

# THE SPIN OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF SPIN

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When the British MP George Galloway was brought before a panel of the US Senate investigating his possible fraudulent involvement in the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program, he gave a remarkable diatribe against the Republican majority, busy changing the order of things on this globe according to its own conservative agenda. Among other things, he called the Senate's panel 'the mother of all smoke screens', used to divert attention from the 'pack of lies' that led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Returning home to London, he was welcomed as a champion of truth by his followers, having had the courage to raise his voice against an Administration that, as in his own Britain, was waging war on mythical grounds, violating international law and defying ethical standards of honesty and truthfulness. Galloway dared to exclaim what John Kerry constantly tried to avoid saying during the Presidential campaign, although he constantly suggested it: conservative America is pursuing its happiness based on lies. The political rift is no longer between left and right, radical or conservative, but between truth and untruth. At a deeper level, the power struggle is about who defines reality and bases decisions of global importance on those definitions.

Naturally this is not a new struggle. The manipulation and control of the truth by ruling powers is as old as Ancient Troy. Many protagonists have based their legitimacy on false pretences and some have even become world leaders. The current situation differs from earlier

forms of mythification, however, in that this can and does now take place on a global scale. Cheating in small circles and safeguarding one's own interests with calculated guile is no longer sufficient. In our 21st-century 'mediacracy' a drama of global proportions is needed – one that can be played out before all television stations, in every newspaper and on countless websites. The edifice of truth, to call on an ancient metaphor, will not be eroded by the rot of deception nor will it sink into the morass under the weight of intrigue or propaganda. A new edifice will be erected, one more splendid than ever seen before. It will be so stable, so enticing and accommodate so many functions that at a certain moment the question will arise whether it is made of lies. The truth begins to doubt itself. Those who manipulate become saviors. Their myths become more important than reality which no longer penetrates through to consciousness. Take Karl Rove and his status as the architect of a conservative revolution, for example. The time has come that a statesman must protect his spin doctor, rather than the reverse.

It is quite remarkable that architecture has become the most important of all metaphors for this reversal. Architecture has long been seen as the modern prerogative of honesty and sincerity. This Volume presents diverse examples of creating myths as an architectural act and the perpetrator of that act as an architect. Yet this never occurs such that status is diminished. On the contrary, by



bestowing the architectural title to 'someone who's got it all figured out' – a war, a computer program, a therapy, a mascara that really curls your lashes – actually gives this figure greater respect. The word architect is a sign of nobility which, as is well-known, is always especially in vogue with those who want to be counted as nobility. In this way architecture is led astray into a word game that now determines the fate of billions. Of concern is not their housing, but their place in a game of geopolitical architecture.

What do architects make of all this? Naturally they cannot remain untouched by this mythological violence. If they want to somehow profit from the rhetorical theft of architecture, then they must begin with the architecture of their own myth. This may well indeed be their most important job! Architecture beyond itself also means the creation of a story that precedes every architectonic work and that in particular towers over every architectural presentation. The architectonic reality on the ground is not what counts, but rather the architectonic story in the air. A growing number of designers understand this well and are increasingly concentrating on the development of their work's effect in addition to its production. They produce a never ending series of images which will never transcend the suggestion stage. They are present in the right circles and construct their mission's unique story. Without this story the architect's position as the creator of good environments would be increasingly dubious.

For that purpose he or she is often hardly needed or is called upon more infrequently. Yet myths – yes, myths! – are needed more than ever. Whoever is able to create them will be suddenly and absolutely indispensable. For those who believe this constitutes a license to sacrifice architecture to the deceitful machinations of power, it is perhaps of interest to examine whether upright machinations of power (or the deceitful as well as the upright machinations of counter hegemony) can also make good use of architecture's myths. If Alastair Campbell appeared to evidence an architectonic intelligence when he set up Cool Britannia, then this can also be said of Naomi Klein's analysis of the reterritorialization of Indian Ocean beaches after their devastation by the tsunami. If Silvio Berlusconi built his empire on studios and stadiums, then it is also possible to remember the late, streetwise Marla Ruzicka as someone who dared to make contacts with people on the streets of Sadr City in order to be able to tell the story of those who died on account of the war. They order space; they analyze power. Finally, they choose.

The same accounts for architecture. The spin may be a device of opportunism, and it may be a activist tactics. It may be ego spurred, or a strategy of engagement with the other. What counts here is the very fact of spin itself. In the age of Google, a time of queries and hits, one's basic need is to be mentioned, listed, key worded etcetera. It is no longer a consolation to hope for being discovered. Make sure you are covered. ||