MAKING SPACE FOR ARCHITECTURE :
: The culture of public architectural discourse

ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The premise of this report is that architecture can, and should be an active contributor to improving the way we live. This is a broad charter and one that is intended to encompass both tangible and intangible aspects of the way we live - primarily through the design of spaces and imagining alternate futures from buildings and infrastructure to health, culture and equality. As architectural theorist Nicholas Temple asserts, "Architecture's true vocation is to situate and shape our lives"[1] This is not new territory - architects have historically always been concerned with these matters. The challenge currently facing the profession however is how architects can establish and maintain agency within high level decision making processes that are the engines for this type of reform.

This report asserts that architecture gains agency by having an informed public that understand the contribution architecture can make and advocate for their inclusion in decision making processes. By having the knowledge, language and desire to engage in architectural ideas then the public have an opportunity to advocate for design as a solution to their challenges. Fundamental to this process is the ability for the profession to establish and maintain an inclusive and sophisticated discourse around architecture.

For the purposes of this report, the term 'general public' is used to refer to anyone outside of the architectural profession. It refers to individuals but also agencies and groups such as government and business. The 'architectural profession' is used to describe all individuals and agencies who are involved in the cultural production of architecture. This includes writers, critics, institutions, thinkers, policy makers and art practitioners along side those involved in the design and realisation of buildings.

Inherent in the research premise is a criticism of the current state of the relationship between the architecture profession, the general public and decision makers. There is a perceived lack of understanding between the architecture profession and the general public that can manifest as distrust and at worst, mutual destain. There is also a frustration from within the architecture profession that architecture is often seen as a service industry for the delivery of buildings when we crave a more fundamental role in imagining the future of our cities. It is the premise of this report that the only way for the architecture profession in Australia to increase its agency in the shaping of our future is through the quality of relationships we form outside the profession. The following report explores five methods of promoting these relationships, a series of 26 case studies of institutions, events and individuals operating in this field and 12 interviews with leading practitioners.

1 - Prologue from: (2012) *The Cultural Role of Architecture Contemporary and Historical Perspectives,* Routledge

ESTABLISHING A COMMON LANGUAGE

Can main stream media help make architecture legible to the general public?

For something as common place as architecture, it is paradoxical that we often struggle to find the right words to talk about it. This problem is exacerbated by the architectural profession's propensity for waxing lyrical at best and deliberately obscuring meaning at worst. The language used to discuss architecture often falls into equally inaccessible categories; meaninglessly generic, pompously obtuse or professional jargon. Where other niche industries have managed to break down the linguistic barriers around expert fields, architecture is struggling to break through. With a few notable exceptions, architecture has failed to achieve a popular appeal and diverse audience. Why is this important and what can we do to change it?

THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMMON LANGUAGE:

A common language is an essential way for the public to express their values and desires for the built environment to the people who make it. Conversely it allows the people who make it to explain and elaborate their vision to the people who use it. Without a common language the profession runs the risk of appearing inaccessible or elitist and the public run the risk of appearing ignorant or indifferent. This lack of mutual understanding results in mutual disempowerment and invites intermediaries into the discussion at the risk of further obscuring the real issues.

This need for a functional and direct discourse between the public and the profession is of increasing importance. The history of this relationship is long and nuanced. Generally however we can reduce the relationships into three main historical phases spanning from the renaissance to the modern era. Our current explorations into new types of relationships may arguably be the indication of a fourth phase.

In the premodern era, the architect was the instrument of those in power whether that be government, institutions or powerful individuals. The architect would express the values and ambitions of this small minority with a secondary, if any regard for the wider public or city fabric. Modernism saw a radical shift in this hierarchy with governments and individuals seeking the visionary skills of the profession to imagine new ways of living which allowed a direct imposition of the architects vision onto the city. Even when carried out under the guise of being for the greater good, there was little direct dialogue between the author and the user. These utopian explorations met with mixed success (at best) which in turn established the conditions that have led to the present arrangement where architects are now in the employ of a third tier of decision makers. Architecture is commissioned and manipulated by a raft of intermediary entities such as project managers, local governments and developers who while ostensibly operating on behalf of the general public have brought the architect no closer to a direct dialogue with the actual users.

The profession now is arguably embarking on a fourth phase of relationship with the city and its public. A rising frustration with projects that do not meet the needs or expectations of the public has led to a bottom-up, attitude towards commissioning public works. Crowd funding and unsolicited proposals are steadily emerging as a viable means of direct relationship between architecture and the public however it is severely limited in the scope and scale of projects.

If we seek to reject the limitations of the status quo new strategies for discourse are required. The strategies below have been drawn from case studies.

STRATEGIES:

- Talk about architecture more.
- Establish and maintain a high level of discourse
- Do not put architecture on a pedestal.

TALK ABOUT ARCHITECTURE MORE:

Naturally, the more places where architecture discussions are held, the wider the appeal and broader the audience base. We should be talking about architecture in the main stream media, TV, radio and newspapers. We should be folding discussions about architecture into educational programs and schools. Architecture is currently seen but not heard - name it when you see it.

ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A HIGH LEVEL OF DISCOURSE.

The level of discussion around architecture should be sophisticated. The public are intelligent and sophisticated and they have a wealth of embodied experience about the built environment that the profession needs to understand and value. The profession should be able to break down complex ideas and propositions as much for its own comprehension as for external discussions. Fields such as popular science and popular economics have a lot to teach the profession about how to communicate complex ideas with accessible language.

DO NOT PUT ARCHITECTURE ON A PEDESTAL.

The professionalism of architecture and the fierce defence of the professional title should not translate into a monopoly on who may talk about it. Architecture need not be forcibly delineated from other fields such as art, popular culture, finance or real estate. All of these fields are interrelated and a deeper understanding can be gained from emphasising rather than avoiding these collisions. Narratives that connect architectural issues to personal experience is a powerful tool in arguing for the professions relevance.

INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES:

While most of the interviews and case studies do engage with these ideas, the following list of interviews and case studies explore these topics in greater detail and demonstrate specific and successful techniques in this field.

INTERVIEW:

Peter Ho - The Rennovators
Stuart Harrison - The Architects (RRR)

CASE STUDIES:

London Design Museum
Pompidou Centre
MAXXI
The New Institute
Danish Architecture Centre
Canadian Centre for Architecture
MOMA
Chicago Architecture Foundation

LONDON DESIGN MUSEUM - Wall texts

EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

The role of architecture museums and institutions in positioning architectural ideas within a community discourse and expanding the popular definition of what architecture is.

Australia does not have a strong tradition of architecture exhibition but the field is becoming increasingly relevant as architects turn to the exhibition format seeking opportunities to present their work and test ideas with a broad audience. Indeed this is a global trend as architects are forced to find new avenues for expression in an unpredictable economy and increasingly regulated building industry.

It is no secret that architecture exhibition can often fall into the trap of being impenetrable to the specialised and general public alike as the viewer is easily alienated with both the ideas and language used to express them

This begs the questions: What is the problem with the existing ways of conducting architecture exhibitions? How can the problems be overcome? Why is architecture exhibition important? What does a gallery space provide that realised buildings can not?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION?

The problem of architectural exhibition is a recurrent one - How do you exhibit architecture in a gallery context when the building - as artefact- is absent and the drawings, models and writing are encoded in architectural language. Central to this problem is how can an architecture exhibition engage an audience who are not initiated in this language?

A useful first step is to define what is meant by architecture - it is a broad mantle with undefined boundaries. For example architecture could simultaneously be defined as; buildings, a profession, abstract ideas, solutions to a problem, personal expression or a reflection of society and politics. Broadly, I assert that architecture must be defined as the cultural production around architecture as well as the production of buildings.

Secondly, it is useful to examine the motivations behind exhibiting architecture at all. If we accept that architecture encompasses the broad spectrum of cultural production then the purposes of exhibition are threefold. Firstly it is to expand the public perception of architecture to include these non-building parts of the profession. Secondly to educate the public and contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of architecture and lastly to provide a forum for the sophisticated display and discourse around architecture (both within and outside the profession).

HOW CAN THESE PROBLEMS BE OVERCOME?

The case studies shared problems and address them with various techniques. Below are four techniques that were particularly effective at overcoming these problems.

DOCUMENTS AS ARTEFACTS.

It seems obvious, but one technique is to treat the documents around architecture as artefacts in their own right. From the beautiful hand rendered perspectives of the modern era to the almost abstract 3D fabrication documentation, these objects possess an aesthetic value in their own right. Framed and annotated as to elevate these works from the by-product to the subject - they become a way for the viewer to engage with the thematic of the exhibition. Without needing secondary explanation the document can seduce the viewer into engaging with the content.

VISITOR ENJOYING A COLLECTION OF ARCHITECTURAL MONTAGES - MOMA, NYC

ARCHITECTURE AS A VESSEL FOR IDEAS - A LENS TO REFLECT ON CULTURE

An architecture exhibition can choose to isolate architecture as anomalous from the every day or to embed it as an indecipherable part of community and culture. Both of these techniques serve to show the viewer what is already there - in other words... how to see architecture in the built environment. The technique of embedding architecture in a cultural context engages the viewer with an accessible narrative and then highlights the role of architecture within it.

PLAYBOY ARCHITECTURE - THE NEW INSTITUTE | This exhibition used the frame of Playboy Magazine to examine architectural ideas around male identity and domestic space

RUMINATION ON A THEME - A DEPTH OF UNDERSTANDING

The retrospective exhibition is a traditional form of display. This display of a single architect or a movement of architects allows architecture a multiplicity that is often denied through the examination of a single building or example. Testing through iterations, seeking out the genesis of an idea or contextualising an idea within a broader discourse is a much more comprehensive way to display work. In turn using this discreet body of work and dwelling on a theme allows a much more sophisticated discourse and a sense of enhanced understanding from the viewer.

ZAHA HADID RETROSPECTIVE - Danish Centre of Architecture

A COMMON THEME - ARCHITECTURE ALONG SIDE ART AND DESIGN

Another technique is to embed architecture within a larger creative context - asserting architecture's position along side art and design. Art galleries in particular are good at a cross disciplinary approach to thematic explorations. This technique allows the conversation around architecture to be about ideas rather than buildings.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE DISPLAYED SIDE BY SIDE - PS1

WHY IS ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION IMPORTANT?

In entering into this research I was questioning whether architecture exhibition was a relevant or effective mode of architectural discourse at all. In conclusion, I feel that architecture exhibition is indeed relevant and in some cases the only effective forum to conduct particular types of discourse. The main benefit of the exhibition format is that it allows for the exploration of architectural ideas away from the constraints of building. Conversely though it is still a spatial form of exploration that, as distinct from publishing or criticism allows for a sensory and experiential dimension to the presentation of ideas. The exhibition format creates the conditions for exploration, experimentation and possible failure that is unacceptable in built form.

Lastly, the exhibition format positions architecture in a cultural arena which gives the non-building parts of the profession agency in their own right. This is a key aspect to the expansion of the popular definition of architecture.

INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES:

Many of the interviews and case studies examine this issue of architectural exhibition however the below selection provide stand-out examples in the field. The Victoria and Albert Museum and MOCA are included in this list for the particularly unsuccessful aspects of their architectural exhibition.

INTERVIEW:

Pippo Correa (MAXXI)

CASE STUDY:

Victoria and Albert Museum
London Design Museum
RIBA
MAXXI
Pompidou
MAMO
The New Institute
AEDES
Danish Architecture Centre
MOMA
Storefront for Art and Architecture

MOCA - Models on display as part of the 'A New Sculpturalism from Southern California' exhibition

SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

How temporary architectural actions can showcase the potential of architecture and be the instigator for architectural discourse

For the purposes of this chapter, I will define temporary architectural actions as an architectural act that is clearly delineated from the normal operations of a place but physically embedded within it. As discussed in the introductory chapter, this architectural act can take many forms ranging from a built physical form to an idea, conversation or event. These temporary actions have the ability to influence a public audience by demonstrating the transformative potential of architecture. The distinction between temporary actions as opposed to other forms of discourse is that acquires agency through the tangibility of its actions. This is first hand architecture rather than architecture filtered through other modes of communication. There is a long history of temporary architectural actions from follies, pavilions, World's Fairs etc... If there is any distinction between these historical actions and contemporary ones, it is that architects are now using them in a more deliberate way as a self conscious form of advocacy for architecture its self.

I have identified a number of dominant types of temporary architectural actions: pavilion, festival, conferences and initiatives.

PAVILIONS

Architects like to tout the pavilion typology as a means to pure architectural expression. Without the hefty burden of complex programming, servicing etc, of a more complex building type, the pavilion embodies the hope for an architecture that's primary concern is expression rather than shelter. To generalise, the main characteristics of a pavilion is that it is temporary, programmatically simple and generally small in size

Pavilions are often commissioned by bodies that are seeking to create a temporary focal point as part of a larger over arching aim. There are regular pavilion programs from, the annual Serpentine Pavilion program in London's Kensington Gardens or world trade expos every 4 years, to incidental and experimental calls for temporary structures. The role of a pavilion as a focal point of a larger event or exhibition is common.

The benefit of a pavilion as a mode of discourse is that people can physically interact with it forming an embodied or experiential relationship with the space. As a building type, it is also familiar and accessible to the public. There are no perceptual or intellectual barriers to understanding and participating in the space.

The main dangers of the pavilion typology is firstly its propensity to fall into the category of spectacle. In this case the structure becomes an oversized ornament pressed into the service of marketing or as promotion. Secondly, pavilions can sometimes sit awkwardly between sculpture, installation and architecture. These disciplinary distinctions are not essential but when poorly handles can create confusion and discomfort when the rules for physical engagement are unclear.

SERPENTINE PAVILION - LONDON

MOCA - Temporary pavilion as part of the 'A New Sculpturalism from Southern California' exhibition

FESTIVALS

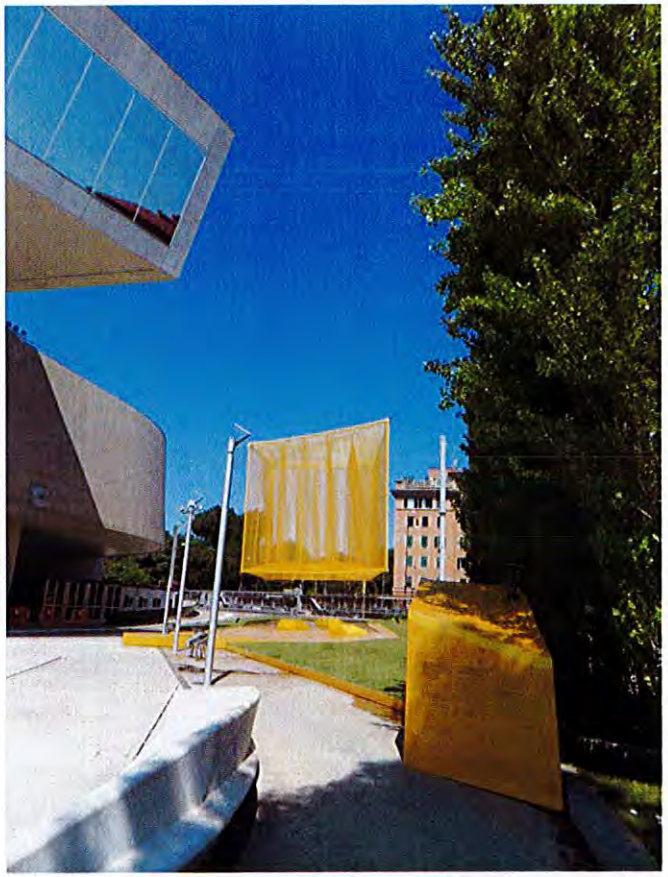
There is a proliferation of contemporary festival types, from music festivals, biennials, triennials, virtual, physical, popular or arcane. The common elements are that an organising body has conceived of a temporary event that is themed around a defined premise. Architecture and design festivals are held globally and range in charter from education to marketing and sales.

IMAGE: http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2014/06/140605-elements-of-architecture-at-the-venice-biennale.asp

Architecture Festivals, biennials and triennials are often varied affairs that can include, exhibitions, forums, film, open houses, workshops, debates, competitions, pavilions, talks, walks and more. These events stand out as a mode of architectural discourse as they are deliberately public and aim to generate an intense moment of focus, attention or debate around architecture.

The benefit of festivals as a mode of discourse is that they create a critical mass or activity that encourages a temporary increase in the volume and visibility of architecture. A festival has the ability to draw crowds, attract media attention and to frame a discussion in the way that stand-alone or one off events can not.

The danger of architecture festivals is that if it is not done sufficiently well then it can further alienate an already disinterested public. The success of the whole is reliant on the quality of the individual parts.



YAP AT MAXXI- Temporary pavilion as part of the 'Young Architects Program'

CONFERENCE

Conferences are more often then not an event aimed at professional discourse rather than public participation. There are however a few notable examples that manage to transcend that barrier such as the Design Indaba conference in South Africa and the South by South West Music conference in Texas, USA.

These conferences include the public as a vital component of their charter and manage to expose and promote a highly concentrated and high level of discourse around their topics.

INITIATIVE

In this context I use the term 'initiative' as an umbrella term referring to a place's affiliation with a branding or a program designed to elevate and promote their design or architecture credentials. Examples of this type of program include the 'European Capital of Culture' and the 'World Design Capital'. These programs promote an agenda of architecture and design thinking and are designed to elevate the internal and external focus on these matters.

IMAGE: http://www.industrypdx.com/inspire/cape-town-shifts-and-implications/

This is an interesting mode of promoting architectural discourse as it relies on a place to declare that architecture and design are a priority. There is little tangible substance to the initiative, it is almost wholly reliant on the branding and reputation of the initiative to lend legitimacy and attention to the subject. This is almost like

a sponsorship or a marketing campaign for the place in question.

The benefit of these types of initiates is that it creates a moment of intensity and scrutiny around architecture and design. It creates the environment for discourse on the subject to occur and equips the public with a framework for engaging it.

COMMON GROUND

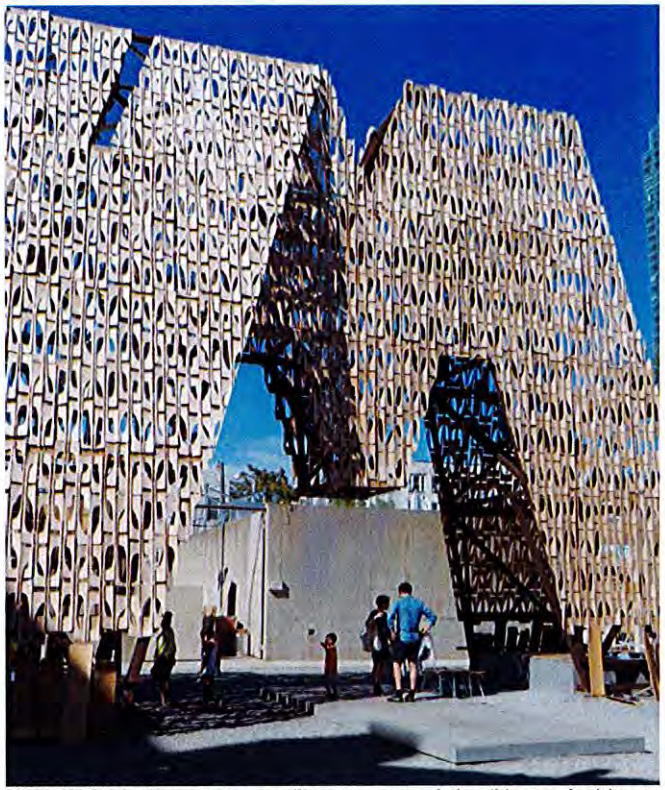
The common ground between these different types of temporary actions are that they are actions that are explicitly in the public domain, they are part of a larger idea, organisation or charter, they are or can be repetitive, they are experiential and they form opportunities for explicit marketing and promotion.

It is important to have these temporary actions in the public domain because they remove architecture from the rarified environment of the profession and place it in a familiar public domain. It makes explicit the relationship between architecture and the places it seeks to affect. It literally transforms the built environment and thus demonstrates the potential of architecture more broadly.

By being linked to a larger idea, organisation or charter, these temporary actions become part of the matrix of cultural production. It is an intentional step away from the self referential nature of some architectural discourse and again it allows architecture to demonstrate its potential rather than relying on interpretation or interpolation.

The repetitive nature of these events also allows for the establishment of a longer and deeper type of architectural discourse. For example, the Serpentine Pavilion series not only creates a popular annual event on the London summer social calendar, it invites comparison between the pavilions from year to year. It allows the pavilion attendees to build up a body of expertise, experience and knowledge of contemporary architecture by putting them in close and regular contact with it.

The experiential nature of these temporary actions is a potent way of creating meaningful connection between a tangible architectural expression and the public. The public are invited to relate architecture



YAP AT PS1- Temporary pavilion as part of the 'Young Architects Program'

specifically to their embodied experiences of space which may be extrapolated into their everyday experience of the built environment.

The marketing and promotion of these actions is a most effective way in bringing architectural language into the main stream. 'Design Indaba' billboards in the centre of Cape Town announce to the public that their city is concerned with design. It prompts enquiry, stimulates debate and ensures that architecture and design are in the collective cultural consciousness of a place.
By examining the types of temporary architectural actions and by seeking their common ground, it becomes apparent that these temporary actions are a form of advocacy. These actions argue for the relevance of architecture and invests in the relationship with the public by showing what it can do. Temporary architectural actions are a potent mode of public architectural discourse.

INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES:

The range and scope of temporary architectural actions is vast. The below selection of case studies covers a selection of these types. The notable exception from these case studies is the Venice Architecture Biennial which was unfortunately not held the year of my study.

INTERVIEW: PIPPO CORREA

CASE STUDY:

Serpentine Pavilion
Design Indaba
Marseilles European Capital of Culture

Young Architects Program, MAXXI,
Young Architects Program, PS1
London Architecture Festival

EMPOWER YOURSELF

The role of doing rather than talking. How local scale interaction and speculation can empower architecture.

The modes of architectural discourse discussed in the previous chapters were primarily concerned with explaining architecture or seeking to elevate its status as a way of arguing for the agency for the profession. The premise of these types of discourse is that the public and the profession both hold their own agency in the built environment and the task is to align the skills and values for a mutual betterment. There is also an argument for the need and value for architectural expression in its own right.

This chapter however takes a alternate position and seeks to understand the role of architectural discourse in disenfranchised, struggling or emerging communities. In these circumstances, the role of architecture changes significantly. Architecture in this circumstance ceases to talk about and advocate for its self. Architecture has the potential to become a potent advocacy tool that can work on behalf of those who have no agency within their own built environment.

The role of architecture as advocate has a long and rich history and deserves a dedicated study of its own however for the purposes of this report, I thought it would be worthwhile to include a brief chapter on the distinctive form this type of architectural discourse takes on.

I have consciously avoided discussing the role of architectural projects in needy communities such as relief work, volunteer projects or NGO initiatives as I believe that is a field unto its self and one that falls outside the specific concerns of this report. This report is concerned with modes of architectural discourse.

ARCHITECTURE AS A LANGUAGE OF POWER

Architecture is a discipline that has emerged from and has agency with societies decision makers and power brokers. Built form is an accepted form for the expression of institutional and governmental authority, architectural documents such as drawings, specifications and proposals carry legal weight and the professional status of the architect seeks to assert an authoritative voice in society. It is this status and these tools that can allow architecture to be a means of communication between a disenfranchised public and authorities.

The architect can become the interpreter between the collective desires of a group of people and the decision makers who have the power to instigate top-down change. These techniques and tools do not belong to architecture alone but they may be useful to understand as a mode of potent public discourse.

THE TOOLS AT OUR DISPOSAL:

DRAWING

The convention of architectural drawing brings an authority the description of space. There is an empirical dimension and an assumption that the information presented is objective and correct. Drawing can take the form of documenting and measuring existing conditions. For example, this technique has been used to great effect in the push to legitimise informal settlements in South Africa. By drawing maps and describing the conditions of contested townships, the government authorities are confronted with an objective measure of the large and complex communities they may be seeking to displace. The communities themselves become armed with a tool that describes their physical space as a way to argue for appropriate and sensitive change.

PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY

The inherent authority of the architecture profession is a contested subject however, it may be generalised that architecture has the potential to assert impression of authority. Inherent in this perception is that architects are experts in not only building but in thinking about societies, space and the environment more broadly. In this case architects may be able to lend authority to causes or communities struggling for agency.

INTERPRETATION

Architects possess the skill of interpretation. Abstract ideas and desires can be made manifest into interpreted proposals for the way we live. This interpretation may take the form of imagined alternatives for building or the city or in larger gestures such as manifestos or imagining radical futures.

TANGIBLE RESULTS

Architects can also rely on the strength and success of built outcomes to advocate for a position. A proposition that once appeared radical and risky becomes reliable and predictable when supported by successful real world examples.

THE RISKS

The risk of perceiving architecture as a tool for advocacy is the potential for misinterpretation or paternalism in the way it is applied. I do not assert that architecture is the saviour for all societies ills however I do believe that in the right circumstances, architecture is uniquely positioned to have a positive influence in the shaping of society.

INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES:

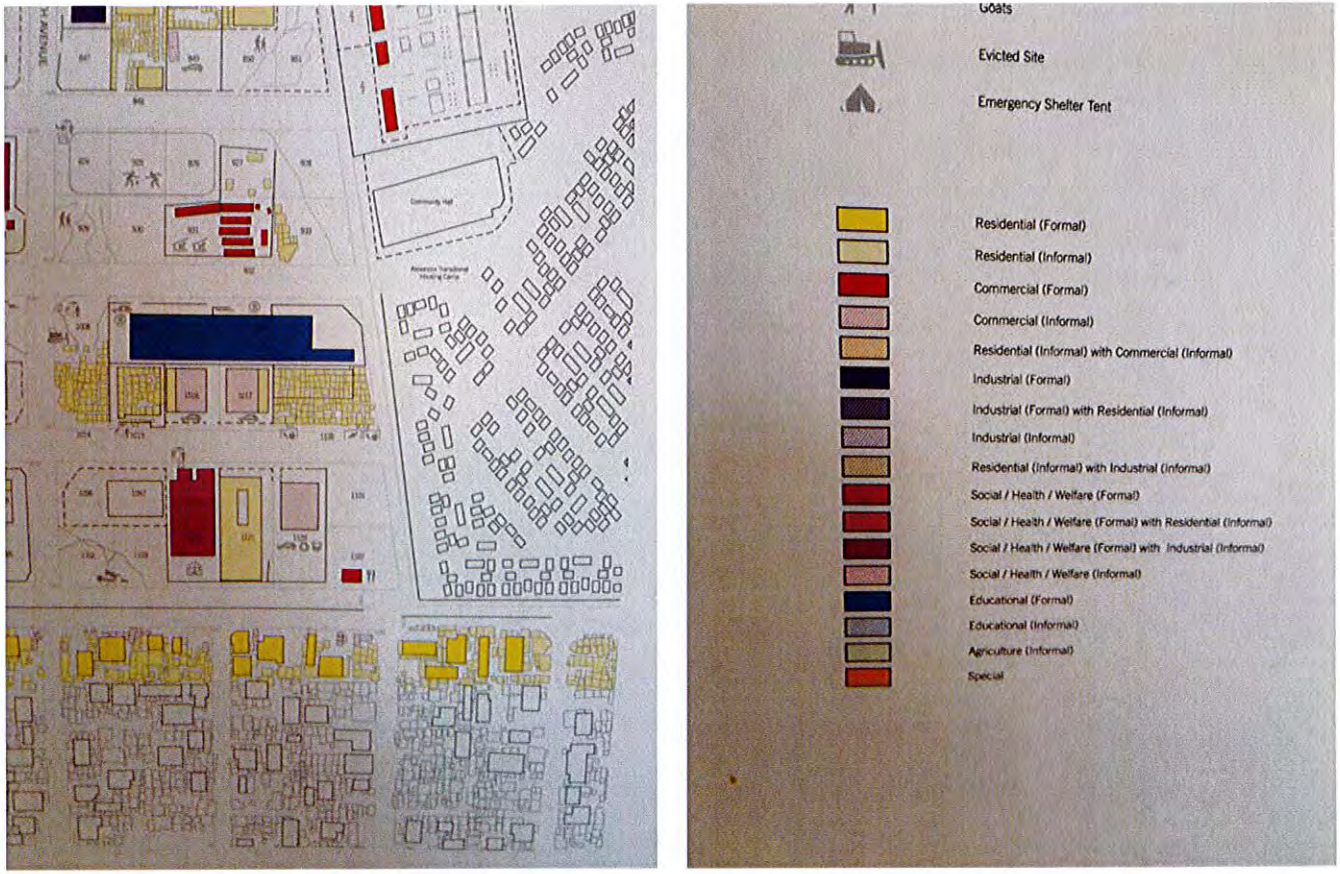
These case studies provide very specific examples of where architecture can advocate for and instigate meaningful change. Each example is tightly related to its location and community and have grown organically from the place.

INTERVIEW

Zahira Asmal - Design for Democracy
Thorsten Deckler & Anne Graupner - 26'10 South Architects

CASE STUDIES

Gothe Institut
Design Indaba
The Architecture Foundation



INFORMAL STUDIO: MARLBORO SOUTH - GOTHE INSTITUT - Detail from the mapping drawing which describes the complex make up of the informal settlement at Marlboro South. This map was made before the government demolished the township and was subsequently used by the community to petition for compensation. In the absence of formal land ownership and legal protections, the map became the primary document describing the nature of the settlement before its distruction.

TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES.

Why an internal culture within the architecture community is vital - even if no one else understands.

The final aspect of architectural discourse I will examine is the necessity for a strong internal discourse that is aimed towards the profession rather than the public. This may be counter intuitive considering that this report is particularly focussed on accessible public architectural discourse however, I believe that the two forms are interdependent and essential to support one another.

The vitality of the internal discourse and the quality of intellectual enquiry creates a fertile ground for architectural production. Buildings however, are slow, litigious and costly expressions of architectural ideas and almost always subject to burdensome client and monetary constraints. Other forums and other modes of production are needed for exploration, experimentation and most importantly failure. Forums such as publication, exhibition, competitions, conferences, debates and events are all ways that these ideas can be explored. These architectural explorations are often deeply encoded in a specialised architectural language, whether it be in terminology, context or graphic production. I would argue that this specific use of language is integral to maintaining a high level of internal debate even though it is often inaccessible to a wide audience.

I assert that these complex architectural expressions are essential for maintaining a vibrant and dynamic architectural profession. The public discourse needs to run in parallel to the specialised discourse with each field being self aware of the limitations and opportunities of each. In this way both the public and the specialised discourse can work in tandem and learn from each other.

ARCHITECTURE ASSOCIATION - Graduation Exhibition

The observations around this type of specialist discourse follow:

SITES FOR FAILURE

In a highly commercialised and letigious world, we need to cultivate sites where intellectual failure are allowed. Experimentation and failure are closely related and new conceptual ground can not be found without either. Provocation can take many forms and when done well can be a rich source for enquiry.

HIGH LEVEL INTERNAL DEBATE AND REFLECTION

Specialised discourse is only as useful as it is robust. Architecture needs to cultivate the skill of deep reflection and sophisticated debate that transcend fashion and popularity. Critique and discourse are inseparable - however critique is an art and should be recognised to be distinct from opinion. Architecture often falls into the trap of assuming that the role of creator and critic can coexist.

COLLECTING THIS MATERIAL FOR POSTERITY

The issue of collection and archiving architecture is fraught. However, a mindful engagement with the subject from practitioners, researchers and institutions can establish a meaningful resource for the future. A robust debate around what constitutes architecture will subsequently inform what goes into these collections and the best way to store and access them.

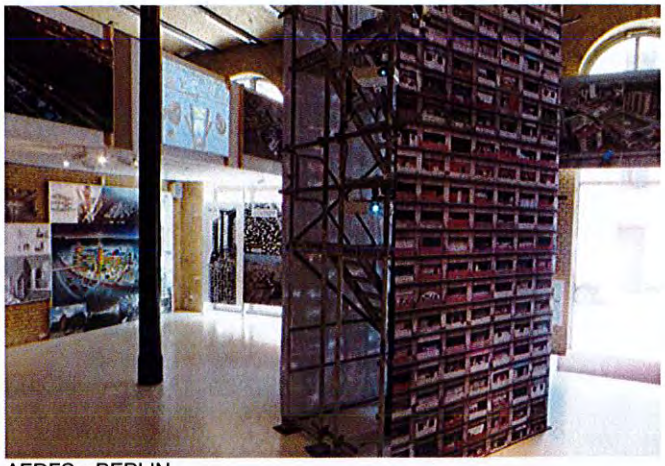
INTERVIEWS AND CASE STUDIES:
The selected interviews and case studies are from individuals and institutions that are actively engaged in cultivating a rich and specialised discourse.

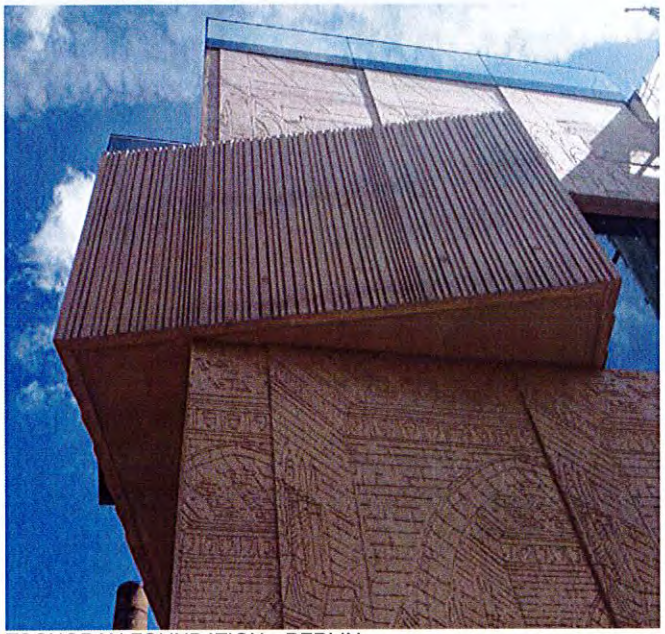
INTERVIEW:

Eva Franch Gilbert

CASE STUDY:

AA Graduation Exhibition
Storefront for Art and Architecture
RIBA
The New Institute
AEDES
Tchoban Foundation
Danish Architecture Centre
Canadian Centre for Architecture
The Graham Institute


AEDES - BERLIN


TSCHOBAN FOUNDATION - BERLIN


STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE - NYC

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MAKING SPACE FOR ARCHITECTURE :
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ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION - CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

The intention behind these case studies is to present a range of techniques used to enable architectural discourse. The case studies comprise of a short description of the exhibition or event and then first hand observations and reflections. These reflections are not intended to be a definitive or empirical analysis – they intend to form a series of leading questions around the role and efficacy of the techniques.

I conducted these case studies through site visits between March and August 2013. Unless otherwise stated, all images were taken by myself.

The blue text on each title page is a summarising point from the case studies.

CASE STUDIES:

01: Design Indaba
02: Designing South Africa
03: Gothe Institut
04: Architecture Foundation
05: Victoria and Albert Museum
06: RIBA
07: Serpentine Pavilion
08: London Design Museum
09: The Architecture Association
10: Great Tichbury Street Festival
11: Pompidou Centre
12: Mamo
13: Marseilles - European Capital of Culture
14: MAXXI
15: The New Institute
16: AEDES
17: Tchoban Foundation
18: Danish Architecture Centre
19: Canadian Centre for Architecture
20: Museum of Modern Art
21: MOMA PS1
22: Storefront for Art and Architecture
23: Chicago Architecture Foundation
24: The Graham Institute
25: MOCA
26: LACMA

DESIGN INDABA

Cape Town, South Africa

CASE STUDY 01 -

FESTIVAL / DESIGN / CONFERENCE / EXPO

Be world-class but not to the exclusion of the community that supports you.

DESIGN INDABA

Design Indaba is a independent design conference and expo held annually in Cape Town. The Conference presents a program of international speakers from a wide range of design disciplines over a 3 day period. The expo component is designed to be part trade-show and part show-case of local South African designers. The conference and expo are complimented by a program of fringe events which include music, film, art and performance at locations throughout the city.

Design Indaba has an impressive street presence in Cape Town, with street banners, billboards, flyers and posters all announcing the presence of the event. The visibility of this event coupled with the longevity of the program over almost 20 years must help to shape the perception of the local residents about their city as a centre for design thinking and excellence. The success of this program certainly contributed to the awarding of Cape Town as the 2014 'World Design Capital'

From an outsiders perspective however, Design Indaba seemed to miss a few crucial opportunities to promote a local design culture. The program of conference speakers was overwhelmingly European and American centred. The expo displayed an array of local design talent that unfortunately suffered from the overbearing commercial premise of the event. To my eyes there was a notable lack of a focused and sophisticated presentation of local (or even African more broadly) design. This begs the question whether design events should adopt the charter as advocate for a local place. In the South African context I think the answer is yes. As a emerging economy and a place actively trying to forge a new identity and strong community, I think that design is an active tool to do this and one that should be utilised. By focussing on an international market and especially one that operates at a disparate economic level, I think that it runs the risk of appearing to be an elitist pursuit and something inaccessible to a local audience.

THIS IS NOT
A CONFERENCE
RENÉ REDZEPI

DESIGNING SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa

CASE STUDY 02

ADVOCACY GROUP

DESIGNING SOUTH AFRICA

Zahira Asmal is the founder and driving force behind Designing South Africa. She states *" I hope to assist in fostering a culture of reflection and critical thought in South African society...and how through design-orientated thinking, it can better inform future decisions..." (pg.15)* Zahira sees the struggle to construct a post-apartheid South Africa as an act of design in its self. This framing creates a point of access into the overwhelming task of shaping a nation. The term 'design' its self connotes intentionality and expression of values. 'Design' is understood as a verb – it is an action and a process. This re frames the components that form a society – its politics, its cities, its infrastructure etc.. - as designed elements that have inherent in them the possibility for them to be re-designed and re-imagined.

Designing South Africa seeks to empower the public by exposing societies fundamental building blocks as elements that can be affected through design. While the broad charter of Designing South Africa focuses on nation shaping, architecture is a recurrent tool for expressing these ideas. To examine one example, Zahira uses the main soccer stadium built for the 2010 Soccer World Cup – Soccer City as an example of how a building can embody values such as national pride, racial inclusiveness and collective healing. Zahira states *" Given South Africa's apartheid past, the World Cup presented and consequently created an opportunity for racial and socioeconomic integration in the stadiums, on the streets and in the fan parks, all united under a single identity – that of being South African"* (pg.21) specifically related to Soccer City, Zahira asserts *"Icons, such as Soccer City, are engraved in the collective memory of the nation and offer designers, cities and government opportunities to ignite a national unity once again"* (pg.20)

The Designing South Africa's book - Reflections and Opportunities. Reflecting on the design journey of South Africa and the Soccer World Cup

GOTHE INSTITUT

Johannesburg, South Africa

CASE STUDY 03

EXHIBITION / UNIVERSITY / POLICY / ADVOCACY

Know your audience and bring them with you in the explanation of complex ideas and architectural process.

GOTHE INSTITUT

Informal Studio : Marlboro South was an exhibition held at the Gothe Institut in Johannesburg to showcase the work and research of 51 students from the University of Johannesburg's Department of Architecture under the studio program run by 26'10 Architects. The exhibition comprised of drawings, diagrams, photographs, film, comic strip and models. The exhibition was complimented by a newspaper style publication that compiled all the exhibition material.

This exhibition was remarkable in the potency of the content and the clarity of its charter. The exhibition text clearly describes the goals and agenda of the work – this is a project that is arguing for change and demonstrating how that change may be realised. The exhibition shows how architectural professionals and residents living in informal settlements can work together to affect the way communities are perceived and managed by government planning bodies.

The exhibition combines both traditionally architectural techniques such as drawing and mapping with more universal modes of communications such as film and a comic strip. Where architectural techniques are used (such as a figure-ground drawing) the accompanying text describes what the drawing technique is, what it is designed to show and how to interpret the resulting drawing. This is one of the best examples I have visited of an exhibition that acknowledged the diversity of the audience members and were able to maintain a high level of discourse while simultaneously making the information generally accessible.

The exhibition content was in-depth and sophisticated

There was a fluid overlapping of traditional architectural techniques and more universal modes such as video.

PHOTO CREDIT: http://www.prismaflex.com/files/2013/10/graphit_profiltapisserie_southafrica_CREDITPHOTO-3.jpg

ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

London, England
CASE STUDY 04
INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / ADVOCACY / EDUCATION

Define your own parameters. Success is measured by how well you archive these goals rather than how many people you reach.

ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

The Architecture Foundation's central role is as an advocacy body. This advocacy operates both internally within the profession and externally to engage the general public.

The public face of the Foundation is a glass shop-front to a busy street strategically located on the way to the London Design Museum. This public face enables the exhibition content to be highly visible and give a public presence to the Foundation. A cynic may ask if the exhibition space is adding anything to the operation of the Foundation. The optimist may posit that a physical space for display and an exchange of ideas can support the functioning of the Foundation even if the audience is limited

The Architecture Foundation has a glass shopfloor in Central London. It appears that this display space has a symbolic as much as a functional role.
PHOTO CREDIT: http://www.doublet.com/en/UK/events/diaporama/architecture-foundation-london


The
Architecture
Foundation

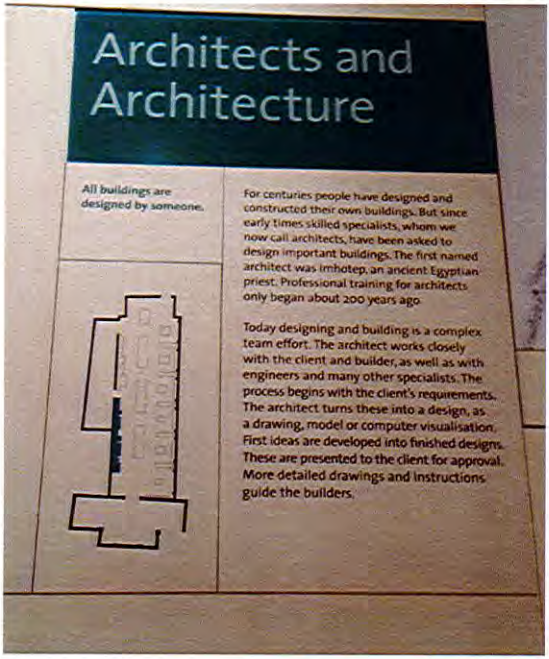
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

London, England
CASE STUDY 05
INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / EDUCATION

Architecture is a diverse topic. Define the aims of the exhibition and ensure you can satisfactorily elaborate them.

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

The architecture gallery is a joint venture between the Victoria and Albert Museum and Royal Institute of British Architects. The architecture gallery is a small gallery room that sits within the larger Victoria and Albert Museum. The charter of the architecture exhibition is ambitious in seeking to explore meaning through design, function, response to climate, stylistic developments, materials, structure and urban planning. The small exhibition suffers from this broad charter by providing a unresolved assortment of ideas with a random collection of artifacts in support. This exhibition more than any other I have visited sought to start from absolute first principles. This basic starting point - what is architecture?- had neither the space or curatorial vision to elaborate it gives the feeling of a profession struggling with its own identity. It was difficult to justify the existence of a dedicated architecture gallery in a vast museum full of building fragments, industrial artifacts and design objects all of which were much more compelling than the narrowly framed architecture gallery.



A typical example of the architecture gallery wall texts. This text attempts to define architecture in it's two paragraphs resulting (in my opinion) in a reductive and overly simplistic statement that fails to distinguish the difference between architecture and building.

The Architecture Gallery is permanent and small in scale. The space is packed full of disparate and diverse items.

A typical exhibition hall in the museum. Here, full scale building fragments are used to discuss history, artistic technique, religion etc... This creates a fractured relationship for the visitor as they enter the 'architecture gallery' which is physically and conceptually dislocated from the rest of the museum

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS (RIBA)

London, England

CASE STUDY 06

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS (RIBA)

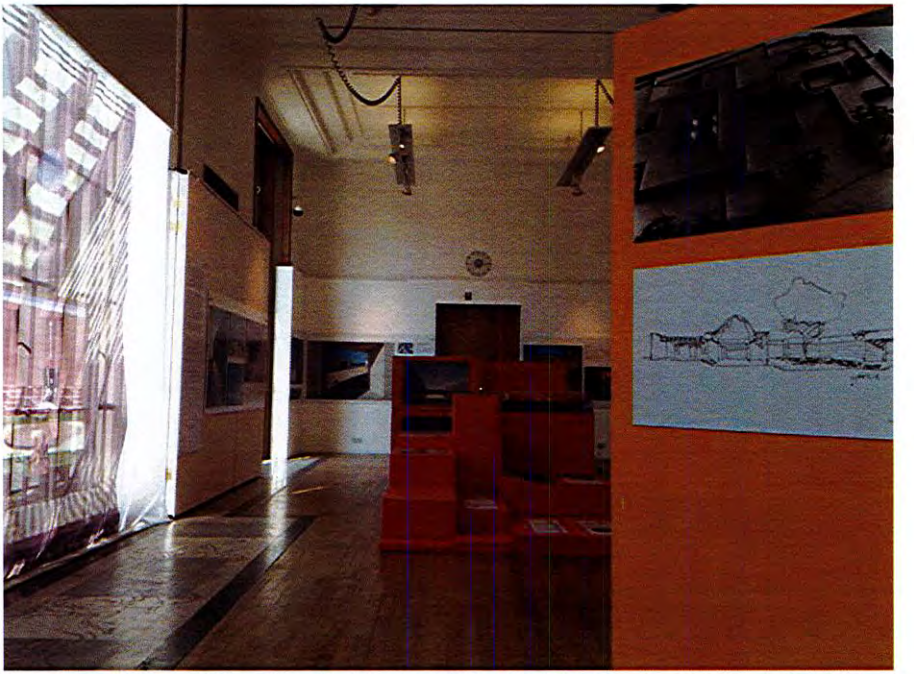
The RIBA galleries occupy 2 floors of the Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA) in central London. RIBA is the central authority for architects in Britain and acts as an advocacy body for architects, design and to influence UK government policy. The exhibition spaces along with the cafe and bookshop create publicly accessible spaces within the institution. The two exhibitions on display during my visit were a retrospective of the architect Charles Correa and an exhibition entitled 'Social' showcasing the work of the UK architecture practice Hawkins/Brown. While both these exhibitions were retrospective shows, the techniques deployed were significantly different.

The Charles Correa exhibition was a traditional looking exhibition that utilised drawings, models and photographs mounted to the walls and plinths. The Correa exhibition presented a sombre reflection on the body of work and encouraged contemplation from the viewer. This approach provided a depth of information and in return required a intensity of intellectual engagement from the viewer. The result of this technique was an exhibition that was narrowly targeted towards the architectural profession and those already familiar with or interested in Correa's work. I think this type of exhibition has a place in the spectrum of architectural exhibitions but the restricted reach of the show needs to be acknowledged.

The Social exhibition on the other hand used the gallery space to create an architectonic experience – couches, 1:1 mock-ups and interactive sculptural pieces sat along-side a video piece and a publication on the practice. The visitors can choose to deeply engage with the content by reading the text and publication or watching the accompanying videos or they can just enjoy the experiences of occupying the space. The benefit of this technique is that even at the most cursory level of engagement, there is an experience of architecture. This exhibition was also very successful in the story-telling around particular projects. Video works were used to tell the story of a project from genesis, development to realisation. These stories were compelling and accessible and were able to describe

the journey that leads to a built project rather than presenting only the final product. My only criticism of this exhibition is that it lacked a critical or curatorial eye which at times left the viewer feeling like they were participating in a marketing exercise or advertorial rather than an impartial exhibition.

The 'Social' Exhibition uses eye catching and unexpected display to support their assertion that they adopt a nontraditional approach to architecture



The Charles Correa exhibition utilises traditional architectural techniques such as drawing, models and photographs. In this context they are arranged to present a breadth and depth of information.

The 'Social' exhibition provided multiple opportunities for dwelling and full scale architectural

SERPENTINE PAVILION

London, England

CASE STUDY 07

PAVILION / FESTIVAL

Establish an expectation in the public for high quality and meaningful experiences of architecture.

SERPENTINE PAVILION

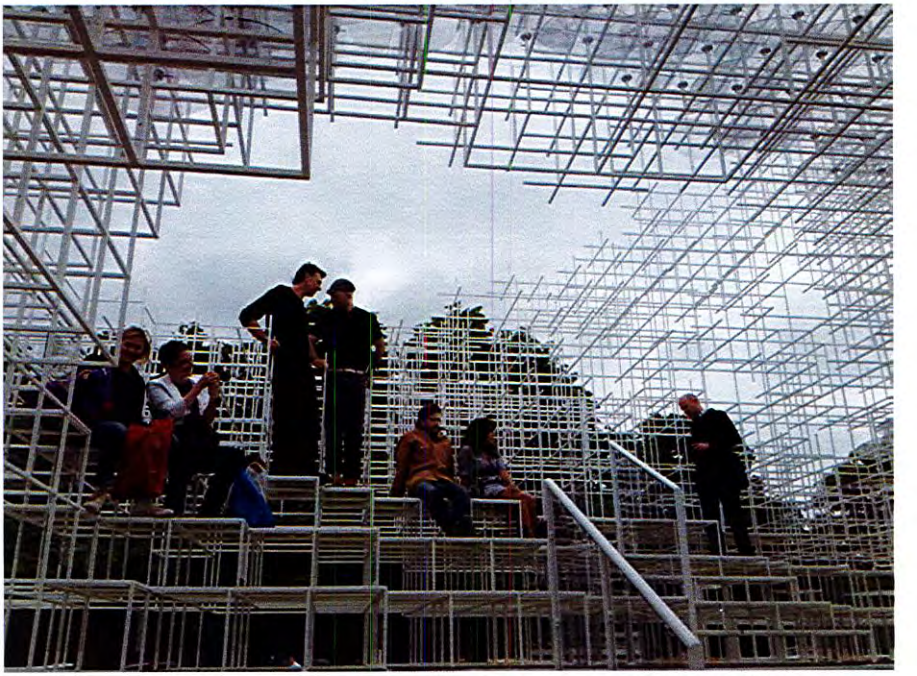
The Serpentine Pavilion is a yearly program that brings international architects to build a temporary pavilion in the Kensington Gardens, London. The invites are chosen by their global standing and a condition that they have not built in the UK previously. The pavilion provides a temporary attraction in the city and hosts a series of events over the summer months. The only fixed features of the pavilion is a small cafe which frees the pavilion from more onerous functional considerations of a more permanent building. In the great tradition of architectural pavilions, these structures become testing grounds for formal and conceptual exploration.

