

**Unfolding  
Architecture**

*i*

Gordon, a quiet man dressed in grey, was standing on a street corner in the city where he lived, and for two hours he had been standing, looking up at a skyscraper. His neck ached, but he was unable to look away because he couldn't be sure, never mind understand, whether the top right corner of the building was loose.

Loose is not used here to describe a crumbling or derelict building. It was just as it sounds. Gordon watched the corner of the building as it flapped in the breeze.



(At this point Gordon did not know that this was by no means the only instance of un-doing. Buildings all over the city were coming apart at the joins.)

*ii*

Another day, later that week, he walked past the tower block again to find that he was able to see the whole of the interior from where he stood. But he was not, as he had thought, looking through newly installed glass, there was simply no longer a wall. The building had opened. Underneath his feet he saw bricks from the tower spread like a road. The wall had come quietly free of the other walls and had spread itself down on the ground.



It was then that it occurred to him, the building was not falling apart, it was unfolding.





*iii*

Gordon did not tell anyone what he believed, of course, since he would likely be thought senile. But over the next few weeks he saw signs of this unfolding all over the city. Walls peeled away from the structures of buildings. The internal structures of buildings also unfolded and became horizontal lines like they had once been on the surface of the paper used to plan them.

He thought of origami, the folding and unfolding required to create structure and volume from a single sheet of paper. He knew that it was sometimes necessary to make folds that would then be unfolded to facilitate the final shape in origami. He tried to conceive of some way the unfolding could lead to re-folding, reforming, but he knew that it could not.

*iv*

One day he came across an open space in the city with which he was not familiar. A weariness overcame him when, from the framed pictures that lay firmly fixed to the floor, he was able to identify the ground as having recently been a small house. This house was now merely a horizontal plane, an unfold. It was only then that Gordon had a real insight into the vast space held inside the buildings of this city, and the implications this held if it all unfolded.

v

As it turned out there was a logic to the unfolding; the larger buildings generally took longer to unfold because they contained more joins. Once the smaller buildings had unfolded, the larger ones eventually covered them. The stacks and mounds under the final layers of the unfolded city became the shallow contours of a new landscape.

vi

The people of the city felt a desperate need to defend their own territories. The process of unfolding was only marginally delayed by their valiant efforts to staple, glue, nail and tack their architecture back together. But these efforts were ultimately futile; the unfolding was unstoppable.

Gordon was equally distressed by the thought of his own home succumbing to this terrible phenomenon.

He had been working on his house for more than a week, putting preventative measures in place, when the unfolding began.



*vii*

So what became of the interior of his home? As he had seen in the instance of the small house, his own pictures and mirrors that once hung upon the walls were now embedded into the floor. The glass of the windows and doors allowed glimpses into the many layers of the city deep below, a mass of walls and openings slowly being compressed into a solid ground. Some doors on the top layers could still be opened, often leading to small caves below. As he collected the most precious of his belongings Gordon caught glimpses of himself in the mirrors and glass of his old house.





*viii*

In some cases furniture sat where it always had, functional and intact, but completely exposed. It was as if the furniture was intended for a set in a play. The whole city had become a kind of open stage, vulnerable and accessible. Any notion of privacy was destroyed as each person's interior space was revealed.

