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Edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

**POLITICAL WRITINGS 2001-2003**

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N.B.: These essays originally appeared in *CounterPunch*, “America’s Best Political Newsletter”. Many of the hyperlinks are no longer active but have been retained to illustrate the simple elegance of hypertext during the now-bygone years of Web 1.0. Many of the hyperlinks went to the author’s then-active Landscape Agency New York Archive-Grotto (a site created c.2001 on Geocities). With the closure of Geocities by Yahoo! in 2009, the site was subsequently archived by the Web Archive (<http://www.geocities.ws/ateliemp>) and the Wayback Machine ([http://waybackmachine.org/\\*/http://www.geocities.com/ateliemp](http://waybackmachine.org/*/http://www.geocities.com/ateliemp)). Most of the LANY A-G pages are still available through one of these two archives. All essays presented here have been re-edited as of 09/22/2011. While *CounterPunch* archived the articles in late 2011 and changed many of the titles, the original titles have been retained herein.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2001, just as the dust was settling from the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York, and while living in Queens, where the acrid smoke from the conflagration drifted in my windows, I began a correspondence with Jeffrey St. Clair, co-editor with Alexander Cockburn of the decidedly left-leaning Web newsletter *CounterPunch*, contributing my first epistle on September 18, 2001, one week following the event of 9/11.

St. Clair, being an eminent environmentalist, also then accepted for publication in *CounterPunch* various writings I submitted on the nature of contemporary architecture, urbanism, and landscape architecture, and its cooptation and complicity with the spectral regimes of neo-liberal capital. The essays regarding “landscape” were intimately tied to the additional submissions surveying the post-9/11 wasteland, most especially the machinations of Capital-and-Power in its furious attempt to reestablish control over everything within and within range of its rapacious claws. This destructive amalgam of Mammon and Power, after 9/11, jettisoned any last vestiges of mock civility and by 2003 the world was fully immersed in the Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld war on everything and everyone not already subjugated to their vision of total domination.

Along the arc of these collected writings what develops is a somewhat devastating cultural critique of post-modernity and late-modern nihilism, expressed politically and culturally. The vacuousness of a world dominated by spectacle and consumerism is the principal impression, and the appearance and disappearance of various other critiques of the same is part and parcel of the shifting terrain of this period with its constant, if not relentless pursuit of the foremost “suspect”, human subjectivity itself, by Capital-and-Power.

By 2003, having had quite enough of the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld regime, I was in the process of exiting New York for the first time (having arrived in 1993) and decamping for my first visit to Australia. The essays end more or less where they began; surveying the wreckage of a world ruined in part by the venality, malfeasance, and general complicity of architecture with the two-headed demon of Capital-and-Empire. Notably, this time frame is also the time of the “post-critical” phase in “post-contemporary” architecture (or the time when architects decided it was somehow beneath them to engage in a rigorous critique of their own role in what Giorgio Agamben has called “the destruction of experience”). The self-serving aspects of this rear-guard operation are, now as then, truly reprehensible.

What has transpired since 2003 is telltale ... The middle 2000s “boom” and the subsequent collapse in 2007 more than prove that architecture has utterly lost its bearings with few exceptions. An emergent critique on the left of “cognitive capitalism”, while promising, has yet to make any serious inroads into the corrupted discipline itself, as the purveyors of the post-critical vision for architecture remain unrepentant and, despite their increasing isolation and ineffectiveness, without direction.

It is interesting, then, to re-read John Berger’s 2003 article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*,<sup>1</sup> an excoriating assessment of all that was wrong then and all that is *still* wrong now. Foremost in this regard is the damning analysis of everything turned to hyper-commodity, a bizarre and terrifying confirmation of the usurpation and exploitation of “surplus value” by a worldwide cadre of hyper-capitalists.

As Slavoj Žižek points out in the essay here entitled “Sublime Žižek”, a new, better world exists in the very battle *for* it. That battle remains, today, the only responsible means to that end.

GK (09/23/2011)

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<sup>1</sup> John Berger, “Written in the Night: The Pain of Living in the Present World”, *Le Monde Diplomatique* (February 15, 2003); <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/27a/113.html>.

September 18, 2001

## **Requiem: Dies Non, Not Dies Irae**

By Gavin Keeney

The extraordinary events of September 11, 2001 will long resonate in the psyche of the world for reasons that transcend politics, religion, and real estate. The current calls to rebuild – bigger, taller, more defiantly – are premature and absurd.

The nature of the World Trade Center as a symbol laden with the unstable stuff of signifiers (signs), pointing to a signified (content) that is ultimately ill-defined and illusory in itself, calls attention to the reasons for its targeting and for its remarkable former presence and, now, absence.

New York architects are already clamoring to claim the site for the resurrection of a new symbol, either of defiance or reflection, but a symbol nonetheless.

There is but one significant gesture that might satisfy the need for reclaiming and recolonizing this hole in the tight knit fabric of Manhattan – a city within the city climbing over itself with significance and cluttered with clashing symbols.

This “void” should remain a “void” – as New York architects Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio have pronounced – an elegant encomium to the disaster and the only universally adequate and valid expression of a non-ideological claim.

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has identified, at the center of all ideologies, the persistence of an absence, a rift in consciousness, that is continually overwritten and obscured. This ghost or “absent center” is the unstable foundation of subjectivity itself and the under-utilized locus of ethics (Emmanuel Levinas).

The void in New York must not be filled with yet another symbol or sign of feigned stability and composure but instead remain a cipher for the human condition – a state of being that, uncertain of itself, must fashion an unremitting concern for every other thing and being not itself.

This site at but one center of the world must remain free of all statements of arrogance and ostentation – free of bombast and insipidness. The metaphysical “music” that fills this “void” needs not a Mozartean “Dies Irae” but an inspired “Dies Non”, a “score” without defiant spectacle or apocalyptic machinations; a sonorous “etude” to comprehension and lucidity and, in fact, a blessed absence of any and all rhetoric.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2001/09/18/dies-non-not-dies-irae/>

April 8, 2002

## Mouth Wide Shut

By Gavin Keeney

“U.S. media coverage of the conflict has been intense in recent weeks, as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) mounted a large-scale invasion of the West Bank and Palestinian militants carried out several major suicide bombings. Amnesty International (4/3/02) has condemned the targeting of civilians by both sides, voicing concern over ‘flagrant human rights abuses’ by the IDF, including looting, mass detentions, the targeting of medical personnel and possible extrajudicial executions. Israel has tried to exclude the press from the entire area where the abuses are occurring; the Committee to Protect Journalists has expressed alarm (4/2/02) over the apparent targeting of reporters in ‘ongoing incidents in which IDF forces have opened fire on, or in the direction of, journalists attempting to cover events in the West Bank.’” ([Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting](#))

George W. Bush’s recent pronouncements virtually begging Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and for Yasser Arafat to curb Palestinian “terrorist” activities come after a round of withering attacks on the White House from both domestic and overseas critics for its detached, silent Sam role, despite the continuing US bankrolling of Israel to the tune of three billion dollars a year. (For more on this hellish music, see [Israeli Gears](#).)

**QUOTE-UNQUOTE 1** – “In these circumstances, America cannot ignore world public opinion. There is a nearly unanimous global consensus that United States policy has become one-sided and morally hypocritical, with clear displays of sympathy for Israeli victims of terrorist violence and relative indifference to the (much more numerous) Palestinian civilian casualties. At risk is America’s ability to maintain international support for the war on terrorism, and especially for plans to deal with Saddam Hussein.” Zbigniew Brzezinski (*New York Times*, 04/07/02)

The announcement despatching Colin Powell to the Middle East comes with a built-in five-to-eight-day delay, giving the [Israeli military](#) time to further destroy most of the West Bank in pursuit of Palestinian “terrorists”.

Perhaps it is time to suspend all [US aid to Israel](#) and divert that largesse to the Palestinians such that they might rebuild their provisional “territories” – not quite a patchwork of bits and pieces unwanted by Israel for settlements, “national parks”, or military outposts.

Perhaps, too, it is time to launch a concerted, *serious real* effort to lobby for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games in Hebron. Henry Kissinger can act as go-between for the IOC and the Palestinians, as he did for China and the 2008 Summer Games. Kissinger can with one stroke reverse his international reputation as War Criminal and unrepentant Cold Warrior by supporting the PLOlympiad 2012.

Cutting off aid to Israel would be a superb “humanitarian” gesture – albeit a high-handed *coup de théâtre* that is perfectly consistent with current American foreign policy – i.e., imposing economic sanctions on states that violate human rights and murder innocent civilians. It can be qualified on all sorts of grounds. Diverting the money to the Palestinian “homeland” Bush has recently paid lip service to would be a case of putting our money where the President’s mouth is. Bush would have to live up to his rhetoric and US taxpayers might feel a sense of “finite justice”. The huge flow of cash and credits to the Middle East in the form of military and “civilian” aid would be put to much better use rebuilding the lands destroyed by the very forces of repression we have underwritten for decades on end versus shoring up the Israeli military and funding new rear-guard Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine.

**QUOTE-UNQUOTE 2** – “The foreign minister of Spain – which currently holds the European Union presidency – said the EU would discuss imposing sanctions on Israel if it continued its incursions on Palestinian territory.” (*BBC World Service*, 04/07/02)

The spiritually bankrupt Bush League could then claim the low-to-middle moral ground of a “kinder, gentler, and compassionate” realpolitik, a *volte face* contravening the overwhelming tsunami of venality and unilateral opportunism passing for foreign policy in the 1 1/2 years since the Supreme Court anointed the Texas dimwit Court Jester for the Free World.

Lastly, perhaps it is time for Bush and the Congress to bite the bullet and ratify a treaty signed during the Clinton Administration – i.e., the Rome Statute to establish an [International Criminal Court](#).

**QUOTE-UNQUOTE 3** – “Today [Thursday, March 28] in New York, Ambassador for War Crimes Issues Pierre Prosper stated in a press conference that ‘unsigned’ is one of the options considered by the Bush Administration to the soon-to-be-launched ICC.” (*Coalition for the ICC*, 03/28/02)

These three radical ventures would be the ultimate hat trick for an Administration well on the slippery slope to historical ignominy. US participation in the ICC (which will be established with or without US support) would signal to the world that the US supports an international system of justice versus its own selective version of punishing its enemies and exempting its home-grown war criminals. This last gesture would save the Bush League from the ultimate indignity of disappearing into the muck and mire of its own petty myopia.

**QUOTE-UNQUOTE 4** – “I have a kind of firm, semifirm signature as it moves across the page. It will probably take about ... you know, about three seconds to get to the W, I may hesitate on the period, and then rip through the Bush.” (*Harper's Weekly Review*, 03/26/02)

**QUOTE-UNQUOTE 5** – “When a renowned and respected retired politician like Zbigniew Brzezinski says explicitly on national television that Israel has been behaving like the white supremacist regime of apartheid South Africa, one can be certain that he is not alone in this view, and that an increasing number of Americans and others are slowly growing not only disenchanted but also disgusted with Israel as a hugely expensive and draining ward of the United States, costing far too much, increasing American isolation, and seriously damaging the country’s reputation with its allies and its citizens.” Edward Said (*ZNet*, 04/07/02)

[Projection of West Bank Final Status Map \(2000\)](#) (*Passia*)

[The Circling of East Jerusalem – Roads 45 and 5](#) (*ARIJ*)

[The Invasion of Bethlehem and Our Tax Dollars at Work](#) (*CounterPunch*, 04/05/02)

[Israeli Media Ban Brings Protests](#) (*BBC World Service*, 04/05/02)

[Extracts From Bush’s Speech](#) (*BBC World Service*, 04/04/02)

[Justice for Chile: Will Kissinger Finally Pay?](#) (*CounterPunch*, 04/04/02)

[Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#) (*United Nations*)

[International Justice](#) (*Human Rights Watch*)

[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (*LCHR*)

Edward Said – [Palestine Has Not Disappeared](#) (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, 04/02/98)

Anthony Lewis – [Is There a Solution?](#) (*The New York Review of Books*, 04/25/02)

Landscape w/ Bullets – [Postcards from Hell](#) – Raffaele Ciriello, an Italian photo-journalist, was recently killed in Ramallah (West Bank, Occupied Palestine)

BADIOU: TRUTH & LIES – [Manifesto for Philosophy](#) (SUNY, 1999) – [Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil](#) (Verso, 2001)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/04/08/mouth-wide-shut/>

## So Long Frank O. Gehry?

By Gavin Keeney

While in Los Angeles, in 1998, Frank Gehry's architecture was required viewing. The Gehry tour included: 1/ The Chiat-Day thing (1991), with its gigantic Claes Oldenburg binoculars marking the entrance to the parking garage; 2/ Rebecca's (1985), the Venice club-restaurant that resembles nothing less than the underside of the Santa Monica Pier; 3/ The nameless parking garage in downtown Santa Monica swaddled in chain link; 4/ Gehry's residence (lost somewhere in the vacuous grid of greater Los Angeles); and 5/ Edgemar (1989), a curious pile of forms topped by an open-air box fashioned from Cor-Ten steel I-beams, this latter item perhaps signifying the bleak prospects of the mini-mall syndrome of which it is part and parcel despite its self-conscious "edginess". At this time Edgemar contained: 1/ A restaurant; 2/ An architectural bookstore; 3/ An ice cream parlour; 4/ An exhibition hall; 5/ A gift shop; 6/ A beauty salon; 7/ Some other forgettable stuff; 8/ An upper echelon of tiny offices for aspiring media companies; and 9/ A cavernous sub-grade parking garage. In-between all of this was a rather non-descript concrete plaza with a few tables, chairs, umbrellas, and a ramp beloved by skateboarding teenagers.

Gehry's studio, a notorious redoubt for aspiring young architects (many from the chic Southern California Institute of Architecture), is also in Santa Monica. The studio's equally renowned model shop, where Gehry's preliminary crumpled-paper forms are worked up into a somewhat more presentable product, was, in 1998, considered a kind of "Siberia" for interns – one could disappear into that wilderness and never be heard from again. For non-rising (frustrated) interns there was a weekly, Gehry-free session at the Chateau Marmont bar at 8221 Sunset Boulevard, where, no doubt, the latest rumors from "Siberia" were aired. Or, tired of all that, perhaps the conversation drifted to the re-telling of tales about celebrity architect Richard Meier's sexcapades in the construction trailer high above Los Angeles, where he lolled like a movie star on location, throughout the 1990s, as bulldozers destroyed the chaparral-covered hilltop in Brentwood where the new Getty Center was under construction. As the Getty ploughed ahead, approaching a one billion dollar price tag, Gehry's own Disney Concert Hall (designed between 1988 and 1991) was ostensibly, intractably stalled for lack of cash – something current Gehry projects consume mountains of. Sometime in the late 1990s, however, a benefactor finally stepped forth and downtown L.A. will soon inaugurate yet another wild bit of stand-alone architecture. This one will be set on a giant podium (concealing yet another parking garage) and surrounded by a garden. Gehry decided, late in the game, that the foliage of the plants would look terrific reflected in the Bilbaoesque metal-clad facade. Given the episodic nature of L.A. architecture, this newest bit will at least feign a user-friendly ambience unlike Arata Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art (1986), with its anti-urban anxiety, its throw-away Marilyn Monroe curve, and its sterile and foreboding plaza with surveillance cameras.

It was Gehry's now bankrupted and sold American Center in Paris (1994), the lithesome Fred and Ginger Building (1996) in Prague (with Vlado Milunić), and the extravagant Bilbao Guggenheim (1997) that put the Canadian-born, L.A. architect on the map – *not* these homegrown confections. His reputation is now "sealed", as it were, like a grand jury indictment. Gehry is now *architecte du jour* for new museums and left-leaning civic structures worldwide. Once called "the most psychoanalyzed architect in the world", Gehry can now afford the very best psychoanalysis in the world – something quite necessary should he suffer the same inversion of reputation now eating away at the fortunes of the other big star architect of the 1990s, Rotterdam-based architect Rem Koolhaas.

Gehry broke free of the regional stranglehold of L.A. architecture with the completion of the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany, in 1987. Two years later he won the coveted Pritzker Prize, the equivalent in architecture of a Nobel Peace Prize. (Vitra is actually an ensemble of buildings, strewn across post-agricultural landscape, and includes Zaha Hadid's iconic, bright-red Fire Station.) The collision of angular and curvilinear tectonic forms of the Gehry portions was striking, then, and architecture critic Martin Filler ably noted that Gehry was, in fact, triangulating with two other legendary expressionist structures in the hinterlands where Germany, France, and Switzerland meet. According to Filler, Gehry's Vitra pays homage to Le Corbusier's Nôtre-Dame-du-Haut (1955), at Ronchamp, in the French Jura, and Rudolf Steiner's Second Goetheanum (1920s), near Basel. The neo-expressionist label has followed Gehry ever since, even if his buildings are perhaps more properly neo-surrealist *pace* André Breton's diktat that Surrealism gives "free rein" to fantasy. As such, one must ask, after neo-Marxist

critic Manfredo Tafuri, if these buildings are not actually “emblems of an intellectual bad conscience” (*Architecture & Utopia*). Perhaps this will be the first line of inquiry when Gehry hits the analyst’s couch in the near future; that is, if he is not *already* the most famous architect-analysand in the world.

Curiously, Gehry was first branded a deconstructivist architect in the 1980s. As deconstructivism is a particularly virulent strain of post-modernist architecture based on formalist language games, Gehry denied the association. Of the two dominant streams of architectural post-modernism – 1/ The semiologically bastardized version promulgated by British critic Charles Jencks and 2/ The all-enquiring deconstructivist type derived from French post-structuralism and represented by architects such as Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi, and Daniel Libeskind – Gehry’s middle work mostly resembled the latter though it never quite fit the pigeon hole.

Over-exposure, not to mention under-exposure, is the artist-architect’s worst best friend ... Ubiquity breeds contempt (if not envy and/or ennui). Repeating one’s self *ad nauseum*, or recycling one’s triumphs, is a sign of impending bad weather. Gehry’s new Manhattan Guggenheim, proposed for a site at the edge of the lower East River, is, fortunately, hopelessly stalled (as was the Disney Concert Hall?) pending the outcome of the twin financial misfortunes of New York City and the cash-strapped Guggenheim Empire (grossly over-leveraged by “CEO” Thomas Krens).

Neither of these problems is irreversible, however, given the recent resurgence of *noblesse oblige* amongst the rich and chattering classes – the same that loved the Bilbao Guggenheim. Perhaps the Guggenheim elite will cut a deal with the City and push the new museum across New York Harbor to Governors Island, a prestigious, unclaimed bit of New York real estate and former Coast Guard station. The future of the island, an as-yet-unresolved gift to New York from the Clinton Administration, was batted about by the Giuliani Administration without ever coming to closure. Now that Giuliani is “history”, and his scheme for casinos and other “public-private” development on Governors Island has been universally panned, a “cultural campus” of one sort or another is the preferred option. Unfortunately, for both the Guggenheim and Frank Gehry, a titanium-clad, neo-surrealist museum would clash terribly with the colonial and neo-colonial architecture of the island.

That said, one cannot help but point out Gehry’s recent, albeit minor contribution to Condé Nast’s image problems ... I recently went to the Condé Nast HQ on Times Square, for lunch, with an editor of *House & Garden*. The main course was the Frank Gehry designed cafeteria (2000) – a bizarre “salad” made out of leftover bits from Bilbao. (Entrée to this luscious enclave is strictly by invitation.)

The building is billed as “green” architecture, a term denoting environmentally friendly building technologies. It’s greater bulk is by Fox & Fowle, a New York architecture firm of little distinction. The cafeteria was swarming with twenty-somethings (interns?) and swirly twirly, signature Gehry forms. Along one edge of the careful clutter of tables and banquettes, tucked here and there into a rather small amount of space, Gehry inserted an impressive wave wall of reflective material that resembles a funhouse mirror. The editor told me that they invited a Feng Shui expert to see the new building *after* it was built, ass backwards, so to speak. (Expect most Condé Nast publications to continue to hemorrhage money.)

It seems everything is wrong, not the least the NASDAQ electronic billboard on the west-facing, black rotunda at the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway. This particular piece of nonsense wraps the Times Square side with flashing electronic images. One upper suite within this section also happens to be the graphic art department for Condé Nast publications (*Vogue*, *House & Garden*, *Architectural Digest*, *New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, etc., etc.). Gratuitous imagery, indeed! The BID (Business Improvement District) that runs the newly renovated and sanitized Times Square has decided that high-voltage signage is what people (i.e., tourists) wish to see as they wander aimlessly up and down Broadway.

