first café's in the base that actively opened a terrace on the riverside.

The mall, called Gradsky Trgovski Centar (GTC) or City Trade Centre, is a prominent urban block at the southeastern part of the waterfront. The building consists of a three-storey base with commercial functions around a spacious atrium and has residential towers on top. It was built in 1973 by Zivko Popovski, one of the leading local architects at the time of the reconstruction after the 1963 earthquake. While the main urban scheme was developed by the Japanese team of Kenzo Tange, many other buildings came to existence in the two decades after the disaster. On both sides of the river, some modern public buildings were realized: the Macedonian Opera and Ballet building, designed by Biro 77, a collective of Slovenian architects, was one of the most outspoken pieces of architecture with its

oblique planes sliding down towards the river. The museum of contemporary art was another piece of modern architecture, built in 1970 outside the city centre on a hill in the northern part of the city, designed by a group of Polish architects. Many international architects thus joined in the reconstruction of the city, while local architects also adopted the architectural language of the Modern Movement. Zivko Poposvki had worked with Dutch modernist Jaap Bakema, known for his functionalist and at times brutalist buildings in the Netherlands.

By now, the entire plinth of the GTC building on the riverside is filled with bars and in summer, the promenade along the river is one of the hotspots of Skopje's urban nightlife. While earlier, one would hear the rustling leaves of the plane trees and the slow movement of the water of the river below while walking on the promenade, nowadays the different bars and terraces



Fig 3. The City Trade Centre by Zivko Popovski (1969-1973).

compete with their speakers spreading popular Balkan rock under the trees. The scenery has changed, too. The riverfront on the other side is occupied by new buildings, erected at high speed around 2012-2014. Large buildings, constructed in steel, concrete, Styrofoam and plaster refer to antiquity, their

cornices carrying sculptures of saints and heroes often borrowed from neighbouring Balkan states. New footbridges – again with sculptures – cross the river, while huge fountains are situated on city squares on both sides of the stone bridge, and a triumphal arch was built in the city centre. The Skopje 2014 project, initiated by the populist government at the time, was an attempt to rewrite history and compose a narrative of Macedonia as a glorifying nation, claiming its heritage to Alexander the Great. The whole project seemed to happen in a flash – and without the involvement of the local architects.

A next step in the project was to clad all existing façades in the city centre with plaster on polystyrene panels with the same neoclassical expression – the City Trade Centre included. In December 2014, citizens of Skopje gathered around the building on a snowy evening and made a long human chain around it to protest the facelift of this modern monument. Their hug was heard. The building did not receive a mask.

### **The Dean's Office, the Post Office**

The two architects invited us to come and visit the Faculty of Architecture the next day. From the Stone bridge in the city centre, we walked along the southern waterfront towards the west, passing the surreal building of the post-office, a remarkable building that seemed to be the result of a crossing of Japanese Metabolist architecture and Yugoslav socialist concrete architecture, designed by Macedonian architect Janko Konstantinov in the 1970s and 1980s. We followed the busy Partizanski Boulevard leading into the neighbourhood of Debar Maalo and passed a large orthodox dome church and an open-air market before reaching the Faculty of Architecture, an ochre-coloured modern building with a small yard on the side. Some students and teachers stood smoking and talking under a small canopy, on the flight of stairs that led from the yard to the entrance. When we entered the Faculty, we found on the left-hand side a small glass office for the caretaker, but no one was present inside it. We waited in the hall, which had

a light terrazzo floor, and plastered walls painted green up to the height of the white wooden doors, the upper part of the walls was white. Varnished wooden display cases with glass fronts were hung against the walls, showcasing posters of lectures and courses. The staircase of the same terrazzo flooring was painted yellow on the sides and had carved wooden handrails. We were taken to the Dean's office on the first floor, where we sat around a large table with the two professors we had met the evening before, and the Dean, a professor of urban planning with an impressive black moustache. The meeting was the start of what was to be a long-lasting collaboration. In the decade that followed I often visited the country, bringing students from the Netherlands, teaching at the Summer School in the mountains bordering Bulgaria, and at the Faculty as visiting professor in 2014. Then, at the peak of the Skopje 2014 project, I noticed that the conversations in the Dean's office became more cautious – the Faculty staff had to be very careful in mentioning the delicacies of the political situation. It was difficult to openly criticize the building activities in the city centre.

Some of the teachers and researchers at the school became close friends. Many of the younger generation had studied abroad and worked at internationally renowned architecture offices. Despite all the opportunities they most probably had elsewhere, they chose to devote their time and efforts to the local Faculty of Architecture despite the political and financial struggles. They joined the protests against the rapid facelift of the city, and they continued to teach their students that architecture could be more than the bombastic show they witnessed in their city. They chose to be in Skopje and make a difference, there.

In 2018, Slobodan Veleviski and Marija Mano-Velevska were the curators of the Macedonian contribution to the Biennale, with an exhibition entitled 'Freeingspace'. The position of the modern buildings from the time of the reconstructing of Skopje, currently tucked away from the public's view by the grand fountains and the newly constructed buildings, was taken as

point of departure for a series of design scenarios that hoped to again bring some life to these former beacons of cultural and public life. The post office, for instance, was reconnected to the main city square by means of an elevated platform in their proposal. Possibly a gesture to Tange's proposed platform on the other side of the city wall, this platform seems much less rigid in its architectural elaboration and in the uses it affords. It bends and slides, connecting different buildings and the street level, while offering, as a proposed programme, opportunities for play. The intervention is one to be confronted by means of walking, climbing, jumping, bouldering, playing hide and seek, and maybe resting and looking back at the river.



Fig 4. Skopje 2014 development. New buildings at the riverfront.

### The City, Its Faces

The image of the city that accommodates two worlds, Oriental and Western, connected by the stone bridge, has faded away. A buffer of new buildings glorifying a dubious past has been placed in between, pushing the real characters of the city behind a cardboard stage set, which equally hides

the modern legacy of the 1970s. Some parts of history are foregrounded, others hidden or denied.

If the railway station could be seen as a living creature with multiple personalities, this diagnosis might be true for the city of Skopje as a whole. It tells different stories, from different perspectives, highlighting different parts of history, following different logics, transpiring different societal visions. The city is alive in its many fragments, its simultaneous faces: in the old bazaar and the stone bridge, in the modern monuments along the river, in the music on the terraces, even in the fountains playing music and giving light shows. It is alive in its people, who use the city and adapt to its continuously changing conditions.

It is 2016, summer. We have just returned from the Summer School in the monastery in the mountains. Ilva and Dzvezda, two 6-year-old girls, Dutch and Macedonian, play with the water of the fountains, run among the sculptures, dance to music in the street and caress the kittens on the terraces. They do not speak each other's language, but they understand each other in seeing each urban element as an object of play, not hindered by any knowledge about its construction, about it being real or fake, belonging to one urban narrative or the other. The city is their stage, where different stories can be played.



Fig 5. Skopje 2014 development. The new face of Skopje city centre: fountains and 'antique' cladding. In the background, the mountain Vodna.



Fig 6. Macedonian Opera and Ballet, by Biro 77 (1981), framed by the new neoclassical columns and statues of the so-called Skopje 2014 project.



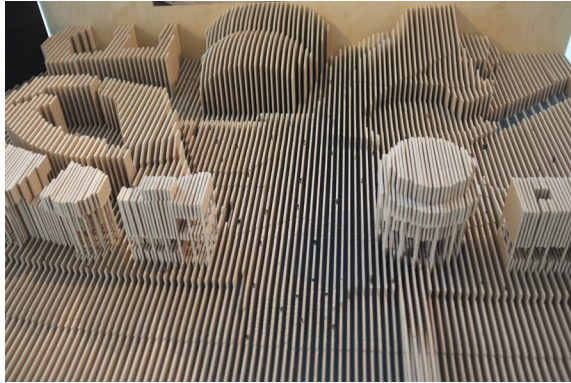


Fig 7. Model from the “FREEINGSPACE” exhibition, presented at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2018, and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje 2019, curated by Marija Mano Velevska and Slobodan Veleviski. The model depicts North bank of river Vardar, with the site of the Macedonian Opera and Ballet, and in white the new buildings of the Skopje 2014 project. The proposal presented at the exposition FREEINGSPACE was not to demolish all Skopje 2014 buildings, but to accept the current situation, and free the public space towards the river from the new colonnade, re-establishing the connection between the Opera building and the river.

- 1 Manon Tardieu. *Evocative Narratives: The Fictive Character in Site Research*, paper presented at the Conference ‘Writingplace. Literary Methods in Architectural Research and Design’, Delft University of Technology 2013, based on her graduation project in the studio Border Conditions, Delft University of Technology 2012.

# *Belgrade Baroque*

Marko Jobst

Introductory reading compiled by Naomi Stead

# Reading of Marko Jobst's *Belgrade Baroque*

Compiled by Naomi Stead

The opening line. It cuts open the story – where and how? This is a writer's question.

It is a provocation: 'The memory is that of an event never witnessed and the story should be cut open somewhere else, closer to that crucial moment a few years later when I enter her for the first time.'<sup>1</sup> We wonder immediately what 'enter' means here. In innocence (perhaps) it might mean 'enter her' as the writer enters the character, inhabiting it, entering as in *inspiring*, breathing into – entering into the world that the writer produces, like one might sink into a pool of water, like one might occupy with empathetic imagination. Or, of course, it could mean 'enter' in the other way . . . The physiological sense, the anatomical sense. There is of course the bigger question: How does one self enter another?

- 1 *From the workshop*: 'The memory is that of an event never witnessed and the story should be cut open somewhere else, closer to that

crucial moment a few years later when I enter him for the first time. Yet when the period is invoked, with its dissolution of forms that had seemed solid only months earlier, the first thing to surface is the severe haircut of his adolescence, framing the face dominated by a crudely sculpted nose. Jean d'Arc as a Yugoslav youth perhaps, even as the adjective was becoming meaningless by the minute, and had probably been so from the outset. He is auditioning for the choir and without its architectural setting – the low, peeling ceiling, the old concert piano in tired lacquer, the church next door, Baroque in style and incompatible with the dogmas of Orthodoxy corrected – none of this would have happened. No memory, no placement; just a collection of objects indifferently arranged. He is wearing the earrings his father had instructed him to wear. *So they know you're a boy*, he'd said before he'd closed the door on their low family house in the suburbs.'

Anyway, who is speaking? A collective memory, a building or the abyss of a daydream that draws the reader through layers of time, spaces, consciousness? None of that. It's a child. A Baroque child. Which is, it seems, at the same time the descendant of an architectural style, a young Serbian boy undergoing all sorts of cultural initiation rituals and a church novice entangled in the transgressions of religious practice. His own and the institutions'. Boy, child, style, they are one. Or at least, they are inseparable, as they slide inside out of each other in permanence.<sup>2</sup>

- 2 *From the workshop:* 'Here, the guide had said, the child was born. At that moment an ectoplasm utterly banal yet infinitely moving materialized before my eyes. This was the spot where something innocent was said to enter the world. This, the spot in which what is beyond gave to soil. My eyes, minor tributaries. So I escaped their performance to hide under the arches outside, or that is how the mind remembers. For the arch above my head might well be imagined, lifted from a painting of a virgin receiving divine word from an alien being only he can hear, Fra Angelico by way of El Greco. Who is the child the tears seek to comfort? The question, it strikes me years later, is not of whose innocence was at stake – own, or that of others – but whether it had been a boy in the

**first place, that fragile little body birthed in the spot the star indicates, or something more complex, deliberately made obscure over time, wilfully erased. A child that inspired wonder and awe. Strange child.'**

The 'person' in the text conveys a certain weakness. That is, the boundaries between expressions of the person are porous and meandering – 'I', 'we', 'you'. A fugitive sense of self, but yet a quite definitive grasp of memory, of the object (mastery over the object by the gaze, through the literary apprehension of the external world). The temporal shifts: a complex writing of history across the personal (moving across surfaces, through substances) and 'scholarly' or institutional registers, from the ancient to the immediate, and to intimations of futurology. The text is a form of parallel travelogue (through time and space); one desirous, embodied, immersed in the 'person'; the other analytic and reflexive, explanatory.

So: a text that is elusive and allusive, *evocative* – in the sense of evoking ghosts or shades, revivifying half-articulated feelings and ideas and memories, ambiguous, smoky or blurry or half-remembered images, obscure, semi-transparent, seen through a veil. The answer to confusion is to surrender to it, allow yourself to proceed in the dimness and half-light, light a candle and sit in the shadows.

Spatial descriptions, rituals, encounters, disruptions: the reader is witness to acts never witnessed, in a city never visited. Interiority is linked with spatial form; the church, its spire, as an index of first transgressions (the kiss).<sup>3</sup> This link also expressed through shapes: the spiral as 'a sense of self that returns, transformed'. This whole text is a spiral, tracing 'Invisible arcs of desire'.<sup>4</sup> Other shapes are invoked – the square, the passage. Links between history and biography through place, opening the question of how buildings carry memory (or erase it – a bookshop bearing the name of a Jewish merchant made to disappear). How space holds memory, and how memory holds space, and how space *erases* memory. Writing becomes an act of reclamation – marking hauntings and traces of what is left behind and what is not. The estranging sense of relocation.

- 3 *From the workshop*: 'More important is the kiss, and the walk that followed, our exit from a fleeting Eden. *Kalemegdan*: a field of battles, as the misconstrued translation maintains. Because that is when realisation arrives, as I passed St. Michael's Cathedral, the sense of a life being snuffed out, made to fit a mould imposed on it, as if it were clay. The image of the church will remain an architectural synonym of that claustrophobic moment, a dark blot in the sky above

Belgrade, folding and unfolding endlessly, assuming the cloak of a transgression that cannot be named, its very essence forbidden. That first kiss: it is the ornate Baroque spire of a church whose paradigm would never be repeated. It pierces the sky.'

- 4 *From the workshop*: 'This attic is where key intimacies would be exchanged, body upon body on the same mattress, a conjunction of limbs driven to awkward ensembles. Invisible arcs of desire, diagrams in the air. Gone, after all this time. Traceless.'

Built form is bodily: 'The skin of the building . . . has been scraped away.' And that body is itself the answer to uncertainties, to questioning: 'This body. My Body.' But yet it gives us up: 'I never expected tears from you.' These are emotional landscapes, the text traces a path along 'a route that is lost to me now' – not because the buildings themselves are lost, but rather forgotten. The 'real' architecture is affective: 'My eyes. Minor tributaries,' while the violence is both real and metaphoric: 'I was hit for being sloppy and inert.'

The city opens variously: the suburb, the room where the choir holds its auditions, the attic, the street, the church. At first, there is a church. A female freedom fighter and a stylistic portrait analysis; a juxtaposition of artefacts with memory

and discourse. Soon there is only a voice resounding through a church nave; air waves touching walls, ceilings and oil paint. The church, the inscriptions of gender, the violent production and reproduction of identities; the initiatory, ritualized tears; the ottoman empire and its multiple legacies; ethnic cleansing; Bethlehem.

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The title, 'Baroque Child', is also a provocation, an allusion, a doubling. It seems to open a parallel between architectural style and personal style – this seems to indicate a confluence between people and buildings that steps between anthropomorphization and personification. The Baroque, *the style that is at the core of what needs to be said.*<sup>5</sup> What would a Baroque child be? And by extension, who here is this Baroque child?

