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Mals Mots: Aphorisms-Sweet and Sour-By an Anti-Hero Architect

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Mals Mots: Aphorisms— Sweet and Sour—By an Anti-Hero Architect

Valid Rantings

Double curse in this day: an architect whose work is mannerist and well-mannered.

I am an exhibitionist: I go around exposing my doubts.

What a shame to justify rather than design.

When we were young we had to suffer upright, uptight, sanctimonious, and pious-reformist-progressive Modernists in architecture—now we are old we have to suffer regressive, perfectionist-historicist-preservationists, purist urbanists, or expressionistic egoists in architecture.

The unforgiving medium: you can't modify or edit the work once it's up.

Hype Critics: Journalism

Journalists like spectacular architecture: it makes their job easier.

You're never sure you're good unless you're ignored or controversial.

No good art can be universally liked in its time: the problem is to make it so the right people hate it.

What's retardataire to an avant-garde critic is often avant-garde.

Purposeful misunderstanding can be a technique of criticism.

There is little understanding of architecture these days—the art of it, the sweat, the subtlety.

Hype Theories: Avant-Garde

What's with this artistic originality stuff that the Modernists derived from the Romantic movement—when the history of architecture is dominated by: sublime English Gothic derived from the French, sublime English Renaissance derived from the Italians, sublime Renaissance architecture derived from ancient Rome, sublime ancient Roman architecture derived from Greece; why can't our architecture derive and represent all kinds of things for our complex and contradictory age of multiversalism?

If you're really avant-garde you don't know it.

Good art involves fractions of inches as well as ideas.

I'll take the vulgar over the pretentious any day.

No God in the details today—only ideology in the concepts.

Ideology is the last refuge of scoundrels.

The trouble used to be architects read only one book—now they read too many books (or pretend to).

Peter Eisenman says he gets his best ideas in the shower but I think he gets them from books he hasn't read.

Let us remember our American genius for plain speech and pragmatic content—not pretentious, not heroic, not esoteric—that of Emerson, Thoreau, Lincoln, Hemingway—which must not be substituted by perfumed shit.

Hype Buildings: Decon-ism

Admitted pastiche is better than disguised pastiche.

It can be said the Neo-Modern vocabulary of today or that of Deconstructionism represents a revival—indeed, a revival of a revival, that of the International Style, itself derived from an early-twentieth-century industrial vernacular, and it sits rather at home as a style among styles within the reviled context of postmodernism—and it accommodates at the same time to the hype sensibility of today as it promotes punk and blue trusses as appliqué and floors and walls as ramps: it engages the vulgarity of Las Vegas in terms of hype-forms but not commercial symbols—it represents the easy-heroic stance of today—like a Poussin landscape with plastic gods in an Arcadian Disneyland.

Try to be constructive—do not try to be destructive—or else you will risk being more adolescent than significant.

Exception as a motif should be an oxymoron.

All bravado is no bravado.

Consistent inconsistency and flamboyant inconsistency are both a bore.

Architecture is not an aria all the time playing.

Naughty boys are cute as they get attention—up to a point—in life as in architecture.

The safety, the prestige, the journalistic appeal of the extremist position.

If you are not turned on by the idea of shelter probably you should not be an architect but a sculptor; if not turned on by architecture but by theory you should probably be a philosopher.

I Love Mannerism

Viva a fragment that implies a whole.

Richness and ambiguity over simplicity and clarity: down with Minimalism that your work brags of.

On being a mannerist architect: you are either vilified or ignored.

Beautiful lessons via Beethoven via Toscanini: non-ending themes as fragments within the movement as a whole; lyrical and dissonant juxtapositions to promote supreme tension/sublime affirmation.

It's as important to make a plan as it is not to follow it.

Urbanism: Design and Bureaucracy

Making history is as important as preserving history.

Awkwardness is part of growth and growth is part of vitality.

Beware of urban do-gooders.

The only thing worse than a corrupt bureaucracy is a zealous bureaucracy.

Today architects frequently submit to taste qualification committees set up by architects who haven't made it representing community groups who don't get it.

In the old days when experts rather than consensus held sway you got a lot of shit, but the system did not preclude some good coming out of it.

Generally the people who are most critical of Disney have bad taste.

Pseudo-urbanity—closing off streets and littering them with *objets*.

Originators and Followers

The only thing worse than being ignored is being imitated—although your followers, as part of their perversity, disguise their source.

If you're lucky you live long enough to see the bad results of your good ideas.

Your followers sometimes do it before you.

If you're good you're misinterpreted.

Your followers say you didn't go far enough with the original idea.

The fate of someone who has been influential: your original contribution has been forgotten because your idea has become pervasive—or you're blamed for the misinterpretations of it that have become perverse.

An original artist is not necessarily a good artist; a good artist is not necessarily an original artist.

I've been wrong a lot and now my wrongs are clichés.

Anti-Heroism and the Sublime Ordinary

Pay homage to the nerd in life and art.

The universal ideal as it emerged in architecture is more vividly observed in the fast food realm of McDonald's and Pizza Huts all over the world than in the realm of heroic architecture.

Mass culture is as relevant as high culture.

Work to be of your time and then you will be ahead of your time.

I love the Swiss chalet, the generic house and barn, that exemplifies architecture as shelter at an almost Japanese extreme—and whose lyrical eaves protect people, animals, structure, and ornament below.

Look at artists' lofts or Edison's labs—as well as the Italian palace and Nassau Hall—and you see the significance of generic place for functional activity and evolution.

Iconography

Viva iconography and scenography in Las Vegas now—and soon all over.

Houston: a beautiful American city—except the billboards aren't big enough; how sad that legislation is at work to diminish the poignant, colorful, and scale-ful juxtapositions of billboards and bungalows beyond the highways.

Since the late Middle Ages no vocabulary or style of architecture has been totally original or not somehow based on a style of the past—Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Eclecticism, Modernism—the latter based on American industrial vernacular architecture or industrial engineering forms—except for Rococo, Art Nouveau, and some Frank Lloyd Wright: let us now abandon our hopeless search for new forms and define the artful dimension of architecture as iconographic.

Learning From Now

Learning from everything.

Flights of fancy start from the elemental fundamental.

The assurance of the naive surrounds us.