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Alternate Currents

Editorial

Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till

Jean-François Prost writes that 'architects often prefer photographing or showing buildings at the height of their "perfection", when the presence of time is imperceptible and user-trace absent.'[1]

In distinction to this attitude, which is typical of aspirations for autonomy, this issue of *field*: deals with architecture as a praxis that is much more complex and varied than is often portrayed. The essays come out of 'Alternate Currents,'[2] a symposium held in November 2008 as part of the Theory Forum series at the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture. The call for papers asked not for answers to the dominant modes of architectural production, but for positions, ways of working and thinking away from the 'normative' or 'mainstream'. Architecture not in the sense of 'building' but as something that can be considered, to use Beatriz Colomina's words, as an 'interpretive, critical act';[3] something that is inclusive of the user; something that is aware and communicative of all phases of the process of its production; and, something that can alter and change perceptions as well as pioneering new forms of thinking, acting and engagement. This is architecture that desists from any autonomy but rather sees itself as part of a wider social and political landscape.

Over the past decade we have watched in despair as architecture has finally achieved its aimless fate, as predicted by Manfredo Tafuri, of being reduced to pure form. This year's architecture biennale in Venice is a case in point. Despite its stated aim to display 'architecture beyond building' it has, in most cases, led to the throng of 'star' architects producing artwork, installations and sculptures that fetishise shapes.[4]

The wordiness of the 'critical' versus 'post-critical' debate that has so occupied the US theorists has only served to distract from the underlying

1 Jean François Prost, 'Adaptive Actions', *field:* 2(1)(2008): 139.

2 'Alternate Currents' was held at the Showroom Cinema in Sheffield on 26th and 27th November 2007. The symposium took place as part of the AHRC funded research project 'Alternative Architectural Praxis' and was co-produced by The Agency, one of the School of Architecture's new research centres.

3 Beatriz Colomina, 'Architectureproduction', in Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This Is Not Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 207-21.

4 Cf. David Levene, 'In Pictures: The Venice Biennale', http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/sep/16/architecture [accessed 16 September 2008].

poverty of architectural production.[5] However, there have been a number of people operating beneath the radar, taking one or more of a number of positions: the social, explicitly political, feminist, participatory, encouraging self-management, bottom-up, non-hierarchical and/or cooperative. This loose grouping stands in relation to a history of practices that have stood aside of normal professional definitions: co-operatives, the strong social engagement and collaboration of different disciplines in the 1920s, participatory movements in the late 1960s and early 70s, self-managed and organised projects in the late 1970s and early 80s; feminist approaches in the 1980s. Our call for papers attempted to find these often unsung heroes and their documenters, and in so doing address a number of questions. Why we would need such different approaches in architecture? Where would one start? How are they run? How financed? For whom do these practices work for - and whom not? What for? How do they operate?[6]

5 For a good summary of this debate see: George Baird, ‘Criticality and Its Discontents’, *Harvard Design Magazine,* 21 (2004): 1-6. Also online at: http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/research/publications/hdm/back/21_baird.html

6 The Camp for Oppositional Architecture held in Berlin (2004) and Utrecht (2006) has recently started to raise and discuss similar questions. See also, AnArchitektur, ‘Camp for Oppositional Architecture’, *AnArchitektur : Produktion und Gebrauch gebauter Umwelt* (2005), AnArchitektur, ‘Camp for Oppositional Architecture. Theorizing Architectural Resistance’, *AnArchitektur : Produktion und Gebrauch gebauter Umwelt* (2007).

ALTERNATE CURRENTS
_ a symposium on architecture /
_ organised by the school of architecture / university of sheffield /
_ venue / showroom cinema / paternoster row /sheffield / s1 2bx
_ 9.00am 26th November 2007 to 5.00pm 27th November 2007

_Alternate Currents is a major international symposium which looks at _alternative forms of architectural praxis // The symposium will present a range _of ideas from around the world proposing how to conduct architectural practice _in new and reflective ways // Many of the speakers start from a critical position _with regard to the normative models of architectural practice and the values _embedded in it // From political, social, gender and theoretical standpoints, the _speakers propose innovative ways of thinking about the future of architectural _practice //

Fig. 1. Flyer the 'Alternate Currents' Symposium held at the Showroom Cinema, Sheffield, in November 2007.

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Silke Kapp, Ana Paula Baltazar and Denise Morado of MOM find one answer to this when they argue in their essay for *field*, along the lines of the work of the Australian architect and sociologist Garry Stevens, that the discipline's main rationale 'has always been the design of buildings for the representation of power, and not the design of pleasant spaces for all.'[7] For them architecture is about the latter; it is about 'the transformation of space by human work' and is neither concerned with size, scale or function but with everyday spaces such as 'dwellings or unpretentious public facilities.'

[7] See also, Garry Stevens, *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998).

This statement suggests a fundamental ideological and political shift, namely the move from product to process, with the knowingly naïve sentiment of 'pleasant spaces for all' standing in active confrontation to architecture as a tool of exclusion and architects as executers of this exclusion. The architect(ure) of process is a role of active engagement and active directing; it is about taking a lead yet at the same time relinquishing control. It is about having an imaginative vision, but executing it in the name of others.

Alternate Currents aimed to begin a discussion as to what precisely a position like MOM's can and does mean for the production of architecture and its occupation.

Being 'different', 'alternative' or 'experimental' have become catchwords amongst architects in order to distinguish oneself from the many other offices offering architectural services, and to gain access to new marketplaces. Against this essentially expedient move, *Alternate Currents* was interested in practices that are engaging self-critically with their own role as architects and with the wider role of architecture within today's society. This issue of *field* publishes ten contributions to this discussion, with a number of others published in *Architectural Research Quarterly*.[8]

[8] *ARQ* 2 (12)(2008).

Tessa Baird, Anna Holder and James Wakeford examine interviews they conducted with Part II graduates in the UK about 'values' and 'frustrations' students had encountered during their formal education and whilst working in practice, the course of practice taken, architectural interests outside of paid employment and each interviewees architectural agenda. Eeva Berglund provides a historical sketch of Women's Design Service, an organisation founded in the 1980s in London with the intention of working towards a better built environment for women by 'helping them get involved in design and planning, doing research, lobbying and giving advice.'

In their essay entitled 'Site-Seeing: Constructing the "Creative Survey"', Carolyn Butterworth and Sam Vardy look at the unchanged nature of the architectural practice of the site survey and how techniques from relational

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art practice can offer an 'alternate creative survey' which will open up and provoke new relationships between the user, architect and the site itself.

Prue Chiles and Leo Care explore their own work as part of the Bureau of Design Research (BDR) at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield. The BDR is somewhere 'between a research-based consultancy, a Project Office and *something other*', and addresses the need of architects for 'finding a way in.' It does this through making design and regeneration processes accessible to communities and to students through 'tested and innovative *tactics of engagement*', as well as by bridging the gap between community/city, academy and practice.

Mathias Heyden's contribution is a call for bringing activist & architectural practices, university work, and political & economic discourse into an imminent and productive exchange in order to reinforce direct-democratic and sustainable potential in the built environment.

Silke Kapp, Ana Paula Baltazar and Denise Morado of MOM (Morar de Outras Maneiras) explore ideas of how to 'overcome the production of space as "reproduction of the social relations of production"' by drawing upon the informal production of space in the Brazilian *favelas*, the work of Lygia Clark and their own practice.

By discussing Leon Alberti Batista and examples from her own work, Ruth Morrow investigates whether the loss of his appendix to *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* 'may have been fortuitous' since it 'leaves a void in which we can continue to examine and re-imagine our own individual practice and "the services" we offer.' Being strongly situated within the 'who' (the parameters of her own persona) and the 'where' (the context from which she operates: one material, one strategic and the third academic), Ruth emphasises the importance of a 'critical space to practice creatively.'

Andreas Müller discusses the role of the 'fundamental protagonist', the user, in architecture. Starting with Giancarlo de Carlo's statement dating from 1969 that 'the intrinsic aggressiveness of architecture and the forced passivity of the user must dissolve in a condition of creative and decisional equivalence', Andreas explores Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, the German Werkbund's publication *Lernbereich Wohnen* and Ottokar Uhl's *Democratisation of Aesthetics* in order to reinvigorate the 'promising potentials of participation.'

Jean-François Prost presents his project *Adaptive Actions*, which operates a 'shift in focus from representation and aesthetics to the programming of possibilities of use in the built environment.' *Adaptive Actions* is a collection of examples of alterations by residents to their home, their workplace or public space—all observed, revealed and shared

with others. Jean-François acts as the instigator who provokes and promotes such actions.

Finally, through a series of interviews with 'non professional designers' (three couples who chose to not employ an architect for their respective house extensions) Flora Samuel traces these people's design aspirations, decision-making processes and their satisfaction with the end product thereby highlighting critically the current perception of architects by the public.

As important as these papers were the discussion that the symposium generated, especially among the students at Sheffield, was in some ways more significant. Their education explicitly addresses the social and political aspects of architectural production, but the students sometimes express frustration that there are too few role models of people actually walking the talk. The symposium provided a window into a world beyond formal gratification, architectural dross or self-absorbed discourse, and for this we are immensely grateful to everyone who contributed.

Acknowledgements: The symposium *Alternate Currents*, on which this issue of *field:* is based, was conceived and organised by Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till as part of their ongoing research project: Alternative Architectural Praxis. We are indebted to AHRC for funding this work. Thanks to our fellow Agents at Sheffield for support and chairing of the sessions, to Bea Munby for organisational help and to all the fifth year students who engaged so fully in the symposium and debate. Finally, this issue of *field:* would have been impossible without the scrupulous editing of Nishat Awan.

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Architecture as Critical Exercise: Little Pointers Towards Alternative Practices

MOM (Morar de Outras Maneiras): Silke Kapp, Ana Paula Baltazar, Denise Morado

Taking architecture as an event implies looking at it as an open process. This openness means not merely opening finished objects towards their use, but the openness of the whole process of design, building and use. Ultimately, it means the autonomy of builders and users and the end of a fragmented production of space. The question is, what would then be left for architects to do? In our opinion, some very relevant tasks: in the first place, a constant and incisive theoretical and practical exercise of critique; secondly, the production of interfaces or instruments for helping all actors involved to realise their own critical actions on space; and thirdly, any mediation required between the actors themselves and those interfaces or instruments. These possible practices, along with others we might not even be aware of, are attempts to overcome the production of space as 'reproduction of the social relations of production'.[1] We draw references from the informal production of dwelling space in the Brazilian *favelas*, as well as from the art of Lygia Clark, to suggest little pointers towards alternatives to the formal, heteronomous, normative and problem-solving practices of architecture.

[1] Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976).

In order to discuss alternative practices in architecture, and also to explain what our research group is trying to do, we may start with the definition of architecture itself. But, don't worry; this will not be a treatise on the whole range of intricate definitions that architectural theorists have delivered throughout history. Let us just examine three basic meanings of the term.

In a first sense, architecture refers to a corpus of specialised knowledge and practices which constitute an art, a profession, a discipline or, as Pierre Bourdieu would synthesise, a 'field'.[2] The object of that discipline or field is supposedly man-made space, just like the object of medicine is health, or the object of cooking is food. In spite of that architecture as a field does not accommodate most man-made spaces. Thus, in a second sense, architecture means the very small portions of man-made space historically addressed by this specialised knowledge.

[2] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *A Distinção: Crítica Social do Julgamento*, (Porto Alegre: Editora Zouk, 2007).

The Australian architect and sociologist Garry Stevens,[3] who has analysed the architectural field in terms of Bourdieu's theory, understands that the disciplines' main rationale since its establishment in the Renaissance has always been the design of buildings for the representation of power, and not the design of pleasant spaces for all. Therefore, architecture in this second sense consists of extraordinary buildings, places, or landscapes, which contrast against a background of other spaces not legitimated by the discipline. Although such outstanding objects are the main topic of specialised publications, academic lectures on the history of architecture, or discussions among professionals, they are rather irrelevant to everyday life. Moreover, architects' products are actually their drawings

[3] Garry Stevens, *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

Fig. 1. Central area of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, ennobled by a famous piece of architecture, which would score high in the (play)field of the architectural discipline. Photo: Marina Amaral Horta, 2005. Collage: MOM.

and not buildings, as since the Renaissance, the specialisation of the field has turned to abstract conceptions instead of focusing on concrete constructions.

We could add that the often-diagnosed crisis of architecture is in fact a crisis of the 'field'. The field as such has been at risk since the 20th century, because power has much more powerful ways to represent itself than by mere buildings. To mention just one symptom of this situation: every architect knows that winning a competition or having drawings widely published is as important as actually building anything. If it is true that the architectural field is ultimately focused on the representation of power, then it is just a consequence of the fact that for a politician or a government, announcing a new project underlined by beautiful drawings earns as many votes as the enterprise of building itself. Hitler was probably the first politician who systematically used this strategy of obtaining the effect of actual buildings through impressive representations (by means of architectural models shown in motion pictures).[4]

[4] Cf. Documentary directed by Peter Cohen, *Undergångens Arkitektur*, (Sweden: 1989).

Fig. 2. The area shown in Fig. 1 as it really is. A small illegal self-produced settlement (*favela*) is surrounded by legal buildings designed by architects or engineers for the real estate market. The workers who build the legal buildings neither design nor use them. They probably live in places like the small *favela*. This illustrates two very different processes: one in which design, building and use are separate from each other and one in which they happen simultaneously. Photo: Marina Amaral Horta, 2005.

The third meaning of the term 'architecture', and the one we will insist upon, is *the transformation of space by human work*. The term stands for a process, not a product; it neither depends on size, scale or function, nor on the presence of a design or previous plan; and it emphatically includes everyday spaces, such as dwellings or unpretentious public facilities, which are the focus of our research to date. This is a very wide definition and we

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know that it does not satisfy some of our colleagues, but we have to go a bit further to show why we insist on it anyway.

According to the inner logic of the architectural field, the distinction between architecture in the second sense (also called 'real architecture') and architecture in the last sense (also called 'ordinary building'), is usually based on a sort of artistic, mythic, formal or metaphorical quality. It has, in fact, little to do with 'real' construction and use and seems very hard to explain—so hard, that it is employed like a secret code. Who gets it has some chance to reach a powerful position inside the field, who doesn't will at best occupy a subordinate position, working for other architects or designing mass products for the building industry that are not accepted as 'real' architecture. So, if we want to discuss alternative practices, the first step is to break through such an excluding logic and instead to take every transformation of space by human work as an object of investigation and reflection. This means giving up the ideals of authorship and integrity for the architectural work, as well as the assumption that users and builders are passive subjects willing to conform their actions to the imagination of the architect. It also means not to avoid questions related to sociology or political economy, such as the real estate market, public policies, or spontaneous and informal production. A theory about architecture in this wide sense is still unwritten, and this has a quite obvious reason, since the field as a whole tends to privilege exclusive and excluding discourses over those that could blur its own limits. In concrete terms, that is to say that architects prefer the certainty of their traditional roles to reasoning that undermines the exclusivity of their skills. If every transformation of space by human work were taken as architecture, what would be left for architects to do?

In our opinion, some very relevant tasks that are concerned with providing a means of autonomy for people involved in the production of space. In the following sections we will try to clarify those processes that we are investigating, though there might be many others. Firstly, the constant and incisive theoretical and practical exercise of critique; secondly, mediation, if and when mediation is desired; and thirdly, the production of interfaces or instruments to help actors realise their own critical actions on space. However, before explaining these possibilities, it is important to remark that we are not asking for the replacement of all conventional architectural practices by these alternatives. Besides being incredibly presumptuous, this would just be another constraint. What we intend is to try some different ways, without turning them into new norms.

Critique

Let us begin with the critique. It is quite common, at least in our architectural context, to hear complaints about people who just criticise without offering a better solution—it is called 'destructive critique' in

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opposition to a supposedly 'constructive' one. In other words, if you don't know how to improve things, stay quiet and do not disturb others by questioning. This is probably one of the most ideological and conservative assertions ever put forth. Why shouldn't we express disagreement or uneasiness even without knowing the problem precisely or having a solution? In natural sciences no one would contend that a disease should not be described and debated until a cure is available. But this very logic is applied constantly to social or practical matters inhibiting protest, disqualifying opposition, and killing discussion. This is inconsistent; for a critique focused on domination and heteronomy—and every serious social critique is ultimately focused on these—to instantly delivery a new 'solution' would just reproduce the normative character of the very object of the critique. Prejudice against critique serves only to keep things going as they are.

The philosophers and sociologists, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno put it in a more elegant way. They coined the expression 'critical theory' for the attempt to discern why, in spite of all the instruments available, human suffering has never stopped increasing in modern society. Adorno says:

> We may not know what the human being is and what the right form of human things would be, but we do know what the human being shall not be and which form of human things is wrong, and only this determinate and concrete knowledge keeps the other, positive, open for us.[5]

Or in Horkheimer's words: 'I see myself as a critical theorist. That means that I can say what is wrong, but I cannot define what is right.'[6] So, the task of a critical intellectual is to discern, to understand, to show 'all circumstances in which man is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and despised'.[7] For Karl Marx it was a categorical imperative to change those circumstances. But modern industrial society humiliates, enslaves, abandons and despises people in ways that are far less evident and far more diverse than the oppression of the 19th century working class. Making those ways intelligible is the task of critical theory, whilst individuals must decide for themselves what to do.

Why do we then talk about the 'theoretical and practical exercise of critique'? How does the term 'practical' apply to such a critique? A critical exercise is at once a form of theory and a form of praxis. It tends to be more theoretical as long as it concerns society as a totality, and it becomes more practical as it approaches specific situations. But in no case is it intended as a manual, a manifesto or a problem-solving strategy. It does not supply universal rules or general statements of what kind of space would be good for human beings. It always remains critical and non prescriptive.

5 Theodor Adorno, 'Individuum und Organisation', in Theodor Adorno, *Soziologische Schriften I*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 456.

6 Max Horkheimer, 'Zur Kritik der Gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft', in Hermann Glaser, Karl Heinz Stahl (eds.), *Opposition in der Bundesrepublik: Ein Tagungsbericht*, (Freiburg: Rombach, 1968), p. 21.

7 Karl Marx, 'The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', in David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 69.

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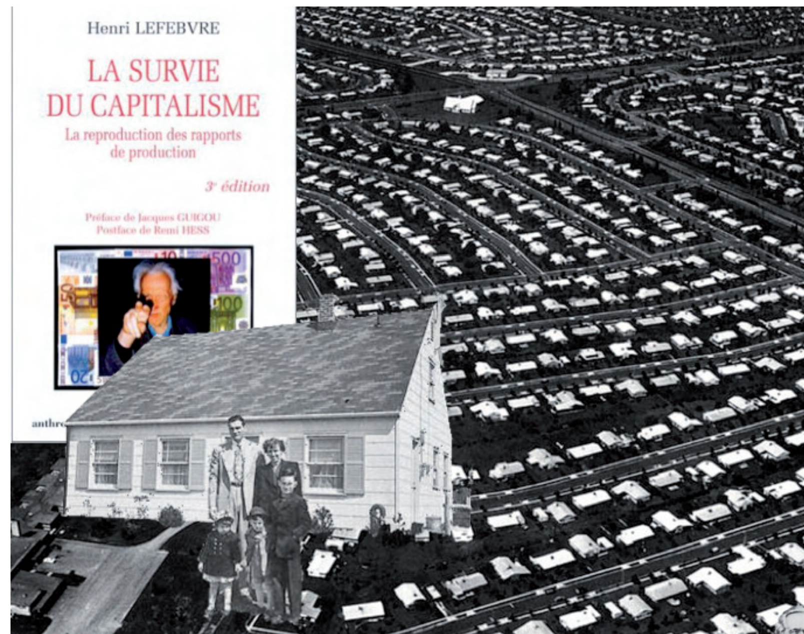

Fig. 3. 'Reproduction (of the relation of production, not just the means of production) is located not simply in *society as a whole* but in *space as a whole*. Space, occupied by neo-capitalism, sectioned, reduced to homogeneity yet fragmented, becomes the seat of power.' (Henry Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism,* p. 83). Images: EA-UFMG Archive. Collage: MOM.

On a more theoretical level, two authors seem especially important to the critical understanding of architecture. The first one is Henri Lefebvre, the French sociologist who has investigated in detail the idea that space is the main structural element of social relations. In a very interesting book called *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, written just before *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre sets out some crucial statements about space and society.[8] He argues that the persistence of capitalist social relations is not self-evident. It is neither 'natural' nor 'obvious' that a mode of production to which crisis is inherent, manages to maintain productive forces constantly subordinated to contradictory relations of production. Marx had already clarified the mechanisms of crisis in capitalism, showing that recession, unemployment and poverty are part of the system, not its failures. This made him believe that capitalism would collapse. But he was wrong; in time, the crisis became worse and the mechanisms of domination became stronger. Therefore, Lefebvre asks how capitalism maintains and renews itself generation after generation. His answer is that capitalism survives due to its capacity to produce space according to its own logic, and to accommodate any resistant niches into itself. Capitalism is not a mode of production beside others, because in spite of its inconsistencies and contradictions, there is no 'beside' anymore.

It is easy to understand what Lefebvre means by looking at the spaces marginalised by this logic, such as exotic landscapes, historical towns, squats, or Brazilian *favelas*. Those spaces are the concrete figures of

[8] Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (London: Blackwell, 1991).

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dialectics; they would not exist as 'exotic', 'historical' or 'illegal' without a dominant order categorised as 'normal'. But at the same time, especially in the case of squats and *favelas*, the very (economic) order that makes them marginal is also the one that has produced them in the first place, and has always depended on the labour force they provide. As soon as such spaces achieve some political or economic strength, they are neutralised by a set of 'plans', which may consist of direct physical interventions or 'requalifications', or of other abstract measures like the need for a connection to the international air transport system, the nomination of a place as cultural heritage or some regulation of urban property. All this may appear as an attempt at inclusion, but it also imposes the dominant order upon these spaces.

This dominant order means, first of all, heteronomy or that individuals and primary groups are no longer able to negotiate and to decide for themselves. Even if participation is part of public policy, the whole process of the production of space turns out to be bureaucratic, far from the understanding of most people, and dominated by so-called 'technical' decisions. Therefore, one of the main goals of a critique is to show how the general and abstract logic of the production of space determines people's lives and forces them into a passive role.

The very concept of 'user', so commonly applied in architectural discourse, only makes sense in the context of a capitalist production of space, as shown by Lefebvre. Users are people who by definition, do not produce space but receive it in forms determined by others more or less worried about their own well-being. Modernist architects generally

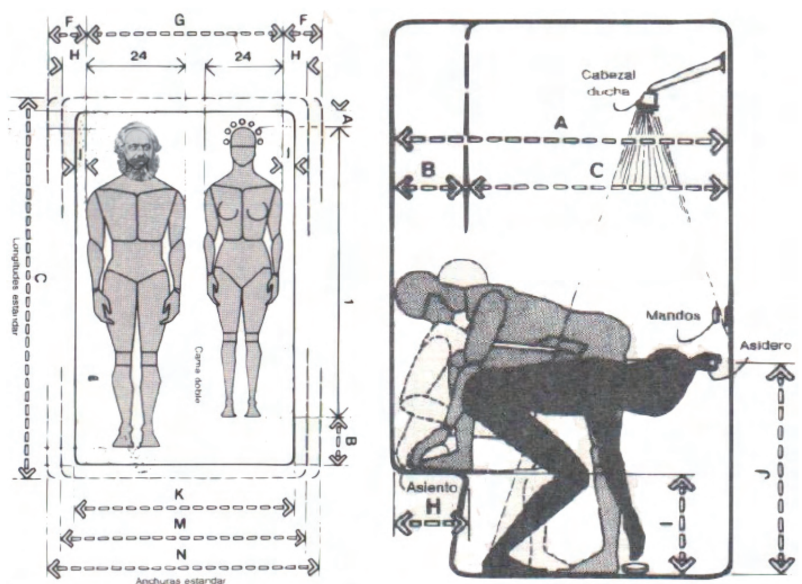

Fig. 4. Ergonomics playing the role of conforming users to spaces. Images: Julius Panero and Martin Zelnick, *Human Dimension and Interior Space: A Source Book of Design Reference Standards*, (New York: Watson-Guptil). Collage: MOM.

presumed that they knew the universal needs of the users better than the users themselves. Later, this position gave way to a more empirical approach, in which specific features of concrete communities and groups were taken into account. But as long as we work with the idea of having users, we are still operating within the same logic. The very fact that there is no better expression to designate people who live in the spaces produced with the help of architects, is itself a symptom of our imposing practice. Since we apply the term anyway, we should at least be aware of its entanglements.

Yet, some architects are working on a critique of the passive role of the user, seeing architecture more as an event than as an object. But often they do not really reach a point where relations of production are questioned. Bernard Tschumi, for instance, advocates that it is not important what a building looks like but what it 'does'.[9] In any case, who defines what a building shall 'do' is still the architect and not the user or the practice of use. The proposed design process for such an event-architecture is often based on prescriptions of movement. (An example is the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2000. Hani Rashid and Greg Lynn, together with their students, have recorded the movement of a person within the empty pavilion and then created a kind of wire-frame structure representing her movement. This structure was placed inside the pavilion, resulting in it being a greater obstacle to other people's movement than the empty pavilion itself).[10] Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, for their part, stress the experience of the user in a given space. Pelletier even focuses on the role of ephemeral architecture in an attempt to emphasise experience over the conception of finished buildings.[11] But since the social process of production is hardly discussed, such a user remains a contemplator, or at best an interpreter of a given poetry. Finally, Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till see architecture as an event closer to the way we do, envisaging a design for action.[12] Their practice also contrasts to most designs in welcoming the change that an event-based principle of design and building will inevitably engender. But even in this case there persists the premise that conception, building and use are separate operations. Going a bit further, the way we see architecture as an event means that the whole process of the production of space needs revision, from designing to building and using. Instead of basing design on a prescription of events, on foresight, on previous experience, or on careful observation, our question is how to provide instruments or interfaces that allow people to communicate their desires: to simultaneously design, build and use their spaces. Such instruments would be like alphabets and words, with maybe some glimpses of grammatical rules, but surely no texts. Architecture would be part of the action, not its background and neither its well-defined outline.

A second very important author for a critical discussion on architecture, is the Brazilian architect and artist Sérgio Ferro. In the sixties, having

9 Cf. Bernard Tschumi, Lecture at Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, 28 November 2002.

10 Cf. Asymptote.net, '2000 Venice Biennale U.S. Pavilion', (2008); www.asymptote.net.

11 Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, Lecture at School of Architecture, UFMG, Brazil, 5-7 August 2007.

12 Cf. Sarah Wigglesworth, 'Place setting—Wigglesworth and Till Architects', in Peter Cook and Neil Spiller (eds.), *The Lowe Lectures: The Power of Contemporary Architecture*, (London: Wiley, 1999), pp. 116–19; Jeremy Till, 'Too many ideas', *EAAE News Sheet*, 59(1)(2001): 20–24.

recently graduated, he took part in the design of buildings for Brasília, the new Capital. The contrast between the inhuman conditions of those building sites and the political and architectural discourses on freedom and democracy, which supposedly gave rise to the whole enterprise of Brasilia, led him to formulate a radical critique of all architectural design. In Ferro's view, design is nothing more than a way to turn architecture into a so-called 'commodity-form', or in other words, the existence of a previous design is the main condition for the systematic production of architecture as commodity.[13]

[13] Cf. Sérgio Ferro, 'O Canteiro e o Desenho', in Sérgio Ferro, *Arquitetura e Trabalho Livre*, (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006), pp. 105–200, [our translation].

Fig. 5. According to Sérgio Ferro, design is necessary to turn architecture into commodity, controlling its process of production by predefining the product. Brazilian magazines of 1947, 1971 and 2007 show the privately owned home (in Portuguese, *casa própria*) as an unquestionable object of desire. Images: *Arquitetura e Engenharia, (*6)(1947); *Veja,* September 1971; *Veja,* March 2007. Collage: MOM.

As every other process that produces commodities for the sake of maximum profit, the modern building industry depends on the extraction of surplus value, which means that the employed labour has to produce more value than it receives in payment.

This condition is very difficult to achieve if builders work in largely non-hierarchised group, with widespread manual and intellectual skills, taking decisions and carrying them out as part of the same process, and defining its outcome only gradually. In other words, the prevailing order of almost every building site of medieval times, of most ordinary (non-monumental) building sites up to the 19th century, and all spontaneous or informal building sites is inappropriate for the capitalist building industry. It is called 'backward' and contrasted to a 'modern' approach. Ferro argues that Brunelleschi was the first to engage in such a 'modern' order, guaranteeing the extraction of surplus value. The way Brunelleschi acted in the Duomo's building site illustrates that:

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> Faced with a strike for better wages (already extremely diversified), he [Brunelleschi] imports non-Florentine workers, managing to end the strike. And he only accepts the original workers back for smaller wages than those that had prompted the strike (in another words, he is taking care of the absolute surplus value). Worried by the loss of time and energy, [Brunelleschi] installs a canteen on the top of the dome [...] to stop the workers going down to eat, drink, meet each other and talk (we can recognise his aim: the relative surplus value) [...]. He did not hesitate, for example, to fake a disease making the hated Ghiberti lose his position as construction manager as he was ignorant of the tricks of his drawings.[14]

[14] Ibid. pp.105–200 (our translation).

The design, conceived separately and coded in a drawn language builders may understand but are not able to operate with, makes it possible to 'modernise' the sector. Builders can be alienated from the decisions and results, hierarchised according to specific skills and employed at low wages. Disqualification of labour here is very similar to that of a classic factory, with the distinctive feature that its domination has to be consistently reproduced through violence, since on most building sites machinery is not complex enough to assure the division of labour. Unlike workers in a factory, building-workers are usually aware of the fact that the hierarchical order, which subordinates them is not a technical but an administrative feature, and that they would be able to do the same or even a better job without such an order.

Complementary to this short explanation of Ferro's main ideas, it should be noted that the production of surplus value depends on technologically less developed branches, or to be more specific, on labour-intensive sectors such as building construction. Every period of economic growth since the Renaissance was in some way related to intense building activity, not as its consequence but as part of its cause. And as far as we know such a building activity always provides jobs in the worst conditions and at the lowest wages. This was true of the 'Brazilian miracle' during the sixties and seventies, and is still true in the China or India of today. Even in rich countries, such as France, England or Germany, building is hard work carried out mainly by immigrants or other underprivileged social groups. In the face of such evidence, it seems quite bizarre to take Oscar Niemeyer's forms as an expression of freedom. They are in fact just metaphors of lack, because their legendary freedom of gesture only means bondage for others. Obviously we are not blaming architects for the whole mode of production of our society, but if we want to discuss any alternative practice we must question the economic function of design.

During the last couple of decades a lot has been said about the relation of autonomy to architecture, in most cases discussing architecture's status as an autonomous art or science. But autonomy, as well as heteronomy, involves the *nomos*—that is to say the norm. Norms are defined by

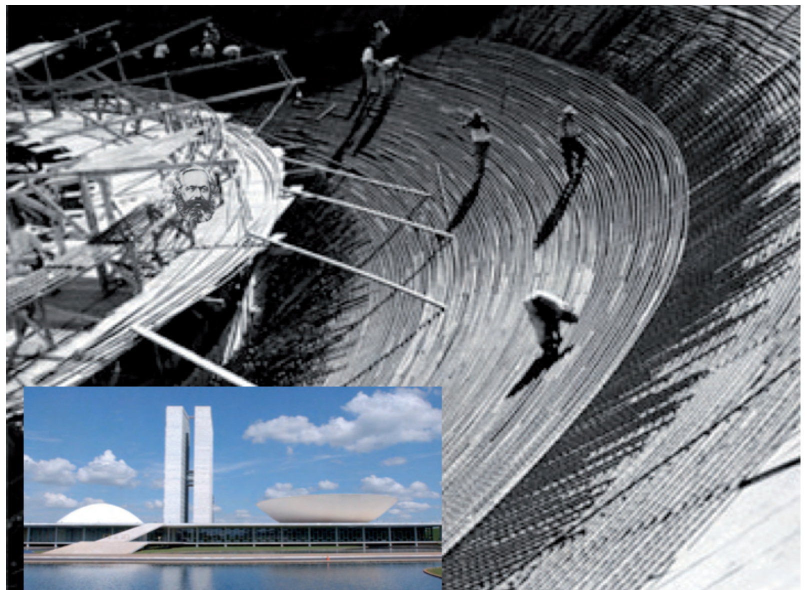

Fig. 6. A typical informal building site with no hierarchy at Aglomerado da Serra, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Photos and Collage: MOM, 2007.

Fig. 7. The famous inverted dome of the National Congress in Brasília designed by Oscar Niemeyer. The structurally inefficient shape demanded an extraordinary reinforcement of the concrete only made possible by very hard and boringly meticulous work. Photos: Marcel Gautherot, 1959, Instituto Moreira Sales Archive; Reynaldo Stavale, Chamber of Deputies of Brazil, 2007. Collage: MOM, 2007.

people through human action and are not similar to natural laws or mechanical devices. Therefore, nothing but people can be autonomous. The expression, 'autonomy of architecture' only means that architects, editors, theoreticians and other actors of this cultural field—which, as said before, covers only a small part of architecture as event—follow a set of norms historically defined by themselves. And such norms serve a double function. Applied on the outside on users' lives and builders' labour, they

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appear as heteronomy and take part in a larger context of domination. On the other hand, the assumption of autonomy protects us against the crude consciousness of this context. In the name of autonomy, the field can refuse to see mass production as 'real' architecture, even though architects mostly design ordinary spaces. Domination always seems more acceptable if it is only an exception: a means to an end, which is a noble art. About Niemeyer's work in Brasilia, most specialists would agree that it was worth the pain.

If we are really interested in a free society we should change perspective and privilege the autonomy of people affected by architectural practice over the autonomy of architects. The only norm for architecture in this case would be a negative one: the more an object or process restrains the autonomy of individuals or primary groups, or imposes dependency on large systems, institutions or interventions, the worse it is. On the other hand, the ideal of such a view would be to emancipate both groups by reverting their separation according to the economical functions of mere consumers or mere labour-power.

Mediation

An everyday production of space, which in some aspects resembles the idea of emancipation, happens in Brazilian favelas today. Nevertheless, the *favela* space should not be romanticised as it occurs out of necessity not choice. The relative autonomy of the *favela* dwellers in the production of their spaces is a direct consequence of their marginal position in the economic system, which excludes them from the consumption of architecture as a formally produced commodity. Any of its possible advantages are born out of its antagonisms within the socially dominant order. It is exactly this antagonistic situation that leads us to the second task mentioned above: architectural practice as mediation in the service of people's autonomy. Mediation means that architects act upon users' requests for removing obstacles to the construction of knowledge and taking of action.
Favela dwellers decide by themselves what to do, working within unconventional relations of production, without separating conception, construction and use. The low-income self-producers we have talked to do not have a plan to rationalise construction and make it cheaper, they keep no record of their expenses, and they do not hesitate to experiment. But in *favelas* building also means hard work because it uses techniques and materials forged by and for heteronomous processes. In fact, *favela* dwellers are excluded from the formal real estate market but at the same time they represent a significant percentage of the consumption of industrially produced building materials, such as cement and its derivates. These techniques and materials do not favour an autonomous process, for instance making difficult the engagement of women and children, the reuse of building components, or open experimentation. There is a basic

contradiction between quasi-autonomous relations of production and heteronomous means of production. Mediation can be useful in bridging this gap, provided that we distinguish very carefully between situations in which the mediation of an architect is desired and those in which it would only restrain autonomy.

Fig. 8. Mediation is not wanted in the building process of Francisco's house at Aglomerado da Serra. Photo and Collage: MOM, 2007.

Francisco, a self-builder in Aglomerado da Serra, the biggest *favela* in Belo Horizonte, is an illustrative example of someone who manages to bridge the aforesaid gap with his own inventiveness (we have already extensively described this in another paper).[15] Francisco is building his house as he conceives and uses it. There is no division between intellectual and material work and therefore he achieves forms and spaces that would be impossible to design. As most people in *favelas*, he does not know any other techniques and materials than the conventional ones, but he achieves his highly individual result because he is inventive enough to use these conventional resources in new ways. Perhaps if Francisco had more knowledge he could mobilise 'proper' technical resources for his specific architectural event and even increase his autonomy. But it could equally happen that a formal knowledge of techniques and materials developed for heteronomous production, would rather lead him to reproduce the formal logic of production. In his current work, he is not constrained by such a knowledge and at the same time his ignorance does not prevent him from acting. The same is not true of the mechanic Roberto, another self-builder in Aglomerado da Serra, who is in fact almost paralysed by his ignorance. Roberto is not particularly interested in building; he does it only because there is no choice. He seeks advice from his friends and neighbours and would surely welcome technical support. In his case, mediation means an increase in autonomy since it would enable him to develop his own spatial ideas.

15 Ana Paula Baltazar and Silke Kapp, 'Learning from "*Favelas*": The Poetics of Users' Autonomous Production of Space and the Non-ethics of Architectural Interventions', in *Proceedings of the International Conference Reconciling Poetics and Ethics in Architecture*, (McGill University, Canada, September 2007) available; http://www.arch.mcgill.ca/theory/conference/papers.htm.

Fig. 9. Mediation would be welcome in the building process of Roberto's house. The two images were taken in January and July 2007, showing that the only visible change in six months was the infrastructure installed through governmental intervention. Photos: MOM, 2007.

