

**LITERATURE, ARCHITECTURE, AND POSTMODERNITY:  
DONALD BARTHELME AND J.G. BALLARD**

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Trinity Term, 2013

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of English Language and Literature for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

Word count: 82,500

## ABSTRACT

### **Literature, Architecture, and Postmodernity: Donald Barthelme and J.G. Ballard**

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Focusing on works between the 1960s and the early '80s, this thesis sets the literature of Donald Barthelme (1931–1989) and J.G. Ballard (1930–2009) within the context of twentieth-century architectural theory and history (written), design (drawn), productions (built), professional practice (managed), and pedagogy (taught). The primary aim of this study is to explore the discursive exchange between literature and architecture, while probing the putative association between postmodernity and architecture. By introducing a broader set of social phenomena into debates about postmodernity, my thesis enables a reevaluation of how the architectural idiom is interpreted in literature.

Using textual and visual analysis, this thesis argues that Barthelme's and Ballard's literary works operate at an intersection of the visual arts and mass media. Responding to American and European twentieth-century visual avant-gardes and socio-cultural transformations, architecture participates in the formulation of avant-garde conceptual frameworks. Critically, architecture is not only an aesthetic discipline; it is also a social discourse. Through the discipline's alignment with 'new' and 'old' avant-gardes, Barthelme and Ballard use architecture as a point of creative departure to undertake formal and thematic literary experiments. For both authors, contact with the architectural avant-garde has literary consequences.

This thesis considers four interconnecting ways literature and architecture 'speak' to each other: representation, discourse, formal comparisons, and influence or inspiration. Within my study these topics are examined through critical meditations on architecture from geographical (Fredric Jameson, David Harvey), architectural (Robert Venturi, Charles Jencks) and visual cultural (W. J. T. Mitchell, Marshall McLuhan) sources. Also figuring prominently are epitextual materials, especially archival documentation from the Donald Barthelme Literary Papers at the University of Houston and the Papers of J. G. Ballard collection at the British Library. This thesis opens up new ways of understanding the interart pluralism that characterises the postmodern.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Support for the research and writing of this dissertation was generously provided by a doctoral award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I would additionally like to extend my thanks to Jesus College for their financial and institutional support.

I am indebted to my dissertation supervisor, Laura Marcus, for sharing an expert's passion for visual culture, and challenging me through the grace of her prose to become a better writer. It is rare to have the privilege of working with someone as talented as Laura; for that I am eternally grateful to her, as well as to the cosmos. I would also like to acknowledge Paul Giles for his early encouragement of all things Barthelmeian. Thanks are due to Geoffrey Tyack for graciously offering his helpful comments and knowledge of architectural history. Many thanks to my friends and colleagues at the Faculty of English, University of Oxford, particularly Terri Mulholland, Tessa Roynon, and Yasmine Shamma. I am grateful to all the attendees of the *Spatial Perspectives* conference for enthusiastically sharing their ideas about literature and architecture – a topic I once mistakenly considered to be 'niche'.

I would like to thank the staff at the University of Houston's Special Collections for their assistance and kindness. Special thanks are reserved for Julie Grob and Nelda Cervantes. I am very grateful for the generous hospitality and warmth of the Sembritzky and Unger families during my stay in Houston, Texas. I have also benefited from the guidance of archivist Chris Beckett at The British Library. Thanks are also due to Nancy Holt and Tony Shafrazi for allowing me to ask endless questions about the haunting mysteries of land art. I am additionally appreciative of Charles Jencks and Nigel Coates for sharing their evolving thoughts on postmodernism and architecture.

To my beloved friends and family, who have selflessly endured years of esoteric musings, inchoate ideas and existential crises of all descriptions, I offer my deepest thanks for your unwavering love and patience. 'Only the mistakes have been mine'.

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## INTRODUCTION

Books are not made like children but like pyramids

Flaubert to Feydeau, 1858 (Hollier 31)

In Wendy Steiner's splendid preface to *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting* (1982), she recounts how she delivered a paper at Harvard University comparing Gertrude Stein's writings to Cubist painting. During the subsequent question and answer session she was asked the unexpected, seemingly 'simple' question: 'Why?'; 'why [...] should [one] want to set up a such a comparison in the first place?' (*Rhetoric* xi). Steiner recalls that she had no reply; she thought the 'interart analogy [...] [spoke] for itself' (*Rhetoric* xi). In her preface she writes that it was this 'speechlessness' that was the catalyst for her book. This thesis is my more modest response to questions of value that I have received over the years, and my own broader questions about an evolving field.

This thesis sets the literature of Donald Barthelme (1931–1989) and J. G. Ballard (1930–2009) within the context of twentieth-century architectural theory and history (written), design (drawn), productions (built), professional practice (managed), and pedagogy (taught). My study does not seek to provide an authoritative, exhaustive reading of literature and architecture, but instead *guided by* architectural concerns, a cultural and theoretical reinterpretation of selected works by my two primary authors. Through close textual and visual analysis, this thesis argues that Barthelme's and Ballard's literary works operate at a crossroads of the visual arts and mass media. The works of both authors respond to American and European visual avant-gardes and socio-cultural transformations; architecture, in its myriad of disciplinary forms, participates in the formulation of avant-garde conceptual frameworks. Architecture's alignment with 'new' and 'old' avant-gardes is a point of access for Barthelme and Ballard, from which to undertake formal and thematic literary experiments. Barthelme's and Ballard's authorial project exhibits facets of the complex discursive exchange between literature and architecture. Emphasising the *artistic*

component of the literary *arts*, both authors participate in ongoing redefinitions of literary expression. Additionally stressed by both authors is an understanding of built architecture as not only a physical or tangible presence, but also as a visual medium. Equally important is the fact that architecture not only communicates aesthetics (design, beauty, taste), it is also a social discourse. This thesis is conceived around four interconnecting ways literature and architecture ‘speak’ to each other: representation, discourse, formal comparisons, and influence or inspiration. In short, my research proposes that, for Barthelme and Ballard, contact with the architectural avant-garde has literary consequences.

The question of the connection between literature and architecture in the postmodernist period is particularly pertinent due to the movement’s putative association with architecture. Fredric Jameson has written that the end of aesthetic modernism, and perhaps even social modernity, was heralded by the ‘great transformation’ of architectural postmodernity (‘Globalization’ 114). For Jameson, postmodernist architecture ‘offered the first signals and symptoms’ of this cultural shift (‘Globalization’ 114). Other prominent scholars of literary and cultural postmodernism, from Jean-François Lyotard to Linda Hutcheon to Steven Connor, have devised their highly influential theories based on the emergence and visibility of architectural postmodernism. However, no critical theorist has offered a persuasive, comprehensive explanation for this cross-disciplinary transplantation. Taking up Hutcheon’s suggestion in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) that the appropriate ‘model’ for theorising postmodern literature is postmodern architecture – as well as the ‘parallel paradoxical manifestations’ found in the visual arts more broadly – this thesis rereads Barthelme and Ballard through aspects of her proposed framework (ix–x). In the process of conducting such an investigation, one finds not a direct arrow of influence pointing from postmodern architecture to postmodern literature, but instead an abundance of reciprocal interactions – as well as disciplinary off-shoots which connect with other time periods and visual media.

Although image culture and visual idolatry has an extensive ancestry, the relative uniqueness of the postmodern ‘pictorial turn’ is due to what W. J. T. Mitchell regards as the ‘paradox’ of postmodernism: ‘new forms of visual simulation and illusionism with unprecedented powers’ *and* a simultaneous cultural unease with this potentially menacing ‘power of images’ (*Picture Theory* 15).<sup>1</sup> As the narrator from Barthelme’s first published short story declares, ‘signs are signs, and some of them are lies’ (*Sixty* 26).<sup>2</sup> This invitation to witness the multiplicity of culture is indicative of Barthelme and Ballard’s ‘intense commitment to pluralism’, the unifying maxim of the postmodern movement, as Charles Jencks proposes (*Post-Modernism?* 29). While the ‘spatial over temporal’ and narrative over poetics are seen as integral differences between modernism and postmodernism,<sup>3</sup> my thesis complicates this division by demonstrating how Barthelme and Ballard utilise a range of visual strategies from collage to concrete poetry (Jameson ‘Globalization’ 94).

At first glance, Barthelme and Ballard seem like unlikely critical bedfellows. The former is from the American South, drawn to the bright lights of New York City, published on the pages of the intellectual pace-setting institution *The New Yorker*, and closely associated, perhaps even punitively, with postmodernism. The latter author was born in colonial Shanghai, reluctantly migrated to the drab London suburb of Shepperton (which he then refused to leave) and is popularly known as a writer of science fiction, and then, later in life, a producer of so-called popular ‘airport fiction’. While Barthelme’s creative project in many ways responds to his father (as considered in Chapter Three), who was an avant-garde modernist architect based in Houston,

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<sup>1</sup> In more recent writings, Mitchell has been careful to re-emphasise that the ‘pictorial turn’ does not imply that ‘we [...] live in a uniquely visual era’. Instead, highlighting postmodernism’s ontological uncertainty, ‘[t]he “visual” or “pictorial turn” is a recurrent trope that displaces moral and political panic onto images and so-called visual media’ (‘Showing Seeing’ 91). Some critics have read this as a ‘softening’ of Mitchell’s position or even a revision; I disagree. If *Picture Theory* (1994) is read carefully, it is clear that he is not suggesting that image culture is exclusive to the postmodern period.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Me and Miss Mandible’ (1961) was Barthelme’s first published story as a professional writer. Originally featured in a small magazine called *Contact* under the name ‘The Darling Duckling at School’, the story was later reprinted in Barthelme’s first volume of short stories, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari* (1964).

<sup>3</sup> In the context of Barthelme, Stanley Trachtenberg visits Joseph Frank’s three-part series of essays on ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature’ (1945) – see pages 16–18 in *Understanding Donald Barthelme*.

Texas, it should also be noted that other contemporary authors have biographical connections to architecture that do not appear as visibly in their work: for example, Kurt Vonnegut's father was a practising architect. Incidentally, Ballard, too, had a member of his family who was an architect.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the biographical, thematic concerns and critical responses establish more distinctive points of comparison: the works of both authors are voyeuristic, oversexed, pockmarked with disciplinary jargon, widely repugnant to feminists and generally assumed to be dispassionately apolitical. Yet what significantly binds both authors is an intellectual and creative immersion in their respective avant-garde art scenes and traditions. Pairing Barthelme and Ballard draws to the surface the applied significance of architectural and visual avant-gardes to postmodern literature. Strikingly, through the prism of architecture, more thematic and responsive commonalities than differences emerge between the two authors.

Comparing Barthelme and Ballard, one an American writer, the other a British writer, brings to the forefront the transformative cultural exchanges that shaped Anglo-American postmodernism. Postmodernity, especially literary postmodernity, is widely conceived of as an American phenomenon. In addition to Barthelme, the best-known postmodern writers are American: Thomas Pynchon, Vonnegut, John Barth, Robert Coover, and William Gass. It was American literary critics that promoted and brought the term 'postmodernism' to a wider audience in the 1960s and '70s. Architectural postmodernism also centres on American figures, as seen in the buildings of Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Philip Johnson, Frank Gehry, and Michael Graves.<sup>5</sup> Yet the boundaries of postmodernity are unfixed, and the question of the internationality of postmodernism, as Hans Bertens suggests, is critical to its canonisation and periodisation (*Weltanschauung* 63). By introducing an Anglo-American axis to my research, I challenge an exclusively Americanist approach to postmodernism. Through the inclusion of an

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<sup>4</sup> Ballard's brother-in-law was an architect (*Conversations* 245).

<sup>5</sup> As is the case with the postmodern authors listed above, noticeably, this group is also white and male.

American and British author, my study underscores part of the international scope of postmodernism as a ‘movement’, with identifiable transnational themes, characteristics, and influences.

It is not uncommon for authors of contemporary fiction, or earlier time periods, to use architecture or architects for metaphoric or representative purposes. Using representation as the basis of her study, Marilyn Chandler’s *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (1991) takes up Henry David Thoreau’s ‘deceptively simple “What is a house?”’, and seeks to explain what she perceives as the ‘prominence’ of houses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American fiction (1). Perhaps two of the most popularly known examples of metaphoric or representative architecture in literature come from the twentieth century: the buildings of *The Fountainhead* (1943), which ‘were not Classical, they were not Gothic, they were not Renaissance. They were only Howard Roark’, and the ‘spiteful’ house, 124, in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) (Rand 7; 3).<sup>6</sup> This point characterises the two dominant ways that twentieth-century intersections of literature and architecture have been critically approached: the urban and the domestic. The limited existing criticism of intersections of architecture and contemporary fiction focuses almost exclusively on the imagery of ‘the home’, marginalising built form outside of the vernacular (as is the case in Chandler’s study). External studies are dedicated to more generalised understandings of constructed spaces, often focusing on the urban environment.<sup>7</sup>

The quotation by Gustave Flaubert cited at the beginning of this introduction, as transcribed by Denis Hollier in *Against Architecture* (1989), is an acknowledgment that the challenges of formulating and interpreting interart analogies are not exclusive to the twentieth

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<sup>6</sup> Morrison’s ex-husband, Harold Morrison, is an architect.

<sup>7</sup> For some analysis of what Douglas Tallack calls the ‘representational consequences’ of architecture and the urban in literature (and the visual arts) see his book *New York Sights: Visualizing Old and New New York* (Oxford: Berg, 2005). Additionally of interest to the issue of ‘representation’ is Matthew Taunton, *Fictions of the City: Class, Culture and Mass Housing in London and Paris* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy (eds.), *Urban Space and Representation* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000) and Liam Kennedy, *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).

century. Nineteenth-century studies like Andrew Miller's *Novels Behind Glass* (1995) have made significant inroads into investigating how advancements in material culture influence writers and their literary output. My thesis is undoubtedly indebted to Miller's examination of Victorian narratives and commodity culture, which is framed by Joseph Paxton's epoch-making temple to empirical modernity, the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Place. It was through Miller's analysis of the legacy of the exhibition on Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens that my eyes were first opened to the expansive literary possibilities of architecture. Miller's book is shaped by a broad theoretical and historical methodology, which employs the ideas of critics such as Walter Benjamin, particularly his decades-long, unfinished *Arcades Project* (1927–40), and the influential architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri's study on utopia, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalism Development* (1976).<sup>8</sup>

Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (1992) also influenced my study. Vidler's text provides a historical, 'post-Freudian' look at the *unheimlich*, in the context of theories on architecture and space, from philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard to contemporary architects/architectural theorists like Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman. Critically, *The Architectural Uncanny* also approaches architecture as a social discourse (particularly in regards to 'homelessness') and as part of the avant-garde; it proposes that 'theoretical elaboration of the uncanny helps us to interpret the conditions of modern engagement, the special characteristics of architecture and urbanism as arts of spatial definition allow us to advance the argument into the domain of the tangible' (*Uncanny* 13). Vidler finds that 'the uncanny has, not unnaturally, found its metaphorical home in architecture' (*Uncanny* 11). The interrogation of literary texts forms a significant aspect of proving his project: for example, as part of Vidler's argument about houses he sensitively explores Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839). Employing a wide range of theory (architectural, art,

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<sup>8</sup> For more on how Benjamin's theories intersect with architecture see Gevork Hartoonian, *Walter Benjamin and Architecture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

spatial, literary and philosophical), Vidler negotiates the discourses of literature and architecture into a cohesive analysis. His approach informed my methodology for this study, although my research relies less on spatial theory and more on geographical, biographical and archival materials.

Assisting in the repositioning of how Barthelme and Ballard are conceived in relation to architecture, my thesis integrates archival material, fiction and critical theory. The archival documentation examined includes unpublished correspondence, drafts, sourcebooks and pictures from Donald Barthelme's literary and professional papers, as well as his father's architectural papers at the University of Houston. Limited-edition publications by Barthelme from the New York Public Library Rare Book Division are read alongside the author's better-known texts. Previously unexamined letters and an unpublished short story draft from the recently opened Papers of J. G. Ballard collection at the British Library are also interrogated. By drawing on epitextual materials (correspondence, interviews, drafts, etc.), my study introduces documentation that has been newly uncovered or overlooked. This is not to suggest that I am following an 'intentionalist' approach, which advocates notions of singular authorial 'meaning'. Balancing archival materials and interviews with close textual and visual analysis, my research considers epitextual documentation with a sensitivity to the inherent ambiguity and contradiction that is Barthelme's and Ballard's creative thesis.

What makes these two authors ideal for probing the architectural interdisciplinarity of the postmodern, is how their employment of architecture extends into architecture's broad disciplinary potential and its association with visual avant-gardes. Barthelme's and Ballard's works show a common embrace of an avant-garde derived architectural imagination, where architecture in a multitude of interconnecting forms (as a verb, i.e. what an architect 'does', a noun, a professional discipline, a range of building typologies, a formal object, etc.) represents a flexible methodological framework fashioned for the investigation of contemporary culture. In an effort to defy the perceived restrictions and contemporary irrelevance of literary conventions,

both authors employ architecture as a strategic means of reinvigorating their literary project.

Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh's *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques* (1962) argues that Max Ernst was a 'collage thinker', applying his philosophy across his visual oeuvre from literary collaborations to stamping processes. I would like to suggest the selected Barthelme and Ballard texts exhibit 'architectural thinking': Architectural inflections can be identified across their corpus, from sexualised, anthropomorphic buildings in Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) to formal experimentations with the architectonic possibilities of pictorial collage in Barthelme's 'Adventure' (1970). Architectural allusions and borrowings surface persistently in both authors' texts.

While extending into works beyond this period, the scope of this study emphasises works by Barthelme and Ballard from the 1960s to the early '80s. The reason for this focus is due to its ideological and temporal proximity to the modernist avant-garde and a countercultural spirit. An era that was the height of literary postmodernism, and a time of significant cultural transitions – marked by an increasing preoccupation and anxiety about images and visibility – this period was the most 'experimental' for both authors. It is a time when Barthelme and Ballard took the most interdisciplinary 'risks' of their respective careers, exploring how literature could react to what they perceived as an increasingly McLuhian world. Far from serving as a benign backdrop for action, the representative or conceptual 'presence' of architecture in Barthelme's and Ballard's imaginative writings connote meaning and participate in the dialogic power of their narratives. By tracing the architectural connections within my authors' literary texts, and in the context of their wider engagements with the socio-political transformations of post-war America and Britain, this thesis explains how architecture maps an evolving social landscape, reflecting a diverse range of critiques, from gender to visual culture. This thesis asks: How do literary engagements with architecture encode an evolving understanding of the 'postmodern condition'? If, as Lewis Mumford argues cities reflect the societies that built them, then what narratives can be gathered from Barthelme's and Ballard's architectural depictions? Can the formal qualities of postmodern

literary fragmentation ‘spatialise’ textual experience? In what way are theorisations about postmodern architecture useful for interpreting postmodern literature?

### **Situating Literature, Architecture, and Postmodernity**

One of the more compelling synoptic accounts and justifications for the putative association between postmodernity and architecture comes from Glenn Adamson and Jane Pavitt’s chapter for *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990* (2011) – a book that stems from an exhibition of the same name they curated for the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A).

Appropriately, in Adamson and Pavitt’s description, postmodern architecture is not only described as an exemplar of the movement, but also a caricature of its own tropes and characteristics:

Despite its disciplinary diversity, postmodernism achieved its greatest visibility in architecture. As Reinhold Martin [in *Utopia’s Ghost*] has recently put it, architecture was postmodernism’s ‘avatar’ – the form in which it was most frequently encountered. As theory followed practice, early and influential formulations used architecture as a rubric to define postmodernism’s terms of engagement. Graphic design, the applied arts, fashion and styling, film: all were discussed in parallel to buildings as a way of understanding their own postmodern tropes. Architecture’s ‘postmodern turn’ became the blueprint for other disciplinary histories: Rejection of high Modernism? Embrace, of the ‘low’ and the kitsch? A prioritization of surface over depth, style over structure? Use of quotation, metaphor, plurality, parody? Check your work against Michael Graves’ 1982 Portland Building and see.<sup>9</sup> (Adamson and Pavitt 13)

Yet my observations in this study about postmodernity are not to suggest a sense of artistic periodisation reliant on the theory of a *Zeitgeist*. As Alistair Fowler warns, the concept of the *Zeitgeist* ‘prefers’ to ‘intuit essences directly’, negating ‘historical processes of influence, imitation, or achievement’ (489). He further argues that any attempt to interpret artistic production in this way ‘becomes untenable with the observation that period styles often did not prevail at the same time in different arts and artists’ (Fowler 491). Revealing a problematic aspect

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<sup>9</sup> The V&A exhibition did not include literature within its scope, although postmodern fiction (particularly Barthelme) is a critical reference point in the Adamson and Pavitt’s book. Given the museum’s area of expertise, the exhibition was, unsurprisingly, architecture and design focused. This helps to explain the exhibit’s conspicuous exclusion of the discipline.

that emerges when one attempts to construct interart analogies, the crystallisation of what is now generally conceived of as ‘modernist’ or ‘postmodernist’, in some instances, evolved concurrently; this is particularly apparent when examined across disciplines.

Probing further into critical approaches to interart periodisation, it is useful to introduce more of Steiner’s observations. She asks:

Why is it that the baroque and now cubism are the only major period concepts based on the transference of terms from the visual arts to literature? And why is it that they have created so much more scholarly controversy than noninterartistically generated period terms like “romantic”, “Renaissance”, “medieval”, or “neoclassical,” which receive tolerant lip service, a resignation to the fact that rough as they are, they perform a useful function? (Steiner *Rhetoric* 187)

To Steiner’s list of perennially interrogated periods, which are perceived to have transversed the visual arts into literature, I would like to add ‘postmodern’. For many critics, most influentially Jameson and Hutcheon, the identification of postmodernity emerges from architecture – although there is insufficient consensus as to where this association originates. While Steiner’s critique was written in 1982, theoretically well into the postmodern period, the idea of the ‘postmodern’ was still relatively new to academic discourse. Therefore, Steiner’s failure to include postmodernism is potentially not due to intentional omission, but to critical visibility.

Postmodernism refers to a broad range of phenomena; its ‘phases’ have been mapped as a period of time (the latter half of the twentieth century), a genre-less stylistic, a countercultural ‘attitude’, a series of hypotheses, a cultural climate, a *Weltanschauung*, a discursive formulation, as well as a transformative project. Using Hutcheon’s assessment that postmodernism is a system of “both/and” not “either/or”, it is not necessary to select between these approaches, their contradictions coexist within a simultaneous space (49). Although the origins of the term date back to the nineteenth century, American literary critics introduced the term ‘post-modernism’ into ‘circulation’ in the 1960s and ‘70s, with Ihab Hassan becoming its most prominent advocate

(Bertens *The Idea* 4).<sup>10</sup> In 1977, Jencks published *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, the first book to use the phrase in its title. By this time, Jencks notes, ‘the architectural movement was directed and visibly coherent’, which he speculates resulted in his (and architecture’s) close association with the term/concept (*Post-Modernism?* 19). However, in Perry Anderson’s genealogical study, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (1998), he points out the even Jencks was initially hesitant about embracing the term ‘postmodern’, since ‘the term was – he confessed – “evasive, fashionable and worst of all negative”. His preferred architecture would be better described as “radical eclecticism”, even “traditionalesque”’ (22). Yet Jencks’s misgivings were short lived, and he quickly went on, along with the postmodern architect and critic Paolo Portoghesi, to organise the architectural section of the Venice Biennale in 1980, which was entitled ‘The Presence of the Past’ and garnered considerable critical attention (Anderson 23). Jencks’s identification of postmodern architecture, as alluded to previously, came to hinge around ‘old and new, high and low’, a type of ““double-coding”: [...] an architecture employing a hybrid of modern and historicist syntax’ (Anderson 22). It is these two figures, Jencks and Portoghesi, who act as the most significant influences on Hutcheon’s theorisation of the postmodern in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. The first chapter of her book explains how she conceives of postmodernity:

My focus in the chapter will be on what I think offers the best model for a poetics of postmodernism: postmodern architecture, the one art form in which the label seems to refer, uncontested, to a generally agreed upon corpus of works. Throughout, my (non-specialist) discussion will be clearly indebted to the work of architect/theorists like Charles Jencks and Paolo Portoghesi, the major voices in the postmodern debates. This will be my model, because the characteristics of this architecture are also those of postmodernism at large – from historiographic metafiction like Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra* or E. L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel* to metafilmic historical movies like Peter Greenaway’s *The Draughtsman’s Contract*, from the video art of Douglas Davis to the photography of Vincent Leo. (23)

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<sup>10</sup> The first documented reference to postmodernism (with or without a hyphen), according to Wolfgang Iser in *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (1988), is by British artist John Watkins Chapman in the 1870s. But as Jencks notes this was ‘inconsequential’ since it referred to the ‘social concept of “post-industrial”’ as later theorised in the early twentieth century by scholars such as Arthur J. Penty (*Post-Modernism?* 17). For additional information see Margaret A. Rose, *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial: A Critical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Alternatively, Anderson attributes the ‘Hispanic inter-world of the 1930s’ with first using the idea of the postmodern (*postmodernismo*) as a style – in this instance a ‘conservative’ off-shoot of modernism (4).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Jencks himself takes credit for popularising and even instigating the internationalisation of the postmodern phenomenon, declaring in *Post-Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (1987), '[t]he public response was extremely strong in every country I visited [...]. In fact the response to my lectures and articles was so forceful and widespread that it created Post-Modernism as a social and architectural movement' (*Classicism* 29). As Andreas Huyssen proclaims, without irony, in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), postmodernism 'must be salvaged from its champions and from its detractors' (182).<sup>11</sup>

The terms 'modernism', 'modernist' and 'the modern movement' are equally ambiguous categories of meaning. In the United States, modernist architecture has its genealogy in several sources, including American domestic designs like Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Prairie style' buildings and European imports such as Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius.

'International Style' is a gesture towards specificity, but it is only moderately less problematic. The term the 'International Style' was coined by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in 1932 to denote the most 'prevalent features' of European modern architecture, as designed by Le Corbusier and members of the Bauhaus (Khan 8). In relation to the modern movement, my study is primarily concerned with manifestations of canonical Anglo-American and Western European modernism in the twentieth century, although, admittedly, many of the movement's aesthetic and ideological shapes are derived from the late nineteenth century. In an effort to create distinctions, I have been guided by Nathaniel Coleman's use of 'orthodox modern', which he based on observations by the architectural historian Kenneth Frampton. In *Utopias and Architecture* (2005), a book I revisit at length in Chapter Three, Coleman explains that orthodox modern 'denotes [...] the most reductive aspects of modern (twentieth-century) architecture' (1). Coleman

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<sup>11</sup> Huyssen also theorises postmodernity through architecture. He claims that '[a]rchitecture gives us the most palpable example of the issues at stake [in the modernism versus postmodernism discussion]' (186). See pages 184-88 in *After the Great Divide*.

goes on to explain that this idea of ‘modern’ architecture is largely based on the proposals of the “Athens Charter (1933)” CIAM, a French acronym for what translates into English as the International Congress of Modern Architecture’ (1). Established in 1928, the mission of CIAM was ‘to shepherd the then new architecture [of modernism] from the periphery of culture to its centre’ (Coleman 1). The Athens Charter attempted to ‘establish the tenants of the functional city’ and remake cities in a more ‘rational’ manner (Coleman 1). Coleman notes how this ‘reformist’ tone of the Charter, which had appeared earlier in Le Corbusier’s *The Radiant City* (1935), ‘reduced’ the city by ‘rigidly [clarifying and emptying it], as much as possible, of its mysterious contradictions’ (2). The Charter was particularly influential during the period of intense change after the Second World War. CIAM’s last meeting was in 1959.

For Jencks, postmodernism is ‘neither anti-Modernist nor reactionary. It accepts the discoveries of the twentieth century [...] and the fact that two world wars and mass culture are now integral parts of our world picture, but doesn’t make from this an entire ideology’ (*Classicism* 11). He writes, ‘[i]n short, as its name implies, [postmodernism] acknowledges the debt to Modernism but transcends the movement by synthesizing it with other concerns’ (*Classicism* 11). For the purpose of this study, my positioning of postmodernism has theoretical commonalities with Jencks, but it departs from his theorisation in relation to postmodernism as not ‘reactionary’ to modernism and the significance of mass culture. Instead, I reject the traditional divisions that have belaboured ‘the postmodernism debate’ – namely that postmodernity is either 1) not a distinct movement and is in fact a continuation of modernism or 2) it is a ‘radical rupture’, a totalising ‘break’ with and dismissal of modernism (Huysen 182). A thread running through my thesis is how avant-garde modernism, in its shifting formulations – modernist architecture, Surrealism, Dada, visual poetics, etc. – has participated in the development and evolution of both authors’ postmodern project. The presence of modernism is neither at odds with their contemporary innovation, nor are they haunted by its ghost (although, admittedly, as I discuss in Chapter One, Bartheleme does demonstrate some anxiety in relation to

modernist ‘making it new’). My conceptualisation is indebted to Lyotard’s explanation for the relationship between postmodernism and modernism. He proposes that the ‘minor modifications’ of postmodern architecture, when compared with radical modernist aspirations, are indicative of how the “post-” of “postmodernism” has the sense of simple succession, a diachronic sequence of periods in which each one is clearly identifiable. The “post-” indicates something like a conversation: a new direction from the previous one’ (Lyotard 410).<sup>12</sup>

An ‘uneven development of separate enterprises’, within postmodernism and modernism there are sub-movements, off-shoots and various streams of nuance (Levenson 4). Although unstable categories, to borrow elements of Steiner’s argument about Cubism, these period terms have ‘a special conceptual power. They not only necessitate a technical comparison of the arts—as all interartistic analogies do—but they also demand an *aestheticizing* of history and a *historicizing* of art’ (Steiner *Rhetoric* 192).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, I freely recognise the limitations of interart analogies based on artificial categorisation. The identification of period terms within my argument are used as ‘heuristic instruments’, allowing for more interesting critical inquiry into phenomena that existed without regard for classification (Fowler 496, 509).

Yet direct comparison between different artistic mediums introduces theoretical challenges, and tests the disputed boundaries of literary/non-literary and visual art/non-visual art; Mitchell calls this ambiguity the ‘image/text problematic’ (*Picture Theory* 7). The implications of the image/text problematic will be more thoroughly addressed in Chapter Two, which examines Bartheleme’s use of *literal* pictures as narrative disruptions and facilitators. Similarly, the differing experiential modalities and sensory registers of the visual and verbal illuminate the tension of negotiating conceptual and perceptual experience. When embarking on a ‘comparative study of

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<sup>12</sup> The French theorist characterises this ‘limitation’ as a condemnation. However, prominent figures of architectural postmodernism, like Robert Venturi, would feel the death of the heroic architect and the elimination of the social pressure exerted by that role as a liberation. Additionally, Lyotard’s idea of postmodern architecture’s ‘minor modifications’ is at odds with Jameson’s view of the ‘great transformation’.

<sup>13</sup> Emphasis is my own.

verbal and visual representation', Mitchell cautions, it is important to acknowledge that a text can never be an image nor vice versa (*Picture Theory* 7). Applying Mitchell's warning to this study, despite formal experimentation, literature can never *be* architecture. Using Erwin Panofsky's theory of 'iconology' as a point of departure, Mitchell delineates a new dynamic between 'icon' (image) and 'logos' (rhetoric, literature) in the postmodern era, or the 'pictorial turn', as he describes it:

[T]he cliché of postmodernism is that it is an epoch of the absorption of all language into images and "simulacra," a semiotic hall of mirrors. If traditional iconology repressed the image, postmodern iconology represses language. (*Picture Theory* 28)

But instead of resisting 'critical iconology' (postmodern iconology) Barthes and Ballard embrace it, incorporating text and image, challenging the system of dominance that Mitchell has set forth. Comparative analogies of architecture and literature have an extensive ancestry extending from Plato to Samuel Beckett, as documented by Ellen Eve Frank's *Literary Architecture* (1979). Frank's work is one of the earliest book-length critical explorations of literature and architecture. Her study focuses on four writers (Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, and Henry James) who have all stated that 'literature is like architecture' (3). Frank proposes a tradition of 'literary architecture' that explores how these writers utilise architectural analogues through the structuring and subject matter of a literary work.

Barthes and Ballard's 'architectural methods', however, do not succumb to a reliance on traditions of natural kinship, like the 'sister arts' or Mario Praz's *air de famille*.<sup>14</sup> What Barthes and Ballard are presenting is a balanced strategy of interpretation more akin to art historian Per Palme's *ut architectura poesis*, where the 'fundamental analogy is between literary genre and architectural type' (Fowler 502).<sup>15</sup> Applying Palme's theory Fowler states:

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<sup>14</sup> See Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>15</sup> This theory is derived from *ut pictura poesis*, 'as is painting, so is poetry', introduced by Horace in *Ars Poetica*. Admittedly, Horace's approach does promote a sense of 'natural kinship' between poetry and painting, something which Lessing rejected in *Laocoon* (1766), but Palme's adaptation is more nuanced centring on 'a fertile communication of attitudes and values between the realms of poetry and architecture'

We get a valuable glimpse, for example, of poetic theory applied in retrospect to composition when Michael Drayton tells how he chose *ottava rima* for his *Baron's Wars*, as most suitable "for an epic poem," being the "best proportioned, consisting of eight lines, six interwoven and a couplet in base .... This sort of stanza hath in it, majesty, perfection, and solidity, resembling the pillar which in architecture is called the tuscan, whose shaft is of six diameters".<sup>16</sup> (Fowler 502)

It is the 'postmodern' that Barthelme and Ballard use as genre and architectural style.<sup>17</sup>

This thesis recognises that architecture is more than just buildings, attendant furniture, and drawings, just as literature is more than just novels and poetry. A simple formula used for introductory studies of architecture and architectural history is: 'Building + Art = Architecture', but this summary does little to satisfy the recurring 'what is architecture?' question (Conway and Roenisch 9). As Hazel Conway and Rowan Roenisch in *Understanding Architecture* (1994) note, this definition unsatisfactorily creates a 'dualism between art on the one hand and utility or function on the other' (9). This 'dualism' also encourages a disconnection between the art and science of a building ('aesthetic arts as opposed to the useful or industrial arts') (Conway and Roenisch 9). As seen in Chapter Five, postmodernists (or proto-postmodernists) were attracted to the ambiguity of architecture, since it demonstrated the very blending of 'low' and 'high', 'practical' and 'aesthetic' that they were advocating. Even a casual admirer of architecture is cognisant of the fact that architecture is a discipline far broader than built structure by a trained architect. Further complicating boundaries, Le Corbusier evaluates town planning and architecture as 'inseparable from one another' and a 'single phenomenon' (Ballantyne 213). However, my study has made an effort to separate these two forces, although, admittedly, there are instances where I momentarily veer into some urban planning terrain. My research has attempted to account for architecture's disciplinary diversity (built, written, drawn, taught, etc.), but a totalising consideration is outside the confines of this (or perhaps any) single project.

