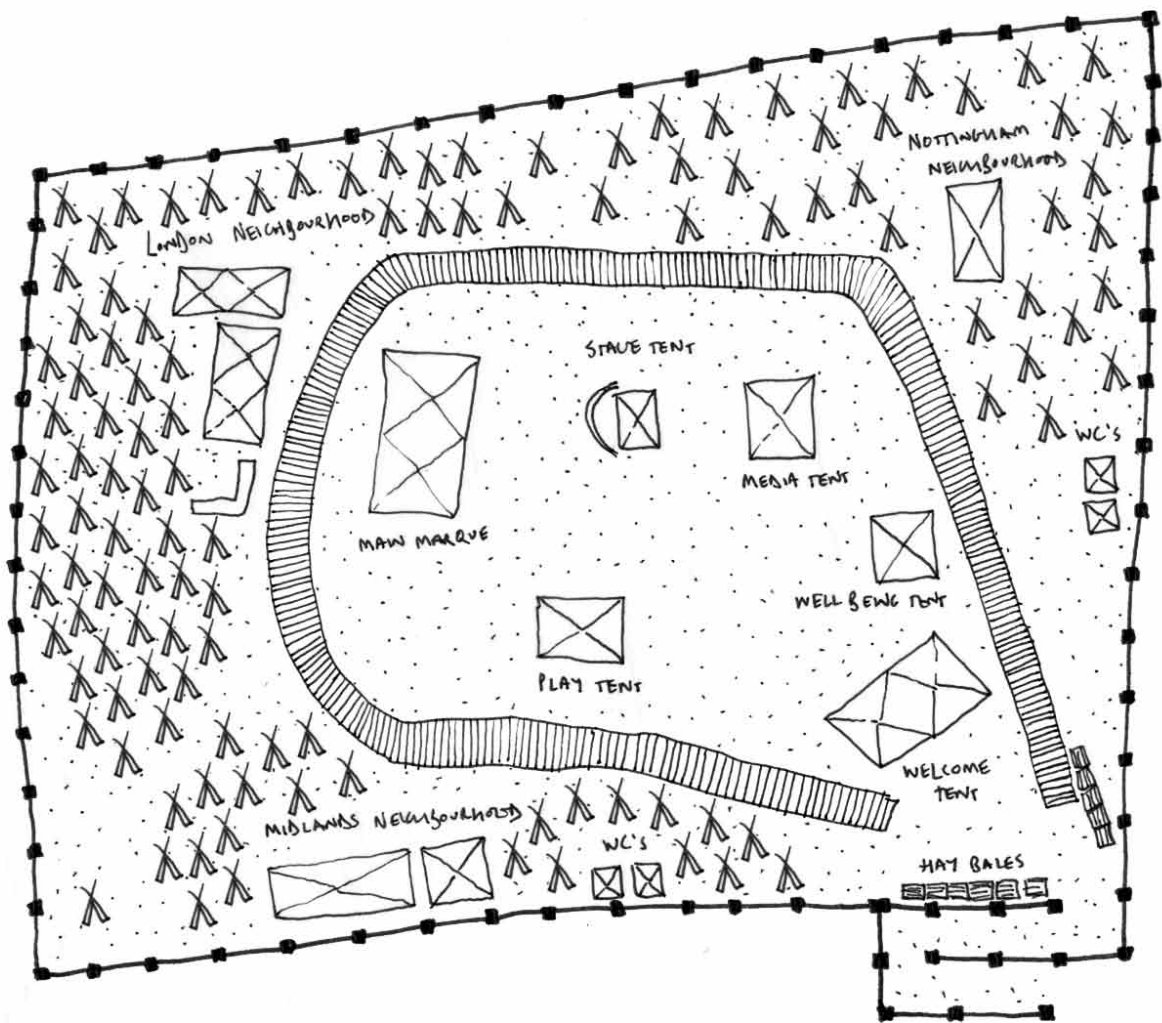


# field:



Agency and the Praxis of Activism

3

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## Agency and the Praxis of Activism

### Editorial

Cristina Cerulli and Florian Kossak

<sup>1</sup> See p.15 for further context.

'Activism is about attitude made manifest through actions and behaviour.'<sup>1</sup>

Leslie Kanés Weisman

The majority of essays in this issue of *field: Agency and the Praxis of Activism* were initially presented at the AGENCY conference, held in Sheffield in November 2008. This event was conceived and produced by the *agency* a then recently formed research center at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield. *Agency* emerged from the convergence of work by staff and researchers in and around the subject of architectural practice and education that was critical of normative values and processes, wanting to propose alternatives and to explore how architectural practice and education might evolve. The name *agency*, potentially provocative, was chosen to give an immediate sense of the research in the group being active, engaged, and outward looking. It implies change, with a hint of subversive irony. *Agency's* strap line 'Transformative Research into Architectural Practice and Education', expands this notion of being active and 'transformative' and suggests a research activity that both creates and responds to shifting conditions. 'Instead of remaining passively (and safely) contained within our academic environments, the group members see themselves as 'agents' acting both within and between the fields of research, practice, education, and civic life'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Doina Petrescu, Prue Chiles and 'The Agency'. Agency: alternative practices and alternative worlds. *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 13, pp.109-111.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Agency' research group, 2009. Before and After AGENCY. *Footprint: Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice*, 04, 113-122.