Another context in which mediation may be welcome concerns public infrastructure or facilities. In *favelas* people usually tackle only the immediate need of the dwelling unit, cutting out sanitation pipes just outside the house, or building in places with no vehicle access. Communities grow too fast to allow spontaneous negotiation and development of infrastructure. The usual institutional response to this situation is something between the radical extermination of the whole settlement or their urbanisation by means of an abstract plan. In all cases this is carried out from the top-down, being heteronomous, formal and normative, without any trace of the mediation we advocate. Instead of learning from the rich process of the production of space in *favelas*, the professionals involved just impose their own practices on them, reproducing the idea of predetermined finished spaces for generic users.

Fig. 10. Recent urbanisation in the Aglomerado da Serra, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. An abstract plan was imposed upon the concrete social and spatial organisation of the self-produced settlement, dismantling a long-established negotiation process. Photo: MOM, 2007.

In contrast, the urbanisation of the *favela* Brás de Pina in Rio de Janeiro, offers a glimpse of the kind of mediation we mean. This enterprise was very atypical because it happened against military policies, which dominated the scene in the sixties. At that time, Rio de Janeiro had two almost opposite agencies to deal with the 'problem' of *favelas*. The military group had created an agency called Chisam to remove them, and the journalist Silvio Ferraz had managed to create another one called Codesco for their local urbanisation. Codesco was only possible due to the elected governor Negrão de Lima, who tolerated it as long as it worked silently, without any propaganda and without affronting Chisam. In this context, the usual bureaucracy did not disturb the urbanisation of Brás de Pina and it was possible to provide mediation instead of an imposing plan. Ferraz hired a group of architects chosen by the local community and Brás de Pina turned into a process involving 998 families, including almost five thousand people.

> The scheme was simple: the people of the *favela* designed their houses (as dreamt by them), architecture students corrected any design mistakes and also estimated the costs; economy students verified people's ability to pay back debt by comparing their income with the estimated costs. Once this was done, people were able to get the cheque to buy building material in any shop registered with Codesco. This register was needed to make sure the shops were not overpricing. Eventually, more architecture and economy students were called in to supervise building and material delivery. Houses were not necessarily built with bricks and mortar. [...] There was no aesthetic prejudice. The only exigency was that every unit was to be connected to the water supply and sanitation systems. [...] Everyone had a say in every step of the decisions regarding the collective infrastructure, if not by directly deciding then by voting. As a result the houses built by the dwellers were almost 20m² bigger than those usually constructed through institutional intervention. [...] Lack of payment has never been more than two percent and was always justified.[16]

[16] Silvio Ferraz, 'Brás de Pina e Codesco', *Favela tem Memória*, (49) (29 June 2004); http://www.vivafavela.com.br/, [our translation].

Negrão de Lima never sanctioned an event to inaugurate Brás de Pina's urbanisation, as it was clearly seen as an achievement of the dwellers, and not of the government. According to Silvio Ferraz it was also much cheaper and more effective in a range of social aspects than all other institutional interventions of that time.

We have tried a similar process of mediation, in the sense of removing obstacles to action, in the aforementioned *favela*, Aglomerado da Serra. The project was for a small institution, which offers complementary education for children and teenagers in dance, music, video, etc. They needed more teaching space. A contractor had suggested a building of bricks and reinforced concrete, which are the most common materials.

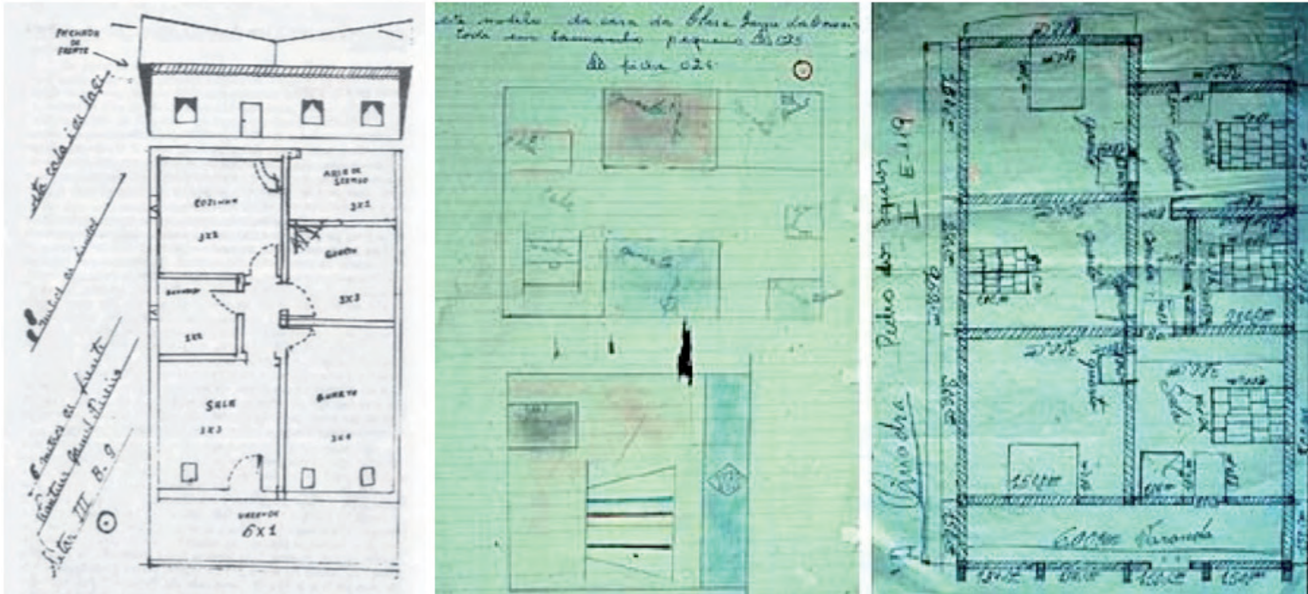

Fig. 11. Drawings from the dwellers of Brás de Pina. Images: Stella Pugliesi, *Urbanização de Favelas*, (São Carlos: USP, 2002). Collage: MOM.

Fig. 12. Teaching space at CIM, Aglomerado da Serra, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The architecture is quite unconventional for its context, but the space is rather appropriate for the climate. It is now used for dance classes. Photos: MOM, 2006.

Since they had no money to build, they asked us for help. We found out that they already owned huge steel pipes and they could get some steel beams for free. Such materials are barely used in *favelas* and although they were freely available, there was no intention of using them. So we helped them to design and to calculate a structure using the steel components. The whole thing cost almost six times less than the conventional building proposed by the contractor.

It is our belief that if architects are to play a role in such processes, mediation is much more important than the design and control of finished spaces. As Brás de Pina illustrates, architects are only supporting actors together with economists, sociologists and other professionals. The mediation this favours is not intermediation: the architect in the centre trying to reconcile two strangers (whether two people or a person and a defined problem). Mediation means to remove social constraints, freeing the exchange of ideas and technical information. It is intended to strengthen people's experience, opinion and judgment, or in short, to enhance their autonomy.

Interfaces

In any case, the mediation discussed above still engenders a kind of dependency, since it assumes the presence of the architect in the event. A further step to increase autonomy would be the production of interfaces that could enable all actors involved to realise their own critical actions on space. Such interfaces can be concrete or abstract, already existing or invented, informational or operational, physical or digital, or any hybrid combination of these possibilities. But they are to be used without the presence of the designer.

For a first exploration of such interfaces, two examples created by the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark are useful: *Sensorial Gloves* (1968) and *Mask with Mirrors* (1967).[17] *Sensorial Gloves* is a set of off-the-shelf gloves and balls of different kinds, sizes, textures and weights, to be experienced by the spectators holding the balls with the gloves on their bare hands. *Mask with Mirrors* is a mask with small moveable mirrors in front of the eyes, juxtaposing and fracturing reflections of the self and the surrounding world. In both cases, Clark provides interfaces for interaction instead of finished art-works:

> Clark rejected the definition of the artist as deified creator, distanced from a spectator who, faced with the work that represents the poetic needs that he himself is incapable of expressing, remains completely passive. On the contrary, Clark handed over the authority of the work to the spectator so that he would cease to behave like one, rediscover his own poetics and become the subject of his own experience.[18]

[17] This argument is developed in detail in: Ana Paula Baltazar dos Santos, *Cyberarchitecture: The Virtualisation of Architecture Beyond Representation Towards Interactivity: Forming and Informing Spaces and Subjects*, forthcoming PhD thesis, (The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, 2008).

[18] Presentation of Clark's work by Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 'Lygia Clark', (1997); www.fundaciotapies.org/site/spip.php?article3058#, [accessed, 19 September 2007]

Clark's focus is not on control, authorship, or physical products. Instead of using expensive materials to obtain an enduring final product for spectators to consume, she uses everyday materials to create very simple objects, enabling people to experiment on their own with sensations beyond their habitual perception. In the case of *Sensorial Gloves*, this means a rediscovery of touch, while *Mask with Mirrors* enables a play with spatial perception. Even without moving the participant is pushed to explore new territories, to engage in new relationships with things, or to rediscover the sensory world. Therefore the art-works are not the objects handed to the spectators, but the outcome of the interaction of the spectators with the objects. The works' actual existence depends on people's presence and interaction, while the only 'final' product of such an event is the enhancement of perception itself. Clark is working as an interface designer, 'a person who induces and channels experiences'[19] without prescribing them. In this sense her interfaces go against the mere reproduction of social relations of production.[20]

Production of space is of course more complex than the events proposed by *Sensorial Gloves* and *Mask with Mirrors*. Nevertheless, we may take them as little pointers towards alternative architectural practices. Design in general, including architecture, is often concerned with realising potentials, with solving established problems rather than raising questions for the user. In contrast, Clark's objects indicate indeterminism and uncertainty as crucial for future designs. They are meant as pieces for experience or as tools to enhance experience by raising questions that are answered differently by each spectator. Considering this, we may go a bit deeper into the specific ideas of three authors we believe to be helpful in clarifying what the design of interfaces could be: John Chris Jones, Vilém Flusser and Ivan Illich.

Jones, in the 1980's version of his *Design Methods*, asserts that modules such as words, bricks, playing cards, etc. are the best examples of design he can think of.[21] According to him the design of modules '[...] is perhaps THE way of designing independently of any exact knowledge of aims, purposes, functions (the things which, in designing as we've known it, get fixed at the start)'.[22] Moreover, in his *Designing Designing*, he stresses that there are two kinds of purposes: 'the purpose of having a result, something which exists after the process has stopped, and does not exist until it has stopped', and 'the purpose of carrying on, of keeping the process going'.[23]

In order to shift from product-orientated to process-orientated design, Jones proposes a separation of the logic of use from the logic of objects and focuses on the latter. Leaving use aside to look at the object may seem strange if we consider the recent discussion on design focused on events aiming at people's participation. But what Jones indicates is that instead of designing finished objects of use with predetermined functions, we should try to look at the objects themselves and their intrinsic logic in the context

19 Manuel J. Borja-Villel, 'Introducción', in *Lygia Clark*, (Barcelona: Fundación Antoni Tàpies, 1997), p. 15, [our translation].

20 For image of *Mask with Mirrors* see; www.leonardo.info/isast/spec.projects/osthoff/osthoff1.html#b; for image of *Sensorial Gloves* see; www.leonardo.info/isast/spec.projects/osthoff/osthoff2.html.

21 John Chris Jones, *Design Methods*, 2nd edition, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992).

22 Ibid., p. XXXV.

23 John Chris Jones, *Designing Designing*, (London: Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1991), p. 162.

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of open processes. This means designing modules as interfaces for people to keep on designing their own worlds. The purpose of such 'modules' is to 'carry on', to enable innovative use since they are not prescribing specific possibilities of use. This is developed further by Flusser.

In *Design: Obstacle for/to the Removal of Obstacles*,[24] Flusser introduces the concepts of 'responsibility' and 'dialogue' in the design context. He argues that objects of use are always designed with the purpose of removing an obstacle, of turning something that was impossible into the possible. Paradoxically, in order to remove obstacles we design objects, which are themselves obstacles. Therefore, and considering that an object of use is also a mediation between the designer and other people, designing means not only opening up communication and action but also restraining possibilities. The question then is how to make objects that create the least obstruction for those following us; or ultimately, to design objects that are not objective. Responsibility in design means this openness of the design to others. The more the objects designed obstruct other people, the less dialogical they are and the less responsible their design is. On the other hand, responsible design leads to less objective (obstructive) and more intersubjective or interrelational design products.

[24] Vilém Flusser, 'Design: Obstacle for/to the Removal of Obstacles', in Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*, (London: Reaktion, 1999), pp. 58–61.

The questions discussed by Jones and Flusser from the perspective of the design itself are addressed by Illich in a wider social context. He considers that instruments and techniques are never neutral but consistent with a certain mode of production and its corresponding social formation. As André Gorz has pointed out, current technology 'imposes a certain technical division of labour, which on its part demands a certain kind of subordination, hierarchy and despotism.'[25] That is why emancipated production would depend not only on changing the ownership of the means of production, as claimed by classic Marxism, but also upon changing the very constitution of such means. Illich has developed this idea opposing the 'industrial tools of manipulation' to what he calls 'tools for conviviality'.[26] While the former are aimed at the interests of 'industries' (today we would say 'corporations'), the latter are aimed at social justice and free work:

> Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision. Industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectations of others. Most tools today cannot be used in a convivial fashion.[27]

[25] André Gorz, *Crítica da divisão do trabalho*, (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1996), p.12, [our translation].

[26] Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), available; http://clevercycles.com/tools_for_conviviality/.

[27] Ibid., paragraph 98.

The purpose of convivial tools is to trigger events and to stimulate dialogue, intersubjectivity, interrelations and political processes of social construction. Therefore, the main principles of their design also apply to what we call interfaces:

> Tools foster conviviality to the extent to which they can be easily used, by anybody, as often or as seldom as desired, for the accomplishment of a purpose chosen by the user. The use of such tools by one person does not restrain another from using them equally. They do not require previous certification of the user. Their existence does not impose any obligation to use them. They allow the user to express his meaning in action.[28]

[28] Ibid., paragraph 101.

Being critical, Illich does not define how to design tools for conviviality but he indicates some features of manipulative tools to be reversed. One of them is called 'overprogamming', which means to over determine things, including objects of use, so that people just 'obtain' them and have to be taught how to operate them. They hardly have any chance to learn from their own doing. Illich also discusses the interventions in *favelas* or settlements in Mexico and Peru in these terms: professionally produced buildings in informal spaces not only create dependency but also devaluate self-production, since overprogramming is seen by many as 'progress'.

> Societies in which most people depend for most of their goods and services on the personal whim, kindness, or skill of another are called 'underdeveloped', while those in which living has been transformed into a process of ordering from an all-encompassing store catalogue are called 'advanced'.[29]

[29] Ibid., paragraph 109.

For Illich, we should instead 'simplify the tools' and 'enable the layman to shape his immediate environment to his taste'.[30]

[30] Ibid., paragraph 135.

Although Illich's view is similar to ours in many respects and although he uses the term 'tool' in a very broad sense (including institutions and 'productive systems for intangible commodities', such as schools),[31] we have a precise reason to prefer the term 'interface'. While Illich is critical of the goals of current western science, he seems to be quite confident in their main principles and methods. His choice of the term 'tool' echoes this confidence, his question being mostly concerned with the application of scientific discoveries or even just with the scale of such applications. He goes as far as to propose the recognition of natural scales and limits in order to enable a future society to not be dominated by industry. But science as well as technology is not neutral. Horkheimer, Adorno and other critical theorists consider the 'dialectic of enlightenment' far beyond the commonplace that 'machine enslaves human', being also critical of the very logic of science and philosophy.[32] So we prefer the term 'interface' because it is less entangled with this logic, especially the principle of causality. An interface is something that separates and connects at the same time; something that does not even determine the nature of the mediation it enables (separation or connection).
Our research group has developed an interface, a kind of 'tool for conviviality'. The 'interface of spatiality' as it is called, is a set of modular

[31] Ibid., paragraph 97.

[32] Cf. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (New York: Continuum, 1976).

plastic pipes, spatial joints made of laminated wood, pieces of fabric of different type, size and colour, ropes and pins to stabilise the structure. It may be used to create ephemeral spaces or to discuss and have a feeling about physical spaces before actually building them. Since it is very easy to assemble, people can quickly experiment with different spatial arrangements without constraints. As a design the 'interface of spatiality' was developed with the purpose to 'carry on'. We needed something to stimulate people's bodily, imaginative and collective engagement with the process of simultaneously building and using space. Therefore the design is open, or as Jones puts it, conceived according to the logic of the object and not the logic of any prescribed use. Its bits and pieces are carefully determined but the spaces created with it and their uses are not. This 'interface of spatiality' has already been used in several different contexts, sometimes with a well-defined purpose and ourselves as mediators, sometimes without our presence and only with the intent to 'carry on'. We learnt a lot from each instance of its use and this has fed back to us in our practical exercise of critique.

An example of an open use of this interface was the project *Lot of Ideas*,[33] for which it was primarily designed. It was a one-day event to publicly occupy a private vacant lot. In order to attract people we had invited several artist groups, who were not supposed to perform presentations of their work, but to engage with other people present in the appropriation of the lot, either using the 'interface of spatiality' or not. An interesting case occured as a duo of dancers decided to use it to perform an improvised dance. They danced in it as if it were a set, without (dis)assembling any part or changing anything. They were even distressed when they involuntarily dislodged a couple of pieces. The interface was used as any other finished space, as a background for the event they were creating. The temporarily finished space was more important than the potential for change.

After watching them we were quite unhappy with the limitation of the 'interface of spatiality' for the purpose of 'carrying on'. Although the time required to assemble the pieces was not a problem for other people, it was impossible for someone dancing to simultaneously build the space using the interface available. It had turned into a final object, at least temporarily. The dancers, though, seemed happy with the interface even if they were not able to actually use it as an open instrument, it was 'inspiring' as they put it. A couple of months later we learnt that one of our partners in the project, *Lot of Ideas*, was commissioned by the dancers to create the set for their next presentation. It ended up as their greatest performance ever and they won a number of prizes for it. All the scenery proposed was moveable and constructed as the dancers performed. Their performance depended on their engagement with the moveable scenery, objects and light. They simultaneously danced and built the space of the dance. The scenery was a perfect interface for the timing of their dance.

33 'Lot of Ideas' was conceived by a group of artists and architects including MOM, as part of the project, *Empty Lots: Collective Action of Experimental Urban Occupation*, conceived by architects Louise Ganz and Breno da Silva, 2005.

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Fig. 13. 'Interface of spatiality': separates and connects without determining the nature of the mediation it enables (separation or connection). Photo: MOM, 2005.

We are not claiming that we have anything to do with the design of such an interface. But we would like to consider the hypothesis that the practical exercise of critique put forward by our 'interface of spatiality' has exercised a great influence on both the set-designer and the dancers. The apparent failure of the 'interface of spatiality' as a practical critique, when first used by the dancers, was immediately surpassed by the success of the critical virus it spread. The main point of this story is to acknowledge the limit of any interface and the unlimited range of the reach of critique (theoretical and practical). Interfaces are only welcome when they are critical and trigger autonomy.

Last Question

The main goal of MOM is to develop a strong critique of traditional architectural practices. In order to do this we resort to theory, field research and to our own experiments with mediation and the design of interfaces. These are informed by and inform back the critique. It is the aim of MOM to investigate and test open source means to enable alternative and autonomous practices for the production of ordinary, everyday spaces. Most architectural initiatives that deal with ordinary spaces are focused on problem solving and have systematically failed. The problems they tackle can be summarised as a collective problem of exclusion, which needs a thorough critique instead of poor attempts at solutions. It is unquestionable that space, thus architecture, is crucial to social practices. Therefore, architecture should be discussed as a socio-economic issue and not as a solution to immediate problems, which are always defined by the very same context that causes them.

An illustrative example of how problem solving works is the intervention of the Brazilian national health foundation (Funasa) in native Brazilian communities. Those communities used to produce their spaces according

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to a circular logic, not only building circular spaces but also circulating over the land (in fact, such spaces were produced so that they could be built alongside work, leisure, and other everyday life activities, bit by bit and without any anxiety to finish). When the area's natural resources were nearly exhausted they would move to a new place. Nowadays, they have lost most of the land and are not able to keep living in the same way. Among other things, sanitation became a great issue and Funasa came up with a solution to their problem: a prefab toilet to be placed outside every house.[34] Not only did this solution not solve anything but it created several new problems. The toilets have become a breeding ground for insects, they generate a bad smell, and will end up contaminating the soil and water since their users have no means of carrying out the necessary maintenance.

Of course this example is almost a caricature. But the point is that problem solving strategies always reproduce a logic similar to the one described above. The first step, as the name indicates, is to clearly and precisely stipulate a problem. This alone is enough to isolate any further step from real life and from the complexity of its contingencies. Moreover, it neglects real people because real people do not behave according to the simple logic of cause and effect; they have imagination, judgement and free will far beyond this closed logic.

In opposition to problem solving practices are the possibilities proposed by Jones, Flusser and Illich. Their methods entail looking at processes not products: looking at the design of interfaces to enable continuity rather than designing finished 'solutions' for use. However, these possibilities would also mean a shift in the production of architecture as a commodity. We are aware of the fact that no manager or public administrator these days would consider this idea 'sustainable', since sustainability is mostly understood as the guarantee of continuous profit. But perhaps we should also consider that today one in every six human being lives as a squatter and that this number is constantly increasing. Therefore, alternative practices focused on use value rather than exchange-value may not be considered as 'utopian' as they appear at first sight. Informal practices could benefit from new instruments—legal, informational and physical—to provide greater autonomy for producers and to make it easier to experiment. And although our own research focus is not on formal practices, they could also become more orientated towards processes, decreasing their emphasis on buildings as commodities, and making the building process more flexible and less imposing, in order to accommodate everyday interferences from workers and users alike. We believe that critique, mediation and the production of interfaces are a means of achieving this. Although there might be many others, those are our research alternatives to normative, heteronomous and problem solving practices.

[34] Cf. www.funasa.gov.br/Web%20Funasa/not/not2007/not211.htm.

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Evolving Participatory Design: A Report from Berlin, Reaching Beyond

Mathias Heyden / ISPARA (Institut für Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung / Institute for Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation)

Starting from a close-up view of a Berlin site typical in its mixing of top-down and bottom-up cultures, the paper focuses on the increasing informal, situated and everyday urbanisms in Berlin and abroad.
It interrogates the strategies of participatory design and spatial appropriation that could help to transform these forces into long term, sustainable and holistic practices. Looking at the artist-squat K77, the research/event/publication, *Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation*, the design/concept Forum K 82—a centre for cooperative, self-determined education and work, and through research on US-American Community Design, the paper argues for bringing activist and architectural practices, university work, political and economic discourse into an immanent and productive exchange that reinforces direct-democratic and sustainable potentials in the built environment

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Pointing at Berlins Top-down/Bottom-up Crossroads

Berlin 2007, at Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm looking toward Köpenicker Straße/Schillingbrücke: at one time the green median on which we stand was a canal that led to the Spree River and to this day still divides the neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg and Mitte. Along the same median ran the Berlin wall completely severing one part of the city from the other. The nearby Spree River was continuing this separation to the southeast. That's eighteen years ago now. The Schillingbrücke is now re-constructed and connects the east and west almost as if nothing had happened. However, the surrounding architecture tells another story.

Directly on the left bank of the river, sits the Bundeszentrale der Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, known as Ver.di (Federal Offices of the Service Industries Union). Red stone encases an office building very typical of Berlin's recent architecture with its huge glazed foyer, having displaced the *Schwarzer Kanal e.V*[1]*.,* one of the city's oldest alternative trailer-parks. On the other side of the river stands one of the countless new hotels—proof of practically the only economic boom in the now almost bankrupt capital. Immediately next-door is the *Maria am Ostbahnhof*, one of the hippest clubs in the city over the past ten years, which as a temporary user occupies the basement level of an otherwise demolished building now completely overgrown with wild city vegetation and more or less hidden from sight. Back on the Kreuzberg side, directly opposite the Ver.di: simple steel and concrete structures from the 1960's and 70's house companies mostly serving the building industry. From Engeldamm, looking in the direction of former east Berlin-Mitte one sees the remaining pre-war *Gründerzeit* tenements (so called 'Wilhelminian' style from the turn of the 20th century)—in many cases renovated for speculative gain in recent years; behind them lies industrial GDR housing from the 1970's and 80's. But it is the lot opposite Ver.di's top-down architecture that stands out from the surroundings.

[1] Cf. www.schwarzerkanalev.de; www.schwarzerkanal.squat.ney; www.wagendorf.de.

A dilapidated *Gründerzeit* tenement and the neighbouring impromptu trailer park, *Köpi*—a squatting project known across Europe—there has been a struggle since 1990 for a user-determined development of the city.[2] Significantly, one of the central points of origin of this bottom-up culture lies right around the corner. I'm referring to the former Bethanien hospital at Kreuzberger Mariannenplatz, which was squatted successfully as the *Georg-Rauch-Haus* in the beginning of the 1970's, and is considered a breeding cell of the bottom-up driven city development that still marks Kreuzberg today.

[2] Cf. www.koepi137.net; ww.squat.net/de

Something else is spoiling the view: directly behind the church on Mariannenplatz, exactly where the Berlin Wall stood, two lots have grown into Turkish 'victory gardens' with accompanying sheds that remind one more of an Istanbul *gecekondu*[3] or shanty than a typically tidy

[3] In Turkish, *gece* means *night* and *kondu* means *placed* or *put*; thus the term *gecekondu* literally means *placed (built) overnight*. In *Shadow Cities* Robert Neuwirth writes that *gecekondu*-builders are exploiting a legal loophole, which states that if one starts building after dusk and moves into a completed house before dawn the same day without being noticed by the authorities, then the next day the authorities are not permitted to tear the building down but instead must begin a legal proceeding in court (and thus it is more likely one can stay). Neuwirth states also that 'half the residents of Istanbul—perhaps six million people—dwell in *gecekondu* homes'. At present, some *gecekondu* areas are being gradually demolished and replaced by modern mass-housing compounds developed by the Turkish government's Housing Development Administration. Cf. Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Berlin garden cottage. This type of architecture, which in Turkey is built practically overnight is still standing in 2007, eighteen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, having occupied East German territory that ran along the western side of the wall and therefore fell outside of either jurisdiction. Such sets of examples could be extended to include many locations throughout the city, all of which support the thesis that the production and use of space in the capital, at least in most inner districts, has been determined through top-down as well as bottom-up development. It must be said that there is an ambivalent play of power and the tendency at the moment leans away from the bottom-up, alternatively driven potentials, as is often the case.

Generally it must be noted that the characteristic achievements of Berlin's city development are closely tied to the city's history. Berlin has had to re-make itself (politically, economically, socially and finally culturally) repeatedly since the beginning of the 20th century and so it has also had to reconsider it's planning and building on a regular basis. This permanent laboratory situation, some call it "Berlin Transit", cannot be directly applied to other cities. But it does seem attractive, useful and promising for a multitude of objectives.

Fig. 1. (Left) Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm looking toward Köpenicker Straße, Berlin, 2007. Photo: Mathias Heyden. Fig. 2. (Right) Cover: *Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung und Mathias Heyden (Hg.), Berlin - Wohnen in eigener Regie! Gemeinschaftsorientierte Strategien für die Mieterstadt (Berlin – Community oriented Strategies for the Tenants City)*. Design: bildwechsel / www.image-shift.net, Berlin 2007.

Assuming that Berlin's city development is increasingly consolidating itself, in other words 'normalising', one is forced to ask how one can apply the potentials springing from the various exceptional (bottom-up) situations to general planning. At the moment this raises in particular the question of the relationship between the numerous experiments in

temporary urban appropriation and a city development that is increasingly oriented toward capital. In terms of concrete planning, how do the (sub)cultures of 'between-use' affect the general planning and building culture? To what extent is this not becoming or already is a part of the neo-liberal project, when for example, the heart of the 'between-use' culture, the districts of Friedrichshain-Kreuberg *Spreeraum* (a vast tract of inner city vacant land on both sides of the Spree River) are increasingly defined by profit-oriented ventures? In particular, the *Media-Spree*-Development, which is trying to 'integrate' the (sub)culture of the so-called urban pioneers into their agenda.

If one considers in this conjunction recent temporary interventions by architects (events, structures and buildings of a temporary nature in a progressive sense) as a precious field research, must we not then ask how to transform such interventions into a direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic city development? If, as we can see especially in the Berlin context over recent years, architects increasingly collaborate with people from all kinds of (sub)cultural fields, shouldn't they also engage more intensively with politics and law, economics and ecology in order to have an impact on the city as a whole? In consequence: how do we make local-spatial commitments in a world in which time moves with speed and people change places at such a fast rate—*Situational Urbanism* vs. spatial commitment?[4] One example of architectural practice reaching out to some possible answers is the project *K 77* at Kastanienallee 77, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, which began as a temporary action, as a performance based on an expanded notion of art, but at the same time urged a direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic, approach.

From Squatting—Art—1. Aid to Art. Commune. Capital. 10 Years K 77[5]

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 marked the beginning of a process of spatial redefinition for the entire GDR: formerly nationalised property was predominantly transferred into private ownership. Alongside this major shift, the majority of planners thoroughly engaged in the capitalist takeover of previously socialist space (so-called *Volkseigentum*, meaning people's property). The rare chance to create a radical and emancipative system of collective property (ruled by the users instead of anonymous administrations or capital) has rarely been taken advantage of.

On November 24th 1990, following a three-day street battle—after the German Unification Treaty was in full force—twelve squatted houses on Mainzerstrasse in a Friedrichshain neighbourhood were violently evacuated by about 4000, mostly West German police and border officers. As a consequence, a policy was put into action that would immediately suppress any further attempts at occupation. In this situation, a group of students of different disciplines from the University of the Arts

4 Cf. Jesko Fezer und Mathias Heyden, 'Pluralistisch-antihegemonialer Urbanismus, Anwaltsplanung, Partizipative Architektur und Community Design Centre', *Archplus 183*: *Situativer Urbanismus*, (Mai 2007): 92-95; Jesko Fezer and Mathias Heyden, 'The Ambivalence of Participation and *Situational Urbanism*', in AAA-Peprav (eds.), *Urban/ACT: A Handbook for Alternative Practice*, (Montrouge: Moutot Imprimeurs, 2007), pp. 329-335.

5 Based on a text for the exhibition and catalogue; Axel John Wieder (curator), *Jetzt und 10 Jahre Davor*, (Berlin, Kunst-Werke Berlin, 2004).

Berlin intervened with the *1. Mainzer Kunstausstellung: Vom Eindruck der Staatsgewalt auf die Netzhaut* (1st Mainzer Art Exhibition: From Expression of State Violence on the Retina). The ambivalent strategy made a building intentionally damaged by construction workers (in order to prevent squatters and alike) accessible to the public, as an exhibition, for an afternoon.

Through the following *2. Mainzer Kunstausstellung—Von HausbesetzerInnen und anderen Bösewichtern* (2nd Mainzer Art Exhibition: From House Squatters and other Villains) emerged a long-term artistic/political collaboration. The participants organised a club engaging in various activities for the establishment of joint living and working spaces as laboratories for imagining a future beyond Socialism and Capitalism.

On June 20, 1992, the *NotärztInnen-Team der Vereinigten Varben Wawavox* (Emergency-Doctor-Team of the United Colours of Wawavox) performed a heart transplant in Kastanienallee 77, a historical building in the district Prenzlauer Berg, which had been vacant for six years. Step by step, and in accordance with their expanded notion of art, the group took over *K 77* as a location for non-speculative, self-defined, communal live, work and culture. Against this backdrop, the Emergency-Doctors, at the closing forum of the exhibit *37 Rooms*, positioned themselves explicitly against any kind of gentrification, in particular in the district of Berlin-Mitte. The Kunst-Werke Berlin e.V. (KW Institute for Contemporary Art) facilitated an exhibition—in aid of a permanent installation of 'room 38 to 103' according to the concept *Social Sculpture K 77*.

At this point the *K 77* buildings were not fit for habitation. Engaging in the *Social Sculpture* included construction with found materials, as well as establishing a collective live and work culture. In order to counteract the anticipated raising of rents that followed the trend of condominium apartments, which had happened in quite a few of the former West-Berlin housing projects in the 1980's, the group worked towards a communal, non-property oriented solution. Since 1994, according to a 50 year lease, the lot is owned by the foundation *Umverteilung! Stiftung für eine solidarische Welt* (Redistribution! Foundation for a World of Solidarity) while the projects association owns the buildings. The real-estate interest gained for the use of the lot goes almost exclusively into socio-political projects, both in Berlin and the third world.

Today, the core members of the self-organised project—about 30 adults and children—live together in 'one flat' on all levels of the *Gründerzeit* tenement, and on top of the small workshop-building in the back—at its core is the principle of a 'negotiation of boundaries'. For example every two years, the inhabitants sort out who wants to live where and in which

Fig. 3. (Left) Kunst. Kommune. Kapital. 10 Jahre K 77 (Art. Commune. Capital. 10 Years K 77). Image: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 1992. Fig. 4. Cover: *Stilkamm 5 1/2 e.V und die Vereinigten Varben Wawavox stellen vor: Ihre Geschichte und ihr Konzept für ein Haus zum gemeinsamen Wohnen und Arbeiten (Stilkamm 5 1/2 e.V and the Vereinigten Varben Wawavox present: Their History and Concept for a House of Common Dwelling and Work)*. Design: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 1992.

(inner) neighbourhood, so that the usage and interpretation of available spaces is constantly renewed.

The high quality of the reconstruction of the old structure of *K 77* (1994-1999) was only made possible through a particular public funding program (existing from 1982-2002), and this enormously helped the sustainability of the experiment. In the process-oriented planning and building stage, a broad variety of forms of self-determination and participation came about: the new spaces were largely laid-out through self-built and partially flexible wallboards. Wall partitions were accordingly fitted with omissions. Openings for light, spatial breaks or room connections were designed so that they can be closed and reopened at 'any time'. Overall, design decisions were left to individuals. General questions (like the layout of floor plans and sections, the kind of construction and material, technical infrastructure of the frontage) were discussed and decided in workshops or weekly meetings, following the principle of consensus. The movie theatre and communal kitchen were designed and built through small competitions. After all, the kitchen is the socio-spatial centre of the house. On the same floor there are spaces for dining, living and play, a 'bathing landscape', a 'public' phone booth and Internet-corner, while in addition a washing-machine room, guestroom, library, three yards and three roof spaces are designed, organised and used commonly.

Alongside collective property and to a certain extent a shared economy, and the possibility to change the internal 'neighbourhoods', there was

and still is a strong attempt to overcome particular conditionings of the individual and the self, and this has lead to collective and self-responsible everyday practices.[6]

In this context, the particular architecture of 'negotiated boundaries' can be seen as a social, cultural and spatial manifestation of a broader understanding of self-empowered space. Such kind of design of the built environment goes along with the deep conviction towards an architecture—described more precisely as radical than oppositional—which relies on the ultimate importance of collective economics in space; an architecture of a direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic economics as an emancipative *Social Sculpture*.

Having been one of the founding members of the project whilst studying architecture, after some time I left school and moved over to the building site: I became an architect through practice, while initiating and experiencing a multitude of strategies of self-determination and participation. The project was an extraordinary opportunity, the best way to become an architect in my opinion. It also drew all available energy into its interior; that is to say that over time we kind of lost the ability to look away from the project. Consequently—after the construction was over—I had the urgent desire to perceive *K 77* as an architect from the outside, to contextualise those experiences in a more general field of design. In order to review my architectural activism, while seeking to expand such beliefs, thoughts, tactics and practices into and against the general development of Berlin and abroad (opposing most top-down driven design), a close research into the broad range of participatory design was desired and necessary. And it became clear to us that if we wanted to spread the agenda of self-determination and participation in the world of planning and building, the education of architects is one of the most important fields to engage in seriously. In doing so, the project *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung* (Under Construction. Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation) emerged and brought me to research and teaching, and to a discourse on such topics in academia.

Under Construction: Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation

From a collaborative seminar at the University of Arts Berlin, the project unfolded into a 14-day building experiment consisting of an exhibition, a lecture series and an open space for spontaneous settlements and unpredictable activities adjacent to the theatre Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin.[7]

The German publication, which followed in 2004, focuses on the viewpoint of planners and architects in the western European context, while relating

[6] Over the years more than 100 people have worked in this space through networks of friends and colleagues towards a self-defined lifestyle. While the first occupants were mostly students who could invest much time in various political, social and cultural non-profit activities, the actors of today are more concerned with earning a living and organising the collective everyday. Still, through the speculation-free lease, district-related and non-profit facilities like a movie theatre, dance and movement studio, artist studios, video, ceramic, wood and bicycle workshops, as well as a natural healing room, can operate at a reasonabe price. And while the thorough restoration and modernisation of the surrounding neighbourhood enforces major gentrification accompanied by the closing of almost every courtyard, the 'Green Oasis' of the front courtyard in *Haus K77* remains open and accessible to everyone.

[7] In cooperation with Jesko Fezer and students of architecture at Universität der Künste Berlin; www.bloccotasti.de/ersatzstadt.

