

## (The) Unbuilt of the Weak, or, the Linguistics of Concrete and Dust

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I am on a pilgrimage to the built and unbuilt, a sojourn of contradictions through (to) the contradictory. The strong, built architectural remains fashioned in the late 1800s by the Muslim cameleers—the Indian, Pakistani and Afghani camel drovers—in the inland of Australia are as much in my view as the weak, absent residua of the unbuilt they never fabricated or erected. I search the thought remnants of these explorer-builders, hoping to uncover something more than (the) concrete lees of primitive construction left after makeshift mosques and rural settlements had been deserted or rendered defunct. The tangible frames prompt deliberation on the relationships of (the) language of the weak, the linguistics of concrete(ness), the grammar of architecture, and the definite versus the indefinite.

The rustic places of worship and peripheral encampments in country South Australia are obvious, apparent, lucid. I collect images, experience contact and proximity, feel the grit of dust beneath my fingernails. The unbuilt is concurrently more distant, abstracted, a language type unseen and actually unwritten. The punctuation between these dichotomies is where I sit and attempt reconciliation. The liminality of the seen (naked) expressed in the absent (clothed). My tool for penetrating and reconciling this weak-strong divide: the language as (the) article. Are you with?

Articles emerge definitely, indefinitely, or absently. The nexus of articulation produces the mortar and sticky stuff marrying the parts: definitiveness specifies, indefinitiveness makes vague, an absent or zero morph forges annulled space-place. Within this tripartite complex(ity)—a weak system—lies an intrinsic enfeeblement: the forfeiture of the unidealised, the unconcrete (subjected)-unconcretised (predicated), the forgotten. 'Do you speak language?' and 'do you speak *a/the* language?' vary in their degree of specificity and determination. 'I am referring to architecture of the cameleers' contrasts with 'I am referring to *the* architecture of the cameleers'. The definite-indefinite, built-unbuilt, materiality-thought, strong-weak, architecture-language contrarities are the methods I use to arrange my project. Still, I know my object lies somewhere between any vantage point into any said divergent portal. For sure, man, I'll definitely never find it.

The cameleers constructed and were scaffolded by their new homeland, stationed among the exotic–esoteric placenames adorning Outback pastoral, rural towns—Marree, Beltana, Tarcoola, Oodnadatta. To me on my Australian desert hajj, the toponyms and places I traverse are as linguistic as architectural, as disassembled as entrancing. The landscape is strong and robust, the persuasion about what I see punchy, terse, laconic. I want to talk about it but find few remarks. Against what epitomises architectural and formal strength and brevity, I identify a linguistic verbosity, a frailty and casual weakness. The weak, the soft, and the voluptuous of my systems of malleable and apologetic thoughts, my language, and the articulation of articles and of (place)names are distinguished from the puissance of the actuality of the built architecture which I behold. The memories of the men and their animals are supple, the red soil workable, the wind desiccating. They worked here, transported goods through notional thoroughfares, opened up colonial Australia. This country would not be the same without them. What don't I see? What can't I see? What bestows itself as seeable?

The cameleers were situated on several (weak) edges, obvious verges. Linguistically marginalised, they spoke Hindi, Urdu, Baluchi, Pashto, Farsi. Financially limited because of their short term contracts, they never occupied nuclei of outposts but would convene their forced dispersal in makeshift and improvised fringe bivouacs—Ghantowns—on the rim. Bijou hubs, cosy nooks which sympathised and had rapport with the Afghans' earlier housed and worded yarn. I reckon these abbreviated architectural librettos and jargonistic travails are tops, mate. Definitely worth a visit. Their languages in contact with the colonial lingua franca, a developing Australian English idiom-cum-cant, were also pressured to the brink, the linguistic perimeter. Pidginised and conceivably creolised medleys evolved, forming paralleled linguistic and architectural parlance, hybridised states, creolisation.

The personal names of the Afghan cameleers—Abdullah, Khan, Shah, Alumgoo—endure amid the contradiction separating the grounded dust fated relics (the now unbuilt, the thought, the linguistic) and architectural realis (it's there, I know it because I can see it) in amalgamated linguistic terrain and architectural reach. I feel acquiesced in thinking of these micro colonies the cameleers occupied in this non-urban land. My interpretation takes the form of a dad joke (a groaner). I view not urbanity, the suavety and refinement of manner often aligned with urban life. It is 'urbanity': reaching the limits of linguistic and architectural occupation in Outback Australia while donning a turban. Dig it, dude?

A weak quip—an unjustified equivocation (still, it was left hanging, palpable, and transparent, so I had to take it)—developed out of seeking to explain these made-weaker people, those architecturally maligned and nudged to a threshold where they still kept their hold. Weak(er) pidgin and

creole languages, interspersed and even disrupted with/out articles, utter something much less humorous yet still real: fusion, adjustment, crusading for staying and belonging. A search for meaning in the lack of a defined medium or definite article, some significance in the broken and the feeble. Few rules govern this rural turbanity, a sort of tribal architectonic anatomy. No code meant no bureaucracy, a desolate democratocracy made flesh. Motile and itinerant, yes. Static and unstained, no. Peripatetic, nomadic, wandering, roving. A bygone migratory coupling noted now through form (secure) and word (flimsy).

So where did our effort lead? In some senses nowhere, to the back of beyond, beyond the black stump, back o' Bourke, out whoop whoop. More questions have cropped up, answers pending. Some could make us come a cropper. The Afghan camel drovers have been met, their concrete and dust-like realities (read: turbanity) have been articulated through musings on the built–unbuilt, strength–weakness, and realised thoughtlike. Often it is merely a *the* which heaves the stoic and sloth–like indefinite toward definite, a swing from weak through strong, soft to hard. A strong statement about materiality realised through an oozy mush in a desert wilderness. I like it, it's been fun. As things come to hand and become more known, I promise to let you know more. I'll be outback again soon. It won't be weak. I'll keep it strong and real, bro.

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