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by Arleen Dewell for GAMSWEN





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### Welcome to Dozen Lectures!

This blog will feature collection of dozen articles held under GAMSWEN project lectures for the Future Design students in the University of Greenwich between 11th January and 28th March 2012.

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## Dozen Lectures

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## Introduction

1<sup>st</sup> Lecture 11.01.2012

First I guess I have to introduce you GAWSWEN and the idea behind it.

Gamswen is a word entirely made up by Dr Mark Ingham and spells news mag vice versa. Also during Gamswen course I will produce a collection of dozen articles varying in size, written by me and based on the lectures that run alongside with the course.

During the very first GAMSWEN introduction lecture Dr Mark Ingham asked us to think about our learning methods, especially what is the best way to learn? We tend to learn by doing, looking, copying, listening, experimenting etc. the list can be endless and every individual can find suitable ways to learn.

Also there was an introduction to the GAMSWEN brief, which consists of twelve sessions, part of it is a lecture and then the other part of it is our way to record and document it, by producing a final piece of work chosen individually. It can be: a blog, an online mag, a book, a film etc.

Lectures will be on various subjects and there should be a 300 word article written about each lecture, or about 1500 words feature article. The article should be also written in a manner of investigative journalism and trying to see things more in depth than just a simple description of matters.

Also part of the course/ project is to follow Gamswen twitter page and be digitally interactive, and understand the responsibility we have over our online output when using social media.

So for me the idea of creating an online blog seems the most appealing and that is how I will try to realise this project.

**So hopefully you will enjoy reading my articles!**

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## Dozen Lectures

### Vaughan Oliver

Very first Gamswen kick off lecture was held by Vaughan Oliver.

To tell the truth I was not familiar with his work, so a quick research afterwards and I was aware that this Sedgefield, County Durham Newcastle born designer, is a bit of a household name/ legend when it comes to record sleeve design. So I was looking forward to the lecture and a chance to see in person a successful world known graphic designer.

Vaughan Oliver comes across as a very relaxed public speaker, his rolling style of speech and County Durham accent was rather entertaining for an untrained ear like mine, but after a minute it got easier and the images reflecting from the lecture hall screen started to speak for themselves.

It was immediately obvious that before us stood a man who has bags of experience and few good stories to tell along his extensive career and collaborations, ranging from before mentioned record sleeves to packaging and to branding.

Oliver has amassed an impressive portfolio of work since the 1970's after finishing college in this post-punk era and started to freelance for a record company.

In his words, "Music was not about to sell but to allow good music, to be out there."

But also Oliver couldn't sum up enough the meaning of inspiration and for him it was the music itself what created that influential connection, and meaning with the design. Also as a designer he urged us to find your own path, and voice, and foremost to be innovative.

I can relate to that as a designer one needs that inspirational platform to be able to create something meaningful and unique. I also think that teamwork and in this case collaborations have even more meaning to the design. Bouncing off ideas and uniting the skills and knowledge from different sources for the best result in graphic design work. At the end no man is an island and we all are influenced by work that is out there, one way or another artistically.

About his collaborations with other artists/ designers he mentions him taking the role of somebody who pushes everyone to the right direction with his eye for editing, or could it even be like he is a bit of a stylist with the great vision of the end product.

It was interesting to hear how his mind works and how his signature style of these otherworldly images and use of text as image has evolved.

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### Neil Spiller – Communicating Vessels



**Neil Spiller** presented to us a surrealist lecture and to me it was my very first experience of that sort. Neil Spiller has been a very busy man with a very long project. He has been creating 250 drawings over dozen years of this mythical island project called, "Communicating Vessels." A place that exists somewhere in his childhood memories and locations, but then again does not when considering its contents, like Brazilian Bush – a hairy structure according to Spiller, and a soft machinery, filled with holy gasoline.

This place is fully created by Neil Spiller and holds massive references to a plethora of surrealists of our time, like Dalí, Duchamp and Dada Baroness to name a few.

