

Tsukuba Centre in Tokyo as ruins, immediately after its completion in 1983, in order to imbue it with a fictional life beyond the building's conventional existence.

Roland Barthes comments in 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' that 'narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.' It is therefore significant that buildings, as physical repositories of and monuments to human culture, now rarely signify anything beyond their quotidian function.

Using the techniques of collage, the ten 'short stories' that follow investigate the reinvestment of narrative form in architecture, depicting a London that is peopled with both real and fictional elements from a variety of sources. In the acquisitive nature of collage, the thematic intent of this book appropriates ideas, tropes and characters from pre-existing critical thinking in the fields of architectural representation and narrative structure.

The modern age has been an unkind chapter in the history of narrative architecture. In pre-secular times, it was not unusual for buildings to be constructed of and around narrative – the proportions, alignment, size and decoration of the great Egyptian temples and tombs were determined by metaphor, not utility, while the Doge's Palace in Venice, with its Bridge of Sighs, Porta della Carta (Document Gate), Scala dei Giganti (Giant's Stairwell) and winged lions, is as much an assemblage of anecdotal vignettes as building. Circular and cruciform plan forms, once steeped in mystical and religious significance, are now merely unfashionable shapes. Today's built environment presents such a poor receptacle for story that Arata Isozaki felt compelled to publish drawings of his

The Architect as Storyteller

Current forms of architectural representation reveal a dichotomy of purpose. The primary form of architectural drawing, produced by the majority of professionals in practice, still follows the triadic system of plan, section and elevation. While these orthogonal forms of representation are well suited to the task of relaying information for construction or fabrication purposes, they possess no qualitative or phenomenological intelligence. That is not to say that they do not describe and proscribe the occupation of space – Robin Evans points out that 'if anything is described by an architectural plan, it is the nature of human relationships, since the elements whose trace it records – walls, doors, windows and stairs – are employed first to divide and then selectively to re-unite inhabited space.' Nonetheless, the codification of construction drawings is designed to prevent ambiguity or multiple interpretation by using a strict and abstract system of notation. Walter Benjamin goes so far to say that 'the most essential characteristic of the architectural drawing is that it does not take a pictorial detour.'

The early deconstructivist paintings of Zaha Hadid or the Chamberworks drawings of Daniel Libeskind exploring the parallels between music and architecture, tell a different story. As Lebbeus Woods comments, drawing is a mode of thinking: 'there

are ideas and feelings that can only be expressed in drawn form. We might imagine, if we look at the caves of Lascaux, that drawing came before writing and was, in its narrative making of marks, its source.'

What both types of architectural representation have in common, and what distinguishes them from a fine art drawing of a building, is that the subjects constitute a projected future. Whether that future is realized or not is not necessarily significant in this respect. Evans comments, 'Drawing in architecture is not done after nature, but prior to construction; it is not so much produced by reflection on the reality outside the drawing, as productive of a reality that will end up outside the drawing.'

The key point established is the conjectural nature of architectural drawing – an alternative future patterning of space and its occupation is advanced that, due to the real potential for its reification and the contextual surroundings, cannot be considered wholly fictive. In the case of more fantastical propositions where there is no intention of realization, divergence from the status quo is magnified with a concomitant inflation of the proposition's fictive quotient. On the one hand, this might lead us to question the legitimacy and place of 'paper architecture', on the other, a case could be made that the

breadth of the disjunction frees us to consider changes in spatial practice that could be truly transformative.

Geoff Manaugh, futurist and author of *BLDG BLOG*, is convinced of architecture's narrative potential: 'architecture, as a discipline, can itself be used to tell stories. In fact, some of the most interesting student work today comes complete with elaborate plots and story lines, supplied for no other reason than to explain why a particular building should exist or require designing. These stories very often exceed today's mass market fiction in imaginative strength.'

Regrettably, the most common vehicle of architectural conjecture is the computer render; produced for mass consumption, the photorealistic image is capable of reaching and convincing a wide audience of a proposition's validity. Its strength, however, is also its weakness – so plausible is the image at simulating reality that no 'reading' or interpretation of the architecture is required or demanded. In its own way, it is as much a fait accompli as the architecture it represents, frozen in time against a perfect and eternal blue sky. As Neil Leach writes in 'The Anaesthetics of Architecture', 'the intoxication of the aesthetic leads to an aesthetics of intoxication, and a consequent lowering of critical awareness. What results is a culture of mindless consumption, where there is

no longer any possibility of meaningful discourse.'

Drawing and modelling, whether physical or virtual, are not the only means of representation available to the architect. Text is an often-overlooked tool in the description of architectural propositions and when used, tends towards the explicative rather than the expressive. The written word is usually limited to specification and the justification of design decisions rather than contributing to creative or conceptual design. An exception to this tendency is the giving of names to buildings, either formally by architects and developers, or informally by the general public. Sobriquets such as 'The Shard', 'Falling Water' and 'The Flatiron Building' are powerfully suggestive, ascribing meaning and qualities that may or may not be espoused in the architecture that they are projected on.