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(Palme 107). See Per Palme, 'Ut Architectura Poesis', *Idea and Form: Studies in the History of Art*, ed. Ake Bengtsson (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959).

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>17</sup> Spurr's work also argues that '[a]rchitectural type corresponds to literary genre' (5).

While David Spurr's recent book *Architecture and Modern Literature* (2012) did not influence this study due to the timing of its publication, it is, however, a nuanced text which advances the field.<sup>18</sup> Spurr's book is preoccupied with how 'the relations between architecture and literature are symptomatic of modernity as a crisis of meaning' (6). He acknowledges that this relationship between architecture and literature goes 'beyond mere analogy', arguing that there are 'at least' two ways that extend beyond art analogue. The first point concerns ideological tension: Spurr indicates that the 'extreme rationality' and functionality advocated by some forms of modernist architecture (i.e. modernist orthodoxy) would appear at odds with the 'spirit' of modernist literary projects, which promoted 'subjective, nonrational experience' (5). His second point is about representation, observing the frequent tendency for literature to depict architecture, but 'architectural representation of literature is rare' (5).<sup>19</sup> He explains this imbalance by citing Hegel's identification of 'literature's capacity to bring before the imagination every object of the mind's conception or the senses' perception' (5).

A less successful recent critical study is Sarah Edwards and Jonathan Charley's edited collection *Writing the Modern City: Literature, Architecture, and Modernity* (2012), which concentrates on urban modernist literature. The book is limited in ambition and does not attempt to address the relationship of literature and architecture to each other.

### **Rereading Barthelme and Ballard**

Despite habitual references to Barthelme's biographical connection to architecture, there have been no sustained critical examinations of his relationship to the discipline. Ballard has fared better: a dedicated event at the Royal Academy, 'Ballardian Architecture: Inner and Outer Space'

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<sup>18</sup> Spurr defines modern literature as from the early nineteenth century to the present.

<sup>19</sup> While 'rare', this form of representation is not unheard of. See, for example, Steven Holl's attempt at 'translating' literary texts into architectural form: Knut Hamsun Centre, Hamarøy, Norway. The study of 'narrative' in architecture is a topic of increasing interest. See Nigel Coates, *Narrative Architecture*. Ad Primers (London: Wiley, 2012) and Sophia Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative: The Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2009).

(2010), focused on the author as an admirer and critic of architecture; and more recently Laura Colombino's *Spatial Politics in Contemporary London Literature: Writing Architecture and the Body* (2013) has taken an urban-centric look at Ballard's literary architectural creations. Due to the conspicuous prominence of architectural manifestations and representations of the architect as a professional – notably in *Concrete Island* (1974), *High-Rise* (1975) and *Super-Cannes* (2000) – it is unsurprising that a popular association between Ballard and architecture has developed. Additionally, Ballard's recurrent, semi-provocative interview pronouncements about architecture have also contributed to this association. For instance, the author famously declared that his favourite building was the Heathrow Hilton, a generic faux-resort space of 'hanger'-like transience, designed by Michael Manser. Yet Ballard's seemingly 'obvious' appreciative relationship with the discipline has critically obscured his more complex engagements with architecture through the visual avant-garde.

Frequently, Ballard's interest in the determinative effects of architecture on human psychology and behaviour is shorthanded by some critics as 'psycho geography'.<sup>20</sup> Psycho geography has dominated the way in which the subject of architecture has been broached in Ballardian studies. Guy Debord, who coined the Situationist term, described psycho geography as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (8).<sup>21</sup> As Jeanette Baxter observes, in her excellent book *J.G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination* (2009), Ballard explored culture through the critical lens of a *flâneur*, and reworked the psycho geographical project in a 'neo-avant-garde' context through reinvented strategies of '*détournement* and the constructed "situation"' (*Surrealist Imagination* 1, 5). However, Ballard's fascination with architecture is not just about his interest in architecture as a 'stage', as the architect and designer Nigel Coates has

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<sup>20</sup> For example, see Chapter 4, 'Psycho geography Today', in Merlin Coverley, *Psycho geography* (Harpden: Pocket Essentials, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> In the context of London, psycho geography is most closely associated with the works of Iain Sinclair, as well as Will Self. Sinclair and Ballard were friends and great admirers of one another. Using archival materials, this relationship will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

proposed. To believe that Ballard's only commitment to architecture is as a literary representation, or a 'backdrop' for action, plot development and storytelling, is to miss out on his engagement with other forms of architectural expression, primarily mobilised through the visual avant-garde.

While, in general, Bartheleme as an agent of postmodernism is critically undisputed, Baxter rejects Brian McHale, Jean Baudrillard and Jameson's '[assimilation of] Ballard's work to the idiom of the postmodern' (Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 10).<sup>22</sup> She is adamant that utilising theories of postmodernity to examine Ballard is misguided, proposing that he is 'motivated by the work of historical recovery, not postmodern play, and the notion of fiction as "vacated funhouse" is a disingenuous aspect of postmodernism which Ballard has rejected consistently' (Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 10). To support her claim she quotes one of Ballard's many dismissive statements about postmodern fiction. Instead, Baxter finds that his 'creative thesis' is part of a 'radical Surrealist experiment', which seeks to unearth the 'subjectivity, reality, time, memory and history' obscured by the postmodern condition (*Surrealist Imagination* 10–11).

Roger Luckhurst's *The Angel Between Two Walls* (1997) is the most influential scholarly study of Ballard's fiction. Luckhurst does situate the author's work (particularly *The Atrocity Exhibition*) within modernist and postmodernist avant-garde traditions, but architecture does not form a significant part of his reading. His book is primarily concerned with the 'unreadability' of Ballard's 'generic diversity' (xviii; Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 10). In addition to Luckhurst's text, I make liberal use of Andrzej Gasiorek's *J. G. Ballard* (2004), which contains some strong analysis about representations of architecture of Ballard's works (particularly *High-Rise* and the Vermilion Sands stories), but due to what Baxter calls the book's 'restrictive format' – the text is structured as a survey, covering work from the early 1960s to 2003 – there is little sustained focus

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<sup>22</sup> Baxter claims Baudrillard's 'hijacking' of *Crash*, in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), is 'ahistorical and amoral', and overlooks the author's own critique of postmodernism (10). Both Baudrillard and Jameson have seized upon Ballard's 'death of affect' as illustrative of the 'waning of affect' (112; *Postmodernism, Or 15*).

(Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 12). Gasiorek is also attuned to Ballard's indebtedness to avant-gardes, citing Pop Art, Surrealism, and science fiction as equal forces of influence.

As my two chapters on Ballard will demonstrate at length, the author is aesthetically, ideologically and conceptually linked to figures of postmodernity and proto-postmodernity through the visual avant-garde – namely Robert Smithson and the Independent Group.

Approaching the postmodern through an architectural prism, aided by an understanding of what I have elected to call a 'commodified historicism', in the context of Barthelme in Chapter One, postmodern architectural theorists like Jencks and Jameson promote a revival of a different conception of 'history' – a fragmented, decontextualised reinterpretation. Chapter Two on Barthelme's 'collage stories' also engages with postmodernism's complex relationship with history. By utilising Jencks's theory of the visual arts, what he terms 'Post-Modern Classicism', I demonstrate how postmodernist reconceptualisations of history intersect with the Surrealist project and the 'new' and 'old' avant-garde. Jencks argues that postmodernism 'owes alliance to two quite different pasts – the immediate and the more distant one' (*Classicism* 11).

Comprehensive contemporary revival of history, as in the case with 'Canonic Classicism', is an impossibility, according to Jencks. This is as a result of the modifying effects of 'pluralism, Modernism and current science' (*Classicism* 40).

Despite the numerous references to Barthelme's familial connection to the architectural profession, as noted earlier, there have only been brief explorations of how the author's works intersect with architecture. Both Stanley Trachtenberg in *Understanding Donald Barthelme* (1990) and Michael Thomas Hudgens in *Donald Barthelme, Postmodernist American Writer* (2001) provide passing, but important references to Venturi. Hudgens's claims that the character Hogo de Bergerac (one of the villains) in *Snow White* (1967) is 'speaking' the language of Venturi, mouthing his criticism about architecture. 'Hogo sometimes functions as a mouthpiece for Venturi', Hudgens notes without more than two short paragraphs of elaboration (90, 116). Trachtenberg's assessment about the influence of Venturi on Barthelme's writings is more

nanced. Most pertinently, he locates formal similarities between Barthelme's texts and Venturi's buildings. Trachtenberg writes:

Perhaps the clearest visual equivalent to Barthelme's fiction can be seen in such postmodern structures as those of Robert Venturi, whose Guild House or whose Visiting Nurses Headquarters, like Barthelme's stories, have frequently been accused of being merely pastiche. (19)

The underlying suggestion in this passage is that Barthelme's 'postmodern' literary genre is analogous with the 'postmodern' architectural style. Trachtenberg follows this observation by quoting from *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture's* 'gentle manifesto' (1966), which he claims 'can serve equally to describe Barthelme's own practice' (19). I will revisit Venturi in detail in chapters One and Three. While not particularly engaged with the subject of architecture, outside of the biographical, my reading of Barthelme is more indebted to Jerome Klinkowitz's *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* (1991) and Tracy Daugherty's *Hiding Man: A Biography of Donald Barthelme* (2009). By introducing a broader set of social phenomena into debates about postmodernity, my thesis necessitates a reconfiguration of how the architectural idiom is interpreted in Barthelme's and Ballard's literature.

This thesis is organised into five chapters. To account for Barthelme's strong biographical connections to architecture, the American author has three dedicated chapters, whereas Ballard has two. The first chapter undertakes a theoretical investigation of how Barthelme manipulates the spectacle of a 'commodified historicism', using a strategy similar to early postmodern architecture, to create a postmodern 'pastiche'. Engaging in a play with architectural morphology, from British Baroque to Burgundian Gothic, Barthelme builds a landscape of composite culture; this blending and problematising of architectural styles functions as an apparatus to critique both modernist orthodoxy and contemporary culture. Primarily addressed are Barthelme's short story collections *Sixty Stories* (1981) and *Forty Stories* (1987), focusing on: 'At the Tolstoy Museum' (1969), 'Paraguay' (1970), 'Construction' (1985), 'Bluebeard' (1986), 'The Genius' (1987), and 'Sentence' (1987).

Chapter Two explores the interrelated strategies of architecture, text and collage. Examining previously neglected archival materials from the Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, I identify the sources of his collages and their allusive meanings. In doing so, the author's underappreciated relationship with artistic collage techniques is further elucidated, revealing how indebted his work is to the innovations of Surrealist collage production. Principal amongst these influences is Max Ernst's 'historical' collage aesthetic. Also interrogated is how Barthelme amplifies the spatiality of his prose through the pictorial strategy of collage. Using the theories of Marshall McLuhan and Charles Jencks, I argue that Barthelme's technique of pictorial collage is an attempt to rival contemporary systems of representation (like television and radio) while recognising the significance of mass media on his work. Capturing the evolving landscape of contemporary mass culture, this chapter examines the relationship between text and image in Barthelme's short stories. This chapter's key texts are *The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine, or The Hithering Thithering Djinn* (1971), *Presents* (1980) and *The Emerald* (1979).

In Chapter Three I consider how Barthelme's *Paradise* (1986) demonstrates the ways in which architecture as a practice and discourse can be 'read', documenting and participating in societal challenges. Confronting modernism's 'failure' to provide a credible execution of the utopian city, this chapter argues that Barthelme attempts to give shape and contours to 'no-place'. In response to a rapidly changing urban landscape, the author interprets and reinterprets the utopian impulse. I also address, through archival and literary evidence, the influence of Barthelme's father in the formulation of *Paradise* – and more generally in the development of the writer's architectural imagination – which has been critically underappreciated or often mischaracterised.

Chapter Four takes an architectural look at Ballard's well-documented literary fixation with time. Crystallised in the recurring mysterious structures of the labyrinth, the spiral and the maze, I explore the ways in which time is 'made visible' in the short story collections, *Vermilion Sands* (1971) and *The Voices of Time* (1962). The titular short story 'The Voices of Time' (1960), and

an essay that Ballard wrote on the American earthwork sculptor Robert Smithson, prompted an illuminating series of letters with the British filmmaker Tacita Dean about time and labyrinths/spirals/mazes. I argue that, for Ballard, the labyrinth or maze is more than a spatial metaphor or narrative tool – it is the edifice, as *built structure*, that creates its temporal power and meaning. This chapter concludes with an analysis of an unpublished Vermilion Sands short story draft from the Papers of J. G. Ballard at the British Library.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I argue that Ballard's exposure to avant-garde architectural ideas, through the countercultural art collective, the Independent Group, is foundational to the creation of his image-saturated fiction. Departing from previous critical studies, this chapter visits the Independent Group's architectural contributions, which were central to the *This Is Tomorrow* (1956) exhibition and the early stages of the organisation more generally. My analysis of Ballard's textual collage *Project for a New Novel* (c. 1958) and *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) will further connect the author with midcentury avant-garde aesthetics. For Ballard, the consideration of architectural form and theory can have literary consequences. I conclude by charting how Ballard's sole concrete poem, 'Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill' (1968), investigates the visual and architectonic possibilities of language and writing.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Architecture as Spectacle and Commodity in Barthelme's *Sixty Stories* and *Forty Stories*

[The house was] wonderful to live in but strange to see on the Texas prairie. [...] On Sundays people used to park their cars out on the street and stare. We had a routine, the family, [...] [w]e used to get up from Sunday dinner, if enough cars had parked, and run out in front of the house in a sort of chorus line, doing high kicks.

Donald Barthelme (Daugherty 142)

Composed in the spirit of experimental postmodernism, Donald Barthelme's depictions of buildings resist national and chronological classification, blending historical periods to create an exhibition of spectacular architecture. Within Barthelme's best-known short story collections, *Sixty Stories* (1981) and *Forty Stories* (1987),<sup>23</sup> which are archetypical of his oeuvre, 'the real' and 'the invented' intermingle – at times they are indistinguishable (D. Barthelme *Not-Knowing* 56). To demonstrate the instability of these monoliths, the author's use of architectural language participates in this manipulation by creating a textual and pictorial collage of commodified historicism. Using a strategy similar to early postmodern architecture, Barthelme's 'play' with morphology creates a postmodern pastiche. This 'overstimulating' cannibalisation of past architectural styles, to invoke Fredric Jameson, also functions as a metafictional device (*Postmodernism, Or* 19). Antiquarian architectural prints and typographic devices are employed to heighten the reader's visual experience, emphasising the primacy of mass media in late capitalist culture. Problematizing conventional reader/text paradigms, the historical incongruity of these illustrations and references transforms the text itself into a spectacle; the reader is simultaneously observer and participant. As Guy Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967):

The spectacle's job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be *seen* [...]; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to

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<sup>23</sup> In 1982 *Sixty Stories* won the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction.

present-day society's generalized abstraction. This is not to say, however, that the spectacle itself is perceptible to the naked eye.<sup>24</sup> (17)

Constructing a landscape of composite culture where post-war consumerism, advertising, mass media and architecture commingle, Barthelme's project captures the postmodern spectacle, while playfully mirroring and occluding its intricacies.

Of the books published during Barthelme's lifetime, *Sixty Stories* and *Forty Stories* are the most retrospective. Both are anthological arrangements of previously published works, with the addition of new stories.<sup>25</sup> The organisation of *Sixty* underscores the survey-like nature of the book: the table of contents indicates by chronological order which volume each short story is from and the original date of publication. Contrarily, *Forty* is more resistant to classification. The layout posits each story as if previously unknown, removing it from its original order and context.<sup>26</sup> This 'reshuffling' creates new associative meaning and is arguably another playful embodiment of Barthelme's 'blank parody' of historiography (Jameson *Postmodernism, Or 17*). Due to these factors, *Sixty* and *Forty* are particularly appropriate for an examination of commodified historicism. I use the term 'commodified historicism' to denote a mode of historical thinking that has been so distorted through the lens of capitalist commodity production as to have lost an understanding of diachronic principles; a late twentieth-century breakdown of historical narrative sequencing. My approach relies on a benign characterisation of 'historicism', such as Raymond Williams's definition of 'a method of study which relies on the facts of the past and traces precedents of current events' (147).

This chapter examines how Barthelme manipulates the spectacle of commodified architecture as an apparatus to critique both modernist orthodoxy and contemporary culture. I would like to suggest that the execution of Barthelme's strategy mimics postmodern architecture's confrontation with the modern movement's perceived failures and ironies. Stanley

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<sup>24</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>25</sup> Many of the collected stories first appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine.

<sup>26</sup> The publication of the content of *Sixty* and *Forty* spans 1964–81 and 1974–87, respectively.

Trachtenberg's (1990) and Michael Thomas Hudgens's (2001) brief but perceptive readings of the 'architectural attributes' of Barthelme's work rely primarily on a biographical interpretation of the author's relationship to architectural practice and discourse – Barthelme's father was a successful modernist architect based in Houston (Hudgens 12). While Barthelme's familial intimacy with architecture is significant and surely the catalyst for his imagination, the way in which we can read architecture within his novels and short stories extends beyond a Freudian explanation.<sup>27</sup> For Barthelme, I argue in this discussion, architecture is a complex visual intertext incorporated as a system of representation designed in part to highlight popular displeasure with orthodox modernist architecture.

### **Consuming Architectural History: From Baroque to Bauhaus and Beyond**

Key to unpacking Barthelme's manipulation of the spectacle of architecture is Jameson's reading of early postmodern buildings in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Appropriately, Jameson identifies the synonyms for late capitalism as, "'spectacle of image society", "media capitalism", [...] and even "postmodernism" itself' (*Postmodernism, Or* xviii).<sup>28</sup> Citing Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia (1975–79) in New Orleans as an exemplar of 'the so-called historicism of the postmodern architects, and [...] their relationship to the classical language', the theorist describes this intersection of history and commodity:

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<sup>27</sup> Arguably, Barthelme does lend himself to this type of interpretation. His most critically successful novel, *The Dead Father* (1975), and his posthumously published novel, *The King* (1990), are both allegories of father/son hierarchy. Similarly, Klinkowitz's argument in *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* hinges on the centrality of this message. When asked in a 1975 radio interview about how he developed his own style as a writer, Barthelme referenced Hemingway stating: 'I think you do it by selecting fathers' (*Not-Knowing* 211–12). Despite this paternal slant, Barthelme has denied 'a strong autobiographical strain' to his fiction, although he does admit that his father's 'attitude' towards the dissemination of modernism was important to the development of his writing career (O'Hara 183). Although two of Barthelme's brothers studied architecture for a short period, there is no evidence to suggest, on the author's part, an architect manqué; when questioned if he ever considered becoming an architect Barthelme retorted that he always desired to be a writer (*Not-Knowing* 294).

<sup>28</sup> Emphasis added.

[T]he elements float loose under their own momentum, each becoming a sign or logo for architecture itself, which is thereby [...] consumed like a commodity [...] in contrast to the role such elements were called upon to play [...] in a modernism anxious to resist consumption and offer an experience that could not be commodified. (Jameson *Postmodernism, Or* 100–01)

The ‘elements’ referred to in this passage are the essential expressions of classical architecture, such as the ‘architrave, column, arch, order, lintel, dormer and dome’, which have been detached into a series of consumable spectacles under the phantasmagoric gaze of postmodernism (Jameson *Postmodernism, Or* 100).<sup>29</sup> Through this assemblage of historical references, architecture itself becomes a brand available for visual purchase, an architectonic signature of Warholian commodity fetishism. In postmodernism, the urgent sincerity of modernism is dismissed, replaced by a ‘depthlessness [...] a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense [...]’ (Jameson *Postmodernism, Or* 9).

The historical ‘antigravity’ of postmodernism is highlighted through Barthelme’s architectural intertext (Jameson *Postmodernism, Or* 101). Reflecting the dislocated nature of postmodernism is Barthelme’s literary style of the ‘short-short story’, ‘flash fiction’, or ‘sudden fiction’, which grew out of 1960s wordplay.<sup>30</sup> As one early critic of Barthelme commented, ‘We perceive in fragments, live in fragments [...]; should we not, then, write in fragments, emphasizing thereby the strange disjunctions, the even stranger juxtapositions, that are part of the everyday experience of modern life?’ (Schickel 15). Or, as the oft-quoted character of ‘See the Moon?’ (1968) states: ‘Fragments are the only forms I trust’ (D. Barthelme *Sixty* 100). This fragmentation also serves to spatialise the text, recasting it as a multi-dimensional medium – jump cutting from story to story, from scene to scene, from block of text to block of text – a parallax technique that defies conventional literary perspective, creating psychovisual collages of textuality, thus opening the potential of text rendered not as image but as ‘shapes’. Yet for

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<sup>29</sup> One should not confuse postmodern architecture’s deference for historical quotations with nostalgia; I prefer Jameson’s term ‘fascinations’, although I disagree that this fixation is ‘without principle’. In the words of Venturi: ‘As an architect I try to be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past – by precedent [...]’ (Venturi 13). See Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or*, pages 18–19 for his commentary on postmodernism and nostalgia.

<sup>30</sup> For further discussion of the short-short story style see Robert Shapard’s introduction to *Sudden Fiction* (1986).

Barthelme this tactic is less about creating a literature that *belongs* to the realm of ‘the visual’, and more about transforming the medium of text through the adoption of cinematic and photographic experiences (*Not-Knowing* 213).<sup>31</sup> As Barthelme simply describes this strategy in one of his few unrevised interviews, ‘You grab something outside of literature, drag it into literature and renew the writing thereby’ (*Not-Knowing* 214).<sup>32</sup>

Following this path of logic, where the textual and the visual interface, Jerome Klinkowitz characterises Barthelme’s first novel, *Snow White* (1967), as using the ‘facilitating principle of collage’, which the critic then claims matured into a technique of ‘silkscreening’ in the author’s second novel, *The Dead Father* (1975). Klinkowitz describes how this ‘silkscreening of language’ informs the novel: the narrative elements are ‘photomechanically superimposed’ and ‘bleed through’, creating ‘simple juxtaposition’ (8). ‘[T]he principle of collage is one of the central principles of art in this century’, Barthelme wrote (*Not-Knowing* 76). Ironically, Barthelme’s third novel, *Paradise* (1986), the text that most overtly engages with architectural discourse, is perhaps his least ‘spatial’ novel, exhibiting a distinct ‘flatlessness’ through the relatively strong sense of narrative cohesion. Perhaps more predictably, and, I would argue, partially due to this non-dimensionality, *Paradise* was also Barthelme’s least critically successful novel and is frequently overlooked for scholarly engagement.<sup>33</sup>

To return to the theories of Jameson, for Barthelme ‘[m]odernist styles [...] become postmodernist codes’ (*Postmodernism, Or* 17). This technique is perhaps most clearly articulated in ‘Sentence’ (1987). One of the author’s most recognised short stories, ‘Sentence’ is one long multi-page passage, ‘full of self-interruptions and searching detours and not quite dead ends’

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<sup>31</sup> For example, see Barthelme’s comments about the influence of film on literary ‘pace’. In this context Barthelme also makes observations about John Ashbery’s use of the ‘jump cut’ in his early poetry and Thomas Pynchon’s ‘long’ but ‘swift’ novels (*Not-Knowing* 213).

<sup>32</sup> According to Kim Herzinger, after most interviews Barthelme had the opportunity to amend his comments prior to publication (*Not-Knowing* 330). Much of the correspondence relating to these changes can be found in the University of Houston Special Collections.

<sup>33</sup> See Patrick O’Donnell, ‘Living Arrangements: On Donald Barthelme’s *Paradise*’, *Critical Essays on American Literature*, ed. Richard F. Patteson (New York: Hall & Co, 1992) xiii, 220.

(Moore 25). Characteristic of the author's work, the short story begins with an experimental premise, and through the disjointed progression of the narrative develops the theme into a broader message:

[...] and here comes Ludwig, the expert on sentence construction we have borrowed from the Bauhaus, who will – “Guten Tag, Ludwig!” – probably find a way to cure the sentence's sprawl, by using the improved ways of thinking developed in Weimar – “I am sorry to inform you that the Bauhaus no longer exists, that all of the great masters who formerly thought there are either dead or retired, and that I myself have been reduced to constructing books on how to pass the examination for police sergeant’ – and Ludwig falls through the Tugendhat House into the history of man-made objects, not the one we wanted of course, but still a construction of man, a structure to be treasured for its weakness, as opposed to the strength of stones.<sup>34</sup> (D. Barthelme *Forty* 153)

The character Ludwig refers, in part, to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969),<sup>35</sup> director of the Bauhaus School of Design from 1930 until the institution closed in 1933 under Nazi pressure.<sup>36</sup>

The implication that Ludwig is an expert on ‘sentence construction’ who can ‘cure’ the ills of the run-on sentence, suggestively referred to as ‘sprawl’ – evoking urban or residential sprawl – is a statement designed to mock the presumption of orthodox modernist architects’ claims to be able to ‘solve’ the challenges of town planning through innovation and technology. For example, in Le Corbusier's *The Radiant City* (1935), he suggests conserving land for green spaces by ‘purging’ cities of their original structures, replacing them with vertical buildings that can house 1,500 people per tower block. This type of insensitivity to the social needs of human beings underlies Jane Jacobs's influential critique of twentieth-century urban planning,<sup>37</sup> *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), where she underscores Greenwich Village in New York City as an

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<sup>34</sup> Note in the original text there is no punctuation at the end of this passage.

<sup>35</sup> In all likelihood, the name also refers to the language philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Although best-known for his philosophical contributions, Wittgenstein also ‘acted as the architect of a city mansion in Vienna which was commissioned by his sister, [...] Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein’ (Wijdeveld 11). For a study of the ‘connections [...] between [his] architectural exercise and his philosophical work’, see Paul Wijdeveld, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Architect* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994). Also see Bernhard Leitner's, *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1973) and *The Wittgenstein House* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Early in his career Donald Barthelme Sr. actually met Mies and complained to the German architect that his buildings lacked ‘human scale’. See Tracy Daugherty, *Hiding Man: A Biography of Donald Barthelme* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009) 15.

<sup>37</sup> Despite the onslaught of public criticism that followed in years to come, Le Corbusier's proposal was not an intentionally oppressive architectural exercise. His motivation stemmed from a desire to address Depression-era urban social problems (eliminate slums, improve sanitation, etc.) and provide more liveable spaces.

example of a successful urban community – the neighbourhood where Barthelme lived during the writing of most of his short stories.

Ludwig's 'fall' through one of his most iconic structures 'into the history of man-made objects' is symbolic of the decline of modernism from the grandeur of the experimental 'new' into historical narrative, thus intimating that history is in a constant state of being written and rewritten, and that architecture plays a role in determining this authorship. Architecture 'speaks', proffering alternative ways of narrating culture, confirming Lewis Mumford's argument that cities reflect the societies that built them. For Barthelme, architecture and language operate within the same paradigm of narrative assembly. This unity of 'conceptual ordering' is described by Sophia Psarra in *Architecture and Narrative* (2009):

A narrative requires a narrator and a reader in the same way in which architecture requires an architect and a viewer. A narrative, therefore, is not only the content of the story that is narrated, or the way in which it is interpreted by readers, but also the way in which it is structured and presented to an audience by an authorial entity, a writer, [...] an architect [...]. The relationship between narrative structure, perceptual experience and representation is the aspect of narrative that is most relevant to architecture. (2)

'Sentence' ends on a conciliatory note, thankful for the flaws of human beings when compared to the cold rigidity of stones. Writing/building, an extension of the writer/architect dichotomy, is entangled in this nexus of humanity, at times grammatically/structurally flawed, sublimely imperfect.

Disarmingly conversational, the story's linkage of architecture and language, two types of formal structure, is worthy of further pause. Due to the decline of the Bauhaus, Ludwig is 'reduced' to being a writer; he now 'constructs' books instead of buildings. This comment is tinged with irony since Mies was ambivalent about the relationship between language and buildings: 'Build – don't talk,' the architect famously remarked (Forty 13). In Adrian Forty's *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (2000), he examines the historical and modernist tension between 'seeing language as lying within architecture, or foreign to it' (11). Forty asserts that in the twentieth century the relationship between architecture and

expressive language has been neglected because of the restrictive ‘modern tendency to identify architecture primarily with the mental work of creative invention’ (12). Forty highlights the assumption in architecture, and other visual art practices, that sensory experience is ‘fundamentally incompatible with [experiences] mediated through language’ (Forty 12). To underscore this point, Forty quotes *The New Vision* (1928), by Hungarian Bauhaus teacher and artist, László Moholy-Nagy: ‘Language is inadequate to formulate the exact meaning and the rich variations of the realm of sensory experiences’ (Forty 13). In ‘Sentence’ Barthelme rejects this notion, and presents three types of ‘construction’ as coequal, interlocking concepts: the construction of books, the construction of buildings and the ‘construction of man’. Barthelme emphasises how each of these constructions are products of human intervention, deriving their power and weakness from ‘man’ himself.

Echoing a curiosity about the commonalities and divergences of architectural construction and textual composition is Barthelme’s essay ‘After Joyce’ (1964), first published in the short-lived New York arts magazine *Location* of which he was managing editor.<sup>38</sup> In the essay, which is Barthelme’s ‘earliest extended aesthetic statement’ (*Not-Knowing* 322), he explains how the Joycean ‘literary object’ modified how readers (and non-readers) perceive the world.

The reader is not listening to an authoritative account of the world delivered by an expert (Faulkner on Mississippi, Hemingway on the corrida) but bumping into something that is *there*, like a rock or refrigerator. The question so often asked of modern painting, “What is it?” contains more than the dull skepticism of the man who is not going to have the wool pulled over his eyes. It speaks of a fundamental placement in relation to the work, that of a voyager in the world coming upon a strange object. The reader reconstitutes the work by his active participation, by approaching the object, tapping it, shaking it, holding it to his ear to hear the roaring within. It is characteristic of the object that it does not declare itself all at once, in a rush of pleasant naiveté. Joyce enforces the way in which *Finnegans Wake* is to be read. He conceived the reading to be a lifetime project, the book remaining always there, like the landscape surrounding the reader’s home or the buildings bounding the reader’s apartment. The book remains problematic, unexhausted.<sup>39</sup> (D. Barthelme ‘After Joyce’ 42)

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<sup>38</sup> Although Barthelme moved from Houston to New York to work on *Location*, the magazine only published two issues, one in 1963 and the other in 1964. ‘After Joyce’ was printed in the latter.

<sup>39</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

When reading ‘Sentence’ in tandem with this essay, particularly in light of the reference to Joyce and Faulkner, one is immediately reminded of both authors’ infamously long sentences.<sup>40</sup> Not just compositional play, Barthelme’s employment of a cumbersome syntactical structure is a reminder that space, like language syntax, is socially constructed (Weisman 2). Expanding on the allegorical path of author as architect, just as the physical buildings and neighbourhoods making up the twentieth-century city are sculpted by the intervention and design of architects and urban planners, so also the city when rendered into text is constructed by the author’s hand.

Joyce, like some buildings, is impenetrable and monumental. Barthelme elucidates this point in an interview on *The Dead Father*, explaining how great authorial predecessors are ‘a problem’ for the aspiring new avant-garde; he describes these ancestral obstacles as the ‘lions in the path’ (*Not-Knowing* 226). Speculating as to Beckett’s reaction to Joyce’s artistic legacy, Barthelme states, ‘Beckett must have felt, “Good lord, this enormous achievement here that I myself have to do something [...] that is as monumental and totally different. How in the world am I going to do that?” And he found a way’ (*Not-Knowing* 226). The monolithic features of Joyce are not just a result of compositional structure, but also due to the grandeur of his artistic strategy and formal innovation. Similar to Joyce, the spectacle of Barthelme’s text is derived from its metafictional qualities, asking the reader to participate in the process of decoding its riddles and anthems.

The question of formal interart comparison was central to the project of *Location*. As one of the editors’ introductions to the first issue reads:

because art and literature had become segregated in an age of specialization [...] [t]he point of departure for *Location* was therefore a literary magazine without poems, short stories, or essays. This unattainable objective was then compromised piece by piece in favor of writers who had not solved the problem of form by shoving it aside. (*Not-Knowing* 321)

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<sup>40</sup> Although also known for his terse prose, Faulkner was listed under ‘longest sentence’ in *The Guinness Book of Records* (1982) for a 1300 word sentence in *Absalom, Absalom!*, his 1936 novel which incidentally features an architect (McWhirter et al. 94).

Attuned to this methodological challenge, Barthelme repeatedly employs an architectural simile to create an argument about language: '[T]he book remaining always there, like the landscape surrounding the reader's home or the buildings bounding the reader's apartment' (D. Barthelme 'After Joyce' 42). He further uses this method of allusion in 'After Joyce' when incorporating postmodern authors into his analysis. Examining William Burroughs's technique for creating 'a fresh mode of cognition', Barthelme writes (*Not-Knowing* 5):

The form of [Burroughs's] work, in other words, suggests that a chunk of a large building may fall on you at any moment. Burroughs' [sic] form is inspired, exactly appropriate to his terroristic purpose. [...] Burroughs cannot be read for very long at a sitting; like Joyce he enforces contemplation, dictates the way in which his work must be approached. (*Not-Knowing* 8)

This passage captures the degree to which buildings are deterministic, controlling through physical form the nature of the activity that takes place between their walls. Similarly, the texts of Joyce and Burroughs both 'dictate' how they are to be read through the configuration of their prose.