The absurd expense of this garbage, the mega-wattage required to light up the acres of billboards, is highly questionable. Gehry’s contribution to this bad joke is admittedly minimal, and *private*, toxic metal tidbits notwithstanding, but it is prototypical of current architectural *jouissance*, that so-called “free rein of fantasy” again, but, hey!, in this case it’s New York, New York – the place so self-important “they” named it twice.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/04/28/so-long-frank-o-gehry/>



## Bête Noire

by Gavin Keeney

**All-Purpose Disclaimer:** The following is a bad dream – the result of a feverish brain and hyper-imagination. It bears no resemblance whatsoever to reality as we know it and readers are advised to wear protective clothing before wading into this toxic picture of things to come. THE GREAT GAME (AGAIN)

“Caspian Sea – Pronounced As: **kaspn**, Lat. **Mare Caspium** or **Mare Hyrcanium**, salt lake, c.144,000 sq mi (373,000 sq km), between Europe and Asia; the largest lake in the world. It is bordered on the northeast by Kazakhstan, on the southeast by Turkmenistan, on the south by Iran, on the southwest by Azerbaijan, and on the northwest by Russia.” (Infonautics)



Image – Henry Fuseli, “The Nightmare” (1781-82)

The ongoing US destruction of Afghanistan is about “space” – geo-physical and geo-political space – i.e., land mass and land surface. To be exact, it is about the Central Asian oil and gas fields that have remained underplayed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inability of the players to find a suitable overland route to deep water ports. It’s about pipelines.

The former oilman now court-appointed Chief Executive (George Bush), the former executive of Halliburton cum Vice President (Richard Cheney), and the current executive secretary or amanuensis for Smart Toyz R Us (Donald Rumsfeld) know which side their bread is buttered on – it’s the Central Asian side. From Uzbekistan to Pakistan represents – after all is said and destroyed – a lucrative oil and natural gas transmission corridor. To the north and to the south of the former Afghanistan are the world’s oiliest despots waiting for a slice of the sludge. Why else would they acquiesce to the liquidation of an entire country?

In this nightmare scenario the neanderthalish non-person pulling the strings – the master puppetmaster – is Nobody, the Grand Vizier of Greed, and the shadow (evil twin) of Everybody (formerly Everyman). Most grand conspiracies transcend mere individuals and reside in the plutosphere (underworld), the shadowy realm of faceless automatons, or the velvet netherzone where the day-to-day machinations of the plutocracy are crafted. This region is *inside* our heads, close to the reptilian core of things – a prehistoric relic where the Manichaeian essence of the struggle for the upper hand originates.

The American public and our so-called allies have been played for patsies (dupes) by the Bush League. And no doubt, after the 2004 defeat of the President (by almost anyone), the new global corporation established to “handle” the opening of the oil fields under the Caspian Sea will have a name not unlike “The Bush League”. Defeated in 2004? Of course. That is the plan. Why choose an enfeebled Vice President if you plan to run on and on? Why not get out after having bilked the American public and bankrupted the country for your own personal gain? Why settle for a paltry salary when you can sit at the top of an international cabal of oil speculators à la Enron? Oh ... Was the collapse of Enron a surprise to the Bush League? No. It, too, is part of the plan.

So, what is the plan? After the liquidation of Afghanistan (and after the Russians have been pacified) an oil deal will be cut with the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, a route will be rammed through Afghanistan and Pakistan – with the blessing of whatever corrupt potentates are nominally the heads of the countries’ armed forces cum police – and the game will shift to Iraq. If Iraq cannot be “turned”, it can be “destroyed”. Take out the Iraqi oil fields and the Caspian Sea fields’ stock rises. Capture and put the Iraqi oil fields back on line and milk the production for a

percentage and it's a win/win situation.

There are only a few companies in the world that can produce the infrastructural and logistical-financial services required to launch or relaunch oil production. Bechtel is one (but that's Bush père's generation), so is Halliburton (just now engaged in an Enron-like downward spiral brought on by a spate of asbestos lawsuits) – the provisional “Bush League” is another (this is the hybrid Bush I and Bush II juggernaut, or the passing of the baton), especially after buying up select pieces of Enron at fire-sale prices.

That Enron was mostly an energy futures trading pyramid scheme does not matter much. It had tentacles in virtually every sector of the “energy” underworld. Those detached tentacles will squirm about on the ground until bought up by squadrons of lawyers on behalf of unknown benefactors. Boxed and shipped to Texas those same tentacle fragments will be nurtured back to full health – full octopus status – through a special neo-clonal parthenogenetic therapy similar to the one used by advocates of human cloning and banned by Bush (i.e., bathed in billions of dollars liberated from the US Treasury and laundered through tax cuts and breaks for the uber-rich and their off-shore piggy banks – the uber-leveraged multinational corporations). The new octopussies will be sent round the world and lo! the new Bush League will be hatched – er – will bloom.

## OUTTAKES

### [Caspian Sea Oil](#)

[Afghanistan](#) – “Afghanistan’s significance from an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. This potential includes the possible construction of oil and natural gas export pipelines through Afghanistan, which was under serious consideration in the mid-1990s. The idea has since been undermined by Afghanistan’s instability. Since 1996, most of Afghanistan has been controlled by the Taliban movement, which the United States does not recognize as the government of Afghanistan.” (Energy Information Administration)

[Enron & Bush](#) (Common Dreams)

[Enron, Enron & Enron](#) (The Nation)

[Enron at the Whitehouse](#) (CounterPunch)

[Enron Commercials](#) (Rtmark)

[Bush, Enron, etc.](#) (BBC World Service)

[Enron Liabilities](#) (BBC World Service)

\*[Work at Enron](#) – Advertising Risk Management–Bandwidth–Broadband Services–Coal–Credit Risk Management–Crude Oil Products–Emission Allowances–Energy Management–Energy Asset Management–Enron Intelligent Network–Facility Management–Fertilizers–Forest Products–Freight–Media Risk Management–Metals (also see Steel)–Natural Gas (Transactions, Transportation, Retail Sales, Storage, Upstream Services)–Lumber–Oil & LNG Transportation–Petrochemicals–Plastics–Power (Generation, Retail Sales, Transactions)–Principal Investments–Pulp & Paper–Risk Management for Commodities (Retail Commodities, Wholesale Commodities)–Semiconductors–Steel–Streaming Media–Voice Minutes–Water & Wastewater–Weather Risk Management–Wind Energy

“[Enron is An Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer](#)”

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/05/22/bete-noire/>

## “All politics is local?”: The Unbearable Lightness of NGOs

by Gavin Keeney

### NGOs KNOW BEST

NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in one form or another have been part and parcel of the theory of civil society since at least the 18th century. Today, the Enlightenment-era philosophy underwriting such institutions has been hijacked by conservative ideologues to support the downsizing of everything, including federal, state, and local government. This is the neo-faith-based version. Critically, this twisted vision of civil society has attempted to downsize the rights of individuals and call into question the rights of dissent and civil disobedience through perverse, fundamentalist readings of its founding texts. Plugged into the mantra of “family values” this doctored concept of civil society reaches back to the Middle Ages when an individual conscience was a liability and radical statements could land one in the stocks, or worse. Giordano Bruno died for your pre-modern sins.

NGOs were originally conceived as agencies to mediate between government and the individual, but oddly, today, 85% of NGOs are funded by governments. As such, few any longer represent possible venues for significant action influencing both government and citizens. This is the other side of the two-headed coin. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that most NGOs are set up to influence *citizens* versus government. Today these institutions, once organized from below, are staffed by professionals who work through mediation, compromise, deal-making and the impressive sounding *amici curiae*, or statements on behalf of *everyone else* in public hearings and legal proceedings. In the case of the neo-conservative version of civil society and the NGO, the favored writ is sure to be the *auto-da-fé*, or the virtual death sentence for anyone wandering outside the prescribed circle of acceptable subjectivity. Despite this vicious social whipsaw that the present-day NGO represents, the pure *idea* of civil society remains the last, best chance – in the absence of activist government – for collective action in the face of wholesale corruption and influence peddling, or that which passes for “public policy” in the age of globalization and corporatization of *nearly everything*. Were not the French, American, and Russian revolutions provisional NGOs?

### NGOs WITH MBAs

Once upon a time, NGOs were primarily philanthropic organizations, neither fundamentalist rear-guard club nor well-endowed lobby for special interests, populated by a now nearly extinct class of beings, *amici humani generis* (friends of the human race). Today, however, the majority of NGOs are plush parking groves for the upwardly mobile, *de luxe* finishing schools (places to polish one’s social skills), and elite bazaars for the nouveaux riche, while the new conservative minority lot participate in the sell-down of individual liberties and public policy. Are churches and/or madrassahs NGOs? Sic transit secular society.

In the former East Bloc countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the NGO is still the preferred means of rebuilding the rudiments of civic culture destroyed by the communists, and for installing new checks and balances in the high-octane, cowboy- and crony-capitalist systems that have replaced the crude-diesel, crony-communist dictatorships of the recent past. The super-rich Soros Foundation pours millions into these countries every year through its Open Society Institute, a late-modern philanthropic operation based on the civil society ideal. OSI-Budapest spent \$17,606,000 in 2000 on programs throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including efforts to help the persecuted Romani (Gypsies) and monitoring the ups and downs of integrating the economies of the East with the EU. The ideology of the NGO is in fact pervasive, and both the World Bank and the United Nations maintain congenial relations with NGOs throughout “the developing world.” In the case of the UN, these groups include champions of human rights, such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Amnesty International, but also champions of free trade, such as the International Chamber of Commerce.

Given this high profile, high flying late-modern version of civil society, one has to ask if certain international NGOs are not stalking horses for globalizing the free-market ideology of the West. Since the ideals of Enlightenment rationality do not automatically translate into the hegemony of the wealthy and powerful, is it not possible that the

NGO combined with the lofty rhetoric of neo-civil society is nothing more than an elegant rope trick?

### NGOs & COWBOY CAPITALISM

In the Czech Republic, the principal agent of market reforms, after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, was Václav Klaus, a Thatcherite economist (schooled in the hifalutin nonsense of conservative economists Milton Friedman and F.A. Hayek). Klaus was finance minister from 1989 to 1992 and served 1.25 terms as Prime Minister (1992-1997) before resigning. During the Klaus period, Czech state assets were pillaged by newly wired consortia formed by businessmen, financial institutions, and politicians who *legally* “tunnelled” (looted) the assets of state industrial and financial structures and dumped the depleted carcasses into the bankruptcy courts. Klaus famously believed that civic culture was the “seasoning of life” and not much more. The absence of a competent press and an independent judiciary, for example, plus a dearth of laws to enforce “transparency” in business transactions, made the scorch-and-burn practices of Czech neo-capitalists all but inevitable. Civil society – with or without NGOs – simply did not exist. Klaus, the die-hard free-marketeer, apparently believed all too much in the hidden hand of the market (even if that hand was stealing state property and buying off politicians). Once a colleague of Václav Havel, in the early days after the Velvet Revolution, Klaus became his most bitter enemy.

Havel returned the favor in 1997 (the year Klaus fell from grace) with a speech before the Czech Parliament regarding the post-communist morass: “Human beings are social animals who feel a need to form associations and to take part, even if it were only within their small worlds, in the management of public affairs and in the pursuit of universal benefit. This, too, was somehow forgotten: under the motto the citizen and the state, the citizen was thrown into a hopeless solitude. In order that he would not feel too lonely, and because it was appropriate, the word *family* was added from time to time. Beyond that, nothing but emptiness.”

State assets continue to be plundered today in the Czech Republic, most recently banks and heavy industry, and the highly respected journal *Respekt* is being sued by *every single member* of current PM Milos Zeman’s cabinet for publishing damning articles about the machinations of the so-called “elite”. The absence of civil society, and meaningful recourse to law, continues to haunt the post-communist world. What in the world could NGOs do in such an environment to make even a pittance of a difference?

Civil society was supposed to engender an elite that would look after the welfare of the nation – this in a time when the Nation-State was in ascendance and when many of the more powerful states were undergoing imperial expansion. This elite, however, schooled in the art of deal-making, soon became the Master (*re* Nietzsche's Master/Slave dialectic) and the levers of civil society became a means for enriching oneself. Most NGOs, now and then, are/were the *parlor* for learning the games of power politics.

In the Czech Republic, today, as elsewhere, a coalition government (combining the worst elements of Klaus’ ODS (Civic Democratic Party), pronounced *odious*, and Miloš Zeman’s CSSD (Czech Social Democrats) has effectively meant stalemate for everyone except those feeding at the trough. The dispossessed have nowhere to turn. One recent story told concerns an elderly woman who jumped off an overpass into the onrushing traffic of a busy expressway in Prague. So many people had jumped from this same bridge in the 1990s that the authorities were forced to erect a fence along the bridge. Not to be deterred, the poor woman brought along her own ladder. Some climb the ladder to enrich themselves, others to *end it all*.

Civil society in the Czech Republic for the most part remains the romantic dream of President Václav Havel, see *Summer Meditations* (1992), imprisoned in an all but rhetorical presidency. Havel made the fatal error shortly after 1989 of vesting absolutely no power in the presidency except that of moral authority, something that will be hard to replace once Havel has left the stage. Perhaps he was right, after all? Havel’s faith in civil society is nostalgic, reaching back to the days of the First Republic, the 1920s, before the Nazis and before the Russians, when Tomáš Masaryk crafted a Czechoslovak state out of the ruins of the Habsburg Empire. To be fair, however, Havel does not equate the complicity of the NGO with the autonomy of the individual bad conscience – the latter is much worse. He does, however, recognize that criminality runs unchecked – high, low, and in-between – without some form of cultural buffer zone between the elite and the dispossessed.

## NGOs TILL THE COWS COME HOME

Here in New York, New York, the typical NGO spends 50% of its time fund-raising, 48% navel-gazing, and 2% hell-raising. This latter percentile is both a result of the exertions required of the first and a byproduct of the lethargy induced by the second. Necessarily middle-of-the-road, or neo-liberal, the vast majority of NGOs are terrified of their own shadow. That shadow is the shade/ghost of civil society past, or the activist origins of the NGO prototype – a radical coalition of citizens. It is a very *long* shadow.

Most NGOs in Manhattan (a.k.a. New York, New York, New York) are plugged straight into the plutocracy and bank on first-class (upper-class) credentials. The boards are stocked with big fish and the collective aquarium has tinted glass like the limousines that deliver the well-heeled philanthropists to catered banquets that pass as board meetings. Such *de luxe* NGOs have devolved into a bathetic version of noblesse oblige making real activism by the majority of such outfits all but impossible, save in such glamorous causes as *saving Grand Central Terminal from demolition*, etc. The annual meetings for the privileged NGOs are star-studded affairs and one has to wonder how much of their budget is blown on self-congratulatory hype and gala events. Such telling details are buried in the annual report.

The modern NGO is clearly not a substitute for activist government, a very unpopular idea, nor should they lull individuals into thinking that sending \$50 a year absolves them of doing anything else. In fact, the bulk of contemporary NGOs form a layer of intermediate fog between individuals and government making it well-nigh impossible to stop the wretched machinery of perpetual deal-making and self-aggrandizement. Given the source of much of their money (foundations and government), and given the uncomfortably similar corporate strangle-hold on funding, pimping, and gilding today's breed of neo-politician (part businessman, part lawyer, part-time talking head, future consultant, future lobbyist, future television commentator, and/or prototype for post-human existence), it is not rocket science to conclude that a landscape of NGOs, as far as the eye can see, is a very gloomy picture indeed.

## OUTTAKES

**Dying for Dollars** – [The World Bank](#) – “The World Bank recognizes the important role that nongovernmental organizations play in meeting the challenges of development and welcomes the opportunity to work with civil society. The purpose of this website is to keep civil society groups informed about increasing opportunity for interaction with the Bank.”

**Multi-national NGOs (!QUANGOs!)** – [United Nations NGOs Index](#)

**Left-Leaning Euro-NGOs** – [Platform of European Social NGOs](#) – “The Social Platform is an association of 37 European non-governmental organisations, federations and networks that work in the social sector and uphold the interests of a wide spectrum of European civil society. The Platform includes associations of organisations representing women, older people, people with disabilities, unemployed people, migrants, people living in poverty, gays, lesbians, young people, children and families. The member organisations also include NGOs working on social issues such as social justice, homelessness, life-long learning, health and racism.”

**Origins** – [Essay on Civil Society](#) by Adam Ferguson (1766)

**Double-talk in Dublin** – [Adam Seligman](#) (ISTR-Dublin) – “Thus, for right of center thinkers as well as for libertarian followers of Friedrich Hayek, the quest for civil society is taken to mean a mandate to deconstruct many of the powers of the State and replace them with intermediary institutions based on social voluntarism. For many liberals, civil society is identified with social movements, also existing beyond the State. And while many of the former refuse to recognize that voluntary organizations can be of a particularly nasty nature and based on primordial or ascriptive principles of membership and participation that put to shame the very foundations of any idea of civil society; the latter are blind to the fact that the achilles heel of any social movement, is its institutionalization which – one way or the other – must be through the State and its legal (and coercive) apparatus. In the meantime both communitarians and liberals continue to assimilate the idea of civil society to their own terms, invest it with their own meanings and make of it what they will; identifying with everything from multi-party systems and the rights of citizenship to individual voluntarism and the spirit of community.” – “Civil society is thus that arena where – in Hegelian terms – free, self-determining individuality sets forth its claims for satisfaction of its wants and personal autonomy.” – “For we know that world-wide 85% of advocacy NGO’s are funded by Government or Inter-government budgets. In the USA the percentage is 65% in Europe only 30%.”

**Václav Klaus** – [Markets & Virtue](#) (*Acton Institute*, 1992) – “Klaus: People always pursue their self-interest, no matter what system they live in. Only ways and methods differ. Market systems, I am sure, encourage people in

pursuing their self-interest to follow such ways that require and strengthen human virtue more than human vice.”

**Václav Havel** – [Summer Meditations](#) (1992) – “The return of freedom in an environment of total moral delinquency has roused what probably had to surface, and what thus was predictable, but which is incomparably more serious than was foreseen: the terrible explosion of the worst human faults. It is as if all the most questionable, or at least the most ambiguous, characteristics were unknowingly cultivated for years in this society and without our knowledge built into the daily functioning of the totalitarian system, so that when suddenly freed from its restraint, they have free rein to burst forth. A kind of regulation – if you can call it that – that the totalitarian regime imposed on them (and by which they were ‘legitimized’) has been ruptured, while a new regulatory system which, instead of taking advantage of these negative aspects, would control them – in other words a system of responsibility freely undertaken by the community toward the community – has not yet been established; nor could it have been, for these things take time.”

**More Havel** – [Address to the Czech Parliament: The Post-Communist Morass](#) (1997) – “Fascinated by our macro-economic data, we disregarded the fact that this data, sooner or later, reveals also that which lies beyond the macro-economic or technocratic perception of the world: the things that constitute the only imaginable environment for any economic advancement, although their weight or significance cannot be calculated by accountants – things like rules of the game; the rule of law; the moral order behind that system of rules, that is essential for making the rules work; a climate of coexistence. The declared ideal of success and profit was turned to ridicule because we allowed a situation in which the biggest success could be achieved by the most immoral ones, and the biggest profits could go to unpunishable thieves. Paradoxically, the cloak of liberalism without adjectives, which regarded many things as leftist aberrations, concealed the marxist conception about a fundament and a superstructure: morality, decency, humility before the order of nature, solidarity, regard for those who will come after us, respect for the law, a culture of human relations, and many other things were relegated to the realm of the superstructure, and slightly derided as a mere ‘seasoning’ of life – until we found there was nothing to season: the fundament has been tunnelled.”

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/05/24/the-unbearable-lightness-of-ngos/>

## **Bush and Mies van der Rohe: Architecture and Ideology**

by Gavin Keeney

In the absence of serious journalism – here, there, everywhere – the recent flow of gilded imagery from Russia, ever since Air Force One set down at Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow on Thursday, May 23, has been nothing less than spectacular. From the opening shots of Bush reviewing the “imperial” honor guard, upon arrival, to the glamorous staged scenes at the Grand Kremlin Palace (St. Andrew Hall), to the imperial city of St. Petersburg (with Bush-Putin visits to the Mariinsky Theater and Hermitage Museum), Bush and Putin have spared no opportunity to illustrate what the press failed to analyze: Neo-Imperial Russia and Neo-Imperial America are now best friends, and, ipso facto demento, will join cloven hooves to stamp out upstart and established miscreants (naysayers) worldwide, but primarily in Central Asia.

The lavish imagery documents the generic addage “A picture is worth a thousand words”, but it also underscores the more subtle notion of cultural ambience, the aura surrounding an event or object. Ambience is the barely legible complex that supports an image – in Walter Benjamin’s well-known interpretation of this epi-phenomenon, aura is also the imagined effect of the object looking (gazing) back at the subject through space and time. As critic Paul Werner has recently written regarding the work of painter Ellsworth Kelly (now on display at the Drawing Center in New York City), Kelly’s apparent abstract paintings are in fact a form of Realism. The planar color surfaces act as a metonym for an implied “fugitive” structure – “a patch of green” connotes a patch of grass, “a patch of blue” connotes a very real patch of blue, the sky, but more importantly quite often the sky at a particular moment. (Or, as Werner writes: “This is no less an affirmation than André Breton’s when he wrote that the color of Courbet’s skies is the color of the blue sky of Paris the day the Vendôme Column fell.”) Given this indelible (anamorphic) stain haunting all imagery and perception, what is to be made of George W. Bush’s sky-blue tie, worn during his tour of the Hermitage?

