

## Ecology: a student-led theory forum

Juliet Sakyi-Ansah, Robert Sharples

Contributors: Steve Parnell, Doina Petrescu

### A Personal Account.

In November 2009 the University of Sheffield School of Architecture (SSoA) annual theory forum took place, this year themed Ecology. A two-day event intended and set to discuss theory and architecture and engage MArch students and school community throughout, with research and areas of interest that surround a theme or topic. Sounds simple enough and not uncommon to any other forum of its type - however this year was different.

Firstly it was hosted in the Crookesmoor Building, Sheffield, the temporary home for both the school of architecture and department of landscape. From the Arts Tower to the leafy former Law Campus, considering the school of architecture's infamous stint in the Tower and the centenary celebration the previous year it surely became something an event can play with. For some it has been an uncomfortable move but for the students it could only be described a positive one.

Secondly and more importantly, it has been a student-led event - delivered from conception to co-ordination and management. But we must clarify, however misleading the title; this was not the entire student-body. Though the proposal to form a core group was opened in June 2009 via e-mail to fifth year Masters of Architecture students transitioning to the sixth, it was a modest three that blindly stepped forward with curiosity and interest in the prospect. For two, with the pressure of other activities of the course including the assessed Dissertation and Live Project, it turned to be a vote of commitment and student empowerment.

When asked to contribute to field, we wanted to provide an insightful personal account of the event. This will follow as a series of notes, where we uncover key components to overview the process. Including a pictorial description of the event, workshops / seminars with extract from Steve Parnell, comments and retrospective questions answered by Dr Doina Petrescu.

## Note 01. A Pedagogical Test Space

As a student-led event and for any forum for that matter, to follow the previous conjunction with the AHRA International Conference 2008 AGENCY we guessed seemed a degree ludicrous. With such a heavy constitution to the schools acclaimed research, it left in our eyes big shoes to fill. However reassuring the Agency Research Group (ARG), whom of which we owe credit and gratitude for their trust and support, it was nerveing in its ambition.

Like the last carried an idea, a theme that had to derive both theory and event, even the idea of it being student-led holds a theoretical strand. A dogma Sheffield as a School holds close, questioning architectural education directly. SSoA known with appeal of student-led efforts and school initiatives such as the Live Projects, plus strongly supporting architectural education with a strong social demeanor, the prospect seemed appropriately interesting and a stretch beyond an offered curriculum. An opportunity to direct the education, manifest something that could only occur from the territory of the students, without a preconceived direction from academia. Well almost. After all, without ARG orchestrating the inception and funding from CILASS, providing valuable advice, and ensuring less grandiose expectations, the process would not have been so rich.

## Note 02. Ecology as Theme

As this contribution unravels the process and delivery of theory forum 09, the theme 'ecology' should remain definitive. As students we wished a response to cultural change. Ecology and architecture is often collided in referring the physical and spiritual relationship between societal development and the environment, cultural and natural processes. Of course 'ecology' reflects a green agenda for both architect and citizen alike, this is understated, but it wasn't what was intended. Ecology in a way is relatively non-descript or conceived relative to its discipline. In architecture it can mean to a degree anything. Within academia and particularly as a student exploring theory, perhaps as inspiration, process or context, ecology it is a term thrown around without really understanding it.

How can architecture engage with concepts of ecology? How does it stand once accepting an insecurity of interpretative methodology? Could the ilk surrounding ecology be reframed, knowledge that is more cohesive and less conclusive? These were questions asked, and in beginning this discussion set a condition that we wished the invited speakers, students and event not to resolve, but could potentially concede. The theme became about finding a common language, a means for knowledge to be shared, and the event forming a ground to test the commons. Where we believe actively or collaboratively sharing research is a transformative for imminent progression between fields, taking the discussion beyond architecture, academics and architects in the profession. The theme aimed to reflect similarly with the departmental move, a departure to something more organic and ethically minded, on a level.