Fig. 5. *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung. Bauexperiment, Ausstellung, Vortragsreihe und offener Raum für Spontanansiedlung und ungeplante Aktivitäten (Under Construction. Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation. Exhibition, Lecture Series and Open Space for Spontaneous Settlements and Unpredictable Activities)*, Jesko Fezer and Mathias Heyden, and Students of the University of Arts Berlin, Department of Architecture. Photo: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 2003.
Fig. 6. Cover: Jesko Fezer und Mathias Heyden (Hg.), metroZones 3, *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung, (Under Construction. Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation)*, Design: bildwechsel / www.image-shift.net, Berlin 2004 / 2007.

to historical discourses and projects starting from the 1960s and extending to present-day concepts and experiments. The publication works as a scientific reader as well as an easily accessible and useful handbook. It includes an introduction, various edited interviews with biographical notes, project illustrations, and correlated material such as additional texts and images, a guide on participative architecture in Western Europe (1960-1990), and an index of people, projects and material documenting the Berlin event *Hier entsteht* in June/July 2003. The main part of the book, the edited interviews held in 2003/2004, features theories, investigations, tactics and practices on communication, design, planning and building ranging from self-building to CAD; on architectural education as well as on self-empowerment, common property and community building.[8]

The project's outcome was and still is awesome. Students became colleagues as researchers, through co-designing and building the event-structure, as well as organising the event, which evolved as an open and lively space for professionals as well as the interested general public. Some also assisted in the guide on participative architecture in Western Europe . And in a similar way to the event, the publication was and is widely acclaimed by all kinds of people. The drive to implement architectural practices such as *K 77* into research and teaching, and the drive to lead

8 Jesko Fezer und Mathias Heyden (ed.), *MetroZones 3—Hier entsteht: Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung*, (Berlin: B_Books, 2004); www.bbooks.de/verlag/HierEntsteht; for English introduction see; www.metrozones.info/entsteht/index.html.

this emerging intellectual, cultural and in the end architectural work back into Berlin discourses and practices, its society and built environment did prove not just necessary but successful and gratifying.

Urban Pioneers: Neoliberal City-entrepreneurs or Agents Challenging a Sustainable City?

The so-called *Kritische Rekonstruktion* (Critical Reconstruction) initiated by actors predominantly from the West and dedicated to 'reinventing' inner city core districts (mainly in the East) according to neo-conservative ideas on the 'European city', is facing heavy and steady critique. Nonetheless, the major cause for the decreasing popularity of these strategies seems to be a declining building economy since the 1990s. Simultaneously, especially in the southeast along the Spree River (Districts Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg), an increasing number of people took over vacant lots and buildings for a variety of temporary purposes, most prominently for clubs, but also other types of self-organised uses (social, cultural and commercial). Contrary to the time between 1989 and 1990, when these spaces were squatted, now the vacant lots and buildings were taken over with legal, but short-term contracts. Until recently, this kind of situational appropriation of space was only taken seriously by some of the younger generation of planners and architects. Today the argument to expand the designer's toolbox with this 'Berlin-type' of informal urbanism is being taken up by the Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung (administration for urban development); this is resulting in promotional agency rather than supporting 'on the ground' initiatives and it is also being taken up by neo-liberal actors, i.e. the *Media-Spree*-Development and its profit oriented ventures.[9]

[9] Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin (ed.), *Urban Pioneers: Stadtentwicklung durch Zwischennutzung / Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin*, (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2007).

In regard to the politics of planning this shift can be seen as positive, at least through the integration of contemporary urban realities in their language, but in the long run questions aimed at strategies for direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic development, remain open. One could say this is reasoned in a kind of politics concerned only with getting from one election to the other. Certainly this is part of the problem, though not the main reason; it is rather to be seen in view of the general flexibilisation and mobilisation of the individual and the self and our societies as a whole. It is to be seen in view of diminishing numbers of employees and a growing number of freelancers; in view of a widening gap in income and the rising price of housing and space for commercial, cultural and ultimately social spaces. And it is finally to be seen in view of a growing individualisation and privatisation of public goods and spaces; parallel to increasing (political and economic) calls to engage in and to extend our civil societies—which seems a serious contradiction.

The myth of the 'creative class' and its adjacent industries as a beacon of hope persists despite the opening up of at least some parts of public as

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well private lots and buildings for development. . Furthermore in Berlin, with its high proportion (although decreasing steadily)of vacant lots and buildings, its (sub)cultural entrepreneurs, there is an emerging group of young Berlin architects who predominantly seem to engage in co-operations with these (sub)cultural producers developing temporary 1:1 projects, rather than challenging themselves in long-term commitments and larger-scale developments. This is not a statement made to undermine such (sub)culturally bound co-operations and temporary projects in any way, quite the opposite. The question here, is rather whether we shouldn't challenge trends, and if so, how we could engage ourselves beyond the 1:1 (event-based projects, while still considering these fieldworks as precious sources of experience to be taken into long term commitments and larger scale co-operations (i.e. with critical-productive experts in politics and law, economics and ecology).

From a broader perspective one could also ask how to bring activist and architectural beliefs, thoughts, tactics and practices, university work, discourses on politics and law, economics and ecology into a productive exchange around the dealings with vacant property (public as well private, in Berlin and abroad), as potential spaces for a future commons. Relating to these questions, a case study of a former public school in Berlin might be revealing.

Forum K 82—Centre for Self-determined, Cooperative Education and Work

In 2004, and visible all over the city, more than a hundred public school buildings were vacant or about to become so. The *K 82* project developed a concept and design for future self-determined, cooperative uses for the Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule, a secondary School in the Prenzlauer Berg quarter.

The particular neighbourhood, formerly known for its intellectually driven, culturally and politically engaged residents, has—simply said —transformed into an area characterised by 'members of the creative class'. The numerous squatted flats and houses have slowly become legally occupied by those who moved from West Berlin for cheaper rent. Today there are multiple restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and numerous boutique shops and the area is occupied by 'young urban professionals' (an old-fashioned term which may be changed) who are facing increasing rents. The neighbourhood is identified in any tourist guide as a must-see 'alternative Berlin'. The inhabitants however, work hard for their earnings, are active in establishing alternative childcare and education, promote organic food and vote predominantly for the left and the green parties. What they do not do is to communicate and promote these everyday conditions, the flexible nature of their work, the economic and in the end social individualisation process taking place and the problems and potentials they face regarding a common present and future.

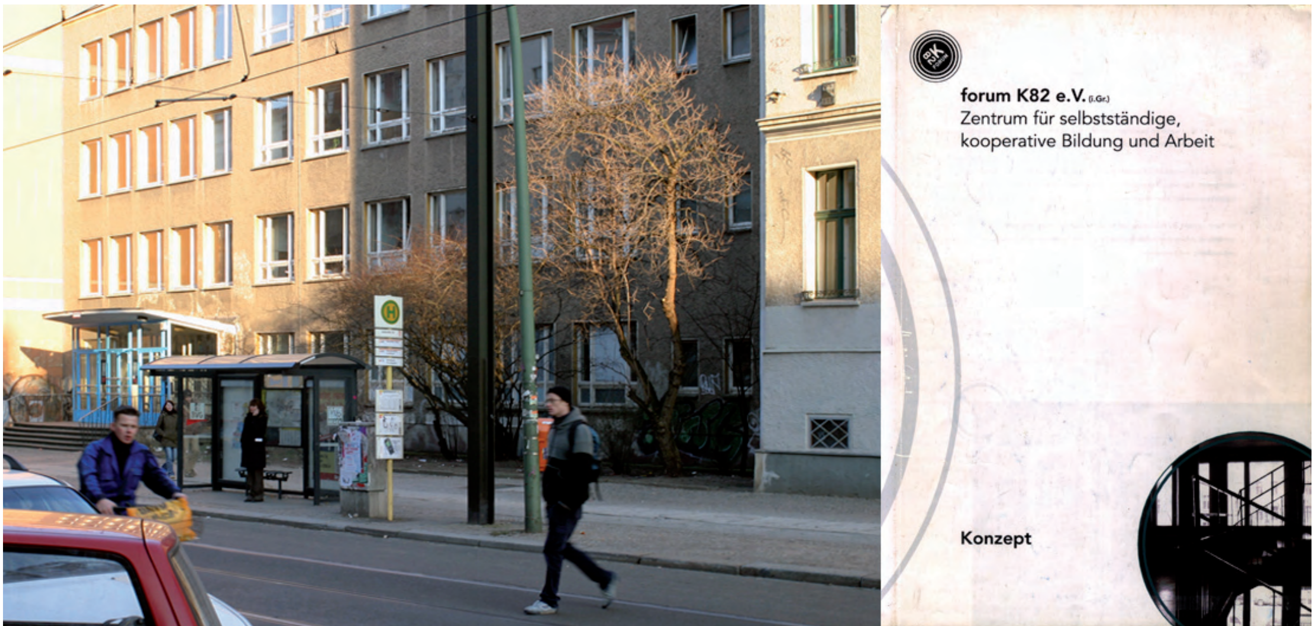

Fig. 7. Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule (Secondary School), Kastanienallee 82, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg. Photo: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 2005. Fig. 8. Cover: *Forum K 82 e.V. (i.Gr.). Zentrum für selbstständige, kooperative Bildung und Arbeit (Forum K 82 e.V. (i.Gr.). Center for Self-determined, Cooperative Education and Work).* Design: Mathias Heyden and Ion Jonas Schmidt, Berlin 2005.

Taking these and other specific aspects of the area into consideration, the design for spaces to communicate and promote the everyday conditions more commonly (in a critical and productive way) in the former Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule, sprang from an architectural studio at Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee (The School of Art and Design Berlin Weissensee). The students' design was communicated quite widely through an arts project (by art students of the same school) taking place in the Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule building for some time. The design was sensitive to the neighbourhood situation and it led to a citizens' initiative, developing a concept for a Berlin centre for self-determined, cooperative education and work, the *Forum K82—Zentrum für selbsbsetimmte, kooperative Bildung und Arbeit* (Forum K 82: Centre for Self-determined, Cooperative Education and Work).[10]

[10] See: www.k82.org

As opposed to temporary projects and uses of space, *Forum K 82* argued for a long-term lease of public property. In doing so the design and the concept promoted more permanent and substantial modes of communication, exchange and cooperation while emphasising the challenges and potentials of changing lifestyles to be promoted; issues which need to be discussed simultaneously with a local and international public. Finally, the design and concept argued that the reuse of the public school could function as an important platform of research by practice looking at our changing societies of today and the ones yet to come. The specific architectural approach was to insist that even when faced with a growing network-society and its particular fragmented dimensions, an

effort to build through a spatiotemporal engagement, that is to say local commitment in a spatial sense, must be taken more seriously than ever.

The project failed mainly due to the district's parliament and government, but it also failed because of a lack of awareness and responsibility in the potential civic actors. This statement is not about criticising particular organisations or individuals, but the prevalent lack of preliminary information, knowledge and discussion, and most of all action towards things to come. This must be seen within the context of a society, which still relies on a version of a welfare mentality (and its left-over 'givens') based on the old, paternalistic model. Self determined and participatory design in such a context even with a common ground and institutional implementation still seems to get stuck in structures, rules and regulations, rather than being an example of direct-democracy and active planning. Questions about the current and future forms of our commons should be more critical and productive than vague discussions on 'the German future' or exalted speculations on 'network-societies'.

One could say: 'so what about "community"' and maybe the dealings on this scale of society, could be helped by the Anglo-American definition? Unfortunately these lines won't leave the space to discuss such anticipation adequately. However, at least from my own viewpoint as an architect engaged in the evolving field of participatory design in central Europe, the North American culture of 'Community Design' carried out by planners and architects, seems to offer promising ways forward that are worth considering.

Community Design: On Involvement and Architecture in the USA since 1963

The term community design indicates how participative planning and architecture try to achieve progressively negotiated, emancipated, just and sustainable productions of space in the US. Emerging in the context of the civil-rights and grass-roots movements of the 1960´s and therefore close to Paul Davidoff's concept of 'advocacy planning'[11], today about a hundred 'Community Design Centres' and similar actors engage all over the country. Committed to serve the public good they primarily work for and with people and/or on topics marginalised in the prevalent productions of space; accordingly clients are citizens and initiatives, private as well public organisations and institutions on the local, state and federal scale. Predominantly Non-Profit or Not-For Profit organisations, they operate as associations staffed by volunteers, as community affected planning, or architecture firms or increasingly within schools of architecture and planning.

One of the oldest institutions of this kind is the Pratt Center for Community Development in New York City.[12] Rural Studio, in Hale

[11] Cf. Paul Davidoff, 'Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning', *Journal of the Institute of American Planners*, 31(4)(1965): 331-338.

[12] Cf. www.picced.org

County, Alabama, is known for its internationally acclaimed 1:1-student-projects and is part of a school of architecture and planning.[13] Also Design Corps is engaging primarily for the underprivileged, but is active all over the county and operates as a small, non-profit architectural firm. Its founder/director Bryan Bell argues vehemently for intervention in the production of space; '98% of which in the US happens without architects'.[14] The Community Design Center of Pittsburgh focuses on direct planning and building for and with the citizens of the post-industrial city, characterised by decay and vast amounts of derelict land.[15] Again in NYC, with multi-disciplinarily objectives the Centre for Urban Pedagogy engages in all kinds of schools and universities while researching and communicating a broad range of planning and design topics within diverse urban scenes.[16] All over the country Community Design actors connect and exchange with each other via the umbrella group Association for Community Design[17].

The wide range of such types of engagement are exemplified further in the Hamer Centre for Community Design Assistance.[18] Residing at the Pennsylvania State University, its work varies from theoretical or scientific projects to on-site construction. Within *design-built* projects, teachers and students have been making earth and straw bale constructions for a couple of years, with a community of Native Americans. Practical and scientific work also comes together in a project dealing with the recycling of building materials, accumulated through different causes of destruction (like storms or floods), or building demolitions.[19] The centre's former director, Michael Rios, who understands architecture, city, regional and landscape planning as a political practice, has been researching community design concepts and projects while asking to what extend they do and can contribute to the quality and enforcement of the US-democracy. He stresses that such work shouldn't alleviate the State from its duties and responsibilities, but that community design must be understood as challenging, qualifying and enforcing the potentials of political and public institutions and commons.[20]

The appropriateness and urgency of these positions and practices becomes especially manifest in regard to the reconstruction of New Orleans, where the marginalised needs and interests of underprivileged citizens can be brought to the surface through community design in opposition to top-down planning and building (by the state) or driven by financial interest. In doing so community-design activists on the Gulf Coast engage with inclusive rebuilding projects, against compulsory displacements and the demolition of flood-prone areas, especially if these are undertaken with a racist agenda or labelled ecological for promotional and/or economic reasons only.[21] Accordingly, such community-design can develop as a type of progressive planning, along strong traditions of self-responsibility and self-organisation. It promises concepts and projects for an urbanism of

[13] Cf. www.ruralstudio.com

[14] Cf. www.designcorps.org; Bryan Bell, *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

[15] Cf. www.cdcp.org

[16] Cf. www.anothercupdevelopment.org

[17] Cf. www.communitydesign.org

[18] Cf. www.hamercenter.psu.edu; www.claimingpublicspace.net—the centre's open-source initiative

[19] Cf. www.hamercenter.psu.edu/events_index.htm; www.buildingreuse.org

[20] Cf. Michael Rios, 'Envisioning Citizenship: Toward a Polity Approach in Urban Design', *Journal of Urban Design*, (13)2 (2008): 213-222; P. Aeschbacher and M. Rios, 'Claiming Public Space: The Case for Proactive, Democratic Design', in B. Bell & K. Wake (eds.), *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism*, (New York: Metropolis Books, forthcoming).

[21] Cf. http://architecture.tulane.edu/programs/tulane-city-center; http://tulaneurbanbuild.com

Fig. 9. *An Architektur 19: Community Design. Involvement and Architecture in the US since 1963*, exhibiton by An Architektur and Mathias Heyden. Photo: Ines Schaber, Berlin 2008. Fig. 10. Cover (forthcoming): *An Architektur 19*, An Architektur and Mathias Heyden. Design: Till Sperrle.

the marginalised and can thus can work critically and productively against domination and segregation in US-urbanism and perhaps even abroad. A careful examination of such strategies seems valuable, at least in order to reconsider the particularities of self-determined and participatory planning and building in (central) Europe. *Community Design. Involvement and Architecture in the US since 1963*, a recent Berlin cooperation with the magazine *AN ARCHITEKTUR. Produktion und Gebrauch gebauter Umwelt*, produced an exhibition and talks with community design actors.[22]

[22] Cf. www.anarchitektur.com

Also there is a forthcoming bundle of booklets with texts on the history and present, theories and practices, of about fifty *Community Design Centre* and similar actors, which will be presented and discussed. This could be understood as a proposition as well as an invitation to expand the research in and discourse on participatory architecture and spatial appropriation on an international level in order to fully grasp the multiplicity of theories and practices, as well as their implications and potentials on both sides of the Atlantic.

In sum such an event, as well as this essay in particular argues for an in-depth knowledge and know-how of politics and law, economics and ecology, which would be intrinsic to our professions, with an emphasis on direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic societies to come.

Reaching back to Berlin, it is one of the many territories in serious need of a knowledge, know-how and most of all intervention from such perspectives; however, this must be elaborated in another text at

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a different time. For the time being I will leave it here, but not without mentioning that one such innovative self-determined and commonly oriented housing project is located where these lines began: at Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm, now looking toward Engelbecken to the left. *Listen to the city!*—Berlin 2008.

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Building a Real Alternative: Women's Design Service

Eeva Berglund

Women's Design Service (WDS), based in London, is a unique organisation, which works towards a better built environment for women. This brief historical sketch charts its development within the heady political context of 1980s London. It suggests that WDS is particularly valuable in offering insight into how architecture and the built environment reproduce inequality but always in ways that depend on context. It highlights the fact that WDS has never lost sight of women's real social situation, a fact that makes its work stand out among built environment discourses.

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Introduction

Women's Design Service (WDS) is dedicated to improving the built environment for women: helping them get involved in design and planning, doing research, lobbying and giving advice. Still, after over twenty years and a solid reputation, the idea of intervening in design and planning to tackle inequality remains baffling. Even for many who sympathise with feminism, the role of buildings and spatial arrangements in reproducing inequality is unclear. That WDS has put (and kept) women on the built environment agenda is worth highlighting for its own sake, but also because in the time that WDS has been operating, women have often become indistinguishable as real social beings whilst their non-standardness has been politically expedient and academically—in some circles—fashionable.

Overall, the story of WDS reflects key currents in British feminist practice in relation to the built environment.[1] Weaving together personal recollections, archival sources, published retrospectives and a sketch of the political climate, I offer a glimpse of how WDS has combined pragmatism with a commitment to reshaping the legacy of obstructions that architects, planners and engineers built into women's daily lives. I dwell particularly on the early days of WDS, showing how it threatened to collapse before it had even begun, but also how its key themes were given space and time to develop in an intellectual and professional environment that would be difficult to recreate today. A fuller treatment can be found in the published 20th anniversary history, *Doing Things Differently*,[2] a project that shifted my intellectual energies away from an earlier career in anthropology towards an engagement with architecture and urbanism.

Quotations in the text, unless otherwise referenced, are from interviews or email correspondence between January 2006 and June 2007 with members of or those associated with WDS. The names that appear below are ones that help progress a particular aspect of WDS' story. Thank you to all who helped with the research, and apologies and an invitation to get in touch, to anyone who feels they should have been mentioned but have not.

A Window of Opportunity: The Greater London Council

The origins of WDS coincided with interesting times in Anglo-American political culture. Arguably the 1980s marked the beginnings of a reversal of many of the social, educational and medical improvements that had been achieved through the previous two centuries.[3] It saw the transformation of Canary Wharf into the centre of global capitalism. It was the period when the privatisation of public amenity, and importantly space, began to intensify and be felt particularly by women in their caring and social reproduction roles.

1 Cf. Lynne Walker and Sue Cavanagh, 'Women's Design Service: Feminist Resources for Urban Environments', in Joan Rothschild (ed.), *Design and Feminism*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), pp. 149-157.

2 WDS/Eeva Berglund, *Doing Things Differently: Women's Design Service at 20*, (London: WDS, 2007).

3 For a discussion of the issue see: Cindi Katz, 'Power, Space and Terror: Social Reproduction and the Public Environment', in Setha Low and Neil Smith (eds), *The Politics of Public Space*, (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 111-112.

Yet the 1980s wasn't by any means just about yuppies and greed. In feminism and in architecture it was a hopeful time. Women from the New Architecture Movement (NAM) had campaigned successfully against sexism in the building press in the 1970s and progressive initiatives were developing further, partly inspired by feminist research on the built environment from the USA, by pioneering researchers like Gerda Wekerle and Dolores Hayden.[4] The Architectural Association's 1979 conference on 'Women and Space' was an important milestone that gave a new confidence to consider and practice alternative ways of designing and building. Above all, it inspired challenges to the normative language of architectural education and an awareness of the social and political values expressed in the built environment.[5] Interviewees recalled a range of activities that constituted a virtuous cycle, from consciousness-raising evenings where young women devoured feminist literature and came to see and experience themselves in new ways, to forms of mutual nurture to better cope with sexism as well as with the corrosive effects of the 'crit' and of the star system in architecture.

[4] Gerda R. Wekerle, 'Women in the Urban Environment', *Signs Supplement*, 'Women and the American City', 5(3)(Spring, 1980); Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1981).

[5] Cf. Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne, 'Evaluating Matrix: Notes from Inside the Collective', in Doina Petrescu (ed.), *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 39-56.

From 1980s, feminist architectural practice in Britain found a concrete and exceptionally successful manifestation in Matrix, a practice that remained steadfastly female, politically motivated and at some distance from the architectural establishment. As Julia Dwyer and Anne Thorne describe it, through Matrix women architects tapped into a broader burgeoning academic and professional interest in women's experiences: women's histories were uncovered, women's work reassessed and the naturalness of gender roles was thoroughly questioned. Alongside this, it became possible to articulate a feminist critique of the built environment as a man-made product that could and should be redesigned to empower women. These were the same arguments put forward by those who eventually founded

Fig. 1. 'Women Need a Voice'. Photo: WDS picture archive, no date.

or joined WDS. Indeed there was substantial overlap and collaboration between Matrix and WDS, and the social and professional networks that developed then remain active to this day.

There was institutional support for women as well. The North London Polytechnic (later University of North London and now London Metropolitan University) was a hub of women-centred, radical architectural thinking, particularly in its innovative Women Into Architecture and Building Programme. The Feminist Architects Network (FAN) was active, and progressively minded architects who were not specifically feminists were campaigning on behalf of and working with community groups, many of which served women. There were also several community technical aid centres, largely publicly funded, offering low cost services to local groups to help them 'get the building and environmental improvements they want, rather than having to accept designs that the "experts" think they might have.'[6] This groundswell of support for community involvement then combined with calls for women to make their voices heard and paved the way towards a politically engaged professional design and building service for women.

What was crucial, however, was the high profile given to women and women's groups since the late 1970s by the Greater London Council (GLC). The GLC's Women's Committee, 'one of the world's best-known and generously funded experiments in municipal feminism'[7] began work in 1982. The GLC specifically helped precipitate a breakthrough for built environment professionals, in that the Greater London Development Plan of 1984 included a chapter called 'Women in London', which posited the need for planning policies to address 'the economic and social disadvantage of women'.[8] The process of drawing up that plan had explicitly brought in a recognition of gender inequality and the fact that a 'man-made world' was making life difficult for a majority of the population. Then in 1985, the Women's Committee organised a 'Women and Planning' seminar and published a research and design guidance folder, *Changing Places: Positive Action on Women and Planning*, in 1986.[9] The document makes clear that there remained a lot of work to counteract men's oppressive attitudes and practices and that the establishment had a duty to progress this work.

Meanwhile the founding members of WDS were working for Support: Architectural Design Resources for the Community, effectively a community technical aid centre. Since the middle of the 1970s it had provided 'architectural design resources for community organisations, the voluntary sector and co-operatives'.[10] For example, it worked with community groups on new buildings and conversion projects, through feasibility studies, designing, supervising works and devising maintenance programmes. A co-operative, it was explicitly sympathetic to feminist goals, as the following extract from its brochure explains.

6 Association of Community Technical Aid Centres / ACTAC leaflet, no date.

7 Sylvia Bashevkin, *Women on the Defensive: Living Through Conservative Times*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 16.

8 'Women in London', in *Greater London Development Plan: As Proposed to be Altered by the Greater London Council*, (London: GLC, 1984), p. 87.

9 Greater London Council, *Changing Places: Positive Action on Women and Planning*, (London: GLC, 1986).

10 Support promotional leaflet, no date.

> Working with projects that relate specifically to women's needs and interests enables the women workers in our co-operative to give practical support to the women's movement as well as contributing to developing a socialist/feminist perspective on the built environment.[11]

[11] Support Community Building Design Ltd, no date.

Tenants' associations with many female activists and women's groups were prominent among its actual and potential clients, and it made sense to seek funding for a dedicated women's service. The women involved approached the GLC's Women's Committee who, indeed, promised funding. This was a politically driven, pragmatic move that took advantage of the unique political and economic circumstances. Two workers, the architects Julia Wilson Jones and Anne Sawyer, took up their posts in the spring of 1984 in an office space in Ferdinand Place, Camden.

By October 1984 the management committee included the political activist, Linda Bellos who went to work for the GLC soon thereafter, Elsie Owusu and Amanda Reynolds, both architects, and Nelica LaGro, who worked for Support, and ten others. As in Support, the core activity was community technical aid and with so many fledgling women's groups on the political landscape, there was never any shortage of work. It is not, therefore, quite accurate to say that WDS was set up against a background of dynamic and fertile interest in progressive and politicised professional work. Rather, from its very beginnings, WDS was creating that 'background', coming up with and developing new ideas and strategies for eroding male dominance in a professional arena that was—and remains—particularly noteworthy in its reluctance to acknowledge or accept women.

Setting the Foundations for Real Expertise on Real Women

WDS' activities from 1984 to 1986 have left only a thin trace. There is, however, in the London Metropolitan Archives, in the minutes of the GLC's Grants Projects Team meeting of 4th September 1985, a mention of WDS as a recipient of funds. In the summer of 1986 the trace picks up once again. A memo dated 4th August 1986 suggests that something, somewhere had been going on.

> Women's Design Service has recently had confirmation of funding from the London Borough's Grant Scheme for two full time workers. We are taking this opportunity to rethink the structure and workload of WDS after a year of uncertainty and loss of direction. [...] We are proposing new aims for Women's Design Service, which will enable it to concentrate more on design issues relevant to all women using the man-made environment, with priority on projects affecting black and ethnic minority women and other groups of women particularly disadvantaged by the built environment.

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Feminist and grassroots initiatives were then at the frontlines of wider battles between radical and conservative ideologies. Soon after Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives took power at national level in 1979, Ken Livingstone—Red Ken—took office as leader of the GLC. A prolonged and often bitterly personal conflict followed, which ended in the abolition of metropolitan government, including the GLC. Among other things, it meant reductions in the resourcing of the voluntary sector and was a setback for feminism. In time, Conservative policies also led to a tangible worsening of services that many of the most vulnerable women relied on, and eventually eroded women's status and opportunities more broadly.[12] That WDS survived the difficult mid-1980s was thus down to the efforts of a handful of people. One was a GLC grants officer Bramwell Osula (in the documentation as Ossulu), who later recalled that a lot of people 'worked very hard to pull off what was then seen as a major funding coup'.

12 Cf. Bashevkin, *Women on the Defensive.*

It has not been possible to establish the exact sequence of events or even establish who the main protagonists were. One who was definitely involved was Angela Diamandidou. She had been a planner-architect but after the birth of her child found it impossible to continue in her job. She was approached by a member of the management committee as someone who had the contacts and skills to help save WDS. When I interviewed her, she raised a key question about the prospects for feminist architectural work, 'somebody well intentioned was trying to set this up. But there was already Matrix. How many clients are there? How could you sustain a group mostly on designing for women?' The solution that the GLC agreed to—just before its abolition—was to move away from providing architectural services to clients and make the organisation a research-based information and support centre.

To kick-start the organisation a development worker, Jos Boys was recruited. She had architectural training, had been a founder member of Matrix and had already worked on several publications including the GLC's, *Changing Places*. Her perspective was both academic and political, and her vision for the organisation was rooted in her frustration over the way that the experiences of working for women's projects weren't building up into a widely available body of expertise. Perhaps WDS could find a new role here, by turning towards research. The steering group then 'agreed that […] the short term objective should be to develop a resource and information base on women and built environment issues.' As opposed to feasibility studies, WDS would 'provide a useful service in offering a "pre-feasibility" information [sic] to groups to help them clarify their building needs.' By the end of 1986, three workers had embarked on a number of research projects and were organising a conference on 'Women in a Man-made World'.[13] The practicalities and organisational framework of the resuscitated organisation were not quickly resolved, but even against a background of uncertain funding, elusive trustees, and lack of material resources, with its three project workers, Jos Boys and a handful of

13 Report dated 4th September 1986, WDS files.

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committed trustees, WDS was on its way to becoming an innovative as well as influential voice.

Changing Places gave high-level support and an evidence base from which to work, one that also informed at least some local planning authorities. Around the country, meanwhile, there was an acceptance within local government to fund social or community buildings. Beyond the UK, books and academic papers on women and the built environment showed a marked rise in the late 1980s[14] with women's safety in urban areas in particular, receiving considerable attention.[15] WDS contributed to the debate with one of its earliest events, a seminar on women's safety on housing estates. The perspective and practical activities that began to develop then are still part of its 'Making Safer Places' toolkit. The methods it developed, like neighbourhood audits carried out with residents, made it impossible to reduce problems to their technical components.

The reborn organisation was positioned as distinct from practices working directly with clients. WDS developed an approach that treated design as dynamic and social, and which led to developing tools that integrated a wide range of issues. Designing buildings and spaces was an important element but not the only one. WDS brought together networks with varied interests, architects but also planners, government officers, tenants and residents and quickly established itself as a contact point for all those interested in women and the built environment. Lynne Walker and Sue Cavanagh were both involved with WDS for a long time, and provide an overview in their chapter published in 1999. It identifies the constants that were present from the start and have continued since their text was published, notably always involving a wide range of people and using a broad repertoire of ways to reach its potential audience. The connecting thread has always been the blunt reality that 'women's experience is that they bear the brunt of poor environments'.[16]

A Social Approach

It was no doubt significant that none of the three workers of the new organisation were fully qualified architects. They framed the task of making better spaces within a social, context-specific set of challenges, drawing from their own past experiences. Vron Ware brought journalistic competence as well as campaign skills, having already worked for Friends of the Earth and in anti-racist initiatives. Rosy Martin trained as an industrial designer, worked as a photographer and was active in campaigning for a more democratic and progressive future for London. Sue Cavanagh's interest in art and design took her to North London Polytechnic where she first heard of WDS.

The work they undertook involved first finding out what women's concerns were. This required time-consuming surveys of the uses of specific spaces

[14] Cf. Joan Rothschild and Victoria Rosner; 'Feminisms and Design: Review Essay', in *Design and Feminism: Re-Visioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

[15] Cf. Carolyn Whitzman, 'The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner: Long-term Feminist Planning Initiatives in London, Toronto, Montreal, and Melbourne', *Planning Theory and Practice*, 8(2)(2007): 203-225.

[16] Walker and Cavanagh, 'Women's Design Service', p. 150.

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Fig. 2. WDS staff around 1987. Photo: WDS.

and much talking. With varying levels of self-conscious theorising, they saw the problems as social rather than technical. They thought hard about roles and activities and about the uses of space through time. They considered maintenance and staffing, things that clearly impact experiences of the built environment but that were—and are—routinely overlooked by many designers. They emphasised that an environment could never be singular, that it is experienced at different times and from different vantage points in very different ways. As a result of this kind of empirically based and practical understanding, and of trying to take nothing for granted, their research highlighted differences among women from the beginning.

In this it was at the forefront of feminist practice, understanding the category 'woman' in a complex and theoretically sophisticated manner form the start. Ever since then, its literature highlighted the crosscutting impacts of different dimensions of inequality and discrimination, and the fact that the implications of this are usually specific to context. Nor did it shirk from difficult questions—something that, according to interviewees, made both Matrix and WDS particularly exciting places to work. WDS even explicitly problematised its own foundations. 'Identifying "women" as a subject and topic of research and concern can project a homogenous image or [...] foster the idea of biologically determined "woman"',[17] and was not helpful given that they were trying to get away from the stereotyping that was making life hard for women in the first place. The solutions were usually found in eclecticism, from its very hands-on approach, and through treating buildings and spaces not as design objects but as actual and possible experiences.

The working culture was also significant. One interviewee noted that they 'were highly autonomous as an organisation, initially individually as well.

[17] Walker and Cavanagh, 'Women's Design Service', p. 151.

We had weekly meetings and lots of other little sessions. It was [...] all women, academics, practitioners, architects, landscape architects.' The first projects dealt with themes that have been picked up and developed further over the years and particularly, given the personal preoccupations of those involved, on parents with small children. *It's Not all Swings and Roundabouts*[18] explored provision for under-sevens. Inspired by disability organisations' successes in promoting more accessible design, *Thinking of Small Children*[19] approached everyday experiences of shopping from the perspective of a carer with a double-pushchair, and resulted in guidelines that were taken up by local authorities and supermarkets and that were beginning to be accepted as desirable by progressive councils and corporations, some of which were collaborators and/or part funders of WDS' work.

18 Women's Design Service, *It's Not all Swings and Roundabouts: Making Better Play Spaces for the Under-sevens*, (London: WDS, 1988).

19 Women's Design Service, *Thinking of Small Children: Access, Provision and Play*, (London: WDS, 1988).

Fig. 3. In-store childcare facilities in Ikea, London, recommended by WDS as an example of good practice, around 1986. Photo: WDS.

Urban safety and fear of violence was, from the start, another area where WDS' practical, dynamic and socially embedded perspective produced powerful results and nurtured a view of feminism that took it far beyond the focus on motherhood. WDS' research showed how different contexts and times influenced safety and perceptions of safety. It was concerned that 'the concept of women's safety [is] being reduced to a technical issue, to be resolved by the "experts"—architects, planners, housing researchers and academics in conjunction with the police' and wanted to 'promote an alternative view [...] that security does not just equal freedom from crime and that tenants should have far more say and control over their own environments if they are to feel secure in their own homes.'[20] It argued against more standard, that is, white, feminist views that automatically posited the home as a space of oppression, or that overlooked cultural variations in women's behaviour and experiences.

20 Vron Ware, 'Problems with Design Improvements at Home', *Town and Country Planning*, (56)(October 1987): 265.

In an advertising flyer from around 1987, under the heading 'What can the Women's Design Service do for you?' advice is offered based on its own research, on design for disability, pollution in the home, design of nurseries, education and training for women entering the building professions, consultation procedures, and women and transport. Planning authorities and organisations involved with building were contacting them at a rate they could not keep up with, even as political events were bringing in an increasingly anti-feminist climate. Their analysis was academically informed but grounded all their work in empirical findings and current concerns. This meant that unlike many architects they were always willing to deal with complexity and contingency.[21] It was not always an easy task but it seems they were well enough resourced to work through some of the early challenges in incredibly constructive ways. And so their early innovations established a secure enough foundation for WDS to overcome the problems that it has since encountered.

[21] WDS' insistently situated and political work could be seen as a real-life affirmation of the kind of contingency Jeremy Till argues has been wished away from architectural thought and practice, 'Architecture and Contingency', *Field:*, 1(1)(2007): 120-135, available; www.field-journal.org, [accessed May 2008].

Equal Opportunity at Work

If the challenge of undoing white male dominance was difficult, putting equal opportunity into practice was hardly straightforward. Moreover, this was the era of explicit identity politics when local authority funding bodies and many others encouraged the assumption that an individual's race, gender and sexuality directly influenced their work. At WDS this periodically led to an imperative to recruit more minority, particularly black, women. Although there was a recognition that it could also be problematic to link identity and professional legitimacy, given that the organisation was specifically geared towards the problems of minorities, their participation at professional level should be promoted as well.

WDS appears to have been drawn quite early on into a typical struggle in women's organisations about the exact meaning of equal opportunity, whether as employers or as service providers. This developed through a series of discussions and meetings with the steering group whose traces can only be found in the archives and whose details were understandably difficult, perhaps even unpleasant, for them to recall twenty years later. It is significant, however, because it illustrates the kinds of pitfalls that those dealing with minority rights had to navigate, and because WDS' constructive resolution of the issue was probably reflective of how it negotiated similar complexities around discrimination in its professional work.

The situation in broad outline was that in 1987, when the organisation was recruiting new workers, attempts to advertise widely in ethnic minority papers produced disappointingly few black applicants. The shortlist of suitable candidates was therefore felt to be unrepresentative by some on the steering committee. After a heated meeting one member wrote to the workers explaining that she thought the deliberations of the

selection committee were racist because they had refused to contemplate interviewing all the black applicants, whether or not they met the application criteria. Significantly, she later resigned and it was decided that one of the jobs would not be re-advertised with an explicit call for a black woman to fill the post.

Those whom I interviewed recalled awkward discussions about whether or not they were diverse enough as a group to reflect the identities of their client communities. This entailed comments about the status of the three workers who were judged to be insufficiently representative. One was asked to qualify whether she was black or not, another insisted in writing that they were not all 'white, middle-class heterosexuals'. Then, as at other times, there was debate about the tendency of WDS projects to identify women with mothers, and about the biological essentialism and hetero-normative assumptions that this sustained.

If the process had been painful and exhausting, in hindsight, they considered it part of a learning curve for politically engaged individuals and groups operating in a world of discrimination, and it ultimately influenced the way they worked. The feminist maxim that 'the personal is political' lived in the decisions they made each week and day, about how to organise one's time, where to be and what to prioritise, how to push political goals whilst avoiding tokenism and seeking to maintain high professional standards. And as a place to work, WDS made it possible for the workers to negotiate problems in an 'incredibly flexible and enlightened way' as Vron Ware put it, particularly in relation to childcare and workplace issues. She also later recalled that it should not have come as a surprise that they were not getting many applications from black women. 'We put adverts in all the ethnic minority papers', but given that women's organisations were even then insecurely funded, it was clear that they were unlikely to attract candidates from marginalised sections of the population. Working for WDS, she suggested, was more likely to attract people with a 'certain kind of feminist voluntary sector sensibility' associated with a culture that itself 'was already waning'.

