Arquitectura en la era de la maquina digital
Don't be my mirror

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Resumen
Esta presentación ofrece una mirada a los nuevos medios que transforman, en varios niveles, nuestras aproximaciones arquitectónicas. Es decir, la forma en la que nos relacionamos con la arquitectura, la comunicamos, la criticamos y, por supuesto, la forma en la que la ejercemos. Se examina el impacto de la proliferación de la imagen, la cesión progresiva de la teoría y la aparición de patrones narrativos, por medio de un enfoque no–erudito, un enfoque mixto en el que los textos, las propuestas y las obras se interpretan de forma narrativa. Los puntos principales son los siguientes: 1. La construcción del yo catóptrico es el primer paso. La imagen representa la cosa, pero la imagen también se da por la cosa. 2. La arquitectura se identifica cada vez más con imágenes potentes, abundantes, apartadas del espacio, fuera del tiempo, en todas partes. Fabulosos edificios fotogénicos, enfoques experimentales audaces y abstracciones potentes y austeras, imágenes de todo tipo que an-estetizan la mirada y sofocan el impulso arquitectónico. 3. Su poder convincente es tan grande que se dan por la cosa misma. Entendemos las imágenes como arquitectura y la arquitectura como imagen. Nuestras referencias arquitectónicas mitológicas son imágenes, reflejos y no encuentros experimentados de forma espacio-temporal. Últimamente, incluso los textos sobre arquitectura parecen ser de menor interés ya que las revistas están *online* y por lo tanto se convierten en hipertextos, incluyendo animaciones de proyectos o trabajos realizados y vídeos de los arquitectos que cuentan la arquitectura, siguiendo la huella marcada por la proliferación de las redes sociales. 4. La teoría, una verdadera hazaña de la era alfabética, está cediendo en tanto que los sujetos se encuentran inmersos en la condición post-alfabética, donde la distancia -fundamental para la teoría- es imposible. La arquitectura se comunica a través de narraciones, una herramienta que conecta nuestra era post-alfabética con la pre-alfabética de la oralidad. Las narraciones no se limitan a la forma en la que se presenta la arquitectura, sino que configuran la forma misma en la que esta se concibe. Comprender los medios como el medium en el que se coloca el sujeto contemporáneo, su hábitat, transforma las relaciones tradicionales del dipolo sujeto-objeto. Y el medio se convierte en una condición multiplicada, donde instantes de *"de repente"* (*εξαίφνης*: instantes que permiten al sujeto pensante identificarse con el entorno pensado) emergen y reconfiguran todas las definiciones espaciales previas.
Palabras clave: arquitectura, medios, teoría, narración, post-alfabetice

Architecture in the digital-machine age.
Don't be my mirror

Abstract
This paper offers a glance at certain aspects related to the way new media transform our architectural approaches in an all-inclusive way. That is, the way we approach architecture, we relate to it, communicate it, criticize it andthe way we exercise it. It examines the impact of the proliferation of image, the progressive ceding of theory and the emergence of narrative patterns, through a non scholar, mixed approach where texts proposals and works are interpreted in a story-telling way. These are the main points made:1.The construction of the catoptrical self is the first move. Image represents the thing but image is also taken for the thing. We built in early moments of our life, the image of our own selves upon an inexistent, unitary perception of us, based on the mirror. Thus, we recognize ourselves through the catoptrical image that belongs to the otherness of the returned gaze. 2.Architecture is more and more identified with potent images. Architectural images are abundant, detached from space, outside time, all over us. Fabulous, photogenic buildings, bold experimental approaches, powerful self-constrained abstractions, images of all kind that an-esthetize the architectural gaze and clog the architectural drive. 3.-Their compelling power is so big that they are taken for the proper thing. We understand images as architecture and architecture as image. Our mythological architectural references are commonly images, reflections, and not experienced spatiotemporal encounters. Lately, even texts upon architecture seem to be of less interest as magazines become online and are therefore converted to hypertexts, including animations of projects or realized work and videos of architects talking about architecture, following the tread marked by the proliferation of social media. 4.-Theory, an immense achievement of the alphabetical era, is ceding as subjects are immersed in this media-structured post-alphabetical condition, where distance -fundamental in theory- is now impossible. Architecture is communicated through narrations, a tool that connects our post-alphabetical era with the pre-alphabetical of the orality. Narrations are not limited in the way architecture is presented, but more importantly, they shape the way architecture is conceived. Understanding media as the medium in which our contemporary subject is placed, its habitat, transforms the traditional relations of the dipole subject-object through the interference of powerful mediators. And then, the environment becomes a multiplicated condition, where instants of suddenly –εξαίφνης, illuminating instants where the thinking subject is identified with the thought environment - emerge, reconfiguring all previous spatial definitions.