This years pavilion was designed by Japanese architect Sou Foujimoto. Comprised from a extensive grid of thin steel bar, the hyper-geometric, structured framework forms a complex matrix that at a distance, takes on an organic or cloud like form. Seating and some weather protection are integrated into the structure with visitors invited to climb into and around the pavilion.

The Serpentine Pavilion Program has three main strengths;

1: Repetition- A yearly event, the pavilion program has become a summer fixture. This repetition places an experimental architectural experience into the public consciousness.
2: Funding- The pavilion program has significant funding. This fact allows the pavilions to be serious architectural explorations. More than spectacles or follies, the architectural explorations can provide meaningful moments for the visitor and expand the frame of reference for what architecture can do
3: Programmatic simplicity – The requirement to only house a cafe in the pavilion frees the structure from more onerous functional requirements allowing the literal and symbolic space for architectural exploration.

The pavilion creates a yearly spectacle in the Kensigton Gardens



The pavilion visitors physically experience the space, creating an embodied knowledge of the

LONDON DESIGN MUSEUM

London, England
CASE STUDY 08
INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / DESIGN

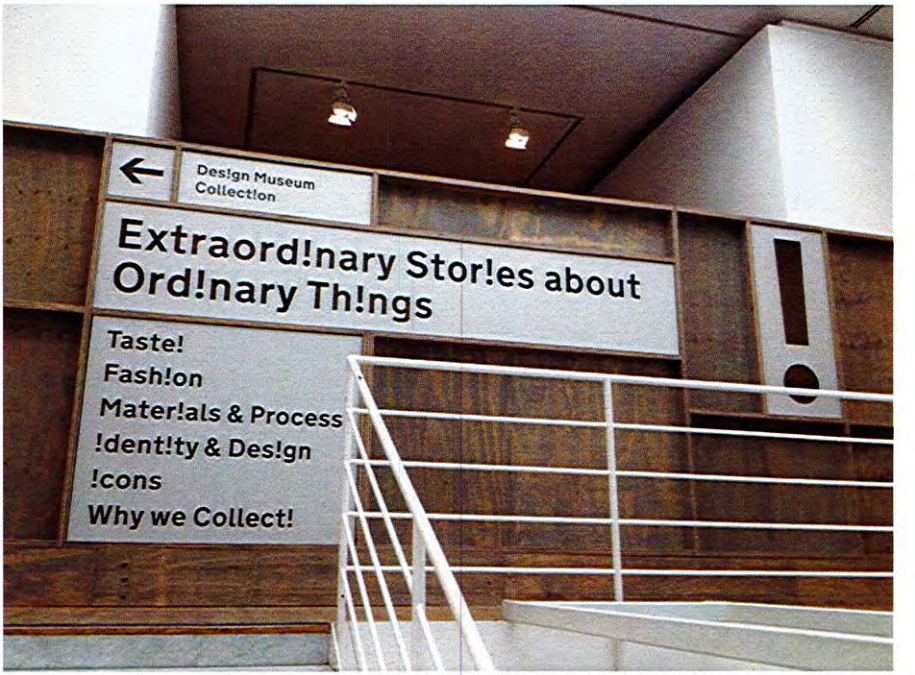
How can text be used to expand the understanding and experience of the work on display?

How can you use the relationship you have with your audience to expand the conversation in new directions.

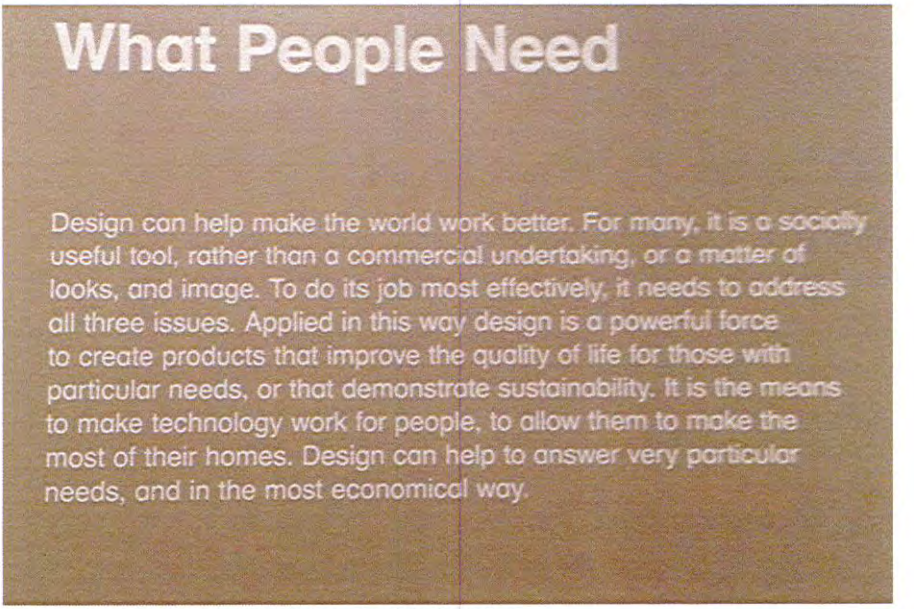
LONDON DESIGN MUSEUM

The London Design Museum hosts permanent and temporary design exhibitions. With a broad approach on design that stretches from fashion to industrial fabrication and everything in between. The Design Museum is a popular museum with over 200,000 visitors each year and a prospect for growth with an upcoming relocation to larger premises in 2016. To my mind, the museum's success rests on the combination of a high-quality and diverse collection and well conceived and executed curation.

The use of graphics and text within the exhibitions is particularly successful. The museum uses a combination of explanatory text to explain individual objects with more conceptual text boards that frame types of design thinking. It is these texts that help the viewer form a relationship with the objects on display. The text is written in accessible language but presents complex and at times challenging ideas. By using this technique, the museum is able to add a depth of understanding to compliment the experience of viewing the objects. This technique also allows the museum to create links between seemingly dissimilar objects that has the potential to draw the viewers attention into new territories.



Text and graphics are used to orientate the visitor conceptually as well as practically.



An example of though-provoking text panels within the gallery.

ARCHITECTURE ASSOCIATION SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE (AA)

London, England

CASE STUDY 09

UNIVERSITY / EXHIBITION / EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE ASSOCIATION SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE (AA)

The Architecture Association School of Architecture (AA) is a university in central London with a speciality in progressive and experimental architectural thinking. The end of year exhibition showcasing the work across all programs within the university occupied the AA building with large banners to the street announcing a public presence. The show spread across 3 floors and intensively filled the space. Each unit or program was specifically designed and conceived of as a stand alone show. The accompanying program promoted the aims of the school and defined architecture as cultural production and conceptualisation. This type of show exemplifies a typical problem with architecture exhibition, the problem of legibility. Architecture in this context is not understandable as building so other tools must be relied upon. This exhibition was one of premise and response. The premise was made explicit through the explanatory text. The response must be interpreted from the work, this was most often compelling but in no way explicit.

The gallery spaces were designed to create an immersive experience and an impression of the ideas as well as displaying and explaining the work.

THE GREAT TICHBURY STREET FESTIVAL

London, England

CASE STUDY 10

FESTIVAL / PAVILION

THE GREAT TICHBURY STREET FESTIVAL

This festival was part of the London Architecture Festival program. A street, in down-town London was closed to vehicle traffic for a half day and played host to a hand full of architecture related activities while the adjacent cafe's and restaurants opened up and spilled on to the street. The architecture activities comprised of a parabolic bamboo structure, a geodesic dome you could decorate, a few 'structural challenges' for kids and temporary street seating. There were also festival attendants handing out Architecture Festival themed pamphlets.

The motivation behind the street closure was unclear but I recall reading somewhere that it was in anticipation of a future pedestrianisation of the street. There was also a studio tour organised by RIBA that concentrated in that area. The festival had a visible street presence but the vibe was somewhat under whelming. It is hard to know if that was due to the unfavourable weather or the event its self. The motivation and the target audience of the event were unclear. The architecture themed activities were stuck between follies and educational or marketing activities, unfortunately they were neither compelling enough or educationally engaging enough to hole any attention.

The street festival lacked the critical mass to create a compelling atmosphere

The architectural installations were under whelming and lacked a critical framing.

POMPIDOU CENTRE

Paris, France

CASE STUDY 11

INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / ART / DESIGN

POMPIDOU CENTRE

The Pompidou Centre is a central institution in the Parisian and International art scene and one that has a long and vibrant relationship with the world of architecture. The building its self is an architectural icon and a monument to experimental and pioneering architectural practice. The Pompidou as an institution includes architecture in it's collection and exhibition charter and draws little distinction between how it exhibits art and architecture. The architecture collection is diverse - during my visit models, drawings, photographs, 1:1 prototypes and objects, construction materials and process artifacts were on display. Architecture was present in two distinct types of exhibitions – one which was thematically arranged and was comprised of a multi- disciplinary array of objects, the second was a specifically defined around the presentation of architecture.

The thematically arranged exhibition – exploring environmental colour psychology in this case – used examples of buildings, graphic design and industrial design to explore the exhibition concepts. The framing of the exhibition in terms of concept -and particularly a concept like 'colour' that one might ordinarily associate with the art world - serves to break down the distinction between art and architecture (and design more broadly). The museum establishes a high level of discourse that links artifacts to ideas and then moves fluidly between distinct disciplinary fields. I think this technique deftly negotiates many of the perceived constraints of displaying architecture (the absence of the building, coded forms of communication etc..) and allows conceptual space for the discussion of architecture. This works in this context because the museum has the institutional authority as a significant cultural institution with a distinguished history of collecting and exhibition. The discussion around the ideas of architecture are normalised and brought along-side familiar modes of cultural consumption that exist within art galleries.

The gallery spaces dedicated to architecture in the Pompidou centre were more traditional in their treatment of architectural objects. During my visit there was a retrospective exhibition of Eduardo Souto de

Moura which comprised of models, photographs and hand sketches. It was a small exhibition that presented a brief but detailed look at de Moura's oeuvre and his place in contemporary and Portuguese architecture. There was also an area for recent acquisitions which placed architecture along side industrial design. This space displayed a range of full-scale objects and created a more interactive experience for the viewer. The objects in this space were curated around themes of digital fabrication and design and used the digital construction drawings along side gallery text and the completed object to great effect. There was an interesting juxtaposition between furniture objects on display that were mounted on plinths and intentionally removed from interaction with the viewer and an architectural folly that viewers could wander inside. This tension between architecture as gallery artifact and as experiential installation is a very interesting space to explore as a curator of architecture, particularly in a gallery such as the Pompidou which has a number of significant installation art pieces.

Curators included building drawings, models, material samples and trade literature seamlessly with their exhibition on 'colour'

Visitors are permitted and encouraged to enter and interact with the architectural installations. This commissioned work by Mac Fornes formed part of the digital fabrication exhibit.

MAMO

Marseilles, France

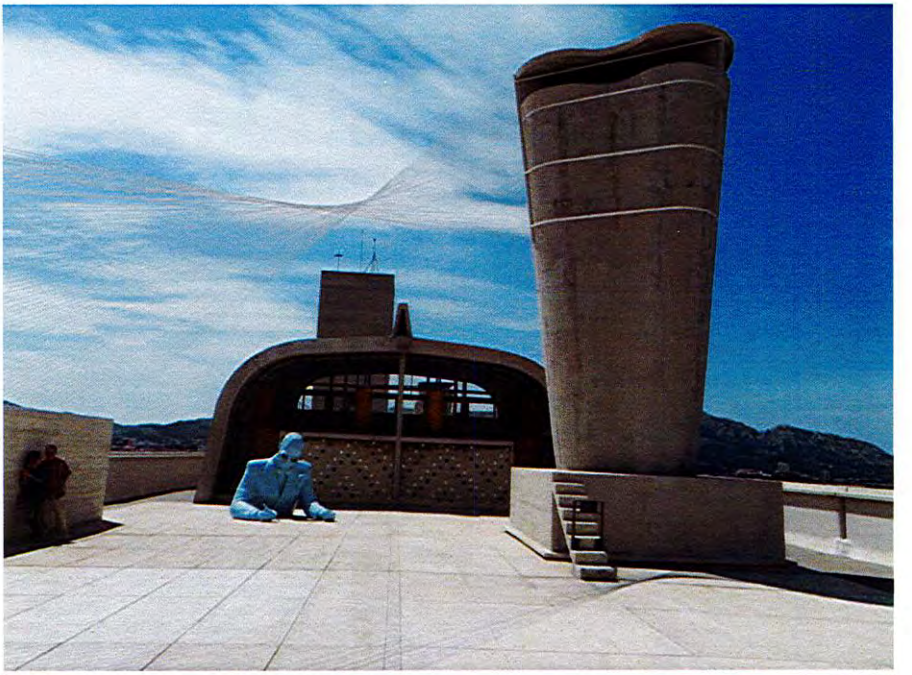
CASE STUDY 12

EXHIBITION / ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENT

MAMO

Opened in 2013, MAMO occupies the roof terrace of Le Corbusier's 1952 Unite d'Habitation in a suburban area of Marseilles. The building its self enjoys a cult-like status within the architectural fraternity, as the architect filled guest book testifies. MAMO is the brainchild of Ora Ito, a French designer who purchased the roof terrace after it fell into disuse and was put up for sale in 2010. MAMO occupies what was once the gymnasium space for the residence of the housing block and is comprised of a small bookshop, cafe and exhibition hall and accompanying open space of the roof-top.

MAMO provides a much-needed focal point for the wandering architects who make their pilgrimage out to the building which is still predominantly private residential and closed to visitors. MAMO is conceived of as a contemporary art space rather than a Le Corbusier, or Unite d'Habitation museum however the opening exhibition was sadly self-referential and lacking in critical or curatorial direction. The potential of MAMO is evident – here is a rare opportunity to occupy and engage with a significant and beloved modernist building. In MAMO the building its self can be explored and experienced in a direct manner! To me the space was calling out for some type of joyful occupation – great parties, lively debates, music and wine. Perhaps my architectural enthusiasm for the building clouds my judgement but I feel like the real opportunity in MAMO is to bring a new life and actively link the Unite into the cultural life-blood of the city if Marseilles rather than fetishising the building as an object. Here is an opportunity to establish the building as an essential part of the cultural fabric of the city that has a value and an appeal beyond the architecture and design community. The hope is that as the program and the project matures it can find a place within the everyday life of the city that will promote the culture of architecture through first hand experience of this modernist masterpiece.



Both the external and internal exhibition spaces showcased artistic homages to the genius of Le Corbusier.

MARSEILLES - EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Marseilles, France

CASE STUDY 13

CITY INITIATIVE

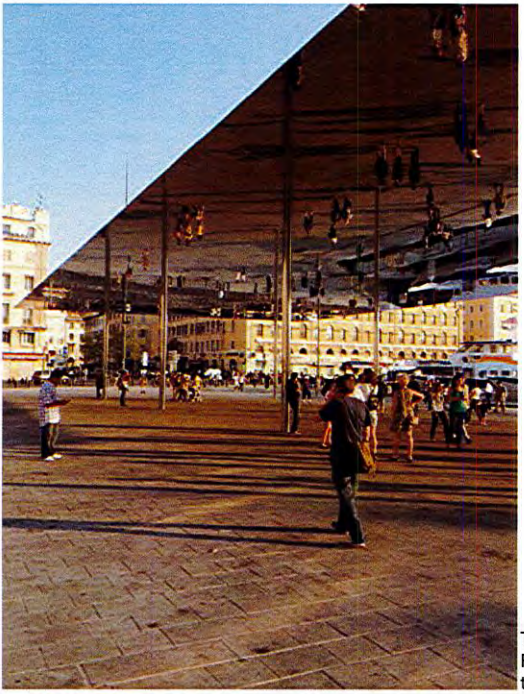
MARSEILLES - EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

In 2013 Marseilles enjoyed the title of the European Capital of Culture. This title is bestowed annually upon between 1 and 3 European cities with the aim of creating a focal point for the exchange and celebration of European cultures. The title is awarded by the European Union based on the strength of a cities proposal, the program has been running since 1983.

Marseilles is an unusual case study when looking at architectural discourse. I chose to make this study to try and understand how something as abstract as a temporary title, can influence discourse, identity and city making. To be the European City of Capital could be seen cynically to be nothing more than a marketing ploy. Clever branding and a new spin on the same old tourism campaigns. In the case of Marseilles however, it seems like this title became a catalyst for real urban and cultural change. There are the obvious examples in the range of new buildings with openings were timed to coincide with the initiative. But there were festivals, temporary exhibitions, a temporary site office with volunteers explaining the program, walking tours and a general buzz in the air that something was changing. The adoption of this title allowed the city planners the opportunity to prioritise a regime of new buildings had previously been overlooked. The discourse that this title instigated also shaped the cities identity from a street-crime ridden port-town to the centre of a vibrant and contemporary cultural centre. It remains to be seen if this shift in perception is real, merely temporary or if it will have a lasting effect. Although 'culture' is a wide mantle, in the case of Marseilles, architecture was integral to the expression of culture and also a vessel for its display or performance.

As a case study, Marseilles demonstrates that architecture has a role to play in a wider urban agenda and that can create a sense of complicity between the public and architecture. Architecture in this circumstance can be the expression of a communities desire, progress or aspirations. Architecture becomes a collective expression at an urban scale.

The Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations designed by architect Rudy Ricciotti was timed to open with the Capital of Culture,



The shade structure at Vieux Port by architects Fosters and Partners was also timed to open with the Capital of Culture

MAXXI

Rome, Italy

CASE STUDY 14

INSTITUTION / ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENT / EXHIBITION / ART / PAVILION

MAXXI – Rome, Italy

MAXXI is a purpose built art and architecture gallery in Rome residing in a striking building designed by Iraqi / British architect Zaha Hadid. The charter of the gallery is clearly defined and split between its architecture and art objectives. The architecture component of MAXXI is focussed on Italian architecture and has a view towards both historicising 20th Century architecture and exploring contemporary themes and ideas. MAXXI also hosts an edition of the international Young Architects Program (YAP) that annually commissions a pavilion structure from a local emerging architects.

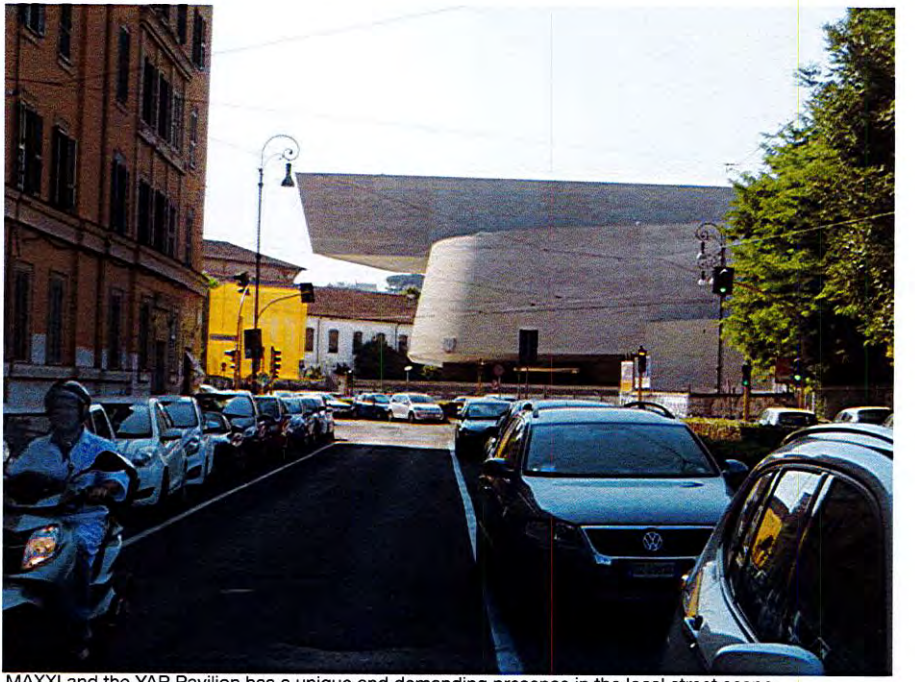
The housing of the museum in a purpose built and architecturally expressive building is significant. Rome is a city laden with architectural history but struggling to find a contemporary voice along side its classic and modernist legacy. The MAXXI building provides a contemporary architectural experience as well as the back-drop for exhibition. Whether it is a conscious experience for the visitor or not, the museum impresses its presence on the viewer. In this way MAXXI manages to reinforce its message about the transformative potential of architecture through its physical fabric as well as its exhibition content.

The main architectural exhibition on display during my visit was entitled 'ENERGY. Oil and Post-oil Architecture and Grids'. This exhibition brought together a range of local and international practices to ruminate on the post-oil future for architecture. There was also a historicist look at architecture in the modernist era of plentiful oil. This exhibition was notable for the diversity of artifacts on display and the depth of thematic exploration through an architectural lens. The expressly architectural agenda of MAXXI allows architecture to be the main lens for thematic exploration rather than a single voice amongst many in a more multi- disciplinary gallery space. In this context, it must be noted that the objects and mediums used to communicate these architectural ideas ware extremely diverse and unconstrained from the conventions of architectural representation such as drawing and model making. Biological installation, video

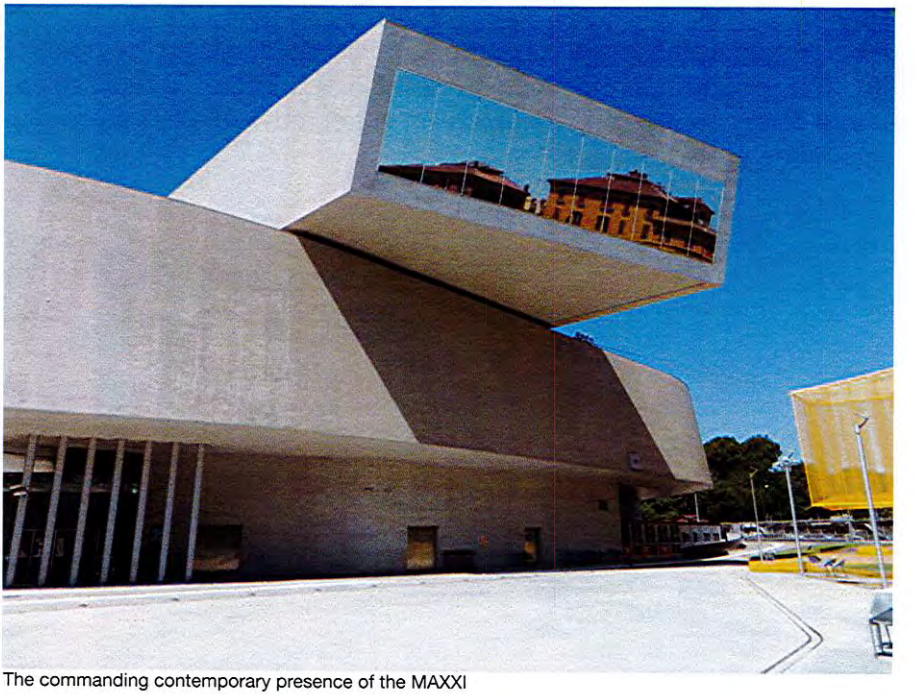
and interactive technology were at home along side; plans, sections, conceptual models and architectural renders.

The YAP pavilion is prominently placed in the public courtyard of the gallery. With a charter to explore issues surrounding environmentalism and to promote emerging architectural practices, the modest pavilion is a medium to explore ideas as well as create experience and spectacle. The pavilion structure provides a microcosm of immersive architectonic experience that can be simply enjoyed or interrogated more critically. YAP pavilion programs exist in New York, Santiago de Chile, Istanbul and Seoul which creates additional opportunities for dialogue across cultures and along the pavilion thematic. I think the strength of this program is both in the playful and invitingly interactive nature of the pavilions as well as its position in a international and inter-institutional dialogue.

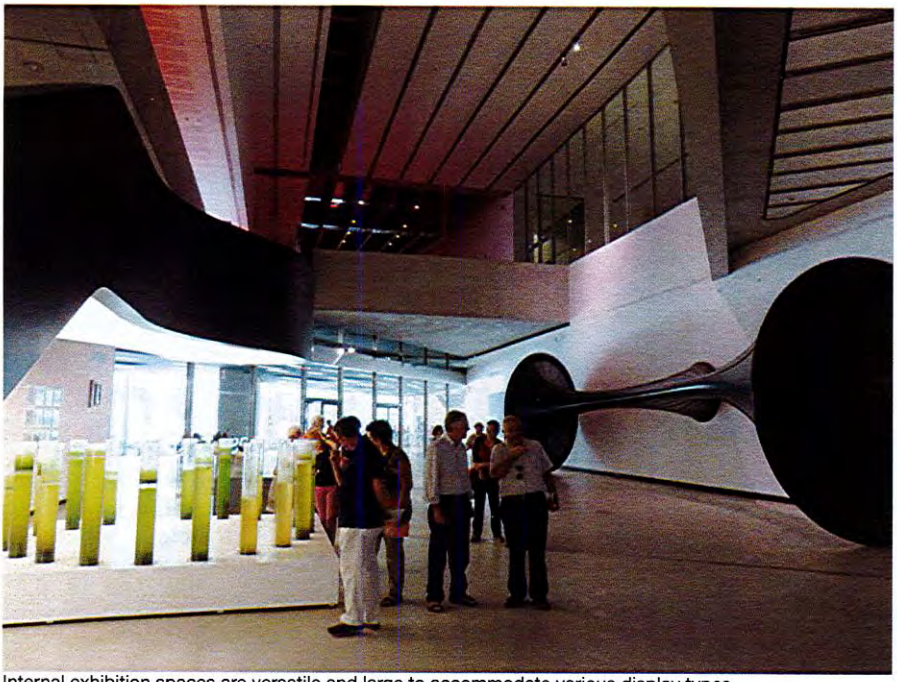
A dedicated architecture museum establishes a setting for cultural life. The ground rules for dialogue are shifted into a cultural space where poetry, beauty and meaning are expected. Architecture can be something more than a building.



MAXXI and the YAP Pavilion has a unique and demanding presence in the local street scape



The commanding contemporary presence of the MAXXI



Internal exhibition spaces are versatile and large to accommodate various display types

THE NEW INSTITUTE

Rotterdam, The Netherlands

CASE STUDY 15

INSTITUTION / ADVOCACY / EXHIBITION

You can be popularist while also creating space for alternative and challenging discourses.

THE NEW INSTITUTE

My visit to the New Institute in Rotterdam was came at a very particular time in that institution's history. Set up in 1988 as the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI) recent governmental budget cuts have led to the amalgamation of the NAI, Premsela – The Netherlands Institute for Design and Culture, and Virtueel Platform – The e-culture knowledge institute. At the time of my visit however, the content of the museum was still part of the previous conception as an architecture institute. As such I will reflect on the institution and the content under the architecture lens rather than in its new incarnation.

The purpose-built Institute building has 5 distinct areas, divided by themes and each occupying a single level of the building. The basement level of the building – named the Treasury - is a moody space designed by Dutch 'starchitect' Rem Koolhaas. The Treasury displays a carefully curated set of objects from the institutes archives that seek to represent the 'highlights of Dutch Architecture'. This is a cleverly conceived exhibition as it makes no claims to be a comprehensive or even cohesive representation of Dutch architecture, however through a provocative selection of objects,a reverent mode of display and a very unusual and character-filled gallery space serves to create a 'sense' of Dutch architecture that creates an impression in the viewer that is as strong as what they might learn from the objects on display.

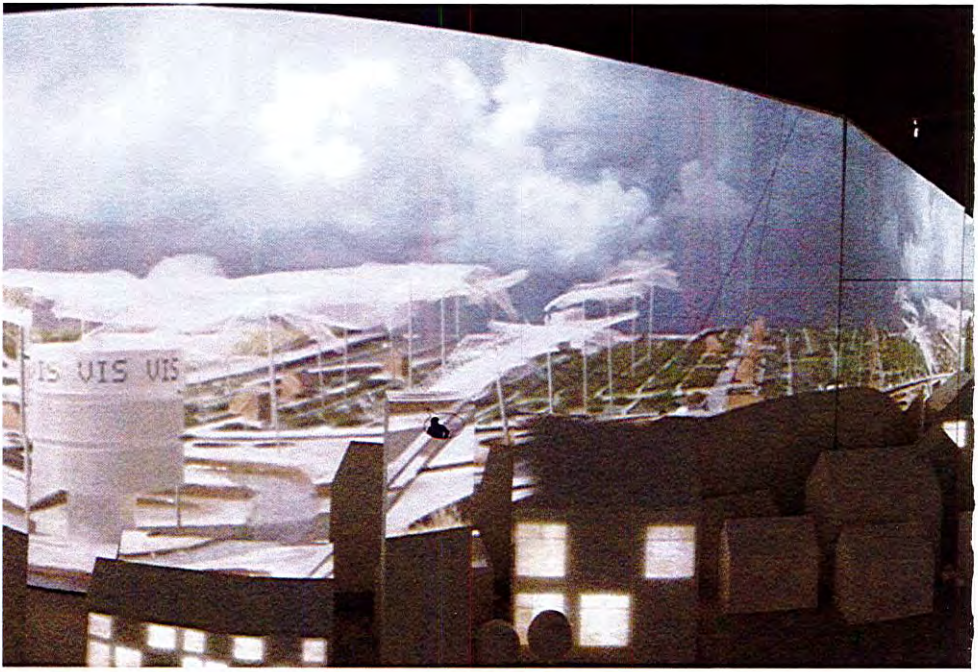
The ground floor level of the museum hosts temporary exhibitions which were arranged around distinct themes – 'Playboy Architecture' & 'The Ruin' were on display during my visit. These exhibitions are conceptual in nature and used installation, photographs, magazines, furniture, text and video to explore their themes. These exhibitions were visually interesting and intellectually compelling and seemed comfortable letting the viewers create their own impressions of the content. The exhibitions were not didactic and required a high level of interpretation from the viewer.

The first floor of the gallery was dedicated to an installation entitled

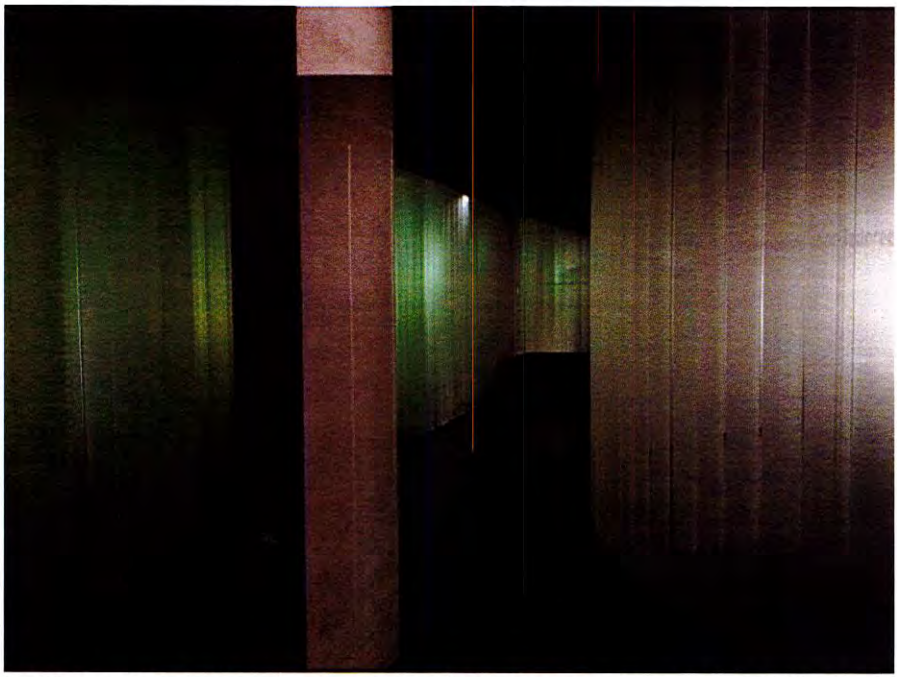
' Netherlands Now'. The visitor is provided with a audio device that narrates a journey through an immersive sculptural environment. Comprising of architectural models, video projection, life-size sculptural forms and photographs, themes such as community, environment and technology are explored within the Dutch context. The exhibition audio is presented in a story-telling format that is tailored to a generalist audience. As a visitor from a architectural background, I found the exhibition spaces compelling but not particularly sophisticated or critical. I understand however that this space is very popular with visitors and was considered by the NAI as one of the most successful spaces within the gallery.

The final gallery is a all-purpose space which is available for the exhibition of specialist shows. This space is typically used by universities, students, architectural practices and researchers interested in generating architectural exhibition. The space is available free-of-charge and initiated, designed and implemented by individuals outside the institution. These exhibitions are generally targeted towards small and specialist audiences. This exhibition space was unique amongst the museums and galleries I visited as it created a physical but also conceptual space for exploration alternate conversations in the gallery context. In this case, the institution extends a cultural credibility to practitioners and work that may otherwise sit outside the main stream, thereby nurturing diverse modes of discourse and diverse audiences.

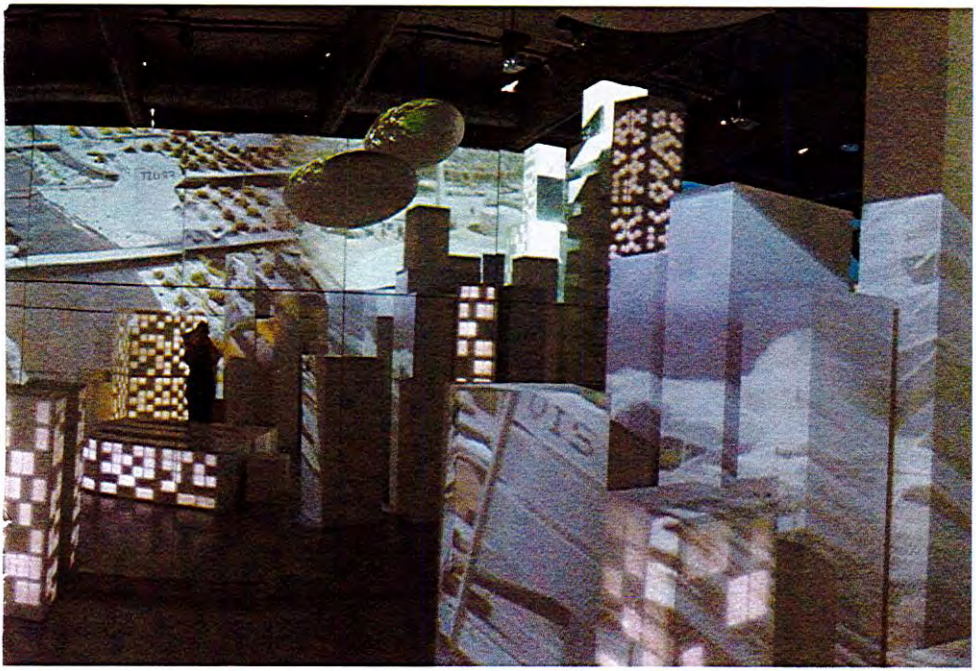
It will be interesting to see how the institution adapts to the new charter and whether popular exhibitions such as 'Netherlands Now' and the top floor free space can be maintained.

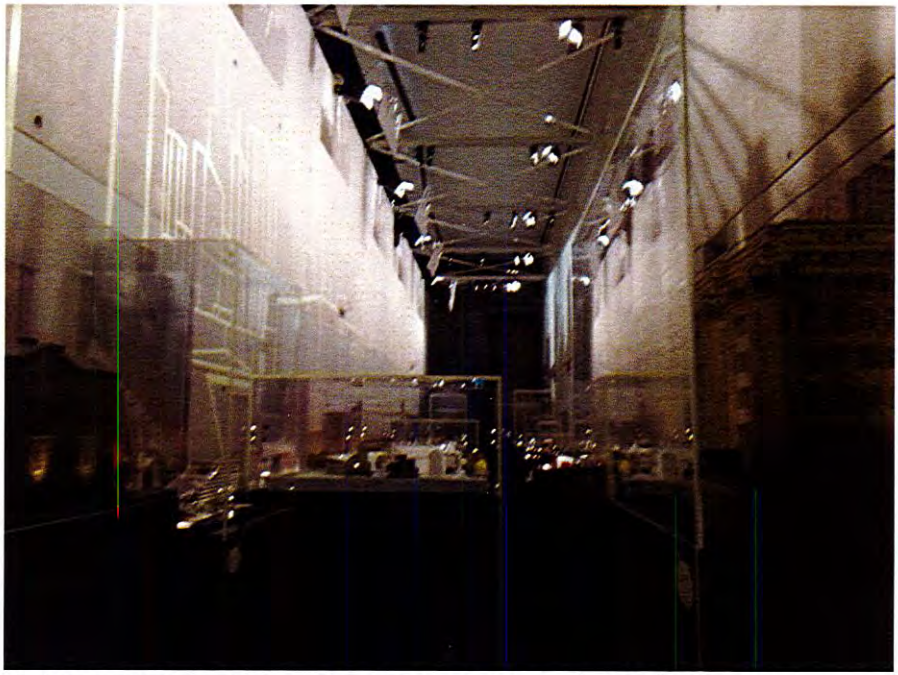


The 'Netherland Now' exhibition is immersive and non-conventional



The 'Treasury' space creates a mysterious space inviting exploration and discovery from the visitors.





Traditional architectural artifacts are displayed along side more adventurous display methods.

AEDES

Berlin, Germany

CASE STUDY 16

INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION

How can we take advantage of the transportable nature of architecture exhibitions to take them to new locations and new audiences?

AEDES

During my visit to AEDES in Berlin, the exhibition 'Beyond Torre David' was on display. This exhibition was a re-showing of the Torre David exhibition which received the Golden Lion award for best exhibition at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennial. The exhibition comprised of photographs, drawings, illustrations, video and text in examination of a incomplete office tower in Caracas, Venezuela that has been adopted by local residents into a multi- story informal housing settlement. The exhibition told the story of Torre David and engaged in the related ideas around housing, affordability, sustainability and equity in a compelling and comprehensive manner. This exhibition stood out among the many I saw of being of particularly high production and research value which is no doubt due to the production of this show for the Venice Biennial and its subsequent re-staging. It also prompts the question as to why architectural exhibitions are not toured more often. This show in particular could have been re-staged with relative ease and re-imagined for diverse spaces due to the nature of the printed poster type material and projections.

The poster, print and video format of the Beyond Torre David exhibition lent its self to a successful re-presentation of the exhibition

TCHOBAN FOUNDATION

Berlin, Germany

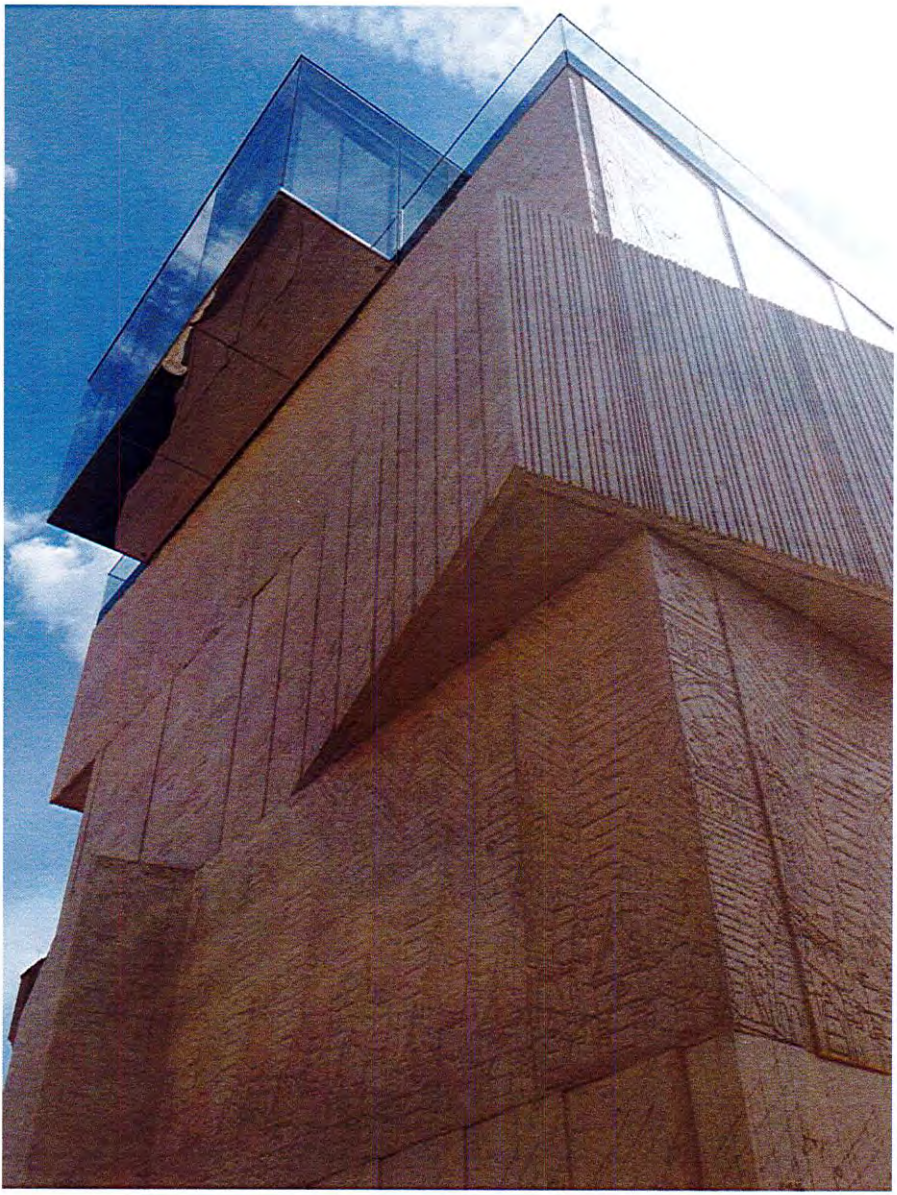
CASE STUDY 17

INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / ARCHIVE

TCHOBAN FOUNDATION

Tchoban Foundation was the only gallery I visited that was purely dedicated to the exhibition of architectural artifacts. Dedicated to the collection and display of architectural drawing, primary aim of the foundation is to educate and inspire architects through exhibition and research the secondary aim is to show these works to a public audience. The exhibition on display during my visit was ' Piranesi's Paestum: Master Drawings Uncovered' which displayed preparatory sketches for Piranesi's great masterpieces were on loan from London's Sir John Soane Museum.

The strength of such a specialised museum is that the topic may be investigated and presented in depth. There is a strong sense of reverence towards the drawings on display and the carefully collated exhibition catalogues that no-doubt create a new body of knowledge on their exhibition topic. There is also a possibility that the gallery can draw drawings from diverse collections to create critical and innovative exhibition content. It is unclear how the Tchoban exhibition program will evolve but the hope is that architectural drawings are used to explore a range of conceptual positions and topics rather than becoming self referential or insular.



DANISH ARCHITECTURE CENTRE

Copenhagen, Denmark

CASE STUDY 18

INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / ADVOCACY / CITY REACH

An institution can extend it's reach as an educator and advocate deep into the city fabric.

DANISH ARCHITECTURE CENTRE

The Danish Architecture Centre is a modest exhibition space housed in a converted historic warehouse along the Copenhagen harbour. During my visit, the exhibition on display was a Zaha Hadid retrospective comprising of models, video, documentation drawings and works on paper (painting, relief models and drawing). The exhibition text contextualised the objects and Zaha's oeuvre within contemporary architecture. The exhibition was grouped into 4 themes and culminated in an in-depth examination of the MAXXI Museum which sought to synthesise the previous themes through a realised project.

DAC has much wider objectives beyond the presentation of exhibitions. With an aim to introduce the visitor to the architectural stories of Copenhagen, the DAC has developed a range of tools including a free iPod app - podwalk & pod run, city walks and informational hotspots within the city. The development of these program's provides locals and visitors alike tools for experiencing the city in a different way. It also extends the reach of the DAC beyond the museum walls and turns the city into the gallery. This technique in turn places architecture in the city consciousness, enabling city users to start to interrogate their space

The city walks programs are advertised across a range of mediums, This billboard explains the program and locates the Architecture Centre as the nexus for these activities

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE (CCA)

Montreal, Canada

CASE STUDY 19

EXHIBITION / INSTITUTION / RESEARCH / ARCHIVE / GRANT

A serious institution can initiate, support and disseminate serious research.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE (CCA)

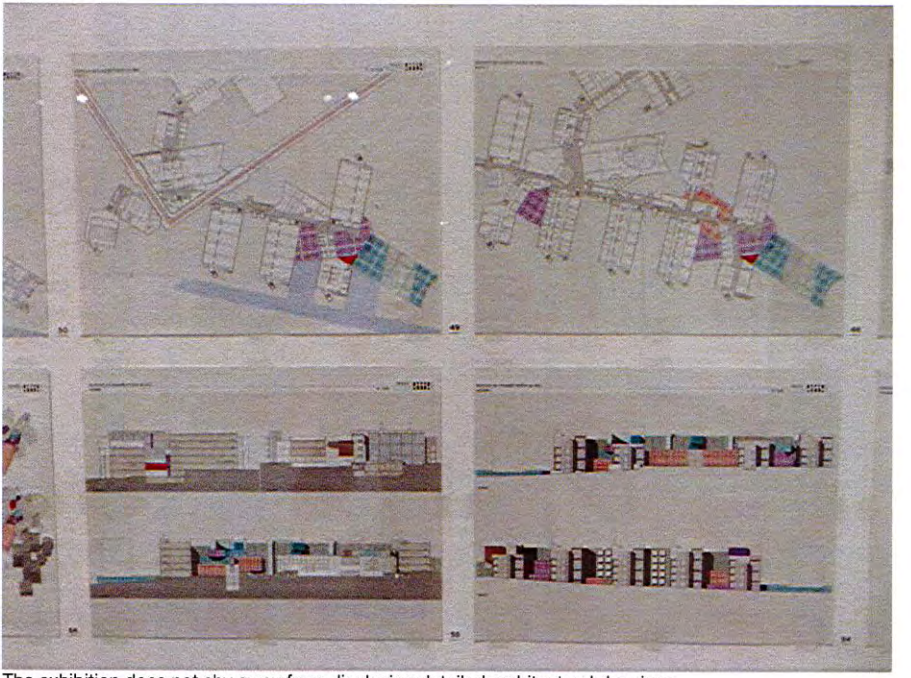
The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) was established in 1979 by the philanthropist Phyllis Lambert. The CCA describes their operations as *'Based on its extensive Collection, exhibitions, programs, and research opportunities, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on architecture, its history, theory, practice, and role in society today.'*

The CCA stood out among the institutional case studies as having the most sophisticated collecting regime, a well defined research agenda and a challenging and active discourse around architecture. There is a high level of intellectual rigour that runs through all aspects of the CCA's operations.

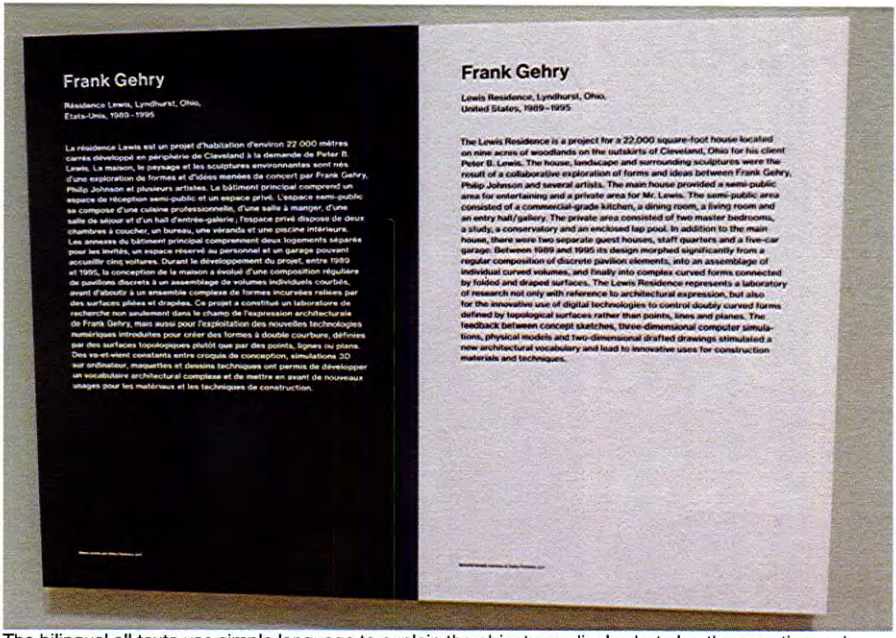
The main exhibition on display during my visit was entitled 'Archeology of the Digital'. This exhibition part of a multi- year research project initiated by the CCA which aims to create a collection of digital architecture. This exhibition sought to chart the origins of digital architecture through the examination of 4 projects in the 1980's and 1990's. The exhibition was curated by leading architect, critic and theorist Greg Lynn with curatorial and collection support from the CCA. The exhibition used a wide variety of exhibition material to explore the projects, from drawings, photographs and videos to computer hardware, original correspondence and postal packs. This combination of contextual artifacts with the architectural artifacts made this exhibition relatable on many levels. The architectural concepts that were being explored sat along side objects that placed the discourse solidly in a physical time and place. The exhibition reflected broad ideas around technological change in society along side the specific discourse around technology in architectural production. This exhibition was supported by a range of events such as talks and seminars and has been published as an e-book in the months since its showing.

This is an impressively comprehensive examination of the exhibition theme and one that positions the exhibition at the centre of the generation of knowledge. The research project initiated by the CCA has also set a broader theoretical agenda within the profession. The exhibition becomes one form of expression of the research project that is continually reinforced through the ongoing research program, online and scheduled exhibition programs. This depth of research is most familiar a university setting but in this case the CCA is able to initiate, fund, support, disseminate and catalogue the research in the public domain.