<sup>4</sup> Architectural Humanities Research Association. See also: <http://www.ahra-architecture.org/>

Organising the conference and curating its rich fringe programme was for the group an act of agency in itself.<sup>3</sup> By choosing 'agency' as a theme and by designing the format of the conference and its fringe events to maximise informal and non-hierarchical exchanges between all participants, including students, *agency* hoped that the contributions to the conference, which also doubled up as fifth AHRA International Conference<sup>4</sup>, would strengthen the relationships between the humanities, the architectural profession, and society. The *agency* group called for contributions that would help to understand what is meant by 'action' in the different contexts of research and practice and what kinds of activities and conditions are relevant, what prevents the reflective exercise of agency in this fuller sense, and what the necessary tactics for action might be.

<sup>5</sup> The Agency' research group, Before and After AGENCY. In: *Footprint: Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice*, 04, (2009) pp113-122; at: <http://www.footprintjournal.org/issues/show/5>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Kossak, F. et al., *Agency: Working with Uncertain Architectures* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Doina Petrescu, Prue Chiles and 'The Agency'. Agency: alternative practices and alternative worlds. *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 13, pp.109-111.

The conference also wanted to address the question of responsibility of the architectural profession and research community originating from their power to act on behalf of others; *agency's* position was that 'the role of architects and academics cannot be neutral' and that 'if played out uncritically it reverts to the interests of those in power'<sup>5</sup> and it sought responses to this position by asking, in the call for contributions, 'What is the social and political responsibility of the architect?'.<sup>6</sup> The papers presented at the conference provided insights into the notion of agency and proposed novel approaches to the issue of practice, broadly falling under four categories: 'urban agencies, pedagogical agencies, social and technological agencies, sustainability, ecology, ethical and aesthetic agencies'.<sup>7</sup>

The Agency conference and, through it, its topic have been documented and critically reflected upon in a number of ways and various outlets. The *agency research group* have written a critical review of the conference, from its conception, its implementation and legacy for another online magazine, *footprint*.<sup>8</sup> Contributions to the conference were published in groupings with different emphasis and readerships: the book *Agency: Working with Uncertain Architectures*,<sup>9</sup> a special issue of *Architectural Research Quarterly*<sup>10</sup> and finally in this issue of *field*.

*field: Agency and the Praxis of Activism* has a very particular emphasis on the notion of activism and what this can mean for an architectural praxis. The forms of activism within architecture are numerous and this issue of *field*: can only offer a snapshot of the broad range of activist approaches, organisations or projects within a contemporary architectural praxis or its rich history.

Any contemporary praxis and theory of such activism dwells hereby on a rich history of groups and individuals that have been and are engaged in exerting agency through activism within the built environment and with or through architecture in particular. It is a praxis that is too often, deliberately, neglected by any mainstream history and portrayal of our discipline and profession. Yet it is also a praxis that is gaining (again?) relevance within academic discourse and education, through an increased presence in any form of media – from exhibitions to websites, from journals to books, but also and most importantly, through a surge of often small yet powerful activist architectural practices.

What these activist practices within architecture have in common are their political approach to architecture, the understanding that architecture and the act of designing, of shaping our environment cannot be apolitical. Architecture is understood as a political act and the praxis of architectural activism aims to change its politics. This can be done through the specific way one operates, for whom one works and, of course, with what kind of projects one engages. In most cases it will not only be a reactive form of engagement, as found so often in mainstream architectural practice, but it is a proactive praxis, one that actively seeks out opportunity of exerting agency. It is, further, a praxis that is in many cases educational, whether within an institutional set-up like a university, or through projects that seek to enable and empower others in transforming their environment. All essays selected for this issue of *field*: deal in one form or another with the issue outlined above.

Leslie Kanes Weisman, one of the keynote speakers of the AGENCY conference, responds to questions regarding the various formats of activism that she has been involved in throughout her life ranging from the development of Universal Design as one form of 'applied' activism to her most recent involvement in local politics, as well as the change from being an educator activist to a being a politician. Underpinning Leslie's

story is the constant hunger for social justice, which is the engine of all her work, from the Women's School of Planning and Architecture in the 1970s, to Sheltering Ourselves: A Women's Learning Exchange to her recent involvement in politics.