Through out the lecture Dean, School of Architecture, Design & Construction at the University of Greenwich, Professor of Architecture and Digital Theory, Founding Director of the Advanced Virtual and Technological Architecture Research Group (AVATAR) and a practising architect partake of such a multitude of name dropping that I truly got confused what's what and when he is, or is not talking about his own project. I do admire his creative strike to go on and on, to create his own imaginary world with according structures and creatures, absolutely overflowing with sexual references.

During the lecture Neil Spiller said, "Imagination is a wonderful thing, sometimes it can scare people."

And I do respect that point of view about imagination, and artists who keep on producing art despite of this primary reaction to something the receiving audience might not understand.

I just couldn't help but this reminded me of an exhibition I had seen by Scottish artist Charles Avery, who like Spiller has pretty much spent the last decade creating a fantastical island and its inhabitants, the Islanders. And I guess like Spiller even he took some inspiration from his childhood on the Inner Hebrides.

Avery on the other hand has taken the project a notch higher and has created a separate topography and an according map to his community, who all have a background story connected to this world of theirs. Most of his work consists of drawings, but there are also sculptures, household artifacts and even taxidermy.

But one streak that is common to both of these men is that they have been brave enough to play gods and have obviously produced something of an interest to the audience, perhaps like a grown up version of a fairytale or a vision into what could have happened if god would have had a day off.

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### Nic Clear

#### Architecture and Animation

Nic Clear starts his lecture by introducing himself as the Course Director of Bartlett School of Architecture. He runs "Unit 15", a postgraduate design unit, which uses film, animation and motion graphics. He also says that, drawing is so instrumental to architecture. Architecture and drawing are so connected to each other, that you couldn't have one without the other. But so far drawings are representations of flat plane and even though they are beautiful to look at, they do not bring designs to life.

*"The Architecture of the Near Future will utilise design skills developed by the current generation of young architects that allow migration across a range of different disciplines, young designers are no longer defined by the names of their courses or their jobs but by the software they inhabit."*

This quote is taken from Manifesto by Nic Clear, and I think it does sum up some of the message he tries to get across. As with his students as well he encourages them to use film, to represent their work.

And with the help of CGI and especially 3D effects, there are vast opportunities for architects to represent their work in different spatial levels. Especially programs like After Effects, skills in editing, constructing the scenes and camera work, does help architects do represent their work in more believable way. Augmented virtual reality is giving architecture new aspects of development.

He also encourages his students to muck about with programs to learn them and have fun with them, rather than teach programs which he points put can end so that all the students create the same type of projects. It is about finding the important techniques to each individual and then experimenting with that. He introduces to us projects and films made by his students that he is very enthusiastic about. Encouraging his students to put their work n their blogs etc to have their work up in the digital platform.

And as last student projects he shows us the well accoladed film, The Robots of Brixton by Kibwe Tavares. Which is set in the near future where Brixton has become a place for robots, who are being marginalised, and there is also a riot in process that echoes the riots back in 1981, or even more the riots of last summer.

And I would like to finish this with a quote from his Manifesto piece.

*"The Architecture Of The Near Future is already with us, though many people do not get realise this. The ground has already shifted, the certainties that were once taken for granted have, to use Marx's phrase, melted into air, we have entered a state of global flux, however it will take some time for the world we think we are living in, to be the same as the world we are actually living in."*

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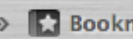
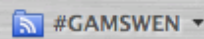
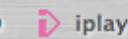
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## Stacey Pitsillides

Digital Death- Stacey Pitsillides

Stacey Pitsillides raises an interesting question during her lecture, what happens to our data after we die? She has been researching and having exhibitions about this topic for four years. And it truly is a matter we should consider more carefully, now days when we are so common in sharing our life and thoughts online in Facebook or Youtube to name a few outlets for our digital life.

And if not to talk about digital death only, then when thinking about ones identity in real and digital life. Are we having the same identity and personality in both ?

I do find it intriguing as well, as now days we live our lives without even realising in two parallel worlds, as in the real world and the other online, the digital world. We manage so much online that one would ask even if the real world has become a bit obsolete.