- 5 *From the workshop: 'St Michael's Cathedral. The Panonian exodus under Arsenije Čarnojević that precedes it by a century and a half. There is an image here that goes beyond the obvious, much as it encapsulates the second coming of Baroque, the style that is at the core of what needs to be said. The scale implied in invoking Vojvodina, linked to the narratives of Ottoman Serbs who became Austrian in the end, its status embodied in the very name used for the province from*

*1848 . . . just as the building of the cathedral was being erected. Rooted in what was given to Serbs once they'd escaped north, across the river. Because that is where Baroque would have come from, a tide to recede, and deposit its convoluted traditions onto those hills south of the Danube. A relic of an exodus. A self that returns, transformed.'*

Baroque buildings are sensual, dramatic, lavish, gilded; space and surface highly ornamented and rhetorical and overblown – playing between light and shadow, lit from above, fond of illusion and replete with painted illusion – populated by angels looking down from the heavens. Could these things also be adjectives to describe a *person* – Baroque in both sensibility and physical being, beautiful and decadent, a Caravaggio cupid, tousled and impish, melodramatic, pouting, passionate, desirable – and even more so could they be aspects of a Baroque *text* – is this a three-way parallel, between a style of architecture, of writing, and of human being? There is a crescendo in the text, in the line: *Baroque is the moment when the ceiling bursts, and the building opens straight onto the Heavens.* Baroque here is not (only) a style, it is an event.

But still, but still, the text is very much in the Apollonian mode: even at the moment of orgasm both the text and the authorial position continue to be

dispassionate. I wonder about desire: there is sex here yes, but there is no love, and a diffuse kind of desire, or perhaps a conflicted one, the desire for the building seems almost greater than the desire for the body or self of the other. Another line: 'There is no memory of the emotional landscape that this self, the self to which I cling despite its many discontinuities, could have been at that moment in time.'<sup>6</sup> This is a curiously cool memoir, for such a hot political and erotic climate.

- 6 *From the workshop:* 'I would have walked back in the direction of Kalemegdan after that first kiss, aiming for the fortress that dumbly occupies it still, along a route that is lost to me now. Not because the paths have been upturned, as many have, nor buildings torn down to give way for forms cheaper and more anonymous; but for the lack of recollection of what I might have considered once he'd left. There is no memory of the emotional landscape that this self, the self to which I cling despite its many discontinuities, could have been at that moment in time.'

It is also self-consciously *writerly*, or perhaps self-consciously literary in its obliqueness and its omissions, the work that it demands of the reader. This is not to say it is 'difficult' or not pleasurable, but it does draw attention to its

own style, its own mode of construction, its fabrication. Partly, of course, this is about transgression as the contravention of convention – and just as architecture history (styles, motifs) is so much about canons and norms, 'standard' academic writing is equally about patterns and their application: conformism, convention, propriety, discipline and disciplinarity. The Baroque bursts its bounds, exceeds them, 'explodes' – the text does the same.

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Consider then the significance of the *seminal* – the search for origins, essences, seeds, authors, and how this can be turned to various political and ideological and racist but also architectural ends: 'Beyond the question of my own genetic allegiances, beyond the relativity of inherited names, what riles is the insistence on the purity of the line with its dumb reproductive imperative at core.'<sup>7</sup>

- 7 *From the workshop:* 'But beyond the question of my own genetic allegiances, beyond the relativity of inherited names, what riles is the insistence on the purity of the line with its dumb reproductive imperative at core. What I see in the image are people he never knew. They could be my own ancestors: those Greeks who had escaped Asia Minor after a tip-off from a Turkish

police officer, a *filos* who, by doing so, had saved their throats the night before they were to be slit; or the Germans migrating south, hugging the shores of the Danube at a dictum of an Austrian empress, carrying among their few possessions a name that might have even been Dutch once. They were peasants, artisans, merchants all; hailing from somewhere where people built pitched roofs, just like the one in the image of ancestors he presents.'

But think also of the *seminary*, the sexuality hidden beneath the robes of religious men, of patriarchs, the secret sexuality of supposedly celibate places and people, the mattress in the attic.

But think also of *semen* – the smell and taste and fact of it, and its first appearance, the first time it emerges from the boy's body, what provokes it, how there is no preamble and no warning, how this provocation is perhaps itself revealing: of predilections and orientations. But think also of the seminal as that which works to impregnate, collaborates in impregnation, but which is equally, between men, the symbol of *unprocreative* sexual pleasure, unproductive expenditure, congress without the chance or risk of issue.

A seminal image in the text: the naked man in the fencing club changing room. The contrast of that stiff white strange

uniform that covers both the face and the genitals in a mask both protective and disguising, and the sudden shocking unmasking of both face and genitals, the reveal.

Architecture isn't only about buildings. There is an architecture of hair, an architecture of orgasm, an ejaculation of architecture. Your body is wrapped in architectural space, mutually animating and inhabiting each other, acquiring sense together. There is no romanticism to that discovery, but pain and enjoyment. Birth and death suspended between a debate on stylistic purity. Male and female being constructed and reconstructed and limbs and minds move inside out of orifices. Depicted and reified in art history. Lived underneath dirty sheets.

8 *From the workshop*: 'Illicit: the first glimpse of a naked body, sited in the changing rooms of a fencing club. I deposit it, in these pages, in a gesture of vengeful retaliation, inside the building of a priestly school that had stood opposite the church before the one that would replace it once the question of Byzantine traditions had been purified. Small and unremarkable but for the style of which a few remnants exist – Serbo-oriental as it was haplessly labelled – and said to have housed the severed head of Karadorde Petrović, *Black George*,



awaiting its macabre transportation  
to Istanbul in Ottoman triumph. A  
symbolic beheading of the first of  
Serbian insurrections. Between limp  
clothes and rusted hooks, ciphers in  
black and brass with which I write  
the likes of us into history, a body  
emerged from the showers. The  
hand of a man lowered the fabric, to  
reveal a form of flesh incongruously  
large to the eyes of a child. The  
beheading, taking place.'

# Belgrade Baroque

Marko Jobst

*This is an excerpt from the first chapter of a manuscript provisionally titled Belgrade Baroque. Part memoir, part architectural reverie, it folds personal memories of the city's sites and histories – and vice versa. The text presented here offers two forms of endnote: textual illustrations that should be understood as their own simultaneous picture captions, and source references that aim to indicate the directions of further research the reader can pursue.*

The memory is that of an event never witnessed and the story should be cut open somewhere else, closer to that crucial moment a few years later when I enter her for the first time. Yet when the period is invoked, with its dissolution of forms that had seemed solid only months earlier, the first thing to surface is the severe haircut of her adolescence, framing the face dominated by a crudely sculpted nose. Joan of Arc as a Yugoslav maiden perhaps, even as the adjective was becoming more meaningless by the minute and had probably been so from the outset.<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Dreyer's Jeanne d'Arc slips seamlessly into the image of a First World War Serbian soldier, as reported by the Western media. There were several of them, all referred to in that same way, reduced to a Western template: Milunka Savić, Jeanne d'Arc. Slavka Tomić, Jeanne d'Arc. Of the images I sift through, carried on the wave of associations and

tenuous links, only the dynamism of a late nineteenth-century painting by Eugene Romain Thirion – swirling forms converging on the fold of an ear, an impassive face and another one that whispers, a trumpet sounded sideways to summon others across the landscape – captures the underlying question, taking Joan's face all the way back to the ecstasies of Bernini, his Beata Ludovica, his Santa Teresa. It is in the emotions of Falconetti, in the artifice of her performance – the realism it announced – that the key to cuts across all categories lies and traverses them. The question of style.

She is auditioning for the choir and without its architectural setting – the low, peeling ceiling, the old concert piano in tired lacquer, the church next door Baroque in style and incompatible with the dogmas of Orthodoxy corrected<sup>2</sup> – none of this would have happened. No memory, no placement; just a collection of objects indifferently arranged. She is wearing the earrings her father had instructed her to wear. *So they know you're a girl*, he'd said before he'd closed the door on their low family house in the suburbs.

- 2 A. Ignjatović, *U srpsko-vizantijskom kaleidoskopu: Arhitektura, Nacionalizam i imperijalna imaginacija 1878-1941* (In the Serbo-Byzantine Kaleidoscope: Architecture, Nationalism and Imperial Imagination 1878-1941) (Beograd: Orion Art & Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2016).

The church stands on a hill sloping towards the Sava River, in what had emerged as the Serbian quarter during the centuries of Ottoman rule, a couple of blocks away from a route out of the Roman camp that had aimed southeast, like an arrow, two millennia earlier.<sup>3</sup>

- 3 Savamala, the Serbian quarter of the entrenched Ottoman city. Formed in the later stages of imperial rule and marked with its own Varoš Kapija, Town Gate – the adjective 'Serbian' implied in the phrase, taken for granted in the gendering of the noun – a name in memory

only, no trace of it left. Images of the area taken from old prints. From photographs taken later, capturing its absence. Here, it would have sprung. Where this concrete, where these traffic lights. Right there. I search in these images for a key that would bring the Baroque back, to be found in a book written by a Swedish Slavist, Belgrade depicted through the eyes of foreigners across several centuries. When did I become one? The mote that had come to define the city.

Its spire dominates the views onto Belgrade from across the rivers, tasked with representing the city's silhouette for ever. The church stands on the site of an older building, and another one before it:<sup>4</sup> sacred markers that lead the trail into the past, Christian as much as it was Slav, pagan as those tribes would have once been. But there are Roman remains here as well, which insist on underscoring everything, a necropolis sited around here precisely;<sup>5</sup> and before it, the peoples that had left no texts to be deciphered, just remnants of bodies and objects smashed together.

- 4 B. Vujović, *Saborna Crkva u Beogradu* (The Cathedral Church in Belgrade) (Beograd: Narodna Knjiga, 1996).
- 5 S. Pop-Lazić, *Nekropole rimskog Singidunuma* (The Necropoles of Roman Singidunum) (Beograd: Singidunum No. 3, 2002) 1-70.

She would relate the story with an expression of incredulity, amused even as she acknowledged its insult: this insistence on gender that should have been evident. And it is that exact expression that resurfaces in memory, of the way her eyes sketched humour to transmute pain. It is an image of an adolescent girl who looks like a boy for whatever conjunction of genes and rebellion, but from whose mouth a soprano would eventually emerge to assure the conductor that this was, indeed, a female body stood before the lacquered instrument,<sup>6</sup> arms limp by her sides. It's the voice that gives her away.

- 6    Invented around 1700, the piano was an answer to the problem of being able to play the dynamic range. Fortepiano, pianoforte. Piano: an instrument that knew how to be quiet. Unlike the harpsichord, it offered its strings to hammers for the striking. A metaphor, no doubt. For what, though? Most music forms specific to the piano were the result of the Baroque. But the Baroque is inseparable from castrati, themselves mere echoes of Byzantium's eunuchs. Anton Raphael Mengs portraying Domenico Annibali, the violence of castration on its way out by that point, the singer's hand hovering over a keyboard. The castrato looks elsewhere. A smile hovers on his lips.

The church was consecrated in 1840. The identity of the architect remained unknown until a century and a half later, when his German surname resurfaced and authorship was confirmed, more or less.<sup>7</sup>

- 7    Vujović, *Saborna Crkva u Beogradu*, op. cit. (note 4).

The journey the name had taken to the construction site on the slopes of the Sava could be traced back to the town of Zemun, that distinct sibling of Belgrade's, and further north across the Danube into the plains that had once been the bottom of the Panonian Sea, fertile with innumerable Pliocene deaths. It is the journey that would have brought the style this far south on the wave of nineteenth-century Europeanizations, itself the result of links forged in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century flights from Ottoman slaughter.<sup>8</sup>

- 8    The Panonian exodus under Arsenije Čarnojević: it precedes St Michael's Cathedral by a century and a half. There is an image here that moves beyond the obvious, much as it encapsulates the second coming of the Baroque to Belgrade, the style that is at the core of what needs to be said. The scale implied in invoking Vojvodina, linked to the narratives of Ottoman Serbs who had become Austrian in the end, its status

embodied in the very name used for the province from 1848, just as the cathedral was being erected. Rooted in what was given to the Serbs once they'd escaped north, across the Danube. Because that is where the Baroque would have come from, the receding Panonian tide depositing convoluted traditions onto the hills south of the river. A relic of an exodus, among other things; a self that returns transformed. That exodus of 1690 under a man who might have been a woman. For Arsenije Čarnojević was from Montenegro after all, where a female child could be elevated to the role of primary heir in the absence of male offspring. She would be made to become a man.

From one empire to another and then back, until the city itself had become a gateway.<sup>9</sup>

- 9 S. Velmar-Janković, *Kapija Balkana* (Gateway to the Balkans) (Beograd: Stubovi Kulture, 2011).

The image of her face is there to justify what came next, yet pales before guilt. There is no going back now, no erasing the trajectories our bodies were to follow; no chance to cast actions in a more favourable light, even as the mind seeks precisely that – absolution and peace. I should have known that it was a different form I had sought in those shoulders, been brave enough to accept the transgression it announced. There were others, after all, scattered throughout the city's interiors, its folds and recesses, who didn't recoil from recognizing desire for what it was.<sup>10</sup>

- 10 Bezistan. Another Turkic word introduced then imprinted. And off it, the single bar of its kind that the city knew, which I'd known of but never visited. The modernism of the passageway, despite its Ottoman name, linked to what would have been the square of Marx and Engels – named these days after a Serbian national figure – and Terazije, that site of weighing and taking measures, equally Turkic in sound. The Bezistan fountain and the figure that dwells there, inside modernism's faltering

illuminations of a culture's darker corners: Aleksandar Zarin, *Young Woman with Seashell*. The exoskeleton that folds space.

But on those days when slight turns vindictive, I maintain that it is she who should be held responsible: for the machinery set in motion as the curtain opened onto the 1990s, for her allegiance to that relentless collective imperative to perpetuate creation, in His name and the name of a pitiful pool of cultural code. It absolves of responsibility, this claim that there is only one tribe worth belonging to. Absolves and then imprints guilt once more, for the inability to forgive the rejection of the people she had, at that very moment, chosen to embrace.<sup>11</sup>

- 11 The Orthodox baptism described in detail, performed on an adult at that, lingers on the edge of the image. She was already 17 when she decided to submit to the water, like many born in the 1970s, unbaptized as we'd been by our minders. And the Baroque making itself known surreptitiously, in the context of Byzantine traditions deliberately forged in the late nineteenth century and cemented in the twentieth, before the Revolution, and after it again. It was that church precisely, which can't be read as Eastern Orthodox any more, with its peculiar detail and techniques soon abandoned. How to make wood look like silver, like gold, because Papal riches remained elsewhere.

The relations remain inscribed in the architecture of the church's form,<sup>12</sup> unremarkably only half a day's journey to the north or west, yet alien here; a space elongated and reminiscent in the form of its name, basilica, of Greek kings long dead, despite which it remained unlike anything properly Byzantine in lineage.

- 12 St Michael's layout, its unremarkable, mixed classicisms. The watered-down, minor Baroque its form suggests. This is the church inside which he would have been baptized, with the choir its integral part: The First

Belgrade Society of Singers, established in the nineteenth century with the building recently completed. It is via the choir that he is brought into the church.

It is an anomaly, confirmed by a spire that remains dark, despite all the gold that glints ominously across the landscapes of childhood. A perverse lighthouse intent on absorbing light, not illuminating passage. It is this building that allows space to be approached as it once was, if the mind's eye would only slow down sufficiently to accept what had survived. It is the architecture of a community she had decided to embrace at a time when such tribal allegiances were forged relevant again, half a century of alternative narratives rendered trivial, obsolete. Yet it remains anomalous, just like the irregular pearl<sup>13</sup> that might have given it its name.