John Jordan, also a keynote speaker at the AGENCY conference, is contributing with a piece that exemplifies his activist art praxis of directly intervening, attempting to *transform the problem not illustrate it* and that wants to change things rather than represent them. This piece, *Think like a Forest, Act like a Meadow*, is a call to embrace a permaculture approach to how we live our lives. The original piece is in the format of a pack of cards, that we have adapted to the format of a journal to improve legibility. Jordan's contribution is put into the wider context of his work as an artist activist through an excerpt of essay by Ariadna Aston.

Melanie Bax uses four voices (action, information, reflection and drifting) to share her experience of taking part in the 2009 Climate Camp and her reflection on the appropriateness and effectiveness of temporary camp as a tool for activists.

Kim Trogal and Sam Vardy reflect on a workshop with activist Brian Holmes and sociologist Anne Querrien set out to question the relationship between *resistance, activism and architectural research and practice*. Issues emerged from the workshop are, in particular, the agency of architecture and practice and possible forms of action in architecture.

In her essay *Advocacy? Three Modes of Operation for the Activist Architect*, Georgette Theodore proposes a re-reading of Paul Davidoff's advocacy planning from 1965 to define a proactive alternative to traditional professional practice. Using three projects by her own planning and research practice Interboro as examples Theodore, explores the notion of the advocacy planner and her new tools (*choose a cause*), including a model of project initiation that occurs without a client (*create a constituency*) and techniques of adding agendas into a project that are external to the goals of the client (*add an agenda*).

Through discussing Nomadic Kitchen, an interstitial sculptural structure that becomes a place of dialogue for residents in a Brazilian favela, Mick O'Kelly demonstrates how art strategies like Urban Negotiations can create a place of agency between participants. O'Kelly also explores the potential limits of art production as an urgent action in creating an aesthetic-ethical-spatial-politics.

In *Territori in Circolo: Architectural Praxis for the Survival of Rural Communities in the Italian Mezzogiorno*, Daniele Vadala' presents an architectural praxis for the survival of marginalised rural communities, threatened by environmental degradation and economic decline. By sharing resources and creating a highly interconnected system, a number of communities in the Calabrian *green desert* are working towards building a sustainable future.

Drawing on personal experience with Architects 4 Aid and Architecture Sans Frontier Andrew Powell reflects on the *Educational Possibilities of Humanitarian Architecture*. He asks the question how an activist praxis in very specific situations within countries like Kenya, Romania or Thailand could have an invaluable influence on the transformation of architectural education, and consequently architectural practice, in the UK.

James Benedict Brown and Tom Warren report from an ongoing local campaign around the closure and reopening of a Community Pool in Govanhill, Glasgow, putting this struggle in relation to the long Glaswegian

tradition of tenants' strikes and fights for social justice.

*Homepage: Internet Activism and Women* by Sarah Considine critically questions the possibilities of the 'virtual space' of the web as a space for activism. Her focus is hereby on female or feminist activism and presenting a range of different examples of usage of this space, from direct action to communication and from journalism to education.

In his essay *Agency and the gift of architecture* Tim Gough, explores the notion of agency as ability to act and, examining an early written building contract, he starts to question the role of the architect as agent, framing the architect as a potential *unnecessary burden* and a financial and moral parasite on the *real* act of construction. Gough also explores the concept of the agent/architect in relation to Saint Paul's notion of sin and potential salvation, linked to the *gift* by Badiou, speculating on what the nature of an architectural gift might be.

While all articles in this issue of *field:* are reflecting on or theorizing about the praxis of activism in architecture in one form or another, and in doing so are also able to exert agency through the discourse they produce, a praxis of activism is indeed about the action, about doing, about challenging and reframing the existing. So once you finished reading this journal – get out and do.

**Acknowledgements:** The conference AGENCY on which this issue of *field:* is based was conceived by the Agency research center and was the 7th AHRA International Conference. We want to thank the University of Sheffield and the School of Architecture for hosting and supporting this event; all sessions chairs, speakers and contributors to this conference; and the numerous MArch students without whose help this could not have been organised.

We further like to thank all contributors to this issue, the *field:* review collective for their constructive work, Nishat Awan for her editing and proof reading work. This issue would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Jordan J. Lloyd to get this issue into shape. Most of all we would like to thank our colleagues in Agency for their support and critical presence.



## Essays



## ‘Educator, Activist, Politician’

Leslie Kanes Weisman in conversation with Cristina Cerulli and Florian Kossak

Interview conducted by phone on the 8th December 2009

C+K: Cristina Cerulli + Florian Kossak  
W: Leslie Kanes Weisman

**C+K: We just thought we’d tell you where we’re sitting. We’re sitting in Florian’s house, at the kitchen table, soft lights and a glass of German wine! Obviously it’s already pitch dark outside.**

W: That sounds pretty nice!

**C+K: Where are you sitting?**

W: I’m sitting in my home office. it’s a little second storey cupola that overlooks Long Island Sound and a very beautiful sunset at the moment. I’m not drinking anything but water, but a glass of Long Island wine is waiting for me.