If preoccupation about identity and tokenism cast shadows over WDS, its projects provided a way out. It turned its attention towards women and emphasised the value of respecting their knowledge and experience.

Pathbreaking Publications

By all accounts, the work benefited hugely from not being rushed. All those I interviewed who had worked in the early years highlighted the fact that they were able to work slowly, learn on the job and do it thoroughly. They also felt that their efforts had brought change and most of them talked about their time at WDS as an exciting moment in their lives. Later they recalled their pride and satisfaction that the buggy and baby-changing

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symbols they had designed turned into routine and mundane elements of built landscapes. They knew that their;

> [B]ooks were bought by some of the big supermarkets; they developed their parking spaces [...] after WDS suggested them. We may not have been the only source but we were certainly an influence.

Although the idea of tackling discrimination through design was in the air by the late 1980s, and even though it is difficult to measure the impact of any particular player, there is no doubt that WDS' efforts in those early years were significant. Beyond WDS, architects and planners with feminist sympathies clearly benefited from its efforts, gaining legitimacy for their own innovations. The architect and long-time collaborator of WDS, Anne Thorne, felt it was important that WDS generated explorative and independent research that was professionally disseminated. It helped support the work of architects who were interested in the clients and their needs and who questioned standard practice. Whether or not an explicit interest in the clients is a specifically female way of doing things is debatable, but it is something that most interviewees emphasised. Another architect who occasionally collaborated with WDS in its early years was Sue Francis, who made the point that WDS, along with Matrix, politicised design and architecture 'because they asked difficult questions.' Clara Greed, one-time Management Committee member and now Professor of Urban Planning, saw WDS as 'sparking something off' and producing 'seminal' and 'inspirational' work, always linking it back to the practical needs of designers and planners.

By late 1987 WDS had six part-time workers. Most interviewees were in general agreement with the comment of one, that no organisation would now, in the early 21st century, be run like WDS was in those days. Another commented that initially, they were like 'half a dozen loose cannons'. Yet the results speak for themselves. In the first year after being reconstituted as a research organisation, they produced several publications and contributed to many others, ran a conference and created an exhibition showcasing the work of WDS, *Built for Women?* The following year they produced two more publications and the Cockpit Gallery collaborated with WDS on making *It's Not All Swings and Roundabouts* into an exhibition and a slide pack. The positive feedback WDS received even included a letter from New Zealand to inquire about the possibility of materials being sent for use there. The guestbook for the exhibition itself glows with praise: 'Magic!' gushed one visitor, and 'I really want to get the planners from my local borough to see this exhibition and take its ideas on board' wrote another. Press coverage was hugely positive and a 'steady stream of requests for information and speakers to address conferences and run workshops' followed.

Making a Place for Women: A Resource Handbook on Women and the built environment was launched in October 1989.[22] *Women on the Move*[23] was part of a large piece of research originally commissioned by the GLC. As a consequence of the abolition of the GLC, it was never fully completed and WDS published the text itself so breaking the mould of equating women with mothers.

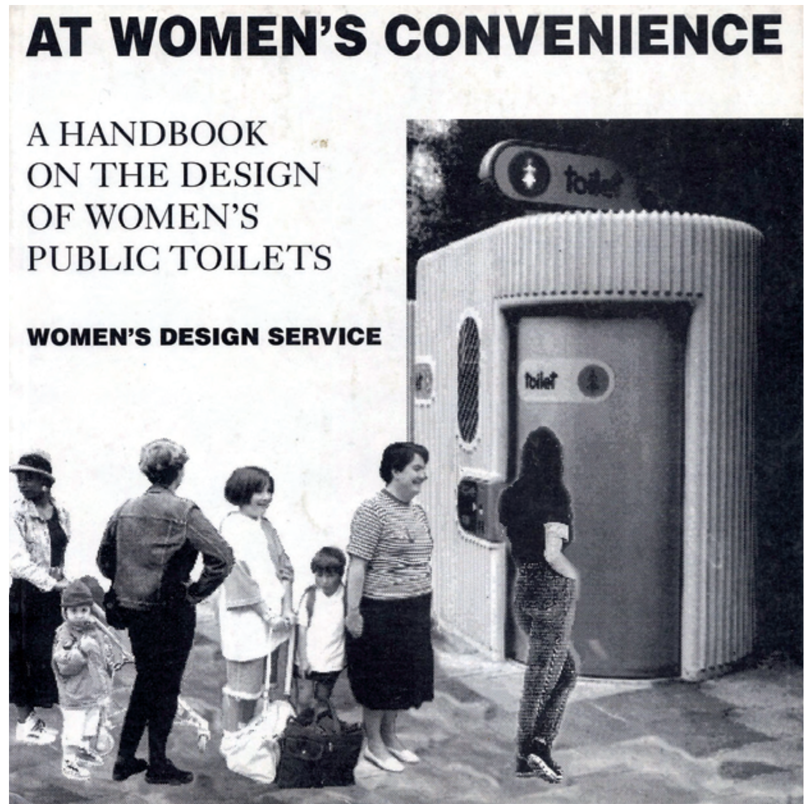

Fig. 4. *At Women's Convenience*, book cover, 1990. Photo: WDS.

At Women's Convenience is one of WDS' all-time great successes. The 'toilet book' demonstrated the extent to which an issue of particular concern to women is potentially a problem for anyone. Although the inadequacies and the absence of public toilets are far more problematic for women than for men, the research indicated that provision was far higher for men than for women. It 'firmly establish[ed] WDS as a leading voice in improving design for women in the built environment' as WDS' Annual Report (1991) put it. It consists of a history of public conveniences, followed by a research-based report on the current situation and a detailed design guide. Besides incorporating existing regulations the book devoted considerable space to maintenance and staffing, a feature that emerged out of WDS' concern with the use of the built environment over time.

The book also captured the public imagination. Under the headline, 'Desperate Measures' Anne Karpf wrote in *The Guardian* newspaper that 'now women's toilets have been candidly scrutinised and found wanting. Women's Design Service […] has compiled the first comprehensive study

[22] An updated version, *Gender and the Built Environment*, is now being produced as an online resource in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London's Geography Department and funded through Urban Buzz. See wds.org.uk for updates on progress.

[23] London Strategic Policy Unit, *Women on the Move: Women and Transport Survey: 8. Lesbians*, (London: GLC, 1989).

of women's public conveniences in Britain'.[24] Media coverage also helped during the research phase, making it easier to solicit the nation's views. BBC Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour' did an item on it which led to an influx of passionate letters. Also, interviewees recalled that the issue was raised by women MPs who operated in an environment, Westminster, that was designed and built as if women did not exist. *At Women's Convenience* received excellent media coverage also because the book was launched with the collaboration of the USA-based ice-cream manufacturer Häagen Dazs, whose first outlet was opened in London's Leicester Square in May 1990 and where, as part of the launch, WDS staff gave journalists tours of public toilets. *The Guardian* dubbed the newly opened shop 'a beacon of quality in a sea of mediocrity.'[25] Perhaps the praise rubbed off on the Women's Design Service. In any case, since then WDS workers have frequently found themselves approached as experts on women's toilets.

Designing Housing for Older Women was a pioneering piece of research on a neglected yet numerically significant and growing section of the population, and was remembered by many interviewees as typical of the forward-looking work of WDS; it was awarded a RIBA research grant and included case-studies, academically informed analysis and recommendations. *WEB Newsletter of Women in the Built Environment*, which had its origins in a number of informal initiatives, finally came under their wing in 1987. A few years later it was effectively replaced by Broadsheets: briefings on specific topics, sometimes based on seminars, talks or ongoing projects that were published, often in collaboration with the London Women and Planning Forum, until the early 2000s. Some research never made it into the world as fully-fledged publications. Two early manuscripts that did get finished were 'Women with Disabilities and Office Work' and 'Women and Sports Centre Buildings'. Parts of the former project were, in 1993, finally published as *Accessible Offices*.[26]

Until 1990 WDS ran as a co-operative structure, and that is how its early workers remember it. Through the early 1990s there was increasing concern with restructuring the organisation and with defining its role and users. Much of this was driven by funding considerations. Strings were often attached to grants stipulating that all expenditure should be tracked and staff be properly accountable to a management group. As urban government itself began to consume vast amounts of consultancy, WDS moved back towards community support. A significant new departure for WDS was starting work in 1994 on the so-called 'Five Estates' in Peckham, where it provided support to tenants. This was one of the largest regeneration partnerships that the country had ever seen, funded by central government.

The emphasis slowly moved back towards working for people, community organisations and tenants' groups, as part of the emerging web of regeneration partnerships produced in the 1990s, with research and

24 Anne Karpf, '"Venturing into Most Public Ladies' Loos Takes Nerves of Steel": Desperate Measures', *The Guardian,* 11 July 1990, p.17.

25 Ibid.

26 Women's Design Service, *Accessible Offices*, (London: WDS, 1993).

publication becoming only one, if still crucial, element of its work. However, WDS' main aims have remained largely the same as they were at the start. Pragmatism and changing political fashions have had impact on its style of working and funding, but in 2008 it still remains a contact point for anyone interested in women and the built environment.

Concluding Thoughts

The 1980s were a significant period for feminism, and so it is not surprising that the direction WDS took then has stamped its work ever since. In the 21st century WDS is still feminist and rights based. It has continued to develop familiar themes, entered new collaborations and nurtured old ones, and it has ventured into new territory as opportunities have arisen. Among its more inventive foci have been exploring cycling from a women's perspective and expanding its work on safety into a specific focus on parks, published in 2007 as *What to Do About Women's Safety in Parks*.[27]

Periods of financial insecurity have been endemic from the beginning, but even with limited resources it has sustained a unique portfolio of expertise. Arguably this is more urgently needed than ever. Women's experiences are still low on the agenda and when they are prominent, women as flesh and blood social beings still get ignored, erased or misrepresented. In built environment discourse and practice, abstract notions of 'other' and 'different' invoke female attributes and experiences but rarely connect to women's concrete realities. Routinely in recent years, women have been pressed into rhetorical service as an alternative or transgressive or otherwise supposedly eye-catching feature of a professional contribution or political platform.[28] In stark contrast to this, WDS keeps its eye on women as real victims and real agents.

If it has survived as such, an unusual organisation, it is I believe, largely due to this commitment to the empirical, which was laid down first in the work of Support and then in the team that constituted WDS in the mid to late 1980s. It seems likely that this was made possible by the working culture of the organisation. This too, was contingent. More than once as a possible response to a funding crisis, the possibility was raised that WDS should become part of some kind of academic institute. 'It's interesting that we remained independent,' an interviewee recalled. Perhaps, in fact, it was more than interesting, it was fundamental to enabling WDS to take risks, explore and to expand horizons in the way it did.

[27] WDS/Anne Thorne Architects' Partnership, *What to do About Women's Safety in Parks: From A to Y*, (London: WDS/Anne Thorne, 2007).

[28] For a discussion of the issues see: Mary McLeod, 'Everyday and "Other" spaces', in Jane Rendell et al. (eds.) *Gender, Space, Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

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Alberti's Missing Appendix

Ruth Morrow

> Him I consider the architect, who by sure and wonderful reason and method, knows both how to devise through his own mind and energy, and to realise by construction, whatever can be most beautifully fitted out for the noble needs of man, by the movement of weights and the joining and massing of bodies. To do this he must have an understanding and knowledge of all the highest and most noble disciplines. This then is the architect.
>
> Leon Alberti Batista, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books.*

Leon Battista Alberti wrote ten books and five appendices.[1] Four of the appendices have been lost including the text entitled 'The Service that the Architect provides'. This paper will look at residual evidence in Alberti's Books that gives form to the work or the service of an architect of his period (1404-1472).[2] It will then examine the everyday work of an architect of this time (i.e. the author), briefly examining projects that represent the polarities of a 'practice' that sits outside mainstream architecture. Whilst Alberti is understood as one of architecture's founding fathers, he was also atypical of his own time. Alberti's passion and skill challenged and supported the development of 'Architecture' and for that reason, though he may belong to an alternative value system to that of the author, he is in some ways a mentor. It is hoped that by reflecting on 'Alberti and me'[3] the mainstream can be reviewed, and a process initiated that leads to the reconstruction of Alberti's Appendix for this time and place.

1. The appendices were 'small books' covering 'The Ship, Economics, Arithmetic and Geometry, and The Service That the Architect Provides.' According to the notes of Rykwert et al, 'the last four of these have been lost'. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor, 4th ed., (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), p. 367.
2. Alberti's birth/ death dates.
3. The author's relationship to Alberti is not one of scholarship but rather through the device of an 'imaginary' friend. This 'working' relationship began in 1991 with a project called 'Alberti's Room', reflecting on the connection between the domestic room and the city.

In the Days of Alberti

Despite the loss of the vital appendix, Alberti provides in his prologue and throughout the ten books, a relatively full description of the skills and territories of an architect. The frequently referenced quote in the paper's abstract: 'Him I consider the architect, [...]', comes from the opening paragraphs of Alberti's prologue. Taken in isolation it sounds somewhat pompous but it is language of its time and the reference to the 'movement of weights' within the quote, alerts today's readers to the difference in Alberti's cultural context. Despite that, Alberti's description of the tasks of an architect, as providing a welcoming hearth and environments that succour the body physically and the soul spiritually, are familiar to us. However Alberti's architect is also involved in 'cutting through the rock', 'tunnelling through mountains or filling in valleys', 'restraining the waters of the sea and lakes', 'draining marshes', 'building of ships', and 'dredging the mouths of rivers' etc. Alberti rhetorically asks whether 'the architect has not only met the temporary needs of man, but also opened up new gateways to all the provinces of the world?' He also draws attention to the significance of the architect during times of war, saying that by using 'the power of invention', architects are instrumental in attacking cities and defending them from siege. That,

> the skills and ability of the architect have been responsible for more victories than have been the command and insight of any general. [...] And what is more important, the architect achieves his victory with but a handful of men and without loss of life.[4]

Clearly, architects of the time were involved in diverse activities at strategic levels, but when wars are over and infrastructure is in place, it is time to focus on the building of buildings; and for the rest of his ten books that is what Alberti does. He covers all that we in our time would expect of someone writing about architecture—design (lineaments),[5] materials/construction, building types, ornament (expression), and restoration. These are themes and issues that can be mapped against contemporary practice, but looked at in detail, he writes of knowledge and practice that lies entirely outside our experience, for example:

> Position your dovecot near water; make it conspicuous and moderately high so that the pigeons, weary from flying and from performing their winged gymnastics and their clapping, will gladly glide in to land with outstretched wings [...]. If, under the entrance, you bury the head of a wolf, sprinkled with cumin seed, inside a jar that is cracked so that the smell can escape, it will attract several pigeons away from their previous homes; and if you cover the ground with clay and repeatedly soak it in human urine, it will further increase their number.[6]

4 Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 4. Is this the first evidence of a sustainable agenda in Architecture?

5 Cf. Rykwert, Leach and Tavernor's glossary in their translation of Alberti, *On the Art of Building* for interesting discussion of definition of 'lineaments', p. 422-423.

6 Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 143-144.

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It is a quirky and rather beautiful passage, and whilst Alberti's concern for pigeons (and rabbits, horses, cattle etc.) is unfamiliar to us today, we might frame this within our own cultural understanding as a demonstration that architecture is determined by the needs of the user.

Whilst architecture seems to have been a wider discipline in Alberti's time and many aspects of its knowledge base are unrecognisable to us today, it is still involved in strategic decision-making and the 'power of invention'. Perhaps, with Alberti in mind, we can look more critically at the needs of our time—where we are today in the profession—whether the contexts we sit within (time and place) require us to broaden our focus to encapsulate territories beyond, around, before and after the built-thing? And whether our skills also need to alter to map against that expanded and shifting horizon.

By looking at a 'practice' that sits on the periphery of contemporary mainstream architecture, perhaps we can review the mainstream and initiate a process that leads to the reconstruction of Alberti's Appendix.

In my Days

I am a female, mid-career, academic/architect. Being not so well off, educated at a regional school of architecture and 'unconnected', meant that 'putting up buildings' was as close as I was likely to get to 'designing architecture'. However, despite not being in the inner circle of the profession, I have always felt that I, and others like me, have something to say about the profession. Architectural education offered and continues to offer a site for alternative dialogues and space to nurture other forms of practice. Over time I have gradually divested myself of the insecurities associated with not building buildings, and paradoxically, as I move away from the central practice of architecture, my actions become increasingly architectural. However, I remain a registered architect and actively support the professional bodies, contributing locally to mainstream built environment discussions, but my practice is definitely different.

Aside from what I am, the issue of where I am (Belfast, Northern Ireland) is significant to the nature of my practice. This is not London, and although it may, like many regional centres aspire to be 'London-like', realistically its history and resources impact severely on such aspirations. Being in Belfast throws up weighty questions about the nature of architectural practice and the role it can play in a period of 'conflict transformation'.[7] Walking the arterial streets of Belfast is an acute test of the architect's optimism and creative vision. But the conditions and lessons learnt in such a critical context can, it is hoped, add to the debate in other sites of contestation that exist around the world: e.g. the nature of long-term relief following climatic disasters, the interfaces between

[7] The language of 'peace and reconciliation' asserts that we are not post-conflict but rather in the process of transforming conflict.

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indigenous and immigrant populations, ongoing issues of segregation/gentrification in inner cities, etc.

My practice, therefore, reflects the 'who' and the 'where', falling into three territories: material, strategic and academic. Whilst the territories themselves are relatively unconnected and the scale of the projects differs, the principles evolve from a central set of values around people and space to a wider concern about the interconnections between critical users,[8] place, creativity and pedagogy. The following sections give an overview of these areas of practice, not as models of best or even better practice, but rather as a way to illustrate a 'type' of practice that sits outside the mainstream.

Material Practice

One such example of this area of practice is the project *Girli Concrete*,[9] a research and development project that was formed around the desire of a textile designer/researcher and architect (author) to work together. Conceptually it sets the utopian challenge of bringing together hard and soft materials and the technologies of two diverse but traditional Northern Irish industries: construction and textiles. The textile designer, having spent most of her working life successfully designing textiles for the fashion industry, was keen to become involved in textiles and space. As an architect, I was interested in ideas of enhancing tactility in the built environment, partly in response to previous work on inclusive design/design for disability, but also as an echo of the many discussions around the sensation of architecture. An example of this being Peter Rice's reference to the need to '[...] make real the presence of the material in use in the building, so that people warm to them, want to touch them, feel a sense of the material itself and of the people who made and designed it.'[10]

Initially, we experimented with a range of materials but settled on using concrete and textile techniques to generate something that would be 'nice to touch'—with the intention of elevating the specification of the human interface to the same level as that of the technical requirements. Our vision became 'Mainstreaming Tactility in the Built Environment'. Although it is utopian and theoretically situated, it is neither an art nor an applied art project. It is also not a traditional product development, since it is neither driven by an identifiable market nor an existing problem. Engineers and scientists struggle with the practicalities of it, questioning why one would deliberately place soft, delicate substances into a harsh alkaline environment. But we have persisted, driven by a strong set of principles and a process of continual critique. In counterpoint to the academic environment that we are situated in, we seek out real-world deadlines with defined deliverables. So far, despite the hybrid nature that at times can draw out scepticism in the purists, we have been successful in attracting research funding, product development funding, press attention and now

8 'Critical Users' are those people most disadvantaged by the built environment either permanently or temporarily i.e. people with disabilities, single mothers, children, etc. They have 'critical' needs and offer us a means by which we can critique the built environment.

9 For more information visit; http://girliconcrete.blogspot.com

10 Peter Rice, An Engineer Imagines, (London: Ellipsis, 1994), pp. 76-77.

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commissions. The project faces technical challenges and opportunities but is on course to resolve and exploit these. We have come to understand that *Girli Concrete* is as much about creating a product as refining a process, and now recognise it as the pilot project in an ongoing, larger and systematic interaction between textiles and construction. Throughout the project we have worked hard to define the context: historically, theoretically and in terms of current markets—we do this as a way to clearly designate present and future territories, avoiding replication. We hope that the project's provocative titling, *Girli Concrete*, openly signals its unconventional, non-mainstream approach.

Fig. 1. *Girli Concrete*, 2008. Photo: Ruth Morrow.

Strategic Practice

This work grows out of collaborations with an artist collective and an inner city community, both based in Belfast.

PS² is a small artist collective, with studio space in the centre of Belfast. They have a 'project space' on the ground floor of the building, known locally as 'the wee space with the big windows'. I co-curate with Peter Mutschler those projects that focus on urban creativity and social interaction by artists, multidisciplinary groups and theorists. We aim to open the traditional categories and expand the work to external locations. Whilst PS2 still values 'internal discourse', we think that some of the work deserves larger audiences and that people outside the traditional art-audience deserve more and better art. We place art before diverse street audiences, initiating a process of active re-appropriation of public space through creative, non-commercial means. It is a model that exists in many other places but we are not driven to be new, just appropriate and active in our own neighbourhood. However because it is located work it does in the end appear to be 'new'.

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I also work with an inner city community, Donegall Pass. It is a loyalist protestant enclave in Belfast with a mix of low rise residential and business uses (notably Asian restaurants and supermarkets) isolated by road and rail routes. Like other segregated areas, it has maintained a strong sense of community. In the past, it was 'the other community' that acted as the threat, but increasingly the challenge to community coherence is from private investment and the privatisation and commercialisation of space;[11] this is particularly true of those inner city working class communities where land is at a premium. The city fathers have little means to restrain development, which although confident of healthy financial returns shows little regard for the existing built fabric nor indeed the societal structures of Northern Ireland. As Schneider and Susser observe of the regeneration of 'wounded cities' around the globe, '[...] reclamation processes can themselves have destructive spin-offs. The communities must in the end become informed and active in order to face these challenges',[12] and it's against this backdrop that I am involved with the Donegall Pass community.

[11] Bryan Bell (ed.), *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p. 264.

[12] J. Schneider and I. Susser (eds.), *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalised World*, (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 16.

The relationship to Donegall Pass and its Community Forum developed out of the project SPACE SHUTTLE (co-curated with PS^2). SPACE SHUTTLE, a scale replica of 'Project Space', was used as a mobile workstation for urban space exploration. It had six missions, and was 'manned' by artists and multidisciplinary groups, who worked for the duration of one to two weeks, in the local environment. Mission 1: the Pass Odyssey, landed on Donegall Pass in August 2006. It was an all—female crew called 'call-centre collective', made up of a group of fellow practitioners/researchers (interactive media, fine art, textile and product design) and myself. Over the course of eight days we ran a range of events (see Fig. 2) that had developed out of six months of talking to community members, producing an 'Index of Ideas' and editing it to suit their and our interests. The events were successful to different degrees, but the long term effect was and still is that the community came to know us as individuals who had energy, could deliver creative actions, source funding, publicise work on national and international networks *and* were approachable.

As a consequence, I was invited to contribute to the formation of the Donegall Pass Community Development Company (non-profit-making) and now act as a Board member. The company has started a process of developing projects that bring together social, economic and physical regeneration. It looks to existing models that release the equity from land that is 'occupied', rather than necessarily 'owned' by communities, with an aim to revitalise the community in a shared future, resisting where possible the effects of gentrification. It will be a long journey but so far there have been some initial 'wins'. In addition, and perhaps more interestingly, some women of the Pass went on to run further pamper events in the vein of the Shiny, Sparkly Sunday Afternoon, out of which developed the first women's group that Donegall Pass has seen in many years.

The Big Whinge Box	An elaborate contraption to collect your environmental concerns and pass them on to local representatives and concerned bodies.
A Doorbell For The Pass	Design a doorbell ring to capture the sounds of the Pass.
Arch Future	Workshop to design a contemporary version of the Donegall Pass Orange Arch.
Passbroadcast	Come and broadcast to the Pass. Visits to BBC and local radio stations.
Model Pass	Workshop to explore ideas for Posnett Street Site. Architects and landscape architects on hand to help out.
Audio Tour	We'll be collecting audio memories related to the Pass—Come in and listen or contribute your own memories.
Shiny, Sparkly Sunday Afternoon	An afternoon of luxury for the women of the Pass, perhaps a manicure, a head massage or a pedicure. Come and indulge yourself in the SPACE SHUTTLE.
Space Walk	Children's workshop—making space suits for life as an urbanaut. Director of Armagh Planetarium will help us to survive the dangers of space. Star in a moonwalk video.
Big Projection Night	We are collecting images of life in the Pass, both past and present; of your special occasions (weddings, birthdays etc.) and daily life. Together with the historic images that have been on show this week in the Shuttle (from Ulster Museum) we will show all during the open-air Big Projection Night on the last night of the Mission.

Fig. 2. Pass Odyssey Events.

Academic Practice

I am interested in scholarship as a means to an end. As part of that I understand pedagogy as the application of knowledge, gained through scholarship, in the construction of skills and understanding. Therefore, within the territory of academia, pedagogy is for me a form of creative practice. I am particularly interested in the pedagogy of creativity itself, being as one might expect, a core element of architectural education. The means by which we give *expression to creativity* is well rehearsed and apparent, but the processes by which we *develop and nurture creativity* going on to *build sustained and sustainable creativity* are less clear. We can read about how others do 'it' and we can talk about developing 'it' in the design studio, through continuous dialogue and critique with those who either claim to do it/have once done it or know someone who

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did/does do it … , but this is vague … . So my academic practice has been driven by the question: 'How well do we teach/learn creativity in schools of architecture?' and thus has become focused on the pedagogy of creativity.

In terms of pedagogy, I am drawn to inclusive, transformative pedagogies. So whilst I accept that hierarchies exist in learning environments—sometimes by necessity—my aim is to firstly expose, and then where possible, swap around those hierarchies. Judith Sachs in *The Activist Teaching Profession* writes of the power of the teacher who becomes a learner and shows the need for teachers to be seen 'to practice the value of learning'[13] and the strength in opening up and becoming 'publicly vulnerable and accessible'.[14] These are, in my view, essential tactics if one is to include and motivate more people for longer in the often 'uncomfortable' process of learning.

[13] Judyth Sachs, *The Activist Teaching Profession*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), p. 31.

[14] Ibid., p. 15.

In terms of creativity, I also recognise this as a process that at different times is both open and closed. When designing with others, it is about knowing the moment at which the process has to be extrovert or introvert. In an attempt to teach creativity, I try to understand the negative and the positive impacts of 'real-life' issues on creativity and I am interested thus, in the set of skills one has to develop to sustain creativity in the toughest of environments.[15] As part of this work, Mission 1 of SPACE SHUTTLE was analysed not as a participative model, but as a 'street-level pedagogy of creativity'. It was concluded that whilst the content of the curriculum and the extent of the classroom could be clearly defined, the struggle lay in forming the 'class' and in negotiating who were the teachers and/or learners and when. This work is further developed in an ongoing research project called Creative Transformations that captures best practice models of community-based creative projects (ranging across two and three dimensional, spatial and environmental projects). These case studies are chosen on the basis that they demonstrate high levels of creativity and show evidence of personal and/or community transformation. They are analysed for those conditions that are conducive or obstructive to sustainable practice.

[15] Cf. R. Morrow, J. Torrington and R. Parnell, 'Reality Versus Creativity', *Transactions: Online Journal of Centre for Education in the Built Environment*, 1(2)(2004).

Practicing in a Northern Irish context makes it apparent that creativity, like reading, writing and arithmetic, is a basic block of individual life and a vital keystone in a civilised society. Long-term conflict profoundly affects creativity. It impinges on people's **Confidence**, takes away their **Voice**, and dulls their **Vision**—the key ingredients for a creative approach. When a society is under threat, the act of looking 'beyond' becomes an act of escape rather than of learning and reinvestment. During periods of threat or violence, creativity is often released in less visible and more transient forms of self-expression, e.g. writing, poetry etc. Creativity relies on challenging the existing and on the fundamental belief in the right to self-expression, yet conflict creates polarised societies where conservative actions and anonymity become ingrained tactics of survival. Whilst

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Northern Ireland is currently in a process of conflict transformation, many of these characteristics still exist. In terms of architecture and urban design projects, which are traditionally viewed as a long term investment for future generations, environments of quality become almost unattainable in a context of latent destruction, where each generation is focused on its own survival. In this environment, teaching and practicing sustained creativity is a challenge, but a profoundly necessary action. Through the Creative Transformations Project, an alternative definition of 'creativity' arose: *a process that recognises and accepts challenges, with a confidence borne out of skills, knowledge and reflection, resulting in a transformative outcome*.

Reconstructing Alberti's Appendix

We now need to scrutinise the issues that arise as a result of such 'peripheral practice'. In doing so, we may begin to see where mainstream architecture could adjust in scope and depth, and in the end begin a process of reconstructing an Alberti's Appendix for our time/place. When thinking of a professional service or action, we typically break it down into the component parts of 'who it's for', 'what it is' and 'how it is carried out'. When we look at 'peripheral practice', it gives us some indication where we might be heading.

Who Might it be For?
If we reformulate the assertive title of Alberti's missing appendix, 'The Service That the Architect Provides', into a question: 'Who do we serve and what services do we offer?', it starts to reflect the concerns of some contemporary practitioners. Bryan Bell in his book, *Good Deeds, Good Design*, generates his own question on this issue, 'how can architects increase the number of people that they serve?' and responds by citing examples of practice that engages with the 98% (of the general public) who typically have no access to architects.[16]

This isn't just a question of making architecture serve more people; it is also about fracturing architecture's reliance on 'good clients'. When Will Alsop says: 'As architects, we are only as good as our clients. If they do not want to explore and achieve something worthwhile, it is very difficult for us to persuade them otherwise.'[17] It illustrates the 'high dependency' that architects have on the 'right kind of client'. This one-way relationship is fraught with difficulties, not least the loss of control over our professional relevance. But the architectural profession might also benefit by uncovering new territories for intellectual exploration, helping to side-line the profession's tendency to generate form through endless lists of architectural adjectives: curvier, shinier, fluffier, smoother, etc. Perhaps, as Frampton suggested in 1983, it really is time to look at the relationship between the architect and user, uncovering new working processes and new spatial programmes. Interestingly, Alberti's meticulous concern for

[16] Bryan Bell (ed.), *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p. 13.

[17] From lecture given by Will Alsop to CABE, 2001. See: *Architecture Link*, (2007), http://architecturelink.gemini.titaninternet.co.uk/NOF/bldgfs.asp?unique=1191529592405&nof_id=12, [accessed 3rd Oct 2007].

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the welfare of pigeons, impacts on his knowledge of spatial practice and programming (i.e. location and urination!). This resonates to some extent with the profession's need to connect not only to those who pay the fees, but also to those who live with the consequences.

What Might it be? (It's not that it's not about building)
In non-mainstream practice, buildings are understood as only one point on the horizon of architecture. It may be a significant and highly visible point, but not always one that can be achieved within time or resources, nor indeed one that is necessary. It involves bringing people to the point where they understand that 'owning' or better utilising their space, whether through permanent or temporary intervention, is empowering and fundamental to improving on life's chances. Bringing them to the point where they also know when not to build, creating a void for future moments or transient activities, acknowledging that this is equally crucial to their health, welfare and development. It is pertinent to ask what other professional, other than the architect, could support this type of activity? In this way of thinking, architecture exists in the territory before, around and after the built thing, and architectural processes can lead as much to an empty space as to a built one.

How it Might be Carried Out? (Collaborations and Pedagogy)
Practice on the margins is dependent on odd conjunctions, it forms pragmatic alliances as a way to consolidate and support activity. In so doing, it realises the enormity of the unheard voice in architecture, i.e. the voice that belongs to everyone *but* the profession. 'Peripheral practice' relies on what Park Fiction calls: 'Tools, attitudes, courage, practices, programs, that make unlikely encounters, meetings and connections more likely, search for them, jump over cultural or class barriers, go where no one goes'.[18] Such a process offers potential sites for 'rich' collaboration and through such strategies one learns to respect the work practices and cultures of others. In return, one is able to view the architecture profession from a fresh position, and rather than undermining professional allegiance, it seems to highlight and intensify the role and skills of the architect.

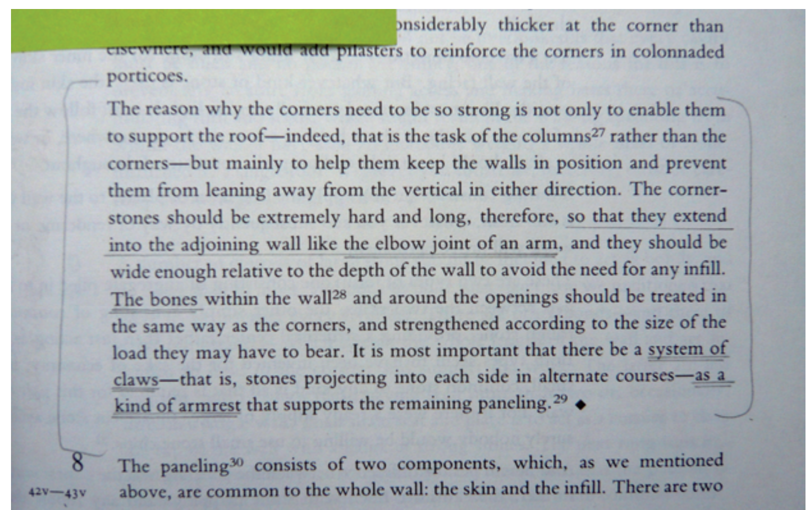
The creative practitioner working in relatively nascent or sensitive territories acts in ways similar to an inclusive pedagogue. In order to bring people along, engage and empower them through creative actions, one has to reveal hierarchies, understand their role and look for instances where they can be reversed. There are times when it is important to be the 'designer' and times where the role is of a 'teacher/facilitator/advocate/ translator'. Knowing *when and how to be present* is critical. Occasionally there is a tendency to be overly sensitive, losing one's sense of professional direction. To this end, 'peripheral practice' should reveal the motivations behind the work/ and the presence of those involved; Define and hold Professional territories whilst remaining open and discursive (Clare Hackett, of Falls Community Council talks about this as establishing

18 Park Fiction, 'Project Unlikely Encounters' in AAA-PEPRAV (eds.), *Urban/ACT: A Handbook for Alternative Practice*, (Montrouge: Moutot Imprimeurs, 2007), p. 30.

permeable boundaries);[19] and probably more crucially, choose the moment and build the bridges. It is not enough to have a good idea; it also has to be timely and relevant.

[19] Comment by Clare Hackett (Falls Community Council), 'Dúchas Oral History Archive' in, Morrow, Rohr and Mey, *Creative Transformations: Conversations on Determination, Risk, Failure and Unquantifiable Success*, (Ulster: University of Ulster, 2008).

Interestingly, these are tactics that mirror inclusive pedagogies. At the heart of the most sustainable forms of creative practice is a pedagogical approach. Perhaps this is why we still read Alberti over 500 years later—because he too was a pedagogue. Even in a mundane passage (Fig. 3) about the construction of corners on stone buildings, Alberti utilises a full range of pedagogical skills; simplicity in the language, clarity in the argument, reasons for needing such knowledge, and analogies used to build relationships between abstract language and mental images. Alberti doesn't just want to tell us what he knows, he really wants us to understand and apply that knowledge. The architect as preacher-teacher has been dominant throughout architectural history, perhaps now architects can build on Alberti's natural instincts, expose (and value) their full complement of skills and place their practice within a pedagogical framework.



...nsiderably thicker at the corner than ... pilasters to reinforce the corners in colonnaded porticoes.

The reason why the corners need to be so strong is not only to enable them to support the roof—indeed, that is the task of the columns[27] rather than the corners—but mainly to help them keep the walls in position and prevent them from leaning away from the vertical in either direction. The corner-stones should be extremely hard and long, therefore, so that they extend into the adjoining wall like the elbow joint of an arm, and they should be wide enough relative to the depth of the wall to avoid the need for any infill. The bones within the wall[28] and around the openings should be treated in the same way as the corners, and strengthened according to the size of the load they may have to bear. It is most important that there be a system of claws—that is, stones projecting into each side in alternate courses—as a kind of armrest that supports the remaining paneling.[29] ◆

8 The paneling[30] consists of two components, which, as we mentioned above, are common to the whole wall: the skin and the infill. There are two

42v—43v

Fig. 3. Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, p. 71. Photo: Ruth Morrow.

Finally: Just Practice

The loss of Alberti's Appendix may have been fortuitous. It leaves a void in which we can continue to examine and re-imagine our own individual practice and 'the services' we offer. Although perhaps it is advisable not to agonise too extensively about what defines architectural practice but rather to get on and do it. There are many urban practitioners, past and present, whose work has been hybrid and difficult to define. One contemporary organisation, Park Fiction says that such groups 'do not let their activities be reduced to symbolic action, mirroring, critique, negation, or analysis of their powerlessness, nor do they muddle along in their assigned corner.'[19] Beyond refusing to 'muddle along in the assigned corner', creating a critical space to practice creatively and with spatial understanding will certainly result in architectural practice if not architecture.

[19] Park Fiction, 'Project Unlikely Encounters', p. 30.

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The Fundamental Protagonist

Andreas Müller

The paper consists of preparatory notes for a research project on the use and the users of architecture. It tries to grasp the quite diffuse figure of the user, its different descriptions and its more or less hopeful theoretical constructions. In many cases, the figure of the user is defined in close relation to its counterpart, the architect, in others it is derived from general social or political concepts. Architecture has to deal with people—at the very least in its built-form—involving them in specific relations with each other and provoking reactions. Therefore with every architectural design, an idea is constructed as to what these relations are and who those people might be.

