

# The Architect

By Gregory Cioffi

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *We love the premise in this fascinating short—like an existential fable—and the provocative questions it raises. There is an aura of mystery that surrounds the enigmatic character of the architect, and much to the author’s credit, it is never explained. George, the protagonist, whose life up until their unexpected meeting is the picture of disorder, is shown the possibility of a harmony that is both material and transcendental, one rooted in the very idea of ‘structure’. The visionary style of Borges has come to play here and Cioffi’s ‘lite’ prose—with its touch of outsider-ism is the perfect ‘voice’ and vehicle. Dialogue sings. Quote:“Everything starts moving! Your mind is moving; the room itself is moving and concurrently, the entire building is moving! Everything you know is an uncertainty. You don’t really know what’s behind those walls, under those carpets and panels; they are just masking the foundation - what is truly holding up that place you call home? Once you reach that point you realize certainty does not exist!”*

## The Architect

Inspired by the Works and Lectures of Mark Wigley

George Whelan was a man of boundless disaster. His life was in endless disarray in perhaps every way imaginable. He awoke each day (sometimes in the morning, occasionally in the afternoon) to a clutter that would make a landfill blush. He could not keep a job, a lover, or even a friend. Hell, George couldn’t even keep a conversation nor did he endeavor to because the truth was he didn’t have much to say. George was late to everything he ever went to and had not the faintest idea of what he wanted to do with his life. George was forty-six years old.

Sometimes, on days such as this one, George would walk around the city aimlessly, waiting for something to strike, a divine inspiration perhaps. But when this inevitably proved fruitless, he meandered over to his favorite spot. It was one of those places someone had to inform you of or, in George’s case, you had to stumble upon it after years of frivolous strolls.

The location was atop a hill on the outskirts of the city. You had to make your way through numerous trees and bushes to find the clearing but once you did, there stood a single bench overlooking the entire metropolis. George liked the spot not only because it was beautiful, but also because there was never anyone on the bench -- until, of course, today.

George stared at the immaculately dressed figure, debating what his next course of action should be. The bench was a two-seater so he could certainly fit. But would that be awkward? Would he have to speak?

Could he still enjoy the view to its fullest extent? After weighing his options, George hesitantly walked over and sat next to the encroacher.

The two men sat in silence for a few minutes until the stranger asked, without removing his gaze from the view, "What do you think they're saying?"

George looked curiously at the man without a clue as to what he was referring to.

"I'm sorry?"

"The buildings, what do you think they're saying?" the man clarified, with a tone best described as excited zeal.

George looked out at the static structures of the city and back at the stranger who was stroking his well-groomed white beard, clearly in deep thought.

As if to appease the man, whom George concluded could very possibly be certifiably insane, he responded, "Nothing. They're not saying anything."

"Nonsense," the stranger responded. "They're always saying something."

"You are talking about the actual buildings, correct?"

"Of course I am. Buildings are always talking to us, telling us about our dreams and aspirations. Of course, what I think a building is saying might be totally different than what you think a building is saying. Conversely, I'm sure the people who work in that building, or the people who live in that building, have their own completely distinct interpretation."

"Weird," was what came out of George's mouth.

The stranger smirked as if George finally understood.

"You are precisely correct, my friend. Buildings are weird, aren't they? There exists a degree of strangeness, no doubt. Children know this, that's why they are afraid at what they might find under the bed or in the closet. I, myself, am haunted by the mere idea; buildings are living, breathing things. They all have stories and I think that's the beauty of it all. But the point is, we're all sharing in the conversation, an open dialogue if you will –back and forth, back and forth."

George, who self-admittedly thought he was actually sort of understanding what the gentleman was explaining, could only get himself to ask, "Who are you?"

The stranger smiled warmly and replied, "I'm an architect."

George chuckled as all the pieces fell into place. What he once viewed as crazy-talk now revealed itself as a passionate perspective.

"I see what you're saying," George said. "They do kind of have something to say."

“Oh absolutely. This city in front of us, for example, speaks many different languages and thus the structures do as well. The people living here comment and talk to the buildings differently than tourists who have never been here. Even rodents, insects, and a multitude of other species have distinct viewpoints. Before you know it, a multi-dimensional discussion is taking place. It’s brilliant, really. Buildings are a medium for communicating ideas.”

“That certainly is an interesting way to look at it,” George chimed in for the sake of contributing to the conversation.

“But the most interesting part, my friend, is that they don’t need us. When the lights dim and city sleeps, on the rare occasion that it does, the buildings do not. The buildings talk even when we’re not there, even when we’re long gone.”

The Architect broke from his self-induced trance. He looked at George directly for the first time. “Fascinating, isn’t it?”

“Very! I find it all fascinating. Intriguing is what it is.”

George’s social skills were clearly lacking in comparison to the expressive dwellings they were overlooking.

“I’ve never even thought to think about it like that!” he continued.

“Of course not,” The Architect responded, almost snootily. “And why would you? People tend not to notice their environment the same way a bird does not notice the air it’s flying through. But we architects are the select few whose job it is to pay attention. We are the social engineers, constantly shaping the world around you; providing you with the framework for your lives.”

George had never realized the magnitude of the profession and meagerly squeaked out, “Thank you. For all that you do for us.”

“You’re quite welcome,” The Architect stoically responded.

“I wish I had your structure. I can’t even see mine. Sometimes I wonder if I have any at all.”

