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Bornstein

The
Monstrous
Darkness
of
Tomorrow

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The Monstrous Darkness of Tomorrow. The Mysterious House in Kuwait

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Biology Studies Rocks

I am glad that I came to this country for a purpose. Unlike many other Westerners who are living here, I am not drifting around just killing time, but I know perfectly well what I am doing. The purpose of my coming to this most dusty corner of the Middle East was not to wallow in impeccable metaphysical insouciance or in the harmonious inertness of locals. Nor was it to delve into the deepest layers of ignorance, as adventurous as this might seem from time to time. No, my purpose for coming here was lofty and truly “mankind-saving.” The waves of enlightenment will hover over the sand and the indistinct buildings of this country. Through my knowledge of technology and my humanist spirit, the region, and finally the entire world, will be led to unredeemable improvement.

It is actually not entirely my spirit that will hover there but that of the eccentric Hungarian architect Györgyi (George) Goldfinger (1897-1988) who lived in Kuwait from 1956 to 1961 and who had ambitious projects for the entire Middle East. Long before Goldfinger became famous for his modernist structures in London, New York, and Hong Kong, this slightly crazy utopianist experimented with what he called “psychodynamic architecture” and was obstinate enough to (almost) put it to practice here in the country where I have decided to settle. I said “almost.” Whether what he planned ever worked we do not know for sure because he left the country suddenly and for unknown reasons. Perhaps it did not work, but in that case, I will continue where he stopped. My two years of research on Györgyi Goldfinger in Budapest archives and German libraries will not have been a waste of time. I will revive his spirit.

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Do you know the Ayan Palace? It used to be a hotel for the official guests of the Emir of Kuwait and it is situated in the area of Al-Qurain. In 1968, the palace was used for negotiations between the Kuwaiti state and the British oil industry. On October 13, the CEO of British Petroleum,

Robert Brenner, resided in the palace and was about to sign an important contract concerning the financial aspects of the partnership, particularly with respect to the expensing of royalties and the charging of royalty payments as a cost against the company's income. For unknown reasons, instead of entering the ceremonial hall on the first floor at eleven o'clock to meet with the Emir as it had been agreed upon, Dr. Brenner made a few phone calls from his hotel room, took a taxi to the airport and hopped on the next flight back to London. The reasons for Dr. Brenner's strange actions could never be elucidated. The contract would only be signed five years later by his successor.

Having been misunderstood almost all his life, Goldfinger received some recognition only towards the end of his life in England and the US. However, this recognition was in no way related to his psychodynamic architecture. The world was merely impressed by his aesthetics, that is, by his radically streamlined, modern expressions. This recognition was superficial, if I may say so. But while I dug into boxes of manuscripts and sketches in the basement of the National Archive of Architecture on Liget Street in Budapest, I discovered an aspect of George that is less well known to the world. This is not the excessively rational, slightly austere and humorless George, but rather the obscure and mystical George. My biggest discoveries were exciting details concerning the collaboration with his friend, the famous Hungarian radio engineer and inventor Marcel (Makár) Neumann (1901-1991). Neumann fled from the Nazis in 1944 by emigrating first to Denmark, then to Finland and then to Sweden. He moved to Berlin after the war where he lived until his death. Neumann remains famous for his invention of the two-electrode vacuum-tube rectifier as well as the invention of the noiseless match. I found most of the material on Neumann in the archives of the Faculty of Civil Engineering of what is today called the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. I learned more intimate details about Neumann's private life through interviews with his granddaughter Annushka who lives in Hamburg and who is Neumann's only surviving relative (a large part of the family had died in Nazi camps). Goldfinger has no living relatives.

Various sources vaguely alluded to Goldfinger's and Neumann's partnership, but so far, nobody knew the exact nature of their collaboration. The result of my research, if I had taken the time to write it up properly, would have earned me a Ph.D. at the German university where I was

studying. But instead of pushing forward my academic career in such a straightforward fashion, I decided to put the things I have learned to practice and to serve mankind by accomplishing Györgyi's mission. This is why I got myself a teaching job in Art History at an English speaking university in Kuwait. The job pays well but I don't care about the money. While much of the other scum of foreigners think only of the finances and prolong their stays infinitely out of pure materialist greed, my reasons for coming to Kuwait have been purely spiritual. And I will leave once my mission is accomplished.

The teaching job is not rewarding since most students have been irreparably handicapped through the oil-subsidized consumer state that leaves them no options in terms of personal development or ambitions. Since they learned from early childhood on to outsource all homework and assignments to maids or students from India and other poor countries (the development of the internet here comes in very handy), they have never bothered to learn anything since they were kids. And why should they? The boys come to school with Ferraris and Bentleys and the girls bring a different expensive purse to school every day. Why would they even attempt to learn something when their lives are perfect the way they are?

Since there is no general education, it is useless to convey information about more particular cultural facts concerning art history. The larger part of my students believe that England is in Southern Europe close to Africa, that biology is the study of rocks, and that Socrates was born in 1982. I obtain these answers every time I hand out the "general culture" test at the beginning of the semester. When I first came, I attempted to correct their answers and to explain to them why what they are saying is wrong. But when I asked them the same questions in follow-up tests and also at the end of the semester, I discovered that they would stick to the same answers. When people so systematically refuse to learn whatever it is, one should not force them.

The most inappropriate thing to do would be to complain about those kids. What would be the use of this? There are many teachers in the world teaching in schools for the mentally handicapped, and they do not complain on a daily basis that their students are so stupid, that they do not know anything, etc. Once you have accepted the job, there is no point in complaining. This is why I very quickly abandoned the idea of distributing knowledge of any kind in this

country. Instead I concentrate on my project, which will save the region not through knowledge (which my students are apparently unable to obtain), but through something much more efficient.

When I first arrived, I was very excited to live in the country where George has been building so many structures for several years. However, I soon discovered that almost none of George's buildings remain extant. I also found out that during the six years that he was living in Kuwait he did not build anything spectacular except for one building. He also finished a couple of buildings in Saudi Arabia and in the nearby town of Basra (Iraq), which I have not seen but I doubt that they are more interesting. And I am also almost certain that they have been destroyed, too.

Goldfinger's specialty in this region were Corbusier style pillar houses, a not-so original agenda since that's what most people would built at that time when they could not get commissions for high rises. Sometimes there is an avantgardistic slant in those buildings, a sort of space-age language from the 1960, but it's just hinted at. Most of George's houses – like those of the other European architects – were located in the districts of Salmiya and Hawalli. There is absolutely nothing original about George's two story houses, and even though about four of them are still extant, architecture historians – should somebody really decide to write a history of modern architecture of the country – will probably confuse them with similar houses built by architects from other Eastern European countries who used to cross the border of socialist-oriented Iraq in the 1960s to make money in oil-rich Kuwait.

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The ramshackle office of the custom police is a perfect sample of third world culture. A broken window is fixed with cardboard and the dusty room is crammed with cheap furniture that is at least fifty years old. Even an old ceiling fan is scratching and creaking away. Two armchairs are standing outside. On the table are swimwear catalogues with pictures of young women that the officers look at from time to time. The catalogues must have been confiscated from the containers. I am sitting on a filthy sofa staring at my Hungarian language book and wonder what is going on. During the last two hours absolutely nothing happened. The officers are bored. Suddenly a bus with Indians arrives. The Indians line up in front of the window, occasionally

fighting with each other for who will be the first in line. Everybody has lots of papers, which the officer inspects, stamps and puts into various files.

Finally, my truck arrives. The Nepalese workers open the door and slowly put the entire content of the container on the pavement: fourteen Pampers boxes. I had retrieved the machinery from the basement of Neumann's daughter Annushka in Hamburg and had them sent directly from Hamburg to Kuwait by boat. Because I had no other boxes, I went to the Mothercare shop in Hamburg-Blankenese and received fourteen empty cardboard boxes, all with big "Pampers" logos on the side.

- What's inside? asks the officer.
- Equipment for my work.
- What equipment?
- I am a scientist.
- Working where?
- University.

A worker opens a box and inspects the content. It doesn't look as if anybody can make bombs or alcohol with it.

- No drugs, alcohol, pornography?
- Nothing. I pass an envelope with two-hundred dollars to the officer.
- Ok. You can go.

My project is not an easy one. From the beginning, I knew that there would be obstacles. But I did not expect that the first obstacle would arise in the form of Ibrahim, the Egyptian caretaker of the building in which I had rented an apartment. This round shaped man looks quite ridiculous as he is swinging his short arms left and right when walking. His energetic stride manifests a constant – probably unsatisfied – will to power. Other inhabitants warned me that his brain is severely disturbed by religious fervor. Despite his strong sense of religion, Ibrahim does not wear a wild beard like a Salafist but only a moustache. Salafists in their short dishdashas are not respected by most other people in Kuwait, but Ibrahim is the kind of person who wants respect above all.

He might be small and inconspicuous, but he has managed to spread his existence over the entire building through the strong smell of naphthalene emanating from his living quarters. The smell has conquered the hall, the corridors, the elevator and even the underground parking lot, which makes his existence quasi ominous. Whenever I smell naphthalene, I see Ibrahim's fanatic eyes hovering right in front of me, those eyes that *always* signify victory and are *always* accompanied by a smile no matter how bad things are.

Is it possible that Ibrahim became suspicious when he saw me bringing the machinery upstairs? Maybe his religious instincts told him that something is going on here that might sooner or later turn against him? However, he has no reason to worry: Ibrahim would be among the first people to be made happy through the installation of my new devices.

*

In Kuwait, almost all buildings tend to be torn down after a life-span of about fifteen years, either because they are already falling apart or because real estate speculation has made the construction of higher buildings more lucrative. As mentioned, of George's buildings (there had been around fifty in the 1960s), only four are left. Only one of them is not a generic Corbusier pillar house: this is the Ayan Palace, which used to be a sort of summer residence for important guests of the Emir of Kuwait. Unfortunately it had been destroyed by the Iraqi army in 1990 and is today only a ruin. It functions as a hangout for young people who climb over the walls and hold picnics at midnight on the premises of the castle-like complex. Drug abuse is current there. Also, many people that I spoke to in Kuwait insist that the palace is haunted. Even more, I was told that its haunted condition has been the reason why the palace has never been restored but been left abandoned after the invasion. I don't believe in haunted places, but it is possible that the persistent appearance of ghosts in the palace has something to do with George's psychodynamic architecture. I am serious!

Looking out of the city-side window of my modern apartment building, I see the parabolic antennas on the roofs of the three-story high, slum-like buildings. I am particularly interested in the antennas. On each roof, there are twenty to thirty antennas and usually they are aligned in

rows. Some of the antenna rows face east, others face south. Those facing south must be antennas of Arab workers from Egypt, Iraq, and the Levant while those facing east must belong to Asians from the Philippines and India. Given that there are so many antennas on the roofs, I had planned to put my own device right into the antenna forest on the top of the building in which I am living. A first inspection of the roof made me optimistic. Everything was so chaotic and my device would most probably have gone unnoticed. Hundreds of cables were spreading on the floor, new and old water cisterns and air conditioners were placed in the most inconsistent fashion, old building materials and broken antennas had never been removed, and furniture had been dumped there. Normally this jungle would have been an ideal place to put my device. Unfortunately, as I discovered a week later, Ibrahim has a sort of shed on the roof, which he visits regularly. The presence of Ibrahim on the roof makes the installation of my device too risky. Finding a suitable place for the installation has turned out to be a major difficulty. The other problem is to assemble all those machines because, to be frank with you, I have no idea how to do this.

I continue examining the cityscape from my window. In the neighboring building, some heavily partying people are gathering on the fire stairs and are having a very late breakfast (it is 4 o'clock pm). Loud Arab music is streaming through the open door to the outside. Those people have been partying for forty-eight hours straight. I actually saw them arriving in their Lamborghinis and Hummers two days ago. I even saw them carrying women upstairs in their arms later that night. In Kuwait, women are not allowed to drive on their own without their husbands after midnight, which is why everybody tends to arrive at the same time at around eleven thirty. For two days, the music didn't stop. When the women arrived they were wearing black abayas and niqabs. Now they are sitting on the men's laps, some of them laughing hysterically, probably under the influence of some psychedelic drug.

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Perhaps I have become overly cautious. Once I even suspected the cleaning woman to be aware of my project and to have taken the devices out of the boxes. Finding it too dangerous to keep the material in my apartment, I started bringing it to my office. Later I found it ridiculous to suspect

this old Sri Lankan woman. There is no way she could understand what those devices are for, and apart from that, she has seen worse things in the apartments of Kuwaitis, as she is telling me again and again: drugs, drunken people, distillation factories, prostitutes, cannabis plantations, salad bowls full of cocaine... Interestingly, those people usually ask her to wear a hijab while she is cleaning because this is the custom in a religious country like Kuwait. She always refuses to wear it under threat of leaving. After all, she is not Muslim.

Given the various difficulties that I have been facing during the first months of my stay, I had to postpone the project for an indefinite time. Finding a suitable venue for the installation turned out to be a major difficulty. Then, about three weeks ago, I had an idea: why not install it right in George's Ayan palace? After all, the design of this palace follows the principles of the psychodynamic architecture for which the device had been designed. And since it is abandoned nobody would bother. The palace is even standing on a hill (a rare condition in flat Kuwait), which will be a main advantage for the project. And it has two towers facing each other, which is a necessary condition for the functioning of the system. Even though not many of the palace structures remain intact, there might still be a fixed place at the very inside of the complex that George had considered as the ideal location. I will try to find this place. It sounds a little like Tarkovsky's "Stalker" but there might really be a magical chamber in this ruin able to bring reason and order to the people. The more I am thinking about it the more I am getting excited.