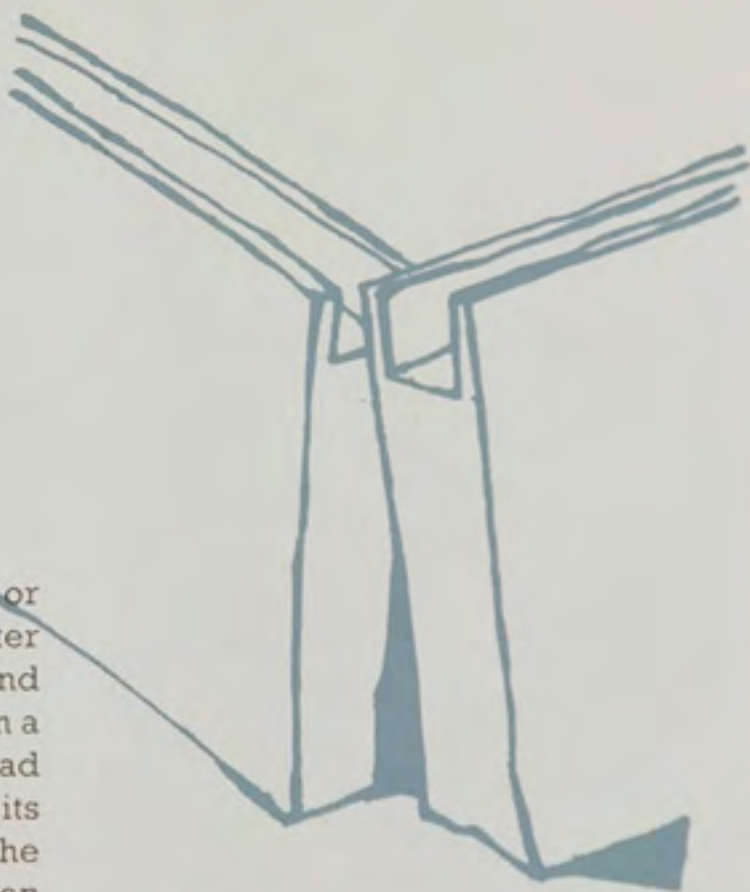


*ix*

At first people stayed upon the sites of their former homes, but soon left after the unfolding of the walls meant they were without shelter. They realised that what was left was only where their houses once stood, for they carried away their homes inside of them.

*x*

Life went on, but without safe or solid shelter. Precarious shelter could be found in the pits and niches that had formed between a folded building and one that had met some kind of prop during its slow collapse. The force of the unfolding, however, had proven itself to be insurmountable and there was little doubt that even these exposed shelters would soon be joining their horizontal neighbours. For this reason most citizens fled.



*xi*

Some buildings were made of such fine materials that upon unfolding the wind caught hold of them and they were blown away.

