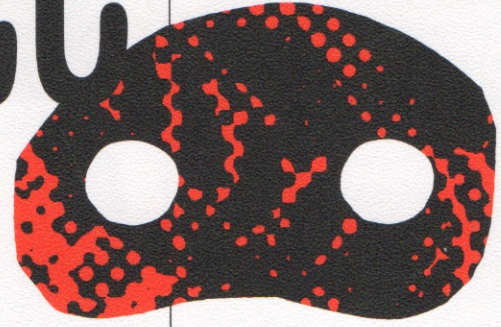


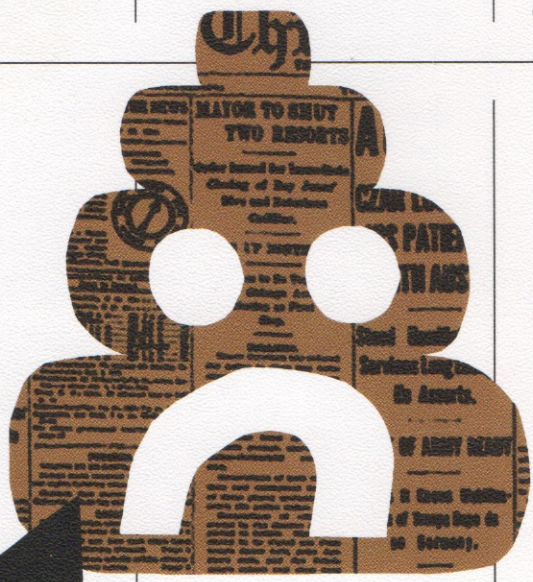
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Claims on architecture  
from an unlikely cast



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Flat Out  
Fall 2016

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## The Challenger

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**Dear Renato,**

*Flat Out* asked me to write to a contemporary architect about a recently completed building. It was not difficult to choose. The Shakespeare Theatre in Gdańsk, Poland, that you recently completed (which, as you remember, was built from 2008 to 2014 after a competition you won in 2005) is probably the best building by an Italian architect since

*Continued on page 4*

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## The Genealogist

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**Get the Door,  
It's Domino's**

In a box kept in the off-site storage facility of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), nestled between what appear to be cabinet fixtures and an envelope of tile samples, sit two bronze sculptures from the office of James Stirling, Michael Wilford, and Associates. The "front" of each object is a shiny quarter-circle; the bottom

*Continued on page 6*

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## The Opinionator

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**The List of 38**

Marina City's recently granted landmark status amounts to the highest possible recognition of its contribution to Chicago, a building's equivalent of a Lifetime Achievement Award. It is an honor that will soon be conferred on the John Hancock Center as well. While both structures are unequivocal landmarks for the

*Continued on page 12*

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## The Ad Man

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**Faves!**

You have the ideas,  
we do the rest.

**Graham Foundation**  
grahamfoundation.org

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There are more than  
34,000,000 ways to create  
a single Domino's pizza.

**Domino's**  
dominos.com

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*Continued on page 34*

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## The Scorekeeper

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**(Swedish) Meatball**

On a recent trip to Sweden with limited time to spare, I decided to experience the local wares in the most condensed form I could manage, determining that I would have time only to eat one typical Swedish meal and see one significant building. My conception of Sweden to date had been a limited mix of clichés: IKEA furniture and social housing, art films

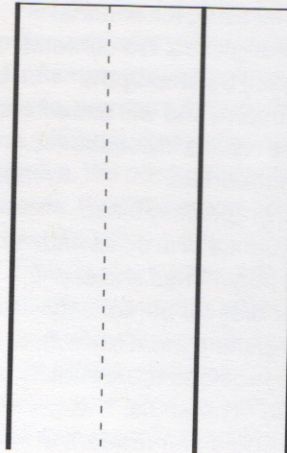
*Continued on page 35*

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## The Graphic Essayist

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**A Subjective Catalog  
of Columns**



*Continued on page 37*

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## The Political Economist

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**Good Design Is  
Good Politics**

When Clint Eastwood appeared in the crucial last hour of the 2012 Republican National Convention to a theme song from the *Dollars Trilogy* and delivered a series of non-sequiturs to an empty chair, missing from the flood of commentary that followed (*Eastwood: brilliant or senile?*) was the attempt to trace back the origin

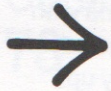
*Continued on page 53*

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# Dear Renato,



## The Challenger



*From page 2*

Giorgio Grassi's restoration of the Roman theater in Sagunto (1985–93). My congratulations.