I take the elevator to the ground floor of my building because I have to pay Ibrahim the rent for this month. Through the glass wall I can see his egg-shaped silhouette as he is sitting behind his desk. As I enter the office he crosses his arms over his big belly.

- As-Salaam-Alaikum.
- Wa-Alaikum-Salaam.

I put the pile of twenty dinar bills on the table. To my surprise, Ibrahim makes a gesture of refusal.

- No paying today. Cannot print receipt. Printer kaput. You come back next week when bought new printer.
- In that case, can you not write me a receipt by hand? I make a gesture of writing on my hand.

– No, not good by law. Receipt needs to be printed on official paper.

Alright, if he does not want the rent now, I will pay next week. I go back to my apartment. I received a red Ikea chair from a professor who was leaving. The chair is not very comfortable but it is the most comfortable chair in my apartment and I spend a lot of time sitting on it, thinking. While I am looking out of the wide open window onto the sea, the rhythm of Arab pop music from the party people on the other side of the house is filling the entire neighborhood. It is getting cooler, it's never getting warmer than thirty-five degree Celsius during the day time, which is a relief after this hot summer. An unusually high number of Kuwaiti coastguard boats are positioned along the coastline tonight as if they are getting prepared for another Iraqi invasion or some sort of a terrorist mass attack. But certainly nothing will happen. There are still 15,000 American troops stationed in the desert to protect us. Down on Gulf Street, two wrecked luxury cars have been pushed on the sidewalk. For three days they have been standing there like monuments of decadent adolescent luxury, oil puddles all around them and the white airbags moving in the wind. On the coffee table that I have placed right next to the window lies a rather absurd book published by the Ministry of Information containing short stories about the Iraqi invasion. All authors are employees of the Ministry of Information. The tone of all stories is kitschy, self-pitying, and nationalistic... Why do I not throw this book into the rubbish? Rather automatically, my hand moves towards the file containing the copied correspondence of Goldfinger and Neumann. I start reading the letter to which I have given the number p-K1 (pre-Kuwait 1) and which I had put on the top of the file. Neumann is writing to Goldfinger shortly before the latter's departure for the Middle East. Like all correspondence between Goldfinger and Neumann, the letter is in German and I present the text here in translation:

Gothenburg, 23.10.1955

Dear Györgyi

Your letter has reached me only recently, that is, six months after you had sent it. You had sent it to Lund, which I left already almost two years ago. I am now in Gothenburg where I got a post as a researcher at the School of Engineering in the Communications Research Lab. I am planning to stay here. I was hoping to move to the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm but finally this did not work out. I am very glad that we could keep in touch and hope that you will not move away from your current address before this letter has reached you. I am sorry to

hear that you have had all those political problems in the USA but I see that things are getting better for you. Contrary to what you wrote in your letter, I would definitely not be jealous of your success should your fantastic project really be put to service one day. I would even forget about the fact that it has actually been me who provided the entire technology and will probably never get any credit for this. But I have other, basically moral concerns. You do want to tell people what to think. How can you say no? In the end, that's exactly what you are doing: you are trying to influence people thoughts. You are saying that you are not telling them what to think but how to think, but for me that's just the same. Your 'what and how' is just lame rhetoric. Now I will tell you even another thing that you will probably not like to hear: you are simply obsessed with those machines because you want power. You want to be the guru of the Middle East. Or perhaps of the whole world? I told you that before and you said no, you said you don't want to be a guru. But it's true that this whole system will give you a lot of power should it ever work out. And this is why I no longer want to be associated with the project. I'm really sorry to say this. Use whatever you want of my material but never mention my name.

Please don't feel insulted, you know that I've always been a very straightforward person.

In spite of all the above said I wish you success. Have fun in the heat.

Best

Makár

Contrary to what the few people who have read the above letter have concluded, it does not mark the end of the Goldfinger-Neumann collaboration. On the contrary, it rather signifies a new beginning. A whole unclassified box with letters and manuscripts had been misplaced in the Budapest archive but was rediscovered by me three and a half years ago. Above that, I could retrieve other letters from friends and colleagues in different countries. Finally, I was able to reconstruct an exciting correspondence.

Who are Goldfinger and Neumann? They were geniuses and they were much ahead of their time. Together they imagined an electronic technology exceeding our senses and nerves. Potentially, this technology would have been able to embrace the entire globe. Even more, Goldfinger and Neumann were the first people who imagined an electronic technology that can entirely dispense with words because it has become an extension of the human consciousness. Finally, they dreamt

of using this technology to create a collective cosmic awareness. The project is particularly remarkable since there were no computers at the time. The first primitive “electric brains” were developed right after World War II in the USA but they were just calculating machines. At that time, very few people could imagine the social and cultural revolutions that those machines would bring about one day in the form of the internet. Goldfinger and Neumann could.

Marcel Neumann was living in Sweden from 1948 to 1957. He would change places many times, and between 1949 and 1951, he was working at the University of Lund where he met the pharmacologist Arvid Carlsson, who would later become famous as the person who discovered dopamine. Carlsson started working on dopamine right after the World War II, though he received the Nobel Prize for his discovery only in 2000. Why would a radio wave engineer be interested in dopamine? Well, Neumann was no ordinary radio engineer. What interested him was: how do radio waves interact with brainwaves? Dopamine is a neurotransmitter present in the nervous system that influences the brain’s pleasure centers as well as its emotional responses. As a consequence – and this is what Neumann found most fascinating – it also influences peoples’ perception of reality.

The sun is going down over Kuwait. The wrecked Italian sports cars are now illuminated by yellowish streetlights. I believe I see blood stains on the fluttering airbags. The yeasty smell of self-made wine and Gucci cologne hangs in the air for a few seconds before it is dispersed by a cool breeze coming from the sea. The veil of darkness also falls on the party apartment whose Arab music has become more and more distinct. A rabbit is running along the beach, which is the one and only rabbit I have ever seen in Kuwait. Perhaps it was a cat but it was really running like a rabbit.

Once Arvid Carlsson had identified dopamine, the question that would keep the scientific community busy during the entire next decade was how to block dopamine in human organisms in cases where people have too much of it. In principle, dopamine is a good thing as it gives us pleasure and emotions. But when you have too much of it you get hallucinations. Hallucinations are sensations that you believe to be real though in reality they are only created by your mind. Hallucinations can affect all five of your senses: you can hallucinate smells or you can feel

somebody is touching you. The medical term for this condition is psychosis – a mental state in which a person loses touch with reality. Some people who have this condition are schizophrenic. Very quickly pharmacologists would develop “dopamine antagonists” able to block dopamine receptors. A person with schizophrenia may have an overactive dopamine system and dopamine antagonists will turn down dopamine activity. Dopamine antagonists were believed to be able to cure people from schizophrenia and related mental disorders. Neumann understood all this when working with Carlsson in Lund and he probably contacted other scientists working in the field. He most probably even travelled to meet those people personally. In the archive, I found not only train tickets from Stockholm to Paris but also a return ticket from Paris to Lyons that Neumann had used in November and December 1950. This means that Neumann spent one month in Lyons at a very significant moment. Around Christmas 1950, Henri Charpentier and Simone Courvoisier had synthesized, at the Rhône-Poulenc Laboratories of Lyons, the most efficient dopamine blocker known up to this point. It was called chlorpromazine. A few years later, this substance would be famously marketed as Thorazine in the United States.

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The morning classes are as boring as ever. Again, I have to explain that biology does not study rocks but living things. On the repeat test there were still twenty-five students who were firmly convinced that biology studies rocks. The “biology studies rocks” syndrome (as I have begun to call it) seems to be a curious obsession in this country. Students simply will not accept that biology studies living things. Today I write the word “rocks” on the board in big letters and cross it out several times.

- Do not write rocks. Biology studies living things! Such as humans, animals and plants. Never write rocks. It’s a completely wrong answer. You understand?

I am almost shouting. This is never good. Never overwhelm the students. Instead, try to seduce them. Admittedly, this is a difficult task since most students are staring at their cellphones.

- Think of the little birds in the air and fishes in the water, I continue. You can very well see that those creatures are alive. So very much alive...

I am singsonging like the birds and some students are looking up from their phones, bewildered. This is the moment where I can employ my acting skills.

– But rocks are dead, there is no life in rocks, I say suddenly in a snarling, grim voice.

And biologists don't want to study that. They want to study the little birds and the fishes. For the last sentence, I had changed the snarling tone of my voice to an almost feminine patter, even exceeding the birdlike singsoning of the beginning. If this did not work, I don't know what can work. To be on the safe side, I take a red marker and write the word "wrong" behind "rocks." Then I cross "rocks" out again and say in a professorial voice: Whoever writes "rocks" will fail this class, you understand?

I hope I did not sound too threatening. Probably not, because most students have returned to their cellphones.

– But why does it not study rocks? A chubby girl asks. Her expensive sunglasses have been pushed up across her forehead. She is holding an iphone in each hand.

– Because it studies living things.

I need to be more patient. The problem is that students cannot take in several things all at once.

– You know, it's because biology studies humans, animals and plants, I reply very calmly.

The chubby girl looks confused and turns back to her cellphone. I will need to spend more time on this problem.

*

Gothenburg, 23.11.1955

Dear Györgyi

What fascinates me about waves is that they need no words. I thought of designing waves that create tastes in human brains: vanilla waves, strawberry waves...

This brief and whimsical note, scribbled in November 1955 on a napkin of Gothenburg's restaurant Lilla Torgets Vinkrog and sent out by Neumann to George who was living in New York, conceals the seriousness of Neumann's character. As mentioned, Neumann was a genius. He not only predicted the type of virtual reality that we are having today, but earlier than anybody else, he understood that waves within particular ranges of frequencies have various types of biological significance. More precisely, he understood that radio waves can have very

specific effects on neurons. Since a neuron is a cell body transmitting an electrical impulse, neurons are very vulnerable to radiation. Neurotransmitters allow communication between nerve cells and this communication can be influenced by radio waves. Neumann wanted to see whether this neuron-radio wave interaction could be used to influence the above mentioned dopamine release. The logic is simple: in the end, the regulation of dopamine release is all about the activity of neurons. Through radiation the neurons' patterns of firing can be altered or the neurons can be made to stop firing altogether once they are exposed to the right waves. And waves can also increase the brain rhythm, which will finally lead to the decrease of dopamine. You guess already what all this boils down to: send the right waves and people will stop having hallucinations.

Salmiya

Today I visit the destroyed Ayan palace. It is indeed built on a hill. The buildings are either two or three floors high, and the complex has two watch towers that are four stories high as well as two water reservoirs, all four of which are placed at the corners of the premises. Obviously the palace has been conceived as a city-like complex containing four buildings of different sizes plus towers, all of which are linked through open, half-open or closed corridors. The main building has a large roof terrace. All roofs are flat.

Approaching the palace is dangerous for two reasons. First, one has to cross a very busy motorway by foot. Several young people have died in the past years, crushed by speeding cars as they were trying to reach the enclosed compound of the palace. This has certainly increased the palace's reputation as a haunted venue. On the one hand, it is not recommended to go at daytime because police patrols can see you from the street and will prevent you from entering. At night, on the other hand, you might find all sorts of lowlife in the ruins, which makes it dangerous for other reasons.

I cannot go at nighttime because I need light. In the dark I will not see the details that I am looking for. After all, I am a historian of architecture and will not visit historical buildings in the dark, will I? Since I cannot go in plain daylight either, I decide to go right before dusk.

As I am waiting to cross the busy street, a group of young Indians is approaching the palace for the same reason.

- You are going to the Ayan Palace? they ask me.
- Yes.
- You know that it's forbidden?
- Yes, I know.
- We also know that it's forbidden, but this is our third time going.

- What is so exciting about it?
- It's haunted. It's called Bait Al-Ashbaa in Arabic, which means ghost house. You hear voices all the time but you don't see any people. So you are running through the whole place looking for people but you won't find anybody. Still, you continue hearing voices. Very scary.
- Why is it haunted? I ask.

An Indian man with a rather British accent answers.

- There has been a lot fighting during the liberation in the palace. Many soldiers died. It's their souls spooking around. There is also a secret escape tunnel from the 1960s that leads to nobody-knows-where. Really exciting.
- You think we will hear the voices this time?
- Yes, we hear them every time we go. And sometimes you also see strange things. Once we saw a woman, entirely covered in black with hijab and all, walking towards the main building. We followed her into the building up the tower. But when we reached the top of the tower we saw her standing on the opposite tower. Her face was very white.
- Scary indeed.
- A friend of mine once saw a veiled woman in the courtyard and suddenly she was walking backwards very, very fast, says another Indian man.

We managed to cross the street and begin climbing the wall where it is lowest. It is not difficult to do.

- You see, they started new constructions here, says the first Indian, pointing to iron rods sticking out of low, square shaped concrete structures. But they had to stop it because the workers began seeing ghosts and refused to continue.
- You see that tree, says the other one. It's a Sidra tree, which is the haunted tree of Kuwait.

One of the Indians has lost his slipper and has to climb back to the other side of the wall.

- And friends told us that once when they were entering the main building they saw a child sitting on the floor in the middle of the room with his palms covering his face and crying. They asked him whether anyone else is in the building. All of a sudden they saw a woman staring at them from exactly where they had entered the compound. She was standing in front of them and had very big eyes. Since she was

stann-ding in de enn-trance dey could not escape. Dey were so afrraid. But while dey were stann-ding dere both de woman and de child suddenly disappeaarred.