1. Introduction.

The paper intends to link architecture in the condition configured by the new media and track significant changes and shifts that come as a result of this unquestionable relation. It focuses on the new condition that architecture and architects are facing due to the profusion and expansion of digital technologies in a moment where the built environment in the occidental world seems exhausted and consumed. Architects can Architecture is largely influenced by this digital revolution which affects many aspects of the architectural activity. First of all, representing architecture has changed, but also, conceiving architecture and realizing architecture is affected. And of course, communicating, criticizing and theorization are revised. Finally, media change what architecture is. Architecture has always been a mediator, a place to be, a filter, an exterior uterus that offers the subject protection, isolation, safety and of course control. Control is a main goal for architecture, control of the exterior environment, control of intrusions, control of the organization of everyday life, a structure and a way to be. Our way of being has radically been influenced by the media. We relate to the environment, the exterior but not just the one at our reach, via media; we understand connections and intrusions via media as well; and we organize our understanding and our being in the world via media. So what is left for architecture really? Is architecture another medium, or is architecture every medium? Can we talk about the media without talking of architecture, design, planning, projecting? Are the new media just another expression of architecture? As was in the past the buildings, the facades, the landscapes? Is everything that is out of us but controlled by us architecture?

Can we proclaim that "architecture is a medium; media are architecture"?

Architects are asked to answer these questions having in mind that as our surroundings become more and more digital, our role depends on how we understand these new surroundings in relation to our architectural profession. If architecture can serve in order to mediate between subject and the digital worlds, architects have a lot more to expect from the future, if on the other hand we narrow our role on the material world, architecture can be found to be under the threat of suppression.

Because media change among other things formats as well, the way to structure a paper cannot be the same. Here are some thoughts about the current condition that are webbed among them. And then comes the central piece that the web has entangled; a central piece which momentarily is found immobilized by the web but can break free in any moment.

2. Theory

Theory is fading.1 This is not so much an architectural issue; it is rather a general circumstance. We are living in a post alphabetical era, where vision, immediately linked to the alphabetical society, has surrendered its dominance to audiovisual and thus non serial, non cause-effect, non speculative approximations. Theory is defined by vision, (theoria "contemplation, speculation; a looking at, viewing; a sight, show, spectacle, things looked at," from theorein "to consider, speculate, look at," from theoros "spectator," from thea "a view" (see theater) + horan "to see" 2). The post-alphabetical era is famously described by Marshall McLuhan as very similar to the tribal characteristics of the pre-alphabetical and radically different to the alphabetical. Therefore, theory is being abandoned in as much as a way to understand and relate to the world. But architects always talk about architecture, learn from architecture, systematize architecture and then teach architecture. So, as theory withdraws a big void is formed. Narration becomes the new way to talk about architecture, to learn from it, and even teach it. Narration is all about the post-alphabetical era of the new media. Close to the orality of the pre-alphabetical era, narration is not about capturing the totality, about supervision and control. Narration is more about sharing a point of view, experiencing something through the other, the story-teller. Theory is a tool used in order to analyze, categorize, systematize, structure and finally comprehend and possess the meaning of things. Narration is about a point of view, not a catholic, out of space, panoramic supervision, a point of view inside the story, or if one is not a participant in it, a point of view from a rather close and determining distance. Narration doesn't aim to the comprehension, or possession of facts, but rather opts for a version, a non-unique, non-permanent, non-absolute, version of facts. Narrated architecture is therefore not explained, not justified and rationalized; this shift is really important because it involves a change in the reception process. Architects are called to appreciate architecture as an experience that can be related and told and not as an objective reality, or even an object that can be dissected and anatomized from outside, without having to participate and become involved in it. Where theory is linear, rigorous, rule-making, distant and out of space; narration is multiple, selective, rule-breaking, contiguous and of this world.

