Fulcrum

architecture as entertainment.

a.cardillo

Long ago, mankind celebrated the mystery of creation by constructing houses for invisible beings called Gods. Architecture transfigured trees and stones into something grandiose and communicative. It was a universal language, like music, and following this rationale the most ancient traditions were stratified. Nowadays, architecture is seemingly the product of corporative brands. Our present appears lost in a loop. Obsession for novelty inhibits research; severing our link with the past restrains our critical skills, reducing it to a mere supermarket of interchangeable stuff. Behind the proliferation of a multitude of neo-modern icons lurks a manipulation: countless ideas, passions, civil wars, and ideals constantly ransacked and abused. Original meanings are altered, rewritten or erased. Thus the past becomes innocuous; an image, a grotesque mask that indistinctly celebrates dictatorship and consumerism.

The past tells us of interactions between mankind. Architecture lets us discover ourselves through others. When adverse entities collide and love one another, new languages are born. The most fertile architecture has always been the result of a sexual clash between the differences. Thus I intend my architectural practice as a journey across countries, a learning from diverse beliefs. I see architecture as that clash of fragments. It is the "already spoken" or "already seen" of architecture which matters to me. This process is a syncretic one, where apparently distant and incongruous elements find an unforeseen unity.

Through architecture, I try to give voice to interrupted tales from the past, to resurrect stories that have been erased by the discourse of power. This discourse of power reveals itself also in the structure of the contemporary architectural offices: corporation, branding, marketing, productivity, profit. Conventional practices seem affected by a bigness complex. They compete to build the biggest thing. And the biggest things requires large practices. Large practices require hundreds of workers, so they build a hierarchal environment deprived of human feelings. Lifestyle determines the work you do. And once you allow it to begin, stops are not allowed because you have to pay a lot of bills. I work alone, at a bench overlooking a valley; biding my time in the streets. Elsewhere, in a park, listening to the rippling waters of a fountain late at night; searching for human feelings. Crawling toward the places where architecture lies asleep. Architecture is an idea and ideas are tardy; they are waiting for you on a lazy afternoon, wandering somewhere. Cyberspace makes physical offices out of date. My office inhabits a laptop and I design small buildings. The most revolutionary pieces of architecture were small buildings. Small scale brings freedom: a wise owner is worth more than an endless budget.

Architecture is a critical act over reality, and at the same time it is an act of interpreting the past. Architecture is not a brand. To switch off the creative process is a fault. Without the exercise of criticism, without taking a position, without conflicts—which are above all internal—there is no creation. But criticism is in the process of becoming extinct. Architecture regresses into entertainment. Thus contemporary architecture celebrates the power, and becomes itself the power.

And even if they seem like opposites, power and entertainment are part of the same strategy, one that distracts people from the real emotions of life.

A building is great when its spaces are eloquent inasmuch as they can resist the changes of their primary purpose and architecture should be able to convey values transcending time and the day-to-day. Architecture is more than function, which is just a casual pretext that gives life to it. Architecture, the city indeed, is like an endless novel, in which the personal experience of the leading character, seen from his viewpoint, continually changes the feeling of the work of time. Over and beyond, from this human dimension, architecture is bound to technological obsolescence and premature ageing.

Antonino Cardillo is an itinerant architect based in London. Active worldwide, he interprets architecture as a way to bridge differences.

diversify or die.

g.barton

ALT sits sandwiched between the keys for both control and command (on a computer keyboard). This arrangement is, arguably, purely an ergonomic one, or maybe even just an accident. However it sums up nicely the attitudes of regime, consumerism, creativity and education. Alternatives belong to power and command authorities, which means, upsettingly, in order to fully re-start a programme one needs control, an alternative + the ability to delete.

"There Is No Alternative" or TINA — an interesting word selection for a neoliberal slogan, one that recommends free-market economics and encourages aggressive fiscal competition. Why focus on the word *alternative* if you are attempting to convince the listener of its absence? For a design-focussed mind like mine, the act of suggesting while denying only makes me more determined to identify any, and all, alternatives.

Thatcher might have found the term *solution* more accurate for what she was describing. Therefore, might I belatedly, and defiantly, suggest we pursue TITS, or:

"This Is The Solution"

In a time where prosperity is severely limited, it falls to our creative thinkers to find new and alternative methods for generating opportunities, by reframing themselves from employees into self-managed self-starting individuals.

In this case I am referring directly to the design employment situation where, until recently, the design degree was seen as a means to just one end, getting a job in an established practice.

With this in mind, it is inspiring to see the alternative routes that students and recent graduates are now taking to generate exposure, recognition and opportunity rather than "a job". The current economic climate has left thousands of qualified and talented minds competing for an extremely limited number of positions (paid or otherwise).