The projects of and reflections on participative architecture mostly assume that the participation of the future users of buildings in their planning is a form of democratic emancipation. But when we focus on the subjects of participation some questions emerge: isn't it precisely only in the process of participation that the figure of the user is constructed, defined as an ideal figure and addressed as a counterpart? Which ideas were projected onto that figure (for example, about the relation of individual and society or about the concept of public space)? And what has that figure become today?

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One can only speculate what exactly the dispute is about. The photograph shows a crowd of mostly young men, gathered in a street, possibly blocking it—some of them are carrying banners. The image is taken from a position inside the crowd, where two persons are standing in the center, vis-à-vis, obviously having an argument, gesturing. One of them is Giancarlo de Carlo, one of the curators of the 14th Triennale di Milano of 1968.

Fig. 1. John McKean: *Giancarlo De Carlo: Layered Places* (Fellbach: Edition Axel Menges, 2004). Photo: John McKean.

The part of the Triennale curated by de Carlo was dedicated to the role of architecture in finding alternatives to a mass society driven by consumerism. It claimed a strong political understanding of the discipline of architecture, made evident in several contributions. The young radical group of architects, UFO, recreated a street barricade in the exhibition space, made from paving stones and the garbage of a consumer society – discarded televisions, refrigerators, bicycles—a reference to the barricades that were erected in Paris just a few weeks earlier. But not only the student generation rebelled, even a well-established architect like Aldo van Eyck linked architecture directly to the new technological potentialities and political conflicts of the time. His contribution showed photographs of U.S. military operations in Vietnam that resulted in the defoliation of entire forests.

On the day of the opening, May 30th 1968, the exhibition was squatted by a crowd of architecture students, who were protesting against the Triennale as a representative institution of the established cultural system. Soon after the press conference the access road was blocked and the building closed to the public. De Carlo suddenly finds himself in an ambiguous position, although he understands the worldwide protests of students as a necessary movement for change, and in architecture as a way of renewing the discipline, those he sympathises with criticise him heavily. He decides to confront them and puts his own role as an architect up for

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public discussion; a radical democratic act, pictured in the photograph as an almost perfect, forum-like spatial setting.

Architecture's Public

A few months later de Carlo published a text—maybe as a reaction to the Triennale conflicts—in which he formulated radically new ideas about the relation of architecture to its public, regarding architecture as an intellectual field as well as the actual building of spatial structures. The essay 'Architecture's Public', emerged from a lecture given at a congress in Liege in 1969, and was published in January 1971 in the 5th issue of the Bolognese magazine, *Parametro*. The text reformulates the relationship between architects and the public, between those who design spaces and those who use them. De Carlo introduces a new and powerful figure into architectural discourse:

> In reality, architecture has become too important to be left to architects. A real metamorphosis is necessary to develop new characteristics in the practice of architecture and new behavior patterns in its authors: therefore all barriers between builders and users must be abolished, so that building and using become two different parts of the same planning process. Therefore the intrinsic aggressiveness of architecture and the forced passivity of the user must dissolve in a condition of creative and decisional equivalence where each—with a different specific impact—is the architect, and every architectural event—regardless of who conceives it and carries it out—is considered architecture.[1]

[1] Giancarlo de Carlo, 'Architecture's Public', *Parametro* (5)(1971): 9.

The emphatic tone in which de Carlo declares the user of architecture as 'the fundamental protagonist' reveals what is at stake: nothing less than the credibility of architecture. In retrospect, after 40 years of the functionalist Modern Movement, de Carlo perceives a failure in principle even in progressive and socially responsible architectural movements such as CIAM. Architecture as a public practice can only be legitimated by its users, who are still not adequately integrated into the architectural process. Even the Modern Movement, that for the first time in history produced architecture for powerless groups in society, adhered to an authoritarian or at best patronising model of planning. Instead of planning *with* the users, the Modern Movement only involved planning *for* the users, degrading them to the level of the objects of planning.

De Carlo instead starts from the assumption of difference rather than homogeneity, addressing the involvement of users within concrete social conditions, acknowledging that their different needs cannot be discovered through an abstraction but only through participative processes. Planning thus becomes an immanently political act, a confrontation of the value systems of the architect and the user, where the architect withdraws from

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his formerly dominant position. The user achieves the right to develop and express desires, which in turn can unleash subversive energies and lead to new hierarchies. The user is transformed here into a figure endowed with revolutionary hope, a participant in the planning process as an autonomous subject.

It is not only the relation between the architect and the user that is redefined here, but also the actual use of the built environment, which becomes a part of architecture, including not only the completion of buildings but also their adoption, change and even elimination. Everyone becomes an architect, the emancipated user as well as the building expert. In fact the use of space itself is in the process of becoming an architectural practice.

Participation Process

The project *Nuovo Villaggio Matteotti*, a housing estate for the workers of Italy's largest steel company, can be understood as a translation into practice of de Carlo's ideas on participation.[2] It is his most radical experiment in participation and it took place in a remarkable setting, based on de Carlos' ideas about an alternative, egalitarian society. De Carlo did not question the need to demolish the old workers' houses to make way for new ones, and a renovation of the existing buildings was apparently never considered. Instead de Carlo assumed and claimed a certain universal right to live in a modern house of a reasonable standard, but still within the system of company sponsored housing for workers. This position is clearly in opposition to the modernist idea of the dwelling as 'Existenzminimum', formulated in the 1929 CIAM conference.

[2] Cf. 'Arbeiterwohnungen in Terni: Interview with Giancarlo de Carlo', in: *Werk* (3)(1972): 141-145.

What seemed problematic at the time for de Carlo—a large industrial company building accommodation for its workers—was dealt with in the organisation of the planning process. As there was a clear class divide between the workers and the management of the company, the planning was perceived not only as an individual emancipation, but also as an act of class struggle. De Carlo insisted that the meetings with the workers—the future inhabitants—had to take place during working hours and had to be paid like regular work. No members of the company management were allowed to attend the meetings in order to minimise control over the workers and to establish a trusting relationship between the architect and the users, allowing them to formulate their wishes about their future homes.

The Production of Space

At about the same time that de Carlo was celebrating the use of space, Henri Lefebvre published *The Production of Space*,[3] where he approached similar questions on the idea of urban space and the role of planning in contemporary society. Based on Marxist theories of production, he developed the idea that space might be produced like a commodity, being

[3] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

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the result of many different, sometimes even opposing social forces that act upon it. On the other hand, it is precisely in that same space that social relations take place. Lefebvre describes it as a feedback process: space is produced through social conflicts while social relations are inscribed in space. This means that social groups or individual subjects can be part of the struggle around the formation of urban space. Everyone can become part of the spatial production process and everyone can take an active role in these spatial negotiations.

Lefebvre specifies this understanding of space with three categories that point at the possibility of shaping space. The categories are 'perceived space', 'conceived space', and 'lived space'. 'Perceived space' for Lefebvre is the physical environment of everyday life. 'Conceived space' is the space of the bureaucrats and planners, an abstract field where power relations are set up and transformed into physical/material space. While the first two concepts assume a rather passive relation to space, the third category of 'lived space' introduces an active role and a certain involvement through the use of space. This is the space where social relations take place and it is shaped through actual use.

With this conceptual construction Lefebvre provides a tool to describe an open space of social interactions and change, as opposed to the abstract space of planners, and the self-evident space of everyday life. This so called 'lived space' gains its full meaning only through use, which means through the active involvement and participation of people in its design. That is the point at which Lefebvre's ideas intersect with de Carlo's, the user becoming an architect and the use of space being equivalent to the designing of space.

Dwelling Education

In 1979 the German Werkbund, the former spearhead of the Modern Movement, published the guidebook *Lernbereich Wohnen* (the title is probably best translated as *Habitation Studies*). It was introduced by Lucius Burckhardt, then president of the Werkbund and a lucid critic of the social housing system, in a somewhat ambiguous way:

> This book gives advice and doesn't want to sell anything. It sustains the right to reasonable habitation. But it also sustains the right and the ability of everyone to define for him/herself what this reasonable, appropriate and proper habitation might be.[4]

[4] Michael Andritzky and Gert Selle (eds.), *Lernbereich Wohnen*, (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1979), I, p. 5, [my translation].

Although the book's title refers to a schoolbook, it contains no teaching units but is something between a sourcebook of examples of how people lived in history and a guidebook for contemporary city dwellers. Its chapters deal with the social conditions and history of dwelling, but also include practical advice for the furnishing of an apartment or the

renovation of old buildings. The last chapter presents a photo series with a variety of 'alternative homes'.

What today appears so strange about this book is its inherent statement that dwelling as an act can be learnt. Though it immediately takes back this claim in the foreword, stating that everyone has the right and the ability to define his/her own form of dwelling. But the rest of the book's 370 pages present most contemporary concepts of dwelling as deeply affected by conventions, mediatised ideals, fashions or unreflected wishes. To avoid such an alienated living situation it is necessary to get to know other possibilities and to be able to reflect on one's own dwelling situation. According to the Werkbund it is the private sphere of habitation where this kind of aesthetic training of the users could initiate an emancipative process.

Democratised Aesthetics

Whereas the Werkbund developed its almost a century old idea of an 'education in taste', towards a less authoritarian aesthetic training, the Viennese architect Ottokar Uhl propagated a radical 'democratisation of aesthetics'.[5] In several texts, written during the 1970s, he developed an idea of a popularised aesthetics of the many. His approach is based on the assumption that the user of architecture should also become a producer of space and thereby develop his/her own aesthetic concepts, instead of accepting the aesthetic standards of others. As a consequence, a democratised aesthetic will be poor in comparison to those of professional aesthetic producers like architects, but they will be the result of self-determined democratic processes. In this point Ottokar Uhl goes further than most of his colleagues. While many architects understand the process of participation as one phase in the design process, which stops at a certain point to be taken over by the expert planner, Uhl tries to open up the process as much as possible. He withdraws from the actual design and leaves far reaching decisions to the users, which include decisions on the programme of a building, its function and even technical solutions.

[5] Ottokar Uhl, 'Demokratisierte Ästhetik', in Ottokar Uhl, *Gegen-Sätze, Architektur als Dialog*, (Vienna: Picus, 2003).

Politics of Aesthetics

The subject of the above mentioned practices could generally be considered to be the worker within Fordist labour conditions, secured by the welfare state, who would eventually be provided with communal social housing. Today the situation is very different. The predominant subject of today's planning is the flexible and mobile creative worker, who will satisfy his/her demand for housing on the market. A remarkable reassessment has occurred since the early days of participative planning and many of the former claims have been realised. The old figure of the user corresponds to a certain extent with today's ideal of the autonomous subject who acts creatively and self-responsibly. The promising potentials of participation—

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self-responsibility, individuality, creativity, etc.—have lost much of their liberating impact, and instead almost turned into demands that are enforced upon today's consumers of architecture. The desire to oppose the homogenising and patronising care of the welfare state with one's own creativity has rather turned into a demand for creativity as an extra value in an increasingly competitive society.

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière, recently developed a contemporary understanding of the relation of aesthetics and politics. In his book, T*he Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*,[6] Rancière assumes that the field of politics cannot be considered apart from the field of aesthetics, as the political is always centered around questions of the appearance of the so far un-represented. The aesthetical, on the other hand, deals with the articulation of the so far inexpressible. Both concepts aim at what could be called a radical democratic society, where the hegemonic order is challenged by social groups that are not, or are not adequately, represented.

Whereas in the 1970s the project of a 'democratised aesthetics' in architecture was aimed at individual emancipation from authoritarian or patronising environments, the radical democratic project is broader. It aims at a general transformation of democratic politics into a field of negotiations. Here the notion of space being a result of constant negotiations of conflicts between different political forces becomes important again. In this constellation the figure of the user of space—seen as a radical democratic subject—could help to redefine the relationship between architects and architecture's public once more. The photograph at least looks beautiful.

6 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, (London: Continuum, 2006).

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A Vocabulary of Engaging Practices: Reflecting on the Work of the Bureau of Design Research

BDR: Prue Chiles and Leo Care

This paper re-visits recent critical reflections on the nature of architectural practice to explore the nature of the alternative practice of the Bureau of Design Research in Sheffield. It situates the BDR as a research-based consultancy, a project office and something other. It discusses the importance of collective responsibility and the role of the academy in the formation of a new practice.

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Situating the Bureau of Design Research and the Lineage of the Project Office

Establishing a *Project Office*[1] in a School of Architecture has proved an elusive goal, both historically and in contemporary institutions. The trend emerged during the 1960's as a new programme of advocacy architecture,[2] emphasising process over product, social and political content over form, and most importantly prioritising teaching and enabling students' 'practicing'. Despite each Project Office attempting a different take on practice, many have had fleeting success before disappearing. Reasons for this stem from either removing themselves from the university and becoming too commercial, or by being too polemical, too removed from reality so that financially they became unsustainable. To achieve the necessary credibility to attract both research funding and industry or commercial patronage, whilst remaining true to a collective idea of social responsibility remains difficult to achieve. However, many universities have persevered in trying to define their own form of alternative practice. The Bureau of Design Research (BDR), established 5 years ago, hopes to learn from past mistakes in forging a new future.

University of Sheffield has had two previous Project Offices,[3] one of which was set up under George Grenville Baines in the 1960's, and was eventually sold off to BDP to become a thriving regional office. One of the main aims of this Project Office was to employ students and to act as a teaching tool. In 1985 a different kind of consultancy office was set up to draw on the specialist skills of the staff, rather than encounter the problems of finding clients who would commit to a project with a design team comprising mainly of students. It had a small team of architects supplemented by the academic staff. In the first four years they developed two main—and quite large projects—one on the university campus. However, by 1991 when I first came to the department, and thought I might be able to practice within the consultancy office, it was clear that it was in trouble. By 1992 it had closed—a silent and unexplained ending. It was very detached from the School of Architecture by this time.

Reflecting—the BDR as an Emerging Alternative Practice

Not exactly an architectural practice, the BDR lies somewhere between a research-based consultancy, a Project Office and *something other*. It is the evolving 'other' that is of interest here and needs situating—how can we navigate the murky waters of working outside the normative professional models we feel comfortable with? By revisiting recent critical reflections on architectural practice, the developing ideals of the BDR can be seen as a reaction to some of the failings of an exclusively architectural practice. One of the last major projects reflecting on architectural practice, carried out at Harvard University in the mid 1990's, is interesting to re-visit.[4]

1 Project Offices in architecture schools have largely taken the model of Grenville Baines at Sheffield. It enabled students and staff to practice but there was no explicit social agenda. Another pioneering Project Office was in New York at the Pratt Center, pivoting between Pratt Institute's planning department and local organisations struggling to address issues of urban deterioration and poverty. Architecture and planning students and the faculty were based on a campus located at the edge of Bedford-Stuyvesant, New York's second largest African-American community. They were challenged by the community leaders to respond to the area's physical deterioration and pervasive poverty. They were further challenged not to study the problem—in the words of one leader: 'We've been studied enough!' but to be both a resource and an advocate for an agenda defined by the desire for urban revitalisation. From the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, the broad political consensus that enabled the passage of national civil rights legislation also supported a war on poverty, which (briefly) channelled significant public investment into Black and Latino communities.

2 Cf. Rachel Sara, 'Between Studio and Street: The Role of the Live Project in Architectural Education', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2003).

3 Richard Wilcox, 'Practice Profile—Academic Consultancy', *RIBA Journal*, 96(6)(1989): 48-50.

4 William S. Saunders et al. (eds.), *Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1996).

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The edited volume published as a result feels remarkably current and it makes me wonder how much we have redefined our practices over the last decade. This yearlong symposium, with voices from both sides of the Atlantic, covers the traditional discussions on the duality of the profession: the disparity between objective and technical knowledge, artistic and subjective ability and the marketplace versus ideological and ethical concerns. It also puts the architectural profession and the way we practice, within its context of rapid technological change, globalisation and the volatile economic climate of the 1980's and early 1990's. The introduction calls on the profession to re-affirm its legitimacy through a renewed interest in all aspects of the built environment.[5]

[5] Cf. Roger Ferris, 'Introduction—Overviews of Architectural Practice', in Saunders, *Reflections*, p. 9.

However, over and above all these aspects of the profession are two suggestions for the future. Firstly, a number of the authors discuss in one way or another that we need more collective responsibility. Secondly, a resounding theme throughout is the importance of the connection between education and practice. Peter Rowe particularly singles out education, encouraging speculation and innovation together with greater collaboration and raising the issue of the role of the academy in the formation of new practices. It was attention to these two slowly emerging trends that initiated the BDR in 2002, within the School of Architecture at Sheffield.

In his essay of the same volume, 'Poverty and Greed in American Cities', David Harvey asks:

> What are the real possibilities for you the architect in your position in society, not as hero who is going to save society, but as worker who is engaging practices that have the possibility of opening up new ways of doing things here and there [...][6]

[6] David Harvey, 'Poverty and Greed in American Cities', in Saunders, *Reflections*, p. 104.

He then goes on to lay out succinctly the key malaise we as a profession are still struggling with twelve years after this essay was written:

> [T]hat is linking with other people, not remaining outside of what else is going on, but being integrated into a general social and political process, and unfortunately, in so doing, having to make choices as to what kind of social relations you seek to support, and what kind of social relations you seek to suppress?[7]

[7] Ibid.

Peter Rowe discusses the very idea of what constitutes architectural practice and the identity of architects and declares that architectural practice;

> [...] requires substantial expansion [...] because [...] the design problems presented by society continue to transcend 'normal' practice [...] this is not only a matter of increasing the scope and usefulness of architectural services, but also of addressing the socio-cultural role of architecture more critically.[8]

[8] Peter G. Rowe, 'Introduction: Architectural Practices in the 1990s' in Saunders, *Reflections*, p. 5.

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Something that has changed over the last ten years is the way we are defining new roles and shifting perspectives in order to prioritise the social role of architecture. Rowe hints at this in the Harvard study when he says that; 'a repositioning of practice then will necessarily require two things: advancements in design itself and further collaboration and cross-disciplinary knowledge'.[9]

[9] Ibid.

It is using the framework suggested by Harvey's call for 'engaging practices' that we find we can best describe and categorise the ways in which the BDR works within the realm of architectural knowledge and production. That we can best categorise our practice through our 'ways of doing' is perhaps one of the key aspects that marks our work as an alternative architectural practice. It is this, alongside the previous history of project offices at the University of Sheffield, that we aim to elucidate and theorise in this paper.

An appropriation of Harvey's vocabulary of 'engaging practices', 'linking with other people' and 'finding ways in', acts as a prompt for the activities and methods of the Bureau.

Linking People, Linking Places

Building and sustaining links with other people—communities, practitioners, academics and students—is one of the key activities of BDR. In our position as a Project Office sited within the academy, working in the studio, the city and within communities, we find ourselves on the one hand inextricably linked to academia, whilst also continually forging new links through our pedagogy and our visioning and construction.

In the four years of the Bureau's emergence, we have attempted to expand our understanding of what role the architect can have with both feet in the university. What is our strategic statement of intent—our point of view? It defines at its core the implicit skills and challenges of architecture as a subject today, including the day-to-day logistics of making a practice work financially, and the challenges of trying to expand the understanding of research and consultancy within the traditional research environment of a science-based university. Over the last four years we have completed over 40 funded projects, many of which include all facets of a 'virtuous triangle' that we are seeking to attain—teaching, practice and research—all seamlessly employed. [10] We have worked with different, rewarding and sometimes confusing agendas. Sometimes feeling quite schizophrenic we lurch from design, ideas, research and teaching to feasibility, research consultancy and consultancy projects. We have built up a reputation for expertise in the areas of school design, community visioning and future oriented thinking. All projects try to contribute to the emerging paradigm of 'research by design', and link academia with practice and the community. We would argue that this enables both reflection and

[10] For more detailed information on all our projects, see our website: www.bdr.group@shef.ac.uk.

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the development of innovative design processes, with the potential to contribute to a new form of practice…

Fig. 1. 'Linking People' ; Working with pupils, staff and parents at Hunters Bar Infants' School to design a series of workshops. The session aimed at engaging parents in the design process and showing them the work of the children as a key part of the development of the scheme. Photo: BDR.

Our practice must be situated in and related to the place we are in and respond to the vitality of that place. At the BDR our theoretical practice is firmly rooted in place, materiality and tradition—a political tradition, the 'centrifugal force' of what Frampton calls a 'critical regionalism'.[11] Key to Sheffield is its industrial past of heavy engineering and craft, its natural attributes: the topography of the hills, valleys and rivers. Together these form a direction that economic regeneration practices can build upon. In Sheffield we are responding to and challenging the city's modes of practice with a political will to seek change.[12] This does not imply a provincial mentality dealing only with local issues, but an ability to *work within* the systems and parameters of the city and to then *reflect* that city in a national and international context—a new critical regionalism.

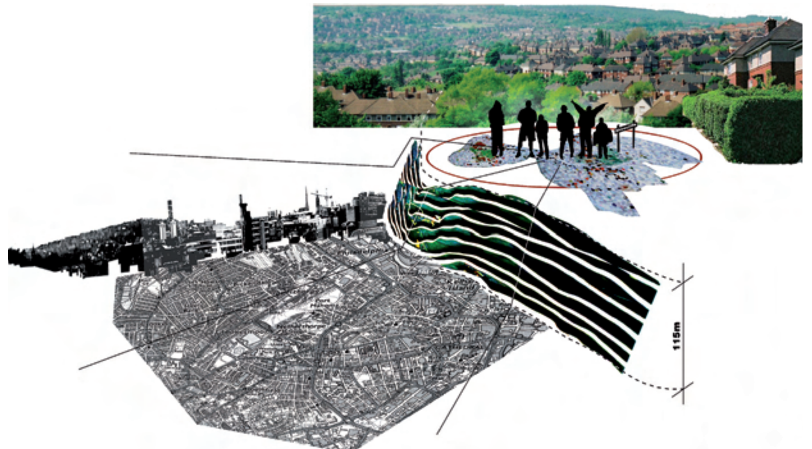

Fig. 2. 'Linking Places'; The SOAR framework document drew together the thoughts and ideas of residents from a number of neighbourhoods to establish principles for the regeneration of the Southey and Owlerton area. These were later coined as the 'Five Big Ideas' and have informed subsequent development. Image: BDR.

11 Cf. Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (Port Townsen: Bay Press, 1983). Although Frampton was not particularly concerned with a political frame of reference.

12 This was addressed in the first BDR project, a framework document for North Sheffield, 'Working with the Southey and Owlerton Regeneration Board'. We developed neighbourhood strategies for the Regeneration Framework for the area, worked on developing a positive identity for the transformation of the area, and looked at new ways of communicating this to the outside world.

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A Project Office is not about traditional research—it is about consultancy and a new type of research. All our projects contribute to an ongoing process of 'research by design', linking academic research practices with consultancy. This enables reflection and development of design processes within the consultancy, moving towards defining new forms of architectural practice. While Project Offices have traditionally implied a building project, we consider the term 'project' to have a broader sense, which could contribute to an alternative type of architectural practice. The clients involved in many of our projects have a long-term agenda, which is always social and they are not interested in short-term expediency.

We are also able to look at new methodologies of teaching both in the university and the community that are not so much about traditional skills and knowledge based teaching but are more about confidence-building, enabling and support. We devise and deliver courses to communities as part of their community-led regeneration programmes;[13] this also provides opportunities to involve architecture students in paid teaching roles.

[13] Such as the 'Buildings by Design' course and others for The Glass-House, a national charity offering design advice, training and project support to community groups throughout Britain.

Not Remaining Outside / Finding a Way In

Prompted by Harvey's call for architects 'not to remain outside' of what else is going on, we can categorise a second series of engaging practices around 'finding ways in', both for ourselves as theorists and practitioners and for the people we work with. Making design and regeneration accessible to communities and to students, not through simplification, but through offering both tested and innovative 'tactics of engagement' is a key element of all our work.

Working from a regional scale to the design of a small detail on a youth shelter to be built by teenagers, is both a privilege and a necessity of the work of BDR. In large-scale projects, our work often centres on the need to penetrate the multiple layers of information surrounding regional development and dealing with the multi-tiered agencies involved in

Fig. 3. The Abbeyfield Park Youth Shelter engaged local teenagers in both the design and implementation of their shelter. The project was designed to engage and engender a sense of ownership from the users as well as making a shelter that responded to the local area. Photo: BDR.

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effecting change. In the same way, switching between working with one child to a whole regional development agency, allows different perspectives that are important for the development of a new kind of practice.

However, another role of a Project Office should be to synthesise and transfer knowledge whilst working with other disciplines within a supportive framework. At its best the teaching and enabling role is part of a reciprocal relationship allowing innovative thinking to pass between everyone involved in the projects.

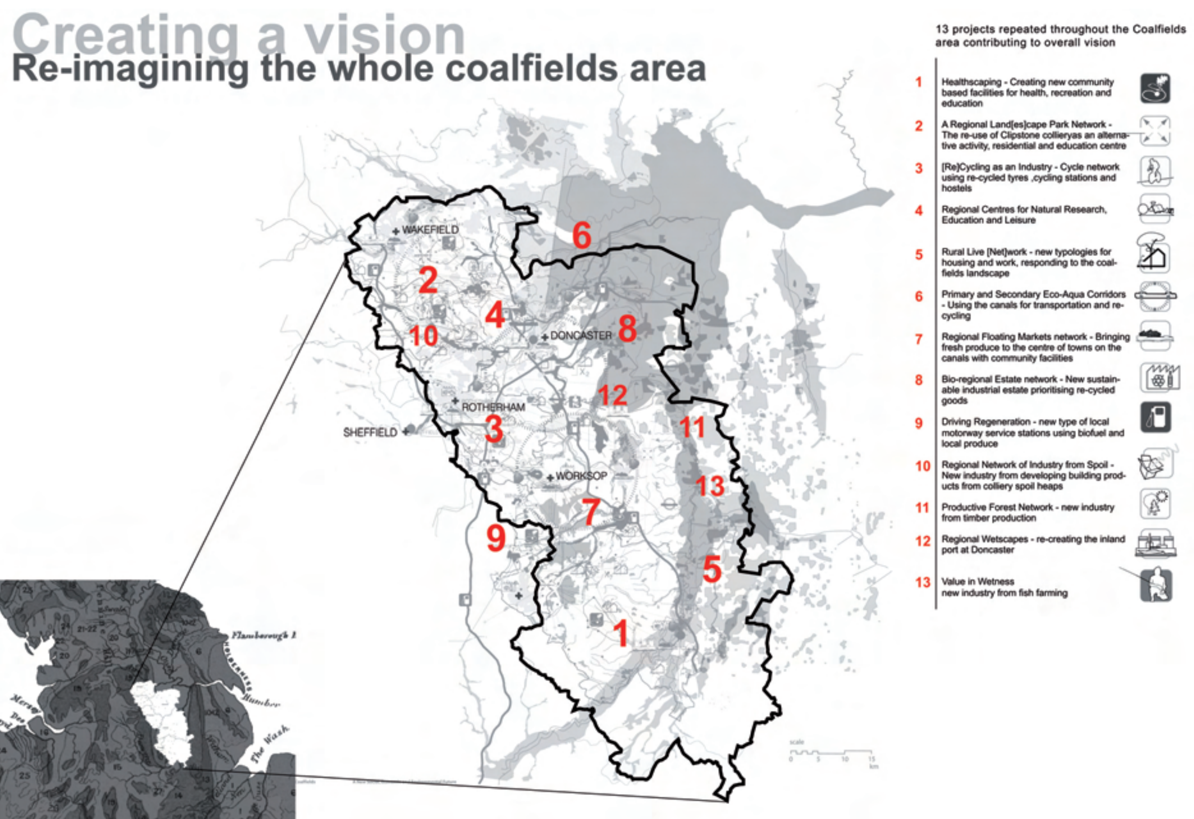

Fig. 4. 'Finding a Way In'; The Coalfields project looked at the regeneration of a massive area of post-industrial landscape in the North East of England. The project looked at ways of finding a 'way in' to understanding the complex, multi layered problems faced in large scale regeneration. Image: BDR.

The BDR plays a pedagogical and enabling role in both the academy and the community. Teaching in architecture schools is an accepted part of architectural practice: new practices particularly need the regular income but also teaching is a way 'of get paid for thinking', to reflect, to be more alternative, to retreat into the ivory tower, '[t]o the tasty realm of subjective freedom…'.[14] Within the studio project this can create a cycle of idealism—unrealisable idealism promoting radical social agendas passed on to students who are in turn disenchanted with practice.

How can we turn that disenchantment into action? Potentially with the types of projects we carry out both as BDR and in the studio. Key to the

[14] Kirtstin Aitken, 'Building on Social Values—Implicating Architectural Education', (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Sheffield, 2007), p.12.

practice of BDR is the Live Project programme at Sheffield.[15] The initial reason for forming BDR was to develop this relationship between the academy [university] and the community [city] through the Live Projects. The live projects sometimes enable further funded work that then involves both BDR staff and diploma students. We are now developing a framework whereby a live project can become a yearlong studio project supported by BDR and individual tutors.

[15] For more detailed information on the Live Projects, see the website; www.liveprojects.org.

In an architectural industry that is increasingly governed by legislative standards and contractual wrangling, experimentation and exploration are restricted. In a world of big business, ideas are carefully guarded secrets and the transfer of knowledge is rarely free flowing. Even in regeneration projects, where guidelines are laid down detailing how the general public should be involved in the improvement of their built environments, large organisations and local authorities still struggle to inform and involve people who are affected.

What is lacking in all areas of architecture, from academic education and research to practice and business, are the links between the different areas and transfer of knowledge between them. One of the conclusions of the *International Projects Office Conference* at London Metropolitan University (2005) was that a project office has to be generous![16] That is not to say that that the generosity has to be based around doing work for free, but rather being generous with knowledge.

[16] *International Projects Office Conference*, Department of Architecture and Spatial Design, London Metropolitan University, 17–18 November 2005.

Integrating

We have taken a political position that BDR should mediate between the strategic agencies involved in policy-making and the affected communities, integrating two ways of working that often, particularly in regeneration, do not meet in the middle. We can use our privileged position within the academy to be an 'agent provocateur', useful to both communities and the 'top down' strategic partners. This has proved one of our most challenging and elusive agendas, due to the fragmented nature of the regeneration process and the piecemeal funding regimes the government has in place. We have also ensured that key elements of architectural practice should always be high on the agenda, including blue-sky thinking, the reimagining, reinterpreting and reinventing of traditional practices, looking at more sustainable futures and of course always ensuring the importance of good design. Embedded within our practice is the desire to form new roles for an architect—more than that of a mere mediator between agencies and communities. We have deliberately tested the water by trying to be responsive to the current needs of society, both in the city and beyond, rather than having our own proactive agenda, which gives direction to the projects we take on (not so different from university research agendas led by the research funding councils). Devolving power to establish better relationships…

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Fig. 5. 'The Matrix'; The education matrix looks specifically at identifying 'good practice' in the educational sector with an aim to integrate the knowledge and ideas of a wide group of sectors within the construction industry. Image: BDR.

BDR focuses on people as much as buildings, broadening the definition of the word 'building', devolving power to establish relationships—*making space for people*. We have found our voice in three areas: design and research of learning environments, community-led design and the future of regeneration within post-industrial landscapes. This is where we situate our practice.

In our experience clients perceive the work of BDR in a number of different ways. Feedback received from community groups we have worked with has shown that being from a university imbues us with

Fig. 6. 'Design Enabling'; it is essential to help stakeholders develop a common design language that aids communication across all parties. This can take a variety of forms from models and montages to verbal and visual presentation skills. Photo: BDR.

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more authority than a private consultant. We are also perceived as less threatening and perhaps the fact that we are a not-for-profit organisation helps them feel they are getting value for money.

Local Authorities form the client group that is perhaps most challenged by the work we do; they particular struggle to take our work on board, especially if community involvement is included. Many projects have been well received but larger-scale proposals rarely implemented. Businesses that have commissioned research projects from the Architecture department previously, are often impressed by our knowledge of the industry and practice rather than an abstracted academic view. Charities are often one of the most rewarding client groups to work for and are in need of ideas that they cannot afford to pay for. Working with students on such projects has often meant that clients have low expectations at the outset of the project, but are overwhelmed by the results.

Between Three Stools

Through disengaging with the academy (either through gradual disassociation or the clearer-cut process of being sold on to form a new company) previous Project Offices at the University of Sheffield lost their unique position of linking academy, city and communities and ultimately ended their life as offices of 'engaging practices'. How can we remain engaged and engaging but allow ourselves room to grow out of the academy and beyond?

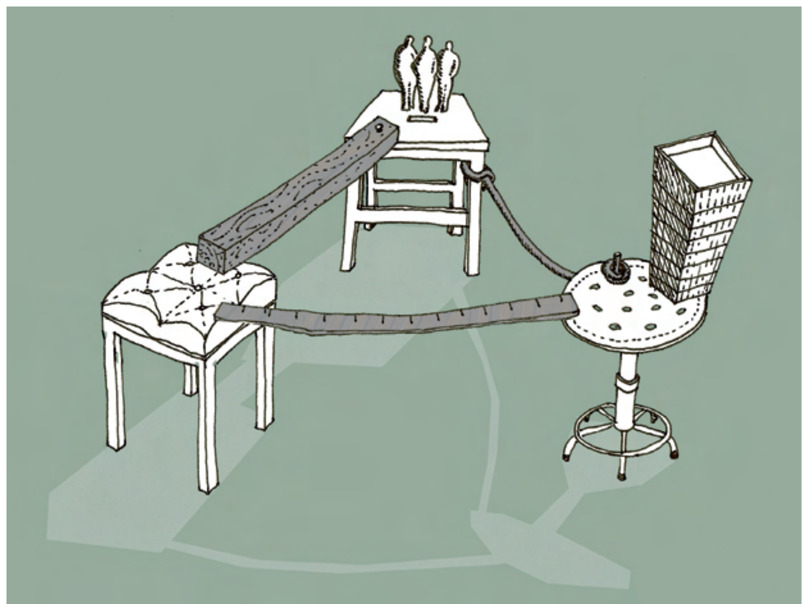

Fig. 7. 'Between Three Stools'; bridging the gap between community/city, academy and practice. Images: BDR.

The answer perhaps lies in the way that the projects are procured. We now have all but three projects funded by clients. This has been deliberate, allowing us to test the water and to be reactive to the demands of the

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groups that we connect with. This approach has made us adaptive and dynamic, which perhaps sets us apart from previous Project Offices. In reality, BDR is a multi-headed beast, taking on all sorts of commissions, from internal university grants to industrial research projects and community regeneration projects. The nature of our workload is becoming broad, perhaps too broad to allow us to keep developing specific skills quickly enough. It is now a question of whether becoming more specialised and focused would have a stabilising effect, or whether in fact it may just narrow options and limit our ability to make connections and engage in different ways.

This paper could be called 'between three stools.' This title not only hints at our role as we see it—bridging the gap between community/city, academy and practice—but also the precarious nature of this existence. While answering Harvey's call for 'engaging practices', the Bureau of Design Research has now reached a point where we need to strategise our plan of engagement for the future.

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‘Dipping Our Toes…’: A Qualitative Interview-based View of UK Architecture Graduates in Practice

Tessa Baird, Anna Holder, James Wakeford

This paper uses graphical diagramming to examine interviews with a number of Part II graduates in the UK. The intention of the project was to instigate a critical environment where experiences of graduates re-entering architectural practice, at this very particular stage in their career, could be shared and analysed. This process was undertaken in order to actively describe the position of graduates in the profession, in particular looking at the values and frustrations they experience or ascribe to mainstream architectural practice.

The paper details the processes of the research, in particular documenting the emergent analysis technique of mapping and coding that was developed for this project. Some key observations from the interviews are described, which inform a series of questions, aimed at introducing an informed critical reflexivity to graduate work, and at potential changes that might be introduced to mainstream architectural practice.

Introduction

This case study uses a graphical technique to draw out information from interviews with a number of Part II graduates[1] presently working within the architectural profession. The aim of the paper is to refine a series of queries about the UK architecture profession, with particular focus on recent graduate experience of the transition from education to practice. A wider aim is to establish potential forms of praxis within mainstream architectural practice that we, as Part II graduates, might implement. We looked closely at aspects of architectural practice that Part II graduates found important and frustrating after one year in employment, and used diagramming techniques to identify areas of common concern. From these areas we drew out key observations, which then informed a series of critically reflective questions for graduates engaging in mainstream practice. Our aim was not to present conclusive findings in the manner of a comprehensive survey, but to identify areas for further in-depth study, and potentially to cultivate an awareness in the graduates of the choices made in their everyday work.

[1] Architecture education in UK is organised in 3 parts. The standard route is a three-year undergraduate degree, which is equivalent to RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Part I, followed by a year in practice, returning to university for a further two-year degree (diploma or masters) that is equivalent to RIBA Part II. Graduates then enter architectural employment as Architectural Assistants, and after a minimum of one-year further work experience can begin studying part-time for the Part III qualification, after which they are fully qualified as architects. An alternative route is to study part-time for each component, whilst working in practice.

Background to the Study

The study was initiated in response to the call for papers for the *Alternative Architectural Praxis* symposium at University of Sheffield in November 2007. This was treated as a stimulus to investigate areas in which we, the authors, had pre-existing interests. Our area of study emerged from our personal questioning of what alternative architectural practice might be, and also a concern to account for the various positions of Part II graduates in the profession.

We do not consider ourselves to be experts in the field, but over the course of our education and periods working in practice, we had all taken part in various architectural activities that might not be considered ‘mainstream’. These include work with voluntary organisations on projects that encompass the design and construction of community buildings in Slovakia and Romania and work on research projects. However, our more recent encounters of working in practice did not necessarily align with our preconceived notions, and we began to wonder if the traditional stereotype of practice, as seen from the vantage of the educational environment, really existed for post-Part II graduates. The processes of design in professional practice and in education are considered distinct but we wondered how far these differences were real, necessary or desirable, and what they revealed about our preconceptions of practice.