Presidential ties have been the source of a great deal of speculative ekphrasis since perhaps Kennedy. (Don’t forget that Clinton supposedly used his tie to send secret messages to Monica Lewinsky.) Ekphrasis is the relatively old practice of describing the exact moment a painting or work of sculpture embodies. Sigmund Freud wrote (anonymously) a rather fabulous account of the meaning of Michelangelo’s *Moses* based on this traditional form of art interpretation. The idea of ambience is a related method of getting down to business – the subliminal message of the power tie (or the piano-key tie!) is of the same order of things. In architectural criticism, one can tell more about a building or landscape by analyzing the environmental elements it engages or disengages rather than by judging the mere facade or structural form. This surplus is a means of getting a purchase on the significance of the entire apparatus that supports and underwrites architecture. Included in this apparatus is the political-economic machinery. The recent twin re-representations of the work of arch-modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, in New York at MoMA and the Whitney, in 2000, accidentally revealed the power of ambient factors in architecture in ways that are admittedly somewhat obscure but also subliminally at play in the very act of artistic and curatorial representation.

### **ARCHITECTURE & IDEOLOGY**

The Mies legend – that he was the exemplar of ideology-free, open-space planning (i.e., free-flowing space and majestic clear span) – is/was both an elective fiction perpetrated by the self-anointed keepers of architectural modernism and a means of obscuring promiscuous political trace elements buried in Mies’ work. This political aura was brilliantly reconstituted in photographs by Thomas Ruff, at MoMA’s “Mies in Berlin”, through artistically doctored photographs of key buildings intended to restore the missing links, or the supplemental ambient forces that produce/support a work of architecture. These included ideological as well as architectural presumptions. At the Whitney (“Mies in America”), the recovery of aura was more overtly realized by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle’s design of the installation, especially the culminating gesture – a room with an eerily spot-lit model of Mies’ New National Gallery (Berlin) amid darkness, and a video loop documenting a day in the life of Mies’ last monumental effort to produce “an architecture of almost nothing”. Manglano-Ovalle’s timelapse cinematography not merely restored the

environmental and existential conditions of the vast empty box set on a gargantuan podium but enhanced these effects and proved conclusively that Mies' game of architectural reductionism came with a very high price attached – i.e., extreme alienation. The New National Gallery was presented as a monument to the supposed autonomy of art and architecture, standing aloof within its Berlin *mise en scène*, a park, with visitors flitting ghostlike through its empty, pure space.

This picture of alienation reclaims for Mies the sublime system of reduction at play in his buildings without erasing the principal adjuncts to his theatrical sense of form and space – the sky, the horizon, the play of light and shadow, and the ever-present symbolic tissue of subject-object relations. The hyper-optical nature of Mies' buildings (he always drew his projects in one-point perspective) underscores the architectonic premise of Mies and Miesian architecture. Signed *Tout à vous*, "here" is the condition of Modernity Itself.

### SPRINGTIME & THE NEW GILDED AGE

In the news media, today, one has to similarly read the images (as one has to read between the lines of any article or Op-Editorial, in say the *New York Times*) to find the presence of the symbolic – the complex of authorized things, ideas, operations that condition our day-to-day consciousness. In the case of the images of Bush and Putin, gamboling about St. Petersburg (after having dispensed with the "historic" Nuclear Arms Reduction Treaty in Moscow), one needs to remember that St. Petersburg is Putin's "hometown" and only recently George W. Bush serenaded Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah in Crawford, Texas (Bush's imaginary "hometown"), driving him around the 1600-acre ranch and pointing out the Texas blue bonnets. Ah! the blue tie. Does the blue tie connect back to springtime Texas and sunny appeasement? Does that tie signal the optimism of George Bush in the new Russia-America entente? In the spirit of free association, please connect the dots: Blue tie, blue blood, blue skies, blue bonnets. Blue is also the natural complement to gold (which is why both blue and gold were part of the cosmic symbolism of the Russian Symbolist poets).

If so, or even if not, what does all that gold leaf signify? Is it not a means of conveying the grand intentions of this alliance? Does it not hearken back to Imperial Russia and suggest that Russia, today, understands the importance of window dressing? The honor guard at the airport reception certainly confounded our usual picture of poorly equipped Russian soldiers slugging it out with Chechen rebels in the North Caucasus (a land crisscrossed by pipelines from Caspian Sea oil and natural gas fields).

Anyway, speaking of the architecture of politics, the broken steppes of Central Asia beckon. Major media's colorful coverage of the Bush-Putin summit resembled nothing less than a National Geographic spread on the perquisites of privilege, wealth, and power. While Bush and his ilk are fast securing the domestic and international ramparts of the New Gilded Age, off-stage, or just beyond the ornate picture frame, there are seething hell-holes eating at the edges. In the analysis of architectural and political form, essentially the art of eye-wash, what is omitted is as important as what is admitted. Reading images is one thing, reading the future is another. Unfortunately, for everyone, the devastated and clotted landscape of Central Asia is the historic repressed aura haunting Imperial and Neo-Imperial Russia.

### OUTTAKES

[Mies and Mies Not](#) – Mies in Berlin

[Levitating Architecture](#) – Mies in America

Regarding the "historic" Moscow Treaty, signed with pomp and splendour at the Kremlin, see [The Independent](#) (05/25/02) – "Moscow was willing to destroy the warheads not deployed, knowing that because of its economic weakness its ability to deliver warheads is going down. America was not. Instead it will 'deep freeze' warheads. In 10 years it will still have 10,000 nuclear warheads that it could use."

For bona-fide National Geographic photographs of the wrecked landscapes of the post-Soviet Caspian Sea basin, by Iranian-born photographer Reza Deghati, [cliquez ici](#).



## **GEO-LINGUISTIC FOOTNOTE**

If the landlocked Caspian Sea can be redefined as “a lake”, all oil and natural gas reserves would belong equally to all countries bordering the waterbody, including Russia and Iran. The one bone of contention between Bush and Putin during the Moscow portion of the summit was Russia’s helping Iran to build a nuclear power plant in Bushehr, Iran. Iran, fingered as part of the Axis of Evil, and Russia, new best friend of the US, would both like to see the Caspian Lake cleared of “arbitrary” claims by rival regional powers. Since the oil and gas is unevenly distributed throughout the sea- or lake-bed, Russia’s and Iran’s share of the action is considerably less than Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and, surprise, Chechnya. A Stalin-era complex known as the “Oily Rocks” – a 48-mile-long network of depleted wells, booms, platforms, storage tanks, and gangways – is currently rusting into the sea between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/06/01/bush-and-the-legacy-of-mies-van-der-rohe/>

## The Adventures of Mademoiselle M.: Or Getting Screwed in Paris

by Gavin Keeney

Paris-based bon vivant and arts dominatrix Catherine Millet's sex memoir (*The Sexual Life of Catherine M.*) raised the collective eyebrows of the art-intelligentsia in Paris, for various reasons, when it was first published last year. Now that it has appeared in English, perhaps it is time to examine in detail Millet's role in the culture wars of the 1980s as well. Some of these intellectual positions are more telling than the sexual calisthenics of the book, and, in one notorious case, they place her more definitively on the slutty side of things than any of the manifold tales of nonstop debauchery.

It was in 1991, while working on my Master of Landscape Architecture thesis at Cornell University, that I first encountered the idea of radical contingency in the form of the work of Scot's poet-artist-gardenist Ian Hamilton Finlay. I made my way to Scotland, where Finlay was famously under self-imposed house arrest at his South Pentland Hills' redoubt, Little Sparta, after a furious round of battles with the Scottish Arts Council and the Strathclyde Regional Council (now disbanded) over the nature of his activities at Little Sparta. Sitting in front of his peat fire, in March, I was treated to a short history of Little Sparta, plus the French Affaire. He asked me to write about the latter, given that the former was already well-documented.

But first a little history. "They", the local authorities, said his gallery, a renovated outbuilding (byre) re-named the Temple to Apollo (the faux Doric facade carries the inscription "His Music, His Missiles, His Muses") was a commercial enterprise and, thus, taxable. Finlay maintained that the garden temple was a sacred, tax-exempt structure, and Little Sparta en masse was a Republic (i.e., a "Raspberry" Republic) devoted to restoring the sacred foundations of artistic inspiration, etc. He was, at this time, "excavating" these foundations through exquisite works on paper (issued through the Wild Hawthorn Press), gallery installations, and in sculptural form in the garden groves of Little Sparta.

This all led to the Little Spartan Wars (the first in 1983), mock battles with the authorities that climaxed in a raid by the Sheriff and confiscation of "works of art" in lieu of unpaid taxes. Finlay organized the Saint-Just Vigilantes, an ad hoc group of supporters (including his good friend Nicholas Sloan at the Tate) and fought a polemical war (initially in the pages of the *TLS*) for almost a decade against the so-called powers of secularized art. It was during the 1980s that Finlay's work, formerly based on the strenuous codes of Concrete Poetry, became "militarized", and mock armaments turned up in the gardens at Little Sparta. Indeed, Little Sparta was the new name given to Stonypath, after the first skirmishes, and structurally denotes a territory set apart from Edinburgh (a.k.a. "Athens of the North"). The Raspberry Republic issued stamps, cards, broadsides, and other polemical memorabilia throughout this protracted battle.

The militarization of Stonypath included Finlay's very strategic foray into the rhetoric of the French Revolution. In particular, he appropriated the Jacobin phase as rhetorical ammunition. And, zut alors!, in 1987, after a round of memorable gallery installations in France exploring repressed thematic nuances of the Revolution (part of his masterful campaign to "de-nazify" neoclassical architecture), Finlay was commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture to design a garden commemorating the Rights of Man for the then-forthcoming bicentenary celebrations of the French Revolution. This commission, and the subsequent soul-searching amongst the French intelligentsia regarding the Jacobin phase of the Revolution, caused much ado about rhetoric in the left-leaning Paris art world.

Enter Catherine Millet and *Art Press*, the journal she edits. *Art Press*, through Mademoiselle M., annoyed that a Scotsman (and a Jacobin to boot!) might actually build a lasting memorial to the French Revolution at Versailles (at the former site of the Hôtel des Menus-Plaisirs where the Estates General met on August 4, 1789 to declare the Rights of Man), orchestrated a campaign of character-assassination in Paris to derail Finlay's prestigious commission. The key documents in *Art Press* were brazen, bizarre distortions of Finlay's Paris 1987 exhibitions "de-nazifying neoclassicism", and they more or less suggested that Finlay was nourished by an unhealthy (morbid) fascination with the iconography of Nazi Germany. This balderdash was spread by word of mouth as well (a fairly

smutty mouth we now find out), and Finlay's commission was revoked. This, notably, was also the time of the Klaus Barbie trial. It all came to a head with a now infamous broadcast on Europe 1 (Emission 8/9) with a panel of savants "discussing" Finlay's commission. This panel included Catherine Millet, Catherine Duhamel (Ministry of Culture, Plastic Arts Legation), Michel Blum (League of the Rights of Man), and Stéphane Paoli (Europe 1 moderator). It was, tout court, summary execution/ambush by media – a black ops/arts operation. The project was canceled post haste. This is all documented in my "A Revolutionary Arcadia: Reading Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Un jardin révolutionnaire*" published in *Word & Image*, vol. XI, no. 3 (July-September 1995).

Finlay fought back and eventually won one-franc damages in the French courts. Millet enlisted the assistance of the so-called League of the Rights of Man (part of the Radio 1 posse), a group one may now wonder further about given Millet's penchant for gang-banging her way to notoriety. Unfortunately, and in the tradition of the roman à clef, the protagonists/beneficiaries of her wide-ranging sexcapades are "masked", in the manner of the grand orgy in Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*.

The commission was never re-instated and Finlay was never paid for his work. After this all fell to pieces, another garden was designed for the historic site of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, a garden which is – curiously – some sort of garden-architectural sop to the memory of Marie-Antoinette.

The French are still very uneasy about discussing certain parts of the Revolution. As a result, a form of selective amnesia wipes out those parts of history that are – um – uncomfortable to address, such as, say, Vichy. We all know now that anyone who stayed in Nazi-occupied France during World War II was in the Resistance, and the Vichy regime was populated by scarecrows. Anyway, The Terror was a repressed cultural memory, then, as now, and Millet played upon the fears and anxieties of the chattering classes to stoke suspicion regarding Ian Hamilton Finlay's artistic agenda. The garden proposal, in itself, was never the issue. It actually was a highly poetic etude with mnemonic devices engaging Rousseau, neoclassicism, Michelet, and, without even trying, high dudgeon of 1980s art criticism, intertextuality. Needless to say, the demolition of Finlay's reputation in France took years to correct while Catherine M. slithered merrily on her way.

## OUTTAKES

**Review 1** – US edition (Grove) – [The Sexual Life of Catherine M](#) – "Written with the unsentimental precision of a guided missile, Millet's slim book detonates little explosions of awkwardness and confusion in the reader, pitting arousal against intellectual contemplation. She writes about her experiences not only with incandescent prose but also with analytic detachment, as if she were a documentarian observing from the front lines of sexuality, fluids, limbs, and garments flying all around her." (*Village Voice*, 05/24/02)

**Review 2** – British edition (Serpent's Tail) – [The Double Life](#) – "Her book, *The Sexual Life of Catherine Millet* [*La Vie Sexuelle de Catherine M*], published in France last year, has sold 400,000 copies and is still inciting worldwide debate. 'This has been one of the happiest times of my life,' she says. 'Not just because the book is a success, but because a lot of people understand it.'" (*Guardian Unlimited*, 05/19/02)

**Review 3** – French edition (Éditions du Seuil) – [Body of Evidence](#) – "For renowned sociologist Jean Baudrillard, Millet's book aroused thoughts about the death of modern reality. 'The naivety of Catherine Millet,' he wrote, 'is to think that one lifts one's skirt to undress, to make oneself naked and so get access to the naked truth – be it the truth about sex or about the world. 'But if one lifts one's skirt, it is to show one's self – not to show oneself naked like the truth (who can believe that the truth remains the truth when one lifts its veil?) but to give birth to a kingdom of appearances, that is to say to seduction – which is exactly the opposite.'" (*Guardian Unlimited*, 06/30/01)

**Notoriety** – [Confidente Publique](#) – "Elle s'y est livrée en Espagne, au Portugal, en Italie, aux Pays-Bas, en Belgique. Pour quelles questions ? 'A peu près toujours les mêmes. D'abord: pourquoi avez-vous fait ce livre? Et très rarement – beaucoup trop rarement – comment l'avez-vous fait ? Et puis la question permanente: comment trouver le plaisir? La presse a insisté sur les expériences de sexualité de groupe: l'imagination des gens en a été frappée, et ils m'interrogent essentiellement là-dessus. Alors, il me faut rectifier: ce livre n'est pas une apologie de l'hédonisme et de la réalisation des fantasmes.'" (*Le Monde*, 02/20/02)

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## POST-NEO-SUBLIME FOOTNOTE

À propos of the French penchant for selectively editing history, consider for a moment the fate of the sublime landscapes of Ermenonville, where Rousseau spent his last days. First, however, please note that Versailles or any other piece of Baroque splendour is maintained to the highest standards of modern historic conservation.

Ermenonville, reputedly designed with the assistance of neoclassical painter Hubert Robert, was the estate of the Marquis de Girardin (1735-1808), one of the “enlightenment era” nobles whose collective philosophical and political intrigues anticipated, if not supported, the French Revolution. (See [READINGS 4](#) for a bibliography of material supporting a comprehensive recollection of this period.) Jean-Jacques Rousseau died in 1778 and was buried at Ermenonville. His remains were first interred on the Île des Peupliers (Isle of the Poplars) in the middle of an idyllic lake created by damming a stream that ran through the estate.

Perhaps the reason this bit of landscape-architectural history has been allowed to decompose has more to do with its origins than its politics (as if those two things can ever be dis-entwined). Ermenonville represents the full-flower of the English-style park in France, a style that supplanted the Baroque in the 18th century and became the favored means of wearing one’s politics on one’s sleeve for the upper nobility. Le Nôtre’s Versailles, Chantilly, and Vaux-le-Vicomte are, of course, French national treasures and represent the authorized French national style (the politics of the ancien régime notwithstanding).

Ermenonville, on the other hand, was chopped into pieces in 1874. It has since been sliced up into various development opportunities. The park has been controlled by the Touring Club of France, since 1938, and they added a 20-acre caravan park. The chateau proper was until recently rented to the Hare Krishna sect. South of “Arcadia”, a 150-acre portion of the original park where a series of fabulous follies slowly rots into the ground, a 40-acre “poplar plantation” was added. The woods are now state owned. A zoo has been constructed nearby the rusticated “mill” – one of the working follies to the north of the chateau – and other portions of the park have been sublet to long-term tenants for recreational ventures (sports fields, etc). La Launette (a stream that feeds La Nonette, which feeds Le Nôtre’s glorious reflecting pools at Chantilly) was polluted by a tinned-food factory. The Île des Peupliers, where Rousseau’s tomb remains (whereas his remains were long ago removed to the Panthéon in Paris) is in the process of being undermined by water rats and collapsing.

See also, [Dumas to the Pantheon!](#) (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 06/05/02)

See also [Blue \(Abendland\)](#)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/06/08/catherine-millet-getting-screwed-in-paris/>

## Loose Lips: Liberty, Democracy and Bush

by Gavin Keeney

Instead of mouthing the words *liberty* and *democracy*, illiberally and demotively, George W. Bush might consider the universal implications (the ideal lineaments) of *Liberty* and *Democracy*. But anyway, please don't hold your breath.

The so-called president's limited IQ has some bearing on this conundrum. What in the world have his Yale and Harvard degrees done for him?

One has to wonder in general if political rhetoric is simply political rhetoric, or if there is a possible signified lurking somewhere between the lines. Does the word *liberty* have a concept? Does the word *democracy* have an implied ethical dimension?

If so, then the next question is "Who owns these terminologies?" Our best collective hunch might be absolutely no one, since they are by definition abstractions. Does the merely nominal nature of the terms *liberty* and *democracy* account for the in-one-ear-and-out-the-other quality of political rhetoric? Are these terms, therefore, bankrupt?

Well (as Ronald Reagan used to say quite a lot) ... George seems to think he knows what they mean and he has expended quite a lot of words to tell us what he seems to think they mean, including words at war with themselves insofar as he contradicts himself from one minute to the next (from one speech to the next). It is apparent that these two words have a temporal meaning in the nouvelle-vague, Orwellian world of the Bush League.

Liberty means, of course, privileges for the elect – a kind of neo-Calvinist school of thought where you are damned in advance if you have not somehow wrested a sizeable income from either: a/ your parents; b/ investments; or c/ crony capitalist machinations, etc. This is, after all, the "End of History", and winner takes all.

Democracy means, on the other hand, US-approved puppet regimes as far as the blind eye can see, plus free market cowboy-capitalism with its attendant woes – i.e., currency speculation, capital flight, and round-robin indentured servitude (for "emerging markets"!) to international financial institutions that are merely the stalking horses for the neo-imperial aspirations of the economic elite.

Attending more to rhetoric than the Real Thing, Bush has made almost anyone with a conscience (again an abstract thing) uncomfortable. Clearly more at home with syntactical operations (even though these are, hopelessly, a serious challenge for the president), Bush seems to either not care about semantics or is oblivious that words usually have meanings. Are we to assume that the president is a brilliant post-structuralist? A savvy devotee of circular, nihilist language games?

I don't think so ... Bush only speaks when the words are prepared in advance by his guardians. As ward of the State, the president can only do what he is told. This brings to mind the apparitional (repressed) golem stalking the American republic. This thing, meant to protect us, has turned into a monster prepared to devour our last principles, including liberty and democracy. This beast is an amalgam of the National Security State, the plutocracy, and corporatism (a.k.a. "globalism").

Bush was placed in the oval rocking chair by this amalgam. This amalgam is NOT structural – it is very real – but composed of "spectral" neo-Americans. Neo-Americans are essentially post-modern vampyres. This gang has hijacked the US economy, foreign affairs, all forms of popular media, the Congress, the judiciary, the military, and – tragically – language itself.

This all reminds me of a Robert Heinlein novella, *Magic, Inc.* (1942), wherein demons have taken over the US government, "magic" has been corporatized, and a cadre of independent magicians endeavors to sort things out. The

great climax of the novella involves a heroic descent into Hell, led by an Oxford-educated African shaman, to do battle with the Evil One himself.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/06/bush-s-loose-lips/>

## **Go Tell Karl Rove!: The Anti-Republican Party**

by Gavin Keeney

As Karl Rove twiddles the dials on the White House Moonshine Machine, prepare yourself for the coming bloodbath. In-between now and then (November 2002) expect to be lectured on individual liberty, personal hygiene, civic duty, discretion, prudence, staying the course?, the middle-to-high moral ground, the implicit loveliness of capitalism, and – if needs be – the reborn born-againism of our latterday be-knighted crusader for all things kind and gentle.

