

Leon Van Schaik's *'pictures'*

BY NGIOM

What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in the way it does, is its pictorial form.

A picture can depict any reality whose form it has.

A spatial picture can depict anything spatial, a coloured one anything coloured, etc.

A picture cannot, however, depict its pictorial form: it displays it.

A picture represents its subject from a picture outside it. (Its standpoint is its representational form.) That is why a picture represents its subject correctly or incorrectly.

A picture cannot, however, place itself outside its representational form.

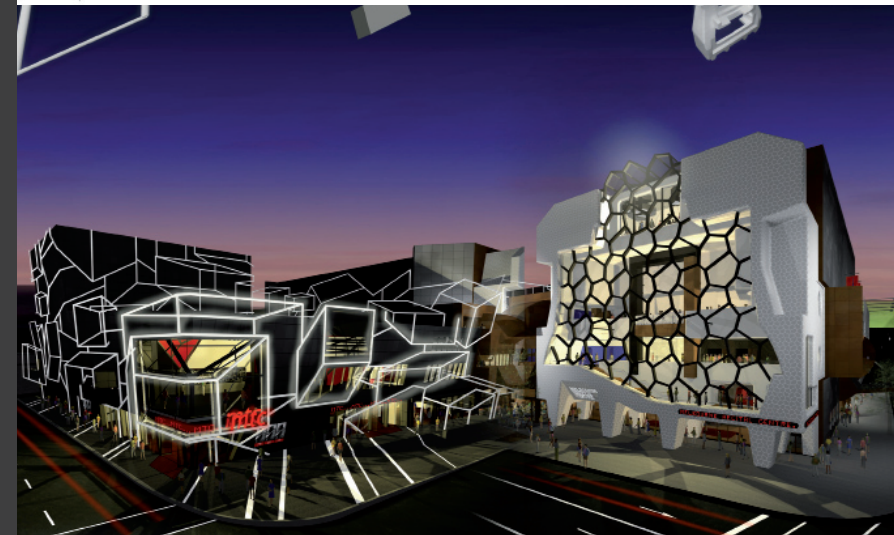
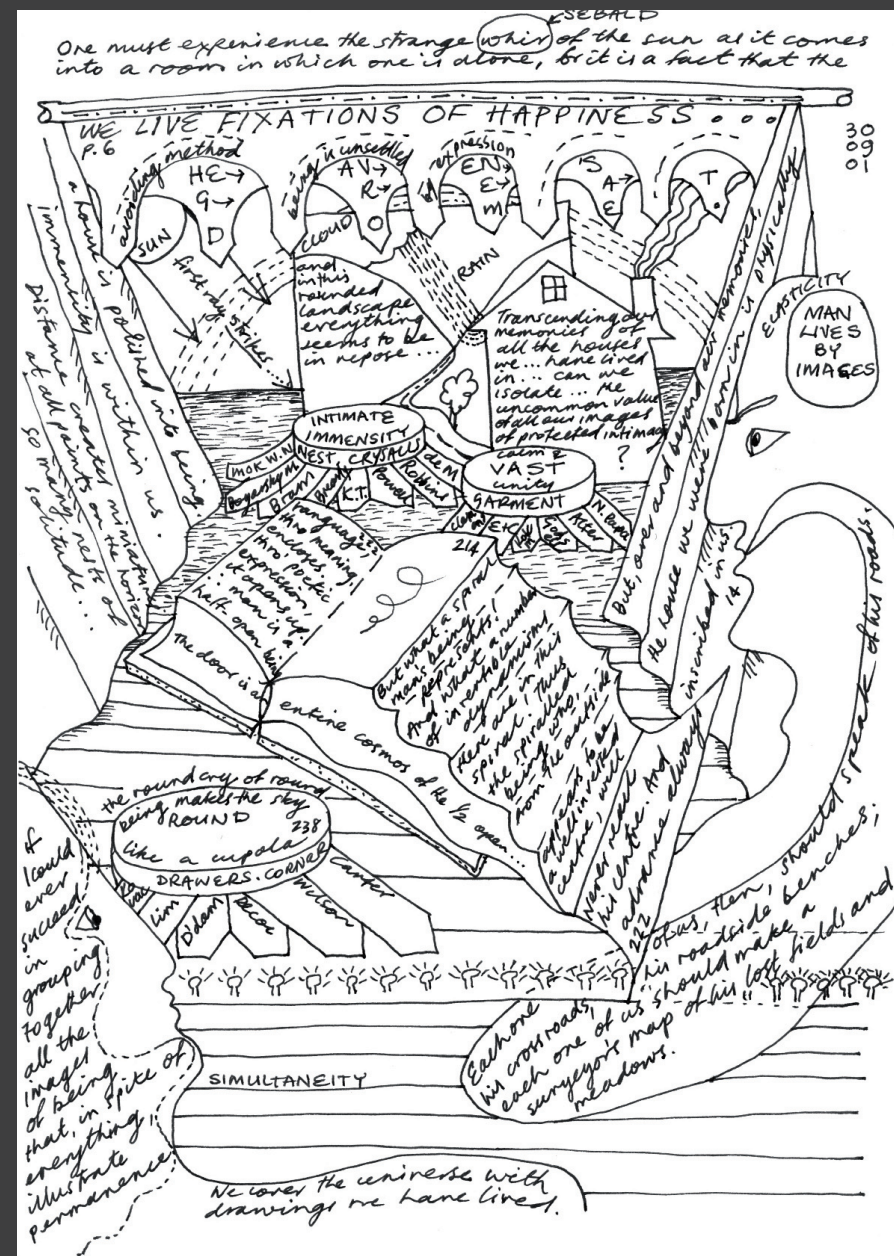
What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. The form of reality.