**C+K: That sounds pretty good too. You’re making us jealous!**

W: It’s a pretty wonderful place to live and work.

**C+K: There are three main topics that we wanted to talk to you about in this interview and in relation to our issue on agency and activism. We would like to learn more about Universal Design as one form of ‘applied’ activism. We also want to talk about your most recent involvement in local politics and how this changed your work from an educator activist to a politician. But we would like to start with what you called the feminist experiment of the Women’s School of Planning and Architecture, or WSPA.**

**Here at the School of Architecture of the University of Sheffield we have a very interesting situation. Our intake of undergraduate students is now more than 50% female**

**and almost 50% of our staff is female as well. And as you have probably gathered from the Agency conference, some of our approaches to teaching have feminist backgrounds or their roots in feminist theory and praxis. So we have already come a long way in this very male dominated profession. Having a strong group of female teachers within the School certainly changes the atmosphere and also how and what we teach. However, this is certainly still a long way away from what the WSPA stood for, a School of Planning and Architecture for women, run by women. But it was certainly also a very different time. So can we start with asking you how different the general situation in academia was when you set up WSPA in 1974?**

- W: It was dramatically different. It helps to understand the historical context in the USA in which the School emerged. In the 1970's the percentage of women in architecture, was very small, maybe 8 percent. While women in practice were relatively scarce, in the academic world we numbered only a fraction of one percent. There were very few women students. The Women's School of Planning and Architecture emerged because of the resurgence of the women's movement in the U.S in the 1960's and 1970's. During those decades professional women's groups and organizations were being formed in virtually all the male dominated professions – from women in law and medicine to science and engineering. All of these groups were not only questioning what we could do to increase our numbers, but also how to go about discovering and defining the particular qualities, values and concerns that we as women could bring to our chosen work and professions. WSPA offered women in architecture, planning, and the related environmental design professions and trades – be they students, faculty, or practitioners – a personally supportive and non-judgemental environment in which to explore serious questions about our work. **Could our experiences of marginality as women in male-dominated fields help us work more effectively with women and other marginalized groups as potential clients?** Could architecture actually serve the greater good? How could we transform traditional architectural education and practice to make it welcoming to women? Did women experience buildings and places differently than men? What did female headed single parents need in the way of supportive housing? How could we synthesize the teaching and practice of architecture as a social art and a formal art?

I began the co-founding of WSPA as a seasoned activist. Having been born and raised in Detroit, a city which has its roots predominantly in African-American culture, I became exposed to social justice issues at a very early age. My activism began with the civil rights movement. I was very fortunate to have progressive parents who not only encouraged me to look at the horrible consequences of racism, but took pride in my participation in anti-racism demonstrations. My father, who was an attorney, bailed me out of jail on more than one occasion! [laughter]. And because my family is Jewish, my childhood awareness of anti-Semitism probably fostered an ability to empathize with other victims of discrimination.

In the late 1960's I discovered another 'ism.' The women's movement raised my consciousness about the pervasive sexism that defined and limited women's lives and aspirations. I became

involved in the founding of a local Michigan chapter of NOW - the National Organisation for Women, which was the most important and powerful organized force in the US demanding social justice for women – from reproductive freedom to equal pay for equal work. For me sexism seemed like just another manifestation of the same patriarchal system in which those in power, typically affluent white males, marginalize and segregate those who are not. I never believed that any one group -- be it women, African Americans, those with low incomes, or gay people - had a monopoly on being the victims of oppression. Feminism as I defined it was simply about striving to create a world in which human differences were respected and valued and all people world be treated with human decency and dignity.

During those same years, in fact it was 1968, I got a part-time teaching appointment in the School of Architecture, at the University of Detroit, an all male, Jesuit-run university. **The only other woman in the entire architecture and engineering building was the secretary – that included students!** Despite the fact that I felt incredibly isolated and lonely, I quickly discovered that I really loved teaching. Thus began my academic career. Fast forward to 1974 when I received a phone call from some women graduate students studying architecture at Washington University in St Louis. They were older students and self-proclaimed feminists who were desperately looking for some women role models. How they tracked me down and found other women academic and practicing architects from around the country I don't know. But they did and they invited us all to participate in a conference that they would put together if we would come. To my knowledge, it was the first conference of women architects ever held in the US. Of course I went and as a result I met three of the women with whom I would co-found the Women's School of Planning and Architecture. At the end of the day when all of the various conference panels and workshops were over (I remember I was on a panel called 'Role Conflicts Experienced by Women in Architecture) four of us went out for a drink at a bar and we started chatting and it was just so comfortable and exhilarating being in a room with women colleagues who understood what it felt like to be a minority. We talked about our experiences with sexist treatment in our respective workplaces. We just couldn't stop talking! I looked around and said 'What we really need is a School of our own, an environment in which we can freely explore how the teaching and practice of architecture can be transformed to embody the political values that we hold as a feminists. They all accused me of being absolutely crazy and I said 'Well yes, that I will admit to, but nevertheless will you participate if I make it happen?' and they said 'Yes,' and probably expected never to hear from me again.