13 P. Davidson, *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

Perhaps. The building initiates the convoluted journey to retrace desire that had recognized itself only once another's body had fit these limbs without friction. The guilt is hers, for perpetuating forms of repression and violence. But it is mine as well: for being a coward.

The second scene, re-enacted as a ritual every time memory fishes her face up from murky depths, is the collection of acts tasked with stitching together genetic lines, by force. There are several memories here, conflated no doubt, yet some remain particular to that first time, the crucial event. They remind of the way she clenched her muscles in discomfort, of the words that had come out of my mouth for reasons I cannot comprehend today, as it was unclear which one of us I'd referred to since we had both, until that moment, been pure in the eyes of the dogma she'd decided to embrace. They remind of the way her body stiffened when I made my tongue meet its slipperiness, wondering if it would taste the same in someone else.<sup>14</sup>



- 14 Courbet's *Origin of the World*, commissioned by Khalil Bay, an Ottoman diplomat. A woman's face was possibly taken out of the frame afterwards, to protect her identity, but in the process the body had become faceless, and abstract. Origin, as origin absolute. It's the nineteenth century, the painting was executed in 1866: the year Serbia and Montenegro signed a pact against Ottoman rule, the last two Yugoslav provinces to part ways eventually. But is the framing of that sort, a fragmentary, dynamic intervention, a Baroque heritage? Velasquez's child who stares right back.

I can't recall that particular flavour anymore; it's been erased by decades of secretions from where nothing Edenic is said to dwell. If dogma is to be swallowed whole.

But before any of the mutual scarring takes place, we are inside Belgrade's National Museum, drifting through empty spaces before one of our concerts. I walk into an empty room to discover that a figure awaits me. And as I turn to meet the gaze of desire I felt so clearly land on my shoulders, it is marble that I find in the perfect silence of the room, nothing more: the polished form of Antinoos, Emperor Hadrian's lover.<sup>15</sup>

- 15 The statues of Antinous, with which Emperor Hadrian revived Greek forms on purpose. The boy's curls form part of an iconography of folds to ensue. 'Antinous has attracted attention from the gay subculture since the eighteenth century, the most illustrious examples for this being Prince Eugène of Savoy and Frederick the Great of Prussia.' Sarah Waters, 'The Most Famous Fairy in History', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 6 (1995), no. 2, 92.

That teenage suicide. The body that had seemed alive seconds earlier, brimming with the need to be acknowledged, is beyond flesh, long dead. While earlier that day, on one of Kalemegdan's winding paths, she had

walked behind me in the blinding sun, past the crumbling fortifications demolished and resurrected from one century to the next,<sup>16</sup> shouting in the wind: *You have the legs of a girl!* The only way I'd known to respond was to walk faster.

- 16 *Barokni Beograd* (Baroque Belgrade) (Beograd: Arheološki Institut Beograd & Muzej Grada Beograda, 2019).

How does it work, this ever-changing diagram of shifting frames of reference when I stop her in the street a few months later and ask for a kiss, as if requiring permission to draft a contract, rather than pursuing desire on impulse? I can still see the place where we stood, at the end of a street where the city's first official school had been erected in the nineteenth century, that site of childhood abuses.<sup>17</sup>

- 17 Braća Ribar, the name of revolutionary brothers who'd given the school its name to be replaced by the name of a king. Varoš Kapija, the spot where this happens, the entrance to the Serbian city . . . except not quite there. It is the area that inherits the name, a shop or two left to denote it. And it is there, just further to one side and up the street, that the only surviving Baroque building from eighteenth-century Austrian rule remains. It is, most probably, the key image. Yet no one can confirm that it really had been built then.

I was inert, too much the opposite of male. We were taught to be dominant. We were all men.<sup>18</sup>

- 18 There is a figure here, the liberator of Belgrade from Ottoman oppression, for a moment at least. Eugene of Savoy, that mastermind general, whose sexual practices were described as filth. A gate with his name remains inside Kalemegdan today, and the tower that marks it. It should be his body, his face, that remains as the final cipher. His wig: into which the folds of history disappear.

# *Decolonizing Your Island Imaginary*

Preparations for a Novella in Four Parts

Hélène Frichot

Introductory reading compiled by Kim Gurney

# *Reading of Hélène Frichot's Decolonizing Your Island Imaginary*

Compiled by Kim Gurney

The Decolonial Winter School 2018 at the University of Cape Town began with a cleansing ceremony. Following introductions (slave name, colonial name and preferred name), three questions went iteratively around a circle. What do you know? (That I am here.) How do you know it? (My body tells me.) And, finally, what other ways of knowing interest you? (Works of art as embodied knowledge.) The morning session that I attended concluded by passing around indigenous plants and speculating about them before a traditional healer informed us of their properties. Many found they were familiar with, and had intuitive knowledge about, the plants, but did not always know their names. The exercise showed how knowing can precede naming.

The full programme included modules on epistemic violence and the public university, ontology and the body, land reform, and actualizing justice and

liberation. It concluded with a tantalizing session: 'Towards utopia at the vanishing point.' The latter was hosted by Fees Must Fall, a social justice movement coeval with the removal of a colonial-era statue of Cecil John Rhodes ('Rhodes Must Fall'). Rhodes did fall. Fees fell too. South Africa now has free tertiary education for qualifiers who cannot afford the cost. That fall began with a performative act, of throwing of shit from a portable toilet cannister at the Rhodes statue, thereby making structural inequities more visible and bringing the periphery to the centre. This 2015 protest, claimed by the initiating student as performance art, triggered a chain of complex and contested events that continue to reverberate in the country's post-apartheid public sphere today. Fallists often insist it was not just about a statue; hence the need for other kinds of decolonization.

This cues Frichot's text: decolonizing an imaginary, 'a suite of colonial imagi-

naries is composed and decomposed through processes of decolonization'. We travel in the text through interlinked vignettes of powerfully evoked worlds in a suite of colours. An island is sepia, a migrant family home is hyper-saturated, an old apartment is conveyed in translucent greys and deep brown shadows. Finally, we are at the centre of empire in royal blue, indigo and chalk. Not only do we move in these various geographies through different colours, but also at different speeds, suggests Klaske Havik. She adds that there is something misleading about those hues, something the images seem to evoke and then turn totally upside-down, 'something very troubling'. This looping plot has thematics reminiscent of Jamaica Kincaid's *At the Bottom of the River*,<sup>1</sup> offers Naomi Stead, a collection of ten interconnected short stories about a young girl from a postcolonial Caribbean island, moving through life.

### **Mahé. 1961**

The text opens with a violence. A girl, running, bleeding. Her brother is a witness. An unseen but smelled expensive cigarette smoke, linked to a young man we are yet to meet. A young man who travelled 15 days on a boat to get to another world, as Havik points out. These kind of details link the vignettes, one to the other.

It also opens with a founding image, which gives the impression of being a

fragment from an archive – a family album or perhaps institutional, suggests Robin Wilson. He calls the image a floating eye, with a strange ambiguity and latent details capable of embellishing 'fiction' with 'truth' to write history differently. Wilson asks: 'How far does this present image travel into the text? Where does it get left behind?' The residual is offered as raw material, Wilson says, and extends this to consider what a transversal photograph might comprise. There are other fragments, too, Havik reminds us: the terrace of the plantation house, the veranda, a man sleeping, the boy as the only person actively engaging with the insects, the sounds, the smell . . . a slow and precise moving of the frame, which other readers in the group regard as filmic.

The text is set on a family property evoking legacies. Land. Specifically: tobacco. A tension is set up of people working the land, and people with the land. This section evocatively describes a scene by panning around different characters, starting with a boy and forbidden Creole. This is an early signal of the issue of voice, language, accent, and translation. There is also an interesting communion between humans and animals – the bird, the cicada, the girl and her secret animal hospital.

Imagine the bird coughs up the meal . . . does this hold the key to the whole project? asks Marko Jobst.

### London, England. 1958-1961

We travel back in time. The son is departing England for the scene just narrated back home. The idea of passing is invoked, as in 'to pass as best he could'. Recently reading Diana Fuss on Frantz Fanon, I was struck by a distinction offered between mimicry and masquerade in recent feminist theory: that mimicry was ironic while masquerade was not. Fuss writes about the potential of a mimicry of subversion while also acknowledging a mimicry of subjugation; that the two interact and converge through slippage, 'from mimicry into mockery, from performativity into parody'.<sup>2</sup>

An image is described of discarding oneself, layer by layer. It connotes displacement – of home. Of other things. When we leave this place, we depart with another violent encounter in which the protagonist is a participant.

Does the bird that swallowed the cicada have an eye, muses Jobst, looking back at the woman from her lap? How does she look to the woman in whose lap she fell, and to the girl next to her? And what, he asks, is the gaze of that which is non-human? How does it allow for the exchange of gazes between humans . . . to reach for the limit of all gazing, as it were?

### Paris, 1968

We are several years later in time, following the young girl in the story. There is a maroon ribbon in her hair, a telling detail we connect with the first, earlier narrative. There are ideas of un/packing, of coming and going. The alienation, in so many ways, is apparent: 'What they don't know is how far she has had to travel to get here.' Indeed, adds Havik, being a minor, a minor person, a minority, evokes notions of embarrassment . . . Class, status, hierarchy, racism.

Manet's painting *Olympia* and the gaze of the attendant. In its time, this painting was very subversive because the subject looked back at the viewer, with its own agency to confront and upend the viewer's gaze, and suggests a relationship to processes of decolonization.

The student uprising in Frichot's text has uncanny contemporary world echoes. On feeling the weight of a stone in the protagonist's hand, the text states: 'In the days to come . . . her local world will come undone and a new point of view will be wrenched open.' It is about the return – as another, says Havik. But the larger plot is also about the arrival – such as the young man being only part of whom he used to be, or halfway towards something else, she adds. Indeed, as the author herself later tells us in reader response, the text holds a tension between withholding and releasing. Its protagonist was initially carried

along by the social uprising around her and then moves into self-determination, which brings us towards the final section.

### Perth, 1977

We are a decade on in time. The scene has now dislocated to a geographically distant place.

A young girl's thoughts: 'The wonder of how many such weeks there had been, an attempt to count them up, and how many more there were yet to come, you know, forever.' Time is evoked once more, extending and contracting. There is also a deliberate temporal interweaving. The woman, now an aunt, returns to a differently peopled scene, blocking the line of escape of the girls she encounters in her untouched room. It is another forbidden territory.

The ending, regarding the eldest son's close call, narrates yet other kinds of violence – this time mediated through distance. But the bird, Jobst reminds us, intervenes for the non-human and thinking beyond human power structures to posit decolonization as the process that unfolds at the edge of the human.

In closing: *Preparations for a Novella* travels between sites, times, characters and events. It finds in its proposition moments when spatial memories are made and lets the threads in that weave spool forward. There is something

deeply set, as a weaver on a loom might predetermine a pattern. But there is also the instability of a loose knot that may yet unravel, come undone and spool lines together in a different way. The text strikes a sensitive balance between foregone conclusions, in the way of certain structural realities, while still honouring the capacities of everyday agencies in its rendering of the key episodes of a novella to come. The thread is red. It registers a pattern making itself through repetitions over time but leaving enough wiggle room for the outcome to diverge. As the author describes it: *a test site*.

And that, in the context of decolonization, may be precisely the point. As Jobst avers: the text keeps staging or citing but not offering narrative closure – there is no final story. The story is in the questioning, or undoing, of the very premise of storytelling that has a definitive narrative arc – as his/tory, colonial history specifically, that demands neat narrative closures and certainties, he says.

We return full circle to the founding image, then, which Wilson suggests could hold the key. Characterized by a torpor, he suggests that image may yet unleash a diaspora of characters into a future text to follow. In the meantime: 'The text makes of the silent image a cicada scene.'

- 1 Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983).
- 2 Diana Fuss, 'Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification', *Diacritics*, vol. 24 (1994) no. 2-3, 20-42: 24.



# *Decolonizing Your Island Imaginary*

Preparations for a Novella in Four Parts

**Hélène Frichot**

## **Preamble**

### **Mahé, Seychelles, 1961**

The boy squats fixated by the side of the house in the provinces of the shadows. The rest of the world is asleep, eyes shut in the languid afternoon heat. It is only the boy who is awake to the humming quiet. On the front terrace, recently swept by the young creole maid Beatrice, the father's white shirt is open two buttons down, and his straw hat with the brown band has slipped the hemisphere of his drowsy forehead. A captive cicada waits. The boy cups his hands, and closes them, attempting to draw forth the cicada's singular sound. Separate it from the chorus of its brothers and sisters. Suddenly, the boy's head snaps to attention during a lull in the rhythm of a cicada song. Somewhere near the storeroom beside the kitchen, off the back half of the house, he has heard a scuffling. In a flash of white crimped dress and lost maroon ribbon his sister shoots across the path, stirring up dust as her sandal meets the dirt beneath the orange trees, which it stirs up, then she cuts right, a stripe of red down her leg and one drop hits the

ground. The smell of a cigarette, the expensive kind, the kind rarely to be found in these days of scarcity, follows after. The cicada escapes, the boy, distracted, watches it secure its freedom. He cusses in forbidden creole. Lifting off his haunches the boy trails off then squats down again to place his forefinger into the ground, rubbing the red viscous drop into a paste. A pilgrimage of ants catches its scent and revises its trajectory. The cicada lands in one of the orange trees standing sentinel to the front façade, as the boy exits towards the left. A bird snatches the escaped cicada in its beak and swallows. Some minutes past four, one of the recently awakened older brothers will down the bird, with its partially digested meal, from the vantage of the upper floor veranda, catching its wing with his sling shot, a fluke, for his eyes are bad and his aim is poor.

### **Interlude**

Across four scenes, closer to fleeting sketches, I offer a preparatory test site for a future project that may, or may not, come to fruition. These scenes anticipate a novella, or a 'fictionella', dedicated to the difficulties of decolonizing spatial imaginaries.

What is at stake are processes of decolonization, specifically of spatial memories, including the residual hold of colonial imaginaries and how these might be creatively critiqued. Inevitably, there persists the trouble of presuming to speak for the other, and forgetting one's relative position of privilege. We are ever at risk of laying traps for ourselves as we tell our pass-me-down stories.

As you have now witnessed, the story opens deceptively bucolic, on an island paradise, in the grounds of a colonial plantation house coloured sepia, shades of mahogany and amber hue, as all the world seemingly sleeps its way through a siesta. An encounter is witnessed between a returned colonial brother and a younger sister the aftermath of which will

concatenate through the following three parts of the projected novella. The second part locates us now at the centre of the Empire in royal blue, indigo and chalk with burnt orange highlights. Temporal registers begin to slip and slide: a young man suffers a humiliating sexual encounter as an older man is confronted ascending from the basement flat accommodation of a government in exile. Part three is sketched in cold translucent greys, and deep shadows, witness to a young woman venturing far from home. She is hosted by a reclusive family member in an old apartment on Rue Buffon overlooking the Jardin des Plantes. Shadows of prehistoric dinosaur skeletons are dimly visible through the looming windows of the museum across the way. She is about to commence a year of study in a far-off land that is both culturally familiar, yet strange. Sitting in a stone courtyard on campus, holding a book between her hands – attended on the right by the statue of a poet, and on the left by the statue of a biologist – she hears a noise as though the long-lost sea were approaching her. A massive swell of student bodies floods the courtyard, taking her up in its wake. The final scenes unfold in a suburb of the most geographically isolated city on this damaged planet. It is offered up in hyper-saturated Super-8 colours, brilliant fuchsias, lilacs, yellows and blues. Sunday evening, a regular family gathering, a composition of sun-touched children's limbs lingering on a makeshift aqua blue tarpaulin picnic mat, laid out on a backyard of buffalo grass. A suite of colonial imaginaries is, from one scene to the next, composed and decomposed through processes of decolonization.

