

## FICTION/NON-FICTION, OR: MYTH AND THE ARCHITECT'S ARCHITECTURE

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**ABSTRACT.** Architecture is constructed not only in its images of objects, but also in its idealization of authorship. While the one-to-one association of Architect with “their” Architecture perpetuates the illusion of the discipline’s agency and fosters impossible expectations of absolute control, broadly speaking, the originary and utopian impulse remains a fundamental component of an architect’s identity. The following paper confronts the largely unelaborated myths of the Architect’s Architecture presented by architectural discourse by way of three exaggerated Architectural figures depicted in works of fiction: Howard Roark (*The Fountainhead*), Stourley Kracklite (*The Belly of an Architect*) and The Architect (*The Matrix* trilogy). More specifically, the paper uses these heroic/antiheroic figures to explore three alternative relations of “Architect” to “their Architecture”. As such, the discussion performs two functions: it tests the fictionality of fictional and non-fictional constructs that reinforce and personify the myth of Architectural authorship, measuring fictional figures against non-fictional figures; and it presents an heuristic, offering both a perspective on the history of twentieth century architecture, and a means with which to negotiate cultural positioning in the ongoing present.

**Keywords:** the figure of the Architect; architectural authorship; fictional architects; modernist architects

### **Introduction / Parti**

Gerrit Rietveld’s Schröder House. Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion. Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum. Architectural discourse and its texts – from the scholarly to the popular – regularly couple sited buildings with biographical persons responsible for their design. It is conventional shorthand. It matters little that the emblematic sliding panels were the idea of Truus Schröder-Schröder; that the pavilion in Barcelona is a reconstruction of a temporary structure built in a

different location under a different name for a temporary exhibition; that the titanium sheets and steel structure of the museum in Bilbao were determined by computer program CATIA. The discursive status of canonical examples exaggerates the mythology that supports almost all architectural work: the image of creation as the generation of a source.

The Architect's Architecture. In many respects, it is a convenient fiction: architects can use images of their Architecture to construct their own image as Architect. Critics, historians, and other parties with an interest in Architecture can describe, categorize, and judge these "works" in relation to authorial figures; and disinterested people can go about their business. While the one-to-one association of Architect and Architecture burdens practitioners with impossible expectations of absolute control – establishing a tragic narrative into which they are repeatedly drawn – the originary and utopian impulse remains a fundamental component of an architect's identity. It is tacitly accepted and enculturated.<sup>1</sup> Architecture is constructed not only in its images of objects, but also in its idealization of authorship.

It is these myths of creation within architecture that this paper seeks to address. It gains traction not by expounding the realities of architecture, but rather by compounding the fictional grounds of the twentieth century's Architecture and Architects. In doing so, it confronts the unelaborated myths presented by architectural discourse with overtly drawn Architectural figures from works of fiction. These figures, whose primary function is to characterize ideas and support narratives, also characterize cultural positions symptomatic of their temporal context. They are amplifications emblematic of strategic responses to the myth of authorship. The paper uses three heroic/antiheroic figures to explore three alternative relations of "Architect" to "their Architecture". As such, the discussion performs two functions: it tests the fictionality of fictional and non-fictional constructs that reinforce and personify the myth of Architectural authorship, measuring fictional figures against non-fictional figures; and presents an heuristic, offering both a perspective on the history of twentieth century architecture, and a means with which to negotiate cultural positioning in the ongoing present.

## **Control / Dynamite**

Howard Roark laughed. (Rand, 1971: 7)

These words serve as the opening sentence and paragraph of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1943). Their objective is to characterize the central figure of the book, the architect Howard Roark. Did Roark laugh at something someone said? No, "[h]e stood naked at the edge of a cliff" (Rand, 1971: 7), very alone. Did he laugh at something he saw? No, his gaze was fixed on "[t]he lake [that] lay far below him. A frozen explosion of granite burst in flight to the sky over motionless water" (Rand, 1971: 7). Wondrous, perhaps; or fantastic – but not comical. Roark

“laughed at the thing which had happened to him that morning and at the things which now lay ahead” (Rand, 1971: 7). What had happened that morning to provoke his laughter? “[H]e had been expelled from the Architectural School of the Stanton Institute of Technology” (Rand, 1971: 7). Roark laughed because he had been kicked out of School after three years, with no degree to show for his efforts.

Those who have attended university and perhaps especially Architecture School might wonder whether Howard Roark laughed because he was a delirious masochist or suffering from pseudobulbar affect. But these would be creative misreadings. Rand’s protagonist laughs in the face of life; laughs at the idea his former Dean’s decision could determine his fate. He laughs because, despite his expulsion, he feels in control.

He looked at the granite. To be cut, he thought, and made into walls. He looked at a tree. To be split and made into rafters. He looked at a streak of rust on the stone and thought of iron ore under the ground. To be melted and to emerge as girders against the sky.

These rocks, he thought, are here for me; waiting for the drill, the dynamite and my voice; waiting to be split, ripped, pounded, reborn; waiting for the shape my hands will give them. (Rand, 1971: 8)

Roark is beyond arrogant, above superior: he believes himself omnipotent. His morality may be ambiguous – his “contemptuous mouth ... the mouth of an executioner or a saint” a ready metonym – but his sovereignty is secure. The material of the world is his to form. He designs without reference to convention or precedent, drawing

buildings such as had never stood on the face of the earth. They were as the first houses built by the first man born, who had never heard of others building before him. ... It was as if the buildings had sprung up from the earth and from some living force, complete, unalterably right. ... No laws had dictated a single detail. The buildings were not Classical, they were not Gothic, they were not Renaissance. They were only Howard Roark. (Rand, 1971: 10–11)

Roark sees himself *The Fountainhead*, the source of the buildings. He gives his buildings a soul, “and every wall, window and stairway to express it” (Rand, 1971: 16). As revealed in a conversation between Roark and the architect he chooses to work for, Henry Cameron, Rand’s hero disavows genesis outside his own hand:

[Cameron:] ‘Why did you decide to be an architect?’

