





HELENA ALMEIDA | Study for Inner Improvement, 1977

photography sourced from troikaeditions.co.uk

stories

Tonic sets a challenge. We offer contributors a base to stimulate their thoughts and start a discussion on a particular theme. For each issue, a letter, an image, a quote or a box is delivered. Here, the responses are pieced together.

For this issue, stories of lessons never learned were told.

*MY FINGERS ALWAYS
SEEM BUSIER THAN
MY MIND.*

Alexander Calder

drawing from August 2015



É engraçado pensar que tudo vive apenas enquanto pensamos nele. Que a confusão só existe quando a queremos desconfundir. Ou melhor, que a confusão só é confusão quando queremos que não seja.

Que acima de tudo é relativa; que tudo é relativo, e que é essa relatividade que nos torna mais interessantes.

Vivemos num cérebro desarrumado que tenta sempre mostrar-se lícido e fresco. Mas na verdade, essa frescura e lucidez só surgirá verdadeiramente quando nos deixarmos positivamente consumir por tudo o que nos envolve, por tudo o que respira, mesmo que sempre quieto, por tudo o que mesmo nunca parando nos cria uma referência, um ponto, uma marca, um lugar.

É na desarrumação que as recordações vivem, e é nelas que nada se perde, pelo menos enquanto por cá estivermos para as lembrarmos. São elas que vivemos, ou que deixamos que nos vivam. Sem elas tudo passa sem conversar, sem elas tudo é mais efêmero do que efemeridade da vida, e sem elas na verdade pouco andamos cá a fazer.

Uns falam de uma vida depois desta, outros falam de uma vida antes desta, uns sentem coisas dessa vida antes desta, enquanto outros sentem coisas da tal vida depois desta.

Às vezes sinto que temos tempo demais para pensar, se a vida fosse mais rápida talvez conseguíssemos desarrumá-la toda de uma vez, sem pensar em arrumar no final.

It's funny to think that something only exists when we think of it. That actually, confusion only exists when we want to *unconfuse* it. Better, that confusion can only be confusion when we don't want it to be and above all it's relative, that everything is relative and that's what makes us more interesting.

We live in a messy head that always tries to appear lucid and fresh. But in reality, that freshness or lucidity, at best, exists when we feed ourselves from everything that surrounds us, from everything that breathes and creates a reference point, leaves a mark, a place.

It's in that mess that our memories live and in them nothing is ever lost, at least while we're here to remember them. We live them or perhaps we let them live us. Without memories everything goes by with no dialogue or conversation; without memories everything is more ephemeral than the ephemerality of life. Without memories, what we're doing around here is worth so very little.

Some talk about a life after this one, others talk about a life before this one. Some have feelings of that other life before this while others feel the one after. Sometimes I feel we have too much time to think. If life was just faster maybe we would be able to mess it up all at once, without thinking of clearing up in the end.



Noiserv on stage

photograph by Fábio Eusebio

*...WE FEED OURSELVES
FROM EVERYTHING
THAT SURROUNDS US,
FROM EVERYTHING
THAT BREATHES AND
CREATES A REFERENCE
POINT, LEAVES A MARK,
A PLACE.*



assembling



breaking

photography taken March 2017



Gerhard Richter, painting

STARTING

Rob Scott | August 2017

I should start by admitting that when beginning this piece I could not even make it over the first hurdle or past the first question to myself. This is because as usual my initial feeling following almost any and every brief is one of doubt. Confusingly, I think this hesitation stems from the experience of just how important the first steps can be. In fact, I find with every new project the first steps become even harder as a result of this awareness.

The first steps often initiate the subsequent chain of reactions that certainly influence if not define the attitude of the subsequent project. As was the case with Rome's founding fratricide that led to an empire founded and ruled through bloodshed and political strife.

If starting is the act that requires something to be done how do you know what to do? An ideally creative process is one without dogma or plan that seeks to find. Due to the impossibility of genuinely starting anew, starting should not be understood as a singular moment of genesis. It is likely that the process may have even started in previous experiences where ideas began to be uncovered. Therefore the challenge becomes teasing out and curating the relevant parts of what has gone before in order to inform another. Knowing exactly what this is can seem impossible. Inevitably it has to be informed by an empirical awareness or an intuition. An intuition is always required to discover as it acknowledges the element of not knowing. A leap of faith is therefore required to pursue.

