



## **The Fort! Da?**

Fehta Murghana

*"... Infancy names the insistence, even the exigency of the fictive or the figural in conscious life (the exigency that gives the insistence of the primal scene).*

*[...] "Infancy has an irreducibly 'fabulous' dimension."*

Christopher Fynsk

*"[The infant or child] enters or is entered into, the places where speech falters and language chokes in the throat of a political body, where the questions of fair representation is peremptorily dismissed or simply not addressed."*

Avital Ronell

In the case of the hut, the child is indeed father to the man...but what of the mother? Whenever architects write about the hut, it always begins -- and ends -- with the primitive, that other to the place that we are always subsided to in western culture.

Everything is always seen to take the path from lowest to highest, a time scheme which allows for the piling of debris behind (or in front of, depending on whose viewpoint you take) the angel of history.

But as a child growing up in the wilds of Mississippi, there was no past, and the future was planned within the confines of numerous 'forts', built and then abandoned. We were like dogs, twisting in the high grass to flatten it, a holding place, just enough space to rest and peer over the top of the grasses,

seeing but unseen. Haven't little boys (and girls? Shouldn't there be a maternal / *fort* function there [*da*] also?) always built Forts? But then aren't Fathers always just returning from the War and just so, aren't little boys always building forts? Isn't the fairy kingdom of the ancient ones in the hillock always over the next rise? A fortification of the Eternal against the depredations of the present, hedge against the closing of the porthole, childhood is itself the gradually eroding fort-against-time, sempiternal now hollowed out, rotted from the outside in (or is it the other way round? Those huddled in the fort of the Red Death are sempiternally the last to know).

A childhood fort is not even yet a hut, that most minimal of adult habitat, but is vaporous, porous to time, even as it attempts to grasp it and balance evenly between above and below. The fabulousness of the fort or the child's dwelling is no more than a sketch, sometimes literally chalk on pavement, a demarcation of inside and outside. Or no more than a confabulation of cardboard and quilt. (Indeed, it is often a *point de capiton* as Jacques Lacan had it, a quilting point, or sedimentation of meanings gathered together and reinforced, a place for the sprouting of the fabulous and the mythic. Later, as the fort morphs into the hut, the Freudian *fort/da* function is perhaps more descriptive with the dispersion of meaning that the 'da' of the other, over there, brings into play: it is no longer a matter of circling the wagons but of making a mark to allow entry through other thresholds, not a gathering in a clearing but an *ecstasis*, sinking in, uncannily, and not out, sublimely: the difference between the juvenile fort and the adult hut.)

The fort formed a juridical outline of space and action, perhaps the first 'legal' outline that the child can establish outside the home (no wonder it's called a fort!), the first outside force or strength (the meaning of 'fort') that the child can muster.

*Deep in the piney woods of Mississippi I built forts, nestled in clumps of privet hedge in an otherwise featureless plain of perpetual twilight pine barrens, carpeted by pine needles; or bits of lumber nailed together almost haphazardly in low lying limbs above blackberry bogs; or scooped out of muscadine vine rambles; cornstalks woven together in the middle of a dry, feverishly hot corn field and more. Some lasted a day, some weeks or*

*even months, a very few perches hanging  
bedraggled from tree limbs after years, still.*

As Giorgio Agamben notes, play transforms structures into events. (It is left to adults to reverse that process into memorialization.) The childhood play of de-marking space into forts, huts, and fairy circles enters into an acceleration of time to the point of a momentary stoppage of history ... or rather, the formation of a palimpsest of times in the guise of spaces, with immediate forgettings.

Curved round into the beginning, the ghostly carapace of the fort fades into the structure of to-come, an extemporization of the boundaries and thresholds yet to be marked.

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*(A primal scene?) You who live later, close to a heart that beats no more, suppose, suppose this: the child - is he seven years old, or eight perhaps? - standing by his window, drawing the curtain and, through the pane, looking. What he sees: the garden, the wintry trees, the wall of a house. Though he sees, no doubt in a child's way, his play space, he grows weary and slowly looks up toward the ordinary sky, with clouds, grey light - pallid daylight without depth.*

*What happens then: the sky, the same sky, suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty, revealing (as though the pane had broken) such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein - so lost that therein is affirmed and dissolved the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond. The unexpected aspect of this scene (its interminable feature) is the feeling of happiness that straightaway submerges the child, the ravaging joy to which he can bear witness only by tears, an endless flood of tears. He is thought to suffer a childish sorrow; attempts are made to console him. He says nothing. He will live henceforth in the secret. He will weep no more.*

**Maurice Blanchot/ The Writing of the Disaster**

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O touseled head standing on the edge of the 'hundred year ocean' eyeing vast expanses of twilight night stretching overhead and in front, receding to infinity, steps on royal road fading to unseen inevitable failure...but now,

NOW! Life stretches out like a train speeding to the horizon in a Kansas wheatfield, a limitless blinding expansion except every expansion needs an expansion gap, an exception, a marking to set off remaindered impossibilities: fortification, to enable impossible happiness, destined to loop around beginning to end, from fort to coffin, both containers of im/possibilities, delayed, defrayed, forgotten, alpha and omega of *desoeuvrement*, workless in any possible world.

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*Only Children can create a counting rhyme that opens up to impossibility and only children can sign of it happily.*

**M. Blanchot / The Step Not Beyond**

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Oh Fort! The first/last halo we will have, going from skin, to marking on world-skin, to the halo of the debris of your worklessness pretending to be useful, to coffin, to earth, world layered round with the bones of the dead, ivoryed interlock waiting for the last round, pretending to see everywhere and always.

*'Hence the 'halo' always indicated, in some way or another, a change of the nature of time. It signified the haloed individual person or place, participated also in a category of 'time' which was different from the one determining the natural life on earth as the medieval mind understood it. The halo, it is true, did not remove its bearer into the aeternitas Dei which is without continuity because in all times, past and future, are present. Yet the halo removed its bearer too: removed him, scholastically speaking, from Tempus to aevum, from Time to semipiternity'*  
**Kantorowitz, The King's Two Bodies**

Oh! Halo of material circling, circling, circling, endless immemorial summer of childhood, thin hub of light layered over the frozen waste world of childhood's end in Spielberg's **AI** (all you crankheads out there moaning about the epistemological errancy of this vision of total intelligence: go tell your mama!) the child plays on, even as thought slows to a stop, protracted in time's abysmal fort/da:

'Aion is a **child** at play, playing draughts'  
(*Heraclitus' fragment B 52*: "The age (eternity / *aion*) is the kingship of a child, playing dice (knucklebones, draughts)")