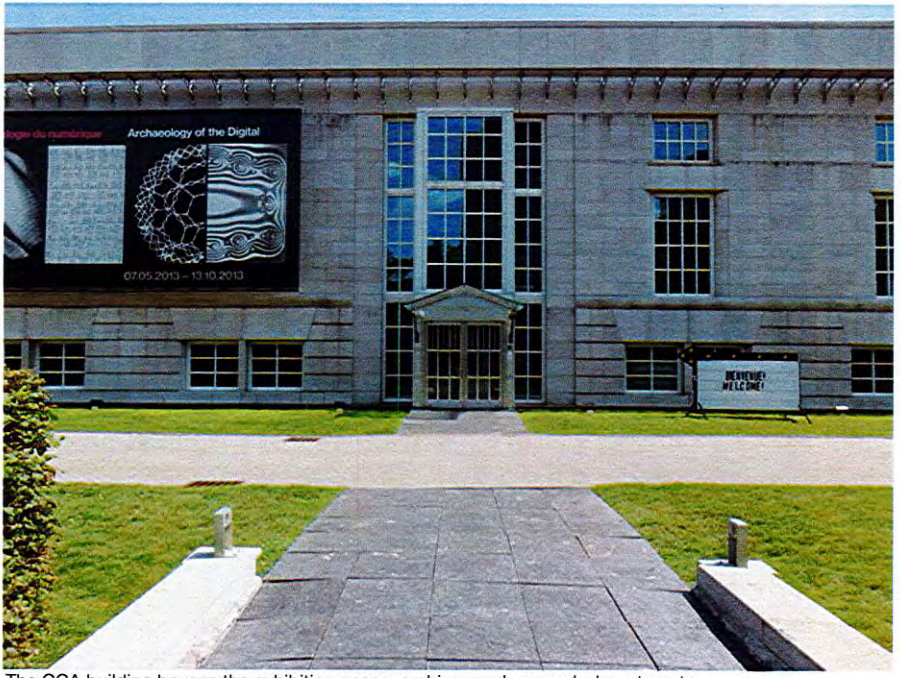
The exhibition layout is simple and relies on the narratives and artifacts to compel the viewer



The exhibition does not shy away from displaying detailed architectural drawings.



The bilingual all texts use simple language to explain the objects on display but also the narrative and concept behind them which allows a sophisticated level of discourse.



The CCA building houses the exhibition space, archives and research departments.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA)

New York, USA
CASE STUDY 20
INSTITUTION / ART / DESIGN / EXHIBITION

How can an installation be conceptual and spatial rather than an empty space?

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA)

The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) is one of the central cultural institutions in New York with over 2.5 million visitors annually. Architecture has been central to the museums collection since 1932, only 3 years after the museums inception in 1929.

The major architecture exhibition on display during my visit was a 'blockbuster' Le Corbusier retrospective entitled 'An Atlas of Modern Landscapes'. The exhibition was a sprawling chronological journey through Le Corbusier's oeuvre described through sketches, plans, photographs, video and full scale mock-ups. While critically panned as incoherent and inconsistent, audience numbers still reached an average of 4000 visitors per day. The use of full-scale room mock ups provide particularly interesting case studies. 5 rooms were recreated from projects at various stages of Le Corbusier's career. These faithfully recreated spaces should have been spectacular highlights of the exhibition but somehow fell short. The room spaces were created as self contained rooms within the galleries. Viewers were restrained from entering the rooms through rope barriers. The tension that arose from this presentation is that the viewer was being asked to treat a simulacrum space with the reverence of a precious artifact or sacred space. The viewers were presented with a physical space but invited to only view but not experience it. This is an awkward proposition in a gallery surrounded by room-sized art installations in an exhibition where you are being asked to engage in an abstract journey about a very tangible places. This exhibition failed at its attempt to talk about architectural ideas through physical installation by reducing the architectural space to an abstract, dislocated and inaccessible object. I felt that to engage with these spaces meaningfully the viewer needed to be able to physically experience them.

The other architecturally themed exhibitions were a re-showing of a seminal 1988 deconstructivist architecture exhibition and a gallery exploring architectural collage. These exhibitions were much more successful to my mind as they allowed the objects on display to compel the audience directly. The supporting text was insightful and

challenging which placed the curious collection of objects within conceptual context.

Interestingly the significant 'design' collection adopted a much more 'museological' approach to the display of industrial design, furniture and fashion objects. These were treated much more pragmatically with descriptive tags focusing on the function and construction of the object rather than constructing a conceptual narrative. The awkward, the conceptual and the pragmatic display of these architecture and design objects demonstrate the unstable foundations of exhibition on these topics.

MOMA's Le Corbusier exhibition was widely promoted throughout New York City. This image shows the museum posters in the city subway.

The reconstructed roms of the Le Corbusier exhibition
IMAGE: http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2013/06/130612-Le-Corbusier-and-New-York-City-A-Love-Hate-Relationship.asp

The extensive breadth of MOMA's architectural collection allows in-depth exhibitions exploring a range of subjects simultaneously.

MOMA's enduring popularity ensures large crowds to even the most unlikely architectural exhibitions.

MOMA PS1

New York, USA

CASE STUDY 21

PAVILION / EXHIBITION / INSTITUTION

MOMA PS1

PS1 is a non collecting art gallery, an off-shoot from the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) located in Queens, New York. The Young Architects Program (YAP), now in its 14th year commissions young architects to design and build temporary structures in the Museum courtyard which remains during the summer months. The built structures are required to provide shade, cool and seating and hosts a range of summer activities including dance parties and openings. During the regular museum opening hours, the structure is available for visitors to experience. In 2013 the structure was designed by young local architects, Kiosk and is comprised of a light-weight steel structure supporting plywood shingles salvaged from a skate-board manufacturer. Supported from the steel structure are large water-filled sacks that provide ballast and a visual cue connecting the atomising water-jets and water spouts that cool the visitors and fill paddling pools at ground level. Stackable/ detachable furniture items provide options for congregating groups. The judging criteria for the pavilion entries specifies an engagement with ideas of environment and sustainability which in this years iteration come by way of recycled building materials. Coincidentally (perhaps) the gallery content was also exploring these themes "*exploration of ecological challenges in the context of the economic and sociopolitical instability of the early 21st Century*"

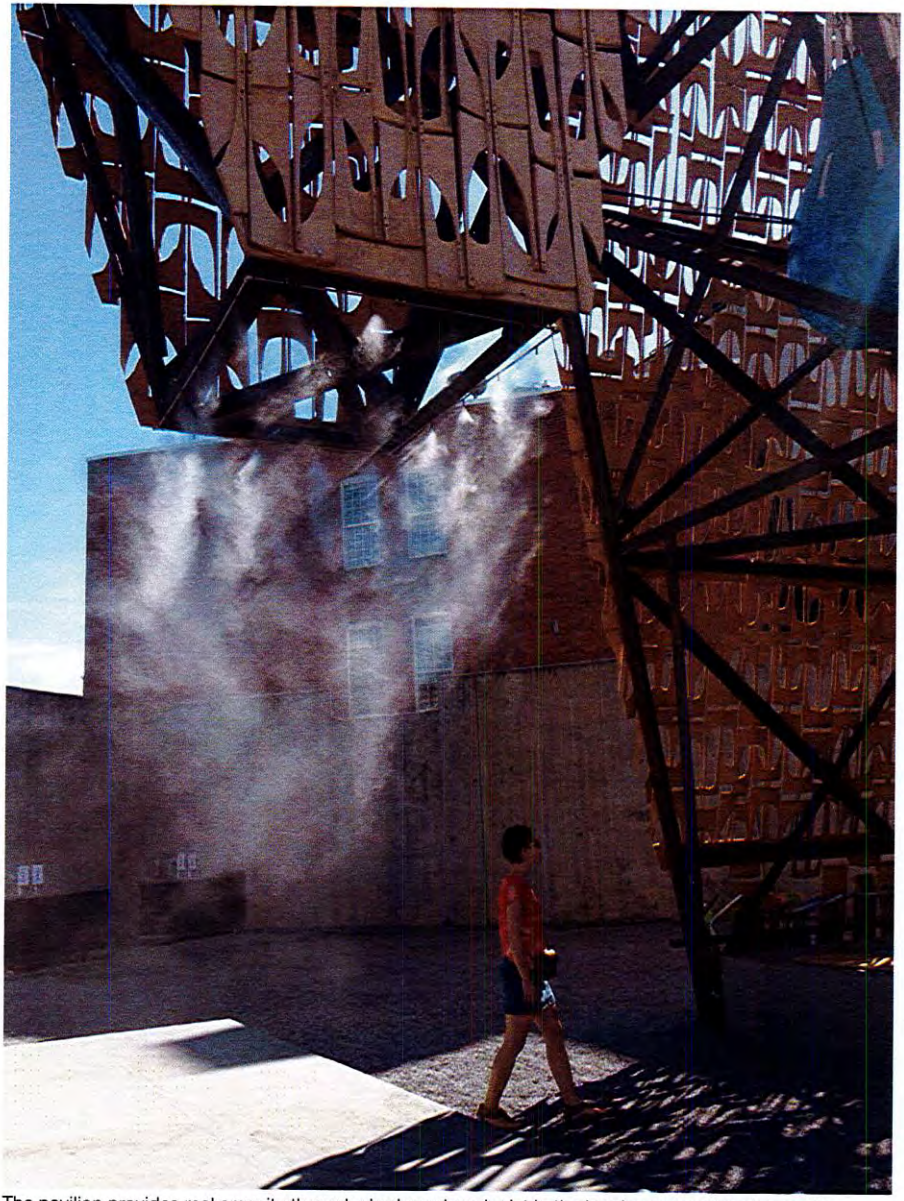
I had expected the structure to be primarily a destination-making piece. A seasonal speciality that draws Manhattan biased residents and visitors alike into the outer boroughs. While it certainly performs this function, it also is wholly of this institution and seamlessly fits with the collection and space. It is not very romantic, but the structure performs a very necessary role of providing shelter in the bleak inner courtyard of the gallery. Shade and cool, to safely ferry the visitor across the very sexy but inhospitable courtyard that separates the entry desk from the exhibition spaces. Conceptually though, the structure operates in the same artistic space as the diverse art works on exhibition avoiding any conflict between the works of architecture

and art. Indeed, numerous works in the gallery blurred disciplinary distinctions.

It is unclear whether museum visitors distinguish between this installation as a work of architecture rather than art. It is similarly debatable whether the distinction is important to either the institution or the architect. The value in this work twofold one explicit and the other subtle. Explicitly, it allows an architect to build, test ideas, publicise and grow. Implicitly it slots architecture into the cultural landscape. It builds a yearly expectation. It allows architecture to create a scene for the season, inserts the word architecture into the city 'what's on' guide and an Instagram-able must-see of the summer.

The YAP pavilion is featured in local 'what's on' guides to the city's summer lineup of events.


Although still a pavilion, the nature of the PS1 site allows the installation to be at an assuredly architectural scale.



The pavilion provides real amenity through shade and cool mist in the harsh courtyard environment.

STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE

New York, USA
CASE STUDY 22
EXHIBITION / INSTITUTION / RESEARCH

Creating a space for experimentation.

Cultivating curiosity is the first step in starting a conversation.

Create an argument for your relevance by making your niche invaluable.

STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Storefront for Art and Architecture (Storefront) is a place for conceptual exploration. With a history of experimental and challenging programming since the 1980's, Storefront is an institution that actively advocates for architecture while simultaneously breaking down what defines the discipline. Storefront aims to 'provoke' - to be provocative, to provoke encounters or to be thought provoking. Many of the exhibitions would not be recognisable as architecture to the lay-public however they are all deeply concerned with architectural ideas at a conceptual level. Storefront takes advantage of it's well established and well respected reputation to explore the outer reaches of architectural thinking.

Located on a small slice of land in downtown Manhattan, the gallery space is comprised of a operable facade and a triangle shaped internal space. Exhibitions and events are hosted in the space with the operable facade configured in each case to draw visitors in to the gallery and extend the exhibition out on to the street. The gallery its self in many ways is more akin to an installation rather than a traditional exhibition space. The location, the operable facade and the use of graphics create opportunities for storefront to have a disruptive presence in the city. Like an installation, passers by wont necessarily enter or engage in the exhibition but they can not ignore it. The playful nature of its physical presence in the city opens the door for diverse audiences and diverse types of experience. This coupled with the experimental nature of the exhibition content provokes curiosity.

This combination of intentionally challenging programming and an assertive physical presence is a unique model for how to build audiences and engagement without being popularist or didactic. This is an organisation that has turned the risk of being conceptually inaccessible into its great strength. Storefront has a stable and broad base of private investment and support as it is internationally recognised to be a unique physical and conceptual space for architectural experimentation.

The gallery space is small and the content is not always immediately comprehensible

The operable facade panels are suggestive in the street scape.

CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

Chicago, USA

CASE STUDY 23

CITY TOURS/ INSTITUTION

Expertise is attractive.

Passion is contagious

CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

On the Chicago Architecture Foundation website, they declare themselves at Chicago's number one tourist attraction. The crowds gathered on a Saturday morning for a selection of walking, cycling, bus and ferry architecture tours certainly lends voracity to this claim. The CAF combines a modest exhibition space, a large city model and a gift shop to form the base for their in-city activities. The Exhibition space is the least impressive part of the foundation with a run-down ante-room hosting a pin-up style poster exhibition about the Chicago river system while I was visiting. The city model is an impressive representation of down town Chicago. Photographs and explanatory texts elaborate on particular landmarks. Large banner style posters showcase work on particular themes and projects completed by local architecture students. The offering of architecture city-tours is extensive and a particular strength of the CAF. Well informed volunteer docents take groups through the city on tours based around certain themes. I participated in a 'Rise of the Skyscraper' walking tour. The guide was very well informed and struck a good balance between accessible and more in-depth information. The guide linked ideas of technological developments, style and aesthetics, social and political narratives in his descriptions of the buildings. The participants on the tour were all engaged and enjoying the experience.

The large scale Chicago City model sits in the foyer to the CAF and provides a focal point for the foundation. The exhibition space (to the left of the image) is under whelming.

The CAF city volunteers are very highly regarded and the tour program consistently popular.

GRAHAM FOUNDATION

Chicago, USA

CASE STUDY 24

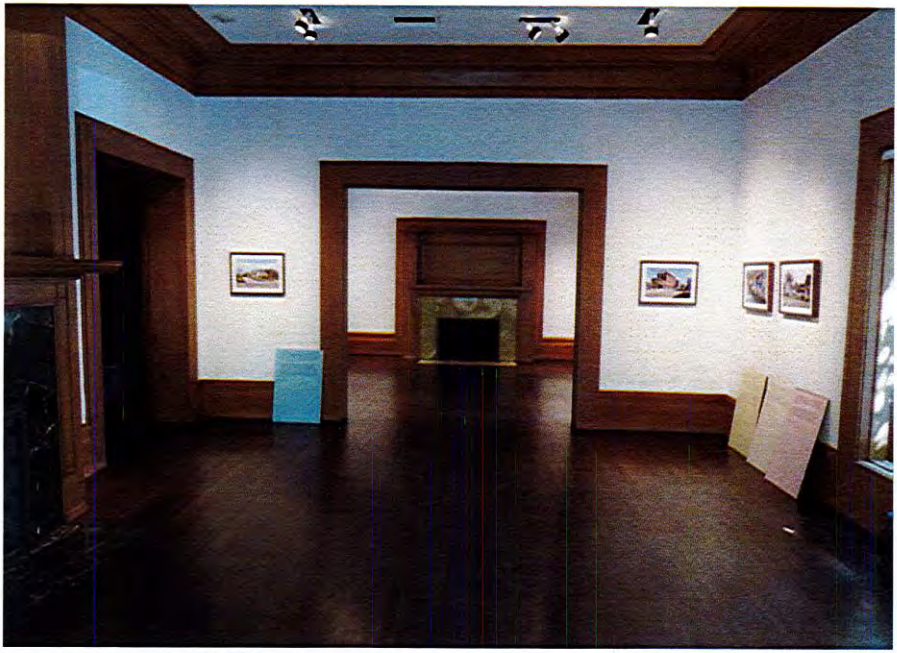
INSTITUTION / EXHIBITION / RESEARCH / GRANT GIVING

Our predisposition to explore ideas through spatial means forces the conversation into the public realm

GRAHAM FOUNDATION

Located in a converted historic house, the Graham Foundation has a small gallery and library space that operates in concert with their major focus which is research and grant giving. The exhibition on display during my visit was entitled *Where if not us? Participatory Design and its Radical Approaches.* The exhibition was thoughtfully conceived and presented. The tone of the exhibition was towards a specialised audience presumably from the research-led basis of the work. The exhibition was sober and required a depth of engagement from the viewer that I doubt a nonspecialist would be able to maintain. In questioning whether this level of specialisation is a asset or a burden I concluded that the critiquing the audience reach of the exhibition is the wrong question. Whether an exhibition attracts 5 or 500 visitors is not the way to measure the success of the exercise. The success is that a body of knowledge has been created and placed in the public domain. In the case of the Graham Institute, this takes place in the form of both publications and exhibitions. Exhibitions create experiences and opportunities for exchange that publications can not. Perhaps this is a quirk of architectural research that operate in a academic or theoretical space are given the opportunity to be expressed in some spatial form. This deference to spatial expression is the unique skill we possess and one that can be deployed to create relationships, meaning and understanding.

The library showed an impressive collection of titles funded by the Graham Foundation since its inception in 1956. I had the impression that the greatest contribution the Graham Foundation makes is to the production and dissemination of new thinking. It is difficult to perceive the reach of this thinking beyond the museum but the longevity of the programs they run must attest to the continuing relevance of the approach.



The Graham Foundation exhibition spaces lend themselves to in depth engagement.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (MoCA)

Los Angeles, USA

CASE STUDY 25

EXHIBITION / PAVILION / ART

Digital overlays should enhance a visitors experience not dampen it through information overload.

There must be a context for and a way to engage with architectural installations otherwise they become nothing but oversized decoration.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (MoCA)

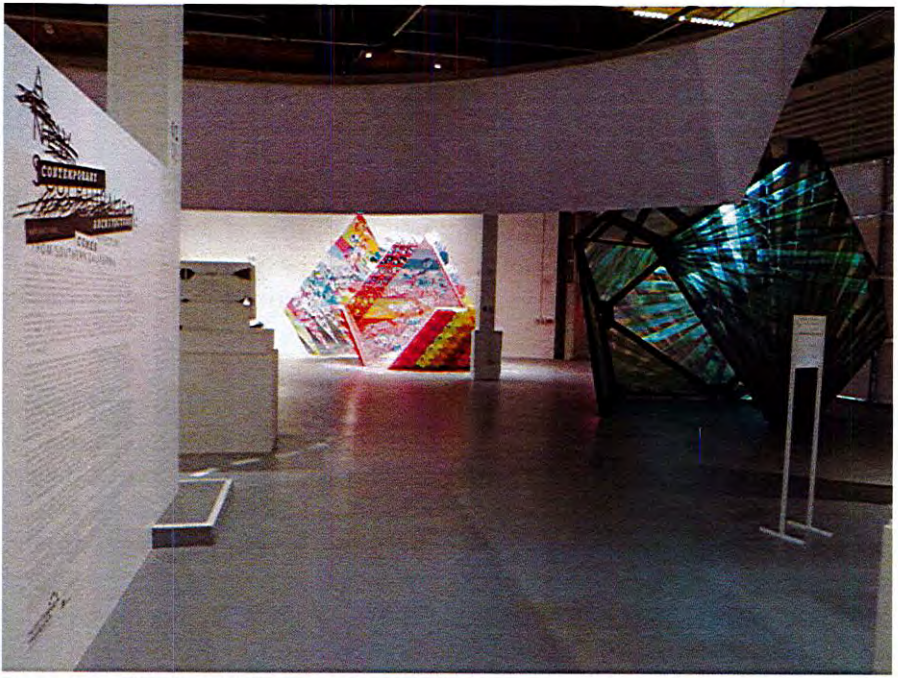
The A New Sculpturalism from Southern California exhibition (Also entitled Contemporary Architecture Comes from Southern California) was one of the biggest and most ambitious architecture exhibitions I visited. It was also unfortunately one of the most conceptually unclear. This exhibition was exploring the idea of sculpturalism in architecture and simultaneously attempting to define a movement in architecture and stake the claim for Southern Californian Architects within contemporary global architecture. This dual aim created conflicts and distraction in the exhibition with the impressive collection of drawings, models and installations struggling for attention amid the overlays of technology, thematic grouping and crowded display.

Rather than examining exhibitions shortcomings, for the purposes of this case study I will examine 2 techniques used by the curators. The first is the use of 'QR' codes along side exhibition text and the second is the use of full scale installations.

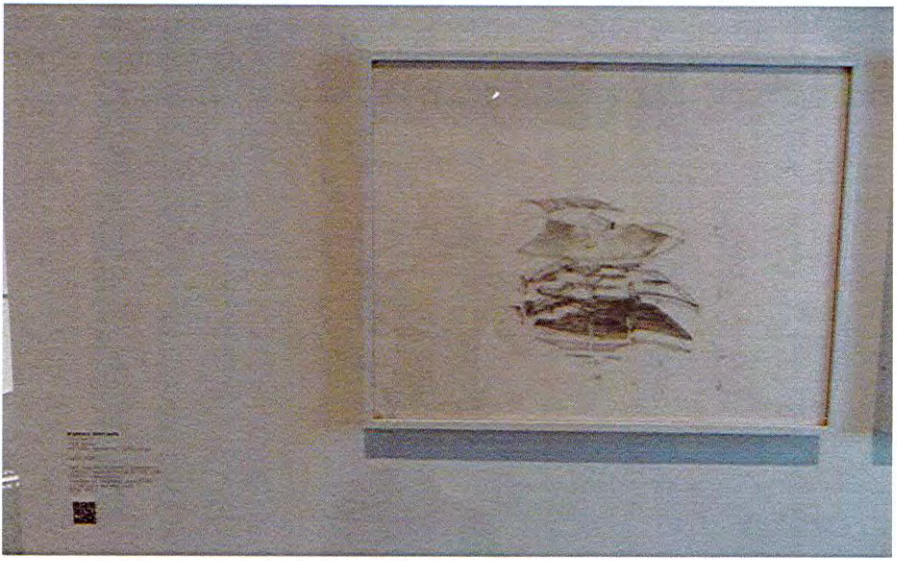
Many of the items on display had 'QR' barcodes alongside their exhibition text. When scanned with a smart phone, the QR code directs you to a MOCA web page that contains an image of the work, the descriptive text, a video interview of the architects and links to the company or project website. This is an interesting technique presumably intended to deepen the viewers experience and knowledge. I feel that in this case study however, the information overlay created a tension between the items on display and the architects as personalities. The curatorial and conceptual intent of the exhibition became very unclear as the themes of 'sculpturalism' and the desire to describe a Southern Californian 'school' of thinking came into conflict with each other. The QR codes also forced the viewer into a virtual space that competed with the physical space of the exhibition. Visitors are surrounded by hundreds of drawings, models, installations and artwork and are focused on their smart phones instead. In this case the QR codes were at best ignored and actively detracted from a viewers experience at worst. The QR code is a tool that can direct a viewer to more information. I would

question the usefulness of this feature in an exhibition context where the emphasis should be on the physically present information and items. Digital overlays can enhance an exhibition experience but it needs to facilitate embodied engagement rather than just provide more information.

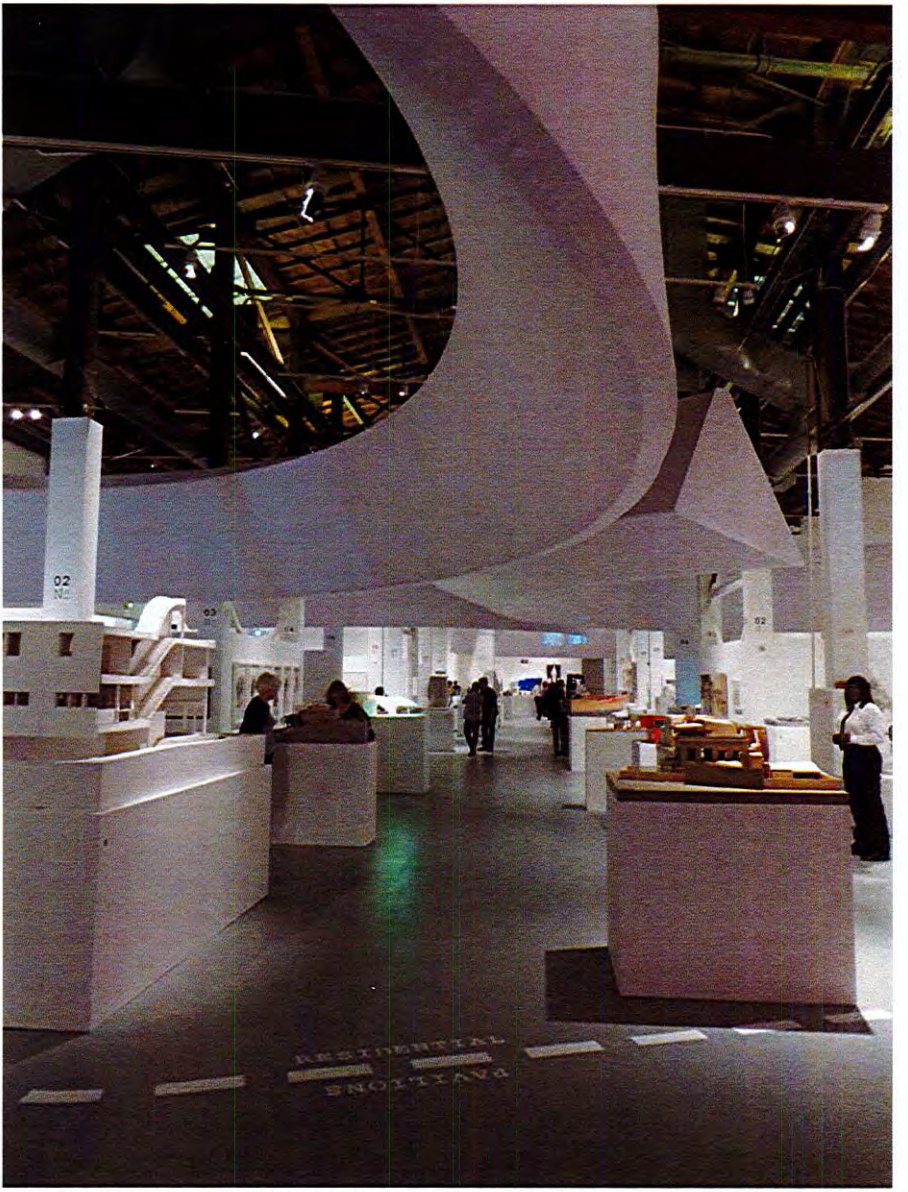
The second aspect I will examine is the use of physical installation in the gallery space. The potential for full scale installation within an exhibition about architectural sculpturalism is obvious however in this case study the pavilions failed to transcend their aesthetic appeal. While the definition of architecture in an exhibition context is as flexible as it is ill-defined there is still a distinguishable line between an object and a space. The pavilions in this exhibition were awkwardly positioned at one end of the exhibition hall and although beautiful, there was no clear way to interact with the pavilions. Security staff actively asked visitors to move away from one installation and the other visitors either ignored completely or gave an only cursory gaze. These pavilions lacked relevance within the spatial curation of the exhibition and extended no gestures for visitor interaction.



The pavilions within the exhibition space were beautiful however they lacked purpose and appeared to have been placed for their convenience to the loading dock rather than to any curatorial intent.



The wall texts, artifacts and QR codes occupied a crowded and uncomfortable conceptual space.



The exhibition space was jammed packed full of artifacts and also had overlays of exhibition infrastructure and staging, video, audio and digital overlays also fought for space along side the pavilions, wall texts, QR codes and painted instructions on the gallery floor.

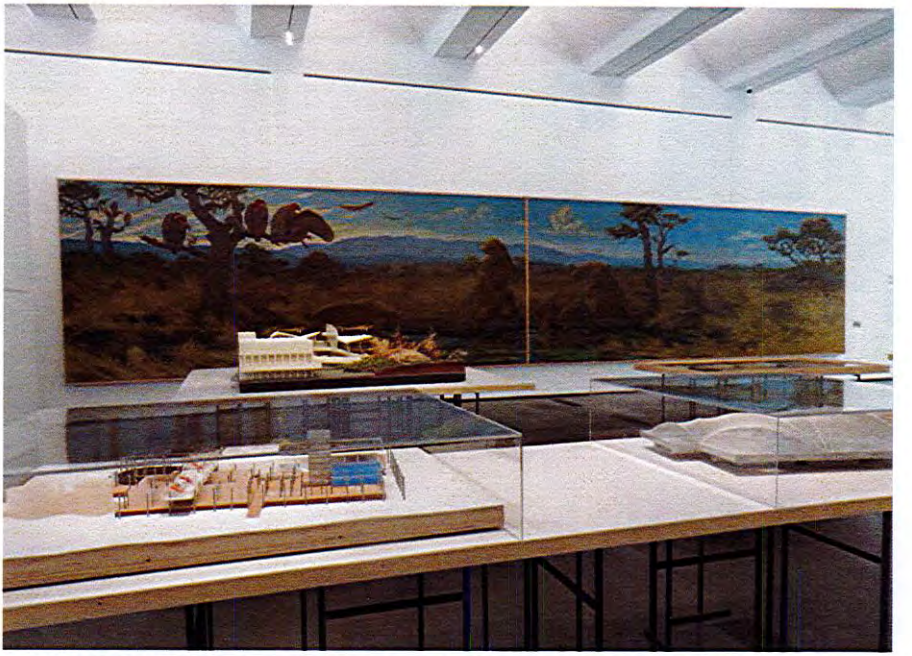
LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART (LACMA)

Los Angeles, USA
CASE STUDY 26
EXHIBITION / ART

A strong architectural exhibition is about something bigger than architecture.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART (LACMA)

LACMA is a museum primarily concerned with art exhibition however the planned building extension by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor prompted an exhibition exploring the history of buildings on the LACMA site. This exhibition was interesting because it used architecture to tell a story about a site and an institution. Architecture in this case was the medium to explore ideas rather than the subject matter. This exhibition was able to succinctly show how architecture can embody ideas about place and cultural values by contrasting various architectural approaches side by side. The exhibition was chronologically arranged and invested considerable time in contextualising the site and the history of the area. The middle section of the exhibition displayed architecture models of the other LACMA buildings, an interesting move considering that most of these buildings are still existing and the viewer would have just walked through them on their way to this gallery. This babushka doll approach show cased the relationship between the abstract (model) and the built outcome. The main attraction of the exhibition was the over-sized models of the proposed Zumthor building. Large enough to examine the internal spaces in detail, the model was mounted at eye height and arranged so that you could walk around comfortably. There was some accompanying text but most part, the architectural models were left to speak for themselves.



The history of the LACMA site was explored all the way back to prehistorical times through natural history museum type panoramas.

The curious scale and mounting height of the Zumpthor models invited an almost playful doll-house like interaction with the models.

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MAKING SPACE FOR ARCHITECTURE :
: Creating a culture of public architectural discourse

A COLLECTION OF INTERVIEWS WITH LEADING PRACTITIONERS

INTRODUCTION

The intention behind these case studies is to present a range of techniques that are used in the exhibition of architecture. The case studies comprise of a short description of the exhibition or event and then first hand observations and reflections. These reflections are not intended to be a definitive or empirical analysis – they intend to form a series of leading questions around the role and efficacy of the techniques.

I conducted these case studies through site visits between March and August 2013.

INTERVIEWS:

Interview with Eva Franche I Gilbert – Director of Storefront for Art and Architecture.

Imogene Tudor (IT): My interest in The Storefront for Art and Architecture (Storefront) is to understand how the architecture profession nurtures its cultural core. Who are the producers and who will be touched by conceptual and theoretical architectural exploration?

So to begin with, I'd like to ask you who is the audience is for Storefront?

Eva Franche I Gilbert (EFG): There are always several audiences, and we do have five different spaces of action in terms of understanding what we do and how we try to reach out, not necessarily to individuals but also to ideas and spaces of action within society. So yes, we are an exhibition space. We are a gallery, but we also do events and we do competitions and we do publications and we do projects outside of the gallery. And each one of those different spaces of action has, one would say, different audiences.

Yes, an exhibition at the Storefront, one could say, is dedicated to very expert groups of individuals who understand the value of that and the contribution to a historical or a disciplinary discourse. But the physical location of the gallery itself already assumes and understands that the public that is not totally familiar with the subject matter is going to be confronted with that. So every time they do work with an artist or an architect or anyone who is going to exhibit or make an installation at the Storefront. I always say there are all these different layers of visitors that come to the Storefront. One is the truck driver that is coming from the Williamsburg Bridge that is going to the Holland Tunnel that maybe has never stopped in New York, and maybe he will not stop - and the only thing he will see is those things he encounters along the way. Most of the time it's wonderful because there is this bench across the street that I like to sit on just to see how people behave and act. And they have like this, they go with a head and they look and then they are like, "Whoa." And they take their camera and they take a photo right?

So I always say, there is a first level of legibility that they need to be able to arrive and read on the building, that there is already provocation and a representation of what the Storefront is -an exhibition or the contents that are speaking to . The same to the passerby, the same to the guy who just comes in and makes a zigzag for thirty-five seconds, to the guy who spends ten minutes to the guy who spends five hours. And from this gradient of temporalities that is the second, the minute, the five minutes, the half an hour, the five hour, you have these levels of expertise. And I mean it's really interesting to be able to provoke and disrupt the space of normality or the same of being able to understand the traditions that each one of those individuals carries. And this is one we've translated, we say to one that is the citizen-at-large, to the architect or the specialized artist. And for me they are all audiences, and this repeats itself in everything else that we do. It repeats itself in the events. It repeats itself in the publications. It repeats itself in the projects. And even though some of those spaces are specifically targeted for a specific audience or subject matter, but yet I still do like to give multiple points of entry so that the work can resonate with all these different layers.

IT: It has been asserted to me that the difference between exhibiting art and architecture is that in art you're there to facilitate the aura of an object. You're there to contextualize an object and provide an experience, whereas in the display of architecture the curator is obliged - almost morally obliged – to inform or educate the viewer. It's interesting you were talking about trying to have multiple entry points. To you is that about information or experience or somewhere in between?

EFG: I always say I'm not interested in display. I'm interested in the production of knowledge, and the idea of a construction of an experience. The object in of itself performs a function. There is no better information that having the object itself. We don't try to give classes about sex; we try to have sex, and there is no better act of learning that the real experiment. And we do like to experiment. And we like to have the feeling that the space of exhibition, even if it is for what one might call art. All architecture is always a space that experiments with those subject matter at the core of that project. We are not a space where we usually display art as art, nor architecture as space of consumption. I'm really not interested in providing

space for the consumption or commodification of ideas or objects but into the generation of them. And that is a very different model from modern institutions, that they do a great job in communicating and informing and transmitting a space of culture to the consumer. That's not what Storefront is about, even when we engage in the spaces that do offer a historical or contextual space of information of objective elements to be consumed. There is also a space of reflection and generation that goes beyond that. They think the distinction between art and architecture in terms of galleries or museums or exhibitions is a very unfair one. Because one is based on an economic model of commodification. One can look and see the biggest and most secure facilities are for art storage. Those are like the new banks because the real money is going to be there. It's very interesting because architecture is enclosing that building, that space. So the idea of just promoting symbolic value is not something I'm interested in, nor something that the Storefront is in pursuit of. We are really interested in increasing the value of the ideas that artists or architect produce through their work. So sometimes we do have shows or exhibitions that objectify a drawing for instance, an architect's drawing. To really understand what is the value in the process and generation of that idea. There's even the performative strategy on the display of something in another place it would be just an objectification of some work and in this case it would be a reflection of a situation of the undervalued on the undermining of society of the architect's intellectual space. So that's my take on this distinction.

IT: I've been thinking a lot about where architects get permission for that intellectual space. Why are there so many architects desperately trying to find somewhere that's going to give them permission for that intellectual production.

"we try to reach out, not necessarily to individuals but also to ideas and spaces of action within society."

EFG: It's funny that you use the word permission.

IT: I think that's the crux of it.

EFG: It's funny because if one looks in historical terms what has been the role of the architect in the decision-making in terms of the construction of the city. I mean, it's like a license to kill. It's like you have permission to act or license to act or power to decide. For me it was a distinction between what constitutes art in architecture. Art is narcissistic, and everything is made within itself. Anything that has a collective understanding becomes architectural. And that's my own reading of it. Architecture always needs to have a collective vision of where society and how that aesthetic or structural material or economical act contributes, and the observer understands the engagement of society around it. Architects, we have lost that permission. We have lost that license to kill because we have not really demonstrated our ability to understand those collective desires, and they feel like that's exactly what we had as a strength. The ability to understand what society was aspiring to as a whole. And to be able to be the spokesperson for those who are not represented for those who do not necessarily have the ability to be at the decision making table. And to be able to speak about sustainability and homelessness and social equity and all those things. The architect was a figure who was an expert in all of these many different traits and was able to bring the expertise, the technological, economical and the social material into one project. This is the distinction as well between the European formation of an architect and the American one. In Europe you are raised as you're one planner, you're one designer, a policy-maker, an architect, a builder where the building and its surroundings, the infrastructure of the city, the square, the public space are all a continuum. And an entire space of responsibility in the table of the architect. In the United States, the architect is formed as the object-maker that exists in a field that is being taken on the side by policy-makers, by urban planners that do not necessarily understand the construction of the singular object. So this distinction of labour has produces that society has been at [the] mercy of people who already hold power.

So how do we regain that power back? It's not only reclaiming it because maybe we no longer have the ability to articulate those things. And I do think the education and pedagogical structures needs to really make an effort in understanding what it takes to regain that position in education and expertise. That sometimes, because I have been teaching in this country for some years, the students and people lack. I do believe that anyone who has spent enough hours and enough time, they understand the forces that constitute good architecture and they understand the relevance of good architecture and the construction of public life. We have this, and I don't know if you have seen it, this competition of competitions. So that is a very simple, easy exercise in trying to regain permission. At saying what is the competition that Obama should organize? What is the competition that Mayor Bloomberg should actually run? What are the questions that we should be asked by

society, so that we could answer them? And the interesting thing is that architects in these years have simply asked to be service providers and not society thinkers, and that is something that is a huge problem. How do you do it? Well, we tried to do it by asking these questions and trying to provide. Once we receive those answers then we go back into those spaces of real decision making. And we say we think there is something interesting but maybe we don't. That is why we are running this competition because maybe architects are no longer interested in that. And maybe they just want to build the highest and the biggest the most beautiful and the most expensive building. Who says we want to change the world and make it a better place. I mean, I don't know if there are any architects out there who say, "I'm just trying to be seen." If you make a survey in the strange deep dark hours I'm not sure what the aspirations of individuals are in these days.

IT: I think being adrift characterizes the profession at the moment.

EFG: It is very funny, if one just reads the mission statements of the architectural offices...

IT: To provide efficient, on-time, on-budget...

EFG: Modern... It's incredible. Okay, they want more of those. ...That is really fascinating for me and a problem I think.

IT: It seems to me that the profession needs to start to look at what we can provide and what the questions that need to be answered are. And I feel like, critical to that success is empowering the public at large with the vocabulary, to start talking about what they want, articulate their desires and their feelings in a way that responds to the built environment. Because at the moment I feel there is too much of a gap, even linguistically, between the public and the architects that allow all these other people to get in between as mediators. I think that is particularly looking at mass media and that kind of thing how we can almost popularize the language around, architecture like what some of those cooking shows have done. Everyone thinks they are a gastronomy expert now because they have watched one season of some cooking show.

" I'm not interested in display. I'm interested in the production of knowledge, and the idea of a construction of an experience."

EFG: You should not worry about that. TV shows about architecture are in the works. And I know the people who are behind them. If you really honestly asked me about it, I don't think that is necessarily the way either. The idea of raising the awareness about the power that architecture is something that mostly good architecture can provide. So we have been talking about, how does one show that there are amazing cities and that there are cities that could be better? And how does one do that? The United States is one of these countries where a lot of people have not necessarily travelled outside of its own borders, and nothing against it, but there are a lot of different ways of understanding the construction of a good environment and cities and places. There's a lot more than just suburbia - how to bring that culture into the table. I think that posing that question to popular media is like saying, "How has Hollywood helped to create great poetry?" Right? So great architecture for me needs to be transmitted through great projects.

IT: So you think that the built manifestation can do that.

EFG: Yes. Or that real spatial experiment. And I'm just saying because I haven't found the medium for it. Right? And architecture has a lot of very specific qualities that have a lot to do with its real physical presence. And there is a tectonic side and a physical side and there is a sensorial side, and there are many things that have to do with being there.

And this is why we are very much interested, and there isn't one part of the culture of architecture that is transmitted through different texts. And could we transmit it through communication and media and education and trying to bring words of vocabulary and understanding? But I don't necessarily think that it's better food because there are TV programs about food. Alright? I think that if there would be more restaurants and less McDonalds, that would help more than TV programs. People can still talk about and use the same vocabulary that they use on the TV with gourmet chefs when they are eating a hamburger at McDonalds.

IT: Okay, so just being able to express it doesn't mean you can identify with it.

EFG: And you can express it in real terms. I promise you, I could take you for a hamburger at McDonald and we could talk about the quality of the onion in relationship to the buns . This meat has a kind of smashness of it - could be the that could be dematerialised.... I mean, I could talk about the hamburger from McDonalds to the highest understanding of it until I don't taste another

hamburger. So to say that we need to educate and communicate to the people about architecture is by building things. It's by making architectural projects. And an architectural project could be a film, and it could be a TV program. The way that the media has constantly produced a banalisation of culture, I think that's really problematic for the real production of culture.

IT: So the onus come back to the consumers, the public, the users...

EFG: Not the word consumers.

IT: I know. It's an antagonistic term! So it's assuming that the public are of no help, so the profession needs to be the visionaries. We can't go to the public and say, "What do you want, what do you value, what are your hopes and aspirations?"

EFG: I think those questions are embedded in what it means to practice as an architect. I don't go around saying, "Doctors, doctors. You should think about the microorganism in my knees " I don't go around telling doctors how to think about medicine. And they care about public health, and how do we live a higher quality life? And they try to understand what makes us be more depressed and be more happy. And they really try to think about that they are the guardians for an understanding of life. And individual life and collective life. And the same goes into lawyers, and the same goes into all these different people who try to keep society working as a whole. And I have no idea what is going on, where everyone thinks they help by having an opinion now about what architects should do and how they should do it. And I think that's fascinating to me because... I've never encountered an amazing architectural project that came from the decision or the collaboration of half a hundred people.

IT: No, absolutely not. I think what brought me to this way of thinking was saying that we've gotten ourselves stuck in this situation where essentially politicians and developers are making their decisions on what's being built.

" Architects, we have lost that permission. We have lost that license to kill because we have not really demonstrated our ability to understand those collective desires, and they feel like that's exactly what we had as a strength. The ability to understand what society was aspiring to as a whole. And to be able to be the spokesperson for those who are not represented for those who do not necessarily have the ability to be at the decision making table."

EFG: Because they think that they can be architects.

IT: Whether they think they can be architects or not, they still hold the money. They are holding the purse strings, but at the same time they're ultimately accountable to the public. Whether that's through the market, if the apartments will sell, or for the politicians if they seem to be giving back to the citizens. So there is a direct accountability back towards the public. Given this dynamic though, I have no idea why people put up with such low quality architecture being built. So I was looking towards the vocabulary to possibly explain this phenomenon. Otherwise, how can you account for it? I was looking for a way, that the public can start demanding quality from the people that they have power over. Do they buy the apartments, do they re-elect the same people again to start saying what they want? But maybe that's too indirect.

EFG: This is why developers are building those things, because that's what people think they want like why people are buying iPhones - because there is a user experience and a consumer market. It is an entire over-structure that there is a kind of visionary understanding of desires, and they are able to produce it and go beyond that. I think architects have been waiting too long for that big builder or developer to come into our door and ask us to make something. If it's cool we'll make it more expensive, and if it's more experimental it goes over budget. And I think we need to start being able to say yes to their concerns and to start being able to work within those constrains. Architecture is this amazing space of creativity that sits within the most terrible constraints one can provide for a space of experimentation. And I think that architects have not been doing a good job. I wouldn't put it in the hands of just the developers and the politicians. Because there is always ultimately someone who is called an architect who might not necessarily be one, or I wouldn't call him one. He's a builder that actually accepts to do that. And I'm not blaming society for the situation of the architects. I'm blaming the architects for the situation that they have put themselves in, and for the inability to really make themselves valuable. And that is part of our culture and our institution as well. Trying to raise the level of agency and awareness and not just to be self-

content with what we earn, what we do, and of course that we have acquired through hundreds of years of building amazing things into this world. If one looks into what has happened in the last hundred years in the world there are many cities that have never been, but in that time there is a lot of crap that has happened. I think it's okay that we have lost the respect and the status because we have not really done a great job of it. So I think we just need to get better in what is developing our profession. The idea of embodying this collective aspiration, I mean it's the will of the architect to understand the society that one lives in. It's part of our job, and it's not about our main service; it's about being observant and understanding, and to bring all those things together. And it's not about whether you have participatory design. Not everyone needs to know of everything. And it is the idea that I love - knowing somebody that cooks and has time to cook and give me something that was made out of amazing love, expertise and knowledge. ...And of course I will want to go, "Oh I know," and go into the kitchen but I know won't be able to replicate it because there is a magic that goes into the passion that either made the person a cook or an architect or so on. There is a lot in what society has produced in the last twenty or thirty years that is the status of these individuals. The idea that a person has pursued a career for a certain measure of status or that benefits are going to come associated with them. I assume it has produced this very strange concept that is unemployment. Unemployment just exists within a society, where the society tells you what you are. You cannot be unemployed in life. You cannot be. Life is life. You are not unemployed. Unemployment is a bureaucratic concept [and] a very recent one, and I think that has produced employment and that has produced spaces of expertise and control. Architects are never retired, right? An architect is never unemployed. They can be starving. It's a different question. But it's not unemployed. It's a very fascinating situation ...to work with people who I do believe that they understand that they are architects and they want to be architects and they want to participate. Ultimately, the profession of the architect is contrary to what people think that is theirs. A narcissist individual is someone who is extremely generous in giving his or her life into the production of that zeitgeist or that spirit of the time. And some of those individuals .... are still there and there are some that are not. And I think that is fine. And I think that's something that is happening not only in architecture, but it's happening in other disciplines.

"Architecture is this amazing space of creativity that sits within the most terrible constraints one can provide for a space of experimentation."

IT: Do you think there is a current avant-garde in architecture?

EFG: One is never able to see the avant-garde that one is inhabiting.

There is always an avant-garde. There is always one. Absolutely. The avant-garde is a... fictional construction of what was before. And that movement tried to push things in a certain direction and it was significant enough to have an impact that might have continuation or not. But it just produced a space of otherness. The avant-garde is a certain way to account for what is already there, yet we are not able to discern and decipher because we still don't know what is going to be next. But then for sure in ten years we will say the avant-garde was that. And the whole thing is how does one produce multiple paths of exit, of movement within a given condition that are not just repeating the trajectories that one has inherited. And obviously Storefront as an institution is in charge of trying to push things toward an edge. And that edge always is somewhere else. So even if society then moves in that direction, then we will try and move it in another direction where there are more individuals and more concerns that we believe are important to bring into the center of society in that regard. So of course there is an avant-garde but I cannot see where it is. Otherwise I would be a visionary. And if I had known probably I would not even tell you or I would not dare to say it.

IT: Do you think that there are any comparable institutions to Storefront? People that are opening up that space?

EFG: I want to believe yes. I want to believe yes. I think there are individuals, but I think Storefront represents the spirit within many architects or individuals, that believe that a different way of doing things is possible. And we just made these tote bags where we just started this international series. And this is very funny. ...We've always refused to do these things. But these are like, "Okay Storefront is here, and if you actually have it and you're walking with it then Storefront is you." There is this idea that here can be where the gallery is or it can be where you are.

So are there other institutions? Institution is a very strange word. Right? And as much as we say, yes we are an institution. After thirty years we have gained that status. We cannot escape it. I don't

"I'm blaming the architects for the situation that they have put themselves in, and for the inability to really make themselves valuable"

think there is an institution that tries to reinvent itself so constantly and radically as the Storefront does in terms of programming and in terms of focus and in terms of really trying to understand what is it that we should be doing next. If you ask me, I would say no. I've been looking and trying to figure out, but I don't know if there are small groups, organizations and collectives that do what we do in a different scale for a different period of time. It is customary that they have their own specific time. And I think they are seminal for what we call the contemporary production of culture. So we do have a project on the ends of this, to really try to enact and ignite that kind of desire into a collection of space of a transmission of knowledge. For the production of more spaces for alternative action and thinking. I do think that architects have entered too much into this space of servicing and not envisioning. And doing our job that it is to envision and not to service.

IT: I think Storefront has a particular strength as an institution. I agree with you that there are other thinkers and other provocateurs performing similar roles. Storefront has this thirty year legacy that lends authority to the vision. Instead of it being a crack-pot doing something that's incomprehensible. There's an authority that comes with that. And it's interesting whether that's a help or a hindrance to your work.

EFG: No that's great because you can do whatever you want. (laughs)

IT: Yes that's right. There's your license to kill.

EFG: There it is. There it is. No but it true that it is an amazing privilege for someone to be able occupy the space that we do. Because the Storefront has many people from obviously the four directors, or five, or six or seven. Where we are going now is through the archive, but it was also Kyong but it was also Shirin but it was also Glenwise but it was also another guy who we just found like two vice directors or vice curators and it's like who are these people. Where are they coming from? Are they real or are they fictional? And then you had the people in the world who manage to keep the storm from the overflowing when this institution was about to disappear and they're Sarah Heard and Joseph Grima. And the institution is an extremely dynamic organism, and it's ultimately its board of directors and advisors, who are the keepers of the spirit of the institution, has really managed to respond throughout different time periods to that. And with the trust to their director to really take that constant cure of into all kind of different heights. And of course what we value the most about ourselves is our license, not to kill but to fail. And we don't mind. What we would mind is if we didn't have this possibility for failure. And I think that's extremely important as an institution to say, "Well we don't know but...maybe" And this is something that I do value, that I do appreciate. But yes, it's something about Storefront that keeps itself fresh while institutionalized at the same time. And it is yes, this license to kill but to influence we've drawn thirty years of weight and reputation when it is still experimentation and fresh.