*NEED IS SO MANY
BANANAS. NEED IS
A HAM SANDWICH,
BUT DESIRE IS
INSATIABLE AND
YOU CAN NEVER
KNOW WHAT IT IS.*

This leap is often made through a set of assumptions, meeting an immeasurable threshold of reasonable doubt. These assumptions however, should not be taken as given but are required to allow for the unexpected. Therefore, it is necessary to repeatedly question these assumptions that drove the initial spark. Doubt is then essential to further understand the desires at the cause. If there is desire there is doubt and vice versa.

It is also important to remember the generality of the starting point, as it is often abstract and illusive. This then means it has to be subsequently interpreted and manipulated leaving a further variety of possibilities. Each possibility may be equally valid but in order to progress a difficult decision has to be made, meaning letting go of the rest. Creation therefore cannot be equated, as there are no answers but only speculations yet to be defined.

Such whimsical decision-making is easy to disregard as facile and is usually ignored but starting has to be naïve. We routinely have to make things up in order to find our way. In uncharted territory you are forced to create your own map defined by your own rules and hierarchy of importance. If there is no given route or destination what else can you start with but an intuition when you cannot know. Therefore, is it really flighty to begin with a feeling?



the studio

photograph taken May 2017

Opportunities may come along for you to convert something - something that exists into something that didn't yet. It might be the beginning of it. Sometimes you just want to do things your way, want to see for yourself what lies behind the misty curtain. It's not like you see songs approaching and invite them in. It's not that easy. You want to write songs that are bigger than life. You want to say something about strange things that have happened to you, strange things you have seen. You have to know and understand something and then go past the vernacular. The chilling precision that these oldtimers used in coming up with their songs was no small thing. Sometimes you could hear a song and your mind jumps ahead. You see similar patterns in the ways that you were thinking about things.

Tonic selected a very interesting image and accompanying text that both have everything to do with architecture.

If Hitchcock's movie - *The Rear Window* (1954) - directs us, right from the title, to the word *Window*, Dylan's work is in itself a window set upon the vast world of music.

It is very interesting for us to find in the selected Hitchcock image all the technological apparatus needed for creating a movie, all the multidisciplinary crews that allow it to exist and, simultaneously and paradoxically, on the left corner, almost lost in all this enormity, the final object that the spectator will see as a finished work of art.

One of the merits of the director, as of the architect, is to reduce to invisibility all this complexity, fundamental to the existence of the movie. Invisibility not only from a strict visual point of view but invisibility in such a way that frees the work of art.

This is a paradox that is easily recognized by our masters, being Hitchcock, Dylan or Le Corbusier.

This last one sates: *Architecture begins right where engineering ends...*

Something not easy to say today, in a world that presses architects to normalization in all levels of their profession, constructive elements included...

Windows are probably the first and more easily visible victims of said normalization. Their technical function of regulation of all the fluxes that cross the buildings, objective or poetic - in liquid or gas form, as well as light and other visual relations (as Hitchcock movies show so well) - but also their decisive role in the definition of architectural language are aspects not easily compatible.

The act of building such compatibility demands from the architect the ability to take risks when he tries to create a window that he knows will fully answer the architectural expression sought, but fears that it might not comply with the technical demands as effectively as a standard window.

So, also in the window, one can find the tension between art and technique that makes the work of the architect as difficult as fascinating.

But on the image Tonic selected, one can also sense a fantastic inversion of the perspective that happens between filming and the final result on the film. If on the stage, the space where the story happens is minuscule when faced with the necessary technological apparatus, on the film the result is exactly the opposite with the setting acquiring a dominant presence and preparing the viewer for the scenes recorded from the interior towards the exterior (when Hitchcock puts himself in the place of Jeff watching the outside world from the limited mobility of his wheelchair, set upon his window).

This double inversion of scale, even if with differing individual aspects, is also fundamental when we are designing a building.

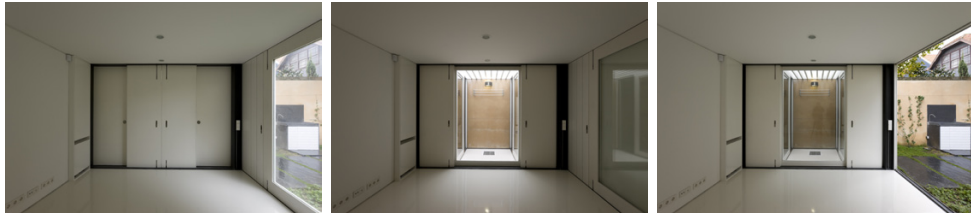
The tension that arises between the scale of public space and interior dwelling can project itself upon the building, concentrating itself mainly upon the form, proportion and design of openings and, once more, windows.

