A RESPONSE
Patrick Healy, November, 12ᵗʰ 2021.

One senses, on first reading the thesis work of Mr.Pantaleone, the intense problem of the crisis of fragmentation of meaning and symbolic relations, or, the challenge to any notion of autonomy in architectural discourse, and one senses also, that even in his robust theorising, his generation, like each generation of architecture and architects, must face the theme of crisis and meaning, independence or dependence first outlined by Hegel in his view that architecture because it deals with externality, material reality, had to ask if the external object had meaning in itself, or, was it a means to an end, or if in serving an end it could appear as independent.

It thus comes as no surprise that the thesis is throughout edging towards a manifesto. A manifesto would only contain promise, instead Pantaleone identifies the making of the crisis, situates an historical event, and pursues to its end how working from an 'ideology of failure' a new process led design could open up for the practitioner.

The work of the thesis in what it sets forth is an Uber-modernity in the sense of Nietzsche, the need for an 'overcoming'   that goes beyond, that is literally an act of constant transgression; a re-evaluation of all values including the stories architecture tells itself.

There is a crisis, and for Pantaleone it is not solved by invoking the very means which brought it to pass. The precise failure of modernity can be charted, and he introduces the telling metaphor, when speaking of the failure of the interpellation of ideology, that it demonstrates 'the inability to metabolize its negative product'.

The situation as viewed is no longer bearable, and he has in mind the entire collapse of the techno-optimistic-utopian ballyhoo, that lead to endemic toxicity and an actual wasteland. The Soviet notion of Sotsgorod, socialist city of the future, idea of utopic industrial city, is a mask for real time nihilism. The Soviets had invited mostly German and Dutch architects to work on plan and construction of 20 such cities, but by the outbreak of the second World War had to strip some of the unfinished cities for iron as part of the war effort. The whole reason for these cities was the exploitation of resource rich Siberia. A recent Dutch film documentary has been made, for which see art. Sotsgorod Wikipedia.

It is because failure too is not metabolized that that the differential product of growth is delegitimised to waste. For Pantaleone re-thinking this situation requires a revolutionary nihilism, which is a nihilism against immanent nihilism. The very conception of 'nihilism' is a Russian term that gained currency towards the end of the 19th century. For Heidegger it holds sway in the philosophy of being since the work of Nietzsche, and may continue for a long time to come. That is indeed a radical and alternative way of thinking of history. The soviets wanted to avoid the 'criminal anarchy' of capitalism at all costs, and ultimately collapsed into anarchic criminality.

Pantaleone will advance his critique and looks, as he puts it, at how the negative draws attention to the instability of every form and points to the contingency of all boundaries. He will develop a method guided by such propositions, a method that understands in the differential of transgression the significance of improvisation and also of care taking with his remarkable contention that 'failure can be an abductive normative support'.

He openly espouses the very epistemological status of the searching subject as hesitant, unsure, needing to find out through trial and error. It is a description of an older empiricism, which did not have science as a form of metaphysics – the only place and bearer of truth. He seeks an alternative that is not caught in a binary, dualist grip, something that is really other than the false necessity that presents itself as inexorable.

There is a complex weave in the text, an acceptance and concomitant rejection, yes the modern is technological and renders everything into the question of efficient causality, or treating all relations as a means to an end, there being no end in itself, just transactional moves that belong to the economic metaphor of cost effectiveness in relationship to persons and nature. His reading of the ontological consequences of this has parallels in some of the most advanced thinkers of modernity.

What resulted in architecture, after Schinkel's complex legacy was disbursed, became a question about: In what style should we build? which lead to a modernity that was arbitrary – in the sense of subjective, one could choose style, styles. It was to be the valorising of a pick and choose from the discrete menu of the past,

aided and abetted by an enormous increase in historical minded research in an iterative loop history entered architectural discourse and was to become regulative. Architectural discourse needed to distinguish its own infima species.

For the Saint-Simonists in Paris – as studied by Kracauer in his book on Offenbach- money and industry were the goals of a to be liberated and truly egalitarian society, and this around the 1840's. It is there with the work of Fourier, Prudhon one sees the emergence of 'socialist, utopian' notions of urban planning emerge as a political directive.

A second response to this modernity was to initiate an act of destruction, and begin again with a tabula rasa, thus Karl Kraus' comment that Vienna had been demolished into a metropolis, a primal gesture of destruction which Loos would develop in his built work as an ethical demand.

A third and concomitant development of modernity was to safeguard the role of architecture by submitting it to itself, in other word a theory of autonomy. Destruction was not just a wrecking ball, it was literally a de-structuring in which built forms and the discourse of architecture developed even as they it radically interrogating itself with respect to any normative or regulative ideal.

Fourthly there was a modernity that took scientific socialism as a future for an everyday Utopia, which in its shining and radiant truth could look back at all history as a preparation for that moment. Think of Nova Huta as such a model, paradigm future. Adorno would say this is the model of construction that always results in a nightmare.