[Roark:] ‘I didn’t know it then. But it’s because I’ve never believed in God.’ (Rand, 1971: 41)

The disbelief promoted by Roark paves the way for a creationism in stark opposition to monotheistic religions. The Architect-God is not selfless, but rather self-serving and self-centred.

[Roark:] 'I don't like the shape of things on this earth. I want to change them.'

[Cameron:] 'For whom?'

[Roark:] 'For myself.' (Rand, 1971: 41)

His business model is as boldly egoistic as it is commercially precarious: "I don't intend to build to have clients. I intend to have clients to build" (Rand, 1971: 18).

At the culmination of *The Fountainhead*, Roark is given the opportunity to produce a design for the Cortlandt housing project. While the high-rise public housing scheme was awarded to his rival, Peter Keating, the commercially successful (but, by Roark's assessment, creatively bankrupt) architect asks Roark to produce the design for the project under Keating's name. Roark agrees to Keating's proposal on the condition that his design must not be altered in any way.

Later, upon visiting the Cortlandt construction site and observing the project's deviation from his original design, Roark is confronted by the distance between his vision of the structure and its existence as realized tower blocks. Rather than accept that his design for Cortlandt is necessarily distinct from the actualized product – that his "vision" is separate from the structure as it exists – Roark blows up the building. In destroying Cortlandt, he regains control: the only existent scheme is in his mind.

Roark's turn to dynamite dramatizes an architect's refusal to acknowledge the limitations of their authorship. As he reminds the courtroom in his well-known trial speech, Roark routinely conflates his design process with the act of "making" Courtland.

I designed Cortlandt. I gave it to you. I destroyed it. [...] I destroyed it because I did not choose to let it exist. It was a double monster. In form and in implication. I had to blast both. The form was mutilated by two second-handers who assumed the right to improve upon that which they had not made and could not equal. (Rand, 1971: 677)

As the self-proclaimed sole creator of Cortlandt, Roark convinces the jury that he had 'given' them the building – and that he had the right to take it away. The jury's decision finds the building belonged to Roark rather than those who might own or occupy the dwellings, those who financed or commissioned the project, or those who realized the project while Roark was on his extended yachting holiday.

At stake in this image of the Architect as an artistic visionary who "creates" ambitious designs is a set of questions regarding the line between image and reality, fiction and non-fiction. Roark is an architect for whom architecture exists primarily as a creative or artistic expression of his own tastes and desires. His decision "not to let [Cortlandt] exist" caricatures the myth of authorship that underwrites the creation of Architecture. This construction, nevertheless, is closely aligned from established figures from western architectural history.

## Dynamite / Control

These eight months shouted to me ‘Logic, truth, honesty, burn what you loved, and adore what you burned’. (Le Corbusier, quoted in Jencks, 1973: 143)

Parallels between Roark and Frank Lloyd Wright are well documented (Berliner, 2007; Burns, 2009; Costanzo, 2016). Comparisons to Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe have also been made (Flowers, 2009: 113). Roark’s uncompromizing formalism and unwavering belief in the heroic potential of modernism are viewed as consistent with the dominant historical view of the modern Architect as “an artistic hero or genius” (Sully, 2009). His individualist approach and difficult hero status is entirely in keeping with standardized accounts of non-fictional high-Modernist architecture.

The most acute expressions of the tacit assimilation of the myth of authorial control are the megalomaniacal designs for serialized production, and “ideal” cities and urban projects conceived and represented at the birth of the Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne (CIAM). The utopian agendas supporting the non-fictional plans of Le Corbusier (and his disciples) relied on a fictional image of free creation and immense power. Schemes such as the Ville Radieuse reimagined life, categorizing and ordering society into functions, organizing the city as a project of architecture. By so doing, they reduced complex contexts to closed systems, installing an internal formal language that edited out the external social, political and economic factors that would inevitably continue to determine the urban environments.

The idealization of architecture on such terms provoked the architectural critic and historian Manfredo Tafuri. In *Architecture and Utopia* (1973, English translation 1976), he famously credits modernist architecture with laying the foundation for the complete absorption of the discipline under capitalism. Tafuri contends that the utopian projects of the early-to-mid twentieth century were ultimately subsumed as a force of capitalist growth because they overestimated the discipline’s ability to determine the development of the urban environment. Analyzing “the course of the modern movement as an ideological instrument,” he argues architecture came to be determined by “the ideology of the plan” – that is, became utopian, and ultimately, inevitably, ill-fated (Tafuri, 1976: 48). Tafuri’s rather pessimistic conclusion was that, by the mid to late twentieth century, architecture had been completely incorporated into the capitalist system, facilitated by the claims on the city made by self-aggrandizing Architects.

A Roarkian – or at least Roarkesque – understanding of Architecture is the foundation upon which the image of Architecture’s autonomy of form has historically been built. This figure’s belief that architecture can be realized without being altered or instrumentalized by larger political, economic, or social forces – and then appreciated by an enlightened public – echoes the non-fictional Modern architects’ denial of the discipline’s determination by its broader conditions. Non-

fictional, utopian schemes like Le Corbusier's Algiers or Josep Lluís Sert's Barcelona were conceived under the assumption that their justification lay in their supposed rationality; those who drew them did not consider that their organizations might be naive, irrational, or narcissistic.