3. Images

Images become architecture.3 Images are not just a way to represent architecture. Representations have been a powerful tool for humanity; in fact, as Lewis Mumford has pointed out representations can be considered the most specific characteristic of human kind. Representation is a tool that has made possible non verbal, non-limited by spatio-temporal restrictions communication. Representations of course include the alphabet, which has led to the predominance of abstractions in our form of relating to the world. Architecture has been understood, categorized, conceptualized, and taught through representations for centuries. But in the 20th century, the proliferation of images and texts has radically changed our relation to them. The images are no longer understood as representations but as the proper thing; they are equivalent to the thing and are often taken for it. Architects express their opinions for buildings that they never have visited, without acknowledging this as a setback. In fact, there is the certainty that the image of the building allows us to know all there is to know about it and sometimes images and drawings reveal hidden details that only God and the fellow architects have access to. Images are interchangeable to the thing and of course their abstraction allows us to experience more of them in less time, ignoring space frontiers. The new media have taken this reign of the image a little bit further, as images are now so easy to move around and everyone is so accustomed to be exposed to and digest a vast number of images in

a daily bases. Circulating images has also become very cheap, thanks to new media and of course thanks to new possibilities to capture image. Photography and not only architectural photography is being under threat because of its vast proliferation. Images are becoming excessively determining. Architecture is more and more identified with potent images. Fabulous, photogenic buildings, bold experimental approaches, powerful self-constrained abstractions, images of all kind that anaesthetize the architectural gaze and clog the architectural drive. Architectural images are abundant, detached from space, outside time, all over us. New media make possible for us to experience architectures that take place in any part of the world. We see it all, we know it all and yet we can only be informed. There is no means for much more and, certainly, there is no time; information is profuse and its flow is endless. Intangible images correspond to our insubstantial, temporary connections to them. But we are at the same time seduced. Their compelling power is so big that the proper thing becomes irrelevant. We understand images as architecture and architecture as image. Our mythological architectural references are commonly images, reflections, and not experienced spatiotemporal encounters. Lately, even texts upon architecture seem to be of less interest as magazines become online and are therefore converted to hypertexts, including animations of projects or realized work and videos of architects talking about architecture, following the tread marked by the proliferation of social media. Texts can be enriched with images, videos and talks, while the proper text becomes, at the same time, less and less attractive. The contemporary consumer of architectural information feels burdened with long texts that oblige him to follow meticulously a single line of thinking, an argument presented in the traditional, linear, alphabetical way. He is relieved when he is able to glimpse a photo, look at a drawing, read a title or a short text and have the story told by a short video. Linear structures become dense and heavy and therefore architecture is every time less analyzed in the traditional way. Diagrams4, boards, mosaic structures that reveal in one glimpse a multiplicity of connections, performing a condensation of information, are preferred. Of course, interpretation becomes critical as it is through the interpretative process that connections are chosen, that compressions are achieved. Photos become central and drawings are in many cases replaced by images, images that are not only 3d representations based upon 2d drawings but also images that are autonomous, self-referenced, all-inclusive objects that communicate architecture or at least an architectural atmosphere. The profusion of images and the progressive abandonment of typical 2d drawings are in line with the emerging importance of the experience in architecture. Images appear as a way to narrate experiences.

