





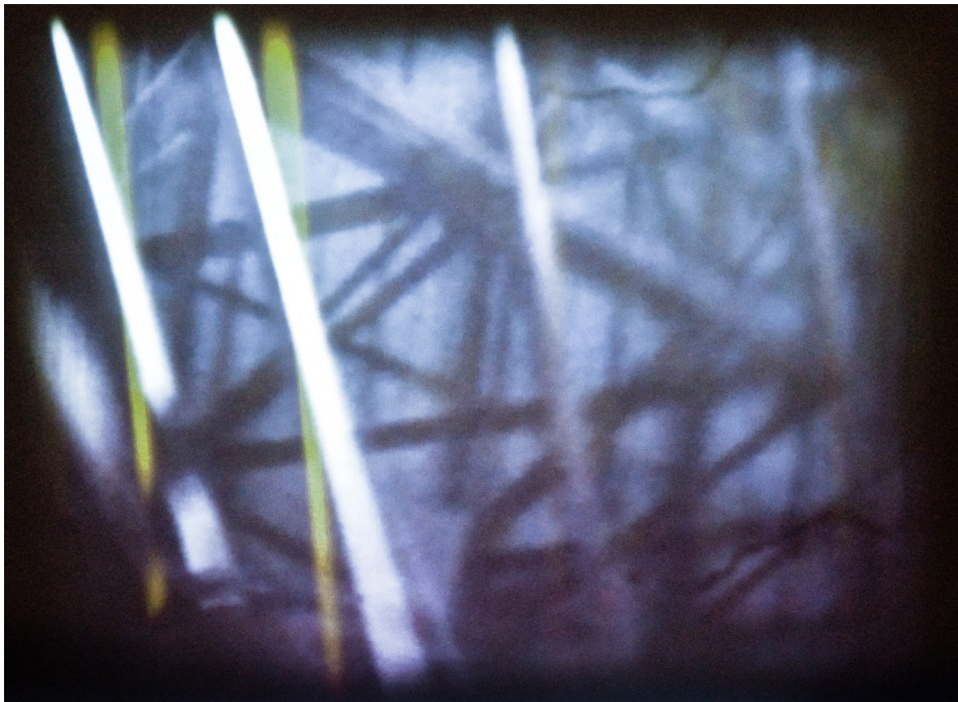
IX

TEXT COMPILED BY IVAN VLADISLAVIĆ

OUT THE WINDOWS

STEIDL

THE WALTHER COLLECTION



OUT THE WINDOWS

One of the more unusual design aspects was the question of fear of height phobia... A great deal of thought was given by the architects to the sensation of vertigo and this is one reason why there will be no balconies, although wind velocities would have made these uninhabitable on all but the calmest days.¹

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Some of the young chaps on the construction site used to throw things down the core just for fun. I remember one day when the building was nearly finished they threw a fire extinguisher down. It was nothing but high spirits.²

*

Windows: opening sections of windows to each flat have been positioned at 1.5 m off the floor level (320 mm higher than the bye-laws require) in order to prevent accidental falling out of the windows.

Objects falling from the building: for a distance of 10 m from the perimeter of the building the piazza is protected, to prevent persons from being hurt from objects either falling accidentally or deliberately being thrown from the building.

Suicide prevention: the public areas of the residential building have been completely sealed to prevent them from becoming vantage points for attempted suicide.³

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But the outward-looking apartments around a vertiginous hollow core had an alienating effect and the building developed a morbid allure for suicidal souls. Strangely (or significantly) most tended to jump outwards rather than into the building's cold inner core.⁴

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Someone in Johannesburg's tallest flatblock has a strange way of expressing himself – throwing heavy bronze book ends and bottles of beer from his windows in apparent fits of rage. And his fellow





OUT THE WINDOWS

residents at Ponte, the posh ‘five star’ block of flats in Berea have been ducking and diving for cover in recent weeks. ...

