

Temporary Events

Although the Perth Entertainment Centre closed in 2002, its demolition did not commence until 11 May 2011. Its ruination was, however, rapidly completed, and by December of the same year its iconic 1970s two tiered ring (enclosing what was said to be the largest purpose-built 'regular theatre' in the world) survived solely in photographic records and associative memories of its glory days (sellout concerts by the likes of Wings, U2 and Radiohead). Meanwhile, alongside it on the former car park site, ARM and Cameron, Chisholm & Nicol's cubist jigsaw puzzle, the new Perth Arena, has been daily extending its colourful exoskeleton. In a familiar urban spectacle two rates of exchange were available for comparison and contrast. If it is true that every building is a ruin waiting to happen (and, vice versa, every vacant lot is a *building* waiting to happen), it is also true, at least in the economy of late capitalist urbanism, that ruins are faster constructions than buildings: with crane and bulldozer, you can make one in a day; however, the carefully laid plans of future ruins take longer to disguise. The *look of novelty* may be the most powerful magic architects have in their battle with the gorgon of obsolescence and urban violence.

Some processes of transformation are harder to classify using the Empedoclean schema. Not everything, it seems, oscillates between Love and Strife, between an ideal amalgamation or unity and violent dismemberment and dispersal: in the time it took to return the Perth Entertainment Centre to a circus of cloud, a volume of air, two Cambridge mathematicians 'solved' the 'eternity puzzle' devised by Christopher Monckton. The challenge to produce a dodecagon out of 209 pieces (each a combination of triangles) is said to have inspired ARM's Jurassic geometry for the Perth Arena. In any case, the logic of this transformation is that one maze or labyrinth produces another. The 'solution' does not 'ruin' the 'puzzle': it merely leads to another. If anything of the spirit of the old Entertainment Centre is carried over to the new Arena, it is the idea of a non-linear temporality, an experience of place as endlessly puzzling. The thread through such labyrinthine environments is the performances they accommodate, those games and concerts in which the present seems to stretch out to create a *templum*, a sacred space of play where time (*le temps*) metamorphoses into *tempo*.

The conscious creation of spaces of play suggests a paradox at the heart of an urbanism predicated on the society of spectacle. Although, in the manner of much 1970s and 1980s breakthrough and knockdown urban development in Australia, the Perth Entertainment Centre typically stood massively apart and self-contained, it also owed these qualities to older precedents: the circus, the arena and the amphitheatre. The function of this class of buildings is to close off sections of the city for the sole purpose of spectacle. Cinemas, boxing halls, concert venues and theatres populate the fabric of the city with tiered architectural shells whose emptiness is designed to house temporary events and 'full houses' (which alternate with periods of eery emptiness and cryptlike abandonment). The external walls of these establishments are characteristically high, blank and, except by turnstile, impenetrable. Turning their backs on the city, such *colossea* curate a collective

spectacle in which they themselves become invisible, like the camera that shoots the film. As soon as the external wall of the arena is breached, its magical power to conjure up spectacles is compromised. Strictly speaking a ruined arena is a contradiction in terms. As soon as its invisibility is breached, it loses its control over visible wonders.

To put it another way, when the overlooked (in the English sense) suffers ruination, it enters the realm of the overlooked (in the American sense). Because the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome lies in ruins, we can see the labyrinthine hypogeum under the former arena or sand-covered stage. Ruination materializes the mechanics of the visual illusion. It also (in the eyes of a photographer like Tarry) announces a new illusion, a building that stages its own destruction, that continuously produces fissuring, that (after Piranesi) stages the imprisonment of the eye in a way that allows us to inhabit its briefly utopian architecture differently, as a place for seeing differently. To borrow an old Stoic objection to the commodification of the games: here, among these wrecked metallic canopies, the temporary inhabitant is able to participate actively in the *agon*, the contest, of life. When the spectacle took precedence, the struggle it represented could be sidelined: the object of the Stoics (but also of modern sports moralists) was to refocus attention on the inner drama of the athlete – to be in harmony with nature is, says Seneca, to be like a runner who adheres to the principles of running. In this athletic allegory, the spectator is secondary. In a ruined amphitheatre, however, there are no spectators only historical actors.

Ruined or not, the good stadium or arena confronts the architectural paradox of staging the ephemeral. It allows the evanescent to enter the symbolic economy. Regardless of what it stages, it enables the report of what happened to be amplified. Hence, when people fondly recall a concert or tennis final, they assert the authenticity of the 'I was there' experience; however, in asserting this, they claim a certain cultural prestige. What is this? It is a claim to have suffered in a certain way, to have shared in a passion, to have borne witness to a superhuman event. It is interesting to compare this individual and collective experience of ecstasis with the content of the lyrics U2 or Radiohead perform. A typology of the lyrics heard during the thirty years of mega-concert activity in the Entertainment Centre would manifest most points along an erotic timeline stretched between the first glance and the final betrayal: the distinction of the song is to present the emotional transformation occurring as a struggle inseparable from the song's performance. The good performer is the one who persuades the audience that their struggle is an inner one, that this is rehearsed behaviour seemingly happening for the first time. Even if the subject is the ruin of hope (or its opposite, a breach in the wall of despair), what counts is the passage, the act of passing from one state to another.