This was a slightly older woman who had the strongest Indian accent. By now the whole group is getting really excited. The man who had lost his slipper has caught up with us and reports:

- Once, in winter, we saw the lights on in the rooms like in a normal house and inside were Arab guys in white dishdashas though in winter everybody is wearing black or grey dishdashas. When we saw that we just turned back and went home.
- There are also people performing satanic rituals.
- Some people say that the plan of the building is like a David Star when you look at it from the top. It was probably built by a Jewish architect.
- And if you fall asleep in one of the buildings you will find yourself waking up in the middle of the busy road the next day...

We have almost reached the building. A dog is barking from afar. This is not really a supernatural phenomenon, but still it gives one a strange feeling here because normally you never hear dogs barking in Kuwait. The David Star floor plan actually makes sense, it can even be vaguely guessed when looking at the building's ruins on Google Earth. George himself talks about it and explains that this wall disposition is best suited for the maximal distribution of alpha and beta waves because in that case, certain magnetic constellations are produced in the middle of the complex through the waves' reflection against the walls. In general, George found out that radiation is most efficient when it comes from two sides and mixes somewhere in the middle. The alpha waves come from the left and the beta waves from the right, if I may say so, though in reality it is, of course, much more complicated than that. I am no specialist of those scientific details but I understand that this must be the reason why there are towers on two corners.

Together with the Indians I enter the first building. The air is stuffy. Trash, especially bottles and cans, is lying around everywhere. We go upstairs on wooden stairs whose planks have been partially removed. We enter a big hall, which must have been the ceremonial hall where contracts used to be signed. The room is completely gutted and pieces of red and golden wallpapers are hanging from the wall. On the main wall, somebody has sprayed the word "help" in large letters. Was this a besieged Kuwaiti soldier at the time of the liberation in 1991? Though

the interior is completely destroyed, I immediately recognize traces of Hungarian art nouveau design. The shapes of the door openings and of remaining metal the railing of the stairs are indeed very elaborate. Overall, George's design turns out to be quite conservative, which has probably not been noticed by anyone before me. As a matter of fact, most Kuwaitis know neither Hungary nor Art Nouveau. I would be interested to know what original window and door frames George had chosen but all frames are gone now. The building had been destroyed before it could be documented but it seems to have been a supreme example of European modern design though, as can be expected, it must have also been adapted to the Arab taste by local outfitters who topped it up with Arab elements. Of course, everything has been taken away.

I am getting rid of the Indians who seem to look for a quiet place where they can smoke their joint. It's time to start my personal research because it will be dark in a few minutes. I climb up the spiral staircase of the East Tower and reach the terrace overlooking the palace. I am looking around. From here I can see the West Tower as well as the water towers. In the distance is the skyline of Kuwait city with the white half-moon standing right on top of the greenish shimmering skyscrapers. This is quite a view. I can smell the marijuana smoke coming from below. I touch the wall behind me and beat it with my fist. It sounds hollow. This means that there is an unexplained inaccessible room behind this wall; a room with no entrance or windows. I will need tools to pound a hole into the wall and look what's behind. I will have to come back.

*

When I arrive at my apartment at midnight Ibrahim is waiting for me by the glass door where he spends his days and nights sitting on the low wall that encloses the parking lot. He is wearing his usual long-sleeved T-shirt with broad horizontal stripes, an item that you can see only poor Egyptians and occasionally poor Indians wearing. He proudly stretches his belly forward.

- I have to talk to you, he says.
- What's up?
- You have to move out immediately, the police will come tomorrow morning at six thirty and throw you out. You and all your furniture.
- But why?

- Because you did not pay the rent.
- But I offered you the rent and you said that you cannot print the receipts.
- But you did not pay. Today was the last day. Now it's past midnight. Tomorrow the police will come with a truck and take all your things.

Fuck. If this really happens they will find the devices.

- Can I talk to the owner?
- Police is coming. When apartment is empty we will repaint it and after tomorrow new people will move in.
- But what did I do?
- You did not pay the rent.

The conversation is turning in a circle. I enter my apartment. Should I take this seriously? I should probably take it easy. Ibrahim is crazy, I always knew that.

To calm down, I pour myself some of my self-distilled vodka into a glass that is already standing on the table and put the CD of Bartók's Sonata for Violin Solo into the laptop. This sonata is a piece that Neumann liked to listen to all his life. While I listen to the meditative, almost Zen-like sound, the images of the Ayan Palace are circulating in my head. Why does this stupid Ibrahim have to bother me all the time? He got suspicious already on the first day when he saw me moving in with my equipment. This was the day when the fourteen large boxes with "Pampers" written on were brought to my house. I can still see Ibrahim's face as he was slowly deciphering the word "P-a-m-p-e-r-s" on the boxes, looking as confused as anybody can look. Why would somebody bring fourteen large boxes of nappies to Kuwait?

- You have wife? he asked me.
- No, I'm single, I replied.

This was our first meeting. Since then he has never stopped scrutinizing every move I make.

*

The folder with George's descriptions of the Ayan Palace was supposed to be in the file entitled "Kuwait 2" but I can't find it no matter where I am looking. Instead, I find in one of the Pampers

boxes a file containing other “pre-Kuwait letters”. On top of this file is the letter that I had numbered as pK-13b:

New York, 29.12.1955

Dear Makár

Your name signifies happiness. When you say that I should use your technology in order to do something really good, like saving humanity for example, my answer is that “making people happy” is the greatest service I can offer to humans. I have thought a lot about what “saving humanity” is supposed to mean today and I came to the conclusion that it means to level out the gaps of development that continue to exist in the world. However, establishing equality is not merely a matter of abolishing economic exploitation as I used to think as a youngster in my Marxist days, but it is also dependent on a change of thinking styles. We are intellectuals and, most generally, all we want is that enlightenment be maximally distributed in the world. And it is sad to see that some people – consciously or unconsciously – prevent themselves from getting the message of enlightenment by continuing to believe in superstition and mysticism. When it comes to enlightenment, colonization has not only had negative effects but also a few positive effects. Obviously, it has not had enough effects. The cerebral obstacles among the colonized populations have always been too inveterate. Apart from that, the era of colonialism has just come to an end. This is why I decided to use the technology that I have at hand in order to deal with the “cerebral obstacles;” and I am dealing with them more efficiently than it has ever been done before. More precisely, I want to free humanity from the biggest illusion humanity has ever had: I want to liberate them from the illusion of God. You might not remember it (we were actually both rather drunk), but we had discussed have been discussing this topic many years ago in Budapest in the Café Hadik. I remember you saying: “But if you take religion away from those people, how can they know what they should do next?” Well, they will have to start thinking on their own. And they will because they have to. Many people (and apparently also you) seem to believe that the common folk will suffer a complete ethical decline once they lose their religion. But why would that be so? It is only too obvious that they are suffering an ethical decline right now, through religion. How can you say that people will be lost without God when it is so obvious that they are lost because of God?

My flight to Kuwait is booked for January 5. I will fly from New York via Beirut with the newly founded Middle Eastern Airlines. I signed a contract with Naguib Architects for the construction of a whole string of rather insignificant one family units in a newly developed area called Salmiya, which is quite far away from the city center. Naguib is an Egyptian who has made millions of dollars in Kuwait during the last ten years. Please send all future mail to Naguib's address that I have written on the back of this page.

I started learning Arabic, it's very similar to Hebrew.

Wish me luck. I am going to the Middle East to kill God.

Warmest regards

Györgyi

To my surprise, Naguib's Architectural Offices still exists. I was able to contact the present owner, who is the son of architect with whom George was working, an Egyptian who became a naturalized Kuwaiti in the 1960s. Unfortunately, this man could not tell me anything about George that I did not know already. But Goldfinger must have made a strong impression on the old Naguib. The son said that until the end of his life his father frequently mentioned "the Hungarian genius." When I asked him about the Ayan project he said that all material linked to the Ayan Palace has mysteriously disappeared from the office's archives. I knew that already but now I can be absolutely sure.

The doorbell is ringing: it's Mohammed, the dark skinned caretaker from Southern India. Mohammed is Ibrahim's colleague and he seems to be quite excited tonight.

- Sir, the reason why you have to leave is the European lady who is coming to your house. Ibrahim does not like this.

Somehow I am relieved. At least there is a reason.

- But I talked to the owner when I was signing the contract and he said that female visits are allowed. We were even joking about it. He said it's allowed as long as it's always the same woman and not more than one.
- But Ibrahim does not like it.
- Who is making the rules here, the owner or Ibrahim?
- Ibrahim will tell bad things about you to the owner.

– I think I have to figure this out with the owner. Thank you. I give him a quarter of a dinar.

The “European lady” is actually Lebanese and it is Nathalie, the biology teacher. She has colored her hair blond and really looks very European. But I wonder if there is not something else behind Ibrahim’s hostility. Why would he bother so much that a lady is coming to my house? Is there another reason? Or is it simply that he hates all Westerners? Bartók’s concert becomes very meditative. I sit down on the red chair and read Neumann’s immediate reply to George’s letter:

Gothenburg, 1 March 1956

Dear Györgyi

Though I always vaguely guessed your motivations, I was surprised by what I read in your last letter. I really don’t understand why you want to kill religion. Sometimes, when you say that you want to help people to improve themselves, to wake them up from a dream and to awaken them to “reality,” I wonder if you are not the religious person and not them. Yes, I think that when you say that people have to “awaken,” you talk like an American preacher of some Puritan sect. I am an atheist myself, but I have to recognize that religion has done many good things for humanity in the world. There is much religion in culture, and culture is a precious item. Did you ever think about that? If you kill religion – and I start believing that you could really be able to do it – you will also kill culture or at least a very large part of it. In the end, you will create people who are mere technocrats, who function like machines and who have no sense of goodness or beauty. You will create spiritual cripples. Of course, I know that you will answer that all you need for the production of culture is an abstract idea of the good and of beauty, and that those ideas are innate in each person. No God is needed for the production of culture or ethics. That’s what you are saying. The problem is that this might be true for you and me. But most people will not see the sense of having any culture once you have washed God out of their brain. Did I say the word? Yes, you are brainwashing them. Apart from that, if you really eliminate the idea of God, they will soon start creating a new concept of God. You will answer that that’s ok with you, that in this case you will simply send out more waves. But to me this does not make sense. You cannot constantly expose people to radiation only because you are afraid that a concept of God will re-emerge at some point. If they want a God let them have it. And if

they want to abandon it for some reason then they can do so, too. But they should not abandon it because you've been sweeping their brains with electromagnetic waves.

Apart from that, there are some practical considerations. Like chlorpromazine, which will be commercialized this year in the United States under the name of Thorazine, your waves will have side effects such as constipation, sedation, low blood pressure, restlessness and the inability to stop moving. Among the side effects are also repetitive involuntary movements like grimacing, tongue protrusion, lip smacking and rapid eye blinking. Do you know that you are going to create a mass disease? You turn Kuwait into a country of freaks! Do you want a whole nation to be constipated or running around like mad, all the time sticking out their tongues? I am not joking but ask you to reconsider your project.

I hope you are surviving in the heat. I understand that the real heat is yet to come. Did you build something interesting recently?

All the best

Makár

Kuwait, 1 Nov. 1956

Dear Makár

I arrived at Al-Maqwa Airport of Kuwait (which is only a huge sand field) in early January. We were flying from Beirut at night and I could see the tankers in the sea whose lights looked like astrological signs on a dark night sky. Next to me was sitting a man who could not open his briefcase because he had forgotten the number combination. It took a Hungarian math genius to find out the combination for him. He looked at me as if I am God. Things are ok so far, except for the heat. Naguib has air conditioning in his office but it makes an unbearable noise. American cars with air conditioning have been sold here since last year and I am definitively going to buy one as soon as I have the money. Kuwait is a very exotic and completely underdeveloped place. There are many covered women where you can see only the eyes and there are camels, sheep, and everything you would expect from the Orient. Traffic is chaotic. Cars, motor rickshaws, camels, sheep, people, all moving through the city on whatever part of the street that pleases them. Very charming. People are so innocent. The prayer call from the minaret wakes me up at 4.30 every morning. I don't get enough sleep. Salmiya, where I am supposed to build a whole

string of modern style villas, is a piece of desert romantically situated on the ocean. So far, there is not even a palm hut there. We are going to build a sort of Cote d'Azur on the Arabian Gulf. Constructions will start in a few months.

In response to your concerns: I don't want to create perfect people (if I would, I would indeed sound like those new American evangelists). But I want to give people a chance to improve themselves with the help of their own efforts, desires and individual capacities. In order to do that, they first need to learn to distinguish the real from the non-real. How could that be otherwise? At the moment, their individual development is blocked by illusions and nothing good can come from that.

All the best

Györgyi

PS. Dopamine also contained in bananas. Should I prevent people from eating bananas?

The above letter would reach Neumann only sixteen months after it had been sent. He was by then already living in Berlin. George had sent a second letter from Kuwait (which arrived in Berlin at the same time) in which he points out that he had chosen Kuwait because religion was still very persistent there and because the flat topography made it an ideal place for the experiment. He also chose Kuwait because in the case of an accident, the damage would remain limited due to its isolation and rather small population. In reply to those two letters Neumann writes in April 1958:

Berlin, April 2, 1958

Dear Györgyi

I was worried because I had received no word from you for almost two years. I thought you'd been massacred by a wild Bedouin. Your last two letters date from November 1, 1956 and February 22, 1957 but they got stamped in Kuwait only in January 1958. It seems at least one of them was lying at the post office for thirteen months and then both got stamped on the same day. Because I left Sweden last February, I never got those letters. Fortunately, the Swedish post is reliable and forwarded both letters to Berlin.