Well if not obsolete then I do find that, we do have a slightly different kind of existence to ourselves digitally than we have probably in real life. Not to mention the Avatar platform of gaming where one can create a persona accustomed to their tastes and communicate through them in a special like minded community.

Or the most common way of leading a life is to have a blog, which is like an online diary where people can be as open or private as they wish in terms of sharing information about themselves. And another interesting phenomena, when talking about blogs is the followers that blog writes amass and perhaps a certain kind of celebrity status that it can evolve into. Not to mention how marketing and capitalism has tweaked the opportunities involved in an online blogosphere.

But returning to the digital issue passing away, I find the story I read in New York Times involving Mac Tonnies, a blogger and writer who passed away at the young age of 34 of cardiac arrest. He had amassed through his digital presence of blogging many web friends, some he had never even physically met but kept in contact with over the year by e-mail or other digital ways. So his sudden death came as a surprise to many of them and they wanted to keep his memory alive via another blog, as a digital memory stone.

So when in the past we might have looked at the photographs of our beloved ones or read their letters or even diaries, we now can in best case scenarios have access to their digital persona and keep it alive, even after they are now more.

And also this new parallel life we all are leading will be creating more need for solutions that certain new type of companies are dealing with, when obtaining ones passwords or access to digital presence might be needed or if we need to leave directives around for what were to happen to our digital presence if we were to pass away.

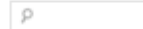
But this is still agenda is still taking small steps but there is definitely need to understand where we stand in our presence in the digital world.

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### Rachel Armstrong



#### Rachel Armstrong – Evolved not Made

Rachel Armstrong introduces herself as having an interest in biology and not being an architect though she is here to talk about her work in living architecture, or Bio Architecture in another words.

*Her research investigates a new approach to building materials called 'living architecture,' that suggests it is possible for our buildings to share some of the properties of living systems.* She is also a Senior TED Fellow and a speaker, TED being a non-profit organisation for bringing together people from Technology, Entertainment and Design by holding conferences to spread innovative ideas and by helping people connect with each other. Also an

interesting piece of information about TED organisation is that it will be featured this summer in the film Prometheus by Ridley Scott, as a prequel to his well know Alien film. So in this film we can all watch a vision of a TED talk from the future circa 2023! By the words of screenwriter Damon Lindelof :” In really, really good science fiction the line between the science and the fiction is blurry.”

Dr R. Armstrong is actually medically trained and used to work in leprosy hospital in India. And that's also the way she got interested in the human and science connection trying to find help for leprosy patients. By seeing through her practise how science and finding solutions through machinery, manipulating certain assemblages that could help the ailing body of a leprosy patient. Also she does share with us her enthusiasm of synthetic biology, but then also raises the question how do we make things? Is it possible that things don't just evolve but there is also a possibility to engineer things?

She showed us a clip of what seemed to be moving cells in liquid, and actually later came to find out that they were protocells reacting in oil and water, reacting to one and other, not like a living cell would with DNA but still synthetically forming an alliance so to speak. And actually Dr. R. Armstrong has got another video clip available online of one of her TED talks where she lectures about creating carbon negative architecture as opposed to carbon zero buildings that are being built from recycled elements, but still don't fully address the building industry's way of contribution to lowering emissions. So she is suggesting that this form of protocell chemistry in oil and water could give us a new technology, to produce a solid material with biological properties that could be engineered in to architectural needs.

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Here Dr. R. Armstrong explains for Warwick Knowledge Centre article about her aforementioned project: "An example of one kind of Living Technology is a smart paint that can trap carbon dioxide of the surface of our buildings and convert the gas into a solid substance like limestone. The idea is to form a protective layer or 'shell' around our homes that would have an additional knock on benefit of mopping up the carbon dioxide and binding it in a 'paint' but we would also burn less fossil fuel to heat our better insulated homes."

Another of her projects is in short about to keep Venice from sinking, a city that has been built on the most harshest of surroundings. In the same article she continues: "The greatly expanded area over which the weight of the city was spread would help attenuate the city from sinking. The longevity of the historic city would be extended by literally equipping it with the ability to engage in a struggle for survival against the elements by giving it a technology that conferred life-like properties on it. Additionally the protocell technology would provide other important benefits such as, carbon dioxide fixation, adsorption of pollutants, providing new niches for the local marine ecology and which are symbiotic with and beneficial to established environmental systems."