IT: How do you measure success?

EFG: Success is not a word or a concept that I'm interested in that much. I always say there are three ages in history which success can be measured. If one says, "Ah we have received two hundred thousand likes on Facebook. Right? Great. Amazing success." I'm not. Because tomorrow I wouldn't feel this way. Because tomorrow someone else would come up with two hundred thousand more likes and you're done. I'm not too interested in that success. Then you have the success of how many visitors to the gallery, how many articles are written about your work, about how many covers of the New York Time and ...those things are great when you are applying for a grant to measure success. Right? You know if you have enough public relations and you have the right connections and you have the nice dinners and the right friends. Probably you will get it, but I'm not that interested in that either. And then you have the third one that is the history of ideas. Fidel Castro used to say, "History will judge me." That is when after things and time have passed and certain things remain and stay. And then there are the crazy intrepid historians who go through the archive and find things and then start understanding how certain things shaped the world in one way or another. If you ask me about success, "When are you happy?" I'm happy almost everyday. One does what one cannot avoid not doing. Right?

We are very interested in understanding how things resonate, how things actually start proliferating

and people adopt other ways of doing things. When you see that people are able to go outside their own box, when they are able to say, "Wow, that really changed the way we can really open up things." This is actually extremely gratifying to me, when someone writes an email or actually says, "You know, I think I'm going to think about that in a totally different way now." That is exactly what the institution is for me. From the set design to programming, to events, to competitions, that is really to try to produce a space of difference. And in that construction of difference there is always the possibility of greatness. And the fact of just being able to produce that is for me successful. And not that people like it or don't, but the fact that there is the understanding of a production of alternative of something that is beyond the economical and the normal. For me that is valuable.

And of course differences for the sake of it might not necessarily carry the most fascinating, elaborated works, but that is where you are actually trusting that there is certain collective values and principles that are the ones that are driving us as human beings or individuals. So that difference can be qualified then in that regard. But ... you want to also feel that [someone] is doing right in knowing someone trusts [you]. I don't exactly, totally, necessarily know what you are after but you know what, I think I trust you. And I think that is success. The idea that someone can trust in someone else, that one has produced enough evidence for that act of trust or generosity. When someone gives you money, and gives you support and says, "You know what? I think you guys are doing a good job." And they can give you a hundred dollars or fifty dollars or ten thousand and that for me is an act of success of being able to gain that space of confidence. ...Ultimately, in order to produce those things we also need all those other acts of generosity and trust.

IT: So, to have success is to retain autonomy? Or an autonomy of intellectual space?

EFG: This is a fascinating question, how if someone would enclosed me inside prison, right? I think there are places of thriving. I think one needs to be able to find within one's society and one's expertise the spaces that one can strive through. Yes, the Storefront has a space of autonomy within society and I do have it within the institution and so on, but...I think there is an inability to see the things that imprison us. Right?

" And of course what we value the most about ourselves is our license, not to kill but to fail"

And I think that is another exercise. What is it that is imprisoning us that we are unable to see? And that is a very luxurious question to ask. And I think it is the luxury not of the autonomy but of asking those questions that we did not even know that we wanted to ask, right? I think that's part of the thing. And to be able to give people the opportunity to rethink there way of acting and repositioning themselves within society. Every time an artist or an architect comes, it's the luxury of reinvention. And the just say, "what is that you want to do to your work?" Not what is your obsession but what is your position? And to be able to do that very freely and very openly, I feel that is the big luxury that we do have. Because even if we do have economic pressures and we don't have disciplinary pressure we didn't have any pressure and we didn't need to be accountable to anyone except to, in a certain way, ourselves. That is the side that we still don't have a prejudgment about. So I think that is the biggest luxury we have. Is to be able to be accountable to our future space of judgments.

IT: One last question: I've just been very interested in your perception of the rising number of specialized studies that are emerging. Curatorial studies for architecture, curatorial studies for design for example. How do you think these courses may contribute to the field of architecture?

EFG: I think that is this clear x-ray of the inability of architects to understand what they are doing. Therefore, we need to create a new group of individuals who understand what have the other ones done. Because it is obvious that people are doing things when they didn't know why they were doing it and how they were doing it. And yet there is still a blind belief that there is something worth while in what they have been doing. Yet they still don't have the ability or the articulation therefore we need to find someone else who talks about it. That would be my first reaction, right? My first gut reaction is that specialization is extremely problematic yet expertise is a very interesting concept. Meaning I think it is important to have deep knowledge and passion in whatever one is interested in. But disciplinary narrowness just produces cliffs and levels and I think only when we are all citizens of the world, that we are responsible in making and constructing. Yet in order to operate and we need to be able to contribute to our own highest virtuous passions and so-on. I like to think of myself as I like to cook and I like to skate and I like to bike and play handball, do architecture, and be a curator, and make buildings and master

plans and so-on but one needs to find what is the space of contribution to society that I can give the most. And I think that's what society lacks within its educational system should be doing. It should be the link. The downside of it, sometimes there is an understanding of an economical model. I think it was like five years ago an article in the New York Times saying, "The most risk taking job is to be a curator." And there were like five profiles. And after that there were five programs and after that there was new program for curator. It's amazing how it's a different way to realize the artistic calling. For me there is no difference between articulating thought and constructing though. It's like a poet is in a certain way a curator of words, and an architect is a curator of materials and societies and so on. However one wants to call it, I think one must be able to understand what are the paths that one wants to follow. I don't have a problem against those programs, yet I don't think I would want to be in it if I was not knowledgeable to the contribution to the totality of things. Like Groucho Marx, "I don't want to belong to a club that would accept me as a member." So I don't like to call myself an architect but I am one. I don't like to call myself a curator, yet I am one. I don't like to call myself a director, but I am one. So specialization doesn't go anywhere, but it is necessary to keep on going as an individual.

Interview with Stuart Harrison – Presenter of 'The Architects' Radio Show on RRR Radio

IT: As both a practicing architect and a public media figure, how do you see your role?

SH: I think I have a couple of roles, which have developed over the last 10 years. One is as a bridge between us as the profession and them, as everybody else which is probably infinitely more important. There are a variety of ways that this bridge manifests its self. Sometimes it manifests its self just through what we normally do as architects, designing reasonable quality public work - if we can, but then more directly through media which for me has taken the form of print, radio and tv. But it started in fact with print in magazines you know, and radio and then more recently, tv and then of course there are books. All of these have different audiences, it is hard to know which has the biggest audience to be honest, I guess it is fundamentally, well me and a group of similarly interested people in Melbourne, Sydney, and other places in Australia who collectively agree that we need to improve the perception of architecture in the community and make it seem more relevant, seem less elitist and think about a variety of ways we can be a bridge to the wider community.

IT: How would you assess the general design and architecture literacy of the general public?

SH: Underrated. I don't know if it is a case of the typical media dumbing things down or whether it is architects assuming or wanting to know more than everything else. Whether it is an inability to explain things that are really not that hard. I mean, everyone is in it all the time....people understand how it works, I mean it is the centre of their lives. I think it is hard to acknowledge that some times but if you listen to people talking about their living room, it is not that different to the one we might have. People understand light, and things being warm, decorative or simple. You know, people understand these things so the is a sense of how to we bring some thing to that, that we make it clear that we can help, that we are relevant. By the way we are able to think about these things slightly differently. So I think the bigger crisis that architecture has with the wider community is in saying what we do and that's partly because we don't explain it, or have the opportunities, or the time to do all that extra stuff of explaining. So I do think there is an under rating of the intelligence of the audience so when Simon Knott and I started our radio show, we decided that we didn't want to dumb it down. We have a reasonably informed audience on the radio station 3 triple R which is something to understand. When we watch or listen to something, we like to be at a level where we can follow but we are learning something. So when I'm listening to science, I am struggling but I am following, and you sort of rise to the occasion. Where as I think on a lot of occasions - and we have had this when dealing with media distributors who make media, who say, let's bring this down, let's simplify this. We are constantly battling against that and it is important not to seem rarified and elitist but at the same time, you can have a reasonably sophisticated conversation - as long as you explain what you a talking about, that's the very important thing. I guess through many years of teaching in architecture, you get an ability to explain things to people. In that way the audience is like an enormous group of students who are often very keen to learn more. But you have to make it clear and treat that properly.

"Whether it is an inability to explain things that are really not that hard. I mean, everyone is in it (architecture) all the time....people understand how it works, I mean it is the centre of their lives."

IT: have you been cognisant of a difference in the audience between your work on RRR and ABC Radio National this summer?

SH: That's very interesting - yes. We we aware of it and the people we were working with at the ABC were aware of it. But it was actually a positive experience for our regular radio show I think. It forced , or encouraged us to slow down a little bit - we often talk very quickly - literally slow down and try not and do too much. So I mean, the radio show when we started was about almost the kind of conversation you would have when you were in a bar. The Radio RN stuff was a bit more curated. We tried to keep a conversational quality but at the

same time there were a set of rules and those rules were only loosely prescribed to. So I think in part that was our own perception of Radio National and all three of us - who all on occasion listen to Radio RN so we have an in built perception of what it was to do that. In terms of the intelligence though it was very much at a similar level. We certainly didn't regard RN listeners to be any smarter or less smart than RRR listeners. In terms of that we used the same rules - if you're going to say something, explain it and using a method where the three of us talking. It is good if one of you don't know as much as the others because you serve as proxy for the wider community. It is good if we are reviewing a building if one of us haven't been to it because they can go 'Explain it to me, how does that work" and you can bring people into the conversation. Because ultimately, that's what's important, for people to be able to listen and feel like they are a part of that conversation or at least adjacent to it. That scenario you were talking about was more acute when we were doing the ABC TV stuff where there was a real sense of having to dress certain things up in a certain way that might be amusing, that might be entertaining in a TV sense. Because we didn't know anything about TV, we had to run along with that and try and work it out. So there was more of a sense of 'let's make this, lets not try and complicate this, people a not that smart" Which this was, before it was axed, the only arts program on Australian television with Australian content, surely, this is the place where you can have a reasonably sophisticated conversation but the answer to that was 'no'. Well, maybe that's fair enough, out of all the things that I have ever done, that's the one my parents watched.

IT: Do you think that's because the quest to be entertaining muddied the waters?

SH: I think it was this sense that if there is so much talk about architecture in its own way, built environment or public space - and the show was about public space, public infrastructure, public built environment. Well it took on this narrative of the Western, for whatever reason and there was an idea that was going to help. People would find it funny, it's almost like you had to get someone slightly drunk first or something. So we thought that was unnecessary, but then again, we didn't know. I was always thinking about Robyn Boyd when he did his television show in the 60's in Australia. It was just him sitting at a desk talking to camera. They didn't even go to the project! The great thing about the show was that we got to go to the projects and talk about the projects and that was really great. You can really only do that on TV, I mean you can on radio and its ok. We were surprised how much you could condense into a short period of time.

IT: Do you find it necessary to define what architecture is.

SH: I don't personally but a lot of people seem to want to define it.

IT: So on the radio show when you say "we are the architects" what do you think your audience thinks your talking about.

SH: Well, it's about what architects do or what architecture is. The name The Architects is interesting because it is ambiguous whether we are the architects or whether it is the people we have on the show. Which we like! My definition of what architecture is what architects do. So that gets you around a whole lot of conceptual difficulties. Sometimes it is an expanded view of what architecture is, which is the thing that is often talked about these days, and then sometimes it is around buildings. I think it is all of those things to be honest. So it doesn't stress me too much in defining architecture. What stresses me is, perceptions of the profession.

IT: And what do you think those perceptions are? Are they negative?

SH: Traditionally they have been pretty negative, yes. So that is part of the opening problem we sought to address. So that may have improved.

IT: Does the problem stem from a perception of architects as elitist?

SH: No I think I think it is... Well there is the view of architects as elitist and then there is an idea that the works that architects do is expensive and an idea that architects are kind of pedantic. These sort of things. I think in a large way, the profession has begun to respond to it. And shift in the was the think of what good architecture is. But the reason that I think that perception has probably improved is that the general acknowledgement of the importance of design has improved. Along with it, I think we go. But it is up to us to do that perception changing. In terms of the wider community changing though, it is not their fault,

IT: Do you think the Australian perception towards architecture and design is unique?

SH: Yes of course. I think architects often complain

about their standing in society, and sometimes that's wholly unjustified because there is a tendency to say, well, if I was in Spain architects are treated like heros, which is not true. But there is this general high regard. You know, clearly it would be better I think for everybody if architecture was more valued in Australia. In the Australian consciousness there is a scepticism over certain things, but that is just where we've come from but it isn't where we need to stay. Australia is probably not the worst place for this but it is certainly not the best.

IT: That space certainly opening up a lot of space for conversation about architecture.

SH: I do think it is very important for us to do that.

IT: do you see your role as an educator?

SH: Yes! In everything I do, whether I like it or not, I am an educator. I worked that out a few years ago... I mean sometimes you are educating a builder (which sounds terribly elitist! But it's true) and some times the builder is educating you. But sometimes you are educating your client, sometimes you are educating a wider society. But if you are an educator and you perceive yourself as such and acknowledge that it doesn't mean it is a one- way street. I educate people but other people also educate me. I have done direct education at university, I've educated through media.... You known I like sharing knowledge....

IT: So, is there a tension between your role between as an educator and as an entertainer?

SH: I am not an entertainer. If anyone find what I do entertaining it is only because they find it interesting. I think we all like to think we're funny, so yes, of course I like to crack some jokes, to make people feel at ease. I'd always rather think of myself as an educator than an entertainer.

IT: On radio, you have an incredible freedom - or constraint- that you are freed from architectural convention of communication. Namely drawing. How do you deploy that advantage?

"One of the benefits of radio is that you're free from those architectural conventions of drawing etc, so the ideas and the narrative are the key things that you can talk around."

SH: it lends its self to certain was of thinking about architecture, it lends its self to the story about a project, and it actually lends it self to critique. Because critique is often verbal. Where as critique in the written sense can be stifling, often people tone down criticism, good or bad on paper and moderate. So talking about architecture in a critical sense is liberating. When you're talking about architecture, it suits the narrative, it's a story, its a verbal thing. When you're talking about a project, I always try and talk about what the project looks like but also, you know, the back story of the project becomes interesting because you're talking about. It verges on news and current affairs some times, you know, there will be some particular scenario and something coming out of that. So there are a series of narrative strands that weave themselves through a city like Melbourne, and these have big shifts, like a change in government or cultural condition, like the growth of sustainability or in the architectural world, the shift away towards post-icon projects. And then the projects themselves often have little stories within them that are often pretty interesting. The limitation of radio is often the visual and in the beginning we were really stressed about that, we were very conscious to try and get images to the website of things that we are talking about but I don't stress about that much these days. One of the benefits of radio is that you're free from those architectural conventions of drawing etc, so the ideas and the narrative are the key things that you can talk around. That realisation that this would work as a medium didn't occur to us until we had been doing it, because we were worried that it wasn't going to work because we hadn't really thought about the benefits of being free of those conventions. So it took us a while to work out that it was going to work and that it was maybe even preferable. I mean the other thing that worked out well for us with the radio as we get closer to 10 years on air, those past 10 years have been a renaissance in radio, globally, so I think in some way we are part of that, and that is almost completely linked to pod casting and a certain rejection of TV and its often mediocreness to real exceptional bright lights in radio, This American Life, etc...this idea that radio is cool has emerged and there is a certain ability to get into depth. You know, long form interviews are something that are really great, sometimes on film buffs forecast which is a film show on RRR they have interviews for 40 minutes, its only when you have been a broadcaster you realise what an enormous amount of time that is. And how good it is to have that depth where as on TV, for whatever reason, is a medium, that when we were doing our little program 6 minute things wouldn't be enough, but it was enough. You not able to get into the other sides of it, you're captured by the artifact

etc. When you're on radio you're interviewing somebody, whereas on TV you are typically showing the building so it is just about its self. The long form interviews are a particularly great format to tease out issues.

It goes back to this question of "what do you do" it is about acknowledging that it is not always about getting the pens out to effect some positive change sometimes your role might be talking, sometimes your role might be just advising, I think a lot of architects find that hard to deal with because their ego is built on an ability to draw the line, and I think one of the things you get better at, post that process of indoctrination as a student, as you get older you get better at acknowledging that you don't always have to be designing things to be a part of things. And so providing procurement advice for example, is an area that needs innovation, and its an area that I think is really important. But it's a sensitive one, because to give good advice you need to know that the person you suggest knows what they areas talking about.

IT: As an advocate in a public sphere, does your work in the media have political dimension?

SH: Yes, there's a few examples recently, Christine Phillips, one of our co-hosts enacted some real change around that debacle with the Venice pavilion, where a very clandestine, dare I say it, Sydney type operation was going on and there was a lot of vocal complaining and agitation, and so there was a change to the process as a result of that. It didn't become the perfect process but it wasn't an awful process. And it opened up the possibility of some more interesting things to occur. When I talk about advocacy and change I cite that example. I also site the example of when I was a 1st or 2nd year student in Perth, we had a campaign to stop the demolition of Council House which was a fine modernist building. And it worked. So sometimes we can have an influence in a reactionary sense, if you have interesting

"It goes back to this question of "what do you do" it is about acknowledging that it is not always about getting the pens out to effect some positive change"

people involved with that.

IT: How do you measure the success of your role as an advocate?

It is hard to measure your success in the media or as an advocate. I think if things get better, that's one way of doing it, don't know! I don't know what the measure is. I suppose when you have people who listen to the show and say ' I am not an architect but I listen to your show and I really enjoy it and I have learned something from it. I think we know we bare having a positive impact, measuring it is another thing though...

Interview with Pippo Ciorra – Director of MAXXI Museum for Art and Architecture

IT: Let's start with the obvious question around exhibiting architecture - How do you exhibit architecture when the artifact is absent and the documentation is codified. Do you think this oft cited obstacle is relevant?

PC: Less so than in the past. For two reasons... one is that the we developed techniques and approaches that made the documents artifacts in themselves. You know, acknowledge that the documents are documents in themselves, like drawings. Last year when we had no money left we just took out all the drawings from our collections and exhibited them and it was one of our most successful exhibitions. It is an ambiguous condition and you can work within the space of that ambiguity. Second, there is a changing role of architecture today so there is not only the built things. Architecture is event, performative, etc... so many times when we do exhibitions on contemporary architecture we ask the architects to design the space, so at that point the distance between the object and the representation fades away and you work in a different way. I think this has to do with the social and disciplinary role of architecture today.

IT: Do you feel the need to initiate the visitors to what they are about to see?

PC: Well, I am an architect you know. So I came to be an architect through design, criticism and a lot of exhibition design. So I think the way to design a space is important, I mean the space is your mediation. The space of negotiation between you and the public. So the way you use the space, the way you modify the space, you design the space is your introduction to the exhibition. MAXXI has this lucky condition with this beautiful open space so sometimes the exhibition pops out and you can play with for example - the gas station which is now in the garden. Then you have this sort of public space which becomes the initiation to the exhibition and to the contents of the exhibition.

" So I think the way to design a space is important, I mean the space is your mediation. The space of negotiation between you and the public. So the way you use the space, the way you modify the space, you design the space is your introduction to the exhibition."

IT: Do you attempt to initiate visitors into the architectural language of the work you exhibit - for example plans, sections, elevations etc...

PC: No we do not. For starters, because everyone in Italy is an architect. We are 160,000 architects, plus like 80,000 architecture students and who knows how many other professionals who do our jobs badly. So, no we don't do this but at the same time, the museum has a strong educational project. The education team is very active in explaining the projects and I think that at this point in our history in Italy, we have this legacy of the 50's and 60's with architects like Scarpa, there is a sensibility around drawing. Especially in a city like Rome, drawing which is even excessive I think the drawing is a piece in its self. It is considered like a piece of art

IT: That is interesting in contrast to Australia which I suggest is in the opposite situation which throws up its own challenges.

PC: Well you also don't have the same vices we have!

IT: What can MAXXI as an institution do that temporary events such as Biennials or temporary exhibitions in art galleries do?

PC: Well we have a consistent program. I think the roles of biennials and normal exhibitions are to update. You know, what is new, what is the most current thinking at the moment, you go to Biennials to monitor what is going on in architecture. I think an institution has a commitment to expand architecture, to make it accessible to a wider public. You know if we don't have 200,000 visitors to an exhibition then we get in to problems. So we need to expand the wider vocabulary of architecture and to make architecture a language accessible. On the other had we try to really push architecture towards innovation. So on one side we try and

make architecture more accessible to society and we try and modify the perceptions of architecture. I mean the series of exhibitions we have done so far, Recycle, Energy and now we are doing an exhibition on Italian immigration. We do historical exhibitions like Morretti and Nervi but we also do the contemporary. I think there is a metaphor that comes from being an exhibition designer. Different from art where the dominant thing is the aura, so the curator is basically working to emphasise and frame the aura of a piece. In architecture the object has less aura but that gives you more freedom to work in the critical space of the object. I think that critical space becomes a metaphor for the museum becoming a public space for the museum. What happens in the Piazza of the MAXXI is that baby sitters come with their babies and the people from the neighbourhood so that becomes a confrontation space between the culture and the society. So that's what we try and do to expand the common field. The common space between the specificity of the museum contents and the needs to promote culture and society to a wider audience.

IT: is there a role for MAXXI as an advocate for architecture in the city?

PC: Not officially because we are a national institution and there are local institutions, like there is the local Museum for Contemporary Art, there is a Casa de Architectura - the architecture centre from the city - but we are actually planning to do something like this. One of the things that I want to do is to create an alliance with this other institutions and to launch an ideas development for Rome 2050. Also, the Italian architecture scenario is a very specific one. It is funny because it is full of legacy and quite depressed in the present so we need to be advocates for these other issues so you need to be committed and activist. The Museum has a commitment to advocacy but the city is a delicate issue because, institutionally it is not our topic but we are learning how to deal with it.

IT: I suppose having this museum designed by Zaha, to be built at all is a form of advocacy. To say that Rome can support contemporary architecture.

"In architecture the object has less aura but that gives you more freedom to work in the critical space of the object."

PC: Yes. That is exactly what MAXXI is. MAXXI is the legacy of those two years of optimism we had in Italy from 1996 - 1998 when Provi was the minister and for the first time the ministry of culture made statements about promoting contemporary architecture in a land where the preservation of the past is of-course a major issue. So from these issues and these actions at that time, an agency was created to support what was to be a law - but was never enforced - but there was an agency for contemporary art and architecture that launched the competition for the MAXXI. The MAXXI was exactly the manifestation of the idea this society could and this city could support contemporary architecture. What is also very interesting is that the MAXXI never had even being very prominent and clearly contemporary it never had big reactions where as the Richard Meyer building has been crucified from the first moment. I think that is because it is a very successful building but also because of its location because you have all the buildings made for the 60's Olympics by Nervi & Moretti, there is the auditorium by Renzo Piano, you have the most beautiful Italian building from the 1930's is just across the river. So this is an architectural district, which from this point of view was probably the best place to do it.

IT: So this is the zoo, where all the architectural experiments are kept

PC: Italy has a particular and contradictory history of architecture. In the 1930's with the fascists there was this delegated area for modernism which was a very specific period. And then there was the university campus and the for italica and this somehow had an impact on what happened after here. But the museum happily found this. Maybe mistakes in history are so important because, look at the model of this building. There were 2 more wings to be built that were not completed. One of the big wings that was not built was sitting in the middle of the open space. So the fact that the Piazza is the open space that it is quite loved by the neighbours and the city.

IT: And this in turn provides the opportunities of expanding ideas beyond the gallery

This brings me to the next question about the roles of pavilions and temporary exhibition, the Serpentine Pavilion being one of the most notable examples. I'd be interested in your comment on the tension between pavilions such as these on one hand creating wonderful opportunities to create new and significant work and on the other had running the risk of trivialising architecture by reducing it to spectacle alone. Fashion, aesthetic and shallow?

PC: One one hand I think architecture is aesthetic, but I think this idea of pavilions falls into an

interesting tension which is around today. If you go around these biennial's and in editorials you will see that there is a lot of resistance to the idea of building architecture. The queen art today is visual arts. I you think that in the 60's... well it was art again but in the late 60's architecture with the radical movements, utopia was the leading language and then in the 70's probably urban design as the idea of a new society and then cinema in the 80's. I think now the artist can do whatever they want as artists. They use architecture, they use video, drawings, they use anything with this incredible freedom which seems to be the only appropriate language to catch the meaning of society today. So architecture is not as protagonist as is was in other moments in this recent story. So there is a risk for architecture to be colonized, to become performative or yes, performative art. You know building pavilions - you have been to Fujimoto's Serpentine - and we have the new YAP just opened. So there has to be a statement. I am very happy to do YAP. YAP for me is important because it is scouting for new ideas and new teams. But for me you do one installation, then you do another installation and then an exhibition but then you need to do a building. The final scope of our profession is to try and change the space of the society in which people live so I think pavilions are useful to improve our knowledge of what is happening in the field of ideas and in the potential of architecture. In the possible solution for materials, ideas, technical, expressive and it is risky but to investigate this closeness with art. Because if you see one of these things architecture, art or landscape. You don't know what it is and I like the expanding of this grey zone but still our final task should be to modify the world. It is very clear that things run very quickly today, you know it is hard to keep up with the pace. It's a very articulate topic but it is a crucial topic.

IT: I am interested that the charter of MAXXI has this dual aim to express the 20th and the 21st Century architecture. What are the motivations for this duality?

" The final scope of our profession is to try and change the space of the society in which people live so I think pavilions are useful to improve our knowledge of what is happening in the field of ideas and in the potential of architecture."

PC: It is the mission of the gallery. This is the first museum of architecture in Italy. The legacy of Italian architecture in the 20th Century is incredibly rich and also very difficult. You have the fascists, the modernists, and the progressive and classical Marxist you know. It is a wide field to be investigated. The task of the MAXXI is to be at the same time MOMA and an activist because the few institutions we have in Italy in this field we have to play this double role. On one hand we have to consolidate because architecture culture in Italy is fragile now because how the discourse has been managed in the last 20 years and because of the difficult architecture in society. It is fragile and needs to be somehow consolidated. This double mission is somehow important. You still have to promote the big masters. One one hand there are a lot of main figures, we did Corbusier, we did Moretti... but on the other hand there are large areas of historiography where we need we need new protocols. We need a new paradigm. For example in the 60's there was 'official criticism' there was Tarfurri, nobody would say anything against Tarfurri. So now we can start to revise this history to find new things, it's a very productive open field for architecture. And then he contemporary for me is so important because I mean I work in a museum because I want to have an impact on architecture. We are an alternative to the other powers we have in Italy, to have an impact on the situation of architecture I mean, this is not Holland! In Holland everyone is sensible to the problem. Here you have to do propaganda, push the architects who look for new ideas

IT: What are the motivations behind MAXXI's strong interinstitutional links?

PC: Well MAXXI is a baby. The archeology of MAXXI is in the first 10 years of this century when we were in the old building. But it was not an autonomous museum and then we started doing exhibitions in 2011. Since May 2011 we have done 40 architecture exhibitions so we have been incredibly active. So on one side, from the beginning I thought we needed to network, also for economic and so many reasons but also you need ???. In the last 20 years Italy got so used to a provincial approach to architecture problems that the international network is an antidote to that you know. A new institution wants to collaborate with its best brothers which actually works well enough. And on the other hand we use the international network as a kind of magnet to raise the level of the architectural discourse in this country.

IT: MOMA in New York has franchised the YAP idea to a number of institutions. MAXXI could have easily had a pavilion in their gardens, tell me why this affiliation is important to MAXXI.

PC: When I started MAXXI I wanted to do something like that. I had the Serpentine in mind. Then speaking to Barry Bergdol, Barry proposed for us to do this thing together. For us the problem of our young professionals is isolation. If you went to the last boring biennial by David Chipperfield, in the international pavilion, there were 4 Italian Architects. There was one good Architect, an architectural historian who just sat on two architectural juries where David Chipperfield had won, another architecture historian who was there for good reasons and then a group of young Italians doing this magazine Sirrocco who are strictly conservative and who were supposed to be there to do an exhibition with Georgio Grassi but Grassi refused. So that is Italy in the last Biennial. So Isolation is a big problem. So for them the possibility to have a confrontation with the work of people of the same age from different countries to be exhibited in the 4 countries it is an open door works very well for the architects.

IT: How can Italy be isolated when geographically it is just the opposite.

PC: Culture. Italy was a leading architecture culture in the 70's with Aldo Rossi and those people. There were a few leading and very radical architecture cultures in the 60's. Think of Japan, Italy, England, Russia in their way and in the other countries, Japan in particular you had people who could turn this into pragmatism. Toyo Ito for example learned from Kenzo Tange and then teaches Fujimoto and Sejima and so that becomes minimalism and pragmatism. In Italy - it is a metaphor for society- established powers act as brakes for changing for evolution. So this kind of fixed decay. This kind of stubbornness of the academic, editorial and political powers in Italy blocked the transition. So we missed the transition so Italy is still struggling to get rid of this image we have after the 70's and now it is even fashionable again so it is very dangerous for us.

IT: In your recent lecture at SciArch you noted that you thought curatorial studies for architects were

" in the 90's the architect's ambition was to build a museum, now it is to do something in a museum"

useless. Can you elaborate on this position.

PC: Well I think that's because there is not a tradition of curatorial studies for architects. in Italy, if you go into the history of the incredible exhibitions that were done in the 60's, 70's and even 80's, there were historians, journalists, architects. And even here when I start to think of an exhibition I start to think of the space. I think the space is my material prima. My matter. So I think it is interesting. So this fight that I had with Sylvia is because now you have something like 1,000,000 educational curatorial programs. And it is hard to teach curatorial studies, you know I think it is a practice. I mean you can teach 10% but 90% come from putting together the experience you have as an architect as a critic, and historian. But on the other hand in the discussion we had I acknowledge that - and thins goes back to what we were saying about pavilions - in the 90's the architect's ambition was to build a museum, now it is to do something in a museum. It is like the building world has been completely left to the commercial markets and your legacy won't be committed to the museum. It is very interesting.

IT: One of the problems we face in Australia is a lack of a common language between architects and the general public. There is also a mutual distrust that goes along with this. Is this problem universal?

PC: We are doing this exhibition about Italian architects that moved abroad. One of my assistants showed me a map of statistics made by the EU where they show you the degree of acceptance the architects seem to have in each country and Italy was of course the darkest. But I think this happens more or less everywhere but I think it is very string in Italy, because when you speak to the people, they think of the 5000 person unit by Florintino. You know this idea of using the people's house to build your own idea of the city so we are still being accused of that. And that is what we have to work on. The counter balance of this is the green-wash, this green bullshit, so you have to be careful because most of the green stuff is marketing.

IT- Is there a problematic lack of critical distance where architects are trying to be both the author and the critic at the same time?

PC: My own self education started when I writing for a daily newspaper, so my aim was to try and make architecture generally accessible. It was a great aim and I still try and do it when I have the time. I think that the curatorial project is a critical project. Criticism is in a very difficult time. I think there are many answers to this. One of the answers is sort of polarisation that has Vanity Fair on one side and academic writing on the other. There leaves a void inside but I think that this void is where magazines can work. So we have the

possibility to fill this void and to turn criticism into a visual language. That's what the museum does and that is what we have probably learned from the art world. I can have terrible rage against the news papers because they always write gossip about my president but they are not able to do a serious review of a show. And they don't want to do a review of the show so you end up buying an advertisement so I think the critical language is in great danger today and the museum has to try and

" I think the critical language is in great danger today and the museum has to try and help in that field."

help in that field.

10 years ago or something, everyone was saying that there would be museums online and that no one will go to museums anymore. It has been to the contrary, the museum goers have increased to I think that the mission of the museum is very important. That's why I like the idea of a magnet of a public space that can bring the people to a museum. Because it is true that in the museum you are in one very specific environment and in touch with that environment in a different way. This also has to do for me with the idea of the Museum as things happening in the city. This is the other side of the coin because the museum is sucking so many of the program's that were happening throughout the city - you come here to see the film, the concert, the dance to do yoga. So the city becomes something not any more under the control of architecture.

Peter Ho – Director of Phooey and Star of 'The Renovators' TV show

IT: Do you consider yourself to be an advocate?

PH: Yes. I remember being asked that question in New Zealand. Am I an advocate or an activist? and I think the answer to both of those things is yes. Both obviously being very different but I am learning that I am more of an advocate than an activist. But if I cut to the chase I have now had the privilege of now having done two the elision shows that related to what we do as a profession but slightly on the edge of that, they are design related but they have a different perception of we in our community understand as what is design. When I started- when I look at the Renovators - if I just look at our work as Phooey Architects the things that I understand as especially as somebody who is interested in sustainability and has been involved in somebody that was interested in sustainability for a very long time before it in a sense became topical. It s something that has always been in the edge and it has always been a matter of how important it is to make it accessible and main stream if it is going to have success which it is currently projected to do so on some kind of form. It obviously public discussion on every level which is very exciting. As a consequence it is really understanding how to make this accessible and what were the communication and values that were required to make this available to a wider audience. The work that we do (at Phooey) is not as main stream as we would like it to be and triggers a whole lot of questions for me that then make me look on a bigger picture which I remember Norman Foster putting very clearly on the table at the World Architecture Festival in 2009 which was reminding us all that architecture profession was a very small part of the building industry. Globally architecture is approximately 2%, 2%! As an economic base. And if we look at here in Australia -I don't know the numbers precisely - but is approximately what it is. We have to ask ourselves a question then - what is it that we do? and is it actually important for us as profession to put more money into the pockets of our own design professional and are we interested in doing so and if we are how do we do that. Is it about doing great design by our own standards? It is then much more questionable as to how we communicate to a much wider audience to the other 98%. And what the actual language we use to do so to speak it to the .....My very first adventures into television going in to the New Inventors made me understand, oh my god, I have to speak to a demographic that is a family audience at a 7:30 to 8:30 time slot. What does that actually mean? I don't even know what that actually means. I was an architect - I had only ever spoken a very flowery language which I was quite entertained by and made me feel quite good about myself but the reality was that did not necessarily hit the right kind of target for the audience or for the kind of values that were required to be shared about design in that space. And that was on the ABC and ABC as we know is again a very small (from a ratings perspective) much less ratings than main stream television. So to then go on to the Renovators on to main stream television to go six nights a week of an hour every night and speak a language and try to understand what are these questions that I have just asked, how then do we - and this is the primary reason I went on to the Renovators - was to understand how do we talk about design and architecture and sustainability in a way that is much accessible to the main stream and how does something like the format of reality television which is as main stream as you can possibly go, make that possible? And potentially inject that power and energy into it, what are the values that we have learned from design and architecture that actually relate to that. Are they related at all? Are there actually any architects in general that have infiltrated that kind of space and is there anybody that I can think of in television in general if I use television as a medium to understand how to communicate and communicate in a space where we are usually as architects understand it from a $

"I was an architect - I had only ever spoken a very flowery language which I was quite entertained by and made me feel quite good about myself but the reality was that did not necessarily hit the right kind of target for the audience or for the kind of values that were required to be shared about design in that space."

per square meter perspective where as I am now talking about a dollars per second perspective which is a completely different space. Learning to speak not one response but 11 different responses to the same question to speak to many different demographics and audiences. Learning how to speak to Betty in Blacktown which is the lowest common denominator in understanding how to say that in a very short, sharp and quick way that makes is exciting to a general population that is related to their interests. It is certainly my interest as an architect to that kind of space. So that was very interesting to try and work out how to do that and then recognise from a casting perspective what did they choose me? If I have a look at the cast and the cow who were involved in that space, they have chose somebody who is (and this is a reflection on me trying to understand my role in the world) understanding oh my god a) they have chosen an architect on that show BANG I'm out of the main stream, BANG I'm from Melbourne, again out of another main stream - culturally Melbourne is very different to the rest of the country, again I have learned this through ratings seeing on a daily basis who is watching what and what age group is watching what and trying to understand why they are watching it to understand that the success is generally what works and what doesn't work in television BANG I'm Chinese again I'm out of the main stream and I can talk for hours on a nightly basis I would receive on twitter - racist remarks because, again this is a broad reflection on the whole of Australia and understanding how far out of the main stream and then BANG there is a silly Chinese man with facial hair you know again, further and further away and then again he cares about sustainability.

IT: So you are on the fringe of the fringe.

PH: Exactly so in terms of offering then kinds of views to that particular space it was to be in a sense to create an alternative view, to create things that were outside of what that perception. What is Peter Ho going to say now? A) how is he actually going to use the space of television to communicate ideas about design. You know I remember starting there and the very first design exercise was to see somebody take a beautiful Danish piece of furniture and the exercise was to re-do it. So what did this guy do? He painted the chair, this beautiful timber and I freaked out! I freaked out because it was straight there and then I had to realise that the audience that I was dealing with knew nothing about what we had been taught. They didn't have the basis of going, well - that has value. The values that we had a lady changed. That was an immediate response and the words that I chose to use I actually had to sit there and go oh my god how - I don't know if I can do this show...I really don't know...Number one, how comfortable am I that my own profession is going to watch me do this and in terms of the work we do what we are interested in , how is this reflected in this space and is this actually going to be good for me or is this going to be bad. How is this going to help me understand in terms of, again a bigger kind of understanding of Phoey Architects as re-use and adaptation specialists. How well am I actually going to understand that in terms of making what we do more accessible to a main stream audience as being an activist and an advocate for architecture, design and sustainability. So it was huge thing taking a step back and to work out where all this fits in and to choose my words carefully but understanding the time pressures from a dollars per second perspective. Understanding that what I say, if I want it to make it on to the television, which is different to radio, this is different to other bits and pieces to having control, it is a complete commercial reality which I have no control over. I have spent my whole life trying to take control over my work and all the things and activities I do to the throw all that into the wind to go into the most major public space that I have no control over and have only gone into out of the complete respect for Shine Australia the production company who produced Masterchef and the quality they achieved with what they were doing, the fact that it was Channel 10 doing it. Channel 10 who basically put 3 shows out there that unfortunately didn't do very well but did it in the main stream, on big badgers and had the guts to actually do it and push the envelope of what television can and cannot do. That's a huge commercial risk and from where I am standing I bow down to them, to say wow, you guys are really hard core in terms of being able to do that in that space- and they suffer for it but that kind of reflects on the nature of people, just how conservative our society is in terms of what they think is important.

"You know I remember starting there and the very first design exercise was to see somebody take a beautiful Danish piece of furniture and the exercise was to re-do it. So what did this guy do? He painted the chair, this beautiful timber and I freaked out!"

IT: So if something like the Renovators equates to a challenging of the status quo. This is if nothing else a comment on the conservative state of the communities values. In your work with both The

Renovators and The New Inventors was there discussion behind the scenes about the term 'Architecture' ?

PH: No.

IT: Do you think we are talking about the same thing when you say architecture and when the audience hears the word architecture?

PH: No. And I would say that because of how tangible certain things are in terms of understanding the complexities of the things that we do are. Everybody thinks they are a designer. Again we live in a world of in a society of DIY. And that is great but it is again arguable whether that is good for the architectural profession. But I can only see that if you get more people involved in design, can they get in and understand a much more complicated sign issue?

IT: Is that inviting people to try and fail to assert a value in our profession?

PH: Not necessarily to try and fail, but to then get a better understanding about how to do something better. And then judge for themselves which is better.

IT: So it is a way to measure the success or value of the input they are getting from design professionals.

PH: If I look at the scope of services that we provide in our profession from sketch design, design development, contact doc & contract administration stage. 98% of the population would probably go through that documentation and work out what they could do for themselves. Design - I can more some furniture around, I've seen it done on the television and I've also seen that I can do it myself. I think it works for me over here.

"Everybody thinks they are a designer. Again we live in a world of in a society of DIY."

Interview with Zahira Asmal - Director of Designing South Africa

South Africa is caught between the needs of a developing nation and the aspirations of a first world nation. We are currently grappling with what to do. We do not have a design council in South Africa so there is no one body that represents Design For Change or Design for Innovation.

IT: So who put together the Cape Town Design Capital 2014 bid?

ZA: An organisation called Cape Town Partnerships. When they first thought about doing this I had just returned from Lisbon with the Designing South Africa idea and they said 'how can we work together on this?' So we consulted and were able to give talks. At that time, the people putting it together were an urbanist, a Cape Town City Manager, urban planners, former editor of house and leisure - so they each had their own understanding of what design was and the power of transformation but they were all certainly very passionate about Cape Town as a city. Although some of them wanted to exclude Cape Town from the rest of South Africa. There is something else you need to know about Cape Town - and this is an aside - Cape Town and the Province we are in (we have 9 provinces) is the only one not under the ANC. So from the time of our democracy, the ANC ruled 64% of South Africa. And since then I think it fell to the Democratic Party which formed part of the former National Party. So that's an issue here, issues at a national agenda differ from the Cape Town agenda. A better life for all is the ANC tag line, and this poster (Designing a better life for all) to me is Design is how we can have a better life for all but when I present this I have backs up against the wall. As I see it we a challenging the government to find a new way of doing things - to use design and innovation. Design is at the cusp of individual expression, cultural expression, technology but also for change - for a solution. So one side as an initiator, creator but also as a solution to challenges that we have. So I think that will fundamentally that will be the difference between design in South Africa and Design in Australia for instance. Because on one hand, I meet a designer who say they are bored and I say ' how can you be bored?' When there are solutions, but they say they are not part of the elite who are designing fancy houses for fancy people which is such a minority. Fancy houses for fancy people a the minority. When I hire I can tell just from the work they are producing which one is the one for social change and which designers want to design fancy houses for fancy people.

" Design is at the cusp of individual expression, cultural expression, technology but also for change - for a solution. "

IT: It seems such a shame that there is such a distance between these two identities as designers. The slogan from your book 'Designing a better life for all' stripped of it's political associations seems like a complete truism.

ZA: It is a truism! Henning and I wrote the essays in the book, and when I was working with Henning he was having a rant about the government and I was having a rant about designers, about them being bored. Because in Cape Town you live a happy life, there is immense beauty and all the distress is on the flats far away. It is tucked away so it is the perfect apartheid model. Johannesburg on the other hand was faster to develop - firstly it is only 150 years old. Cape Town on e other hand is about 350 years old. So Johannesburg as evolved very quickly - mainly from the gold rush and because gold attracts a certain kind of person, it's about making a fortune, making your money quick - you know, take everything you can and so to this day, Johannesburg still attracts those kind of people. The gold rush mentally is still there and so this is what we showed in our exhibition in London. At that time, Johannesburg supplied 70% of the world's gold. 70%! In once city, that's quite something so you can imagine that people just flocked to the city. You can imaging that you are Jewish or Greek - people just came in with that reality. They wanted the Gold Rush but the mining institutions then had to find cheap labour. So at once the gold rush attracted the free world people to come in and make their fortune but it also drove the government and mining companies at that time to find migrant labour in South Africa.

This migrant labour situation was so horrific, it has dictated the fabric of our society to today. So when you pluck heads of households from their families because they are able bodied and young boys just for their bodies to leave their homes for long periods of time - similar to what Dubai is doing now with the Philippines and India - and leave them in barracks without windows and to live a life this way. That we are still feeling the effects of that migrant labour. So Johannesburg is still, on one side a gold rush city and on the other side it still has the remnants of a kind of depletion. A lot of black people in South Africa miss a nucleus, women are the heads of the household - they feed their children, they clothe their children, they take care of their grand parents and the men that come back from the mines. Black women are a strength not only for the black families but for the communities. They have become the centre of South African Society as care givers, as educators. But just to give you a kind of back drop, Durban for instance is Zulu, Indian and Colonial and it is like this because, Zulu - because it is their place, Indian because of migrant labour as well - so there was a need in South Africa because of the great abundance of resources to just bring people from all over the place and just out of will or force this kind of thing happened. But the mentalities in the different cities are very much ingrained. It is still there.

IT: South African design identity in relation to the African continent

ZA: This issue resonated more when I was younger, before apartheid crumbled, basically my entire childhood until I was a teenager. I was at Mandela's inauguration in 1994, I was 16, I remember that day very clearly so for us, I was at university and I was thinking, you know the world is our oyster, now we are free but little did we realise that the work only started then as far as building a nation because we didn't actually know what that meant. If I had to break down, what does it mean to be South African, this question, and the reason I am bringing it up, not to digress to much from your topic, but a lot of what you will see in Design in South Africa, will ask that question. Some designers say, why should I ask that question? I just want to design a table...why do I always need to be identifying something. When I was working at Design Indaba, a lot of people, our guests would always say, what is South African Design? And I would say, just give us a chance to answer that question... When I was a child for example, I didn't feel South African, I didn't know what it meant. I had a South African passport but I remember throughout my childhood we would support the opposing team. I supported Australia more than South Africa in cricket, always, because we weren't allowed to play. All the men in my family were kicked out of the sport because they were 'of colour'. So there was always this feeling for any kind of development. I was too young, I was 16 when we came to democracy, I mean I only member this in sport and education, the way we lived, the parks, our schools, the beaches we go to, the restaurant we ate at, the entrances we used in buildings were all things that were designed in our country dictated where we could and couldn't be. And where we could be was less than where we could be. So black people, 70% at that time occupied 13% of the land. So how could any of these people say, I am South African? By virtue of the fact that they were born here? And yet they could not own any thing, you couldn't go anywhere, you couldn't taste, feel or touch. So what was it that made you South African when the fabric of our society wasn't ours. So right now, building up on that, we are feeling feelings we have never had before. I this that is why a lot of South Africans, especially Afrikans South Africans would say I am South African because, they colonised it and they called it South Africa so they could be South African and they ruled with their government. But I certainly didn't feel South African one little bit.

"I think there needs to be a greater discourse of design or what designers in general can do to address the psycho-spatial health, education matters that we have in South Africa."

People are discounting, South Africans especially how deep, how deeply designed and entrenched apartheid really was. Spatially, architecturally, buildings, in our education systems, in our health systems in where you could be, at what time of night. The reason I am saying this, is that there is a major opportunity for design to address these issues. So yes, it is a great opportunity. Yes there is a place for fancy things, there is a market for it but I think there needs to be a greater discourse of design or what designers in general can do to address the psycho-spatial health, education matters that we have in South Africa.

IT: That is an interesting point, if nothing else, designers should possess an ability to shine a light on how the political and social values of a community manifest in a material form. If you accept that a society has experienced a radical shift in their values than it follows that the designers should develop ways to reflect that.

ZA: Absolutely. Honestly, I don't think we're doing enough. So on the side of government, they don't know that design could be a solution. They don't actually know what design is. And so I see a lot of designers, like Nathan Ready for example, he suggested that we change the name 'Designing South Africa' he said, people just won't get 'design'. And I said, but are we unpacking it? There is no point in lamenting 'oh, nobody gets me'. The more relevant question is, are WE getting it, are designers getting design? I think the name is not the point, it is what meaning you add to that word that actually has meaning. So when you unpack what design is to your client, to the government, they will get it. But as soon as you say 'but no one understands me' the client is not going to understand the work you a doing. But that is also a thing of not wanting to unpack, maybe because they are unsure because sometimes in South Africa designers may feel like they are not doing enough. Because yes, they have the fancy clients that pay them a lot of money but then what next, what else are they doing. So are designers in it for the money and the pretty things, or are we also part of a greater fabric of society and knowing that you a only as strong as your weakest link. So I challenge designers on one hand but then I also ask governments to come and see the demonstration of designers on the other hand.

IT: Who was the audience for 'Designing South Africa?

ZA: Well, I wanted designers to see how their work is being applied to a broader context. Publications a only one part of a greater discourse. We have exhibitions, we have seminars, imagine! We had the designer of the World Cup logo, meet the designer of the stadium for the first time! And for me they are essentially working on the same project -the World Cup- but they had never met each other but Designing South Africa brings that together. So we are weaving away at this larger fabric at this huge blanket, bringing people together so government, designers, academia. People do a lot of things for mandates and because we have to tick the boxes. Designing South Africa doesn't have to do any of that. For us, we measure our success if we are actually meeting people. Our audience would be government. We want government to understand what design actually means to city making, to place making, to building, to public transport, to public space, to the education system. So yes, I used the World Cup mainly because South Africa, leading up to the end of apartheid, the National Party -everything is political here. In the world generally but particularly in South Africa - particularly because we had this changeover in government, the whole regime actually so the National Party know they we coming to an end so they didn't want to have any public infrastructure because.... From the 1990's no major public works happened because of this transition. The National Party didn't want to invest in it. When the Democratic Party came in there was planning around housing especially - a lot of which were unsuccessful. So when the World Cup comes to town, the whole country gets mobilised for all sorts of building and infrastructure developments. The Haupt Train was going to happen without the World Cup in mind- it was going to happen anyway as well as the .... And .... But it was expedited to meet the World Cup deadlines which was great. You can see around Cape Town that it is still happening.

" I am interested in how Designing South Africa could serve in joining the dots. Because on one side, we can see the amazing work an the potential impact that deign can have and on the other side we see what South Africa needs and we speak to government and they are just not joining the dots."

Diepsloot was set up in 1999 as a temporary camp and it is still there now

So what is happening? In my opinion, the dots are not being joined. So government has a mandate, and the people that are put in these positions change every 5 years. The mandate doesn't change but the vision does maybe but even still these people are left homeless without sanitation and running water and so South Africa's problems are not being solved and in fact, there are more people without homes now than there were 10 years ago. I am interested in how Designing South Africa could serve in joining the dots. Because on one side, we can see the amazing work an the potential impact that deign can have and on the other side we see what South Africa needs and we speak to government and they are just not joining the dots. So we are hoping that Designing South Africa can serve to join the dots, the reason we reflect in the World Cup is that is happened so swiftly, people worked with urgency, maybe because there was the spotlight shining on South Africa at the time and because we had an expectation of huge numbers for tourism purposes. But then with the aim of - how do we serve a greater population of outsiders- German, Swedish etc... who don't understand the situation. How do we bring them in? So Signage has improved

in South Africa. We have always reflected on the difficulty of dealing with South Africa's 11 official languages, and the these visitors come to town and we do move them swiftly around. We are constantly reflecting on the World Cup, not only because it was a successful event, but because it was successful in creating a legacy for future work. And also for South Africans to understand that people can mobilise, and it is not just about South Africans doing it. For me it is about global collaboration - It is all important. So what we are doing in the coming years, approaching our 20 years of democracy is creating what I am calling 'Designing our Democracy' and so this year I want to address designing cities. This will touch in issues, city issues, housing, education and health. Then it will go on to identity, what does it mean to be South African how do South Africans portray themselves internationally, from a design perspective, from a cultural perspective but also how is our government markets the nation. What I want to bring to the government is a discussion about how we design, how we curate a platform internationally. So while we are working at that we can deconstruct and construct what South African identity means. What does it mean for me growing up? What does it mean for you as a black person? What does it mean for you as a white person? Do you feel African? Do you feel South African? What does it mean? While we are doing that cultural inquiry, then we can showcase internationally on it.