Even if you believe that religion is a psychosis and nothing more, which I don't believe (by the way, is culture then a psychosis, too, in your opinion?), you should ask yourself why certain psychiatric disorders appear at certain historical times and disappear at other times. The problem is that you have never been interested in social life and its study. For example: why did young French men in the nineteenth century lapse into fugue states and wander until reaching Kiev or Tunis without remembering how they got there? Psychopathologies come and go. You have to look at the causes and combat the causes and not just the symptoms.

I told you two years ago that I believe that religion has done many good things for humanity. Today I would make my statement even more dramatic. To be at least somehow religious is a natural human impulse. Humans need to explain to themselves – or at least think about – the origin of the universe. In that sense even you and I are religious. We are scientists. When we look at the complexity of nature and at the superior design it obviously contains, we do indeed think that somebody must have created it. I am not saying that this creator needs to be called God – you know that I am an atheist – but there is obviously some supreme power at work here. And asking those philosophical questions is what makes people human. Strictly speaking, those are religious questions, but people will no longer ask them once they have been submitted to your radiation. You are taking those questions away from them simply because you do not like their possible answers. To me this does not make sense. Once again, you are creating spiritual cripples.

I hope we will continue this discussion. Tell me how far you have got with your project and how Kuwait has been so far.

All the best

Makár

PS: I think up to four bananas per day are ok.

Whatever Neumann would write to George, his concerns fell on deaf ears. In particular, George could not grasp – or refused to grasp – Neumann's equation of religion and culture. For him, religion was clearly the contrary of culture. In George's view, religion had created a sort of "second world," a little like what we think today about virtual reality: a mindsphere in the sense of a "new layer of hominization," as George would call it much later in a paper presented at a conference in Prague in the seventies. (Interestingly, George would describe in that paper an

interconnected world in the way we know it today. He thought that there would one day be a “new layer of hominization that inhabits the earth in underground and undersea wires, and also the air in the form of radio waves”). For George, this “second world” called religion was in no way linked to human culture, it was not even bound to the surface of the world, but had an existence of its own. That’s precisely how he saw religion. George found that this imaginary world needs to be destroyed in order to create a *real* human culture with earth-bound customs, rituals and common-sensical logic.

What is my own position in this discussion? In the Neumann-Goldfinger debate, I am clearly on George’s side. First, he is perfectly right when saying that he only influences *how* people are thinking and not *what* they are thinking. Therefore, he cannot be accused of brainwashing people. People will always be able to think what they want, but they should only think things that are real and not think in a hallucinatory way. In other words, they should simply think correctly. In the end, George did not care about their thinking’s content but he required them to think logically. Is that too much? And the existence of God does not follow from any logic. That’s the whole point. Therefore, Neumann’s argument that George is destroying culture does not hold. Nobody is preventing them from creating a culture. And cultures that are created with the help of correct thinking will necessarily be better. The problem with people who follow religion is that their thinking is not correct.

Kuwait, June 5, 1958

Dear Makár

I knew that the post is very slow here but I was surprised to see that it took them thirteen months to stamp a letter. You ask me how far I have got with my original project. To tell you the truth, I have been so busy that I did not even have the time to think of it. For two years, I have been finishing two villas per month in an area far away from the center (I think I told you about it). I have had two and a half years’ time to study the situation in Kuwait. Everybody tells me that it used to be the most unique city in the world until twenty years ago, because its inhabitants had managed to build an aesthetically pleasing city by overcoming the most unfavorable physical conditions through inventiveness and good organization. But when I came, there was already practically nothing left of it. Instead I saw a pseudo-futuristic kaleidoscopy of architectural

shapes put together in the most illogical fashion. A strange new city has been drawn over the old one as if the old one had never existed. You need to know that in this country demolition takes place without permit and planning. Suddenly, overnight, the old house is gone and a seven-floor high rise goes up. The result is an encyclopedia of everything that can be wrong in architecture. Nothing works, nothing makes sense. It's urban suicide because the traffic paralyzes everything. But it's not only the traffic. Crappy buildings, unused roads, unused shopping centers, leftover spaces... When I think of what could have been done and look at what has been done, I am scratching my head in disbelief. Foreign consultants (I guess I am one of them) get paid millions of dollars but all they do is mess up the city like amateurs.

I like traditional Arab architecture. Arabs were building to survive and they did it well. There is some logic in their buildings. Today they are building to show off their oil wealth and the result is total nonsense. And the local authorities understand neither the ancient nor the modern. It's all about speculation and money. In the end, the city reflects the spiritual-social-psychological anomie that people are living in. They need to start thinking logically. At the moment, there is just development at any cost, and I believe this will continue for decades.

As a result, I have postponed the wave project. On the other hand, everything I see here is very interesting and I don't regret having come. But the project is not forgotten. Next year I'll get back to it and I will do it seriously.

All the best

Györgyi

This is George's last extant letter from Kuwait. He might have written more but (as I will explain below) those letters might have been destroyed because of some special circumstances.

Love Street

Oilpunk is a mental system stretching into physical space. It is a little like kitsch, which is not merely physical, but appears as a psychological mass phenomenon. For those who are part of the system, the mental system of kitsch is difficult to detect – just as difficult as the mental system of Oilpunk. Kitsch and Oilpunk are subtle, much more subtle than propaganda, which is another kitsch system used in totalitarian countries. Politics creates kitsch, which is called propaganda. However, kitsch as a mental system creates politics and Oilpunk follows the same rules. It is much easier to live with propaganda than to live with Oilpunk. Propaganda can be detected, it can be resisted or even be ignored altogether. But the Oilpunk system is inveterate, involving everything and everybody as a potential producer or receiver of Oilpunk. Oilpunk is not a matter of choice but a matter of what Heidegger called *Geworfenheit*. We are thrown into Oilpunk, we have to swim in it and while we are swimming we are contributing to it. Unless one day we wake up from Oilpunk.

*

- What about tonight?
- I prefer not tonight, I'm tired.
- Why?
- I had a difficult day.
- What happened?
- I had a student who did not know the difference between multiplying and adding. Instead of adding the points he got on his test he multiplied them and insisted that there is no difference.
- Could you explain the difference?
- I tried but he could not grasp it. And imagine, on top of that, he was a statistics major.

I prefer not to tell Nathalie that I am going back to the Ayan Palace tonight because she might be worried. Again it is dusk as I jump over the stone wall. This time I carry not only a torch but also a hammer and a chisel in a plastic bag. As I am jumping, my right leg gets scratched on a piece of iron sticking out of the wall. I am limping when I approach the main building. I cross the reception hall and climb the steep stairs trying not to touch the filthy handrail. Again I am standing on the platform of the East Tower. The sun is setting behind me. I look down and see a group of four women in black abayas is walking through the grass-covered inner courtyard, the ample black cloth of their cloaks floating in the wind. Why did I not see them when I was downstairs?

I set the chisel to the wall and begin to hammer. First, I try it very softly. It makes a lot of noise in this silent night. But it works well because the stone is rather porous. I try harder. Thick chunks of brick are splashing away. I am hammering faster and faster. I want to “hammer it in,” I want to put my tool into the flesh of George’s building. Soon the hole has a diameter of five centimeters. That will be large enough to look through. I take the torch and look inside the empty space. It seems that there is nothing in there.

I will have to cross the courtyard and climb on the opposite tower. I am looking down. The four women have heard the noise of my obsessive hammering and are curiously looking in my direction. I hesitate. I would be embarrassed to walk past them with the hammer and the chisel in my bag. What will they think I am doing, hammering holes into walls in the middle of the night? Perhaps they will call the police. I better stay here until they have moved on. Suddenly my movements freeze. A gust of wind brings a strong smell. Is this marijuana? No this is not marijuana, this is the smell of naphthalene. Naphthalene! Is Ibrahim here? Within seconds, his victorious smile appears before me with his moustache and piercing eyes. Now I hear steps from the staircase. Somebody is coming, very slowly, up the stairs, step by step. Is Ibrahim coming to murder me? Relax. So far, no crime has been committed in the Ayan Palace. This is just a hangout for stoned people, nothing else. The steps are getting louder and the naphthalene smell is getting stronger and stronger. I grab the chisel holding it in front of me like a saber. One never knows. A second later the shape of a black abaya emerges. I recognize the face. It is a student.

- Sir, what are you doing here?
- I could ask you the same.
- We are just sneaking out and having fun.
- That’s nice.

I am unable to hide my relief.

- But we are not taking drugs, you know.
- Neither do I.
- Sir, can I ask you a question?
- Of course.
- I wrote on the test that biology studies rocks and you said that it’s wrong. But why would that be wrong? What is biology doing if it’s not studying rocks?
- That’s a really good question, I say. My smile is almost as broad as hers. I am so relieved that these are just innocent students. Alright, I say, now please tell me very calmly: why do you think that biology studies rocks?
- But biology is the earth science, it studies the environment, the pollution, everything. And the earth is made of rocks. That’s why we think that biology studies rocks.
- Well, I see what you mean. But it’s not really like this. Biology studies living things such as humans, animals and plants.

Meanwhile the three other abaya girls have arrived on the platform and are looking at me as if I were there to entertain them. It’s probably because I started gesticulating as if I am in the classroom. Four black creatures holding cellphones in their hands like torches and smiling at me with their bright red lips on the top of a tower of an old palace at midnight. And I am talking about biology and rocks. Could anything be more unreal? Now they are forming a half circle around me. Their faces are childishly friendly. I notice that all four have identical straight eyebrow shapes. Some hair is sticking out under their hijabs. It seems to be colored in reddish blond at least in the case of two girls. One after the other looks at my chisel, which makes them smile even more, probably because, so far, they have only seen their Bangladeshi servants doing manual labor.

- Sir, why are you making a hole into the wall? asks the tallest one.
- Because I am studying... rocks.
- So you are a biologist?

- No, I am an art historian.
- That's cool.

The only thing that does not fit into the picture is the naphthalene smell. Those are not typical students. The latter tend to use expensive western or Arab perfumes. Maybe they took their abayas out of the naphthalened storeroom for this special occasion?

- You are cousins? I ask.
- Yes.
- I have to go home now.
- Is your wife waiting for you?
- I have no wife.
- Oh.

*

I manage to drive my car through the nighty traffic which is as suicidal as ever. Highway 30 is the most dangerous motorway in the world in terms of accidents per users. People seem not to drive but to fly in their cars without considerations of life or damage, being confident that Allah will either protect them or not protect them, which, in the end, does not matter because whatever happens is Allah's will anyway.

On Love Street or *Sharia Al Hubb*, young men in a brand new Porsche Carrera model are blocking the street because they want to get the phone number of the girl in the car next to them. The girl doesn't want the number but she probably does want the attention she's getting. Others are driving their motorbikes with the front wheel in the air, doing some serious and dangerous maneuvers in order to impress girls in SUVs.

I come home and see that my allotted parking space has been taken by a yellow Ford Mustang. Ibrahim must have removed the iron barrier. I am paying hundred dollars per month for this space. I have no choice but park my car on one of the sand fields behind the block and walk home. On my way I pass by the ruins of ancient villas that George might have built. He and his

generation have contributed to the futuristic cyberpunk feeling of the city. It is sad that in a few months those villas will be demolished.

As I approach my building, a wave of warm and humid air reaches me from the sea. It was much cooler in the Ayan Palace. Kuwait is situated on two distinct bays and the climate can change from one bay to the other. I am stepping through large patches of sand that subsist in the middle of the city. They are reminders of the desert. Legions of stray cats sit on open rubbish bins and watch me as I am passing by. Kuwait is a feast for cats. Humans, on the other hand, can get a lot of juice here. There are juice bars on every corner because alcohol is forbidden (is that a reason?). The prayer call for the morning payer simultaneously resounds from several mosques in the area. I reach the party building in front of which are parked about twenty luxury cars: Lamborghinis, Bentleys, Lotus... The loud Arab pop music is still on as it was in the morning. This is the fifth day of continuous partying. Somebody is screeching like mad from a window of the top floor. Suddenly many people open windows on other floors and scream in the same way. Those parties are worth being invited to. Once they actually invited me upstairs because I started talking to a guy downstairs and complained about the noise. He simply invited me in. That was a really fancy party: women in bikinis sitting on the sofa, a lot of cocaine... By the way, all the men were cops by profession. I also learned that the latest attraction at these parties are iPhone apps through which people send each other videos with women dancing naked wearing only a niqab.

But there are more interesting things in the neighborhood. In the basement of the same building is a gay massage salon held by Filipinos; twenty meters further down the street is a brothel called “The Royal Men’s Health Club” with several Rolls Royce parked in front of it. Huge portraits of the Emir are painted on the outside wall and in the staircase.

Ibrahim greets me from his usual hangout by the glass door. It seems that he is about to leave home for his morning prayer. His movements are sleek as if his entire body has been covered with grease. I see the disgust in his eyes as he starts talking:

– You have to move out by seven thirty. The owner does not want people like you here, he says.

- What kind of people does he not like?
- People who do not pay the rent.
- You know perfectly well that I wanted to pay the rent.
- But you didn't pay. Now your case has been given to a lawyer. If you don't pay you will go to prison and then you will be deported.
- So let me simply pay now and tell the lawyer to stop the procedures. That's the easiest solution.
- It's too late now. Even if the case is cancelled, you will still have to pay the lawyer.
- How much?
- Fifteen-hundred dollars.
- How do I pay?
- Give the money to me.
- Will there be a receipt?
- My printer is broken.
- Ok.