It is also from the perspective of architecture that Barthelme disputes Klinkowitz's assessment that the author's engagement with modernism is only on the level of form, not content (13–19). In 'Bluebeard' (1986), an absurdist retelling of Charles Perrault's late seventeenth-century tale, the aristocrat's seventh wife recounts a conversation with Bluebeard:

"The history of architecture is the history of the struggle for light," [Bluebeard] said one day. I have latterly seen his remark attributed to the Swiss Le Corbusier, but it was first uttered, to my certain knowledge, in our sitting room, Bluebeard paging through a volume of Palladio. (D. Barthelme *Forty* 82–83)

The latter name refers to Andrea Palladio, a Renaissance architect practising in Venice and Vicenza, to whom the eighteenth-century Venetian architect Giacomo Leoni dedicated a four-volume study. The Le Corbusier (1887–1965) quote is from *Toward an Architecture* (1923), a manifesto of modernist architecture for the mechanised age. Referencing this important work of radical architectural theory with the suggestion of plagiarism, or at least an implication that the tenets are less than original, serves to humble and domesticate the modern movement, demystifying its elite (and perhaps inaccessible) concepts and ideologies. In *Modern Architecture*

*Since 1900* (1982) William Curtis acknowledges that in the 1920s modernist architecture was only accessible to

isolated pockets of upper-middle-class bohemia, or [...] large-scale planning bureaucracies with a progressive look. The taste of ‘everyman’ in the 1920s was frankly more at home with [...] the Arts and Crafts movement, which had [...] been based on time-worn notions of dwelling. [T]he creations stemming from the Bauhaus [...] were likely to be seen as emblems of a highbrow clique. (Curtis 291)

The fact that Bluebeard is inspired to expound on the Le Corbusier passage while reading an eighteenth-century study of a Cinquecento architect is a playful blasphemy of the modern movement’s rejection of historical allusions.

As the name ‘International Style’ suggests, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson’s manufactured movement envisioned a homogenous model of architecture, irrespective of place or vernacular tradition. In architectural discourse this is frequently referred to as a style that does not ‘communicate’ – in essence, a method without historical homage, disconnected from geographic situation. Encapsulating the most frequent criticism of modernist architecture, Charles Jencks writes:

Among the several ills that modern architecture suffered during its brief reign as the dominant mode of building in the West—from the late 1920s to the early 1960s—was the loss of historical consciousness. This was a self-inflicted condition [...] due to strictures of such architects as Walter Gropius, who wished to ban the teaching of architectural history from the Bauhaus. [...] The result of this doctrine soon became apparent: an abstract architecture shorn of location in place and time, an architecture of amnesia. (‘Time Fusion’ 141–42)

Of course, promoters of the International Style studied the classical orders, and some architects like Le Corbusier referenced his trips to Greece as locations of inspiration; yet despite this, the dogma of orthodox modernist architecture demanded the omission of history from its dominant discourse. The concept was to create a design of technological principles, free from the ‘yoke’ of history. These architects believed that in order for buildings to be ‘transparent, functional, and necessary’ it was prerequisite to be ‘acultural and ahistorical’ (Jencks ‘Time Fusion’ 141–42).

The modernist architectural spectacle was intended to be an experience predicated on clarity, innovation and formal exploration. Consider Le Corbusier’s description of the experience

of entering his L-shaped Villa La Roche. In *Oeuvre complète* (1946–70) he writes, ‘You enter: the architectural spectacle at once offers itself to the eye; [...] Here, reborn for our modern eyes, are historic architectural events: pilotis, the horizontal window, the roof garden, the glass façade’ (Colomina 5).<sup>41</sup> This spectacularised ‘rebirth’ of form is a wholly different approach to the classical ornamentation of postmodern architecture, as described by Jameson. Although Le Corbusier’s building contains what he defined as ‘classical hierarchy’, the ‘event’ of the space is not a result of usurped architectural histories of the past, but due to inventing *new* histories.<sup>42</sup> Where postmodernism promotes classical precedent and then reconfigures its elements, modernism’s desire is to reshape architectural language anew.<sup>43</sup>

Further emphasising this debate about history and architectural practice, on the following page of ‘Bluebeard’ Barthelme layers additional architectural references from the past.

[T]he restoration of the south wing of the castle, [was] bastardized in the eighteenth century by busy bodies who had overlaid the Georgian pristinity with Baroque rickrack in the manner of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor. Striding here and there in [Bluebeard’s] big India-rubber boots, cursing the trembling masons on the scaffolding and the sweating carpenters on the ground, [Bluebeard] was all in all a fine figure of a man. (*Forty* 83)

What first appears to be an arbitrary culling of the architectural canon, a strange catalogue of fixations, is, in fact, a calculated act of pastiche. Moving swiftly from early twentieth-century modernism to Georgian and British Baroque, Barthelme conflates time. Seizing upon multiple historical periods in rapid succession, the author is mirroring early postmodern architecture’s reliance on the signifiers of history, favoring dispersive imagery to ‘wholeness’.

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<sup>41</sup> As cited and translated by Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (London: MIT Press, 1994) 5.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the classical elements of Le Corbusier’s Villa La Roche see Kurt Walter Forster, ‘Antiquity and Modernity in the La Roche-Jeanneret Houses of 1923’, *Oppositions* Winter-Spring. 15–16 (1979).

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Vidler has a divergent opinion on modernist and postmodernist architecture’s relationship to history. Vidler suggests that while modernism was resistant to history and strove to eliminate its influence, these efforts themselves were a point of intellectual contact with history. Modernist architecture was already being ‘historicised’, as its own period style, by the 1940s (*Histories* 9). Postmodernism, however, is ahistorical since it arbitrarily decontextualises historical periods through fragmentation and assemblage. See Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

This strategy of ‘ornamental layering and vernacular mannerism’ has an architectural analogue in the works of Robert Venturi (Trachtenberg 19). In Venturi’s influential ‘gentle manifesto’ of postmodernism, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), the architect suggests hybridising architectural histories to influence contemporary work. He advises learning from the Italian masters like Borromini (1599–1667), and twentieth century adapters of traditional styles such as Edwin Lutyens (1889–1944), to overcome the ‘contradictory’ forces of building and landscape. Among the historical periods emphasised are Baroque, Mannerist and Rococo.<sup>44</sup> Barthelme’s casual dismissal of Baroque as ‘rickrack’ may suggest an ambivalence towards Venturi’s theories, or perhaps architectural postmodernist theory in general. More likely the author is resistant to the authority of *any* aesthetic movement that claims to have found a ‘solution’ to dwelling, a hesitation that Venturi would probably echo. As suggested by Hudgens, the pattern of Barthelme’s stories is one of ‘question-posing’ not ‘problem-solving’ (108). Similarly, Venturi championed the ‘distorted rather than “straightforward,” ambiguous rather than “articulated”’ (*Complexity* 16). Conscious of the problematic legacy of the ‘heroic modern architect with utopian visions’, Venturi advocated a more ‘modest’ role for designers of the future (Ellin 58).

Yet this is not to imply that Barthelme’s representations of architects reflect an unrestrained disavowal of the ‘megalomaniacal architect’ trope, a figure immortalised in the late twentieth century by Ayn Rand’s 1943 *roman à clef* about Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Fountainhead*.<sup>45</sup> Notably, Barthelme’s father was a great admirer of Wright, a paragon of wilful ambition, technical ability and unapologetic innovation. In *Sixty*’s final short-story, ‘Grandmother’s House’ (1979), one detects an uncharacteristic sombre admiration for this trope, in this instance expressed through the narrator’s adoration for Antonio Gaudí. Appropriately, Gaudí is an

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<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that Nicholas Hawksmoor’s architectural style is frequently compared to Borromini’s.

<sup>45</sup> Of course, this point is open to debate. While Rand denied Wright’s influence on her work, the parallels with Howard Roark are improbably similar for many to believe her claim. Regardless, in a 1943 letter to a fan Rand explains, ‘I chose [architecture] [...] because one cannot find a more eloquent symbol of man as a creator than a man who is a builder’ (Britting 51).

architect who resists classification, fusing Gothic geometries, Art Nouveau curves and a fantastical imagination – he is one configuration of the architectural madman/genius.<sup>46</sup>

Expressing his perspective on the role of the architect, Gaudí declared, ‘The architect is a ruler in the truest sense of the word, since he is not presented with a finished constitution, but must first lay it down. This is why great rulers are called the master architects of the people’ (Zerbst 4).

Amongst a fragmented dialogue about Grandmother’s house receiving landmark status, building a brothel, and the parenting of teenage girls, one of the unnamed speakers delivers a lyrical soliloquy on the Sagrada Familia, Gaudí’s life-long unfinished icon of the Barcelona skyline. The speaker recounts how he ‘swooned’ in the presence of the vast cathedral:

—But when I saw the great Gaudí church in Barcelona, the great Sagrada Familia, the great ghost of a cathedral [...], then did I realize especially after seeing also the plans and models [...] for those portions of the great cathedral not yet built and perhaps never to be built, [...] the artisans in smocks still working on the beautifully inked plans and the white plaster models, and the workmen on the extant towers of the Templo Expiatorio de la Segrada Familia in Barcelona, [...] the amazingly few but truly dedicated workmen still working under the burning inspiration of the sainted Catalan architect Antonio Gaudí, having seen all this I then realized what I had not realized before, what had escaped my notice these many years, that not only is less more but that *more is more too*. I swooned, under the impact of the ethical corollary.

—What is the ethical corollary?

—More.<sup>47</sup> (D. Barthelme *Sixty* 447–48)

In this compressed Gaudí hagiography, the primary speaker captures the grandeur, the excess, the ‘higher calling’ of architecture. In the process, Barthelme manipulates the concepts of physical creator and spiritual creator, conflating god and architect – an association with a long ancestry, dating back to the ancient Egyptians (Kostof 5). While the second speaker later emphasises Gaudí was ‘laboring *in nomine Domini*’ (*Sixty* 448), the popular legacy of Sagrada Familia is not as a shrine to the workings of God, but to the endurance and vision of the human spirit. More precisely, the spirit exalted is that of Antonio Gaudí himself, creator-architect immortal, posthumously guiding the hand of the living.

Straddling Mies (‘less is more’) and Venturi (‘less is a bore’), Barthelme’s speaker (‘*more is more too*’) moderates between the minimalism of modernism and the decorativeness of

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<sup>46</sup> Gaudí has been claimed by some postmodernists, such as Jencks, as one of their own.

<sup>47</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

postmodernism, seeking equipoise between these two prominent forces of twentieth-century design. Again, Barthelme's resistance to absolutes is illuminated. The statement, 'not only is less more but [...] more is more too', is a less authoritative dictum, in the vein of Mies and the more 'gentle' Venturi, than respectful observer offering conciliatory mediation. The tone acknowledges the validity of each movements' critiques while calling the reader's attention to alternative possibilities of 'newness' – like Gaudí, a figure situated outside of the master narrative of artistic movements, specifically the linear story of modernism transmogrifying into postmodernism.

'The Palace' (1973) reveals a similar gesture towards collaboration.<sup>48</sup> In this short story a man waiting in line at a New York City bank fantasises about the creation of a palace co-designed by prominent modernist and postmodernist architects, from Richard Neutra to Louis Kahn to Venturi. The type of collaboration imagined is one where each architect defies their signature style to create a greater level of synergy between their work and that of their peers. 'Kahn's dark-red brick towers look amazing and lovely against Mies's exposed steel (in this case, Cor-Ten, which rusts to a handsome reddish brown, rather than his usual black-painted steel—just one instance of the courtesy and tact and sweetness that prevailed)' (D. Barthelme *Don B* 24). At the end of the speaker's musings about all the different components each architect contributed, the narrator marvels, 'The wonderful part was that the whole place *worked*, it came together beautifully, none of the architects tried to upstage each other—the palace appears to be the product of a single hand' (D. Barthelme *Don B* 24).<sup>49</sup>

Underlying this seemingly innocuous concessionary tone is Barthelme's discomfort with taxonomy, a scepticism which extends from his own work as a writer to architecture. When discussing the largely rhetorical debate about 'what is postmodernism?', Barthelme states that his

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<sup>48</sup> 'The Palace', originally published in the December 24, 1973 issue of *The New Yorker*, was later slightly altered and reprinted in the non-fiction collection *Guilty Pleasures* (1976). *The New Yorker* version was originally located in the magazine's 'Notes and Comment' section, unsigned and untitled (D. Barthelme *Don B* 342). Blurring the line between fact and fiction, it now appears in the posthumous *The Teachings of Don B.: Satires, Parodies, Fables, Illustrated Stories, and Plays of Donald Barthelme* (1992), edited by Kim Herzinger.

<sup>49</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

writing is about realism – in the Harold Rosenberg ‘realism is one of the fifty-seven varieties of decoration’ sense of the term (*Not-Knowing* 316). However, Barthelme did express a reluctant openness to the ‘postmodernism’ label since it was the ‘most descriptive’, when compared to alternatives such as ‘metafiction’, ‘surfiction’, or ‘superfiction’ (*Not-Knowing* 267). Venturi was even more adamant about his lack of association with postmodernism, declaring in the May 2001 issue of *Architecture*: ‘I am not now and never have been a postmodernist and I unequivocally disavow fatherhood of this architectural movement. [...] There was no promotion of postmodernism in *Complexity* [...], but ironically, accusations abound that that book started it’ (‘A Bas Postmodernism’ 154). Barthelme was extremely well acquainted with the theories developed by Venturi and quotes liberally from *Complexity* in the author’s third novel *Paradise*, published the same year as ‘Bluebeard’.<sup>50</sup>

While there are numerous twentieth-century references throughout ‘Bluebeard’, the time in which the story is set is nebulous, as if chronology was irrelevant and the distant past and the recent past coincide. For Barthelme, modernism is firmly classified as ‘the past’. As indicated by David Gates in his introduction to *Sixty*, ‘by the time Barthelme came along, even making it new was getting old’ (Gates xi). This is not to suggest that the more historically inclined architectural movements are not exploited in Barthelme’s writings. For instance, in ‘Sinbad’ (1984) the protagonist of the same name attends the Beaux-Arts Ball sponsored by ‘the Arts and Architecture Departments’ where he sees ‘a young woman wearing what appeared to be men’s cotton underwear’ (D. Barthelme *Forty* 19). When asked, the woman says she has come dressed as Lady Macbeth. Similar to all the non-sequential scenes of the narrative, this event occurs without explanation and the reader is left to wonder what connection a scantily clad woman might have to neoclassical architecture. If one is a scholar of architecture, it might be known that the Beaux-Arts Ball is a notoriously louche affair where cross-dressing is commonplace. Yet when

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<sup>50</sup> *Paradise* and its relationship with postmodern architecture will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

confronted with this spectacularised image, even the knowledgeable reader is forced to recognise the absurdity of this academic institution's tradition, a hidden irrationality of conventional culture. The quizzical humour is amplified when one considers that the Beaux-Arts teaching was accused by critics of 'erring in the direction of academicism' (Curtis 28). While Barthelme has a penchant for industry jargon and boasts of his 'misuse of language', a seemingly democratic principle aligned with Jameson's concept of postmodern 'aesthetic populism',<sup>51</sup> at times the polymathy required to unpack Barthelme's works undercuts this generalisation (*Not-Knowing* 56).

Despite these references to other architectural traditions, modernist orthodoxy provides the most frequent reference point for *Sixty* and *Forty*. This is not surprising when one recalls that postmodernism is 'post-modernism' – after and reacting to modernism. To follow Jean-François Lyotard, the "post-" of "postmodernism" has the sense of [...] succession, a [...] conversation [with] a new direction from the previous one' (Lyotard 410).<sup>52</sup>

For Barthelme, the development of an architectural dialectic began at an early age. Growing up on the outskirts of Houston in a house resembling Mies's Villa Tugendhat, the Barthelme family was, as the author states, 'enveloped in Modernism' (O'Hara 184). The family patriarch and designer of the house, Donald Barthelme, Sr., was a zealous convert to the International Style and trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition (H. M. Barthelme 7). The building existed in a constant state of amendment. Barthelme, Sr. was meticulous in his following of modernist design principles, regularly rearranging the domestic space, tearing down walls if necessary to achieve his iconoclastic vision. Capitalising on the readily available workforce of his four sons, the entire family participated in the evolution of their father's project in every aspect, from rug making to demolition (Daugherty 19–20). The house, which Barthelme described as an 'anomaly amidst all the houses around it', was effectively a showcase for modernism featuring

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<sup>51</sup> To illustrate postmodernism's 'aesthetic populism' Jameson references the title of Venturi and Scott Brown's *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972) (*Postmodernism, Or 2*).

<sup>52</sup> Lyotard does admit that this conceptualisation implies a linear understanding of chronology.

Aalvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen furniture (Daugherty 18–19). This intimate understanding of spatial aesthetics was coupled, and perhaps reinforced by, the unusual landscape of Houston, Texas – the only major city in the United States without zoning ordinances.<sup>53</sup> An article in *The New York Review of Books* speculates as to the ‘deep and abiding influence’ of Barthelme’s first three decades in Houston, where ‘surreal juxtapositions (billboards next to churches next to barbecue shacks)’ define the environment, ‘[...] though his early reading of Mallarmé is usually given the credit’ (Moore 26). Even after Barthelme moved out of his parent’s house, and began to develop his own literary aesthetic, the author continued to take great care in the design of his domestic space, enthusiastically decorating his residences with modernist furniture (H. M. Barthelme 48–49).

The post-World War II ‘victory’ of the modern movement in the United States gave way to ‘corporate status quo’ as the idealistic blueprints of the 1920s gradually became ‘absorbed by the contradictions and cycles of mass industrialism’ (Curtis 239). While the author recalls how in the late 1920s and early 1930s modernist architecture was ‘visually and spiritually important’, Barthelme also notes that by the 1980s modernist design had reached an anticlimactic juncture and there was ‘Aalto-derived furniture in the airport waiting rooms’ (Brans 121-22). One of the speakers of Barthelme’s short story ‘Rif’ (1987) captures the counterfeit vulgarisation of once avant-garde design, when she describes how her new neighbours have ‘shockingly, identical’ furniture to hers. Among the items listed are, ‘two wrong-side-of-the-blanket sons of the Wassily chairs’, ‘black enamel near-Mackintosh chairs’, ‘brass quasi-Eames torchères’, and a ‘fake Ettore Sottsass faux-marble coffee table with cannonball legs’ (D. Barthelme *Forty* 40).<sup>54</sup> No longer

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<sup>53</sup> Zoning ordinances are the American equivalent to British planning and building regulations.

<sup>54</sup> Wassily chairs were designed by Bauhaus associated architect and designer Marcel Lajos Breuer (1902–81), featuring structural frames of chrome covered bent-steel tubes. Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928) was a Scottish architect and interior designer of the Glasgow School. Charles Orman Eames (1907–78) was an American designer and architect; he and his wife Ray Eames were known primarily for curved plywood chairs and modular storage units. Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007) was an Austrian-born architect practising in Italy. He eventually disowned the modernist aesthetic, objecting to the morality of Bauhaus

shepherd of ‘the new’, in Barthelme’s texts modernism is used as a historical location. Conscious of the irony of relegating modernist architects to merely ‘another’ historical period within the canon of architecture, Barthelme also indiscriminately places postmodern design within the same paradigm. Here Barthelme is responding to the rapid cultural permeation of design into mainstream consciousness in the era of late capitalism. By the time Barthelme authored ‘Rif’, Ettore Sottsass’s subversive postmodern works of the 1970s had seeped into the Italian suburbs, ice-cream parlours and gaudy three-star hotels, in bastardised form. Mimicking this intersection of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, Sottsass then utilised this phenomenon in the 1980s as a location of inspiration. The resulting aesthetic belonged to a ‘nonspecific past’, a palimpsest of history, recent past and contemporary (Sudjic *Things* 84).

Postmodernism was decidedly comfortable with commerciality and artificiality, unabashedly welcoming the messy insincerity of mass consumer culture. When, in 1984, the American furniture manufacturer Knoll hired Venturi and his partner Denise Scott Brown to design a range of chairs, Deyan Sudjic, director of the Design Museum in London recalled that ‘it seemed as if the postmodern moment had really come’ (*Things* 81). Venturi sought to subvert ‘Miesian purity’ by recollecting memory and association through a sense of commodified historicism. The architect designed:

a series of three-dimensional cartoons that evoke the forms of Chippendale or Queen Anne, or apply decorative patterns to bent plywood. They were deliberately transgressive [...] a reference to another moment, in contrast to the modernist idea of approaching design as though nothing had ever been done before.

They were ironic [...] in that they were to be taken not literally [...] but as a commentary [...]. To sit on a chair that provides you with a cartoonish memory of Chippendale craftsmanship but does not give you the reality of that craftsmanship [...] lay[s] out the associative nature of design. (Sudjic *Things* 81, 84)

In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century the postmodern architects’ affinity for commerciality has extended further into the sphere of mass-markets. Modelled on Alessi’s

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philosophy and its claim to ‘timelessness’. Rejecting rationalism, he was well-known for his eclectic styles, which fused historical styles and periods. (Curl 110, 464–65, 252, 728)

success, the commodified architect is personified by figures like Michael Graves, whose cutlery at the American mega-retailer Target proudly features his image on the packaging (Sudjic *Things* 35). The postmodern architect actively participates in capitalism's mobilisation of fantasies, stimulating desire and consumption. An extension of commodity fetishism, this is the architect as celebrity, recasting his or her buildings in the role of pornographic avatar.

In a sense Barthelme anticipates this eventuality in 'The Genius' (1987), an eclectic account of a questionably profound scholar who simultaneously lampoons academic and celebrity culture. A savagely humorous story, part of 'the genius's' intellectual ritual is a type of architectural tourism – voyeuristic visits to historic architectural spectacles as a means of validating his elite status. 'The genius is only visiting the church in the first place because the nave is said to be a particularly fine example of Burgundian Gothic' (D. Barthelme *Forty* 12). The reader is wryly aware that this is the same genius who declared earlier that the most important tool of today's genius is 'rubber cement' (D. Barthelme *Forty* 8). The veracity of his intellectual pursuit is dubious, opening the possibility of architecture as simply an activity or product, performed or acquired as a means of enhancing one's own personal stature, a symbol of cultural charade.

In contrast, the subject of political economy was a tenuous one for the modern movement. While the theorists of the Deutscher Werkbund rejected capitalism, they simultaneously wished to retain industrialisation and a technological future, especially in relation to mass-produced buildings. The belief was in the 'third way', a space in between capitalism and communism, a location that was never realised (Colquhoun 11). This is not to suggest that modernist architecture had no relationship with commerce. Architecture as an industry requires large financial investment and highly skilled labour; modernist architecture relied on corporations and wealthy patrons to further its implementation. As suggested previously, by the 1950s corporate America began to utilise modernist architecture as a model of efficiency and a marketing tool. Moving from counterculture to commercial, during this same period a soft-drink advertisement featured 'a

rosy-cheeked Santa sitting in a form-fitting Saarinen chair with a bottle of Coke' (Nicolai). While Mies appeared to be content to tint the glass of the Seagram Building (1954–58) the colour of his commissioner's whisky, underlying this flagrant advancement of corporate prestige was still a sincere agenda of public service. The deadpan humour of 'The Palace' exploits this bifurcation when the narrator asserts:

Mies [...] Corbu [...] Nervi and Aalto and Neutra and Saarinen and Louis Kahn and all sorts of other people, all geniuses, got interested [in the palace], contributed bits, ideas, little pieces, because none of them had ever done a palace before — I mean real, honest-to-God palace, as opposed to a corporate headquarters. (D. Barthelme *Don B* 24)

Barthelme directly acknowledges this changing professional reality for architects in his introduction to an exhibition catalogue for 'Architectural Graphics'<sup>55</sup> (1960) sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Association and held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. In his first publication for the Association, he writes:

Many of the largest corporations are now paying a great deal of attention to the kind of image they present to the public. This is reflected in the increasing use of celebrated architects for factories and company headquarters, in the increasing homage paid to the idea of comprehensive design programs, embracing every facet of the corporation's endeavours. [...]

The burden of carrying all these messages falls ultimately on the design and the designer. He must mediate between the character of the building [...], the character of the client or the client's product, and the character of the situation in which his work will be placed, the already existing complex of messages with which his must compete. (D. Barthelme *Not-Knowing* 166)

On the cusp of postmodern design, Barthelme's commentary is a harbinger of a new style, capturing the shifting landscape of architectural praxis – one of commercial challenges and opportunities. As Spiro Kostof recalls in *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession* (1977), from the 1960s through to the 1970s in architecture schools in the United States there was serious concern about the 'future of architecture' (xviii). This prompted the American Institute of Architects (AIA) to create the Committee for the Study of the Future of the Profession, chartered

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<sup>55</sup> Architectural graphics are a generic term for 'communicating architectural ideas', ranging from perspective drawings to architectural drafting; they are an effort to capture the client's imagination by overcoming 'the flatness of a two-dimensional surface' (Ching viii). See Frank Ching, *Architectural Graphics* (4th ed. New York: Wiley, 2003).

with the responsibility of reviewing the discipline's 'range of possible futures' (Kostof xviii).

This is also, of course, the professional climate *Complexity* was responding to.

While the destruction of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri on 15 July 1972 provided a dramatic visual spectacle to associate with the end of modernist dominance, Barthelme foretold of its decline in short stories like 'Paraguay' (1970). A story favoured by the author, in 1974 Barthelme described 'Paraguay' as 'an almost beautiful place' and 'a hint of what I would like to do, if I could do it' (*Not-Knowing* 56–57). It is a tale of Le Corbusier's utopian vision of a 'radiant city' gone awkwardly fantastical.<sup>56</sup> Using the phrase 'silver cities' as a pseudonym, the narrator of the story observes 'the dim piles of buildings' and recounts in the vein of a travelogue his encounter with what rapidly reveals itself as a regimented mode of urban existence. The reader explains that this Paraguay 'is not the Paraguay that exists on our maps', it is a 'new country' (*Sixty* 121–23). The mode of life is bureaucratically 'predictive', everything from 'rationalized art' to 'white noise' is carefully produced and distributed *en masse* (*Sixty* 124). The city even has a 'plan' stored in a box, which 'governs more or less everything' (*Sixty* 128).<sup>57</sup>

To ensure the reader does not overlook the allusion to *Radiant City* (1935), Barthelme in a footnote attributes a paragraph to Le Corbusier's *Le Modulor* (1948), in a '[s]lightly altered' state (*Sixty* 125).<sup>58</sup> The critical impulse behind this farcical representation is the 'prophetic elitism' of the modernist utopian message (Jameson *Postmodernism, Or 2*), which claimed to be able to 'fix' the traditional city, and its failure to deliver this promise. In an interview Barthelme states:

[T]he Modern movement in architecture [...] envisioned not just great buildings but an architecture that would engender a radical improvement in human existence. The buildings were to act on society, change it in positive ways. None of this happened, in fact a not insignificant totalitarian bent manifested itself. (O'Hara 190)

While architectural historian Alan Colquhoun cautions not to equate 1930s Fascism with the modern movement, he does note that the proliferation of anti-democratic totalitarian ideologies in

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<sup>56</sup> See Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City: Elements of a Doctrine of Urbanism to Be Used as the Basis of Our Machine-Age Civilization* (London: Faber, 1967).

<sup>57</sup> In the short story, Paraguay is referred to as both a city and a country.

<sup>58</sup> In *Le Modulor* (1948) Le Corbusier sets out his system of proportion based on the male human figure and the golden ratio (Curl 496).

the first half of the twentieth century was ‘no accident’. He further concludes that in relation to capitalism, modernist theory ‘misread the very *Zeitgeist* it had itself invoked’ (Colquhoun 11).<sup>59</sup> Retrospective evaluations of the modern movement have identified that the architecture was not as ‘coherent, logical, [or] objective’ as its apologists believed and accusations of inefficiency, high cost and responsibility for the decline of craftsmanship have haunted its legacy (Curl 496).

In *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon* (1991), Paul Maltby advocates using alternative approaches to postmodernism rather than ‘the innovation of modernism as the *principal point of reference*’ (17), but from the perspective of architecture this is reductive.<sup>60</sup> By re-contextualising Barthelme’s writings in relation to modernism, the reader gains greater insight into the author’s relationship to architectural discourse. This method does not negate his response to the postmodern condition; it is in his representation of architecture where these elements intersect.

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<sup>59</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### Barthelme's 'Collage Stories': Spaces of Language, Image, Media

As founder and editor of the University of Houston's interdisciplinary alumni quarterly *Forum*, and later as the managing editor of *Location*, Barthelme developed his ability for balancing late twentieth-century avant-garde content with 'an eye toward page layout [...] and market image' (10). In *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* Klinkowitz observes how the author understood the capacity of writing as a 'PR vehicle' and that language 'often functions in many ways other than for the transmission of ideas' (10). Barthelme's connection to mass media was not only as observer and commentator,<sup>61</sup> but also as agent and participant, actively promoting the manipulation of language and image during his careers in journalism and public relations. As Barthelme's second wife, Helen Moore Barthelme, recounts in her biography *Donald Barthelme: The Genesis of a Cool Sound* (2001), the author had a longstanding interest in typography and kept a file of out-of-copyright art to use as illustrations during his employment at *The Houston Post*, and then subsequently at *Forum* (78). It was at the University of Houston periodical that Barthelme's relationship with images evolved and he began 'experimenting with art incorporated into the text of articles'. As Helen Moore Barthelme notes, '[i]t was not surprising that later [he] continued this practice in writing fiction' (78).

Appropriately, in 1960 during Barthelme's tenure at *Forum*, he published Marshall McLuhan's speech 'The Medium is the Message', seven years prior to the release of the revised text in book form.<sup>62</sup> In this early formulation of McLuhan's most influential theories, the critic

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<sup>61</sup> As Edmund Carpenter deftly points out in his essay 'The New Languages', 'English is a mass medium. All languages are mass media' (162). McLuhan echoes this claim in 'Classroom Without Walls' (2). However, in common parlance, the term 'mass media' refers to television, radio, newspaper, etc. – what McLuhan describes as 'new media' ('Classroom' 1). My use of 'mass media' follows this more conventional designation.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Medium is the Message' was later published as *The Medium is the Message* (1967), after a printer's typo that McLuhan elected to embrace. The book version incorporated graphics co-created with Quentin Fiore.

seeks to understand the ‘unique dynamics’ of electronic media, asking if these ‘coding devices’ determine patterns of thought and therefore constitute ‘new languages’ (‘Medium’ 19–20, 22). McLuhan’s analysis focuses on what he identifies as two basic types of communicative order: the visual and the auditory (‘Medium’ 20). Visual structure (associated with the eye) is a ‘bead-like’ linear system of organisation that has been shaped by the phonetic alphabet and printing, while auditory space (associated with the ear) is a ‘mosaic’ of ‘simultaneous relations’, defined by a lack of lineal or sequential connection. Following the invention of the telegraph, McLuhan argues that there has been a shift towards ‘non-visual and non-Euclidean modes’ (‘Medium’ 20). McLuhan’s theorisation of media and culture is based on an inherently spatial model. According to Richard Cavell in *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (2002), space can be read as the unifying ‘conceptual category’ of the critic’s varied corpus. Cavell writes:

McLuhan productively situated his work within the increasing spatialization of contemporary social and critical [...] theory in the half-century since the end of the Second World War, a spatialization out of whose Modernist context McLuhan’s own work emerged and to which it subsequently made a significant postmodernist contribution. (6)

Recognising the ‘audio-tactile’ power of television as a paradigm shift, McLuhan’s ‘probes’ into the evolving media landscape sought to identify the effects of technology on the central nervous system. Enthusiastic McLuhanist Tom Wolfe writes in his introduction to a posthumous collection of McLuhan’s lectures and interviews, ‘[t]he so-called generation gap, as he diagnosed it, was not ideological but neurological, the disparity between a print-bred generation and its audio-tactical, neo-tribal offspring’ (xv). In collaboration with the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter and colleagues from architecture, psychology, and political economics, in 1957 McLuhan established an interdisciplinary graduate seminar in culture and communication at the University of Toronto (Theall 7, 24). Donald F. Theall asserts that these Ford Foundation-sponsored seminars

contribute[d] to delineating for North America the avant-garde intellectual agenda of the 1950s and early 1960s through their interdisciplinarity, the variety of topics discussed, and the various

individuals who published in its journal *Explorations*, most of whom were to play important parts in the formation of McLuhan's own work. (31)

Perhaps most significantly, McLuhan's interest in the 'tribal' emerged from his collaborations with Carpenter. Carpenter was an ethnologist and archaeologist intrigued by aboriginal and prehistoric art, while McLuhan was 'a historian of early language arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric) deeply attracted to the more radical aspects' of modernism (Theall 31–32). Opening up points of intersection, the Ford seminars dwelled on these contrasting territories (Theall 32). According to Helen Moore Barthelme's biography, it was actually through Carpenter that Barthelme was introduced to McLuhan's work (H. M. Barthelme 75).

In an attempt to retune textual practice for the electronic age, after the publication of *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), McLuhan's subsequent books were structured by a 'mosaic' approach (*Gutenberg* ix). *Counterblast* (1960), *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), and *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968) were some of the most experimental, designed to seduce mass-market readership by the incorporation of photography, colour graphics and dynamic typography.<sup>63</sup> These texts were essentially guidebooks for decoding the technological present and helped give rise to – the misleading and often misinterpreted – 'dazzling puns and alliterations' of aphoristic McLuhanisms (W. J. T. Mitchell *Pictures?* 208). After the publication of McLuhan's third book, *Understanding Media* (1964), a successful publicity campaign in America brought him considerable media attention. By 1966 most major publications in America, Britain and Canada had dedicated articles to McLuhan (Wolfe xx). Seizing upon his growing popularity, McLuhan founded the Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto. A gifted self-marketer, over the late-1960s and 1970s McLuhan rapidly ascended to academic celebrity status. Blurring the line between messenger and medium, McLuhan consulted for American corporations on product development, regularly contributed to popular television and radio shows (including a

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<sup>63</sup> *Counterblast* is a contemporised tribute to Wyndham Lewis's typographically charged Vorticist magazine *Blast* (1914–15). McLuhan's text was originally self-published in 1954.

sketch comedy show), and famously made a cameo in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) (W. J. T. Mitchell *Pictures?* 219). Yet the academic legacy of McLuhan's vision is an uncertain one. While his impact on media studies is undeniable, in the 1980s his 'global village' was interpreted as too optimistic and was treated with 'poststructuralist suspicion' (W. J. T. Mitchell *Pictures?* 219). McLuhan's tendency to rapidly shift from one inchoate 'probe' to another, without 'undertaking any thorough explanation of a "linear" (that is, analytic) sort', did not endear him with the academy (Ong 29). As W. J. T. Mitchell notes, McLuhan 'was quickly supplanted by a new media oracle in the early eighties, the rising star of the more politically correct and safely posthumous Walter Benjamin' (*Pictures?* 219, 21).