But to begin, we are in the tropics, on a cluster of islands just outside the path of seasonal cyclones.

### **Plantation Stories Continued**

In the settlement of Victoria, Seychelles, traffic revives around the central roundabout with its commemorative clock dedicated to the diamond jubilee of a dead queen. The faint sound of its 4 p.m. chimes weaves its way along a coast laden with leaning coconut palms, and up the driveway, past the orange trees to the old plantation house. The plantation grounds take up

some 200 acres. Terraced and planted upwards towards a prominent island peak, it is one of four such family properties spread across the main island. All of them will be requisitioned, parcelled up into smaller holdings, some of which will be claimed by the hands of the hard labour once put to work on the land, but the driveway up to the old house survives to this day. There is tobacco, some of which is dried in the attic of the family home. The coconuts that grow wild across the estate are harvested like manna from heaven. Each morning the working men with their hessian bags – gunny sacks – collect the fruit that has fallen during the night. Crack, one, two, three, they turn the fruit on the end of a stake to yield the nut inside. The cinnamon trees are harvested in three-yearly cycles following an elliptical loop up and across and down the slope of the property. The labour is divided, the women strip the leaves and cut the bark into quills with their small curved knives. The men cut and collect the larger branches. Every part of the plant is used, the aromatic timber makes an excellent stove fire in the old kitchen. The women descend the slope with their bounty balanced on their heads and sinewy necks, in large bamboo baskets cushioned with folded cloth, while the men heave their hessian bags of logs on muscular shoulders. Once the leaves have been steamed in the forty-foot vats in the *l'usine* and the thick essence collected in one-litre glass bottles, packaged in timber boxes, protected with straw, due to be exported by boat to India, the damp vegetable matter is spread across the grounds as fertilizer. The many sons of the plantation owner run like pups through the vegetable mess rolling their bodies in it, smudging their white shorts and shirts to the daily horror of the plantation laundress. After the joys of shooting down birds with .22 rifles, or catching rats to claim the price on their heads, their third favourite chore is undertaken on those mornings when it is time to inseminate the vanilla flowers. They scamper from bush to bush with stolen stamens inserting them into the yawning mouths of one pale waxy flower after the other. Taken *en masse* this murder of sons is a constant blur of movement, one barely distinguishable from the next, but when midday meal times arrive each is allotted his place in descending order,

the eldest seated closest to the patriarch, the youngest at the matriarch's end of the long dining table, the supervisory end of the table closest to the kitchen where the cook labours daily.

Abruptly the house is awake. Two bodies, silver quick, shimmy down the heavy columns of the front terrace. This is just moments before the father awakens. The father catches sight of his sons' tail ends rounding the house and grunts in surprise. In the darkened salon behind him his wife leans forward from the cushions of her old damask arm chair, making herself visible as though emerging from the camouflage of her afternoon reprieve. The cook in the kitchen, who had mastered the art of napping on her feet, raises her crumpled brown face from her hand, the mark of her large elbow leaving a faint ring of perspiration on the bench top, she goes to fetch the lentils to separate the food from the stones and debris. As she settles herself onto a tired rattan stool in the rear yard in the shade of her favourite tree, a bird with a crippled wing falls plump in her aproned lap. It does not cough out its cicada meal, but such a thing would be worth imagining. The girl comes along from the south side of the house, a dark expression on her brow, but she promptly shifts her concerns, crouching by the cook who takes her hand comfortably in her own. They both croon over the bird, which the girl collects, taking it away to join her secret animal hospital.

### **London, England, 1958-1961**

His ship is due to embark on its long journey southwards, but for now he is in a fix. He has suffered a losing streak and has had to downgrade his ticket home from London, a metropolis that is gunmetal grey and flinty. He becomes cagey when his friends ask about seeing him off at the station tomorrow on his way to Southampton, via steam boat through the Suez Canal, calling in at Mombasa and finally arriving at Port Victoria. No good-byes, old chaps, he cheerily responds. Come visit me in my very own island paradise soon! Though he very much hopes they will not. He reflects with a hardening knot in his gut on the large run-down plantation house, the sound

of its corrugated iron roof under the rain. The worn-down damask chairs, the endlessly mended clothes.

They have a special treat organized for him. He is slapped on the back, and led by hand. Room after room after room, one engulfed by the next, as though the place were nothing but luxuriant, velvet-lined interior. Shadows and recesses, infinite abysmal mise en abyme. The lights down low to hide the wear. Thick curtains move heavily across a doorway. Is that a face disappearing into the shadows? He is led further along and the air becomes thicker as he traverses serial antechambers into a wing of the establishment he had never before visited, nor realized existed. All those long nights of playing cards and flaunting his winning streak, while scrambling to keep up with his schoolwork. In the end, he had had to sit complementary exams at Middle Temple, privileged school for becoming barristers. But that is all behind him now. Finally, they come to a halt, and he is issued into a chamber. His eyes refocus. She calls to him with her silken limbs and obscured face. He is instructed towards the necessary ablutions. A large washing bowl, a heavy jug, a small royal blue towel. Wash them well in warm soapy water. The water is cool. Now come. He doesn't remember getting his trousers down, but he remembers stepping towards her as she lay across the bed, paid up and awaiting him. Now her skin looks waxy translucent, and her head drops away as her neck curves over the horizon of a satin pillow. He steps towards her, noting her curiously hairless flower, and with the first step he promptly spills himself. With the second and the third step he manages to regain himself. How long does it take? He suffers a fleeting vision of bundles of cinnamon branches and undergrowth, pepper trees laden with berries, looming mountains rising up towards the sky. Botanical bounties awaiting extraction. Moving forward more rapidly towards the headless torso, he focuses on a lamp that glows yellow on the far bedside table, her left arm stretched towards it as though holding it aloft to light the way. He lunges towards her and his early losses run through him red, and so he takes her by the hips and flips her and enters her all in one smooth movement, his fingers sinking into waxy flesh. He takes her via whatever

passage presents itself to him, and why not take it all, follow all available openings. He enters into the world and it has a salty taste, and the faintest tinge of vanilla. He twists her arm harder. She lets out a whimper and a head attempts to raise itself out of the tussled bed clothes. Then she hesitates, and sighs, and resigns herself to the violence of youth and the vindictiveness of male virginity. As he exits she turns and gives him a look, which he catches. Back in his trousers now, his damp shirt tucked in. He suddenly witnesses her maturity, her experience, and what he apprehends before pushing it out of mind and swiftly departing the room, is the open gaze of a woman who has seen it all before, a look on the level that has measured his kind and found it wanting. The next morning, with a growing sense of unease only matched by his queasy stomach, he peels himself off the carpet of his friend's room, grabs his travel trunk, and leaves, barely making it to the station in time. Hiding the shame of his newly discovered manhood, which comes with an expensive degree, travelling home again, home again.

### **Paris, 1968**

Grey translucent air as though one could see through a world in which the weight of things is a matter of little consequence. The other side of the world, the up-side of the world, a girl discovers herself over-ground. She holds her hand up to this new atmosphere, all her veins and arteries etched vividly producing a neat pattern match with the bare broken branches of the trees along the boulevard beyond her window.

They find her a quiet, queer girl, she rarely smiles, and she wears rather drab clothes, a maroon ribbon in her hair, a cheap excuse for a fringe. When she speaks her accent holds a melody that is languorous, and they take her for stupid, all at sea in the big metropole, a provincial no doubt. What they don't know is how far she has had to travel to get here, how well she has familiarized herself with being out of place. Between lectures on a Monday morning she is sitting in the courtyard with a book in her lap, behind her the

tall unfluted Corinthian columns beyond which the administration offices are to be found. On her right a poet and on her left a biologist, both cut from stone. A lingering after-image from this morning's lecture. Art history, Manet's *Olympia*. The impudence of her gaze, on the level. And tending to her, leaning across the bed with a basket of fresh cut flowers, a dark attentive face.

She lifts her head, animal-like, tilts an ear, because the improbable noise of the long-lost sea rumbles towards her and then bursts as a wave of bodies spills from the passage on her left, one body nearly falling over the next, their shouting laughing voices now distinct, and their voices now in unison. *Defence d'interdire. It is forbidden to forbid.* A circular paradoxical construction. It is forbidden to forbid. No prohibitions here. The colonnade across the courtyard is flooded, they move towards her, she recognizes some faces, she stands up warily, they are shouting all together, they near her and a few break away and take her up, folding their arms into hers, raising her up, her book abandoned, she turns in time to see one stray page lift off and take flight. A poster, *Usine-Universite-Union*, smeared with homemade glue, another poster with a bearded face, and a voice through a requisitioned megaphone. Then something begins to burn her eyes.

Carried along, she has not been home for a great many nights, she has lost count. In the reclaimed Odéon Theatre, a marathon of speeches, and one crowded afternoon a young man takes the stage, reserved, neatly dressed, and his serious, lullaby voice takes her in. The Odéon rises up to the gods from the packed stalls, young men and women hang precariously from gilt balconies, the red velvet holds the smell of spent tobacco, the interior atmosphere is nearly unbreathable. Garlanded with young bodies, laughing, calling out. There is a lull in the noise and the laughter and the profanities called out across the void as the well-dressed young man on the stage speaks with the wretched of the earth, that we may claim self-determination, that another world is possible, a world we will call, the Third World. In



the days to come she will feel the weight of a cobblestone in hand, her fury rising up, a hand barely large enough to hold it, let alone throw it. And her local world will come undone, and a new point of view will be wrenched open.

### **Perth, Western Australia, 1977**

Now it's late Sunday afternoon again, the weekend spent, and a lilac-tinted evening descends. Moving her legs around on the blue tarpaulin, her knees knock against those of younger and older cousins. Some speak a melodic French cut through with creole, others murmur in broad English, they don't really pay too much attention to which language they are speaking, the important thing is to have your say, to shove your way into whatever gap in the conversation you can find. Relegated to the aqua blue tarpaulin crinkling beneath their restless, pale and freckled, tanned and olive and brown limbs. They have discarded the chipped plates, the rice and lentils served and eaten, repulsive though oddly comforting consistency. And sometimes the orange salty desiccated fish, her favourite, in a large aluminium baking pan. Blackcurrant cordial drunk out of old yoghurt containers, sour milk to spoil berry, eradicating the risk of breakage and with household economics in mind.

She and her older cousin begin to plot a local adventure. On the kitchen table inside, ever present, a small dish with sliced chilli and white vinegar. And the buffalo grass cuts into their bare calves and thighs, when their legs stretch beyond the tarpaulin raft, and later in the evening the adults beneath the awning ignore the children's plaintive cries of collective boredom. The adults talk endlessly in their slow melodies, shattered from time to time with, BEZE, Creole, FOUTOU, expletives, and tangled with Australiana where gaps have started to reveal themselves in the mother tongue.

Tonight, as the Super-8 projector begins to whirr, the two girls sneak quietly down the unlit hallway and into the bedroom, unoccupied, untouched

for years. One door of the bedroom leads into the hallway, which leads further along to the grandparent's bedroom, forever out of bounds. The other door of the aunt's bedroom leads into the lean-to where the younger cousins are gathered in front of the Super-8 projector mounted on its tripod. A cartoon, the same cartoon animated again every time, the one where the knives slice through the air in pursuit of a cat who has swallowed an oversized magnet and a mouse who looks on with a belly laugh. The same scenes evince the same laughter. The room, the aunt's room, is untouched, no-one ever enters, the room awaits them. Their line of escape has so far proved successful. On the low dresser with its squat stool, dollhouse-like, the eyeshadows and lipsticks and hairclips and brooches and mascara and eyeliner are a cornucopia of dress-up possibilities. Where should they start? There are the heels behind the built-in cupboard's sliding door, and something with sequins slips out, and something in hot pink, and something in orange, and another in a shade of turquoise. Their feet are by far too small, but this will not stop them. By now the vivid emerald greens have mixed with the sky blues, and the blush has smeared into the shocking red lips of small girls who have pulled over their heads oversized garments, who have riffled through forbidden drawers, who have not hesitated to consider the radical contents of the bookshelves. They suppress their laughter, but snort uncontrollably through pink nostrils.

Then the door to the hallway opens. Standing there is a woman they have never before encountered, though their bodies murmur in genetic recognition. She looks down at them, at their fury of powders and tulles and taffetas writhing on the floor of the compact interior bedroom, which she has not set eyes on now for so many years. She has returned.

The next week, when they are gathered again for the Sunday meal, news arrives of the eldest son's close call. Just shy of a silent bullet that passed him by as the front door to the terrace house was cordially opened. He witnesses his oldest friend's breast abruptly adorned with a corsage plume

of unseasonal red spreading outwards. He turns. A wing and a prayer. He mutters. The faint scent of vanilla. He ducks out of view. Later, and I stress, I cite from newspaper clippings, the police report that the killing may have been politically motivated. The killer was bearded, they say, and I quote, of African appearance, or of Mediterranean appearance, or of Asian appearance. There appears to be some disagreement, though in further reports there is talk of a female accomplice.

# *Offscreen: Making It and Faking It*

Kim Gurney

Introductory reading compiled by Catharina Gabrielsson

# Reading of Kim Gurney's *Offscreen: Making It, Faking It*

Compiled by Catharina Gabrielsson

There are strong cinematographic meta-dimensions to this piece. Not only because it's structured like a film script, but also for what it conveys about the production of films, like a *mise en abyme*. The Spectacle, first brought up by Guy Debord, may well at this time constitute the naval for our medialized and screen-transmitted perception of reality. But there is obviously more to it than that. I am reminded of the Japanese film *After Life* (1998) by Hirokazu Kore-eda that, much like 'Offscreen . . .', centres on the frantic activities going on behind the scenes, the 'loading space' of magic. Shot in what looks like a dismal social service centre, *After Life* follows the activities at a waystation for the souls of the recently deceased. Once a week, a group of bewildered newly-dead arrive at the station. They are taken care of by social workers, who encourage each person to identify his or her happiest memories. These form the cue for a team of set designers and

film makers, who go about replicating the chosen memory. At the end of the week, the recently deceased watch the films of their recreated memories in a screening room. As soon as each person sees his or her own memory, he or she vanishes to whatever state of existence lies beyond and takes only that single memory with them.

*After Life* is a celebration of the emotional and emancipatory power of the moving image. It's linked to the ingenuity and skills of the crew who with very little resources, in just a few days, manage to shoot the scene that will allow the soul to pass on into eternity. Kore-eda's expression of the essential magic of film resonates with Ingmar Bergman's description in his autobiography, where he accounts for his sense of wonder and awe at first encounter with the *laterna magica*. But by also focusing on what goes on behind the scenes, Kore-eda explicitly forwards an understanding of

the prerequisites for the making of this magic. In 'Offscreen . . .', the magic is evidently of a radically different kind: not the unforgettable moment that saves a soul, but the banal ephemerality of a one-minute commercial where most of the efforts are rendered futile, meaningless or lost. But it has the same joyful approach to the collective, and to collective work, collaborating for a common goal. The narrative (if we may call it that) touches upon the face of one after the other, who all have their trajectories, their particularities and skills, entering at significant moments to do their bit.

