



the towers of no harm, david kennedy-cutler

The Towers of No Harm

A Sunday somewhere north of Detroit and definitions of America are peeling off. The city has foreclosed itself and there are skeletons of brick teetering across from the state-funded stone of museums and a thrown-together easter-colored football stadium. There are thousands of pedestrians jaywalking the massive boulevards and endless almost-empty parking lots.

I'm reading *The New York Times* in the passenger seat of an S.U.V. and there is a picture of a grand theatre somewhere in this city that was converted into a parking garage in the 1970's. Cars are carried up to the old balcony on a freight elevator and the stage is paved over. I fold the newspaper into quadrants while we drive in loops around the massive grey sprawl, complicit in tag sales and rising energy costs.

We stop in some driveway and I find a few gems: retro books about the art of Macrame and surveys of modernist design. These 25 cent books are records of utopian dreams of the back-to-the-land self-empowerment of the 1970's and grainy photographs of the influence the International Style on product design. Each image begs to be explained.

The front page of the paper is dominated by the politics of recovery. In New York they are arguing over the footprints of the World Trade Center. They're building another box that someone else can open up at some later date: modernist package design on an inhuman scale. Proceeding with caution the planners consider the practicality of grief and the need for office space in the revitalization of Lower Manhattan. The architects and the governors and mayors and the port authorities step up to podiums and announce designs for the "Freedom Tower" with grave faces and turkey necks: power flapping flesh united in dark suits, behind microphones, and behind them flagpoles and firemen. They have come together under the banner of the burden of physically manifesting Freedom, apparently now resigned to it's proper noun status as a hallmark of a new era. To be here and now is to join hands in absurdity, anti-meanings... what a sad enterprise and without any healing at all. To do something small is to actually make a gesture to the future. A dream is a thing that can't be thought up intentionally. We keep digging under the trauma site and can't find any problems, and from our burrowed hole we cannot see that history is happening right above us.

~david kennedy-cutler