Challenging his audience to think differently about languages of the ear and the eye, McLuhan's somewhat idiosyncratic taxonomy links media by its sensory and cognitive effect. As he reveals, media that can be *seen* can still be auditory:

The items of news and advertising that exist under a dateline are interrelated only by that dateline. They have no interconnection of logic or statement. Yet they form a mosaic whose parts are interpenetrating. Such is also the kind of order that tends to exist in a city or a culture. It is a kind of orchestral, resonating unity, not a logical unity of discourse. (McLuhan 'Medium' 20)

The opacity of McLuhan's 'visual' and 'acoustic' locution demonstrates the limitations of 'master[ing] the field of visual representation with a verbal discourse' (W. J. T. Mitchell *Picture Theory* 9). According to McLuhan, since the early nineteenth century there has been a return to the 'auditory all-at-onceness' that characterised the Western preliterate era. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), McLuhan briefly charts this perceptual shift, writing:

In the electronic age which succeeds the typographic and mechanical era of the past five hundred years, we encounter new shapes and structures of human interdependence and of expression which are "oral" in form even when the components of the situation may be non-verbal. (*Gutenberg* 3)

McLuhan remarks that prior to the invention of the printing press children learned primarily by oral instruction, but today the 'monopoly of the book' has been supplanted by film and television acoustic simultaneity ('Classroom' 1-2).

McLuhan emphasises that while the eye is singular ('focus[ed]', 'pinpoint[ed]', 'locating each object in physical space'), the ear is plural ('favor[ing] sound from any direction') (Carpenter and McLuhan 67). Suggesting that sound is diffuse and that a primary attribute of the ear is that it is indiscriminate, McLuhan writes that '[t]he ear favors no particular "point of view"' (McLuhan, Fiore and Agel 111). This is not to imply that written language cannot be auditory in its modality. In 'Acoustic Space' McLuhan and his influential anthropological protégée Carpenter cite the oral elements of poetry as an example of a medium that evokes 'the visual image by magical acoustic stress' (69). Describing the 'interplay between sense perceptions', McLuhan and Carpenter write:

Poets have long used the word as incantation, [...] [p]reliterate man was conscious of this power of the auditory to make present the absent thing. Writing annulled this magic because it was a rival magical means of making present the absent sound. Radio restored it. In fact, in evoking the visual image, radio is sometimes more effective than sight itself. (69)

Expressing a desire to understand how electronic media are reshaping communication and society, in 'The Medium is the Message' McLuhan asks how the advent of new technologies determines 'unique powers of expression' ('Classroom' 2):

What has been the effect of the typewriter in structuring decision-making in our world? How has the typewriter been affected by tape recorders? What has been the effect of the typewriter on the writing and publishing of books and newspapers? On the short story? On poetry? On reading habits? ('Medium' 22)

For McLuhan, the introduction of electronic technology affects the very 'character of language', creating 'shifts and freedom of the spoken idiom' ('Classroom' 2).

Responding to the challenge of new media 'pressure', McLuhan writes that 'the artists, poets and musicians of the past century have unanimously abandoned visual structure in their work in favor of auditory all-at-onceness' ('Medium' 20). In the posthumously published *Laws of Media* (1988), McLuhan examines in greater detail how the return of an acoustic mode of awareness – created by the electronic epoch – has shaped twentieth-century art, science and philosophy. An example of this, McLuhan recounts, is how the 'single perspective' of tonal music was abandoned by the end of the nineteenth century in favour of 'the mosaic of acoustic

space' embodied by the compositions of Schoenberg and Stravinsky (McLuhan and McLuhan 52).<sup>64</sup> Paralleling this multifocal sensibility is the appearance of Cubism. McLuhan observes, 'Cubism ("multi-locationalism") is one of the painterly forms of acoustic space. [...] [C]ubist painting abandons single fixed points of view along with Euclidean geometry and perspective' (McLuhan and McLuhan 55). Quoting Swiss art historian Sigfried Giedion, McLuhan goes on to highlight how Cubist painting and Le Corbusier's architecture developed under a similar principle of spatial simultaneity, free from the boundaries of interior-versus-exterior visual logic:<sup>65</sup>

Giedion explains how, by using simultaneity and transparency, artists escaped the static container that was visual space: "Around 1910 Picasso and Braque, as a consequence of a new conception of space, exhibited the interiors and exteriors of objects simultaneously, in architecture Le Corbusier developed, on the same principle, the interpenetration of inner and outer space". (McLuhan and McLuhan 55)

Recalling Le Corbusier's 1926 manifesto 'Five Points of a New Architecture' – the *pilotis*, the roof garden, the free plan, the free façade, the ribbon window – is to return to the discussion of the spectacle of Le Corbusier's Villa Le Roche, as described in the last chapter. Exemplifying Giedion's observations, Le Roche is a subtle interplay between inner and outer space. In *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (1994) architectural historian Beatriz Colomina challenges the notion that modernist architecture emerged as a high artistic practice, disconnected from mass culture. Instead, Colomina argues, mass media was an influential site of artistic production for modernist architects like Le Corbusier. Points of inspiration for the circulatory movement of Le Corbusier's *promenade architecturale* included not just a resistance to Baroque fixed-point perspective (where the building was intended to be viewed from a single vantage point), but also photography, film and advertising. As Giuliana Bruno observes, '[T]he

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<sup>64</sup> This observation by McLuhan was derived from Donald Mitchell's *The Language of Modern Music* (1963). In his book, Mitchell also draws parallels between the biographies and methods of Schoenberg and Le Corbusier.

<sup>65</sup> See Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (1941). Giedion also wrote an article published in *Explorations*.

architectural site is scenically assembled and mobilized' (59).<sup>66</sup> Colomina proposes that Le Corbusier's experience as part of the editorial group for *L'Esprit nouveau*, where he was the primary person responsible for securing the magazine's advertising, provided the architect with the image sources for his articles and books (118). In fact, after reviewing the working material for *Towards an Architecture* and *The Decorative Arts Today* (1925), Colomina claims that Le Corbusier's books were actually constructed through 'a continuous editing of found images' (119). This is despite Le Corbusier's repeated claim that the art object is hierarchically situated above the everyday object (Colomina 119). When reviewing Giedion's comments it is also worth noting that the execution of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's theories about perspective and space resulted in not only Cubist painting, but also collage. Based on observations about Picasso and Braque's Cubist collage between 1911 and 1914 (which was conceived of as 'an extension of painting'), Eric K. Lum asserts that as a result of Cubist invention, 'Painting [...] moves towards architecture in the medium of collage, as architecture is able to divine meaning and justification of its artistic aspirations through collage' (204). Present in even the flattest of Cubist collage is an aspiration to cantilever beyond the picture plane (Janis and Blesh 111).

McLuhan and Giedion's observations about the acoustic mode of twentieth-century artistic production is echoed by Barthelme's assertion about collage; Barthelme repeatedly recounted his belief that 'the principle of collage is one of the central principles of art in this century' (*Not-Knowing* 76).<sup>67</sup> For Barthelme, collage is not just an aesthetic formal model, it is a field of social, philosophical and scientific thought. In his acceptance speech for the National Book Award in Children's Literature in 1972, for *The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine, or The Hithering Thithering Djinn* (1971), Barthelme spoke of the competitive landscape for books in

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<sup>66</sup> This observation by Giuliana Bruno in *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (2002), is based on Colomina's analysis.

<sup>67</sup> Barthelme's pronouncement about collage took on a variety of forms over the years. It appears that the first widely known reference was during a 1970 *New York Times Magazine* interview with Richard Schickel. In the publication Barthelme is quoted as saying: 'The principle of collage is the central principle of all art in the twentieth century in all media' (*Not-Knowing* 204). On subsequent interviews he tempered and elucidated this statement, but generally kept to the original premise.

the age of television (*Not-Knowing* 55). He said: ‘My pictures don’t move. What’s wrong with them? [...] I asked my child once what her mother was doing, at a particular moment, and she replied that mother was “watching a book”’ (*Not-Knowing* 55). In a period of increased mass media output, there is a conflation of the eye and ear. Barthelme replicates the ‘acoustic’ aspects of electronic stimuli by positioning literature as an ‘orchestral’ entity. Yet, in an interview with Pacifica Radio in 1975 Barthelme denied that his use of textual and pictorial collage was an attempt to make his writing ‘be a television set’. Instead he proposed that his aim was closer to ‘[t]rying to destroy a television set’ (*Not-Knowing* 233). Taken within the context of the interview, this comment is not intended as a statement of disdain for mass culture; instead, by composing his own collisions of disconnected stimuli, Barthelme is rivalling popular media culture.<sup>68</sup> Barthelme’s technique of collage is an attempt to overpower the intense ‘combinations of noise and information’ that emanate from contemporary systems of representation (like television and radio) while acknowledging the influence of mass media simultaneity on his own work (*Not-Knowing* 233–34).

Intentionally challenging the boundaries between text and image, language and picture, Barthelme began in the late 1960s to incorporate paper collages into the layout of a number of his short stories.<sup>69</sup> Collage stories like ‘At the Tolstoy Museum’ (1969) and ‘The Flight of the Pigeons from the Palace’ (1972) feature partial or wholly reproduced drawings of classical architecture, a visual rendition of the archetypal commodified historicism discussed in the previous chapter. Some of Barthelme’s collages are from a single ‘ready-made’ picture, while others are a series of pictures and/or typography glued in absurd juxtaposition. Once assembled, the collages were presumably photographed and then printed (in book or magazine form). While the ensembles lack the three-dimensional scissored edges or seams that distinguish collage, for

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<sup>68</sup> As Paul Giles warns, ‘Attempts to moralize Barthelme (especially as either “for” or “against” contemporary culture) fail every time because his texts remain quite elusive to any didactic category imposed upon them’ (387).

<sup>69</sup> A select few of Barthelme’s collage stories also include photographs.

the most part they retain a disjunctive quality. Paper is the ‘classic’ material for collage, and Barthelme’s selection of this medium embraces and elevates ‘one of the commonest, more trivial things in our world’ (Janis and Blesh 146). Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh in *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques* (1962) describe the delicate character of paper as a medium, as well as its potential for significance: ‘Its nature is evanescence—water can dissolve it, flames consume it, fingers tear it [...]. [E]ach bit of paper could as well be an important document—a will, the pardon of a condemned murderer, a treaty of peace—as [well as] a discarded newspaper’ (146–47). Mirroring the spatialisation of Barthelme’s stories, to use McLuhan’s term, the structure of the author’s collages are ‘mosaic-like’. As the viewer learns to interpret this ‘language’ of disparate images, a sublime beauty emerges from the initial cacophony; it is collage as alchemy.<sup>70</sup>

While the layering of mixed media into a single object has an extensive history as folk art that predates the twentieth century, it was not until this period that collage was embraced as a fine art.<sup>71</sup> As Eddie Wolfram explains in *History of Collage* (1975),

It was with the genesis of modern art in concert with modern psychological and technological knowledge that collage began to be a significant means of expression, a unique means of picture-making which has left an indelible mark on art of [the last] century. (Wolfram 14)

From *Le Journal* to *Life Magazine*, a relatively unifying characteristic of twentieth-century avant-garde collage is its appropriation of mass media and mass-produced materials.<sup>72</sup> Making it an adept tool for social reading, collage is a composite art form, derived in part from what Benjamin refers to as ‘mechanically reproduced’ culture. In the last century, collagists have transplanted and transformed a diverse range of man-made media and printed ephemera, including: newspaper pages, magazine clippings, advertising slogans, catalogue cut-outs, book pages, graphic art,

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<sup>70</sup> In Ernst’s essay ‘Beyond Painting’ (1948) he describes collage as, ‘something like alchemy of the visual image’ (12).

<sup>71</sup> The term ‘collage’ encompasses a broad range of phenomenon; attempting to locate a definition of the principle is beyond the scope of my argument. However, the primary preoccupation of this chapter is with ‘pictorial collage’.

<sup>72</sup> For a survey of the ‘pre-modern art’ genealogy of collage, see chapter one in *Collage* by Herta Wescher.

product wrappers, printed typography, images of celebrities and political figures, comic strips, postcards, printed sheet music, photography, and film. Collage is an example of a ‘perennial’ impulse in art, where ‘materials talk back [...] to the civilization that is producing them’ (Rosenberg ‘Audience as Subject’ 31). In collage cultural artefacts are removed from anonymity; as Janis and Blesh observe, ‘[w]ith collage, art materials become an inventory of our time’ (148). Lum argues in his dissertation *Architecture as Artform: Drawing, Painting, Collage, and Architecture* (1999) that the early twentieth-century ‘collage image’ embodies the trope of modern fragmentation.

[T]he collage image came to signify both the collapse of nineteenth century bourgeois culture, as well as the imminent arrival of a new metropolitan era steeped in perpetual movement and fragmented images. [A] model of contemporary culture emerged which celebrated popular media and the increasingly frenetic pace of modern life. [T]he artistic avant-garde [...] revel[ed] in the visual and haptic fillibrations of the disjunctive rhythms in the new metropolis; the dislocated nature of collage signalled the modernist disruption of permanence and whole form in art and culture. (Lum 209)

This is not to suggest that prior to the twentieth-century mass-production and technology did not play a role in the development of collage. The machine age of the nineteenth century created an environment for collage and decoupage: print advertising became more ubiquitous and inexpensive goods allowed for greater experimentation with household objects. Poster art of the late nineteenth century also featured collage methods. Photomontage emerged as a new technique in parallel with the development of photography, eventually becoming popular with photojournalists, advertisers, and postcard designers (Wolfram 9–14). Some Victorian aristocratic women used photocollage for making albums. Despite this growing popularity, it was not until the twentieth century that collage became regarded as a ‘legitimate’ artistic aspiration (Wolfram 15).

Most art historians identify 1912 as a watershed year for collage, when Braque created *papiers collés*<sup>73</sup> and Picasso applied a piece of rope and printed oilcloth to his canvas. As the ‘broken’ vocabulary of Analytic Cubism gave way to a literalising of Cubist space, collages were

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<sup>73</sup> It is generally accepted that Braque made his first *papiers collés* in 1911.

one of the defining features of what Spanish collagist Juan Gris called the ‘synthetic phase’ of Cubism (Wolfram 15). The politically charged Futurist ‘free-word’ collage, as embodied in the works of F. T. Marinetti and Carol Carrà, emerged in sharp contrast to the aesthetic and philosophical occupations of Cubist collage. The Futurist manifestation exhibited ‘the interpolation of word forms and typographical letters [...] [it was] an attempt to bring topicality and documentary realism into art’ (Wolfram 42). The Dadaists and Surrealists continued to test conventions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ subject matter through collage, integrating ‘found objects’ and playing with the meaning of words when placed out of context. Perhaps Marcel Duchamp’s most significant contribution to the reinvention of collage was the ‘anti-art’ concept of ‘ready-mades’ (and its conceptual cognates: ‘corrected ready-mades’, etc.). Decrying ‘the scientific objectivity’ of Cubism and Futurism, Raoul Hausmann claimed Dada sought ‘the true experience of all relationships’ and ‘your true state: wonderful constellations in real materials’ (Wescher 136). Hausmann began making newspaper collages in the summer of 1918, and shortly thereafter created ‘static films’ of photomontages and, eventually, assemblages. After 1919 Berlin Dadaists like Hausmann, Hannah Höch, George Grosz, and John Heartfield, used the raw documentary powers of photomontage to ‘hold up a distorting mirror in the face of the immediate postwar years’ (Wolfram 82). During the 1920s, Heartfield, in particular, focused on collage as a commercial and propagandistic graphic art, using his prolific works for book covers and posters (Wolfram 137).

Introducing himself to Hausmann as ‘a painter, I nail my pictures’, Kurt Schwitters once remarked that he employed whatever materials ‘the picture required’ (Wescher 152–53). Schwitters’s technique of abstract collage construction (‘*Merz* pictures’) was deliberately spontaneous and biographical, blending his scavenges of chaotic metropolitan life into ‘well-

balanced compositions' (Wescher 153–56).<sup>74</sup> For Schwitters, it was not the prefabricated component parts that built the collage that were significant, instead the objective was coalescence (Wescher 153). Schwitters famously used his collage techniques to create architectural structures within his Hanover apartment. *Mertzbau* was an ever-evolving grotto of old lumber, moulded plaster and other found materials, 'combined into a rambling, stalactitic, uterine cavern' (Janis and Blesh 63). When asked by *The Parisian Review* why he resided in New York, Barthelme retorted that the 'filth on the streets [...] reminds' him of Schwitters's art.

Schwitters used to hang around printing plants and fish things out of waste barrels, stuff that had been overprinted or used during makeready, and he'd employ this rich accidental material in his collages. I saw a very large Schwitters show some years ago and almost everything in it reminded me of New York. Garbage in, art out.<sup>75</sup> (*Not-Knowing* 286)

Yet the grotesque beauty of found matter was not the exclusive material of early-to-mid-century collage. Although Henri Matisse was not previously known for collage-making, in 1931, after accepting a project for an American collector, the artist happened upon a distinctive technique of creating shapes by cutting up coloured paper (Wescher 303). Ultimately, this serendipity resulted in a period of vividly coloured, free-hand *gouaches découpés*.

In an interview Barthelme stated his 'closet' desire was to eventually create a book entirely of collages, which he described as a 'collage-novel' in the vein of Max Ernst (*Not-Knowing* 290).<sup>76</sup> Although a great admirer of the Surrealists, and highly influenced by his early reading of Marcel Raymond's *From Baudelaire to Surrealism* (1933), Barthelme never brought this project to fruition – all of his published collages are an accompaniment to text.<sup>77</sup> Yet in a number of Barthelme's collages the hand of Ernst is revealed, as I will discuss in greater detail

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<sup>74</sup> The made-up term 'Merz,' which came to encompass Schwitters's works and collage philosophy, is derived from 'Kommerz' (commerce). Schwitters commented that unlike his academic portraits, which were 'art for commerce', Merz was 'art from commerce' (Janis and Blesh 64).

<sup>75</sup> In an earlier interview Barthelme stated that, 'New York City is or can be regarded as a collage' due to the diversity of its urban texture (*Not-Knowing* 204).

<sup>76</sup> Barthelme may have been referring more specifically to *Une semaine de bonté*, since Ernst's other well-known collage-novels have brief 'narrative' captions.

<sup>77</sup> A minor exception to this is a collage of Henry James that Barthelme made for a series of 'artists' postcards' for the Smithsonian Institution in 1977. Departing from the norms of his collage stories, this particular collage incorporates a photograph and coloured paper.

later in the chapter.<sup>78</sup> For the autocratic leader of the Surrealists, André Breton, Picasso and Braque's *papiers collés* 'opened up new sources of "unreal reality" for art' (Wescher 185). Ernst was a 'collage thinker', applying his philosophy broadly from literary collaborations to printing (stamping) processes.<sup>79</sup> Similar to *frottage* (rubbing) and automatic writing, for the Surrealists the collage method was a vehicle for mobilising the hallucinatory unconscious. The Surrealists aspired to be 'directed' by the mind; the 'author' (producer of the work) was recast as the 'spectator', watching the artistic creation emerge without intervention (Ernst 'Inspiration' 20). In his essay 'Beyond Painting' (1948) Ernst explains his 'mechanism' of collage: 'I am tempted to see in collage the exploitation of the chance meeting of two distant realities on an unfamiliar plane, or, to use a shorter term, the culture of systematic displacement and its effects' ('Beyond Painting' 13). For Ernst and Breton, collage upends the fixed status of 'ready-made reality'. Collage is a place where through displacement a 'false absolute' escapes its 'naive designation' and transforms into 'a new absolute value'; the 'mechanism' of collage allows unrelated objects to 'make love' ('Beyond Painting' 13). Yet Elza Adamowicz, in *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* (1998), is quick to note how this automatist approach neglects the production stage of collage, '[p]rivileging the mental activity instigated by the collage elements, [...] the flow or continuity between the images of the unconscious and their projection onto the page' (7). Although known primarily as painters, Joan Miró and René Magritte were among the Surrealists who produced pictorial collages in the latter part of the 1920s. Like Salvador Dalí, Yves Tanguy applied collage elements to enhance his oil paintings (Adamowicz 8; Janis and Blesh 82). Photocollage and photomontage also appear in Surrealist journals during this time.

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<sup>78</sup> In the interview Barthelme acknowledges his indebtedness to Ernst. He states that prior to *Great Days* (1979) he 'had done a number of pieces combining text with collages, Max Ernst collages, really'. The author goes on to say that after a positive review of *Great Days*, which noted with relief that there were no pictures in the book, he 'went back into the closet with the collages' (*Not-Knowing* 290).

<sup>79</sup> For more on Ernst as a 'collage thinker' see Chapter 8 in Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh's *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques*.

In the 1930s Adamowicz charts two main trends in Surrealist collage production. The first theme identified is the ‘renewal’ of ‘satirical collage’; recalling the Berlin Dadaists, photomontage is the ‘polemical instrument’ favoured for this purpose. Political subtexts can also be revealed in paper collage, for example in Ernst’s second collage-novel, *Rêve d’une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel* (1930) (an anti-clerical critique), or in the Lion de Belfort ‘book’ of his third collage-novel, *Une semaine de bonté* (1934) (an attack on European militarism) (Adamowicz 10–11).<sup>80</sup> Beyond formalist and materialist readings, within Barthelme’s collages there is a discernable subtext of cultural critique. Barthelme did not use collage as protest, like John Heartfield or Raoul Hausmann, yet his collage is fashioned as a metaphor for an increasingly fragmented modern existence. By selecting collage as his method of illustration, Barthelme is conspicuously embracing an art form charged with a socio-political ancestry. Although Lum asserts that much of the social critique present in European avant-garde collage was drained when transplanted to the United States, one can assume that Barthelme’s understanding of collage (particularly of Ernst’s works) extended beyond a popular or rudimentary comprehension (203–04). In America in the 1960s collage already had socio-political preoccupations, as displayed most visibly in George Lois’s *Esquire* covers (Nel 76).<sup>81</sup> The prevalence of short stories with an American socio-political undercurrent – especially in *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts* (1968) – demonstrates Barthelme’s political awareness.<sup>82</sup> The content and illustrations of short stories like ‘A Nation of Wheels’ (1970) and ‘The Inauguration’ (1973) amplify the possibility of additional (i.e. non-spatial) readings of Barthelme’s collages.

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<sup>80</sup> In 1934 the Nazis condemned Ernst’s work; scholars speculate that this, and the social and political turmoil in Germany, may account for the ‘mood of catastrophe’ that permeates *Une semaine de bonté* (v).

<sup>81</sup> In 1960 Lois became the first art director to establish his own advertising agency (Consuegra 32).

<sup>82</sup> ‘Indian Uprising’ and ‘Robert Kennedy Saved from Downing’ are both examples of non-illustrated short stories by Barthelme with a strong socio-political impulse. See Chapter 4 in Maurice Couturier and Régis Durand’s *Donald Barthelme* (1982) for additional consideration of Barthelme as a narrator of culture.

The second tendency in Surrealist collage was the growing interest in found materials that possessed strong ‘erotic or sadistic connections’. As Adamowicz observes, ‘In collage, the fetishistic appeal of part-bodies and the elliptical erotic narratives of advertising images and slogans are underscored even further by the surrealists’ cutting and pasting practice’. Among the collagists interested in ‘the erotic connotations of fragments’ are Paul Eluard and Georges Hugnet (Adamowicz 11).

Barthelme was acquainted with the works of Joseph Cornell, a pioneer of three-dimensional collage (assemblages), and owned a well-worn copy of Kynaston McShine’s book on the artist.<sup>83</sup> Many of Cornell’s ‘theaterlike containers’ rely on ‘tipp[ing] [...] the balance between word and image’ (Maxwell 405). Assemblages like *Untitled (Paul and Virginia)* (1946–48) display fragments of print material derived from nineteenth-century sources. Although sections of text and illustrations from the English edition of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* appear within Cornell’s box, blocks of the author’s story are obscured by superimposed pictures; the words and their attendant meaning are represented as subordinate to the book’s own illustrations (Maxwell 405–06). Richard Maxwell in *The Victorian Illustrated Book* (2002) notes that both Ernst and Cornell ‘reimagine the Victorian illustrated book as *saturated* with pictures, to the virtual exclusion of text’ (405).<sup>84</sup> This disinterest in the content of the stories is underscored by Breton’s foreword to *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929). Introducing Ernst’s first collage-novel, Breton revels in the mystery of the unknown. Writing of the rich material of engraved adventure and crime stories, Breton states: ‘These illustrations, unlike the impossibly boring texts they refer to, represent for us a plethora of such disconcerting conjectures that they become precious in

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<sup>83</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. Barthelme also wrote a short story for the Leo Castelli Gallery’s *Joseph Cornell Exhibition Catalogue* (1976). According to Herzinger, the exhibition took place in New York from February–March 1976. Barthelme’s ‘Cornell’ text was later reprinted in the *Ontario Review* (Fall/Winter 1976) and in 1983 as a titleless ‘interchaper’ in *Overnight to Many Distant Cities* (Don B. 344).

<sup>84</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

themselves, [...] without our being in the least concerned with the name or motives of the assassin' (8).

Other American collage works, from Ad Reinhardt's abstract interlocking geometric formations to Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock's 'collaged' Expressionist oil paintings, further established the diversity of American approaches to collage (Wolfram 140–141, 298). The popularity of collage-making in mid-century America was, in part, due to Peggy Guggenheim's 1943 exhibition of young American artists at the Art of This Century gallery. Influenced by European Surrealists – many of whom were in exile in New York – emerging artists, including Motherwell, Pollock and William Baziotes, experimented with *papiers collés* for the show (Janis and Blesh 171). The 1948 retrospective *Collage* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York also served to increase aesthetic awareness of the medium, institutionalising its diverse formal potential. Due to the influence of European modernism, there was a collapse of art categories and spatial dynamics in architectural design after the Second World War. As post-war painting (Abstract Expressionism, collage paintings) increasingly adopted an architectonic condition, architecture was shifting towards a flattened artistic profile. The commonalities linking modern architecture with collage construction was the formal language of '[f]lat surfaces of color and material, compressed depth, [and] overlapping planes' (Lum 204). After the Second World War American architects sought 'typological precedents' from a European avant-garde immersed in Bauhaus pedagogy (Lum 204). Lum asserts that post-war American design education used collage (and painting) as an 'instrument' to reconnect architecture with fine art, emphasising a 'formal analysis of Corbusian syntax' as a model (205). Architectural drawing – plans and elevations – had a more direct relationship with collage, owing to its predisposition for compressed spatial depth and a desire to articulate space beyond the paper's surface (Lum 205).

In the 1950s and 1960s Pop Art, with its meta-fascination with kitsch and consumer-oriented media, brought a new perspective to collage – suddenly there was the possibility of 'the whole world [as] just one great big material collage' (Wolfram 158). Although Pop Art is a

movement traditionally associated with America, an early example of Pop collage can be located in Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956). Exhibited at the seminal *This Is Tomorrow* show at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, the collage seemed to herald a new – McLuhian – age.<sup>85</sup> The assembled living room of the electronic era is decorated with a Ford car logo, prominent television set, conspicuous product placement, and movie billboard flashing through the window. As Robert Hughes explains, Hamilton's collage should not be confused with folk art. He writes: '[The collage] came out of what Hamilton would later call "a new landscape of secondary, filtered material." Pop Art, far from being "popular" art, was made "by highly professionally trained experts for a mass audience.'" It was done *to* the people' (Hughes 342, 344).<sup>86</sup> Echoing Hamilton's late capitalist impulse, Bartheleme claimed that the purpose of collage was the creation of a 'new reality' from 'unlike things'. He stated that collage is 'an *itself*, if it's successful: Harold Rosenberg's "anxious object," which does not know whether it's a work of art or a pile of junk' (*Not-Knowing* 204).<sup>87</sup>

Sculptural collage had already become a significant art form in the hands of the early twentieth-century avant-garde – like Jean (Hans) Arp and Jean Tinguely – but in the mid-century John Chamberlain and César brought a new dynamism to the medium, contorting smashed cars into coloured compressed units. Neo-Dadaists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns in the 1950s resurrected the Dada spirit, turning eclectic combinations of found materials into objects of beauty. In his 'combine paintings' Rauschenberg used urban detritus in conjunction with Abstract Expressionist techniques to 'integrate' 'wildly disparate objects' by splattering them with paint (Wescher 309). Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in 1978 used collage as a conceptual design to articulate their displeasure with grand modernist, utopian visions of the 'ideal city'; the architectural historians called their model of urban design 'Collage City'. Seizing upon the layered diversity of pictorial collage, the 'collage city' rejects International Style 'total design' by

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<sup>85</sup> *This is Tomorrow* and Hamilton's collage are discussed at length in Chapter Five.

<sup>86</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>87</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

strategically assembling small utopian communities ('fragments') into a loose fusion (Rowe and Koetter).<sup>88</sup>

Barthelme shared *Location* co-founder Harold Rosenberg's commitment to defying disciplinary 'segregation' and promoted an exchange of ideas between the visual arts and literature. According to Daugherty, Rosenberg wrote in his proposal for *Location* – a magazine dedicated to art and literature 'on a fairly equal basis' – that the 'experience of painters and sculptors can be of great value in helping current American literature to reestablish contact with modern developments in form, method and thought' ('Stockade Syndrome' 4; Daugherty 202).<sup>89</sup> The visual arts were to reinvigorate contemporary American fiction; presumably, one of these art forms was collage.<sup>90</sup>

Guided by Mitchell's attempt at terminological specificity, where both 'image' and 'picture' in vernacular usage are generic terms for 'visual representations on two-dimensional surfaces', there are contrasting components of these expressions that are worthy of isolation (*Picture Theory* 4). For the purpose of this chapter, 'image' connotes the abstract reproduction of form, as in a 'likeness' or 'resemblance', while 'picture' (which sits under the image 'family' umbrella) suggests the existence of a 'concrete object or ensemble' (*Picture Theory* 4; *Iconology* 10). This is, admittedly, a far less metaphoric approach to the idea of 'the image' than the one Ezra Pound proposes. As Joseph Frank recounts,

"An image" Pound wrote, "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." The implications of his definition should be noted—an image is defined not as a pictorial reproduction, but as unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time. (J. Frank 226)

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<sup>88</sup> Admittedly, this abridged history of twentieth-century physical collage is far from exhaustive. By providing a somewhat truncated narrative, my intention is to help the reader situate Barthelme's works within the major trends and transformations of twentieth-century physical collage. Barthelme was both professionally and personally engaged with the contemporary arts, so it is reasonable to assume that he would be knowledgeable of (and probably influenced by) this lineage.

<sup>89</sup> Harold Rosenberg and Thomas B. Hess were the founders of *Location* and employed Barthelme as the managing editor of the short-lived magazine. Rosenberg is best-known for his theorisation of Abstract Expressionism, which he termed 'action painting'.

<sup>90</sup> The first issue of *Location* featured a five-page spread on Robert Rauschenberg, which included a double-page reproduction of a collage.

Clearly, I do not negate this additional connotation of ‘an image’, but for the analysis in this section I would like to suspend the temptation to over ‘textualise’ the visual arts, and summon the uniqueness of pictures as pictures.

When Barthelme ‘pictures architecture’ in his collages, he is portraying buildings as a personification of architectonics, real or invented; there is a gesture towards spatiality (as embodied through perspective) and therefore perceptual experience. The intention of Barthelme’s pictured architecture is not for the purpose of architectural graphics (as discussed previously) – to convey schematic detail as with an elevation or multiview drawing – but as an evocative display produced for artistic spectatorship. His rendition seeks to challenge the spatial hegemony of architecture, in its three-dimensional manifestation. In Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour’s seminal exploration of American vernacular ‘pop architecture’, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), they write of the modernist establishment’s rejection of spatiality in forms of art other than architecture:

During the last 40 years, theorists of Modern architecture (Wright and Le Corbusier sometimes excepted) have focused on space as the essential ingredient that separates architecture from painting, sculpture, and literature. Their definitions glory in the uniqueness of the medium; although sculpture and painting may sometimes be allowed spatial characteristics, sculptural or pictorial architecture is unacceptable – because Space is sacred. (7)

Operating in a place between painting and sculpture, in the early twentieth-century collage became a medium which sought to puncture the convention of prevailing genres. Due to its indeterminate spatiality, collage was an adept tool for the modernist avant-garde’s ‘radical reinterpretation of the picture plane’ – a rejection of ‘one-point perspective and the attempt to portray “real space” in two-dimensional work’ (Harrison, Atkinson and Grasdahl 9). Adding to this complex lineage is the rise of ‘paper architecture’ in the 1960s and 1970s. Due to the recession of the mid-1970s, groups of young architects experimented with communicating their design principles not through commissions, but as theoretical drawings on paper; constructing alternative urbanisms and utopian futures. Archigram and Superstudio were two of the most notable paper

architecture groups that emerged from this period; many of their publications incorporate collage and photomontage into their architectural renderings.

As a postmodern scion of avant-garde spatial experimentation, Barthelme's use of collage is imbued with this ancestry. Reflecting the incongruent landscape of contemporary mass culture, Barthelme amplifies the spatiality of his prose through the pictorial strategy of collage. Of course, the irony of Venturi and Scott Brown's observation is that, under the direction of Gropius, collage, assemblage and montage were embraced by the Bauhaus aesthetic (Wolfram 130).<sup>91</sup> From the 1950s, collage was an 'integral part of architecture and design education' for Bauhaus expatriates teaching in America and England (Lum 204). Their interpretation of collage was as 'a means of viewing abstract painting in architectural terms, where space and material are compressed onto the compact density of a single plane' (Lum 204). Clement Greenberg's analysis of collage was the inverse of this consideration; to him collage was 'the transition by which painting could see itself heading materially towards architectonic condition' (Lum 204).