Kore-eda's rendering of the messiness behind the scenes – the makeshift props employed to transmit an unforgettable ride in an airplane, for instance – carries implications for the definition of art. Shifting offscreen is a shift towards labour, expanding the limits of what counts as art – the 'work of art'. It meddles with the terminology of Hannah Arendt, for whom 'work' is the highest category of human endeavours, elevating us from the toils of biological existence that she calls 'labour'.<sup>1</sup> There is a gesture of radical generosity to this shift that, in Gurney's case, comes with the method of carefully observing, engaging, documenting and composing the various assemblages that are in question here: the intensities of sites, places, materials, objects, and people wrought together in 'Offscreen . . .'; the 'constant mashup of uncanny objects [that] offer a landscape

of surprise'. And, similar to Kore-eda's *After Life*, 'Offscreen . . .' puts forth the significance of 'the kind eye that grants both people and things a second chance'.

There is an inversion going on here. In that way, putting backstage frontstage points to issues that have less to do with the definition of art, and more to do with the politics of visibility and invisibility that resound in Western culture. Pulling the drapes in front of the 'loading space' is not only addressing the question of labour, but also the concealing of labour. It's a theme that underpins modern architecture, making an appearance in eighteenth-century Britain – as the landed gentry planned their houses to ensure the invisibility of servants<sup>2</sup> – and pops up again, on a different scale and register, in contemporary places of leisure and consumption where service and maintenance are kept out of view. In the current phase of so-called post-industrialism, the abyss of production has been pushed to such a distance that the conditions of labour can be safely ignored. By inverting the gaze, 'Offscreen . . .' carries a charge that is both aesthetic and political. It resonates with the architecture of theatre in contemporary design practice – such as the work of Haworth Tompkins in the UK and Patrick Bouchain/Construire in France. Haworth Tompkins's work at the National Theatre combines the production of new workshop spaces with the opening up

of backstage space to the public; and thereby the opening up an aesthetics of the found, of accretion, of mark and trace is prioritized. It's a strategy that ultimately proposes that architecture (the total architecture of the institution, not just as a space of theatre itself) is articulated as if in process (if the 'trace' does not become over-aestheticized and precious, as it sometimes does), and ultimately performative, formed and reformed with each theatrical event. In the work of Bouchain, the reclamation of 'backstage', and an aesthetics of the as-found, is directed at the notion of preserving previous traces of labour – evidence of the industrial past and the of the lives that were defined by it.

'Offscreen . . .' affords a view of the potentiality of the forgotten, ignored or abandoned. It captures the immanence of what Ash Amin once called 'the ordinary economies of the city', factors that are enfolded but downplayed in Gurney's script.<sup>3</sup> Lapses in town planning, lingering land use, investments held back, speculations awaiting the moment to strike from the undercurrent to people willing or desperate enough to take a job where they can get it. As long as there is work, the production of dream worlds keeps racism and capital at bay. As long as there is work, there is space for those improbable assemblage of things that weren't meant to fit together. There is a sense of relay and resonance across spaces here, of the mobility of materials

artefacts and labour. I am reminded of how certain sound artists write of the connectivity of sound in its vibrational effects, of sound's ability to transfer through boundaries and connect spaces. Sounds, smell, trades, flows of energy: a constant fluctuating mobility affected by pressure. The physical pressure of spraying, glue and smells linger throughout the text.

There is a sense of hope in how 'Offscreen . . .' shows how people keep going (and what keeps people going) in constant dynamic adaptations to failures in infrastructure, the fallacies of economies and policies, and transformations in technology and media that will change the livelihoods of millions. This tracing of people, practices and objects conjures up a logic of intensities, or ecology – a levelled plane of immanence where the spatial hierarchies between on and off stage cease to exist simply by following the lines of production, appearance and use, reuse, reappear-ance and reproduction in that 'cyclic' motion that is addressed and delicately placed in the middle of the script. The doubling of realities, the intersecting of thinking, building and projecting realities complicates the notion of time. It's a doubling that not only concerns production, postproduction and film, but also a doubling between the reader, the author, the reality of the set and the hyperreality of cinema or film.

We're brought to this place through a mix of reportage, ethnographic inquiry and internal monologue – simultaneously observing and thinking it. The systemic and meticulous retracing of sequences and spoken words creates a feeling of things happening in real time, as if to joyfully exaggerate the imaginary of consumption society. The enthusiasm of advert languages; the humour in the original phrasing of the interlocutors; the making of objects destined for destruction, but which, at the same time, are destined to destroy another one's imaginary. But the voice of the author of this film script, composed of five major shots, remains mysterious. We do not literally hear her voice, but perhaps it is there, and perhaps it's ultimately to do with the question of perception. As if there is someone speaking silently from a cellar hole, I would think, or a man-hole, whose voice is distributed through underground channels. It makes sense to think of it as a decentred subjectivity, a consciousness or 'mind' able to move around freely and take up that body one instance, another one the next, giving voice to an array of actors. I know this is a misreading, but the question of 'self' or 'voice' are real, tangible and hard aspects to deal with when working with a radical empiricism, practicing the art of paying attention. If the allegedly neutral position adopted by 'objective' research shuns the question of ethics, the documentary approach adopted here puts ethics centre stage.

- 1 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- 2 Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages', in: Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association, 1997).
- 3 Ash Amin, 'The Ordinary Economies of Cities', in: Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Globalization, Institutions, and Regional Development in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).



# *Offscreen: Making It and Faking It*

Text and images by Kim Gurney

A Storyboard

**Shot 1**



An Easter Island statue beside a large silver brain marks a cornucopia of objects outside Props to the Stars, neighbours to Sets & Devices. Over time, these two props have shapeshifted around the yard, taking up a variety of poses while breaking down to reveal their spongy innards.

ACTION: We open on a drive to Paarden Eiland, a Cape Town industrial node, to source steel from a manufacturer. This square tubing will create the armature for a new setbuild: a six-metre-high tiered cake that, once complete, will support a range of costumed film characters in a high-kicking song-and-dance routine to advertise a comparative insurance calculator. The scene will culminate with a confetti bomb set off by the special effects workshop two doors down from Sets & Devices. But all that razzmatazz under bright studio lights is yet to come. I am seated in the front of a pickup as Nawawie Mathews narrates the extreme pressures of the set-building business: 'If we are late, it's the end of us.' Sets & Devices is geared up for big builds, he adds later. They relish the impossible and get the most ridiculous lead times on projects. 'Over the years we have done some amazing stuff in the shortest possible times,' he adds. A life-size elephant with flappable ears that can host a crowd of partygoers on its back? Check. A giant cheese that will dwarf a human actor to make them appear mouse-sized? Check. A period house that will rock and crumble on a rotating axle into the sea? Check. Mathews agrees that a lot can happen in postproduction, but to get the real look and feel, nothing beats an actual setbuild. At Macsteel, 70 lengths of 25 square tubing of 1.6 thickness is added up by Billy, with tattoos on her arms and a wealth of experience in engineering. Back at the workshop in Salt River, off the key spine of Voortrekker Road that joins the city centre with its northern suburbs, a team of nine full-time staff will make a circular base from this square tubing, brace it and reconfigure. Mathews already has the modular build in his head. The bottom tier will be in quarters; the second tier in halves; the third and fourth tiers full, he tells me on the journey back, light, smaller and easier to carry and assemble. They may arrive on site to find the location is on the tenth floor, for instance, so the build must always be nimble. Mathews should be at mosque now, it is nearly 12:30 on a Friday but 'it's between me and my God' when a deadline kicks in. It evens out in the end, he adds, catching hours here and taking them there. Today: 'I'm kicking in.'

Back in the office, Mathews sketches things on the computer. His job is largely client-facing and then overseeing aspects of production and quality control as well as pitching in with the physical build – usually metal- or woodwork. It all begins with translating an initial sketch from clients into something more technical and three-dimensional and this is where the digital sketching comes in. Mathews was a pipefitter and boilermaker who trained in mechanical engineering before running a clothing manufacturing company until cheaper imports gave that a knock. He is wearing a T-shirt that reads *afterthefall*, in reference to recent nationwide student protests about decolonization and financial access, pushed-up sunglasses, combat pants and flipflops. The desk is cluttered and the waste basket is full. Behind his head is a framed piece of textile: blank canvas. The fan is on. Both landlines are down. And they have a crappy little website, he adds, but it makes no real difference since they operate on word of mouth. 'Most places nowadays, they have these fantastic websites, but when you go there and actually deal with them, the service is shoddy. The quality is poor. So we are not big on the social media pages.'

Tomorrow, they will sort the plywood to make the tracking board, which is the cladding for the tiered cake, from white 6-mm MDF. They will use wide-flanged pop rivets spaced to look like part of the detail. The boards will not be riveted until they are on site. They will lay this all out as an octagon. Cut the circle in four and four again. The very first act in this complex puzzle is to inscribe a 6-m-diameter circle on the concrete workshop floor and then from this layout to work out the angles for the board. With some pace, the build kicks in. Mathews kneels down with chalk in hand to draw that very first shape. He makes recalibrations in his head and on his cell phone calculator, then drills in a screw to mark the centre point. The team sets up the skeleton using tape measure, string, a square pencil and drill. The rods from Macsteel get offloaded and replaced with some rugby poles made earlier for another commercial, stacked for delivery. A bench is spray-painted. Things wind down. It's Friday and people want to get home.



## Shot 2

**ACTION:** Initially, the cake was supposed to rotate, but budget and time constraints ultimately keep the design stationary. The commission expands to include a door that must look like the door in a set – a painted flat, in film parlance – that will swing open for the key character, a meerkat, to step forward into another world. A cherry tree gets added to the wish list, in a riot of pink blossoms, and a manhole cover on a raised platform. Later, it is decided a real tree at the filming location will better stand in and the fake tree is cancelled; they build it anyway to possibly sell on as a prop.

The entire setbuild of cake, door, tree and manhole cover should take ten days of regular working hours to complete, the team estimates. The production process is a complex, hierarchical and border-hopping one, since 90 per cent of the originating clients are based overseas, explains Bobby de

Beer, manager of Sets & Devices. He runs his business with an unlikely combination of steely resolve and a kind eye that grants both people and things a second chance. The work is very cyclical, driven primarily by seasons and exchange rates. South African summer is silly season when the workshop is a productive din and eerily quiet in the brief lulls between jobs. A regional drought given front-page coverage helped make those lulls in 2018 deeper. The set builders are not good at waiting. They find a multitude of odd jobs to do instead: renovating a house, turning the legs of a table, welding chairs, assembling a replica sofa. Some have specialist mechanical skills and they use them, often tackling things no-one would touch, as De Beer puts it – straightening the chassis of a write-off or remodelling a motorbike from scratch. But when a new job card walks in the door, an adrenalin surge is palpable. The deadline is always short and immovable.



### Shot 3

ACTION: The art director for the shoot, Ninon de Klerk, also runs Artappel prop house opposite Sets & Devices in a parent design company called Artichoke. De Klerk, an architect by training, is a major and long-standing client, and she pops in and out of the workshop to confer on the build's progress. The cake armature is at its heart. The rolled steel must be cut in the correct dimensions and welded together. This is a specialty for Luke Lentin – welding and sheetmetal work. He says: 'In this kind of a job, we can't help but work under pressure because they want everything *yesterday* . . . My part of the deal is getting it done as soon as I possibly can because I do the skeleton. That has to be done quickly and perfectly because people have got to build on that.' Lentin has been with Sets & Devices about 20 years now. On his feet all day, he ends his shift with a grubby face from the metalworking visor and supported by a crutch for a sore knee. He always wears blue jeans and a long-sleeved shirt on his tall and lanky frame. His fingers stick out of cut-off gloves that keep the shape of his hand when he sheds them onto the tabletop. Recalling a previous build that was memorable, Lentin draws with his finger in the dust of the table to demonstrate the shape of a giant cheese so large it had to be transported on the back of an articulated lorry. He is one of the first to arrive in the mornings, driving his old Mercedes-Benz and bringing along his colleague Aristote (Ari) Manza, who also lives in the northern suburbs.

Manza is tall and slim, a runner who is training for the ultra-marathon. When he arrived in South Africa in 2013 from the Democratic Republic of Congo, he couldn't speak any English but is now conversant. 'I love it,' he says of his work. 'I enjoy it, every part. I am making good relationships with everyone. Each and every place I am going I am meeting different kinds of people.' Manza is a dexterous set builder who learnt his carpentry trade from his father and his father before him: 'That is what we are doing back in our family – grandfather, father, brother, uncle.' Manza is also a deft sewer and sets up an impromptu station one day, making new seat covers

for a car. He bends over a long train of black material flowing to the floor wearing a red and white long-haired wig and black puffer jacket with a red scarf looped in an elegant knot at his throat. Two powerful globes illuminate the unlikely installation. When Manza leaves the company for broader horizons in Belgium later that year (2018), his sewing station remains behind. His description of set building suggests iterative design thinking. 'That is what we are doing. We make something smaller, put it together and it grows – like the cake.' He thumps his knuckles of his one hand into the other four times to drive home his next point. 'With sets, when the pressure comes, you have to push. You have to push.' Manza wears a soft blue cap, like a butcher's, perched on the top of his head, and pitches in with the build.

Over the ensuing days, the team constructs the cake armature in interlocking pieces. Exact measurements and design recalibrations are sketched with a pencil on scrap paper or directly onto wood surfaces. While building the cake skeleton, the team also assembles a stage for a student play on the side. Its elevated platform is reached by a ladder. The revolving door also starts to take shape. It goes through three versions of working drawings. The door gets hinged into a frame but one side will not close. Some wood is sliced off. The pediment is made with wood and Perspex; budget constraints mean different solutions for things. The pediment needs to be more arched. Some glue and paint are used to age it. Later on, the alignment of the bricks is out of whack. After some argy-bargy about tools, the design is finally resolved. The bricks get pulled off and put back on again. The recalled tree is complete. Some real foliage is attached to its branches as a final flourish. At day's end, the set builders cool themselves off with a high-pressure air hose. Brett Blake, set builder and de facto workshop foreman, opens a beer and passes it around.

**Shot 4**

ACTION: The circular steel frame is lying on the floor with clamps placed at equidistant intervals along its perimeter. Later, the team puts the entire construction together and welds it in place. Everyone peels off into subgroups to get the jobs done. Offcuts and dust accumulate in the workshop, so does banter. The radio is broadcast from an old sound system in the kitchen. The chef, Liso Mkiva, who doubles as a proficient set builder, daily rings a brass bell to summon the crew for lunch.

The cake's tiers have special wooden hoists that secure them for welding. The welding torch and angle grinder are going all day. Blake is the locus. Today, his trilby has a feather in it and when the day is done, he hangs the hat on the gas tank of the welding machine. A large cylindrical white tube is cut and then painted by Xolile Siyana to create the cake's centrepiece. The team tests the structure for stability. When complete, the steel armature is disassembled into its component parts while work begins on the tracking boards. The wood must be cut to size and painted, ready for cladding on site.



Blake joined the set-building team around 2010. He used to work in the car industry, doing vehicle bodywork and related mechanics. That industry took a knock with the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 and he moved on, ending up at Olympic Trucking down the road before joining De Beer. It's give and take in the workshop, he says. You learn a lot and get to show people a lot as well. 'Also, I've met some amazing people just working here. Because the place just attracts . . . good energy. People come around, artists, and it's been really nice. I've helped out with projects, if I'm not busy.'

Each day is full of subplots, says Mathews, and they require constant recalibration. There is also physical risk involved. Lentin has a bandaged left index finger and blood is seeping through the seams. Pushed a wrong button. He self-bandages and swears by the power of spit. 'Works like a bomb.' Then he makes himself a special glove, replacing the index finger with the thumb from another glove to accommodate his swollen digit, and carries straight on.

The final touch to the tiered cake is Vuyani Alfred Ramayana on hands and knees, trimming the edges of the cladding. It is strenuous and sweaty work. The cladding and its corresponding armature are finally colour-coded so they can get pieced back together on site. Two of the smaller circular steel tiers are positioned on edge while the trimming goes on. Lentin gets between them and mimics a hamster scrabbling inside a wheel, paws going.