The relationship of photographs to their subject matter suggests that ruin is immanent in the act of looking. In perhaps the most notorious and chilling instance of this shadows of Luftwaffe aircraft fall cross the roofs of Warsaw suburbs about to be bombed. Afterwards, the military will have the evidence they need to prove that destruction occurred. The capacity of photography to freeze frame the flux implies break out – the resumption of change. The miraculous arrest of decay produces decay: think of the melancholy associated with photograph albums where, turning the pages, we feel older. The resumption of

unstructured time is also implicit in the construction of the photograph: even the violent decomposition of the Perth Entertainment Centre has to be composed if it is to be visualized; photography, in this context, salvages ruins from the dust-veiled caverns of collapse. In many ways the two objects juxtaposed in these remarks spring off in opposite directions – architecture towards the immaterial form, photography towards the materialization of deformity. Here, in the challenge of representation, they converge. The aesthetic challenge of representing ruin, ordering disorder into a memorable image, finds its counterpart in the distortions inherent in the conventions of architectural drawing – the section, the plan and, above all, the axonometric drawing. In short, any angle to the real tends to ruin it. As no ideal viewpoint exists, except in the idealisations of linear perspective, any image of a building undermines its integrity.

In short, remembering is re-membering: no recollection occurs without a selection and rearrangement of materials. The ineffable dimension of buildings under construction and suffering erasure is volume. The documentation of vagrant sunbeams penetrating the gloom through fissures in the ceiling finds its equivalent in the fascinating pinhole camera views the public is afforded into the storeys-deep excavation of foundations. It could be said that in assembling a puzzle of members, ARM aims to stage the possibility of break out. In any case, it is difficult to determine (on paper at least) whether their animation of the building form tends towards amalgamation or disaggregation. Either way, the power of the volume to generate an archipelago of relationships defined by fissures is evidence of a sensibility attuned to ruination. After all – and this applies to Tarry's photographs – what can survive of the demolished past if not a certain volume, whether it is the physiological imprint of an over-amplified concert or the theatrical encasement of players who, at an immeasurable distance from the spectator, fill the crowd with a shared sensation of life as agon, the human being perilously balanced between self-fulfilment and self-ruin.

In the work of building and unbuilding the tribal nature of what we call progress is clear. Nightly almost, news comes from the middle-east of bombed buildings. Formally, the wreckage of office blocks or hotels, where the debris of sectioned rooms spills out into the streets, resembles the ordinary and orderly demolition we practise ahead of renewal. Apart from applying the psychology of fear, bombardment produces limited military advantage: it has, rather, a ritual aspect, being, perhaps, a survival of the old practice of 'deconsecration' ahead of invasion. Whatever the case, a similar architectural *ressentiment* surely drives the authorities to attack older buildings with explosives. A political advantage is seen to be gained from the overthrow of *earlier* authorities, especially when the replacement structure is said to incorporate something of the old (a fragment of its proportions, materials or program). In this sense the new belongs to the order of ruination, its object to create new foci of attack. The grander the gesture, the larger the target. Photography possesses in this regard a certain menace, as it can be said to line up the object for further possession and dispossession. The photograph gathers evidence of unexpected consequences (new shadows, for example), which it archives as a blueprint for future revenge.

To this extent, the resistance of the new Arena to representation – its demolition of the image – not only announces an optimistic new urbanism: it contains its own defence against

immediate appropriation and removal. Obviously, in an epoch of digital imagery and the instantaneous circulation of an infinity of images, nothing lasts: buildings like the new Arena are ruined colosseas from the hour of their inception, for the world of possible combinations produced through the net is so much faster than any puzzle a building might ponder. The maze has become a continuous now of digital rearrangements, a cosmopolis of meetings, assemblies, events real and virtual, in relation to which any physical amphitheatre is like a Stone Age cave. What then? Tarry does not simply document an act of inner urban sacrifice: he discovers in the destruction of a collective memory, certain hidden aspects of the building that, until their exposure, were unknown. He brings to light a supplementary ambience that no doubt animated the space, contributing to the 'experience', but which, until then, had remained unrepresented.

Similarly, the architects of the new Perth Arena assert the existence of a certain unfinished: their archipelago of passages laid into the walls and roof may be a charm against the over-determination of activity programmed into the interior spaces. The disguise (and distortion) of the interior volumes is an act of ruin in-advance, carried out against the forces of representation. Beyond the relationships that can happen, beyond the infinity of agonistic permutations (every tennis match is different although the 'overall effect' adds up to the same thing), some other possibility of social coexistence remains: perhaps the ruined state of the shell laments its escape and an irrecoverable loss; alternatively, its crazy patterning idealises a maze that remains as a potentiality of the building cycle. Equally, by documenting the paradoxical materialization of the Perth Entertainment Centre at the moment of its dematerialisation, Tarry says something about the motivation of remembering. An event space embedded in collective affections achieves a life of its own: in the revolt against spectacle that its destruction seems to stage, it insists on the popular value of the spectacle; a political meaning, always thought to permeate the lyrics, the ephemeral sense of solidarity, the 'I was there' boast is retrospectively grafted onto the entertainment. To *entertain*: to hold together or, more exactly, to hold *among*, implying an archipelago of knots in a net. As a practice of recording and building, entertainments both photographic and architectural resist the dialectic of ruination in which they are located.

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