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TV TIMES

The room where I work is hot and noisy. On the site next door the foundations have been laid for another glass building. My main concern is that the structure will blot out my view of the river, though it may come back to me in the reflections of the reflective glass; in the reflections of the reflections in the other glass buildings.

In the Gold Tower I can see the reflection of a yacht moored at Kangaroo Point. In another frame of another building I can see a patch of river, oily green against a backdrop of mangroves, and in the frame next to it is a section of ancient plumbing, and the wooden fire escape of the building where I work.

Once our buildings were made of stone. They say that strong personalities can leave their imprint in the living stone. Generations of government clerks can attest to the presence of a superior conscience within their departmental walls. Prospective homebuyers have always been sensitive to the *feel* of a place. "I don't like it. It doesn't *feel* right." The agent knows better than to reason. He will jangle his keys in his pocket, and look the other way as he escorts them back to his limousine.

Glass buildings have their own ethos. They rise like icy mosaics in the heart of the city, capturing our duplicity within their frames. The buildings in the view from my window enable me to see a world not in my view by reflecting the reflections of the building juxtaposed. I have watched a man performing tai chi in a laneway somewhere after hours, his shoes and socks and briefcase lined up neatly against the wall. He looked like a bank teller or an insurance clerk, but there was a primordial theme to his graceful execution of the martial art. I watched him four floors up and a block away, framed in a sheet of reflective glass, but as close as the image on a movie screen.

These days I devote myself to the study of glass buildings. A young man in the next office gave me a safety helmet as a joke. It hangs from a nail on the wall. A visitor to my room may be excused for thinking I am a builder or an engineer. I call myself a reflectologist.

When I look into the glass I feel that I am at the heart of all things. I am not unlike a clairvoyant. My oracle is multitudinous, layer upon layer of images from elsewhere. I can see the Cathedral, the laneway off Edward Street, the river, the bridge. Such are the city's archetypes. And flashed across them are the cars and planes and pedestrians, the traffic officer on his rounds, the foreman on the constructions site, a

pregnant woman with a child in tow, all innocent of their duplicity.

One girl thought she saw her dead sister in the Blue Tower. She imagined her sister trapped in the glassy facade, a child's blue heaven. "Yes, children", the nun reassured them kindly, "God allows all little ones to take their toys with them". On a chart behind her the Angel Gabriel beamed rays of golden light to the Virgin. "Yes, dear, I am sure he will let you ride your dinky in heaven".

Office workers are particularly vulnerable. At any moment of the day they can travel in a time zone, up and down the high rise, each level like a different station on a television set.

Lately I have noticed a subtle change in the nature of the reflections brought to me for analysis. People are seeing menace everywhere. They may report a scene of violence they have witnessed in a reflection on the third floor of another office block. A woman raped behind a construction shed, or a schoolboy abducted in a car.

The city resembles a war zone; rubble, deep craters, deafening noise. There are police everywhere. Old buildings are being demolished every day, often under a cover of darkness. You pass an old building on your way to work, and one morning it is gone, reduced to a pile of rubble, a side wall still intact, venetians drawn to keep out the glare.

One of my clients, returning to his desk with a cup of coffee, saw the city engulfed in flame. Then the glass wall outside his office burst, and he was sucked into an inferno. It was a momentary illusion, and he was able to continue to his desk.

My paper in the *Australian Journal of Reflectology* v. 1(2) deals with this trend: "Where Do You Hide In An Hallucination? Dynamics of Viewing A New Architecture."

Simple imagery has taken on an ominous meaning. The configuration of pipes beamed into the black rubber edge of a glass sheet resembles a cross. The reflection of a man loitering on a streetcorner is threatening to someone.

In my paper I have attempted to explain the phenomena as an hallucination, like the UFO or the mystical vision. I believe there is even a Watchglas Society whose members are studying the reflections for a sign from their saviour.

The new architecture has an imagery all its own. You expect to see a mirror view, yourself or your surroundings, but instead you see something happening a block away, or something that may not be happening at all. "Usually it is unpleasant, distortive, horrifying", I quote from my paper, "a holocaust, or an earthquake. The shattering of the world."

A colleague of mine told me that he studies reflections as an art form. He argues that reflective buildings offer as much as conventional art in their interpretation of the world. Even political parties hold this view. They have been known to consult with us on social issues, when public opinion means the polling booth. A shrewd manipulator in his high rise office can wave a hand at the view from his window, and instead of a jellybean offer his young executive a friendly precursor: "What do you see in there, sonny!" "What do you think of that, lad?"

When people come into my room they go directly to the window. The opening dialogue relates to the view. "What a great view", they say. I know they mean the river. The passengers on the ferry are in our dimension. Occasionally I can see the Captain at the helm, and the red blouse of a girl on her way to work. Soon they will be obscured by the new glass building, but they may come back to me as a reflection in the reflective glass.

The sash windows in my office have to be propped open with sticks, and the fire alarm is a nuisance. Most of the tenants avoid the lift, grateful for the old world dignity of four floors and some oak panelling. There are frequent excursions with the signed petition, and the Letter-to-the-Editor. No one wants to see this building replaced by a new glass tower, except perhaps the developers, who have glazed the city with them.

On a bright day I feel as though I am swimming in a glassy sea. I keep my eyes open underwater, and one two one I loop my arm up and swing my head for a breath. The water glints sharply as the blade of a knife. The momentary shock imparts a memory; the waxed floor of a hospital ward, a history bee in primary school; "Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in 1497". Then my head turns again and the breath slides out in silvery bubbles.

Across the road a window dresser arranges a screen to cover the modesty of a mannequin. On the tenth floor of the MIM a clerk checks some data against his files. The dental nurse in the Commonwealth building, preparing cotton wool on a tray, pauses a moment to look at the skyline.

Around them the fragile architecture gleams magnificently.