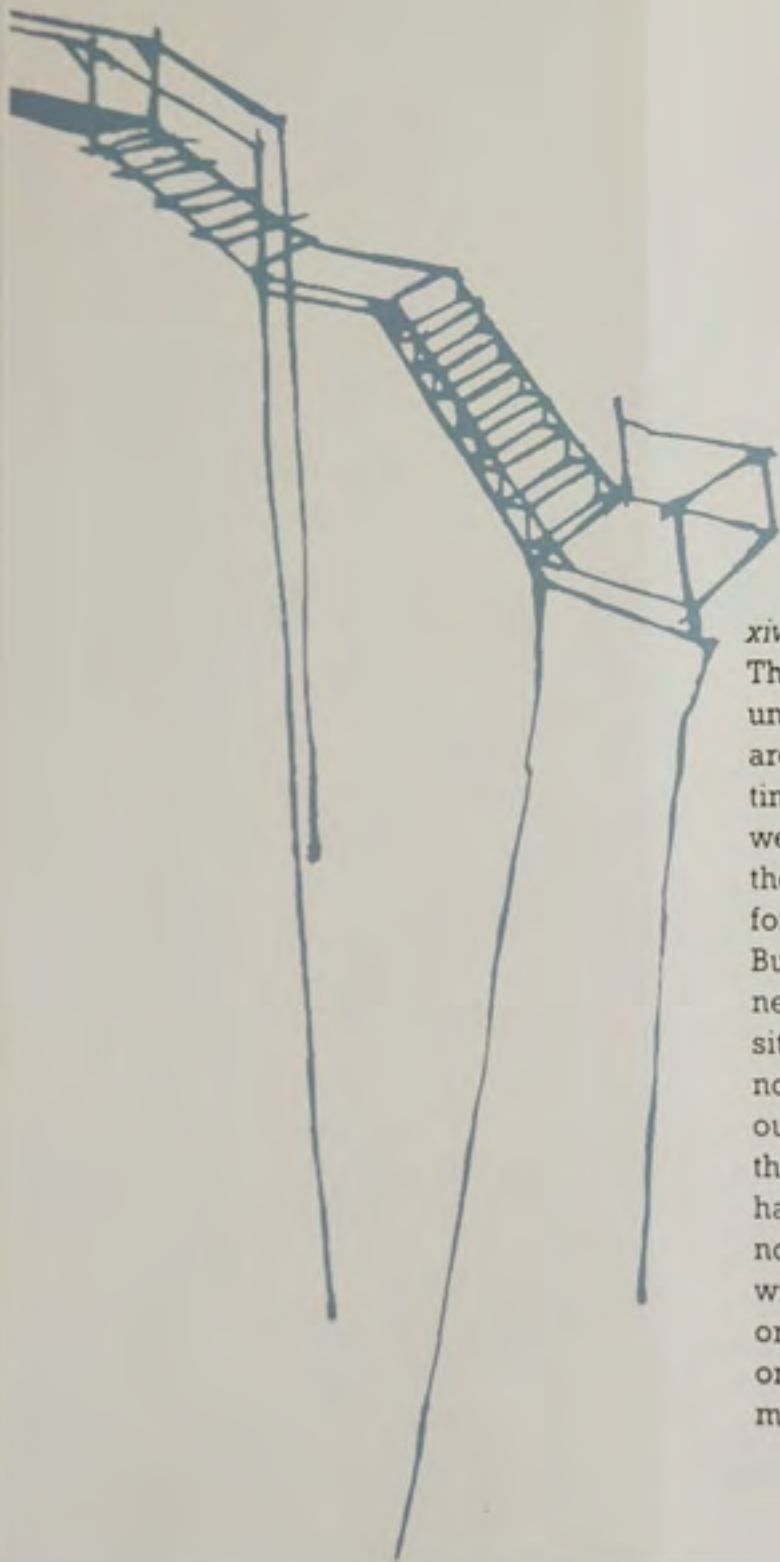


*xii*

The cathedral, being considerably older than most of the other buildings, was an exception to the rules of scale and it deteriorated rapidly. The dome of the cathedral was also, unexpectedly, an exception to the rules of (un) folding. Rather than opening out at the joins, its huge dome unpeeled like the skin of a baked onion. Then the layers eased apart from one another. Each section of each layer gently dropped away and then the bricks underneath unfurled themselves in a long snaking ribbon and fell softly to the ground. All of this debris formed a small but intricately decorated hillock. The interior of the dome was now the exterior and its gold leaf blazed in  
the sun.

*xiii*

The buttresses of the cathedral, on the other hand, were so dense that they unfolded much more slowly than the rest of the building. As a result they drooped until they leant on each other like a group of drunken friends. They provided some refuge from the elements, still being semi-vertical, and became the favourite place to congregate for the few who remained. People referred to them as the lean-tos. The use of this phrase reminded Gordon of the ambition these people would once have had for their own homes. Extending was usually the logical progression for someone expanding their own  
small empire.



xiv

The staircases of the city had unfolded like the rest of the architecture. Their concertina forms spread until they were flat tracks that hugged the ground. They were transformed; they became roads. But what use were roads with neither destination or necessity? There were no landmarks nor termini left in the city, only outwith the city. There was also the question of what this place had become. Surely it could not be called a city any longer without the requisite cathedral or university and with little or no population? It was now merely a site, the site where the city once stood.



*xv*

This site became a place of despair and disturbance, but unexpectedly, this also left room for the very opposite: hope and potential. The city had returned to a landscape, not an Arcadian vision of verdant pastures - though small patches of grass had begun to grow over the new ground - but an open plain, full of possibility.

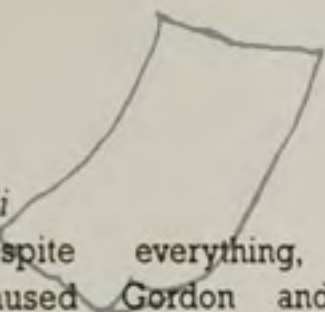


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Because of the manner in which the buildings had become joined to the ground, there were few building materials available. Consequently, any shelters that had been constructed were made almost entirely of furniture. Chairs were stacked and bound to form a kind of scaffolding upon which tables and cupboards could be propped to keep out the rain. What once surrounded and went above now lay below. The exteriors of people's homes were now constructed entirely of the interiors.



*xvii*



Despite everything, this amused Gordon and he thought back to those first few days when the entire city was unfolded. Then there had been no inside. But without inside, he thought, could outside exist? For outside to exist surely it was wholly dependent on there being its other: the inside. The outside to him had always been a kind of non-place that could never be fully occupied; it was always some distance away. It was no wonder then that he felt unease in the non-place of the site where the city once stood: he had been forced into an outside without antidote.

*xviii*

With his own home unfolded like the rest (it had formed part of the new tabular plain ) Gordon realised that all he was able to do now was to contribute to the re-making.

He picked up an old newspaper that he had brought to the small shelter where he now lived and rolled it into a cylinder. And it was clear to him that in this cylinder there lay the beginnings of a tower.

For Lesley the librarian and  
lover of books.

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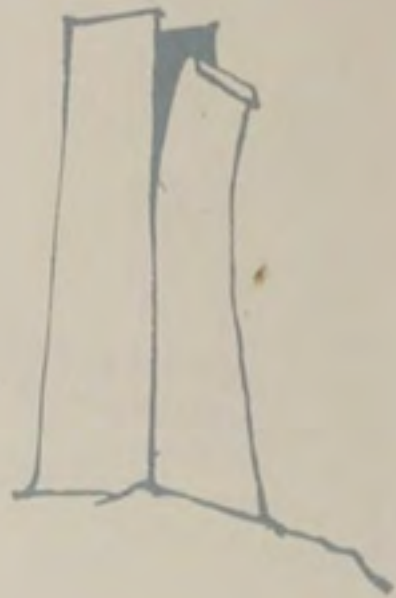






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