The prima facie reason why architecture and narrative are considered irreconcilable is that buildings do not unfold over time in the way that films or novels do. Space nevertheless contains temporal associations, most obviously in the architectural promenade in which spaces gradually reveal themselves to a mobile observer. Architecture also has the capacity to transcend the physical, encoding poetic sequences into its fabric – the Danteum, Terragni's

rewriting of 'The Divine Comedy' in architectural form, for example, does more than illustrate Dante's work; it translates the poem's structure and metre into spatial proposition. The question is also not necessarily how to inculcate architecture or architectural representation with temporal elements; a rapprochement can be equally reached by viewing conventional narrative in less sequential terms, focussing more on the descriptive than the prescriptive.

The Storyteller as Architect

The city as protagonist appears periodically in literature and film. Noir, for example, has become almost synonymous with Los Angeles and the writings of Chandler, Cain and Ellroy. 'Berlin: Symphony of a Great City', the German silent film of 1927 directed by Walter Ruttmann, portrays a day in the life of the German capital. As a medium with intrinsic chronological progression, film lends itself easily to plot structure, yet there is no strong narrative thread to the city symphony, perhaps to maintain the focus on the city itself, rather than its inhabitants. Instead, Ruttmann links themes and perspectives using Soviet montage techniques, suggesting spatial connexions that would be impossible in a conventional narrative. Peter Ackroyd classifies his magnum opus on London as a biography, insisting that we should regard the city as 'a human shape with its own laws of life and growth'. Like Ruttmann, Ackroyd elects not to

follow a chronological sequence in London's story: 'Contemporary theorists have suggested that linear time is itself a figment of the human imagination, but London has already anticipated their conclusions. There are many different forms of time in the city, and it would be foolish of me to change its character for the sake of creating a conventional narrative.' Similarly, in 'Invisible Cities', Italo Calvino avoids a conventional sequential structure in his paeon to the city of Venice, playing out the prose poem through a series of urban descriptions recounted to the Kublai Khan by the explorer Marco Polo. When asked by the Khan whether he will repeat the same tales to his people, Calvino echoes Barthes, explaining that there are as many versions of a tale as there are listeners, via the proxy of Polo: "I speak and I speak," Marco says, "but the listener retains only the words he is expecting ... it is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear."

Other authors have used architecture as a framework for their stories, the most obvious example being George Perec's 'Life: A User's Manual' which uses the device of an imaginary Parisian apartment block, 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier, to structure his work; Perec pictures the building with its façade removed, behind which there are ninety-nine rooms set out in a ten by ten grid, each of which is designated a chapter describing the stories of the rooms'

inhabitants in connexion with a central puzzle.

Like any other character in a novel, architecture assumes the role of protagonist when the plot of a story is unable to unfold without its intervention. The cathedral of Notre Dame, for example, is key to a number of episodes in the life of Quasimodo – the hunchback is first introduced as a child at the cathedral's foundlings' bed; he becomes deaf after being made Notre Dame's bell ringer, claims sanctuary at the top of the bell tower on behalf of the gypsy girl Esmerelda, and finally takes refuge within its massive stone walls when besieged by a mob intent on his death.

The Fallacies of Linearity

The creation of a building is generally perceived as a linear process. Appraisal of a client's needs is followed by the development of a brief; a concept is then established, around which a design evolves through drawing and modelling. Soon after, the principal intentions described in the drawings and models become frozen as technical and contractual considerations assume prominence, culminating in an inhabitable structure via the agency of a builder. The brief is the beginning, the design the middle and the building the end. However, it is equally valid, and indeed commonplace, for brief to follow building, for instance when extant urban fabric is repurposed

to house new functions, or for design to precede brief, for example in the case of the geodesic dome. Design is by nature iterative; beginnings and ends are found where we choose to locate them. As the postmodern author Neil Gaiman observes, 'human beings like things to be story-shaped. The universe does not hand over beginnings, middles, endings; stories cut and shape the world, impose patterns on it.'

The linearity of the building is also challenged by Beatriz Colomina, who contends that the physical building is just one of many possible modes of architectural representation. She argues that the site of architectural production has moved from the built environment to other media such as film, photography and journalism, a 'displacement that presupposes a new sense of space, one defined by images rather than walls'. Drawings, specifications, photographs, models and texts all are manifestations of a single platonic archetype, and any one of these manifestations is as representative of the architecture as the physical building.