Long story short – the three women I at met in St. Louis contacted a few more women they knew and together seven of us joined forces to co-found WSPA. The logistics of organizing were all the more difficult because of our geographical diversity. One co-founder was from San Francisco, one was from Vermont, two were from New York City, I was in Detroit, and two were living in Cambridge, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> The entire group never met face to face until the opening of the very first session in Biddeford Maine.<sup>2</sup> We organized via phone calls and long letters to each other, pre-E Mail era. I flew from city to city to meet with everyone in small groups. My father drafted a simple legal partnership agreement that we all signed. Each of us put up

<sup>1</sup> WSPA co-founders were Katrin Adam, Ellen Perry Berkeley, Noel Phyllis Birkby, Bobbie Sue Hood, Marie I. Kennedy, Joan Forrester Sprague and Leslie Kanes Weisman.

<sup>2</sup> This first session took place in 1975 at St Joseph's College in Biddeford, Maine. Further WSPA sessions were held at Stephenson College at University of California in Santa Cruz, (1976); Roger Williams College in Bristol, Rhode Island (1978); Regis College in Denver, Colorado (1979); and in Washington, DC (1981)

some seed money in accordance with her financial means to handle the publications and advertising, the insurance and rental fees and other costs. WSPA's co-founders held different views about many things, and none of us would have agreed upon a specific definition of feminism. But one thing was clear to all of us; WSPA would not duplicate what was available in a traditional academic setting. I think we each understood -at least I certainly did – that form, content, and context have to have a kind of consistency. You can teach feminist subjects in a traditional university setting where you still have to do grading and adhere to a regular semester schedule. **But you can't transform the behaviour and identity of those who are being educated without the personal transformation that can only come from placing academic knowledge within the powerful framework of personally meaningful experience.** At least that was my basic premise.

**C+K: How did you structure this school and how did you teach in order too achieve this transformation of behaviour?**

W: We decided that we needed an environment in which we could be completely free to explore ways of teaching and learning together, without the traditional distance and distinction between 'teacher' and 'student.' We drew upon the experiences and expertise of every 'participant.' In fact the 'faculty' were also participants. We limited enrolment to about fifty so that everyone would get to know everyone else during our two week residential summer programs. We scheduled classes and events so that we didn't form cliques. Participants all enrolled in one of six possible primary or 'core courses,' each of which was team-taught by two co-founders. Every one of the six core course we offered was scheduled to overlap at least once with each of the other core courses in a joint session. And each core course organized an 'all school session' in the evening. That way everyone participated in learning some aspect of the entire curriculum, including the co-founders who we referred to as coordinators. We did a lot of creative things to foster self-direction and personal empowerment, and to avoid the authoritarian teacher-driven learning experience. For instance, we put up a 10 foot long wall calendar for scheduling courses and events. The calendar contained a very large grid noting each day with 24 hour time slots. Core courses were fixed. But everyone was free to go up to the calendar and enter changes and additions anywhere in that grid. For example, if the weather was especially nice, a class might change locations and meet at the beach and just note it on the calendar. If someone wanted to have a discussion on a particular topic at eleven o'clock at night in the dorm lounge, they just entered that information into the calendar without having to ask the 'person in charge.' Whoever wanted to go just showed up. Everyone checked the calendar all the time.

**C+K: But what was the actual content of these courses? Did you throw the curriculum of traditional architecture schools completely overboard or did you translate course content from a traditional architectural education into these new frameworks of operation?**

W: We offered courses based on the issues or subjects that each of the co-founders, and the other coordinators/'faculty' who joined us after our first summer session, wanted to explore. In that sense our curriculum was very 'self-serving.' It was designed to benefit the co-founders/coordinators as much as the other

participants. That's why we were able to say 'We don't need to be paid or make money on the school because the pay-off is going to be in professional and personal growth.' Our goal was to break even financially so that our out-of-pocket administrative and on-campus residency expenses were reimbursed, which we were able to do for each of the sessions that were held.

For example, co-founder Ellen Perry Berkeley, who was an architectural journalist writing for several well-known professional magazines, investigated and taught architectural criticism and writing to critique high style buildings from the user's perspective, well before the now familiar post-occupancy evaluations were being conducted or discussed. I co-taught a course with Phyllis Birkby called 'Women and the Built Environment,' in which we asked the participants to draw their ideal fantasy environments, after going through a guided meditation exercise that we had scripted. Phyllis was an artist as well as an architect and I had some training in art therapy. After the drawings were done, each participant verbally explained their images and the group responded, pointing out comparisons with their own and other drawings. Through this subjective analytical process, we began to learn about the environmental factors that made women feel safe and comfortable or threatened and fearful. So in a way we were involved in environmental psychology before the field was named and established.