‘The other day a lady was walking into the building and was narrowly missed by a heavy book end,’ the Ponte spokesman said. ...

All tenants received an urgent note this week: ‘Please don’t throw things from your windows.’⁵

*

There are two legal peeping toms keeping their eyes on the giant Ponte block in Johannesburg’s flatland. Eagle-eyed security guards are squatting on two hills, waiting and watching for the next object to be thrown out from a flat in the 51-storey building. Armed with binoculars, the guards have so far reported not having seen anything thrown out. But despite the check, this week it was raining bottles, carelessly tossed out and crashing to earth with explosions. ...

‘I have been to the police about what’s been happening here, but they are powerless to act unless someone is seriously injured or killed by a falling object.’ The spokesman said that cleaners and security staff in the building... have been offered ‘substantial rewards’ if they find the source of the trouble. Tenants have also been warned in circulars that anyone found throwing junk out of their windows would be automatically evicted.

Unidentified flying objects have been waging a reign of terror on pedestrians walking in the grounds of the giant block. The objects range from cast iron statues to beercans, flour and water bombs and bottles. Some objects have also been hurled at pedestrians on nearby pavements.⁶

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The things that went sailing into the core of Ponte
A snowglobe from London that my parents never missed
The things that went sailing into the core of Ponte
We never heard a sound
Did they ever hit the ground?⁷

*

7



This is a picture of Ian Werdmuller, 45, committing suicide. For personal reasons he lived only two-thirds of his natural lifespan.⁸

*

Hillbrow and Berea are no ordinary neighbourhoods. The areas are known for a high rate of prostitution, and walking along the pavements near the skyscraper apartments is highly dangerous – if the death this week of Ponte security guard Harold Thisele is anything to go by. Mr Thisele died after he was struck on the head by a bottle allegedly thrown by tenants at Ponte City.

The latest incident is the second in less than a fortnight. Last week a pedestrian, Mr Daniel Maluleke, narrowly escaped death when a size-10 police boot missed him by a few metres as he was walking past the police barracks at the former Down Town Holiday Inn. ...

Police spokesman Major Eugene Opperman has warned flat tenants to stop throwing missiles. He said the police would not hesitate to take action. ...

A spokesman at Ponte City, Mr Moss Leaka, described the incident as ‘unfortunate.’ He said a reward of R5 000 would be offered to anyone who identified the culprit. ‘It is the first time such a thing has happened. We used to have non-residents coming here to commit suicide. Now people just throw missiles.’ He said letters had been circulated to inform tenants about the incident and an internal investigation was under way. ...

A hawker, Mr Solly Motaung, who sells fruit in nearby Soper Street, said: ‘I decided to move some distance from where I used to sell because I was continuously disturbed by objects thrown from the flats. Sometimes beer bottles would be thrown at me. It was pure luck that I was not hit.’⁹

*

‘I have been running this building for six years and in my term there have been three suicides. If I wanted to do that, I would probably pick Ponte because then I would be reasonably sure of my success.’¹⁰

*

There was a lady who was staying on 44 or 45, she’s the one that jumped, inside here. It was in September. I can’t forget, because it was so painful. They say that when death comes, you don’t see anything happening. That lady – I think she was from the Congo – she came inside the house and found her boyfriend with another woman. Then she just opened the door and went out and jumped. People were curious. They said, ‘How does one jump? Where do you die?’ Some people said, ‘No, you die on the air.’ Those who were standing outside by the lifts, they said they heard her scream – *Aaaaaah!* – But then when she reached around twenty-something floors, she was silent. I think maybe you just knock off – and then she went down.¹¹

*

... I had started collecting 8mm and 16mm Bolex cameras and I thought it would be great to load one of them with film and toss it over the edge into the core... I eventually found a lightweight 8mm Canon camera, 300 feet of film and a solution to a makeshift parachute – a wire coat hanger, plastic shopping bag and gaffer tape...¹²

*

1) Throwing items from windows: this has become a big problem. We have children playing in the gardens as well as tenants and people walking around the property looking for a sunny spot to enjoy the winter sun.