To reiterate Venturi and Scott Brown's statement: 'although sculpture and painting may sometimes be allowed spatial characteristics, sculptural or pictorial architecture is unacceptable – because Space is sacred' (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour 7). These words make several claims simultaneously; 'pictorial architecture' refers to a building that is conceived with beauty as the presiding factor. Modernist orthodoxy's resistance to historical quotations was famously subverted by Venturi's 'decorated shed', which endeavoured to demonstrate the accessibility of form *and* function. Yet this meaning of 'pictorial architecture' implies that 'what pictures want', to invoke Mitchell, is to be 'desired' for purely aesthetic purposes. For theorists of modernist architecture this assumption is anachronistic since, as Mitchell argues, 'pictorial desire' was

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<sup>91</sup> See Chapter 8 on Bauhaus collage, including the works of Adolf Hölzel, Herbert Bayer, and László Moholy-Nagy, in Wolfram's *History of Collage*.

dramatically altered by the hand of modernist abstraction, a style defined by paintings that did not want to be pictures – ‘pictures that want[ed] to be liberated from image-making’ (*Pictures?* 44).<sup>92</sup>

Although Barthelme’s early publications utilise exclusively textual strategies to communicate, 1968 saw the publication of ‘Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel’ and ‘The Explanation’, which, as Klinkowitz argues, anticipate the stories that fully embrace collage in the subsequent year (62). In the early 1970s, with the release of *City Life* (1970) and then *Sadness* (1972), Barthelme’s collage stories became available in collected form. In 1980 Barthelme published a limited edition book, *Presents*, consisting of one ‘extended’ short story in loose episodic form, accompanied by four pages of collage. Barthelme also used collage as an advertising medium, promoting the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston by designing flyers with his collages.<sup>93</sup>

It was in *Guilty Pleasures* (1974), however, that Barthelme’s use of pictures reached its mass-market apogee. Assuming a confessional tone, in his preface to the book Barthelme writes that his ‘secret vice’ is the ‘pleasure’ gained from ‘cutting up and pasting together pictures’ (*Guilty Pleasures* vii). Linking collage and media, Barthelme writes that the creation of *Guilty Pleasures* was in response to ‘all sorts of stimuli and over-stimuli’, reemphasising elements of McLuhan (*Guilty Pleasures* vii). It should be noted that *Guilty Pleasures* is oddly classified as non-fiction by Barthelme’s publisher, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. While the book does contain stories with an autobiographical slant, other vignettes are overtly fantastical. Some of these collage stories, like ‘Eugénie Grandet’ and ‘Letters to the Editore’, later appear cast as fiction in *Sixty* and *Forty*. The implication that the material contained within the pages of *Guilty Pleasures* is non-fiction, coupled with the absurdist mode of much of the graphic content, should give pause to readers considering Barthelme’s use of picturing.

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<sup>92</sup> Recalling Lacan, Mitchell reminds the reader that even this is a form of desire (*Pictures?* 44).

<sup>93</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. Barthelme joined the creative writing faculty at the University of Houston in 1983.

One of Barthelme's earliest published collage stories, 'Adventure' (1970), is of particular interest due to its prolific use of pictured architecture.<sup>94</sup> 'Adventure' opens with the reader being told that Christine has had a 'typical Metz childhood' but now she was 'ready for something ...larger. [...] [T]he great city of her dreams' (D. Barthelme *Don B* 98). Once inside the 'great city' she marvels at the 'gorgeousness of the architecture', which strikes 'her dreaming eye with the force of a hundred blows' (D. Barthelme *Don B* 99). These passages are flanked by a Romanesque arcade with two male figures pasted in the foreground and a separate freestanding collage of an ornate Baroque pavilion with a cut-out of the word 'telephone' fairly arbitrarily pasted below its dome. The pages that follow introduce a fantastical garden, classical busts and sculpture, and lavish interiors. Recalling the pleasure palaces of the eighteenth century, it is through images of architecture that the 'adventure' that the title demands is provided. With closer inspection, one finds that the collages of architecture eclipse the text – quite literally, the words are dwarfed on the page. This overshadowing is not surprising in an art form characterised by unrestraint, when one recalls that collage is a medium where 'the nature of the materials used determines the composition's shape' (Laliberte and Mogelon 17). The content of the text is prosaic; no poetic flourish is required since the pictures deliver the dynamism of the narrative. As the story proceeds and Christine wanders through her dream city, once again Le Corbusier is summoned when the reader is told that she will never forget this 'radiant city' (D. Barthelme *Don B* 103). Despite her felicitous surroundings, Christine returns to Metz to marry her lover, and the final collage is a domestic scene of an aproned woman surrounded by two children with the caption: 'Is there never again to be...adventure?' (D. Barthelme *Don B* 103). This story is an example of Barthelme's text and collages adhering to the same narrative objectives.

Klinkowitz claims that Barthelme's 'nonverbal' collages interrupt the words of the story while still 'advancing' the narrative, but this assertion is predicated on a conceptual cohesion between text and image (Klinkowitz 62). Although this unity exists in 'A Nation of Wheels'

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<sup>94</sup> 'Adventure' was originally published in *Harper's* magazine and remained uncollected until *Don B*.

(1970), 'The Photographs' (1974) and 'The Dassaud Prize' (1976), in other stories there is pictorial and textual divergence. Many of Barthelme's collages are not illustrations in the literal sense that they illuminate the narrative, as is the case in his graphic novel *Sam's Bar* (1987) illustrated by Seymour Chwast. Instead the collages often operate independently, inserting themselves between the text and inhibiting a purely textual focus. *Presents* underscores this theme: while the textual episodes hang together loosely, the collages only abstractly align with the prose. For example, in *Presents* an account of Yves Klein readying his nude models with blue paint sits opposite a page with collages featuring two variations of Romanesque capitals, which support on their abacuses a Greco-Roman bust of a woman and two circular swatches of damask fabric (*Presents* 10–11). Conclusions can be drawn from this juxtaposition about parallels between contemporary and classical aesthetics, the changing status of women, intersections of art and female beauty, etcetera. One may also be inclined to consider the classical formula of associating architectural harmony and representations of the feminine. As Jencks reminds us in one of his essays on classical sensibilities, the use of classical archetypes in contemporary art exhibits the hallmark of postmodern reflexivity, by 'neutrally' underscoring the artifice of the picture and forcing 'self-consciousness' ('Post-Avant-Garde' 64–65). Yet *Presents* itself provides no clues for a method of decipherment; the intention is for the burden of interpretation to be on the viewer. This technique harks back to early twentieth-century collage, with its challenges of narrative discernment – where a bottle is no longer a bottle, a guitar no longer a guitar (Laliberte and Mogelon 11). Oddly enough, this process is not disruptive to the narrative; typical of Barthelme's stories, the content is not linear or hierarchical: picture and prose come at the reader all at once, they are in McLuhan's terminology 'acoustic'.

Generally, critics collectively refer to Barthelme's stories featuring pictures as his 'collage stories', although there is an element of ambiguity to this term, since some critics, like William B. Warde, Jr. in his essay 'Collage Approach: Barthelme's Literary Fragments' (1985), employ the phrase to reference both Barthelme's 'fragmented' formalism (textual collage) and his stories

which utilise pictorial collage.<sup>95</sup> While the hybridising effects that these two strategies create are of interest, intimating that they are equivalent understates the divergences between text and picture.<sup>96</sup> The protean concept of collage also illustrates the challenges of mastering *verbal* representation with a *visual* discourse – a type of reverse ekphrasis. Hinting at his own sensitivity to these differences, Barthelme refers in his introduction to an exhibition on Rauschenberg, to ‘physical collage’; in doing so, one assumes, he is drawing distinctions between the visual art medium and theoretical or literary collage (*Not-Knowing* 185). Although now regarded as a ‘Neo-Dadaist’, Rauschenberg began his career associated with Abstract Expressionism. Barthelme’s intimacy with the Abstract Expressionist movement – the first wholly American style of art to garner international attention and influence – is most visible in his professional and personal relationship with the de Koonings. The author even changed the dedication of *Paradise* from his daughter Anne to Elaine de Kooning, shortly before publication.<sup>97</sup>

Yet much of the detail of Barthelme’s collage stories has been compromised due to the poor printing quality of some of the book editions; lines and edges are blurry and contrast levels make the collages appear darker than intended. Barthelme’s collages are almost entirely in greyscale, with the notable exception of his sole children’s book *The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine*.<sup>98</sup> The magazine versions are much truer reproductions of Barthelme’s artwork, capturing nuance through higher quality printing processes and paper. Due to the smaller scale and the layout of books, the placements of the collages vary from the magazine originals. In some

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<sup>95</sup> Barthelme has contributed to this ambiguity; “‘Junk collage’ [...] learned [...] from Max Ernst’, the author once described his writing style to the fashion newspaper *Women’s Wear Daily* (24).

<sup>96</sup> Some critics, however, like Nicholas Sloboda, have demonstrated sensitivity to the oppositional nuances of textual collage and pictorial collage. Using Mitchell’s ‘critical iconology’, Sloboda argues that Barthelme’s ‘hybrid artistry’ (the author’s interplay of text and image) is not exclusively quixotic, but a ‘poetics at once his and postmodern’ (117, 110). See Nicholas Sloboda, ‘Heteroglossia and Collage: Donald Barthelme’s “Snow White”’. *Mosaic* 30 4 (1997): 109–123.

<sup>97</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. Andreas Huyssen claims that Barthelme, and other postmodernists, sought to challenge the ‘dominance of abstract expressionism’, but the author’s own aesthetic forcefully contradicts this claim (188).

<sup>98</sup> In the case of *Fire Engine* the colour aspect of the images was added during publication pre-production. Barthelme did ‘colour in’ some of his collages, but they may have been intended as doodles since none appear to have been published.

instances, like 'At the Tolstoy Museum', entire pages of collages have been omitted. While Barthelme frequently revised his short stories for the collected editions, there is no evidence to suggest that these omissions were by his request; more likely, pragmatism, space constraints and publishing costs guided the decision. If one accepts Klinkowitz's statement about 'narrative advancement' then logically the removal of these pictures alters the narrative of the story.

In the *New Yorker* version of 'Tolstoy' printed on side-by-side pages, four decoratively framed identical portraits of Tolstoy overwhelm half of the page. Lest the reader takes these imposing pictures too seriously, a Napoleon in miniature gazes at the display from the left-hand corner. Tolstoys abound, and on the lower half of the right-hand page there are two pictures of, purportedly, the author as a youth. Everything is diminished by this formidable figure; emphasising this is the story's opening paragraph, where the reader is told:

Our gaze drifted toward the pictures. They were placed too high on the wall. We suggested to the director that they be lowered six inches at least. [...] The holdings of the Tolstoy Museum consist principally of some thirty thousand pictures of Count Leo Tolstoy.

After they had lowered the pictures we went back to the Tolstoy Museum. I don't think you can peer into one man's face too long—for too long a period. A great many human passions could be discerned, behind the skin. (D. Barthelme 'Tolstoy' 32)

Displaying Barthelme's penchant for demystifying 'geniuses', what follows this obsequious account is a list of Tolstoy's most mundane and, in many cases, least flattering experiences: 'As a youth he shaved off his eyebrows, hoping they would grow back bushier. He first contracted gonorrhoea in 1847. He was once bitten on the face by a bear. He became a vegetarian in 1885' ('Tolstoy' 32). Upon turning the page there is an engraving of a columned atrium with the same large image of Tolstoy peering at the reader; the caption reads: 'View from third level to floor of entrance court' (D. Barthelme 'Tolstoy' 34). A visible plate number on the bottom of the picture indicates that the engraving was originally taken from a pattern book. It is unclear if Tolstoy's image has been replicated on the floor of the museum, or if it is his ghostly visage peering from beyond, but, as the reader was warned in the opening paragraph of the story, Tolstoy is omnipresent. The following pages have three additional pictures of Tolstoy accompanied by

architecture, all of which are included in the version that appears in *Forty*. The atrium image, however, was eliminated and the layout of the story is dramatically altered, with each collage appearing on a separate page. Much of the comedic dimension of the story is lost by these alterations and, while still absurdist, the effect is muted.

The majority of pictures composing Barthelme's collages are from copyright-exempt clip-art sourcebooks, which permit the limited use of the pictures without attribution. While Barthelme's collection of collage sourcebooks is extensive and exhibits signs of zealous handling – book covers have been slashed by penknives, numerous pages cut or removed, in some instances pictures have been coloured in with markers – most of Barthelme's collage elements are from books from the Dover Pictorial Archive Series.<sup>99</sup> The desired aim of the series was to 'make available [...] a rich repository of illustrative material that will prove useful to contemporary artists, designers, illustrators and others in their work' (Hutchinson viii). Some of Barthelme's sourcebooks include: *Handbook of Early Advertising Art* (1956), *1800 Woodcuts by Thomas Bewick and His School* (1962), *200 Decorative Title-Pages* (1964), *The Wildest Old Engravings and Illustrations* (1966), *An Old-Fashioned Christmas in Illustration and Decoration* (1970), *Curious Woodcuts of Fanciful and Real Beasts* (1971), *Victorian Inventions* (1971), *A Source Book of French Advertising Art* (1974), *Decorative Floral Engravings: 118 Plates from the 1696 "Accurate Description of Terrestrial Plants"* (1975), *Historic Ornament: A Pictorial Archive, Ready-to-Use Contemporary Small Frames and Borders* (1975), *Decorative Silhouettes of the Twenties* (1975), and *Men: A Pictorial Archive from Nineteenth-Century Sources* (1980). From only a cursory look at the images contained within these books a theme emerges: the majority of Barthelme's collage sourcebooks depict historical life as the fantastic, the spectacular, the

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<sup>99</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. Occasionally, Barthelme did also use pictures from original antiquarian prints and etchings as collage elements. For example, one of the bodiless heads collaged in *Presents* is from an antiquarian Italian folio.

romantic even.<sup>100</sup> As McLuhan declares in the opening statement of *Laws of Media*, ‘each of man’s artefacts is in fact a kind of word, a metaphor that translates experience from one form into another’ (McLuhan and McLuhan 3). Contained within Barthelme’s sourcebooks is a rendering of the distant and recent past in its most exaggerated form, commodified for the spectatorship of the contemporary viewer; most of the images are from engravings which have been sourced from advertisements.<sup>101</sup>

One of Barthelme’s sourcebooks that is not based on advertisements is the collection of woodcuts by noted English wood-engraver Thomas Bewick (1753–1828), who is credited with popularising illustrated books in the eighteenth century (Darton 17; Selborne 23). As Jenny Uglow recounts in her biography of Bewick, *Nature’s Engraver* (2006), unlike natural history books with sumptuous copper engravings, ‘[w]ood engravings were the plain man’s art’ (xvi). Prior to Bewick’s transformation of this method of relief printmaking, wood-engravings were regarded as crude and were even ‘dismissed by the critic Horace Walpole in a cursory footnote in 1782 as “slovenly stamps”’ (Uglow xvi). Due to the relative inexpensiveness of woodblock illustrated books, Bewick regarded wood-engraving as a valuable ‘vehicle to instruct and moralize’ an expanding ‘newly literate public’ (Selborne 22). Joanna Selborne, curator of prints at the Courtauld Gallery, characterises Bewick’s style as a new ‘anecdotal’ picturesque (22). Fittingly, in Robert Hutchinson’s introduction to Barthelme’s copy of *1800 Woodcuts by Thomas Bewick and His School*, Hutchinson notes how Bewick, ‘established the pictorial symbolism of

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<sup>100</sup> Barthelme was not the only author in the latter half of the twentieth century experimenting with out-of-date illustration styles. For example, the writer/illustrator Edward Gorey exaggerated the sinister darkness of Victorian illustration in his drawings. Many of his major works were published in the 1950s and 1960s. Maxwell writes: ‘Gorey [...] uses crosshatching in his drawings [...]; in effect, he reproduces the effect of old book illustrations for a publishing industry that relies on photoreproduction’ (412–13). Embracing the publishing techniques of their time, Barthelme’s replication of collage on a flat (photo-reproduced) surface is similarly evocative. Barthelme was an admirer of Gorey’s textual and pictorial *humour noir*. The cover of the paperback edition for Barthelme’s first book, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, was illustrated by Gorey. Barthelme wrote a review of *Amphigorey Also* (1983) for *New York Magazine*. The book is a collection of humorous Surrealist inspired parodies fixated on bicycles. In the review Barthelme identifies Magritte and Ernst as imaginative points of departure (*Not-Knowing* 94–96). For more on Victorian-inspired post-war texts see pages 412–19 in Maxwell’s *The Victorian Illustrated Book*.

<sup>101</sup> Engraving was the only means of mass-producing pictures until the advent of photography.

his age, the clichés if you will, in which we still tend to think of eighteenth-century England – the small house in the snow, the lamb with its mother, the cat seated in the window’ (viii). For Barthelme, it is in the quaint imagery of the decontextualised, atemporal picturesque that he finds sites of creative departure.

From a man holding up a penny-farthing in ‘Tolstoy’ to the eroticised scientific instruments featured in ‘The Dassaud Prize’, Barthelme’s fascination with inventions summons Ernst. Much of the materials for Ernst’s collage-novels were selected from nineteenth-century sources – sensation fiction, the popular science magazine *La Nature*, and books by French wood and steel engraver Gustave Doré – which were already old-fashioned by the 1920s. In *Max Ernst: Collage* (1988) Werner Spies calls this fixation ‘[t]he fascination of the obsolete’ (78). Ernst had an affinity for outmoded mechanical contraptions, recasting early transportation devices, optical instruments, zoological and botanical apparatuses, and tools for medical experimentation in a grotesque light. The images possess an inherent absurd humour, revealing a tension between the spectacle of human invention and the perversity of human ambition. In 1922, Ernst illustrated collections of poems by Paul Eluard, featuring collages sourced from old book and catalogue wood or zinc engravings. Marcel Jean argues that because

this method of reproduction by then had been supplanted by new techniques, the engraved pictures which Max Ernst transformed into visual poems were already childhood memories for people of his generation, possessing a picturesque quality that is both derisive and very engaging, and which becomes enhanced, revived in a sense by the very humour of the *collage*.<sup>102</sup> (88)

On at least one occasion, Barthelme used a picture from Doré’s 1875 engravings for Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) (Nel 78).<sup>103</sup> Although Barthelme and his intended reader were further removed in time from the original sources of his engravings, the images can still be recognised as ironically quaint and strangely familiar. Evocative of a more general cultural

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<sup>102</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

<sup>103</sup> Presumably, Barthelme’s copy of Doré’s work was reproduced from sourcebooks, or some alternative secondary material.

memory, in Barthelme's collages the historical fragments are 'revivified' through postmodern interpolation.

In his essay 'Beyond Painting' (1948) Ernst passionately details his 1919 discovery of illustrated scientific catalogues as source material for collage:

[...] I was struck by the obsession which held under my gaze the pages of an illustrated catalogue showing objects designed for anthropologic, microscopic, psychological, mineralogic, and paleontologic demonstration. There I found brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me and brought forth an illusive succession of contradictory images, double, triple and multiple images, piling up on each other [...] [like] visions of half-sleep.

These visions called themselves new planes, because of their meeting in a new unknown (the plane of non-agreement). [...] [By] embellish[ing] these catalogue pages [...] I obtained a faithful fixed image of my hallucination and transformed into revealing dramas my most secret desires – from what had been before only some banal pages of advertising. ('Beyond Painting' 14)

Demonstrating the seduction of collage-making, the last line of Ernst's paean to collage strikes a similar tone as the previously mentioned preface to *Guilty Pleasures*. After recounting the 'pleasure of cutting up and pasting together pictures, a secret vice gone public', Barthelme concludes: 'Guilty pleasures are the best' (*Guilty Pleasures* vii). Ernst's 'obsession' with illustration-based collage also speaks of imaginative wonderment and the expression of inner yearning. However, for Ernst it is not only the production process of collage that is evocative, it is the resulting outward display of his mental pictures: 'I obtained a faithful fixed image of my hallucination and transformed into revealing dramas my most secret desires' (Ernst 'Beyond Painting' 14).

In the early 1920s Ernst used a variety of materials for his collages, including photographs, engineering drawings, advertising illustrations and scientific line illustrations. Perhaps most significantly, by 1920 he had discovered steel engravings in Victorian books, 'with their absurd dramatics and disturbing psychological overtones' (Janis and Blesh 98). Collage as a medium and technique concerns the multiplicity of images and the layering of meaning. Ernst played with collage as a means of creating a double vision of history and modern culture. Displaying isolated repetitious products dislocated from any necessity based in reality, catalogues

and advertisements hold a particular resonance for collage. Spies observes Ernst's general lack of interest in material with aesthetic aspirations, opting instead for 'low' art illustrators' and draftsmen's renderings of 'banal imagery' (78). Department store catalogues were amongst the last to retire wood and steel engravings, reusing plates for years at a time. The resistance to adopting autotype printing for photography was due to both economic reasons and a desire to protect perceived brand reliability (Spies 78). Replicating this catalogue-like cacophony of paraphernalia, the Dover Pictorial Archive Series is a palimpsest of connotations, the images having been transplanted from their assigned destination to a thematic collected book, with the ultimate intention of being transferred for a second time to an undetermined location. While the genealogy is obscured, present in illustration-based collage is the simultaneity of old and new imaging. The usage of outmoded techniques forces the viewer to recognise the displaced nature of the illustration, resulting in sustained ambiguity about the true context of the images' origins – Why is that man smiling? If opened where would that door go? Ernst recognised the potential of collage for manipulating narrative-making: the artist's collage-novels are a culmination of Surrealist storytelling. Ernst's penchant for engravings from Victorian illustrated books adds an additional layer to this crisscrossing of narratives. As Janis and Blesh recount, '[from the] inevitable literary allusiveness of engravings once used to illustrate fiction, come the literary overtones which still further mark Ernst's engraving collages as a new art species' (101).

Many of Ernst's illustration-based collages reproduce mechanical accuracy, dexterously concealing the collages' joints so that alterations are barely discernable to the naked eye.<sup>104</sup> Unlike the Dadaist and Surrealist *mêlée* that characterises some of his collages, Ernst was able to create synergy among his collage elements by capitalising on a 'technical advantage of line engravings' – the engravings' lines could blend the pasted joints (Janis and Blesh 99). Methodically fusing the old images, the lines lock together seamlessly. As Spies observes, since

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<sup>104</sup> What is believed to be Ernst's first collage constructed entirely of steel engravings, *Preparation of Glue from Bones* (1921), is an excellent example of skilfully hidden joints (Janis and Blesh 99).

the subject is distilled into a series of lines and dots, illustrations printed from wood-engravings were particularly adept at deception (77). Ernst's technique captures the Surrealist 'realism of the unreal', assembling discordant subject matter with an 'air of verisimilitude' (Janis and Blesh 99). As Paul Eluard wrote in the epigraph to 'First Poem Visible' in *Une semaine de bonté*: 'And I object to the love of ready-made images in place of images to be made' (*Une Semaine* 180). Most of Barthelme's collages that are not ready-made are often crudely – possibly reflexively – 'handmade'. The collage elements are layered without regard for visual harmony. At times, a skilful Ernstian unity is struck, and in other instances there is haphazardness to the work. Despite Ernst's avowal of automatism, compositionally Barthelme's collages often contain more spontaneous dynamism.

While Ernstian energy – ready-made backgrounds, period engravings, female eroticism, scientific instruments, etc. – extends across Barthelme's pictorial oeuvre, the influence of Ernst is particularly visible in Barthelme's *The Emerald* (1980). In this limited-edition book, motifs from Ernst's *Une semaine de bonté* hang suspended in phantasmagoric transplantation. Printed on heavy paper stock, next to the title page is one of Barthelme's most compositionally sophisticated collages: a baboon's face emerges from a cratered moon pasted onto a vertical piece of black paper that has been cut on a diagonal; below, on the whiteness of the page, a woman's head serenely smiles from the body of a bat with veiny outstretched wings (**fig. 1**). This design is atypical of Barthelme's work; most of his collages sit on the page in isolation, with no backgrounds, or ready-made backgrounds. Yet the reference to Ernst is emblematic of Barthelme's formal technique and aesthetic – and a witty nod and wink to the knowledgeable reader/viewer familiar with the styles of the twentieth-century avant-garde. Adopting the motif of human beings with pasted-on bat wings from *Une semaine de bonté*'s 'Cour du Dragon' sequence

(fig. 2), the theme is literalised and thus made more overtly humorous by Barthelme.<sup>105</sup> Instead of the haunting voyeuristic violence and dark eroticism of Ernst's Gothic collage-novel, Barthelme's Ernstian mode resurrects and revises these motifs in an innocuous, but no less dramatic or absurd way (fig. 3). Barthelme has constructed a pictorial representation that mimics the playful erudition of his short stories. The bat-woman in *The Emerald* lacks the anthropomorphic subtlety of Ernst's figures, where wings elegantly sprout from the backs of gowns and jackets; instead all but her head is from a bat. Generally, Barthelme's collages, while still oddities, are non-threatening. Conversely, Ernst pulls back the curtain of *drame bourgeois* to reveal sinister phantoms (Ashbery vii).<sup>106</sup> As John Ashbery comments, 'The terror is heightened by the fact that these figures who once stood as symbols of taste and correctness have changed character and are now rampaging in a world of nightmare' (Ashbery vii).<sup>107</sup>

Similar to *La Femme 100 têtes* and *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel*, the collages in *The Emerald* are situated above short 'captions'. While the words in *The Emerald* do obliquely refer to the pictures above them, they hardly elucidate the meaning of the collage or the story's narrative. Instead, the pictures and attendant text operate in a dreamlike space, disconnected from conventions of narration, liberally exploring thoughts and associations. For example, in *The Emerald* the text accompanying the baboon and bat-woman collage reads: 'It was the man in the moon. Deus Lunus. Him' (*Emerald*). The first collage in *La Femme 100 têtes* depicts an upside-down male nude dangling from the sky in a contrapposto stance, arms extended as he is drawn downward into a wild landscape by a net anchored by a mob of men. The text

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<sup>105</sup> Ernst's animal-men were inspired by the French illustrator Grandville (1803–1847), an artist highly admired by the Surrealists. For Ernst, winged animal-men were iconographical representations of his mythical creature, Loplop. The figure of Loplop portrays a simultaneous embodiment of life and death.

<sup>106</sup> Developed in the eighteenth century, *drame bourgeois* is a type of French middle-class play that exists somewhere between comedy and tragedy.

<sup>107</sup> Ashbery himself is a paper collagist, although he did not publicly display his art until 2008. The exhibited collages at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York City, were mostly from the 1970s, although some of the works dated from as early as the 1940s. Ashbery began making paper collages while attending Harvard. One of his fellow classmates and friends was Edward Gorey. See Holland Cotter, 'The Poetry of Scissors and Glue'. *The New York Times* 2008, New York ed., sec. Art: AR1.

states: ‘Crime or miracle: a complete man’ (*Headless Woman* 15).<sup>108</sup> The tone of these two captions is similar: they are foreboding and inchoate. Spies links *La Femme 100 têtes*’s ‘erratic sequences of imagery and text’ to serialised illustrated novels of the nineteenth century, where, frequently, captions from the story were arbitrarily cut and placed below an unrelated event (209). Additional Ernst hallmarks can be identified in Barthelme’s collages. For instance, in the final collage of *The Emerald* a reclining female nude lies on her back while bisected concentric geometric shapes spin above her body (**fig. 4**). In Chapter 1 of *La Femme 100 têtes* a reclining female nude rests on top of an organ, gazing above at a concentric series of triangles pasted over an oblong face (**fig. 5**). Again in *The Emerald* a large two-legged rodent stands erect behind a caped man (**fig. 6**). The visage of the figure closely resembles the mask-like faces of Polynesian Moai carved stone sculpture, which Ernst used throughout *Une semaine de bonté*’s ‘Easter Island’ sequence (**fig. 7**). The elliptical eye slits, square jaw line, protruding mouth and exaggerated angular nose all bear the same characteristics. The silent black and white drama of ‘Easter Island’ fuses the ‘primitive’ with a European technique and aesthetic, interjecting the threatening wildness of the foreign into familiar trappings. Indebted to Ernst, Barthelme’s ‘Easter Island’-inspired collage contains a corresponding simultaneous humour and terror; as the exotic beast stalks the caped man, the viewer is intrigued by the frozen drama, caught in a tense space between laughter and fear.

Instead of Jencks’s idea of a postmodern ‘nostalgia’ for the past, I would like to suggest that Barthelme’s sourcebooks function for him not as a historical revival, but as a fetishised artefact of a distant culture – similar to the Surrealists’ use of tribal art. As Carpenter writes in the introduction to an exhibition of Surrealist-owned tribal art objects at The Menil Collection,

Houston:

The Surrealists saw in tribal arts a mirror of their own vision and collected parallel works from distant lands. They assembled these tribal images [...] juxtaposing them randomly, without regard

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<sup>108</sup> The same collage is reproduced as the final picture in *La Femme 100 têtes*. The closing version reads: ‘End and continuation’ (325).

for function, culture, or history. They let objects collide. They hoped accident would reveal analogies that convention concealed. (Carpenter)

Presumably, a facet of the ‘shared vision’ of the Surrealists and tribal arts is ‘multi-locationalism’. Summoning unconventional associations, these sourcebooks allow Barthelme to transverse time, space and chronology, joining cultural imagery that would otherwise be disconnected and allowing an intimacy with the past that is otherwise difficult to access from the contemporary world. Pictures from ‘forgotten’ books no longer read – which, in general, constitute the raw material for Barthelme’s sourcebooks – Breton claims, ‘give an illusion of veritable *slits* in time, space, customs and even beliefs’ (8).<sup>109</sup> Like the disparate cultures of the indigenous peoples which captured the Surrealist imagination, by sheer juxtaposition – or ‘collision’, to use Carpenter’s term – the ‘unfamiliarity’ of the idols, masks and figurines are made ‘familiar’ (Carpenter). A vision of the past arranged through the prism of postmodern disjunction, Barthelme’s collages simultaneously offer an alternative view of history and contemporary life – an extension of what Jencks identifies as ‘postmodern classicism’, where the avant-garde “‘shock of the new’” of Duchamp’ is replaced by the “‘shock of the old’” of Mariani’ (‘Post-Avant-Garde’ 17). In opposition to the ‘Modernist notion of creativity *ex nihilo*’ (*Classicism* 217) – a fixation that Jencks characterises as ‘the fetish of the new’ (*Classicism* 12) – is the postmodern reinterpretation of classical sensibilities.

Best known for his canvases of classically inspired Greco-Roman figures painted in plasticity celestial hues, Carlo Maria Mariani is, to Jencks, an artist who typifies a contemporary reinvention of classical mythology. Jencks writes that, while initially the viewer might struggle to locate the innovation within Mariani’s ‘dreary academic reconstructions’, the paintings engage in ‘surreal “re-mythification”’ (*Classicism* 48). Employing the iconographical cues of classical allegory, Mariani’s myth-making delivers its ‘shock’ through historical exchange, where ‘the past paints the present, the present the past’ (*Classicism* 51). Paralleling this revisiting of past forms of

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<sup>109</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

communication, McLuhan writes of how a shift towards the ‘all-at-once auditory experience’ is a return to a ‘tribal’ past; a move that will eventually result in ‘the global village’ where there is only one tribe, ‘the human family itself’ (‘Medium’ 24). In *Explorations in Communication* (1960) McLuhan and Carpenter observe a reversal of primitive and Western contemporary cultures due to the oral elements of ‘the new electric sensibility’ (McLuhan and McLuhan 47). ‘Just as the Eskimo has been de-tribalized via print [...] so we, in an equally brief period, are becoming tribalized via electronic channels’ (xii). McLuhan and Carpenter go on to explain that these statements of observation are not intended to pass judgment; they are neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad’, but that it is essential to understand their ‘cause and process’ so ‘we can orchestrate’ their benefits (xii). To the contemporary reader, McLuhan’s ethnocentric conflation of the oral with ‘primitive’/ ‘tribal’ culture is highly problematic. A helpful, although naively optimistic, companion for this deficiency is Walter Ong’s more carefully devised system of ‘old’ ‘primary orality’ (pre-literacy) and ‘new’ ‘secondary orality’ (the ‘post-typography’ electronic era) (135–37). A former student of McLuhan’s, Ong writes:

[secondary] orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas. [...] But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print.<sup>110</sup> (135–37)

Demonstrating Barthelme’s relationship to historical imagery, the collages in *Fire Engine* were primarily sourced from a series of books called *Old Engravings & Illustrations* by The Dick Sutphen Studio.<sup>111</sup> The introduction to *Old Engravings & Illustrations, Volume One* (1965) describes the book’s collected material as, ‘graphically dated items...their use being presently in vogue. Others, however, have become the very basis of contemporary styles. (Nearly a century later!)’ (D. Sutphen 2). The typographic text banners (which Barthelme called ‘legends’) interspersed throughout *Fire Engine*’s pages – declaring free-associative phrases like ‘BURIED

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<sup>110</sup> McLuhan directed the MA thesis for Ong, who went on to write *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982). The influential book charts the varying ‘personality and social structures’ of oral and chirographic cultures, and, unsurprisingly, is strongly influenced by McLuhan’s theories.

<sup>111</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

JEWELS / Oceanic Dredging Company', which sits to the upper right of a cut-out of a knitting pirate – come from the third edition of *Handbook of Early Advertising Art (Fire Engine 8)*.<sup>112</sup>

When asked about the process of constructing *Fire Engine*, Barthelme remarked:

I gathered together the pictures I thought I could use. That book was dictated by the pictures. [...] Those legends, as I call them in the children's book, come from a nineteenth-century printer's type-specimen book. It's a catalog from which printers can order type, samples of type specimens, and whoever set the specimens was wonderfully funny and imaginative. So I didn't write those words, I just took them out of the catalog and used them both as a design element to make the pages more interesting and also because what was said was very often quite appropriate and funny in itself. [...] [T]he printers were wonderfully literate in the nineteenth century. (*Not-Knowing* 245)

When pressed further on the subject of the 'legends', Barthelme agreed with the interviewer that they are 'almost calligraphic in the sense that [they're] illustrative and yet very, very amusing in meaning' (*Not-Knowing* 246).

While Barthelme's book may have resonated with some adults, the honour of the National Book Award was not bestowed upon *Fire Engine* without a degree of controversy, and there continues to be debate over whether Barthelme's book is truly for children. I suspect that this is due to the rigid 'adult' collage story technique that Barthelme transferred from his short stories, with little augmentation. With the exception of the sickly colours and the typographic 'legends', the collages in *Fire Engine* could be mistaken as pictures from any of his short stories. As E. L. Konigsburg, the author of the successful children's book *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, recounts in her non-fiction book *TalkTalk* (1995), the National Book Award panel of judges failed to reach a unanimous agreement. The dissenting judge, who was a children's book periodical editor, issued a public statement of his disagreement with the other two celebrity (non-children's literature) judges. The first printing of the book was shortly remaindered. Konigsburg wryly commented that '[children] have little need for the avant-garde' (60). Barthelme responded to the criticism by stating that his daughter enjoyed the book.

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<sup>112</sup> The first and second editions of *Handbook of Early Advertising Art* were titled *Early American Advertising Art*.

