

Al Neil / VISIONARY ASSEMBLAGE: A Builder's Psychosis

Antonio Gaudi's great church, Sagrada Familia in Barcelona and the crazy soaring junk towers at Watts, Los Angeles, of Simon Rodia (who took the consumerism of the coke bottle to unassailable heights), were structures formed by a certain beatific specific of mind known only to paranoid schizophrenics. With Sam of Watts, as Rodia was locally known, the paranoia was dominant because *he* alone built the fence keeping away intruders while he was building, ever upwards, his strange lifetime work of genius. The magnificent edifice he created, now known worldwide as the Watts Towers still stands in the black ghetto among memories of fire and blood of the riots of 1968. Rodia had skills, bravery and dedication of an unknown nature.

The conjunction of form, content and found material actualized in the object has always been a goal of us latter-day collagists and assemblagists; in my case to work within and overcome my well-founded paranoia and schizophrenia.

In music, when tones roll they split into configurations of waves called the sine, either out of the throat or from sublime ancient instruments such as the flute. From this meditation comes the timbre, the sounds of the body in relation to the spirit and the aether.

What we like-minded musicians are intent on is worrying the airwaves by inserting other sine waves into the aether to boost up the world sound timbre into the positive skull or carapace of the heavens where it could reflect back positively from blue or red planets and contribute to the saving of the earth. By these means, the forensic dissolution of the sound waves are once and ever controlled and into the bounds and charter of the right to beauty. So, in sound I practice gathering the castoff junksounds around all of us and bring them into the power of the combine.

I think great store should be put in the appearance of anomaly. The twisted and conjoined space between evil and perfection is manichean and will never be reached, but there is a slim opening in collage music for the Klangfarben to lustre; a sun ray through a crystal. When playing music in this manner, after long minutiae of

tautology, one can see or feel a blinding light and hear it: then there is nothing and a return to tautology.

Here's to Gaudi, Sam of Watts, Hieronymus Bosch, Paolo Soleri. Indeed, to all the members of the paraschizoid gang who did not die before leaving their brief signature of all things, just as did the great mystic, Jakob Böhme. Those masters of art and spirit are always in my mind and hold me to the earth, in the midst of wars and pestilence.

Finally, let's hear it for Kurt Schwitters, who had no trouble with his psychic demons. The great master of Hanover simply ignored the international art racket and worked daily with his psycho-pathological energy on his MERZ house, caverns of plaster and junk.

Anyone in his right or left mind would have to say that Paolo Soleri's earth-silt dwelling and sculpture in the Arizona desert at Arcosanti fit right in there with the idea of the pathology of the builders I am writing about.

The dream of building one's own habitat with castoffs and built to the summit of confusion to all but the artists themselves justified finally the bizarre spirituality of their work and, of course, the longevity of the work and the wonder of its being.

The amazing structures at Hanover, Barcelona, Watts and Arcosanti were and are ornamented with useless fabrics of spiritual quest. That is to say it was a pathological and manichean quest by Schwitters, Gaudi, Rodia and Soleri to back off evil and destruction they could see every day, and design and assemble huge spaces where only the good, bright and beautiful could survive.

I'm not a philosopher, I'm an artist. But as a paraphrenic, I would have gone straight inside walls as a basket case, or into the ground, kill or be killed, stared doubly at walls, if it hadn't been for the examples of Soleri, Schwitters, Gaudi and Rodia who dedicated their pathologies to, in some cases, useless assemblages to the human spirit.