The construction of the pure Architect, then, rests upon the denials of the myth of creation – the rejection of the limits of creative control, and refusal of the inevitable distance between a vision and an actualization – and the non-myth of self-creation. To the extent that they contribute to broader histories of the period, such denials often appear as ingrained into the psyches of Modern Architects (Donald, 1999; Glendinning, 2011). Take, for example, Le Corbusier defacing Eileen Grey's E-1027 (Colomina, 1996), seeking to "own" a building on which he had no claims. The denials are compounded by a commitment to integrity that is characterized as much by Frank Lloyd Wright's "[w]hat is needed most in architecture today is the very thing that is needed most in life – Integrity. Just as it is in a human being, so integrity is the deepest quality of a building" (Wright, 1992: 110–112) as Roark's "[a] building is alive, like a man. Its integrity is to follow its own truth, its one single theme, and to serve its own single purpose" (Rand, 1971: 17); and exemplified by Jørn Utzon's famously abandonment of the Sydney Opera House project halfway through construction. If architects believe Architects are responsible for creation, and that creation can occur without pragmatic compromise, and that individuals and Architecture should have integrity, why shouldn't they control the buildings that are attributed to them? It is not a stretch to imagine a non-fictional Modern Architect confronted by a building that did not live up to expectations taking to dynamite. From this perspective, destroying an object that is non-Architecture and anti-Architect is not only logical but warranted.

Historical fact and historiographical rhetoric also link Modern Architecture with nitroglycerin. Charles Jencks made the connection hidden within subjectivities as desires and afflictions overt: "Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 p.m. (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grâce* by dynamite" (Jencks, 1977: 9).

Jencks's parodically precise dramatization ostensibly cleared the way for his introduction of Post-Modern Architecture. The narrative is one of failure, and succession. It can be seen as the staged closure of all that had proven inadequate with the heroic utopianism of modernist Architecture, clearing the way for a fresh new object. In practice, it was far from such a clean slate.

Seen in relation to the myth of authorial control, Jencks's destruction construction is surprisingly non-confrontational. His dynamite to some degree collapsed the construct of absolute and idealized Architecture, but it left the fundamental myth of creation intact, the potential for and obligation of control in place, the demand for integrity in position. Utopian thought persists in these as the "tacit coefficient of architectural invention" (Coleman, 2012: 346) – or, in the

terms of this discussion, of architectural creation. Attempts to counter the fiction of Architecture with realities of life fail to disturb these deep-seated codes. Indeed, they surreptitiously reinforce the myths, which are expressed in references to the past and projections to the future; in relations to looming presences classifiable as neo-objects.

## **Eternal / Rotting**

[Speckler:] Rome in ruins has had more influence on architecture than it ever would brand-new. (Greenaway, 1987)

Peter Greenaway's 1987 film *The Belly of an Architect* traces the demise of the American architect Stourley Kracklite over a period of nine months in Rome. Kracklite, in Italy to curate an exhibition on the enlightenment architect Étienne-Louis Boullée, suffers from increasingly debilitating stomach pains and digestive problems. Kracklite's obsession with Boullée is based on a basic personal association: Boullée's conceptual form of "neo-classicism" serves as a reference point for Kracklite's connection to history. The Architect Boullée is Kracklite's role model. The exhibition curation is a means for him explore his construction of an idealized past, along with his own dramatized present.

Boullée's mostly unbuilt projects mirror Kracklite's own limited oeuvre. The absence of constructed architecture is a recurring theme, used by other characters within the film to undermine both architects' legitimacy. Early on, Kracklite's wife Louisa refers to the lack of buildings to which he can lay claim to challenge his claims to expertise – and demean his ego:

[Louisa:] And where is the evidence for *your* talent? How many buildings are actually standing to your credit?

[Kracklite:] A few.

[Louisa:] Stourley! Six!... and a half... I'd say... though to hear you talk, the world would think there were fifty or more. One of those six buildings is about to be demolished because it stood so long unfinished, one has been changed out of all recognition because others had to complete what you started... and there's our house that's so experimental, unfinished and incomplete that rats wouldn't call it a home... and now you're wasting your time putting on an exhibition in memory of another architect who also built practically nothing! (Greenaway, 1987)

Greenaway is deliberate in his alignment of Kracklite's stomach problems and the unrealized, or "undigested" architecture he produces. The weight of history impressed by "the eternal city" and its classical architectural tradition exposes the dysfunctionality of Kracklite's own processes; the authority of the past casts in strong relief his contested form of architectural authorship – indeed, his claims to the title Architect.

Kracklite's attempts to come to terms with the past express his inability to live up to both the ideals of its construction, and the ongoing nature of its presence. He obsesses over referents, and fixates on death and decay. Kracklite repeatedly brings up Boullée's unbuilt design for a Cenotaph for Isaac Newton, 1784, itself influenced by the Mausoleum of Augustus, constructed on Rome's Campo Marzio in 28 BCE. Over the course of *The Belly of an Architect*, he becomes increasingly convinced that his stomach pains are being caused by his much younger wife's use of poisoned figs to slowly kill him in the same manner as Caesar Augustus' wife, Livia. Kracklite's reverence for Boullée and paranoid obsession with the demise of Augustus all serve as repeated reminders of his fascination with the classical tradition – the neo-classical Architecture of Boullée, in addition to the classical antiquity represented by Augustus. The late news that his pains are due to a terminal condition – likely stomach cancer – reinforces the tragic nature of his fixation.