If this fails, expect the immediate invasion of Iraq, to begin as soon as the polls show the Republicans losing serious real ground in the Senate and House elections. It might also be worthwhile, then, while all this posturing is under way, as trial balloons come and go, as bluster turns to compromise, as deals are made to salvage individual reputations and fortunes, that the voter huff and puff in return – first this way, then that way – by way of whatever venue you find worthy, sending false signals to the White House number crunchers. Send Bush's numbers up one week, send them to the bestial floor the next week, run en masse to third party candidates, embrace your least favorite new Democrat (for five minutes), and in November vote anything but Republican. If voting for a third party candidate will be a vote for the Republicans, you'll probably have to vote for the new-old Democrat anyway.

Send nice letters to the White House. Send lots of them. Send e-mails to Republican congressional candidates extolling their virtues. Ask them how you can funnel to them your life savings without setting off campaign finance reform alarm bells. Join focus groups and pine for a return to Reaganism – nice dull trickledownism. Complain to newspapers about media bias. Write your friends and ask them to switch parties (several times). Sow so much confusion that the Moonshine Machine blows a circuit and is rendered inoperable.

In other words, tell Karl Rove to get lost.

After you've completed your first round of monkey business, and the smoke is still rising from the War Room at the White House, relax. Smile, enjoy your last weeks of summer and prepare for the Great Confusion. Media will change its prognosis every 24 hours. The Republicans are up, the Republicans are down, the Republicans are stuck, the numbers are volatile, the American public is fickle. Whatever you hear, smile. When you do finally vote make sure the effort has not been in vain.

In the last weeks of October pull out all the stops. Call Republican candidates and tell them you don't understand them any longer and you are sorry to hear they may lose. Send them campaign contributions in the form of rolled pennies. If you have any green stamps left from the 1960s, send these. Send them an IOU. Put signs out on your lawn or stoop with a picture of one candidate but affix the logo of the opposite party. Mix things up. Distribute literature in your neighborhood asking voters to wear clothespins on their noses when they go to the polls. Offer them a clothespin. If asked by a Republican zombie on the street if you are a Republican, feign the attention span of an eight-year old and say "sort of". Send clothespins by the boxcar load to the White House. You could even paint them red, white, and blue or include some soiled laundry. When the calling centers start blitzing the nation with automatic get-out-the-vote messages unplug your phone. If they persist, block the call. If the local Republican or Democratic machine calls close to the election, tell them you're an anarchist and you'll be on vacation during the election.

In other words, tell the political machinery to get lost.

After you've switched parties about half a dozen times (not on paper but during any correspondence or interaction with the machinery of contemporary politics), re-register as an Independent. If you cannot vote in your local primaries as an Independent, change to any party whatsoever, but vote Anti-Republican. When Bush makes his next speech about ethics and dental hygiene, exercise, or how to balance your checkbook, send adulatory letters and faxes to the White House. Praise the make-believe president for being so clean, buff, and perhaps throw in an erotic

memento. You could even send naughty birthday wishes, even though it's not his birthday. Include a picture of yourself in your birthday suit. Imagine tens of thousands of birthday cards arriving at the White House in September and October, gumming up the mailroom, as it sorts through letters looking for support for the destruction of Iraq, Iran, North Korea – the axis thing – and throws out all the whiny letters from disgruntled investors who lost everything on Wall Street and don't have a pot to piss in.

In other words, tell the Bush League to get lost and join the Anti-Republican party.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/13/go-tell-karl-rove/>



July 15, 2002

## Be Still My Beating Heart

by Gavin Keeney

Here's a snippet from William Safire's latest op-oratorio, "Hence, Loathed Melancholy", in the *Upper Right Coast Times*:

"The capitalist system is not in crisis. In recent months, it has been doing what it is supposed to do in the wake of every speculative binge: correcting itself. After a bubble bursts, people who have been deliriously blowing bubbles demand to know: How could 'they' have done this to us? But we, the investing people, have done it to ourselves – as we do in almost every generation." ([New York Times](#), 07/15/02)

Safire unpacks his polemic by quoting from Milton's *Il Penseroso* ... "Hence, vain deluding joyes ..." And he goes on to blame the victim for participating in the economic meltdown precipitated by what otherwise dispassionate analysts see as unprecedented malfeasance across the board (across the boardrooms) in corporate America.

I love structuralism when it is deployed as a critical tool. I despise it when it is used as an excuse. When I hear statistical abstractions summoned to explain distortions in the market or political horrors of one kind or another, I remember Mark Twain's comment, "If I stand with one foot in a bucket of boiling water, and one foot in a bucket of cold water, according to statistics, I am warm." I am also reminded, when mechanistic theories are deployed to deflect guilt, of Paris in 1968, when "structure took to the streets".

Here's my response to Safire's Op-Ed item (which in the *Times* usually means op-portunistic ed-itorial):

Date: Mon, 15 Jul 2002 07:44:09 -0700 (PDT)  
From: "Gavin Keeney"  
Subject: Hence, Loathed Melancholy  
To: safire@nytimes.com

Il penseroso ... You missed one hell of an opportunity to also appropriate Milton's "Necessary fall ..." Who, in this current imbroglio, is the interloper, leaping the walls of the garden, transforming himself into a snake ... GK

Here's WS's response:

From: safire@nytimes.com  
Date: Mon, 15 Jul 2002 10:45:14 -0400 (EDT)  
To: ateliermp@netscape.net  
Subject: AUTOMATED RESPONSE

You were good to write. (That's better than "It was good of you to write," because sentences beginning with "it" are boring.)

Your comments go into the thought processor inside my head and may one day pop up in a column.

Thanks again (which is repetitious but not redundant).

Sincerely,  
--William Safire

Swoosh! In other words, in one head and out the other!

This is terribly cute, mostly because Safire is the author of an infamous column in the *Upper Right Coast Times Magazine*, "On Language", wherein he lectures us on the language games of present-day cultural production.

So, let's turn the tables. What's with the "--" thing before his name? Isn't that usually reserved for identifying a quotation by an author? To locate the axiomatic epigraph or epigram? Isn't he unconsciously (or consciously) denoting his own self-importance?

I wonder if WS mistakes himself for the true genius of language, WS from Stratford-on-Avon. For him to throw Milton at us in an Op-Ed homily is very becoming his high opinion of himself. I like Milton, as a post-arcadian. If only we could rescue him from Stanley Fish (and now William Safire)! I say give Stanley Fish any color Jaguar he desires, as long as he gives back Milton.

But back to the *Times*. I've encountered both pathetic fallacies and ferocious pathologies in the Op-Ed pages and the forums that go with them. When Paul Krugman was lecturing us about the virtues of globalization and, in particular, the Quebec Declaration early last year, I wandered into a forum where an Irish brawl was taking place. It was all but impossible to discuss anything because the site had been hijacked by economic hooligans with a "let them eat cake" approach to the Third World. They were no doubt acolytes of First World triumphalism. I've saved some of the exchanges for a good laugh ...

<http://www.geocities.com/ateliermp/krugman.html>

To his credit, Krugman has been merciless lately on the subject of crony capitalism, especially regarding the Bush League. He has even backtracked somewhat regarding neo-liberalism and globalization. Safire, on the other hand never apologizes for anything. He is so much the contrarian that his agenda is, in fact, "libertarian" and he will in one breath attack Bush as a wannabe dictator (for breaches of civil liberties, etc.), and in the next praise the idiotic triumphalism of post-cold war capitalist imperialism. His role as apologist (and sometimes strategist) for the brutal policies of Ariel Sharon in suppressing the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank is another matter. Combined with Pulitzer prize winner Tom Friedman's pro-Israel rhetoric, the Op-Ed pages of the *Times* have become all but unbearable. I suppose they let Maureen Dowd dump on Bush for comic relief from time to time just to spare us from total despair and/or cynicism.

But back to Milton ... *Il Penseroso* is an exquisite study in melancholy. It exudes a world-weariness that only a poet can capture in words. Melancholy is the affliction of humanists. I knew a humanist once upon a time, before the advent of neo-liberalism ...

Sic transit specious appropriations.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/15/the-air-between-bill-safire-s-ears/>

## Grave New Urbanism: The World Trade Center Burlesque

by Gavin Keeney

Now that the digital ink is dry on the six plans released July 16, 2002 for the benighted World Trade Center site, perhaps it is time to draw a few preliminary conclusions while rehearsing some recent events and possible future history. Any surmises at this point are purely conjectural because it is in the nature of a master plan that everything will change several times before the first new buildings are actually assigned a footprint.

The plans were initiated by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), a recently created quasi-public agency within the Empire State Development Corporation. The master plan was awarded to the New York City firm of Beyer Blinder Belle after an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) was released earlier in the year. Beyer Blinder Belle is the firm that gave us the renovated Grand Central Terminal, and is a highly capable, if dull architecture and planning firm. The fact that Grand Central Terminal is now a shopping mall on neo-classical steroids is not their fault.

The LMDC was created by Governor George Pataki and ex-Mayor Rudolf Giuliani. The race to complete the planning phase of the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan ("everything south of Houston Street") has a great deal to do with Pataki's 2002 re-election campaign, now underway. As a result, this thing has to be 'perceived' as placating everyone – with the exception perhaps of architects. But that is a matter that we will get to in a moment.

The WTC site is one of several big opportunities in NYC right now for very big, very lucrative design commissions. The run-up to this master plan was such a horrendous insult to the public, insofar as everyone with or without a shred of design sense seemed to have a plan. Plus, and perhaps more interesting, there were visions and prophetic dreams ... Anyway, late last fall there was an incredible surge of self-interest and grandstanding in the architectural community best typified by an exhibition in early 2002 at Max Protetch, a Chelsea art gallery, of ad hoc proposals for the site. This was orchestrated by *Architectural Record*, the big trade magazine for the architecture world and also the house magazine for the American Institute of Architects. This event was primarily an emotional outburst of the most hysterical type and the designs that were exhibited were almost entirely without merit. The exhibition has now been shipped to Venice for the next Biennale and its installation is being underwritten by the US Department of State.

For more than you'll ever want to know about this subject, and for links to the WTC proposals released on July 16, see [World Trade Center Burlesque](#).

New York City is a climate where big fish generally monopolize everything. The architectural firms that land large planning commissions have to negotiate an incredible array of flaming hoops in the form of regulatory commissions, community boards, zoning laws, etc., etc. Only the big fish can play at this game. It's very labor- and capital-intensive. The task of developing city-owned property is usually consigned to a consortium of real estate developers, planners, and architects (plus lawyers). This process has been the preferred method since central planning fell from grace after 1960s urban renewal gave city planning in general a very long-term black eye. Today, in cities across America, the public-private development model is the paradigm. The recent makeover of Times Square is an example of a twist in this game, as it is controlled by a Business Improvement District (BID), another quasi-public authority but one permitted to solicit funds on behalf of redevelopment from businesses within its boundaries. BIDs were originally created to facilitate upgrading down-at-the-heels sectors of Manhattan. Lately, however, they have become the favorite device for businesses to take over and police neighborhoods, or, as in the case of Central Park (which is run by a conservancy), partially privatize public space. At best, city planning can lay out a template and hope it is observed. There are few enforcement options.

This is the shadow world or background animating what is going on at the WTC site. The new master plan is actually an attempt to pull together a large set of unresolved issues in Lower Manhattan by capitalizing on this high-profile project. The main issues remain: transportation, infrastructure, live/work neighborhoods, waterfront access,

and everything in-between (formerly known as “public open space”). The dotcom boom was good for Lower Manhattan insofar as it drew startups to the alleyways of Wall Street, fostering what was until recently called Silicon Alley. A glut of office space in downtown Manhattan also caused a slow, but steady conversion of older office buildings to apartments and condominiums. TriBeCa became the holier-than-thou arena that it is now after SoHo became one continuous shopping experience. Now that TriBeCa is “full”, Chelsea (further uptown) has become the new hot destination for art galleries and the fashionisti.

Several major themes have emerged in the six plans for the revitalization of Lower Manhattan, and, even if the six schemes look an awful lot alike, they are different. To focus on the architecture is in fact a mistake because these plans only represent massing versus actual buildings. It is the spaces in-between that ought to draw people’s attention.

The former World Trade Center plaza was a disaster. It was an inhospitable, wind-blown zone with the barest of amenities. Worse than Lincoln Center! The stuff stuffed below the deck was primarily shopping and dining facilities. The subway lines and PATH trains coming into the underground station were grossly oversubscribed. The one pedestrian link to Battery Park City required following a labyrinthian path through the retail complex until you located the overpass, which then dropped you into the César Pelli designed Winter Garden where you were again invited to shop and dine. Once you exited the Winter Garden, to the promenade, your options were to ogle the yachts parked in the boat basin (a few years ago, one had a fake helicopter on deck) or stroll along the harbor dodging the rollerblading public. (There are a few choice eateries along the way.) If you walked all the way to the newish Museum of Jewish Heritage, you might find a few small parks fenced off and looking very spic and span. These represent the unbuilt portions of the Battery Park City master plan (from the late 1980s) and they are a means of “parking” land. They are the future footprints of yet another piece of deluxe real estate.

Thus, New York City is in a quandry. It seems only capable of building high-end real estate. Trump this, Trump that ... The WTC master plan proposals all include the same amount of retail and commercial office space that was lost with the collapse of the two towers. It was *required* by the LMDC. The footprint of the former twin towers is now (finally) accepted as sacred ground, since it is a grave site, and nothing will be built upon this hallowed piece of ground. There will almost certainly be a design competition for a memorial, which everyone with a conscience admits must be included in whichever of the big redevelopment schemes is selected.

The six schemes have fascinating, if conservative landscape urbanistic components. The one with the most potential includes a “promenade” (a new Park Avenue) running north-south and linking up to Battery Park at the very tip of Lower Manhattan. This would at the least partially re-green another section of Lower Manhattan. But it will become primarily another congested traffic corridor (even if West Street is submerged). The fact that the promenade is presented in plan as a Beaux-Arts folly is again something that is provisional versus real. All the other schemes are primarily variations on a cluster of mid-rise towers (some with embarrassing stumps or masts attached to the top like a prosthetic signifying “higher” aspirations). In the current climate of lowered expectations the only loud noises demanding buildings as tall as the former towers are emanating from the tabloids (the aforementioned architects have mostly piped down).

New York has two other amazing things in the works that impinge on this project in subtle but serious ways. One is the Fresh Kills End Use Master Plan, the post-closure plan for the world’s largest dump on Staten Island. (Fresh Kills is also the place where the rubble from the collapsed towers was taken and meticulously sorted.) The second is the redevelopment of the West Side Railyards behind Pennsylvania Station at 34th Street. This includes the conversion of a monstrous neo-classical pile, the Farley Post Office, to a new Penn Station. The latter project is a gift of major significance to New Yorkers as the current Penn Station at Madison Square Garden is one of the most loathed structures in the city. New York’s Senator Moynihan, just prior to departing Congress, also made sure that a new train will finally link the city to JFK (and it will depart the new Penn Station). The last big deal is the 2012 Olympic bid. Yes, New York City wants to host the Summer Games in 2012 and is pushing mightily to get that plum “stealth” redevelopment opportunity. A decision from the US Olympic Committee is due in early November.

For additional details on the Fresh Kills End Use Master Plan, see [Fresh Kills – Capitalism’s Golgotha](#).

All of these impressive activities have one thing in common: massive private real estate ventures most often using public monies, public land, and tax exemptions to proceed. The public can at best hope for a few embellishments around the edges and, in the case of the Olympics, a temporary upsurge in transportation spending (including high-

speed ferries which will “go away” after the games close).

So, what might Manhattan (New York, New York, New York) look like c.2012, if the Olympic bid is successful? In-between the deluxe condominiums, the top-shelf new office space, and the astounding assortment of shopping and dining facilities we find several new temporary parks, yet another museum that cost so much to build there's nothing in it, a renovated library or two that are closed for lack of operating funds, several City Parks Department designed dog runs with dog-styling boutiques, a tree, a slightly wider sidewalk here and there (with barriers to prevent jaywalking), very big (and pricey) parking garages, traffic jams everywhere, city-licensed kiosks everywhere selling \$2 (12-ounce) bottles of tap water, air-conditioned tents for one gala event after another, a special limousine-only lane to the FDR from Wall Street, hundreds of statues of Rudolph Giuliani looking very buff, artistic renderings in bronze of homeless men and women (the real ones have been shipped out of state with the garbage), one lonely coffee shop that is not a Starbucks, a couple of newstands that have been in existence for more than two months, smoke shops with \$9-a-pack cigarettes (to help pay the Olympic-size bills), another very expensive art installation by Jeff Koons and/or Louise Bourgeois, a splendid new stadium behind the new Penn Station (which will be given to the super-rich Yankees after the Olympic games), the new Air Train to JFK (already overtaxed and ill-equipped to handle baggage), high-speed and high-priced ferries (rented for the occasion), an army of policemen and women (many with two-weeks training), millions upon millions of tourists and kazillions of daytrippers from New Jersey, Upstate New York and Connecticut, and – oh yes – a handful of New Yorkers who have not sublet their apartments and fled the city.

For a bibliography examining the fascinating world of Olympic-style urbanism, including the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, see [Olympic Urbanisms](#).

[Synopsis of the Plans](#) (*Guardian Unlimited*, 07/17/02)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/20/world-trade-center-burlesque/>

July 24, 2002

## Roamin' in the Gloamin': Van Morrison: In September

by Gavin Keeney

“When the leaves coming falling down  
In September, when the leaves come falling down ...  
When the leaves come falling down in September, in the rain  
When the leaves come falling down”

–Van Morrison, “When the Leaves Come Falling Down”,  
*Back on Top* (Exile Publishing Ltd., 1998)

Leon Wieseltier, contributing editor of the *New Republic*, has promised for years to write an essay on the music of Van Morrison, the Irish bard/troubadour. Thus far, he has not delivered on the promise. It has been repeatedly delayed – perhaps because Morrison’s work itself is infused with temporality. Delaying, rounding, rummaging, idling, and all forms of prevarication abound. “Say goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye ... Get on the train, the train, the train, the train, the train ... This is the train, the train, the train, the train, the train ...” Transitions and glimpses of “something” litter the musical landscape, but “paradise” – the eternal now – always slips away. “Got you in my sight, got you in my mind ...” For me, Van Morrison’s music will always be infused with the spirit of “the Fall” – of impermanence, always-already deferred “transcendence”, and somber “autumnal” hues (and cries).

I first understood Morrison’s legendary status – as legendary prevaricator/idler – when I read Hunter S. Thompson’s paean to *Astral Weeks* in *Rolling Stone* sometime around 1972-73. I had just started college and *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice* were available in the library. Thompson’s article circled round *Astral Weeks* and swooped incoherently down on “Slim Slow Slider” – the most amazing song on this extraordinary 1968 recording made in New York City in one continuous recording session – a journalistic feat utterly consistent with the music. “Saw you early this morning, with your brand-new boy and your cadillac / You’re gone for something, and I know you won’t be back ...” This song shatters the mirror of innocence, played out through the other songs of sexual awakening, e.g., the delirium of “Just Like a Ballerina”, and represents the emergence of something purely archaic – expressed in the ravaged, wordless conclusion. This undercurrent is present throughout but irrupts mercilessly at the close of the last song. The infamous, wayfaring journalist was apparently struck dumb by the savage incantation of the song – the young girl “slipping and sliding”, riding away into oblivion. “Tell it everywhere you go ...” It struck through the Gordian knot of Hunter’s cynicism to his post-romantic soul. Hunter S. Thompson was after all a burnt-out romantic, albeit one obsessed with guns and drugs and Richard Nixon. Many years later in the Woody Creek Tavern, outside Aspen, Colorado, and sitting just below the Hunter S. Thompson memorabilia mounted on the wall, I remembered that first encounter ... Too bad he didn’t saunter through the door. He could have tried to explain himself. I’ve been trying to track down this article for years, to no avail. Sometimes I think I may have hallucinated the whole thing.

I heard covers of Van Morrison songs from the *Moondance* period in bars by local folk musicians in those first years of college. I was 18 years old and the music – combined with rivers of draft beer – was a near-death experience. It mattered little that it was not Morrison singing the songs. The bands were superb folk-blues bands – the place was Northern Maine, where first-class musicians were in a kind of self-imposed exile in the Great North Woods. I eventually purchased *Astral Weeks* and it was the beginning of following Morrison’s ambling career over nearly 30 years. Before Van Morrison captured my imagination, I had listened principally to the folk minstrels Joni Mitchell, Tom Rush, Tom Paxton, Eric Andersen, Phil Ochs, Leonard Cohen, and Jesse Winchester. To this day I listen to Joni Mitchell’s *Blue* (1971) ... Tom Rush, exquisite in concert, was one of the first to bring early Jackson Browne songs east, from California. Around 1972, he was covering “Colors of the Sun” and “These Days”, by Browne, and “Biloxi” (1971), Jesse Winchester’s gift to humankind. “The stars can see Biloxi / The stars can find their faces in the sea / We are walking in the evening by the ocean ...” In just three short verses, Winchester encompassed the entire world. I wished, then, that “I had a river to skate away on ...” I still do.