Ibrahim is following me with his eyes as a move past.

*

How much religion could George actually have encountered in the 1960s Kuwait? There was certainly a lot of traditional religion around, but at that time, it was inoffensive and not as aggressive as today. Not all religious people are aggressive today, but religious terrorism is always hanging in the air, so to speak. Still George wanted to eliminate religion in the name of progress. Since George has left Kuwait, the Middle East has made no progress, but has moved backwards instead on many domains. It seems that the region has chosen the political path of self-destruction. In my opinion, many disasters could have been prevented had George's system been put to work on time. But it's never too late. I absolutely have to finish this work before I get deported.

The big question is: why did George not continue? For a long time my hypothesis was that he had to abandon the entire project because Neumann would not provide the right equipment. This

is why I was surprised to find that Neumann continued working on the project and even improved the machines until his death in 1991. It was his daughter Annushka who had kept his last machines in the basement of her villa in Hamburg Blankenese.

As I mentioned, most people believe that Neumann and Goldfinger fell out in 1961, the year when George left Kuwait and went back to London. It has been thought that they had never talked to each other again. The most adventurous reasons for this have been given. Some historians put forward a love triangle story involving a blond Swiss woman as the reason why Neumann and Goldfinger became enemies. It was a further surprise for me to see that both men had resumed their letter exchanges in 1979 after an eighteen-year interruption. They would write each other regularly until George's death, Neumann living in Berlin and Goldfinger in London. I have speculated about the reasons for this change of mind. One reason might have been the Iranian Islamic Revolution, which took place in January 1979. In the light of those dramatic events, both men had the desire to rethink themes that had been important for them in younger days. In those late letters discussions are as aggressive and outspoken as ever and revolve around world politics as well as the increased use of religion in political contexts. At the same time, no one saw any reason to revise his former position. Here is the example of a Goldfinger-Neumann letter exchange from 1979:

Kensington, February 24, 1979

Dear Makár

You probably think that I should have become wiser now in my old age, but recent events only show me that I have been right from the beginning and that there is no reason to change my opinion. I can only reiterate the points that I have believed in all my life. First, it remains a fact that religion is a psychosis. And a person who is psychotic is out of touch with reality. People with psychosis hear voices or have strange and illogical ideas. They can get excited or angry for no apparent reason. In general, they are hard to talk to and say things that make absolutely no sense. And if you doubt what they are saying they become aggressive. Of course, they are commonly unaware that their condition is an illness. Are you telling me that you do not see the image of the contemporary religious person in this description? If I had been able to plant your devices into the desert twenty years ago, the world probably would be a much better place today.

Maybe I could even have sent the waves across the Gulf to Iran. You know that transistor amplifiers became very powerful right then, at the beginning of the sixties. If everything had worked out with my project there would now be no stupid fighting in the name of God. Unfortunately it did not happen. Today religion creates lots of problems. And I have the feeling that in the future it will be the thing creating most problems on the planet. Religious wars, terrorism – everything will increase. If I could, I would send out my waves now and people would stop fighting. Imagine: suddenly they would no longer remember what they are fighting for. They would stand there dropping their weapons. What a funny thought! Why did we not do it?

Do you still think that I want to transform people into zombies? To me they appear like zombies now.

All the best

Györgyi

Neumann's reply followed immediately:

Berlin-Charlottenburg, April 22, 1979

Dear Györgyi

It is interesting for me to note that you have not changed a bit during all those years. But with me it's the same. By and large, I can only repeat what I told you thirty years ago. Your mass radiation therapy will only create the emotional indifference that Lehmann had already described in 1956 in Canada after the commercialization of Thoraxine. You think you will have eradicated stupidity but you haven't. You have merely eradicated the interest in doing stupid things. People will appear less stupid simply because they will have lost interest in everything. But in reality they will be more stupid than ever. Your "therapy" is similar to television in modern consumer culture, which has made entire populations politically and culturally passive. I prefer active people who have enough knowledge to channel their energy towards good deeds. And if they lack that knowledge, one has to educate them. The other thing that I still believe in is that if you had gone your way with your project, you would have killed culture. People need to be able to feel love, empathy, and creativity in order to be human. All this is just as important as rationality. Are you telling me that love, empathy, and creativity are merely hallucinations and

should be eradicated? Thirty years ago we were talking about happiness. I think both of us have different ideas of happiness. I do not believe that the people in the Islamic Republic of Iran are happy. They are brainwashed into believing that they are happy. But your people, once they are deprived of all “hallucinations,” would be equally brainwashed and incapable of living a rewarding, happy, and responsible life.

Best wishes

Makár

PS: I saw pictures of your Shepherd’s Bush Tower. Congratulations, this will be a classic. For me you are one of the greatest architects of the twentieth century.

I have read this letter many times. I’m always intrigued by Neumann’s sentence “if they lack knowledge one has to educate them.” Well, I am an educator but I do not seem to have much success here.

*

The Indian website offering custom made essays to students explains: “*Now you can really concentrate on your studies. Don’t waste your time writing term papers. We do that for you. For two-hundred US dollars we write you any course paper you want.*” I begin to understand why my students have never learned anything in their lives. Other people have always been doing the work for them.

It is cold in my office. The air conditioning cannot be regulated. I get a call from the Indian caretaker.

- Sir, you have to pay the money for the repair of the shower.
- But it’s not my fault if the entire floor collapses. It must have been damaged beforehand. Poor building quality, as usual.
- But Ibrahim says that foreigners always damage everything. Only Arabs pay attention when they are using the shower.

As I am looking at my phone, I discover an SMS on from Naguib Architects, which reads: “Call Imam Zaid. He wants to talk to you. He knew Goldfinger. Telephone: 221 3421.”

I did not know that Goldfinger had contacts with an Imam. It does not appear anywhere in his writings. I am getting excited and want to leave immediately. But first, I have to prepare tomorrow's class. I quickly download pictures of plants and of rocks from the internet. Somehow we got stuck in the general education part. This is week four into the semester and I have not managed to say a word about art history.

As I am walking across the campus, I feel an atmosphere of both eroticism and carelessness. Both male and female students are clinging to their iPhones that they hold statically in front of them. Most men are holding car keys and sunglasses in the other hand. They have the emptiest facial expression possible but least they are polite and greet me.

– How have you been those last days?

This is my Arab colleague Mostafa.

– I was in Budapest for a vacation, I reply.

– Where is that city?

– In Hungary.

– Are those people Latinos? You know, I met such people in the US. They speak Latin, can you imagine? That language is two thousand years old but they are still speaking it. By the way did you hear of our Kuwaiti colleague Manal? She broke her neck.

– Broke her neck? What happened?

– Got divorced.

– You mean her husband broke her neck?

– No, she had a lover but had to keep it secret from her family. So her lover put a ladder outside his bedroom window and she used to climb through his window using the ladder. But the ladder was unstable. The rest you can imagine...

– Amazing. She is a very respectable woman.

– Yes, with Ph.D. and all.

– And feminist I think...

– Yes.

Few things can be more easily found in Kuwait than the Al-Nahadh Mosque. I had actually passed it by several times. It not only sticks out of the sea of new skyscrapers and ruined older buildings, it is also conspicuously located in the middle of a roundabout with heavy traffic moving around it. All streets seem to lead to that roundabout. Will the pious visitors not get crushed by cars given that the mosque is so difficult to reach? I send a message to Imam Zaid announcing that I have parked the car but that I cannot reach the mosque on the island because there is too much traffic. A minute later the Imam comes out of the mosque and waves at me. He has a huge grin on his face. Once the old Imam with the impressive beard steps on the street, his right arm raised straight in the air, the cars stop immediately and I can join the mosque on its island. We go in.

– Welcome to the center of illumination, knowledge, and discernment, he greets me, his arms outstretched. Muslim scholars and historians value this place because it contains literary and scientific masterworks. The mosque has always contributed to the social development of the Islamic society by spreading solidarity, sublimity, and virtue. You are welcome to draw forth from our infinite sea of knowledge.

– Thank you.

Imam Zaid leads me into his library.

– This is my private space, he says. Here I can do whatever I want.

An Egyptian servant, clad in a traditional gallibaya and wearing a turban, brings tea in small glasses on a tablet. The Imam sits down opposite me in a huge arm chair. This man must be almost a hundred years old.

– How is your life in Kuwait evolving? he asks me.

– So far it's ok. I am trying to bring some knowledge to this remote corner of the world.

– And how does that work out?

– To say the truth, not too well. It's difficult to bring knowledge to those cellphone-addicted Ferrari fetishists.

– I understand what you mean. But you will solve that problem, too. After all, you are German. The thing that intrigued me most when I was in Germany is their greeting, which is "Alles klar?" It means: "Everything clear?" I always wanted to reply: "No, nothing is clear for me." But for Germans everything must be clear. Even metaphysical problems have been definitively solved. Kant did that a long time ago.

- I'm not that optimistic. I am rather feeling like a missionary in a land without mission.
- But you have a mission.
- It is just as if the students have installed a knowledge defense system around them and are shooting down every bit of knowledge that is approaching. They seem to think knowledge is dangerous.

The Imam laughs, spontaneously, honestly. Suddenly I feel very talkative.

- You wouldn't believe the things they are telling me. For example, they do not believe that the movements of the moon follow certain predetermined patterns. They think that the moon is a sort of cloud whose appearance will be announced a day earlier in the weather report. "I see moon!" somebody shouts. "Where is it going?" "It's coming here." "Alright tell the people we'll have full moon tomorrow."

The Imam is laughing out loudly.

- But that's normal, he replies. The front page of the *Kuwait Times* announced during the rainy period that "astronomers have predicted more rain." Apparently they cannot distinguish between meteorology and astronomy.
- Yes, there is no distinction made between what is inside and outside the atmosphere. It's all the same as long as it's up in the sky.
- Do they believe that the sun follows certain patterns? he wants to know.
- That's actually what I asked them. Many of them think that nobody can predict at what precise time the sun will rise tomorrow.
- It has not always been like this, the Imam says seriously.
- That's what I understood. When Goldfinger was in Kuwait, for example, there was some intellectual life here. Kuwait's modernism was even trendy. The avantgardistic buildings built at that time would be admired all over the world. I recently found photos of some cartoonish space-age buildings in an old National Geographic issue on Kuwait from 1969. These buildings were presented as examples to imitate. Amazing how creative they were at the time. Unfortunately the buildings have been demolished. What is Kuwait today? Today Kuwait is slow-thinking and conservative and the home of many Filipinos. It's basically unproductive. You cannot say that the oil is "produced," it just comes out of the earth and is sold. And once it's sold it's gone.
- I see that you have understood everything, he says.

The conversation stops for a few seconds.

- How did you hear of me? I ask.
- Naguib’s son is part of the congregation and comes to my *khutba* every Friday since he was little. He told me that you are writing a book on Goldfinger.
- But how do you know Goldfinger?
- I know him from Moscow.
- From Moscow?
- Yes, in 1931, when I was a communist.
- You were a communist?
- Yes, I am Egyptian and I was member of an anti-fascist group called “Union of Peace Partisans” in Egypt in 1930. In Arabic it’s *Al-Itihad al-Nisai’e al-Misri*. The group was organized by the Swiss engineer Jacquot-Descombes.
- And in 1930 Goldfinger was in that group, too.
- Exactly. He came to Moscow from Hungary when the country was hit by the Great Depression. The Communist Party had saved him. And they sent him to Moscow.

George’s link with communism is relatively well known because he designed the headquarters of the American Communist Party in New York on 23rd Street in 1935. However, what is less well known is that his encounter with Marxism occurred relatively late in his life and was entirely coincidental. It took place in 1928 when he won first prize in a chess tournament organized by the Architects’ Trade Union in Budapest. The prize was a copy of Friedrich Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*. According to an interview he gave in 1945 to the American communist newspaper *The Daily World*, this book drew his attention to “immutable laws and connections in the world” other than those laid down by the natural sciences. For him it was a revelation. The influence must have been strong enough to let him seek membership of the Communist Party in 1930. In that year, he even spent a month in prison because he participated in a union strike. After his release from prison, the Communist Party offered him an opportunity to study at the Lenin Institute in Moscow. Though he was already thirty-three years old at that time, he was happy to leave depression-ridden Hungary and went.

- So you met him at the Lenin Institute.

- Yes. And you won't believe it, I met many other interesting people there. For example Rabbi Wise who became a good friend, too. You might have heard of that Jewish Communist.
- Yes, I heard of him. And were you good friends with Goldfinger, too?
- Well, I was only eighteen and Goldfinger was much older though not old enough to let our relationship develop into a father-son like bond. My relationship with him at that time was rather one of adolescent cheekiness. Zaid is chuckling.
- But Goldfinger later abandoned all communist ideas. As a matter of fact, he became so anti-communist that he could not come back to Hungary after the Budapest uprisings against the Soviets in October 1956.
- I know the whole story. Me too, I abandoned communism at about the same time. So, in 1956 Goldfinger was really hanging in the air, he had no place to go. In the US, McCarthyism had reached its peak and he was probably on their blacklist. But he could not go back to Hungary either. This is why I offered him a chance to come to Kuwait.
- Well, there actually was one other place where he could have gone: Israel.
- Good point. Yes, he even tried that, but just in 1956 Israel had begun occupying the West Bank and the Sinai Peninsula, and obtaining residence visas was very difficult. So he came here.
- And there was a lot of building activity going on here at the time.
- Yes, it had just started, but I did not want him to only build houses. I very explicitly suggested that he come here for some other project. You probably know about his experiments.
- You mean his experiments? So you knew what he was doing?
- Of course I knew. And as I said, I explicitly invited him to do it here.
- I don't understand. You are an Imam. He wanted to destroy religion...
- It is *because* I am an Imam that I had nothing against it. I knew perfectly well what he wanted to do. But I was convinced – and still am – that he couldn't have done what he wanted to do. Think about it. His whole theory is based on the idea that God is an illusion, a hallucination. But as you can imagine, I believe that God is not an illusion. God is a reality. That means, once people lose all their illusions they will see the reality of God even more clearly. So, why should I have been afraid of his experiments? He

should simply have tried. The result would have shown him the truth about religion. And his installations would have strengthened the religious spirit in the region.