*The Belly of an Architect* maligns Modern Architecture and the figure of the Modern Architect. In contrast to Howard Roark's confident rejection of the classical tradition, the portly Stourley Kracklite appears cursed by it, imprisoned by Rome, and consumed by Boullée's and his own unaccomplished designs and their legacy.

[Mori:] Are you a modern architect, Mr Kracklite?

[Kracklite:] No more modern than I should be ...

[Marcolonna:] No more modern than Boullée, would you say?

[Flavia:] Replicas of whose buildings now appear regularly in every Totalitarian Capital in the world? Peking, Moscow, East Berlin...?

[Kracklite:] ... and Rome, Signorina Speckler?

[Flavia:] Boullée didn't design buildings, Signor Kracklite – he just designed monuments. (Greenaway, 1987)

Roark and Kracklite are both Modern Architects; the most obvious of their apparent differences stems from their respective historical location: Rand situates Roark's story at the height of modernism; Kracklite is the modernist Architect viewed from a postmodern perspective. Greenaway's figure is an expression of a futile struggle. In this sense, the closeness with which Kracklite holds the figure of Boullée – and, through him, the tradition of Architecture – is significant. Kracklite is an architect for whom architecture exists primarily as a creative or artistic expression of its own internal history of experimentation. Both literally and figuratively, architecture is a matter of rumination and digestion.

Caught between a thoroughly abstracted past and his own speculative designs, Kracklite's ethereal architecture is expressed throughout *The Belly of an Architect* using repeated references to the dome. As both David Wills (1992) and Michael Ostwald (2001) have observed, the importance of the dome in the film transcends connections between the monuments of Boullée and Augustus, extending to the body of Kracklite himself and his problematic, rounded belly. The tension between form and function, design and building unfolds through the dying body of the



Architect set against the myth of the eternal within Architecture. As Willis explains, “if the dome is at the beginning of architecture it is also at the end or outer limit, where it becomes mausoleum, cupola, pantheon, in other words, monument. ... [I]ts function no longer concerns the living, it no longer concerns living itself. A mausoleum is therefore the antithesis of the domus at the same time as it is its apotheosis: a house for the dead to go on living in” (Wills, 1992: 100).

Where else but Rome could the figure of Kracklite underline the existence of an Architecture that “no longer concerns living itself”? Kracklite repeatedly wanders a series of Roman sites that have long outlived their connection to the functions of the living. *The Belly of an Architect* deliberately situates Kracklite within the idea of Rome. Rome, as *Urbs Aeterna*, is where Kracklite thinks Architecture and writes postcards to the long-dead Boullée.

The Architect comes undone in the Rome of the present, when the relationship “between the Modern body and the postmodern city” (Ostwald, 2001: 140) forces Kracklite to confront the everyday and the contemporary as conditions that challenge the abstract temporality of his architectural thought. As his life unravels, Kracklite holds tight to versions of Architecture and the Architect that exist completely independently from the social, political and commercial processes of contemporary Rome. The nostalgic version of Imperial Rome and Enlightenment-era Paris for which Kracklite yearns manifest as destructive myths of architectural control.

While exaggerated within *The Belly of the Architect*, Kracklite’s ill-fated attempts to access a kind of timelessness embedded in the architectural reference points he uses to shape his own identity are not an entirely fictional construction. The tragic confrontation between Kracklite and the conditions of his present, between immortality and decay, highlights an important temporal dimension to the myth of architectural control. Again, the utopian dimension of modernist architecture – of the Architect’s vision and the impossibility that this vision or design process could simply materialize as a physical structure; of the distance between creating and making, or designing and constructing, and of conceiving of versus inhabiting architecture – is shown to confound the architectural author. The anti-utopian and anti-modernist themes that saturate *The Belly of an Architect* speak to postmodern architecture’s efforts to rid itself of the utopian project and somehow collapse or overcome the temporal distance between architectural ideas and the experience of architecture as built. The destructive force is directed at the Modern Architect, whose cancerous growth exposes the myth of the monument that underwrites his Architecture.

*The Belly of an Architect*’s treatment of Kracklite is symptomatic of broader discursive practice. Fairly or not, the postmodernist perception that the archetypal Modern Architect failed to pay attention to a flawed reality in favor of a kind of classical idealized architecture drove a thorough “unthinking” of utopian thought within the discipline at that moment (Martin, 2010: xiv). Viewed as a costly disconnect, this led to a standard reading of modernism as having enforced a

formal, functional, architecturally-determined city that effectively edited out the messy everyday social and commercialized conditions of the urban environment.

## **Rotting / Eternal**

The gifted architect will not be understood and this will cause him a thousand irksome setbacks; and if he wants to keep his position, then he must refrain from any resistance; he must not listen to the voice of his genius but descend to the level of those he must please. (Boullée, 1953: 84)

Boullée's abstracted neoclassical forms can be seen to parallel the detached mode that he adopted in practice and the separated position from which he designed. Kracklite's fixation with and eventual succumbing to decay and death can be linked to his obsessive association with this idealized version of Architecture and the Architect. Boullée's position and concomitant aesthetic sensibility has led to his designation as one of the "first moderns" (Nesbitt, 1985: 177).<sup>2</sup> Kracklite's probable gastric carcinoma is Greenaway's punishment for the Architect's glorification of his eighteenth-century idol, and his unbuilt Architecture. The plot positions Kracklite as a stooge doomed by and for the mistakes of history.