### Note 03. Pre-Event Process Overview & Extracts

#### Week one: Composing concept

Independently, the tfo9 group developed the theme for the event through discussions and feedback from Agency Research Group.<sup>1</sup> Ecology as a theme was researched through journals and publications, departments outside the architectural field, extended universities, and through research students and scholars of SSoA.

<sup>1</sup> ARG: Transformative Research into Architectural Practice and Education, Sheffield School of Architecture.

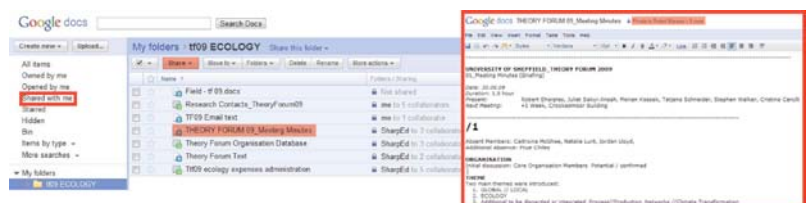


Fig 1. Online database facility from Google.

#### Week two: Working Platforms, development

The methods of communication within the tfo9 group were critical as the availability of the students proved challenging and initially noncommittal. The use of *Ning*<sup>2</sup> and *Google Docs*<sup>3</sup> were the key tools for collaboration. Online database facility from *Google* was used to record activities, hours of work and became the source of documentation for **tfo9**. This would be a means to completing the dissemination and review of the project, thus leaving a legacy.

<sup>2</sup> Ning is the leading online platform for the world's organisers, activists and influencers to create social experiences that inspire action. <http://about.ning.com> [Accessed 02/09/2010]

<sup>3</sup> Google Docs allows the creation and sharing of work online. Google at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) is an online search engine that is part of the Google Corporation.

#### Week three: Call for Papers

The main categories of submission included *talks*, *workshops*, and *interventions*. As a protocol for calling for papers, the broad themes of the event were developed along with the formalities of the submissions. The papers were to be peer reviewed so the submission guidelines focused on simplifying the format to abstracts to manage and review the received.

<sup>4</sup> Crookesmoor Building, Conduit Road is originally one of the university's libraries from the 1970s, the Crookesmoor Building presented dynamic spaces following its refurbishment to accommodate the two departments.

This was achieved in a way that still allowed the presentations to maintain diversity in their format, which met the objectives of the event having an array of activities and methods of learner-educator participation.

**Week four: Event format**

Using the new home of SSoA, the event layout utilised the dynamics of the Crookesmoor Building.<sup>4</sup> The theory forum proposed its activities to be flexible with the building's quirky character, reflecting the theme, and in reference to the habitation of slack spaces. Using the proposed event composition, tf09 group created the learning platform for experimental exchanges to challenge the traditional linear forms adopted by previous theory forums in the school.

**Week five: expanding tf09 group**

Following conception, the working relationship and ability to collaborate improved amongst the committed members. Being a lack of peer support at this stage, fellow students were invited to join and/or to act as extended members. There were hesitations in acknowledging the benefits and potential of the project to both the school and themselves of participating in the development. So, an incentive was proposed for a portion of the budget to be allocated to 'voluntary' hours. Consequently, the scale of ambition for project was reassessed.

**Week six: Going Online**

A webpage was designed as an online site for the organising group to upload graphically/text-based information for the benefit of extended groups who shared interest in the event and as a platform to direct those within the school. At this point, the forum was also publicised.



Fig 2. Theory forum listed on architectural and humanities websites: SUAS, AJ and AHRA. [Accessed 02.09.20]

**Week seven to Week ten: reviewing abstracts**

There were challenges during the review phase. This included the eventuality of split decisions in the tf09 group on abstract topics and the cost or advances that had to be met to host some guests. Submissions were continuously reviewed with facilitation from ARG.

**Week eleven: Conference graphics & people skills**

“We need graphics for the front page, and a jpeg about the latest news.”  
Sam Vardy. PhD Student and tutor in Architecture, Sheffield School of Architecture.



Fig 3. Event poster options: Mel Bax and Sarah Considine, October 2009.

