

**HERE THEY SEE,
WHAT THEY ARE**

To publish is to build. They are both the dissemination of content.

Books have structure, schematics, and foundations. Whether one re-assembles found fragments or presents original material, designers can superimpose the skeletal framework of a layout over the final product. They see the foundations, the load-bearing beams, and the passages. Envisioning one's place in a book works in the same way one imagines standing in the entrance foyer of a new skyscraper.

The similarities between the construction of publishing and architecture are perhaps evident, but less obvious are the ways they inform one another, that books are also models for buildings. A work of fiction can function as a detailed blueprint for a narrative space, a walk through a large city is a valid outline for an epic. Lines and pages also act as planes that enclose walkways. The texture of paper is as equally tangible as a granite block. A suitably solid stack of dictionaries could withstand any car wreck.

On one level, films are the architecture of stories, giving life and focus to experience. The built environment hems closer to the vernacular architecture of physical books, though, incorporating the printed structures: tables of contents, footnotes, and indexes. A story is generally bound by a single genre, a book properly arranged can associate a multitude of categories from a collection of tellers—as well as its underlying premise, context, and motives.

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We sat on the sofa, in a dimly lit corner. She had her laptop on, vaguely working while we spoke, while I rocked my computer back and forth on my leg, upright.

“You seem to be under a lot of pressure,” I said. “How soon is it due?”

“Last week, really. I’ve arranged a few extensions but the printer says they needed the files already to meet the publisher’s launch date. The thing is—and I know we have a copy editor—but I can’t help reading and editing the texts as I lay it all out. It’s distracting me from completing the design, but I can’t let go that the content is too integral to the book for me to ignore all these silly errors.”

*There was plenty of noise in the room.
Forced air coming from the espresso
machine, at least five parallel conversations
which even at normal tones still combined
into a mild roar. The rattle of coins merged
with phone notifications and a infant's wail.*

*After a moment I said, "I wonder
what it would be like to work in an
office, like our grandparents did."*

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1. *what should we do for dinner*

2. *can you get vegetables for a salad?*

2. *you got a letter today*

2. *looks important*

1. *from the US?*

2. *yeah Denver is the return address*

1. *take a photo and send it to me*

1. *probably the quote from the engineer. I had to ask a specialist for anchoring the tower, the local firm didn't give me confidence*

2. (photo)

2. looks expensive

1. is the work progressing well?

2. better than earlier. it seemed to be missing a dialogue to join the parts together. but it's much better now.

2. perhaps was too analytical

1. what do you mean? the diagrams?

2. well it's like the story about the science class

2. *when students dissect a frog, no one's that interested and the frog dies*

1. *sounds bleak*

2. *ah it's not so bad. I'll show you when you're back*

1. *so, beets, greens, and carrots?*

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Late that afternoon I was on the building site in the pissing rain, faced with the enormous concrete abscess where I was meant to intervene. Several years had passed and the expectations were high; this was largely of my own doing. I always manage to talk a fantastic game but remain aware of my acute limitations toward meeting my lofty statements.

Dripping wet, miserable, and over-caffeinated, I passively scanned the horizon for a joke. Any joke. In the absence of a concept, humour would suffice. Doesn't it for everyone?

A stone middle finger perhaps, sculpted to resemble the relic of Emperor Constantine. Awful. I moved toward the idling digger for warmth.

At that instant my glasses fogged over completely. Vision impaired, my mind began to slip. I imagined myself sitting in a comfortable leather chair, in a warm room with an open fireplace. The room is surrounded on three sides with glass, the other side a bookshelf impossible to see the top of. There was a ladder on rails, like you would see in ancient university libraries. Facing these shelves, their payload sharpened and could read the spines of the equally sized books. These all belonged together, volumes of the same story. It was not my story.

On the train back home I scribbled some notes as usual, half-ideas and titles I'd probably shove into a sketchbook and not see again anytime soon. After writing, my work inspiration was indistinguishable from itemized lists of overdue bills to pay and daily tasks still to do. Each page did a lot more to illustrate the activity of my mind on a given day rather than provide important information at a quick glance. There was a series of numbers next to a vaguely axonometric doodle, captioned by a poorly recalled verse from an Oliver Stone film. 'You, people see what they want. Me, they see what they are.'

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Tired after a long, contentious dinner conversation, she sat down and opened the file for a preview.

I was confused. “Are you sure about this?” I said. In scanning it over, there didn’t seem to be a thematic cause for the origin or direction of the book’s information. The sketches and photos were ordered in a manner I hadn’t conceived.

Progressing steadily, at a measured pace, each chapter then built on the last. After a minute, it hit me at once that her understanding of space was far stronger than my own. Somehow, she'd managed to elucidate in the flow of one hundred pages what I could not via countless notebooks, research, and meetings. It was as if rounding a corner, then convening toward a monumental heap, aggregated and solidified like conveyors of sediment culled from a fetid pond.

“What now?”

“We get started.”

JL Murtaugh