I've never followed any band or artist through every up-and-down cycle. I collect the periodic releases that seem relevant, then dump them later when they seem irrelevant. With Van Morrison it was *Astral Weeks* (1968), *Moondance* (1970), *St. Dominic's Preview* (1972), *Veedon Fleece* (1974), *Wavelength* (1978), *Common One* (1980), *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (1983), *Poetic Champions Compose* (1987), *Enlightenment* (1990), *Days Like This* (1995), and, in 1999, *Back on Top* that impressed me. *Astral Weeks* remains in my collection, come hell or high water. It resides, permanently, "Way down upon the diamond studded highway where we wander ..." The middle period – the 1980s – was typified by Morrison composing music that became almost purely instrumental – the surly and sharp Irish bard's voice vanished below layers of jazz and new-age sonic (synthesized) improvisation. The Vangelis effect, plus some forays into Scientology ... Throughout, however, the saxophone became Van Morrison's second voice, and it has remained so through the later years – never quite going away. The 1999 music biz buzz about a "return to form", with *Back on Top*, was, of course, nonsense – in Morrison's work there is no urform. Van Morrison is a musician's musician. Like Texan Townes Van Zandt, before and after his recent death, Morrison remains a musical conundrum.

The mysterious presence of the music is the topographic sublimity itself of musical expression. The mystical, rapturous takes on Nature – Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Nature deified and defiled – are surrogate experiences of the innermost landscape of language. This sexualized ambience has been perfected since his first raw days with the Belfast band Them. Morrison has since his youth lived in the echoing spaces/passages of music and landscape. What else is "Ireland"? He has soaked up the influences of American gospel, blues, and jazz and brought a literary, poetic consciousness to the creative tableaux of his songs. But after all is said and done, there is that Pentecostal fire burning below the stylistic operations. "Give me the fire, ah give me the fire ..."

The music of *Common One* accompanied me through a period of rediscovery of the pure, symbolic realm of First Nature. Living in Southern Maine, and on the coast, I became obsessed with studying the landscape closely for its metaphoric power, but also for the signature of the Real. The songs followed me through snow-covered fields in winter, spruce and pine woods and coastal beaches in summer. *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* seemed to me to descend from the starry vault of winter nights – the music carried transcendental and cosmic wave formations (symphonic, emotive, aural dreamscapes). Like David Crosby's *If I Could Only Remember My Name*, the songs had virtually no lyrics other than pure non-semantic fragments of speech – cries and moans – or the phonemes that haunt the foundations of all languages. Later, when I met Crosby quite by chance, I told him that this was my favorite work of his. He said others told him the same thing.

*Poetic Champions Compose* was a gift from a friend. It was before CDs and I had a tape for years till I replaced it with a CD recently. The haunting "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" remains the formidable experience of that work, just like "Slim Slow Slider" from *Astral Weeks*.

And then along came *Back on Top*, in 1999, with the lyric gems "When the Leaves Come Falling Down", "Philosophers Stone", "In the Midnight", and "Golden Autumn Day". I purchased it at the Virgin Megastore at Times Square, where music resembles an avalanche. Where you have to pick your way through a wasteland of musical rubble to "find your way out". At the same time I purchased the 1999 Townes Van Zandt release, *A Far Cry from Dead*, a sardonic title since it was released (and mastered) after his death. As a poet, Van Zandt inhabited the same musical parallel universe as Van Morrison, plucking songs from the archaic aether as inspiration came and went. "Livin's mostly wastin' time / I waste my share of mine ..." Coming from Texas, Van Zandt worked in a far more rustic idiom – country blues and folk. With both Morrison (the bawdy bard) and Van Zandt (the hard-drinking minstrel), music is essentially the landscape of that parallel universe that poetic, primal consciousness inhabits. In Long John Baldry's a capella version of "Wild Mountain Thyme" I found confirmation of this truth – in a song where landscape and subjectivity collide head-on like a car crash. I listened to that song repeatedly until I learned it by heart. I can still sing a fair version ...

The war cries of the poet/minstrel are the pangs of struggle – including lamentations and "rack screams" – or protestations against Being-on-the-Road-to-Perdition (to update Heidegger), or, perhaps, Being-Sunk-in-the-Mire. What else was John Lennon's extraordinary primal scream phase all about? The existential anxiety of Townes Van Zandt led him to a so-called shamanistic, haunted country blues oeuvre, and to slow alcohol-induced self-immolation. (There is an apocryphal and questionable all-purpose excuse for why the Irish drink too much as well: i.e., to quell their "native clairvoyance". Given the history of Ireland, one might just as well substitute "drown their sorrows" for "quell their native clairvoyance".) No one has appeared to replace Van Zandt, in terms of poetic

intelligence, with perhaps the exception of Sam Phillips. (If only she can stay away from the pop producers ...) She is in many ways maintaining a post-Virgin Records vigil for her own soul. *Fan Dance* (Nonesuch, 2001) is a sign that this vigil is, for now, brilliantly, a matter of “marking time”. For the moment, Sam Phillips has escaped the “heart collector”.

Morrison, equally a stranger in a strange land, has appropriated Blake, Yeats, Wordsworth, Coleridge and the English-Irish literati (and illuminati) in his lyrical, sometimes mystical perambulations but never Kierkegaard, Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre. Perhaps Leon Wieseltier would be so kind as to explain why.

“Only a dark cocoon before [we] get our gorgeous wings and fly away ...”

### ANCIENT HIGHWAY

“There’s a small cafe on the outskirts of town  
I’ll be there when the sun goes down ...

When the grass is high and the rabbit runs  
Though it’s talkin’ to you and I  
And every new generation comes to pay  
The dues of the organ grinder jam ...

And I’ll be standin’ there, where the boats go by  
When the sun is sinking way over the hill  
On a Friday evening when the sun goes down  
On the outskirts of town. I wanna slip away  
I wanna slip away, got to get away ...

Travelling like a stranger in the night,  
all along the ancient highway  
Got you in my sights, got you on my mind  
I’ll be praying in the evening when the sun goes down  
Over the mountain, got to get you in my sight ...

And you’ll be standing there, while the boats go by  
While the boats go by on a Friday evening  
Got to slip away, got to slip away down that ancient highway  
In a town called Paradise, in a town, in a town ...

And we’re driving down that ancient road  
Shining like diamonds in the night, oh diamonds in the night  
All along the ancient highway  
Got you in my sight, got you in my mind  
Got you in my arms and I’m praying, and I’m gonna pray  
I’m gonna pray, to my higher self, ah don’t let me down  
Don’t let me down, give me the fire, ah give me the fire”

–Van Morrison,  
“Ancient Highway”,  
*Days Like This* (Exile Publishing Ltd., 1995)

“What Astral Weeks deals in are not facts but truths. *Astral Weeks*, insofar as it can be pinned down, is a record about people stunned by life, completely overwhelmed, stalled in their skins, their ages and selves, paralyzed by the enormity of what in one moment of vision they can comprehend. It is a precious and terrible gift, born of a terrible truth, because what they see is both infinitely beautiful and terminally horrifying: the unlimited human ability to create or destroy, according to whim. It’s no Eastern mystic or psychedelic vision of the emerald beyond, nor is it some Baudelairean perception of the beauty of sleaze and grotesquerie. Maybe what it boiled down to is one



moment's knowledge of the miracle of life, with its inevitable concomitant, a vertiginous glimpse of the capacity to be hurt, and the capacity to inflict that hurt." –Lester Bangs

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/24/van-morrison-in-september/>

## Sublime Žižek: Guarding Lenin's Tomb

by Gavin Keeney

Slavoj Žižek, the Giant of Ljubljana, is like the great brain of Goethe's fairytale "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily". In this revolutionary and allegorical tale (reputedly inspired by Mozart's *Magic Flute*) there are two lands separated by a river. There are only two ways to cross the river. One is by ferry, and the boatman is a kind of sadist that exacts bizarre tribute for the occasion. The other is to wait for the giant to appear and appropriate his shadow as a type of liminal bridge – perhaps a metaphor for the umbra (or penumbra) of semi-consciousness and imagination.

Žižek, as this giant (or giant brain), has cast a very long shadow indeed in what can only be termed "cultural studies" (though he would despise the characterization). He is effectively the most brilliant purveyor of Lacanian mischief, and, as a follower of the French "liberator" of Freud, Žižek's Lacan is almost exclusively transcribed in mesmerizing language games or intellectual parables. That he has an encyclopedic grasp of political, philosophical, literary, artistic, cinematic, and pop cultural currents – and that he has no qualms about throwing all of them into the stockpot of his imagination – is the prime reason he has dazzled his peers and confounded his critics for over ten years. He is also a legendary trickster (having learned his craft as part of the communist nomenklatura in Slovenia), a kind of Don Quixote for unrepentant Marxists and scourge of liberals, social democrats, new-age "obscurantists", multi-culturalists, and ... You get the picture.

I first sat through a Lacanian conference at NYU in the late 1990s and understood 10% of the language. It was, however, 110% thrilling. The sheer bravado of the performances by the French-inflected intellectuals was delightful and *sexy*. It was only later, in 2001, that I had an opportunity to hear Slavoj Žižek speak. The event was standing room only, and the venue was a very high-brow, conceptual art gallery called the Drawing Center in NYC. Žižek was reading/performing "Il n'y a pas de rapport religieux" from the latest edition of *Lacanian Ink* (#18), the movement's journal. In this particular essay he rehearsed Lacan's notion that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship but re-enscribed it in the context of something else (in this case "religion") – as he is wont to do with most all his tactical maneuvers. The print version is illustrated with works by Damien Hirst. More striking, however, was that this perhaps marked the beginning of Žižek's appropriation of Saint Paul. This appropriation of Saint Paul is significant insofar as when Žižek performs one of his acts of re-writing he is taking/ripping the original out of one context and inserting/transplanting it into another. In the case of Saint Paul, what interested him most was that here was a figure (not a disciple!) who constructed the entire edifice of the Christian faith on the crucifixion and resurrection. Recall that in Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ* (or at least Scorsese's) Paul appears in the delusionary vision Jesus has – i.e., that he has escaped the cross and gone on to live, marry, and have children – and repudiates Jesus as an imposter. Žižek is quick to point out (often) that post-modernists have multiple versions of everything – e.g., multiple versions of Nietzsche and multiple versions of Marx or Freud – but he also is the master of re-branding a concept, or a historical figure, to elucidate what might be best termed "synchronic or structural phenomena". As a skilled structuralist (though he'd deny this too), Žižek constructs castles in the air and then sends a barrage of waves in pursuit of these tentative forms. He is Neptune to his own Odysseus – but he is also Minerva. In the case of Paul, as in the more recent resuscitation of Lenin, we witness Žižek isolating a critical moment, or even a failed moment, for purposes wholly related to the exasperating state of the *current* critical or failed moment – late-modern capitalism and post-modernity.

In such an intelligence we see the mark of an archaic *synthetic* brilliance – an almost heroic intelligence – that assembles, analyzes, and destroys. His actual performances are theatrical events. He sweats bullets as he unpacks his torrent of complex references, flings asides, flings aside asides, tackles a hard kernel of Hegel or Marx, drops in an allusion to Hitchcock or even some pop cultural trash like the *Worst-Case Scenario* phenomenon or Reality TV to explain away our symptoms – to talk through our collective delusions and paranoias. His agitated (agit-prop) presentations are exhausting for the audience and for the actor. When he concludes, he invariably loses his bearings and is led off stage by his host or hostess. At the Drawing Center, he was whisked away by handlers (before the Lacanian bacchantes/babes could get to him?).

So what is he up to? And why does he succeed, where others have failed, in constructing an “actually existing” alternative to left-right politics?

The version of Lenin that Žižek is re-enscribing into radical political discourse is ostensibly (by his own admission) the Lenin of the October Revolution, or the Lenin that had the epiphany that in order to have a revolution “you have to have a revolution”. Why is he doing this?

Primarily the goal appears to be to demolish the coordinates of the liberal hegemony that permit excess and aberration insofar as it does not threaten the true coordinates. He suggests as well that the true coordinates are much better hidden than we realize. The production of cultural difference (a trendy subject) is to Žižek the production of the inoperative dream – a dream that recalls perhaps Orwell’s *1984* or even Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* where a kind of generic pastoralism or a sexualized nature substitutes for authentic freedom – the flip side of this is film noir. Žižek has determined that late-modern capitalism has engendered a whole range of alternative seductions to keep the eye and brain off of the real Real. The Real only exists as a fragment and this fragment is fast receding on the horizon as fantasy and often phantasm intercede. These dreams and nightmares are systemic, structural neuroses, and they are part of the coordinates of the hegemonic. The hegemon – the prevailing set of coordinates – always seeks to “take over” the Real, and, therefore, this contaminated Real must be periodically purged.

Without descending into the Lacanian house of mirrors we can understand this on an everyday level if we observe what Žižek is up to with “Lenin”. In his essay “Repeating Lenin” (1997) – ever the trickster, he convened a symposium on Lenin in Germany in part to see what the reaction would be – Žižek sets up a deconstruction of the idea of form to effectively liberate the idea of radical form. “One should not confuse this properly dialectical notion of Form with the liberal-multiculturalist notion of Form as the neutral framework of the multitude of ‘narratives’ – not only literature, but also politics, religion, science, they are all different narratives, stories we are telling ourselves about ourselves, and the ultimate goal of ethics is to guarantee the neutral space in which this multitude of narratives can peacefully coexist, in which everyone, from ethnic to sexual minorities, will have the right and possibility to tell his story. The properly dialectical notion of Form signals precisely the IMPOSSIBILITY of this liberal notion of Form: Form has nothing to do with ‘formalism,’ with the idea of a neutral Form, independent of its contingent particular content; *it rather stands for the traumatic kernel of the Real*, for the antagonism, which ‘colors’ the entire field in question ...” (italics added). He is interested, as most fire-breathing artists are, in discerning the real Real amid the rubbish of systems. In part, in appropriating “Lenin” he is also looking for the moment when Lenin realized that politics could one day be dissolved for a technocratic and agronomic utopia – “the [pure] management of things”. That Lenin failed is immaterial, since Žižek is extracting the signifier “Lenin” from the historical continuum which includes that failure – or the onslaught of Stalinism.

He adds: “‘Lenin’ is not the nostalgic name for old dogmatic certainty; quite on the contrary, to put it in Kierkegaard’s terms, THE Lenin which we want to retrieve is the Lenin-in-becoming, the Lenin whose fundamental experience was that of being thrown into a catastrophic new constellation in which old coordinates proved useless, and who was thus compelled to REINVENT Marxism – recall his acerbic remark apropos of some new problem: ‘About this, Marx and Engels said not a word.’ The idea is not to return to Lenin, but to REPEAT him in the Kierkegaardian sense: to retrieve the same impulse in today’s constellation.” He compares 1914 to 1990, and, in a superb bit of multi-tasking, describes how Lenin attempted to convince long-suffering Russian soldiers to withdraw from the front and turn on the Czar. He does this by drawing on multiple, but singular examples of times when the Slave came face to face with the Master, as in the famous case of Hitler’s train being momentarily stalled en route through Thuringia when a second train full of wounded soldiers pulled alongside permitting Hitler to see them and they to see Hitler dining in splendour. (As a Žižek-inspired aside, let us note that this scene was folded into the recent film *Enemy at the Gates* (2001), a rather mannered depiction of the Battle for Stalingrad, wherein two snipers go up against one another and the entire war is collapsed into a game of cat and mouse.) Žižek marshals (martial?) several versions of this accidental (catastrophic) confrontation which is *always already* suppressed to illustrate how the veil sometimes falls from the carefully constructed image we have both adopted and been inducted into. This image is the so-called Real but in fact the mirage constructed by the hegemonic “hidden hand”. Perhaps this is why Godard (and Herzog) both came round to admitting that there were no more images available for cinema and, as in Godard’s *King Lear* (1987), the audience is left effectively staring at a bare-naked light bulb.

“Today, more than ever, we should here return to Lenin: yes, economy is the key domain, the battle will be decided there, one has to break the spell of the global capitalism – BUT the intervention should be properly POLITICAL, not

economic. The battle to be fought is thus a twofold one: first, yes, anticapitalism. However, anticapitalism without problematizing the capitalism's POLITICAL form (liberal parliamentary democracy) is not sufficient, no matter how 'radical' it is. Perhaps THE lure today is the belief that one can undermine capitalism without effectively problematizing the liberal-democratic legacy which – as some Leftists claim – although engendered by capitalism, acquired autonomy and can serve to criticize capitalism.”

Here Žižek takes aim at all manner of post-cultural delusions – including Deleuzian escapisms, and/or new Situationisms – in the manner that Marxists have long endorsed. On the one hand, the Left has decided to indulge “the long march through institutions”. On the other, the new surrealist or rote formalist is merely indulging in “ludic” games. These games usually come with the price of disengaging from the “proper” political, or, as with 1920s French Surrealism, playing at the political. This severe “Socratic” agenda – of deconstructing the coordinates of the ruling hegemony – is, for Žižek, impossible if the crisis of identity plaguing the late-modern subject (the doubling, tripling, quadrupling of identity) is not ‘cauterized’ by intellectual fire.

In his critique of contemporary capitalism Žižek finds not simply the conditions that Marx anathematized but those same conditions reified and made nearly intangible. “A certain excess which was as it were kept under check in previous history, perceived as a localizable perversion, as an excess, a deviation, is in capitalism elevated into the very principle of social life, in the speculative movement of money begetting more money, of a system which can survive only by constantly revolutionizing its own conditions, that is to say, in which the thing can only survive as its own excess, constantly exceeding its own ‘normal’ constraints ... Marx located the elementary capitalist antagonism in the opposition between use- and exchange-value: in capitalism, the potentials of this opposition are fully realized, the domain of exchange-values acquires autonomy, is transformed into the specter of self-propelling speculative capital which needs the productive capacities and needs of actual people only as its dispensable temporal embodiment.” In the era of globalization, then, the main question is: “Does today’s virtual capitalist not function in a homologous way – his ‘net value’ is zero, he directly operates just with the surplus, borrowing from the future?”

What Žižek is hammering away at, repeatedly and in various guises, is the empty present-day concept of the Universal (what I would call the meta-Real). The Universal is the form of forms (perhaps the urform of all forms) – as it signifies the latent content of all possible forms. This may seem hyper-Platonic, but in fact such “higher” coordinates are the vacated premises of modern-day political economy. It is other possible concepts of political-economic form that are repeatedly revoked and/or given up for mutable, indeterminate, vague, and generally empty gestures in neo-liberalism. These empty gestures substitute for the meta-Real where everything critical is actually *manipulated*. This manipulated terrain, in Lacanian terms, interacts/intersects with the realm of the Symbolic – the place where the Thou Shalt Nots are inscribed. The Symbolic, in turn, is controlled by the collective force of the hegemonic, now “dematerialized” structures of late capitalism. Žižek’s complaints against “new social movements” is that they are generally “one issue movements” which do not engage the Universal. This totalizing language is partly a linguistic convention to confer a semantic and structuralist integrity to the idea of the Universal Singular, but also to circumvent or defuse the endless ineffective operations of “strictly limited goals” or “marketing” typified by the ubiquitous and generally tolerated NGOs. How many such organizations use a liberal, white guilt trip to raise funds? How many of these organizations exist *only because* government has been purged of its higher functions (its higher calling)?

“In a proper revolutionary breakthrough, the utopian future is neither simply fully realized, present, nor simply evoked as a distant promise which justified present violence – it is rather as if, in a unique suspension of temporality, in the short-circuit between the present and the future, we are – as if by Grace – for a brief time allowed to act AS IF the utopian future is (not yet fully here, but) already at hand, just there to be grabbed. Revolution is not experienced as a present hardship we have to endure for the happiness and freedom of the future generations, but as the present hardship over which this future happiness and freedom already cast their shadow – in it, we ALREADY ARE FREE WHILE FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM, we ALREADY ARE HAPPY WHILE FIGHTING FOR HAPPINESS, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Revolution is not a Merl[eau]-Pontyan wager, an act suspended in the *futur anterieur*, to be legitimized or delegitimized by the long term outcome of the present acts; it is as it were ITS OWN ONTOLOGICAL PROOF, an immediate index of its own truth.”