The victimization of the Modern Architect did not take decades of retrospection to manifest. A similar characterization can be seen thirty years earlier. It was less visceral, but no less violent in its attribution of blame and its rendering of abstraction as a disease that needed an antidote. The fact that the story is non-fictional magnifies the significance of its myth-making.

The prelude to the fugue begins at the seventh meeting of CIAM. Under the leadership of Le Corbusier, the ostensibly progressive Congress was insular, hierarchical and cultish. The scene was set for an upheaval that would affect the movement of mainstream architecture from Modern to postmodern, and the change in the figure of the Architect from the empowered and destructive Roark to the diseased and imploding Kracklite.

The plot is a universally accepted part of architectural history. The architectural critic Reyner Banham establishes the main protagonists: a younger faction of architects, who had attended CIAM VII "in order to sit at the feet of 'grand maîtres'" (Banham, 1966: 14). At CIAM VIII, 1951, they are promoting ideas that were anathema to the CIAM orthodoxy that emphasized abstraction and control: "In the suburbs and slums the vital relationship between the house and the street survives, children run about, people stop and talk, vehicles are stopped and tinkered with: in the back gardens are pigeons and pets and the shops are [a]round the corner: you know the milkman, \*you\* are outside \*your\* house in \*your\* street" (The Smithsons, quoted in Klemek, 2011: 97).

By CIAM IX, 1953, this "younger faction" have formed a splinter group. Their influence is often said to have caused founding father Le Corbusier to renounce his membership. According to a more assertive and graphic position, "the young

arrivals [to CIAM] – particularly the polemical Smithsons [Alison and Peter] – ... effectively dismembered it” (Klemek, 2011: 97).

Expressing the shifting power within CIAM, the Smithsons, along with Jaap Bakema, Georges Candilis, Giancarlo De Carlo, Aldo van Eyck, Rolf Guttmann, Shadrach Woods and others, are tasked with organizing the tenth meeting in Dubrovnik, 1956. This sees their identity formalized under the name Team X (or 10). Through the course of that meeting, and the next held in Otterlo in 1959, CIAM is officially disbanded – or, effectively, destroyed.

British Team 10 members Alison and Peter Smithson framed architecture “as the direct result of a way of life” (Banham, 1966: 47). They sought to engage wholly with “the realities of the situation, with all their contradictions and confusions” (Smithson & Smithson, 1957: 332). It was a position that was overt in its rejection of “the Cartesian aesthetics of the old Modern Architecture”; “Le Corbusier’s dream of a Ville Radieuse” (Smithson & Smithson, 1957: 334). In clear opposition to CIAM orthodoxy, the Smithsons emphasized a formal architectural conceptions. Their architecture was not characterized by absolute categories, abstraction and finalized manifestations of perfection, but rather by flux, impermanence and use. They stressed the ‘as found’ condition of lived reality rather than the archetypally Modern conception of tabula rasa. They countered the abstract CIAM dogma with a strategic focus on the ordinary, crass, commercial realities of contemporary culture.<sup>3</sup> Treating the concept of an architecturally-generated utopia as thoroughly discredited, the Smithsons – and many other architects of their generation – probed the everyday in order to overcome the problematic space between the architectural idea and its existence as built form. Their commitment to architectural “realism”, however, was tested by legitimate non-fiction.<sup>4</sup>

Robin Hood Gardens is a public housing estate in London designed by the Smithsons during the late 1960s, and constructed between 1968 and 1972. A couple of ten- and seven-storey apartment blocks, the estate is universally considered a significant example of post-war British brutalism. It is a manifestation of the Smithsons’ opposition to the Roarkesque, Modern Architecture of CIAM. The project nevertheless falls into the troubled nexus between the architect’s authorial control, public housing and demolition. In 2010 when the building was slated for demolition, over 75% of the remaining residents supported the proposal (BBC News, 2008). A number of well-known contemporary architects rallied to save the structure,<sup>5</sup> but residents and commentators reinforce its significant shortcomings (Frearson, 2015); and the excavators began pulling it down in August 2017.

It did not take Robin Hood Gardens’ physical destruction for the Smithsons’ focus on an ostensibly messier kind of reality to be reduced to another version of Architectural creationism – or, in other words, for the myth of the Architect’s Architecture to be raised by the project. Speaking in the 1990s, Peter Smithson recalls that shortly after the buildings’ construction was completed, residents were

“shit[ting] in the lifts” (Hutchinson, 2011). Rather than seeing this outcome as a product of use, he interprets it as an “act of social aggression” (Hutchinson, 2011). In so doing, he – and by extension, Alison – betrays a commitment to the myth of authorial control. Perhaps encouraged by the estate’s fictional referent, the Smithsons’ position reveals they felt their “gift to the poor” was being defiled.

Fecal vandalism may be an extreme example; but shits in lifts are a non-fictional analogue to the fictional *Belly* cancer. Robin Hood Gardens eventual demolition and Kracklite’s tragic and splanchnic demise both suggest the enduring habit of Modern architecture to remain wilfully ignorant of the processes of the human body is pathological. In a kind of inversion of Roark’s Cortlandt St explosive punctuation mark, the fate of Robin Hood Gardens will now provoke the eternal and unsolvable question of whether the buildings should be considered Peter and Alison Smithson’s brutalist masterpiece or the residents’ personal prison. The tragedy of lives spent in the tower blocks will forever be overshadowed by the tragic narrative of the Architect holding onto their Architecture.