As authors of this paper, we tried consciously not to align ourselves with some ‘fashionable’ idea of the alternative as a binary opposition to the established and traditional. As we considered our approach to the subject of alternative practice it became clear to us that there was not a strict

duality between what might be considered alternative and in contrast what is termed traditional. Often it seemed that the qualities assigned to the alternative such as 'acknowledging that architectural practice has to deal with architecture's economic, political and social significance',[2] might actually be considered by many to be merely good practice. The significant issue seemed to be whether such characteristics were actively pursued or achieved in specific cases.

[2] *Alternative Architectural Praxis*, 'Definition', (2007); www.altpraxis.wordpress.com, [accessed 28 April 2008].

In devising our interview questions, it was our intention that the interviewees would speak about their architectural activities not in terms of this notional binary, but in order to assess which aspects of their work they valued, and which they found frustrating. We hoped for a wide-ranging discussion that hinted at proposals for a practice that did not stem from a desire to tick the mythical boxes of alternative praxis, but had emerged from the critical process itself.

Methodology of the Study

We conducted interviews with eight individuals who had worked in practice for one year since graduating in Architecture (RIBA Part II level), and who had not yet undertaken the Part III course to become fully qualified. The interviews were conversational and held in an informal setting. The research methodology follows a 'rejection of positivist notions of the social world, embracing interpretation, meaning in context, [and] interaction.'[3] Our methodology of 'one-to-one' basis interviews mirrored informal peer discussions, although we added an imposed 'structure' of open-ended questions with the interviewer taking a directing role.

[3] Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 6, cited in Linda Groat & David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, (New York: Wiley, 2002), p. 173.

The gathering, recording and analysing of data from the interviews followed this interpretive ethos: interviews were wide-ranging and discursive, and the process of 'mapping' and sifting the recorded information allowed observations to materialise through techniques of coding and analysis.

Structure and Content of Interviews

Due to our 'amateur' status and lack of resources, we were reliant on contacts within our peer group rather than selecting interviewees through random sampling of a large field. However, in order to get a spread of data representing a variety of perspectives, we used our contact network to interview graduates from different schools of architecture, working in a range of architectural practices. Graduates had studied across nine UK universities and worked in practices of two to over a hundred employees.

Whilst the interviews were discursive and open in nature, the following questions were used to prompt discussion and direct the conversation. They were also referred to when mapping and analysing the interviews.

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Interview Questions

Question 1: **Education**

Overall, during your (formal) architectural education:
What particular aspects of your studies in architecture did you consider of most value?
What particular aspects of your studies in architecture did you consider most frustrating?

Question 2: **Practice**

During your architectural work, post-education:
What particular aspects of your work do/did you consider of most value?
What particular aspects of your work do/did you consider most frustrating?

Question 3: **Course of Practice**

Since leaving university, what factors have been important in choosing your course of practice?

Question 4: **Architectural Interests Outside of Paid Employment**

What (if any) architectural interests/projects do you pursue outside of your main paid employment?
What factors motivate you to do this?

Question 5: **Architectural Agenda**

As a person involved in the practice of architecture what is your agenda, if any?
How does this sit with your role within your place of work?

Choice of Terminology

The terms 'value' and 'frustration' in questions 1 & 2 were informed by observations we made following our own experiences of architectural education and practice. We deliberately avoided using binary oppositions of 'important/not important' or 'frustrating/rewarding' as we were not attempting to judge experiences but to elicit conversation on a range of issues. In fact, we considered the terms 'value' and 'frustration' to be provocations. In our own discussions we began to view the idea of 'frustration' as a motivating factor and not necessarily as purely negative. Frustrations often prompted us to react or change things, and also to critically reflect on them. 'Value' as a term is again open to interpretation and was used to allow respondents a certain

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freedom in discussing what they enjoyed personally and what they deemed important to the profession at large.

The use of 'agenda' in question 5 was also provocative, as we did not expect the participants to have an eloquently prepared response to this question. We used this term as a device to encourage interviewees to consider their concerns from another position, one that might be distanced from their day-to-day affairs. However, this term caused some unforeseen problems when we came to use it in interviews: the majority of respondents seemed confused or uncomfortable with the idea of 'having an agenda', and shied away from labelling the issues they thought important as such. The question usually required additional explanation in order to elicit a response.

Processing: Recording, Mapping, Filtering and Interpreting

The conversational manner of the interviews was a conscious attempt to gather qualitative information, however it also made direct comparisons between interviews difficult. Statistical analysis was deemed neither valid nor desirable due to the core objective of maintaining the specificity of the experiences recounted. We also recognised the degree of bias that could occur through interpreting the interviews at face value, or by mistaking our impressions of the discussion for what was actually said. A further processing of the interviews was therefore deemed necessary in order to gain some insight.

There were four stages of coding and analysis: Recording, Mapping, Filtering and Interpretation.

Recording

This was a form of transcription, distilling each conversation into separate written segments containing interview responses as statements, questionings, wonderings and interjections. The purpose was not to edit content, with direct quotation retained wherever possible, but rather to have a standardised format for all the interviews for comparison and digestion.

Mapping

The mapping followed the chronological sequence of the recordings but split the interview segments into two columns; one categorised as values, the other as frustrations. Between the segments the path or route of the conversation was drawn, crossing between the categorised columns as the interviewee's responses had, with interviewer questions or less categorical responses placed in the bridging space between the two. The result was a diagram that described the trajectory of the conversation [Fig. 1].

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With each conversation in the same format we could view and directly compare them. The mapped interviews were placed next to each other to create a new combined map. Horizontal lines were drawn that connected instances where planned questions were asked, resulting in a flexible grid or matrix, which revealed the proportion of time devoted to each particular question in relation to the other interviews [Fig. 2].

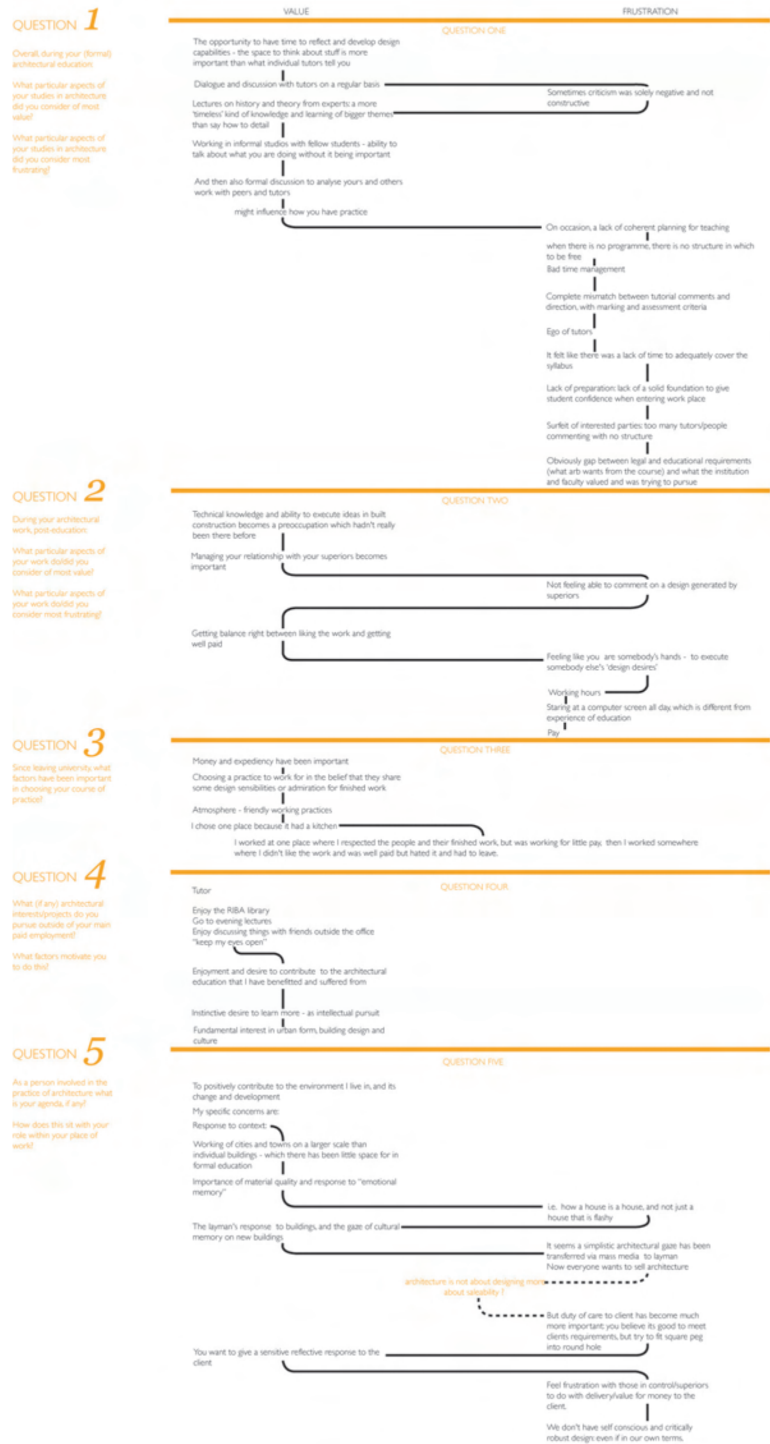

Fig. 1. A typical mapped conversation. Image: Authors.

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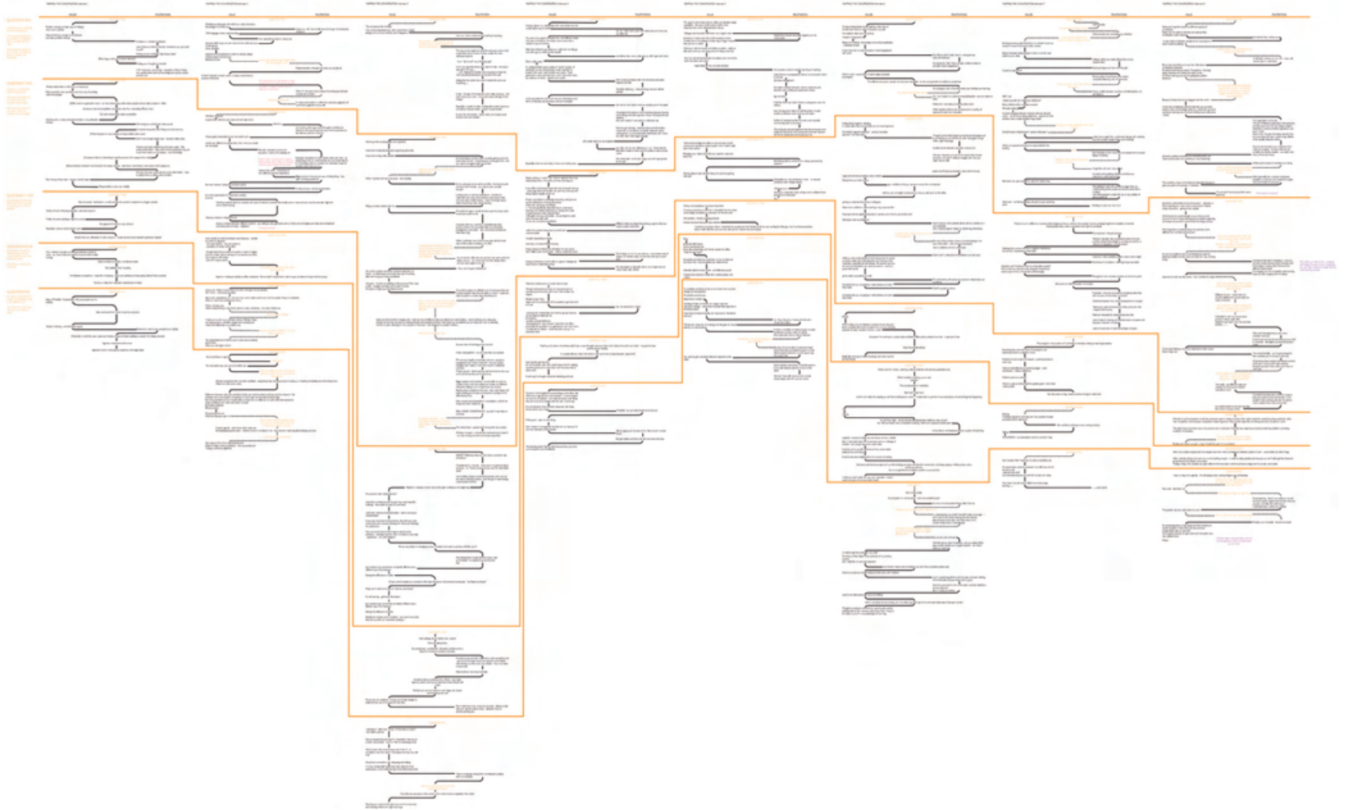

Fig. 2. The full mapped data. Image: Authors.

Filtering

Through spatialising the recordings we were able to find relations that would have been impossible to determine in conventional text. Priorities and experiences were compared and contrasted. However, the main opportunity that the mapping offered was the possibility of 'filtering' the data that detached our personal agendas from the content. Rather than a simple reading of the interview text as the basis for determining significance, we could focus in an unprejudiced way on areas of the map that showed spatial significance. This formed the third stage in the processing of the information. We concentrated on the instances where a rapid or intense oscillation occurred between the two columns. These were identified visually, regardless of content, and placed as a series of highlights across the map. We gave significance to these oscillations between value and frustration as we thought that these were instances where the interviewee was (or could potentially be) expressing an unresolved issue or contradiction within their architectural experience. Something of value had been identified, and yet this couldn't be separated from an area of frustration or dissatisfaction. To us this seemed like a relevant place to investigate possibilities for alternative praxis.

Of these areas some simply contained disparate topics and staccato responses where the conversation had apparently not flowed. In most cases, however, the highlighted areas revealed an issue or a set of inter-

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related issues pertinent to the discussion. These highlights provided qualitative instances of broader themes, which could be identified in a less succinct context throughout the other interviews.

Iterations of this process revealed a number of themes scattered across the map that could then be discussed. In no particular order the themes are:

Group working practices
Individual working practices
Hierarchical relationships
Design process
Material processes
Remuneration
Learning
Practice size
Making a 'positive impact' in the world
The role of the architect
Balance / conflict
Ego of the architect

These themes are shown as colour-coded, highlighted areas on the Interview Map.

Interpreting

Although the themes defined above and the mapped oscillations represent a potentially significant insight into the experience of architectural education and practice, the sample was never intended to be large enough to make claims across the subject area as a whole. Instead it has allowed us to make observations and pose questions informed by first-hand accounts.

The observations shown here are not exhaustive, but have been chosen because they struck a cord with our own experiences. The scenarios or phenomena they depict were not necessarily apparent to us before we began this under-taking. However, because we have found them to be pertinent we hope they can be easily recognised by others involved in the field and thereby encourage further debate.

Observation 1

A Change From Critical Learning to Passive Practice

An overriding *value* observed in the responses of nearly all the interviewees was the importance of learning. Learning was sought and valued, both in education and in practice, and for some respondents also in the architectural interests they pursued outside of their main employment. However, the nature of the interviewees' responses changed once they

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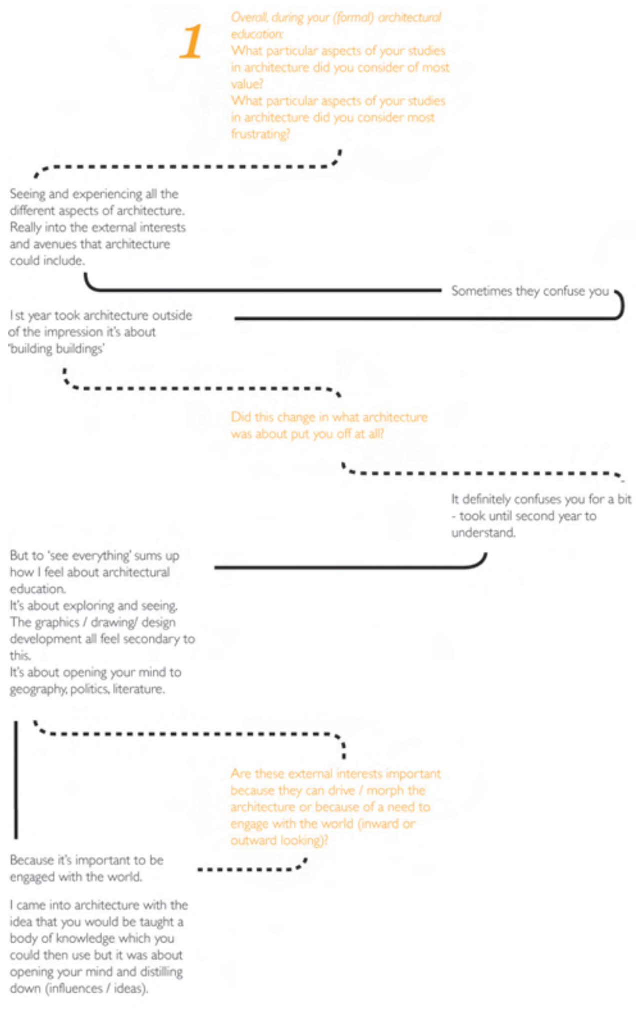
began to discuss learning in practice, describing a method of learning derived from observation and absorption, which moved away from the more critical engagement they associated with education. In some instances it felt as if the learning desire became a thirst for its own sake, seemingly with little reflection on its method or the values implicit within it.

Examining more closely the situation of Part II graduates, this 'learning desire' can be seen as an understandable reaction. Once in practice graduates are confronted with a mass of information on a day-to-day basis: the realities of contracts, client relations, building techniques and how to best manage jobs within the office, to name but a few. In addition, the qualities often deemed of merit in education become less appreciated. In reaction graduates hold on to the desire to learn as their tool to negotiate the new experiences they are facing. This 'sponge-like' response is a logical



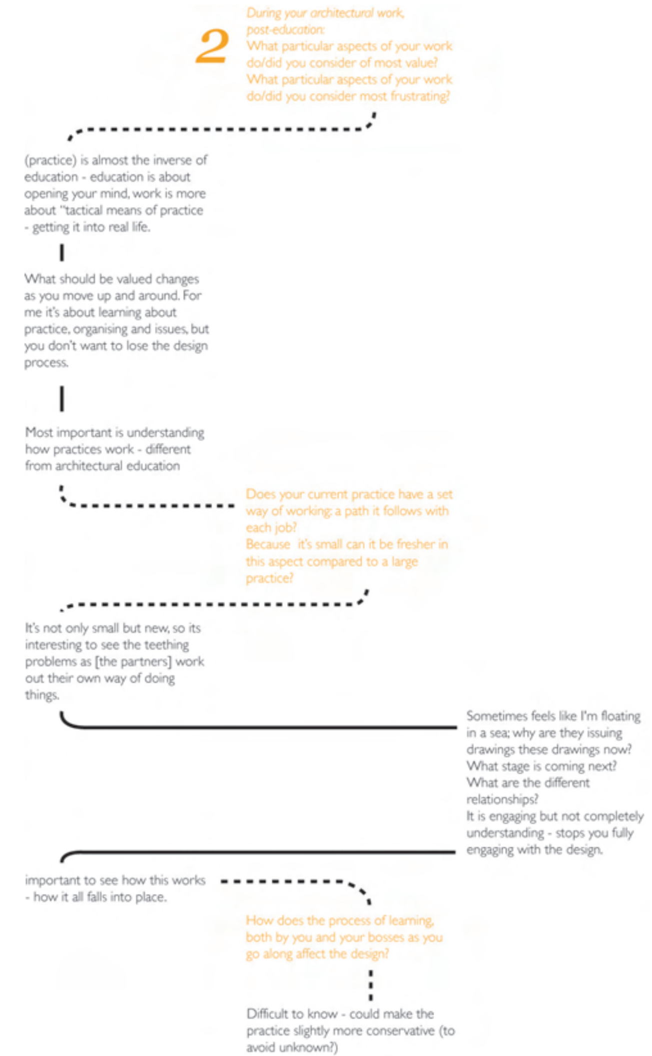


Fig. 3. Extract from Interview map—discussing learning in architectural education. Image: Authors.
Fig. 4. Extract from Interview map—discussing learning in architectural practice. Image: Authors.

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extension of values learnt in education—exposing oneself to new ideas, learning through experience, trial-and-error—but without also carrying through the reflective criticality that is part of most schools' diploma or masters degree.

Several questions arise from this observation. Firstly, is an unquestioning 'desire to learn' really the best approach to understanding how to practice architecture? Secondly, will this approach empower the graduates to act on their perceptions and experiences in practice?

Observation 2

The Value of Office Type and the Acceptance of Compromise

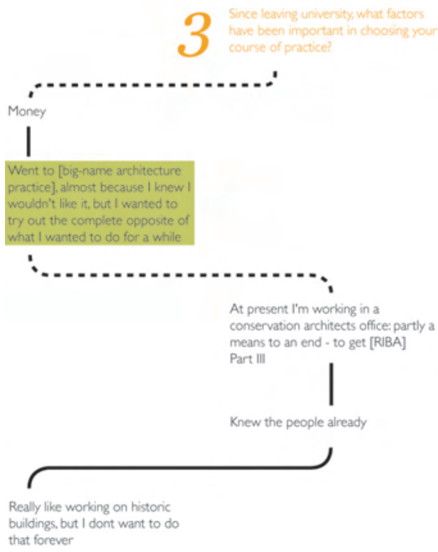
The language used by interviewees to describe the architecture offices they encountered suggested that firms were regarded as being one of a 'type', with particular accompanying characteristics ascribed to each. This was especially apparent when interviewees were asked about what had influenced their 'course of practice' (question 3). Having worked in one 'type' of firm meant that interviewees wanted to 'try' something completely different next. This was mostly achieved by moving between offices of different sizes, or between practices considered more or less traditional/ progressive.

The overarching view seemed to be that working for these various 'types' of architectural firms was of definite, although possibly intangible benefit. In an extreme case this impetus became so strong that the individual positioned themselves within a firm they had no real desire to work for, just so they could experience this 'type' of practice for themselves.

Other respondents followed a similar principle whilst also demanding more specific educational input or experiences from the firms they chose to work at.

Regardless of the reason for choosing a particular firm our impression was that the people thought they would either 'fit in' or not. Interviewees did want to have an input into the daily workings of the practice, but there was a sense that their presence would not be of much influence. This might be expected for the participants working in larger offices with corporate structures, however the same attitude across the board suggested a certain reluctance to engage with the form and structure of a practice beyond the design ethos.

It could be worth asking how this mentality of wanting to work for different 'types' of practices influences the nature of graduates' engagement with their current practice? It indicates a certain unfulfilled satisfaction and also a lack of agency in influencing the workings of



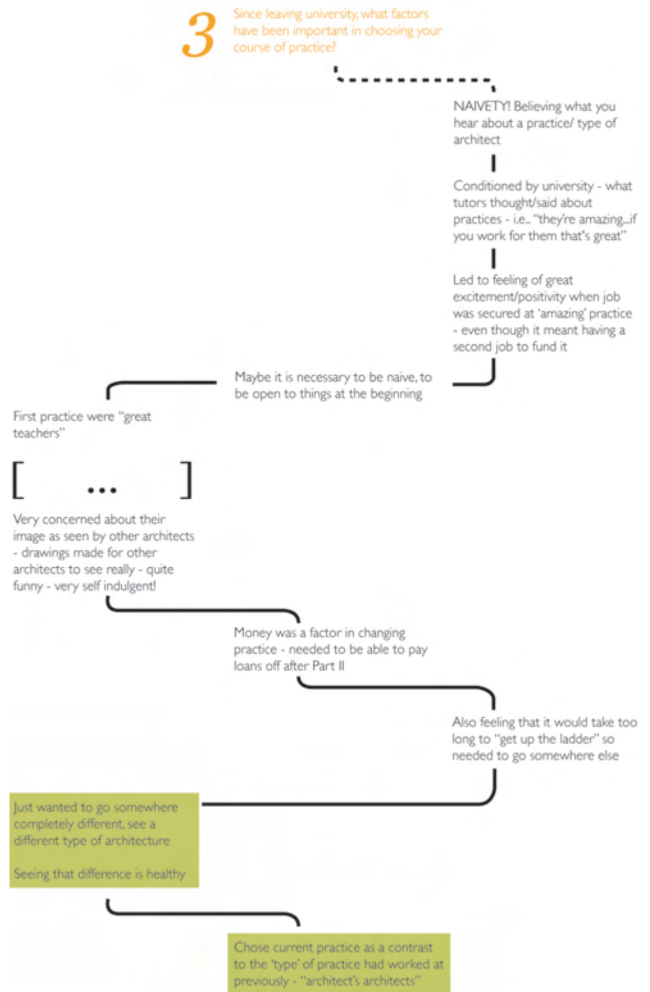


Fig. 5. Extract from Interview map—choice of practice based on experiencing different 'types' of practice. Image: Authors.

Fig. 6. Extract from Interview map—choice of practice based on experiencing different 'types' of practice. Image: Authors.

their current firm. The quote highlighted in Fig. 6 is an extension of this phenomenon, where the notion of 'types' is linked to finding a compromise between preferred architectural output, praxis, remuneration, working conditions and general quality of life. This seems no less idealistic than expecting to find a perfect 'fit', although it is somewhat accepting of the notion that to work for a practice that fulfils one requirement may well result in neglecting the others.

This might lead us to ask how graduates choose the criteria for assessing what makes up this balance? Should the notion of practice 'type' be consciously rejected in favour of more nuanced assessments of the balance between the practice's concerns and those of the graduate? Alternatively, should demands be made more explicit to act as drivers for improving praxis? Should graduates, as employees, be willing to submit to an unsatisfactory role, balancing this with 'quality of life' (and work) in other areas?

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Observation 3

Paid Employment Doesn't Seem Able to Satisfy Graduates' Architectural Ambition

While it is possible that our question on 'architectural interests/pursuits' could be considered 'leading'—implying a pressure to be seen to undertake architectural activities outside of paid employment—there is no doubt that respondents were involved in a wide range of architecture-related pursuits in addition to full-time paid architectural employment.

This may be unsurprising to the readership of this journal—it often seems taken for granted that architects feel the need to pursue architectural interests outside of practice and are motivated to do so. However, when surveying the range of work undertaken outside of practice as related by the interviewees—teaching and guest reviewing in architecture schools, self-building, running small jobs etc.—it is difficult not to wonder what the influence on mainstream practice might be if all this energy and architectural ambition was able to be utilised in practice in some way?

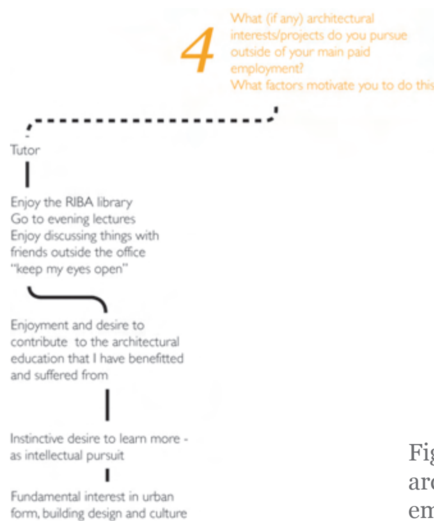

Fig. 7. Extract from Interview map—architectural pursuits outside of paid employment. Image: Authors.

Does this state of affairs reflect badly on architectural practice, indicating that it is not sufficiently diverse to allow the professional desires and values of graduates to be encompassed in their work? Or rather do graduates expect too much of a commercial enterprise? Perhaps these questions reflect back onto architectural education in the way that it prepares students for practice. Does it to foster a greater confidence for self-action or conversely should it provide more realistic expectations?

Another suggestion was that keeping an element of architectural activity separate from employment allows for an individual architectural identity to be maintained. For instance one respondent stated; 'I don't want to be part of someone else's brand.'

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Observation 4

Agendas Not Confined to a Certain Field and Yet to be Fully Developed

Respondents interpreted the question of architectural 'agenda' in a variety of different ways. These ranged from a set of values to guide design and practice, to stylistic and theoretical values, appraisals of certain stereotypes, comments on ambition and career plan, and reflections on the nature of 'work' for architects—or indeed for anyone.

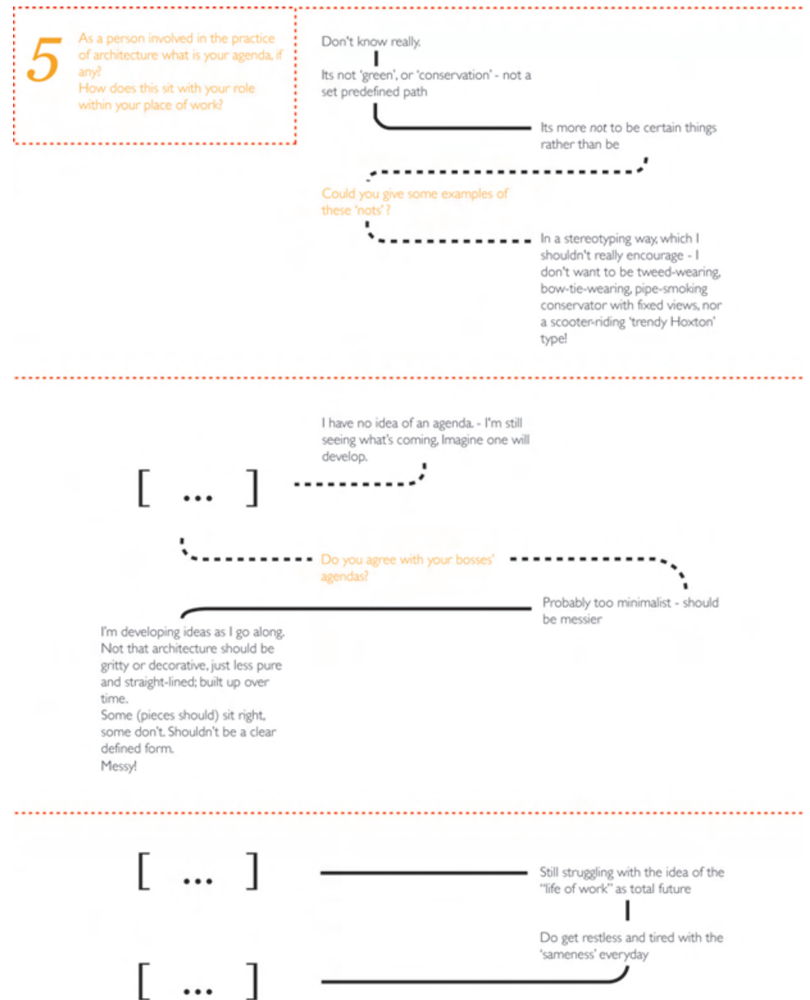

Fig. 8. Extracts from Interview map—various responses to the idea of architectural agenda. Image: Authors.

The idea of 'an agenda' driving individual choices in architectural practice was something we wanted to explore. This was partly in response to the theme of the *Alternative Architectural Praxis* symposium; there was a feeling that 'alternative' praxis was a response to something or embodied some kind of agenda, and we were keen to see whether this was something that was an issue for graduates entering mainstream practice. We also wanted to gain some understanding of underlying motivations that might influence the career choices and actions of graduates.

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As discussed above, not all the graduates we spoke to had a strong underlying set of principles, acquired through education, that were informing their career decisions. Again the idea of ongoing learning and exposure to many types of experience was cited—in some cases as a reason for not having an agenda, in some cases as an agenda in itself. In a few instances, conflicts between office and individual agendas were uncovered but this did not seem to be a universal experience in the confines of the small group of people we spoke to. What might the value be of developing and learning to articulate a clear agenda for architectural practice at this early stage?

Although most interviewees expressed something that could be construed as an agenda, responses were often fragmented and lacking clarity. Does this suggest a hesitancy to commit and therefore contribute towards a passive learning? Alternatively, does delaying a defined agenda imply a mature response, with the patient assimilation of ideas until they become sufficiently developed alongside a confidence to act upon them?

Observation 5

The Reality of Teamwork Does Not Lead to Equality of Decision-making

Most respondents noted the value of teamwork in both the educational and practice context. Interviewees recognised that there were significant differences in teamwork in practice and education. They valued such aspects in practice as the pace of production and the sharing of pressure and responsibilities, which in education is often placed on individuals. They also appreciated being part of a team that really seemed to achieve things.

However, there was a certain degree of frustration regarding the way in which office hierarchies intersected with notions of team structure, where the work of the team was undermined by the overriding opinion of senior practice members. One interviewee described this as ‘the sweep of the cloak’—a ‘Zoro-like’ character appearing from nowhere, making his mark on the project before disappearing again, and leaving you to deal with the consequences. Because of this it seemed interviewees felt a degree of scepticism towards teamwork in practice as it became undermined by the reality of office hierarchy. Whilst the positives of teamwork were generally lauded, occasionally a conflict appeared between this working ethos and the desire to be recognised or to have your own way.

Conclusion

We set out at the beginning of this paper to explore the position we had personally found ourselves in, between an extended higher education and full integration into a professional institution. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that at the end of our investigation we find this position of limbo

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to be so important in determining the reflections of our contemporaries. Contradictions of opinion and conflicted responses to questions on such broad themes as 'values', 'frustrations', 'agendas' and 'factors determining choice' are probably natural to this type of enquiry. However, the themes running through the interviewees' responses build a picture of graduates grappling to understand their position in practice. The desire to learn about the conditions they find themselves in, to experience a range of practice types, and to pursue other outlets for their architectural interests could be read as an attempt to situate and define themselves within a confusing field. The reticence to commit to an agenda (although some people then described one without the label) and the notion of finding the perfect 'fit' in the future add hesitancy to this reading, whilst general graduate frustrations and difficulties in resolving the reality of practice to imagined ideals cloud the situation further.

To us it would be unfortunate if this time between education and practice lost its independence and became burdened by yet another structure attempting to govern it. However, it seems that the current 'suck it and see' approach is not providing the best environment for a breadth of architectural experience or critical reflection. Obvious reactions might be to blur the line between education and practice, or to reappraise the value of professional qualification, questioning which aspects within it truly merit protection.

Clearly this paper does not demonstrate a wholesale rejection of the current state of practice, as many aspects were found valuable, interesting, and exciting by the participants. The paper also does not intend to advocate an aggrandised sense of the significance of the post-Part II period and the self-importance of individuals at this stage. But it seems apparent from our sample that the there seems to be a lack of criticality at this point partially due to the transition from education to practice. It seems that the application of this criticality could be of benefit to both Part IIs seeking to understand the running of their practice and to the industry in general. It should also be noted that the sampling was undertaken at a specific period of economic strength in the UK, before the current credit crisis that is likely to affect the construction industry. Participants were viewing their positions within a context of plentiful work options, from which to pick and choose, which may have allowed them to be more confident in expressing dissatisfactions as these could be realistically addressed by changing jobs. However, the participants responded to questions as if they had not been asked before and seemed to relish the occasion to talk in a context that invited considered criticism rather than a general gripe. Whether these opinions can be accommodated within practice remains to be seen.

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Suburban Self-build

Flora Samuel

My paper focuses on three case studies in suburban Cardiff, through interviews with their designers David (Financial Adviser) and Rachel (part-time Slimming World Consultant), Gareth (Surveyor) and Belinda (part-time Secretary, formerly Environmental Scientist), Pete (Tax Inspector) and Sarah (part-time Tesco management). I examine the ideas and values expressed by the home owners, the role of the non professional designer, their reasons for not employing an architect, sources of design inspiration, who actually made the decisions, attitudes to sustainability and satisfaction with the end product. Whilst the sample is small and the studies close knit—they are all within the same block—the study confirms, what many of us know from experience about what is really being built in Britain today and why, as well as serious concerns about the image of the architect in the minds of many people.

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Introduction

My paper is located in suburban Cardiff; the subject is the house extension, the practitioners, who are the owners and the band of individuals that assist them through the construction process. This is the alternative practice that I want to talk about—a melange of non-designer designers and homeowners that together produce what must be the vast majority of home extensions in Britain today. Cumulatively, it has a profound effect on our built environment in even the most regulated of areas. The value of this practice, if indeed it is a form of practice, depends greatly upon our perception of the architecture profession's claim to aesthetic authority and upon the degree to which we acknowledge the act of building as central to the processes of identity formation, played out 'narratively'.[1]

Here I will explore the ideas and values expressed by the home owners, sources of design inspiration, the role of the non-professional designer, reasons for not employing an architect, attitudes to sustainability and satisfaction with the end product. The study is more about exploration than conclusions but it reveals something about what is really being built in Britain today, as well as the deeply problematic status of the architect in the mind of people just rich enough to employ them.

During this process I will try to examine the building practices of the various owners on their own terms, looking at their original objectives and aspirations, even if this goes against every grain of my own architectural sensibilities or '*habitus*', which—in Pierre Bourdieu's terms is 'a sense of one's (and others) place and role in the world of one's lived environment'.[2] As Kim Dovey writes in *The Silent Complicity of Architecture*, Bourdieu's theory of habitus is 'useful in understanding the deep conservatism of the field of architecture and its deep complicity with practices of power'.[3] In my opinion it is this complicity that has, in part, led to the neglect of the non-architect designed domestic space by the architectural research community. It may be a low status area of dubious aesthetic worth but it is, however, a sphere that is increasingly valued by anthropologists and ethnographers who have made it the focus of their studies, via journals such as *Home Cultures*.[4]

Self-build

The practice that forms the basis of my discussion is defined in the language of magazines such as *Grand Designs* and *Homebuilding and Renovating*[5] as 'self-build'. Very often, however, it is the technician who draws up the scheme and the builder that leads the design.[6] Architects are rendered virtually invisible in this process. The wide variety of material on the web, on the shelves of the high street stationers' WHSmith and in our libraries pertaining to the issue of home extensions, does little to further the cause of the RIBA professional.[7] Time and time again the

1 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p. 53.

