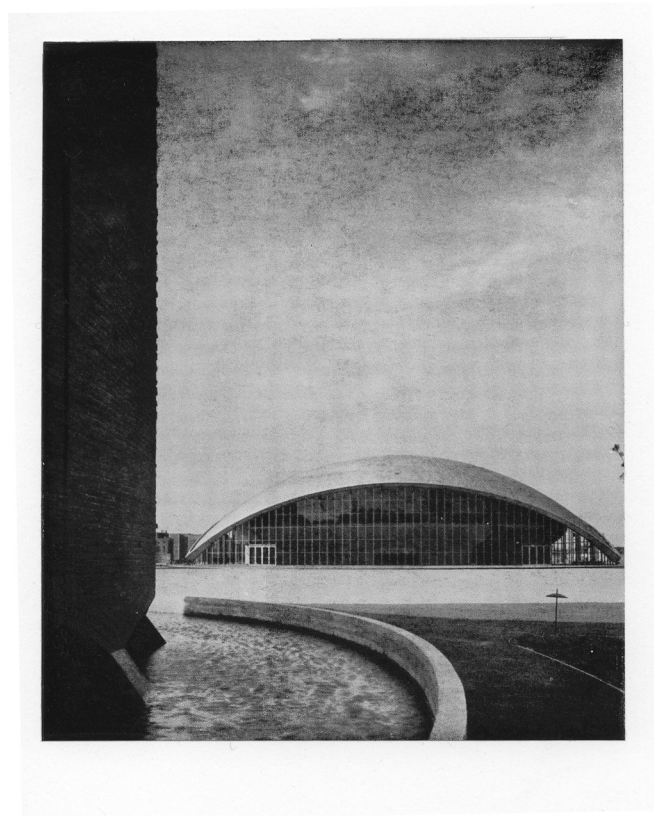


## About Thick Air and the Frustration of Distance in time and space, about riddles.

Brian O'Connell

Cleaning out a now-old house (I won't say whose) I came across a set of printing plates – clichés in French, German and Dutch, I would later find out. Individually wrapped in faded white paper, their surfaces held vaguely discernible images. An architect had built the house for himself in 1951, in what would become suburban Cologne. I thought perhaps these plates held some riddle that if solved might bring me closer to their owner.

I returned to Amsterdam where I lived at the time, where with the aid of a master printer I was able to remove the fifty-year-old varnish that had been applied to preserve the copper surfaces from the ravages of time. Now, with a masterful touch it would be possible to extract the images that had been concealed for so many years. The plates, ten of them in all, revealed strangely familiar but not immediately recognizable images of buildings, walls, glass, furniture, plants; views of the highly ordered and perfectly arranged sun-filled planes of Richard Neutra's Southern California and of the futuristic curve of Eero Saarinen's Kresge Auditorium on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, along with unidentifiable office parks and shopping malls.



Looking at these images, I am now struck by their insistence on two forms so familiar to Modernism: the curve and the plane, the circle and the square. These forms hold within them the two equally familiar models of time, the cycle and the progression, return and extension. That these forms emerged from two surfaces, one old, one new, being pressed under incredible pressure until the acts of the past – the work of acid on copper – were transferred to the material of the present – paper – seemed to suggest yet another form. This was a form through which time is broken rather than maintained, where surfaces *flow through space, parallel to each other*. Could this be the secret threat of the graven image? I had always thought it was meant to be the opposite.



Returning to these images, this double form seemed to come out at me more than the shapes I had understood in them before. The familiar shapes I thought I knew turned out to be the suggestion of the shapes that I was actually observing. These were patterns set down in some past place, a series of lines and reflections of lines demarking air and glass that *despite the presence of so much transparency seem such an obstacle*.

*Now the distance is even larger.* It had become the distance between the image, its origin and my present. But, it did nothing to reveal how it had been carried through time to end up in the back of a closet in the house of a German architect already more than twenty years dead. All that space was filled with *Thick Air*. Perhaps *Thick Air* is all that exists between the planes of such parallel forms; perhaps it is what keeps them together.

*Thick Air* attempts an impossible flow across and around a square volume as if it were round. We see a man screaming at the top of his lungs. The camera follows him from the opposite side of an enclosed volume. There is an uneasy-ness embedded in this circulation. Slowly, a strange fact comes to light. Though we can walk around this structure, at each corner we are forced into a reversal as we are asked to trace the opposite side of this volume. Rather than continuous cycles we are following parallel lines. In

this movement, the circle and the square confront one another and we are left to deal with movements that can at best hope to face each other in an attempt to be understandable. The circle is squared and the line is bent along right angles. Time, too, is squared and mandates a doubling, and the use of twins.

If there is frustration to be found in distance, it is the frustration of knowing that such a doubling is inescapable if time is to be overcome. It is the frustration of having to inhabit two places at once, of having to be *someone else. Similar but someone else.* Because, *I can only be another person. Everything else would be impossible. Only you stay the same. The space between us contains information. It is history. It is Nature Near.*

New York, 2009

The text the man is screaming:

*".....this is to address the fact that we flow through space, parallel to each other, you and I, though maybe in different heights. Between us 1400 cubic meters of air. And glass. I face you to make my self more understandable. The distance from where you are and where I am is 11 yards or 10,2 meters. But this will change in a short while. Mentally we might be even further apart. I feel awkward. Screaming at the top of my lungs to be heard. Despite the presence of so much transparency. How can something so light, seem such an obstacle. Now the distance is even larger. 17 meters. And I am someone else. Similar but someone else. I can only be another person. Everything else would be impossible. Only you stay the same. The space between us contains information. It is history. It is Nature Near. I will disappear now. Every time we move around a corner a similar situation. I have spoken to you before. Or yelled. Through the same space. But something has changed. The reflections are different. I am on the other side now. Or you are. You have to understand. We move in circles. You and me and a person very similar to me. We move around corners. We move in circles. And we float through space. Yet divided by space. I want to reach you but i cannot. I will Stop talking now. Hear the quiet.....  
The space between us is silent. Or I think it is. I cannot be sure since I am not in it. There is no one else in it either though. That's why it seems calm. Quiet. The reason why i am saying all....."*

Thick Air, Simon Dybbroe-Moller, 2009.