A picture whose pictorial form is logical form is called a logical picture.

Every picture is at the same time a logical one. (On the other hand, not every picture is, for example, a spatial one.)

Logical picture can depict the world.

(WITTGENSTEIN, 'TRACTATUS': 2.17-2.19)

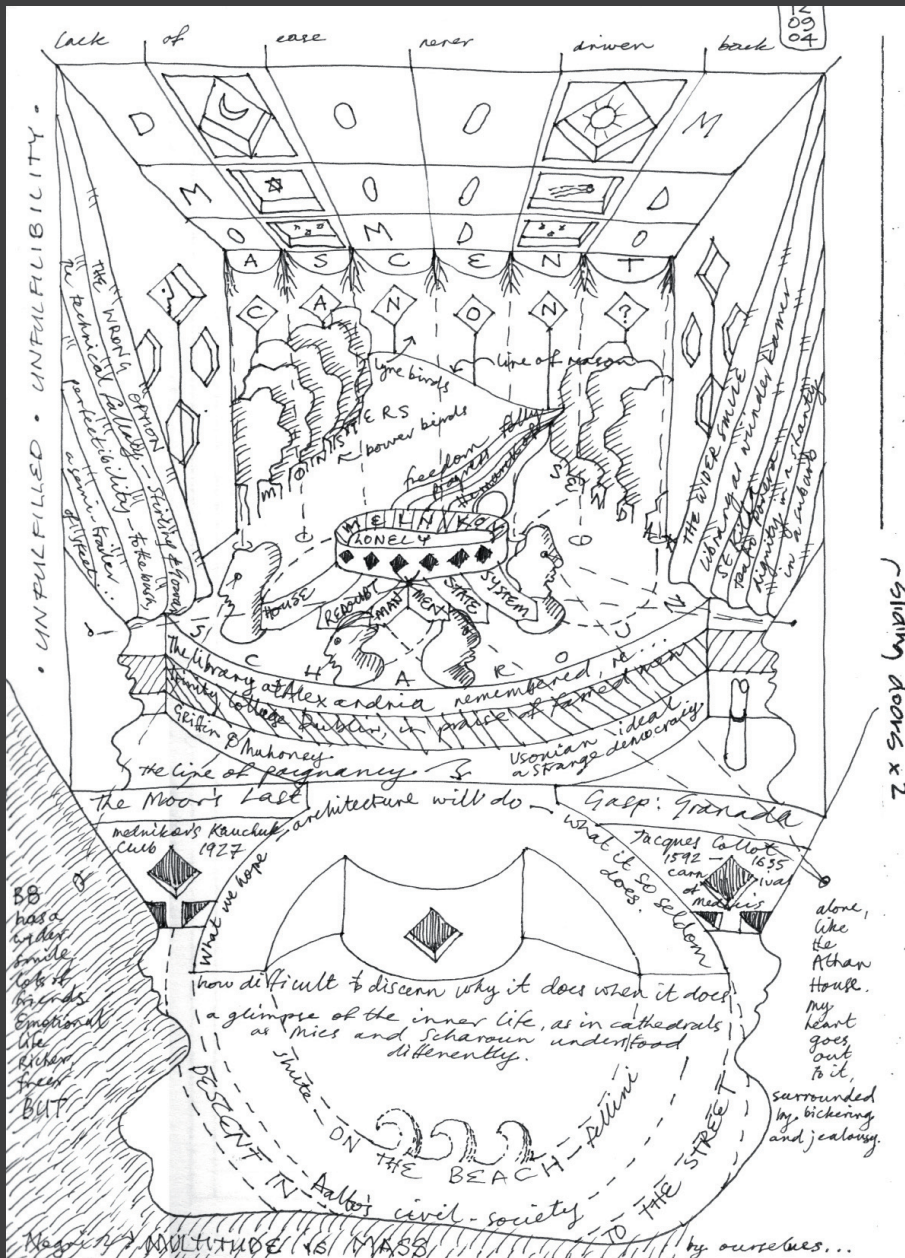


ARM (ASHTON RAGGATT MCDUGALL)