## **Prick / Data**

[Neo:] Choice. The problem is choice. (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003)

Even the most cursory understanding of the Wachowski’s cybergoth trilogy *The Matrix* (1999, 2003 & 2003) recognizes the story focuses on the messiah-like hero figure of Neo. The individual who within the Matrix identifies as Mr Thomas A. Anderson, chooses the red pill to “stay in Wonderland” to fully embody his three-lettered nom de guerre, Neo. Guided and supported by Morpheus and Trinity – to whom he is “the One” – Neo is released from his own personal prison where he is functioning as a human battery, before going on a quest to bring about a new world order.

Measured against this major narrative trajectory, the role played by the character of the Architect is subsidiary. His presence in the three movies is limited to two reasonably short scenes in episodes two and three (*The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*). His screen time amounts to less than five minutes. However, the Architect’s significance to the story far exceeds these indicators.

The Architect first appears in the scene that precipitates the climax of *The Matrix Reloaded*. A medium height, medium build, middle-aged white male with tidy white hair and beard, wearing a light grey, three-piece suit, black tie over angled collar clip, and black socks and black leather shoes, The Architect appears a personification of order. The attire may be seen as an update on Frank Lloyd Wright; and while the beard is more mature psychoanalyst, the image of authority is coherent. The Architect sits in a high-backed, black leather office, or perhaps boardroom chair in an otherwise empty concave room surrounded by animated screens. The chair’s casters seem functionally extraneous within the space. The

Architect's arms rest on armrests, his legs are bent so his feet sit evenly on the shiny, light grey floor. He appears comfortable, but not at ease.

The Architect swivels and greets Neo, and after Neo asks who he is, he says: “[The Architect:] I am The Architect. I created the Matrix. I have been waiting for you” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003).

In establishing his status as the creator of the Matrix, and his ability to anticipate Neo's movements, The Architect reframes Neo's position within the computer simulation. Neo's time outside the Matrix – in the “real world”, on the Nebuchadnezzar and in the underground city of Zion – and his physics-defying acts within the Matrix – performed thanks to capacities uploaded directly into his central nervous system – had encouraged him to believe the saviour prophesy and his role within it. The news that he is part of another being's creation once again degrades Neo / Mr Anderson to the status of affected subject.

Responding to Neo's existential questioning, The Architect further reduces Neo's significance: “[The Architect:] Your life is the sum of a remainder of an unbalanced equation inherent to the programming of the Matrix. You are the eventuality of an anomaly, which despite my sincerest efforts, I have been unable to eliminate from what is otherwise a harmony of mathematical precision” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003).

The Architect reveals that, far from being “the One”, the Neo in *The Matrix* trilogy is a sixth version of the character. The Architect tells Neo his commitment to an individual quest is misguided; that his actions ultimately and inevitably fit within an all-encompassing structure within which the Architect determines every eventuality. Neo resists the information – “I can say whatever I want! You can't make me do that! You old, white, prick!” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003) – but must eventually accept the conditions behind the Matrix and, indeed, in world beyond its design.

To elaborate to Neo the systemic anomaly that gave rise to him and his predecessors, The Architect reflects on his previous work. He outlines three historical Matrixes. The original, he says, was a naive utopia, “a work of art: flawless; sublime. A triumph equaled only by its monumental failure” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003). It is important to note that The Architect attributes the failure not to the deficiency of his vision, but to faults in the running of the program – to humanity's imperfections, not his own.

The Architect created the second Matrix in reaction to the first failure: he tried to understand and design for the complexities of humanity – what he calls “the varying grotesqueries of [human] nature” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003) – in order to control it. Again the design failed to produce a stable system. After appraising his failures and supposedly realizing the inherent impossibility of achieving a perfect, pure, absolute design, the Architect entered into a collaboration with an “intuitive program” called the Oracle. The new design team added “the imperfection inherent in every human being” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003), experienced by individuals in the Matrix in the form of choice. The third Matrix

gave the individuals the feeling that they were, to some degree, in control of their fate, despite the fact that, within the construct, they were nothing more than bits in a vast program.

By the end of the trilogy, the running Matrix has been fatally compromised. The Architect, realizing another failure, returns to screen in the ultimate scene of *The Matrix Revolutions*. He meets with the Oracle – an intuitive program that analyses human psychology; according to The Architect, the co-parent of the Matrix (she is “the mother”, he is the “father”) – who has been influencing the course of proceedings through the vehicles of change, Neo and Agent Smith. The Oracle’s goal of making the Matrix unstable has succeeded. The Architect agrees to a “truce” – a new status quo in which his control is ostensibly further ceded to The Oracle’s humanistic values. This does not signal defeat: his untempered cynicism – “just how long do you think this peace is going to last?” – and tragic worldview – “Hope: it is the quintessential human delusion, simultaneously the source of your greatest strength, and your greatest weakness” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003) – suggest that The Architect has, instead, adopted a new strategy of control.

In sketching out the history of the Matrix(es), The Architect introduces three design ideologies: from a simulated world based on utopian ideals and aimed at beauty; to one based on disgust, focused on the sublime; to a humanistic system incorporating aspects of irrationality and unpredictability. By his own assessment, The Architect changed through this process – he learned to have a “mind less bound by the parameters of perfection” (Wachowski & Wachowski, 2003) – and his recourse to formal collaboration speaks to a major shift in methodology. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests these changes were pragmatic; that the underlying mindset of The Architect – in terms of the idealization of his own identity – remains consistent. Far from exposing his ineptitude as a designer, his description of the failings of the Matrixes to Neo is an attempt to express his control over their working. The recount evidences his belief that the running of the system was part of his design, that the simulations were under his control throughout. For the duration of the extended, iterative process that starts in his history and ends with projections into the future of *The Matrix Revolutions*, he retains a commitment to the myth of authorship, shifting focus, getting help, but never letting go of his own sense of superiority or control. While, by name, the former Mr Anderson is Neo, The Architect’s commitment to, and continual re-working of this deep-seated myth provides support to the claim that he is neo-.