### Week twelve: core programme

The three categories of the conference; Talks were scheduled with conventional conference approach that reflected previous theory forums such as Alternative Praxis:<sup>5</sup> speakers present their papers followed by a round of discussions. Workshops were informal and ‘hands-on’ and required advanced preparation and co-ordination from all cohorts. This began early dialogue and aims to be more democratic with participating students and attempting to make the event more inclusive in decision-making.

### Week Thirteen: budget, negotiations & incentives

The Teaching Module often has a budget for its speakers. On this occasion, there was an additional budget from CILASS; this funding covered the development, evaluation and dissemination. With international contributors and prestigious academics attending, as there were no registration fees for to partake in the conference, the majority was in agreement that not all expenses could be covered. The general incentive to confirm contributors’ attendance was the exposure that they would receive in the UK and the potential for their papers to be published in field: journal. Additional negotiation was needed to justifiably use part of the budget to cover payments of student volunteers.

### Week Fourteen & Fifteen: Programme outline

The programme for each day of the event was developed and confirmed with the speakers, workshop co-ordinators and those installing the interventions. It was revised several times to suit the guests. The first day of the conference was offered to those who were only present papers. Those running workshops and presenting papers were required to attend both days: the workshops running half a day for diversity in the schedule.

<sup>5</sup> Theory Forum held in 2007 at the Sheffield School of Architecture.

**Week Sixteen:** Accessible to all

tf09 was designed to be accessible to all students in both university and location. The activities remained flexible in their typologies and time slots, the idea based on theories of ecology. As an example, films were screened for those who wished to engage with familiar concepts on a less academic level.

**Week Seventeen:** More volunteers required

“Dear 5th & 6th year students,  
There are a fair number of people who are now involved with the organisation of the event but we would like MORE of you to participate. Please sign up to join the team!! Theory forum 09: ECOLOGY has been student-led from the conception to date and we would like to finish it off as such. The more students involved now the better it is as a 'student-led' event.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Email sent out to MArch Students by tf09 requesting more student volunteers. 26.10.2009.

**Week Eighteen:** Collaborative learning through Workshops

**Week Nineteen:** the office, the teaching, the learning and logistics  
tf09 obtained an office in the department in the last few days leading up to the conference. This was a definite bonus, adding another level of moral and professionalism to the organisation. From here we operated logistics and house publicity was produced such as event and activity posters, habitat illustrations and programmes.

“Dear All,

As there are only a few days left before the tf09 days, the organising team has set up a short meeting with all 5th years tomorrow Monday 9th November, in the MArch studio space, at 12h30.

The agenda of this meeting is to finalise the workshop organisations and clarify the last minute details with the forum programme. Also, outline your assessment criteria. [...] The forum will be assessed as part of the ARC 553 module. The submission consists in a 2000-3000wd essay, on a topic related to the workshop in which you have been involved and one or two papers given in the Forum.”

# student-led theory forum 09 **ECOLOGY**

global | local | sustainability | scarcity | industry | cross culture | collaboration | production  
technology | networks | processes | participation | exchange | economics | integration | emergence **NOVEMBER 13/14**  
Sheffield School of Architecture

## Workshop Option 02

### Title – **Frozen Lakes, Liquid Networks:**

#### **studies into arctic infrastructure, urbanism and ecologies**

Workshop Leader/coordinator – infraNet Lab- Neeraj Bhatia Director, Maya Przybylski Director  
Lateral Architecture, Waterloo University and University of Toronto

### Description:

The physical infrastructures of the twentieth century – those of roads, rail, air, data, sewage, water, amongst others – have tended to operate as singular and independent systems. The infrastructures of the twenty-first century, if they are to respond to impending urgencies

Fig. 4 Theory forum 09 Ecology webpage.



Fig 5. Final event poster: Kathy Wong, 5th Year MArch. Activity Poster Sheffield School of Architecture, October 2009.