**C+K: So the WSPA was a complementary institution or would you rather say that it wasn't an institution at all.**

**W:** It depends on how you define institution. We never wanted to become a full-time degree granting program. Permanence was never a goal either. WSPA was more like an 'intellectual' summer camp. Each session took place in rented facilities on a different college campus that was chosen very carefully with several criteria in mind. We varied the geographic locations to encourage enrolment from all parts of the US and Canada and to balance the travel costs for participants and coordinators. We picked places that had really beautiful natural landscapes that were tranquil, rich in historic and vernacular architecture, and near local communities with women's organizations and neighbourhood groups that we could involve in our curriculum. For instance when we were on the west coast in California, we studied architectural projects that used alternative energy like solar heating, geo-thermal, even aqua-culture. We also deliberately chose campuses that had very bland architecture because we wanted to be able to transform the neutrality of our surroundings into a space of our own by covering the walls with the photos, writings and drawings we developed during the session. WSPA sessions were designed for both recreation and the 're-creation' of everyone who participated - personally, professionally and spiritually.

**C+K: How crucial was it then in that respect that the WSPA was in fact a women's only summer camp, that it was not only the content that came exclusively from women, but that the participants within it or the students were also exclusively women?**

**W:** It was absolutely at the epicentre of the entire creation of the School. During the seventies there was a very different dynamic among women when men were present. That's still true today to a certain extent, though less dramatically so. WSPA offered

the same sort of experience as exclusively women's colleges; an environment in which women could be completely themselves without gender roles playing a part. In these settings women are not competing with men and are not expected to suppress their abilities or thoughts. We wanted WSPA to provide a safe and supportive space in which women were not the minority; where they could discover what they had to say to each other and how to take what they learned and bring it back into their own lives and work. So WSPA offered a welcomed respite. **It was temporary separatism directed toward enhancing personal empowerment and professional confidence in the 'real world' we all returned to after each session.**

**C+K: How much was this an experiment of its time? Do you feel that it still would have relevance today? Could the Women's School of Planning and Architecture still exist today? Is there still a need for it? And if so, how would it differ today?**

**W:** There is no question that WSPA resulted from the times in which it existed. It was never really envisioned as a permanent school. In fact we co-founders planned WSPA so that the administration and teaching of summer sessions would be taken over by other women participants so that we would not have to remain the core leadership group indefinitely. And this did happen to some extent. But the fact is that as others came in and replaced us, the school sessions became more and more conventional. But maybe more importantly, after seven years of experiencing what WSPA had to offer, many of us got what we needed from WSPA, -- an enhanced confidence and sense of purpose that enabled us to create personally and professionally relevant and meaningful work for ourselves in the greater world at large. A lot of innovative and exciting spin-offs resulted from WSPA -- from the creation of a women's development corporation and all women's architectural practices, to scholarly work that included research and new courses on women and environments that were taught in traditional university programs, and a number of pioneering books like my own first book *Discrimination by Design*.<sup>3</sup> So when WSPA finally began to peter out, I thought that was exactly what we had always intended for it to do. When it wasn't relevant to those who were prepared to put in the effort it took to run it, at that point, then it wouldn't be. Although the WSPA experience would still have been very valuable and relevant for women in architecture and planning during the 1980's, the co-founders needed to move on and no one else was available to fill the void.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> The archives of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture are housed in the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History Manuscripts at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

I moved on, with my sister WSPA co-founder Katrin Adam, to create another 'women's school' in the 1980's, *Sheltering Ourselves: A Women's Learning Exchange*. SOWLE was a grassroots, Cincinnati, Ohio-based international educational forum on housing and economic development for low-income women and their families. SOWLE's 'learning exchanges' were designed in a variety of accessible formats that included conferences, colloquia, classes in home maintenance and repair, housing and neighbourhood tours, and a computer-based network of women and women's organizations involved in housing, economic development and community organizing throughout North America. Our participants included women of all ages and racial and economic backgrounds -- academics, architects, planners, developers, builders, neighbourhood organizers and residents of public housing. SOWLE is now



inactive but lasted well into the late 1990's,

As for today? Yes I think that what WSPA offered would still be relevant and valuable to women, but the need is certainly not as widespread or as urgent as it was almost 40 years ago! Perceptions and expectations have changed. Although the number of woman in architecture schools and practices still varies greatly, it's no longer surprising to find women in these roles and today both young women and men expect each other to have careers and to be wage earners. But I think the most interesting difference is that opportunities for socially responsible architectural education and practice are readily available in many traditional degree granting programs and in innovative educational initiatives like the Global Studio, founded by WSPA alumna Professor Anna Rubbo of the University of Sydney in Australia. Today we live in a global society in which international students in our schools and international collaboration and team work in practice is becoming the norm. And with it, the kind of respect and valuing of human diversity both in the profession and among our 'clients' that WSPA fostered is also increasing. I think that today the notion of multi-cultural, 'human-centered' architectural education and practice is more compelling than a gender-based approach.