In other fields, the dismantling of sequential narrative as dogma is well established, perhaps illustrated most viscerally in the cut-ups and fold-ins of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin. Inspired by Dada experiments of the 1920s, Burroughs and Gysin applied

the techniques of collage to text. Burroughs describes the cut-up method thus: 'Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and cross the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4 ... one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page. Sometimes it says much the same thing. Sometimes something quite different.' The cut-up technique is a potent rejection of linearity, demonstrating how the juxtaposition of aleatory elements can lead to original and surprisingly coherent outcomes relying on imagery and poetic association. However, the rare instances of recombinant epiphany derive their potency from an obligatory mass of barren white noise, leading Burroughs to employ cut-ups only as an intermediary stage of composition in his later work rather than in their unexpurgated form.

The Reader Reborn

In 1967, Roland Barthes' landmark essay, 'The Death of the Author', declared the independency of a text from its author, empowering the reader to distill a unique and personal reading from a multiplicity of layers and meanings: 'We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning [the "message" of the Author-God] but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue

of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' The liberation of a work from an authoritative voice has proved to be double-edged. As a society, we have become accustomed to having information spoon-fed to us, and for culture to entertain rather than inform – film has become synonymous with the 'high concept' movie in which a story's premise can be condensed into a single tagline, while the novel has been reduced to the 'unputdownable' beach read. Consequently, we have lost the patience and facility to develop a critical understanding of a work with any intended ambiguity or invested subtext.

This cultural drift is even more pronounced in the field of architecture where perception of a building rarely extends beyond its superficial appearance. With the disappearance of signified meaning in contemporary buildings and the obsolescence of meaning in buildings of antiquity, our ability to read architecture has completely atrophied, if we are in fact aware that architecture can be read at all. Despite the rich imaginative conjecture that thrives in schools of architecture, the intention to implant buildings with meaning is increasingly uncommon. When it does occur, it is often the equivalent to the high concept movie, exemplified by projects such as Libeskind's Manchester Imperial War Museum in which the building is composed of three interlocking shards that seemingly

derive from a shattered globe – a seductive opening statement but, at the same time, a one-liner.

In an urban milieu where context and the genius loci of a place have become subsidiary to economic and political considerations, reducing architecture to pre-determined programmes and their formal manifestation, the act of binding architecture into the story of its inhabitants can only bring a new relevancy to the built environment, projecting, but not predicating, the rules of its occupation.

The short stories of this book's title are set in different time periods of London, intentionally locating themselves in the liminal territory between fiction and architecture to provoke an engagement between readers and their two-dimensional counterparts occupying the depicted city. The stories are neither illustrated texts nor captioned images; the collages represent a network of spatial relationships, and the text, which splices genres such as science fiction, magical realism and the fairy tale, a thread that links some of the nodes of that network together. The written elements of each piece begin to cast a rigid carapace around the amorphous field of potential stories generated by the collages, but should be regarded as merely one reading of them. Text and collage, or more precisely,

text and photographs of collage, are two aspects of a story existing in a troubled relationship, sometimes working in parallel with one another, sometimes reinforcing one another and other times contradicting one another.

A Romance of Many Dimensions

In his eponymous novella, Edwin A Abbott created the two-dimensional world of Flatland, whose inhabitants consist of lines, points and polygons. Subtitled 'a romance of many dimensions', Abbott's story, written in 1884, is both a mathematical treatise on dimensional perception and a satire examining Victorian sexuality and the class system. Taking a cue from this work, each of the stories in this book begins life as a two-dimensional sheet of paper. The paper and is then cut, inscribed, folded and fused into a narrative, occupying a territory that is both real and surreal; cardboard cut-outs are spliced and woven into yarns with shadowy nuance to partially occupy the third dimension. Using paper, carbon and glue as ingredients, the stories construct a sequence of improbable marriages between reality and fantasy, laced with a healthy dose of myth and locational specificity – a leather-bound suitcase masquerades as a living breathing house with cooing hens perched on window sills, a dating agency at Battersea brings prospective owners together with their ideal pet, three towers

in Smithfield Market built from straw, sticks and bricks form a porcine dormitory for meat packers. Like the artwork described in Abbott's Victorian satire, the short stories are 'immoral, licentious, anarchical and unscientific' yet, from an aesthetic point of view, 'glorious', 'ravishing' and 'a pleasure to behold'.

Collage has been chosen for this work to take advantage of the medium's inherent plurality – pieces of a collage or assemblage are only ever half-assumed into their new context, bringing with them a wealth of connoted meaning from their original time and place. We usually expect objects to exist in a singular location, but the elements in a collage or assemblage oscillate between existences like Schrödinger's Cat, presenting a flexible vessel in which the reader is encouraged to deposit his or her own historical and cultural montage.

The ultimate purpose of this book is to demonstrate that architectural representation need not be a neutral tool or mere picture of a future building, that drawings and models have a direct influence on the conceptual development of a project and the generation of form, and that there are alternatives to the reductive working methods of contemporary architectural practice.