## Note 04. Two Day Event – An Evolving Habitat

*Friday 13th November*

08:45 – 09:20 Arrivals [seminar room 3]

Talks [Lecture Theatre 1]

09:15 Introduction (Flora Samuel / Robert Sharples / Juliet )

09:30 Ecologies: limitations and possibilities // Irene Scalbert SAUL,  
Ireland

09:50 The Potential of the Empty House // Catharina Gabrielsson / The  
London School of Economics

10:10 Ecology as Lived // Kush Patel, university of Michigan

10:30 – 11:00 Discussions

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11:00 – 11:20 BREAK [seminar room 3]

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[Lecture Theatre 1]

11:20 Ethics vs. Aesthetics // Steve Parnell / The University of Sheffield

11:40 Pictorial Ecology // Nigel Dunnett / University of Sheffield

12:00 Urban homeostasis: Counterbalancing Urban Disruptions //  
Ruxandra Berinde / Technical University of Cluj – Napoca, Romania

12:20 – 12:40 Discussions

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12:40 – 13:40 Food Fuddle [White Turret]

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Keynote Followed by Discussion

13:45 – 14:45 Neeraj Bhatia & Maya Przybylski // Territorial Ecologies /  
Directors Infranet Lab, Waterloo University; University of Toronto

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15:00 – 18:00 Workshops [White Turret, Seminar Room 4, Seminar Room  
5]

01 Urban Homeostasis: Counterbalancing Urban Disruptions //  
Ruxandra Berinde

02 Frozen Lakes, Liquid Networks // Neeraj Bhatia & Maya Przybylski

03 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle // Matthew Hesketh & Joanna Langford / SSoA

04 Pictorial Ecology: a social revolution in the urban landscape // Dr Nigel  
Dunnett

05 Slack Space: the potential of the empty house // Catharina Gabrielsson

06 Synthesis for Design Thinking & City as Orchard // Jordan Lloyd /  
SSoA alumni

07 Constructing Criticism; the other side of architecture // Steve Parnell

Film Screenings [Lecture Theatre 3]

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18:00 – 20:00 Evening Social [White Turret] Food | Drink | Live Music |  
Films |



*Saturday 14th November*

09:00 Arrivals [seminar room 3]

09:30 – 10:10 Experts at Breakfast [SUAS Lecture Space Undergraduate Studio]

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Talks [Lecture Theatre 1]

10:20 Design Ecologies: Ecologies of Access // Lisa Tilder/ The Ohio State University

10:40 States of Change: Transformative Shanghai // Rosalea Monacella / RMIT University

11:00 Education for Sustainable Architecture: Qualified Architects with insufficient Knowledge? // Bing Chen / University of Sheffield

11:20 – 11:50 Discussions

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11:50 – 12:10 BREAK [seminar room 3]

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[Lecture Theatre 1]

12:10 Urban Space and Models of Sustainability // Mick O'Kelly / National College of Art &amp; Design / Dublin

12:30 Ecology and the Art of Sustainable Living // David Haley / Manchester Metropolitan University

12:50 Critical Ecologies // Jon Goodbun / University of Westminster / WAG Architecture

13:10 – 13:40 Discussions

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13:40 – 14:20 Food Fuddle [White Turret]

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15:00 – 18:00 Workshops [White Turret, Seminar Room 4, Seminar Room 5]

Continuation of Workshops from Friday

Film Screenings [Lecture Theatre 3]

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16:00 – 17:00 Workshop presentations and feedback

17:00 Conclusion from tf09 Team



[Top Left] Fig 6. Arrivals and first meetings. [Left] Fig 7&8. Ecology as lived, speaker\_Kush Patel. The difficult first Panel set a standard for the remaining discussions, opening ecology to diverse architectural perspectives. [Top Right] Fig 9. Break. [Right] Fig 10,11 & 12. Tea, coffee & homemade treats, cups made from recycled cardboard. Intervention A: Kitset, Artist\_Chris Cottrell. A participatory spatial adaptation that progressively evolves.