## **Data / Prick**

[Koolhaas:] the entire depiction of the architect as a kind of monster is an incredibly bizarre myth, because architecture is not worse or better than any other profession. It used to be that architects were seen as articulating the shape of society – but that was much more a projection created by architects. Now that we are all completely confused about the shape of society, architects are equally confused. (Koolhaas & Miyoshi, 1997: 4)

Numerous examples suggest Rem Koolhaas is aware of the myth of Architectural authorship. It is ironic that one of the most well-known contemporary architects – indeed one deserving the overused, clichéd title, starchitect – has shown overt concern for collapsing this myth. Co-founder and figurehead of Office of Metropolitan Architects (OMA; and, later, the research arm or “think tank”, AMO), Koolhaas made his name in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Unbuilt designs for the Dutch Parliament Extension (1978), Boompjes residential towers (1980), Parc de la Villette (1982) and others – categorized neo-avant-garde due to their formal association with typologies from and the language of high Modernism, including that of El Lissitzky, Mies van der Rohe – catapulted him into discursive prominence. His book *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978) – elaborating a philosophy he calls Manhattanism, inspired by the paranoiac-critical method of Salvador Dalí – quickly became a seminal text in architectural history-theory. This artistic, egoistic approach to architecture, however, did not last.

In the mid-1990s, Koolhaas began to frame architecture around quantitative information. In 1995 – working with graphic designer Bruce Mau and others in OMA – Koolhaas published *S,M,L,XL* (Koolhaas, Mau, Sigler, Werlemann, & Office for Metropolitan Architecture, 1995). As the title suggests, it is a book that discusses designs across scales. In presenting his work in this structured way, Koolhaas constructed an Architecture that did not just respond to data, but embodied data – was itself “a form of data” (Vidler 2000, p. 3). With the ready connotation of consumerism – the sizes recalling t-shirt tag categories – he gave Architecture a new kind of accessibility and relatability.

Approaching architecture as an embodiment of data was common to much of the celebrated work coming out of the Netherlands in the 1990s. Arguably pushing the approach to its most extreme was MVRDV, founded by former OMA members Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries. One of their first-built and most celebrated works, the WoZoCo housing complex – with its cantilevered apartments solving a restrictive building footprint problem – illustrates the purported process: draw a complex diagram that incorporates and synthesizes all the competing interests and ideas within the project, and build that diagram. The methodology can be used at scales up to XXL (as shown in the blurb for *Metacity/Datatown*): “Imagine a city that is described only by data, a city that wants to be explored only as information. A city that knows no given topography, no prescribed ideology, no representation and no context” (MVRDV, 1998–2007).

The entire city becomes a datascape, the mass of digitized information a virtual reality. The form of the resultant built environment is supposedly unimportant: dubiously, given the heavily simplified language evident in their body of work, they claim to “avoid any sort of aesthetic aspect in our designs” (van Rijs, in Frey, 2008). Rather than drawing drawings – the traditional process of architects, perhaps emblematic of the myth of one-to-one creation – MVRDV use “mapping” to produce “topologies and topographies” (Vidler, 2000: 1).

The move towards quantification suggests high Modern economic rationalism, and thus complicity with the dominant economic and political ideologies and processes of the age – neoliberalism, consumerism, corporatization, globalization. Qualitative value, subjective meaning, poetic engagement with space and event and so on are all at best restructured or at worst edited out of the totalizing system of zeros and ones that serves late capitalism. Far from creator, the Architect in this system becomes a processor. Koolhaas suggests the role is characterized by an “apparent never-ending surrender,” and a concomitant ordinariness: “[Koolhaas:] I do not see myself, or my office, as a role model of any ‘architect’s ability’ (inability would be a more interesting domain). I have never thought of our activity as ‘affecting change’. I’m involved with how ‘everything’ changes in ways that are often radically at odds with the core values of architecture” (Koolhaas & Whiting, 1999: 50).

It is challenging to see the myth of authorship behind this image of a data-concerned architect. While post-theory architects such as those at OMA and MVRDV may be accused of tacitly progressing neoliberal agendas, their ostensible objectivity provides an alternative to the image of the heroic Architect committed to a personal vision. With this comes a potential way out of the tragic Modern narrative, destined for death, destruction, rot and ruination. Deference to data and collaborative engagements seem to help position the digital architect as part of a broader design machine, serving society. Yet beneath superficial appearances, the mythologies of the Architect and their Architecture remain embedded within this construction.

A clue is evident in Koolhaas’s adjective, “apparent”. Like The Architect in *The Matrix* trilogy, the data Architect has indeed let go of the overt utopianism that underwrote the Roarkesque construction of high Modern Architecture. The history of Modern Architecture – its failures and collapses – has made idealistic presentations untenable: the collapse of Architectures – the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe and so many other grand schemes, and the non-realizations of plans for Algiers and so many other cities – have led to discursive conditions in which utopian images (devoid of irony or political parody) cannot survive. But images of Architecture and the image of the figure of the Architect are not indistinguishable. Explicit presentations of fallibility within the design process and the limitations of the designer do not evidence a surrender to uncontrollability. On the contrary – and again, paralleling The Architect – an ostensibly divested ego provides a secure base from which to rebuild control.