4. Architecture is a mediator.
Architecture has always been a mediator, a way to be in the world. It is a filter and an interface, a controlled by man medium, a habitat that enables the subject to have a regulated, manageable relation to the world. This capacity to control by means of architecture the relation between the subject and the environment has radically progressed in the 20th century. Yet, the 21th century has presented architects with a new challenge. The environmental medium of the occidental subject has been augmented. We are submerged in the digital media and of course living in a rather multiplied or at least doubled condition. On one hand, there is the physical body that relates to the physical space and on the other hand, there is the digital world that is absorbing a good portion of our everyday life. Space and time limitations are reconsidered and redefined. We are in need of mediators in both spheres, physical and digital. Architecture is therefore asked to mediate now our relation not only to the physical but also to the digital environments. The contemporary subject is overwhelmed by digital stimuli, techno-spheres and media arbitrated encounters that architecture cannot ignore in its mediating mission. Architecture emerges as an enhanced mediator, one that allows us to participate, manage and finally control digital surroundings as well as physical. Of course, digital surroundings don't have to be materialized, they are rather immaterial but very determined constructions where accessibility5 is as decisive as is interface. Architecture and interfaces are finally about the same thing. They both mediate between two different systems, they both filter and transmit from one to another. But can interface be considered as architecture and architecture as interface? Is this a rather crude and simplistic approach? Architecture is definitely an interface, we have for centuries thought of architecture as a way for us to stand in the hostile, uncontrolled, vast natural surroundings. And when these surroundings became progressively tamed and restrained, architecture unfolded to various layers of mediation, the city with its immediate natural environments, the neighborhood to the city, the individual dwelling to the neighborhood. But lately our existence in the world is considerably defined by intangible, digital spheres that have intruded all aspects of daily life. 6 Architecture functions as an interface whether it is the subject and its physical environment or the subject and its virtual surroundings in question. And if we can take for granted that architecture has always been and will always be an interface, what is difficult to assure is that interface is architecture as well. This is a very important issue that has of course great importance for the future of architecture. If we understand interfaces as architectural devices that mediate for our analogical body and its augmented digital environments, then architecture can still be found everywhere. But if we delimit architecture in the material mediating process of the subject to its physical environment, then architecture is going to be banished from many aspects and many instances of everyday life. If on the other hand, we understand all interfaces as a design process aiming to understand, organize and structure relations among systems, then architecture inasmuch as design, can be found in every interface. Media, mediators, transitions, interfaces seen as architectural expressions as design issues, allow architects to maintain their mediating role between the subject and its world.

5. The catoptrical self.
It is well known that we obtain consciousness of our selves through the gaze of the otherness, that is, through the image reflected at the mirror, an image that can never correspond to our proper perception of the self. The significance of media for the construction of consciousness becomes obvious through the example of the catoptrical construction of the self that reveals how our perception even of our own self is determined by others and by the media. So, theory is fading, leaving its place to narration. Images are taken for the real thing and architecture becomes indistinguishable from its storytelling representations. And of course, architecture

equivalents interface and vice versa. But, this seems a rather theoretical approach, not very coherent with the statement that theory is losing ground. Yet, this is not really a theoretical paper as it presents a specific point of view; it tells a story from a certain angle, it hasn't assured a certain distance from facts and doesn't pretend to have a totalizing, rigid and regulating effect. The story is told using only a single book as reference, an academic paper, a newspaper article, a website of an architectural firm, an architectural page at Facebook, a blog and a videogame. That is, atoptrical images that constitute the architectural self without corresponding to the own perception of it. Let's take two stops.

5.1. Two unrealized architectural projects:

1991: A Diller+Scofidio's project, Slow House, North Haven, NY

Never built but with a great iconic power. It tells the story of un-built projects and their capacity to change their architects' destiny but also our perception of architecture. This project is centered round the relation of the physical to the mediatic.7 The architects compare the technological aspects of a window to those of a monitor, the authentic view to the mediated. 8 In a single project there are multiple references on vision and its relation to architecture and new media. And there is also the description of an experience; the project is presented as a trajectory, or the ending of one. The architectural firm will later on take its investigations of architecture as experience and architecture as interface to impressive extremes. (Fig. 1)

2014: An architectural competition

An architectural competition aiming in rethinking architecture in terms of narration was presented this year by an online platform for architecture. Powerful images of dreamlike, otherworldly architectures are webbed to trancelike, fairytale narratives. An alternative way to understand architecture and a research upon the role of the architect in our changing world seem to be the main aspirations of the competition. The competition and the participants have no ambition to realize and built the winning proposals. But their iconic power overwhelms the net. 9 And of course there is no question of whether this is architecture or not. In other words, even though it doesn't t aspire to be materialized, cannot be actually linked to any use or function and doesn't offer any information on the technological aspects of its structure, it is understood by its architectural audience as architecture and furthermore, it is applauded and admired.