Thorsten Deckler (TD): Yes, so that's one of the things you're confronted with as an architect, that you must reconsider about Washington D.C, Paris, all over France, but actually Joburg is a relative shit hole compared to all of those grand cities, although all those grand cities at some stage were also relatively crap.

And there were good reasons for past man to do what he did, besides wanting to control the population. So, I think driving the west we are stuck in it's industrializing, but industrialization is actually over. So, you have a whole bunch of migrants stuck in Johannesburg, because there is no reason to actually be there, but it's still better than actually being in a rural city. And you have this incredible flux of people coping and adapting with this inherited landscape that was designed to be dysfunctional. So as architects we just couldn't help but key into that. We're kinda always wondering why not more people do. Because once you know about it, why would you ignore it? I think it partially maybe also had to do with not, sort-of the commercial high-flyers doing skyscrapers which would otherwise keep us very busy.

And so this was the exciting and threatening images of Joburg, we were presented with when we were just graduated right? [image of Joburg slums] We graduated into this mess and you say "these guys don't need an architect."

Anne Graupner (AG): Well, if you chose to look at the mess.

TD: Yes. I think many people flee from this. I thought it was really interesting because of the people we hung-out with like Lindsay Brendler, Eddie Glastonston, were like, really amazing, energetic architects who looked at the city differently. Obviously this could have been our bread and butter to do this kind of gated communities

"whether you're an architect, or urbanist you are a custodian of the public realm, but the public realm is something that is just thrown away completely."

Imogene Tudor (IT): I noticed those gated communities while I was driving on my way to your office. From an Australian perspective the level of aggressive security is really shocking.

AG: Yes, for us it's really shocking too. Joburg is representative of these two worlds, and I think for young graduating students until recently we didn't look at it. It was like this other (slum) part of the city - we just didn't look at it.

TD: There is essentially a white run practice in country with affirmative action. That's your opportunity. But not, coming out of that background, not wanting to access the geographical architecture until really now. How are we going to be architects here because we want to stay here because we like the weather. We like the energy. We like the craziness of it. We've tried to live in Europe and we wanted to try something in South Africa. I know this is a typical matter. So the thing whether you're an architect, or urbanist you are a custodian of the public realm, but the public realm is something that is just thrown away completely. Apartheid in a sense has been entrenched much further through capitalism. By the franchised development and thinking. But there are also beautiful aspects about that abandonment of our public realm, of the spaces in between. So this is a church in Hillbrow, by the ridge, on the Hillbrow-Yerdal [0:03:24]Ridge. And this guy's actually praying. So there's another whole beautiful likeness to [Johannesburg] that one doesn't always see. That's sort of the flip side and why we like it very much. So the projects we started on - for instance, this is a very small project. It's like an SMS project where depending on our community aides, [throughout Johannesburg] [unclear 0:03:49]. They SMS everybody they can think of and we got back 14 names. And it shows you what a kind of magnet this place is to difference. And then that effect got conserved into this artificial hot house of apartheid which is where cultures group together like areas of New York, but here they have been legislated to be like that. So that makes it quiet exciting as an architect. You can have a client; you can have clients in all of these different spheres. And I think another thing floors you actually when you see things like this.

This guy's a roadside worker fixing potholes and roads, and [he] comes across hubcaps all the time. So he built this thing to on the weekends, earn extra money in one of these abandoned slack spaces that's supposed to be public space. But if you look at the design, concept and execution, it's fantastic.

You saw the taxi system that was actually to get people to [and] from outlying townships to centres of work. In response to this unequal dysfunctional city, other systems have also come and created a microcosm. This is Diepsloot. You can buy your lunch, you can buy a room and it will be built in a day and it will cost a tenth , a twentieth of what the state spends on tax payer's money on developing housing. ...This attracts a lot of judgment. So, the self-constructed city, often academics are very romantically or completely bleakly [say] don't ever intervene in here because it's like the very accommodating foot hold for the urban poor to even start accessing the city's economy, [when] actually affliction is four times higher and child mortality is ten times higher. That's a little weird to say that.

On the other hand to just discard it is silly because there is a 2.5 million backlog in formal houses, and this has taken its place. And I just found it pretty delightful that there is also this, which fathers build and they also build in Australia, which calls into question the education of the architect for us. Like no graduate in our office, nor employee, would be able to create this. I've been looking at this stuff and you don't see it when you get educated at university. ...This is another project to document the signage which is produced everyday and it has been reconstructed... by people who fix their exhaust pipe by the road. So it's a hundred percent recycled. It's very beautiful and accomplished, and I don't think a fine arts graduate would be able to do this. So, it's very disarming and very inspiring. So when we get commissions like this, and then - do you want to explain?

TD: But the cool thing about using something that has been designed for that site, is that there are these little bolts with which you use to fix the metal to the poles. You can chop of the head of the bolts and now no one can steal the metal and you don't really need lighting because the headlights of the cars will light it. And that was using again existing material... that is usually chopped up and burned from billboards and reconfiguring them to this idea of a soccer ball prototype. It was the first ball made on the African continent, believe it or not. So two were made. Then we got busy at practice again. And these were projects we . . . this is an example of also something again, with standard elements that allows an event to happen. So we are a big fans of Dean Agubodi's[0:10:31] work, which is about people essentially and what they do. So if that gets the stage then that makes the city really urban. And then another thing, we had a company called Chopped City with a friend of ours, Henry Westlesson[unclear 0:10:45], and well basically, curated and designed a lot of exhibitions to tell the story of [Johannesburg] through its architecture. So in a sense, as we started out our practice, we reprogrammed our thinking using what we knew, which was buildings, to talk about [them]... and to look at them in terms of our history and contemporary situation. That took away the judgment that we have in built-on places like Monte Casino; which is a big gambling complex designed by basically Hollywood set designers. It had pigeon shit on the signs and stuff. It becomes fascinating for you to look at, to tell the story about the weird place you live.

AG: I think most of the projects that were in there, not like great architecture, was more the fact that because we have a democratic setup now certain projects happen. A lot of which were infrastructure projects, like taxi ramps. Constitutional courts, like stuff that actually make the city work. A previously divided society... came together and connect. I think the exhibition was quite interesting for Vienna, or generally ... first-world Europe, which at that time was all about beautiful architecture aesthetics, and there it was not about that. It was about the fact that this building was built is an achievement.

TD: ... There became exhibitions about the whole of South Africa and they were formatted into books; which helps us in a way steer our clients from the decisions like themed Tuscan architecture. Some of it came from the event. So this is a background graphic made out of old mining maps during a electronic gig during the World Cup, and with the conditions to frame aspects about other cities. So for instance Durban, I went to apply for the UIA Congress... with all respects, it's a backwater. But as you think about the port, about and the Indian Ocean and the hybrid identity that was created through the sugar cane slavery setup and how it links back into open world and Asia, it's like a completely fascinating place but it's about how you frame it back to the world. So, it's all about looking at what you always over-look in your backyard.

AG: I think that very much links to what you said when you walked in, about how does architecture become part of the culture. And what we really

don't have here in South Africa, when you'd see it in Europe – like, if there's a new building coming up, people discussing it and having an opinion and if petitions and here... anything goes. Also, our professional buddies that are starting now... Keiffer[0:20:40] for example, the local Hartings Institute for Architecture[0:20:45] only recently moved back into the city. Before they were just sitting in a suburb... doing their thing, but not actually connecting to the parts of the city and keying into what is actually happening... while the city continues to develop. So in that gap, we actually decided... we have a real need for this. The events we organized, were about... we always said it's about any city enthusiast can give a presentation. So we had people who were did their own little projects; doing photographic essays, or someone who wrote something. We even started something called My Jozi. Where people, almost in the Pecha Kucha style, could present their favourite place in [Johannesburg] and it's was so interesting because you suddenly... start to be ... a tourist in your own city. And seeing parts of and getting insight into certain cultures. Obviously, if you know people from diverse cultural background, they will show you something you've never seen before. And you'll say, "This is really interesting. I didn't know this." So we did 37 different sessions of these, and actually public works from London... their practice is also very much engaged in the public realm. They happened to be in South Africa when we did this project with the bed factory[unclear 0:22:10] with them. And the presented at one of these Friday Sessions. So they actually took the concept of Friday Sessions, and it's running in London now and they have funding, which we don't. We think it's great actually. You know, the concept has started in another city. And what the really nice thing was, it wasn't only architects that came. It was like people ....suddenly felt, [they] could access the city in way [they] would never access it because they are carpenters, they are lawyers, and it's hard to connect to these strange people called architects. ...It was also like a huge networking opportunity for people who might have some kind of creative spark in themselves and want to do something that other people. If you always preach to the ready converted, no new ideas come.

"And often it's very self-referential, architects amongst themselves all, refer to the same things, know the same things, they read the same magazines..."

TD: And I think that system can also stagnate, where you only talk to other architects. Because people have such other ways of reading things and responding. I tell you, it's interesting if you're open to it, and are not protective of it.

AG: And often it's very self-referential, architects amongst themselves all, refer to the same things, know the same things, they read the same magazines...

TD: In [Johannesburg] being on the periphery of this global discourse, in some stage we are a part of it too of and then not, we were respectfully studied, in Vienna and I in Holland for a while. We missed it but then had to generate our own thing in [Johannesburg]. It's like an advantage sometimes to not be in the same tent. So, then that... Friday Session idea took root in other projects that we did. For instance, this was a commission to reconstruct this art cinema in Soweto. In the end, there was essentially only enough money to... hold events rather than build a container that would shelter the events and essentially so we have good weather so that we can do it. And that was one of the highlights of spending money, of not spending money but spending energy in this particular place through not expected fixed infrastructure that may be dead actually. A kind of new energy and new development which can be powerful. And I would say that this dance that these girls performed is so good, you could try anywhere, any world stage, but they aren't professional dancers. And it shows what little you need in order to support really amazing production of culture. You know, the former places of where accepted production is already celebrated, which is also fine. But the idea, I think we all suffer from this idea of "you need a building to do something."

AG: This project was very much about keying into what was the inner community, and keying into the creativity and the skills the community had. And they are... almost mobilizing the community and making them the people who drive the project which is often is that successful. That project actually died because...

TD: The actual client was useless.

AG: I mean we had an NGO plan it who was trying to facilitate skills development, assessing the skills and then they worked with us and we'd like to develop the vision for you. Can we develop that? ...Otherwise it's just the architect coming and saying well do this [and] that. ...Once the architect steps out, whatever you've created becomes a liability. So what's really important is to mobilize the communities and take ownership of

the project, and as an architect, you're more of a facilitator and moderator.

TD: But you cannot mobilize people necessarily. I think that's ...a thing we thought that we were doing but I'll show you some other stuff, but the project we did in Marlboro was really something where the crisis is already underway. So the guys are fighting the city because the cops are coming an evicting them for the warehouse and they go "We need plans" We really need an overview of what's happening; how many people, and how do they live? And we want plans to table to the city, so they we are not so vulnerable to the top dog decision-making.

IT: So, it's having somebody to be able to speak the language of the planners to be able to start playing the game..

IT: That was great at he exhibition at the Gothe Institute to see that mapping across time... that you have arrived in virgin territory. There's this huge history that goes back and then into the future.

TD: That is really difficult to communicate those things. I mean how do you do it? Movies leave out a bit, the map tells you a little bit, the comic tells you something and the largest map tells you what it is now, or was. So you had to do all these different angles. When you do get formal commissions... for instance the orange areas, twenty-five-thousand housing opportunities they call it, so twenty-five-thousand sites. We met someone at a party and [asked], "Do you do urban design?" Sure we do. And I can't help myself (laughing). It was a crazy huge project. Essentially the system we had to service was this: it was a reconstruction development program which had to make good on the massive backlog of houses. Because the apartheid state didn't build significant housing for the past 30 years. So, we built 2 million, 2.3 million houses as a country, as a nation. Which is an achievement, but it comes at a cost, least of all what they look like. But you could also argue that people will extend and improve and add to them once they have title to the land. But the land needs to be cheap because of the low-densities [and] it's located really far out and so you spend a third of your disposable income on travel. So, actually there are poverty traps. But if you operate within that system, and that's just starting to get to know, we've been working on it for seven years and what is that even all about. So this looked at how houses can grow. We built 2,000 houses and a show village configuration which looked at spaces in-between creating variety and choice. But that's also a misnomer because people just get allocated off the lists into houses.

"So, it's having somebody to be able to speak the language of the planners to be able to start playing the game.."

The thing that really worked, the things that we learned from where our office was located in that the private realm being so dense and so small and being so close to the public realm, you need to be negotiating a space in between, which is usually a threshold. And making these thresholds happen... you had squeeze and squeeze and squeeze on the budget, but they insisted the assistant that resigned from the project got reappointed. [This point is in contrast to] It makes a massive difference to how people use this as a space because the grannies look to this one kid who's rude or throws stuff and disciplines them.

IT: But it's also acknowledging that there is a system that is very complex, that completely works. It transports a huge number of people. That's functional and well-maintained because it's such a necessity. So it's not just an incidental place, it's vital part of that community.

TD: Which is great that the government has recognized those things. So the approach again was to make a threshold, which was previously a fence, to program that threshold with opportunities for people who were already trading there. Now that it's formalized there's a much bigger range of... services that have been shown to have established themselves.

And our next question... as architects... can you just step back and say, "Ok, I'm only going to do buildings and we will not get into housing because it's complicated." But why? Because I think engineers end up designing housing and they're the wrong people to design housing. In fact, I think that architects are probably also the wrong people, but at least we confer with them on another scale. And then we worked in ranks[0:36:34] and that is a precursor to Marlboro. It's a complete golf and private estates landscape and these guys built some of those houses and settled there because there was work in the 80's. And so the idea was to set up a studio inside that space. We made a deal with the residents, the NGOs that were working there. And we] said look we can't deliver solutions to fix the place, [but] what do you really need? And they said, "We want an accurate map, and we want a map of what can be next year and then for the 10 or 20-year plan." And the way it then

worked was to set up with the help of an NGO, teams of residents and students. And we chopped up the place into four quadrants, and each quadrant had four students and two community planners who lived in that quadrant. ...And then students went around measuring together with residents and working with this, which was called a re-blacking plan. And all the black is footprints existing footprints that remain in stretches, and all the shaded and grey are moved. And they were moved to create inner circulations for a fire-truck or an ambulance. It also creates new opportunities for sites. And it takes some of the very congested areas and redistributed people into larger sites that people claimed for themselves when the settlement was established. All that negotiation with Mrs. So-and-so, "Will you take someone from the wetlands area and accommodate them on your 400 sq. meter site?" is not done by architects. You just demonstrate. You say, "This space - you can put people here." And the community itself does the canvassing. Every week they had church gatherings and before they would give feedback on this university project. And they, in sense, built momentum. It was already underway when we arrived, which is a very important thing. And so that then happened. They took the map and ran with it. They tackled them as the most difficult piece of the settlement where it was bad - slum lords, flooding and unsanitary conditions. And then we hung around a bit as a practice helping with plans and to demonstrate to people, "Ok, if you don't move the house ... don't worry about it we can bend the road." Because they didn't actually get fixed on things. So what we ended up doing in the space of four months, so this is the existing conditions when we were there, but you can see they tackled a church and wetlands area. And this is still carried on today. So I think they've done up to a hundred relocated households. And they escorted the old with some Chilean NGO who essentially pays for new walls because the structure is sometimes thirty years old, they figure it might fall apart. And there's a savings scheme. So people subscribe to that package by pledging an amount. Everything has been so kept informal and very light because of the promise of formal housing and the illegal status of this. You can move most of these houses in a day. You can move fence posts within ten minutes or half an hour.

But people are cottoning on to this [program, and] it's a very fluid state in which the community can take a step forward. And the state is taking a step forward and saying, "We're not going to cover our housing backlog, and our townships are burning, informal settlements are burning." That's where people are dying because of multiple deprivations. Why don't we upgrade the well-located ones. And communities like Shuck Dullahs International which is a global, southern hemisphere organization that originated in India, through saving schemes, as many women run, they are fighting to infiltrate informal settlements... and passing on methodologies. You'll meet people living in a shack and he has been to Brazil and India to share knowledge. And you work in ranks with people from all over, even Capetown... [who want] to witness this process in order to replicate it. That is a really crazy way to work but it's super exciting. And It means just shifting your mind-set as an expert, who paid for six years of university education, who knows what the hell is going on into, "I don't really know what's going on, let me engage"

AG: It says a lot about skill development on both sides even for us as professionals. The community planners come to our office and he said you can't do this because of that... there are all these rules in the way this community lives which you would never access if you wouldn't start talking to them. And in the same way, in the processes, they start to understand this is how you draw plans, this is what a legend is. And you pass that knowledge onto them. So they'll also be able to present back to the city and when they come, they are experts. The community leader will know what they're talking about. They will start talking in planning language, and that's really empowering.

IT: I suppose it's about recognizing expertise as well, isn't it?

TD: Yes, it's really obvious and basic actually. That's obviously Malboro which you've seen. [It's] a crazy industrial wasteland, but is actually rich in what happens there. All the ingredients of [a] city are being put in here by people and instead of fighting it, one could say let's work with it.

The past engagement caused... court cases. The community went in against the city meaning the city wouldn't be able to implement its plan of creating an industrial park. And the people who were evicted were living in tents, which is worst than the shacks. So, there was this question of, "How do we resettle land in Malboro?" So as a practice, with two other lecturers that we worked with, we proposed settlement options that can start small. People said can you just give us 10 sq. meters. It's all we need. We have the materials stockpiled somewhere in Malboro and if you give us the land, we will build our houses in a week.

AG: That's also about taking into account, [that] 10 sq. meters is really small and you have different

family conditions. So the options we developed were... let's start with 10 sq. meters but it might as well be if you combine two it will be 20 sq. meters. It can even go 40 sq. meters, but the whole question around this is obviously security of tenure. Right now it's informal settlement, it's 10 sq. meters a shack that you can build up in a day. But South African government has now... publicly made the statement that there are informal settlement upgrades. Like four years ago, they were still talking about a need to eradicate all informal settlements. So these resettlement plans are [asking] should there be an opportunity of this security of tenure. ... Can it grow? Can it grow vertically and what does it do? How can this model be prepared for when the city comes in with services and how connect to the formal city, because right now it's laying off the grid. And [there] will be some kind of... informal way of building it. I mean there's financial assistance but the reality is that these parts of the city will have to be integrated into the formal system at some point.

IT: Yes. I think it was very interesting to see this work after yesterday having the art market at Maboneng. It's got the same vibe. You've got these big warehouses that Maboneng has obviously been gentrified with. And it's got these design shops and printworks and nice cafes and that kind of thing. And then to see the way the community in these informal settlements have occupied these same space and they've seen opportunity. They've been able to say there are these places that are well located to transport and [are] close to the city and have all those things so how can we develop it up. It's an interesting fork in the road, the future development of these places.

TD: And you don't know what the future holds for people there, but at the moment this is stuck in a deadlock with metro police illegally waging a war and getting formally reprimanded. And I think there is business interests behind that, with this business annex forum, we don't know. It's really complicated. But unless the city takes a stand and makes a clear commitment, either going "all you guys have to leave or you're [going] to stay". People are just carrying on in that kind of limbo and it's not healthy either way. I think the big key is that the process leads us rather than we're leading a process. In that we are... responsive to what we are being told by the various people who know the area. But it's really, really complicated and on one level it's really simple.
And this is the ... second to last slide. This is a project we are doing at a university. It's a big cow shed, because [they] are doing this big agricultural show in the cities. But it's being squatted [0:49:18] by the services and maintenance department of the university. It's... a lot of departments, lordships, oh what do you say? Turfs. One of the service managers asked us to expand operations into this kind of crazy warren. And you need to go and negotiate with the mailing office and the procurement office. And it's exactly the same on one level as working in Malborough South . So we were still thinking we've got to be leaving architecture with this work, but you're actually coming back to it. But now I'm excited about [these] weird projects, like this, because now we can see the value that we can offer. By not going, oh your roof does that so we can line up all your offices like this. And you will actually never get to an end result because you will never implement it. It would be too expensive or disrupt the system too much. So you're working with a faulty and damaged base and you're okay with it.
This is all the stuff we recycled in our house to make it cheap, but it also added this nice dialogue of past and present. Those windows in the office used to be in a classroom which was here. These shutters were next to the windows. It's just two examples of what became surprisingly satisfying out of a condition of need.
And we have only one bathroom in the house. It's super unusual for South Africans to have ensuite, main, master bathrooms and a bathroom for the kids and a bathroom for the guests. So we have one big bathroom, but you can also [bathe] out here in the open. This is the kind of stuff we enjoyed but it's a different mind-set that we do think [Johannesburg] or being here has imparted. You're just kinda okay with the constraints that you are facing, and in that you find the joy.

AG: And the opportunity.

TD: And I think... wherever we go we are from [Johannesburg]. And I think all the stuff you do as an architect, it's like you're enquiring through design into complex aspects of the world. And I think [Johannesburg] really gives you something that you can take anywhere because there's a certain way of looking at something. It's... a combination of, we had this horrible past and we can't be that presumptuous in the way we go about. We actually have to listen and indulge difference and out of that clobber something together.

AG: Like showing them what their rule is and then understand [that] you can't actually displace people anymore so it's not okay. Are you really going to displace the people, are you really going to stick to your war(laughs) and that's how you keep to your other. But you have to demonstrate it.

TD: It's hard. It's hard for everybody involved. It's really not easy. Those questions are just so loaded [with] paradox.
IT: On the other side of that, I think the other problematic aspect of social engagement is not understanding what that means so it becomes a lip service. We want to work with a disadvantage communities. Okay, great. So how do you understand your community and how do you not force that in a top down in a damaging way.

AG: And you see it a lot. ...[People] see [South Africa] as country that has a lot of [the] first world. As a European you can come here, it's not too African, its not too foreign, it's not too scary. And you can completely engage with the first world but then you can also go into an informal settlement [and] give the architectural students and architectural adventure or experience for seven weeks and then they go back. There's a lot of projects out there. And in the community... (interrupted)

TD: They will build their buildings.

AG: ... and then the community sits with this liability. This whole what happens after the course and what happens with what we have actually brought to the community is very seldom considered or carried through or not provided for. I think what the Malboro course and the Rainsloot[0:58:26]course, what we really stress, is that before you go into the community, there is a pre-course engagement for you. And we also don't go into projects where there isn't a community for this, or momentum. And then there is a very long negotiation when you basically say if we come here with some many students, this is what we can do and this is what you can do. What can we do together that is of benefit for you when we move out of here. And in the case of Malboro South, it's this big map. That they can now use this as a tool to negotiate with the city. It empowers them to say, "This is who we are. We were actually part of [the project]." It's not like an architect's office that did it. They know exactly what all of this means. So I think that this process of engagement plan you've seen, this is for seven weeks. But as a matter of fact, it's that much, and it's that much and it's ongoing.

IT: So, let me just finish up with a question. You talked about these Friday night symposiums or events that were about opening up the debate and breaking down architecture as a cloistered profession. It talks to us in our own language. You've done a lot of work with exhibitions [and] books as well. I... wanted to know where exhibitions sit in your mind about why exhibitions. And it's coming from a bigger inquiry of the relevance of architecture exhibition, and why it's a very flawed and difficult process that also has a lot of benefit. You've done well. How do you conceive of the exhibition work that you do? Why do you do exhibitions?

AG: ...What is really important about us is that [we] actually get people to engage with the information you've engaged. That also forces you to tell the story in a way that's accessible. I mean, it's really difficult. With the Gothe Institute as a partner, we had a fantastic client. ...The Gothe Institute as such, is about cultural... exchange and sharing culture. The big program in arts and culture that they do, a little conference and other sorts of things. So Yun Hindinroy who is the program manager for something in Africa like a [presentation]. As architects we often think this is our language and everybody is supposed to understand it. ...We really had to say, look what is really important. For example the figure-groundwork... we know what it means. But someone else will say, "What is this actually and what does it do?" It's really important to explain. It talks about density, it talks about different areas, it talks about scale and that's not only for the public, it's also for the students.

TD: You remind yourself what a figure-groundwork does, besides being a funky graphic.

IT: Which is what it is often reduced to. How many students produce them with no explanation because it looks great.

AG: ...I think also curating and exhibition was very much about sitting back and saying what were those seven-week things about. There was a lot of material the students produced, but as the creator of the exhibition, use the research and say, "What do you do with all this information?" He actually had to make more information than was produced. The figure-ground was not produced by the students. Although I remember in the briefing meeting we talked about a monument with the figure-ground. And to some degree if you look at the Life World mappings, they were asked to map the settlements. So, they did start to understand it. But then as the exhibition curators, we have to overview why we do this work. And we also use the students to, on the way, you're going to take a key to exploring little bits of it. Then you need to look at the whole thing again and make sense of it.

IT: But why exhibition? You could do this website, you could launch a website or you could make a publication and launch publications about synthesizing information and reprocessing it and representing it. What does an exhibition give you?

AG: If you look at the exhibition, there [are] also components with different scales. So if you look at the movie room for example; big blown-up things. That's really important because the film alone doesn't give you the scale of it. So, that's also, I think, an exhibition is very much about telling a story and creating an atmosphere. Emotionally touching and making the people ...

TD: On a very simple level, if you go into an exhibition, if you make an effort to go into that space, it's not like scrolling through a blog or a website. The commitment of the audience of, "I'm here now for a reason and I'm going to sit through these 30 minutes of movies." But after then, when you've got that, I think you can extend it beyond the classic... attention span of the average exhibition goer. It's like ten minutes.

AG: ... To me an exhibition is always a spacial experience. Even if you go to the Bauhaus or an exhibition on something else. You always go and there is an atmosphere in it. I think the question of good or bad exhibitions is what do you do [with the] information. Do you manage to process this information in a way that is not just facts and data? It's also about you [wanting] to explore. I think this exhibition gives you the opportunity to explore different scales. If you're the guy who's interested in data you'll go and read the newspaper when it talks about demographics and the rules in the warehouse and so on. If you're the person who has [only] ten minutes, you might just look at the movie.

TD: But you can see the components in relation to each other through peripheral awareness but you can't really on a blog, or maybe more so in a book because you can page really quickly through books. But I think that those are things you don't really acknowledge, which I'm only thinking of it now because I'm talking to you. Also the process and engagement map you couldn't show on that scale in a book or on a blog. You'd have to zoom in and then move around and you'd completely lose your overview of that graphic.

Interview: And I suppose there is that thing when you look at these maps and you need to engage with them or not, depending on what your interest is. But then on the flip side of this exhibition for instance you had that big panoramic photograph. It actually said were not talking in abstract. You can see the guy with the cart, wheeling it down the road. You can say the scale attracts so does, as you say, the peripherals. Kind of, the pros amid its adjacencies[unclear 1:06:12 will make them really evident, I suppose.

AG: I also find that exhibitions give you the opportunity if you get it right. [They] give different entry points to engage with something. It's very much about what you see when you come in. So the first space is really about big and bold. So you can spend you time there and you can leave and you will probably have understood something, but you can link from there and also go into the detail. ...A book doesn't allow you to do that. It's also you can go to an exhibition with someone else. You can simultaneously look at something, which with a book it's difficult.

TD: That's the nice thing about exhibitions is the audience. And as you start talking to people then that exchange draws you to other things. But I think it a question of when you draw on a computer as opposed to hand, because we all do hand. It kind of drafts people. I think when a computer is as powerful and wonderful as it is, I think you can also lose the purpose of what you're doing because you never have that overview. You say, "I'm creating a map and it's this big and the purpose of this map it to communicate x, y and z." And with a computer you can zoom in infinitely but you never can grab the overall picture because your screen's a bit small.

AG: And I think the exhibition now, because the new year for first years has just started. They've really made a point to say, take students there and you can do all sorts of things. You can talk graphic representation. You can talk about consistency. You can talk about the powerful images. You can talk about space. What do you experience if you go into this movie room? What does it make you think of? So, I think I still find exhibition [is an] amazing way to engage people with architecture. You know the panoramic is like an art that you can study while learning about photography. What does an image like that say. It gives you a different access point.

Interview with Alexandra Lange – Architecture and Design Critic

Imogene Tudor (IT): We'll do a little bit of context for the research...it's a research scholarship through the professional registration body in New South Wales. And the topic of my research is methods of promoting a culture around architecture and design...

And there's a particular interest is looking at the relationship between the public and the profession.

And there's kind of three avenues that I'm exploring as part of this. The first is the media (this is where you fit in) and I'm also interested in TV, and radio, and print media, and particularly mass media. So, not so much blogs and Internet media, but a bit more on mass media.

And then there's looking at institutions and galleries and particularly the big ones, so, when I was in Europe last month, I was visiting MAXXI and the NAI and those really kind of big players, but also smaller galleries as well.

And then the third part is looking at temporary installations and kind of manipulations of the city in the public realm, as a way of advocating for the possibilities of architecture.

So, it, it's born out of a quite personal frustration really in the first instance, that I feel like there's a mutual distrust between the public and the profession that the public view architects as irrelevant at, best and elitist at worst, and inaccessible, and a kind of deliberate inaccessibility.

And then the profession view the public with a certain degree of disdain, and off course generalising that they don't understand, and that they can't engage, and they're just disinterested, and that kind of thing.

" I don't think, architecture is very complicated, and the reasons we need architecture and the way we improve architecture are not things that require specialized language."

So, I'm really interested in the work that you do, in particular is how you deal with the language around architecture.

Alexandra Lange (AL): Yes, that's really interesting because, I mean when you describe there as being two poles, the public and the profession, I immediately think where am I, and I do really feel like I'm between those two because I would never say that I was part of the architectural profession.

And, in fact, I feel like this year, you know, particularly in the U.S., with, I would say the return of feminism in the profession, and there's tremendous frustration in this, you know, statistics for architecture, like, I would not want to claim to be part of architecture because I'm rather disgusted with architecture and some of the institutions.

And I'm hoping that, you know, some other women who are architects or who would teach an architecture course seem to be trying to create new institutions and new spaces for, you know, better dialogue and perhaps actual, you know, progress, I think, in a more equitable profession to happen.

I think the critic has always been, mediating between those two groups, and, in a best case scenario, helps to explain both of them to each other, and you know, doesn't take on the colouration of either.

Just recently there was something in, oh, I think it was Building Design Online, where somebody said, you know - I'd like to reiterate Alexandra Lange's call for, you know, clearer language for all of architecture and I sort of - oh, did I say that? Is that what people think I'm saying?

That's so interesting. If that's what people think I'm saying, that's great, because that, I mean, that's absolutely fundamental.

I mean, I don't think, architecture is very complicated, and the reasons we need architecture and the way we improve architecture are not things that require specialized language.

And, ultimately, you know, the reason that I love

architecture is primarily about aesthetics and feeling and emotion, and I think that's a way that you start to capture more of the public, so they start to understand, oh, there's a difference between, you know, this part and that part and this critic can tell me what that is, and by telling you can make that happen again.

IT: Would you agree that there is a crisis in the perception of the profession or the agency of architecture, or that this is a perpetual state of being,?

AL: I don't know if there actually is a crisis. I think there's definitely a perceived crisis, and I think some of these, you know, ten percent of two-part conflicts within the profession about, you know, there's landscape urbanism taking the place of architecture, it's art taking the place of architecture. All of this is a manifestation of anxiety that it used to be always the architect first.

The architect won the competition and brought in the landscape architect, brought in the artist, and now all the hierarchies are being upset, and I think rightly. I think, you know, most competitions, you could arrange those players any way you want. In an ideal world, they would be arranged collaboratively and I think, in fact, ideally it ends up being collaboration anyway, but, you know, somebody has to be in the lead.

And, so I think there is this anxiety and this feeling like - oh, people aren't so interested in this anymore. They're interested in larger things. And I think there's also a different kind of discussion happening about cities where positive and negative spaces have been reversed, and we're starting to talk about the streets as a space.

Parks as economic generators, etc., have just become so much more common, I mean, I think, in history, the story of this period, it's going to be about the way landscape architecture has changed.

And taken more of a role and, I sort of said as a joke last year, that the real, revolutionary thing the

"I don't know if there actually is a crisis. I think there's definitely a perceived crisis"

Pritzker Prize can do is to give, to give the Pritzker Prize to a landscape architect. And, I don't feel like we're so far from that. I mean, you know, there's sort of a set of about ten landscape architects that are working in cities all over the world.

I think they, like they have the clients, and they have this power to face more parts of cities that I think we use to give the architects.

Now, there's more public money and more public support for those kinds of projects. So, I guess they would say - I don't know if architects have actually lost ground, but they may have perceptually lost ground. And that makes people feel very protective about their place in the world. Especially, as we know, when their place in the world is not necessarily very big. I mean architecture has always had this weird relationships they have to have clients, so they never, you know, there's, I mean it's totally out there, but okay, so there's the Howard Roark idea of the architect as the power player, but architects have always needed clients, and so they're also in a service industry, so there's always this push-pull between self-perception and the actual structure of how projects get made.

IT: I feel like the profession could do a much better job at communicating directly with the public, mainly because I don't think there's a great understanding of how much agency the public actually has.

Architects can be the vehicle for to express the publics desire, and we can be a method of expressing those aims, and so, I was kind of advocating for this kind of dialogue and Eva (Storefront for Art and Architecture) completely disagreed on this - no, no, no, it's got nothing to do with the public, it's the role of the architects to elevate their own position in the city so they get more power. So, they're directing it, and it's their job as a professional to understand the public at some kind of, you know, larger level.

AL: Interesting... I guess, two reactions to that: one is, I'm actually, in the process of preparing this talk that I'm going to give, on a panel at Harvard me and two other architecture writers, are going to talk about, I don't know, critical features, new critical modes, and I decided what I wanted to talk about was social media as a way for architects to communicate not just about themselves in a promotional way, but more about what they see, what goes into their design, sort of, what their larger field of associations is because I feel like most architects are using things like Instagram and Twitter just to praise themselves, to show pictures of themselves, to say I'm giving this talk, etc., etc. But, you know, I know, from architects I know, that when architects travel, they go and they see all these other buildings, like I would love to know, like what do architects go and look at on their vacation what fills ups their expectations?. Where are their

influences? and I think that most writers on Twitter are constantly doing that...you know, I like reading this. This interests me, so you create this cloud of association, it's like, not everything that I Tweet is about myself or even about architecture, so people know - oh, she likes toys, oh she loves Marimeko. Like I think that makes people more interesting.

And, I think architects could make themselves more interesting and also kind of start to create an interpretive framework for their work by showing what else they're looking at what else they're reading.

IT: And I suppose that would also help to disassemble this idea of the single genius who gets an idea in the middle of the night.

AL: Yes, exactly, I mean, for example, I follow Iwan Ban on Instagram, he's probably the most mobile person I've ever encountered in the social media forum, and he's going all around the world to take pictures of everybody's projects but he's also, Instagramming the people and the side notes on these places. And, I think that can be fascinating, and I think, that's something architects could be doing too. You don't have to be a professional to do it.

When I go places, I am Instagramming, you know, the buildings from 1961 in Hanover, New Hampshire, it's like, don't forget about these, sort of amazing structures, you know, they're everywhere. And I feel it's very democratising, it's very levelling, and it also just shows, you know, that design is everywhere, that we can appreciate so many things.

And there's no reason that architects can't do that too, and I think they actually are doing it internally, but they're not sharing it. And so, for kind of more, kind of like direct communication, what could be easier?

IT: You know you'll end up with an entire Twitter feed full of balustrade details and stair nosing like - oh, my God, look at this...

AL: Well, I would hope that they would also have the capacity for self-correction.

I mean it's funny, I mean you do, one does have a perception of what kind of Tweets and Instagram pictures get the most response. And, sometimes, I would Tweet something that I know nobody else cares about but it's important to me, I mean it's important to keep your core.

And actually, if an architect went around multiple cities taking pictures of balustrade details, I actually think that could be kind of fascinating as an ensemble. In fact, really, like that's, that's their focus? That's what they see? I mean, that is kind of interesting in a weird way. Not as your only channel, but, I mean, seeing these things as part of, you know, many channels.

'Cause it really, it just, it bugs me when all you see is an architect, you know, they're in China and they show you pictures of their building. But, come on, I mean, aren't you doing something else in China?

Yes...And the second part of that was just about the public and public discussion. And, you know, that's something, as I'm sure you know, that I was thinking about when I wrote my book and this, the gap that there can be in language, between the language of architecture speaking in the language of the public speaking and this way that completes, rather than, kind of, actionable suggestions...

Because, I think the public does need to participate through your community board meetings, public forums, maybe there are ways to get better suggestions online, though I tend to think that there are problems with that in terms of participation and democracy and you can't prove that model entirely.

But so, just, it's this idea, can the public read a drawing and say - I don't think that ramp is going to work. I think that's going to be for boarding. I mean this is the example that I was, you know, occurs to me.

And I feel like, how can we get people to the place where they can say that, because that's something that architects will listen to rather than - I hate ramps. So, I mean, you know, I mean there's just way that.

Okay...this way that, that architects cannot hear reasonable suggestions because they're not couched in the right language. Easy to ignore when you don't want to do it, and vice versa, if you can't articulate what you think is wrong, then you just are whinging or come off like an whinger and the process isn't working.

There's public participation, but there's not really public input.

IT: I'm interested to know, in, what you feel about a particular theory. When I was looking at the media a couple of really successful architecture radio shows in Australia. Came to mind - I don't know if you came across Three Triple R, The architects?

AL: I know them, I didn't really get to talk to all of them or learn more about their show, but I was fascinated that it is so popular...

IT: It's been going for ten years...

AL: And that we don't exactly have a show like that here...

IT: Well, I think 99% Invisible is maybe the closest that I've encountered over here, but that's short form and not architecture-specific.

AL: And that's great, and I feel like he's very careful because he's not in the profession, he may get more listeners because he never couches it as an architecture and design show, you know, I mean, it's always about...That's not the angle.

IT: Essentially. So, I was thinking why there aren't more architecture TV shows? I mean, in Australia, we're obsessed with architecture, obsessed with, well not architecture, obsessed with buildings and renovation, and home ownership, and all this kind of stuff. And so there's any number of home renovation competition shows and that kind of thing.

And, I was thinking about the phenomenon of cooking shows over the last, say, five years, where, to me, and I don't know if this is naive or not, it seems like there's been an absolute elevation in the type of language that is, has been used to talk about food.

So, instead of just buying a list of ingredients, there's a lot more sophisticated language about how it's made, the provenance of the food, and so the common person, you know, like using, you know, my parents as the example, go to the supermarket, and they're shifting in what they're looking for, because they've got this arsenal of additional language to, you know, whether it's really improving, you know, the way they eat or anything like that is different.

And so, it seems like there's an opportunity for architecture to do a certain thing and I think Grand Designs out of the U.K. is one example that does

"...how do you connect people's slightly narcissistic love of redoing their kitchens and watching other people redoing their kitchens to a larger discussion of how we live and how architecture operates?"

that.

But, I don't know, do you think that's a valid comparison? Or...

AL: It's interesting, I mean, I feel like, and I watched Hot Shots, so that's was my reference point.

I watched Hot Shots because I've been watching Project Runway since almost the beginning, and, well, it's not as good as it used to be, I felt like from the beginning, Project Runway was incredible because it showed very talented people making things before your eyes, and it talked about making.

And then that model, you know, was successfully applied to cooking, but has been unsuccessfully applied to a lot of other things, including not so much architecture, but interior design. There was this terrible show called Top Design...
It was just awful, I mean, I, work out that thesis, you probably have to watch a lot of failed shows....

Because, it, it's not that it hasn't tried but they still haven't hit on the formula...And part, I mean, and part of the problem is always, I mean, (why the problem I get is the always?) is it takes so long, you know,

I mean, to do a show about the making of a building, you have, I mean, that's a lot of hours of filming that they then compress into an hour-long show or a half-hour long show.

And so what, it's like what chunk of the architectural process could you break off?

I think it's part of the question, how do you connect people's slightly narcissistic love of redoing their kitchens and watching other people redoing their kitchens to a larger discussion of how we live and how architecture operates?

I mean, I think, you know, right now in the U.S., there's a new love of modular construction, and there's a project, I don't know, maybe you can go and check it out, in the Bronx, that's a very stylish, modular apartment building, and the way it's being sold is with this, you know, speeded-up video, showing it being constructed, you know, in just 20 days, or something like that.

Something incredible.

And so, like that's, I mean like that's the kind of video that people seem to like. But, I mean, it's

problematic, because it's not showing you all the work that was done before the factory. It's not showing the design work required to make that even possible. I mean, you know, it's like there are all these other thought processes, manufacturing processes that allow this magical 20-day construction schedule to happen. Which is fine, I mean it is pretty magical, but, I mean, it's just, it's the problem of TV and architecture, I think, ultimately the speed is tricky, but I do feel like people are constantly trying TV shows about design. I mean, I think the, think the market for the home renovation shows in the U.S. has dropped off a bit. There were a lot, there were. You know, so...Real estate money, I think is slightly, is slightly different.

But I remember actually when I was in Australia, people talking about Grand Designs, and I think I came home and I was planning to get it on DVD to try to understand the fascination, and I didn't, but now you, you've given me a mental note to, but, I thought that was an interesting story, because people seem to feel that sometimes the show did approach architecture, which that kind of show doesn't always do.

So, I mean Yes, I feel like, Yes, for architecture, what you're kind of asking is how can architecture present, repackage itself for mass media or make itself more part of the mass media discussion?

IT: I, I suppose what I'm asking is if you believe that it is possible for something like a TV show to impact the way the public discuss architecture? Is there a way to elevate the discussion beyond, "I like it" or "I don't like it"

AL: Right, right, and that's, I mean it's funny because that's exactly, you know, when I teach criticism to students, you know, that's exactly the trick that they need to perform in their own minds, is - I don't like the colour. Why don't you like the colour? What associate, you know it's like you have this series of teacher questions. What associations does that colour have? What are you thinking of? Like, blah, blah, blah.

You don't like this stark architecture. Would you like this modern project if it were made of stone? Do you just have, you know, a negative perception of white brick as cheap? But if I show you an actual example of a sample wall, can you see how beautiful this is art.

"I feel like, too often, when architects are given a platform, they are abstract and self-promotional. And that is really deadly"

Whatever, the parlour trick of the moment is, how could you make that happen? It's, Yes, I don't know, maybe you do just have to get more architects to kind of come down a level, and think about how to communicate why they like what they like, so that the public can, kind of adopt that language.

You know they come together in the middle in terms of language, but to do that, you know, it would be required of media companies, editors, etc., giving architects that kind of a platform. And I feel like, too often, when architects are given a platform, they are abstract and self-promotional. And that is really deadly, I mean, I, I did a lot of, have done a lot of sheltered journalism and...

IT: So, what does that mean?

AL: Oh, say, it means, you know, like dwell magazine...

IT: Okay, okay, so for an audience, for a specific audience, is that what it means? By a sheltered...

AL: Yes, it means, it means pretty pictures of houses etc..

IT: All right, got it....

AL: Yes...so the text is always going to be positive because...You know, there are 6 projects in the design issue and they all have to be fabulous.

Yes...but, so, I interviewed architects and they're talking and I'm just thinking - I can't use any of this. If I come back to my editor with all these quotes about, you know the inexorable qualities of space, they're going to say - no, no, we want to talk about the tile in the bathrooms and why it's green.

IT: Yes, I get it...

AL: And so, it's the, the ability to self-edit and think about your audience and I don't, I don't go to that many community board meetings and which is how these things are structured in New York, but it would be an interesting project for somebody who is being better paid than I am, by the hour, to go to a series of architect presentations and kind of figure out, you know, who in the city that's doing a lot of public is good at it? And to analyse why, and put, you know, and put them on camera and say this is what works and this doesn't.

Like, I think that would, I think some sort of comparative survey in whatever city would be interesting. Like, so, some people come up well and some people come up badly in, I mean, you've

done it and you've probably been at meetings and thought - oh, my God, won't they stop talking, instead of shooting yourself in the foot?

So, it's almost like we need, we need more of them on camera, and then public speaking coaches should analyse the film. Or something like that...

IT: I've been in meetings where people from my own company have stood up and said, well, if I have to explain this to you, then there's no way you're going to understand.

AL: Right, I know, I mean the bottom line is, don't be impolite,You know, don't be snotty and dismissive. I mean, personally, I, you know, as a, as a previously younger woman, writing about architecture, I've been patronized by so many older architects, and I don't like it. I had to suck it up because I wanted them to give me my quotes for the story, but that kind of attitude does not come off well to anyone.

I mean, I don't think, I think most younger architects like... it's hard to be like that anymore. For good reason...but still...

IT: I think there's an egotism entrenched, it'll take a while to get past it.

AL: An architect never retires.

IT: I'm really interested in, there seems to be this rise over the past few years or specific, graduate programs and university courses looking at both criticism, which is like the (d-critcourse?) but also in architectural or design curation.

And, I don't know, this to me feels like almost a concession that we're not doing it well, or we need to out source it, or this needs to be a specific course of study. I'm not sure...

AL: You mean because in the past critics just came out of architecture course? They, they had the same training, for architecture and then just decided they wanted to write, which is actually, basically what happened to me. I just decided that was what I wanted to do.

IT: And same with the curation as well, that, you know, we've traditionally, I think, you don't get trained as a curator to curate architecture and design.

AL: Well, I'm not so sure that's true, I mean because, our history programs, which have always had an architecture component section, and my PhD is actually from an art history program. I mean curation was our, was traditionally, you know, part of the job, like one of the two professions.

I mean, so, were people trained in curation? I think it all was all more abstract, but previously, there was more emphasis, which I think has been de-emphasized today, on connoisseurship and relationships with museums, and so students were more likely to encounter objects, you know, as part of the teaching process.

But, I feel like in both art history and architecture schools there's been a rise in, you know, other things that people needed to know, you know, computer programs, post-modernist theory, I mean, all of this, you know, there's just the pedagogy has changed so much that I know even when I was in graduate school in the early 2000s, the institute of fine arts when I went was one of the last top programs where connoisseurship and you know, like, taking classes at the Met was really prized.

And that's something that I still like a lot, you know, I like to go to thrift stores and look for modernist pieces, and I feel like that's the kind of connoisseurship, I can spot the occasional gem amongst the usual lot of crap.

And, so that appreciation of objects and knowledge of them up close is less and less part of programs, but I think it very much (relates?) to curation where you're, you know, kind of looking at a collection and thinking about the objects and the stories that they tell.

And, and then in architecture, I think historically, you know, history and writing were more part of the curriculum and I think those things may have been sidelined somewhat... By the rise of, a certain amount of technocracy, in a way.

IT: So it's been crowded out of the curriculum.

AL: Yes... I mean it's funny, I already, so I have a BA in architecture from Yale, and Yale has produced a tremendous number of critics and I think the program always emphasized writing more and they have this thing called an MED, which is a, it's like, it's a Master's of Environmental Design but it's basically a writing program...

It's for people who want to write about architecture. So they sort of spun it off themselves, but just in terms of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum, there have been a number of professors that mostly wrote and didn't practice and were just there for a one time. And the most famous is

Vincent Scully, who's been teaching this history of architecture class for more than 50 years?

I don't know, my mother, my mother took it in, like 1968.... So, and then I took it in 1992 or something, so, you know, an incredible longevity, and he is someone that talks about architecture in very visceral terms. And so I think, for a lot of people that has been a very formative experience in a language that you use about architecture. And not every school has somebody like that, who is such a powerful speaker and is part of this tradition and clearly valued at this very high level by the university.

So, so I think, these programs are being created partially because of a lack in the way the curriculums of these more traditional programs are now taught, so, it's not, you know, how to put together an exhibition, how to put together an essay, it's just not as emphasized and so it feels like you can't go over there for that.

I mean, I think there is a narrowing in a lot of professional schools... And part of it is just trying to make sure people are ready for their profession, I mean there's a lot more pressure placed on schools to prepare you in a kind of one to one way for the future, and I think the way I was educated was more on the liberal arts model, like if I learned all these things... I mean there's ...personality ... Which none (of them?) can afford in terms of time or money. I was lucky.

IT: Yes...do you think in the next, say, five to ten years when the graduates of these new programs have matured and have established their professional careers, do you think it'll change the discourse, or is it just slotting in to a preexisting model?

AL: Yes. I don't know, I think our program SVA is very small, you know, one year we had 15 graduates, last year we had 5 graduates, so the number of graduates of all of these programs collectively, I think, is quite small. It might be interesting to try to put a number on it. So, I don't know how much, you know, as a, as a class or coterie they can change. I mean, our graduates have gotten really excellent jobs, really all across the spectrum of, design and communications, curating, critics, communications, like publicity essentially, but for very worthy causes. You know, one of our former students is now going to be doing Communications Director for the Department of Design and Construction for New York City. Which is the sector of New York City government that hires architects so, that's a great job... I mean, that's terrific. And, so I think, I think that even in another 5 years that the program has been going on, someone who runs it has really expanded the range of skills that people learn because the students learn about, interviewing, all of these things and so they can kind of figure out where their own interest lies, and the point is that when they graduate, they will, they will have communication skills in a variety of areas. So, it, I think it's, in a way it's become more and more practical, so it gives you a background in history. It also teaches you the skills to be a new media person very broadly defined. I mean skills that I in fact don't necessarily have because I have to teach myself. Did anyone ever teach me how to interview? No. I've just interviewed a lot of people.