I am baffled. This is the last thing I had expected.

- But... but he did not continue. Why did he leave Kuwait?
- He had to stop because I made him leave. It was me who got him deported.
- But you were just saying that you were not against his experiments.
- That's true. I was not against what he *intended* to do. I even suggested that he put the devices on the top of the minaret of my mosque. But like so many things in the world, this project changed direction once a woman was involved.
- Marta Ösch, I shout excitedly.
- Exactly. Once this Swiss woman put her nose into the project, everything turned towards the worst.
- You know that she later married Neumann?
- Of course I know. It was me who persuaded my friend, the Chief Rabbi of Frankfurt, Ignaz Hirsch, to get Neumann excommunicated so he could marry Marta. Hirsch was another former communist I knew from Moscow. I simply wanted Erna to get her hands off Goldfinger.
- What was wrong with Marta?
- An awful woman. Walked like a penguin. Very proud. I never understood what she was actually proud of. Serious case of megalomania. Goldfinger should have directed his radio waves just at her. That's what I actually told him.
- And that's why you threw her out?
- It's because she was going to hijack the whole project. She was megalomaniac and extremely narcissistic. She wanted Neumann and Goldfinger to modify the radiation in a way that *she* would be recognized by the whole world as a new Goddess. Of course, first, it is technically impossible to do this and, second, it would have completely bypassed the purpose of the project. But you could not talk to that crazy woman. She was obsessed with her messianic image. Chanting songs in her own praise at parties with a microphone. And completely off tone. Had pictures of herself singing into that microphone plastered on all of the walls in the house.
- So she was really crazy.

- Yes. You know, at that time they started putting loudspeakers on the minarets for the prayer calls. She insisted that she wanted to sing through those loudspeakers.
- So you had to send her away.
- Yes. This is why I decided to get her deported. It's easy for me to get somebody deported in forty-eight hours, you know. Of course I knew that she would go to Neumann once she arrived in Europe. I even knew that she would try to get married to him. But the most important thing at the time was to liberate George from that woman because she had such a bad influence on the project. Marta went indeed straight to Neumann. She immediately flew from Zurich to Berlin. But Neumann knew how to handle her. He got rid of her a few years later.
- Exactly seven years later. But in that case Goldfinger could have stayed. Why did you throw him out, too?
- At that time, Goldfinger was confused, disoriented. Personal crisis, depression. That woman had messed him up completely. Once I thought he would jump off the minaret. I had to do something.
- Those six years in Kuwait had been too much for him.
- Yes. Kuwait appeared to be the entirely wrong place for him to stay. So once Ignaz Hirsch had told me that Neumann and Ösch were married, I got George deported, too. Of course I did this only once I knew that he could go to England. I would not have sent him back to Hungary or to the US in 1961.
- So that's why the correspondence between Neumann and Goldfinger stops in 1961.
- Maybe it did not stop immediately. It is very much possible that Marta destroyed the letters that Goldfinger had sent to Neumann after the Kuwait period. It is safe to assume that Goldfinger, if he wrote something, did not say good things about Marta in those letters.

I am sipping the sweet tea. There are books everywhere around me, most of them in Arabic, but some are also in Russian and other European languages.

- The documents, I say.
- What documents?
- The documents concerning the Ayan Palace.
- You mean those from Nagib's office?

- Exactly.
- As you certainly know, they have disappeared.
- Yes, Naguib says they disappeared. It’s you who took them?
- And if I took them, what do you think I would have done with them?
- You would have destroyed them.
- That would have been the best thing to do before somebody else starts some stupid project using those ideas. We were living in the sixties, you know. Atheism was on the rise...
- Then tell me at least what you know about the Ayan Palace.
- Well, the Ayan Palace is a mysterious place because of the special design fostering strange echo effects.
- Do you not know more about it? I was looking at the towers, even looking inside. I thought some stuff might be hidden there.
- Which tower were you looking at?
- The East Tower.
- No, look at the West Tower. And look into the water reservoir towers, too.
- What is inside?
- I’m not sure. But even if there is nothing inside, you should consider the position of the towers. The waves are accelerated through magnetic fields. The whole architecture produces a complicated pattern of echoes. That’s why people always hear voices when they are there, especially at night. This was George’s contribution to the project. Neumann could only produce the waves but they have to be sent out from certain places in order to mix and reflect against each other. George developed the architecture that made this possible.

I reach out for a copy of *Das Kapital* in German. It has indeed a dedication in German by Rabbi Wise from Frankfurt. “To my dear friend Zaid. In memory of the most intellectual moments of my life.”

- Do you speak German, I ask.
- I speak nine languages. How is your stay going otherwise? he asks.
- I have problems with the caretaker of my building. He bothers me.
- Egyptian?

- Yes.
- Most Egyptian caretakers are Muslim Brothers.
- He seems to be a little hypocrite to say the least.
- You know there are two kinds of religious Muslims in Kuwait, the radical and the moderate ones. The radical ones take the scriptures literally, they absolutely believe that the Quran has been written by God, that you will go to hell if you drink alcohol, etc. and they follow all the rules.
- And what do the moderate ones believe?
- They believe exactly the same things but they do not follow the rules.
- Interesting.
- Did you ever bring a woman to your flat?
- Occasionally.
- That's it. The caretaker does not like this.
- He seems to think that all Westerners are bad people, that they are only doing immoral things.
- That's probably what he thinks. While he is chaste as the drifting snow... You know, those people are so sexually frustrated, they can't bear seeing other people with women.
- What shall I do?
- Did he ask for money?
- Yes.
- Don't pay. Go to the court house, there is the possibility to pay the rent through the court, then you won't have to deal with him. If he says one more thing call me and I will get him deported.

I am driving back through the thick traffic past the mixture of modern high rises and third world shags that represents the core of Kuwait city. There are other dystopian places in the world like Detroit or some suburbs of Tokyo, but in Kuwait the dystopia is fed by millions of petrodollars, which makes the place unique. This stay in the mosque was highly memorable as it appears like another unreal experience in Kuwait though in some way it appears to be more real than all the rest. Maybe this Imam is the first real person I have met since I arrived. As I am diving through the greenish atmosphere of this cyberpunk city, my car is serving me as a diving bell. Corvettes

and Mustangs in flashy colors swim next to me. The sparkling silhouettes of skyscrapers stand out from the watery sky like mighty corals.

- What happened?
- The oil ran out and Oilpunk has turned into Liquidpunk.

I am driving through the underwater panorama. Faster and more streamlined cars are passing over my roof uttering nothing but the gurgling sound of air bubbles expelled by their oversized exhaust pipes. The street lights emanate a phosphorene glow. I can feel that the atmosphere and the universe as one and the bubbly substance surrounding me gets enriched with cosmic radiation. Electromagnetic particles meet protons heavier than hydrogen while the hot sun wind accelerates collisions with photons that are left over from the big bang. Track lights, hovering high above me, are created as those particles bump into nitrogen. The silent traffic is fast, but slow at the same time as lanes are piled one on top of the other as high as eight or ten layers. On my left, I see waiters swimming from table to table in nautical restaurants on Gulf Street serving aquarian customers who are sitting on terraces and eating seafood. On my right I see a Ferris wheel heavily shoveling through the water. Maids in wet pajamas are giving oxygen to fat children who are flapping their fins... Can there be a form of civilization that is not bound to the surface of the globe, a civilization that does not attach humans through gravity to random customs, rituals, traditions, religions, and hierarchies? Can there be a civilization lifting itself up through its own reason, floating in the air like high-frequency radio waves? A society where knowledge is so fluent and liquid that it does not even have to be taught because it is flowing from mind to mind? A civilization where nobody will quarrel because there are no words to quarrel with? This was actually George's vision of the world: electricity, once it is united with the cosmic consciousness, does not need words and will bring about collective harmony and peace. George was dreaming of a weightless, virtual civilization.

*

- Sir, do you remember me?
- No, frankly, I don't.

I am in a hardware store in search of a copper coil that can be used to transform an electric kettle into an alcohol distiller. The young Indian man looks at me inquisitively.

- Sir, we visited the Ayan Palace together.
- Oh yes, now I remember. How are you doing?
- Fine, thank you.
- You look happy, Sir.
- Do I?
- Yes Sir. And nice sun tan. How long have you been in Kuwait?
- For almost one year.
- And how long are you going to stay?
- I don't know. And you?
- I am here only temporarily.
- For how many years already?
- I am born here.
- But you say that you are staying only temporarily?
- Yes, like my father, who was born here, too. My grandfather came from India in 1962.
- So you are living here temporarily since three generations?
- Exactly. Nobody can get a passport.

I am impressed by the transient character of worldly things for foreign subjects in this Gulf country where existence is temporary in administrative terms.

- Did you ever go back to the Ayan palace?
- Yes, we went several times. And we discovered some very interesting things. The underground passage, for example. There is a door underneath the West watch tower, which leads you right into a tunnel. From there you come to a large underground room located right underneath the courtyard. That room has a huge metal plate on the ceiling, which is very strange.

I am staring at him in surprise. Of course! The waves are supposed to be reflected against this steel plate on ground level. George had even made a sketch in a notebook. I could have thought of this earlier.

- And did you see more ghosts?
- Yes, but these aren't dangerous ghosts, they just like to play around.
- You mean they are Kuwaiti ghosts?

- Yes, exactly. And should you ever see something really dangerous, don't be afraid, just pray to God.

*

The news last night reported that the terrorist army from the Islamic State has managed to surround Baghdad at around 8 pm and will most probably bomb Baghdad International Airport by the end of this week. If they win, the entire Iraqi army will be diminished to almost nothing. Since almost the entire army is stationed in Baghdad, there will be no defense force left for other parts of the country. In other words, if Baghdad falls, nobody can prevent the terrorists from coming down South marching right into Kuwait. Within a few months they will be down here, probably happily recruiting one third of the Kuwaiti population into their own ranks, including the army. The other two thirds will be massacred. Time to get out of here? Perhaps, but first I have to finish my experiments. Maybe I can save the lives of millions of people.

- Hello? My telephone is ringing. There is a strange voice with a thick Arab accent at the other end, obviously struggling with the English language.
- Hello, I have documents.
- Which documents?
- Documents.
- Ah.
- Do you want them?

These must be the Goldfinger documents about the palace that Imam Zaid had got hold of in 1961. But who is calling?

- Well, I can look at them.
- Do you want them or not?
- How much?
- Thousand Dinars.
- Ok. Where do we meet?
- Do you know the Shia mosque, the one where the bomb exploded?
- Yes I know.

- Right next to it is a restaurant called Alhambra. Meet me there tomorrow.
- But who are you?
- See you tomorrow at nine thirty.

*

On Monday I give the students the third repeat test on general culture. The first question is: “What does biology study?” Sixteen out of forty-nine still write that biology studies rocks. One student writes: “Biology studies all sorts of living things. Especially rocks.” The phenomenon begins having a mystical dimension to me. What is it that makes them think that rocks contain life? There must be an explanation. Another student writes: “Biology studies rocks, but only the living ones.”

I quickly find the bombed mosque and park the car in an almost empty multi-story parking lot next to it. This rundown area is right in the city center but at the same time it seems to be at the end of the world. The quarter is entirely inhabited by poor Arabs and Indians. The building where the restaurant is supposed to be turns out to be a complete ruin that even the Indians abandoned years ago. But the restaurant is indeed there. Through a window on the ground floor window I see a black barkeeper wearing a bowler hat, a bowtie and a waistcoat. Glasses are hanging upside down over the counter. This place looks fancy, like an upscale bar in London or Los Angeles, except that the bottles contain no alcoholic beverages. I go inside. The barkeeper is polishing glasses with a white napkin. “Upstairs,” he says without smiling, pointing with his wide shirt sleeves to the stairs. Through the window I see the abandoned mosque. In this mosque a suicide attack by the Islamic State had made twenty-seven victims and left two-hundred-twenty-seven people injured.

The person I am looking for is waiting for me at a table. He is wearing an old black costume and a cheap synthetic tie. Somehow he does not fit into this environment. But I know his face from somewhere. Who is this? He seems to be Egyptian. Religious or not religious? Rather religious. Wealthy looking, stylish Kuwaiti couples are conversing at several other tables. This is a modern place built into the decrepit environment of the city center. I sit down at his table. Without

greeting me the man pulls a large wooden box from underneath and puts it on the table with a noise. The Philippine waiter looks at him disapprovingly.

- It's all inside, he says.
- Where did you find it?
- Can't tell you.

I lean back.

- Shall we order food?
- Ok.
- Do you know what kind of food they have here?
- Yes. It's American-Asian fusion.

I look at the menu and it seems to be the standard food you are getting in Kuwaiti restaurants: Burgers, spaghetti, as well as some Arab food. More interesting are the juices that have been mixed by some famous chef. Coconut with lime and spices, coke with rose syrup, alcohol-free Strawberry daiquiri...

- Can I look inside the box?
- Quick look ok.