The most strident embrace of modernity also had its recognition that not all was as it seemed in the new disenchanted, secular, enlightened world. Carl Einstein in his Fabrication of Fiction would see the espousals of the most avant-garde artistic theorising as a leaving the question of community in abeyance and thus making artistic practise meaningless: the ravings of a godless sensorium claiming for itself everything and anything. Carl Einstein is a spectacular example of 'whistle-blowing' the chant of modernity's dernier cri, and such anti-modern high modernists need to be studied again in more detail.

Pantaleone's thesis lays out the stakes involved. He identified with a tremendous and fatal focus the crisis and the response required. His focus requires a methodology to eventuate and not a fixed result. The searing critique of the multiple failures of modernist discourse leaves one with no alternative but of resistance and revolution; a revolution which in the upshot of previous accounts must be viewed as 'productive failure'. The focus allows a project to emerge. Awareness is all. That awareness does not depend on the 'object' and some mysterious being in itself, taken as objectivity. It seems to me that the issue of a pre-conceptual intuitive instinct is the much undervalued dimension of awareness that Pantaleone is pointing towards.

In another idiom one could say that the aim of the thesis is to open the way for a tacit knowledge, as developed in Polanyi's writing on the tacit dimension, or in Paul Feyerabend's Against Method to advance the critique of the techno-dominance and reign of efficient causality, to choose a form of engagement which directly challenges the fairy tale of Modernity, to use revolutionary nihilism to counter the immanent and undisclosed nihilism of the ideology of progress.

As with Agamben on the contemporary, there is a remorseless exposure in fine rhetorical passages against the mess of potage that has been presented as caviar, an unmasking of the claims of progress, of science as truth, and a return from the demands for constant novelty and the bankruptcy of dominant powers. It is as in the work of Deleuze not literature but now philosophy 'in a minor key'. The failure of the modernist project is the void that opens up the call to thinking, and action.

The fatal focus is a mining town in Siberia. Pantaleone describes it in stinging terms. Here the usage of 'a case study' may lead to over specification, would the thesis also be true of the Rhondda in Wales, Ruhr-region in Germany, and what of the coming China ghost cities of consumption and devastation? Detroit, Pittsburgh, even Heerlen, in South Limburg basin. Of course, more research, different comparanda, ongoing critique. Emerging as it does from medical practise, the notion of the 'case-study' may be itself a primary transgression in the sense developed in the thesis of a 'showing of the limit'.

What is remarkable is that in all of this account of what he terms ' the aimless continuation of a failed project…giving rise to a feeling of 'bleak nostalgia' the paradox in no way inhibits his search for other ways of going on, and not of treating as necessary what was always contingent and driven by a rapacious deceptive ideology

that claimed not to be one. This dissimulation is the form of the Prince as modern politics. a constant act of propaganda and sleight-of-hand, what was so well captured in the film Dr.Caligari's cabinet. Again one can do no better than read Kracauer in his: From Caligari to Hitler study of contemporary films from 1920's to understand the effect of advertising and cinema in shaping the masses.

The more vertical expression can be seen in Fritz Lang's Metropolis. Again we are faced with the need for what Pantaleone sees as a revolutionary nihilism, and indeed he is very aware that this failure of modernity is a most devious opponent.

This is in some way the part of the thesis which has to travel on a skip over very tricky rapids: How to tackle the issue of ideology without being simply an agent – however indirect- of ideology? Pantaleone has found a form of negative dialectics which is not in thrall to some view of rationality and enlightenment, rather it is able to accept indecision, create approaches and speak of value without needing the manipulation of a technogenetic apparatus. In the most Hilberseimer's of worlds a crack opens in the pavement, and even in miniature the wilderness grows, but not as a wilderness to be managed.

Of exceptional interest is the way having frankly avowed the failure, Pantaleone insists there is something to advance. Advancing something is done with all the fraught consequences of a performative injunction. Other ways of advancing would be a setting upon, an en-framing, a neat encapsulation with an algorithm to repeat the statistically dominant appropriation of data, which never asks the question of the singularity of 'datum', of experience, of deep diverse entanglements, the myriad minded and excessive world of meaning, surplus and affect, long before fact or even fiction. One maybe needs to re-iterate Duchamp's reduction to the non-significant to attempt the 'worthless' as the place- holder of the creation: a radical void that liberates.

Here the thesis runs against any fashionable avowal. We know for example that in the work of Walter Benjamin there is a close reading of Sigfried Giedion and Emil Kaufmann, and the notion of construction' where the introduction to architecture of non-natural materials en masse, steel,iron,glass, play the role, for Benjamin, of an unconscious and thus he sees the technologies of 'artistic architectures' and industrial cities as gathering, a gathering around bodily processes, as in the manner of a dream around frameworks of physiological processes.

From section J of the DasPassagen-Werk it is clear that for Benjamin to see things as they unfold through the architectural problem of the age is to see them in the purvey of the ruin – for Pantaleone it is not a ruin and capable of allegorical or mimetic extrapolation, it is a failure and a disaster- for Benjamin situations and things become obsolete.