It has created something quite beautiful. In chasing the infamous rainbow, the most ingenious and driven designers have found weird and wonderful alternative ways of debunking the corporate, hierarchical job structure. For many it begins whilst still in education, feeling the grip of the institution inspires some to challenge formalisation, manipulate briefs and stretch expectation. It is this type of approach, existing outside traditional systems, which is more likely to see architecture and design rise out of the commercialised flatlands in which it often too comfortably resides.
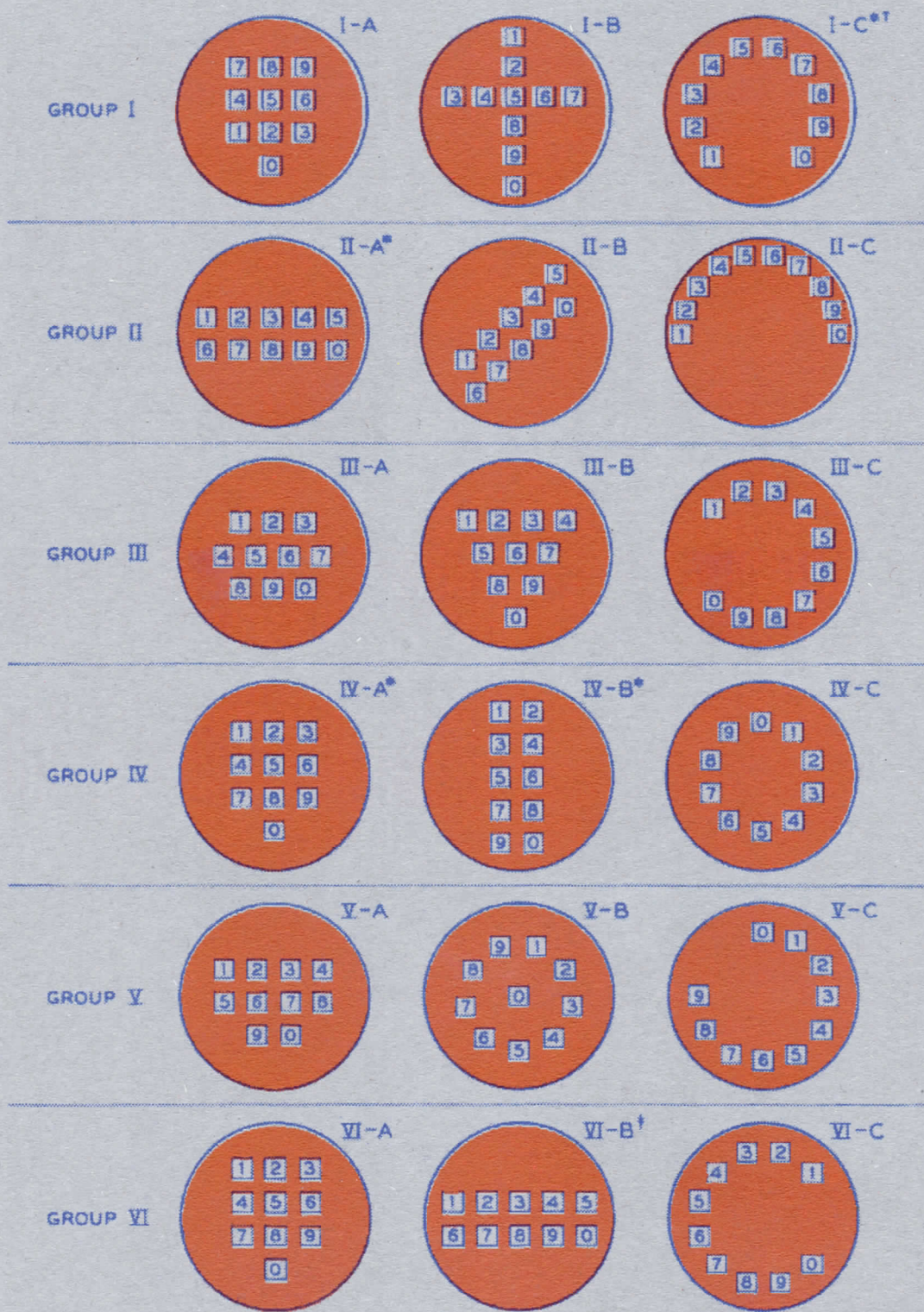
This isn't a move towards getting-a-job commercialism but more a realisation of the need and want by many people today to investigate the make-a-career alternative, regaining ownership of our creative futures rather than relying on the offerings of others.

When we obsess about one solution it removes our power and ability to diversify and problem solve. Finding (good) alternatives is the fundamental role of the designer, but this is not a piece of writing simply about the importance of diversification. Incessantly looking for alternatives can be unhealthy, there needs to be some balance and some stability. It is really more about the psychology of being aware of other options open to you, the notion of discovering and perfecting the ability to make an educated decision between two or more alternatives. It is imperative also to discuss that the right solution for me might be the wrong solution for you. By having options and alternatives it allows a greater proportion of our society to be satisfactorily catered to...