This action can kill people. Please act responsibly and respect lives. *Any person found throwing items from the windows will be evicted immediately.*¹³

*

4) Throughing items out the window: once again we request that you refrain from doing this as it can hurt and even kill. We do not want to be the ones to call on your flat and tell you your child, who was playing in the garden, is in hospital because an irresponsible



person threw a chair out the window. During November a tenant's arm was broken because some-one threw a chair out the building. *This will not be tollerated and those caught doing so will be evicted immediately.*

*Please report such incidents to us and assist us to make Ponte a better and safer place for all of us and our children.*¹⁴

*

'How about putting up a safety net?' Kraner asked, nodding in the direction of the shaft.

'Old wives' tales,' Jacques dismissed the suggestion. 'All those stories of people jumping to their deaths. That was long ago, in the wild, wicked seventies. Those days people called the edge on top *suicide gallery*. But now only darkies are living here, we don't have that problem anymore.'

'Why is that?'

'Well, the blacks don't fling themselves off high buildings.' Jacques pulled a Camel out of his packet. 'Heights make them panic. They'd rather hang themselves. Don't ask me why.'

...

'But whites like to jump, you say?'

'Yes, they do,' Jacques replied. 'But whites don't come here anymore, they're too scared. People want to live their last moments in peace, I suppose. Don't want to get raped or robbed moments before they put an end to their sorry existence. Ponte as a launching pad for suicides – that's the distant past you are talking about.' After two puffs, he stubbed out his cigarette and tossed it down the shaft.¹⁵

*

The things that went sailing into the core of Ponte
And all they got was maybe 200 rand
They sent him sailing into the core of Ponte
Did anybody hear?
Did they watch him disappear?¹⁶

*

Sometimes I will stand and look down. Yesterday I was *up there* – the last floor – I was looking down and I thought: 'What is a person thinking throwing herself *down there*?' No matter how stressed I am, I can never do that. Because you die before you even reach down there. And probably when you're going down, somebody throws a condom on top of you!¹⁷

*

When you find that body, you don't find a body. You find pieces, pieces, pieces.¹⁸

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4) Throwing items out the windows: on 9/11/2005 a child was seriously hurt and admitted to hospital after being struck on the head with a bottle that was thrown out the PONTE window. *The person who is responsible for this should be jailed for life. How can we do this to a child. Do you realize what the parents of this child is going through. We almost had another fire in the building as the mother of the child had to rush him to hospital and forgot the switch the stove off.*

Please make Ponte a safe building as we are spending a lot of money to ensure that the tenants are protected from criminals why should we not make it safe for the children!!!

CHILDREN DESERVE TO BE KEPT SAFE AS WELL.¹⁹

*

Common area's: as you can see, we are now repairing the garden canopies in all common area's. Again, we plead with you not to throw items out the windows. A child was seriously injured by a bottle that was thrown from one of the windows. This happened about three months ago and he is out of hospital now, but still has a



long walk to recovery at the parents expense as he still has to have further treatment to overcome the after-effects.

If this does not stop, management will have no alternative but to raise a monthly levy of R75.00 to each flat in order re cover the cost of cleaning and damage to property.

*Please report people that through items out the windows*²⁰

*

THROWING RUBBISH OUT THE WINDOWS: This has now become a SERIOUS problem and management will now take strict steps to combat this. If this does not stop, we will have NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO ADD A MONTHLY LEVY TO EACH FLAT IN ORDER TO PAY FOR THE CLEANING. We will now make an effort to identify the people throwing rubbish from the windows and these people WILL be evicted. Especially for used NAPPIES being thrown out the windows. People like this does NOT belong in a CIVILIZED SOCIETY. During the last week ANOTHER CHILD WAS HURT BECAUSE IF RUBBISH BEING THROWN OUT THE WINDOWS.²¹