The relation of the masses to architecture becomes a form of nostalgia, in the prostitution of space, the urban spaces being construed as rooms, the phenomenon of colportage, and endless masquerades a form of distraction is evinced with a narcotic and stupefying effect, the political role required of 'entertainment' whether in music or literature and especially in architecture which replaces lost aura of the art work with monumental distraction. The resistance is the idleness of the stroller, a kind of lazy Oblomovian solution. Such resistance hardly mounts to very much given the scale and enormity of what is required in an exploding demography of middle-class and other consumption.

Adorno in lectures on Freedom and History read the matter more crisply, even whilst trying to 'save the phenomenon'. There is a crisis of history and meaning, even given the industrial scale, perhaps because of the industrial scale, it is a crisis that belongs to the domination of technical rationality, which Adorno saw in shape and size of airports, the expansion of technological instruments world wide and in what he called' Americanization' of renewed German cities after WW2 and ultimately the domination of a means-end rationality where the survival of the individual is geared to species survival.

The real crisis, was not just these symptoms as mentioned earlier, but it was where the domination of nature continues as the violence of self-fulfilling totality and the individual is subject to the abstract universal. Such a domination can only be broken by the achievement of a reconciled non-identity of the particular to the individual. A future, as Adorno sees it, no one can manage. Despite his savage attack on Heidegger's 'jargon of authenticity', there is no philosopher he is closer to in this critique than Heidegger in his writings on technology and the menace of planning on global scales.

Two further moves are initiated in the thesis, one an analysis which culminates in a methodological reflection and two a breaking of the mirror of the therapeutic in terms of spatial practise. If one is a response to the post Anthropocene disaster, then it requires an 'invenio, where one arrives again, through improvisation, play at the re-evaluation of values.

The site which has come about in this Soviet place all' it is treated not as the last word and a call for abandonment, rather by detailing the ambivalent and fragmentary situation of the analysand; the so called abject object requires another way of seeing, improvising, engaging. Here the rich contribution of the thesis can be seen in how Pantaleone after freeing his methodology from merely reversing the situation in order to return to some originary 'earth perfect' nevertheless manages to introduce a way of using a non- invasive, and sensitive' instrumentarium' to open up the disaster in its full manifestation and through his improvisation of a self-correcting, re-generating, auto-securing platform, he creates a dynamic of multiple views and intervention which are the present participle: building, as a process, and not' the building' as noun; or some abstract universal being sought.

It is difficult to unpack the dense argument made in the second and third part of the thesis, which is facilitated by looking not at the analysis of the ravaged site, but rather how the invenio/fecit is combined by Pantaleone in his use of literally a building process that is instantiated in each performative moment, and which is harnessed by ancillary items such as photographic inventory and in a surprising way the human scale, the actual physical act and embodiment of the researcher, architect, student.

It is a process which takes the reality seriously and seeks in the phenomena what is given as well as what cannot be grasped without the intervention and changing of viewpoint and perspective. The process is as much sculptural as it is architectural, as much improvisation as it is diagnostic, with its roots firmly to be seen in Arte Povera, and a militant refusal of an imagistic solutions to the ruin on which he works. For Benjamin the ruin caught the gaze of the melancholy brooder, who puzzled over a problem to which the solution had been found but forgotten.

Benjamin viewed the arcades and their development in Paris under the sign of fragmentation and ruin. It is a heuristic device. Pantaleone is looking at the detritus of an exploded modernity and stunning dystopia with no redemptive resources in allegory. Benjamin creates correspondences which exclude dialectic conceptions, there is a jostling of paradoxical objects in the window of a surreal boutique window, with bricolage which sees everything in the purview of the ruin, merely a symptomatology of a 'lust for the past' .

The brooder and the allegorist are cut from the same cloth. They rummage among fragments and find pieces of a puzzle to see if they fit together rand the fitness is more important than any pre-established harmony, one looks for the piece and the fit with meaning, the fit with the piece, and the fit with the meaning ,If there is no progress, neither is there decline.

In such a constellation effected by Benjamin we see the difference in the analysis of Pantaleone, which depends on the given, the self-evidence of disaster and destruction, which cannot have a constuctivist solution in the sense of a restoration or myth of primal origin. Hegel rejected Laugier's 'primitive hut' pointing rather to the continuity of the cave's interior, and the hole in the ground as better candidates, candidates that were elected by him to face the inevitable 'externality' of architectural concerns. This brute gesture is equivalent in some way to the catastrophe as seen by Pantaleone, and for which he creates a means and method of addressing in a most ingenious way.

Whilst it would be possible to tie in this inspired working of the platform as a re-establishing the view not from the plan but from the elevation, it is also credible to link it to the drift of the walks of Parisian surrealists, and the development of psycho-geography in respect to an actual 'situation', which Henri Lefebvre maintained was the most urgent and difficult requirement for new practises of critique and spatial creation, ...how to have in the now a new that was neither driven by crass technological/commercial demands, or a now that was seen simply as a sequence of combinations or re-combinations of the past. It seems to me Pantaleone is finding a way through.