And we are not only talking about the long discussed (if not less important) problem of framing the outer landscape, as this is a much more complex architectural problem.

In Portugal, the financial crisis, has led most of us to work on micro-scale projects.

These small works, if one can make them with the same energy as the bigger ones, have the potential of concentrating part of the said energy on the architectural detail.

Architectural detail, as a result of the referred scale, acquires a closer connection with craftsmanship. This allows us to work in direct relation with artisans and create unthinkable solutions in an industrial production structure.



photography by Luis Ferreira Alves

ANTÓNIO NEVES | Music room and laundry in Matosinhos & Chemist's shop in Porto, 2008

Not exactly the almost trivial (but nevertheless very important) Mies aphorism *God is in the Detail*, but probably more something like *small is beautiful*...

If Hitchcock's scenario (known to have been built inside a studio but based in an existing courtyard with real buildings, which he instructed to study with great care and detail) makes one think about the layering of windows the image suggests, the chosen citation of Bob Dylan is an opening to other very important aspects of our design practice.

Not only because these small projects are *Opportunities (...) for you to convert something - something that exists into something that didn't yet...*

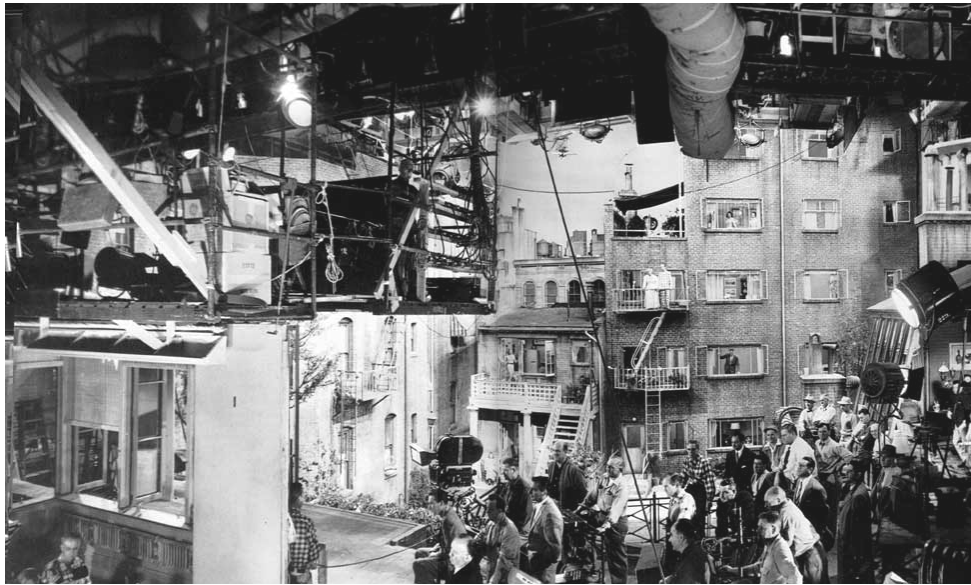
Or because *Sometimes you just want to do things your way* in order to open space to a poetic view of architecture, or personal, when you *just want to say something about strange things that have happened to you, strange things you have seen...*

And in this imaginary world of references one can join Corbusier, Wright and Mies; Coderch, Jacobsen or Barragan; Távora, Siza and Souto de Moura, but also another heritage that Dylan invokes (and that one can find in his work but also in the projects of the referred masters, in a complex and beautiful spiral movement similar to the one identified in Hitchcock's studio-set) and that is connected with vernacular architecture, a connection that Dylan shows in a masterful way:

The chilling precision that these oldtimers used in coming up with their songs was no small thing.

This relation with the vernacular and timeless roots of our culture, I think, puts us in a total different paradigm, much richer from a human point of view, much closer to the sometimes forgotten social function of architecture, far from the show-off culture often found in current buildings.

Like Hitchcock and Dylan, it puts us closer to the roots of cinema, music and architecture.