Not only does the building perfectly fit into the city, but — not content with just its amazing morphology and supreme typological precision — it is also surprisingly generous and spectacular inside. The generosity of the interior space (something that was always missing in buildings by architects of the *Tendenza*, for instance, who focused on typological correctness without any interest in space) adds a new dimension to what would otherwise be just another complacent and ostentatious exercise in erudition. The Shakespeare Theatre demonstrates an explicit pleasure in spatial articulation and also an unpredictable passion for technical exploit. The wooden hall of the theater opens to the sky by lifting its metal ceiling. The two halves of the ceiling rotate and open like iron wings that emerge in the city landscape. All of this adds an unexpected dimension to an otherwise perfectly “correct” project: the building resonates with a larger set of images, and somehow exposes an entire possible world of associations. Again: the building is amazing. And yet, there would not be much scope in this letter if I simply flattered you with compliments. The theater in Gdańsk is something worth being discussed. And my questions will be kind of *flat out*.

At this point I cannot ignore any longer a certain tone the building has for which I cannot feel much sympathy. Indeed, why all this darkness? Why this *Götterdämmerung*-like atmosphere? Is it really necessary? Are you really sure that typological precision and morphological inventions require this death-metal atmosphere? Is this tone not somehow suggesting arcane secrets and setting the stage for a kind of *Illuminati* pseudoscience? Is this really a good idea for architecture?



Renato Rizzi, The Shakespeare Theatre, Gdańsk, Poland, 2014.  
View of interstitial spaces.

Hans Poelzig was not so severe. Albi Cathedral was less grim. Even George Dance's Newgate Prison looks kind of serene compared to the Shakespeare Theatre. This tone suggests that the building is part of a conflict, as if the theater would somehow protest, oppose, and fight *against* the city where it belongs. But why protest? Why oppose? Is this something that architecture can really do? And even if it could—which I sincerely doubt—why do this? Why is all the indisputable artistic talent and architectural knowledge embedded in the design of the theater not being put to the service of the contemporary city?

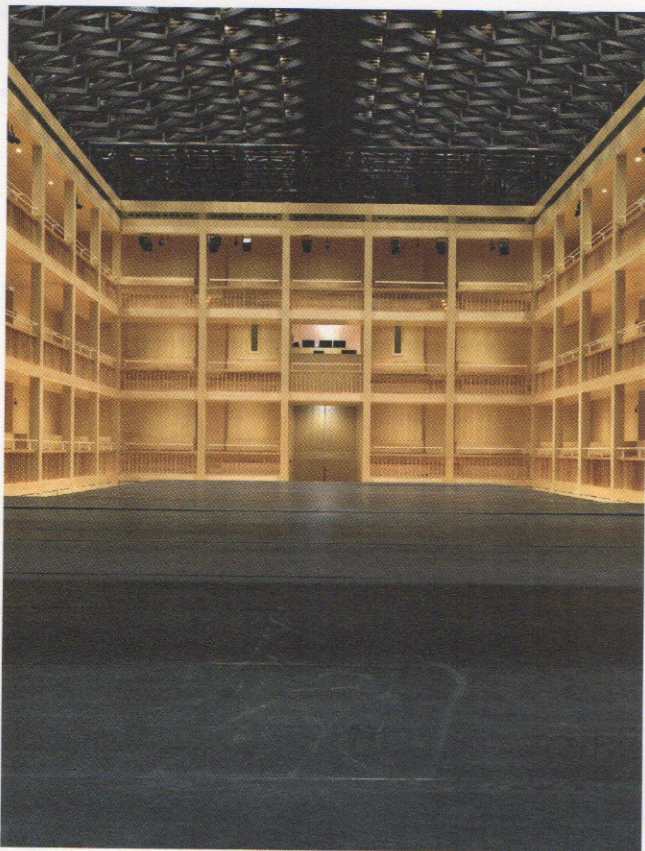
Is the darkness of the building a “message”? And if so, a message of what? Or is it just a by-product of an excess of self-destructive earnestness? In case it is a message, I fear what this message might be. If there was no intention to broadcast terror, then I wonder why you did not take into consideration this risk. Aren't my cheap pop references obvious? How could you not think that teenagers would start calling the theater “the dark fortress” or “the Darth Vader spaceship”? Seriously, didn't you ever think of that? And—in case you did not want to design that—wasn't this misunderstanding worth taking care to avoid?

And, most importantly, if we understand architecture as protest, then we understand it as “message” and “communication” and we end up losing the specific relation of architecture to time, its peculiar indifference, and its opaque generosity. Shouldn't we first of all make clear that *architecture is not a medium*? Because if architecture is a medium, then what would be the difference? You make buildings that say “you should be mourning,” while Bjarke Ingels makes buildings that say “you should be partying.” Is there any difference? Aren't both approaches contrary to the specific incapacity of architecture to communicate? Again, if architecture accepts the ability to *speak*, isn't it already lost? Why not be a bit more complacent—and at the same time a bit more elusive?