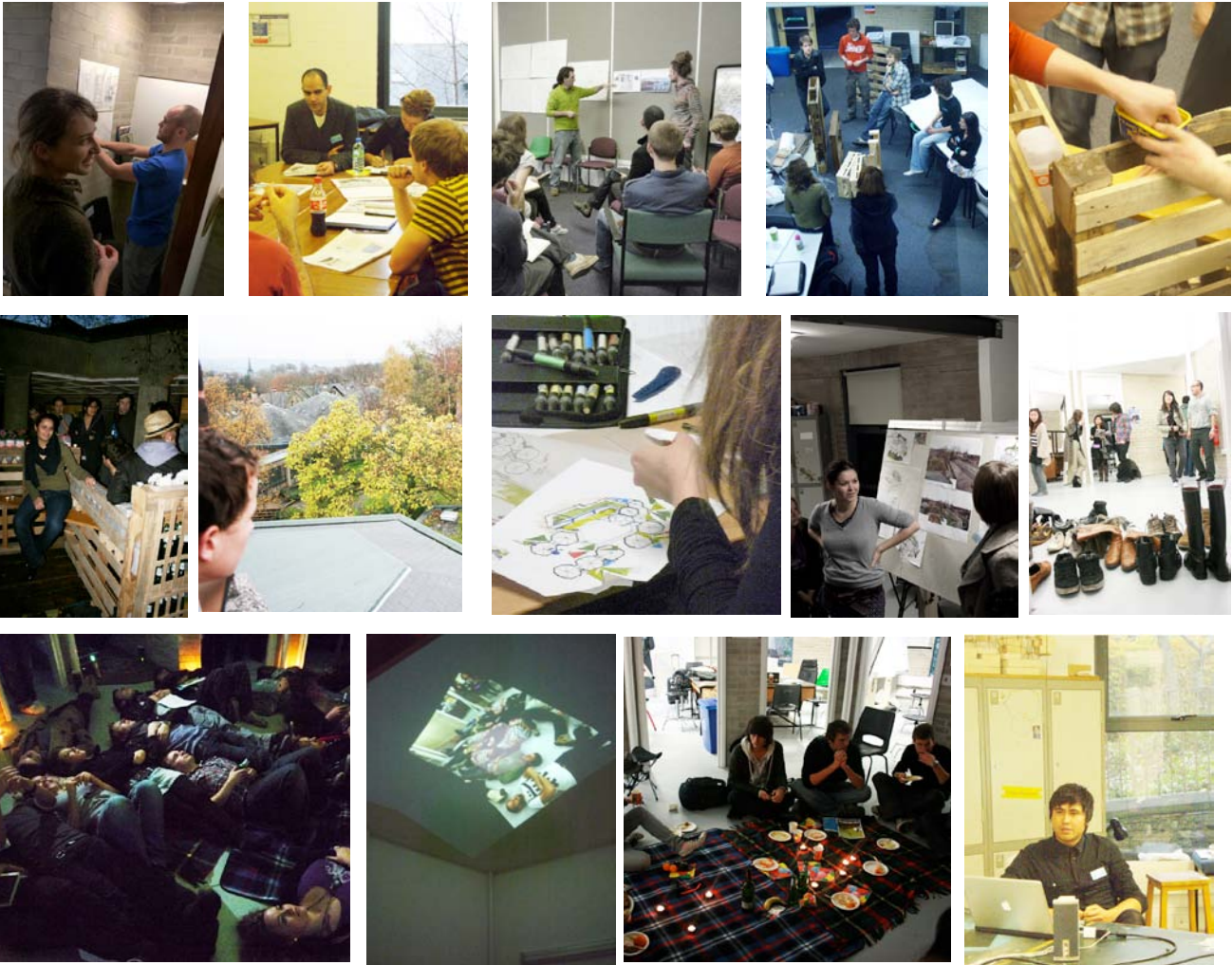
[Left: above and below] Fig 13&14. Pictorial Ecology, speaker\_Nigel Dunnett. A contribution from the Department of Landscape describing green roofs and urban meadows. Another diverse range of speakers for second Discussion Panel. [Middle: above and below] Fig 15&16. Lunch, a Food Fuddle-the idea that everyone contributes a 'dish', round the table, the most collective engagement of tf09. [Right: above and below] Fig 17&18. Intervention B: Three Portraits of Suburbia-Artists/Researchers\_Melanie Bax and Sarah Considine. Delivering independent and part funded research project 'We Love Suburbia'.