**C+K: How did you personally operate at that time? Were you still part of an architecture school or in academia or did you form a practice somewhere? How did you run this kind of operation?**

**W:** WSPA was co-founded in 1974 and our first session was held in 1975, the year I moved from Detroit to New York City to become an Associate Professor and founding faculty member at a new School of Architecture at Newark College of Engineering, which then became known as the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Starting up a new accredited degree program as a full-time academic was almost as exciting and challenging as creating and running WSPA. Both were labours of love but my NJIT salary paid the bills! WSPA wasn't meant to be a full-time preoccupation, although it certainly became that for me and a number of other co-founders. Like many activist educators and practitioners, we had two full-time jobs I fell into teaching quite by accident as a young, married woman right out of school, and discovered that I absolutely loved it. And so I never pursued practicing architecture, other than through pro-bono services that my students and I provided through my service-learning courses. I quickly found out that for me, finding ways to use design thinking and processes to foster the unique creative potential in each of my students was as important, or perhaps even more important, than teaching 'architecture.' Educational theory in general and the development of feminist pedagogy specifically became the focus of my teaching and scholarly work as an architectural educator. Over the years I worked very hard at developing methods and opportunities for my students to discover for themselves their own ways of learning, thinking, designing, and contributing as future architects. In essence, I became an educator who used architecture as a vehicle for social justice and for community activism.

**C+K: I think many of us, particularly within the Agency group, could completely subscribe to that. I'm just curious that you just said you never practised architecture. I think**

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Kanes Weisman 'Diversity by Design: Feminist Reflections on the Future of Architectural Education and Practice' in *The Sex of Architecture*, Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman, eds. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996) pp.273-286.

**quite a number of us would actually argue that this is our practice of architecture and that we are practising architecture. Obviously it is not building buildings or designing them, but we nevertheless see what we do as an architectural practice. Could you subscribe to this view or does practising architecture mean building buildings?**

**W:** Of course I share this view! I spent decades trying to expose students to the diverse ways they could use their architectural educations when most educators were focused exclusively on teaching tectonics – the formal art of designing and constructing buildings. I wanted students to understand that serving society and being involved in design practice are not mutually exclusive. Of course being a good designer was considered the highest form of accomplishment in architectural school. Socially meaningful work that did not always require or result in the production of a work of architecture was seen as second-rate. I had an enormously difficult time all those years ago, convincing the university and my own colleagues that my sort of teaching was a legitimate form of scholarship and practice. Some of them scoffed at my work as marginal at best and irrelevant at worst; but there were some who praised it as the most important thing that architects and educators could be doing. Few academic architects were writing about the social art of architecture. Today things are quite different. Service learning is generally recognized and respected as a valuable part of an architectural education; and there is a significant body of published literature on the subject. In many architectural schools and programs around the world, including University of Sheffield, it is formalised within the curriculum and recognised within the promotion and tenure process.

**C+K:** **You called yourself an educator first, but you also said earlier that you came from an activist background, and maybe one is never just one or the other. I wondered whether you could give us some kind of clues as to what your understanding is of an activist within architecture or within architectural education. What is your understanding of activism in relation to architecture and its praxis?**

**W:** For me it's almost impossible to separate activism from education because I've spent so many years synthesising them in my work, be it at WSPA or SOWLE or within traditional academe. There are those who would still argue, if they were being honest, that the role of the architect is to produce beautiful formal works of high style architecture and that the client is a means to that end. For these architects and educators, the impact of buildings and spaces on people is not the driving motivation for their work. The activist educator/practitioner finds as much or even greater meaning in using her or his skills to enhance the quality of human life, especially for those who have the least, even if that means a very modest or even no formal architectural solution. But that choice is certainly easier for salaried faculty to make than it is for practitioners who have to make a living through commissions and can 'afford' just so many pro bono projects. I have always viewed architecture as a socially embedded discipline and practice, but I don't see why that needs to be at odds with a love of the formal art of architecture. Perhaps there is a parallel between how I define feminism and how I view activist education and practice. My feminist and activist consciousness may have begun with

my involvement in social change movements, but over the years that consciousness has been transformed into a way of being and behaving in the world; into a set of ethics and values that permeate everything I do, every interaction I have with every person, whether it's a student or a colleague or someone who's bagging groceries in the grocery store. **Activism is about attitude made manifest through actions and behaviour.** I couldn't actually imagine stepping over a homeless person sleeping on a city street as though they were not there. **I couldn't imagine walking on a beach without carrying a bag to put trash in. It just wouldn't occur to me not to stoop down and pick up a piece of litter.** One 'wears' a feminist/activist perspective almost like a pair of glasses, like corrective lenses through which one sees and understands the world, and how physical space, social space and built space reflect and rebound upon each other.