ALFRED HITCHCOCK | *Rear Window*, photo taken on set, 1954

photograph sourced from monovisions.com



The Basement Tapes

photograph sourced from theband.hiof.no

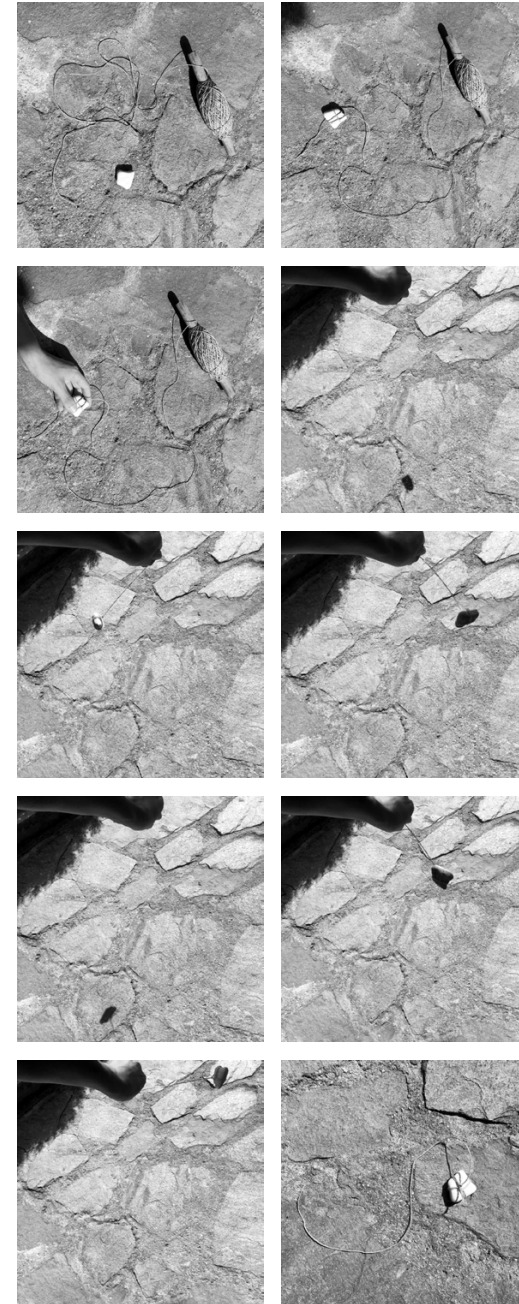


the boat as a floating piece of space

photograph by Olympia Katsarou

The human touch, a piece of string, the wind force and their interaction can contain allegorical meanings for a different way of seeing. Seeing from below to above or upside down. At first sight I am amazed by Calder's ability to compose sculptures so fragile, animated with movement when responding to the human touch or the wind currents. Each piece looks like a particle of a starlike abyss hanging similar to nebula in the chaos of the firmament. Planets, galaxies and the entire solar system, suggest a place that belongs in no specific location. Precise coordinates seem too unnecessary to mention. The author sees before they produce words of what it is they want to show. They set the grounds for a world that satisfies their vision in their attempt to produce ideas that serve a continuous struggle to reinvent reality. Sometimes a planetary system of particles, others an imaginary city with references to a real place, or even a floating boat, these have all been used as tools of Foucault's other places of eternal possibilities of interpretation. Many thinkers intended to subvert the relationship between the self and the visual world, setting our perspective of cities and society upside down, similar to Gaudi's chains of weighted strings. This other place, could be parallelised to a creative process of thinking, described by a complex multiplicity of others, moments, protagonists or thoughts, that even though in heterochrony, act as a whole. In one's fantastical process of discovery when crafting an idea, smaller fragments of thoughts imprint a rotational movement around each other, similar to the phenomenon of centripetal forces between planetary bodies.

Take a pebble and a piece of string, which you then wrap around each other. Holding the edge of the string start moving the string in rotation until the pebble sits perpendicularly amongst mid air. The centripetal forces between those three bodies are resulting either in perfect balance or include possibilities for numerous breaking points along the string's length. It is that breaking point for a creative mind that could be associated to the loss of any architectural reference, when attempting to create something of one's own imagination. A creative process is occasionally also similar to a boat in the middle of the ocean. When Foucault gave a spatial definition to a boat, he characterised it as a floating piece of space, that has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the recent civilization's imagination. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police takes the place of pirates. The moment of departure from the stable and re-assuring mainland to the middle of the ocean holds many possible destinations, or creative results, stretching in that way the limits of imagination. The boat similar to Calder's sculptural components, is exposed to sea streams and wind currents, while the wind sculpts the sand of the journey's destination.



photography by Olympia Katsarou



Alexander Calder in his studio, 1941

photograph sourced from [tate.org.uk](https://www.tate.org.uk)



photograph sourced from [hiveminer.com](https://www.hiveminer.com)

Ermita de San Sebastián, La Toja, sec.XII

HOW MANY SHEETS OF PROCESS DO YOU HAVE?