[Left] Fig 19,20&21. Keynote, Territorial Ecologies. Speakers, InfraNet Lab-Neeraj Bhatia & Maya Przybylski. talking about methodology and various research pursuits. A pen poised & slides from Presentation. [Right] Fig 22,23&24. Evening Entertainment following an afternoon of workshops and spatial transformation - informal exchange over drink, local curry for all and two-piece Jazz.



[Top Left to Right] Fig 25,26&27. Experts at Breakfast, an opportunity for expert / non-expert exchange with coffee and croissants – figurative speed dating. Fig 28. Design Ecologies, speaker\_Lisa Tilder, talked about the content of her forthcoming book of the same title. Fig 29. Education for Sustainable Architecture, speaker\_Bing Chen-Highlighting the hypocrisy of architects living 2.5 planets. [Bottom Left to Right] Fig 30,31&32. Urban Space and Models of sustainability, speaker\_Mick O’Kelly, Ecology and the Art of sustainable Living, speaker\_David Haley. A relaxed final Discussion Panel. Fig 33. Group Workshop Feedback/presentations followed by tfo9 team conclusion and thanks.



[Top Left to Right] Fig 34. Workshop #01 Urban Homeostatis: Counterbalancing Urban Disruptions // Ruxandra Berinde – preparatory work for presentation. Fig 35&36. Workshop #02 Frozen Lakes, Liquid Networks // Neeraj Bhatia & Maya Przybylski – group proposals for depleting ice and open transport routes. Fig 37, 38 & 39. Workshop #03 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle // Matthew Hesketh & Joanna Langford / SSoA – the Love Seat built from reclaimed materials. Fig 40,41&42. Workshop #04 Pictorial Ecology: a social revolution in the urban landscape // Dr Nigel Dunnett – proposals for ‘greening’ Crookesmoor Campus. Fig 43,44,45&46. Workshop #05 Slack Space: the potential of the empty house // Catharina Gabrielsson – testing slack space and social rituals. Fig 47. Workshop #06 Synthesis for Design Thinking & City as Orchard // Jordan Lloyd / SSoA alumni – overall presentation of contemporary issues, personal research and methodologies, plus, allotment visit with Grow Sheffield.



Fig 48. Workshop #07 The other side of Architecture// Steve Parnell - Day One Group discussion.

## Note 05. Workshops & Seminars

### 07 Constructing Criticism; the other side of architecture

#### Steve Parnell University of Sheffield

As a speaker at the conference, I was invited to lead a workshop. Given that my talk was about ecology in architectural magazines, and my overarching interest in architectural journalism and criticism, I elected to conduct the workshops in a way that would enable the students to write critically about what was happening in the conference around them: to put it in some kind of context for dissemination. As the students were to write a longer essay, the motivation was to engage with a more critical aptitude and to practice writing with a shorter piece in blog format. Each student was then encouraged to read the other work and comment.

On the first day, the discussion focused around what criticism was, and how it might be constructed in theory. The second day built on this theory and involved the students, in pairs, working with the other workshops and reporting on them. This second day was more directly relevant to the theme of ecology, whereas the first day was more generally applicable to an architectural education. The practices of design and criticism are not so different. The main difference is that criticism doesn't have to solve a problem, whereas design does. Criticism doesn't have to be written (it can be *designed*), but at the same time, design can be written: many of the same critical faculties are employed in each.

Examples of the results of this exercise are presented here.

<http://arc573.blogspot.com/>

## Note 06. Teaching Theory & Research

Dr. Doina Petrescu, former Theory and Research Module Leader and member of AGENCY, answers retrospectively questions regarding the Theory Forum as a method for education.