### Shot 5



ACTION: The cake has left the workshop. Cape Town Film Studios is about 35 kilometres from Salt River, wedged between polar socioeconomic conditions: the sprawling township of Khayelitsha and the leafy winelands of Stellenbosch. The studios are easily visible from the N2 motorway leading out of the city, landmarked by large pirate ships built for the TV series *Black Sails*. Its five studios are larger than aeroplane hangars. The CEO stops via Segway by the latest addition to this infrastructure and remarks upon the studio's high-end soundproofing. He seems a bit put out that the only sets allotted to this prize space are a wooden door on wheels and a manhole cover. The team carefully transfer those sets on site, 'carrying the egg' as they call it. But even now, new instructions are coming in. A different coat of paint needs to be added: the door must be charcoal and glossed while the bricks need more ochre. Another bit of reconstruction has to happen

so the door can move flush to the ground when it swings open. Broken telephone, is how De Beer puts this last-minute work, and it takes some doing. At lunchtime, there is an impromptu football match outside. Later, when all the extras have arrived, the director sits in a chair and a man with a megaphone instructs the assembled cast to rehearse ad nauseum a scene they will later film. A line of interested observers are perched on the few available chairs and dozens of extras take up the floor. In this rehearsal, a two-dimensional meerkat puppet on a wooden stick dances through the doors with his human puppeteer to a jingle that soon becomes a vicious earworm. Lights! Cameras! Action! And a line about Tuesday being payday. A woman stands behind each door, to pull them open on cue, and gets the timing slightly off. They are supposed to open on the *i* of night but are opening on the *gh* instead, the megaphone intones in a British accent. 'I know it's silent . . . so don't wait for the *gh* ok?' Silence! . . . Lights! Camera! Action!

### Shot 6



ACTION: The clinching scene is the singing and dancing cake. It's assembled by the Sets & Devices team in the Stage 5 film studio next door. They use a metal detector to find the armature to attach the cladding. Professional riggers use a crane to set up lights and hoist a green-screen curtain from roof to floor. They navigate aerial walkways that interlock just metres from the ceiling. Safety checks find the cake wanting and the set builders must source planks over four metres long to better secure the structure. That done, De Klerk attaches a skirt of blue fabric around each cake tier fringed by a row of LEDs. A rigger tests a two-dimensional meerkat on the top tier, then a three-dimensional puppet, then a stick with green squares, a silver ball and a colour chart. The cake is now ready. Bring on the fruit! And a series of actors file in one by one. After dress rehearsals with a French dance instructor, feet and music reverberating around the cavernous interior, it is time for the full fruit ensemble. Film characters including Marvel's Deadpool are interspersed with gladiators. There is an astronaut, a deep-sea diver with an old-fashioned helmet, women in bonnets, men in military regalia, all doing synchronized high kicks. And 5-6-7-8. *Rolling!* Four high-pitched beats repeat, and 5-6-7-8. The dance begins again. The camera rigging lowers. *Aaaaand CUT!*

From a perch at the back of the room, multiple views of the cake are visible through camera screens. Large crosses in viewfinders are echoed by orange crosses on the greenscreen curtains. The walkie-talkie orders the director a flat white ('a proper one'). Video replay at the corner table is agreed: they should soften the blue of the sky. Trial runs resume followed by confetti discussions. One man has his hands in the air with his fingers coming down like spiders to show how the confetti should rain. The technical crew scurries between marked boxes packed and unpacked like Russian nesting dolls. Pozzy drive. Action box. Rope box. Every piece of equipment is modular or on wheels. CREW identifiers hang around necks. In the far corner, the manhole cover on its raised square platform waits, balanced upon paint cans, for its 15 seconds when an actor will jump onto it as a

kind of landing pad. A man has injured his finger and comes to the on-call medic at the back of the room. The medic has just attended to a woman who also injured her fingers digging in Cape Flats sand for a side scene. 'Are we going to get this into third gear or what?' a voice interjects for the final take. Gravitron, the special effects team, co-ordinates a confetti bomb to explode at just the right moment.

### Shot 7



**ACTION:** The breakdown of the cake takes place on-site, with angle grinders, over a weekend while the main shoot moves location into the city centre. There, Gravitron fakes 2,500 square metres of snow for a street scene. Cleaning up all the wet paper is the hardest part. Eight casuals and four crew start at 2 p.m. and end at 11 p.m. As snow goes it was a fairly easy setup, says Michael Mostert, a pyrotechnician and coordinator at Gravitron – it was just big. There were over 500 extras involved in that shoot, he adds. Mostert says the best part about the job is that every

morning you eat breakfast in a different location. 'Sometimes you're in the city centre on Heritage Square, sometimes you're in Kogel Bay and you can see the dolphins in the surf . . . You are shooting in the mountains, you are shooting here and there, so it's always different stuff all the time. But you also need to concentrate on what you are doing.' Indeed, Cape Town has become a popular filming destination – in part because it can stand in for so many other kinds of places, according to a statement from the Cape Town Film Commission. This global range is reflected in the upstairs reception office at Cape Town Film Studios. A row of clocks marks major international time zones: Los Angeles, Toronto, New York, London, Berlin, Cape Town, Mumbai, Beijing. Downstairs, a series of makeup rooms have large mirrors framed by naked lightbulbs. Outside, the broken-down cake gets stacked in pieces onto a flatbed truck and carted back to the Sets & Devices workshop.

### Shot 8



ACTION: The blue cloth that was draped around the cake – *High Class Quality, Made in China* in gold lettering on its fringe – sits in a crumpled heap on a pulley in the Salt River workshop, and then disappears. The metal stage in its modular parts migrates outside to the porch where it soon earns a second skin of rust. It languishes adjacent to the manhole cover, which keeps company with an abandoned swing. The reject tree, which never made it to the film shoot or the prop house, shifts around the washbasins where various accoutrements hang from its branches like a magic inveigler until its fake bark peels away. The metal skeleton then joins its retired compatriots sitting on the porch. ‘We keep a large stock of materials for just-in-case. If it has to happen in a hurry, then you have it in-house and can use it,’ says De Beer of the graveyard of former sets in the workshop’s backyard. Sure enough, the cake is reincarnated a couple of months later when its metal armature is welded by Lentin into two new leases of life: burglar bars for a studio and roof tresses for a newly built shed.

### Shot 9

ACTION: The commercial takes about two months to appear on the client’s website. It is 60 seconds long. The cake features for two to three seconds cumulatively. The team at Sets & Devices has not seen the end result. In fact, nobody shows much curiosity during the build or after about where the set is going or what it will do once it gets there. ‘We tend to be a bit laissez-faire about the whole thing,’ says De Beer. ‘Very often we have done builds for a commercial and [when we see it] we don’t notice our build anymore. So we have lost interest in that.’ The advert is called *Hooray*. It celebrates a full year of a movie ticket deal – hence its journey through the seasons with the cherry tree representing spring. Watching the final storyline from the polished end-point is uncanny. Everything is back to front. The revolving doorway features early on. It is indeed cast as a stage flat, which mimics a film studio. The animated singing meerkat that walks through the swinging doors is a marketing character for a rewards programme that gives movie tickets in exchange for buying a product using a comparative online tool.

As the director's storyboard describes it, 'the door has acted as a magic portal and now instead of being in the studio, we are outside, in the real world'. That real world is an apocalyptic film where soldiers high-kick to the sights and sounds of warfare artfully wired up by Gravitron. The advert is structured by zooming in on particular objects that become something else, creating transitions from one scene to the next. The open end of an assault weapon becomes the end of a megaphone the meerkat uses in front of a romantic scene. The manhole cover triggers a reverberation that segues into an epic crescendo of the singing and dancing film characters on the cake, showering confetti onto Cape Town's city centre.

The final frame of this fantastical scenario pans out to reveal the starring meerkat is in fact watching a musical on the cinema screen, with a friend. And with that final frame, we understand: everything we have just seen was make-believe.

#### Research interviews

Brett Blake, 22 February 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Bobby De Beer, 9 May 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Luke Lentin, 20 February 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Aristote Manza, 28 March 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Nawawie Mathews, 8 February 2018, Sets & Devices, Salt River

Michael Mostert, 14 March 2018, Gravitron, Salt River



# *Ordinary Walking, Ordinary Writing*

Some Thoughts in Preparation for an Essay  
as Yet Unwritten

Naomi Stead

Introductory reading compiled by Robin Wilson

# Reading of Naomi Stead's Ordinary Walking, Ordinary Writing

Compiled by Robin Wilson

## Beginnings: Judgement and Genre

Starting with an incidence of judgement (of anonymous, academic 'peer review'), prompting a consideration of this text in the light of Naomi Stead's wider reflections on criticism and of the role of genre and institution in defining the possibilities or limits of judgement.

The peer reviewer: the incorporation of 'on- and off-screen' voices in the production of the academic text (to 'render it less opaque'). (A curiously strong convention of institutional propriety within academia that we have challenged through the methods, format and intentions of Transversal Writing but, in doing so, encounter different layers to 'anonymity' and its construction).

The 'opacity' of the scholarly text – a core object of critique for the transversal text?

Naomi Stead gives consistent attention to genre, sub-genre, counter- and in-between genres, in a 'mashing of genres'.

## On Spatial Stories, 'Watching' and 'Loiterature' . . .

Walking and thinking get tuned to a bodily rhythm of pace and breath in an invitation into the writing process, and as an invitation to *inhabit the body of the writer for a while*.

To work on foot: The sensuous mobility of a slow commute. The ordinary, habitual walk to work; the ordinary affect. These hyphenated possibilities of walking-writing, walking-thinking.

'Ambulatory thinking' (David Andrew), thinking on the move.<sup>1</sup>

Walking as a way of reading the city and/or writing about it, escaping the 'I', becoming another, one of the many

moving bodies . . . However, for me, the related acts of walking and writing bring me closer to 'I', even if in strong relation with the places, the paths, the rhythms of walking. Is it then through walking that the 'I' becomes exposed, fragile?

*it is when I walk*

*. . . my voice between*

Roaming the streets of the ordinary, sensation analysis . . . a radical empiricism

. . . the root shooting out forming *entanglements* . . . But tamed through reflection, and recoding, and the meta account.

Here is a writerly performance of the body's disposition that is also a space and time of gestation: This is a text about a text to come. About *the not-yet*.

'The desire to produce a fragment of a text that is yet to come into existence.

A thought about the not yet, the thing to come.'

Evoking the unwritten. And the ending as beginning.

This peripatetic text (peripatetic across the city, across time and through writerly genres) conjures an as yet absent text. It desires the 'new' from the 'bog of reality'. Knowingly, it does not simply

rely on 'newness' to spring from the raw material of urban space and from found things chanced upon in the narrative meander. It values perception/expression in the encounter with the 'real', but desire is invoked/captured through a redrafting of writerly disposition in a reflexive questioning of genre and subjectivity, tested out in a re-evaluation of the 'ordinary'.

'Expanding the particular to the universal' within this mode of peripatetic attention. Scale and the architectural; the loss of determinate scale and the invocation of the utopic: 'to have no scale is to have *no place*' (Eric de Bruyn on the work of artist Mel Bochner).<sup>2</sup>

'A boring walk', often ugly and uncomfortable.

(Could this discomfort/malaise also be a sign/symptom of living in the present with the yet to come?)

The 'shame and exhilaration' of assuming the role of the tourist, albeit a 'reflexive' tourist.

Reflexivity and shame: perhaps 'shame' functions here as something like an afterglow of an older, modernist drive to 'negation' – a (reflexive, self-questioning) form of antithesis and revolt as the precondition for innovation/the radical?

'The most ordinary forms of watchfulness.'

(Clarity . . . carrying knowledge lightly through the everyday . . . spare precise gentle grasp.)

This 'watchfulness' is different to the act of simply turning one's regard towards the overlooked and or the otherwise trivial, as it suggests something more insular that requires protection: the 'watch', guardedness, not simply a 'free' regard onto that which intrigues or that which is desired in a fluid passage of encounter. Here the walker is also seemingly 'beating the bounds' (ancient practice of walking the boundary of a parish – but here perhaps of a conception the self); 'on watch' for change?

### **The Necessity of the 'I' and Its 'Rogue Intensities' . . .**

Paying attention to the 'ordinary', 'overlooked' and the 'trivial' in order to assert the 'I' of the text, the autobiographic mode – but that 'ordinary' context is ultimately a *stage* for the I's work with 'entanglements' (past and present relations, professional and personal) and an uncertain temporality. A 'thicket' of entanglements lies behind the ordinary (the veil of the 'spare precise'), where the 'I' risks dissolution in a search for greater definition (?)

*Through your words, I get a clearer understanding as to why the personal needs to be written: because it is always another story, the particular one . . .*

'Rogue intensity': can an 'I' ever be a rogue intensity?

*when no one else*

*that time disappears*

*that I taste words . . .*

*unripe. bitter, sweet. repeat.*

Walking . . . is where the 'I' dissolves? Or perhaps oscillates between being outlined against the background and merged with it.

Re-calibrating figure-ground.

What are the limits of subjectivity when written from the 'I', as subjectivity clearly delineated, embodied? I think back to the text's polyphony: to the 'you' of the author's Stockholm walk, to the non-human, and the non-particular voice.

The dissolution of the subject: desirable, achievable, if only for a moment? What would happen in that moment? Would the walker become the highway she is walking by, in a way that reveals something about the world?

Why is it that I always feel guilt aside the trodden path?

Your clear positioning as queer, as 'other' than a universal male, and the obvious necessity to seek the first person to be

able to take part in what is called 'dis-course' came as a revelation to me. 'Pride is a refusal to be shamed by witnessing the other as being ashamed of you.' – So where does shaming start inside the overwhelming presence of male discourse? Reading those lines, I immediately situate myself in the uncomfortable position of jumping in and out of a male discourse, claiming, as you say, 'an unmediated access to truth' – and simultaneously, violently rejecting it. Being at the same time radically estranged from it and granted the offer to inhabit it.

I inhabit a voice that seems to include or exclude me at will, depending on the multiple stages of academic encounter where I perform. This awkward position at the edge is, in fact, rather solitary as it involves being simultaneously 'othered' and normative. But what Donna Haraway explains as 'situated knowledges' never occurs by oneself, it always occurs together, as all those particularities come to resonate, to produce what she calls feminist objectivity. *I never understood something so clearly about myself, and that was an immediate reaction to your text.*

Vulnerabilities we induce through our writings . . .

A slippage between 'I' and 'you' and the unwanted curiosity of an audience about the identity of the 'I'. In proffering the first

person through recourse to the 'peripatetic' mode of reflexive, watchful writing, the 'I's presence in discourse is also made complex through the ambiguity of the you that accompanies it. (Suggesting the critical structuring of the text's notion of 'weakness', perhaps?)<sup>3</sup>

### Endings: From Forestalling to 'What's Happened?' . . .

To forestall the next walk . . . putting off the walk, intending to go out on that walk . . . goes off finally on that walk . . .

Forestalling and anticipation/ forestalling as anticipation. Writing, as the act/ gestation in the present, as forestalling/ anticipation:

*right here: is language*

*here and now. my language is*

Forestalling events to one's advantage – hesitancy or strategy?

An understanding of how writing wields time: understanding the difference between 'what's happened' and 'what happened'; inscribing present experience into past and future.

We conclude with the promise: Or the ambulance dispatch answering service, not 'what happened', but 'what's happened': this in place of a Melbourne walk, produces, perhaps unintentionally a state of emergency . . . don't give me your nar-

rative, lest a life be lost, give it straight up, the important details.