*

NAPPY RESEARCH: You will notice that security is now working on a research on how many flats have got babies. We have spoken a lot about people throwing items out the window. It was found that the most items that are thrown out is USED NAPPIES. We will have to implement a levy for this. We are not discriminating against people with children, but we have no alternative but to address the matter in a way. The cleaning up around the building is costing about R70000.00 (SEVENTY THOUSAND RAND) PER MONTH. If people should stop throwing items out the windows, the cost of the cleaning will drop and we will be able to spend money on other LUXURIES for tenants. WE WANT TO BUILD A SOCCER FIELD where the basketball courts are, but money is wasted on cleaning.²²

NAPPIES OUT OF WINDOWS: We are nearing the end of our nappy research and will shortly add a levy of R75.00 will be added to all flats where there are babies. We have been talking about this for a long time. We were approached by the health inspector and they confirmed that this is legal.²³

*

4) It is again holiday season and *all parents are requested* to look after their children. In the past we had problems with kids damaging property and throwing items out the windows. The whole of last weekend children were throwing bottles of water at people passing by. *Should we find the children responsible for this, you will be held responsible for your children's action. You will be evicted.*²⁴

*

And then there was another boy who also jumped, this side. He was a small schoolboy, but he never went to school. He always used to be selling fatcakes or samoosas. Have we always had this thing – these boys with the buckets? Why? They don't go to school, they're always walking, you know, raining, not raining, they're selling. We said, 'No, the mother's telling him: if this bucket is not empty, don't come home.' So maybe the child was frustrated. They say that boy came from wherever, he came in the house and he wanted something from his mother. The mother refused. Then he just jumped. The amazing part, you think you find them struggling – but they just fall! I wonder, have you seen when you throw this glass, how it goes down there? Imagine if it's a body. But it doesn't splash. Or you crack from the inside – I don't know. It's so terrible.²⁵

*

I'm going to sail into the core of Ponte
I'm gonna get down to the bottom of it all
I'm gonna go sailing into the core of Ponte
Retracing the fall
That killed my brother Paul²⁶

*

5) PAINTING: Just a kind reminder that they have started painting the outside of the building. Please do not throw items out the windows as this could injure the painters.²⁷

*

Scraps of newspaper whirled in the upswells amid the dark vortex of Ponte tower's hollow centre. Inside one of its now empty penthouses, two young women – giddy at the prospect of throwing themselves off the iconic building – mulled over the thought...

Saturday's opportunity to abseil off Ponte Tower attracted hundreds of adventurous Joburg residents. The event, organized by Ponte developers, Investagain 229 and the Johannesburg Development Agency, charged the brave-hearted R500 to abseil, or repel, down the building – rigging included.²⁸

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20. 2006 Ponte internal newsletter, March 2006.
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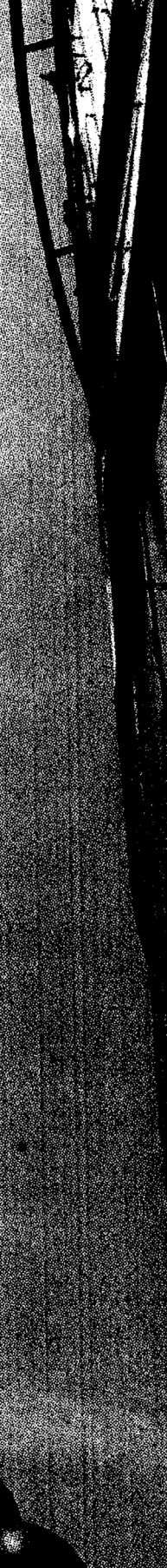
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Back cover: 'UPS AND DOWNS: Edgar Gaiao freefalls from the 54-storey Ponte towers in Hillbrow, Joburg. Gaiao has been jumping off the iconic building for many years.' *Star*, 2007





Taking the plunge