So indeed there are ways to create architectural structures that are evolving according to needs of their surroundings.

But coming back to her initial lecture during Gamswen course she does give a brief overview of western ways of resolving our surroundings and, our ways of what has made sense to us at the time of how to understand our world. From ancient Greeks philosopher understanding that universe has got an order that can be rationalized and ultimately we as humans can bestow order in the world. Moving on to the Middle Ages, when superstitious mindset overtook the Greek rationality, towards the enlightenment when the liked of Galileo and Newton came to see that things can be measured mathematically or the Christian ideas of identity and science.

But are things in our life predetermined? Does also the domination and savagery of human species over its surroundings, and what kind of outcomes our actions will have in the future? And the bottom line seems to be the over simplification of our surroundings, which sometimes can't be applied to the natural world.

And what Dr. R. Armstrong seems to suggest that just like in Surrealism, for example we can't oversimplify life and that we need to tap into finding new methods for seeing the complexity of things.

What the future holds is a challenge the humanity to finding new humane ways of living in this planet.

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### Interlude – What have I learned so far?

An Interlude lecture given By Dr Mark Ingham to look back at what has taken place during out Gamswen lectures and also what will still to be. And also to evaluate our own methods of working with new information, and how to turn that into interesting articles.

Well I don't know if I have always understood all lectures but I can still feel the benefits of these different speakers introducing their ideas to us students. There have been some truly bizarre lectures, like Neil Spiller's where I felt a bit of an outsider to his vision. Where as Dr. Rachel Armstrong's lecture was very intriguing and thought provoking about Living Architecture.

Stacey Pitsillades did present her ideas, even though tit was not really a full length lecture, about Digital Death.

So from now on I am looking forward what will be next on the GAMSWEN lecture menu.

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## Dozen Lectures

### Manifesto

I always thought that to write a manifesto it has to be politically inclined, like the The Communist Manifesto coined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, written in 1848 it is still seen as one of the most influential socio-political publications. Or more artistically inclined goals and rules for film making, like Dogme 95- The Vow of Chastity by Danish filmmakers Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. Their aim was to bring back the simplicity, purity and lack of overproduction in film making.

Well I have to say when watching Mark Ingham lecture about manifestos and then looking into to the subject, I actually found the idea to write your own personal manifesto rather titillating. The word is derived from Italian word *manifestare* from Latin word *manifestus* as to "make public".

I guess it could be like having your own declaration of your personal views about life or work, certain goals and rules that matter to you. Just simply written down on a piece of paper where one is now and what one wants to achieve, because ultimately we all do want to achieve something. And as the only constant in life is change, so can the manifesto change and evolve with us.

So as a design student but also as a human being I wanted to try to coin my own manifesto, that most likely will keep on developing with me.

For me procrastination does seem to be a bit of an issue, that hinders me to get on with things, and that sort of popped on my list almost immediately. I still also wan't to marvel at life and never get too old to do that. I think it is important not to know it all, but to rather find new things that interest you and inspire you. I also have a tendency to be overcritical of myself, and my achievements sometimes, so I need to also remind myself not to be too harsh to myself. And as I was going on, I also felt the need to add some bits of lyrics of two very different songs, from two very different artists, that I listened to at also very different time in my life.

Astrud Gilberto sings in her song Stay about the importance of making sure that we get

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Astrud Gilberto sings in her song Stay about the importance of making sure that we get everything out of life, even if it has to mean that we fake it sometimes until it comes true. And I think there is some true to that, sometimes I feel like I can trick my mind to believe that, and it can then happen.

And another artist is Finnish rapper called Rusadof, whose prose does resonate with me and his lyrics in Onkki Doukki translate simply to " even though there are lots of things bit wrong, but I will always know that everything will end up being OK".