I write this because I think that my office produces—to a certain extent—similar projects. We both refer to buildings of the past and I suspect we both like bulky, fattish, windowless, and highly useless buildings. We both try to build something realistic and efficient starting from this counterintuitive starting point. I believe you do an excellent job in this. The Shakespeare Theatre looks impeccable not just in formal terms but also from a functional point of view.



Renato Rizzi, The Shakespeare Theatre, Gdańsk, Poland, 2014.  
Aerial view of the theater with the roof wings open.



Renata Rizzi, *The Shakespeare Theatre, Gdańsk, Poland, 2014.*  
Interior view of Elizabethan stage.

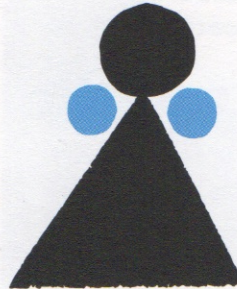
The difference I see is that my office explicitly fears that our passion for sturdy buildings from the past could be misunderstood as some sort of reactionary ideology. So in the end our buildings always include some idiotic, unexpected elements, something that somehow does not entirely belong there. Most importantly, we are always careful not to communicate anything and keep our buildings as silent (or even better—dumb) as possible.

It seems like you do not care about this. You do not mind running the risk of being mistaken for some reactionary fanatic and I suspect this will reduce your opportunities to make more buildings, which would be sad, given how good they are.

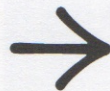
All the best, and good luck for your next works.

Yours sincerely,  
The Challenger

# Get the Door, It's Domino's



## The Genealogist



*From page 2*

is the same shape rotated ninety degrees counter-clockwise. A smooth, concave middle connects the two surfaces, giving each sculpture a leaf-like profile. They are engraved, one with “James Stirling 1988” and the other with the names of thirty architects or architecture firms in alphabetical order, from Tadao Ando to Venturi, Rauch, and Scott Brown. Stirling claimed to like the design. “It’s a nice object,” he affirmed in a letter to their unexpected source, Domino’s Pizza.<sup>1</sup>

From 1988 to 1991, Domino’s Pizza awarded these trophies to thirty architects or firms annually—thirty, because of Domino’s thirty-minute delivery guarantee; architects, because the company’s founder, a “devotee” of Frank Lloyd Wright, was fascinated by the field.<sup>2</sup> In 1988 and 1989 it named the “Domino’s Pizza Top 30 Architects in the World,” including Stirling; in 1990, it was the top thirty in North America; in 1991, it was thirty from the United States. What seems like an odd combination of worlds today—Domino’s Pizza and trophy architects—was not really any less odd twenty-five years ago. Despite and because of its weirdness, however, the pizza chain’s

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Kathryn Crawley from James Stirling, September 11, 1989, James Stirling/ Michael Wilford fonds, CCA, Montreal, AP140. S2.SS2.D23.

<sup>2</sup> “The Domino’s 30 ’88,” introductory text in Domino’s Farms Development Corp.

commemorative publication (1989). Consulted at the CCA library.

<sup>3</sup> “Making Pizza since 1960...” company history, Domino’s Pizza Inc., accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.dominos.biz.com/Biz-Public-EN/Site+Content/>

# Curtains

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## Cast

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(in order of appearance)

### The Challenger

Pier Paolo Tamburelli

### The Genealogist

Jayne Kelley

### The Opinionator

Alexander Eisenschmidt

### The Mortician

Sam Jacob

### The Odd Couple

Robert Bruegman (Oscar)  
Paul Andersen (Felix)

### The Muckraker

Anonymous

### The Outsider

Jon Langford

### The Ad Man

Ellen Grimes

### The Scorekeeper

John McMorrough

### The Graphic Essayist

Ania Jaworska

### The Political Economist

Zehra Ahmed

### The Inventor

R. E. Somol

### The Talent Agent

Penelope Dean

### The Cameo

as Himself

### You

Julia Di Castri

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## Special Thanks

Giovanna Borasi, Kathie Chung, Adam Doster, Audrey Goggin, Geoffrey Goldberg, Sarah Herda, Shan James, Daniel Mellis, Devon Morris, Paul Mosley, Yasen Peyankov, Charles M. Schulz, and Lauren Van Damme.

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## Suggested Citation Format

The Cameo (R. E. Somol), "Easier Done Than Said," *Flat Out* 1 (Fall 2016), 3, 65–72

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