I open the lid. I see gilded papers that must be the assembly instructions for the devices. That's exactly what I need because I do not have the faintest idea how to put those things together. There also seem to be explanations how to place those machines inside the Palace. Even the steel plate under the courtyard is mentioned with physical formulas and calculations added. Wow. At the bottom of the box, there is a large sheet of paper with the substance of blotting paper. It has been folded six times to fit into the box. I unfold it. What I see almost puts me in a panic-like state of anxiety. It is a text written in Hebrew. I hastily refold the paper and put it back into a box. I look around to check if somebody has been watching me. In this country, the Hebrew script is as obscene as pornography. You don't want to be caught with this in public.

The bearded guy is staring at me. Is he amused? Not really, his face is expressionless, he seems to have no clue what all this is about. Suddenly, I remember where I have seen him. This is Imam Zaid's servant who served us tea in the Al-Nahadh Mosque. He found the box in Zaid's archive and decided to sell it. Without his turban he looks very different. But I could have concluded much earlier that he is a religious person. His pants are held by suspenders and are

much too short, about thirty centimeters away from the earth. That's typical for people who are used to wearing a short dishdasha (which is the sign of the religious). When those people decide to wear pants, they also like to wear them short.

- And you really want thousand dinars for this? I ask.
- Yes.
- Can you not make it a little cheaper?
- You want it or not?

I pass him an envelope. Saving humanity can be expensive.

*

- Psst. Psst.

Mohammed, the Indian caretaker, wants to tell me something in secret.

- What's the matter?
- Are you moving out tonight?
- I don't think so.
- But you have to move out tonight because we have to disinfect the apartment after you.
- Why do you have to disinfect the apartment?
- Ibrahim says we always do this when foreigners move out.

I can see that Ibrahim is giving Mohammed a hard time, too.

- Sir, Ibrahim has a question for you that he could not ask you personally because he does not know the words in English. Therefore, he asked me to be the translator.
- Ok, so what is the question?
- But I want you to know that this is not my question but Ibrahim's question. I am just translating.
- Ok, what is it?
- Why do you need so many nappies?

I begin to assemble the machines in the living room. It is really time to check whether they are functioning. After all, they have not been used since 1991. I hope that I did not bring a heap of scrap to Kuwait. The shipment had cost me five-thousand dollars. Assembling the parts turns out to be more difficult than expected. There are far more components than I thought, some of them very small. There seem to be two sets of identical elements plus a few smaller ones. The instruction sheets that I found in the box are extremely scientific, and though most of them are written in German, there are many words that I don't understand. Sometimes George also added a few sentences in Hungarian in the margin that I have to look up on google translate. This will take me several days. And then there is the text in Hebrew, which probably contains the most essential information. I have still no idea who could translate this for me. One cannot type Hebrew letters into google.

The doorbell is ringing. Is this Ibrahim? What will he say when he sees all those machine parts spread out on the carpet? No, it's Nathalie. I had completely forgotten that she was coming tonight.

- What for God's sake are you doing? Nathalie asks as she is entering.
- I am assembling an industrial water distiller. You know that the water is so dirty in Kuwait, you don't even want to wash your hands with this.

Nathalie examines the parts quietly.

- But it doesn't look like a water distiller.
- How do you know what industrial water distillers looks like?
- Where do you put the water in?
- It's not ready yet.
- Anyway, I can see that those two parts do not fit together. This one goes together with the round one.
- Alright, you're a biologist. That makes more sense than an art historian here tonight. So go ahead.
- Just today I assembled a camera with a single-crystal X-ray diffraction core facility. I think I can do this one, too, Nathalie explains.
- Was the camera for filming rocks?
- Rocks? I'm a biologist. Why are you talking about?

- Nothing. It just came to my mind.
- So, what is this machine for? Looks like old radio technology from the eighties.
- Difficult to explain. It's for art history.
- I thought it's a water distiller.
- It can have many functions.
- I don't understand.
- That's what I said. It's complicated. Conceptual you know...
- But it has to work. Better let me do this. You sit in your red chair and just watch.

With the seriousness typical for scientists, Nathalie concentrates on her work. But she also manages to make a few entertaining remarks.

- You know, the other day I thought about your punk thing that you are always talking about.
- What do you mean?
- I mean your Oilpunk thing.
- What did you find out about it?
- Is Oilpunk not like Steampunk that cannot be washed off?
- Very funny, I say. But I have another problem. Do you know somebody who can read Hebrew?
- In this country, this is like asking me if I know somebody who is a child molester. What do you need that for?
- I found a document on art history that has never been translated.
- You found a Hebrew document in Kuwait?
- No, back in Budapest.
- Then ask somebody from Budapest.

Nathalie assembles the elements in no time. All parts are at places where they seem to make logically sense.

- Now we can turn it on, she says.
- But where?
- The switch is here.
- Ah, ok.
- There is a second one where you regulate the intensity.

- Turn it a bit higher.
- Look, something is moving.
- Yes.
- But why does it make that funny noise?
- Because it has not been used since 1991. I hope nobody will hear the noise.
- Ok, I hope for once you are impressed by what I can do. What do you want me to do next?
- I want you to put on your light blue nighty, which goes so well with your blond hair.

*

The real Oilpunk is yet to come. It will take place in the last of our oil days when the last few drops will be pulled out and people will fight over it. Then oil pirates will lead raids on the last remaining fields.

*

The next morning the street has been blocked off by at least ten police cars. There must have been a fight in the party building. A black man covered in blood is yelling at the policemen who are trying to restrain him. Another man is smashing the bicycle of an Indian delivery man to bits. Again and again he is trampling on it. The Indian delivery man watches anxiously but does not move. Mohammed, the Indian caretaker is walking by from the parking lot. He looks much happier than usual.

- What's happening over there? I ask.
- The delivery man had to deliver something and he discovered that they are having prostitutes and drugs in their flat. So he called the police. Not a good idea because all the people in the apartment were policemen.
- What did Ibrahim decide to do about my rent? I ask.
- Ibrahim is no longer working here.
- What?
- Yes, he left yesterday night, went back to Egypt. He said he wants to be with his family.

I could indeed have noticed it myself that he is gone. The smell of naphthalene has disappeared.

- This is strange, I say.
- Yes, all of a sudden. Nobody understands why.

Was it Imam Zaid who got him deported?

- But you know Sir, the last time I saw him he had become a completely different person. He was so kind, like a lamb. He had even shaved his mustache.

Is it possible that the machine we assembled yesterday night did work and that it had an effect on Ibrahim's mind? If that's the case, then we have really made a big step forward. The next step will be to install the machines in the palace so the waves can be distributed over the whole region. If I let the machine run just here in my apartment, it might affect some people; but my aim is to save a large part of humanity. The most urgent matter is now the translation of the Hebrew text. The only person I can think of able to help me is Imam Zaid. I will send him a photo of the text. Maybe he will not like to receive a text written in Hebrew, but I want to solve this riddle as quickly as possible.

Night Writing

As we are driving in Nathalie's Peugeot sports car we are approaching Kuwait city's blue and greenish shimmering skyline. It is almost midnight and a fresh breeze is blowing from the sea. The center of Kuwait is a really cool place. Skyscrapers are standing in the middle of no man's lands like miraculous survivors of a nuclear attack. At the bottom of the slender towers, like grass growing under a tree, are planted two story houses from the 1970s in the most uncoordinated fashion. Those houses are crumbling away in the hot and dry wind while Ferraris and Bentleys are parked just next to them. Sometimes tiny restaurants stylized for an exquisite clientele are hidden in some of those ruins. Boutiques with luxury brands are installed in places where you simply wouldn't expect them. We are passing by a boutique called "Serb Fashion." What can that be?

It's early spring and people are sitting outside on café terraces. The environment is dominated by an aesthetics of war and destruction: large empty stretches of land beautified by a half-dead palm tree, demolished buildings, half-demolished buildings, rubble strewn everywhere... In Kuwait, high density is constantly juxtaposed with emptiness. At the end of a sand field appears a row of three cafes with fashionable people chatting in the bright neon light. The gathering looks like a fatamorgana, the superior mirage of a café hovering above the hot asphalt, bending the light of the full moon. The whole situation has an effect similar to van Gogh's painting *Café Terrace at Night*. French chanson music is audible from afar, which makes the scene even more unreal. Several luxury cars are lined up in front of the cafés and more cars are parked in the middle of the road.

- Look, there is another Peugeot like ours, says Nathalie.
- Remarkable. There are only twelve Peugeots like this in Kuwait.

We get out of the car and walk through the fine sand. Shards of broken mirrors are lying on the ground reflecting the sparkling skyscrapers. Two completely dried trees are holding out by the roadside. There must have been a house and a garden here in the past. The cables that used to water the plants are still coiling on the ground, but the water supply had been cut at some point. In the distance, a group of Indian workers gather next to the entrance of a narrow bridge that will lead them over the busy motorway. Basically, the bridge leads from one sand field to another one. We arrived at the café and chose the middle one. From our table we have a perfect view of the illuminated skyscrapers with lights blinking on the top, but also on the ruined, though still inhabited, buildings in front of them. Next to us are sitting three girls with sunglasses. They look a little blasé because they are not talking at all. Nobody is wearing a hijab here. The Philippine waiter arrives.

- What’s your specialty? Nathalie asks.
- Hot dogs.
- Only hot dogs?
- Yes, all organic. We also have vegetarian ones.
- What’s the best one?
- Hungarian with crushed poppy seeds. Or Japanese *okonomiake* style.
- I take the classic one, I say.
- Just with ketchup and mustard?
- Yes.
- I take the pineapple one, orders Nathalie.

We are looking at what the other two cafés are offering. The specialty of the one on the left seems to be toasts, the one on the right sells fried eggs in all shapes and all styles. As we are waiting for the food, I receive a phone message. It’s from Zaid. I open it hastily and read: “You are the dumbest person I’ve ever met.” Nothing else. That’s all Zaid is saying. Is he angry? Did he find out that I bought the documents from his servant? Does he think that asking a Kuwaiti Iman for the translation of a Hebrew text is inappropriate?

I examine the three identical old houses in front of us. The plaster has completely fallen off all walls and one can see the bricks. Two tall and very green trees are standing next to each house. They are Talha trees, a sort of Acacia, which is the only tree native to Kuwait. Still they need

artificial irrigation. During the Gulf War in 1991, Kuwait's natural environment was devastated by the oil pollution. However, the flora and fauna has proved to be remarkably resilient. I imagine what those houses might have looked like in the past. About fifty years ago, they must have been summer cottages. At that time, the sea came up to about here. It was pushed back as more land was reclaimed. The houses are surrounded by high walls. One wall has vaulted arches on the top on which one can see remnants of a blue tile pattern. The windows, at least those that are not broken, have been covered with white paper or plastic foil. Others have been replaced with plywood or cardboard. Rusty air conditioners are sticking through each window. The inhabitants have constructed wooden sheds on the balconies, and an array of cables links the houses in all directions. The garage next to one of them is covered with parabolic antennas; more antennas are planted on the ground and are standing next to a leather chair and a table. There is also a large flower pot containing sturdy green plants. The floor surface is covered with green grass, which looks like a miracle in this environment.

Another message from Zaid arrives: "This is not Hebrew but braille." I stare at the message.

- Why are you staring at your phone like this? asks Nathalie.
- Because I am stupid.
- Why?
- The text.
- What about the text?
- It's not Hebrew but braille.
- I actually thought that it looked very different from Hebrew.
- So why did you not say anything?
- You were so convinced that it is Hebrew.
- Now Zaid thinks that I am an idiot.
- Well, as an art historian you should have had more aesthetic sensibility.
- Ok, now we know that it's braille. How will I get a braille text translated? We need to find a blind person. But that should not be difficult. It's at least easier than finding a Hassidic Jew.
- Now I also think that you are stupid, Nathalie remarks.
- Why?

- Do you really think that a blind person can translate this for you?
- Why not?
- This is not a braille text embossed on paper but it has been copied by hand. How could a blind person read that? There are no bumps on the paper.
- That’s true. But is there anybody who could read that?
- Nobody can read this unless you emboss it on paper for a blind person.
- That’s interesting.
- Why is this interesting?
- Because it means that this text has not been written for normal people. It looks like it was written for blind people but it’s not. Second, it has not been written by a blind person. How could a blind person write this by hand? So what can it be?
- If you ask me, it looks like a poem. With verses, there are just a few words in each line...

When we go back we pass by a yellow bench on which is written: “Ever heard there is no beauty in Kuwait? We’ve heard it a lot and that’s why we painted this bench in yellow.” Positive thinking is probably the only thing that can save you in Kuwait. When we arrive at home I have an idea. Maybe Nathalie is right with her estimation that this is a poem. There are sixteen short lines sometimes consisting of only one or two words. This probably represents a link with Goldfinger’s architecture. Goldfinger’s teacher, the famous architect Imre Lajos, had built a “School for the Blind” in Budapest. It is well known that it has a plaque with a braille poem on the façade. Lajos mentioned it in their correspondence. This poem that has been molded into a copper plate might be related to the one I found in the box; or it might even be the same. I go on google and search for photos of the school that could possibly show the wall with this poem. There is none. There are photos of the school but none where the poem can be seen. And of course there are no books on Hungarian architecture to be found in Kuwait. How can I get hold of that poem?

- I think I have to go to Budapest, I say to Nathalie.
- Why?
- There is a braille poem written on the wall of the school for blind people. This school was built by Goldfinger’s teacher Imre Lajos in 1933.
- And you think it is related?