Hopping from peak to peak, and periodically descending into the valley of present-day culture for refreshment, Žižek outlines a topology of activity that recovers revealed truths. In many ways he is similar to a host of others who have sought to reverse the decimation of our experience of the world. Like Giorgio Agamben – see *Infancy and*

*History* (1993) – he has utilized language to re-enscribe the terms of resistance and the game of turning things upside down to empty them out and examine them. His appropriations are classic as well as modern. His giant brain is an effective bridge to another world inside or opposite, above or below, or simply always already here. His agenda is to foster and engender a withering critique of the structural chains that enslave late-modern man. His nostalgia is for very large gestures – for the meta-Real, the Universal, and the Formal. “THIS resistance is the answer to the question ‘Why Lenin?’: it is the signifier ‘Lenin’ which FORMALIZES this content found elsewhere, transforming a series of common notions into a truly subversive theoretical formation.”

## OUTTAKES

**Slavoj Žižek**'s essay [Repeating Lenin](#) (@ Lacan.com)

The new **Karl Marx** – “Capitalism has now triumphed, it is ‘the only game in town’, statist socialism is ‘dead’, and, yes, that is what Marx had said would happen all along.” [Tittering at High Gate](#) (*Guardian Unlimited*, 05/19/02)  
**Žižek** reviews *Lenin* by Hélène Carrère d’Encausse – “In 1914, an entire world disappeared, taking with it not only the bourgeois faith in progress, but the socialist movement that accompanied it. Lenin (the Lenin of What Is to Be Done?) felt the ground fall away from beneath his feet – there was, in his desperate reaction, no sense of satisfaction, no desire to say ‘I told you so.’ At the same time, the catastrophe made possible the key Leninist Event: the overcoming of the evolutionary historicism of the Second International.” [Seize the Day](#) (*Guardian Unlimited*, 07/23/02)

**Alain Badiou** rehearses his reappraisal of the 20th century – “Where are we today? The figure of active nihilism is regarded as completely obsolete. Every reasonable activity is limited, limiting, constrained by the burdens of reality. The best that one can do is to get away from evil, and to do this, the shortest path is to avoid any contact with the real. Ultimately one comes up against the nothing, the there-is-nothing-real, and in this sense one remains in nihilism. But since the terrorist element, the desire to purify the real, has been suppressed, nihilism is deactivated. It has become passive, or reactive, nihilism, that is, hostile to every action as well as to every thought.” [One Divides Into Two](#) (*CultureMachine*, 2000)

**Jacques Lacan** [Bibliography](#), plus linkage (@ Psyche Matters)

See also, **Thus Spake Žižek** in [Landscape Formalism, Anyone ???](#) (*Anti-Journal 2:1*)

For a biography of **Slavoj Žižek**, see [More Žižek ...](#)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/07/27/zizek-and-lenin/>

## ***Vox Populi: Everyone's a Critic***

by Gavin Keeney

It's possible to rule out much of the so-called criticism of large, high-profile design proposals as "internecine" squabbling (professional jealousy, etc.), but it is not possible to pass judgement so easily on the increasing public interest in design – especially urban design – and most especially when design includes the now-ubiquitous memorial, monument, or icon gratuitously placed in a prominent "public" space – the Mall in Washington, Hyde Park in London, the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, or the grave and historic open spaces of Florence, Rome, or Venice.

The WWII Memorial, the proposed WTC Memorial, the Princess Diana Memorial, the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, and a new entrance to the Uffizi Galleries in Florence are all cases in point. What they have in common is that *everyone is now a critic*, and this *everyone* transcends the usual authorized mouthpieces of design – architects, historians, cultural figures, etc. – and includes "the people".

In the case of the WTC process, this has taken the form of informal and formal "pulse-taking" – viz., ad hoc groups supposedly representing the "will of the people", leading to a statistical take-down of the first six plans from Beyer Blinder Belle and the LMDC (and Port Authority). In the sense that this statistical "consensus" might actually represent "the public", there is something useful to extract. In the case of the WWII Memorial (and Senator Dole's heavy-handed role in premiating the St. Florian proposal) one can only wonder about representative government. With the brouhaha in Florence (lead by Franco Zeffirelli), over the Arata Isozaki proposal for a new loggia/entrance to the Uffizi Galleries, a different set of problems emerge.

Isozaki's loggia is clearly a bizarre manifestation of post-modernism. It is part neo-rational urban icon and part stage set. Perhaps this makes Zeffirelli an appropriate critic. Isozaki's estranged urbanism – his hyper-conscious sensitivity to form and to the hegemonic essence within such forms – makes his proposal something to look very closely *into*. Is it not somehow, bizarrely "appropriate", in the sense that it appropriates a language that aggrandizes the very thing it is critiquing?

Anyway, it is time for architects to get over the fact that the public now cares about such things. Most of these projects either utilize public monies or public resources (including public space) to merely exist. They quite often are gestures of supposed magnanimity as well. That they are thrust into the public sphere at all tells us a great deal about how the icon or the model (or the monument) literally rules (divides and conquers) the landscape of things (that in most all cases is an amalgam of mostly mute signs *avant la lettre*).

## **RES PUBLICA**

It may be time to properly "socialize" the public interest in things public versus pay that interest lip service. Sure, let the authorities of culture continue to premiate designs, deliberate, and act through the process of the commission, but, at the end of this process, there may be yet another process long overdue. This follow-on process might be the "referendum" where the statistical pulse may be taken without the preliminary selection of the voting members determined by a pre-selection process or a vainglorious fiddling with demographics in pursuit of fake heterogeneity. This referendum might be the ultimate payback for the authoritarian mode of operation – either the so-called public process, or the flipside, the cultural apparatus of the well-heeled and elite. The fake populism of certain critics and journalists would in this case be overridden by the very real (and no doubt frightening) prospect that the public might simply vote "None of the Above".

## **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

[Winter and Maybe Spring in Berlin](#)  
[World Trade Center Burlesque](#)

## OUTTAKES

[The WWII Memorial Fiasco](#) – “The National World War II Memorial will be funded almost entirely by private contributions, as specified in Public Law 103-32. Through the generosity of a variety of giving constituencies, the campaign has received more than \$186 million in cash and pledges, enough to cover current estimated project costs. Support has come from hundreds of thousands of individual Americans, hundreds of corporations and foundations, veterans groups, dozens of civic, fraternal and professional organizations, states and one territory, and students in 1,200 schools across the country.” (*National WWII Memorial*)

[National Coalition to Save Our Mall](#) – “The Fine Arts Commission; however, rejected architect Frederich St. Florian’s original design for the complex because, the commission said, it was too large and imposing. Critics complained that the massive ring of towering columns proposed by St. Florian were reminiscent of the Nazi-era edifices of Adolf Hitler’s architect, Albert Speer.” (*Chicago Tribune*, 07/06/00)

[Monument to Diana](#) – “The committee had been unable to choose between Gustafson, known for her glasshouse at the National Botanical Gardens of Wales, and Anish Kapoor, the Turner prize winning British sculptor, who proposed a dome of water. The committee suggested the two designs should be exhibited for the public to decide. That did not happen.” (*Guardian Unlimited*, 08/01/02)

[Uffizi Imbroglione](#) – “Florentine film director Franco Zeffirelli, who studied architecture in the city, has labeled the avant-garde design, which won an international competition in 2001, a ‘shameful horror,’ and has appealed to those who love the city to speak up and defend its artistic heritage.” (*Wired News*, 07/29/02) – [Arata Isozaki & Associates Nuova Uscita su Piazza dei Castellani](#) (*Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/08/03/everyone-s-a-critic/>

## Auteur-Driven Vehicles: The New New Laocoon

by Gavin Keeney

“The starry heavens above me  
The moral law within  
So the world appears  
Through this mist of tears”  
–Nick Cave (Longitude Music Company, 1996)

The problematic myth of the lone genius is driven by the romantic concept that a singular being may embody the spirit of the times. This myth-on-top-of-a-myth – the incommensurable *Zeitgeist* (demoted to the episteme by Foucault) informing the work of an intensely attuned individual – is also the main spring driving the auteur-driven vehicle. What distinguishes the auteur-driven vehicle from *everything else* is the presence of the guiding spirit of the plenitude of Time Itself – a presence problematized by the assumption of the mantle of omniscience by one (sometimes two) very clever persons.

In the case of a film director (Andrei Tarkovsky, Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Bresson, Akira Kurosawa), the auteur formula is part-and-parcel of the idiom of the art film. In the case of theater (Bertolt Brecht, Eugène Ionesco, Peter Brook, Tom Stoppard), the phenomenon is more precisely focused on the ability to *assemble the ensemble*, as Wim Wenders has tried to do in a more prosaic manner and with less success in film.



### TANGENT 1 – [In Praise of Obscurity](#)

In architecture and landscape architecture the auteur-driven vehicle is the so-called “boutique firm”. Whether or not this term is pejorative depends on which side of the divide you sit on – which side of the partition. The nature of this type of firm is to present a “signature” style while proposing an alternative to the service bureau, or the corporate design office. Whether such claims are valid usually rises and falls on the reputation of a “name” and a “style” versus something more vital and “of the times” as in film or theater. This “something more” is *intellectual substance*. What all the nouvelle vague filmmakers had in common was a desire for the film to also act as a critique of cinema and its times. Style is not sufficient to fuel the auteur-driven vehicle for long, and this is why most run “out of petrol” after a decade or so.

The low end of the auteur-driven phenomenon is the cult of the personality in its most prosaic (paranoid) form, and the cult of genius in its highest. The latter warrants/bears close scrutiny, while the former is just as well left alone (ignored). The ensemble and the signature, the form and its progenitor, the idiom and its maestro, are all relative terms *insofar as there is nothing exceptional except the claim to genius*.

Nick Cave’s music is an example. What would the dark (brooding), brilliant (poetic), philosophical (dialectic) musings of the misanthropic artist mean without the sonorous ambient force of the violin against the tinkling melodic line of the piano and the ominous “fat” bass line. Wenders picked up Cave in *Wings of Desire* (1987), as he picked up Lou Reed in *Far Away, So Close* (1993) for associative magic. Such appropriations are the stuff of the auteur-driven vehicle and *automatically* undermine the romantic notion of creating something out of nothing. Yet, paradoxically, the *Zeitgeist* is both something *and* nothing. Moreover, any work that taps into the spirit of the times will carry the amalgam of forces present at that time *further*, stretching and warping the fabric of time such that new forms emerge infused with the stuff of repressed dreams and nightmares. Such works of art are exceptional because they illuminate the interior of time and draw/cast shadows.

### TANGENT 2 – [The Birth of Shadows](#)

Boutique firms come and go ... Normally, one or two bona fide auteur-driven vehicles emerge every decade. Just



now there are dozens upon dozens appearing. Why? Is it that the corporate idiom is so totally (morally/artistically) bankrupt? Is it that architects and landscape architects are tired of working their way through the professional stations of the cross? Is it because there is something wholly radical afoot, and the auteur-driven boutique firm is the best method to press forward? To press the agenda?

All of these unanswerable questions have a single cause – that is, the professions of architecture and landscape architecture *are* all but bankrupt and the would be artist-designer knows it all too well. The corporate service bureau exists, will always exist, as the Hollywood or Bollywood landslide of lamentable films goes on and on. In the design world the realization seems to be that *everything is at stake*, although this is also almost *always* the case. Why is it more so now?

### TANGENT 3 – [Landscape Formalism, Anyone ???](#)

Perhaps it is the fusion thing – the inexorable movement toward a vital, integral, intelligent form of form-making. The signs of intense pressure, pushing upward from below, that exist in other fields are beginning to manifest in architectural and landscape-architectural design. That these two traditionally antagonistic fields are merging (against the will of many of the rear-guard) is a significant sign that something immense is *underway*.

Truly, then, the Zeitgeist has got us by the – um – short hairs. Ante up or fold! Your options will diminish as the floodgates are opened.

“Out of sorrow entire worlds have been built  
Out of longing great wonders have been willed  
They’re only little tears, darling, let them spill  
And lay your head upon my shoulder  
Outside my window the world has gone to war  
Are you the one that I’ve been waiting for?”  
–Nick Cave (Longitude Music Company, 1996)

### NOTES

Image (above) – *Laocoon* (copy, Adriaen de Vries, Wallenstein Garden, Prague) – The original de Vries sculptures in the Wallenstein Garden were carted off by marauding Swedes to Drottningholm, Sweden during the Thirty Years War.

Of course, Clement Greenberg wrote “Towards a Newer Laocoon” (*Partisan Review*, 1940), and Lessing wrote *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), and the Roman copy of the Greek Laocoon dug up during the Renaissance (1506) created a sensation and some may say sparked the Mannerist revolt around about the 1520s (the sack of Rome by Charles V occurred in 1527). Nevertheless, Greenberg’s and Lessing’s diatribes were primarily arguing for the differentiation of the arts. The *New New Laocoon* argues for the total merger of *everything*.

Historicist Nonsequitur #1 – Some say things began to go awry when Socrates demolished the Homeric universe. Others claim it all started to unravel when medieval scholastics failed to pinpoint how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Still others believe the great mistake was going off the gold standard. Lacan would, of course, blame American psychoanalysts. Critics of Lacan would blame the 45-minute session. If Nietzsche were alive today, he would no doubt say the world began to fall apart when we started putting milk into little plastic bottles with fake nipples.

Figura serpentina – “Mannerism, which discovered the spontaneity of the mind and recognized art as an autonomous creative activity, developed, in accordance with the spirit of that discovery, the totally new idea of fictitious space.” Arnold Hauser, “The Concept of Space in Mannerist Architecture”, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 279

See [Renaissance/Mannerism: Readings 2](#)

## RELATED DOCUMENTS

[Architecture's Clay Feet](#)  
[World Trade Center Burlesque](#)  
[Vox Populi – Everyone's a Critic](#)  
[Ipseity, You Say?](#)  
[Landscape + Architecture](#)

## OUTTAKES

“Greenberg felt artistic ‘quality’ could be judged by the degree of ‘purity’ art achieved in its own medium and effects exclusive to itself. He was a follower of the philosopher Immanuel Kant and the ideals of in[t]uitive experience and purity. During the ’60s his views were questioned by artists and critics who saw them as too self-referential and resistant to change and much contemporary criticism has been dedicated to refuting his theories. Recently, though, his theories have been reconsidered in light of his politics. Although he originally supported Marxism, Social[is]m and Trotsky[is]m he eventually rejected them in favor of an avant-garde that is concerned only with itself.” [The Greenberg Symposium](#) (*ArtNetWeb*)

“There is still a great deal of controversy concerning Lessing’s relation to rhetoric, the so-called genius-aesthetics of the 1770s, and how his criticism is to be positioned with regard to Romanticism. Incontrovertible is his status as the primary literary theorist and critic of the German Enlightenment.” [G.E. Lessing](#) (*Johns Hopkins University*)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/08/19/the-new-new-laocoon/>

## Immortality: The Quest for Fire

by Gavin Keeney

“Somewhere, even now, a lamb was being led up to the altar steps, a lamb chosen for its perfection and purity: even its delicate hooves, its knobby, skinny legs, were perfect. The eyes of those who had chosen it were loving – they valued it, enormously. And the lamb itself? It felt this love and shyly looked up at the eyes around it glowing with desire. It would not comprehend that desire had different depths. Gratiated, it would get to its knees, it would gracefully lie before its lovers, it would never suspect the blow.”

–Jane Alison, *The Love-Artist*

*The Charterhouse of Parma* – Stendhal’s great novel (written in 1838) follows the life of “our young hero” Fabrizio del Dongo (a Lombard nobleman) through the early 1800s and life in-between the various reactionary and revolutionary movements following the French Revolution, including (early on) a turn on the battlefield of Waterloo. It seems to mimic the realist novel but is something else altogether.

The Romantic hero is actually an anti-hero, and the various allies and enemies he engenders in his quest for fire by “enthusiasm” turn one way then the next as circumstances dictate. The rapid succession of troubles – reversals of fortune – lead the reader into a labyrinth of social mores and historical-cultural shadows that end only by illuminating the timeless landscape of tragedy.

Stendhal’s worldweariness reads in a manner of a literary mannerism – it is unclear what his intentions are beyond spinning an extravagant tale of immense intrigue and abominable outcome. His noted style is somewhere between the detached irony of George Sand and the great illumined tableau of Balzac. As the story races ahead – and there are few (perhaps no) denouements allowing the reader to catch his/her breath – an entire epoch unfolds and begins to collapse (notwithstanding the closing, momentary glory of the Prince of Parma’s court).

The sheer bravado of Stendhal’s performance sketches a period of despotism “marred” by the revolutionary fervor of Northern Italy and one detects an almost structural edifice for the tale lurking below the apparatus of places, venues, situations, character, and – um – *coloratura*. The novel seems to arrive full-blown from the ear of Stendhal and the “libidinal economy” of the protagonist’s rebellion (and eventual accommodation) suggests that the tragedy is more a matter of universal portents told against the rugged landscape of Lombardy than an historical tale of ruination by passion.

It might be best to read this thing straight through without stopping. Such a strategy enhances the nature of the narrative which is truly a tour de force – an (intentionally) overwrought avalanche of words and images – and matches the origin of the text insofar as Stendhal is said to have dictated the story in “a mere seven weeks”.

*The Love-Artist* – Jane Alison’s re-creation of Ovid’s (Augustan) Rome is sliced through by various portentous events, not the least of which is the purely fictionalized conspiracy of inspiration developed between Ovid, after having produced the *Metamorphoses*, and Xenia his fair but grave muse.

Xenia’s perturbations – she is a witch seduced and retrieved from the shores of the Black Sea during a “vacation” Ovid takes (while waiting to see how his *Metamorphoses* is received in Rome) – become the source material for *Medea*, the poet’s legendary lost play.

The mutually suspicious presumptions of the relationship between the two main characters begin to impress into this timeframe a dual quest for immortality – on Ovid’s part his desire to be famous, and on Xenia’s part the search for the *quinta essentia*, the philosopher’s stone. She is actually more a rustic alchemist than a witch. The patrician Ovid and the wild Xenia mutually exploit one another as he develops his re-telling of the ancient tragedy of Medea, hiding from her his tablets of wax and furtively pursuing his patron, Julia, the granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus.

Xenia sees and hears things ... The release of the details of her clairvoyant, visionary experience of Rome are, however, carefully calibrated and mostly concealed from Ovid such that he must at times provoke her to reveal his destiny (which is all that seems to matter to him).

This is an astonishing work of literature that captures the inordinate ambition of a poet suspected of corrupting the morals of Rome and a passionate, confused seer laboring to negotiate the splendour of Rome and cryptic intuitions of the vanity of the same. Alison's prose sings the reader's eyes and soul as it piles the story onto the timeless pyre of tragic works of art. Xenia seems to slowly realize that the elusive *quinta essentia* "belongs" to Ovid (the poet) *afterall*.

As the pressures build, and Ovid nears the conclusion of his *Medea*, Xenia has twin visions of the future:

"Here, and here – you won't believe it – will be palaces with walls and ceilings all covered with images of your stories, with your words, even, painted in gold! And there, on that hill up the river, will be the most gorgeous hall filled with sculptures of your characters, so vivid, so like flesh! And not just in Rome but in palaces beyond the smoky hills to the north, and farther, in cities and countries that haven't yet risen ... In small dark cells far beyond the Alps, a thousand years from now – imagine – men will be bent over you, taking pains to put down your words with a flourish, taking such pains that the thin line that is your work, your life, will stretch on forever ..."

This confirming vision of Ovid's immortality is countered by another image of a ruined Rome buried in dust with Cleopatra's Needle poking through a grassy, pastoral, future landscape ... Poussin's landscape ... As the relationship of muse, poet, and patroness reaches a futility mirrored in Alison's prose by ghastly intimations of what Ovid is writing (plotting) through *Medea*, Julia, fueled by hatred of Augustus for banishing her mother and for her own virtual imprisonment, conjures her own vision of revenge:

"She wanted the aqueducts to topple into valleys and upon the famous Roman roads, leaving heaps of pulverized brick. And that tremendous hieroglyphed needle, for which her grandfather had ordered an entire ship to be made, to haul it back from conquered Egypt – she wanted it to shiver as it shattered upon the ground. And oh, the millions of bodies buried beneath all this wreckage, reduced to what they were all along, masses of pulp and blood, senseless. Then, the world torn open, how the beasts, smelling the chaos and blood, would break free from their dens, come blinking out into the sudden harsh light!"

This vision of catastrophic ruination occurs slowly, dawning on Xenia and Julia. For Xenia, it is always coupled with the realization: "So few will remain, she thought, shutting her eyes and listening. But of all of them, Ovid would. Of all this great age, this great Roman world. She could see his face, ancient and boyish, laughing from millennia ahead." Strange, then, that Ovid is banished by Augustus (a disgrace that actually occurs in the opening scenes of the novel) to a rotting Roman outpost on the Black Sea for his various presumptions and vainglories, and that he dies there never to return to Rome.

"So it was not just that his words would live on for a few hundred years; it was more than that. The bodily, expiring things of the world were transformed by him into words – which themselves would be taken up, millennia later, by other hands, other minds, and transformed once more into voluptuous bodies of color and marble. Sublimation."

Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Modern Library, 2000)  
Jane Alison, *The Love-Artist* (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2001)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/08/31/stendhal-ovid-and-alison/>

September 5, 2002

## Beaux Rêves, Citoyens!!!

by Gavin Keeney

“We cannot tear out a single page of our life, but we can throw the whole book in the fire.”

–George Sand

## DINOSAURS AMONG US

As Uri Avnery ably points out in the Labor Day 2002 edition of *CounterPunch*, “[the dinosaurs have returned](#)”. This is not so much a matter of politics as culture. The risk to culture of the small-minded and myopic is profound.

In Europe there is a lively debate about culture primarily because of the expansion of the European Union. This debate takes on urgency as nation-states undergo the internal dissension between wanting to open borders and the anxieties of losing one’s unique cultural identity. As a result, the bureaucrats have to fudge and fiddle with the strictures of integration, not the least of which includes allowing certain powerful nation-states to “opt out” of key agreements. The overall package of EU transnational identity has, since its last metamorphosis into a trading block, generally been watered down and tweaked to accommodate both political and cultural queasiness here and there.

In the US there is no such argument. The transnational powers have complete control. These powers are so well institutionalized that any debate whatsoever is automatically reduced to a question of “personal hygiene”: Do I buy that product? Do I hold my nose and vote for that candidate whose rhetoric is calculated to the one-thousandth degree of demographic polling? Do I refuse to read that increasingly nasty newspaper or watch television at all?

There are endless, lovely axioms of the kind that make one smile – e.g., “Swords into Ploughshares”, “Bread not Circuses”, or “Knowledge is Power”. Is there one that has not been reversed in these bizarre times? “Ploughshares into Swords”, “Circuses not Bread”, “Power is Knowledge”? Of the first, “Swords into Ploughshares”, here, in New York, one may drop by the United Nations compound to see Evgeny Buchetich’s monumental (Social-Realist) statue of this heroic act *frozen in time* (in bronze). Quite odd, really, since the UN has been reduced to cleaning up and administering the devastated lands and people caught in-between “emerging markets” and the neo-imperial colossi of the First World.

## THE SUPER-GREASED CORRIDORS OF POWER

The obvious condition of debility *across the board* is 1000 times worse than the 1980s when there was actually an opportunity to expect something to be done through representative government to forestall and/or *investigate* the shenanigans of the hooligans in the ante-rooms of the White House. No such “avenue” now offers itself – Pennsylvania Avenue is now a DMZ. Congress has become the “loyal opposition” (or a willing accomplice) and the judiciary is operating in mostly secret or unidentified locations. The motto of the 1980s, “Greed is Good”, has transmogrified in the new millennium into “Greed is US”.

It would seem that Americans disparaged by this scenario might decamp to Sweden or Canada, “loving it or leaving it” being the default action for all dissidents today. If only truly open borders did exist ... Alas, there is no leaving home. We are required (and coerced) into inhabiting the fortified cage set up for us by the usurping armies of Mammon and Reaction. Our pulse and brainwaves will soon be metered, our every movement (of body and spirit) monitored. If sleep and sex could be commodified an Enron-type sleep-and-sex trading scheme would emerge.

The current battle for *everything* requires that American citizens think, read, breathe, and observe *deeply* what is going on. The newspapers and television will not suffice. The Internet is full of misinformation and self-serving sniping and harangues. Just visit *Drudge*, or *Salon* ... It is more important than ever that Americans *dream*, and, in dreaming, *wake up* to demand a new and better world.

The first realization will be that power has been handed to the most corrupt cabal of self-interested interests in the

*history of history*. This power includes the power to deny the most basic freedoms *in an instant* by manufacturing crises. This power is blind and knows no bounds. Its daytime smirk is matched only by its nighttime revels – deep inside the darkest sectors of the reptilian core of the brain. Greed and perfidy unchecked ... Power-mad and happy about it ... Rampant nihilism passing as faith-based usurpation of everything that might be exploited to extract monthly payments from an enslaved populace ...

### THE DARK HEART OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

These are but a few of the “pictures” (patterns) that might appear on an EKG attached to the monstrous brain of the beast stalking America (and the world). This beast must be driven back into its swamp ... Clearly, we must take up our pens (and intellectual cudgels) and act vigorously – *now* – to reclaim our right to dream.

Aux armes, Citoyens! Bury your senators and representatives in e-mail, boycott the usual scurrilous suspects of corporate media, read novels that quicken your pulse, lay in supplies of uncontaminated works of the human spirit, go see the “new” Godard film *Éloge de l’amour*, speak your mind (and soul), vote with your feet, and expect the miraculous.

### RELATED DOCUMENTS/OUTTAKES

URI AVNERY – [Return of the Dinosaurs](#) (*CounterPunch*)  
JEAN-LUC GODARD – [In Praise of Obscurity](#) (*Archive-Grotto*)  
ALAIN GRESH – [There is Another, Better World](#) (*Le Monde Diplomatique*)  
FORUM SOCIAL MONDIAL – [Appel à Initiatives](#) (*Alliance pour ...*)  
FEEL-GOOD NGOs – [The Unbearable Lightness of NGOs](#) (*CounterPunch*)  
BÊTE NOIRE – [The American Golem](#) (*CounterPunch*)  
THE ANTI-REPUBLICAN PARTY – [Go Tell Karl Rove!](#) (*CounterPunch*)  
LOOSE LIPS – [Liberty, Democracy, and Bush](#) (*CounterPunch*)

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/09/05/beaux-reves-citoyens/>

## Parting Shots: A Refracted History (Summary) Of The Twentieth Century & The Always-Already Deferred Fusion Of Landscape + Architecture

by Gavin Keeney

“The page contains a single sentence: ‘Underneath it all he knew that one cannot go beyond because there isn’t any.’ The sentence is repeated over and over for the whole length of the page, giving the impression of a wall, of an impediment. There are no periods or commas or margins, a wall, in fact, of words that illustrate the meaning of the sentence, the collision with a wall behind which there is nothing. But towards the bottom and on the right, in one of the sentences the word *any* is missing. A sensitive eye can discover the hole among the bricks, the light that shows through.”

–Julio Cortazar (1966)

### HISTORIOGRAPHY, FORMALISM(S), AND CRITICAL HISTORY

In early structuralism (Roman Jakobson) there exists the theory of the dominant – e.g., the visual arts in the Renaissance, music in Romanticism – to which other forms conform/strive to merge. In Modernism the dominant is/was science – and linguistics, architecture, sociology, psychology, etc. attempted to produce a synthetical system outside of/in contradistinction to the humanities. This is the either/or of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, which, of course, he abandoned after the Russellian project collapsed.

In Russian Formalism we see the first moves toward a system of signs freed from semantic content. This is also why Russian Formalism appealed to the neo-rationalist architects of the 1960s and 1970s. The end game however (Manfredo Tafuri’s idea of hegemony returning) of formalism was Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism and Functionalism – all more or less new forms of architectural nihilism (see Massimo Cacciari) at first and, then, new forms of architectural dogma. Nicholas Berdyaev’s suggestion that Communism failed because it was not spiritual enough contains a suggestion that the humanities and science are essentially irreconcilable until systems are truly “open” – hence Umberto Eco’s anti-ideological concept of the “open work”. The mechanistic worldview and the organic worldview are two mutually antagonistic and insufficient themes that plague philosophy and architecture. (See José Ortega y Gasset.)

Russian landscape – the silent and primordial figures and gestures lurking in the literature and art of the Silver Age (1890-1920) – gave way to the slashing, machinic universe of agit-prop avant-gardism. Socialist Realism killed even that latter, mechanistic worldview in favor of heroic images of an always-deferred material and technological utopia. Tafuri’s utopic realm of the sphere – versus the fallen world of the labyrinth – was idealism pictorialized. In the rarified realm of “structure”, politics (and ideology) were momentarily bracketed (or pre-prepared) before re-deployment. Hence, Tafuri favored – even against his own better judgment – the meta-logical games of formalism as acts of resistance and criticality (and oftentimes aesthetic cruelty).

Lyricism returned in the 1950s thaw in Russian literature, and it is that spirit plus an intense inner working of the subject/object dialectic that animates the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky. Landscape, in Tarkovsky world, is *mise en scène*, and reflects always an inner condition as does the supporting apparatus of architecture (often ruined architecture) and the things of everyday life. Tarkovsky connects the latter-day Russian aesthetic of the tragic to the pre-Revolution mysticism of Russian lyric poetry and literature.

It might be said that landscape “returns” in waves (in movements through things) versus as an object or set of objects. An ecology of signifying forms is the meta-ecological model underlying signifying chains. New topographies and the renovation of the architectonic aspect of design almost always prefigures a re-deployment (re-surfacing) of repressed content (other possible futures, or always-already deferred alternative models). The ideological aspect of the aesthetic (Terry Eagleton) consists of the mask that Tafuri considered the chief characteristic of Gramscian hegemony. In theory, this mask must be removed and the underlying content exposed

and transformed to liberate consciousness (Demetri Porphyrios). Thus, radical formalism comes and goes – it’s here and then not here – as the diachronic history of architecture reveals the diachronic nature of signifying systems. Synchronic applications, on the other hand, are typically applied to the critical historical operations of philosophy, history (art and architectural), and aesthetics.

Curiously, avant-garde modernist and late-modernist art and architecture share an innate anima towards the return of the out-moded (Hal Foster). Paradoxically, late-modern (or neo-modern) art and architectures also permit a selective return of certain forms of avant-garde formalism – the primary example in neo-modernist architecture is the persistence of varieties of purism and architectures of liminalism (the Whites, or the New York Five) and minimalism. Blame Kenneth Frampton for the New York Five, if you will, but their collective position was an act of recovery and renovation of principles buried in the avalanche of generic modernism after Le Corbusier. The so-called corporate modernism of the post-WW2 period led directly to the crisis of the 1960s. Tafuri may have denounced historiography as mythography, but critical history also contains its own mythicizing subject (the architecture of deferred utopias reaching back to the Renaissance). (See Tafuri on Alberti.)

The problem well may be that architecture is implicitly hegemonic in itself – as it almost always denies ground. Its own version of hegemony is built into its reliance on materialization and the technological spirit. It is this latter thing that emanates from within hegemony as a form of positivism that takes no prisoners. This primary urge within architecture is the place where architecture is overwhelmed and appropriated by conventional/instrumentalized forms of everyday hegemony. The age-old architectonic of metaphysics underwrites this doubling of hegemony.

Machine-age romanticism pervades modern architecture. This is the “Machine Ate the Garden” syndrome. It is prefigured in Blake and Thoreau and problematized by Leo Marx and proponents of the industrial sublime. The hegemonic aspects of architecture crush landscape whenever its own precious autonomy is threatened. This is most evident in urban environments. This aggressive autonomy issues forth from architecture in defense of its hegemonic status – utopian or otherwise. The avant-garde is complicit in this handing over of architecture to everyday hegemony insofar as it abdicates its responsibility to prevent the collapse of free consciousness into new empty forms (new masks). Clement Greenberg’s “Towards a New Laocoon” preceded the hegemony of abstract expressionism and set the stage for the 1960s revolt of conceptualism and minimalism. Gottfried Lessing’s *Laocoon* (1766) simply countered the late-Baroque concentration of the arts in de-materialized spiritual form by placing limits on literary and plastic art forms. Heinrich Wölfflin produced an art history without names that essentially took the synchronic approach to reading form to a new level of systemization by way of psychological precepts. His gift was absorbed into Russian Formalism by way of Symbolism and then Futurism. This abstract approach to mining history came to an apotheosis in Structuralism proper (by way of Ferdinand de Saussure), and was undone in turn by post-structuralism, in which case the diachronic political critique of post-Marxism extracted maximum revenge on the tyranny of the signifier.

Today, we see the advent of a deterministic virtuality (an almost-new vitalism) that impregnates everything with the shimmering sign of nothingness. This nothingness – the ultra-depleted surface of things – is, paradoxically, valorized as the most prescient of conditions, as the late-modern subject is primarily presented as a void (a virtual and virtuous nothingness). This renascent nihilism suggests that architecture has grown weary of its complicity in hegemonic orders and has elected, instead, to play versus resist. Such a strategy also suggests that the flotsam or debris field of architectural *de-construction* has opened up to purely instrumental and ad hoc games played from “inside” architectural production – i.e., within the folds of information and data that produce/impress the architectural image as well as the architectural object. As the shimmering architectures of the de-materialized subject are increasingly realized as actual cultural fabric, the anti-ideological ideology of “total flow” might be expected to reveal itself. That this pluralistic, negative ideology has arrived out of a de-construction of previous ideologies is fully consistent with the nature of the production of architectures. What is curious is the maelstrom of incorporations that occur in the intertextual apparatus of architectural virtuality and de-materialization. As the architectural object moves closer to a field condition in and of itself, a wide array of previously repressed material is folded into the matrix. This new “ecology” is, in fact, a form of psycho-social re-conditioning – and the incorporation of the idea of “landscape”, as figure or fold, suggests a possible way out of the deterministic circle inscribed in the generation of purely synthetic environments. This “way out” is through the proverbial hole in the wall of the architectural image – the “cracked” and “broken” surface. A possible re-inscription of depth is in and of itself predisposed to return landscape + architecture to its place in the creative construction of consciousness. This concept of depth approaches Heidegger’s “running ahead to meet the past”, and, as a cipher for the production of



timeliness, such an approach precludes complete immersion in the detritus of over-determined, collapsing systems and/or the seductive, de-materialized field of flows and vectors. Despite the scintillating presence of surface, at some point the issue of architecture's ontological ground must be formally re-addressed.

“The possibility of access to history is grounded in the possibility according to which any specific present understands how to be futural. This is the first principle of all hermeneutics.” –Martin Heidegger (1924)

Thus the wheel rolls on and on, turning over and over, crushing incomplete school after incomplete school. The provisional nature of form-making is revealed in the process – and the essentialist worldview within such processes escapes unscathed to return another day as another attempt to reach the ontological ground beneath our feet and some form of synthesis, or, as Walter Benjamin proclaimed, “The Coming Philosophy”.

### ARCHITECTURAL HORIZONS OR TIME NOT-ITSELF

Upon disposing of (setting aside) the achingly beautiful photographs of so-called natural landscapes (the Sierra Club idiom) and the glossy, romanticized vernacular images of working landscapes (the National Geographic idiom) – or first and second nature – and circling this same window on the world (photography) in search of something more timely (third or “fourth” nature), the image of the subject/object dialectic reappears through the agency of the putative autonomy of the photographic work of art. (See Aleksandr Rodchenko, Edward Steichen/Alfred Stieglitz, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Hilla and Bernd Becher, Josef Koudelka.)

The sense of time not itself provided in Heidegger's lecture “The Concept of Time” (1924) works to the foreground in the various worldviews contained in photography – whether the socio-politically charged works of Magnum or the extreme, aesthetic ambient “landscapes” of Karl Blossfeldt, Michael Kenna, Geoffrey James, Balthazar Korab, plus architectural and fashion photography in general. Closer to the origins of modern photography, the work of Steichen, Walker Evans, Rodchenko, Man Ray, Josef Sudek, et al. pictures the “elan vital” – the inner history – of photographic subjectivity through an apparent objective apparatus, an apparatus that proves in the end to be mythic versus empirical. These early progenitors of the photographic aesthetic meld the expressionist, constructivist, and cubist affects of an inquiry into form and the interplay of object and field, the latter most often portrayed as shadow or tenebrous void out of which emerge the forms of life (often as vestige, phantom, and/or fragment) imbued with momentary auratic, if not symbolic verisimilitude, only to fade into the fixity of the frozen image.

In architectural photography (Sudek, Ezra Stoller, Julius Shulman, Marc Llimargas, or Hélène Binet) and fashion photography (Helmut Newton, Richard Avedon, Steven Meisel, Juergen Teller, Nick Knight), the concept of trace and vestige moves to a new level of significance, productivity, and seductivity in the suggestive yet aborted narrative content, landscape (urban and otherwise) often providing a telltale (palpable) intonation or adumbrative depth suggesting a deferred grounding of abstract (de-materialized) desire in consumption, appropriation, expropriation, and photogenic simulation. That such aesthetic precepts have further burrowed their way into the present-day image of architecture through computer-generated simulations is, therefore, no surprise.

In the photographic expropriation of landscape, in and of itself, the image of constructed ground (space) – whether gardens, cities, parks, cemeteries, airports, etc. – supports the subtle but persistent themes consistent with the production of an elective versus enforced hegemony. This surplus hegemony is “elective” insofar as such circumstances are either avoidable or generally out of reach. The nature of time, as relative to environments and variable milieux, and as depicted in an imagery that selectively edits/represents cultural values (currents) and implicit historicity (timeliness), or that which asks “How?”, frames and enhances the authorized and unauthorized perceptions of cultural conditioning; viz., the emptiness of the typical modern architectural image is an elective minimalism as are the polished products of the sensuous and seductive editorial pages of glossy fashion magazines which often appropriate and “re-style” classic, Baroque, and modern landscape gardens as *mise en scène* supporting the dream-state of haute-couture fashion and design. Indeed, such fashion statements operate within the world of photography as an excess (a type of hallucination) glorifying the scenographic and privileged places and attitudes (*modus vivendi*) identified as “de luxe” and or “elite” in the rarified upper reaches of “society”, a class-conscious production of cultural identity. In turn, a titillating noirish under-/over-world is suggested in the extreme and phantasmatic imagery that is folded into such normative fashion pages (e.g., Newton and Teller) as an image of extravagance, decadence, and an excess of “success” (freedom through mock bondage). This latter imagery

substantiates the ineluctable charisma of the urban chic and is present in diverse forms, including the presentation graphics of present-day architects and landscape architects.

The ageless, immortal landscape that stands just outside this frame (process) of forceful or frivolous “acculturation”, as a “timelessness” within timeliness, in turn supports the indeterminate nature of the authorized/unauthorized activities of the elite, the voyeur, the flaneur, the aesthete, the connoisseur, and the so-called cognoscenti (fashionistas) – an explicit confrontation/clash of the microcosmic, iconoclastic architectures of the heterogeneous with those of the everyday world of the *hoi polloi*. The macrocosmic image – the wide world – often is deployed as a spectral other and supports a synoptic, panoptic return to preternatural and natural vectors of consciousness ostensibly outside historical time and its proscribed, constructed ground. Landscapes of the primordial ground condition and re-insinuate the elemental dialectic of self and ground through a social and aesthetic reductionism to primitive or unalloyed terms consistent with the concept of wilderness and primitivity. The structural and operational terms of such a grounding are built upon the innate aesthetic allure of things archaic and/or of a radically contingent “nature”. Landscape + architecture appears, then, as ever, suspended in the void between Pascal’s two infinities.

The production of time (timeliness) – as time has no abstract reality, as such, other than the neutral concept of timelessness – is as often a surplus as an intentional affect of design. The promenade (*architecturale* and *cinématique*), the cemetery or park as heterotopia, the cacophonous urban bazaar and street, the implied orthodoxy of certain styles and modes of structural landscape – historical (diachronic) and trans-historical (synchronic), or “isms” – all effectively produce fictionalized forms of time bound up with a system of inferences and discursive structures that are both concealed and masked (see Tafuri, Fredric Jameson, and Mike Davis), as all hegemonic systems construct a surface to which things are projected. In the latter case – e.g., in the synchronic plenitude of avant-garde formalisms – much “modernist” landscape is complicit in the spurious conflating of the timeless and the timely, primarily through an extension of seriality and cinematic aesthetic strategies inconsistent with unmasking conventions and undermining the everyday (default) mode of the production of time and space. It is the putative production of authenticity that motivates the avant-garde (“every new age requires new forms”), while almost always the operative forms are re-absorbed into a new conformity. The bricolage of post-modern landscape and architecture, or the pop and minimalist landscapes of the 1980s avant-garde, is, thereby, directly implicated in the demotion of landscape architecture to a type of brinkmanship versus an authentic re-writing of the codes of everydayness. This denial takes both the form of ahistorical games and faux avant-garde agitation. It is the polar opposite of the utilitarian and pragmatic (often conservative and reactionary) modes utilized by the status quo. In most cases the faux avant-garde and the pragmatic are both facile and instrumentalized representations of landscape as surface, intentionally glossing or bracketing cultural and intellectual depth, troublesome and pernicious forms of ideology, and introducing a type of determinism by way of formalizing contingent systems. In other words, “How?” is endlessly supplanted by “What?”.

The fixity of images is a relatively ancient problem in aesthetics, while the structural and contingent gestures of design and representation betray or conceal this concept insofar as they produce a product or condition versus a continuum. In the case of the production of a continuum, time is portrayed through a dynamic synthesis (*syrrhesis*) of structural and ambient forces – an avant-ecology of signifying factors (images, signs, forms, functions) that imply as well as access a vast otherness within, beyond, above, or below the constructed ground of image/place/time. Rote fixity collapses under such immense pressures and time opens up to “other times”, to other horizons, the nature of time itself (implied historicity) forced to the foreground or gesturing wildly in the background. In-between, almost always, remains the subject (the proverbial, metaphysical, irreducible middle-ground) situated at the crossroads of vertical and horizontal axes, *x*, *y*, *z* (the conventional coordinates of constructed space) replaced by “fourth” nature – “fourth” nature being the very image of Being, a sublime portent for the cipher of time not itself, or time as the provisional field for the non-ideological unity of things.