Again, the demand for brevity, clarity, no extraneous details, for life depends on this . . .

- 1 See: Kim Gurney, *The Art of Public Space: Curating and Re-imagining the Ephemeral City* (London, Palgrave, 2015), 58
- 2 Eric de Bruyn, 'Alfaville, or the Utopics of Mel Bochner', *The Grey Room*, no. 10 (2003), 76-111: 87.
- 3 See: Louis Marin, 'Critical Remarks on Enunciation: The Question of the Present in Discourse', in: Werner Hamacher and David E. Welbery (eds.), *On Representation: Louis Marin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 373-387.

# *Ordinary Walking, Ordinary Writing*

Some Thoughts in Preparation for an Essay  
as Yet Unwritten

Naomi Stead

## **Tell Me What's Happened?**

In March of 2018, a small article appeared in the daily newspaper in Melbourne, Australia. It seemed an item motivated by public benefit and education, but perhaps also fell into the category of the curio. It described the effect of different linguistic formulations used by phone dispatchers at ambulance stations, when someone telephoned in need of urgent medical attention. The story was about the difference between the dispatcher asking 'what happened' – which tended to send the caller off into a long-winded narrative account with much extraneous detail – and the dispatcher asking 'what's happened' – which caused the caller to report, quickly and directly, the sequence of events that led to the medical emergency. The difference between these two modes of communication – the division of 'what' and 'what's', the single letter, the contraction of 'has', the tense of this – was measured in long seconds, even minutes, and could easily be the difference between life and death. Accordingly, the dispatchers were now all saying: tell me what's happened.

I haven't been able to stop thinking about this article. I have been struck, even obsessed, at the potency of this seemingly tiny linguistic shift. There

you are, lying on the side of the road, the lights all gleam and dazzle in your half-closed eyes, colours blurring one into another as your life bleeds away across the bitumen, while the person who is supposed to be saving you stands there with the phone pressed to their ear, looking up at the sky and down at their feet, shuffling about, waving their arms and searching for the right word as they range back to their childhood, reaching deep into the past to fully and properly tell the story, the narrative, of how things got to be where they are, here, this instant, while you lie on the ground, departing for the next life even as they speak. That added apostrophe of contraction, that shift in tense from simple past to present perfect. So: tell me what happened?

### On Walking and Writing

The topic on which I have most focused my experimental writing practice is walking. Walking and writing, writing on walking, a walking-writing. The literary precedents for this are well known: Wordsworth was a famous walker, and his poems full of walks. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)<sup>1</sup> and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)<sup>2</sup> both feature protagonists undertaking an observant, evocative, memory-filled and ruminative walking tour around a specific, actual city – Dublin and London respectively. More recently, Iain Sinclair and W.G Sebald have produced books structured entirely around walking, with Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997)<sup>3</sup> and Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* (1998)<sup>4</sup> full of descriptions of the experience of walking, and places seen on foot. Meanwhile, the connection between walking and literature is theorized via concepts such as the 'spatial story'<sup>5</sup> and 'loiterature'<sup>6</sup> – a literary-critical mode of thinking and writing that wanders, is digressive and discursive, that writes waywardly from the margins, and pays close attention to the overlooked and trivial.

Meanwhile, Francesco Careri has described the various incarnations of 'walking as an aesthetic practice' in twentieth-century art and architecture, tracing the performance and significance of walking through Dada and Sur-



realism, via the Lettrists and Situationist Internationale, and on to Land Art and the work of Stalker, among others.<sup>7</sup>

Urban walking, in particular, has both freedom and the charm of disrepute. Rebecca Solnit, in her magnificent book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, writes that:

*The history of both urban and rural walking is a history of freedom and of the definition of pleasure. But rural walking has found a moral imperative in the love of nature that has allowed it to defend and open up the countryside. Urban walking has always been a shadier business, easily turning into soliciting, cruising, promenading, shopping, rioting, protesting, skulking, loitering, and other activities that, however enjoyable, hardly have the high moral tone of nature appreciation.*<sup>8</sup>

Solnit has started a list here, and I can't help but think of more synonyms for walking (skip wander plod sidle gambol stride march mince saunter mooch stalk amble) and of how walking becomes a performance and bodily attitude, a mimetic response to both internal mood and external terrain. So what then is it for a woman to walk in the city, a queer woman, a queer woman essayist and architecture critic? What is the role of judgment here, of evaluation, of description, of narration? These are things I seek to discover, in a series of walking writings that meander, pulling things in my wake (books, ideas, images, people) in an ongoing project, a continuing fascination, of which the essay that is promised though not yet written here is another instantiation.

### **On Being 'Brave'**

A disquieting moment: I receive the comments back on a paper I have submitted following an open call for contributions to an edited book. The call has asked explicitly for speculative, experimental, open-ended texts, perhaps even radical ones, and I have taken the opportunity to submit something rather windy and loose, not heavily embroidered with footnotes, just

referential enough to establish its own credibility without being weighed down by scholarship. The essay is, as usual, written in the first person, and reflects on my own experience, and that of others of my acquaintance, as they live variously unconventional family lives within conventional housing stock: the accommodations and constructions that this brings, the effects of normalization on various modes of 'queer' subjectivity and elective family, of our lives within buildings.

None of this is in itself disquieting – I am not worried about my own paper, which to my eye is a fairly commonplace exercise in reflexive academic writing, taking theoretical ideas and locating them in the minutiae of the actual life of actual people. But I am disturbed by the referee's comments, which describe the paper as 'brave, autodidactic, insightful and very well written'. Why autodidactic? What aspect of it seems self-taught? But more importantly, why 'brave'? To my eye, it isn't brave at all – it's one of my more tame efforts, and nowhere near the level of risk or self-exposure that other writers are willing to advance. The fact that it seemed not brave to me, and yet brave to the reviewer, is alarming – is there something I am not seeing here? The corollary to courage is foolhardiness. Am I being brave, or stupid?

I do not think of such work as brave, nor do I particularly want it to be, or at least not if this 'brave' is, as I suspect, a synonym for 'exposing' or 'confessional'. Writing in the first person, and with a certain presence of the authorial persona in the text, might be described as 'brave' in the sense of bending the conventions of scholarly writing – but only to someone for whom that was risky to the point of problematic. 'Brave' might also be used here in a murkier sense – it might be brave to 'out' myself as part of a sub-altern group, to undermine my own authority or status, to damage my own credibility as a scholar by being overly partisan, overly personal. This would be brave in the eyes of one who did not share that same status, or one who wouldn't dream of relinquishing their 'higher', normative status within a text – which is, in my books, not brave. I've been reading Maggie Nelson, who

quotes Sara Ahmed: 'The moment of queer pride is a refusal to be shamed by witnessing the other as being ashamed of you.'<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore: 'well written'. What greater condemnation could there be? All style and no substance; pretty words and no content; a confection. The icing without the cake.

### **Something Afoot**

I have written three papers about walking over the past ten years, three essays about walking, writing, place and subjectivity, each of which can be seen as a prelude and promissory note for a fourth essay, as yet unwritten, here being conceived.

The three existing texts each explores a distinct urban context: respectively Stockholm, Sydney and Brisbane. They build upon one another, quite explicitly, each addressing a different set of ideas within a larger constellation examining walking as a critical-aesthetic practice, how this intersects with a queer feminist embodiment and subjectivity, and hence also authorial position and voice; how the sensorium and human body can be framed as a perceiving instrument, taking account of the built and natural environment and their entanglements; and how an author can register such experience in writing – as craft and literary art, as well as scholarly argument, framed within genres, tones, styles, voices and conventions of its own.

In all this I follow Jane Rendell, and her exploration of 'spatial stories' as the 'kind of thinking that corresponds to walking, one that follows an itinerary, keeps up a certain pace and remains in constant motion, moving from one thing to another, engaging only in passing'.<sup>10</sup> Rendell links this to historical movements in art and philosophy, theory and architecture, seeing the spatial story as 'a theoretical device that allows us to understand the urban fabric in terms of narrative relationships between spaces, times, and subjects'.<sup>11</sup>

Each of my three texts is a narrative, yet falls very distinctly within the essay form. They assay, try out, go forth, come back. They are works of creative non-fiction; they are experimental (to varying degrees); they are personal, while trying hard to be neither sentimental nor confessional; they seek to locate ideas and insights (both theoretical and experiential) within space and time, and string it all together with the enforced linearity of a walk – a circuit, a loop.

The three essays are in various degrees of completion – the first two already published (one in a journal of architecture theory, the other in an interdisciplinary journal of feminist and gender studies research), the third a complete but arguably failed draft, as yet unpublished.

### **Three Walking Essays**

The first of the essays is about a Stockholm walk. Titled 'If on a Winter's Day a Tourist',<sup>12</sup> it is an account of being a stranger and a tourist in Stockholm, of the experience and novelty and thrill of walking, throughout the course of a single day, through the city in the cold, and also (perhaps incongruously, perhaps not) a kind of emplaced erotics of urban space, enacted via homage to a different scholarly essay and its authors – Eeva Jokinen and Soile Veijola's essay 'The Body in Tourism', and particularly their device of a dialogical conversation between an 'I' and a 'you'.<sup>13</sup> Part of the pleasure of the essay is its bending of genre conventions, its quasi-fictional, semi-magic-realist weaving of scholarship and quotation into story, as the scholarly literature was integrated into the experiential account, quite literally emplaced in the landscape as described.

The second essay is about a Sydney walk. 'Writing the City, or, the Story of a Sydney Walk' is, as the name suggests, an account of a walk around Sydney, but this time as a prodigal return – of one who has lived in the city but then left and returned, noticing the changes, in a narrative suffused with melancholy and loss.<sup>14</sup> In the essay this walk, too, took place in the course

of a single day, and was equally threaded through with interpersonal affect – as the narrator walked a circuit of the places she had known and lived, going to visit her former girlfriend while waiting for her new girlfriend to finish work. At the level of structure, the text followed a pattern of alternation – flipping or stepping between descriptive (theoretical) and discursive (radically empirical) modes. The meta-narrative was a reflection on the previous, Stockholm essay – on the process of writing and producing it, on producing and performing experimental writing and the effects of this, on feedback from friends and colleagues and audiences and also, crucially, from editors and anonymous referees, as it was stitched and re-stitched into a scholarly paper. This second paper was thus an instance of ‘research on research’, an abstracted methodological reflection, which was nevertheless grounded in the specific details of a later, specific walk.

The third essay is about a Brisbane walk. Titled ‘To Work, on Foot: The Sensuous Mobility of a Slow Commute’, it addresses a different city again: Brisbane, a sub-tropical city in the north of Australia, where I was living at the time of writing in 2014. While adhering to some of the structures of the other two papers (a single walk, presented as an account immersed in the minutiae of the city, thickly described, reflecting on other theoretical and conceptual questions in the space and time of a pedestrian journey) it was also an important departure. For one thing, it deliberately addressed what I called serial walking – a commuting walker’s path, retracing the same track, or deliberate variations of it, to the same destination, day after day, hence opening on to questions of familiarity and habit and, importantly, the *ordinary*.

The first two papers met with some small degree of success, or response, or at least to the extent that most papers meet success these days, when dropped into the void of academic publishing. But I have come to think of this third paper as a failure, and as potentially revealing in this failure, since it is unclear to me still whether it failed because of an impossibility in

the conception, an incompatibility in the proposed venue of publication (a scholarly journal of geography – not foregrounding the artifice of research and writing per se – focussed less on form and more on content) or perhaps an inadequacy in the writing and the writer (the inability to trans-mogrify such ‘ordinary’ material into something transcendent) or perhaps a simply insufficient amount of observation, not enough empirical research in the form of walking and looking – to provide the necessary ‘material’ that would make the essay succeed. The consideration of these questions may, indeed, form the basis of the fourth and succeeding paper, which is yet unwritten, and is here promised, elided, absent.

### **The Third Person Is Not I: The Queer Author, Queering Authorship**

To write academic essays in the first person is to be political. As a matter of principle and also politics, I make a point of framing my authorial voice as subjective, and my knowledge as particular to a given place and time and circumstance, interpreted quite openly and explicitly from a given standpoint. This is an ethical stance – making transparent the construction of knowledge, its specificity and individuation, its particularity. Also it is a feminist stance – writing women, or a woman, or a *queer* woman, into the corpus of architectural knowledge. But it also implies a particular mode of connection with a possible reader or audience: a collapsing of the cold disembodied distance of the third person universal, instead inviting the reader in, deliberately inhabiting the live body of the author, projecting the timbre and tone of a particular, intimate, authorial voice.

This has me wondering about queer authorship, and the possibilities of queering authorship, and the ways in which intellectual work and scholarship in architecture might (continue to) be queered through authorial register, which is to say writerly voice, or style, or perhaps even *orientation* in relation to disciplinary conventions. Such a mode might value the experiential and fleeting, the subjective and affective, the material and erotic, the trivial and radically specific, the incursion not only of the author into

the text, but the circumstances of the writing, the *now* of writing intruding into the *then* of the text. It might embody a certain scholarly polyamory, a certain promiscuity of genre, a bending of scholarly conventions – not as an outright rejection of them, but as a stretching and deformation, almost but not quite to the point of rupture.

Such a mode might imagine scholarly writing as itself a kind of flirtation (as per the work of Brady Burroughs) – using quotation and citation and reference and concepts of influence as a kind of elaborate mating dance, like that of the crane or flamingo or some other tall and stately bird, bending and flexing, its state of frolicsome excitement sublimated to the rituals of the form. It could be a romance, it could be a means of solicitation.

Such a method might be idiosyncratic. It might take the feminist dictum of the personal being political to a foppish level of exaggeration. More than merely seizing first-person subjectivity, such a mode might revel in the personal, shuttling between the genres of essay and memoir, fiction and non. Furthermore, it might present a very particular kind of first person – a snuffling, stuttering, curious, amorous, embodied, highly specific kind of character, part fact, part fiction, all construction. It might mean a certain inhabitation of the authorial persona, perhaps even an *occupation* of the first person, a camping out, a demonstration, a seizing of that place for the queers, for those of us on the margin, those who look askance.

Because: just as I myself have never been ‘normal’, likewise I have never presumed to occupy the scholarly third person as an authorial voice or stance. I was never normal, I was never universal; the third person never spoke for or through me and I never presumed to speak in and for it. I did not presume to represent others, but only and histrionically myself: with a radical (perhaps self-absorbed? perhaps narcissistic?) degree of subjectivity. I always stood outside the implied ‘we’ of the scholarly text – that we was not I. The third person universal is more than a voice, it is an autho-

rial position, a position of authority, from which the non-universalist person (the queer person, the woman) is always already excluded, or begrudgingly included.

Normative scholarly authorship, standard scholarly conventions, the universalist authorial position, is challenged by the queer individual and her always already 'other' authorial voice or persona. Queer subjectivity seems to lend itself to the contravention of conventions – writerly and otherwise. Perhaps there is something interesting in that: in the very weakness and contingency and specificity of a particular, single voice, telling stories. The trivia of it all. That's enough.

- 1 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, edited with an introduction by Jeri Johnson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1922]).
- 2 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Penguin, 1996 [1925]).
- 3 Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (London: Granta Books, 1997).
- 4 W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, translated by Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1998).
- 5 Alison Stenton, 'Spatial Stories: Movement in the City and Cultural Geography', in: Clare Bryant and Susan E. Whyman (eds.), *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay's Trivia* (1716) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 62-73.
- 6 Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).
- 7 Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2005).
- 8 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001), 173-174.
- 9 Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2015), 22



- 10 Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 188.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Naomi Stead, 'If on a Winter's Day a Tourist: Writing the Phenomenological Experience of Stockholm', *Architectural Theory Review*, vol. 14 (2009) no. 2, 108-118.
- 13 Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen, 'The Body in Tourism', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 11 (1994), 125-151.
- 14 Naomi Stead, 'Writing the City, or, The Story of a Sydney Walk', *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 18 (2010) no. 4, 226-245.