5.2. Two borderline architectural practices:

2013-4: Constructopia10

A course based on the logic of ubiquitous media and storytelling. The space of the course is the hybrid space that is created through the fusion of the actual physical space of the classroom and the digital space of cyberspace. There is a professor, responsible for the presential interaction with the students. On the other side of the screen there are six tutors who only have mediated access to the students' works. Each tutor proposes a theme related to narration, or narrative tools. In this particular course, there are six tutors and six different themes: 1. Frankenstein Creator, 2. Plot Construction, 3. Des-contextualization [U.(F.)O.], 4. Envelope-Interior: Skyscraper, 5. Fata Morgana and 6. Re-mix. There are different levels of transmedia storytelling: a) tutor-students, b) tutors-professor, c) students-professor, d) group to group and e) external visitors. Tools, goals, methods, attitudes vary from team to team but narrations are omnipresent and theory is left aside, points of view are important and different, groups are taught by sharing different approaches. Intermediate spaces allow tutors living in other countries interact with the students and share their different points of view. All is done through the screen, even in the physical space of the classroom all is presented through the digital space of the screen. Multiplicity of points of view in the same context reveals the radical difference between theory and narrative; as diversity is a sine qua non of the narrative approach and the six groups of students are working in parallel but in obviously different directions. (Fig.2)

1996: Tomb Raider-Lara Croft

The designer of the video-game, Phil Campbell11, an architect, writer, game creator and freelance designer, explains why societies need us – "to provide their little bits of reality-based magic, the construction of a well-placed order". He underlines the need to accomplish smooth transitions from the play and our ideal online places to the cold, hard light of reality. "The game's manipulative world desperately needs this kind of expertise, a world where the manipulation of space is a primary storytelling device. At present, we rely too much on blatant wordplay for scene-setting, cold expositionary dialogue that emphatically makes a story 'told' rather than 'lived'. Our advantage, though, is that the emotional impact that can often only be implied by the best architecture can be vividly acted out in a game, with a palpable sense of danger, the threat of 'real' death, a life lived at hyper-reality pace. We can carelessly defy gravity and logic in a place where Escher constructions are not merely visual conundrums; they are traversable and habitable."12 Video-games offer a vision of architecture out of its material delimitations, spaces without gravity, rules, decay, where time and distance have no significance, where the subject can live incessant emotionally intense situations, where all is allowed and all is possible. Space is designed as consecutive powerful experiences. Again, there are condensations and concentrations; there are breath-taking images; there are fabulous narratives; there are unique moments to be experienced and there is a medium, that is, architecture.

6. Suddenly, the end.

This is a long-lasting conversation. Plato describes the suddenly- εξαίφνης, as illuminating instants outside space and time limitations, where the thinking subject is identified with the thought environment.. We can now aspire in moments of suddenly- εξαίφνης, through projects that fullfill the role the architectural medium has always had, that is, connection and separation at the same time. This is a new challenge for mediations, mediate without

interfering. This can be a new challenge for architecture in the context of the digital media. . Architecture can mediate allowing the identification of the subject to its environment. Digital environments can be immersive. The future of architecture cannot be, obviously, foreseen. But architects are going through a rather tricky situation; we have to place ourselves in the new reality of the 21st century. Mediations, interfaces, digital media overlapping physical reality, digital spaces and augmented physical spaces are without doubt an already established reality. Architects can chose to form part and then form this reality or maintain their distance from what seems sometimes to exceed our potential, due to lack of technological and informational knowledge and other times to under-stimulate our architectural interests, our need to leave our trace in space and in time. Perception of space and time, the two maybe most important schematizations we have made so far, seem to be also mediated and altered by digital media. At the end, architecture cannot be excluded from this new reality. On the contrary architecture can use this new condition in order to construct ground-breaking conditions of mediation between the subject and its environment.

Fig.1. Slow House, Diller+Scoficio, 1991, NY

Fig.2 Constructopia, Frankenstein, 2014, DUTH

Notas
Fig. 1. Slow House, Diller+Scoficio, 1991, NY
Fig. 2. Constructopia, Frankenstein, 2014, DUTH

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Biography

Polyxeni Mantzou (1969) is an architect, N.T.U.Athens (1994). She has a PhD in Architecture E.T.S.A.Madrid, UPM, 2000.She is an Associate Professor of Architectural Design in the School of Architecture, D.U.Thrace. She is also an invited professor in various universities and in post-graduate programs. Her research field is mainly oriented at architectural design and new technologies. She coordinates and has participated in research programs investigating how new technologies affect the perception of space and the creative process; the implementation of interactive installations in urban spaces; and the use of architectonic interfaces in public urban spaces. Her architectural work and projects has been awarded, published (in catalogues and magazines) and exhibited, and constructed. She has published in scientific magazines and in the proceedings of international conferences on issues related to architectural theory, new urban spacialities; responsive interactive environments; new media and spectacle strategies in architectural spaces.