Marta Ascenso | September 2017



I learned about the word process in Porto, as usual. Now, thinking back in time, I realise it all started much before and perhaps I just wasn't familiar with the word. It all comes from a point when I understood that in this life I was about to choose, everything would merge in consequential relations and that was the process. The story is the process.

I remember in high school, the art students used to walk around preparing exhibitions, making their own timetable from a very early age, often unfairly accused by friends of lacking on work and responsibility... What they couldn't see, I assume because we were all too young to really know it, we were still working but the process was different. For us, it was about keeping the eyes opened because everything, and I mean it, everything can relate to something else and then to some other thing and before you notice, you have a library, not just of books, but of films, objects, people, everything that you could maybe call memories. I think it was Siza who once said that your memories stick with you in a place that you don't know but they always come back to help you when you're in trouble.

When I was in Porto, I learned the word could be materialised and that was in itself another reality. The concept of *sheets of process* was something new that developed with time and I think I now have a better understanding of it. *How many sheets of process do you have?* Because yes you could count them! All they were doing was showing us that the story was just as important as the final product and that was as true for our projects as it was for most of the work we do, or shall we say, life we live. Is there any difference if all of it is in permanent relation?

unexpected families of chairs and clouds

photography by Marta Ascenso



the process

drawings from Porto by Marta Ascenso

From Porto you get this “unfear”, this attitude of not being precious with what you do but, on the contrary, you prove it by doing. You draw, you make models, you break them, you draw on top of them and all of it is part of a process of working. That is sometimes more valued than anything you produce in the end. It’s a journey.

It may not be what is usually perceived as beauty but if it does its job and is part of something much bigger, of course it will become beauty. It’s all about stories. Maybe I ask too many questions and maybe that’s the reason. I’m always annoyed if there’s no statement from the artist, no explanation in the exhibition, I feel it like a lack of respect for me who was just trying to understand what’s behind it, how it got there. As soon as I know, I’m much more interested.

After those surprising experiences of counting sheets, I let the process speak for itself. I realised for example that my sketchbooks became “less beautiful” (if that can even be said) but more real and honest, perhaps. As soon as I stopped worrying about “processing”, it developed its own way. I stopped having big sheets but I started having too many sketchbooks. I found my way.

Sometimes the process that guides me is weird, unconventional, some would even say unreasonable but it’s my own and usually takes me there. A good friend, whose opinion I appreciate a lot, once told me that sometimes you have to stop. You have a deadline and you stop because you have to. I guess we learn what that process requires and sometimes it’s not the most typical.

I often find myself observing things that are apparently useless or of little significance for most people. Sooner or later, I end up stumbling in these thoughts or objects or whatever form they might have. Then I keep finding relations between these things, I guess it helps me telling stories. I usually call it process. A constant state of process.



the studio

photograph taken February 2016



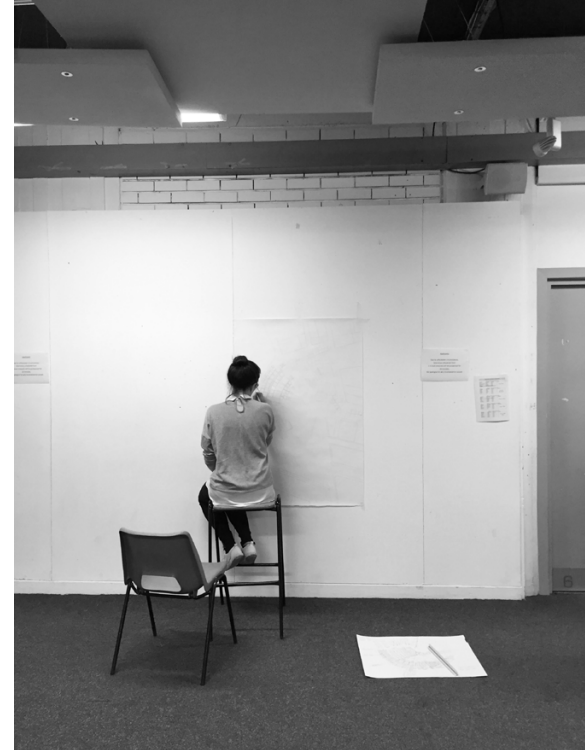
photograph sourced from *The World of Charles and Ray Eames*

Charles and Ray Eames playing



making

photograph taken April 2016



Elizabeth drawing

photograph taken March 2017



YVES KLEIN | *Anthropometrie de L'Epoque Bleu*, 1960

on the left, photograph sourced from ruledodo.be
on the right, photograph taken April 2016



the studio, by the end of the year

2



SEPTEMBER 17