The philosopher, Wittgenstein has many followers but few could grasp his philosophy, as you could only know his sayings through the sense of it: not by analysis. Followers of Wittgenstein know inherently that his sayings contain truths but the exactness of the truths eludes them. Legend goes that after some discussion on the 'Tractatus', which was presented for his PhD examination, Wittgenstein ended the session by clapping his examiners' (Russell and G.E. Moore) shoulders and saying 'Don't worry, I know you'll never understand it'. So, the rest of us are forgiven if the real intentions behind the above caption from 'Tractatus' escapes us. Wittgenstein's sayings about 'picture' are as elusive as the other aspects of his philosophy, but the sense of what Wittgenstein says is iterated in van Schaik's ideograms.

In the introductory address of his exhibition at the WOHA Gallery in Singapore in September 2009, van Schaik explained that his ideograms have their genesis in Wittgenstein's early philosophy, so it must be referenced to Wittgenstein's 'picture'. Van Schaik's ideographs mirror Wittgenstein's 'picture' more closely than anything else we can imagine. Or they are like two faces of the same coin, one of which is a verbal allegory, and the other a pictorial encapsulation of mental moments.

Leon van Schaik's ideograms mystify his colleagues, associates and students as they occasionally appear seemingly from nowhere during a conversation. They are neither explicable nor explainable and they are executed faultlessly within minutes. In the pamphlet text that accompanied the exhibition, Professor Richard Blythe of RMIT suggested to van Schaik that he re-construct an ideograph so that it could be 'easily grasped', but received a retort instead. All the ideographs are one-offs, for a particular situation, for a particular moment in time. No two ideographs are the same and it is sensed that even if van Schaik had attempted, the ideographs could not be repeated.



EDMOND & CORRIGAN

These pictures fascinate us, more so because they emanate from one of the most respected critic in the architectural field and one of its most influential educators. Could the van Schaik's pictures be unpacked at all – at least for the benefit of scant explanation? The hint of the thought behind the man could perhaps be found in a generic ideograph with the words, 'Theatre of Practice', followed by 'Integrated Scholarship' leading on to key phrases which could be found in his book, 'Mastering Architecture' (1995), which was described (by William Lim) as one of the most important guides on architectural education.