2 'Introduction to First Edition', Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (eds.), *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 21. Each of us carries with us a range of different types of 'habitus'. If operating in my parent's habitus the degree of synergy between the owners and myself is greater.

3 Kim Dovey, 'The Silent Complicity of Architecture', in Hillier and Rooksby, *Habitus*, p. 285.

4 On the advantages and pitfalls of interdisciplinarity see: Sarah Pink, 'Introduction: Situating Visual Research', in Sarah Pink, Lásló Kürti and Ana Isobel Afonso, *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3; Cf. *Home Cultures*, Berg Publishers, (2004-current).

5 *Homebuilding & Renovating* (1999-2008); www.homebuilding.co.uk, [accessed 2007].

6 Cf. Roni Brown, 'Identity and Narrativity

architect is depicted as an expendable figure who is perhaps of some use in the drawing of plans that are necessary to obtaining various statutory permissions. There is no delineation between the architect, architectural technologist, or indeed the chartered surveyor, all are perceived equal to the task.[8] Paul Hymers, in his book *Home Conversions*, describes 'a good designer' solely as 'one who possesses the necessary skills of draughtsmanship and is familiar not only with the details of construction, but also with the problems and regulations relating to the work.'[9] At no point is there any mention of the words 'design' or 'quality'. Hymers describes the RIBA as a 'club' immediately endowing the chartered architect with an aura of extreme elitism and helping to add several zeros to the client's envisaged fee. In doing so he reinforces what might be called a new 'culture of amateurism',[10] potentially a sign of a more democratic (though some might say, more low-brow), emerging culture in which the traditional role of the professional has been consistently undermined.

It is very difficult to find any reliable information on the subject of exactly how many people choose to employ an architect and why so few do. The RIBA has no formal statistics on how many domestic clients choose not to use an architect, but K. MacInnes in an article on self-build in *Architectural Design*, has asserted that only 6% of self-builders contract an architectural firm.[11] Certainly some of this type of activity operates at the level of the black market and is unlikely to be included in official figures. The perception is that the use of an architect worries builders who do not want to work within a detailed contract and so give higher tender figures, a further financial disincentive for the potential client, already daunted by the prospect of an imagined architect's fees.

Cardiff Case Studies

I have concentrated my research on three extensions, all within the same area of East Cardiff—Roath Park. Although the sample is extremely small there is consistency in the study. All the properties are of the same type: three bedroom, pebbledash semi-detached houses from the 1950s, indeed all of them are on the same block. The houses are currently worth around £300-400 000, which is fairly expensive for Cardiff where a house can be bought for £100 000 in a less desirable area. Through interviews with their designers David (Financial Adviser) and Rachel (part-time Slimming World Consultant), Gareth (Surveyor) and Belinda (part-time Secretary, formerly Environmental Scientist), Pete (Tax Inspector) and Sara (part-time Tesco management), I chart their different stories.[12]

Rachel and David's is the largest extension with a contract sum of roughly £100 000. It has a single storey added to the side and back of the house and a loft-conversion in the roof to house a new bedroom and en-suite bathroom [Fig. 1]. On the ground floor, the extra space provided by the building work has allowed for the expansion of the kitchen and dining

in Homes Made by Amateurs', *Home Cultures*, 4(3)(2007): 213-238. Roni Brown records the 'borrowing' of plans from a builder by one of her self-build informants. She notes that 'adoption and adaption of existing models and designs would appear to be a relatively common feature of amateur practice.

7 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) is the professional body of architects in Britain.

8 In the words of the *House-Extension* website either of these consultants will, 'provide advice on what the best options are with regards meeting requirements within the constraints of the position of your property'; House-Extension.co.uk, *Planning Permission Using an Architect, Architectural technologist or Chartered Surveyor*; www.house-extension.co.uk/planning/use_an_architect.htm, [accessed 2007].

9 Paul Hymers, *Home Conversion*, (London: New Holland, 2003), p. 16. This book is so popular that it is sold at a discounted rate by, the highly popular retailer, The Book People.

10 C. Leadbeater, 'Amateurs a 21st Century Remake', *RSA Journal*, (June 2003): 22-25. Cited in Brown, 'Identity and Narrativity', p. 263.

11 Katherine MacInnes, 'Here's One I Designed Earlier: How Architects Can Capitalise on the Growing Self-Build Market', *Architectural Design*, (64)(1994): xvi-xvii.

12 The names of the informants have been changed for publication. All quotes from informants are from interviews carried out by myself at their homes, over a period of a few weeks.

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room, a utility room and a little office to the side of the front door [Fig. 2]. Windows and doors throughout are made of timber, the kitchen flooring is slate and the kitchen tops are granite. Belinda and Gareth's house is a smaller version of the same thing. They have built a single storey extension along the back, repositioning and enlarging the kitchen and dining room and in doing so creating a downstairs WC and utility room in the centre of the plan [Fig. 3]. The contract sum in this case was roughly £40 000. Both couples professed that their projects had come out on budget, Belinda adding that Sarah Beaney (of the Channel 4 television programme, *Property Ladder*) says 'always to allow 10% for extras', but clearly neither of the projects had come out even remotely on time. Pete and Sara's extension was to have been of similar scale, a widening of the extension to the side and the building of a room to replace the garage in

Fig. 1. David and Rachel's extension, rear view. Photo: Flora Samuel; Fig. 2. David and Rachel's extension, interior. Photo: David.

Fig. 3. Belinda and Gareth's extension, rear view. Photo: Flora Samuel; Fig. 4. Pete and Sarah's extension under construction. Photo: Flora Samuel.

the garden, but because of unforeseen problems the project was confined to the latter, which was just emerging from the ground when I went to interview them [Fig.4].

The owners were still very much embroiled in the process when I visited them in Autumn 2007. My informants are all known to one another and they are friends and acquaintances of mine. They are all in their late 30s and occupy the 2000 census band 4, 'administrative and secretarial occupations'.[13] Each couple has two to three children, all of them under nine years of age.

It is tempting to describe the couples as ordinary but half of them are part of the tiny percentage of people who, in the late 1980s, would have gone into higher education and each couples' collective income is in excess of three times the national average.[14] They are in fact relatively wealthy and well educated by British standards. Although fond of literature and music none have any manifest interest in the visual arts, as such it seems that they have little interest in 'symbolic capital', associated by Bourdieu with aesthetic taste, the production of which is, in Dovey's terms, 'the architect's key market niche'.[15]

This is a group of people who may be rich enough to employ architects but remain completely alienated by the profession. Instead such homeowners turn to builders, surveyors, technicians or friends, indeed anyone who can produce the plans necessary to get through the process of obtaining planning permission. Armed with a CAD package the individual cuts and pastes standard windows, cavity walls etc. onto drawings for fees as small as £50.[16] He is then frequently asked to put together the necessary information for Building Regulations submission. The resultant building, although rarely beautiful, is often deeply satisfying to the homeowner and a source of great pride.

None of the informants were entirely inexperienced in the business of construction. Rachel's father had done several extensions himself and helped the couple, while Gareth, as a surveyor whose job is concerned with the disposal of office space, had a good idea of the issues involved. He also received help from his father who is a builder. Pete and Sara had themselves completed an extension to their living room a few years previously, an experience that informed this more recent work.

Interviews took place on site enabling me to see for myself what my informants were referring to, the house itself providing the starting point for discussion.[17] My prior knowledge of the couples would turn out to be both a benefit, as they were more relaxed, and a problem—they did not want to offend me. I did not want the interviewees to feel constrained because they knew I was an architect, albeit one who had stopped practicing. I told the interviewees that I just wanted to know their feelings

13 Cf. National Statistics, *Standard Occupational Classification* (2000); www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/ns_sec/soc2000.asp, [accessed 2008].

14 Research into the readership of *Build It* magazine gives some insight into who a typical 'self-builder' might be. But this research refers to the building of entire new homes. I have yet to find similar data on house extensions. See: AMA Research 2003, *The UK Self-Build Housing Market*, 2nd edn., (Cheltenham: AMA Research, 2003). Cited in Brown, 'Identity and Narrativity', p. 270.

15 Dovey, 'The Silent Complicity of Architecture', p. 288. 'Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept.' Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 1984), p. 57.

16 It is easy to find these technicians on the web. Brown discusses their usage in Brown, 'Identity and Narrativity', p. 279.

17 On reflection I think it would have been more appropriate to video these conversations with my informants as they walked round their extensions and spoke about what they felt. I would then have been able to tell something about

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about their extensions and why they did them the way that they did. I also said that I was interested in why people did not choose to employ an architect and whom they employed instead.[18]

In addition, I asked the couples to photograph the things that they felt were important about their extension projects (on throwaway cameras that I gave them for the purpose) as I knew that I could not help but misrepresent their homes, either in the pursuit of aesthetically pleasing imagery or in order to dramatise my own findings.[19] I think I was hoping that the couples would take photos of their children enjoying the extensions, using odd corners for play, or raucous dinners where kitchen and dining space worked in remarkable accord. Instead I felt somehow disappointed to discover that Belinda had seen fit to get rid of all the 'junk' from her surfaces, 'dump it on the sofa' and then take the pictures of the extension in the usual architectural manner, devoid of life and people [Fig. 5]. David did something roughly similar. The only photographs with people in them are by me.

Objectives

When questioned about their objectives for the extensions Rachel, David, Pete and Sara were unanimous in their choice of one word: 'space'. If pushed further, the first couple said that they wanted the house to 'work better', the second that they wanted to 'get our living room back'. Gareth and Belinda were more fulsome: they wanted a new kitchen; they wanted 'quality'; they wanted to overlook the garden; and lastly, space. Light had been a real area of concern for Gareth, who had worried that it would be too dark at the rear of the extended room. Rachel and David were remarkably pragmatic, expressing no interest in light, detail, feelings or

Fig. 5. Interior of Belinda and Gareth's extension. Photo: Belinda; Fig. 6. Interior of David and Rachel's extension. Photo: David.

their very physical responses to their own homes, from the way that they moved through the buildings, or the ways in which they touched the surfaces. For an account of such a method see; Sarah Pink, *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

18 Particularly helpful in creating the questionnaire was; Thomas F. Burgess, *A General Introduction to the Design of Questionnaires for Survey Research*, (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2003), available: www.leeds.ad.uk/iss/documentation/top/top2.pdf, [accessed 8 September 2007].

19 When in search of architecture without architects, Bernard Rudofsky sought out examples of edifices of aesthetic worth, which were framed in dramatic black and white imagery to enhance the very qualities that he so admired in them. Cf. Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, (London: Academy, 1965).

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anything else that we might be pushed to consider in an architectural education. However, David's photographs of the extension told a different story—he was clearly very pleased with the quality of light achieved in certain parts of it at certain times of day [Fig. 6]. Gareth and Belinda seemed to know more about the particular design considerations and had the language to articulate themselves, possibly because they had sought out precedents of the kind of space they wanted to achieve in magazines. Having said this, Gareth referred to the project 'as just a bog standard extension—nothing groundbreaking' as though it would be pretentious to aspire to anything more. Gareth was particularly pleased with the utility and downstairs WC as places to keep things that spoilt the look of the rest of the place. I found this striking as, unlike Rachel and David, he had not listed making the house 'work better' as a concern.

I asked about the relationship to the surrounding area. All the couples expressed a good deal of reverence for their—in Sara's words—'lovely' houses and for the unified appearance of the neighbourhood, despite the fact that the 'pebbledash semi' is not generally admired for its aesthetics. I began to wonder whether they had cherished childhood memories of such places (it seems that indeed Pete and Sara had been brought up in versions of the same type of house on nearby Barry Island), or whether such neighbourhoods appealed to particularly conformist people. All the couples wanted their extensions to look as inconspicuous as possible. In the words of David, 'it's an old house and it is our duty not to mess it up'. Gareth and Belinda wanted their extension to 'blend-in', feeling that if you lived in a semi-detached house it was in some way your duty to mirror the house next door—even though they are not close to the couple next door.

'Architectural Design Services'

Questions about the variety and type of help sought by Rachel and David in preparing drawings, revealed their degree of confusion about what had actually happened in the process. They spoke highly of a planning consultant, found through a family connection, who was reasonably priced £100 and gave them what they felt to be good advice on how to obtain planning permission. It took them a while to remember the profession of the first person that they employed to do the planning drawings. 'Oh yeah that total dickhead ... what were they?'—a quantity surveyor, as it turned out. He drew the planning drawings, 'got lots of things wrong and didn't listen', as a result of which he had to redraw the plans four times. They found him through a family connection and employed him because he was cheap. He charged them for three days work, but David who saw him moving windows around on the computer, thought the job had probably taken him 'top-end two hours'.

When asked if they actually understood the drawings the response was a unanimous 'no' from David and Rachel because 'they were so bad'. And a

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'more or less, not 100%' from Pete and Sara. The answer from Gareth was a categorical 'yes', from Belinda, 'not really'. Clearly they had to rely on words to communicate their desires and needs.

Gareth and Belinda also used a quantity surveyor, a colleague of Gareth's to draw up their plans, both for planning and building regulations, though Gareth himself did the survey and spent a great deal of time sketching at the table with Belinda thinking through different options for the plan. The couple seemed reasonably satisfied with what Gareth's colleague had done, although he had been very slow. A structural engineer designed the foundations while the 'builder just made it solid'. Gareth himself had written the specification together with his colleague.

Pete and Sara had gone down a rather different route. Some years ago they had their living room extended by a builder with an in-house 'architect'. They had worked with the same team at the start of their new extension. I asked them how they knew that the architect was an architect; 'only because that was what the builder called him', was the response. Apparently he worked on these jobs in the evenings and weekends outside his usual full-time employment. He did all the drawings and the written specification for the couple.

In Rachel and David's case, the submission for Building Regulations approval was completed by a structural engineer recommended by the builder who was, in the opinion of the couple, not cheap. Apparently he was very sloppy with his drawings, changing scale by accident as well as blocking-up windows. More 'used to designing bridges than houses', the structural elements, in the opinion of the builder, had been vastly over scaled. What was worse he had 'lied' on several occasions. The structural engineer also wrote the specification. When asked if they understood this document, the response was a unanimous, 'absolutely not'. However, the builder had gone through it with Rachel and David clearly stating what was included in the tender price.

The most critical decision in the whole process was the choice of builder as much of the process seemed to be reliant on his skill and integrity. Fortunately all the couples seem to have chosen well. Four builders tendered for Rachel and David's job and the decision of who was employed was based on the builders' 'attitude to Rachel', who knew she would have to put up with these men in her house for several months. There was not a great deal of difference in the tender sums and finally they employed a builder who had worked with Rachel's father on a previous occasion. In spite of the careful vetting he had great difficulty in taking orders from Rachel, always deferring to David instead. It took three months of Rachel acting as project manager for the builder to accept her, a woman, in the role. Her method of managing the team was to write weekly lists of things that, in her opinion, needed to be done. David meanwhile handled the

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financial side of things. In general, they were happy with the input that they received from the builder who 'said when things wouldn't work' and 'changed things helpfully'. For example, he advised them to have a unified floor finish across the room that they were extending to make it feel more spacious. The couple did, however, recognise that they should not have taken his advice regarding the position of the en-suite bathroom in the loft, which he put on the rear elevation when it could have been positioned in the middle of the plan creating a large sunny living space overlooking the garden.

Gareth and Belinda saw three different builders and took a great deal of care in following-up personal recommendations. Their chosen builder confined himself to issues of construction, advising the couple that it would be more straightforward to knock down part of the existing structure than to try to work with it, making changes to the floor slab and to the height and the pitch of the roof. Somehow—and Gareth and Belinda didn't really seem to know how this had happened—the builder made a change from three to two roof lights (a sensible decision in my opinion, as each window became associated with a particular living zone, though the implications for illumination could have been grave). Materials were chosen to match with the neighbouring extension and for the builder's convenience. Gareth chose PVC windows although Belinda preferred timber. Pete and Sara chose PVC because they 'matched the rest of the house', as if PVC windows were 'original features', not 1980s replacements.

Pete and Sara initially chose their builder because they had worked with him before but were disappointed when he pulled out of the project in favour of a larger job. They then sought prices from three contractors, only to chose one that had been 'recommended by somebody in Church' because they 'felt that he knew what he was talking about'. They had left all the decisions about materials up to him, just saying that they wanted it to 'blend in'. Although the project had only just started on-site, their builder had already made suggestions about creating spaces for storage that they found helpful.

All the couples recognised that special skills were needed for dealing with builders. Gareth had learnt that 'you have to keep on top of the builder—keep speaking to them'. Rachel had learnt the importance of planning ahead, anticipating when decisions would be needed, for example on the positioning of the electrics. None were keen to repeat the process in the near future.

The Role of the Architect

So why didn't any of the couples directly employ an architect to assist with this highly stressful and expensive process? In Gareth's words; 'I'm not sure how much an architect would add'. Clearly, cost is a major issue in

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all this—arguably the only issue. For Rachel and David, the imagined cost of an architect was the real issue, as they did not make any enquiries as to how much this might cost. Whatever the cost, it clearly was not going to be worth it in their opinion. If you are not familiar with reading plans and understanding the nuances of space-making, the technician's drawings might not look so very different to those of an architect, so there is no point in paying several hundred pounds extra for them. Then there is the question of whether people can really tell the difference between a space designed by an architect and that designed by a technician. My suspicion is that, very often, they can't. Whether this is because of 'nature or nurture' is a very intriguing point that has its origins in the work of Plato and which can also be seen in the work of Le Corbusier, amongst others.[20] For Bourdieu however, the idea that aesthetic experience might in some way be innate or universal rather than social, would be yet another misleading belief that keeps 'arbiters of taste'[21] in their dominant roles.[22] Roni Brown, in her study of self-builders, observes that: 'Novelty, distinction, originality, and above all, a "total design concept" (or "flow between aspects of the design", are not prerequisites of amateur home–making and building' instead, and perhaps paradoxically, 'the desire to achieve an individualised and personalised home, appears fundamental.'[23]

I asked Rachel and David if they were shown examples of extensions designed by architects and extensions designed by builders and technicians, and whether they thought they would be able to tell the difference.[24] The answer was 'probably not', although Rachel did concede that work by architects might be more elegant in terms of materials as 'getting a decent finish out of builders was really difficult'. Both had seen an extension by an architect on the other side of the road and they had not been impressed. When asked if they thought that architects made a difference to the way in which a space was designed, they had to think for quite a while before acknowledging that 'they might see things that you couldn't see' and also that the use of materials would probably be better. Pete and Sara didn't think that an architect would make much difference on a 'project this size', but that maybe you could tell whether an architect had been involved from the 'windows, their shape and style' and the 'details' which might be 'out of the ordinary'. Rachel, David, Gareth and Belinda felt there might be times when it was appropriate to employ an architect, but they didn't think that they themselves had needed one because they had a 'good idea' of what they wanted.

From my reading of the magazine *Grand Designs*, I had thought that its instigator, Kevin McCloud had done more in Britain to further the cause of architects than anyone else in recent years; his programme of the same name is keenly viewed by most of the subjects of this survey. My illusions were quickly dispelled, however, by Rachel who pointed out that whenever they showed an architect on *Grand Designs* they were usually 'real prats'. She did however speak approvingly of the programme *Property Ladder*,

20 Cf. Flora Samuel, *Le Corbusier in Detail*, (London: Architectural Press, 2007), p. 39.

21 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 16.

22 Dovey, 'The Silent Complicity of Architecture', p. 289.

23 Brown, 'Identity and Narrativity', p. 278.

24 Brown indicates that some of her informants had difficulty in envisaging the size of the spaces that they were building. Ibid., p. 280.

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'which makes you feel you can do without them'. Belinda felt that the architects on *Grand Designs* were quite pushy, citing the example of one female architect who had been 'quite miffed' when things had not gone according to her plans. Either way it is always the owner not the architect that is placed at the heart of the process.

The respondents were unanimously negative about the public image of the architectural profession. When asked what architects could do to make themselves more employable, David thought that more should be done about marketing: 'we get stuff from double glazing salesmen through the door—why not architects?' For him, their lack of prominence on the high street was a real issue. Rachel made a face before saying, 'well they seem to have a problem with their street cred at the moment'. It turned out that they did have a brief conversation with a 'creepy' architect who they felt to be too senior a member of his practice to be of much assistance to them. Gareth and Belinda found the idea of a percentage fee 'weird'; they would be 'scared' of it escalating.

When asked whether they were worried that if they had employed an architect he or she might have taken over the job, they didn't think it was a consideration. Gareth and Belinda said that they would have gone to some length to find an architect that they got along with.

In spite of Belinda's background in environmental science, sustainability made no impact on the design of her extension, possibly because Gareth, for whom it was not really an issue was the dominant partner in the process. Sustainability had absolutely no impact on Pete and Sara's scheme: 'maybe in an ideal world'. David and Rachel were concerned about issues of sustainability in the design of their home, but their aspirations were quickly thwarted by the practical implications of pushing for sustainable construction. Solar panels had been investigated but were, as they are for many people, quickly deemed to be too expensive—it being difficult to claw back the £5 000 or so cost in the event of moving. They tried to use less concrete but to little avail. Generally they were faced with so much complexity in trying to get the job done at all, that pushing environmental alternatives seemed all but impossible. This, in my experience, is the reality of homeowners who feel a degree of concern about the environment in Britain. Builders often look on such ideas with incredulity, making them very difficult and costly to implement. A provisional sum of £1 000 for solar panels, written into a tender document by an ignorant builder, quickly translates to £6 000 or so for the panels and tank once the project is under way, rendering them financially unfeasible. Such is the scarcity of skilled contractors in areas like Cardiff, where such an astonishing amount of building work is taking place, that there is very little choice when it comes to builders. Until more builders become experienced in these areas there is little hope of pushing the sustainable agenda, especially when architects are so peripheral to the process.

Conclusion

As Tim Anstey, Katja Grillner and Rolf Hughes have so appositely enquired in *Architecture and Authorship*, 'who is to be identified with the role of authoring in architecture—who is to be excluded from such an account?'[25] I found myself, in the course of writing this paper, gravitating from a position that was pro-professional architects to a position broadly supportive of the owners themselves. These people had learnt a great deal in the process of developing and extending their own homes—this highly positive process itself clearly adding to the degree of engagement that they felt with the place as home. However, a sense of despair creeps in when I consider the near total disengagement with issues of sustainability. Gareth and Belinda had done more homework than Rachel and David, who might have benefited from a checklist of issues to consider, or being made to articulate their desires more precisely. If, like Gareth and Belinda, they had put the relationship with the garden on the agenda they might not have ended up with a bathroom on the critical south-facing façade.

25 Tim Anstey, Katja Grillner and Rolf Hughes (eds.) *Architecture and Authorship*, (London: Black Dog, 2007), p. 10.

Although none of the informants wanted to repeat the process, they all talked of further changes that they felt their houses needed. Such ideas fit in with those expressed by the anthropologist Sarah Pink, who writes of the home 'as a necessarily incomplete project' constantly subject to change, whether in reality or in the imagination of its inhabitants.[26] Brown observes that the homeowners are embarking on 'a creative journey that allows for reflexivity and personal discovery and the representation of autobiographic content in the materiality of the home'.[27] Indeed, it is the role of self-building in the formation of identity that she emphasises in her study of self-builders. In justifying her findings, she tries to correlate them with current thinking on the measuring of 'well being', in particular the work of Christie and Nash on *The Good Life*,[28] and illustrates how fundamental participation and creativity are to any definition of human needs. The extensions and conversions that I have discussed in this paper are not particularly aesthetically pleasing, in the usual sense of the word, they have different qualities, ones not usually addressed in architectural discourse.[29] The major factor seems to be the investment of time and thought by the owners, which gives the work a highly personal quality, even though paradoxically, they might appear to outsiders to be deeply generic.[30]

26 Pink, *Home Truths*, p. 57.

27 Cf. T. Jackson and N. Marks, 'Found Wanting' in I. Christie and L. Nash (eds.), *The Good Life*, pp.31-40. Cited in Brown, 'Identity and Narrativity', p. 269.

28 Christie and Nash, *The Good Life*.

29 This point is emphasised by Neal Leach, 'Belonging: Towards a Theory of Identification with Space', in Hillier and Rooksby, *Habitus*, pp. 297-311 (298).

30 We have explored an extreme version of this process; Flora Samuel and Sarah Menin, 'Self-building' in Jo Odgers, Flora Samuel and Adam Sharr (eds.), *Primitive, Original Matters in Architecture*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

British people are increasingly taking their homes in hand—in 2005 the average person spent 15% of their day on 'repairs and gardening',[31] whilst the DIY market in Britain expanded by 77% over the period 1990 to 2000.[32] Significantly, DIY is classified as a 'leisure' activity by the Office of National Statistics. Why it ceased to be classified as a necessity and translated into a pleasure is a thought-provoking question that is at the heart of this discussion. Here enshrined in the methodology of the government's statistical data is a belief in the importance of DIY as a

31 Cf. National Statistics; www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=9503, [accessed 7 September 2007].

32 Cf. Verdict (1998-2008); www.

Verdictonline.co.uk/VerdictReports/EuroDIY01PRESS.HTM., [accessed 7 September 2007].

pleasurable, self-affirming act, though the cynical might suggest that it is solely a justification for high levels of VAT on DIY products and services.

The picture I describe here is of two groups almost fatally divided: the owners (and potential clients) and the architects. When an earlier version of this paper was presented at the Sheffield conference in November 2007, one member of the audience made a comment to the effect that it was lucky my informants did not want to work with architects, as he didn't think that 'we' architects would want to work with them either. For Dovey 'the key role of architects is to join design imagination to the public interest; it is to catch the public imagination with visions of a better world'.[33] Certainly, this is the case with public architecture, which should obviously be the territory of the architect but the situation in the home is less clear. It seems to me that there is room for architecture to be taught at a really basic level, perhaps in adult education classes, through the medium of the home-building magazine or through quick one-off fixed fee consultations with an architect. At the very least, some assistance could be made available for the reading of plans, or more effort made to generate legible visual form. Anyone who has worked through countless plans with first year architecture students knows that there is a real craft to planning, interweaving the considerations of use with a response to environmental conditions, particularly light. I refuse to believe that these issues are purely about aesthetics and therefore bound up with complex power struggles of taste. They are more to do with the space in use, but then where does use begin or end? I do not believe that the self-builders were as good at organising space as a reasonably well-trained architect. In the end I am forced to accept two, perhaps contradictory, beliefs: firstly, that self-build is an important and empowering activity,[34] secondly, that architects have much to offer in the design of the home.[35] As Dovey observes, 'from within the field of the design' it is necessary to 'acknowledge yet ignore Bourdieu's work because it does not offer an easy way forward'.[36]

33 Kim Dovey, 'The Silent Complicity of Architecture', p. 294.

34 Cf. Daniel Miller (ed.), *Home Possessions*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

35 Bourdieu himself has pointed out the futility of denouncing one set of aesthetic values for another, whilst still remaining within the constraints of the aesthetic game. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 48.

36 Dovey, 'The Silent Complicity of Architecture', p. 295.

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Site-Seeing: Constructing the 'Creative Survey'

Carolyn Butterworth, Sam Vardy

This paper explores the role the site survey could play in an architectural praxis, where emphasis is placed upon a participatory user. Even though the profession increasingly accepts that architecture is a relational construct rather than an object-based discipline, the site survey remains intransigent. New working practices are emerging that transform the later stages of the design process in architecture, through the creative participation of users, but the site survey remains unchanged, characterised by its focus on the physical and its abstraction from the user. We discuss in detail the limitations of the normative site survey model and propose, with examples from our own work, the use of techniques from relational art practice that offer an alternate 'creative survey' model, which provokes new and potent relationships between site, user and architect.

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In this essay we consider the role of the normative site survey in architectural practice, analysing its limitations and suggesting how to overcome them through the application of techniques from art practice. We propose that the use of these techniques can transform the normative site survey model into a useful propositional tool for participatory architectural design.

Our interest in site surveys is a product of our backgrounds in both mainstream practice and academic teaching and research. From practice we have first-hand knowledge of the normative model of the site survey, where we have found it to be unnecessarily limited in both its execution and its application. From our teaching and research we have learnt techniques from art practice, which can transform the site survey into a more effective and creative tool. This essay outlines the perceived limitations of the normative site survey and describes experiments with a more provocative form of site survey, which can yield far greater insight and engagement than is usually the case.

The aim of this essay, therefore, is to make the case for an alternate site survey, one which goes beyond the normative model and expands the idea of a survey to cover not just the site but also the programme and the user. This alternate site survey is a propositional and transformative tool with which architects and users can explore and test possibilities for the use of the site and the future building. It is important to state that we see this as an 'alternate' site survey, not an 'alternative' site survey. While we argue that the normative site survey may be limited, we firmly believe that it is by no means useless. We propose an alternate form of site survey to augment and complement the normative model, not to replace it. In this paper we differentiate the alternate survey from the normative site survey by calling it the 'creative survey'.

In normative practice, the site survey appears in Stages A and B at the beginning of the RIBA's Stages of Work. The aim of the site survey is to enable the architect to gain an understanding of the site. But what is meant by the site and what kind of understanding is gained? The majority of architectural projects start with a red line on a map. The client body, having agreed on the extent of the red line, hand over this map to the architect and so identify the 'site'. In so doing, the site is defined by its physicality, its perceived vacancy and its difference from what is outside the red line. The architect now has an area of investigation to which they can apply the long-established methodology, which is the 'site survey' and it is this that defines the architect's understanding of the site.

The site survey is a closely defined set of information gathered by the application of standard tools. The list of inclusions for a site survey, as defined by The Architect's Job Book,[1] comprises of only physical characteristics and the given format of the survey is limited to plans,

[1] Sarah Lupton, *The Architect's Job Book, 7th Edition* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2000).

sections and elevations. Drawings and the secondary tools of the site survey, images and data in various forms, all become what Jonathan Hill calls the 'tools of abstraction'.[2] The abstraction offered by drawings is especially powerful because of the importance placed on them by the architectural profession. Writing on architectural drawings in general, Lefebvre states:

> Within the spatial practice of modern society, the architect ensconces himself in his own space. He has a *representation of this space*, one which is bound to graphic elements [...] this *conceived* space is thought by those who make it to be *true*.[3]

The site survey abstracts the site so successfully that once completed it can sit in a folder on the architect's laptop, and for the architect, this representation of the physical reality of the site *becomes* the site for the purposes of the design. Lefebvre's choice of the phrase, 'the architect ensconces himself', is telling; the site survey becomes a place to nestle, to settle securely, safe in the knowledge that the site survey is 'true'. The real site may seldom be visited again. In truth it may be avoided, since there is always a risk that it might have changed since it was surveyed. Yet, the site survey is constantly referred to, and in effect, replaces the site. This codified, abstracted and fixed version of the site carries enormous weight in the determination of the parameters of the architecture that follows.

The site survey's ambition to be comprehensive is perhaps its essential limiting characteristic. The process does not acknowledge the abstracted nature of the information that it produces nor does it recognise the absence of other information that it has not gathered. Such limitations are not considered in the adoption of the site survey as signifier of the site. This adoption goes so far, in fact, as to obliterate the site so that we reach the paradoxical situation where the map is indeed the territory; the site survey has become the site.

So, on completion of the site survey, how can we now characterise the architect's understanding of the site? According to Barthes, 'there is no drawing, no matter how exact, whose very exactitude is not turned into a style',[4] and so it is the case with the survey drawings. The architect relies upon their exactitude without considering the artifice deployed in their production. The survey describes only a limited set of characteristics of the site, that is, those that are deemed useful in the imminent design of the building. These are the measurable aspects of the site's physical, socio-political and cultural characteristics, and of these it is the physical characteristics of the site which are given primacy. Giving such value to the physical, by extension, engenders an understanding of architecture as a mostly physical discipline; the conception of architecture as object. By focussing almost entirely on the physical the site survey establishes a

[2] Jonathan Hill, *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 25.

[3] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p. 361.

[4] Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 17.

context in which the design process then takes place, a context which in the main ignores contingency, temporality and happenstance.

So, to summarise, the normative site survey is limited both by the reductive nature of its remit and also by the levels of abstraction integral to its communication. Its sole audience is the architect who is predisposed to forget the actual site with all its idiosyncrasies and happy to locate their design on, as it were, the site survey. This closed circuit has no capacity to incorporate information from existing and future users and sets up an object-based process of design, which will continue to operate at a high level of abstraction.

The normative site survey springs from and reinforces an architecture which prioritises the object. However, we recognise a very different type of architecture emerging, influenced both by critical architectural discourse and by changes in client expectations. There is a shift away from the modernist preoccupation with architecture as an object-based discipline towards the notion that architecture is a relational construct, where 'architectural design process is not an activity that leads to the making of a product, but is rather the site of the work itself'.[5] This development is influenced by recent critical discourse on art, notably the theory of 'relational aesthetics', by Nicolas Bourriaud. Bourriaud's contention that 'the contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination'[6] seems applicable to recent developments in contemporary architecture. This theoretical shift towards a 'relational architecture' is compounded by the more prosaic influence of funding requirements. Clients of publicly funded buildings increasingly expect architects to demonstrate community engagement in their design process and there is 'an unequivocal acceptance of participation as a better way of doing things'.[7] The result of this being that normative practice has had to redefine its relationship with the user, so that even the most conventional of practices will have had some experience of a public consultation exercise. Our experience from practice indicates to us that public consultation is often cursory, and tends to be neither creative nor useful and sometimes may even be harmful. Influenced by critical art theory a few practices are developing a relational praxis, which aims to construct 'a productive realm in which both architect and user enact reciprocal transactions between the simple realities and the highest dreams',[8] but even these, we feel, do not exploit the full creative potential of the site survey.

It may seem that of all the stages of an architectural project, the site survey is the least conducive to the inclusion of public participation. Remember Lefebvre's description of the architect nestling into their representation of the world, forgetting reality and regarding what they have produced as 'true'? Despite relational shifts in other areas of the design process, the relationship that the architect has with the site survey is still one

[5] Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, (London and New York: I. B Tauris, 2006), p. 157.

[6] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2000), p. 20.

[7] Jeremy Till, 'The Negotiation of Hope', in Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, Jeremy Till, (eds.), *Architecture and Participation*, (London: Spon Press, 2005), p. 24.

[8] Jeremy Till, 'Architecture of the Impure Community', in Jonathan Hill (ed.), *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 74.

of possession. The site survey is a precious object, an indicator of the architect being chosen by the client, who has in effect 'given' them the site, and now the architect alone understands it. The last thing the architect wants is for other people to spoil it. Lefebvre describes the term 'user' as having something 'vaguely suspect'[9] about it, a suspicion we cannot help feeling most architects still share. Jonathan Hill points out that in current practice 'the user is a threat to the architect because the user's actions may undermine the architect's claim to be the sole author of architecture',[10] and the last bastion of that sole authorship is the site survey. Whilst the overall practice of architecture shifts to become a more relational praxis, the normative site survey remains intact and unquestioned. We suggest, however, that alternate models of site survey are being offered from outside the profession by some artists, as the following example demonstrates.

9 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 362.

10 Hill, *Actions of Architecture*, p. 3.

Fig. 1. *The Singing Ringing Tree*, Crown Point, Burnley by Tonkin Liu. Photo: Carolyn Butterworth.

The Singing Ringing Tree in Burnley, East Lancashire has recently been awarded an RIBA National Award, to the great consternation of many in the architectural establishment who struggle to see how a piece of sculpture can win an architecture award. Responding to the criticism, Greg Penoyre, head of the awards jury, described *The Singing Ringing Tree* as an 'artefact' which 'has a complex, many-headed client and funding background, and importantly is bringing about significant community involvement and has received local support'[11]. The implication being that although in isolation the piece is more likely to be identified as sculpture, when assessed as part of a process, it is architecture. This is a radical decision for the RIBA to make. As far as we know this is the first time an RIBA Award has been given to a project where the process of its inception and its potential effects after completion are material to its perceived success as architecture. In contrast to the vast majority of awards, which

11 Greg Penoyre and George Ferguson, 'Should sculpture be allowed to win an RIBA award?', *Building Design* (29/6/2007); www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=427&storycode=3090361, [accessed 9 Dec 2007].

are given to buildings in isolation, this award has been given to an amalgamation of built form, relationships and processes. Singled out for special praise was the participation of local school children in a series of events led by artists. We would describe these as 'creative surveys'.

It is interesting to see how the two disciplines of art and architecture converge and separate in the production of the *Singing Ringing Tree*. It was designed by architects Tonkin Liu and commissioned by the public arts organisation, Mid-Pennines Arts. While the architects progressed the design of the sculpture, the client organised a series of events to raise awareness of the project and its site. It is this component of the design process that we wish to discuss here because it is these events that are, in our opinion, 'creative surveys'. As an example we shall look at the Flag-Flying day held on the site of the *Singing Ringing Tree*.

Fig. 2. Flag Flying Day on the future site of *The Singing Ringing Tree*, Crown Point, Burnley. Photo: Nigel Hillier on behalf of Mid-Pennine Arts.

To maximise its visibility from Burnley, Gayle Knight from Mid-Pennine Arts organised an artist-led event, which could 'serve a technical purpose but also encourage ownership of the site for the children involved.'[12] Artists and school children made flags which they waved furiously on the hilltop site, Crown Point, while down in Burnley other children recorded whether they could see the flags. The architects used the information to inform the precise siting of the sculpture and a connection between Crown Point, Burnley and those schoolchildren was made.