MARVEL life LIKE o CHILD  
I want to get on with things in my life-> **RIGHT AWAY**  
Do **NOT** give in to  
**PROCRASTINATION**

For **TIME** is running  
take **everything** **LIFE**  
can bring you  
**Y** know its **TRUE**  
o **SO TAKE IT**  
**U** even **FAKE IT** 'til it  
c o m e s **T R U E**

**STOP** STAGNATING  
& gathering **MOSS**

vaikka meno ei aina oo  
min **DOUPPII** kaikki tulee  
menne Vie!

**OUKKI DOUKKI**

DONT BE TOO HARSH ON YOURSELF  
TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF  
& LOOK AFTER OTHERS  
YOU CARE ABOUT

be **INSPIRED**  
be **UNIQUE**  
be **RESOURCEFUL**  
be **INQUISITIVE**  
be **BRAVE**  
be **FEARLESS**

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## Animated Robotics



During our 9<sup>th</sup> lecture Mark Ingham introduced us briefly to the history of animation and also we watched a short animation called the Robots of Brixton by Kibwe Tavares. And as the lecture was mainly about robots in animation, he suggested us to write about our favourite animated robot if there was such.

Well to think of it for me it sounded like a thrilling option and a quick memory scan afterwards I remembered an animation that could as well have been something of a first connection with outerspace mystery and encounter with robots, but not just any kind of robots

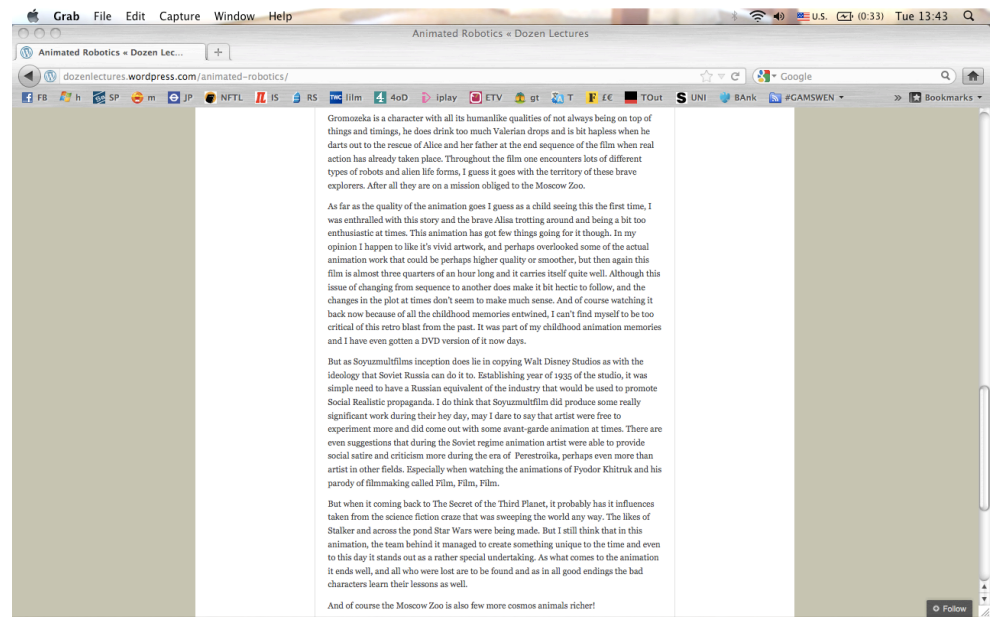
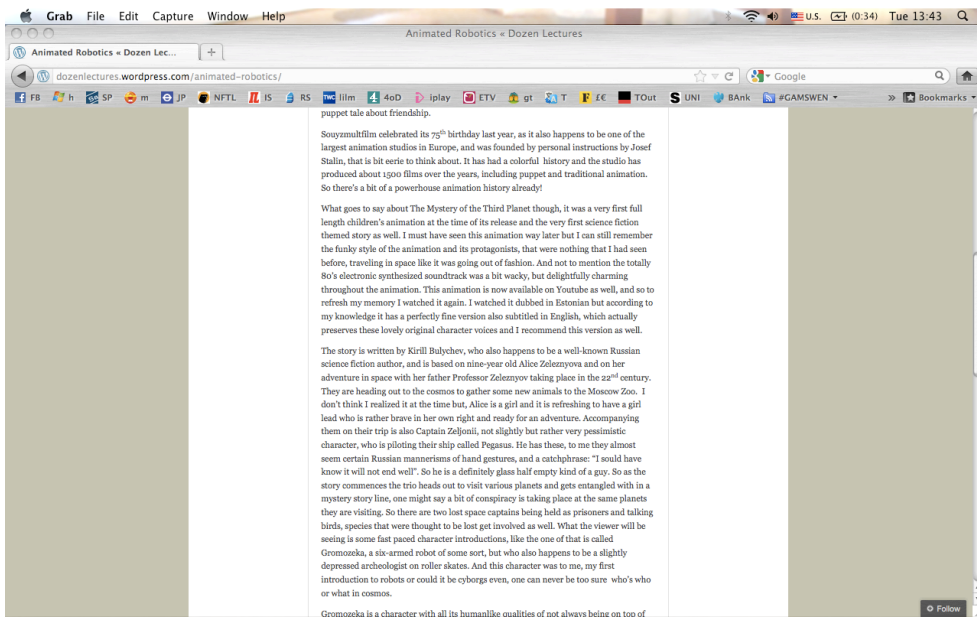
more like robots in cosmos.