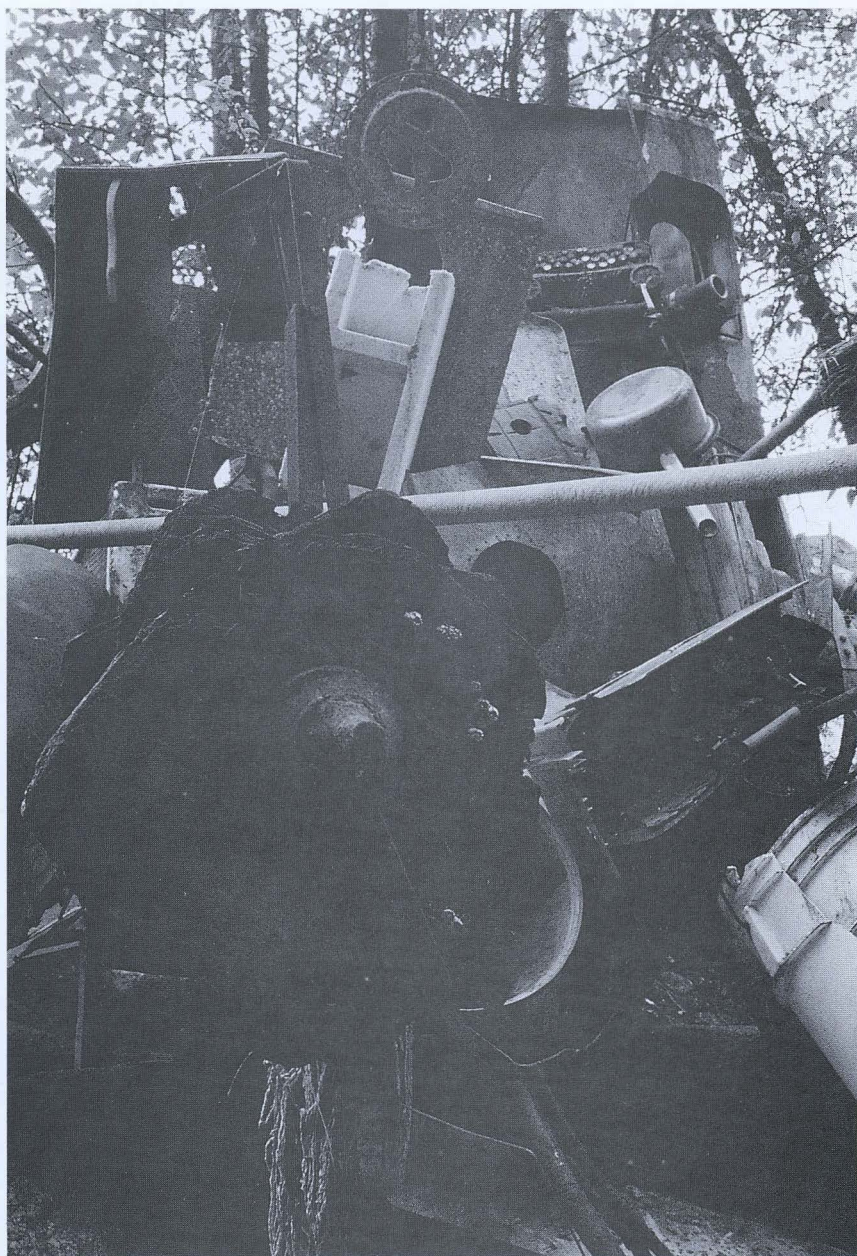
It is no new insight to speak of schizophrenic art saving the mind of man, or woman or even child from disintegration, atrophy, catatonia, or pills, dope, electroshock, the looney bin. I've known since the early '60's that I am paranoid schizo, and in hindsight much earlier. This is no big deal to harness the split or divide the line between the I and the thou, the manichean and the perfect, to form up the disparate into the One.

So what can be said: the psychic visionaries of architecture, of assemblage, extend their vision to retrace their psychic past and extend it into first, the real, the time of the time and then, beyond that to hint at infinity.



Detail, *Existence (dedicated to Alfred Jarry)*. 1972. Installation view, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Photo: Todd Greenaway



Detail, *assemblage on beach rock*. Work in progress, Dollarton, B.C.



Al Neil & Carole Itter
Detail, *assemblage between trees*, 1989. Work in progress, Dollarton, B.C.



Detail, *assemblage in progress*, 1968- . Dollarton, B.C.

Photo: Carole Itter