[12] Gayle Knight, Mid-Pennine Arts, personal interview, 25th Sept 2007.

It is interesting to speculate that without this and other art-based events, the *Singing Ringing Tree* would not have been seen as so closely connected with the local community, would not have been as successful an emblem of the regeneration of the area, and would not have been given an RIBA award. There is a separation here between the work of the architects and the work of the artists, but it was the synthesis of the two that resulted in a process deemed by the RIBA to be 'architecture'. We suggest that architects should be learning from such examples and integrating 'relational art' techniques to transform their site surveys.

Our remaining examples, which illustrate the potential of the 'creative survey' were done by ourselves or by our students. In each case, the architect places themselves in a position of active engagement with the site and its users and, in so doing, also becomes a user. The following examples use elements of performance to create an active engagement between site, architect and users, and there is a direct connection here between the 'creative surveys' and performance art. The use of performance enables the architect to step outside the role of expert and also invites users of the site to speculate beyond their normative 'roles'. A context is created where the site becomes unknown territory. The architect joins with the existing and potential users of the site and all participants become the surveyors of that unknown place. The survey becomes the context for discovery and experimentation for all who take part. Crucially, this process of discovery uncovers significant and useful insights into the nature of site, the uses to which it will be put, and the needs of users that are impossible to uncover by other means. Furthermore, these processes reinforce the role of the architect. This is not design by committee or by focus group, rather it is a platform for the architect to exercise their professional skills and to fulfill their potential responsibilities. However, the journey to obtaining these insights may require unexpected skills, as our next example from Accrington demonstrates.

The music of the mariachi could just about be heard over the noise from the buses and the hot dog stand. Claudia stepped up onto the stage that the group had made in front of the old Market Hall. Tentatively, at first she started to step and sway and then, picking up confidence and speed, she twirled her bright orange skirt faster and faster, round and round, her stamps and handclaps becoming louder and more insistent. People reacted in many different ways—some barely seemed to notice, some averted their eyes and hurried past, some stopped and watched, two little girls started their own silly, giggly dance. After a few minutes the music stopped and Claudia stepped down from the stage. People drifted off, back to the shops or into the Market Hall and Accrington town centre returned to normal.

Fig. 3. Claudia Amico dancing outside the Market Hall, Accrington. Photo: Carolyn Butterworth.

Claudia Amico was interested in the notion of performance in Accrington's town centre and specifically around the market hall and so she decided to dance on a make-shift stage to provoke people's reactions. She had previously interviewed people in the street on the subject but found it difficult to coax out stories and thought dancing might prompt 'a different form of interaction; working on their reaction'.[13] To record these reactions she enrolled her fellow students to talk to people about her dance and the

site. Stories emerged of other dances and performances in Accrington, of how there used to be a lot more dancing and how people don't dance so much in public anymore. The dance also gave Claudia an opportunity to see how people reacted to impromptu performance; how close they stood, how long they watched, 'it was learning by doing',[14] she says.

13 Claudia Amico, email to Carolyn Butterworth, 25th Sept 2007.

If we scrutinise Claudia's dance we can identify elements of observation, proposal and transformation within it, and it is this synthesis that we believe, characterises it as a 'creative survey'. As an observational tool the performance uncovered current and historical information about the site, the people who use it and what they use it for. As a propositional tool it demonstrated how the market hall area could be used as a performance venue and Claudia feels that it had a marked impact on the development of her design proposal.

14 Ibid.

> There was a different perspective towards the project after doing this, the idea of human contact [...] the everyday against the unconventional. It was at this point that I felt that all the elements for the concept of the market started coming together.[15]

Finally, Claudia's dance has become rather unexpectedly, a transformative tool to be used as a symbol of a newly reinvigorated town centre by the town council in their masterplan. The dance has been assimilated into the history of the town centre and continues to be generative in its suggestion of possibilities.

15 Ibid.

Up close the building is so lickable; sleek chromium, crunchy travertine, squeaky glass, luscious marble. I licked every material I could find including the water of the pond. I like to think the building enjoyed it despite the fact it sent me off with a wretched sore throat.

So now I have a special relationship with the Barcelona Pavilion. I remember how it opened up its cracks, splits, smears, scratches and fissures to me and I think of it with fondness. It does a fine job of concealing its decay and flaws and stands impervious as an icon should. But I have licked it, and I know different.

Fig. 4. Carolyn Butterworth licking the Barcelona Pavilion. Photo: Emma Cheatle.

So much is known about the Barcelona Pavilion, its place within the modernist canon, its construction and reconstruction, and its provenance that it is very difficult to relate to the building on a personal level. When Carolyn was asked to survey the building it was clear to her that carrying out a normative site survey was not going to reveal anything that had

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not already been documented comprehensively. She decided to lick the building and was astonished at the richness and usefulness of the survey information that resulted. This implacable, smooth building turned out to be extremely lickable, full of texture and taste. It's clean modernist lines are pitted, moss-ridden and crumbly when licked.

This simple, 'creative survey' revealed the unexpected; Carolyn, as Ben Godber writes, 'has equally articulated the rich textural nature of the materials and the unexpectedly sensual quality of Mies' pavilion'.[16] It also became a very useful generative tool for the development of a design proposal and, in the ongoing use of this image in books and lectures, it has in a sense, transformed the existing building. The Barcelona Pavilion has never been quite the same since.

[16] Ben Godber, 'The Knowing and Subverting Reader' in Jonathan Hill (ed.), *Occupying Architecture*, p. 190.

In the old shopping arcade a fisherman sits patiently by a gulley, waiting for a bite on the line. The scales of the recently-caught fish next to him gleam in the light from the stained glass windows. Curious shoppers stop and stare, trying to make sense of what had suddenly appeared in a space that they know so well. When they ask him what he is doing the fisherman points out that a river flows under the arcade. Suddenly the ground beneath them is transformed into a thin surface under which is rushing water teeming with fish. Many seem surprised but some offer up stories of how sometimes the river bubbles up through the floor, how it used to be called the 'River Stink' before it was culverted and how they were going to build a theatre on that site until they started digging, found the river and built the arcade instead.

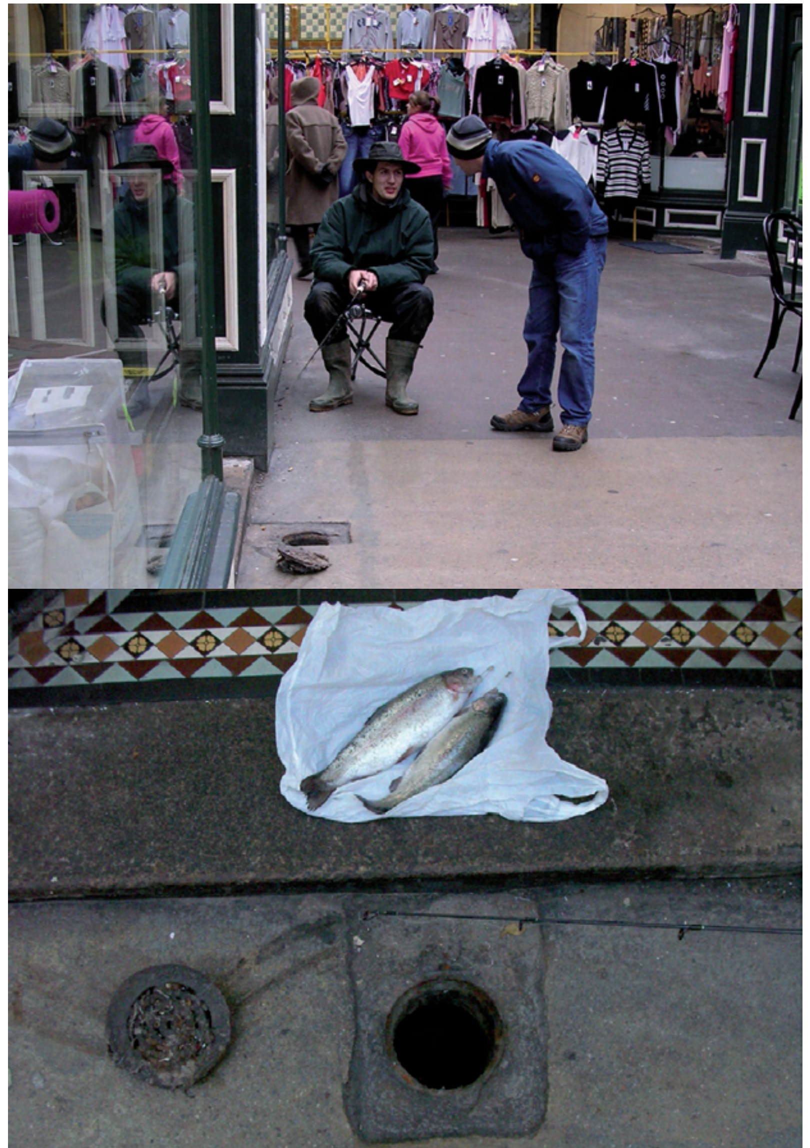

Fig. 5. Richard Gaete-Holmes fishing in the Victorian Arcade, Accrington. Photo: Kirstin Aitken. Fig. 6. Fish apparently caught in the Victorian Arcade, Accrington. Photo: Richard Gaete-Holmes.

Kirstin Aitken and Richard Gaete-Holmes were intrigued by the culverted river, which runs underneath Accrington town centre and embarked upon a performance which, as Richard says 'can be seen as an attempt to challenge the public's idea of thresholds and what lies hidden'.[17] As the 'Gutter Fishermen' they spent the day fishing down drains and gullies in a move 'aimed to make a metaphorical and visual link between the hidden realm of the culverted river and the public realm of Accrington town centre'.[18] One such site was the Victorian Arcade, a shabby line of shops where Richard and Kirstin wanted to 'challenge the public's perception of a space that they thought they were familiar with, by suggesting the unknown and engaging their imagination.'[19]

17 Richard Gaete-Holmes, 'Re: Creative Site Surveys', email to Carolyn Butterworth, 5th Oct 2007.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

The 'Gutter Fishermen' placed themselves in the site and became users for the day and their use of the site was truly unexpected. The playfulness and simplicity of the idea sparked the imagination of other users and a dialogue emerged between architect and user, student and local, fisherman and shopper. Richard and Kirstin's 'creative survey' enabled them to expand the architect's conventional role as observer and engage with the site and users in a way that revealed radical possibilities for the site. As Kirstin says:

> Doing something as absurd as fishing in the arcade made us feel vulnerable but it opened paths of conversation that would never have otherwise been possible, and opened my eyes to aspects of the town that a more conventional survey could not possibly have raised.[20]

20 Kirstin Aitken, email to Carolyn Butterworth, 5th Oct 2007.

A cake was built and a stair tower decorated. Refuse chutes were dusted with hundreds and thousands, downpipes were studded with glacé cherries, icing dripped off handrails and the air tasted of sugar. While the kids had fun in a place which had always frightened them, the adults came together and talked. Suddenly an empty stairway became a place of celebration where people met their neighbours, shared news about the estate, discussed its good points, its bad points, its memories and its future.

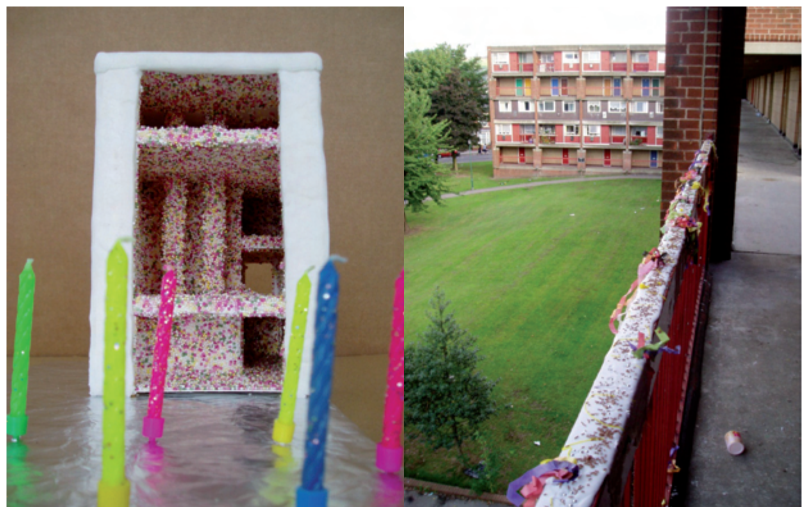

Fig. 7. A cake of the stair tower and iced balustrade, Lansdowne Estate, Sheffield by Carolyn Butterworth, gmproducts & Encounters. Photo: Carolyn Butterworth.

The work of Encounters, artists Trish O'Shea and Ruth Ben-Tovim, has had a great influence on the development of our ideas about 'creative surveys' and how architects can learn from artists. They have occupied three disused shops in Sharrow and transformed them through the collection of stories, artefacts and ideas brought to them by the people who

lived and worked there. By giving attention to the small things in life they open up conversations about the big things and we were inspired by the positive and trusting response they elicited from the people who came to the shops. The knowledge and understanding that Trish and Ruth acquired through this process stands as an impressive 'creative survey' of the area.

Fig. 8. Kids icing the stair tower, Lansdowne Estate, Sheffield by Carolyn Butterworth, gmproducts & Encounters. Photo: Carolyn Butterworth.

We first worked with Encounters in the Lansdowne housing estate, a drab collection of slab blocks built in the early 1970's. We were intrigued by the large stair towers, which overlooked the grounds of the estate, but noticed that rather than stopping and enjoying the space people hurried through as quickly as possible. We knew we wanted to create an event around a stair tower to engage people with the space.

Fig. 9. Iced rubbish chute in the stair tower, Lanssdowne Estate, Sheffield by Carolyn Butterworth, gmproducts & Encounters. Photo: Carolyn Butterworth.

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21 Trish O'Shea, Encounters, personal interview, 4th Oct 2007.

We made a model of a stair tower, then iced and decorated it as a cake with the laundry poles as candles. We then invited the local residents to come to the stair tower, see the cake/model and ice the real thing with us; for an afternoon the site was transformed.

'Where the well-known Garston Netto stands today, there used to be four small cottages. I used to live in one of those cottages. A small two up-two down with a small back yard. At the back of our property was a railway sidings and a coal stack. One of my fondest memories was when my brother and I removed a loose slat of wood in our back fence. We then sneaked through and had bags of fun sliding down the coal stack, much to our mother's dismay because we always came home black from the coal dust.'

Fig. 10. The Moey on-site in Liverpool by Encounters and gmproducts. Photo: Sam Vardy.

The Moey project, also in collaboration with Encounters, involved a mobile 'shop' touring South Liverpool for five weeks, not selling but collecting. The Moey followed a route around the neighbourhoods of South Liverpool collecting memories, stories and objects as it went. Visitors to The Moey were asked to leave a bit of themselves behind—an answer to a question, a memory or an image for the next visitor in the next neighbourhood to see and add to. The Moey changed and transformed as things were collected along the route. In itself the Moey became a 'creative survey' and enabled a critical and cultural engagement with parts of South Liverpool that would not have been possible through the one-way processes of observation and recording.

In terms of funding, commissions and agendas the last two projects, in collaboration with Encounters, were art rather than architecture. However, they are entirely relevant to architectural discourse because they are a form of 'creative survey', that is an active, synthesised mechanism which can identify, understand, communicate and transform the site of architectural praxis. By making space for conversation, negotiation and communication, this form of engagement can reveal spatial, economic, social and cultural potentials that are of immediate and practical value to architects, and which are difficult and costly to obtain through other research or survey methods. The 'creative survey' rapidly creates a level of intimacy with the

site itself, which is revealed in multiple dimensions simultaneously, and with the users whose relationship with the site and whose desires for it are demonstrated viscerally.

While the 'creative survey' does not follow a predetermined pattern it usually exhibits the following characteristics:

> It is not limited by a red line around a site
> It is not only carried out by the architect, but by other users too
> It is active, experimental and open-ended
> It makes proposals rather than just recording what is
> It can occur at any time through the design process
> It allows proposals to emerge rather than be imposed
> It employs language and codes that are accessible
> It can 'create processes through which people can together, cope with change.'[21]

In essence, the 'creative survey' expands the focus of the normative site survey to encompass users, time, programme and physical location, and it forges a relationship between all these dimensions. It also attempts to provoke a reaction, thereby encouraging connections to be made between the architect, the client, the users and the site. In so doing it enables opinions to be formed and a feeling of hopefulness to emerge. The provocation of the 'creative survey' elicits a genuine sense of empowerment, for all the users who participate.

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Adaptive Actions

Jean-François Prost

Today's urban experience is defined and encompasses a variety of phenomena that change the way we interact with the city. Mobile and transformable architecture, increasing population displacement, the 'generic city'... These unravel on a large scale and impact on residents' perception of and relation to their environment. Can simple actions, images and ideas such as the hybridisation of conventional and unusual urban realities, 'deghettoisation' or use and assertion of public spaces infiltrate the collective imagination in order to promote identity, specificity and a sense of belonging? The ongoing *Adaptive Actions* project lends artistic voice to marginal causes and alternative urban lifestyles to address site-specific issues related to post-conception and post-production in urban development.

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Architects often prefer photographing or showing buildings at the height of their 'perfection', when the presence of time is imperceptible and user-trace absent. Some architectural agencies even control representation, allowing circulation and posting of approved images only. *Now* is the *modus operandi*—priority goes to the image of the building in the present and there is very little concern for its progression in the future. Much emphasis is placed on what must be photographed, celebrated, recorded and published in magazines rather than on users' adaptation of space and appropriation in various form. Very little importance is given to what happens post-conception and post-production: to the life cycle of a building, construction or landscape after being built.

Adaptive Actions operate a shift in focus from representation and aesthetics to the programming of possibilities of use in the built environment. By observing, revealing and sharing residents' adaptive actions, this project aims at encouraging others to act and engage with their environment as well as informing designers on possible extensions to their programme.

Fig. 1. '*Détroit ville résiliente* (Detroit Resilient City)'. Photo: submitted by FNJFP at; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/83.

Can perceptions be altered and change pioneered through simple actions, images and ideas? Can the identification and representation of realities, which have up to now been perceived as improbable or absurd, lead to new urban concepts and construction processes? The ongoing *Adaptive Actions* (currently based in London) throw light on these questions. They explore alterations in the workplace, the home and public spaces in general. The project lends creative voice to marginal causes and alternative urban lifestyles. Imagination and personal creativity's potential to impact on daily life is emphasised, particularly within public spaces. Thus, it indexes and reports on existing actions in

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the city and encourages the implementation of new activities, such as the adaptation of architecture, landscape and objects, which unfolds in several stages.

Singularities

In order to document and create an inventory of existing urban alterations, an ongoing survey or call for collaboration, open to all, is announced on the Web and through printed documents. It should be noted, however, that since these realities take place on a small scale, and are often only known to a restricted number of locals, the request for postings is used to accelerate the process. Collaborators register and log in as actors on the website and submit actions directly and instantly on-line, add links, text or comments if desired. By offering a space to share experiences, ideas,

Fig. 2. 'Passage'. Photo: submitted by François; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/19. Fig. 3. 'Passage 03'. Photo: submitted by François; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/44.

Fig. 4. 'Temporary Shelter'. Photo: submitted by François; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/38. Fig. 5. 'Domestic Appropriations'. Photo: submitted by Urban Dwellers; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/85.

types of actions and specific accomplishments, *Adaptive Actions* creates an inventory of alterations rarely visible to the public.

The website's objective is to collate a variety of actions of a popular, theoretical or scientific nature, expressing conflict and cooperation, opposition and composition. The presentation of projects will create a vocabulary with which the collective imagination may express itself through the use of existing structures and will encourage the growth of similar actions.

Assemblage and Cooperation

A programming of events, workshops and round tables in different localities on specific topics create links, associations between actors and actions. The aim as Maurizio Lazzarato would say, is not to neutralise differences but on the contrary to enrich the concept of the common through the existence of these differences.[1] As he argues, the challenge is to find ways to retain this multiplicity, to arrange heterogeneity while maintaining disparity.

Some proposed actions are conceptualised and carried through collectively. Our shared knowledge and expertise is applied towards accomplishing a creative project, the aim of which is to modify the intended use of architectural and urban elements.[2] This communal project could, for instance, emphasise one existing documented action to give it more resonance and a stronger impact. Some actors might want to pursue, reinterpret, extend, or do variations of existing adaptive actions.[3]

Relational Shift

Adaptive Actions initiates a relational shift. Resident collaboration is an essential part of the process, which involves the hybridisation of conventional and unusual urban realities, disseminating such novel notions as 'deghettoisation', as well as the use and assertion of public spaces through site-specific interventions. This relationship with residents in itself constitutes the first element of this action-research project and is critical to its success. Whilst the instigator may intervene in public spaces, he primarily acts as catalyst. Relationally, the focus is on the concepts brought forward by the instigator rather than strictly on what is produced. It is no longer a question of infiltrating public space but of penetrating the collective imagination. Consequently, the actors themselves become immersed in the infiltration process and act as agents of it. For the relational shift to happen, it must be an expression of the people as an integral part of the context.

The role of the instigator in this particular situation is to encourage a different attitude, initiate a new practice, exchange ideas, share

1 Cf. Yves Citton, 'Puissance de la Variation, Maurizio Lazzarato', Multitudes n°24 (2006): 187-200; Maurizio Lazzarato, Puissances de l'invention: La Psychologie Économique de Gabriel Tarde Contre Économie Politique, (Paris: Les empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 2002).

2 A series of 'open houses' and workshops were organised at SPACE (London) to discuss several proposed actions or contexts of intervention—see Olympic walks and suppers following the 'All Aboard' action; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/46.

3 Such as Gewuerfel's action 'Building the Future?' which reused the 'All Aboard' action paint to erase pictures taken by this urban photographer of the past and lost Lower Lea Valley in London; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/59.

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knowledge and skills. This project explores, promotes and encourages daily actions, ways to stimulate active and committed participation and to challenge organised space, as well as imposed movement patterns, by creating positive tensions, measuring and testing the limits of tolerated appropriation. A multiplicity of actions—like displacing and leaving a chair in an unplanned place can have an impact on our urban lives.[4]

[4] See for example, 'All Aboard' action; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/41.

Fig. 6. 'Olympic Perimeter Walk', London, January 2008. Photo: submitted by Adaptive Actions; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/46.

Fig. 7. 'All Aboard', London. Photo: submitted by Adaptive Actions; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/41.

Interstitial Experiments

In Liverpool, one is struck by the quantity of urban plots zoned as 'public lands' but designed to remain in disuse, fenced off. A project with benches entitled, *Public Loitering Area*[5] was undertaken, which aimed at adding an additional element to the fenced-off property—a good example of a punctual space-activating micro-action. The project offered local

[5] Adaptive Actions is the continuation of prior research initiated at the Liverpool Biennial 2006—Public Loitering Area; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/21.

residents the opportunity to participate by placing a bench on the land or by proposing a location. After launching this urban action with several benches, others also joined in and installed many other benches on new sites and this continued for nigh on several months after the end of the Biennial.[6]

[6] A new phase of this project is being initiated currently by a Liverpool resident on new proposed sites—for news and future details go to the Adaptive Actions website.

This project and other adaptive actions are most commonly micro-actions and constitute one form of resident participation complementary to conventional or non-conventional ways of building or to various-scale interventions. Micro, interstitial, actions are needed to complete and activate large structures incapable of, and not conceived for adaptation to constantly changing local realities. They give flexibility to large structures linked to increasingly complicated regulations, legal obligations, etc.

Fig. 8. 'P L A: Public Loitering Area'. Photo: submitted by Anonymous; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/21. Fig. 9. 'Use Inflexions'. Photo: submitted by François; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/84.

Places and Non-places

In Montreal, Canada, in the late 80s, a Portuguese plaza was designed to commemorate and mirror the character profile of the neighbourhood. Today, virtually all Portuguese residents have moved elsewhere and this very specific cultural space is left as a strange fragment that answers in

no way to the contextual uses of the current residents. In this case and many others, citizen appropriation or actions represent an interesting alternative to adapt buildings to the flow of change and enable activation and meaning in different public spaces. Increased mobility and movement of populations, as well as acceleration phenomena displace people to places that have no personal memories, or personal links to desires... These frequent displacements mean that there is a need for personal appropriation in order to bring character and singularity to spaces, which might be too generic or, conversely, too specific to foster a sense of belonging.

Open Process and Architectural Appropriations Integrated to Future Building:

The submitted action 'Atwater',[7] showing bird feeders installed on the balcony of a large repetitive concrete tower, is an interesting addition; a (possibly) missing element in the conception of this important twenty-five floor, 150-metre-long residential project. Environmental studies have proven that similar towers in urban centres have a negative impact on bird life: they create barriers, disrupt flight patterns and reduce sources of food. This action, the initiator of which is unknown, could serve as an indicator—a sign of an unfulfilled need. It has been integrated into a new architectural project and programme.

Through similar documented actions, *Adaptive Actions* explores and gives value to non-linear, continuous construction processes with phases (conception, production, post production, management...) that allow distinctions to be attenuated and transitions to become less brutal or even non-existent. As Stephen Wright states about art in a broad sense, it's about thinking 'in terms of its specific means (its tools) rather than its specific ends (art work).[8]

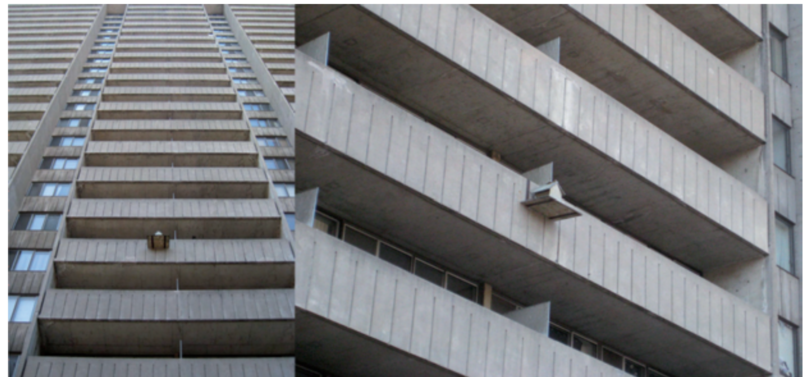

Fig. 10. 'Atwater'. Photo: submitted by Maxpro; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/65.

This new scenario brings non-existent transversal links, accelerated cycles, changed attitudes and roles. Buildings like cities are living entities, changing constantly in unpredictable ways and need to be

7 For further details; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/71.

8 Stephen Wright, 'The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade: An Essay on Use-value and Art Related Practice', Parachute 117 (2005): 123.

constantly rethought through all these cycles rather then simply built and demolished. All buildings are initially biased and comply to a specific programme. Buildings should be constantly observed, monitored, rethought, and reworked. Residents, upon intuition and observation, may suggest actions, which, with more means and further discussion, could be progressively materialised.

Fig. 11. 'Residual Spaces'. Photo: submitted by Surplus; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/86.

Transformable and Automated Architecture

To facilitate appropriations and allow adaptations, many flexible and mobile attributes are presently explored and integrated into constructions. The conceptualisation of such devices raises many issues and challenges. To what extent should or can objects or devices be contextualised to changing situations, users and new parameters? Moreover, to what extent can they answer the distinctive needs of users, of a programme or specific event? To that effect, various strategies for context-adaptation of devices can be introduced: positioning and setting modes, designs with component-modification or collapsible functions, dimensional variations... However, many transformable devices or construction elements have never been tested or activated by users and many mutative possibilities are symbolic. Many difficulties occur in using units conceived as transformable and adjustable devices. Adaptable elements are often not activated for various reasons: they are overly complicated or non-functional, too time-consuming, unnecessary, or simply do not correspond to the real need for change. Most mutative attributes are utopian and offer little scope for individual innovation.

There are effective risks related to an aesthetic based on ideals of transformation, which can decrease the usage potential; for instance,

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pillar-shaped billboards (such as *Colonnes Morris*, a piece of urban furniture often found in Paris and other cities used for advertising) are unusable due to the impossibility of modification, lack of mobility, and an overly complicated design, rendering permanent that which was supposed to be temporary.

In the research project *Adaptive House*, adaptation is on the contrary effortless.[9] Hundreds of sensors survey movement and behaviour and a central computer hub analyses and stores the data and then creates patterns of use. Programming is carried out and adjusted by computers. Temperatures are adapted to body activity: higher temperatures if inactive, lower if very active... To counter current building ineffectiveness, architects are presently inventing and exploring a new self-referential and self-mutating digital and automated architecture that could maintain constant dialogue with its context and the human body; it would necessitate little human participation, input or activation. These pre-programmed buildings constantly survey and analyse users and context (in relation to body rather then intellect), report and implement adjustments accordingly. But how and when will this new environment be effective? To what degree will it be ethical and respect privacy rights whilst forecasting on desired changes?

9 For further details see Adaptive House at; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/67.

No Final End

Not all future transformations can and should be anticipated and integrated in building production and design. Rather then being planned, they should be given space, a structure to grow, to expand, to take shape. By leaving undetermined and un-programmed spaces in buildings, architects could contribute to their development. Funds could be allocated to future programming of events and possible transformations, which could be coordinated by a group of citizens.

But for buildings to be able to change progressively, more organically without resorting to traditional grand schemes and gestures necessitates an ideological shift. As long as representational space continues to dominate over innovation and exploration, little change is possible. The predominant emphasis on looks over experience, ideas or uses is certainly one of the biggest obstacles to creating a new and alternative architecture. This architecture is less oriented on the final product and more on the 'use value',[10] more on what Anne Querrien calls the building's 'enunciation'.[11] The interest and desires are there but the academic, professional and media pressure limits and controls explorations, restrains exaltation and creative possibilities. How can we go beyond curiosity and amusement and begin to implement and make these changes?

10 Stephen Wright, 'The Future of the Reciprocal Readymade', p. 123.

11 Anne Querrien, 'Fabriquer des Seuils à une Troisième Nature, Multitudes n°20 (2005): 13-22.

Adaptive actions are often seen as individualistic, personal, fragmentary and spontaneous. Since these actions are unplanned, rarely thought

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[12] Such as the housing project by Le Corbusier in Pessac, France. It was transformed by residents and is presently being brought back to its original state.

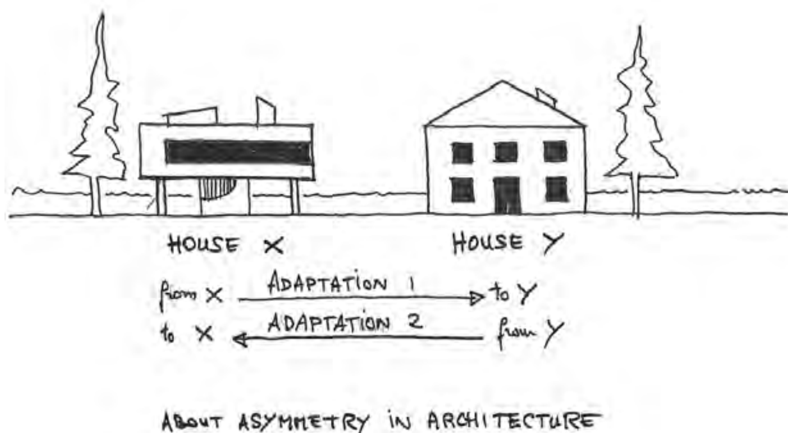

Fig. 12. Pessac by Le Corbusier. Photo: submitted by Bobby; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/75.

Fig. 13. 'Dots versus Demolition D'. Photo: submitted by FNJFP; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/65.

Fig. 14. Roof Dwelling. Photo: submitted by Marie and Jean; www.adaptiveactions.net/action/52.

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through globally (i.e. in relation to the building as a whole and the city) they are often considered undesirable, of little value and non-constructive.

Adaptive actions can negatively alter the overall visual effect of the building by creating unplanned additions. However, many user adaptations are positive and form part of the normal evolution of the construction as a nuance or critique of the building, and should therefore, in many cases, be encouraged and reviewed before they are removed.[12] Of course, input from a mediator or coordinator can balance the needs and requirements of all parties, recognising the value of aesthetics, materials, urban and building design, as well as taking into account a crucial element in all of these: usage, which is undoubtedly more efficient when the users' perspective is considered. Very little thought and time are given and budgets allocated to post-production, in order to pursue, improve, activate and adapt constructions for various and changing users.

Resident's adaptive actions prolong the life of buildings by progressively adapting their environments in a number of small, sustainable moves, thus avoiding accelerated or premature degradation, as well as avoiding the need to resort to large, urban renewal projects.

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Notes on Contributors

Tessa Baird, **Anna Holder** and **James Wakeford** are recent architecture graduates from the Royal College of Art, University of Edinburgh and University of Sheffield now finding their way in practice. Previously they were involved with the charitable collective, Voluntary Design & Build in a number of international building projects. They have also worked for architectural design and research practices in UK and Europe. Their research interests include participatory practice, visual representation and time-based/scenario-driven architectural design.

Eeva Berglund studied and then taught social anthropology, with a focus on environmental questions, until 2002. Since then she has become a local authority planner but much of her energy has gone into research and writing and into voluntary work. Until earlier this year she was a trustee of Women's Design Service.

Carolyn Butterworth runs an MArch design studio at University of Sheffield and also has an architecture practice in Sheffield. Previously she was a director of van Heyningen and Haward Architects in London. Through her teaching, writing and practice, Carolyn explores how blurring the boundaries between art and architecture can develop the role of the practising architect. She is particularly interested in how the working methods that emerge can help architect and stakeholders alike form a critical attitude towards the site, the brief and the design.

Leo Care divides his time between architecture practice as associate director of BDR and with PCA, and tutors at degree and MArch level at the University of Sheffield. Leo is a founding member of Playce, an international network of architects, designers and educationalists. The group aims to improve awareness and encourage learning of the built environment, through design and play by undertaking workshops with young people in different countries, celebrating cultural and architectural diversity.

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Prue Chiles combines research and practice with teaching. At the University of Sheffield Prue initiated the acclaimed Live Projects programme. She directed the MArch/diploma architecture course between 1997–2002. Prue now directs the Bureau of Design Research (BDR), which she founded in 2002 within the School of Architecture. BDR redefines the role of the architect in relation to the university, the community and practice. This work is augmented by a small private practice—Prue Chiles Architects (PCA). Formed in 1999, the practice has undertaken a number of innovative buildings including one of the 'Classrooms of the Future'.

Mathias Heyden is a carpenter, architect and founder of ISPARA (Institute for Strategies of Participatory Architecture and Spatial Appropriation), a Berlin based office and lab for strategies of participatory architecture and spatial appropriation, wherein he works as initiator/curator, teacher, writer/editor, and artist. He has held teaching positions at Universität der Künste Berlin, Department of Architecture, at Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee, Department of Architecture, and has lectured at several architecture schools in Europe and US.

MOM (Morar de Outras Maneiras/ Living in Other Ways) is a research group founded in 2004, at the Department of Projects (PRJ) and Graduate Programme in Architecture and Urbanism, School of Architecture, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil (www.arq.ufmg.br/mom). **Silke Kapp** is senior lecturer in Architecture at UFMG, where she also coordinates the research group MOM and the Graduate Programme in Architecture and Urbanism. **Ana Paula Baltazar** is a PhD candidate at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. She is working as a researcher at MOM. **Denise Morado Nasciment**o is a senior lecturer in Architecture (UFMG) and sub-coordinates the research group MOM and also heads the Department of Projects.

Ruth Morrow is an architect/pedagogue. She has practised architecture in Ireland, UK and Germany and taught in schools of architecture in UK and Ireland. Her work focuses on the interconnections and potentials between people, place, pedagogy and creativity. Her teaching and research rely on strong activist and collaborative instincts. Despite a strong commitment to conceptual and revisionist thinking she finds she can only make sense of and resolve concepts within the physical realisation of the idea. Recently, Ruth has been co-curating urban projects with the artist initiative PS^2 and collaborating with a textile artist on 'mainstreaming tactility'.

Andreas Müller is an architect and exhibition designer, currently living in Berlin. He is a co-founder and publisher of An Architektur—Production

and Use of the Built Environment, a political architecture magazine which focuses on the critical analysis of spatial relations and the visualisation of their inherent socio-political conceptions. With An Architektur he organised the 'Camp for Oppositional Architecture', international congresses on the possibilities of oppositional architectural practice, in Berlin (2004) and Utrecht (2006). In 2008 conducts a research project on the use of space at the Jan van Eyck Academy Maastricht.

Jean-François Prost is a Montreal-based artist who studied architecture. His research focuses on non-disciplinary ways to explore the city, architecture and urban material. Act of resistance, state of mind, or ideating device, Prost's work activates and promotes social engagement, defends the presence of art everywhere at anytime. He is a founding member of atelier Syn- and member of the Board of Directors of Montreal's DARE-DARE mobile art center. His individual and collaborative work was featured in various galleries and international events (Liverpool Biennial 2006; Canadian Centre for Architecture). He is currently hosting the Canada Council for the Arts International Residency programme at Space, in London.

Flora Samuel is an architect and Reader at the Department of Architecture and Engineering, University of Bath where she teaches architectural history and design studio as Director of Studies for the MArch. She has published extensively mainly on the subject of Le Corbusier, also the subject of her PhD. She is an associate editor of ARQ.

Sam Vardy is a director of gmproducts, a small multidisciplinary group based in Sheffield and London; he teaches at University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. He is carrying out doctoral research on the concept of Self-Organisation and Architecture, which, along with his teaching and practice, focuses on social and cultural approaches to alternate forms of spatial practice in shifting political environments.

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Contact

For all enquiries, submissions and comments please contact:

field@sheffield.ac.uk

field:
School of Architecture
Arts Tower Western Bank
Sheffield S10 2TN