Well I am talking about Russian cartoon and particularly Taina tretei palnety aka The Mystery of the Third Planet, released in 1981 in the Soviet Union by Soyuzmultfilm and directed by Roman Kachanov, the famous director of Cheburashka- heart warming puppet tale about friendship.



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## Simon Herron

Simon Herron is an architect who springs from a great architectural lineage, his father Ron Herron , a man behind the avant garde architecture group Archigram, but more about it later, can add a certain expectancy of exceeding edpecially in one is in the same field of profeccion.

So it is rather curious how Simon Herron started his lecture by mentioning his baggage and his dysfunctional family, and in this case these factors also seemed to have been something to draw inspiration from.

I suppose everyone can relate to the notion of baggage, and in this case he is referring more to the figurative meaning of past experiences or even long-held ideas that can be seen as impediments or perhaps platform for inspiration. But in anycase we haul that baggage from past to present with us and on to the future more or less.

And to Herron these perhaps are his collages. He continues to demonstrate how he might combine cut out images and mixed media in his projects.

He gives a glimpse into how collages were done before the digital era, groups like the Constructivists have created some impressive work that is still relevant by using simple and at times limited techniques. And as I promised more about a Archicram. When conducting my own research I found out that the group of six men behind the magazine that was established in 1961 and was in production until 1974. During the 1960's historically in the world progressive times were taking place socially and politically. The space age was opening new horizons, the invention of contraceptive pill and avant garde ideas stirring up the new wave in the stagnant waters in existing cultural structures. Archigram was a manifesto to call out radical change in predominant architecture but it managed to epitomize innovative collages of this new direction the group had envisioned.

Rather exiting part was also a chance to see how technology now days has made it possible to explore this seminal magazine online by [The Archigram Archival Project \(AAP\)](#). The groups magazine visual and especially thinking of the equipment and techniques used back then makes it still look relevant. The graphics and type have been used in experimentally and it was real fun to go through these vast and informative archive.

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Rather exiting part was also a chance to see how technology now days has made it possible to explore this seminal magazine online by [The Archigram Archival Project \(AAP\)](#). The groups magazine visual and especially thinking of the equipment and techniques used back then makes it still look relevant. The graphics and type have been used in experimentally and it was real fun to go through these vast and informative archive.

The idea of drawing to be provocative, and experimental comes across when Herron moves on to introduce works of his students. His explanation that drawings are physical and also the idea of drawing an invisible thing that can be intangible, but can be expressed through drawings with different methods. The work that his students have produced are really interesting and his enthusiasm when explaining the projects and work involved is tangible.