And now, and so I think, I feel like you're going to see these graduates take a leading role in a lot of different institutions, but I don't know if it's going to be so clear that they're all doing the same thing. I think it's more insidious and we can only hope that it creates an appetite for, you know, more people communicating more clearly.

But me, really, I mean maybe the best case scenario is that some of that interest infiltrates back into the larger institutions like architecture schools. I mean, I'm going to be at the GSD at Harvard this fall on a fellowship, and I saw that Sanford Kwinter is teaching a class on writing, and I'm probably going to do a criticism workshop for a week.

And I'm very interested to see, how many students are interested in that, because I think that's kind of a tell, because they understand this as important as possibly as important as their rendering skills or not. Or is it only, you know, 10 students every year who see that this is going to be key to their professional life.

And then you focus on them.

IT: See, in my experience of architecture school, I've always had a perception of myself that I'm not a good writer, I'm not very articulate, and I'm not very confident in that skill. And then coming out particularly into small practice, oh, my God, I do so much writing. And it's a, it's a skill that I've had to develop very quickly.

AL: Right, I and, well I think even you, everyone needs to go around and say that as many times as possible. You think you don't want to write, but you're just going to have to, so you might as well be good at it and know how to do it, or as good as you can be.

IT: Absolutely, but I, I think it's really interesting to

feel this frustration that I can't express in words, why this is so important, but I feel desperately that it is important, so, whether it's putting together a, proposal to pitch for a job, or at the other end, running an e-mail to say - you said you don't like this kitchen configuration, but hear me out, this is why I think you should give it another shot, so that way they kind of even if you had to express yourself, if I can't do that, then, you know, essentially, the architecture suffers too

AL: Yes...So, I mean, that's in a way another crusade...I mean there's that, there's that kind of public coming together to communicate of architects and their client, the public, and there's just within architecture schools trying to get students to understand it needs to be part of their arsenal.

IT: I've been asking this question to everybody that I've interviewed, do you think there's an agreement on what architecture means, the term architecture? Is there consensus?

AL: Aah, no...

IT: Do you think that's important?

AL: Aah, I mean, I guess I would see architecture as many things, there are a lot of things that fall under that rubric and people pick and choose. Is it important? No, because, I think, I think what people understand as architecture more generally is all related. It's not like they're saying that plant is architecture.

But, it definitely is elastic in the sense that maybe there's a common perception of it as being a building with special qualities, and the difference between architecture and building is sometimes so operative though I think architecture critics should and have started paying more attention to just building also.

But then, there's the wider idea of architecture as things that are designed and three dimensional and occupiable by people, which is just, you know, like a very wide category, including parts of streets and all of that. So... Yes, I think, one is contained within the other. It's generally clear from context, which kind people are talking about.

IT: Yes... I suppose, I think the trickiest grounds is when architects identify the conceptual realm that they work in as architecture. So, for example, me being obsessed with the, origins of lapis lazuli and how that's influenced, the western perception of the colour blue, to me is architecture. But again, talking to my parents, or to my grandmother... It doesn't have a front door with a welcome mat out the front...

AL: Yes...

IT: It's not architecture.

AL: What that gets more into, I would say, you know, (professionally?) and academic discourse, which I generally feel is pretty separate,

And the definition of architecture as widely perceived... And, for my own part, I feel like I have participated very little in academic discourse since I got out of my PhD program. You know, there are certain kind of texts that I don't really read anymore. Because I never got that much out of them, and because my goal is always to try to write in a way that anyone could read it. It's not necessarily that useful for me. I mean, I'm interested in your emphasis on mass media, 'cause I feel like that's one of my current frustrations is that I would really, I think of all my writing as being able to be, you know, consumed by a mass public, but I don't think it actually is, and so, how can I start to work for one of the publications that has a wider audience?

Because that's really my goal. And sometimes I realize, oh, I'm not really accomplishing that through the outlets that I'm currently writing for but it's difficult to package architecture and design for those cyber tech places that really do still have a mass audience.

IT: There was a show in Australia, a reality TV show, called The Renovators that was panned, that was an absolute failure. Only ran for one season, but they measured the failure of the show because it was only reaching an audience of one million people, five nights a week. So to me there's this, there's this...

AL: Right...there's this gap in the number of zeros. Right, that would be fabulous. And not quite...

IT: Can you imagine that?

AL: I know... and I think there is, there is some sort of architecture show currently under production for TV As a public broadcasting station, but I'm not, I'm not quite sure what. I'm not quite sure what the rubric is. But they would be perfectly happy with that.

It's like a smarter audience than this audience. I mean that's also, you know, it's like, when I talk about a mass audience, there are also layers, you

know, there's a New York Times audience, there's a true mass audience, I mean, obviously, one would be satisfied with either, Long way from that right now.

But, Yes, when you measure it in that, in that way, it's hard to see that as a failure.

IT: I might ask a final question... Who do you think is doing it best? Who do you think is talking about architecture and, you know, best is a subjective term..

AL: Well, I guess, as I was saying before, I'm actually pretty excited about the current state of discourse in New York City, Because I feel like what's best is for there to be... Multiple strong, articulate voices, like I don't think it's best when there's one critic who sort of eclipses all others, however great they may be. So, I feel like right now, New York isn't a pretty good place, you know, might argue with individual arguments of places because, Michael Kimelman is at the New York Times, and he has taken cues from these larger discussions and really expanded the (party you work as?) beyond the single building. In fact, I don't think he's that interested in the single building.

But, it's not just him, you know, there's Justin Davidson at New York Magazine, who is, you know, also doing an excellent job. There are good architecture reporters, like Matt Chaven at Crain's, New York, who does a certain amount of opinion, he's mostly a reporter but, more importantly, he's kind of on these individual urban stories and can, you know, report on one every week, which the New York Times itself doesn't always do.

It's in a real estate context. And then there are a variety of, you know, smaller, other voices, myself included, I hope, but, well there's James Russell at Bloomberg News, there are Goosperry Jacobs who writes from a Top list sometimes about New York, sometimes about other things.

" I'm actually pretty excited about the current state of discourse in New York City, Because I feel like what's best is for there to be... Multiple strong, articulate voices"

So, there are just all these people, all of whom are good writers who know what they're talking about, have been doing it for a long time, and on any one issue, you can usually get, you know, three different people chiming in. And they don't always agree. And, I think that's really, that's the best case scenario.

So, it may be more but what we have to hope for, it may be more of that scenario than individual superstars,

I mean, in the same way that architecture has to get away from the superstar, I mean, in a way, you know, those critics are collaborating, whether they like it or not.

They're collaborating and making sure, if you're looking at different media, you'll see this issue pop-up, and it's being written about at multiple places, so, it's kind of inescapable.

So, I would say Yes, the goal is not individual superstars, but better discourse in every city.

Interview with Jorn Konijn – Architecture Curator (New Institute - Netherlands)

Imogene Tudor (IT): To contextualise my research I am interested in architectural discourse across 3 formats, exhibitions in galleries, the media, and then the last is events, so more temporary insertions like festivals and temporary pavilions.

Jorn Konijn (JK): And promotion from a kind of country perspective?

IT: Well, it comes from a personal interest, in looking at the culture of architecture in Sydney. And it's basically born out of a particular frustration that I encounter or I think it's quite common in Australia that is a misunderstanding between architects and the general public that there's this kind of assumption that architects are there to waste money, and to, gratify their own egos, and then in inverse, architects think that they're not understood by the public, and I think there is a need to argue for our own relevance, and also to educate as well. So it is a Australian perspective, but it's not so much about promoting Australian architecture, it's about promoting understanding and I daresay, respect. But understanding primarily

JK: But then, architecture in a broader sense of from modernism to post-modernism to traditionalism to...

IT: Well, I think this is part of the question and this kind of, or I might start with the first question that I'm asking as the blanket question, is, there's the often-cited problem with architectural exhibitions that it's difficult to exhibit architecture and from that architecture when the artifact is absent.

How to have a building in a gallery? And the documentation and all the material around it is encoded in a very specific language. So, do you think that it's a relevant problem, or is that a problem?

JK: Hmm...no, not so much actually, because I

"Architecture can be a curtain, architecture can be an, an event, architecture can be a feeling, architecture can be a smell, something like that."

tend to look at architecture and curate architecture in the most broadest sense as possible. So for me, architecture is another known and model for along a sketch or something. Architecture can be a curtain, architecture can be an event, architecture can be a feeling, architecture can be a smell, something like that.

So for me, it's always more about the way you tell it, and the instruments you use, than that you really think that aah, have this object, we don't have this famous painting.

But it's, in the end, I think always about the story you want to tell, and is the story engaging? And what are the instruments you have that you're going to tell the story with? So, yes, I try each time in different ways...

IT: Do you find that there's a need to define what is architecture? Or, all of those things that you've just discussed, feed into a broad range of definitions and you, you've got it somewhat easily here that you've got an architecture gallery and people come here and they...

JK: They expect architecture, yes.

IT: But is there any disappointment in the audience?

JK: Maybe there is, but I tend not to think too much about it. It's not so much from a rational point of view but I tend to come across a subject and find it very interesting. And only then I start to think about how am I going to translate it? And does it have a specific relevance to our social, liberal, economic situation or something like that?

But it's not to that already from the get go. I think like - okay, how are we going to do this? Or, is this really architecture? Or, something like that. Is it maybe that? But, I tend to think more about the ways of telling it than thinking about - is this object really architecture?

IT: You must have an expectation in your visitors though, that they are willing to come along to say that - yes, I understand what I'm being shown, or... did the audience need to understand what they

are seeing?

JK: It, that is actually a constant debate about it and we were struggling very much here with it as well. That they spread the museum. So, it's now not only architects it is also for design and e-culture. So, we have to think little bit more about that but, kind of, going back to the old situations that we have this main space, that was the space for kind of our main blockbuster type of exhibitions. Sometimes, it would be a portfolio of thing, like a Corbusier exhibition, or a Louis Kahn we had last year. I think what the general audience tends to think of what architecture is. What they expect.

The second venue, that you maybe saw as well, that's we really started from the idea that we thought that our museum was not to, how do you say, but the feeling was the threshold was too high for most people to get in.

Yes...So we thought we need to make an exhibition that is a little bit more simpler or easier to enjoy and has a bit more that this experience feeling. Did you visit this...

IT: Yes...with the audio....

JK: So there's a huge criticism on that it was too childish or the...and I have criticism on it as well but smart. If I take my dad there, he loves this, this expression... And it's really meant for general audience, of what they expect of architecture. And we try to layer it with several themes and several subjects, and maybe my dad doesn't understand all these subjects, but, you know, it's a way to try to bring architecture to general audience.

And the third space, which is the top space, we decided that should be really for architecture experts, for students, for more, kind of, yes, professionals or something like that.

So in this way we try to come up with a, with a wide variety, and the third, the fourth, I'm getting that space downstairs, which shows kind of the highlights from our archives.

So this way we try to kind of give a really broad way that everybody who come here can find something that they like, and have some sort of engagement with architecture. Does that make sense?

IT: That absolutely makes sense. I think the first two spaces and, the treasury absolutely makes sense to me, so a moving dynamic exhibition, a contextualized exhibition, and a slice from the archives.

I find the fourth one more interesting, having a space specifically pitched for professionals. Where did that idea come from or what's the genesis behind that?

JK: It's actually because we have quite a lot of relationships with friends at the technical university. They are all students. We get a lot of offers also from crit portfolios and also architectural offices who usually have a smaller wish. And they say - ha, we'd like to exhibit our work.

Now, this space, in very practical terms, is what do we call budget, has no budget. So basically, people have to bring it themselves.

IT: Yes...Stick it on the walls,

JK: Stick it on the walls...stuff like that. And this tends to be usually students or architecture professionals who want to, kind of, show their work.

So, that's comes out of a more as a practicality. But we've also had many times that we really tried to make something out of the space, but it's, it also in practical terms a very difficult space to work with, in terms of lighting, in terms of blades that you cannot take out. So, last year I did an exhibition there on a Brazilian architect.

And it was very much a struggle, but that subject was very specific to Brazilian context and to know a little bit about Brazilian architecture, so that is typically an exhibition that I think would fit there. And general audience normally doesn't really have a good connection with a subject which is so far away remotely from them.

IT: I think the current exhibition that I saw earlier this week: the...

JK: The Ruin?

IT: The Ruin. I would say that that's also pitched at quite a high level. I mean as a professional and as somebody very interested in the subject. I found a lot of the content quite opaque. I mean interesting because of its opacity...

But it's certainly not catering to a popularist demographic in that sense...

JK: And they're not stupid our new director, he, I think, is trying to really follow a different path... Than what our previous director had. So, he comes from a background of visual arts... And he is trying to find a way in which he does not only

present architecture but also present design and e-culture, which is now the new thing. And I think in that case our previous director had an easier task, because it was only an architecture institute. And he could do an exhibition on Louis Kahn and so show models, and show the blue prints of the projects. But on the other side, he also did quite experimental projects, exhibitions that he showed there.

We had a exhibition on Dutch designers and Chinese designers, which featured almost only contemporary art, there was a ivory piece in there for example, that you think could interest a general audience. But I think that the exhibition we did on the Brazilian architects was also in terms of size and in terms of specificity, that would really not be okay in this main space...

That would be just too, too detailed too specialised. That was the choice.

IT: How do you measure the success of the exhibitions?

JK: It's always very difficult. And in terms, you always have the audience, visitors, the reviews in the newspapers, but, yes, that's always difficult to kind of judge an exhibition on that, I think. So, but, what else do you have huh?

So, an exhibition might travel throughout the whole world, so (for instance?) I did an exhibition architectural consequence that travelled, I think, even to Sydney and farther to Melbourne. several other... To Moscow, to Sao Paulo, etc and in terms of that, you can think like aah, that's a great success...But on the other hand, some other people complained about it that it was too detailed or that they didn't understand it, or stuff like that. So, it's always matter of taste... So, judging whether it's good or not good is often very difficult at times. I've, in a very selfish manner, I would say I tried to be at least myself be very happy. And, I also think that if really like what I made, I'm sure that another 5 or 6 people would like it. And if I make for these 5 - 6 people and gave them a nice insight, or gave them a good afternoon, or I gave them some new thoughts, then already I succeeded. Maybe the, that's the bar is very low with that, but, yes, I cannot claim that I will change the minds of...Thousands of people, so. And people with this, it's often a matter of taste. One person likes something, the other person really hates it.

So, it's very difficult to answer that question...

IT: Yes... I was talking to Pippo at MAXXI last week.

"...a nice insight, or gave them a good afternoon, or I gave them some new thoughts, then already I succeeded."

And he was saying that their bar of a successful exhibition is two hundred thousand... Visitors through an exhibition.

JK: Here, we aim to have hundred thousand per year which we made easily last year, but we had a huge renovation. We created this whole new deck and before that this deck was not there was a little bridge going there. And we're not a gallery we are called institute. And, a lot of people found it very frightening. No clue what is this building. Basically and we had to, we'd struggled a lot with that actually... Because there's opposite here as the museum which is a very popular museum and we saw each time those trucks moving and, oh, everybody walking out to enter museum and they never came to us. And we had huge signs for exhibitions, but people must have found them frightening or they didn't know what it was.

So we really worked in the last of the last couple of years on that.

IT: You know, ironic that you used a spatial solution, to this whole problem

JK: It was, this building was designed in the late-80s - early 90s, and at that time, the whole idea was really to have art or architecture to really put it on a pedestal. And, preferably with a big water around it like a castle, yes, and, I know, this is something that is not really appealing to me, you know, I'd really like to have much more open feeling to it. And a lot of people we invited to do exhibition, just struggle with that. Yes, because even once you're, you want to have a lot of audience. You want people to enjoy it and, at least I do, with my exhibitions. I don't want to make something for only for 4 or 5 people...

IT: Yes it is interesting to talk about it as being an intimidating culture, I've found the exhibition of the treasury really intimidating... And, you know, that gave it a little bit of excitement, but I kept on wanting to leave and not peer behind and another curtain.

JK: We also had a lot of debates about that and I fully understand what you mean. I also understand the idea of Rem who did that space actually, and he really wanted to create this idea of finding a treasure. Something like that. But, yes, it does have this sort of coldness, I think, that space...

IT: It was the smell of the plastic to me. It was like, it's visceral

JK: We opened this, what is it, two and a half years ago? And the smell is still so daunting... I do think it was good that all those beautiful models that we have installed there and are never on show before the audience are now permanent show...There's some beautiful work there...

IT: Yes...I mean, perhaps I'm reading too much into it but I did, I did appreciate that you have to get over that discomfort to actually look at the work. God, that's so simple, it is like Dutch architecture in general, with the reputation that...

JK: You must struggle to enjoy something, right?

IT: Yes and it also makes you work for it, which then means the payoff is greater

It's interesting what you were saying about being approached by students and firms. I suppose that role is taken in Australia by the Institute of Architects, there equivalent institutions here?

JK: Yes...we have the Association for Dutch Architects...But they don't have the space to as an exhibition space. We have a lot of local architectural spaces, and the one in Amsterdam is actually relatively big, so that also hosts sometimes smaller international exhibitions. But this is really the only kind of national museum for architects.

But, in general, there's quite a lot (on show writing?) in terms of architecture show, and I tend to know (he's?) getting other countries there to actually (quite a live off?)...

IT: Yes...Well, that's certainly the case in Australia as well. We, we don't have a dedicated architecture gallery. And so it falls into the context of either the universities, which is very, introspective and then the institutes as well, which have their own agendas. And so, I suppose again, coming from, MAXXI, where I spoke to people a lot about commissioning work, as part of the expression of

"So, as you know, a lot of architects are without job. So, we set up different programs in China, India, and Brazil, to see if we can match Dutch architects to Chinese architects, Indian architects, Brazilian architects..."

the gallery charter, in particular reference to the YAP program, which is there at the moment.

What's the attitude of the NAI to commissioning work or commissioning temporary items?

JK: It's a little bit different, but more, I don't know if we do that often here, because here, the basic premise is very much about making the exhibition and curating the exhibition. And off course, you always hire designers or architects to make specific things.

But we tend to do this, kind of, quite a lot in terms of the Venice Biennial or the Sao Paulo Biennial or Shenzhen Biennial. We ask for specific artists or architects to make a specific installation for that space.

IT: And it's the role of the NAI to be the mediator?

JK: We are officially by the Dutch government appointed to, to always, make sure there's a good exhibition in Venice, in Sao Paulo... And in Shenzhen... Because the other part that is, was, is maybe also interesting is that the previous director really tried to push the limits of the museum a lot. And tried to see what is possible, yes, in terms of playing a very active role for Dutch architecture at the moment, outside the museum.

So, as you know, a lot of architects are without job. So, we set up different programs in China, India, and Brazil, to see if we can match Dutch architects to Chinese architects, Indian architects, Brazilian architects and connect project development to it... To have them actually realize in your building or something like that. So, a very active role for the institute, which are really pushing the boundaries of the museum and also pushing the boundaries of what our task actually was.

IT: Yes, okay interesting. So as an advocate for Dutch architecture the gallery and exhibition works are secondary to procuring real architectural projects. You can actually be promoting actual projects in a meaningful way...

JK: Yes, we're semi-government, so it means that we do get all of our money from the government, but we're not part of the government, so we can operate somewhat independently. As some of directors always just very much looked at the tasks they were given, to do exhibitions, rather,and other directors thought, maybe I can push that boundary a little bit, and do something that goes beyond the museum.

The previous director was very much about that...

Which is, yes...it's a choice, and this director, I think, he still needs to kind of find his new way and I'm sure he will also do something like that. He's more interested at the moment in trying to set up more relationships with the universities here and with researching and stuff like that.

IT: Yes...okay. I suppose it's a position of great advantage to have a direct line to government, but are there also other obligations that come along with that?

JK: In terms of pushing specific architects, or anything like that? The content-wise or program-wise, not at all... But in some instances the previous minister's, he's a generous very much on the creative industries, and making sure architecture would be in terms for us relevant, not so much in term so cultural, intrinsic mould but also in the economic mould.

So he wanted to see clear-cut results of - what you guys are doing to promote architecture and does it make any money for some of the officers here? That was also one of the reason why we set up this program abroad, etc...

So it's not so much that they tell us on a very specific way - you need to push this type of architecture or this type of architects. But in terms of broad lines of the direction, that is, that they do give... And the new minister is more into education. So, that usually means that maybe after a couple of months, and it comes to us as well, and they ask us to do a little bit more on education.

IT: Yes...okay. Looking through the website content of the NAI, very interested in the international programs that you promote Danish Architecture and the speaker series. How, does that sit alongside the exhibition work and the promoting of actual opportunities that you were just mentioning.

JK: We used to have kind of four instruments. One is very simple, it's a visitor's program, in which we invite foreigner curators or foreign journalists just to come to Holland. And they spend the week here and we show them all great examples of Dutch architecture.

Show them the exhibitions that we have. And we hope that from that week that they're here, that they program something in their own country.

And I think this is a way that's actually very cheap. It usually costs tickets and hotel and one girl makes a program. And it's quite effective.

Very often, long-term results, if you, if you choose the right people - come out of that, which is very nice thing. So that's a one instrument...

IT: That, that's interesting, sorry to interject, but... in, at the Pompidou Center, I did notice that there was a whole section directly dedicated to Dutch design,

JK: Oh, yes?

IT: So, I wonder that's the kind of thing you're talking about.

JK: This could be that, but I'm sure we had nobody from the Pompidou... Over in the last month, but it could be also that a curator just finds it interesting and travels to Holland at his own cost, and... curates it...

IT: Okay...but I, I can see how that can, that can apply, because you need to elevate, I mean, walking around the exhibition where you've got all these great masters and there's a whole room dedicated to what's happening here...

JK: Yes, in Holland...that's good, ha?

IT: You think to yourself, these guys must... Be at the top of design. Yes, interesting...

JK: And, but also sometimes happens that the Dutch Embassy abroad gives a specific fee or a ticket to one of these people. And sometimes they call us to help with the program, or sometimes not, so this sometimes goes a little bit like that, but it's okay...

The second thing that we had, which was unfortunately cancelled because of the budget cuts, was a program called Debates on tour...that you may be read a little bit about...

Each time we try to send 2 or 3 Dutch architects abroad, to, from Mexico to Korea to you name it. Always dedicated to specific themes. And discuss and debate with their counterparts in those specific countries and have a good discussion, a good debate, and usually what comes out that is a article or theoretical thinking, stuff like that.

The third is actually, what we have this travelling exhibitions. So sometimes we have an exhibition here, or we just offer it to other type of museums. So the Lele Exhibition that I did, so we're offering it now to Madrid and to Portugal and stuff like that. So we hope that it will travel.

And in this case it's an exhibition about a Brazilian architect but normally it's about Dutch architecture. This could travel as well. Like we have one in Russia right now, and there was usually a whole range of exhibitions travelling.

And the fourth is this program that I told you about, for this match making in China, Brazil, India to really have Dutch architecture make some money, and we do some work.

I forgot this that, then we also have this biennials for growth that we present...so, Sao Paulo, Shenzhen, and Venice.

IT: Okay, interesting. Do you think about it in a different way? I mean the exhibitions that you put together for the institution for here and the ones that you take to these biennial. So, is there a different mind-set that goes along with them?

JK: Yes, for biennials is always very different. because it is international showpiece and it's all kind of like, you know, everybody shows off their best work. And it's a particular case in Venice. So, for Venice it's usually we choose a specific artist or a specific architect that gives like kind of like a show, showcase. But for Sao Paulo, it was very different and the last time I curated Sao Paulo was I thought it would be much more relevant to curate it together with somebody from Brazil. So, because I always find it so strange that you think of something here and then ship it to the other side of the world...And then just place it there and you have no clue if it works in the local context, so we decided to share the curatorship with a local party, which was for us also very interesting thing to see what they would come up with. And, that's a interesting exercise, I think. And that eventually traveled throughout Brazil and it was very kind of a Brazilian subject and stuff like that. So it depends very much on the, on the location and what you exactly curate there.

IT: So with institutions, and more permanent galleries, they seem to adopt the role of education and, I suppose it would, so, rather than trying to present just the latest and the newest, it is consolidate and to contextualize the content.

JK: We, I think we try to do both, but that's maybe a bit arrogant to say. But at least, but what the director has aimed for is that he would really like have the, his exhibitions to really be the creme de la creme, to be the top notch stuff...But also have large educational part here, and schooling and have the lectures. In terms of giving context and having a general audience. Sometimes you maybe can wonder, you know, if you try to do everything, how does that reflect on you, like. Can you be really specific then or something like that? (inaudible). Can you do it good if you try to do everything?

So, but, it is our task to do everything there is to do.

IT: Yes, that's right...Do you, do you think the biennials will remain relevant?

JK: Yes, I think what was very good that Sao Paulo did for this year was that they stepped out of the country pavilion ID. Yes, the last one was ridiculously bad, I thought.

Yes, it was really bad, and that, so they had to do something. Because it's not Venice and they cannot compete with Venice, and the exhibitions over there are very poor. And, they took away the original, kind of, country pavilion ID and just appointed a really good curator, who curated really good top notch creme de la creme exhibitions from all over the world.

I think that's a very good step they made. For Venice, I think it will remain for some time like that. But it's very interesting to see I think what Koolhaas is going to do, or what he's trying to aim for is to not only have his own exhibition to be able to one specific theme. But also try to have the country pavilions fit that specific theme...

And that's a huge ambition that is probably impossible to realize, but I'm very curious what he's going to end up with.

IT: It seems like he'll be fighting against the internal mechanisms, I know the way that it works in Australia..

JK: Exactly, and in all these countries.

IT: The, the directors are already appointed and it's half way designed before the theme is announced

JK: Yes. He then call us comes in - hey, can you do it about fundamentals? Laughter

IT: Absolutely, and you know people internally are pushing agendas and holding the purse strings and...

JK: Yes, so I think it's very admirable of him that he's trying to do it, but so yes I don't know...

IT: Yes. I think that there's an argument that says that the avant-garde in this kind of biennial context

is becoming less relevant with the proliferation of digital media that shows everything that's going on all the time, immediately. I don't know if you would agree with that.

JK: Could be. Yes. I don't know, maybe I'm too traditional for that. I tend to think that,avant-garde can you really say the avant-garde in Venice is really the avant-garde here, what's really the avant-garde? It's probably online with the young hipsters or something....But it is a showcase and it remains a showcase. You tend to see things that, for example, last year Romania's pavilion I was super surprised by it. I had no clue about architecture in Romania and that the pavilion was very good, high-end, great quality.

So you're always surprised, but it always seems to be very much, kind of, like a now in two years that the Romania pavilion can be very different again, and maybe not of my liking or not such great quality. It so, always happens like that. And the last exhibition that we had there wasn't my personal favourite and a lot of people really hated it and also a lot of people really liked it, so, yes.

IT: I heard quite the opposite, I heard that it was, yes, much lauded and enjoyed.... Which might be that's a criticism in a backhanded kind of way.

JK: At best pushing the limits very much, which I think was very good about it... But, kind of it was just a curtain, I don't know if you see that.

IT: Well, I mean, I've seen the press about it, but I've only been to the art biennial, I've not been to the architecture biennial.

The, just the art biennial, I was just so overwhelmed by the volume, I can and...

JK: It's huge.

IT: I can imaging walking into a space that's just a curtain might almost be a relief. (inaudible) Oh, God. Okay, I can understand this I can enjoy it.

JK: Don't, don't tell it to our previous director, because there was, off course, a lot of thinking behind the curtain. But it can be very overwhelming. I agree with you. And tiring and it feels like work. You have this 3 or 4 days watching exhibitions

IT: Well, it's like a marathon, it's an endurance contest.

JK: We have the biennial here as well, with the Rotterdam Architecture Biennial.

IT: Yes, that's next year?

JK: It's, is it next year or is it 2004...2014 is next year. It's actually always every three years, but it now it's called a biennial.

And, last time it was here, and it was also huge chunk of information. We had people coming in for two or three days at nine in the morning and leaving at five, because, yes, they wanted to experience everything, and read all the texts and see through all the videos. I personally don't have the attention span for that.

IT: The biennial here does it expand into the city?

JK: Yes. Very much. Especially last edition, which I think they did really well. And, I think that's also one of the things about the Shenzhen Biennial in China, it's very good. That it moves every time to a different location and they used the biennial as a catalyst for changing this area.

They tried to do that here as well, aah, have you been there to the to the ski block? Where they built this bridge of wood? It's very interesting...

IT: Yes, I've been very interested, I was in Marseille, which has the European Capital of Culture end of year...

JK: Yes, they also have that,

IT: Having this idea of having an event or having a festival or having a biennial as almost a way to force yourself or force the conversation towards architectural design and it's been interesting the last week here in Rotterdam.

Everything that you read about Rotterdam, so you know, even, you know, the tourist guide, you know, Rotterdam and says - Rotterdam is a city of architecture. And so it implants this expectation in your mind, so, I can imagine, for a non-architect as well, you'd walk around and think differently about the buildings and that kind of thing.

JK: Yes, also because of the bombing off course, so everything is new and modern here, and because Rotterdam receives very little tourists per year and they try to also, how do you say, have a balance, counter-balance between Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Amsterdam being very much the tourist city because of the old buildings and the Van Gogh and the tulips and the blah, blah, blah...

Yes, so what do we have feel about modern

architecture here?

But, Rotterdam receives very little tourists every year. But what is really nice is that the beautiful 17th century inner city, is I think unmatched and very romantic in a way. But there are also some really great modernist or post-modernist buildings in Amsterdam as well, are really worth it. And, it's a pleasant city to bike around and in one day see all the highlights, but now I'm maybe more like the promotional bureau of Amsterdam. I love Rotterdam as well by the way, so....laughter...

JK: But, but, in terms of Australia, does it have this, have the specific policy in terms of promoting architecture? Or, not at all on a government level?

IT: It's difficult, we fall under, so there, there's no specific ministry for culture. It comes under another portfolio.

JK: The states?

IT: Well, it, sorry, there is a federal, comes under the art policy, it is very broad...

JK: Here, it's shift, it's under two. It's under the culture, but it's also under the Ministry of Spatial Planning. So it's a bit of both, which I think is a very interesting combination. Because it's a both, the, market and the thinking about how a city works, etc... But also the artistic approach and the cultural approach...

IT: I'm no expert on...Policy in Australia, but my understanding is that architecture has fallen between the cracks, and I, if I recall correctly, this year was the first year ever that architecture was named specifically under the art policy. And there was one line that said something like - and we should promote contemporary architecture or something like that.

JK: But architects travel also to Europe and see this or see the Marseille... And maybe come back and say - hey, we need this as well, or want this or...

IT: I think there is, and again, this is just my complete opinion, I think Australia is in a difficult position that their architecture has been completely co-opted under commercial imperatives, which I know is globally the case as well, but the discussions around architecture in Australia are all about real estate, they're about value, and things like design are seen as a dirty word, you know, to talk about that...

"I think it really helps because people in The Netherlands do know about architecture. And most people 9 out of 10 know of Rem Koolhaas."

J**K:** Oh, yes? That's superficial or what?

IT: Yes, and also there's, a bit of an anti-intellectual culture in Australia. So, it's seen as superficial, but also irrelevant.

JK: I think it really helps because people in The Netherlands do know about architecture. And most people 9 out of 10 know of Rem Koolhaas.

So people know that and there's a sense of quality, a sense of international acclaim, or something like that and I think that helps the middle firms as well. There's always a lot of jealousy off course - oh, Koolhaas has this and that. This is what you always have off course. And the internationals really helped set the name of Dutch architecture... And then, okay Dutch architecture, in some of the most famous examples are Koolhaas etc, but Dutch architecture is also smaller companies... And I think that really helped them. Sometimes you hear of companies that are now working in China or Russia? I always consider them very local architect, but can they benefit from the big name and from the famous name?

Interview with Karen Kubey – Institute for Public Architecture (Executive Director)

Karen Kubey (KK): ...So yes, first briefly about the Institute for Public Architecture (IPA). The IPA was founded in 2009 by Jonathan Kirschenfeld, who is an architect who's done a lot of important work in support of housing. And he did a project that's well known, at least in New York, that's called the floating pool, that's like – it's docked up in the Bronx in an area that doesn't have a lot public amenities or a lot of anything actually. So there's no space for a pool, so it's in the river, so people from anywhere can go there. And it's on a barge, so it could technically float wherever you want it to. So he's been working for decades in the sort of like unsexy world of housing and public projects and found that missing in New York was an organisation that would support architects like him that would work to bring greater visibility to those sorts of projects and to sort of give a sense of community for people who work in that kind of stuff. So he founded it with those ideas in 2009 and he got it to the point where there's a little bit of money aboard the 501(c)(3), which is like the non-profit status, which is like super annoying to get. So he took care of like a lot of the basic stuff. And then we met through a project with the Architectural League, the League invited us both to...

Imogene Tudor (IT): What is the Architectural League?

KK: Oh, the Architectural League is the most important architectural organisation in New York.

IT: Okay.

KK: So to give you a little background– so the two biggest organisations in New York are the AIA and the Architectural League and they've both been around a super long time. I don't know, I think the AIA is slightly older, but they've both been around like 125 or 100 years, something like that. And the AIA is currently housing the Center for Architecture, which is on Laguardia. I don't know if you've been there?

"...working for decades in the sort of like unsexy world of housing and public projects and found that missing in New York was an organisation that would support architects like him"

IT: No yet, but I will.

KK: And they do a ton of programming and they're more directly tied in with the profession. And that's set up like – there's a lot of committees and it's – a lot of the work is volunteer with those with big staff and – so they're really important and they've had that space for over 10 years, which is a storefront. So that's actually – I would really recommend you go there because that's their idea for how to engage the public to have – like physically have the storefront space in downtown Manhattan. So the AIA is there. Then the Architectural League is also super old and also amazing. And they are a little bit more open. They do a lot of – they do a lecture series, they do a couple of things that are the biggest stamp of approval for young architects in the ISA. So there's the Young Architects programme and Emerging Voices programme. So basically you'll see, if you go back in the records for like which firm has got a dozen words, they're the ones that like turn out great. And yes, the League is very cool – and I say that more often, that means it's like – to me that means that they do programmes that are little bit more intellectual and like connecting architecture and art a little bit more and taking on sort of larger issues that might not have like super direct impact on day-to-day practice, but you know, they take off – they put it back.

So Jonathan and I met because the Architecture League was involved in a project called Making Room. He's actually now – I don't know if they'll show it out in New York, but it's going to become an exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York. And that project is about using design to advocate for changes in housing policy. I don't know anything about Australian housing law, but I guess – I would guess it wouldn't be too dissimilar where over the years, since the late 1800s, there have been all these different housing laws from a place and at the time, each of them made a lot of sense, but now in 2013 we have this huge stack of laws and a lot them don't make sense anymore, but it's hard to get people to erase them because they feel like you're lowering living standard or something. So

this is a project that looked at a couple of different – a few different problems in housing in New York. One is that there are laws preventing what's called micro-units from being built, even though there are a lot of – tons of single households. And then at the other end of the spectrum, there are laws that prevent like groups of people from living together. So no more than – in New York City and State, no more than three unrelated adults can live together. But a lot of this stuff is happening all the time and no one like physically – everyone just turns a blind eye. So the idea of the project was to – the League and the Housing Advocacy Group recruited architects like me and Jonathan and others to produce designs that broke these laws on purpose to say, okay, we're actually going to imagine something better…So anyway, that's what's showing now that you should see.

IT: Okay.

KK: Yes, and you should see the Museum of the City of New York is cool in general, and as a museum, they connect – not always, but sometimes they connect on sort of design and political issues. Yes, they're really cool.

Okay, Jonathan and I met that way and so then I have been with the organisation for about a year. So on total start-up mode, so yes. So we did all the setting up of the website. And you get a mission and you get a board and all that stuff. And then we had our first project this spring and summer, which was – because – I suppose because both Jonathan and I both have an interest in housing, our first project was to stage an exhibition at the Center for Architecture, which is the place run by the AIA, that connected some stories about housing from the 60s and 70s that people had forgotten about with contemporary problems in housing in the United States. Yes, so the show was up for a few months and it had three programmes and they were all packed. So, that was our way – that was our first thing and that was our way to start the conversation about something that's just really important, but nobody talked about it a lot.

IT: Okay. And so why was the exhibition format chosen?

"So the idea of the project was to... produce designs that broke these laws on purpose to say, okay, we're actually going to imagine something better"

KK: Because of the – it was a project that I had been working on for a few years and an exhibition basically gave a really good excuse to have these programmes, and I just thought it was best with the material that was available. So we made it so that it would be engaging to both architects and the public. So that was, you know – you have your photos and your drawings, but then we also had interviews with some of the architects and did it in a way that connected design decisions with planning decisions in the way the stuff is presented. And then we were conscious – when put together the programmes, we were super conscious to not have it just be architects, there was architects' developers, policy people, looking at all the issues at once.

IT: Okay. And so what were the programmes that spun off from that exhibition?

KK: So, one of the programmes – the first programme was called Beyond the Lawn and that was looking at… So the show itself was called Low Rise High Density and that was a type of housing – low rise meaning up to about four stories, high density meaning dense enough to support public transportation. And so the show connected experiments in that type of housing from the 60s and 70s when it was like the biggest thing, there was a big show at MoMA; everyone was super excited about it because it was a counterproposal to tower-in-the-park modernism. So we connected those things with contemporary issues where architects from the 70s were imagining, "Oh, you know, suburbs are over, America is going to densify," blah-blah-blah, but it actually – now it's actually finally happening and now suburbs are getting more dense and Americans – statistics of Americans going toward multi-family housing are finally coming true. So we were connecting these things that we're well known for years ago with a couple more issues. And one of the main things that those projects tried to do is to articulate – like some are public and public spaces – very carefully. And so Beyond the Lawn was looking at open space in housing from a social and design point of view.

The second programme was to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Marcus Garvey Park Village, which was a project in Brooklyn that was featured in this big MoMA show. So there's a ton of support for it and really interesting people involved. It's a really complicated project, so we're just like 40 years out, bringing the original architects together with some critics. It started a discussion in that. That got pretty heated.

IT: That sounds fascinating.

KK: It was – yes, it got pretty intense because you get into policy stuff very quickly.

IT: And where was that conversation staged?

KK: Yes, we had the exhibition at the Center for Architecture because that way we could have – the programme is also in the same space and they'd be really accessible.

IT: Yes. So what was audience for that explosive talk?

KK: What was the audience?

IT: Yes, were they mainly architects?

KK: Well, the ones that I would have recognised would have been my friends that would been architects.

IT: Yes, that's right.

KK: But definitely, there were other people – I was really happy for that one especially because one of the people we brought in is working in the exact neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is called Brownsville and it's – for the last 50 years or more, it's been one of the poorest neighbourhoods in New York. And in 1973, these guys were trying to make change in the neighbourhood through this housing development. And we also brought in a woman from an organisation that's trying to improve the neighbourhood now, so we could compare – so we could look at the difference in techniques 40 years ago and now.

IT: Very interesting.

KK: And the main that she's doing, as you might expect, is there was some community engagement then, but she's – her organisation is much more invested in those processes. So she was a real help in actually getting people from the housing development and the neighbourhood to attend. And so my favourite part was a guy who raised his said and said, "I grew up in this project; I'm now an architect partly because I was inspired," and then someone else was talking about issues in the neighbourhood. So it was – there were definitely a number of people from the neighbourhood even those who are far away. So that was cool. And then some old-school guys who have been fighting the fight for 40 years and then – I don't know, it got – yes, who else? Yes, architects and policy guys and neighbourhood guys and – yes, it was pretty wild.

"the discussion was really amazing, but I sort of looked around for the last programme and was like, "Oh, no. It feels amazing, but are we just talking to ourselves?"

That's my goal with the exhibition. And we're also – I mean, the exhibition ended in June and sort of in July we'd still hang out. And now it's – like okay, now we're going to try to do a publication and I think you know about that. Because also – and then the last programme we did was called Low Rise High Density Now and we brought together an historian, Richard Plunz, who wrote the book on New York city housing – which is amazing, by the way – with a developer who hasn't been building that kind of stuff in New York, but has been in Philly, so he's started talking about why with the guy who's the chief architect for Public Housing Authority in New Jersey City, who is really amazing. And then who was the fourth? Someone so cool. I don't know, but anyway. That was great. So we ended on that because then it brought it into the present and it also – the exhibit was internationally scoped, but this last – the discussions tried to be more focused on New York because we are in New York.

So at the end – and I started to feel a little frustrated sitting there because I wasn't sure – look, the discussion was really amazing, but I sort of looked around for the last programme and was like, "Oh, no. It feels amazing, but are we just talking to ourselves?" And so – and then also it was a little frustrating because they were critiquing some of the earlier attempts to change housing. So you know, this huge show at MoMA that was coupled with this prototype development and they were saying, "Well, prototypes don't work," or whatever. So I said, "Oh, my god. If you can get a prototype developed, isn't that amazing?"

So my last questions with the panel feels like a softball where I was just asking – so I was like, "Okay, we're looking around the room; these are all architects who want to make some change in housing. How can we do that?" And I think the only answer is to do everything. So yes, you need exhibitions. Yes, you need talks. But then you just can't talk, you obviously have to – you know, like the city you have to be super engaged with. Governing people, someone said – someone in the panel said, "Okay, we actually need to change the way the media is representing housing; like there's a problem because on TV, everyone lives in a single family house." Not quite, but close.

So we need to change that. Yes, so obviously there's not really an answer to that question because it's too vague, but I think we just have to keep doing stuff for other – and work with media. There's a great guy – maybe the best guy in the country, I think, is John Cary with public interest design. And he's probably the most savvy. He went to Berkley like me. No, he's not from California, he's from Minnesota, but he's been in California for a while. And publicinterestdesign.org came about because he gave a commencement speech at Berkley and named a bunch of things, like different organisations doing great stuff. And students came up to him and said, "Oh, this is so great; where can I find out about all those organisations?" And he had to give them a huge list and so he ended up making this one website that would try to bring together all these different organisations. I think it's mostly – I haven't looked to see if it's international or not, but if there's one place to go to look at the range of organisations trying to do this kind of work, that's a good place to start.

IT: Many of these concerns have been recurring through my research but so far but I've been framing it in this kind of abstract relationship between the public and the profession with this concept of "for the greater good", like we should do it because we deserve better quality in everything. We deserve better quality housing and public space and transport. And architects traditionally held that role and we've lost our agency and how do we get it back. And so it's really interesting to hear that through a housing lens, that it achieves a huge amount more focus because – yes, it can have these kind of tangible focal points, which I think is really interesting.

KK: Yes, I mean something that – so something I'm interested in and one of the reason that I decided to take the job with the IPA is that with the recession and everything, a lot of architects were turning toward public work because they didn't have any other work. So – and a lot of it is good; a lot of it is crap. A lot of it is like, "Oh, we've got something in the parking lot."

"I'm interested in – because I think for a while there's been a divide in the profession... where there's was sort of the community-minded people and then there's the design people. Right?"

Okay, I guess when it's bad, it's bad. So I'm interested in a couple of things. I mean, the reason I took the job is because I think I'm interested in taking the momentum that's going on right now and might even be dropping off now that the recession is sort of ending, and trying to take the best bits of what's been happening and push that forward, even when people start having money again. Like let's not forget the best parts of this. And also I'm interested in – because I think for a while there's been a divide in the profession, probably also in Australia, where there's was sort of the community-minded people and then there's the design people. Right? So I think we've come to a point to where you can't be either-or and I think I'm interested in – you know, I think just in the last couple of years that I have started to see personally really good criticism about some of the public stuff to say, "Ah, it's not actually all good." So that's – you know. So being more critical about the do-gooder public stuff so that you're actually – which I think is what your project is all about. And also bringing together these two sides to say that okay yes, it has to be really well designed; we have to treat architects as professionals who know what they're doing. But also you have to – you have to also engage the users or the government or whoever else. So trying to get those things together is something I was really – and I'm still interested in.

But that's why I was thinking like that in New York, there are so many non-profits...
So I was like, "Do we really need another one?" And then finally I thought about it and said, "Okay, yes"

Yes, I think that it's not as discussed. I think the questions in housing that really affect the way that people are living in the United States, I mean, my exhibition was international, but my focus is mostly in the United States because that's where I'm from and whatever. So it seems to me that the questions that are most important for most Americans are not the same ones that are being addressed in school. And there certainly are housing studios and stuff like that, but...

IT: It's a bit unfashionable.

KK: Yes, right.

IT: It's the kind of subject at university that you do because you think you probably should, rather than because you're genuinely interested

KK: Yes.

IT: Where do you think the lack of ambition comes from?

KK: Well, I think it's really complicated, but I mean, a big thing – so the story of – maybe I'll just step back and tell you sort of the intro story for the exhibition?

So the exhibition opened on June 12, 1973, this huge show opened at MoMA called Another Chance For Housing, and on the same day Marcus Garvey Park Village broke ground and Low Rise High Density was presented as the future for the United States. And it was the – the effort was led by the Urban Development Corporation, which is amazing. It was run for seven years; from 1968 in the wake of the Martin Luther King assassination, until 1973 and in those – wait, that's five years. Wait, okay, until 1975, 1975. In those seven years, they produced 33,000 units of housing in New York State for meeting American people, to working with ushered architects, like Richard Meier. So, but then Nixon came into office and basically cut federal housing funding as it existed. And then after that, there was a huge fiscal crisis in the New York State. So you know, there was tons of energy and then that – the Urban Development Corporation's housing unit closed.

And so with that closing, people stopped talking about – and they had – at the time that they shut down, they had engaged 70 architects and found seven sites and they were going to keep looking at this prototype. It was kind of this whole thing, and then: done. So my exhibition said, okay yes, that experiment stopped, so people stopped talking about this, but actually there's other interesting things happening that are connected, people just haven't engaged with]. So I mean, a big thing – the biggest thing is that housing funding doesn't really exist anymore, you know.

IT: I think there's like a common preconception – and I am interested to know whether you agree on or not on anything so that when you buy into it, is that there was this period of optimism about the possibilities of architecture; these grand schemes to re-ambition the city, these – particularly with high density or medium density housing. And architects in the world have in instances been given a decent run to explore these options and then towards the end of modernism, it was accepted that a lot of these were absolute powers. You know, people in European context and they'd create awful spaces and so they could say "yes, we did the experiment and the outcome is not great." And so the assertion that I've heard is that architects basically lost their confidence as a profession to envisage new futures. And that opened up this space for a whole lot of other people; so bureaucrats, project managers, middlemen to come in and fill that space who are arguably less adaptable or less visionary with their thinking. Do you buy into that?

KK: Partially. I think – I mean, something that I was looking at is that in 1973, that was the moment when probably architects were over-confident and thought that they could design something and that was all bravado, but now I think that we've gone – swung too far back where we think that architecture can't do anything. So I'm interested I'm the middle ground. Recognising there is some value in what we're doing, but that it has to be in concert with this social, political and economic stuff.

IT: So the one question, which I'll just maybe finish on... You were talking about advocating for high quality outcomes in the public realm and high quality outcomes for the public at large through housing. How do you engage with the public directly through your organisation?

KK: Well, we've just gotten started.

IT: Yes, of course! So, in the best of all possible words, how would you like to happen?

KK: Right. Yes, well I think we're just – we're lucky to scale up from what we've been doing. And so we were happy to get packed houses for all of our events, but they are packed houses in a relatively small venue with a relatively diverse crowed, but still probably mostly architects. So I think up from there, and then we got a pretty good amount of press for a small show. So I think we're also looking to increase that and also be more engaged with general interest press outlets. The thing that John Cary does really well is he'll write opp eds in Christian Science Monitor or like whatever, sort of general interest publications. So he's finding a way to use editorial to get a larger audience interested architecture. So we're going to be doing some of that. And then we have a project we're launching soon that's going to be – we don't have a name or anything yet and it's not yet public, so whatever – just don't put it on the internet yet.

IT: Yes.

KK: But it's going to be rapid design responses to public debates. You may have heard that there's various important debates going on in New York City right now, like Penn Station is horrible and just – they just made a decision to only renew the lease of Madison Square Garden for another 10 years, so there's a possibility that Madison Square Garden could move and we could have a proper train station. And then there was controversy with

the library and controversy with Folk Art Museum and through various means, have been through architectural responses to these debates, like, "What if we do this?" Blah-blah-blah. So what we're going to be doing is – but sometimes they're slow, sometimes – whatever. So what we're going to be doing is setting up a platform so that the next time there's a decision that we as architects think needs more debate...

IT: Because it means that the people who are running these competitions and having these ideas are asking such narrow questions that only get the predictable responses. They're only approaching firms of a particular scale and of a particular ethos. They're framing it in such a way that the debate is stifled and that's – I know Storefront are currently running the competition of competitions as well?

KK: Right, Storefront is currently doing everything...

IT: So yes, they were looking at holding a competition to nominate what should be up for discussion, basically so what they feel like need to be on the agenda.

KK: Yes, yes. And then the other was also was like, use everything we hate. Like, "Oh, my god, these blogs are terrible. Oh, my god, everyone is just into images," or whatever. And to seize all that stuff that maybe hate on and try to use it for good. Just see like, okay, well, this is the way the world works. We're going to work with it and try to put some of your sick stuff out there.

IT: Interesting, yes.

KK: So that's something that we're just beginning; we're not ready to launch it yet, but that's our next project.

Interview with Martien de Vletters – Canadian Centre for Architecture (Director of Collection)

Imogene Tudor (IT): The question I've been asking everybody is, "What is architecture; what are you displaying or how do you define it and is important to define it?" And the really consistent answer has been: it is not necessary to define. Architecture is what you put on the walls; it's never questioned. And the other question is, "How do you display architecture when the buildings are absent?" And the answer has always been, "It's not a problem."

Martien de Vletters (MV): Hmm?

IT: Artefacts hold their own value in their right. Yes, it's been very consistent, which is encouraging.

MV: If I had to answer this question, I'd find it extremely difficult to display architecture. I think we're not really good at it; no one is really.

IT: Okay.

MV: I worked for 12 years at the NAI. I was the Chief Director there for the last six years and then I was architecture publisher and I find making books on architecture is far easier than doing exhibitions.

IT: And why is that?