### Question 1

**Composing part of the MArch course structure, it is fair to say the theory and research module seems enlightenment for students in the relationship and role of theory and research within architectural discourse, particularly within academia.**

**a) How important do you feel is that role and how do you feel it has changed/developed in the education of the course since the initial intentions of the theory forum?**

The Theory Forum was designed as a format for teaching and learning theory at the Postgraduate level. This involved high standing lectures given, in some years, by invited lecturers and in others, by people selected through calls for papers. We had the concern of opening up the Forum to people we don't necessarily know, but who might have done research on the topic. The proposals coming through the call for papers were peer-reviewed and selected (i.e. TF Architecture and Indeterminacy in 2006), we had also the concern that the Theory Forum should be related research conducted in the school. In 2007, The Alternate Currents TF became an international conference connected with Till and Schneider's AHRC research project. Also we were concerned with raising the profile of the TF as research event and developed it as an AHRA international conference – Agency- involving hundred of participants in 2009. In all these configurations, the students were exposed to a research community in the area of humanities and they were invited to take active positions: interviewing participants, preparing questions, organizing parts of the event. With Ecology, we tried to involve students not only in organizing but also in conceiving the Theory Forum, in choosing the topic, selecting the participants, deciding about the structure of the event, communicating. This is the expression of a kind of ecology of education...

**b) Subsequently, what was the intention and inspiration for theory forum 09 to be a student-led event?**

As you might know we had an IBL GRANT, Cilass. to support this initiative into inquiry based learning. This built on existing innovative practice within the school to promote and support student-led initiatives in the curriculum. We have tried to establish a platform for an empowered

discourse amongst staff and students and to foster better connections between the design studio and lecture-based parts of the course.

## Question 2

**It is easy to speculate theory forum 09 as a two-day event, we feel when regarded as a process it is important to remember its purpose, origin and importance of its theme - 'ecology', as being contemporary or current.**

**a) How does this process of theory forum 09 of student organization / conception and its outcomes compare to previous?**

**b) Is 'ecology' important and was it insightful? Did the theme and assessment criteria provide scope and diversity for theory and research as a teaching module?**

This was an amazing experiment, an instance of true participation in education. Even if you have done the most, also for us, as mentoring staff, it was a lot of work, as it involved lots of meetings, exchange and advice to help you in the decision taking.

The speakers were a mix, some very good some less, which always happens in a conference based on call for papers. It was maybe more difficult with the workshops which were very different in nature and very unequally conducted. Though, students haven't complained about this.

As a whole, the students have been much more pro-active and receptive and had a very rich experience. Nevertheless, some of them still complained in the feedback about the theory course as 'unclear'. The essays, which is the form of assessment of the theory course, were much better than in the previous years.

It had to do with the topic which was generous in scope, but also with their involvement in preparing it.

Unfortunately, staff was less present during the Forum ... I am wondering if it was because a student led event is perceived as less interesting and lower standing research event... or just because of time, etc... Still work to do on this side!

### Question 3

**For the students, participating in the event is something that is not assessed and to become part of the process was always a choice. On one hand, the co-ordination / operation of the event was mostly successful due to voluntary or gift culture. On the other, the students to be assessed and otherwise were provided incentives in order to participate and attempts on our half for it to be more inclusive.**

**a) What could be said about the value of participation without a value of educational necessity?**

This is a good question. I think that one can learn from informal situations too, as always happens in education. We can leave space for informal learning, and can even 'formalise' this space. This happened when we programmed informal events to take place (i.e. food fuddles, conversations.) The learning process is fluid and doesn't stop at the door of the conference room. The exercise of participation was a learning experience too. Was it assessed fairly? Does it need to be assessed? We have the same problem with the live projects. Participation belongs to another type of logic and economy of education than the one which uses marks to assess quality, isn't it? Also, in practice, participative work is very often not rewarded financially – but affectively, symbolically. Maybe we have just to recognize this other kind of economy.

**b) Based upon this in the future, is it realistic to think the process could be more inclusive? Could / should the format or ideal of the event change?**

I think we should continue to experiment with it. Not necessarily trying always to 'improve' it in the sense of best practice in education, but continuing to take risks, try new formats, set new agencies.