One plausible means of understanding *Fire Engine* is through an examination of E. V. Lucas and George Morrow's 1911 early Surrealist work of fiction, *What a Life!: An Autobiography*.<sup>113</sup> Employing a strikingly similar visual aesthetic to *Fire Engine*, *What a Life!* is composed of cut-out merchandise from the *Whiteley's General Catalogue*. Although *What a Life!* was authored for adults, in 1899 Lucas had published a children's picture book, *The Book of Shops*, which took a more conventional approach to book illustration.<sup>114</sup> While the title might imply a comparable interest in commodification, *The Book of Shops* is, in fact, a lyrical account of the types of services provided by different retail businesses (the bookseller, the market, the fishmonger, etc.). Lucas recounts in *Reading, Writing and Remembering* (1933) how he and Morrow conceived of the idea of *What a Life!*:

[We] hit upon the device of forcing the blocks in a stores [sic] catalogue to illustrate a biography. [...] We applied first to Harrod's for permission and, being refused, went to Whiteley's and were made welcome. The next thing was to let ourselves go; and the process of bending the material to our will was, I can assure you, very exhilarating. (252)

Maxwell describes Lucas and Morrow's experiment as an attempt to 'transform Victorian illustration by dismembering it' (Maxwell 400). Like Barthelme's *Fire Engine*, the faux-autobiography *What a Life!* is about the adventures of a privileged youth. The pictures of mainly household goods are situated without flourish, typically two per page, interspersed with sparse accompanying text. Similar to Barthelme's employment of fantastic historical images as a catalyst for literary adventure, Maxwell observes how, 'Lucas and Morrow rediscover the tropes of nineteenth-century sensation fiction—poisoners, ghosts, jewel robberies, obsessive lost loves, the lure of India—in the everyday world of consumer goods' (401). What Maxwell is alluding to is the power of 'things' in isolation, the malleable associative meaning of objects when liberated from their mundane everyday contexts. A parallel can be located in Barthelme's repeated motif of museums and zoos, as seen in 'Natural History' (1971) and 'The Educational Experience' (1973); these are stories are cabinets of curiosities where objects are transformed by decontextualisation.

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<sup>113</sup> Thanks to Professor Laura Marcus for the valuable introduction to *What a Life!*.

<sup>114</sup> *The Book of Shops* was illustrated by Francis D. Bedford.

The narrator of *What a Life!* claims that he is ‘the foremost conchologist of the country’ and his ‘collection of 14,000 varieties of winkles’ now resides in the Natural History Museum (Lucas and Morrow 122). Adjacent to the text is a decorated nautilus. Both authors’ imaginative representation of ‘things’ is more than what Bill Brown calls ‘commodity-fetishism-as-usual’; instead, it is akin to his observations about how Paul Strand’s photography ‘makes meaning’ out of inanimate objects by ‘discovering a kind of thingness obscured by their everyday use as objects’ (Brown 4, 9). Barthelme’s 1972 short story ‘Wrack’ is perhaps the most conspicuous example of his fascination with liberated ‘thingness’; on the first page of the story a shuttered door, an ornate frame, and a high button shoe sit within the columns of text. While the story does name and refer directly to the ‘things’, there is a distinct catalogue-like feel to the layout; the title ‘Wrack’, a homophone for ‘rack’, only serves to amplify this association. The reader would be forgiven for thinking that the accompanying narrative is an innovative sales technique designed to showcase the products – that is, if the content of the story was not so nonsensical. Appropriately, *What a Life!* was itself transformed into an art object; recognised as a ‘pioneer work of Surrealism’, the book was exhibited at MoMA (Lucas and Morrow).<sup>115</sup>

There is a similar type of ambiguous free-associative logic at work in both *Fire Engine* and *What a Life!*. Where, at first glance the relationship between the text and the pictures in *What a Life!* appears rational, on closer inspection one realises there is a disconnect; many of the designated images only conjure the impression of the objects or experience that they refer to in the text. For instance, the passage ‘A lenient and generous teacher, the Doctor took us often to the Crystal Palace’ is juxtaposed with an elaborate birdcage, which in some ways does conjure the general architecture of the glass and cast-iron exhibition building (Lucas and Morrow 28). This technique of visual parallels and similarities plays tricks on the eye, creating a flipbook-like quality where, if you rapidly turned the pages, the continuity between text and image would

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<sup>115</sup> It was at MoMA’s second major retrospective ‘Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism’ in 1936 where the book was exhibited.

become more plausible. While pictures dictated the narrative of *Fire Engine*, Lucas suggests, when he writes of his and Morrow's 'process of bending the material to our will', that the *text* of the story was the guiding principle. In *Fire Engine*, the pictures do roughly correlate to the prose, however, the typographic 'legends' still engage in free-associative meaning. It is, for example, conceivable that 'MODERN ENTERTAINMENTS / Barnumian Charioteering / Trapeze Daredevilism, Pugilistic Ruffianism / Shortgowned Theatricals' loosely relates to the images of charging woolly mammoths and an on-looking crowd of top hat-clad men (D. Barthelme *Fire Engine* 15–6). Regardless of the fact that there are no trapeze artists or circus chariots, the typographic banners and images help to evoke a carnivalesque atmosphere. The 'legends' contribute to a sensation of frenzied animation, fuelling the 'event' that is required by the action of the narrative.

Other images and text within *What a Life!* engage in a type of pictorial synecdoche. Above a picture of a breadboard with a built-in slicer is the passage: 'She gave me no hope and I left her in despair. For days I lived on nothing but a few sandwiches' (Lucas and Morrow 89). Of course, there is no sandwich in the picture, just a partial loaf of sliced bread and a cutting board. However, the entirety of the meaning is still conveyed: immediately the mind supplements the absence of the corresponding image with a presumption that, through action, the sliced bread will eventually become a sandwich. The predisposition for logic is so strong that only a part is necessary to communicate the whole. One picture of upside-down smoking pipes in *What a Life!* is of particular interest due to its apparent Heideggerian subject/object play. The caption reads: 'Two swans – one English and one Australian – were always on the lake' (Lucas and Morrow 14). The curved 'necks' of the pipes and their broad 'body' seem to peacefully float in the white of the page – when looked at with a determination influenced by the text. This double-meaning image seemingly taps into the subconscious, a phenomenon that Mitchell notes is called 'multistability' (*Picture Theory* 45). 'Multistable images', like the famous optical illusions 'Duck-Rabbit' or 'My Wife or My Mother-in-law', are 'a class of pictures whose primary

function is to illustrate the co-existence of contrary or simply different readings in the single image' (*Picture Theory* 45). Mitchell describes how multistable images are frequently found in nineteenth-century psychology and anthropological studies of 'so-called "primitive art"' (*Picture Theory* 45). He writes, 'Masks, shields, architectural ornaments, and ritual objects often display visual paradoxes conjoining human and animal forms, profiles and frontal views' (*Picture Theory* 45). This observation summons the previous discussions about the Surrealists' fascination with tribal arts and McLuhan's commentary about the 'multi-locationalism' of preliterate cultures. Yet Mitchell warns the reader to be sceptical of an association of multistable images with the 'savage' and 'modern' mind, particularly due to 'their recurrence in artistic practices of all ages' (*Picture Theory* 47-8).

Weighing the impact of McLuhan's theories in media studies on Barthelme is an imprecise task, but what is evident is that McLuhan is again featured by Barthelme in 1963, on this occasion in the launch issue of *Location*.<sup>116</sup> Appearing in print for the first time, 'The Agenbite of Outwit' expands on McLuhan's interest in the 'grammars' of new technologies.<sup>117</sup> The possibility of Barthelme's wholesale adoption of McLuhan's theories is unlikely. In a letter to Helen Moore Barthelme he described the 'The Agenbite of Outwit' as 'a strange piece from the Canadian anthropologist Marshall McLuhan' (H. M. Barthelme 145). In 1961, a year after McLuhan's appearance in *Forum*, Barthelme published his own first short story, continuing to shape his mastery of the non sequitur just as his career as a journalist, publicist and editor came to

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<sup>116</sup> Daugherty has identified a number of short stories by Barthelme that the biographer feels exhibit McLuhan's 'phenomenological approach' and his media 'theology' (152-53). The proposed short stories are: 'Me and Miss Mandible' (1960), 'Brain Damage' (1970), and 'At the End of the Mechanical Age' (1973).

<sup>117</sup> The title of this essay was not the first time McLuhan played with Joycean puns; referring to the phonetic alphabet 'and all its derivatives' in the introduction to *Explorations in Communication*, McLuhan and Carpenter declare, 'For 2500 years we have lived in what Joyce called "ABCED-mindedness"' (xi). Ong observes how McLuhan perceived Joyce as a writer with 'precociously acute awareness of ear-eye polarities' (Ong 29). Theall also recounts in *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (2001), McLuhan viewed Joyce as 'a technologically oriented poet who anticipated the rise of digiculture, the emergence of the wired world, and of virtual reality, thus providing one possible pre-history of cyberculture' (35). See Chapter 9 in *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan*. Barthelme called Joyce, 'the great collagist, literary collagist, of the century' (*Not-Knowing* 76-77).

an end (Klinkowitz 10). During the same year, Barthelme had the first of four pieces for *Harper's* magazine purchased. Entitled 'The Case of the Vanishing Product' (1961), the article is a largely sombre account concerned with the status of contemporary advertising, and exhibits some McLuhan conceptual hallmarks. The article documents the trend in advertising towards what Barthelme calls 'product concealment', that is, the encouragement of brand-specific consumption without directly featuring that brand or product in the imaging of the advertisement; instead, there is a carefully selected associative proxy for the product. In the concluding paragraphs of the article Barthelme quotes Carpenter to support a more subversive theory of why advertising companies might pursue such a strategy (D. Barthelme 'Vanishing Product' 31). In his chapter 'Donald Barthelme and the Historical Avant-Garde' (2002) Philip Nel interprets the author's usage of advertising legends in *Fire Engine* as a critique of consumerism and materialist values. Linking his argument to 'The Case of the Vanishing Product', for Nel the collages in Barthelme's children's book could also function as 'vernacular advertisements ("selling by indirection") [...] products of Barthelme's imagination' (78).

In an act of presumably unintentional self-analysis, columns of actual advertisements, from F. A. O Schwartz to Jack Daniels, flank 'The Case of the Vanishing Product'. This highlights the importance of taking into consideration the medium of Barthelme's publications. The overwhelming majority of Barthelme's short stories were initially published in *The New Yorker*, a magazine where images in the form of drawings and cartoons hold equal prominence with the articles and fiction that sit beside them on the page. As becomes apparent when reading Mitchell's chapter on metapictures in *Picture Theory*, *The New Yorker* is a location of pictorial self-referentiality *par excellence* (*Picture Theory* 35–49). While many of the cartoons published in *The New Yorker* feature drawings accompanied by humorous captions, there are numerous instances, as Mitchell recounts, where the comedic pictures exist without textual explanation.<sup>118</sup> In this context a reader could be forgiven for, at first glance, mistaking some of Barthelme's

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<sup>118</sup> See Chapter 2, 'Metapictures', in *Picture Theory*.

collages as artwork independent of text. It is the dated ‘historical’ style of Barthelme’s collages that distinguish his pictures from the contemporary style of the commissioned artwork. The ambiguity of Barthelme’s work achieves an even deeper interplay between text and image. In *Picture Theory* Mitchell writes of the seductive legacy of McLuhan’s theorisation of image studies. He states: ‘Our confusion with ekphrasis stems [...] from a confusion between differences of medium and differences in meaning. We are continually falling into some version of Marshall McLuhan’s dazzling and misleading metaphor, “the medium is the message”’ (*Picture Theory* 159–60). Mitchell goes on to caution the reader that when we think of the “proper” “gifts” of visual art (space) and verbal communication (narrative), we often conceive of these attributes as something that can be ‘shared’ between the media. Thus, there is an assumption that the visual arts can ‘lend’ spatiality to prose by the very invocation of its being. Instead, Mitchell states, ‘neither of these “gifts” is really the exclusive property of their donor; paintings can tell stories [...]; words can describe or embody static, spatial states of affairs’ (*Picture Theory* 160).<sup>119</sup> Highlighting the limitations of McLuhan’s most quoted theory is an important reminder of the complexity of the ‘image/text problematic’. However, by placing *The Medium is the Message* into a more comprehensive understanding of McLuhan’s theoretical conceptions of space – i.e. visual structure and auditory space – it becomes clear that McLuhan is not articulating the nexus of representative rigidity that Mitchell is proposing. Barthelme’s postmodern experimentation with the spatiality of prose and the narrative of pictures tests assumptions about the ‘proper’ expressions of representation. When binding text and image into collage stories, Barthelme allows for the liberation of each medium from its popularly prescribed ‘gifts’. By picturing the spatial aesthetics of language, image and media, Barthelme provides a rebuttal to the modernist establishment’s rejection of ‘pictorial architecture’, allowing for greater imaginative freedom of architectural idioms.

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<sup>119</sup> In a footnote to this commentary Mitchell does clarify that, ‘Texts *may*, of course, achieve spatiality or iconicity, but the visual object invoked does not require or cause these features’ (*Picture Theory* 160). Emphasis is the author’s.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Rereading *Paradise*: Architectural Practice, Social Change, and the Utopian Impulse

In his exhaustive biography of Donald Barthelme, Tracy Daugherty describes how during the mid-1980s Barthelme ‘ruefully’ mused that his style of writing was no longer fashionable.<sup>120</sup>

Gone were the days when he was considered a luminary of radical formal experimentation; he was now a forgotten member of the old guard, a postmodern provocateur outmanoeuvred by emerging styles of writing. As Daugherty recalls:

[Barthelme] would sit in his Houston duplex [...] and tell me he had “done his little thing” in fiction. His moment had passed. The “postmodern” writing with which he’d been linked had been forced to retreat into a small arrondissement in the American literary landscape, surrounded by General [Raymond] Carver and his troops. In writing classes, Don quoted his old philosophy teacher [...]: “It is a mistake to regard literature as a graveyard of dead systems.” Privately, he didn’t sound so sure.<sup>121</sup> (41)

Reflecting this sentiment of uncertainty, Barthelme’s third novel *Paradise* (1986) is his ‘most extensive reflection on the state of art and the artist in postmodern culture’ (O’Donnell 216). In a time when the critical spotlight increasingly focused on a new generation of writers – ‘minimalists’ and ‘dirty realists’ like Carver and Charles Bukowski – within *Paradise* Barthelme observes the cyclical nature of artistic movements.<sup>122</sup> The novel’s protagonist, Simon, is a middle-aged ‘sometimes inventive’ architect, who the reader is told has ‘a tragic sense of brick’ (*Paradise* 58). Having separated from his wife, Simon is on ‘a kind of sabbatical’, living in a sparsely decorated Greenwich Village apartment. He agrees to take in three financially struggling lingerie models – Dore, Anne and Veronica – as his semi-permanent houseguests. Graphically

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<sup>120</sup> This chapter is deeply indebted to Daugherty’s biography, as well as to the University of Houston archives.

<sup>121</sup> In 1981 Barthelme moved from New York to Houston to teach full-time at the University of Houston.

<sup>122</sup> When questioned directly about trends in literature, Barthelme commented that, ‘Everything goes in waves. [...] [I]t’s a kind of cyclical washing: the tide comes up onto the shore and brings different things each time’ (*Not-Knowing* 312). For a perspective on the difference between Barthelme’s often terse prose and ‘minimalist’ writing – which gained popularity in the mid-1970s and early 1980s – see Daugherty’s *Hiding Man* pages 442–43. Barthelme’s brother, Frederick Barthelme, is typically associated with dirty realist and minimalist fiction.

explicit sexual encounters ensue, until the once obliging young women become increasingly radicalised by feminist rhetoric and inevitably leave. Unlike Snow White's mute submission to the dwarfs' shower-time sexual advances, *Paradise* is reflexively aware of its stereotypical gendered titillation and exhibitionistic prose. Just as Anne asks Simon, 'Is this a male fantasy for you? This situation? [...] It has the structure of a male fantasy', the lingering observation is implicitly posed to the reader as well (*Paradise* 55). As Daugherty proclaims,

*Paradise* is no fairy tale. It's a mirror image of *Snow White*. Instead of a woman living with a gang of men, we see a man sharing space with several women. Don's first novel was pure fantasy; this one is distinguished by its brutal views of aging, sex, and death. (470)

Underscoring the novel's non-sensational aspirations, while in bed Simon responds to Anne's question about male fantasy with, 'It's not a fantasy, is it?' (*Paradise* 55). Proposing an alternative more artistically and socially productive outlet for fantasy and imagination, the reader is later told, '[Simon] saw nothing wrong with male fantasies (the Taj Mahal, the Chrysler Building) but denied that he was in hog heaven' (*Paradise* 80). The story of the women's eight-month stay is chronicled in third-person through drifting dreamlike recollections, interspersed with disembodied 'Q and A' vignettes – which are generally assumed to be conversations between Simon and his therapist.<sup>123</sup> As Patrick O'Donnell suggests, the novel investigates the complexities of 'living arrangements' in postmodern society. In addition to the novel's overt eroticism and its replication of clichéd colloquial language, the text ambitiously explores themes of personal and cultural decay, generational disconnect and career lethargy; it is largely a novel of interiors, focusing on external static domestic space and Simon's internal phenomenological considerations.

In a 1975 interview Barthelme confessed that, unlike short stories, novel writing gave him 'great difficulties' (*Not-Knowing* 224). He was, however, convinced that the experience of

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<sup>123</sup> Readers of Barthelme will be familiar with this 'Q and A' format from short stories like 'Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel' and 'The Explanation', both published in the 1968. Alan Wilde in *Middle Grounds: Studies in Contemporary American Fiction* (1987) has paid particular attention to the 'Q and A' vignettes in *Paradise*. See Wilde's Chapter 8, 'Barthelme his Garden'. The 'Q and A' series of exchanges in *Paradise* has been amongst the most intensely scrutinised aspects of the novel.

completing *The Dead Father*, ‘told me, if not what, at least how to begin writing the next [novel]’ (*Not-Knowing* 224). Most scholarly readings of Barthelme’s development as a novelist assert that *Paradise* is the result of resolved ‘formal and thematic’ novelistic and cultural problems, which were first raised in *Snow White* (1967) (Klinkowitz 87). Promoting this assertion, Jerome Klinkowitz treats *Paradise* as a fulfilment of the prophecy of formal liberation heralded by *The Dead Father*, a novel widely interpreted as having removed from the path ‘the great obstacle of decaying modernism’ (Klinkowitz 100). As Klinkowitz argues, ‘If [*Snow White*] suggests what needs to be done, *The Dead Father* (1975) actually does it—clearing the way, eventually, for the unrestricted practice of novelistic expression in the aptly titled *Paradise*’ (Klinkowitz 87). Despite the fact that in 1975 Barthelme stated he was already confidently working on a new novel, his prediction turned out to be false and it was eleven years before he published another. If *The Dead Father* is indeed an allegory for a long and painful funeral for modernism, *Paradise* provides no answers in the wake of the Dead Father’s burial. Klinkowitz notes, *Paradise* is a ‘narrative fated to deconstruct itself. If *Snow White* builds itself upon stasis [...] and *The Dead Father* exercises himself along a clear and active line of progress, *Paradise* forms itself in dissolution’ (Klinkowitz 106–07).

Like many of Barthelme’s works *Paradise* is a text resistant to interpretation, yet perhaps no other work by the author has been so critically divisive and contrarily interpreted. While many newspaper critics gave the novel a positive reception – the *Chicago Tribune* called it a ‘singular achievement, [...] vintage Barthelme and his most accessible work yet’, the *LA Times* remarked that the book was ‘agile, witty and [...] one of the blackest things [Barthelme] has written’, *People* magazine proclaimed the novel to be ‘Barthelme’s sunniest, mellowest and most entertaining book’ – other critics were less generous, disappointed by the novel’s perceived ‘creeping realism’ (*Not-Knowing* 314). The *San Jose Mercury News* ran with the headline:

‘Doleful realism fills Barthelme’s third novel: Funny surrealist loses his humor’.<sup>124</sup> After praising Barthelme’s best-known 1960s efforts – *Snow White*, ‘Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning’, ‘The Indian Uprising’, etc. – infamous and influential *New York Times* literary critic Michiko Kakutani wrote that in the ‘predictably idiosyncratic’ *Paradise* ‘wit and intellectual one-upmanship dwindle into fun and games; detachment into mechanism; narrative fragmentation into mere absurdity for absurdity’s sake’ (Kakutani). Disparities in critical readings abound. While more recently, Zuzanna Ladyga asserted that critics’ primary objection to the text was its ‘non-postmodern’, “‘greater warmth and direct engagement with emotion’” (7), Kakutani’s judgment repeated a more common refrain, declaring that

the accusations levelled at Simon in his private life echo criticisms Mr. Barthelme’s own work has received: as various characters put it, Simon is unserious, he doesn’t care about people as individuals and his “cheapo irony” reduces people’s emotions to the status of glib jokes. (Kakutani)

Amongst the most common critical pronouncements were accusations and rebuttals of male chauvinism. Richard Eder, reviewer for the *Dallas Times Herald*, proposed that one possible reading of the novel was that Simon ‘becomes a combined den-mother and domestic sex object to these gorgeous and insecure [young models]’. On the other hand, Kakutani forcefully argues that ‘Simon is a classic male chauvinist’ and that Barthelme’s writing of the women portrays them as ‘dumb, incompetent and incessantly whiny. Further, they’re virtually indistinguishable from one another – half the time we don’t know which one of them is talking’ (Kakutani).<sup>125</sup>

Perhaps one of the most interesting reviews of *Paradise* was conducted by *Progressive Architecture*, a magazine which appears in the novel itself. The February 1987 *Progressive Architecture* editorial determines that, while Barthelme was the son of a ‘respected’ architect and the author ‘occasionally drops knowing comments about architecture into his works’, in *Paradise* ‘the main function of Simon’s profession [...] is [as] a source for name-dropping: [...] passwords

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<sup>124</sup> The newspaper reviews and interviews that do not have bibliographic citations in this chapter are from material found in the Donald Barthelme Literary Papers and the Donald Barthelme, Sr. Architectural Papers.

<sup>125</sup> In his essay ‘Living Arrangements’, O’Donnell has conducted some interesting analysis about the novel’s gendered ‘dialectic of control and disorder’ (212).

to a club, contributing nothing more to the novel'. This chapter seeks to complicate this claim, arguing that Barthelme imaginatively addresses architecture as a social discourse, as well as the role of the architect in the development of American cultural and social progress. *Paradise* demonstrates how architecture as a practice and discourse can be 'read', documenting and participating in changes in society. By incorporating biographical and archival materials into my investigation into Barthelme's relationship with architecture, this chapter will contextualise the broader cultural debates that were in circulation when Barthelme was writing *Paradise*.

Additionally considered is the influence of Barthelme's father in the formulation of the novel – and more generally in the development of the writer's architectural dialectic – which has been critically underappreciated or often mischaracterised. I aim to redress this imbalance, providing a more symmetrical account of the exchange of architectural and artistic ideas between Barthelme and his father. Considering the critical tendency to view *Paradise* through the prism of Barthelme Sr., a closer examination of the architect is worthwhile. Irrespective of his recorded theories of architecture, in Barthelme studies Barthelme Sr. has been cast in the role of Ayn Rand's Howard Roark. This is in part due to Barthelme's characterisation of his father in various interviews, to Frederick and Steven Barthelme's statements in their memoir *Double Down* (1999), as well as to Barthelme Sr.'s self-cultivated mythology. I seek to reappraise the popular caricature of Barthelme Sr. by charting his evolving views on the role of architecture in society, through publications, interviews and personal correspondence.

Also of interest to this chapter is the way in which *Paradise*'s architectural depictions relate to utopian ideals. As Fredric Jameson aptly notes, despite its historical 'variability', the idea of utopia 'has always been a political issue, an unusual destiny for a literary form' (*Archaeologies* xi). Jameson further asserts that postmodernity signalled the end of the 'enclave-type withdrawal [...] this type of Utopian fantasy', by 'coloniz[ing] social space'. Due to globalisation, a phenomenon that Jameson regards as a defining feature of postmodernity, the 'Utopian succession' of 1960s anarchist cooperatives and rural utopian retreats became an

increasing impossibility (*Archaeologies* 20). While postmodern fiction is typically more closely associated with the dystopian novel – consider that Margaret Atwood’s gendered science fiction dystopia *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) was published to great critical acclaim a year prior to *Paradise* – Barthelme’s novel *is* utopian.<sup>126</sup> Utopias are positive or negative imaginative projections of desire, John Carey explains, where dystopias are expressions of fear (xi). Probing the possibility of a rejection of social norms and conventions, Simon and his guests have attempted to retreat from modern existence. If, as Lois Gordon suggested in 1981, Barthelme has found ‘modern men’ to have ‘lost residual roots with humanity and instead become monsters of information’, *Paradise* is an experiment in the reformulation of social bonds (22). As the novel moves through the pensive domestic space of a near-empty apartment, Barthelme plays with the tradition of the ‘utopian spirit’ and experiments with a mediation between what Lewis Mumford has termed ‘utopias of escape’ and ‘utopias of reconstruction’ (*Story of Utopias* 10).

### Revisions

To elucidate *Paradise*’s concerns with the status of art in contemporary culture and the imaginative role architecture played in the development of Barthelme’s text, it is important to review the compositional stages of the novel. Many critics have noted that the genetic seeds of *Paradise* were published as short stories in the *New Yorker* and *Esquire*: ‘Simon’ (1984), ‘Basil

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<sup>126</sup> Some critics of utopia, like Krishan Kumar in *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987), use the terms ‘anti-utopia’ and ‘dystopia’ interchangeably. Kumar writes that he intends for anti-utopia to be a ‘generic term’, which includes dystopia and ‘cacotopia’. According to Kumar, British philosopher and jurist Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) ‘invented “cacotopia” – an evil place – and it was later joined to “dystopia” by John Stuart Mill’ (447). ‘[U]topia and anti-utopia are antithetical yet interdependent’, Kumar explains, ‘They are “contrast concepts”, getting their meaning and significance from their mutual differences. But the relationship is not symmetrical or equal. [...] Utopia is the original, anti-utopia the copy – only, as it were, always coloured black’ (Kumar 100). However, for my purpose I distinguish between ‘anti-utopia’ and ‘dystopia’. Following Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent’s definitions in *The Utopia Reader* (1999), negative utopia or dystopia is ‘a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived’, where anti-utopia is ‘a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia’ (2).

from Her Garden' (1985), and 'Paradise (Before the Egg Broke)' (1986).<sup>127</sup> Yet Barthelme's compositional revisions of *Paradise* have been critically neglected thus far. In a letter simply marked '3 November' Barthelme sent Faith Sale, an old friend and then editor at the American publisher G. P. Putnam's Sons, the first sixty pages of what was to become *Paradise*.<sup>128</sup> Between this early version of the text, the original manuscript and the final published form, there are some notable variants that are worthy of scrutiny. For instance, in the original version of the story the nature of Simon's profession is never divulged; instead the reader is vaguely told '[c]ircumstances have given [Simon] a year of his own' and that he does '[n]othing, at the moment' (*First Sixty Pages* 2, 13). On various occasions Simon claims a series of absurd jobs that he readily admits are fictional. For instance, at one point in the text the reader is told, 'Simon was at that period in the habit of telling people who asked him what he did that he narrowed ties for a living'; and on a different occasion he states: 'I have this company that puts out fires. Oil well fires' (*First Sixty Pages* 19, 43). Although, when compared to the published edition, the architectural content of this early draft is suppressed, presumably due to Simon's work as a non-architect, the novel still has a strong architectural subtext.<sup>129</sup> This evidence affirms that the architectural 'dimension' of the text was embedded in its origins; thus, architecture is a considered and substantive part of the integrity of the narrative. Through exposition the reader is eventually told that Simon's mother is involved in architecture, having worked as a draughtsman in the office of mid-century modern pioneer Richard Neutra. Like Barthelme's father, she is trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition, 'which meant that she had extraordinary skill in doing renderings'. In 1941 she married an architect who was killed a year later in the Battle of Midway

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<sup>127</sup> Barthelme occasionally recycled material from his short stories into his novels and vice versa. He described these salvaged shorter works as 'little plucked chickens from aborted novels' (*Not-Knowing* 224).

<sup>128</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. More than two stages of the literary evolution of *Paradise* have been preserved. In addition to the materials mentioned, multiple preliminary typescripts and gallery proofs with typed and/or handwritten corrections are also archived at the University of Houston.

<sup>129</sup> In Barthelme's short story 'Simon', published in the *New Yorker* in 1984, the main character is an architect. However, while the sixty-page draft does make use of the short story in an abridged form, the section that refers to Simon as an architect is omitted.

(*First Sixty Pages* 44). Additionally, there is another architect in the sixty-page draft in *Paradise*. While attending a conference in Stockholm on an undisclosed subject, Simon meets a woman named Sonia who studied architecture in Paris (*First Sixty Pages* 18).

Considering the amount of critical attention that has been dedicated to gender relations in *Paradise*,<sup>130</sup> and the sexualised opportunism of the inclusion of three lingerie models (characters that do not appear in the sixty-page draft), it is intriguing that both of these figures of architectural practice are women. The incorporation of a mother figure as an independent and relatively successful woman in the field of architecture problematises the Freudian interpretations that have doggedly affixed themselves to Barthelme studies. The juxtaposition in the sixty-page draft of an idle Simon, who regards work as something to avoid and concoct absurdities about, with his ambitious mother contrasts greatly with the postmodern Three Graces that are the lingerie models. Yet the suggestion that Simon's mother was a draughtsman working in Neutra's Los Angeles office is, if not an element of 'paradise', perhaps fantasy or wishful thinking. The Beaux-Arts atelier tradition, which was highly influential in the professionalisation of architecture in the United States, was notoriously male-dominated.<sup>131</sup> As Gwendolyn Wright documents in 'On the Fringe of the Profession: Women in American Architecture' (1977), the architecture industry was influenced by Victorian sexual stereotyping. Women were marginalised in architectural practice and often given work perceived as less desirable. Frequently they were relegated to 'women's fields', namely domestic architecture, especially interiors where they were 'dealing with other women's needs' (G. Wright 280–81). Wright observes the persistence of these discriminatory practices through the late twentieth-century. For some women, like Mona Hofmann who with her husband commissioned a Neutra house in the San Francisco area, modern architecture was seen as means for social progress, altering women's domestic lives by 'raising' 'the standard of living

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<sup>130</sup> As noted in Chapter One, *Paradise* is Barthelme's most critically neglected work. However, of the analysis that has been undertaken, gender plays a defining part in the critics' argument.

<sup>131</sup> See Joan Draper's chapter on 'The Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Architectural Profession in the United States' in *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession* by Spiro Kostof.

for women' (Hines and Neutra 143). Barthelme appears to signal an understanding of the limited opportunities for women in architecture. During a conversation between Simon and an unidentified second speaker, about the protagonist's family history, they state:

She settled in Los Angeles and went to work as a draughtsman in Richard Neutra's office. Her training was Beaux Arts, which meant that she had extraordinary skill in doing renderings, among other things, and after a time she was doing most of Neutra's presentations. Not the design, but the boards on which the project was presented to clients.

Did Olaf [Simon's father] offer child support?

Olaf sent affectionately inscribed copies of his books, from time to time.<sup>132</sup>  
(*First Sixty Pages* 44)

Acknowledging the professional and economic challenges of being a single mother seems to support the idea that Barthelme is attempting to depict, with some level of sincerity, the evolving role of women in American society. In the published copy of *Paradise* Simon implies a similar understanding of the limited employment opportunities available to women. Musing about the remote possibilities of domestic bliss and living 'happily ever after' with Dore, Anne and Veronica, Simon imagines enrolling the women in architecture school. Like biblical Adam, in Simon's paradise he envisions remaking the women in his own image. Simon exclaims:

What was there to do with these women? He'd send them all to MIT, make architects of them! Women were coming into the profession in increasing numbers. The group could chat happily about mullions, in the evening by the fireside, tiring of mullions, turn to cladding, wearying of cladding, attack with relish the problems of blast-cleaned pressure-washed gun-applied polymer-cement-coated steel. Quel happiness! (*Paradise* 101)

Towards the end of the models' stay at the apartment, resigned to their inevitable departure,

Simon assumes a more sombre tone:

There was no place in the world for these women whom he loved, no good place. They could join the underemployed half-crazed demi-poor, or they could be wives, those were the choices. The universities offered another path but one they were not likely to take'. (*Paradise* 168)

Between Simon's mother and the models, Barthelme charts the seemingly intractable obstacles of discriminatory gender practices through the generations. Simon concludes that despite the empowering affirmations contained within the feminist books the models read, the condition for

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<sup>132</sup> While much of the dialogue in the sixty-page draft makes use of quotation marks, this particular passage does not.

women in postmodern society is bleak. Simon's bare apartment, 'paradise', is presented as a flawed sanctuary for these women, a location of problematic 'enclave-like withdrawal', to use Jameson's term. As O'Donnell observes, 'there is a strong undertow of violence in the novel that gives it a more "sociological" dimension, especially in its depictions of violence toward or the abuse of women' (213). According to Daugherty the 'tentative title' of the novel was *Ghosts*, and references to ghosts exist in both the draft and final versions of *Paradise* (436). For example, the reader is told that for Simon one of the 'rewards' of living in the anonymity of New York City is 'enjoying' 'life as a ghost' (*Paradise* 119). In the sixty-page draft references to ghosts are associated with ageing and assume more ominous undertones. The narrator explains, 'At fifty one becomes a ghost. There is no official ceremony' (*First Sixty Pages* 24). The models, with their indistinguishable voices and lack of social visibility, could further be read as ghosts.

There is also a biographical and social component to Barthelme's reference to Neutra. While Barthelme Sr. was never employed by Neutra, he did have contact with the famous architect when they worked on the same project. In a 1984 interview with the Houston architecture and urban design magazine *Cite*, Barthelme Sr. recounted how Neutra incorrectly claimed the sole credit for the building of Avion Village, a three hundred-unit housing development for airplane factory workers near Dallas, Texas (O'Brien 17–18). Avion Village was constructed as an answer to the problem of 'finding suitable housing within commuting distance of defense plants' (Sylvian 29). In 'Avion Village: Texas' World War II Housing Laboratory' (1992), Kristin M. Sylvian describes how in the mid-1940s housing shortages in major American centres of defence production and military activity began affecting industrial production; this contributed to high employee turnover, absenteeism and workplace accidents. President Franklin D. Roosevelt intervened on the issue, creating greater governmental infrastructure and pushing legislation for defence housing shortages. As Daugherty notes, defence housing was a 'critical test' for advocates of modern architecture, '[t]heir vision of enlightening the world through art collided with a need for immediate low-cost shelter' (30). Avion Village

was built under what became known as the Lanham Act, designed as part of “‘planned communities” that would serve as archetypes for the postwar period’ (Szylyan 30). While Daugherty notes that Avion Village did not adhere to conventional modernist aesthetics, the structures contained a humanism embedded into their design. The biographer writes that Avion Village, ‘put the human body and the body’s needs at the center of its plan, dignifying the lives of the workers and their families’ (30). Daugherty further claims that Avion Village is an example of the type of ‘social justice’ that Barthelme Sr. ‘practiced [...] in his architecture’, and that at home he encouraged Barthelme to see ‘art as a lived-in space, its beauty as functional’ (30). Later in Barthelme Sr.’s career he became a professor of architecture. As a 1989 profile in *Texas Architect* notes, within the university system Barthelme Sr. ‘focused both on promoting good design and conveying the ethical responsibilities of an architect, which he held to be greater than those of other artists’ (Schmidt). In the *Cite* interview Barthelme Sr. stated that Neutra was a ‘nice guy’, but that the well-regarded Texas architect Arch Swank was responsible for the Avion Village’s two-story units, while Barthelme Sr. in part designed the one-story units. Neutra was notoriously difficult to work with and the circumstances surrounding Barthelme Sr.’s departure from the project is unclear; he was either fired or quit. Curiously, while numerous other famous architects are mentioned in the text, it should be noted that no reference to Neutra appears in the published version of *Paradise*.