- Probably it is. There is actually a strong link between Goldfinger and this building. The project is famous because it was the first time that an architect would build something while supervising the work from a remote place. Lajos was in Wisconsin at the time when the work on the School of the Blind started. Goldfinger was his assistant. He built the school by following the instructions that he would receive from Lajos in Wisconsin via the telephone. This was a very exciting concept at that time. An architect being able to construct something in Hungary while physically being in Wisconsin.
- I see. And what will you do when you find the poem?
- I will ask a blind person to read it to me.
- But it will be in Hungarian.
- The blind person might speak English. Or I will transcribe it and put it into google translate.
- Is it really necessary to go to Budapest for this purpose?
- I really need this for my research. By the way, it is a very beautiful school, it's a pity that the students could never see it.

*

I arrive in Budapest on the day of the city's bulky waste collection. It seems to be a very special event in Budapest. Budapesters can put their bulky waste in the street only twice a year. When the bulky waste collection is announced, hundreds of gypsies arrive already two nights early. They gather in the streets of the residential areas and reserve the territory in front of buildings where they expect the waste to be put. Every gypsy has his own territory and considers all the items that will be put into this territory his own. Anybody who wants to take something from the rubbish heap has to pay money to the gypsies. I am wading through shards of old television screens, computer keys and all sort of rubbish, sometimes still stemming from the time of the Hapsburg Empire. I ask people for the Vakok Intézet, which is the Institute of the Blind. I enter a café and almost fall over a black Afghan wind hound that is lying on the floor. Nobody seems to know the school. Finally I find it. I walk through the gate to the wall where I expect the plate to be. And it is really there: a green copper plate, 60 times 40 centimeters large with small bumps sticking out of the plate: a poem in braille. I take the large paper that I found in the box out of my

backpack and compare the two texts. I want to check if the dots are at the same places. Surprise!
They are not at the same places. Not at all! These are two completely different texts.

A blind woman is coming out of the school.

- Excuse me Madam, is there still another braille poem like this in this school?
- As far as I know, that's the only one.
- Can you tell me what it means?
- I read it a long time ago.
- Who wrote it?
- Nobody knows. Apparently it has been put here by the architect when the school was built.
- Can you please translate it to me?
- The lady put her fingers on the poem and slowly translates it. I record her words with my phone:

Look for the signs.

When he saw the footprints,
some memories or I swear to God,
like a lock of his hair
or the wearing ring.

If the tar pits filled with

The halo and harp
maybe,

I could not believe it.

If there was a place like Graceland
where I could
tapping a bathroom and bedroom slipper,
then,

My faith

You need not
so blind.

- What do you need this for? she asks.
- I am an art historian doing research on this architect. His name is Goldfinger. I actually have a copy of another text that seems to be different, but you cannot read it because the writing is not embossed.

I send a message to Nathalie.

- I found the plate. Somebody translated the poem to me. But it's not the same text that is written on the paper.

Nathalie texts back immediately:

- Me, too, I got the translation.
- What?
- I translated it. It's easy. Braille is a binary system. I started with so called "night writing," which is a simplified braille system, similar to computer language. There is a code of twelve dots arranged in columns of six. That's easy to understand for anybody who knows computers. Braille is the first binary form of writing developed in the modern era. I learned it and read the text. I put it into google and translated it from the Hungarian, and here is what I got:

Pay attention to the signals.
When he saw the footprints
Some memories, or I swear to God,
Like a lock of hair
Or is it a ring.
If the pit is filled with
Halo and Harp
May,
I cannot believe.
If there was a place like Graceland
where can I
Touch Slippers,
Therefore

I believe,
You do not need
So blind.

- This is indeed similar. But how is this possible? The text that you have looks completely different from mine. How can we both have the same translation?
- It's because I'm Arab.
- What do you mean because you are Arab?
- I am used to reading texts from right to left. So I thought why not try to read it this way. And it worked. The words made more sense. From left to right it was just gibberish.
- So the text on the paper is the mirror image of the one on the copper plate?
- Exactly.

Suddenly I remember the story of this poem. How could I have forgotten it? When Goldfinger went to the US in 1935 to work in Lajos' New York office he brought several items from the School of the Blind project, among other things, an ink print of this poem. Apparently, he had made the ink print himself and what I found in the box must be this print, which is why it was on blotting paper. Logically it is in mirror writing.

I am walking back past old sinks and discarded wooden wall coverings. The gypsies look at me suspiciously. The poem is about God and about Graceland... what is Graceland? It's also about faith; and the word "blind" comes right at the end. Could it be about "blind faith?" This means that it is related to religion and to Goldfinger's project of freeing people from religion. But why did he put that into the box? How can this help with the installation of the machinery? I need an advanced literary interpretation of this poem.

The Monstrous Darkness of Tomorrow

Nathalie is talking more and more often about leaving Kuwait. She was born here and has suspected all her life that something in this country does not make sense.

- I know nothing about poetry but I think that this poem is bland nonsense, she says.
- I looked the whole day at fin-de siècle poetry as well as at other poetry that has been used in Art Nouveau architecture in Eastern Europe. Still, I have no idea what the poem could be about, I admit. And the style has nothing to do with the style of the epoch.
- You simply have to look at it in a different way.
- In which way?
- Don't look at the words, just look at the dots.
- That's an extremely formalist approach.
- I don't care what it is called, but it is clear that the number of dots is not completely random. There are relationships between the numbers of dots.
- Can you explain that?
- Look at the first letters of the words. If we take the first letter of the words of the first line, and the first letters of the words of the second line, we see that the values have exactly doubled for each letter. This can be no coincidence, it signifies a progression.
- Ok. But what does this signify?
- Braille is a binary system that gives you certain coordinates on a table. If I relate all values of the first letters to the Polybius square in which every two-digit code represents a character, we can identify certain positions on a table. If we use Barbier's variant, we will have a 6×6 matrix meaning that we will have sets of twelve dots encoded by thirty-six different locations. If we see it that way, then this text is a computer program describing certain geographical locations. More precisely, it spells out where certain elements should be placed within a square. The trick is that the system is not static. The

positions change in non-proportional ways when the values are increased. You could say that this program is about a dynamic space and its coordinates.

- What does *that* mean?
- It means that the space evolves according to the values that you put in. The whole poem is an algorithm.

A square with certain positions in it? Suddenly I realize what that must be. The square represents the courtyard in the palace. Inside this space certain positions are indicated. The dynamic development corresponds with Goldfinger's explanations of alpha and beta waves being reflected by the walls in the first place, but also reflecting each other in order to attain the most efficient texture. The right magnetic constellations will be produced in the middle of the building complex. But it does not happen by just sending them out randomly. The palace itself creates a sort of "wave echo," which needs to be regulated by an algorithm in order to be efficient.

- You say it's about a space. Can we draw the space?
- That's easy. Make a table with numbers of dots horizontally and vertically. That's your space. We calculate all values according to Barbier's variant and place them on the table. I started this already.

I am looking at her sketch. The lines linking the coordinates vaguely represent the shape of a David Star. Nathalie continues.

- Here you see two very high values in the two left corners of the square.
- That's the watch towers, I say.
- What?
- Nothing, just go on.
- And then there is something relatively large in the middle, though it has only half the value of the others.
- That must be the steel plate.

If it is true that this is a computer program, then it surprises me that Goldfinger and Neumann had that code ready in 1935, the year when Goldfinger had it fixed to the school. We don't know when the two men began thinking about the project, but Neumann and Goldfinger met in 1919 at the Faculty of Civil Engineering of Budapest University and had enough time to develop the system. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1921 as well as the Second World War

interrupted the work. It is only somewhere in the late 1940s that Goldfinger and Neumann begin talking about it again.

- Nathalie, I have to tell you something. All this is not for art history but for a much more important project.
- What is it?
- It's for stopping stupidity, it's for saving humanity.
- Nobody can stop stupidity.
- This system can. You will see. We have to install it.

*

The machines are heavier than I thought and it is particularly difficult to lift them over the wall of the Ayan palace. The heaviest item is the generator for the electricity. The Indian from the hardware store is helping me carrying the stuff. It's good to have cheap labor at hand whenever you need it. We go back to the car four times and bring all the material. It was difficult to persuade Nathalie to come with us, but without her I have no idea how to regulate the frequency. We carry the main machines and the generator up to the towers and place the other items in the courtyard. I have brought another chisel, and now we are making holes in the walls of the towers that are large enough to place the machines into the two empty rooms. Then both machines will have to be linked with a long cable that we swing from one tower to the other. Finally everything is in place. In a few seconds the system will be set in motion. All I need to do is press the button of the generator. Standing at the top of the tower, I shout as loud as I can:

- Hey stupid people out there. You think you have a brain? Just wait, I will show you that your brain is just some paper pulp that adopts whatever form I want it to adopt.
- Stop playing Mussolini, says Nathalie.

I continue shouting:

- Stupid people out there! You think you are thinking? It's me who is telling you what to think! Wait until I press the button. Still seeing hallucinations? No, they are all gone! Where did they go? The thing is that they never existed. You made them all up. Welcome to the desert of the real! Welcome to the desert of the real!

- You are crazy, says Nathalie. What do you think will happen? You think tomorrow morning you will watch the news and you will see that Sunni, Shia, Jews, Christians shake hands and stop fighting? That ISIS is rendering their arms and begging for forgiveness? That Al-Qaida is helping to rebuild the Twin Towers? That Saudis and Iranians are hugging each other? That Muslim brothers become television stand-up comedians parodying the religion of old times? Is that what you expect?
- Yes, that’s exactly what I expect to happen.
- Everything you are doing is so vague. You say you “expect” this or you “expect” that. But this is not scientific. In science you should *know*! Did you ever think about what else *could* happen? Can anything go wrong with this machine, I mean, can it have a reverse effect, an effect that is not desired?
- Well, nobody really knows, that’s why it is an experiment.
- That’s exactly your problem. You know nothing. I have been doing everything here. You could not even put the machines together. You cannot distinguish braille from Hebrew. Then you travel to Budapest and come home with a poem that I could figure out while sitting at my desk. And even then you are unable to understand what the poem is saying. Now you shout “press the button, I want to save humanity,” but you are not aware of any risks. But don’t tell me that it’s my fault if something goes wrong.

I am about to press the button. Suddenly I smell naphthalene. Oh no, not those girls. Soon four smiling faces with bright red lips are coming up the stairs.

- Sir, it’s you again. What are you doing here?
- I am examining rocks.
- Is this your wife?
- And what are *you* doing here?
- We saw people bringing in heavy things and thought they were putting in a bomb. We got scared. That’s why we called the police.
- Why would anybody put a bomb here?
- Because the palace has mystical powers.
- Do you really believe in that? Well not for long. You’ll see. Where is the button?

Police sirens can be heard from afar.

- Sir, the police are coming and now we will get deported, shouts the Indian. He begins trembling.
- How can we get out of here?
- Let's pray to God! The Indian is falling on his knees and starts praying in the Muslim way.
- We can't go back. The police are coming from the street. And on the other side is the new Palace complex. We can't jump over that fence.
- Is there no other way?

The place is filled with loud echoes of the Indian's prayer.

- Unfortunately not.
- Did you not say that there is a tunnel? Nathalie asks.
- Yes, there is a tunnel! We can try that.
- Where is the entrance?

Suddenly the Indian is getting back on his feet.

- Right underneath this tower, he answers
- We are rushing down the stairs.
- Did you press the button?
- Yes I did.
- Remember one thing, I shout to the girls, biology does not study rocks!

We disappear into a hole in the earth.

*

The wind is blowing from the sea towards my window. If ISIS invades Kuwait, in a few hours the dream called Kuwait will be over: no parties, no restaurants, no Oilpunk. But what if the machines did work? I cannot wait for the result. I bought our air tickets and Nathalie is coming with me. She does not like it here anyway. What will remain of Kuwait if ISIS comes? Well, one thing will remain and that is what Kuwaitis have been practicing for centuries: the dialogue with

the sea, the dialogue with the invisible and the unforeseeable. The dialogue with the monstrous darkness of tomorrow.

Appendix

Biography of George Goldfinger

1897 born as Györgyi Goldfinger in Pecs (Hungary) to a Jewish family. The family owns a furniture factory in Pecs and Goldfinger's father Aaron would later open a furniture shop on Király Street in Budapest.

1914-19 Studies of architecture at the Faculty of Engineering of Budapest University.

1930 Joins the Hungarian Communist Party.

1931 Studies at the Lenin Institute in Moscow.

1932-35 Works in the studio of Imre Lajos in Budapest.

1935 Moves to New York. Works in Lajos' New York office and designs the headquarters of the American Communist Party.

1945 Moves back to Hungary.

1955 Flees the communist system and moves back to New York. Attempts to establish his business but has to leave because of McCarthyism.

1956-1961 Lives in Kuwait

1961 Moves to London

1988 Dies in London

Important buildings:

1935 Headquarters of the American Communist Party in New York

1964 Fleming Center in Hong Kong

1968 Bartholdi House on Dalenham Gardens in Hampstead, London

1972 Shepherds Bush Tower, London

(from Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Goldfinger)

Biography of Marcel Neumann

1901 Born as Makár Neumann in Győr, Hungary

1919-25 Studies engineering science (specialization: radio engineering) at the Faculty of Engineering of Budapest University.

1944-57 Flees Hungary and lives in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland.

1949-51 Works at the University of Lund, Sweden.

1955 Becomes Professor at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

1957 Moves to Berlin. Works at the Otto Soms Institute and at the Freie Universität.

1991 Dies in Berlin.

Important inventions:

Noiseless match (1935)

Two-electrode vacuum-tube rectifier (1970)

(from Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Neumann)