### THE FUSION THING: TOTAL FLOW OR NOTHINGNESS?

The historical, diachronic interplay of landscape + architecture in modern architectural production is/was at times a visionary *pas de deux*, while at other times an anti-visionary *danse macabre* (*danse mécanique*). In the latter case, landscape (milieu, ambiance, ground) is eclipsed and/or flattened in the strenuous and sometimes idealistic (utopian) seige represented by high-borne modernist formalism (technocratic, positivist, pragmatic, and programmatic). In

such scenarios, landscape became an almost nothing, not by design, but by proscription, elimination, and/or abstraction. In this essentialist project, landscape became de-natured space.

In the somewhat delicate, often lyrical case of the *pas de deux*, landscape is situated at the elective nexus of interpenetrating systems (architectonic and environmental fields), as intermediate condition, or simply noted, in passing, as a surplus value incorporated into the development of the architectural object by juxtaposition. The extension of architectural elements into the near landscape in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto or Carlo Scarpa, and the penetration of the building by so-called free-flowing or layered space suggests the classical disposition of positive and negative, solid and void, and the articulation if not transformation of architectural forms to fully synthetic forms in the rare instances when landscape and site impregnate architecture with a prescient auratic “interiority” and/or formal radiance that plays out in an explicit synthesis of verticality and horizontality – as in early modernist villas – thereby picturing the contingent, material conditions for architecture’s emergence. The most immaterial aspects of ambient environmental factors – the play of light and shadow – often provide architecture with an archaic uncanniness (an elemental timeliness) that is purely ephemeral and, most usually, unintended (purely incidental). Tadao Ando and Steven Holl are masters of this poetic/phenomenological genre, while others (Frank Gehry) simply accept the inevitable “patina” of building marked by time. The mutable materiality of architecture supported this embrace of the ambient, as glass curtain walls and metal cladding became ever more common and de-materializations occurred in the genre, noted explicitly by MoMA’s mid-1990s exhibition “Light Construction”. Dan Graham’s mirrored pavilions play wonderfully with this omniscient quality of glass doubling the field of vision such that the very field of representation breaks down into a prismatic and often kaleidoscopic universe of shards, filters, and superimpositions – the effect entirely dependent on the setting of the object in the landscape. This latter de-materialization invokes the concept of “total flow” and the tendency towards objectifying surface at the expense of depth.

Outside of this cyclic, accidental, and discontinuous emergence of sublimated aspects of architecture’s implicit ground, a third order of symbolization and abstraction is to be found that represents a preliminary and provisional synthesis of subject/object relations – i.e., most often a figurative symbiosis built into form and described as gestural or sublime fusion of “form” and “content” in sculpture and the hybridized field of land art, most especially, where discursive orders are stripped away and an elemental, generative, and formal essence presses forward. In the case of art, and its near-automatic assumption of conceptual autonomy, the works of Isamu Noguchi and Robert Smithson, plus the avalanche of land art inspired landscape architecture after the 1960s, re-present the archaic and liminal nature of almost-first nature (perhaps “fourth nature”) through hyper-sensual manipulations of form and a presentiment, if not an acclamation, of pre-linguistic forms and seminal structural operations versus aspects of full-blown discourse (full-fledged signifiers). Here, timeliness is reduced to an iconic presence tipping inexorably toward absence (timelessness). These liminal measures most often take the form of excavations or insertions (interventions) that at the least pretend to re-write the codes of occupying or mapping presence. This type of deep-sea diving comes in many forms and is not limited to the delineation of art-in-the-landscape, or art-as-landscape. The concise, inwardly driven nature of such expression is primarily poetic and is found in all of the arts. This archaic *jouissance* deliberately invokes the ontological ground as a place “before” – pre-existent to – the emergence of the Imaginary (the phantasmatic world of doubled and/or tripled un-realities). These figures play in the dust of the Self, seemingly before the emergence of the ego (and superego). Such fictive gestures also act as analogues for the extreme interiority of works of art and architecture prior to their deployment as cultural signs and tropes (figures of speech and thought). In the process of stripping away the detritus of signifying chains (modes of expression and discourse), such maneuvers circle the same ground repeatedly. The eventual collapse of the operative figures of near-speech simply occurs as the work vanishes into the annals of art or architectural history. The dissolution of many of Heizer’s and Smithson’s remote works matters hardly at all given that they were putative gestures at/within “wilderness” but overt acts of defiance aimed at the production of art and the art world.

From 1930 to 1960, the time of the emergence of high-modern architecture (and the International Style), landscape was effectively subjugated by the ordeal/onslaught of hyper-structural and technocratic instrumentalities – cultural, political, economic, and otherwise. The image of architecture and the architect as glossy man accompanied the last hurrah for messianic modernism. The high-architectonic was at best complemented by neutral ground/landscape, though most often ground/landscape was “locked away” in the spatial assault of low-formalist and high-functional orthogonal systems – super-functionalisms. The amalgam that came to be known as corporate modernism, and which was typified by Mies van der Rohe’s transcendent glass office buildings (set upon pristine podiums), is/was, according to Massimo Cacciari and Josep Quetglas, the pure reification and secularization of the certain abstracted

aspects of sacral architectures past. This “classicism” masked the origins of the modernist experiment in socially self-conscious experiments in form-making – e.g., Mies’ problematical Berlin period – and became hypostatized in the omniscient and omnivorous over-production of sterile corporate architectures. Most mid-century modern landscape architecture, following suit, adopted the dominant visual code of geometricism and the architectonic logic of *plan libre* as the spirit of the age, overthrowing the last vestiges of Romanticism, post-Romanticism, and the late-Olmstedian picturesque. The latter continued well into the mid-1900s transposed into the form of national parks and interstate transportation systems. In the case of the exemplars of modern landscape architecture (Dan Kiley, Garrett Eckbo, Christopher Tunnard, Hideo Sasaki, and Peter Walker), an attendant minimalism, expressed in seriality and typological reductionism, secured the accommodation of landscape to architecture, albeit through subjugation and abstraction. Antoni Gaudí, Roberto Burle Marx, and Luis Barragán, on the other hand, appear to represent unique expressions of critical regionalism before it was characterized as such by Kenneth Frampton.

After the 1960s, as the hegemony of abstract planning and object-oriented modern architecture increasingly fell into disarray (and disrespect), various alternative visions emerged alongside post-modernism (after 1968) both reviving and re-negotiating the language of generic historical form and the geometric and material expressions of late modernity – modernity being measured, in Lacan’s immortal words, “from the Renaissance to the so-called zenith of the twentieth century”. In the 1980s, as the last signs of the ecological and vernacular movements of the 1970s faded or were absorbed into a new artistic vision of landscape architecture (including expropriated affects of land art), a new wave of design speculation, which premiated or gave equal merit to ground, submerged the last vestiges of high (mid-century) modernism and the ubiquity of the neo-baroque landscapes of corporate campuses and urban entourage (Walker’s “everything 3 meters apart”). Rote geometricism continued as a default methodology in landscape urbanism, especially in the case of 1980s urban projects that sought to revitalize the devastated economic prospects of the city center. The waterfront “festival marketplace” became the new re-urban model, ending – thankfully – with Battery Park City in the late 1980s.

In landscape architecture, various neo-modernist schools attempted a revival of geometricism, but without the stringent and necessary measures of pure (and grave) formalism – as was occurring in architecture – while post-modern schools evolved toward a neo-minimalist, sur-rationalist, or neo-mannerist mode of representation. Deconstructivist-inspired landscape urbanism appeared as figurative “storyboards” in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily in the guise of international design competitions (see Berlin after 1989). Narratology and linguistics permeated the “extended field” (Rosalind E. Krauss’ term) inherited from the 1960s, but failed to secure the poetic task of re-writing the foundational language common to landscape + architecture. Rather than search for primordial pre-linguistic analogues in design languages, linguistics was applied in a very literal, superficial, and artificial manner as “writing and reading” the landscape. As landscape architecture attempted to re-align the dysfunctional and infrastructural contingencies of the modern city, late-modernism also clashed with New Urbanism. Landscape + architecture fell into vogue, however, only insofar as the type and scale of projects and commissions required the collaboration of multiple disciplines and aesthetic considerations and/or computer-generated modeling softwares promoted convergence (see Parc Downsview Park). This nascent order only tangentially embraced the artistic *jouissance* of renascent forms of formalism – that dialectical/synthetic hybridization of milieu and anti-milieu that returns at times of cultural crisis. The deterministic and materialistic (anti-humanistic) systems of planning which evolved from Ian McHarg’s system of mapping produced a new wave characterized by its obsession with *terrain vague* and “junk-space” while new ecological imperatives were advanced in the necessary re-appropriation of post-industrial wastelands, urban and ex-urban. This latter movement, post-McHarg, returned to landscape the dynamic instrumentalities of process-driven design, while adding wholly new representational systems and blurring/obscuring relative scales and normative graphic conventions. Montage and mapping were combined to produce a new avant-garde sensibility, even though much of the intellectual rigor of the Dadaist-inspired idiom was off-loaded or simply repressed.

Today, following this historical melange of schools and movements, the always-already deferred synthesis/syrrhesis of landscape + architecture – that which resides uneasily in the interstices of all instrumentalized and discriminatory systems and/or fields, and that which has been problematized as “in-betweenness” – may be seen exacting revenge in the form of an irruptive other-worldliness in the operations of various latter-day conceptual artists (the irrepressible avant-gardists). This other-worldliness (which is radically contingent versus transcendental) comes to expression in the form of the attempt to bring/harness the figures and forces (gestures) of things and milieux – an ambient intellectual and environmental syrrhesis (flowing together) – that counters cyclical reification, outright expropriation, and rote appropriation. As K. Michael Hayes had pointed out, the late-1990s emphasis on flows

(datascape, vectors, etc.) in mostly virtual architectures might, in itself, end in a return to a mere emphasis on imagology and surface without the induction of the intellectual coordinates that support critical-historical consciousness. Virtuality is, after all, the present-day reified realm of the Imaginary. To this must be added the poetic, intertextual, and the extreme formalistic gestures harvested from post-structuralism and structuralism. This quest to bring ambient cultural and natural forces to play within the axes of three-dimensional space – to produce the total work of art – stands astride the conflicting claims of architecture to be both an art and a science. It is in the latter instance, in architecture as a hyper-conscious (self-conscious and critical) art, that the more profound exemplifications of landscape + architecture will be found. Everything else will proceed per usual.

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

An “elective” synthesis of landscape + architecture will be accomplished in the future, as it has always been accomplished in the past, in the singular work of art. The forms and types of this “near-total work of art” are variegated and not reducible to landscape nor architecture, but, instead, open onto a vast, heterogeneous field that is symptomatic of the human condition; that field of subjective topographies comprised of the fundamental unanswerable questions and paradoxes of worldliness and timeliness.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/11/02/parting-shots/>

December 23, 2002

## **New Books Christmas 2002: Livres Deluxe**

by Gavin Keeney

The tidal wave of big books passing as coffee tables has come for the Holiday Season 2002. This year's big sensation includes: *Grace Coddington: Thirty Years of Fashion at Vogue* (with slipcase); the perhaps bi-annual *Visionaire*, with #38: *Love* (a self-consciously stylish compendium of everything hip, chic, and – um – stylish); and *Palaces of the Sun King*. The mammoth tome on the graphic works of Albrecht Dürer, associated with the current exhibition at the British Museum, will – alas – not be available till February-March 2003.

Then there is the big photo-documentary *New York, New York* with its six-foot-long gatefold image of the New York City skyline. If that does not please, one can opt for *Dressing the Man: Mastering The Art of Permanent Fashion*, or perhaps a crisp monograph – *David Adler Architect* – on David Adler Architect.

The publishing sensation of the year – *Dream of Palestine* – written by a fifteen-year-old Italian girl (of Palestinian descent) will not be available in the US (in English, French or Italian), but you can buy Oriana Fallaci's anti-Muslim screed *The Rage and the Pride* (in five languages). The former is in the process of being suppressed overseas and will probably never see the light of print in the US, while the latter has climbed the bestseller list despite being universally condemned as a post-9/11 apoplectic tirade in “defense” of the supremacy of Western values. Odd, indeed, since both of these titles come from the same publisher.

Moving down the publishing foodchain one can buy innumerable cloth-bound works of non-fiction and self-congratulatory biography. This includes Al and Tipper Gore's latest literary outing, *Joined at the Heart*. Or perhaps the new David Rockefeller memoirs might please the man about town on your Christmas list.

Pop-up books are very popular this time of year. The *Pop-Up Book of Phobias* (1999) still charms. Plus, there is now a *Pop-Up Book of Nightmares* (2001). There is even an Antoni Gaudí pop-up book this season – or, should you prefer, *Frank Lloyd Wright in Pop-Up*. Pop-up architecture titles seem to be on the rise.

There are all manner of little gift books available for the inexpensive, novelty gift. The *Worst Case Scenario* line has been extended to include a sex and dating edition – not to mention “holiday”, “travel”, and “golf” editions. There is a rash of dog books too. *Designer Pugs* is charming. Perhaps next year will see *Pugs in Leather*.

Enormously expensive editions of enormously expensive jewelry are au courant this year. There is *Jar Paris*, a monstrous tome on the work of the French jeweler. *The Queens' Jewels* has made quite a splash in newspaper Christmas book lists.

Tom Brokaw's books continue to sell well – Anybody say “synergy”? – and there is a cookbook from one of the characters of *The Sopranos*.

Wine books are an excellent choice, for example *Michael Broadbent's Vintage Wines* is an excellent supplement to a case of a nice French red. There's also a book on caviar, foie gras, and truffles (*Caviar, Truffles, and Foie Gras: Recipes for Divine Indulgence*)! Or perhaps that nice boxed edition *Ferrari 1947-Whenever* will warm the heart of your boyfriend, father, brother, or employer.

Few people give novels this time of year even though – like Hollywood – there is a rash of new stuff aimed at the holiday down-time. These are almost always semi-expensive cloth editions and you have to wait till at least one year for the paperback.

There's also a mini-spate of auto-erotica: “boy books” as they are called. Bruce Weber's annual photo-narrative *All-American: Short Stories* has just arrived and features “eroticized images of Hudson River beaches”. “Girrrrrl books” are harder to come by.

And let's not forget the *Bushisms* series. These collections of Thus Spake the So-Called President continue to please partisans of all stripes. The quotations are eminently "quotable" and one has to wonder if the so-called president is receiving royalties.

Lastly, let's not overlook the interiors, decorative arts, and above-mentioned architectural monographs aimed straight at the heart of nouveau-riche America. O new Gilded Age! There are so many books on this subject that it is all but impossible to sort out the style of the moment though cool minimalism seems to reign supreme in the upperly mobile, chic world of the urban cognoscenti.

At Bergdorf Goodman the elegant publications of Assouline were on display this past week, with wine, as the holiday season accounts for perhaps 1/4 to 1/2 of all *de luxe*, annual book sales. This event took place on the seventh floor amid a gorgeous array of "housewares".

Big, swank volumes are the gift of choice for corporate giving and orders of 100 titles are not unusual. "Could you wrap those, include a card, and we'll send over a messenger." "We'll fax over a list of the recipients for the gift cards." The \$7-an-hour seasonal workers at these luxury book emporia are only too eager to oblige, half hoping many of the books will be returned after December 25 and their temporary jobs may be extended a week or two in order to process the deluge.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2002/12/23/livres-deluxe/>

## **The Drunken Flower**

By Gavin Keeney

“The soul must die”,  
said the drunken flower,  
close to its own end,  
withering away

I chose the blood-red wine  
because it was imported by  
Dionysos Ltd.,  
a gorgeous French Merlot

I put the rose-purple flower  
into a small vase of wine,  
and drank the whole bottle,  
sailing into the evening

I argued with No One  
about Everything,  
about useless things,  
and about Love (martyrdom)

It was not possible  
to go way Downeast,  
the ‘S’ea would not allow it,  
refusing to oblige

The coast of Maine  
is in my soul (as sea-smoke),  
like so many other  
trembling (swirling) things

I said farewell to it,  
realising it held me  
no longer enthralled,  
in its grips

Enthralled by Every-thing,  
the great ‘S’ (Spirit),  
written against the sky  
by trees at dusk, sings

At dawn (singed), I read out  
the Book of Lies (slowly) –  
And it has no purpose  
other than its own

Thus, and for very sound reasons  
(unreasonable reasons),



I accept everything  
that passes

<http://www.counterpunch.org/poems07262003.html>

August 21, 2003

## **The Infernal Machine: “Architectures” in Service to Nothing**

By Gavin Keeney

The machine that ate the garden rages on (and on and on). It bulldozes everything every day. We are all “landing sites”, and this machine levels everything making sure nothing significant might land there (in us).

Rem Koolhaas has declared architecture dead ... I have never listened much to his pronouncements, given that he dumped a load of vacuous rubble into the discourse of architecture anyway. But he is right, insofar as reputation-mongering leads to reputation-mongering leads to reputation-mongering. Everything else is destroyed in the process – every other alternative. The world is destroyed every day by the vast machine rolling relentlessly toward oblivion.

Arundhati Roy has suggested throwing monkey wrenches. But the machine is now so vast, it would require a cosmic monkey wrench, which we may anyway, any day soon get. Something has to land to stop the machine.

The machine is Capitalism writ large, ugly, and in-between – everywhere, every day ... It crushes every other idea that comes along – every question mark is shredded along with the self-incriminating documents.

Capitalism survives by endless abstraction. What is needed to counter it is a radical contingent alternative vision, an aesthetics of the sublime, and a sublime aesthetics (Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou’s “Universal”). Žižek is right to defend the principle of radical individuality ... What else is more dangerous to the machine? Where else might we find the landing site for some-thing else?

This some-thing else (this sublime aesthetics) has been called “The Coming Philosophy” (Walter Benjamin), or “The Coming Community” (Giorgio Agamben) ... It is the vast landing site within things (including the human soul) that awaits some-thing else.

I know so many people, right now, trying to clear away the rubble and free this landing site. The machine senses their presence and grows more subtle and pernicious. The demi-urgic thing – the Capitalistic beast – colonizes everything everywhere, both dreams and nightmares. The Surrealist idea that advertizing colonized the unconscious is just one such insight. That this machine is now attempting to finish off the human soul is an entirely different matter.

The way out is always the same way out ... What matters must be sorted out from what doesn’t matter. What matters is the nothing much that the machine can never touch. For everyone, today, this nothing much is everything that matters. It must be sited – again – in the world as a force that can stop the machine. It requires that everyone still aware of this nothing much marshals the strength (the inner and outer resources) that the machine hijacks to clear away that site, to locate it, and to re-write it into the world.

McHouses, McCars, McCorporations, and McPeople ... What else? What can replace such a titanic withering force? The secret, sublime antidote (the way out) is to say “No” to the machine, and to say “Yes” to everything else.

Cities are the crisis point ... They are the test tube for new experiments in subjecting people to new forms of colonization. In most cities, the interface has been lost (the landing site paved over repeatedly, buried in rubble and resurfaced again and again). Currently, there is a new vast empty thing called Landscape Urbanism making the rounds of architecture schools and design studios equating urban landscape with infrastructure. The former broken interface is to be replaced by a new, fully synthetical interface where everything once “given” is turned into something “taken away” (but sold back to you). This so-called new idea is quite simply the reification of the broken idea of Nature ... It is part and parcel of the logic of the machine to take away things given and sell them back to you as the latest, newest thing.

Architecture everywhere is in service to the machine. With few exceptions it services that machine. Massimo Cacciari has asked for buildings that “sing” – when what we almost always get instead is building that further

divides and destroys the experience of the world (dividing, sub-dividing, and parceling out space, selling space back to us), while pretending that progress has been made. Such architectures are bankrupt even though they made the capitalist machine whirl. Public space has been systematically colonized these past decades such that it is unrecognizable as such. Public resources have been converted to quasi-public piggy banks for speculators in the name of productivity and efficiency. Architecture continues to mutate – attempting valiantly at times to get out of its own path – re-generating itself and its role, struggling to free its potential, only to fall again into the grinding maw of the machine that is always already eating the garden.

This bleak scenario contains a singular silver lining ... This silver lining is a golden thread. This golden thread leads out of the labyrinth (Manfredo Tafuri's labyrinth) to a sphere outside, in the air, in the imagination, in the spirit of every thing "useless" (not yet subjugated, or dying to be reborn out of subjugation). This vast sphere is Idealism Itself ... It involves the collapsing of subject-object dichotomies (of Master-Slave dichotomies). It is mocked in the marketplace of ideas every day ... It is mocked and it is crucified every day. So what? This sphere is the landing site the machine can never touch. Embrace it and bring on a new, better world.

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2003/08/21/the-infernal-machine/>