MV: Well, as you say, you miss the topic that you're exhibiting. Basically it's outside. It's always better outside than it is inside. Let's say the objects that you show are never made to be art; quite often not. I mean, occasionally they might be, but let's say a drawing by Berlage or by Cedric Price, whatever, it's not made as an art object, as a painting is of something. So you always have to explain what you're exhibiting. People don't understand floor plans; people don't understand axonometries. I'm totally convinced. I mean, basically, people could like an exhibition for other reasons of course, but I don't think – let's say the objects that you have to work with are very easy objects to do. So when you do an architectural exhibition, you always have to add a layer.

" I'd find it extremely difficult to display architecture. I think we're not really good at it; no one is really."

Whether it's an education layer or whether it's a kind of aesthetic layer or whether it's – I mean, with paintings, you could paint the wall black or white or blue, but you have the paintings and you have them there. You can elaborate a little bit more on the text and so on, but basically that's it. It's also limited in that respect. But let's say for the architecture, it's difficult because you always have to do something to explain it and at the same time, it's nicer because you have to do that.

So you always have to think about what you're displaying. So I think, myself, if I look at all the exhibitions that I've been curating at the NAI, I think I only succeeded once or twice in all these kinds of exhibitions that I did to actually do a really good exhibition.

And, I mean, I'm not here the curator, so I'm the director of the collection, so I have a new position now. I find that very relaxing that I don't have to curate an exhibition so much, but you always have to find the narrative. You have to add the story; you have to give either spatial or in the story itself. You really have to do something.

IT: Interesting. I just have come from New York where I was visiting the Corb exhibition...And I really enjoyed it, but I thought it was a terrible exhibition.

MV: Yes, exactly.

IT: And there was – I mean, as an educated and kind of predisposed to enjoying that kind of thing, you know, it's so frustrating because that layer of interpretation didn't give me much

MV: Yes, especially because if you see the title that it's about landscape

IT: Landscape, yes.

MV: And so your – I mean, as you say, the objects are wonderful and some of them are super – I mean, they're art objects. And to be honest, one of the two exhibitions I think as a curator I had succeeded is Le Corbusier exhibition, which I

did in May, which was an collaboration with Vitra and with RIBA and so it was a travelling, touring exhibition, but it was a very rich exhibition – as this one is as well, because you have paintings, you have artefacts, you have sculptures that you can use. So you have a lot of things that you can use to explain to explain the story. As in New York, some of the work is fantastic, but as a narrative, let's say a modern landscape, I don't really see it.

IT: You know, I found that so confusing. I was like, why did they adopt that premise? because in reality it's set up as a chronological retrospective if you see it. I mean, it starts with a drawing when he was 15. And then it's trying to make this link to the landscape that I just found very interesting.

MV: Yes.

IT: So, it's so fascinating because you are the first person who's – maybe you're the only person who's being particularly honest with me about the difficulty of these objects. Do you think it can be done? To be able to say to a completely uninitiated public: this is what a floor plan is, this is what a section is etc...

MV: No, the question's, of course, is what is it what you want to tell. Because I think what is very interesting what I say from, let's say, here, CCA's mission and for example, if I compare it to NAI or with basically any European – it's intuition as Visite or in Frankfurt or especially the ones that also have archives and collections themselves. Not all of them have, of course; not all of the – like Bordeaux doesn't have – I think they don't have a lot of art collection, but I think all European institutions have been dedicated to collect and to make accessible the build environment of the country. Like in the Netherlands, they're restricted to Dutch architecture.

And they are restricted – well, no, they're not restricted in whatever they collect, but let's say the tradition there is that they have been collecting the built environment. Of course, it's built and un-built projects, but it's basically – the cultural architecture in the Netherlands has been collected. Here, that's something completely different, which is – this is

"...it's not about the glorious – to celebrate the glorious architecture whatsoever, it's much more about the experiment."

an international collection, so it's not restricted to Canada. We have a lot of Canadian archives, but it's not all; we have also the archives Cedric Price, we have the archive of Gordon Matta-Clark. We just received the archive of a Spanish firm, Abalos & Herreros, so it's not at all restricted to the country; so the identity. And it has nothing to do with the build environment because Phyllis Lambert, the founder of the institution, was always been interested in, I think, in the experiment and in the idea of architecture. So it's not about the build environment. And in that light, I think the collection, but also the exhibition policy or let's say the exhibition programme has been always about the idea of architecture. Architecture as a cultural artefact and it was not about architecture.

So it is not to show the best building of Richard Meier, let's say; that's not what we do here. If we – so let's say that the issues that we address relate to architecture, but also have a relation to society and quite often we show them in a very experimental way.

So in that sense, we make it ourselves a little bit easier in the sense that we're not, let's say – then you can actually say that the objects themselves are more important than the floor plan.

You know, whether it's a good floor plan or not. That's not the question that I want to raise here or want to raise. And so it's very much – for example, you have these exhibitions on speed, on the senses and sensibility of this city. There was an exhibition on actions and how to activate the city that has been – even in the earlier days, there was exhibitions about the image of architecture, rather than architecture itself. So it's very much, let's say, it's not about the glorious – to celebrate the glorious architecture whatsoever, it's much more about the experiment.

So that's not a way of looking and that makes it a little bit more – but you end up with the same problem; you still need a lot of narrative to explain.

Let's say – our next exhibition – we have now an exhibition on, let's say, the first generation of architects that used the computer.

And the next exhibition will be on, let's say, the towns that were modelled for – let's say, to model the new towns, Chandigarh in India and Casablanca in Morocco, which is because we received the archive of Jeanneret, the cousin of Le Corbusier.

But we did not choose to make an exhibition on Pierre Jeanneret. We chose to do something to address something else with the work of Jeanneret. So we can use the archive, but it's

about something else than to celebrate the big architect or whatever.

IT: So are there any boundaries to your definition of architecture?

MV: No.

IT: Like do you ever encounter the edges?

MV: No, you need all – I mean, that's the issue, of course. In an exhibition, you need the objects, which is different from a book or from a lecture or whatever you do. With an exhibition you need good objects. And you need also – I worked at the NAI when Aaron Betsky was there and he always had this vision saying, "You have to attract people with the best objects you can get." Whatever it is about, they have to come to you to enter the building to buy a ticket because of this particular fantastic, beautiful object or interesting object or whatever. And I think it's similar here; you need good objects to show whatever you want. And I think in the realm of – I mean, architecture in that sense is so broad; you can address so many issues, that you can address all kind of global issues, all kind of local issues. It's a very – you can even address issues that are not there yet. We had an exhibition a year ago on everything that Montréal is not, let's say, to we really – we had an open call for ideas for Montréal to improve the urban life or the urban environment of Montréal. There is this notion that it kind of developed and stopped after the expo in the Olympics Games. So nothing really happened, so whatever you see here is basically a kind of a static situation according to some people. So the question was: how can you reactivate the city? So it was an open call and all kind of, let's say, objects or ideas came in. So no, in that respect, you don't really have boundaries.

IT: Yes. It's interesting; I was here – it must have been 2009 when there was the Speed exhibition. And I was so surprised to see the trade literature. And I was like, "Of course." I mean, of course that's an artefact; of course that there's all these cultural values inherent in those documents, but it take a lot of prescience to collect those kind of objects. Which is interesting. In the way that you approach the collections here, it feels like it's an emerging field. There's not a huge amount of historic precedent for architecture collections. Are there any other fields that you look to for direction or inspiration on how to curate it, or do you make it up as you go?

MV: You make it up as you go in a way because you're depending on what people want to give to you. So, there's also the opportunistic – as I say, I think CCA has been interested always in more the ideas and the thinking of architecture rather than the outcome of it, the buildings. So, in that respect, you see – let's say, the way the library has been built up. Of course there are other examples, old examples to where you have – let's say we have a lot of prints and drawings from the 16th, 17th, 18th century. That's even true of some other museums, of course. You can see the kind of North American model in that. And at the same, well I think there also – let's say, archives have been built up that are very specific for CCA, we're building up an archives of all histories or interviews and recordings of people.

Always related to a project that CCA was doing, but I think – I mean, that's something I have never encountered in any other museum.

IT: Yes. I was just talking to Nicole earlier this morning from the education department and it seems like there must a wealth of information that they create through their education programmes and that kind of thing as well. You must be generating a lot of your own content as well?

MV: Yes. Yes, I know there's a lot. And I have to say, compared to what I saw at NAI, here people are much more aware of their own history. So everything has been kept as a kind of huge institutional archive that is – I have to say, at NAI things were done and you continued to the next, basically. So there's a more conscious here of the content generated by the institution itself.

IT: I was reading the book from the AA looking at the history of the curation of the Venice Biennial, and they talk so constantly about how so much of the correspondence just isn't there anymore because it was text messages over Blackberry or earlier there were letters and correspondence that were just not kept because there wasn't an attitude towards collection

MV: No, but also in Biennial in Venice, for example, I think it's very difficult because you always have this outside curator and this person is there for his or her own reasons, so the moments that I was involved in the Venice Biennial from the NAI, I remember that I was dealing directly with the curator. You know, where you would have to the Dutch Pavilion, so he was corresponding with me about what we should do and then we did something completely different because we did not want to align with him for all kinds of strategic reasons. So for sure, I did not send all these messages or all the emails or even letters or even letters, I did not send through the office of

the Biennial, I just sent it directly to him of course, which we have – so it's very – I mean, that's an enormous – yes, if you want to do that, you have to have a super careful records management system in place.

IT: Do you think it's important?

MV: Well, that's a good question because I guess if you would interview of people involved afterwards, after every Biennial and you would have let's say 10 or 20 interviews of everyone would tell you a different story. And I'm not sure if that story would be so different from all the correspondence that you would have. So, but I don't know if they do that at all. I don't know if they interview the collaborators. I don't think so, actually. It would have been great.

There's always an interview of the curator, yes, somewhere in the exhibition of the Biennial, but I don't know; I don't know. I'm not sure if it's – it might be juicy to reap all the correspondence, people that were kept out or not. Yes, I guess so, but the real – let's say, if it would change your thinking of this particular Biennial, I doubt because – yes.

IT: As a collector, as somebody in charge of that, how do you anticipate what's going to be of value?

MV: Yes, that's very difficult. Let's say it's easy in the cases of the famous people. You know, if – but it's getting more and more complicated if the subcategory of people – let's say if Daniel Libeskind would come to us and say, "Would you like to keep – to take care of my archive," I'm not sure if the whole archive would be so interesting for us.

Maybe parts of it. So that's a difficult question in terms of – and you have to really define that. But for example, the Archaeology of the Digital is maybe a good example. With this idea that the digital starting, let's say mid-80s and of the 80s, to really change thinking and working in architecture, for architectural offices, for people working at architects and so on. There was this notion here; there was this idea: we should do something about, we should do something with it because it really changed this particular period of time when people are experimenting with the digital. We're not talking about how – let's say, the current way of digital working because that's a kind of instrumental – I mean, now it has become established, people have work flows, they are systemised and so on, but we are talking about the earlier days. Then you want to capture actually the moment that the thinking was developed on using the computer is a tool as an instrument to really enlarge your thinking on architecture or something like that. And instead of looking at the most important projects, for example, or the most important project in this particular – we asked Greg Lynn to select 25 projects – not people, but projects – that have been influential in this particular period of time. Of course, it is his selection. I mean, if you would ask someone else, they would come up with not a totally different selection, but a slightly different selection, I'm sure. But let's say, he's been part of that development, so he's being asked, "Okay, can you select for us the 25 most important projects?" These 25 projects were key projects in the thinking on architecture with using the computer. They go in very different directions, all these projects, and we try to collect these projects and then build up an exhibition so that your first exhibition is upstairs and then you have the next two exhibitions in the coming years.

And if you then talk about selection, it's actually fairly easy to understand. I mean, with the archive of Abalos & Herreros, we also received – beside a lot models and drawings, we also received two hard drives. But let's say, on the level of thinking with the digital, that these two hard drives are not interesting at all. Their archive is interesting for other reasons, but not because of those two hard drives. While the projects by Chuck Hoberman upstairs, these are interesting in terms of digital. So we try to capture this particular moment and to collect that and to give access to that and the people will make their own choices, of course.

IT: Okay, so does the way that it works is you design the premise of the exhibition and then start collecting?

MV: No, in this case – it depends a little bit, but in this particular case it was Greg Lynn who came up with the 25 projects. We tried to collect these projects. We're still working on that, before the exhibition starts, and the next – and then with the material that we receive and we collect and it's donated to the CCA, the curator and our people can start to work with. But it will never be enough, for example, because you have again the problem with sometimes the objects are not enough to tell the story.

So we'll have to get loans from other museums or you'd like to enlarge this with publications or – well, whatever. So a lot of things – let's say, a lot of other artefacts you want to include that aren't part of the particular archive.

We have a large library where you may even find a lot of material.

IT: Hmm. So you said earlier that it's the quality of the objects that draw visitors into the exhibition. How do you assess that quality? Is it a uniqueness?

MV: Partly. I think it's also in fact. In the end, it's also intuition in a way.

Let's put it the other way. I was asked when I came here to do an exhibition. It was in this Montréal exhibition; I was asked to make a small exhibition with using the photography collection on Montréal.

So that's the two ingredients that I had to work with. Then but still you need to have narrative, so I started to think about: okay, what if we would do only panoramas of Montréal? Because you have the mountain, so you have a lot of opportunities to have panoramas. And so we started to look at the collection for panoramas; there were only three or four and they were not so interesting. So you make up an idea; it could work in a book, it could work in a thesis, but it did not work as an exhibition because we did not have enough. Well, so we had a few other corners we came up with or – whatever, the grid, or kind of obvious topics that we would like to collect to group photographs around. And it was not easy to do that actually because you want to show something new, you want to show something attractive. So in a way you want to build up a narrative and at the same time you cannot do that if you don't have the objects to do it with.

And if you find good objects, you can kind of rewrite the narrative of course, in a way, if you're able to do so. And then you chose really the attractiveness of the object.

IT: Yes. I suppose that's the next question. It's about the aesthetics.

MV: Of course, yes, it's about strange objects. It's also about how to position the object towards each other. In some, you know, you can make a huge difference having one object there, one object there or having them revolving.

"And sometimes you have to kill your darlings. .. but there's only one way to have a good exhibition; you have to go for one specific angle or two or three, whatever, but you really have to stick with that"

Yes, you can do a lot of things with that. So really, in the end, you have to have a good story, you have to have good objects and it should match, and at the same time you have to – it's really intuition in a way.

And sometimes you have to kill your darlings. You know, we had some really, really fantastic photographs and in the end they did not fit into the narrative that we came up. And it really hurt, but there's only one way to have a good exhibition; you have to go for one specific angle or two or three, whatever, but you really have to stick with that, I guess.

IT: Do you think there's a capacity for architecture exhibitions to be shocking?

MV: I guess so. Yes, I guess so. I mean, I'm thinking of one that was shocking. I can't really think of anything. I remember an exhibition at the Biennial from Romania, the Romanian Pavilion, that was shocking in the sense that it's clear that everything at that moment was about money. It was a very, very odd – it was buildings or something they showed. I mean, it was not so clever, but it was shocking in a way because it was so telling you something about the society at large. But let's say it was not the most interesting exhibition. I guess so, yes. Yes, it must be. I don't really have a very good example.

I think you have to be lucky in a way to catch the moment.

IT: Yes. Tell me something about the time scale of architecture; that it's – architecture takes a long time.

And so quite often the moment has passed. Exactly. No, that's what I'm saying; you have to be really – to have to lucky in terms of timing. I guess it can only be shocking if the timing is absolutely right. Because if you would show this exhibition a year later, it would not make any sense at all or whatever.

So I think that makes a difference. Well, in a way I think The Imperfect Health's exhibition that was held here, I found it in a way, parts of it were shocking. One of the artefacts that were shown were chairs developed – designed by Japanese, I think, for a hospital and they were made bigger because people grow, you know; they are fatter and they are bigger. So the chairs that were – let's say if you see the design of the chairs, in a way that's shocking because it's telling you something

on our society. So in a way, yes, you could have your perfect health, you could read that as a kind of shocking exhibition.

But shocking, maybe that's too – that's not an easy way to describe an exhibition. It could also be surprising or...

IT: Yes, enlightening or a revelation...

MV: Yes.

IT: Do you think with the profusion of access to content – so blogs, particularly in these kind of saturation of images and stuff – does that make the need for physical collections greater or does it diminish the need for a physical collection?

MV: I think in a way I'm not sure it will increase, but I think the physical collection is always important in the end because blogs and everything you can find online or images of – I mean, in the end, people can tell you everything about this MoMA exhibition Le Corbusier, but unless you've seen it yourself, you can't really judge.

So you can read all the blogs, all the – you can also read the catalogue and it can be very enlightening and can be very interesting, but to see the paintings by Le Corbusier or any other of the work, the sketch books or whatsoever, that's a totally different experience, I think.

So I think there's always a need for the original objects or the unique objects.

IT: Yes. I think when I started this research, I had an assumption that a person needs to experience architecture, you know, one-to-one scale was really important. And so ideas of building installations or recreating moments of the building so that you can actually feel what the space is like, I had assumed that was a good thing. And I was really surprised at how little impact they had at the Core exhibition at MoMA; these room reconstructions.

MV: Right, yes. Yes. It does not add anything to whatever you see.

IT: Not at all. And I was so surprised that it really challenged my assumption and maybe it's because you couldn't get into the space, that you couldn't – you were still removed from them, you had to look at them.

Do you think there's any value in recreating spaces?

MV: No, no. I don't think so. No. No, unless you're able to really create an experience. I remember at the NAI, we had this exhibition of Daniel Libeskind with installation. He really completely refurnished in a way this enormous space, the main exhibition hall, with metal installation. So you went in and you went into all kinds of spaces; very strange spaces, but that was not a – he invented that for this particular space. It's like his building for Nussbaum Museum in Germany where he created this building for an artist who died in the Second World War and actually the – so you see that it's a chronological exhibition. The museum was only dedicated to this painter and the further you get, the more narrow the spaces get, so in the end, you feel so terrible, which is of course the moment that he dies in one of the gas chambers and so on. So let's say the experience of – whatever you think of the paintings, it doesn't really matter because the experience of how this life had developed and then was stopped was stopped was really brought by the architecture. It was not so much – you could see the paintings of course, but the space was dramatic. And I think he gave a kind of a similar drama to his installation that he did at the NAI.

And then I think you can really create something, but it's not a reproduction; it was something new in fact.

No, I don't think that's really – no, although I have to say that for example, the exhibition of Herzog & de Meuron with all their materials that travelled from – it was at NAI, I think it was here and I think it was also at the Tate.

Yes, and then they have, of course – they had the huge panels of one of the walls that they were using. They're very tactile in their work. So there's the tactility of their work, joins, panels, even windows. Yes, and it was fantastic. I thought that was – in a way, it's a one-to-one presentation or let's say it's a close up of something and that worked really well, but it was something very specific from this office, of course. And you saw these tables with all the models in different – for one project, the models in different – I mean, plastic, textiles. So all kind of different ways of looking at it and I think that worked out very well.

Yes, but yes, it's not – I mean let's say, the ones that I saw at MoMA were not so interesting.

IT: Yes, yes. This CCA doesn't seem to have a tradition of commissioning full-scale work, like pavilions or installations or interventions. Is that correct, or...?

MV: No, no, that's correct, yes.

IT: Do you think that's – I don't know – a valid way of expressing an architecture exhibition or is that important? How does that fit into the CCA's charter?

MV: What they do here is – they we do here is we commission to photographers, for example, or an installation inside the building, but not a pavilion or not a building as such. In a way because we're not into here so much in what is in the end build, but much more thinking of. So that's why, let's say, the aural history project is much more seen as being important than perhaps someone building a pavilion.

I think there's a lot of other possibilities and other institutions or governments that can do such things better in a way than an architecture museum.

IT: Yes. I think one thing that strikes me about this institution is there seems to be a real, almost, distance between the profession and the institution. And not that they're disassociated, but a lot of the other institutions in their charter is about providing opportunities, providing platforms, like the top floor at the NAI is dedicated to a conversation between the profession and the institution. Whereas here it seems – I don't know, just a little bit less interested.

MV: Yes, it's not at all. No, which is – I mean, this top floor (at the NAI) is something fairly recent. And I think, for example, RIBA is much more connected to the architect's profession.

IT: Oh, absolutely.

MV: ...because of their – because there are a professional association. So that's a very different history. I mean, at the NAI, I remember that we always said, "We're here for the architecture, not for the architects."

IT: Yes.

MV: Now I think with this third floor, you could say they're also there for the architects. Which could be good; I don't know. Here I think it's not much – it's not really the issue. Basically first of all, architecture around us is very poor here in Montréal. In the North American context, I mean, there are some fantastic projects and I quite like the 60s and the 70s architecture here around, but you really have to be – you have to like it, you know. It's not an easy way of liking a city. And so, you cannot really reflect on that. I mean, it's not so interesting.

"think it is still one of her main drivers – is to look at contemporary architecture through historical knowledge."

Yes, you could say. Well, for example, what I thought was a topic here is public space. I find that it is an extremely – I mean, especially in the North American context, public space is seen very different than in Europe. And that's something you could address very easily and to engage people also, the local community. I think CCA has tried in the past to do several projects, but on the other, CCA's objective has always been to be a more international and research-based institute, rather than attract the millions.

IT: Yes, or as a way of elevating the status of local architects.

MV: Yes, no, that has never been – let's say, it has never been Phyllis Lambert's objective. What I think she was trying to do here from the beginning onwards – and I think it is still one of her main drivers – is to look at contemporary architecture through historical knowledge.

That's why she collected all these 16th, 17th, 18th century drawings, prints, photo albums, books; to actually look through history to the current or the contemporary situation. So rather than educate architects to do better building or whatsoever, I think – and you can actually question that whether as an institution, a cultural institution, if you would be successful in that. I remember when I was at the NAI, there was a tendency to not so much focus on the architects, because we all thought, well, the level of architecture or the level of knowledge is quite good in the Netherlands, but it was a much more in educating visitors.

So to actually improve a commission for whatever it was, to have people that are really aware of what they commission to an architect. Quite often they just give a commission; they don't really care about the outcome. They're not good commissioners, and I think – and that could be an interesting way of looking.

IT: Yes, it's interesting. Talking to Pippo Ciorra.

MV: Yes, in the MAXXI.

IT: Yes. I was very surprised that he stated repeatedly that the aim of the museum is about

giving Italian architects an international audience. So that's where the Young Architects programme and that kind of thing and building the pavilion, the exhibition, the tours and everything like that is crucially important, but also examining their own collections – well, their own exhibition content as a way to educate their own architects and to elevate the standards. Because he sees it as an impoverished scene or a kind of stilted scene within Italy.

But it's interesting, the – all the people I've spoken to about the CCA are almost kind of dismissive of Montréal. They're like, "It's not worth the effort" or, "It's not worth engaging with,"

MV: Yes, that's what a lot of people think. I'm not too sure if I agree with that, but that's what the general tendency is; that it's not worth it

IT: It just seems like such a shame. If I was a Montréal-based architect, it would be quite confronting.

MV: No, but you could do two things, right. You can say – because of course, it's part of our public. It's the architects, of course. So they come here for a lot of lectures and we're also hosting lectures from the Architects Association. But what you also try to do is when you address like Imperfect Health or Speed or Archaeology of the Digital, you address something and you hope that people would actually learn from it, your local architects

IT: Yes, so you're pitching it at the world's standard, not the local one though.

MV: Yes, exactly. I mean, and everybody is welcome to come here to do research on whatever they want to, but it's not – it might go with – but that's something – for example, because this is not considered as – well, we're called the Canadian Centre for Architecture, but basically we're not the Canadian Centre for Architecture, we're a centre for architecture.

And we're not representing Canada, we're not representing Canadian architecture. CCA is not the automatically doing the Venice Biennial Pavilion for Canada, for example, which is telling, while the Dutch architecture is always doing the Venice Biennial Pavilion. They will invite different people, but they're the commissioner. CCA has been involved in the past, but not really on a serious level, I think. So I think CCA has never seen itself as the spokesman of Canadian architecture, but we do give chances to – let's say, we have a PhD programmes for Canadian students. If there are good architects that – let's say in the ABS Montréal exhibition, there are some really good architects, Canadian architects and Montréal-architect-based that were part of the exhibition.

But as the NAI is, I think now MAXXI is doing what NAI is, it's kind of a different flow now. But there was this exhibition, 9 + 1, in the late nineties curated by, with three editions, I think, of 9 + 1 Dutch architects that were travelling around. Those exhibitions travelling around, and it was really promoting Dutch architecture abroad.

But that is something that's never been in – because also we're not funded by the government. So that makes a huge difference. We're not forced or we don't have any obligation to either the province, the city or... So that's a big difference.

IT: Yes. I'm really curious about – when I started the research, I was very interested in the relationship between the public and the profession and that frontier of that interface. And then I was talking about it with a colleague and he was saying, "Well, of course, you also have to look at what architects do internally to promote their own culture." And I said, "No, no, I'm not interested in that." And then just over the last few weeks I've been thinking, well, of course we have to look at how we promote dialogues within our own culture because if we're not talking and progressing within the profession, then we stagnate and we're so subject to, particularly, market forces and the outside forces.

MV: Yes.

IT: And so places like Storefront for Art and Architecture, fit into that category, they're not so concerned whether their exhibitions are accessible, it's about cultural production and knowledge production as a means unto itself. And it seems that CCA fits into that category also in that it is, that it's about research, but the charter of CCA is about an advocacy towards the public.

MV: Yes, but not necessarily Canadian public and not necessarily architects. I mean, a lot of people come here, also doing research here, are not architectural historians, they're historians, sociologies and so on. Urban planners. So it's not so much – we're not promoting architecture as such.

IT: So how do you reach this international audience?

MV: Well, one thing is collecting international collections, so people come here to do research.

We have strong ties with a lot of universities and we have these programmes. And then with the exhibition, of course, to publish the catalogues in French and English. It's distributed worldwide. Well, now of course, you have the internet, so you – but also from the early days, I think the first exhibition that they did here, that the CCA produced was a travelling exhibition. So from the moment, it was an institution that was travelling around; it has never been – again, it has to do with the founder as well. As the NAI is coming out 80 years of lobbying by the architects, the architects' profession, to have an architectural institute where they could donate their archives to, that means that the relation with the architectural society is always there, while here it was one person interested in architecture from a specific point view and she built up the whole collection. She built up the institution.

So it's really not funded by the government, not funded by any local municipality whatsoever. So that's a very, very different situation. MoMA, on the other hand, it's part of the architecture department, it's part of an art museum. So, they don't really collect archives, they collect objects. They buy one model from one particular architect and that's what they start with.

IT: Hmm. Do you think the CCA needs the exhibition space?

MV: Well, you could question that.

IT: Because, I mean, the collection seems like a practise in its own right.

MV: In a way, it is, yes. I think you could also say, "Well, why don't we spend the money on making TV shows on architecture or having travelling shows going around?" You know, that could be – yes. No, you could question that. I think it is interesting to have it because it forces yourself to engage with the public because that, I think, is one of the main drivers for me as the director to engage with the public and to do something public; not to only have this collection available for researchers and for very academic approach, but really to engage to the public. And at the same time, it forces you to play around with the objects that you collect. I mean, you could do this also for exhibitions that are travelling around, of course. You don't necessarily need the space here, you can also, let's say, we'll rent a space in New York and we'll have our exhibitions over there.

" I think there is a problem in making the connection to a public. I mean, what I find in general, when architects speak about their work, it's basically to their peers."

But on the other hand, I think you do need a kind of a mass to also – let's say, for a collection, I don't think a lot of architects would donate their work to a collection that has no public engagement whatsoever. So if we would not have the opportunity with this space, I think we would be less interesting for other people.

IT: There's so much discussion going around at the moment about the relevance of architectural curation as an independent field of study. What's your view? Do you think it's worthwhile?

MV: Well, I think it's very much overestimated.

IT: Okay. I suppose to reframe the question, is there a problem with architects presenting the architecture?

MV: No, I don't think so. I think there is a problem in making the connection to a public. I mean, what I find in general, when architects speak about their work, it's basically to their peers. It's really about them communicating to other architects, like academics. They basically are only interested in their colleague professor sitting next to or what this person would think about the book that they write. And it's not really. I think it's much more interesting to engage with the public; whether through exhibitions or screenings or lectures or public programmes or educational programmes. So I think it is not an easy – let's say, curating architecture is not an easy task, as I explained at the beginning, but it's not something that you can really develop a recipe for.

Because you are depending on space, on the objects, on a good narrative, on very ingredients to make a good show, to make a good programme. And I have the feeling a little bit that all these programmes on curating architecture, they're so superficial in a way and they're so – I remember that I was asked to give a lecture in Taiwan on – and the topic was, "How to be a good curator". And I was standing there in front of 400 young students and I thought, well – and the only thing they want to do is being a good curator. And I said, "Well, first of all, you just have to know what you're doing. You have to be good in what you do, basically. So if you don't understand the topic that you're thinking about or writing about, it doesn't make any sense." So I don't know; I find all these

kinds of programmes a little bit – they're kind of – they encourage a kind of laziness. Because I think in the end, a good exhibition is really about being really good in choosing the right material and you have to have a lot of knowledge before you can do that.

So, in a way, it's very – it's not academic, but in a way, it's a kind of scholarly work and then translating it in a kind of journalistic way to a general public. And sometimes you're successful and sometimes you're not.

You have to be a little bit lucky with the objects and you have to be a little bit lucky with the material that you work with.

But let's say, this kind of machinery of curation, I'm not so sure. And also, I think what is very, very important – and that is I think something that is totally neglected – is you have to address something. You have to have an idea. So we have these young people coming here, young students, young curators in this young curator programme. We do have – so we do it ourselves, yes, so...

And we these young curators and the only thing they can think of is filling a space. So they say to us, "Well, just give me the Octagonal," which is one of our exhibition spaces, "and I will make an exhibition." And we say, "Well, what would you like to address?" So first you come up with a topic or with an idea, then you think: what is the best way to address it? Is it an exhibition, is it a web feature, is it an interview, is it a theatre programme, is it a film-screening outside? What is the best topic and so what is it what you want to address? And sometimes it's interesting because we have these young curators coming here, these students doing this problem where we had a big fight with the last two people coming here because they said, "Well, I first need to know the space and then I can do something." And we said, "No, you first have to come up with an idea. What is important for you?" Then ultimately they came up with an idea, which was about cleaning in architecture. Well, it could be a very interesting project. And we said, "Well, very nice. What is it what you want to show? I mean, what is it what you want to address and then what are you going to use it?"

So then one of the two had a fantastic intellectual story about cleaning in architecture. It was a book, basically, but it was not an exhibition. I said, "What objects are you going to use?" "Yes, well, I'm going to search." I said, "Well, but if you find the right objects, your proposal has no substance whatsoever. It might be very good for a book or for anything else, but not as an exhibition." So people are thinking so easily about... So that's my opinion about it.

IT: I think there's an interesting thing at the same time. So there's this rising curatorial studies and, as you say, people getting qualified as architecture curators, but there's also the discussion around the demise of criticism. And I can't help but think those two things are interrelated; that particularly traditional print, criticism is struggling and particularly in a public forum, in newspapers and that kind of thing. And the eternal lament that there's no problem with skilled people to produce criticism, but nobody's willing to pay for it, so then people – you know, it's not worth the time, blah-blah-blah, people have to find other ways to make a living. So I don't know what the relationship is, but I can't help but think these two things are related

MV: Yes, I think you're right in a way, because writing for a newspaper, architectural critic is also very complicated because you have an enormous audience, very wide. You know, people are – your readers might be interested, but might be not. So – but at least, I think you're talking right. Let's say, in the 20th century, there was built-up expertise, but also a discourse on how to criticise architecture. And now with that diminishing, not existing – and as you say, people are paying for – I think of people thought, "Well, the internet with all the blogs and all the critique is a fantastic way," which is true in a way, but on the hand, it's so – how can I say – everyone can write or criticise something on architecture and you'd have the feedback, of course. When you write that and when you click on "publish" or whatever, you think the whole world is reading it, but it's not true, of course.

And of course, you're not paid for it. So it's a total different – there's very different priorities. And I agree in a way that it is very difficult to find very good critics nowadays.

IT: And I think that, as you say about exhibition, exhibition has to be critical in some sense. There has to be a thesis.

MV: Yes.

IT: There has been an engagement because – this comes back to the very first comment that you made – well, we were discussing about the artefacts being absent. So if you're not talking about building, then you're talking about the idea, you're talking about the context. And there must be a critique in that.

So no, I think it's a really interesting position to be in. I think in Australia, where we don't have an architecture – we don't have a tradition of architecture exhibition, people kind of want it, there's a bit of a desire for it, but I don't know that we'd know what to do with it. I don't know that we have that.

MV: Well, yet I think what is difficult in – well, I don't know Australia that well because as a country it's so big and you have the big cities. I mean, the cities in itself could – I mean, there's enough people there to support the existence of something on architecture, but you need to kind of – I guess you kind of – either you have one person that just does it, like what happened here, or you would need, as in Europe in certain places, like in Rotterdam or Paris or also in London, you need this idea, which is a collaborative idea, that architecture is important to discuss with a larger public than just with architects or clients. And you'll find ways for doing that. Sometimes it's a governmental understanding or knowledge and sometimes it comes really from the profession or – yes.

And you could say that in Australia, for example, I guess also landscape issues could arise that easily in your case...

IT: I don't know. I think the landscape element of Australia gets overly mythologised.

MV: No, no, for sure, but even that notion is an interesting. I mean, if you think that, to do the opposite would be interesting too.

IT: Yes. I think, we always struggle with the Australian pavilion in Venice as well. In my opinion, we do. And it's because there's this appetite for Australia as this frontier of these epic landscapes.

MV: Yes, no, but I mean also landscape in the terms of urban landscapes. Let's say landscape in the cities. I published a book on Australian urban landscapes and it was – I mean, I'm not saying it's a particularly very good book, but it was, I think, an attempt to really raise the issues of landscape in urban areas.

IT: Yes. Is there that sensibility about Canadian architecture; about this kind of vast land mass and the vastness of the space is a significant...?

MV: Yes. Well, it's very odd here, of course, because basically the urban life is you have this border between Canada the US and let's say the urban life is from the border until maybe 150 kilometres north of the border and then it ends.

IT: Yes.

MV: And then there's nothing. And also, a lot of Canadians have never been more than 100 kilometres north of Montréal, for example. People just don't go there. Talking difference about the distance east to west in Canada as well, it's just this tracts of land that...

IT: But it seems to have played less into the consciousness.

MV: Yes. I don't think – I mean, it's not so much very sure thinking here. You would expect... [intervention]

IT: Yes, I really think so.

MV: Yes, for sure. Maybe more in areas like Nova Scotia or Newfoundland where it is more – you have more the feeling to be at the end of the road than any – it could be. I don't know really, to be honest.

IT: And I mean, just being in the Netherlands with so much of the discussion about the identity of architecture in the Netherlands is about the flatness, about the water, about – you know, like this tension between man and the waters or whatever. It's fascinating.

MV: Yes, no, no. I sometimes – you know, it's because – well, it has been this score for about two or three centuries, so it's an old – it's not old in the sense that, but let's say it's a long tradition in pointing it out or using words to explain whatever we or they do. Yes. And that's true, yes.

Interview with Nicole Lattuca – Canadian Centre for Architecture (Assistant Curator, Educational Programs)

Nicole Lattuca (NL): So these – we collaborated with an architect in Rotterdam called Noa Haim and these called the – for her project – Collective Paper Aesthetics. And so basically it's just a modular design piece and so you just kind of fold them up and snap them together and build. And so we did this for a project for one of the events here in Montréal. They have different events throughout the year that the city all participates in. And the event that we participated in was – I think it was Journées de la Culture and so thinking about the different things that go on in Montréal. And the project was called Building the Biosphere.

So the Biosphere is like an inspiration of this modular design. And so it was a way to kind of link the international and the local which is something we're always trying to do. And so we have these different partnership where we're always trying to bring in people from all over to kind of talk things locally. These are just some examples of our family programmes.

We put a lot of research and conceptual thought into all the family programmes which happen usually three times a month. We're currently on the month, two to three times or two to four times a month. And so each of them kind of either link up with the exhibition or created I think parallel research with the exhibitions and not just an interpretive project, but usually kind of following its own path of research.

And so that's often for the exhibition, and then we also do things either just addressing contemporary culture. We had one programme last winter called Where Does the Snow Go. There's a book of the same name, and it's just about – especially because Montréal is one of three cities in the world that physically removes its snow from the city centre to the outskirts.

And the other two are Chicago and Moscow. So just this idea that snow is so much a part of our culture, so thinking about city planning, city design and snow. And a researcher here had done some research for his – I think his graduate thesis at Harvard, and so he was able to advise us and kind of give us some references and talk to us a little bit. And so it made it really more in-depth than just some sort of referential programme. And then I don't have any examples here, but – no, Alfred – land use. So we did – we also do programmes related to the collection, like in archives, and suddenly – so Cornelia Hahn Oberlander is a landscape architect from Canada and we have her archive here at the CCA and we decided to do a programme just based on that to kind to engage different aspects of the collection. And so that's another kind of example. It's like the different – a couple of the different types of programmes.

Imogene Tudor (IT): So what's the audience for the family programmes?

NL: It's parents and children; children ages 5 to 12. And it's always kind of part of the mission to engage both the parents and the children together in a conversation and so that it's not ever the parents would drop off the kids or sit back passively or just kind of participate, but that they would be also learning something; they would be engaging. The questions would be addressed to both them and to their children. So usually we have two guides working on those programmes.

It's kind of always thought that one guide would pay attention to the parents and asking questions more complex, where the other guide would be thinking more on the level of the children and how to talk to them. And so there is this kind of true participatory...

IT: Do you get resistance from the parents?

NL: Oh, yes. I mean, sometimes. I mean, not often; just once in a while. Parents like, "Oh, I didn't think I'd be made to work," or "I didn't think I was having to..." Because they're adults; they just want to go – I mean, sometimes they come to these programmes as...

IT: Free babysitting.

NL: Yes, free babysitting. And so the idea that we have to kind of challenge people a little – and we do – it's the same with the tours where we try to not just tell a story of the exhibition, but it's a parallel research and trying to engage people on

there's another way of life, another level of what's going on in the exhibition that relates to their lives, to the general public. Often the exhibitions – or lately, the exhibitions – like now, Archaeology for Digital – it's really hard to find the links of where the every-day public will relate to that, and so we have to start tours with asking questions like, "Do you remember your first computer?" Like, "Tell me what your first..." You know, these just basic things, then you can kind of get them slowly into the subject matter.

So yes. So that's – yes, I mean, sometimes resistance, but mostly people – the audience is sometimes like – the parents are the architects themselves, are designers, are creative in some way and so they are willing and interested to do things.

So we have all sorts of programmes where I just brought a few examples. The university programmes; like that might be interesting. We have Give a Class, Take a Class, Discover Resources. And so Give a Class is if a professor in the city, or anywhere really, wants to bring their class here and teach their class using CCA resources like items from the collection or the spaces or anything. Take a Class is when they ask an expert from here to teach to their group. So like a few times I taught just on like education. Like if a museology course comes here and wants to talk about education practices, I will do something like that. Mostly they want to hear from the people who handle the objects and run the library and deal with conservation. So it's a lot of that. And then Discover Resources is just because we have so many opportunities for university students that maybe they're not aware, we try to bring professors in here to just give a basic one hour – a couple of hours tour to see what we have, see the spaces, understand that there's free Wi-Fi and university students are always free and they can come in here and use the spaces.

Some film screens, like from last year's film programme. And just this idea of expanding education into public programming. And this also kind of filling a need of usually this event in the City, the Journées de la Culture for which we did this, it happens to be in our down time of exhibitions.

And so you know, there's no event going on in the city, there's no exhibition or maybe one small exhibition, so filling the space by having a film programme that people come to and still engaging in activities of the museum. So that's that. And then for the last five years, every summer we would do a one-week Teen Immersion Day Camp, it's called, a programme about 12 to 20 teens to work with either an architect or someone in the architecture field on some topic of contemporary interest and development programme. And this is the result of that; this is a photo magazine basically chronically of the last day camp. And it was all about – it's the called The Unschool and all about school architecture.

From the very physical school building to the ephemeral and kind of everything in between. And so yes, that's kind of a little – a very small overview of just some things you can take with you to kind of review later?

IT: What are your stated aims of the education department? But I think this covers some of it. But is there a more formal kind of objectives that are articulated as a mission?

NL: Yes, I would say really to engage diverse publics in conversation, different publics in conversation with each other. So something I didn't bring here was examples from our public workshop series and that, I feel, really epitomises what we're trying to do with the educational programmes here. And so difference sequences of activities that engage people into a conversation. And so for example, last year we did a programme on homelessness and we invited a scholar from Goldsmith's University in London and she had done previous research here in Montréal about just the homeless community here in Montréal. And so we invited her to run the workshop. And basically we opened it up to the general public, anyone who wants to come. And we had architects, we had people that ran a centre here in Montréal called Forward House for the homeless community. It's a drop-in centre, I think. And then we also had some of the people that go there; so some of the homeless, semi-homeless, participants that use that space. And so you have these people all first doing an activity together and then in conversation. Like an architect trying to think about how the city space is designed, how the city space is laid out, just what that means in terms of homelessness, and then the people that actually live in those kind of marginal spaces. And so the activity was basically – she had a long brown piece of paper and everyone would draw – map out their yesterday. Because everybody is very confident about what they did yesterday; you know what you did yesterday.

And so you do this whole: I started at work and then I went to the gym and then I went to the bar and then I went home and I stopped at the grocery store and whatever; however your day goes. And then we had a conversation, she presented some

of her research, showed some images, talked about specific case studies. And it came back to this long piece of paper, which had then been flipped over and imagining that we were now homeless, draw your tomorrow. And I mean, for some people that's not so departurous and some of them are homeless and for the rest of us, yes, I mean that was really also hard to think of. But yes, it was draw your tomorrow. And so you have to think that you don't have the same resources, you probably don't live where you live, you're probably not going to go to your morning bakery. Where do you start your day? Where do you find food? Where do you find bathroom? Where do you just spend your time? And so going into that whole uncertainty of that whole experience. So then after that, then that set the platform for a conversation about these issues in urban space and design and social structures. And so it was really – it's just kind of what we try to see happen in all of our programmes. I mean, it happens less – in the family programmes it's a little different. We try to engage parents to have conversations with their children and so we've done programmes about modern usage at the home, on a city level, in the global level, so that parents are talking with their kids about who takes the longer showers and how that relates to the oceans and pollution.

And just these different – in city use and water shortages and the bigger questions that go in. And so it's always kind of coming back to engaging the dialogue.

IT: That's an incredibly diverse platform to start from. It's great. Yes, I think there's an assumption when you talk about public programmes that it's aimed at school groups or holiday programmes for children, that kind of thing, but it seems like the charter here is much, much broader than that.

NL: I mean, we do still have – even with our holiday programme, like the Where Does the Snow Go, that was our holiday programme.

And I mean, there is of course always an element of fun in these things. There is active engagement, but there's always this kind of deeper political look that that you want to get kids to think. You don't want them to just have this passive experience. I mean, of course some of them aren't getting everything that they're doing and that's okay, but if there's some part that they like, "Oh," like one fact in there that they can keep with them or the parents keep with them and refer back to, it's just kind of...

IT: I think there's also a question about inviting people to ask new questions.

I think there's been this recurring question that I've had, "How do you make people see architecture and how do you allow people to see that the city is designed?" So of course, the kind of buildings – I think a lot of people can probably understand that, but then infrastructure and systems, like the system of snow removal it's designed and it's in the city. And I think that's kind of such a core concept, educating around architecture.

NL: Right. Yes, thinking about how the city is created for you to navigate it and how you actually navigate is really interesting to see the public grapple with.

IT: Yes. I was in South Africa earlier this year, part of this same project, and I was talking to Zahira Asmal there and she was talking about how the physical design of the city reinforced the apartheid system.

And talking about – like yes, there's the really obvious kind of urban movements about cutting off basic maintenance services to particular communities that then turn them into ghettos; it gave an excuse for the government to dig out great populations. And so there was that kind of control level, but also talking about like signage asserted the Afrikaans authority through, you know, font sizes and about visual hierarchy in the city. Fascinating.

Because of course, it's a political dimension of control; everything like that.

NL: Well, yes, it's interesting. I mean, something – obviously not on the same level, but here in Quebec, the French always has to be I think 30% bigger than the English.

IT: Yes. The first time I was here and I imagined this discussion in the government department here and they're like, "20%." "No, not 20%; it should be bigger." You know, the debate that 30% is the magic number of bigness that you need.

NL: Yes, I know. It's so crazy.

IT: Yes, I think that it's – but I mean, it's such an expression of the values of – that part of the community want to maintain French as a dominant language.

IT: Yes. It's interesting that you mention the expanded field when one of my things I wanted to ask is: do you find it necessary to define what you mean by architecture?

NL: No, I don't think so. Like what CCA means by architecture?

IT: Yes.

NL: No, I don't think so. I don't think there's – I mean, I feel like the vision is always changing. Because we went from these very thematic exhibitions to now this engagement with the digital culture and how that started and how it continues. And so I don't think there is that kind of voice that needs to be kept of what CCA deems architecture. I think it's kind of always looking at different roles architecture plays.

IT: And do you think that's clear to the public that show up? So if you talk to somebody who – you know, absolute general member of the public, and you say architecture, there's certain connotations which would be presumably about building, but I think within the profession, when we say architecture, it's all this cultural production that goes around it and all these kind of – this expanded field, as you say. So I was wondering how explicit you need to make that to the audience that we can talk about snow, like removal of snow, and to me, that's architecture.

Do you need to make that explicit to the audience?

NL: Well, there's a lot of – what we're trying to do also in dealing with the public is to talk about how there are many forms of architecture, many forms of design. How they also are responsible in architecture and design. So I don't know in terms – I guess I don't know in what terms you are talking about architecture.

IT: Do you ever get people saying, "But that's not architecture"?

NL: Yes, no, I'm thinking. And yes, I feel like it's true because I think especially working with teens, that's our audience where you really see that the most. Because you may have your adult audiences who are – who do seem to open up a little more; they seem to understand that, "Oh, so this is a traditional and a very experimental..." – two very different, but overlapping realms that they engage architecture with. Kids are very, very open. They see themselves as architects; you know, we call them the young architects. Like they can engage in any way. It's the teen audience that I think we have seen the most – like trying to define architecture in a very specific way and us trying to open their eyes to know that there are very many ways. Architects – there's vernacular architecture, there's very architecture designed by people that have these degrees; there's all these – like there's different ways to engage. But yes, it's funny because – yes, I was thinking back to 2011 when we did a camp here about subtle conflicts in design, space and architecture. And just the way – trying to talk to teens about space and them always being like, "Well, architecture is an office building." Trying to think beyond that was – yes, I think we're always just trying to encourage the beyond, because I think that's where – for educational programmes, it's like the goal.

IT: Yes. It's an interesting space, I think. I've been looking particularly at the Pompidou Centre and also MoMA as well. They've kind of slotted architecture in to the general art collection pretty seamlessly and I wonder as a non-architect, whether that's a discordant thing or where they just go along with it.

Whereas an institution like this, where – obviously yesterday, on the Machine exhibition, whereas I can imagine some people coming in and going, "Where's the building in here?" Whereas at least in the Archaeology of Digital where it's very conceptual, you can still see photographs of a building at the end or a model of a building at the end where the first room has the building model so you can go, "Okay, so we're going to part from here, but I still know that it's architecture."

NL: Right. And as you said that part about alienating, I mean, I guess I'd like to think more about that, like what that means exactly. Like when you said that by – yes, I guess thinking about or addressing the public as if you're teaching them what architecture is. Is that alienating or do you need some other...?

IT: I suppose it meant that – I meant it in the way the people arrive with a fairly confident notion that they understand what architecture is.

And then by saying, "Oh, no, we're not talking about buildings, we're talking about all these other things."

NL: Yes, is that alienating.

IT: Yes, whether that makes them go, "Oh, this isn't what I thought it was. I'm not sure if I'd like it," or, "I'm not sure if I agree," or "I don't understand it." Maybe it's that; maybe it's feeling like you're not understanding...

NL: But I think they're more – it's funny because I think because the general public and something

that the general public people don't have that very strong knowledge of architecture or like – of course we do have architects and everything that come, that's part of our job. But I feel like so many people are able to more relate to how we present architecture because it is more interdisciplinary.

Than if it was just straight up architecture. We've had the most difficulties with this exhibition because there's really no wiggle room in how to relate your everyday life to Archaeology of the Digital.

Whereas with Imperfect Health, everyone has a body and deals with health and has known someone to have an illness and there's – you know, is concerned about food production. And so all these things that that exhibition touched on, everyone was able to find many aspects they could relate to. So – because I don't think – I mean, people definitely come here generally to see what – you know, because they have some interest in architecture or they're heard about the museum and they want to learn about architecture, but I don't know if they're always prepared for very heavy academic architectural engagement.

And I think they're often pleased when it is something that's interdisciplinary that they can kind of relate to on many levels.

IT: Yes, okay. So you were talking about the problems with the Archaeology of the Digital exhibition. It kind of brings me around to the next question, which is how you measure the success of the public programmes or the success of how you engage with the public.

NL: Well I mean, you measure it in multiple ways. And I mean, mainly it's measured in attendance. This is how – for the Board of Trustees and the directors, this is how we measure success, but for us, we also try to measure it just based on how diverse the content of the programming can be. And so when you have an exhibition like Archaeology of the Digital, you're really only engaging the various aspects of digital culture, digital architecture. Like of course, the different architects' practises, which are not so diverse when thinking of public programming, but whereas in other exhibitions, like with Imperfect Health or Journey, you are able to engage totally diverse topics. Like for Imperfect Health, you can engage dust, but like how people – how dust is an archive of your home. And water usage. And just decision-making in the community based around health concerns and epidemics and – you know, there's ways to go about many, many types of topics to engage in when this is just... So I mean, on paper, I think it's close to the same kind of success rate, but in terms of curating and creating a kind of vision for the public programmes around the exhibition or in conjunction with it, it's a little harder when it's a one topic. I mean, when it's just one straight line, as opposed to linked thematic that has multiple, multiple avenues to kind of sprout out into.

IT: Yes, yes. So what's been the most successful exhibition?