An intriguing discrepancy between the original manuscript and the published *Paradise* is the manner in which Venturi is referred to. As discussed in Chapter One, Venturi’s ‘gentle manifesto’ for what he calls ‘pop architecture’, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), is widely regarded as the foundational text for architectural postmodernism.<sup>133</sup> While there is no reference to Venturi in the sixty-page draft, in the original manuscript Barthelme writes:

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<sup>133</sup> Other architectural historians, like John Gold, regard Jane Jacob’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) as the ‘original’ manifesto of architectural postmodernism.

I love the excesses of my profession, Simon thought, heroics and mock-heroics. Michael Graves and Robert Venturi, Confusion and Contradiction as a text. All those form-givers enjoying themselves as Michelangelo, Wright and his cape, Mies and his pinstripes. Michelangelo most of all: “Where I steal I leave a knife.” An appropriate High Renaissance sentiment. The walls of the architecture labs at Penn had been covered with graffiti. “This is hell, nor are we out of it.” “Hell is other architects.” “The road to hell is paved with naugahyde”.<sup>134</sup> (*First Sixty Pages* 64–65)

The corresponding text in the published *Paradise* is identical to the above passage except that it refers to Venturi’s seminal manifesto by its proper name, *Complexity and Contradiction*.<sup>135</sup>

Attached to copies of the evolving manuscripts, notes from Barthelme to his publisher indicate that the change from ‘Confusion’ to ‘Complexity’ was made as part of a series of alterations and rearrangements at least two revisional stages before the page proofs were produced. In his letters Barthelme provides no explanation as to why he chose to make this change.<sup>136</sup> In the manuscript’s passage, the signature ‘heroics and mock-heroics’ attributed to the famous architects are historically correct – Wright did wear a cape, Mies was known for dressing in pinstripes – which makes the inaccuracy of ‘Confusion and Contradiction’ appear all the more conspicuous.<sup>137</sup> The reference to Venturi’s book as ‘Confusion’ is perhaps an indication of Barthelme’s awareness of the uncertain position for postmodernism in the mid-1980s, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Like literary postmodernism, postmodern architecture was also undergoing its own decline. By the mid-1980s many of postmodern design’s most prominent apologists had disowned the movement they once championed.<sup>138</sup> The ‘Confusion’ to ‘Complexity’ change may signal a distancing of Barthelme from the postmodern movement, or a scepticism towards what many critics have complained is a style, time period, cultural climate, etc. that is difficult to

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<sup>134</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries. Naugahyde is an American synthetic product made of fabric coated in vinyl.

<sup>135</sup> Barthelme used a typewriter to write at least all of his archived works. Therefore, the underlining of ‘Confusion and Contradiction’ is not a significant variation. It would have been understood by the publisher that the intention of the author was for the title to be italicised in its published form.

<sup>136</sup> Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

<sup>137</sup> The quote attributed to Michelangelo by Barthelme is marginally inaccurate. Purportedly Michelangelo stated: ‘Where I steal an idea I leave my knife’.

<sup>138</sup> For example, one infamous rejection of postmodernism was Ettore Sottsass’s 1985 departure from the hyper-kitsch Memphis design group, which he founded in 1981 to a media frenzy.

define. In 1983 art historian and critic Hal Foster wrote in his preface to *The Anti-Aesthetic*:

*Essays on Postmodern Culture*:

Postmodernism: does it exist at all and, if so, what does it mean? Is it a concept or a practice, a matter of local style or a whole new period or economic phase? What are its forms, effects, place? How are we to mark its advent? (ix).

It appears that Barthelme is suggesting that the amorphous postmodern system of “both/and” not “either/or”, as Linda Hutcheon has described it, has resulted in ‘confusion’ (49). Venturi himself famously called for the embrace of architectural tension and conflict in the opening section of *Complexity*. In his chapter ‘Nonstraightfoward Architecture: A Gentle Manifesto’, he wrote:

I like complexity and contradiction in architecture. [...] I like elements which are hybrid rather than “pure,” compromising rather than “clean,” distorted rather than “straightforward,” ambiguous rather than simple, vestigial as well as innovating, inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear. [...] I prefer “both-and” to “either-or,” black and white and sometimes gray, to black or white.<sup>139</sup> (*Complexity* 16)

Explaining Venturi’s “both-and” aesthetic, Nathaniel Coleman writes that the pop architect’s ‘formal inclusiveness ultimately operates as a seductive hook heralding rejection of reasoned principles in favour of irony and undisciplined pleasure, mostly in the shape of self-conscious stylistic eclecticism’ (109). Of course, arguably a similar type of, less purposeful, ambiguity and ambivalence about the idea of the postmodern continues today.

While the sixty-page draft does not mention Venturi by name, there are specific word choices (‘contradiction’ and ‘contradictory’) in the preliminary *Paradise* that suggest that the architect was an original source of inspiration. In one of the draft’s philosophical vignettes two unnamed speakers, presumably the first is Simon, seek to give some theoretical shape to the contours of Paradise:

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<sup>139</sup> Interestingly, Venturi underscores the significance of acknowledging ‘complexity and contradiction’ by referencing not an example of emerging postmodern art but the modernist poet T. S. Eliot. The architect wrote: ‘Everywhere, except in architecture, complexity and contradiction have been acknowledged, from Gödel’s proof of ultimate inconsistency in mathematics to T. S. Eliot’s analysis of “difficult” poetry and Joseph Albers’ [sic] definition of the paradoxical quality of painting’ (16). References to Eliot, particularly as a literary critic, make frequent appearances in *Complexity*. For instance, see Venturi’s 1966 Preface.

Paradise may be spoken of in any way that it can be imagined.  
It is a text inviting study, amplification, *contradiction*.

The naked young woman on the throne of Paradise? Will  
she kneel forever?

I think not.

Are there other naked young women in Paradise, or only one?

I would hope for some thousands.

To what end?

Simple greed, perhaps.

Is greed a permitted emotion in Paradise?

I would think that the various emotions, including the  
troublesome ones, would have free play in Paradise. Otherwise, where  
the drama? Where the day-to-day interest?

But the woman on the throne was yawning, you said.

Indicating possible ennui...

Much of Paradise is *contradictory*, one hazards. To keep the  
interest up.

High level of worry implied by your discourse.

That's what I do. Worry.<sup>140</sup> (*First Sixty Pages* 10)

The conversation's references to 'contradiction' and 'contradictory' subtly propose a connection between the idea of paradise and the postmodern. Signalling their importance and specific connotation, the words 'complexity' and 'contradiction', and their linguistic derivatives, do not appear in the published novel except in the title of Venturi's book. If postmodern culture's defining feature is pluralism, as Charles Jencks has famously pronounced, then perhaps the postmodern landscape is this defunct, sometimes boring, sometimes interesting – or, as Venturi himself wrote – 'sometimes gray' Paradise. The rubric of pluralism insists upon coexistence, obtaining a richness of form from friction. Yet it does not necessitate that this tension is not destructive or counterproductive. The reader is told that Paradise is a 'text inviting study, amplification, *contradiction*', thus linking literature to this nexus of duelling forces. The statement, like Paradise, reflexively requests to be critically read, interpreted and reinterpreted. Unlike the jovial tone of the previously mentioned 'Confusion' passage, this 'contradiction' is described as a 'hazard' that elicits 'worry'. The irrational deductive logic of Paradise does not allow for tidy syllogisms, instead it is an uncomfortable location of conflicting forces and inconsistent meanings. Paradise abounds with pleasures and freedoms, but these attributes are not

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<sup>140</sup> Emphasis added.

offered up without an emotional penalty. While the above passage may not be an indictment of postmodernism, the speakers' philosophical meditations on Paradise advocate caution. Despite the fact that the printed edition of the novel masked its reservations by omitting the above conversation, and by making use of the correct title of Venturi's book, a tone of scepticism and hesitancy is still subtly translated into the final text.

### **Donald Barthelme Sr.: The Not So Dead Father**

It is a commonplace within the canon of Barthelme criticism that *Paradise* – and indeed all of the author's textual references to architecture – is filtered through the colourful prism of Donald Barthelme Sr.. The author's biographical sketch at the back of the 2005 Dalkey Archive edition of *Paradise* begins with the sentence, 'The son of an avant-garde architect, Donald Barthelme (1931–1989) wrote a series of novels and story collections that earned him a wide reputation as one of the most innovative and important voices in American literature'. This paratext makes for a curious biographical introduction to a highly regarded writer whose works, when *Paradise* was originally published, had been in print for over twenty-five years.<sup>141</sup> A fairly ubiquitous feature across Barthelme book reviews, interviews and biographies are obligatory mentions of Donald Barthelme Sr. – and this is all the more true in relation to *Paradise*. The biography's opening statement, 'The son of an avant-garde architect', suggests that the novel's success, in part, hinges on a type of architectural authenticity. Accentuating the mystique of architectural practice, the statement also implies that through Barthelme's upbringing he is privy to an intimate knowledge of architecture not accessible to a mainstream audience. The suggestion is that the novel allows

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<sup>141</sup> While Barthelme's most notable professional awards – the PEN/Faulkner Award, the National Book Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship – are mentioned in the final sentence of the brief biography, what follows is contextualised by the opening statement. The 'About the Author' goes on to state, incorrectly, that Barthelme was born in New York; he was born in Pennsylvania. The 1996 Scribner paperback edition of *Snow White* also misstated Barthelme's year of death on the back cover. In Justin Taylor's introduction to *McSweeney's Issue 24* (2007), which paid tribute to Barthelme, Taylor interprets this erratum as an indication that 'The Donald Barthelme legacy is in a kind of shambles. [...] It is simply that his catalog has not been properly maintained or developed since his passing' (ii).

the reader a brief opportunity to break architecture's code of *omertà*, an idea which holds some echoes of the aforementioned *Progressive Architecture* editorial, which dismissed Barthelme's usage of architecture as 'passwords to a club'. When asked in a 1981 interview about how his father's profession 'as an innovator, as a modern architect' impacted his aspirations as a writer, the author first exclaimed, 'Oh yes, it was very important', before elaborating extensively:

It was an attitude toward his work. [...] He was trained in architecture entirely in the Beaux Arts tradition. No whiff of modernism was allowed to penetrate the Penn architecture school at the time. And he got out of school and suddenly the whole world changed for him. [...] It was very fine training, but it had nothing to do with what was really going on in architecture. So he went through a complete reversal [...]. Remember, at that time—we're talking about the late twenties and early thirties—architecture of the country didn't look like it does today. [...] So, his task was to do an entirely new thing, which was contrary to his training in important ways. And he did it with great enthusiasm, with great zest, and he did it very, very well. (*Not-Knowing* 293)

While Barthelme's enthusiastic reflection is interesting for the purpose of assessing *his* perception of the significance of his father's professional development, the author's admiration falls short of a cogent explanation.<sup>142</sup> It is evident that the lesson of vigorously charting one's own artistic path left an indelible mark on Barthelme. Perhaps more importantly, Daugherty observes that although the author's elected career differed from his father's, 'the idea of *the modern* and the aesthetic principles of modern architecture form the background' of Barthelme's writing (13).<sup>143</sup> Through a review of lesser known publications, interviews and personal correspondence a broader picture of the author's more complex and extensive relationship to architecture emerges than the narrative appreciated by many earlier critics. To fully consider the influence of Barthelme Sr. in the development of the author's architectural imagination, and more specifically in the formulation of *Paradise*, it is important to first become acquainted with the elder Barthelme's career and ideology.

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<sup>142</sup> In the original transcript of the 1981 *Paris Review* interview with J. D. O'Hara, Barthelme stated that he could 'speak for hours' about Barthelme Sr.'s career. He said: 'It was quite interesting; the whole field is interesting'. However, he denied ever wanting to follow his father into architecture, explaining that from early childhood he dreamed of becoming a writer (*Not-Knowing* 294). Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

<sup>143</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

A figure who became one of Houston's leading architects, Barthelme Sr. (1907–1996) was one of the city's early acolytes of modern architecture. Born in Galveston, Texas, he began his studies at the Rice Institute, Houston, but was reportedly asked to leave due to 'indiscretion' (Barthelme and Barthelme 18).<sup>144</sup> Following this temporary setback Barthelme Sr. transferred to the University of Pennsylvania where he completed a degree in architecture steeped in the Beaux-Arts tradition, under the guidance of internationally renowned French architect Paul Philippe Cret. Based on the international centre of art and architectural education, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Beaux-Arts instruction emphasised fine draughtsmanship, 'logical' compositional balance and formal symmetry, ordered progression, grand ceremonial spaces, as well as the study and imitation of historical decorative styles, particularly academic classicism. The Beaux-Arts model was not challenged in American design education until the late 1930s, when advocates of the International Style emigrated from Europe to the United States and assumed positions of leadership (Daugherty 14). Departing from Barthelme's glorified account of his father's first encounter with modernist architecture, Daugherty asserts that while at Penn Barthelme Sr. studied the Bauhaus movement independently and 'pored over Frank Lloyd Wright's published plans'; yet 'still he didn't chafe against Penn's established pedagogy' (13). After graduating in 1930, Barthelme Sr. was temporarily employed by Cret's Philadelphia firm where he worked as a draughtsman, and helped design the U.S. Department of Justice building in Washington, D.C. for the firm of Zantsinger, Borie, & Medary. When asked about 'the state of architecture today' in the 1984 *Cite* interview, Barthelme Sr. retorted:

This postmodernism is just diddling around. It is exactly what we did in 1928, which was to take a traditional building and gussy it up or gussy it down. Paul Philippe Cret was a master at it. He would have someone like me do an elaborate study of a building with a bunch of columns, then he would come and erase all the columns. But he had the proportions of the opening established by that. (O'Brien 3)

During Barthelme's employment at Cret's firm, a yet unknown Louis Kahn worked as a renderer in the same office. As Barthelme Sr. later recounted, Kahn was infamous for going around the

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<sup>144</sup> Rice University was known as the Rice Institute until 1960.

office at night and leaving critiques on his colleagues' designs; no one was spared, not even Kahn's superiors. Barthelme Sr. often told this story to his students as 'a good moral'. He concluded admiringly, '[n]ow maybe you think Louis was bucking for a raise, but Louis was working for Louis. He did that for his own education' (O'Brien 21). An embellished version of Barthelme Sr.'s story about Kahn also makes an appearance in *Paradise*. The reader is told:

When he was in school at Penn, the resident master was Louis Kahn. Kahn was given to muttering. Once he stood behind Simon's draughting table and muttered for almost five minutes. The young architect was too intimidated to ask him what he was saying. The story was told of Kahn that when *he* was a young architect he had worked for Paul Cret, the French maestro who presided at Penn in the 20s. When the other draughtsmen, thirty of them, quit for the day Kahn would take a roll of tracing paper and go from board to board, leaving critiques of each architect's work as an overlay. He did not neglect the boards of the firm's five principals.<sup>145</sup> (*Paradise* 79)

Many years later, when reviewing Kahn's projects for 'India', Barthelme Sr. identified the structures as having 'the basic characteristics of the architecture he and I were both taught at the University of Pennsylvania in 1929. Pure. My God, look at those masses' (O'Brien 21).<sup>146</sup>

Having struggled to locate long-term employment in Philadelphia, Barthelme Sr. moved his family to Galveston in 1932. After working for his father's lumber business, and then in Dallas for the architect Roscoe DeWitt, by 1936 Barthelme Sr. was the lead designer for the city's ambitious Art Deco-inspired Hall of State for the Texas Centennial Exposition at Fair Park. This construction was Barthelme Sr.'s first major project and demonstrates an early example of his 'adopt[ion] [of] the principles of modernist design' (James 56). The building was amongst one of Texas's most expensive projects per square foot; the cost at the time totalled 1.2 million dollars. Yet the building is still in use and remains 'amongst the most monumental structures' in the state (Daugherty 17). A characteristically mischievous addition to the Hall of State was a frieze that wrapped around the building, where the names of fifty-nine historically important Texans are carved into the state-mined limestone. As Daugherty points out, if the first eight names are read

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<sup>145</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>146</sup> Presumably, Barthelme Sr. is referring to Kahn's designs for the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (1962–74). He may also be referencing the National Assembly Building, Dhaka, Bangladesh (1962-83).

from left to right – Burleson, Archer, Rusk, Travis, Higg, Ellis, Lamar, and Milam – ‘Barthelme’ without the final ‘e’ is spelled out. The biographer identifies this ‘playful touch, a buried secret’ as the type of ‘hallmark’ that would later define Barthelme’s ‘art, as well’ (Daugherty 17). In 1937 the Barthelme family relocated to Houston, where Barthelme Sr. worked for the firm of John F. Staub, before opening his own practice in 1940.

Shortly before starting his architectural firm, Barthelme Sr. conceived of a house for his growing family. The project was officially completed in 1941, although, as mentioned in Chapter One, the house was constantly being altered under Barthelme Sr.’s direction. Frederick and Steven Barthelme argue that the ‘kids’ learned about the “‘skill of editing’” from the evolving Barthelme residence (Daugherty 24). 11 North Wynden Drive was an anomaly on the then outskirts of Houston; the structure was ‘[a] low-lying, dark-colored, flat-roofed rectangle with irregular projecting volumes and open interior spaces’ (Daugherty 18). Under the headline ‘Architect Builds Ultra-Modern Home on Wynden Drive’, a local newspaper wrote in 1941, ‘Nearing completion [...] is an unusual residence being built for Donald Barthelme, architect’.<sup>147</sup> The article goes on to note all the curious futuristic details of the ‘unusual residence’: ‘no openings on the west side of the house’, ‘there are 36 feet of sliding glass doors’, ‘all closets were constructed as items of furniture and shipped complete to the job for installation’. Originally, the exterior of the house was made of wood, but later a decorative sheet of copper was added. Barthelme Sr. intended for manually sprayed acid to transform the copper into a vibrant turquoise, but instead the discoloured material was a disappointing brown, and remained that way until the house was demolished. In their memoir Frederick and Steven Barthelme wrote that inside the house,

it was a hotbed of modern furniture: elegant Saarinen chairs, the bent birch of Aalto dining tables and chairs, almost every piece of furniture or fabric that Charles and Ray Eames ever designed [...]. The rest of the furniture Father built himself, or had us build under his supervision. (6)

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<sup>147</sup> Donald Barthelme, Sr. Architectural Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

As Steven Barthelme noted separately, it was ‘the kind of furniture that [...] stands up to announce, in a deep, rich chrome or molded-plywood voice, “Hi. I’m the chair”’ (Daugherty 18). Daugherty argues that, for Barthelme and his siblings, ‘the principles, methods, and means of architecture, as embodied in the house [...], gave life a mythic dimension’ (20). Barthelme Sr.’s didactic message to his children was articulated implicitly by their surroundings, as well as more directly pronounced by their father’s parables. The architect told his children, ‘everything good ever done was done by people who followed their own ideas [...]. Walk alone if necessary. Don’t walk the beaten path’ (Daugherty 20).

As *Texas Architect* recalls, the post-war period ‘was one of the great eras of Texas architecture’ (Fox). Well poised for what became a time of tremendous growth for Houston, Barthelme Sr. quickly rose to the height of architectural celebrity. Stephen James describes how, ‘[Barthelme Sr.’s] files bulged with the usual record of projects underway’ (56). A forceful presence advocating for mid-century modern design in Houston, Barthelme Sr. was frequently mentioned in newspaper society pages and by columnists. However, most of the architect’s reputation-making projects were built in small neighbouring towns outside of the Houston city centre. This was in part due to the bureaucratic nature of the Houston school district and its stringent and unimaginative design regulations (James 57). Over the lifespan of his practice Barthelme Sr. was responsible for building commercial and residential properties, but he was best known for his innovations in early childhood school design. In 1949 Barthelme Sr. garnered his first professional accolade when his St. Rose of Lima Church and School won an award from the prestigious American Institute of Architects (AIA). Echoing Barthelme Sr.’s experience with this school – as well as suggesting the cyclical nature of decorative styles and the rise of ‘neo-modernism’ in the 1980s – in *Paradise* the reader is told that in 1981 Simon designed a Catholic church for a poor parish. The narrator explains:

The church was a bare-bones steel building with insets of glass block as its only design flourish, these however stacked eighteen feet high in twelve bays on either side of the sanctuary—the glass block was the light-giving element, and resisted thievery, too. It had been popular in the 30s,

considered a design cliché in the 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, and presented itself again in the 80s, fresh as new dung. Something to be said for being fifty-three, you could enjoy the turning of the wheel. (*Paradise* 41–42)

In 1955 Barthelme Sr. was elevated to Fellowship of the AIA's College of Fellows. However, for an architect that was well regarded in his time, and produced so many designs for one regional area, it is surprising that St. Rose of Lima is his only surviving building in the Houston area.

By the 1950s Barthelme Sr. was widely published and nationally recognised. He was particularly well regarded for his innovatively designed, yet cost-efficient schools. Featured prominently in popular magazines, such as *Life*, *Time* and *Fortune*, and exhibited in MoMA's 'Built in USA' (1952) and the AIA's 'Ten Buildings in America's Future' (1957), Barthelme Sr.'s best-known building, West Columbia Elementary School (1950–51), was a radically new design for school buildings. The project also won first prize at the São Paulo Biennale of 1954. Located sixty miles south of Houston, West Columbia Elementary was an example of Barthelme Sr.'s mastery of creating functional, aesthetically pleasing projects from low-cost industrial materials. The entire project was built for a mere ten dollars a square foot (James 60). Although he never developed a truly signature style, amongst the trademark design features of his clean-lined horizontally arranged schools were their lack of corridors. Instead of uneconomic interior passageways, large courtyards 'provided circulation and acted as communal space' (James 58). Additional repeating motifs in Barthelme Sr.'s schools were brick masonry, butterfly roofs and scalloped concrete canopies, which 'soften the building's rectilinear geometry' with a system of bar joists that supported the roof (James 58). As inferred in the previously quoted passage from *Paradise*, Barthelme Sr. was especially adept at the careful use of natural light, particularly top-lighting. In West Columbia Elementary large skylights ran the length of the building and the classrooms faced the courtyards with full-length glass panels. The lightweight industrial steel frame of the structure was paired with natural materials, such as redwood panelling in the interiors of the classrooms and marble and orange quarry tiles on the outside walls (James 58). As the journal of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians declared in 2005,

‘[m]ore than any other, the West Columbia Elementary School illustrates the humanist concerns that informed Barthelme’s work’ (James 57–58). For Barthelme Sr., modern architecture was more than a giver of form, it was the ‘key to educational reform’ (James 60).

In 1959 a subsidiary of the Ford Foundation commissioned Barthelme Sr. to design a ‘hypothetical high school to accommodate operational changes’ proposed by the educational reformer Dr. J. Lloyd Trump; the results were presented to an audience at the Educational Facilities Laboratories at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (Turner 9). Unlike his peers who presented drawings and models of schools, ever the maverick, Barthelme Sr. designed not only a school building, but also an entirely new curriculum for secondary education. Barthelme Sr. presented sketches of what he called a ‘School of Tomorrow’, where collaborative student-centred learning was promoted through a “‘drafting room” atmosphere’ (Daugherty 25). The *Tampa Tribune* reported that Barthelme Sr. told the conference attendees, ‘Architects have a job to do for school needs of the present and future, [...] and they will do it in spite of the scientists and educators’.<sup>148</sup>

Along with nine other architects, in 1962 Barthelme Sr. was invited to the Rice Design Fete to conceive of a new scheme for community colleges. Barthelme Sr. explained in the *Cite* interview that it was actually his son who authored the paper that he delivered. Barthelme Sr. is reported as having said:

[Donald Barthelme Jr.] showed up with a sheaf of papers. He rewrote my text for me and it was just beautiful. I didn’t know what a hotshot writer he was at the time. [...] Then I took the tracing paper off my plan and read my paper. It was the prettiest thing I had read in my life, very fascinating, all my son’s talent was in there. (O’Brien 11)

As O’Brien notes, *Progressive Architecture* characterised Barthelme Sr.’s presence at the event as ‘the non-conformist among the architects, who relied more on words than drawings to explain [his] unconventional concepts’ (11). These concepts were encapsulated in the idea of Barthelme

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<sup>148</sup> Donald Barthelme, Sr. Architectural Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Sr.'s 'Growit Yourself College', an idea which the architect subsequently promoted in an article for *Progressive Architecture*. In 'Growit Yourself College' (1963) Barthelme Sr. envisions expansive changes, not just to community college buildings but for higher education as a whole. In his opening argument, which reads like a manifesto, he writes:

We assume, as a point of departure, that buildings can do a great deal more in education than merely house students, teachers and "facilities." We assume that architecture can teach, directly: 1) by a basic modesty of concept, enriched by diversity of materials and structure; 2) by respectful use of elements human in scale and dimension; 3) by bringing people together in face-to-face relationships; 4) by surrounding people with form, colors, textures, and proportions that are as beautiful as we can make them; 5) by reminding people of past human accomplishments and emphasizing continuing values in human experience; 6) by employing the gifts of nature; and 7) by involving people and exposing them to interests and ideas not their own.<sup>149</sup> (48)

Architecture is to play a primary role in this vision; as Barthelme Sr. states, "[l]ittle "a" architecture' is not about art, instead it 'place[s] the obligation "to people" ahead of the opportunity "to build"'. In this model the architect is the shepherd of these humanist interests 'exchang[ing] the 'luxury of self-expression' for 'the richer one of permitting whole groups of people to express themselves' (51). Clearly this ideal is a very un-Roarkian sentiment. At the conference, the forcefulness of Barthelme Sr.'s 'sermon' made many audience members reject him as a "nonconformist" and "not a team man" (James 64). James recounts, 'Barthelme was an evangelist who preached the truth to unbelievers. Barthelme may have inspired people with his passion, but he rarely won their hearts and minds' (61). Increasingly isolated by his dictatorial and idealistic demeanour, in 1963 Barthelme Sr. was forced to shutter his practice permanently. At fifty-six he entered into academia full-time, teaching at the University of Houston for the next decade.

The subject of architecture, and perhaps even architectural education was a topic present on the mind of Barthelme during the writing of *Paradise*. At least five years before the novel was published, Barthelme was actively involved in the revision and review of an early draft of a book

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<sup>149</sup> Unfortunately, it is not known if Barthelme participated in the writing the 'Growit Yourself College' article, or how closely the printed version resembled the original speech. Donald Barthelme, Sr. Architectural Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

on architecture that his father was writing. In an insightful letter from father to son dated 29 April 1981, Barthelme Sr. references ‘the so-called manuscript’ and thanks Barthelme for his time and advice. With a tone of characteristic bombast mixed with resignation, the retired architect goes on to write:

My reaction to all architectural pieces is similar – I don’t think they very much matter in comparison to what I perceive as the much more serious errors being made every day on every side because relatively smart people do not seem to know any better. The hell of it is that it doesn’t take genius or highly talented artists to do better; it simply takes re-thinking the whole matter of building from the beginning.

[...]

At first glance I thought your yellow lines were striking out the material they were drawn through. I thought: Hell, he’s throwing away my best lines. Then I reread your note. There are damn few yellow marks, it seems to me. [I] also note you are a bit chary if endorsing the same: “are there other theorists ---“ atc. [sic], etc [...] I really wouldn’t claim to have originated anything, but I would claim to have given it some thought and drawn some conclusions, or put forth some speculations - don’t we all?

[...]

I am confirmed in my belief that the profession doesn’t want to upset its own applecart. Or even consider the matter. If I am even half-right, the profession should be stopped in its present tracks.

[...]

At the same time I am quite vulnerable – no lengthy research, no authorities, and needing a knowledge in fields I know little or nothing about. Most-ly [sic] speculation on my part. Or hypothesis. Can’t spell, either – or handle the typewriter.

My very best thesis is an old one I told a student 30 yrs ago: Get architecture the hell out of the way of people. (I didn’t practice that, I just said that – now I8d [sic] like to try and do it.).<sup>150</sup>

From the context of the letter it appears that Barthelme Sr. was in the process of penning a book on architecture, perhaps a collection of his theory and personal reflections on architectural practice. It is equally possible that the topic of discussion may be a draft of an architecture textbook. Although nothing came to fruition, correspondence between Barthelme and his father that mentions the possibility of the latter writing an architecture textbook date back to at least September 1978.

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<sup>150</sup> Donald Barthelme, Sr. Architectural Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Daugherty's comprehensive 2009 biography is a notable exception to what had previously been assumptive critical conclusions about Barthelme's relationship to architecture.<sup>151</sup> Eschewing the usual 'dead father' analysis offered by most accounts of the author's relationship with his namesake,<sup>152</sup> Daugherty's probing insights and anecdotal observations demonstrate Barthelme's indebtedness to architecture. In the process, Daugherty raises the possibility for a consideration of how Barthelme approaches literature and postmodernism through a *specifically* architectural perspective. After providing a detailed summary of Barthelme Sr.'s educational, professional and familial contact with architecture, Daugherty explains how deeply informed Barthelme was by the discipline:

Finding copies of *Architectural Forum* around the house with his father's name—*his* name—printed inside naturally piqued his curiosity. Some of [Barthelme's] early stories are built around graphics, collages, or investigations of perspective similar to the plans or illustrations in architectural journals. Even [Barthelme's] sense of language stressed plasticity, the ability of words and phrases to be rearranged in the interest of shaping and design. When he became a teacher, he likened the revision process to house remodelling.<sup>153</sup> (26)

In this Künstlerroman-esque passage Daugherty conveys how Barthelme's engagement with architecture matured from childhood curiosity into a technique that was *sui generis*. Barthelme uses the architectural object as a conceptual approach to literary and linguistic expression. For Barthelme language can be moulded, bent and re-appropriated, crafting new literary objects from pre-existing forms. Similar to his pictorial collage which seizes upon found historical resources, as discussed at length in Chapter Two, the author's literary collage technique is derived from his sense of spatial and material understanding. Elucidating this approach, 'experimental' British author B. S. Johnson declares in the introduction to his collection of prose, *Aren't You Rather*

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<sup>151</sup> The impact of the Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, which was acquired in 2002 from Marion Barthelme, and Donald Barthelme, Sr. Architectural Papers donated in 2001 by Frederick and Steven Barthelme should not be understated.

<sup>152</sup> Even Klinkowitz's thoughtful examination, *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* (1991), is seduced by this approach. For example, the book's anecdotal prologue begins with a story about Klinkowitz's 1975 evening with Barthelme and his third wife Marion. Klinkowitz recounts: "“Why Donald!” [Marion] announced in a tone of mock dismay. [...] “Your father’s is bigger than yours!” With a hideous choke Don spit out his scotch and leaned forward, gasping for breath. [...] In [Marion’s] hand was the latest edition of *Who’s Who in America*, opened apparently to the page where Donald Barthelme, Junior and Senior, were biographically profiled” (4–5).

<sup>153</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

*Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973), that authors can learn ‘something’ from architects. ‘[T]heir aesthetic problems are combined with functional ones’, Johnson writes, ‘in a way that dramatizes the crucial nature of their final actions. *Form follows function* said Louis Sullivan, mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright’.<sup>154</sup> After this statement Johnson quotes Mies van der Rohe, and then continues to explain,

[s]ubject-matter is everywhere, general, is brick, concrete, plastic; the ways of putting it together are particular, are critical. But I recognize that there are not simply problems of form, but problems of writing. Form is not the aim, but the result. If form were the aim then one would have formalism. (155)

Barthelme’s ‘Sentence’ (1987), written a few years after *Paradise*, is an illustrative example of the ‘form follows function’ edict; the ‘Q and A’ therapist vignettes of *Paradise* also adopt a form derived from the text’s content and action. However, in other instances, for Barthelme the shaping and sculpting of his work can periodically overshadow the text’s ability to communicate.<sup>155</sup> The author’s work sits at a crossroads of conflicting alliances, driven by a desire to break from the dogma of the movement that preceded him – modernism – and an indebtedness and admiration for that very same movement. Barthelme’s understanding of the modern movement originates with his father’s passionate interpretation of orthodox modern architecture.

### **Utopias: A Search for Original Purity (Somewhere) in New York**

The biographical component of *Paradise* need not be read as a sign of imaginative impoverishment. While Barthelme was reluctant to classify his work as autobiographical – at a reading shortly before his death he responded to a similar line of pursuit by saying, ‘Don’t confuse the monster on the page with the monster here in front of you’ – the author was adamant

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<sup>154</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

<sup>155</sup> Admittedly, this is a point open to personal interpretation, and returns us to the ‘medium is the message’ debates of Chapter Two.

that his work reflected the world around him (Daugherty 496).<sup>156</sup> But *Paradise* is not only occupied with how the world *is*, but also the world that *ought* to be – and, implicitly, the world that *ought not* to be.<sup>157</sup> According to David Lodge, ‘[i]n a large, quasi-metaphorical sense all significant American literature is utopian in spirit, and saturated in the myths of paradise lost or regained, either celebrating the potentialities of the American Adam, or brooding over where he went wrong’ (236). Although steeped in New Jerusalem mythology, for *Paradise*, contact with the utopian tradition is not purely metaphorical, it is imaginative and evaluative.<sup>158</sup> Often it is through architectural depictions that *Paradise* articulates its exploration of utopia. Decoding the architectural references in the novel serves to further unearth its subtext of social change. As Mumford writes in the preface to his first book, *The Story of Utopias* (1922), ‘[a]lmost every utopia is an implicit criticism of the civilization that served as its background; likewise it is an attempt to uncover potentialities that the existing institutions either ignored or buried beneath an ancient crust of custom and habit’ (*Story of Utopias* 2). Barthelme demonstrates how architecture participates in social change and records social progress; in *Paradise* we can ‘read’ society through architecture. Nathaniel Coleman concludes in *Utopias and Architecture* (2005) that, like utopia, the nature of architecture as a constructive force is primarily ‘preoccupied’ with the idea that ‘what could be, or *ought to be*, is superior to *what is*’ (9, 11).<sup>159</sup> By looking beyond present circumstance and ‘returning the social dimension of utopia to architectural thinking’, which Coleman determines was ‘shed when the excesses of positivist orthodox modernist theories and

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<sup>156</sup> After reviewing the unedited transcript of Barthelme’s 1981 *Paris Review* interview with J. D. O’Hara, Daugherty found that despite Barthelme’s statement that ‘[t]here’s not a strong autobiographical strain’ in his fiction, an expunged statement suggested otherwise. Daugherty recalls that in the raw transcript Barthelme is quoted as having said, “‘I will never write an autobiography, or possibly I’ve already done so, in the stories’” (7-8).