Approaching architectural problems by deferring to quantified and digitized quanta of data representing structures and systems diminishes the significance of the formal aspect of Architecture. At the same time, it opens up new opportunities for the Architect – new, and importantly, more totalizing opportunities. Framing his position within an overtly commercial context, Koolhaas reveals “[w]e have discovered that there are a number of clients who want architectural thinking but not necessarily building” (Koolhaas & Whiting, 1999: 55). This leads Koolhaas to



re-define architecture as “basically ... everything that is purely conceptual, intellectual, or organizational, independent of construction” (Koolhaas & Whiting, 1999: 55).

The diagram – “a tool of the virtual” (Somol & Whiting, 2002: 75) that trades off the rhetorical power of science – allows the architect to exercise their will to control any information. The non-fictional fiction of the Architect’s agency is reinforced by a more abstract megalomania; the fiction of their Architecture gains power by its elusive, intangible, perhaps – to quote Le Corbusier – even “ineffable” aformality.

## **Conclusion / Re-vision**

[These myths] are the collectively shared dirty secret of our profession, and nobody talks about it. (de Graaf, 2017b)

Some readers may dismiss the fictional characters discussed within this paper. They might instead frame Howard Roark, Stourley Kracklite, and The Architect from *The Matrix* as the direct reflections or immediate adversaries of their authors – the alter egos, idols, or nemeses of Ayn Rand, Peter Greenaway, and the Wachowski siblings, respectively. Roark easily becomes a vehicle for Ayn Rand’s conservative politics, and her particular brand of “Objectivist” philosophy; Kracklite’s diseased state graphically embodies Modernism from Peter Greenaway’s postmodern perspective; The Architect neatly sums up all those aspects of the hegemonic order the Wachowski siblings revile. Such arguments are not without value, but authorship constructs that underwrite them means they cannot gain traction on the myths of their subjects.

Similarly, the non-fictional accounts included in the paper might be peremptorily pigeonholed.

They can (and should) be included in the history of architecture. The utopian schemes of Modernist “Masters” reflect a then-acceptable megalomaniac tendency; the “realist” concerns of Team 10 were challenged by the defective shit of the everyday; the data-led design of Dutch architects in the 1990s undoubtedly incorporated more complexity in architectural design. Nevertheless, the potentials of these events should not be limited to this significance. Conventional historiographical practice will reinforce the non-fictionality of their central figures; conventional histories will work to construct mythological figures within discourse. The denial of fabrication that underwrites these scholarly works means they cannot gain traction on their own process of creation.

Ostensibly fictional anti-/heroes and non-fictional myths: all constructs are made in relation to a basic figure. In creating her hero architect, Rand was responding to the image generated by the profession, the discipline, and property developers during a period of intense urban growth and skyline-altering projects (Clausen, 2005). In recasting himself as “the diagram[mer] of everything”

(Koolhaas, 2004: 20), Koolhaas was responding to the image generated by those same forces more fifty years later. As convenient as it might be to mark the death of the Modernist Architect with the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe – or even to rewrite history arguing that he never really existed at all – this would be to suggest that the contemporary discipline has somehow resolved a set of myths about creation that have persisted through various conditions. We might try to more thoroughly historicize the modern–postmodern moment with a greater awareness of the problematic claims of architectural control, but, it is reasonable to expect that, like the ghost Reinhold Martin has seen with respect to utopia, “what is repressed tends to return, transfigured” (Martin, 2010: xxi).

Confronting fiction with non-fiction, and non-fiction with fiction, has allowed this discussion to reveal some aspects of the unshifting foundations grounding the marked shifts in the definition of architecture in the twentieth century. The fictional/non-fictional figure of the Architect this paper has formed provides a lens through which to explore the continuing myth of an architectural utopia, the speculative nature of the design process, and the construction of the Architect and their Architecture. The fragments put together by no means constitute a historical survey of the Architect; nor do they map out alternatives for Architecture. Instead, the paper’s episodic path from Roark, through Kracklite, to The Architect, and its oblique non-fictional echoes, serve to draw out a mythical figure hiding in the shadows of architectural discourse and culture. The diverse conditions in which the figure can be construed, the complexity of its character, and its capacity for adaptation, evidence an agile and robust myth – a strong foundation upon which to build narratives. Its usefulness in this regard suggests it may continue to loom over architecture for decades to come.

## NOTES

1. Reinier de Graaf (2017a, p. 4) has recently referred to this situation as “the architect’s ultimate secret: packaging dependency as authority – the art of deferring the question of who ultimately needs whom, preferably forever.”

2. Nesbitt here is quoting Joseph Rykwert, *The first moderns: The architects of the 18th century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980).

3. A similar tactic was employed by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, first in Las Vegas in 1968, then in Levittown in 1970. Deferring to popular culture and “as found” artefacts appears to be an attempt to collapse the distance between architectural conception and image and messy, lived life. Banham explains that “Pop is now so basic to the way we live, and the world we live in, that to be with it, to dig the Pop scene, does not commit anyone to Left or Right, nor to protest or acceptance of the society we live in. It has become the common language” (Potts, 2010, 47–48, quoting Banham, “The atavism of the short-distance mini-cyclist”).

4. This conceptual distance is further reinforced by the systematic neglect of the Robin Hood Gardens buildings over the preceding decades, conditions that continue to push the realized structures and the reality of occupation and use even farther away from the

Architects' original design intentions (which both project into an imagined future, as well exist in a timeless, idealized state).

5. For example, in 2015, architects Richard Rogers and Simon Smithson circulated an open letter urging architects and designers to oppose the demolition of Robin Hood Gardens. A number of other high profile architects also publicly opposed the redevelopment of the site, including Zaha Hadid and Toyo Ito (see Waite, 2015).

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