## Note 07. Comments & Feedback

“tfo9 was highly innovative on several counts. It is a well known irony of education that teachers learn far more in putting together a teaching event than the students who are supposed to do the learning. The students who set up tfo9 showed that they were more than equal to the task of running an international conference and taught us a great deal in the process. The proceedings opened with a most intriguing paper by Irene Scalbert before moving on into a varied and inspirational diet of papers. In doing so they brought together a diverse group of architectural thinkers into open and relaxed dialogue with their fellow students on the pressing and critical issue of Ecology.’

—**Professor Flora Samuel, Head of School, University of Sheffield**

‘The scope of ecology was revealed through the lectures, but importantly, it was the interaction and investigation of the themes in the workshops that really opened up discussion and their potential application, this being far more valuable and memorable than lectures alone. The social aspect of the forum was really good, encouraging time for wider discussion in and around more planned events. This enabled learning and experiences from workshops to be shared, and also made the event more enjoyable. The forum has plainly had implications for me; many of the topics within the theme that were touched upon I have gone on to investigate further and interrogate /integrate into my thinking and subsequently my work.’

—**Jonathan Millard MArch student**

‘From the starting point of ecology the discussions ranged from the organic and at times political appropriation of space, to the social and environmental role of nature in our urban environment. It was hard to keep up, as the subjects moved quickly from the local to the global, and from the theoretical to the practical, but at the end of the two days we were able to take away new ideas to explore and research, and possible directions for practice.’

—**Sarah Ernst MArch student**

‘I took part in the Theory Forum: Ecology last year by doing a brief presentation and a hastily organised workshop. The event is emblematic of the serious stance that the School of Architecture at Sheffield takes to architecture's role in society. It's an attitude that permeates everything from the content of courses and programmes to organisation and research, and the non-hierarchical format of the student-led theory forum is clearly part of this institutional culture. For me, currently mostly involved in research, it was a very inspiring experience. It offered a rare occasion to bring academic concerns into effect - out in "the open", where they belong - in conversation with colleagues and students. Since it was student-led, there was a sense of urgency to the event that is rare to find within the

research seminar culture. Organising seminars takes a lot of effort and the outcome is always varying, depending on lots of different factors. I'm impressed by the fact that this mode of exchange is practiced already at this level—it's significant in several respects, not merely in terms of bridging research to education but also in putting research issues before the critical eyes of the next generation.'

—**Catherina Gabriellsson, LSE, Speaker**

### Note 08. tf09 ECOLOGY >> Accounting for Criticism.

It is important not to forget the purpose of the Theory Forum, to provide students with a platform to participate and formulate an essay to be assessed as part of a theory and research module. We were of course inspired by TED<sup>4</sup>, pursuing the mantra of 'ideas worth spreading', but it was key for the debate to have a relationship to architecture and return to something tangible.

Ecology emerged from a feeling within the student body that this issue needed to be addressed rigorously, to explore and understand more extensively the relationship between ecologies and architecture. Nevertheless, the potential of the ambiguous definition of ecology was consciously used as the initial intention of the event and theme. As a process initiated by ARC as a pedagogical opportunity or an act of spatial politics, supported by a limited budget, tf09 enjoyed a position where increased speculation and critique could take place. This should be considered a reflection of architectural education. In propositioning such collective student involvement as an all-too-frequently untapped group, it raised questions regarding what it is to be a student or aspiring architect or academic. The value of education beyond acquiring the skills needed to practice architecture is always an open question: though bold, the process of tf09 taught us active negotiation, the struggle to offer inclusivity of approach and relevance of concept, and taught us not to try and change the world in two days.

At the heart of it, the value of tf09 was only as extensive as the collective student participation empowered by the opportunity presented. As a core team we operated as an active, responsible conduit encouraging and testing critical pedagogy. Regardless of internal difficulties and difference, and despite teething troubles we acknowledge that without the student-body's involvement and contribution, working in part by gift culture, the event would not have been possible. Tf09 offered an engaging environment for anyone reluctant to participate, where the peripheral moments of exchange were a comfort only a student-led event could offer.

Finally, we would like to thank the Agency Research Centre for the opportunity, participating speakers, the intervention and workshop co-coordinators and the students, those that contributed to its documentation and organization, and also those who helped us write this account.