<sup>157</sup> This observation has been aided by Nathaniel Coleman’s reading of the distinction John Ruskin makes between ‘ought’ and ‘can’. See *Utopias and Architecture* pages 9, 297.

<sup>158</sup> For a detailed analysis of America as ‘meta-utopia’ see Chapter 3, ‘Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America’, in Kumar’s *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Time*.

<sup>159</sup> Emphasis is the author’s. Coleman finds that, contrarily, contemporary architectural theory and practice is ‘obsessed with expression of how the world *is*’. He identifies postmodernism and deconstructivism as two styles which are ‘self-consciously uncritical of present conceptions’, thus ‘must remain forever captive of what *is*’ (9). Coleman’s latter point is certainly open to debate.

practices became anathema’, architecture can renew its potential for social ideation (10). While *Paradise* offers no blueprints for creation of the ‘ideal city’, it does imaginatively experiment with different formations of social space and community. In spite of Krishan Kumar’s observation that in the twentieth century there is nothing ‘more commonplace than the pronouncement that [...] utopia is dead – dead beyond any hope of resurrection’,<sup>160</sup> Bartheleme’s *Paradise* mediates between what Mumford has termed ‘utopias of escape’ and ‘utopias of reconstruction’ (380).

Seeking a broad set of criteria for an expansive concept employed by theologians, political theorists, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and scholars of literature – to name a few – Gregory Claeys in *Searching for Utopia* (2011) posits that throughout history and across global cultures ‘[t]he concept of utopia [...] is some variation on an ideal present, an ideal past and an ideal future, and the relation between the three’ (7). Coleman notes that generally in architectural discourse utopia is conceived of ‘as being interchangeable with *ideal*, even more so with *ideology*’ (63).<sup>161</sup> Forming two dominant categories, Mumford’s ‘utopias of escape’ and ‘utopias of reconstruction’ draw broad distinctions between utopian propensities; one is introverted, unproductive and conservative, the other forward looking, hopeful and progressive. Mumford writes, ‘[i]f [utopia of escape] leads backward into the utopian’s ego, [utopia of reconstruction] leads outward—outward into the world’ (*Story of Utopias* 21). At times using an architectural image, Mumford argues that utopias of escape are places of delusion, providing a ‘house of refuge’ or ‘compensation’ for those seeking ‘an immediate release from the difficulties or frustrations’ of contemporary experience (*Story of Utopias* 15). A utopia of escape is ‘substituted for the external world’, offering a ‘pseudo-

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<sup>160</sup> Like all aspects of the idea’s history, the evolution of utopia in the twentieth century is incredibly complex and diverse. Kumar’s chapter ‘Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Twentieth Century’ carefully maps many of the major currents of twentieth-century utopianism.

<sup>161</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

environment or idolum' (*Story of Utopias* 15). Conversely, Mumford writes that a utopia of reconstruction is

a vision of a reconstituted environment which is better adapted to the nature and aims of the human beings who dwell within it than the actual one; and not merely better adapted to their actual nature, but better fitted to their possible developments. (*Story of Utopias* 21)

Coleman explains how Mumford's distinctions are 'the difference between fantasies and plans' and signals the critic's recognition of utopia's negative and positive 'dual propensity'(63). In more explicit terms, Ruth Levitas argues that Mumford sees 'a division between bad and good utopias (even if existing utopias of reconstruction are not, in fact, seen as very good at all)' (17). On one hand, Coleman emphasises, "'utopias of escape" provide compensation rather than opportunity, which makes them pathological'. Utopias of reconstruction, on the other hand, 'are projective and thus constitutive' (63). Again employing architectural metaphors, Mumford contrasts utopias of escape and utopias of reconstruction. He writes:

The first leaves the external world the way it is; the second seeks to change it so that one may have intercourse with it on one's own terms. In one we build impossible castles in the air; in the other we consult a surveyor and an architect and a mason and proceed to build a house which meets our essential needs; as well as houses made of stone and mortar are capable of meeting them. (*Story of Utopias* 15)

Coleman recognises a further 'link between utopian and architectural practices', documenting how Mumford 'defended' utopias by referencing architectural drawings. Dismissing the immateriality of utopia, Mumford writes, '[i]t is absurd to dispose of utopia by saying that it exists only on paper. The answer to this is: precisely the same thing may be said of the architect's plans for a house, and houses are none the worse for it' (15).

A modernist who was famously averse to the International Style, Mumford's reliance on architectural metaphors is unsurprising when one considers that he later became one of America's most prominent twentieth-century critics of architecture and city planning. Robert Wojtowicz, in his introduction to a collected edition of Mumford's columns for *The New Yorker*, states that what links the critic's prolific writings on culture is an understanding and evaluation of architecture 'as

an index of civilization' (11). Yet Mumford's employment of architecture in *The Story of Utopias* telegraphs a longer-standing historical association between utopia and architecture. Claeys recounts how 'architecture, urban planning, and [...] the design of entire nations have always played a vital role in the utopian imagination' (114). Illustrating this point, Claeys identifies the influence of 'rational principles' on Thomas More's *Utopia* (117). Through history, architecture has been used to articulate images of just societies and better worlds. In *The Principle of Hope* (1938–47) Ernst Bloch refers to this 'style' of construction as 'wishful architecture' embedded with 'aspirations' to transcend its physicality and become 'symbols of perfection, to a utopianly essential end' (xi, 14).<sup>162</sup> Providing examples of how 'wishful architecture' has traversed cultures, Bloch writes, 'Egyptian architecture is the aspiration to become like stone, with the crystal of death as intended perfection. Gothic architecture is the aspiration to become like the vine of Christ, with the tree of life as intended perfection' (14). However, it was in the eighteenth century, with the birth of Enlightenment thought, that utopian projections fully became part of the 'architect's tool kit' (Martin 148).<sup>163</sup> Prior to this, the idea of utopia as an imaginative instrument primarily belonged to the literary arts, as well as to painting (Martin 148, 208).

Unlike the nineteenth-century city that expanded outward across space, the development of the twentieth-century metropolis centred on the vertical potentialities of height. In American cities, like New York and Chicago, modernist skyscraper office buildings and residential tower blocks came to symbolise this nascent movement (Claeys 123). Upon landing in New York City in 1935, Le Corbusier bombastically declared to the *Herald Tribune* that Manhattan's skyscrapers were 'too small'. Years later, in his study of modernist architecture *When the Cathedrals Were*

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<sup>162</sup> Bloch argues that all art is 'full' of this kind of transcendent 'appearances' (14).

<sup>163</sup> Reinhold Martin in *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (2010) cites numerous books that connect utopian thinking, architecture and the age of Enlightenment (208). Amongst the architects Martin identifies are Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806) and Jean-Jacques Lequeu (1757–1820?). Ledoux, an early exponent of neoclassicism known more for his theoretical drawings of architecture and town planning than for projects executed, created his utopian vision of the ideal city of Chaux which famously included a brothel. Architect and draughtsman Lequeu juxtaposed drawings of nuns exposing their breasts with architectural fantasies of imaginary cities in his 'encyclopedia of the universe'. See Paulette Singley, 'The Anamorphic Phallus within Ledoux's Dismembered Plan of Chaux' and Philippe Duboy, *Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma*.

*White* (1948), Le Corbusier expanded on his comment (164). The architect explained that the buildings witnessed on his trip to New York were too ‘timid’ in their innovation, since the spirit of the great city can only be realised with the audacity of extreme and widely implemented height (Corbusier *Cathedrals* xiv). For Le Corbusier, this vision went beyond utility; instead the architect proclaimed that this aspiration was part of humanity’s destiny, begun over seven hundred years ago when civilisation embraced an epoch symbolised by the construction of cathedrals. According to his theory, the modern continuum of this ambition can be found in the grandiose structure of the skyscraper, a monument not to God but to modernity (Corbusier *Cathedrals* 3–9). Playfully blending real and invented architects, in *Paradise* Barthelme writes of a 1972 conference Simon attended on the work of fictional ‘Greek planner Constantin Doxiodes in Stockholm, at which Doxiodes had declared himself a criminal because he had put human beings into high-rise buildings’ (*Paradise* 109). In the twentieth century, David Harvey notes,

[a]ll the great urban planners, engineers, and architects [...] set about their tasks by combining an intense imaginary of some alternative world (both physical and social) with practical concern for engineering and re-engineering urban and regional spaces according to radically new designs. (164)

Once the ‘imaginative context’ was established by visionary architects like Le Corbusier – Ville Radieuse (Radiant City) – or Frank Lloyd Wright – Broadacre City – practitioners of architecture materialised often less ambitious, scaled down, projections of these famous plans (164).<sup>165</sup>

As *Paradise* reveals, the promises of modernist and postmodernist architecture were ill-equipped to handle the changing social landscape of an increasingly hostile and securitised 1980s city. Observing the ‘failure’ of the modern movement’s utopian gestures, the Reagan-era New York City of the novel is depicted as generic and corporatised. Outside the walls of Paradise, the novel portrays the distant New York topography as degenerative, a disorderly space filled with

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<sup>164</sup> Parts of *When The Cathedrals Were White* were published in the journal *Direction* in 1938 and 1939 before it was elaborated in book form.

<sup>165</sup> Wright’s Broadacre City sought to erase the distinctions between urban and rural by repopulating America with decentralised homesteads (Claeys 124).

crime and random violence.<sup>166</sup> Claeys notes the tendency for the image of the city to become dystopian as the result of ‘extreme urbanization’ (113). By referring back to Carey’s explanation that utopias are positive or negative imaginative projections of desire, while dystopias are expressions of fear, one realises that, due to Barthelme’s characteristic humour and irony, the novel avoids the evocation of anxiety and skirts depiction of fearful moments (xi). Yet the city that surrounds Simon’s compact paradise is a place of discomfort and danger, particularly for women.<sup>167</sup> The narrator of *Paradise* describes the alienating bare functionalism of contemporary urban experience:

New architecture is “soulless,” Simon reads, again and again and again. He has trouble disagreeing when what is being talked about is a seventy-story curtain-wall building on Sixth Avenue. People don’t like to live or work above the second floor in any building, the third at the outer extreme. No building should be taller than a ship. People like light; on the other hand, they also like caves. An austere façade pleases architects; people like decoration, a modicum of drama. Embassies are now being designed like banks, with more and more security [...]. Metal detectors set up at the entrances of schools. Gun-toting Wackenhuts in supermarkets (part of the design). Enter a jewelry store and above the selling floor there’s a booth with bulletproof glass with gun ports and a guy with a shotgun. Giant concrete flowerpots all around the Capitol which have nothing to do with love of flowers. The messianic-maniacal idea that architecture will make people better, civilize them, central to much 1920s–1930s architectural thought, Corbusier, Gropius, even Wright, abandoned. Although modesty is not what architects do best, there is more restraint now, Simon thinks.<sup>168</sup> (*Paradise* 68–69)

By the end of the mid-century even the most fervent acolytes of orthodox modern architecture had deserted their aspirations for radical social change, as discussed in Chapter One. According to Simon, the ‘messianic-maniacal’ dream of social reinvention was ‘abandoned’ by practising architects. As Coleman illustrates, much of the post-World War II architectural discourse attempted to ‘liberate architects from the holistic vision that utopias, ideologies, ideas and ideals

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<sup>166</sup> As mentioned earlier, Simon does enjoy some aspects of the city’s extreme anonymity and lack of community. The reader is told that ‘Simon enjoyed life as a ghost, one of the rewards of living in the great city. So many units rushing to and fro that nobody noticed anything much or had time to remark on strangers in the house, in the neighborhood. Sublets were everywhere, two men and a grand piano might pop up in your building any Wednesday’ (*Paradise* 119).

<sup>167</sup> As O’Donnell has noted violence against women is a theme that affects all three models (213–14). There are other instances of violence or abuse of women in *Paradise*, including a ‘twenty-eight or twenty-nine’ year old black female police officer who is attacked and beaten by two white men (24–26). Simon assists the police officer and she thanks him, telling him “‘You’re a good citizen’” (26).

<sup>168</sup> The Wackenhut Corporation is an American security services firm that operates nationwide. The company is most popularly recognised for providing store security guards.

might offer them'. The totalising utopias of the modern movement, which advocated the complete replacement of present living conditions, were rejected as corrosive. 'Suspicion of organizing visions' was widespread amongst 'the arguments of [late twentieth-century] architectural writers as apparently dissimilar as [...] Colin Rowe and Manfredo Tafuri' (Coleman 64). Replacing the stark zealotry of modernist utopian vision was softer Venturian 'modesty' and accessibility through ornamentation. Simon informs the reader that '[c]oncrete [...] wonderfully useful and wonderfully ugly, should never be seen in public unless covered with ivy, or, better still, wallpaper' (*Paradise* 36).

Even before Venturi's *Complexity*, Jane Jacobs wrote of her own vision of humble spatial intimacy, and situated her critique in opposition to modernist urban planning. Published a year before Barthelme's move to Greenwich Village, Jacobs's influential *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), in Harvey's words, condemned 'the great blight dullness [modernist architects] and their acolytes had unleashed upon post-war cities' (164). For Jacobs, successful city life should be lively and diverse, with community self-government, parks and public buildings that are part of the 'street fabric', and loosely delineated 'street-neighborhood networks' (168, 156). Yet Harvey convincingly argues that Jacobs advocated her own 'preferred version of spatial play', which is equally as 'utopian as the utopianism she attacked'. More controversially, Harvey claims that the stated aims and attributes of Jacobs's distinctive model could be used to 'justify all those "intimately designed" gated communities and exclusionary communitarian movements that now so fragment cities across the United States' (164). Daugherty recognises Jacobs-inspired 'celebrations' of urban space in *Paradise* although he overlooks the potential authoritarian dimensions of her vision, as highlighted by Harvey (220–21). Venturi's more 'humble' change is also, as demonstrated by Simon, an unsuccessful form of spatial renewal.<sup>169</sup> A transformation of the city *has* taken place, but it was not the pure ordered

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<sup>169</sup> This is not to suggest that Venturi desired to fundamentally remake urban space, instead he wished to liberate architects from the strictures of modernist grand vision. Although he had no epochal aspirations,

progression of Le Corbusier's white cathedrals or the conceptual liberation of Venturi's decorated sheds.<sup>170</sup> Instead, at times Barthelme's New York is described as an intense and tumultuous spatial reality on the verge of reaching its boiling point. Simon appears to approve of Venturian prototypes, but the implementation of early postmodern design principles has been less than impactful on New York City.

Further signalling Barthelme's appreciation of the utopian tradition in architecture and its relationship to social transformation, in the reality of the 'new' 1980s New York, architects have shed both their 'messianic-maniacal' tendencies *and* their role in shaping society. Having divorced itself from any suggestion of radicalism, for architects, Venturian 'modesty' is shown to have resulted in a deficiency of grand social ambition. The revolutionary disposition of architecture has been erased, and architects have found their profession written out of the script for dramatic social change. Barthelme reveals this predicament during one of Simon's conversations with Veronica:

"It seems to me," Veronica had said one day, "that you have no social responsibility." "My first social responsibility," he had said, "is that the building doesn't collapse." "Right right right," she said, "but you are after all a creature of the power structure." This was true enough, revolutionaries didn't build buildings, needed only closets to oil their Uzis in, no work for architects there. (*Paradise* 132)

The reader is told that in the past Simon participated in altruistic community-based projects, like the aforementioned Catholic church and the conversion of an 'old armory in a rundown area' into a schoolhouse (*Paradise* 34). While gratifying for Simon, these projects are hardly 'revolutionary', and lack the romantic heroism or daring for which Barthelme quietly seems to be nostalgic.

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Venturi's theories did, however, mark a turning point in architectural theory and practice. But as highlighted earlier in this chapter, by the 1980s the prominence of both architectural and literary postmodernism appeared to be waning.

<sup>170</sup> As Harvey observes, Le Corbusier's 1920s theoretical design 'Dream for Paris' did eventually manifest itself in brick as the large-scale middle-income housing complex, Stuyvesant Town, in New York (1943–47) (164–66). Championed by Robert Moses, the 'city within the city' located on the East Side of Manhattan was designed for white residents only and involved the clearing of 11,000 working-class tenants (Schwartz 84).

Of course, the reluctantly aging Simon is incapable of forceful provocation or spirited conflict. For much of the novel, Simon responds to the unpleasant public spaces of New York, and his inability to locate a place for himself in a changing contemporary landscape, by retreating into a utopia of his own construction. Writing on ‘The Meaning of Utopia’ (2011), philosopher Yves Charles Zarka suggests that, when ‘[f]aced with a reality which is overloaded [...], we have to look for an *elsewhere*’ (Zarka).<sup>171</sup> Just as there is ‘no place in this world for these women’, having failed at marriage and suffered professional setbacks, it appears there is no place in New York for Simon – other than within his bare, recently rented apartment. Notions of fantastical thinking and the imaginary are part of the colloquial lexicon of utopia. But as is frequently observed in critical studies of utopia, the word *utopia*, meaning ‘nowhere’, ‘no-place’, or ‘without-place’, is based on More’s 1516 combination of Greek *ou* ‘not’ and *topos* ‘place’. The association between utopia and ‘good place’ stems from the author’s pun with the word’s first syllable, *eu* (as in *euphemism* or *eulogy*). The result of this etymological mischievousness is persistent ambiguity, leaving the more knowledgeable reader wondering if utopia can simultaneously be *eutopia*, a good place, and *outopia*, no-place. Do ideals of ‘goodness’ necessitate an unrealisable ‘nowhere’? With a second reading of ‘There was *no place* in the world for these women whom he loved, *no good place*’, one finds Simon’s declamation heavily laced with irony (*Paradise* 168).<sup>172</sup> Simon describes himself as ‘a way station, a bed-and-breakfast, a youth hostel, a staging area’ for his model-guests, yet this ‘not-place’ of refuge (utopia of escape) is revealed as no springboard of opportunity (utopia of reconstruction), and there is an even wider, more vacuous ‘no place’ awaiting the women – the outside world (*Paradise* 168). By the end of the novel the reader finds the complications of external contemporary life increasingly mirrored within the interiority of Paradise. Although, as Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent rightly observe, by definition all fiction describes ‘no-places’ (1). Levitas in *The Concept of Utopia*

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<sup>171</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>172</sup> Emphasis added.

(1990) calls the ‘lasting confusion’ around the meaning of utopia ‘a familiar but nonetheless rather troublesome ghost’ (2). Considering Barthelme’s ‘tentative title’ for the novel *Paradise*, ‘*Ghosts*’, this characterisation of utopia appears all the more appropriate. Jean Pfaelzer notes the utopian novel is a ‘literary genre, locked in its own paradox; like any text, it [is] conditioned by history—time past and passing—while it also purport[s] to represent the future—time yet to come’ (3-4). This ‘nowhere’, ‘no-place’, or ‘without-place’-ness of *Paradise* is amplified by the form of the narrative. While the reader is told that the models are with Simon for a specific amount of time – eight months – a sense of linear time is arrested. Dialogue appears to hang in mid-air and is often punctuated by repetitions of three – ‘Right right right’, ‘again and again and again’ – presumably representing the interchangeable voices of the models. Odd juxtapositions and Socratic dialogue abound; both are characteristic features of Barthelme’s fiction. As Klinkowitz observes, like Barthelme’s earlier novels ‘*Paradise* uses [...] short forms [...], breaking the narrative into many small sections that shift time and space as if these entities are merely narrative episodes on the track of some greater interest’ (101).

Like heavens and ‘afterlife elysiums’, traditionally paradise is one class of utopia ‘where nothing can be wanting’ (Carey xix). The reader is told that in Simon’s

hog heaven the hogs wait in line for more heaven. No, not right, no waiting in line, it’s unheavenly, hogly. The celestial sty is quilted in kale, beloved of hogs. [...] [T]hey fall into each other’s trotters, nothing can be done wrong here, nothing wrong can be done.... (172)

Yet Barthelme’s rendering of paradise is full of gaping holes and questions, self-doubt and persistent problematics. Conventionally, as suggested by its Persian root word, ‘paradise’ is a garden. By envisioning a sequestered space of domestic fruits – a walled garden of sorts – Barthelme injects a pastoral sensibility into the compact density of the urban environment.<sup>173</sup>

There may be abundance, in the form of sexual plenitude, but this proves to grant more questions and complications than satisfaction.

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<sup>173</sup> A similar play between urban and rural can be located in Barthelme’s short stories ‘The Balloon’ (1966) and ‘The Glass Mountain’ (1970).

Getting old, Simon. Not so limber, dear friend, time for the bone factory? [...] Send the women away. They're too good for you. Also, not good for you. Are you King Solomon? Your kingdom a scant two hundred fifty-nine thousand, two hundred square inches. Annual tearfall, three and one-quarter inches. You feedeth among the lilies, Simon, garter belts too. Your garden is over-cultivated, it needs weeds. [...]

When he asked himself what he was doing, living in a bare elegant almost unfurnished New York apartment with three young and beautiful women, Simon had to admit *he did not know* what he was doing. He was, he supposed, listening. These women were taciturn as cowboys, spoke only to immediate questions, probably did not know in which century the Second World War had taken place. No, too hard; it was, rather, that what they knew was so wildly various, ragout of Spinoza and Cyndi Lauper with William Buckley sherbet floating in the middle of it. He'd come in one evening to find all three of them kneeling on the dining room table with their rumps pointing at him. Obviously he was supposed to strip off gentlemanly khakis and attend to all three at once, just as obviously an impossibility.<sup>174</sup> (*Paradise* 59–60)

Echoing passages from More's *Utopia* where the reader is given a list of attributes of the fabled land, and its precise size and dimensions, Barthelme seeks to comically give contours and shape to a concept that has spatial and local dimensions but no fixed location.<sup>175</sup> Simon thinks to himself: 'Your kingdom a scant two hundred fifty-nine thousand, two hundred square inches. Annual tearfall, three and one-quarter inches' (*Paradise* 59). With great specificity the reader of the *Utopia* is told that the island has 'fifty-four splendid big towns [...] all built on the same plan, and, so far as the sites will allow, they all look exactly alike. The minimum distance between towns is twenty-four miles, and the maximum, no more than a day's walk' (More and Turner 50). The identical high-walled towns have well-designed streets, and 'far from unimpressive' terraced buildings featuring large enclosed back gardens with swing-doors that open for all – since private property is obsolete (More and Turner 53). Alessa Johns identifies how the infrastructure of More's *Utopia* 'supports the discipline of inhabitants; architecture and institutions encourage certain behaviours and discourage others' (174). Significantly, Barthelme's less expansive description of utopia departs from More's by suggesting the presence of emotion, '[a]nnual tearfall', and a desire for imperfection, it 'needs weeds'. Barthelme's conceptualisation of utopia is indulgent: he accepts shortcomings and celebrates human limitations. Instead of More's strategy of social betterment through a strict template, there are no aspirations for perfection in

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<sup>174</sup> Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>175</sup> This type of anthropological fieldwork 'reporting' is also reminiscent of Barthelme's 'Paraguay' (1970).

Simon's Paradise; infinite pleasure is sought, although not always won. This facet of Barthelme's writing of utopianism mirrors 1960s utopian communities, which 'were committed to egalitarianism and [...] generally marked by an anarcho-syndicalist version of socialism, emphasizing personal, individual freedom, pleasure, and fulfilment at the expense of group unity or coherence' (DeKoven 271). While American utopianism reached its apogee in the nineteenth-century antebellum period, the utopian spirit remerged in the 1960s to form new communities.<sup>176</sup> Yet despite the stated commitment of these egalitarian communes to 'liberty, equality, community [...] both radicalism and the counterculture were exaggeratedly macho and male dominated until the emergence of second-wave feminism' at the end of the 1960s. Marianne DeKoven writes in *Utopia Limited* (2004) that the counterculture tended to '[reproduce] dominant gender inequalities [...] despite their egalitarian ideologies' (272). Barthelme's Paradise is a type of postmodern commune, where the perceived innocence of the 1960s has been stripped of its activism and idealism, replaced by the emptiness of meaningless pornographic sex and irreverent conversation. After becoming radicalised by feminist criticism, the models rebel against the gender inequality reinforced by Simon's Paradise. The models' rebuttal to the patriarchal 'hog heaven' is not a 'second-wave' feminist revolution, resulting in an alternative all-female utopia; instead, Dore, Anne, and Veronica predominately articulate their frustrations through language, forcefully asserting their equality.<sup>177</sup> Eventually the women leave to seek employment.

The external social realities of 'here and now' occasionally intrude upon the enclave-like pseudo-collectivist utopia of Simon's apartment. Although the city is a palpable force within the narrative, few passages are dedicated to events beyond the confines of Simon's apartment, and most of these instances come in the form of recollections from the past. Here in his domestic space, during the models' residency, Simon's engagement with the contemporary (exterior) world

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<sup>176</sup> For a detailed history and analysis of nineteenth-century American utopian tradition see Chapter 3 in Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*.

<sup>177</sup> Although just how 'articulate' their language is is open to debate; the models often speak in an impenetrable argot.

is primarily through his interaction with Dore, Anne and Veronica. As Klinkowitz has observed, this ‘unity of place’ allows the women to introduce Simon to foreign

ideas and practices, including a different language that disrupts the syntax he has used so well thus far. His locale, in fact, becomes a focus for intrusions of all sorts, including street noise, new styles of sex, and texts such as he’s never before read. All of these influences intrude as alien forces, but by reshaping the novel’s own texture become, by its end, the new cultural definition of reality. (101)

Simon’s knowledge and life experience is shown to be out-dated and irrelevant. He gazes with wonder at the ‘messages’ on the models’ t-shirts:

ALLY SHEEDY LIVES! Who is Ally Sheedy? In what sense does she live, and why is that fact worthy of comment? They know, he doesn’t. Simon actually met Pierre Trudeau (at a three-day city-planning conference in Ottawa) [...]. This earns him about a crayon’s worth of credit with his guests.<sup>178</sup> (*Paradise* 43)

Pursuing ersatz philosophy, with risible results, the narrator informs the reader that Simon ‘attempts generalizations’: ‘Dore is *crusty*, Veronica is *volatile*, Anne is *a worrier*. The generalizations are banal but comforting, like others he’s been faithful to over many years, architecture is *frozen music* and art is *a source of life*’ (*Paradise* 43).<sup>179</sup> Simon fixates on ‘triviality’ and agonises over detail (Daugherty 471). In between the domestic mundane and Simon’s sexual dalliances with the models, the architect’s thoughts meander through the clutter of his mind, at times stopping to half-heartedly probe ontological questions. The bareness of the apartment’s ‘Dover White-painted’ space – which Veronica declares has such ‘high ceilings’ that you ‘could hang yourself in here’ – and the ‘messiness’ of Simon’s mind, draw sharp contrast (*Paradise* 13). Meditating on the stagnant literal and figurative interiority of *Paradise*, Jameson observes that despite the radical reinterpretation of space over the course of the twentieth century – especially under ‘the extraordinary wealth of architectural and formal innovation [...] [of] postmodernism’ – ‘one basic form’ of social and aesthetic space has not changed: ‘the *room*’

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<sup>178</sup> Pierre Trudeau is a former Prime Minister of Canada.

<sup>179</sup> Emphasis is the author’s.

(*Archaeologies* 320-21).<sup>180</sup> This idea of creative and social stasis haunts *Paradise*. Simon spends much of his ‘sabbatical’ listening, thinking, and doing mundane tasks, but to what end? The reader is told that Simon is ‘amazed by what he doesn’t care about. [...] He’s thought of no new projects’ (*Paradise* 43).

While the novel avoids a definitive reading of utopias, Simon does emerge from his seeming utopia of escape as a productive constructor of society. After the departure of Dore, Anne and Veronica, Simon gets an office outside of his apartment where he works on a ‘light scoop’ for a small foundation’s office building.

Simon set up a small office in a barely renovated building on West Broadway. [...] [T]he big open windows brought in the clamor of the street, sirens, rape, outrage. [...] He sat at his draughting table, [...] sketching on tracing paper with a felt pen. [...] To be working again felt very good. (*Paradise* 184–85)

One could read this reinvigoration of Simon’s creative energies as a fulfilment of Herbert Marcuse’s theory of socially productive sexual play. As Kumar recalls, in Marcuse’s influential *Eros and Civilization* (1955), a book that helped revive utopianism in the 1960s, the Marxist philosopher claimed that ‘sexuality can be freely and fully transformed into the wider “culture-building power” of Eros’ (Kumar 395); although for Simon, comically, sexual liberation is an exhausting method of achieving productivity. Conditioned by the women to better understand contemporary society, Simon appears to accept the dysfunctional New York landscape, while working on a small-scale project to improve the city by ‘modest’ means.

While Barthelme’s third novel does mirror a form of the present, the idea of ‘paradise’ is a concept bound to both biblical history and imaginative projection. Originating in the Garden of Eden – terrestrial paradise – and heaven – celestial paradise – Western utopianism is grounded in a Judeo-Christian tradition. Committing an intentional act of apostasy, Simon’s *Paradise* is built by man, not God. Kumar observes a tension between paradise and utopia, since the former is associated with religion and ‘other-worldly concern’ and ‘utopia’s interest is in this world’ (10).

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<sup>180</sup> Jameson does, seemingly reluctantly, acknowledge Le Corbusier’s contribution of the ‘so-called free plan’ (*Postmodernism, Or* 321).

Barthelme's rendering of *Paradise* can be read as a rebuttal to perhaps the most famous utopian image of the American 1980s, Reagan's 'shining city on a hill'.<sup>181</sup> This image of American greatness, 'whose beacon light guides freedom-loving people everywhere', harks back to the Sermon on the Mount and signifies a return to New Jerusalem mythology. The moral and social superiority conveyed by this image was wholly disconnected from the shadows of a mid-1980s New York in the depths of the AIDS and drug epidemics. Kumar observes that America and the Soviet Union were 'the two great utopian experiments of modern times' (381). Barthelme's secular utopia, where humans are hogs and fornicating is part of the cultural fabric, rewrites the already bruised mythology of American exceptionalism, and the bankrupt concept of the Soviet utopian experiment. Paul Giles in *American Catholic Arts and Fictions* (1992) states that the novel's paradise is a

distinctively earthly, materialist phenomenon, a "hog heaven" [...] dependent upon the bounties of money and sex. It is certainly not a divine resting place, nor is it the kind of terrestrial utopia Emerson or Thoreau would have favored; Simon keeps his money in a book entitled *On Adam's House in Paradise*, as if to emphasize how his version of bliss diverges sharply from that of the "American Adam" in its more traditional pastoral paradigms.<sup>182</sup> (Giles 386)

The presence of money in paradise is also contrary to More's utopian vision where elimination of money (and private property) are fundamental principles, a feature which Jameson argues 'runs through the Utopian tradition like a red thread' (*Archaeologies* 18, 20). In his foreword to Joseph Rykwert's *On Adam's House in Paradise*, a book that appears in both the published novel and the original sixty pages, Arthur Drexler writes that for architects 'the paradise we hope to gain is modelled on the one we think we lost' (Drexler 8). In the first sixty pages of what was adapted into *Paradise*, Rykwert's *On Adam's House*, is mentioned but in a significantly different context.

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<sup>181</sup> The former Governor of California began using 'shining city on a hill' before he was elected president in 1981. Reagan's 'shining city on a hill' was intended as an homage to John Winthrop. However, George McKenna notes in *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (2007) that this was based on a 'garbled quotation' and that Winthrop intended to convey a sense that the 'world would be watching the Puritan experiment in the New World, and if it failed "we shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants [...]"' (340).

<sup>182</sup> The 'American Adam' that Giles refers to is R. W. B. Lewis's 1955 study of the same name which examines the potent nineteenth-century mythology of a 'figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history' (1).

At the end of the first vignette, in the version Barthelme submitted to Sale, Rykwert's book is referenced in the section's closing line: 'After breakfast he begins to read On Adam's House in Paradise' (*First Sixty Pages* 3). At this moment in the draft, Rykwert's book is the second reference to 'paradise' and subtly provides the framing of the theoretical pursuits that follow, thus suggesting that Simon's ontological questioning of paradise is as a result of reading *On Adam's House*. The complete title of Rykwert's work is *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (1972). The book by the architectural phenomenologist was the second in a series of 'occasional papers' by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.<sup>183</sup> The first in the series was Venturi's *Complexity*.

In 'Varieties of Literary Utopias' (1965) Northrop Frye writes that while utopian satire 'is very prominent', there is 'something of a paralysis of utopian thought and imagination' in contemporary literature. Frye argues that, particularly in American fiction, this is 'the result of a repudiation of Communism' (29). *Paradise* complicates this claim, creating a rich overlay of conflicting utopian traditions and tendencies. Employing identifiably postmodern pluralism, Barthelme demonstrates the 'duel propensity' of utopias, as signalled by Mumford. While Barthelme never fully approved of *Paradise* – Daugherty reports that the author thought the novel was 'pretty weak' and that he 'simply seemed relieved to have finished it' – the breath and scope of the novel's engagement with utopian traditions is impressive (472). The narrative encapsulates a complex snapshot of Reagan-era cultural changes and anxieties. As consumerism, mass media, technology, disease, crime, racism, sexism, and deepening class divisions explode across the urban terrain, Barthelme ponders the shifting role of the artist in a chaotic world. Daugherty recounts the American poet Ed Hirsch's comments about Barthelme's late work:

It's true that the postmodern fireworks can't be found much in the later writing. If what you value most is innovation, then the early work will draw you. But there is a wistfulness and a melancholy in the late stories that I find beautiful. And they're deceptively personal. (472)

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<sup>183</sup> The Museum of Modern Art, New York published the work in association with the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Chicago.