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### **Foray in a Modern Reserve: An Impounding Portrait of Land Use** Robin Wilson and Photolanguage (Nigel Green & Robin Wilson)

During research for the Arts Council funded project *East Sussex Modern* (2016), Photolanguage (Nigel Green & Robin Wilson), visited sites relating to the legacy of the modernist Borough and Water Engineer Sidney Little (1885-1961) in the county of East Sussex, U.K.. These included the impounding reservoirs of Powdermill (1932) and Darwell (1949). The landscapes surrounding the reservoirs have evolved into mature woodland nature reserves and represent complex terrains of land-use and property ownership. 'Foray in a Modern Reserve' (Part I), an image and text 'portrait' and re-imagining of these terrains, is a composite text, an assemblage of diverse texts of occupiers and users of these terrains over time, from Photolanguage's own observations made on site visits, to the archival records of Sidney Little's description of the reservoir infrastructure, to the accounts of UCL archaeologists, Angling and Ramblers clubs and local landowners. It is a vehicle through which to explore an experimental method of spatial writing at the intersection of archival research, visual and textual documentary practice, and visual and textual fiction-practice. Imagery interplays with the text's narrative structure to generate its own narrative and descriptive trajectories. Through the combination of different modes of the landscape's description, through its successive spatialization across different agendas of movement and occupation, 'Foray in a Modern Reserve' constructs a utopic portrait of the modern reservoir reserve. As a composite text, it traces the intersection and dispersal of desire and agency across the terrain as an 'inspection' that must discover and construct its own object, and propose its own figural 'solution' to the landscape's latent equations.

**Robin Wilson** is a lecturer in history and theory at the Bartlett School of Architecture teaching across post graduate and PhD programmes. He is author of *Image, Text, Architecture: The Utopics of the Architectural Media* (Routledge, 2015). His work on architectural representation and the utopian impulse has also appeared as chapters in books such as *Critical Architecture*

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(2007), *The Political Unconscious of Architecture* (2011), *Camera Constructs* (2012) and in the journals *Architectural Theory Review* and *The Journal of Architecture*. He is also co-founder of the collaborative art practice Photolanguage (Nigel Green & Robin Wilson) which revisits and re-imagines the legacy of modernism through arts-based methods. Photolanguage has exhibited in venues such as the Museum of Fine Art, Calais, The Royal Botanical Gardens, Copenhagen, The Museum of Garden History, London, the *Institut Français*, London and the Hub Space, Barbican Centre, London, and produced the *Brutalist Map of Paris* (Blue Crow Media, 2017).

### Offscreen: Making It and Faking It

Kim Gurney

This text of creative nonfiction follows the making of a film set in Cape Town – how it is assembled, where it goes, what it becomes, how it gets dis-assembled and recycled into other forms. It does so from the perspective of the set-builders, the architects of scaffolding for commercials and other events. The research includes observation, formal interviews and visual documentation. This particular set-build for an insurance client becomes a human-tiered cake, a door that swings open into another dimension, and a manhole cover that becomes a portal. Alongside, a former theatre set reincarnates into a festival late-night venue. The set acts as a prosthetic, a stand-in which straddles the liminal space of both making it and faking it. More deeply, the storyline considers the role of human ingenuity in a world where the handmade object gets repurposed into a techno-aesthetic device. The backstage viewpoint is pointedly focused upon how blue-collar artisans navigate logistics, scale and complexity to create inventive forms, and how their onward trajectories become enfolded into speculative circuits. It is also a story about place: the set-building workshop is located in a former train depot in a semi-industrial precinct facing urbanization pressures while the film studio is a Hollywood-esque hub of cutting-edge technologies. This story, in short, is about conjuring new

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imaginaries from a Cape Town site of making and how this may speak to a future world of work.

**Kim Gurney** holds a Next Generation Researcher position in the Centre for Humanities Research at University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Kim Gurney is a writer, academic and artist based in Cape Town, South Africa. She holds a long-standing research affiliation with the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town. This text emerges from her CHR research project, *Green Screen*, with thanks to Sets & Devices in particular Bobby De Beer and Nawawie Mathews. Kim 's interdisciplinary work is exemplified in two recent books: *August House is Dead, Long Live August House! The Story of a Johannesburg Atelier*, and *The Art of Public Space: Curating and Re-imagining the Ephemeral City*.

### Decolonising Your Island Imaginary

Hélène Frichot

Hélène Frichot's contribution offers an approach to decolonising through fiction, where cross-generational memories of family life in the Seychelles are used to critically illuminate colonial histories. The function of this experimental essay is to offer a preparatory test-site for a future project that may, or may not, come to fruition. What is at stake are processes of decolonisation, specifically of spatial memories, including the residual hold of colonial imaginaries and how these might be creatively critiqued. The story begins on an apparent island paradise, in the grounds of a colonial plantation house coloured sepia, shades of mahogany and amber hue, as all the world seemingly sleeps its way through siesta. An encounter is witnessed between a returned colonial brother and a younger sister the aftermath of which will concatenate through the following three parts of the projected novella. The second part takes place in Perth, the most geographically isolated city in the world, in hyper-saturated Super-8 colours, brilliant fuchsias, lilacs, yellows and blues. Following an evening of sun darkened children's'

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limbs lingering on a makeshift tarpaulin picnic blanket laid out on a backyard of buffalo grass, two girls sneak into the depths of a migrant family home, into an aunt's closed bedroom to paint their faces in eyeshadows and lipsticks, only to be suddenly discovered. Part three is sketched in cold translucent greys, and deep brown shadows, witness to a young woman venturing far from home. She is hosted by a reclusive family member in an old apartment on Rue Buffon overlooking the Jardin des Plantes, as she prepares herself for a year of study in a far-off land that is both familiar and strange. Sitting in a stone courtyard on campus, holding a book between her hands – attended on the right by the statue of a poet, and on the left by the statue of a biologist – she hears a noise as though the long-lost sea were approaching her. A massive swell of student bodies floods the courtyard, taking her up in its wake. She recognizes the voice of someone who cries out: *It is Forbidden to Forbid!* Finally, at the centre of Empire in royal blue, indigo, and chalk with burnt orange highlights, a moment of culmination will be discovered. Temporal registers begin to slip and slide: a young man suffers a humiliating sexual encounter as an older man is confronted ascending from the basement flat of a government in exile. A suite of colonial imaginaries is, from one scene to the next, composed and decomposed through processes of decolonisation.

**Hélène Frichot** is Professor of Architecture in the School of Architecture, KTH (Royal Institute of Technology) Stockholm, Sweden and director of Critical Studies in Architecture, well known for its critical feminist approach to the practices and theories of architecture. Her research is located between architecture and philosophy, a transdisciplinary location within which she considers architecture-writing to be her mode of creative and critical practice. In 2017 she was the recipient of a Riksbankens Jubileumsfond sabbatical grant, one outcome of which is the book *Creative Ecologies* (Bloomsbury 2018). She is a co-editor of *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* (Routledge 2017); *Deleuze and the City* (EUP 2016); and *Deleuze and Architecture* (EUP 2013) and the author of *How to Make Yourself a Feminist Design Power Tool* (AADR 2016) and *Dirty Theory: Troubling Architecture*

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(AADR 2019). In 2020 H     joins the Faculty of Architecture, Construction and Planning, University of Melbourne as Professor of Architecture and Philosophy.

### Ordinary Walking, Ordinary Writing

**Naomi Stead**

Naomi Stead pursues a theoretical inquiry into the relationship between writing and walking based on author's previous ficto-critical texts based in Stockholm, Sydney and Brisbane. The text was inspired by a small article that appeared in the daily newspaper in Melbourne, Australia in March 2018, which described the effect of different linguistic formulations used by phone dispatchers at ambulance stations, when someone telephoned in need of urgent medical attention. The story was about the difference between the dispatcher asking 'what happened' – which tended to send the caller off into a longwinded narrative account with much extraneous detail – and when the dispatcher asked 'what's happened' – which caused the caller to report, quickly and directly, the sequence of events that had led to the medical emergency. The difference between these two modes of communication – the division of 'what' and 'what's,' the single letter – was measured in long seconds, even minutes, and could easily be the difference between life and death.

**Naomi Stead** is Professor and Head of the Department of Architecture at Monash University, Australia. She is also Adjunct Professor in Architecture at the University of Queensland, and past President of the Society of Architectural Historians of Australia and New Zealand. Her research interests lie in architecture's cultures of re/production, mediation, and reception. She is an award-winning and widely published architecture critic, having written more than fifty commissioned feature and review articles in professional magazines over the past decade, and is presently a columnist for the San Francisco-based *Places Journal*, where she writes essays on concepts and mythologies within

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and without architecture. She is an experienced qualitative researcher, having undertaken a range of research projects assessing the social, cultural, and architectural significance of built architectural projects. She was the leader of the ARC Linkage project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership,' which led to the co-founding (with Justine Clark and others) of *Parlour*, an activist group advocating for greater gender equity in architecture.

### **Real Estates in Cyprus. A Diary.**

Anne Kockelkorn

This edited ethnographic diary, produced during a research and teaching stint in Cyprus, takes in the island landscape, politics and underlying economic forces dramatically shaping the environment in order to reveal a complex picture across a variety of scales and analytical registers. The aim of this diary is to understand the recent real-estate transactions launched by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and selling EU-Citizenship in tandem with real estate, particularly as high-end luxury development along the coast. This understanding of land ownership and real estate evolves around the notion of territoriality, which defines territory as a cultural and social product and which includes the Lefebvrian dimension of lived space. The fragmented form of the diary entry will allow to cut across the different registers mentioned above; the work of the editing process will consist in framing the subjective position of the self as a political.

**Anne Kockelkorn** is an architectural historian and urban researcher, focusing on the intersections between design, territorial politics and processes of subjectivation. Her PhD in History and Theory of Architecture investigates the representation and production of large-scale housing in France before and after the neoliberal reforms of 1977 (pass with distinction, ETH Medal in 2018). In spring 2018, she was an invited Guest professor in Architecture at Cyprus University and since spring 2019 she co-directs the

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Master of Advanced Studies program for History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zurich. Her co-edited volumes include *Productive Universals–Specific Situations. Critical Engagements in Art, Architecture, and Urbanism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019, with Nina Zschocke) and *Housing after the Neoliberal Turn: A Sample Atlas* (Berlin: Spector Books, 2015, with Reinhold Martin, Stephan Aue and others).

### **Skopje: The Multiple Faces of the City**

Klaske Havik

This contribution offers a series of lyrically framed observations of an architectural educator on repeated visits to the city of Skopje. It reflects on the complex histories and processes shaping the city, from the remnants of the Metabolist city to the neo-classical vocabulary of a reconstituted national identity. Historically, the city of Skopje has been characterized by a series of urban abruptions: from the earthquake of 1963 via the end of Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars, to the recent tensions between nationalist tendencies and the growing migrant population from Kosovo and Albania. These abruptions have resulted, on an urban and architectural level, in a great number of spatial contrasts: the fine spatial grain of the old bazaar area as opposed to the large metabolist urban scheme, introduced by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange after the 1963 earthquake; the contrast between the two sides of the river Vardar; the surreal Skopje 2014 project which consisted the erection of fake neo-classical buildings, fountains and an “arc of triumph” on prominent sites across the city, aiming to establish a heroic nationalist narrative of the ancient Macedonia of Alexander the Great. The contribution is composed of a series of fragments which aim to reveal, through the perspective of different characters, both a story line about the urban transformations in Skopje, and an account of spatial practices of everyday life.



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**Klaske Havik** is leading the chair of Methods & Analysis at TU Delft. She has developed a distinct research approach relating the experience, use and imagination of architecture and urban space to literary language. Her book *Urban Literacy. Reading and Writing Architecture* (Rotterdam: Nai010 2014), based on her PhD, proposes a literary approach to architecture and urbanism. She edited the book *Writingplace. Investigations in Architecture and Literature* (2016), and established the *Writingplace Journal for Architecture & Literature* in 2017. Havik's literary work appeared in Dutch poetry collections and literary magazines. Currently, Havik is Action Chair of the EU Cost network "Writing Urban Places".

### Belgrade Baroque

Marko Jobst

This text, composed of two layers, brings together queer auto-fictions with the architectural histories of an elusive Serbian Baroque in the city of Belgrade. It explores the issues of heteronormativity, nationhood and religion. It is an autofiction that places special emphasis on the siting of memories in Belgrade, Serbia – Yugoslavia as it was – and focuses specifically on the Cathedral Church of Archangel Michael, one of the rare examples of what could be understood as second generation Baroque architecture in the orthodox Christian country. The desired aim of the broader project is to perform an act of queering of the Serbian ideological, national and religious frameworks, of Belgrade and its buildings, and of academic modes of relating architectural and urban histories. An aspect of this process was the approach to illustrations, which are textual: the footnoted fragments that run alongside the main narrative thrust of the text are simultaneously its illustrations and their own captions. Sometimes reflexive, at other times tangential, they hint at a second level of research that lies beneath the seemingly literary treatment of the piece.

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**Marko Jobst** is a writer and researcher based in the UK. Until recently he was Architecture Undergraduate Theory Coordinator at the Department of Architecture and Landscape, Greenwich University, London. He holds a Diploma in Architecture from Belgrade University and MArch, MSc and PhD from The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, in Architectural History and Theory. He has practiced architecture in Belgrade and London and taught at a number of London schools of architecture. He has published on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and creative/performative writing, and is the author of *A Ficto-Historical Theory of the London Underground* (Spurbuch AADR, 2017). He is the co-editor of *Architectural Affects: After Deleuze and Guattari* (Routledge, 2020/21) with H       Frichot, and is currently working on a series of queer fictions.

**Catharina Gabrielsson** is docent in architecture and associate professor in urban theory at the School of Architecture KTH, Stockholm. Her research centres on the relationship between architecture and the city, critically questioning and contextualizing modes of spatial production by juxtaposing aesthetics, politics and economics. Methods include fieldwork operations, archival studies and discourse analysis fused together through an engagement with text and creative writing. Articles and chapters have appeared in *Architectural Theory Review*, *field*, *Deleuze and Architecture* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and *Architecture and Field/Work* (London: Routledge, 2010), among others. She is co-editor for *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* (Routledge 2017), *Deleuze and the City* (Edinburgh University Press 2016) and a themed issue of *Architecture and Culture* (Vol. 5, 2017 – 2) on architecture and capitalism. With Helena Mattsson and Kenny Cupers, she is editor of *Neoliberalism on the Ground: Architecture and Transformation from the 1960's to the Present* (Pittsburgh University Press, 2020). Amongst her current work is also a collection of essays, *Housework* (forthcoming).

*The Writingplace journal for Architecture and Literature is an open-access e-journal, published by nai010 publishers and TUDelft Open. Launched in 2018, it is the first peer-reviewed international journal of architecture and literature. It acts as a vehicle for the Writingplace platform to continue its exchange of knowledge on the relationship between architecture and literature and to address and promote alternative ways of looking at and designing architecture, urban places and landscapes through literary methods. By acknowledging the possibilities of literature as a field of academic research, able to explore architectural imaginations, Writingplace hopes to establish a common ground to investigate the productive connections further between architecture and literature, or a place to engage in writing.*