

I'M FUNNIER THAN KURT VONNEGUT

I do not enjoy reading about architecture. The distinct and uninhibited irony of this statement aside, let me distinguish that I do in fact appreciate such written content and see great value in its proliferation. Though at times weighted down by pompous rhetoric and elevated language that ultimately constitutes a variety of useless fluff [i.e. everything in this paragraph so far], it often contains valuable insight into a designer's thoughts and means of creation. I simply find reading to be an undesirable means of consumption. If life, at this moment, found me stranded in a desert and reading about architecture was the symbolic glass of water...I'd drink the fucking water, because I'm not that stubborn.

Too often I feel there is an unspoken pressure to understand the conversational reference, and as a student of Architecture genuinely uninterested in its written discourse...I found myself slipping. Years ago I used to partake in a club called "SpeechTeam." Often, the activities were less centered on speech [or what you're thinking: "debate"] and instead focused on acting. My own event was Original Comedy. I would write my own story and subsequently perform the various characters through different poses and voices. In 2007, the general plot of my written work centered on a support group for depressed people...some might call it a "dark" comedy.

All you really need to know is that one of the characters was (spoiler alert) very de-pressed and through a multitude of suicidal ruminations, considers killing himself by drinking Drano and swallowing aluminum balls of foil, "Just to go out with a bang."

Of course, this joke always received a huge laugh, because that shit's hilarious, and seven years later I had all but forgotten about my proud 16-year-old grasp on the morbid. Forgotten, that is, until April of 2014. While embarking on my first journey into the work of Kurt Vonnegut, I was struck by a brief anecdote in his book "Breakfast of Champions."

"... his wife Celia had committed suicide, for instance, by eating Drano—a mixture of sodium hydroxide and aluminum flakes, which was meant to clear drains. Celia became a small volcano, since she was composed of the same sorts of substances which commonly clogged drains (65-66)."

That son of a bitch stole my joke. Kurt Vonnegut stole my goddamned joke. Of course, this can't possibly be true, as this book was written in 1973 and I was as non-existent as Iowa State's College of Design building. I do not lament this development. Yes, it makes my joke "not original" and in turn 16-year-old David a

liar...but that David was always a filthy liar...so no loss there. Instead, it excites me. Especially considering that I actually didn't write this joke. My brother, eight years my senior, had suggested it after reading my script. Flash forward to 2014 and a quick text later I had confirmed that he had, in fact, never read a single book by Vonnegut.

The point is that ideas are fluid. We cannot control when or where they come from. In school, in regards to architecture, I only find myself slipping to the extent that I do not ask questions. In reality, I am fortunate for the people around me who have chosen to indulge in reading. For at least a year I struggled with the guilt that I should but did not want to pick up any books that seek to describe the built environment. I resorted instead to non architectural media. Upon reflection, I realized I have not suffered. I have always been able to converse about design. We gain knowledge and information through a multiplicity of sources and genres. In fact, it is "diversity" that best defines architecture, not "architecture" as a term in and of itself.

That my brother had the exact same idea as Kurt Vonnegut, completely separately, and in turn relayed it through conversation as inspired by my written work indicates a fluctuation of creativity across genres and mediums. There is too much knowledge in the world to be worried about sequestering efforts into undesirable tasks. The information will find its way to your brain in its own time and method. Plus, at the end of the day, I take credit for telling it better than Vonnegut...because I did...because "go out with a bang" is just priceless.

By David O'Brien

CITATIONS:

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Breakfast of Champions*. New York City: Delacorte Press, 1973. Print.