But perhaps we shouldn't obsess over the answer — but rather, fixate on the absence of a meaningful question. We can see there is no right answer. In fact, there doesn't appear to be an answer at all. This is the intended process of design education, exposing students to an eternal, internal critical and personal examination with the goal of identifying options for future action and, by consequence, harnessing their potential. It is a process that distracts from truly questioning the framework in which the question is posed.

If TITS represent an alternative, it is because the starting point may well need to be the rejection of the suggested question.

Gemma Barton is a design academic, writer and curator. Her work has appeared in publications like Mark, Blueprint, Archdaily and Architizer.

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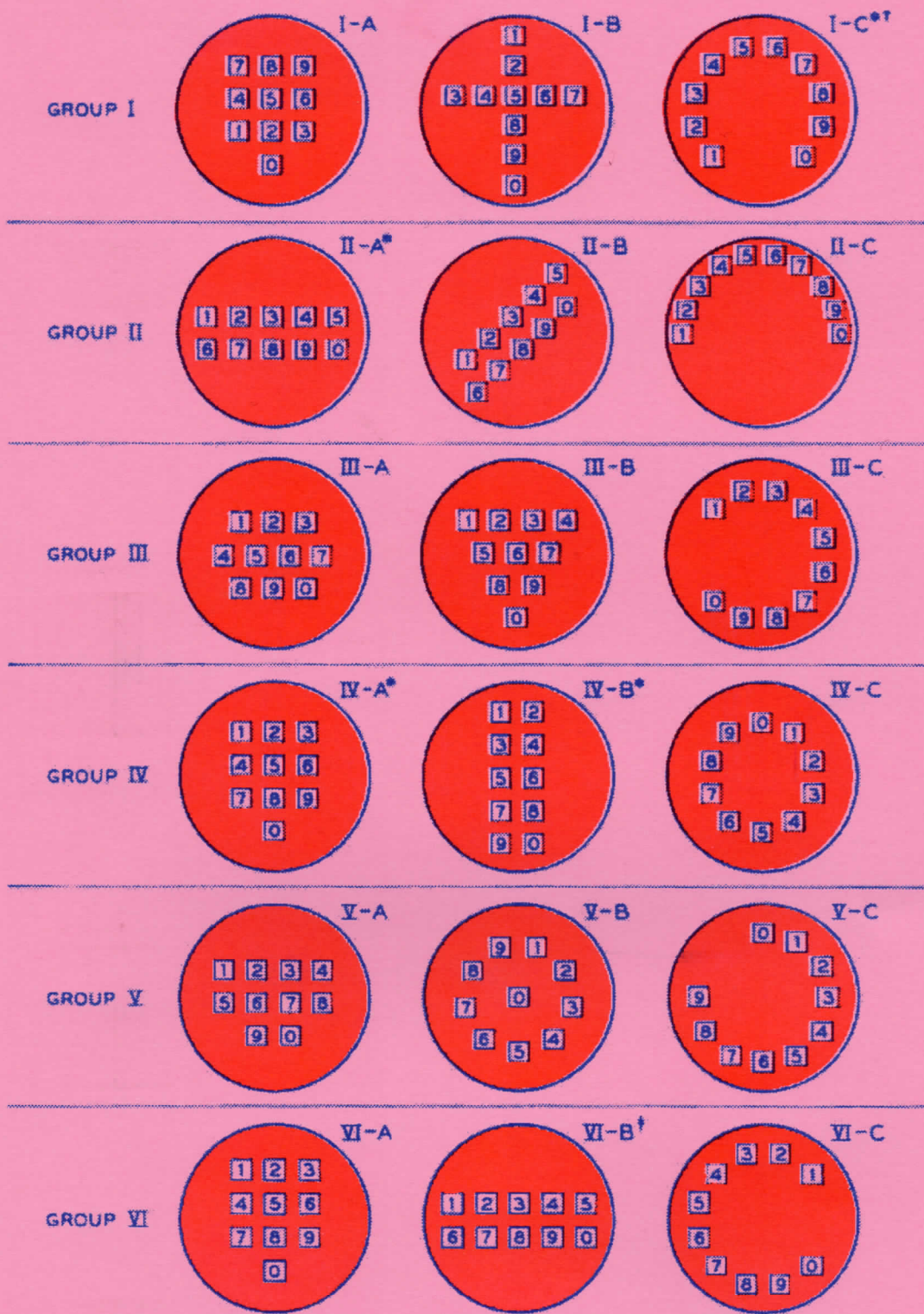
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