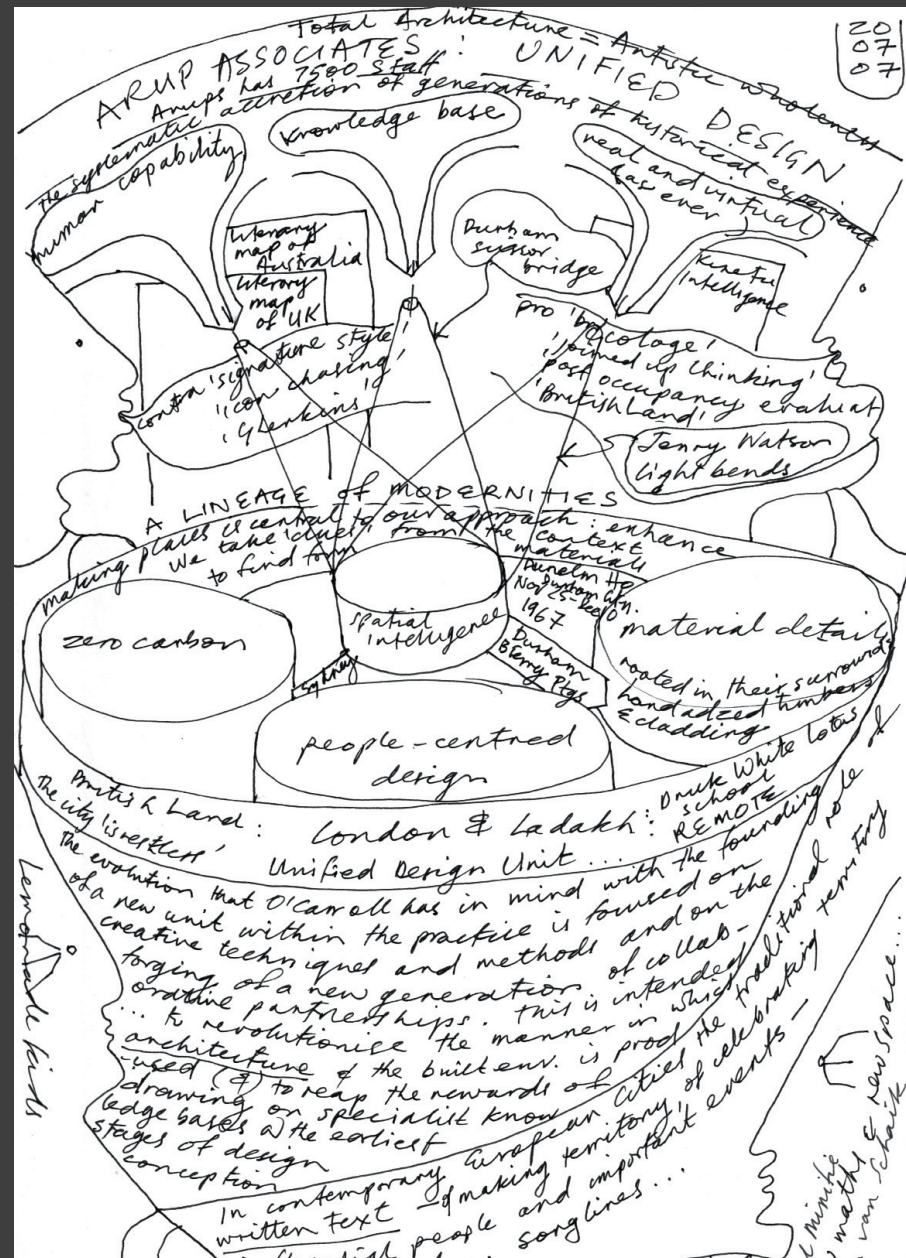
Many of van Schaik's ideographs are mental notes of practices, as exemplified by those that are selected to accompany this essay, that also depict van Schaik's current main preoccupation, which is working with innovative architectural practices to make a practice shift. It is a seemingly impossible task as many of these practices are already acclaimed practices in their own right, and moreover, why would they want to make that shift? Therefore persuading these offices to want to make the shift is itself a seemingly insurmountable task.

The conductor of the discourses on the practices must have a clear view of what went on in individual practices, and in order to provide any kind of guidance the conductor must have a clear view of the proceedings. The habitual ideographs, where practices are seen as events in a theatre seems to be a way of seeing things clearly, even if the method is a private one. The philosopher, Daniel Dennett wrote about the Cartesian Theatre, as a private mental scenario, which is, "our personal, introspective appreciation of the 'unity of consciousness', which impresses on us the distinction between 'in here' and 'out there'.... our conscious minds are located at the termination of all the inbound processes, just before the initiation of all the outbound processes that implement our actions"¹, The ideographs are hence private thoughts made clear for private references and these are thoughts themselves rather than interpretations of thoughts.

Dennett also wrote about Multiple Drafts as a comparison with the Cartesian Theatre, where the brain goes through an editorial process in an observation. He suggested that: "These editorial processes occur over large fractions of a second, during which time various additions, incorporations, emendations, and overwritings of content can occur, in various orders. We don't directly experience what happens in our retinas, in our ears, on the surface of our skin. What we actually experience is a product of many processes of interpretation – editorial processes, in effect. They take in relatively raw and one-sided representations, and yield collated, revised, enhanced representations, and they take place in the streams of activity occurring in various parts of the brain.... This stream of content is only rather like a narrative because of its multiplicity; at any point in time there are multiple 'drafts' of relative fragments at various stages of editing in various places in the brain"². In the Multiple Drafts theory, the brain curates what is being experienced, and there are multiple narratives about the experience, which are constantly changing at different times and places: "Probing this stream at different places and times produces different effects, precipitates different narratives from the subject, If one delays the probe too long (overnight, say), the result is apt to be no narrative at all – or else the narrative that has been digested or 'rationally reconstructed' until it has no integrity"³.

What Multiple Drafts theory infers in consciousness is that the observations we make are valid for only particular time period (fractions of seconds) as our judgements are likely to change as senses change according to the shifting circumstances over every second as the context changes. The mental pictures are constantly under revision and there is no single narrative that can be considered as the canonical version, or the true singular version that can be laid down as true for all time.

This probably explains why van Schaik's pictures are not replicable as these are not even Cartesian Theatres but are frozen moments of the Multiple Drafts, which are not replicable under another circumstance. They are also Wittgenstein's pictures, where the 'picture can depict any reality whose form it has'.



MINIFIE NIXON