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[1] Not just the theory, but also the so-called after-theory, linked to the proliferation of publications. Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos: Diagrams: interactive instruments in operation, in Rattenburry, o.p., p. 100: "The frustrating result is that there is hardly any real architectural theory to be found, despite the diversity of practices at work today and despite a hugely expanded volume of architectural publications. There is only after-theory."

[2] http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=theory

[3] Mantzou, Polyxeni y Bitsikas, Xenofon, "Proyectar en la era del código digital", Actas Congreso Internacional EGA XII, Madrid, 2008, p. 490

[4] Van Berkel ,op. p.102, For architecture the diagrams conveys an unspoken essence, disconnected from an ideal or an ideology, that is random, intuitive, subjective, not bound to a linear logic, that can be physical, structural, spatial or technical;.

[5] Mitchell op . p. 53

[6] Mitchell op. VatVille and SwarmCity, as proposed by William Mitchell reflect new characteristics of these non-material gatherings that either tend to intangibility or use it in order to create physical grouping.

[7] http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/magazine/architects-in-theory.html?src=pm&pagewanted=3 "The quickest way of explaining how, within the profession, Diller + Scofidio became a catch phrase is to describe its iconic project, the "Slow House." A weekend retreat on the Long Island waterfront, it was designed in 1989 for a Japanese art investor. "Our client came to us and said he wanted a house with a view," Diller recalls. That request provoked them to explore the very notion of a view -- for instance, the evolution of the picture window and the terminology in real-estate ads. "Why is architecture a technology that creates a view?" Diller recounts. "Because it mediates it with a window frame." The couple argued that the picture window represents a more advanced technology than the video display -- "because it strips away the hardware that you have on a TV monitor and leaves only the effect."

[8] http://www.dsrny.com/#/projects/slow-house "At the far end is the ocean view. To either side of the "picture window" are two antenna-like stacks: the chimney is to the right, the video apparatus to the left. At the summit of the left stack sits a live video camera directed at the water view and feeding the monitor in front of the picture window. The electronic view is operable; the camera can pan or zoom by remote control. When recorded, the view may be deferred— day played back at night, fair weather

played back in foul. The composite view formed by the screen in front of the picture window is always out of register, collapsing the opposition between the authentic and mediated."

[9]   http://www.metalocus.es/content/en/blog/winners-fairy-tales-architecture-competition
http://www.metalocus.es/content/en/blog/winners-fairy-tales-architecture-competition
It's a great time to be a storyteller. That's what Blank Space, a new online platform for architecture founded in New York City, wants to show us with the launching "Fairy Tales," an uncommon competition that challenges creatives from all professional realms to develop visionary, narrative-based design proposals. Architecture competitions are the lifeblood of the profession, but they haven't changed that much in the past 100 years. Architects are still designing single building typologies like skyscrapers, museums, and houses ad infinitum. By retreating into itself, architecture has lost its ability to send universal messages, torepresent culture in its time, and to address issues that are at the core of human existence. That is why Blank Space, an online platform for architecture, is launching the world's first architecture storytelling competition: "Fairy Tales. Fairy Tales challenges participants to develop visionary proposals that take fun seriously and are audacious enough to ignite imaginations. The proposals willcombine text-based architectural fairy tales with innovative graphic representations, and in doing so, seek to unlock the power of architecture by improving the way that it is shared, digested, and communicated
[10] http://constructopia.wordpress.com/
[11] http://www.philcampbelldesign.com/index.php/bio/ Phil Campbell has been designing interactive entertainment for over 20 years - as an architect, writer, game creator and freelance designer under the suitably mysterious banner of "The Design Engine" - and the rather more direct "Phil Campbell Design". Now Phil is the co-founder of "Inlifesize", a company dedicated to "Creating Digital experiences that matter to your REAL life..."
[12] Campbell, Philip: The height of the kick, in Rattenburry, op. p.113