NL: In terms of the public? Yes, well, I've been here three years, so I've only seen a few of them and I definitely think we just have more luck with the thematic exhibitions.

They're more fun to get all the programmes around, you can engage very conceptual architecture along with very simplistic – like, you know, family programmes, even though often we do the research and have very complex family programmes. Like you can do very basic things and complex things in one – well, and just have a different topic. So I mean, we had James Frazer storing his archives here.

And so there was an exhibition for that. We did programmes around that. I mean, even though it was one monograph, but sure, we were still able to find a few diverse things in there, based around his profits, his interests, but we kind of have to scrap for it a little more.

You know, you can go around to his practise and create a couple of programmes, but then you're getting into things like he was really interested in bird-watching. And then this came into the exhibition, but then we're developing programmes around like bird architecture, bird-watching and while the public is interested in that, it's more interesting of course to keep all our programmes kind of diverse and still engaging. So a higher level of what's going on in your city or what's going on globally or what's going on in your home. And that's a little harder

IT: Yes, interesting. So I suppose you've already covered this a little bit, but I was talking about: how do link the conceptual space of the museum to the realities of the city as a way to form links between the profession and the public?

NL: To form links between the profession?

IT: Well, I think more: how do you take the idea that you're exploring within the museum space back out into the lived experience of the city or as

a way to engage people with their city?

NL: Oh, yes. We do often do programmes offsite too.

IT: Okay.

NL: So we don't even a physical space here in the museum for education. And so that is kind of a blessing in disguise in that we have to become itinerant. And so we engage different spaces in the museum, for one, but then it's brought ourselves also outside of the museum and also outside in foreign partnerships. And the partnerships are often strategic, like working with a local environmentally-concerned organisation through the government. And working on programmes with them just on how to grow your own vegetables and compost your own food and just do all these different things in your own home. And we've collaborated with them in facilitating an experience for the public. And then other programmes engaging different neighbourhoods, like we worked with some designers who lived in this neighbourhood that is kind of slated for gentrification and closing buildings. And so they wanted to do a programme that engaged the neighbourhood and kind of saved this one building that was so key to the neighbourhood, a popular education centre. And so just hosting the programme there at that space, doing a parade through the neighbourhood, doing these different things to kind of still have a CCA presence, but be out there and be seen.

And having conversations with different neighbourhoods, bringing the museum of these walls for people that don't – that have never been here, never heard of it. I mean, it's not the most welcoming space to try to find the door here you know, unless you come here with a school group, a university group, because you have a very specific interest in coming here.

IT: You're not going to just wander in off the street,

NL: Yes, you could live in this city your whole life and not know CCA exists.

NL: And so we do try to get out and do stuff on programmes. We did a programme, a workshop this year at – the Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier at the Place-des-Arts, the big theatre; the big theatre where all the bigger shows happen, and did that with performance artists. And so because of space with performance artists and just anything that gets us – of course, still keeping concerned with what is going on here, what we can do here on in the inside, because people do – we still have an audience that wants to come here. But outreaching. And going out into doing these public programmes for adults, for kids, in city space, but then also an outreach programme that goes into schools.

IT: Oh, okay. So you actually visit schools and run programmes?

NL: Yes.

IT: You've got such an extensive programme. How many people are in your department?

NL: We have five guides – five or six guides. And then I'm the head of the department and then Monique McLeod is the coordinator for the department.

IT: I don't know; that seems like an incredibly generous resource.

NL: Yes. And so yes, because we offer quite a few school programmes like this one; one for a younger age, one for older age – a couple for older ages. And then I think basically that's everything we mentioned here, except for the public programmes – the public workshops. University. Yes, Sajup programmes, which is another programme. It's not a static programme; we change it every year and it usually has to do with the current exhibition. And Sajup – do you know about Sajup? It's like the in between high school and university.

It's ages – it's like the last year of high school and first two years of university, university or college, and then it's ages 17 or 20 or something like that.

And it's a great audience to work with because they're kind of in a space where they're figuring out what they might want to do for a career, they're also still young enough that they have trouble maybe engaging with this kind of higher conceptual content. A lot of the exhibitions here at the CCA are very didactic with lots of text.

It is a little daunting and so we do programmes with them where we first engage them in this very active, very hands-on participatory programme before introducing them to the conceptual content. And so still bringing them that same high level of conceptual content, but through the kind of backwards way of making them do activities first that relate to what... [intervention]

IT: So easing them into the content, yes. So that leads me to the question about – do you have a concept of how the CCA is perceived as an

institution within the city?

NL: I think there's mixed feelings. I think we've struggled with attendance.

But we were able to kind of up that over the last three years and we're actually pretty steady with attendance now. But in the past years there was a struggle with attendance. I think there's also a struggle with the city really wanting to see more Montréal architecture being represented, whereas we are an international institution and we do want to bring – we happen to be located in Montréal, but it is an international institution that wants to bring in international architects and things from – and national architects and people from all over the world, so they could have their interesting ideas occur here for the Montréal audience, as well as a global audience through the web.

But I think with our – we did an exhibition last year called ABC: MTL, and that was all about bringing people – having public programming every single week and a few nights a week, just everyone from the public to bring in their ideas. And it was like an open call exhibition. And so just bringing in a bunch of people to do talks, lectures, workshop, family programmes, everything in relation – but they all are from here and they all have to be about Montréal.

And so I think that kind of appeased people; appeased the city, having this whole exhibition focused on Montréal and we haven't done anything since the early 2000s with Montréal Thinks Big, looking at the 1960s in Montréal. And so even before that, an exhibition that was in the 90s. So I think every few years we get in the good graces of Montréal by doing an exhibition about Montréal.

But for the most part, the city in general, I think, we'd like to see more Montréal architects represented.

Even if that isn't our trajectory. But as far as our education publics, we see a lot of repeating publics; we see schools groups that come back year after year. [Inaudible 00:37:49] public workshops, we have some regulars. So there are – there is an interest in what we're doing, but I think the main interest might be internationally, I think.

People internationally are more interested than locally.

IT: Okay. That's interesting. Do you feel like CCA has any particular authority around the issues of architecture and design? I mean, could the CCA – if there was a controversial development – weigh into the debate?

NL: Oh, yes. Yes, I think the CCA is one of only a few architectural institutions of an international calibre in the world and so – I mean, with this exhibition now, Archaeology of the Digital, this is what they are doing, they are kind of staking claim in the conversation and collecting these early digital archives. So some of the founders of that movement. And so we'll be getting – we already have Peter Eisenman's archive, but we didn't acquire his digital plans as well. Just different things – yes, the different digital archives are starting. This is where this was coming from; like the vision for the collection. And the creation of these books; I'm working with Greg Lynn who's like the best architect.

IT: Who do you think the global peers are for CCA?

NL: Well, the NAI.

IT: Yes.

NL: I don't know if the MAXXI whether it's arrived yet, but there's them. It's hard to – because often they talk in terms of the MoMA and their architecture department, but when you're not an architecture museum alone, are you still kind of a global peer; I don't know. But these same people are who are coming here.

So yes, it's – yes, I'm trying to think who else. That's it, yes; the NAI and the MAXXI are who's talked a lot about and the MoMA is talked a lot about.

But still, in terms of institutional presence or public programming, they always do want to see the are doing the Tate as competitors in terms of public programming.

But in terms of just who we are in terms of architecture, I think those two for me.

IT: I had a really interesting chat at MAXXI with Pippo Ciorra and he was talking about these partnerships, like the Young Architects Project and all this kind of stuff, and it seems like they're in a moment of struggle where they don't have enough momentum as their own institution yet, so they're kind of reliant on all these relationships outside of the museum, which I think might turn into a strength ultimately. But yes, trying to – they have the capacity, but they're not quite there yet. Do you tour with your exhibitions from here?

Yes, a lot of them tour. I think Archaeology of the Digital will probably tour.

IT: Yes, I know at the NAI, that's certainly part of their charter, to almost use that as a marketing tool for Dutch architecture and everything like that as well.

And so where do the exhibitions end up when they tour?

NL: Like which spaces have we gone to?

IT: Yes.

NL: I know that Imperfect Health went to Pittsburgh to the Carnegie Mellon Museum. Yes, so I think Archaeology might go to Yale or it might be our next exhibition, that's going to Yale. The James Frazer Stirling archive started at Yale, was at – went somewhere else after Yale and then came back here. I hope that your. Because I never really pay attention when they talk.

IT: I mean, it does seem like the amount of research that goes into the programmes...

NL: Yes. No, it's worthwhile. You put so much work into it; it's only up for three to six months. It's good for them to go to other places. I mean, has gone to many places; it's going to the São Paulo Biennial or something like that, that's where it will be going next. So it's seen many, many iterations.

IT: I don't know, I think – I mean, we have covered a lot of this, but what kind of relationships do you foster with architecture professions? Do you see it as your role to form those links between the profession and the public?

NL: Like for professional development?

IT: I don't know. Like are you a facilitator for ideas or a facilitator for actual physical contact? So getting architects to talk to the public and the public to meet architects, or is your role just to synthesise the profession and keep it at distance from the profession?

NL: No, I mean a lot of times we invite architects to give lectures, to conduct the workshops. I think it is putting – it's a little of both. It's a little of kind of contemplating architectural ideas. I mean, I have three architects on my team and so just inviting different architects from around the world to come to a programme here or a workshop or whatever. I think it is more involving international architects than local architects. And I mean, a few times we have invited local architects to speak and present to the public and – or just for career-interested youth to meet architects to see – to have conversations about what the field is like, but I think that's kind of – sometimes that seems secondary to talking about ideas. And I mean, it still can be architect-led or designer-led, but we're not so...

IT: It's not a gateway into the profession.

NL: Yes, and it doesn't need to be solely architects; I mean, architects, graphic designers, artists, whoever to talk about these ideas, these architectural ideas.

IT: Do you think the – well, I mean, I can infer from that, but do you feel like local architects feel and sort of ownership over this space or any kind of affinity with the CCA?

NL: Yes, I don't know. I mean, we have good relationships with quite a few of them, so don't – but again, they aren't exhibited here. I do think that as terms of collection, we are collecting local architects' archives and books from their offices, so I think that there is some connection to them. There are these events that they are invited and there was this recent exhibition that many of them took part of. We've just a couple of weeks ago did a collaboration with McGill and their architecture department there for a teen workshop so – I don't know if there is any kind of ownership with the space, but we have architecture professors that comes back year after year to teach their classes here, to do these Give a Class, Take a Class. So I think there is definite understanding of the resources and use of the resources, but I don't know if it's like a – I don't know if anyone feels ownership over the space, that's the thing. Even the people that work here, I don't know. I think it's very much its own entity. I don't know if there is a feeling of ownership.

IT: Yes, NAI – was the very top level is given over to basically the local community. Yes, well I mean, that's the way it was described to me, that there's a – the vault is about presenting the legacy of Dutch architecture and there's public programmes and then there's the permanent exhibition which is very much aimed at the public. And then the very, very top level is – so when I was there, it was the local graduating show.
Architects and they say that, yes, that's very much a space for architects, about architecture and people, they get approached and it's seen an accommodating venue so people can go there and use it as their own resource as well, while them being on a pedestal or being out of reach...

NL: Right. I think CCA in some ways tries to have that, like what we do for the university students having this advertise as a space with free Wi-Fi, as a space for their resources for them to use, but I think it's a struggle for whatever reason, I don't know, but maybe because it isn't handed over so much. I mean, with the exhibition last year, ABC, there was a little bit of that, but there was still very much – it never completely gets handed over. There is very much institutional control over what is shown, what happens, what is presented.

IT: Hmm. Does the CCA ever commission build work as a part of the exhibition? Like even pavilions or temporary installations or...?

NL: Not since I've been here. Well, I mean, yes. Well, not so much build work, not like – I haven't seen architecture being commissioned; I've seen these animals that were made out of paper...

IT: Oh, those ones in the bookshop?

NL: Yes, those were commissioned by an artist. I think his name is Andy Byers and he did a film called Green Porno. And he was commissioned to do those animals for the section of the exhibition called Epidemic in looking at how food is sourced in North America. And so we've seen some commissions, but I've never – nothing built out in physical space. Nothing built for the exhibitions, except for just – I mean, not so much architecture as ways to divide up the gallery in better ways.

Like glass walls and – I mean, I guess in a way, that's kind of commission. Like for every exhibition, we work with an outside architect and an outside graphic designer. And so in a way, that can kind be looked at as a commission. Because of how they change the space, how we work with them and thinking about that space.

IT: Okay, yes. There seems like such a potential with these projects to – particularly talking about the city – to build in the city as a way to extend the reach of the gallery, but maybe that's on my mind just looking at the Young Architects Project as well, which is really clearly about providing a forum for young architects to build, say, a full scale realisation of their ideas.

NL: Yes. Like PS1?

IT: Yes, and at MAXXI as well.

NL: Okay. Yes, yes.

IT: So it's now in Young Architects programme, PS1, MAXXI...

NL: Everyone related?

IT: Yes, it's basically a franchise from MoMA.

NL: Oh , okay, I never knew that.

IT: Yes. It's a really interesting programme. I mean, MAXXI as well, but MAXXI, Istanbul and Santiago are kind of leveraging the MoMA brand to give prestige to what's essentially a pavilion-building programme. But yes, I think that's a really great kind of educational tool because it's about showing. You know, it's not just describing, it's about saying, "This is what we can do; this is what it feels like, these are the outer limits of what architectural thinking is." Whether it achieves that avant-garde or experimental nature, I'm not quite sure, but...

NL: Yes. Oh, that's brilliant.

IT: Talking to – at MAXXI, they are saying that MoMA YAP, it's very expensive to be involved and they maintain a lot of control and that's maybe not necessarily so satisfying, but...I suppose that the MoMA prestige comes at a cost.

NL: Yes, exactly.

IT: Do you have much of a sense of how the educational objectives of the CCA has evolved over its – historically, over its time frame?

NL: Yes, well the director, Mirko Zardini, since he started, he had – in 2006, he had changed how education functions. And so it started in the Communications Department and was seen as a service, and when he arrived, he really wanted to put this curatorial aspect over it. And started the position of Assistant Curator, Educational Programmes. And so that there would be a curator involved with educational programmes. And moved it from the Communications Department into the Programmes Department, which was the department that at that time handled publications, exhibitions – I don't know what else. I think that's about it. Since that time – so that's been for six years. So prior to me, there was for three years Richard; she was the Assistant Curator for Educational Programmes. And then in 2010, I started and was the second Assistant Curator for Educational Programmes. And so, just even in those six years, it's evolved from trying to figure out what curating education was at this time when – in the larger curatorial field there was this education turn in curating. So trying to figure what

that means simultaneously. And since I started, I kind of refined that and thinking like post this turn in curating, how we look at public programming and how the field of public engagement is such a changing field in itself and how to create programmes really while looking at sociological research and things like that. Like how people use spaces already and how we want to engage people kind of where they're at, but then also go to them and kind of bringing the museum out into the streets. And it's going to be going through more changes. And so the – in January of this year is when my contract [inaudible 00:55:27], was when they're going to – it's still kind of unknown, but they're going to start [inaudible] experimentation and see what – brilliant architects and kind of eliminating the curatorial. To how architects can kind of engage the educational programmes.

So we'll see how that kind of turns out.

IT: Yes, interesting. Is your background in education or curatorial studies?

NL: Curatorial studies and education. So I was a teacher for six years and then I went to San Francisco Art Institute and worked with the curatorial programme there.
And so mostly – yes, I'm really the hybrid of the two.

IT: There's so much debate – I'd just be interested for my – I hope – there's so much debate at the moment about the youthfulness or otherwise of design or architecture curation as a field of specific study. Do you think it's important; do you think it's worthwhile?

NL: Yes, I think so. Yes, we had a couple of curatorial interns here. Sometimes we have a Young Curative Programme and curatorial entrants that come every year. And one of them had just finished the programme at [inaudible 00:56:42] for – it's like the CCCP Programme, like the Curatorial Practise – whatever it is – in architecture.

IT: Which is a very new programme, right?

NL: Yes, right. And so it was really great coming from the arts – the contemporary art side of curating to speak with her and have these kinds of conversations and see where there were overlaps, but also they would run these Friday lunchtime seminars where they'd bring the articles that talk about the curating within architecture, and it was really interesting to try to historicise that amongst ourselves.

To try to talk about, "Okay, well, in art you have institutional critique and social practice and you have these different ways that curating shifted and turned. What are the same ways that are happening in architecture?" And it's harder too – because it's so new, it's harder to kind of historicise it outside of just your traditional curating of objects.

IT: Yes. I mean, the problem over and over again, but an exhibition that architects are talking about, well, we we're talking ourselves. So we're producing the work, we also want to curate it, we also want to critique it and I think a lot of times that's where this feeling of an elitist or an inaccessible discourse comes from. And I've spoken to a lot of curators over the last couple of months who are almost exclusively all architects that say, "Curation studies is irrelevant; we're architects, we know what we're doing."

IT: Like you need to live it. Yes, it's different; it's distinct from architecture, but...

NL: But it's still – architecture is still – like art has the practice element and the theoretic element, academic element.

IT: Yes, absolutely.

NL: And so it's just part of that academic element, I think. It doesn't really fit into the practice at all. It's really just in terms of the historicising, the looking at the contemporary social practices and – I don't know. Because I mean, where would it come in with just your general everyday architectural practice?

IT: Well, creating meaning through space. And yes, how you form experiences.

NL: Yes, so that the practice doesn't just serve as an example, but then it could in turn have something. Yes, yes. No, that's cool.

IT: But I think there's a lot of people trying to find their way on it. Do you find it necessary – I mean, it's interesting that you come from an art and education background rather than architecture. Do you find it is necessary to break down the architectural language? So both the actual verbal language, but also the visual language around architecture, to make it accessible?

NL: It all depends on the public, I think. I think it depends on who – I think, yes, often it's really helpful because you're so often dealing with the general public, it's really helpful for the family audience, yes. For university public, not, I think you can speak them at their level. And

you know, often we use the different members of our team for different purposes. So if we do have – you know, I have three architects, I have one graphic designer, we had an art historian who recently left, but now we have a new – she's an education curator from a similar background to mine. And another educator and then an artist-architect kind of person. So we have a little bit of diversity in there and so we're able to kind of cater who's working with the different audiences based on who's coming in. So if we know that it's a really highly conceptual international, maybe, interested group, we will put our architect who is from Lebanon and has worked on architectural projects there. If we know it's someone who is very interested in local, we have our recent Miguel grad who we'll put her with. If we know it's someone who – if it's a group that maybe needs some kind of hybrid of the architectural knowledge, but also in art knowledge, then we have someone for that. The graphic designer is really good because we have designers a lot, furniture designers and so it's also about using the team's skills and placing them with the audience that might best be suited to them.

IT: It must be good as well that within that team with these different backgrounds, that you can kind of pull each other up. I think often the problem when architects talk to architects, you start using this really – almost kind of jargon where things take on other meanings.

NL: Yes, right.

IT: So yes, I think that's really interesting with the language, but then also with the visual material, to be able to say that like, "A plan is an abstraction of a building" or like, "An elevation is this or an axonometric is that." And I thought particularly in the Archaeology of the Digital exhibition, it was pitched to quite a sophisticated level.

NL: Yes.

IT: And I wonder how many people can understand that

NL: Right, get to that level.

IT: Yes, how many people just gloss over it and then it's like, "Oh, I don't know what an axonometric is and I don't understand why that's worth mentioning."

NL: Yes, no, I mean, that's why every tour is kind of catered to the group, every educational programme is catered to the group. And the team does have these different vocabularies for the different levels. If we have someone who is like – on the tour – is one of the fore founders of digital architecture, then we could be right up there with him or her. And you know, or if it's someone who is like, "I have no idea what this means; I never knew architecture was digital," we can also get them to that kind of understanding as well.

IT: Yes. Well, I've taken up a lot of your time, but I might just finish with one last question. And we've actually covered most of it, to be honest. I think this is a kind of interesting point. Do you think, broadly speaking, that the public feel that architecture is relevant to their daily lives?

NL: I wonder. I don't know. I feel like for a lot of the people that we see in our audience, yes, I think that they realise that. I think that – we create these situations where there are these conversations and they do see the relevance and they do understand the design of the city and design of buildings and how that affects them and how that affects space. And I think it's something we strive for with our school programmes to get youth to start thinking about why architecture and design are important, but also that they're an agency in the city.

Okay, but for the huge general public, I have no idea. I don't know. I think it's really hard to say. I feel like I'm far away from that world where architecture wasn't important.

IT: Yes, yes, it's hard to gauge when you're inside, yes.

NL: I think it probably is because everyone experiences it, right? Everyone walks through it and whether or not they realise, they're actively concerned with it. I think everyone has to deal with architecture; everyone has to deal with city design. And so the guy swearing in his car about being stuck in traffic is concerned with architecture, whether or not – if you said, "Are you concerned with architecture?"

IT: They can identify it or not, yes.

NL: So yes. I think so.

IT: It's interesting. I think that question comes out of a frustration within the architecture profession that the role of the architect in the city has changed so much that our – there's an erosion of our relevance or perceived relevance or kind of authority. I mean, all these things, they're interlinked.

NL: Right, yes. I mean, the whole founding

mission of the CCA is that architecture is a public concern.

IT: Yes, absolutely.

NL: And so this idea that it is, whether or not they're actively making it their public concern. They're concerned; they're engaging with it in some way and either fighting against it or appreciating it in some way.

IT: Yes. I think it's interesting looking at the charters of – like on the website, you can read the CCA – and it's very clearly advocating for the relevance of architecture. That's what the stated aims are. And I think there's all the – it's truly interesting to read what's implicit in what the problem is.

So if that's the charter, what's the condition of what responding to?

NL: Right. And something interesting that's been happening here is there was these different kind of organisations around the city and the CCA just recently got involved last year and they're talking about school architecture, which – the reason we got involved is because we did this programme they saw it and they were interested. But it's just interesting that – I mean, it's parents of course, but just other citizens too just talking about the school system and how the designed built structure fits into that conversation.

IT: Okay. About educational outcomes?

NL: Yes, I think so. I think educational outcomes and just – yes, because of how the space – like they did charrette of like – with the kids and the parents and whoever else in the community was interested on redesigning space so that – to kind of work with the changing child. Like you can't – it's been so problematic for so many years that you just put children into chairs all day long in rooms with no windows, or they'll close the windows.

So now they're designing schools with top gardens to teach kids about gardening and food and healthy eating; with lots of light, with spaces to move around. Just this kind of starting – like Montréal is starting to think about that. And I think that's kind of nice that there is that open, expanded discussion.

Interview with Nicola Twillley – Studio X (Director)

NT: So Studio X very interesting experiment. I think one of – so the dean of GSAPP, the Graduate School of Architecture, is his vision and it has mutated several times since he's started it, but it is definitely not a space in which architecture is produced.

So they're not – I mean, the one thing that is interesting is the faculty, you know, from Columbia. We all work here sometimes; so that's what's happening right now. It's like Jeffrey Inaba who is one of the faculty members who is also running his own practise and working on the next issue of Volume Magazine here. So stuff happens, but that's very much sort of like a side effect of just having a space.

And it's really expensive in Manhattan and obviously most events which want to engage to the public would have them in the evening or the weekend, so having people working during the day is smart. I guess it helps you justify the rent. So that's really the only sort of architectural production that happens here.

IT: And so you wouldn't count the kind of intellectual production that happens here as architecture?

NT: Oh, yes. I mean, yes. From that point of – yes. So from the point of view of dialogue. And research to a certain standard.

IT: So I've kind of adopted a definition for the purposes of this research of architecture as the cultural production around architecture, as well as the production of building...

NT: Oh, yes, well then we're all over that. Yes, so it's – yes, yes. So I don't know actually; you should probably tell me what you'd like to hear about.

IT: Yes. Well I might kind of position my assumptions and see whether you think that they're relevant or not relevant to what you do here. But through the course over the last few months, I've been starting to think about – there's this dialogue about architects and architecture needing to reframe their relevance. And there's this increase of architecture galleries, publications, exhibitions, discussions of – well, you know, university programmes which are offering criticism and curatorial studies.

So there seems like there's this desire to somehow talk more about architecture; so a period of reflection back on the profession. And I've been trying to work out why that is. And it seems like the space for experimentation through building is becoming smaller and smaller and smaller. And what I assume, a place like Studio-X provides, is there space for experimentation that's not accountable to kind of deliverables which have got an economic imperative.

NT: I think that is true to a certain extent. So there are definitely projects that we host here where an architect in view of building something will create a spatial experience or even just create a dialogue in space. That is allowing them to the intellectual work that they'd want to do with architecture, but not in build form. Or at least in the form of a building. So that definitely does happen here. Like in varying degrees, I think one of the main goals that I have for this space is I think it's really important for architects to talk to non-architects and I think given what masochists architects are and how they – I mean, they sort of limit who they can talk to just by working every hour of the day. So if you get them into a room with people who are addressing the same issues from a completely different angle, that's a conversation I want to see happen. So it's actually being – forcing that discussion. And I think it ties into making architecture relevant because I don't think that – and expanding the profession's relevance, because I think it works both ways in fact. I think architects don't realise necessarily where they have something to offer until they're put in dialogue with people who have spatial concerns. And also, those people with spatial concerns don't necessarily think of architects as the ones who might be able to help them think them through.

So I'll just give you an example. We hosted this two-day Festival of Dredge – DredgeFest. And New York City is built on dredging; it's the harbour

which is – you know, but it shapes the city in so many ways; economic, but also spatial again. It's being dredged right now for Post-Panamax ships and that dredge has been used to rebuild islands in Jamaica Bay, for storms there's protection and so there's – was the economic calculations of whether it was worth it to dredge the Hudson a little bit further, eventually that completely reshaping the west side of the island and how that's not now a working port because it wasn't worth dredging far enough up, and so now there this focus on "make it leisure" and "rediscover our waterfront" and things like this. So those kinds of conversations and realising – and to bring architects to that table, which we did, but with the Army Corps of Engineers, who are best known for completely reshaping the Mississippi, and just thinking about the scales, these two very – yes, I don't know, realising that they both share a lot of concerns about reshaping the city, and then it's not necessarily a dialogue. You know, architects are busy proposing post disaster solutions left and right and to flood-proof and climate-change-proof New York City. All those are topics that the Army Corps of Engineers' working on too.

So that would be – for me, that kind of conversation and the hope is – and in some cases I know it's happened and in other cases I'd just like to imagine it's happened – is that both sides go out and are more likely to work together. And if not literally those two people working, at least make more sense of speaking with architects about a project in the future, where this is, you know...

IT: So it's like a professional dating service.

NT: Exactly, like match-making for the city. I also think it's just important – it's like because when architects go back and they're harnessing this immense talent and ability, it would help for them to be harnessing it in a way that drew on all of the insights that the Army Corps can offer, for example. Rather than – I'm just using those skills. But rather than - because you see all the time amazing efforts being put it to say, oh, like assistant living for the elderly, architects working on that, but not talking to cognitive neuroscientists who are also thinking about elderly people navigate space and the memories in space.

You know, these are fundamentally kind of overlapping spatial interests that should be in dialogue. So that's – so it actually kind of breaks my heart when I see architects do that kind of work. I see it all the time because me personally, I write a lot about food, food and design, and I cannot even tell you the number of architectural projects I have seen that sort of try and solve some food problem and have not spoken to a single person who actually grows food or actually – you know what I mean? You see it all the time.

IT: There is a supreme ignorance to think that you're a jack of all trades, so suddenly you're an expert.

NT: And so just by making those dialogues happen repeatedly, the ideas have been to leave both sides – in a sense, there's some use in that dialogue; even if there was some insight that they got from that dialogue so they'll do it again. So that's out – at least for me, that's the primary – it's for both sides to, you know – yes, it's a dating service...

IT: Yes. So who directs it?

NT: Me.

IT: So can an architect approach you and say, "I'm trying to do this thing and I'm really interested in elderly people; I don't know what I'm doing"?

NT: Yes, absolutely.

IT: Does it happen like that?

NT: So often that will happen. So for example, we have a guy up at Columbia, one of my colleagues at the faculty there is very interested and wants to do a big project on bio-computations and gotten some funding for it. Obviously he needs to work with synthetic biologists, he needs to work – you know. So he will literally put together an event around that. And just before you came in, we went about scheduling it now. And so – but it's not necessarily even at the start of the projects; sometimes what will happen is after the successful collaboration, we can showcase it here too.
But yes, stuff comes from – originally when I – so I started here two years – probably like today – no, tomorrow is my two-year anniversary. When I started it, it was much Columbia-focused. Columbia faculty initiating things. Now I try to make – and this is – I mean, I'm not an architect, so it's actually – this is my advantage here is that I'm just as likely to be approached by a video game maker who is saying something-something-something, or a set designer to wants to gather a group of people to think about how do you construct fictional worlds, like what are the tools and techniques that we're doing?

That's something where architects have something to offer. So we can do the space for that kind of...

IT: So it seems like you're providing a space, which is pretty basic...

NT: Yes, but actually it's bizarre, though, how hard that is to find in Manhattan. Frequently. I mean, because – and a space that is – so Storefront is an amazing space, it's just not very functional for actual events. I mean, it's great for parties, like I've mounted an exhibition there and held parties there and it's amazing, but it's really – like, the acoustics are actually terrible for a genuine dialogue. This space has its limitation too, but it's one of the very few places where if someone comes along and says, "I want to do this," my attitude is – unless it's completely irrelevant. You know, they want to look at the future of buttons on clothing. I mean, even that, I think I'd probably be like, "Yes, why not? It's sort of interesting, actually." Yes, we are – yes, so pretty much, my theory is it's a space in Manhattan and I can offer it to people for free, so let's do that. And that's actually surprising for here in New York. There are lots of spaces; there are events every – like 10 events you want to go to every night of the week and so on, but – not in summer so much. But before I ran this space, when I would try look for spaces to host events in, it's hard to find a space that's actually free.

So we don't charge. So someone from the New School or a different university, BRAC, whatever, someone who is totally unaffiliated, anyone can come to me, a company can come to me and say they want to do something and it's free.

IT: Yes. It seems so – well, I suppose the other component is there's a space, but there's also a facilitation and a link and it's pulling together all threads and providing the dating service.

Acting as Cupid. It sounds so simple, but I don't know anyone else that's doing it.

NT: That's funny. Yes, we're lucky because I think if you are focused on fund raising or you're answering to a board perhaps, you have to generate more of your – we can be quite responsive. We do generate our own programming that we are particularly interested in pursuing, but we also host all sorts of things that never have occurred to me to organise programming around. And we can be quite responsive, because all that has to happen is that we have to set up some chairs in the – open the shit wine and there it is. You know, and the PA system and then it's done.

So I've – we're lucky. We can be – we don't have anyone – I'm not... And it's also not a thing where it's like we have hang stuff, we have to – you know when you have a more formal building and you're paying the door guy to be there, well then there are cost implications to saying yes to an event. Here it's my time; it's Carlos' time. But we're okay with that then; we'll just come in late the next morning.

So it's fine, you know?

IT: Yes. I wonder why this is such a rare commodity. Do you think it's the kind of – the ever-present money imperatives makes it difficult?

NT: Definitely that. If you – definitely that, and then I think often there's also – and I came in like this, thinking more it was going to be about my curatorial interests and that I was going be running every event and I wasn't going to be hosting other people's events. And then I realised that the more interesting service to provide in some ways is to be discussed and figure out what people want. That way. So I think a lot of people here are interested in this – would rather – or even in this architecture and spatial questions – are interested in organising events that further their own interests. Not even in like a selfish way, but just like being a curator; you want to – you don't find the curators at MoMA being like, "Oh, yes, whatever" exhibition. No, they're pursuing their line of research and developing their own. Whereas here, I think – like if you – in a totally different sort of... And again as well, I was like at first – I think it's also a brand name. You know, a lot of spaces again, if they have to fund raise so heavily, they need to develop a brand. And I think we've sort of gone – like – instead like the potpourri route, like you're just as likely to find anything here. You're just as likely to find a party celebrating contemporary fiction as you are a screening of a film about concepts of deep ecology as you are about – well, we'll do it, you know?

But that would be a terrible thing to do if you were trying to build a brand for all to see what you are.

IT: Yes. So is that then – so you've been allowed this space. So the brand is Columbia and that's why people – you know, there's a certain level of prestige as well with institutions so that you're not a bunch of crackpots with a big room.

There's a bit of a institutional backstop there.

NT: That helps. And I think the idea behind Studio-X – and then forgetting this experimental, so it's just like – I guess the brand is to experiment, you know. So some of those things would work, some of them will be ridiculous and some of them will be about buttons, you know. Well, we've had that. Now I'm like...

IT: You fated it.

NT: I don't know, but yes. So I feel like that also. And at takes long, you know. The dean is very – he likes to re-imagine what Studio-X should be every five minutes. It's actually one of the most – the funniest things is like to read all of this descriptions of it side by side and you're like, "Is that the same place?" It's like the six blind men describing the elephant. But there's a certain freedom here too. So yes, it's funny. It's different. I mean, when I worked at other places, it's been much more rigid and thoughtful and I came in expecting that and expecting to be able to do it.

Yes. But now, I think – you know, because there already are spaces in New York doing that; doing – pursuing all that sort of conversation. And I was like, "So what we offer?" We can offer this weird sense of – yes, expanded. It's like it's just everything.

IT: Yes. I was talking to Eva last week about – from Storefront about allowing space for failure as well. And one of the most – or she was saying that one of the most potent things Storefront has to offer is a space where they give it a go. And it seems like you fit certainly into that mould as well.

NT: Definitely. Definitely, and it's just funny as well. Like some things just are sort of a flop; we just put on a thing and five people would come. And we think, "Oh, well, it turns out there isn't an audience for that." But fortunately – I mean, if that – yes, we're not selling tickets and relying on the tickets to need to pay everything. So we have that. It is like a space that – not really worrying too much and try it anyway. And also, I think people understand – so we have exhibitions here and there that we have – the summer is an odd time to be here because it's much more about working and much less about events and so on. But you sort of narrow the schedule like that.

And when we have exhibitions here, it's like, "This is not..." I mean, I think it's nice for the architects because they are so obviously having to work within constraints that it frees them up to not put on the perfect show. And so if you're putting it on again at a much higher-end gallery or an institution or like a really – then it's your fault if it's sort of thrown-together-looking or something doesn't work or it's not perfectly laid out. Here you are having to work within such ridiculous constraints. I mean, you just can't do certain things and we never have any budget about anything, so then you've almost removed some of the anxiety about perfection.

"I mean, the quantifying audits of success for me are the parts where we can have the sense we've actually literally expanded the audience for a particular conversation"

IT: Yes. And so do you have any sense of success or failure? Is it important at all to define success?

NT: That's a good question. I mean, I think I – I mean, the quantifying audits of success for me are the parts where we can have the sense we've actually literally expanded the audience for a particular conversation, whether that be something like we're getting a lot of traffic online on something that we've posted or whether it's like we get a lot of people in the room or whether we – you know? So actually expanded the audience and again getting a sense that these are people we don't – we have a really weird audience. There's a lot of people who – like if you go to other architecture events around the city, it's the same crowd. Like Storefront is very much the – that is the architecture scene; We get a really weird crowd; they're not architecture students. It's like very multi- disciplinary. But if I am seeing new faces and I'm wondering how on earth this person even got to be here, then I feel like I've succeeded.

Because I would – so that's exciting to me. More people have been involved in like a conversation about architecture in the city and these kinds of questions than whatever comes, something that was built as an architecture, then that is success. So building the audience and then also just that intangible and much harder to quantify feeling that you've actually sort of built a new connection or a new direction for somebody.

And we do – like I say, we do see that come out of events where people afterwards – and it would be most random. Like someone in the audience would have gone on to do something with someone or borrow – collaborated with – you know, bring in someone who does digital mapping and suddenly before we know it, they're collaborating with architect or something. But those are things that we hear like actively; I haven't figured out a way to track that in a more quantified way.

But yes. And I also think tracking the normal things, like what people are saying about this coverage in the media, like is that interesting? Are people have an – you know? But yes, it is quite hard to know how to define success.

IT: Are you keeping fastidious archives of your activities?

NT: Yes, we're much better about it now that I have Carlos. Before, it was a bit of a nightmare, but we video event; they're all online. We – so that's one record. And we also make a log that we keep; that we sort of – that's where we- it's almost a scrapbook for us; lots of interests there.

So yes, we do video predominantly.

IT: Because it strikes me that potentially the value of some of these investigations you won't know until there's some sort of trawling back through the archives or you can follow the threads back to see where they started.

NT: Maybe. And also maybe someone won't even bother watching the video, but they're like, "Dredge? What does that have to do with architecture?" And that will probably – you know?

Because I just even think half the value, for me honestly, I being able to go up to Avery, which is the Graduate School of Architecture, Avery Hall, and all of these students were just absolutely just nose to their computer and never would look up and live in real life. And be able to put up a poster about someone talking about air rights or like a broker specialising in the sale of air rights, which is a big deal in New York. And even if they don't come, honestly, just having them see that and say, "What is that doing in architecture school?"

So some of it is just seeding the idea that these conversation belong in architecture.

IT: Yes, interesting. So do you think that you're at the avant-garde of architecture or on the periphery?

NT: Periphery. For sure. I think what we do relies on architects taking it and doing something with it.

So it's a – I think we'd rather be an idea clearinghouse for architects than – they go and do avant-garde things and I think our role is to be this weird clearinghouse slash giant mixing bowl where you can throw it all together and access it.

IT: Yes. It's interesting when you read about early modernism and then talk about the Paris cafés where everyone would sit around and argue and smoke and generate ideas. I wonder if a space like this could become that free space for those kinds of discussions. So yes, everyone filters back to their practice.

NT: And I think really also that is something I would like to do more of. So that's an area where we haven't [inaudible 00:28:00]. But when I started here, I wanted to turn it into more of a co-working space almost, just a] situation where you could come in and you could work and that there would be people – but just because of who I know, honestly, but then who those people know or whatever, that there would be someone who runs a gene lab sitting next to someone who's researching pneumatic too, sitting next to – you know, just that there would be those – that those kind of mixings would happen not just at orchestrated events, but on a much more – like just that would be how the space is. Logistically, that's been a little bit tough.

But it may yet happen; I haven't given up hope. We're still working on that. And then actually again, you track back through some of the ways he describes the space, he does – oh, you know, excellent coffee. Actually, we don't have running water, but never mind. One day we'll have excellent coffee. And people – inspiring new publications and people exchanging ideas. And he has that vision, it's just the logistics of realising it within – like, Columbia – at the end of the day, Columbia is an unbelievably huge bureaucracy. It is one of the most difficult places to get things done that I've ever worked.

So the fact that this place even exists is a minor miracle, to be honest.

But the gap between the vision that I think the dean definitely has and that I have and the execution can take years, which is too bad.

It's still slow-moving.

IT: Is there any opportunity or interest in something more like a residency programme where you're, rather than waiting for people to pass through, actually kind of curating these exchanges a little bit more?

NT: No, it's a great suggestion. And I think... [intervention]

IT: Because like 90 percent of residencies are a desk in a home in a city where things are happening

NT: I think would be terrific, to be honest. One thing that New York does have going for it is that people do pass through already. So we sort of – it's just like leveraging – you know, we're always having

– and we do, it does, it works in an informal way. So friends of – I'm originally English and friends of mine from London are coming through to our – whether they're the architects or not – would come and work here. Especially once we've got working Wi-Fi; that would help. And drinking water. And so big keys to the bathrooms, all sorts of things. Like you say, it's funny; where the vision actually hits the reality is occasionally very interesting. But yes, I think actual residencies would be great. There's been some talk, particularly with – so you know that Studio-X is part of this global network. So within the network, could we find micro grants for local – for travelling and sort of projects that might connect our spaces? Because I think that's one of things that hasn't been leveraged yet. Each of the spaces, I get the impression, is doing really interesting things in its city, but connecting them.

IT: Well, that's interesting to – yes, I was going to ask about that. So it's more franchised than a single organism?

NT: That's a really good – yes, I think it is. And it's funny; I feel like it's going through a bit of a transition right now where the dean is sort of gather back in again to more of a single organism; having been very, "You take this, make it what it needs to be for your city."

IT: So how did the offshoots come about?

NT: Maybe you should talk to – see if you can get a half hour with Martin before you leave town. But I mean, he's hard to pin down, I will say that, but if you can, because I'm going to give it second-hand. But yes, I think there was this – New York was the first one as recent as 2008, and that was an experiment. And then Beijing was the second, I think. Rio and Mumbai were about the same time. I think there was an idea that the future was going to be global, that the architect of the future was going to be global and then somehow the school had to find a way to incorporate global thinking into itself. And I think the dean had this idea that almost – he wanted to be very conscious about not being like either a tourist or like stealing so that there would be a certain level of authenticity of the project. So I think the idea was the school wanted to launch these things, see what they turned into and then find a way to bring them back into the structure.

So the finding the way to bring them back into the structure is what's being happening really only over the past nine months. So the dean made a – for example, he made a rule that faculty have to travel to the Studio-X city with their – the final year there's always a travelling studio. And so that's sort of a way of knitting together the faculty working with the Studio-X director to shape what that studio brief is. Initially, the faculty really hated that, but it's been – that rule has been in place for two years. So the first year, everyone just actually flagrantly ignored it. People would say, "Oh, I'm going to Studio-X in Mexico City," and there isn't a Studio-X is Mexico City. It's like, gee, this is real; this is not just like fiction or something.

IT: It's like it can be anything, so it's going to be in Mexico City.

NT: Yes. Well, it's admirable in the sense that is the spirit of Studio-X, but also it's hard. They would just go into the – sit down at the dean and say, "Oh, we're going to Studio-X in Galapagos Islands," and you're like, "Yes, yes, let me know how that space is. Maybe you can actually send us a picture because none of us have seen it." So it was really funny. But now as the dean is much better at these sorts of things than I am, He didn't lose his mind and just push harder for next year. So I think it's starting to work. So those types of connections are starting to happen. We're actually working as a career put together for the first time on a couple of things for two upcoming Biennials, so that's the first time we've tried to work together on something. I mean, honestly, it's hard enough to get a solo in this city. I mean, time zone. I mean, physical geography is actually still a barrier

IT: Oh, yes. As an Australian, don't tell me about geographic barriers; you're preaching to the choir.

NT: Oh, my god, yes. God, when I was in Australia, you would tweet and it would feel like you were talking into a void because everyone was asleep.

IT: Well, I always find it interesting that there's this kind of sequential thing. Like all the noise quietens down from this end and then starts up from there, which is exactly what's happening,

NT: It's funny. Yes, no, it is. And like Twitter feed will – I'll wake up to a European kind of world and I – it's a weird thing. But yes, so these barriers are still – and technological barriers are still there. Its also reasonably difficult still to find a great high speed connection for a video conference.

So these things are barriers. But those – I think that is the totally underutilised potential of Studio-X right now is to be – to have these – each of us are putting things into dialogue in our own spaces, but we're not doing this building anything between

ourselves. So there are a few – like I say, that's the direction we're stepping in.

IT: Yes. It seems like there's a little bit of confusion in that space, the way you've described New York Studio-X is like completely autonomous from Columbia, but then the dean's trying to use the students as a way to bring all the other Studio-Xs back together, where it sounds like the studios need greater collaboration,

NT: It is. I think it's really weird. And I think the dean started it with the idea that he didn't know how to do this and he would see what evolved. So experiment, again; that is the overriding theme here. I mean, even the name, Studio-X, is like "X" could end up standing for anything here. And I think now he's feeling that we've all got to the stage where it is more important to know what's going on and to be more connected. I think his idea was to see what happened, honestly, and try to generate a network out of that. You know, and it's funny; people write about network theory and network intelligence and I think his theory is this is sort of emerge a little. But I think it also talks some marshalling.

So it's definitely a work in progress.

Making that happen. And it's also very interesting because the role of the Studio-X in New York particularly to me seems sort of interesting because we're in the same city as Columbia. So what it our relationship – like it's obvious the Mumbai and Columbia – you know, Columbia isn't in Mumbai except for – like that's the physical foothold. But what is our relationship to that?

So the dean is very insistent that we don't play the role of network leader; that everyone in the network must be equal

IT: So New York isn't the centre,

NT: He will spend an awful lot of time drawing diagrams that show – have no centre. Because I don't think – it's also partly like a political correctness paranoia of not putting the American city at the centre of the world, which is a good thing. It would be great if more Americans could think like that, but it is interesting what the role of this Studio-X should be. I think with it, both within the network and in relationship to Columbia, yes, it certainly – it's an ever-evolving situation and I think trying things don't necessarily work, and you know, who knows? We'll see.

IT: Yes. I think – I don't know, the Biennial you were discussing once, but that seems like the perfect central way to bring all these people together. It's part show-and-tell, part opportune leaders sit around for long periods of time and talk and...

NT: Well, that's part of it actually. So we're putting together our first publication as a network right now too. Studio-X files. And so I'm editing the sort of front-of-book, the shorter stuff. And what's interesting about that is it's literally just a chance for us to talk to each other about what we're interested in. And so it's almost like a publication for ourselves because – and those conversation haven't happened; hence why we are not particularly collaborative. So this is happening like with Columbia where it's the much higher levels of the president's office, has a series of grants of global innovation, kind of doing something for faculty who would propose things to take place in...

Because Columbia University has something called the Global Centers, which are again spaces in different cities. So it's funny; the dean started it saying "separately", global centres then started and now they're sort of converging a little.

So somebody must be seeing some value in it. So for example, I put in for a grant from the President's Fund, which I don't know if I've got or not, but to do a multi-year research projects that would be in Rio, Beijing, Mumbai and here, to do with food and would be completely – so I worked with Hydro [Rajeev on like what would the structure of that be? How would we work? So that to me is a way for us to generate research, draw on each other's expertise.

Obviously it's been an issue to find me in New York, which the two would probably have a problem with, but at the same time, it's – I think those kinds of initiatives will probably help us realise what we can do as a network.

IT: Hmm, interesting. I might ask just ask one more question to wrap up, what's your time scale in thinking about Studio-X?

NT: I don't know. And it's very interesting to me in general. I mean, because I think it's very much the dean's baby, and I think actually part of the reason that he's trying to integrate it back into the school is because he thinks it's time, but also because his second term is up.

IT: His tenure is finite?

NT: Yes. So it would be an easy way to cut

costs. And I think he wants to ensure that it lives on.

And so he's trying to show the faculty the value of it right now. So yes, I think I gave you the sort of intellectual reasons trying to connect it together, but I think it's definitely a very practical reason too.

So I don't know. I mean, it does – I mean, it was his personal project, really. It's very much – and many faculty members felt like it was always the money and a bad idea, and I think there are still those faculty members there. So it's going to – and then increasingly and particularly a younger – I mean it hires a specific – but a younger faculty members too would see the benefits and manage to build really important – like there is a lot of faculty members who have managed really important global relationships because probably, you know, they do work in Rio now because of this. So start seeing the value. And I mean, he says that – it's funny, we actually had a global conference called last week and the dean was like, "You want – honestly, you need to sell this to the faculty as how it's going to help them achieve their selfish goals," because if it doesn't have value, it's not going to survive. So that's also an interesting topic.

IT: I think that's such a beautiful way to round out the conversation, talking about value again, because it started about this value which is liberated from any kind of economic or reporting duties and its freedom to experiment and that is its value, and then it comes back around to presumably having to report or submit to some board somewhere

NT: Well, I think we're more actually finding – understanding that at the end of the day we do have clients and the clients are the faculty and the students. And if they're not getting – if we're not doing something of value for them and if board, they don't feel like they're doing something about it, then there's no longevity there.

So yes, it has – it's funny. It was begun in this very free – which I think was great and a great experience and great things have come out of it, but I do think that, ironically speaking, it's having to prove its own worth now.

IT: Hmm. It's interesting that Storefront will be celebrating 30 years.

IT: So there is a sustained need for these experiments. It's not a glitch, but it's just whether this format – the relationship with Columbia is the right one.

NT: Is the right one, exactly. And maybe it's not; who knows? I mean, I think academia is a funny business; people have – it is quite selfish as a profession and we do have very competitive and not collaborative instincts, I think. The way the tenure is set up and things like that. And maybe it's sort of not actually a fit for what this space does, you know. That may be; who know? I don't know. I don't know, so yes, I don't – yes, I think – I fully embrace the sort of "we figure it out as we go along" mentality. And I mean, it is nice to be able to work flights. It is definitely the case that when you start with "in what ways does this place not live up to its potential", we'll be here for the next two years. But the good thing is it's still full of possibilities.

As long as it doesn't need a budget, it's all possible. I know it's weird limitations, but like Eva can go out and fund raise to her heart's content. We're very limited because it has to go through Columbia's fund raising system and they have a very rigid system where they've already tapped that, "this is my donor, this is my donor, you can't go after them". You know, she a lone operator which is scary because if she doesn't make her fund raising goals, the doors close. But nice in that she can be more entrepreneurial about her fund raising. I mean, you have to be like, "I'm writing you a grant," we're all sitting in Columbia trying to get the same thing and so is there any part

IT: Yes, so the amount of energy into feeding the bureaucracy...

NT: There's certain inertia of being such – attached to such a mutual group of bureaucracy. It's really helpful; people help give so much credibility because it's Columbia, so I'm not going to knock it, but it's...

IT: Yes, well it's a double-edged sword.

NT: Yes, exactly.

IT: And I think, certainly what has been reinforced over this research is that we need – at every point we need to seek permission, unfortunately.

And whether that's economic permission or whether that's institutional. And I don't know; I don't know it that's particular to our times or not. It seems like...

NT: Yes, it's a good question. It's an interesting question. I don't know. I mean, I hadn't thought of that, but it is definitely the case.

IT: I mean, the fact that it's such a valuable commodity to have a space that you can come and say, "Can I please slog my guts out for no money so I can put some things up on the wall?"

NT: It's nuts, yes. I mean, that's what constantly amazing to me. We live in a world where that is a really attractive offer to somebody.

Which is nuts. And I was like, "Gosh, you want to work really hard and spend your own time and money just so that you can hang it on..."? Which is why I go into it with this attitude that having this space is just such a privilege that you have to share it, you know, because rent is so expensive otherwise; it's just ridiculous, that if you would try to be a little precious about it and engage people in only certain kind of work can be here or whatever...

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