And this slide parade shows me that there definitely are some intriguing drawing methods being used, like utilising matches in the dark room and serious processes of multiple scanning and constructing images. Also Herron adds that architects live in constructed deceit, which resonates with Neil Spiller's (a previous lecturer and the Dean of the School of Architecture, Design and Construction at The University of Greenwich) lecturer about his heavily surrealistic island that exists in his head and drawings.

I have started to find the idea of making collages more and more interesting, it is rather helpful method to formulate your own ideas with some pre-existing material, and now why not to even experiment with various techniques. After all what strongly comes across from Herron's lecture is the encouragement to be bold and to be experimental while still in university. And that is a advice that several lecturers have emphasized.

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### Neil Spiller – Nouveau Beauty and the Terrifying Architecture of Surrealism

#### Nouveau Beauty and the Terryfying Architecture of Surrealism

As I have already experienced one surrealistic lecture by N. Spiller, I almost knew what to expect from his next lecture that fell under the Gamswen course umbrella.

In short and true to N. Spiller style of lecturing he threw his listeners into the deep and during his rambling style of performing one will either get a hang of it or not. Even though I have visited Barcelona, I was not familiar with Dali museum situated in Figueres and partly designed by himself to hold his art work. This museum with its different artefacts and symbolisms was the centerpoint of the lecture and a fun fact is that even though one has not been there physically the museum website offers a virtual tour around the place. But moving on and also Gaudis work got a mention like Casa Mila, Sagrada Familia I had seen Gaudi's work around town on my visit.

Concluding my own research about surrealism and particulary surrealistic architecture, I like how Magdalena Garbarczyk in her article **Surrealist Spaces** writes: *"One might say that the very concept of architecture, that is commonly supposed to become something real, is in conflict with the roots of the idea of sur-real-ism. On the other hand, we need real things even to express what is beyond reality. Surrealist paintings, writings, films and furniture are all touchable and visible although they make our interpretations travel far away from what the objects are in reality to what they represent in our imagination.*

*The adjective 'surreal' has passed into modern currency in a way that for instance 'impressionist' has not. Everything that is bizarre, strange, weird, disconcerting, disconnected from reality becomes surrealist. Even though the historic surrealism ended in 1969, it remains a commonly used word."*

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So this quote slightly sums up for me perhaps what N. Spiller was trying to lecture to us as well, when taking us on a verbal tour around Dali Museum in Figueres, spicing the tour up with snippets of wisdom and historical knowledge about Dadaism modifying into Surrealism and all the symbolism in it. And how this movement still keeps on influencing the art today.

And also N. Spiller did say something of the sort in his lecture: " *Nothing is without its Surrealistic history*".

Here is an interesting quote taken directly from the Salvador Dali museum- website by Salvador Dali himself explaining his work: "***It's obvious that other worlds exist, that's certain; but, as I've already said on many other occasions, these other worlds are inside ours, they reside in the earth and precisely at the centre of the dome of the Dali Museum, which contains the new, unsuspected and hallucinatory world of Surrealism.***"

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### THE END

#### An End and Another Beginning...

So we have finally gone through the full 12 lectures and I guess it is time to take a look back and ponder over what have we/ I learned.

Has this series of lectures been about interesting topics? Have I been hearing about new ideas and subject matters?

I guess the answer to these questions is, yes. There have definitely been new ideas put to the table by the guest lecturers likes of Rachel Armstrong talking about the new technologies being developed in buildings, Stacey Pitsillades did raise a very relevant topic about our presence in the digital world and what could happen to it if we were not to exist any longer.

Vaughn Oliver and Simon Herron did introduce us to their methods of working and design.

Nic Clear implemented the need for new ways to represent architecture, and Neil Spiller was just bursting with surrealism.

At times I did feel that perhaps some of these lectures were more designed to the students of architecture rather than graphic designers, but all and all they were still informative.

Dr Mark Ingham did start the Gamswen lecture series with an introduction by actually asking us how do we learn?

And for myself I have figured out few things about myself and I do feel that I will keep on developing my habits, and hopefully to the better.

So I will end this with the lyrics sang by Astrud Gilberto in Stay:

**“For time is running, take everything life can bring you.  
You know it’s true so take it, even fake it ’til it comes true.”**

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