“Don’t be preposterous. You can’t see structure.”

“You can’t?”

“Of course not. Structure, that which allows something to stand, is precisely that which you cannot see. If you saw it, it would fall. Any sort of good foundation is inaccessible to our eyes. Look at it like this, you have an apartment I gather?”

“I do.”

“Good.”

“When you are in your room, what are you thinking about?”

“Hm. This morning I debated which microwavable meal I should have for dinner.”

The Architect shot him a look of abhorrence before continuing, “Precisely.”

“Precisely what?”

“You are never truly aware you are in a room, a room with four walls, a floor, and god-willing in your case, a ceiling. If you were to stop for a moment and realize, my goodness, I am in this room that speaks, hears, smells, tastes, and touches, you would find that the room you have come to know and call your own would disappear.”

“It smells? I hope not,” added George as an afterthought.

Ignoring this interruption, The Architect fervidly went on. “You would look at the room for what it truly is. It would seem distant to you; you would feel like an outsider, a stranger in your own home. You would notice the moldings and suddenly think, ‘Hey, these things are designed to hide the relationship between the wall and the floor.’ Actually, they seem to be hiding the fact that such a relationship is very insecure.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen my moldings. Too many trinkets and gadgets of sentimental value lying around.”

“Everything starts moving! Your mind is moving; the room itself is moving and concurrently, the entire building is moving! Everything you know is an uncertainty. You don’t really know what’s behind those walls, under those carpets and panels; they are just masking the foundation - what is truly holding up that place you call home? Once you reach that point you realize certainty does not exist!”

“You know what, I think I’ve always known that!”

“We’re not in a room at all! We are suspended in a set of images that represent the idea of a room but what we are really in, is a state of representation of the thought of a room! Don’t be fooled, friend! This place you call home is really just a representation of a version of you that you would like the world to see and think they know! But it is not you! Only you are you!”

“I am me! I am George!”

“That’s right, George,” The Architect reassured while taking a deep breath.

The stirring homily took a lot out of The Architect and hearing such exhilarating words took just as much out of George; the two were exhausted.

Finally, amidst panting, George said, “That was amazing. Architecture is hard.”

“It sure is, George. But it is also beautiful. I should have warned you. Us architects fall in love with the thought that buildings are thoughts and those thoughts, as I’m sure you are experiencing right now, can be highly contagious.”

“Hey, did you build any of these?” asked George, pointing to the city.

“Me? No. I’ve never built anything.”

George could feel his body come to a complete standstill. He slowly turned his head and looked astonished at The Architect.

“I’m sorry? You’ve never built anything?”

“Not a single thing.”

“But, you’re an architect.”

“George, please. The greatest architects do not design or make buildings; they simply create ideas about buildings. Architects are people who ponder upon the way buildings might think. It doesn’t actually matter if we ever build one!”

The Architect stood up, dusted off his grey suit, and sighed.

“Well, I’m off! Good day!”

As the Architect walked away, George called out, “I thought I was talking to you, not really about buildings, but about your dreams.”

“You were,” the older man answered. “But to build something would be to manifest your dreams. And that’s way too much work.”

The Architect gave a farewell wink and just like that disappeared into the brush, leaving George alone on the bench.

George had never been so inspired to have aspirations -- aspirations he would do absolutely nothing with. It was in that moment that George came to a bold realization: that man, whom he just conversed with, was the greatest architect who ever lived.

**AUTHOR’S NOTE:** *I've always been intrigued with the artistic side of architecture. When you hear an architect discuss planning, designing, and constructing, it is always with passion. When I saw Gaudi's works in Spain, I felt they were speaking to me. Particularly for this piece, I was drawn to the words and works of Mark Wigley, the New Zealand-born architect and author. Many of these ideas came directly from him.*

*I thought it would be fun to juxtapose an archetypal architect (physically inspired by Helmut Bakaitis' role in 2003's The Matrix Reloaded) with someone who literally has no structure in life, no foundation (an obvious nightmare for any architect), someone whose life is an utter mess. Enter George Whelan, the foil to our architect; what ensues is an almost surreal conversation.*

*This is a story about perspective, community, and creation. It's about dreams and aspirations. It's a deconstruction of the artistic soul. It's also about, in a way, absolutely nothing. So have fun with that.*

*Artists such as Hermann Hesse, Wes Anderson, The Wachowski siblings, and my contemporary Dennis Pahl (who has been published in this magazine by the way) acted as inspirations for this piece.*

**BIO:** *Gregory Cioffi (SAG-AFTRA, AEA) is a professional actor and a published writer. His works have been published in The Feral Press, Mystery Weekly Magazine, Queen Mob's Tea House, Little Old Lady (LOL) Comedy, Blood Moon Rising Magazine, The Five-Two, Aphelion, and Allegory Ridge. Six of these stories have been archived in Yale University's Beinecke Collection (Rare Books and Manuscript Library). Greg's film (his foray into directing), The Museum of Lost Things, recently won awards at The Long Island International Film Expo, Global Shorts, and The Madrid International Film Festival. You might have noticed him on the stage or screen in The Irishman, The Godfather of Harlem, or in Tony n Tina's Wedding where, for the last 5 years, he has been married hundreds of times nationally and internationally. Greg teaches a creative writing course and a basic acting course at Nassau Community College. <http://www.gandeproductions.com/>*