**C+K: One would imagine that these corrective lenses led you also to your considerations about Universal Design, which is the second larger topic that we would like to discuss here. You previously mentioned social injustice and inequalities and Universal Design certainly is one form of addressing this. Could we start with summarising the most crucial aspects of universal design?**

**W:** Sure. I became active in the disability rights movement when I learned that my university campus, like many others in the US, was not compliant with Section 504.<sup>6</sup> As was the case with African Americans and women, demands for civil rights by people with disabilities resulted in a number of laws directed toward the elimination of discriminatory barriers to equal access in the US, Canada, the UK, and elsewhere. The connection between my work in architectural education, the design of buildings and public spaces, and creating social justice for people with disabilities was obvious and immediate.

The disability rights movement evolved into the universal design movement when it became clear that passing and enforcing laws did not produce good design that gracefully integrated people with disabilities into the public realm. It only created compliance with the letter of the law, not the spirit of the law. For example, In 1990, the Americans with Disability Act was passed in the US. Compliance with the resultant building codes produced ugly add-ons like ramps that were stigmatizing and segregating. Universal design goes beyond disability. It strives to create products and places designed to support human diversity by affording equal comfort, access and functionality for people with different levels of abilities to the greatest extent possible.– from tall people to short people, fat people to thin people, people with, cultural differences and different language skills and literacy levels. When universal design criteria are properly applied, they are invisible. For example, a zero threshold entrance to a building that's achieved by using a landscape plan with a slight change in grade instead of entering a building using two systems - a ramp and set of stairs - provides the same entrance for everyone. No one would think it was designed for wheelchair access. Universal design seeks to eliminate segregating people by creating design solutions that can be used by many. Universal designers in all fields see design as a means of achieving and supporting human equity, which of course appeals to me as the penultimate synthesis of my work as an activist architectural educator.

<sup>6</sup> Section 504 of the US Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 is a civil rights law with the purpose to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability in buildings and programs or events that are financially supported by the Federal government.

**C+K: Would you say that this is coming from your feminist background, that there is a very strong feminist tradition behind this way of approaching design?**

W: Yes, I think there's a definite relationship. Many would define feminism as equality for women. And they would not be wrong. But I have always believed that in a patriarchal system dominated by affluent white males, no one group has a monopoly on being the victim of discrimination! I don't think feminism is about women getting an equal piece of a poisonous pie. I want another recipe. My definition of feminism, which is shared by others, has always been concerned with all forms of oppression – be it based on gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, age, or disability. I prefer the concept of equity to the concept of equality, which suggests sameness. We don't all need the same things, and our needs change throughout our lives. Equity means that people have what they need when they need it. So yes, universal design is certainly linked to feminism in so far as both incorporate an inclusive approach to achieving human dignity and human equity.

**C+K: How much has been achieved through Universal Design up until today? We obviously still encounter a lot of newly built buildings where Universal Design is certainly not put in place. But do you feel that there have already been a few steps made in the right direction?**

W: Yes I certainly do. Today universally designed graphics and products are being widely used. For example, it's now common place to find informational and directional signage in public buildings and places that are universally understood, regardless of literacy level, cognitive ability, or culture. Multi-lingual and multi-sensory ATM machines are another example. In people's homes it's common today to find electrical rocker switches and single lever door handles and kitchen and bathroom faucets that work equally well for those who are left or right handed, and those with small, large, or arthritic hands and poor grip. Each year there are a growing number of international and local conferences in countries around the world, dedicated to creating universally designed communities and buildings. New books are coming out all the time on universally designed housing in languages from Japanese and Swedish to English and Spanish. The Centre for Human Centred Design in Boston, formerly known as Adaptive Environments, hosts a terrific website with a growing international collection of UD case studies of buildings and public spaces that document best practices for reference by designers, educators, students and others.<sup>7</sup> But even though one could point to a number of excellent buildings, parks and playgrounds that are universally designed, generally speaking, incorporating universal design principles into architectural practice is still mostly the result of the values and consciousness of the individual architect. Sometimes clients still wrongly associate UD with prosthetic devices like ramps, which are designed to serve people with disabilities, which they assume to be only a small percentage of the population. Sometimes they believe that universal design will cost more. Good design doesn't always cost more. But cost, in my mind, should not be measured solely in terms of the value of the dollar. It should also consider the value it brings to human well-being. I am very encouraged by the ever growing inclusion of universal design concepts and principles in the curricula in

<sup>7</sup> See Universal Design Case Studies, <http://www.universaldesigncasestudies.org/> [accessed 2009].

<sup>8</sup> The Universal Design Education Online website, [udeducation.org](http://udeducation.org), contains a variety of outstanding courses, projects and teaching materials for educators and students to use and/or adapt to their own curriculum, including a term project titled 'Universal Design: Beyond the ADA' by Leslie Kanes Weisman, and a four part teaching unit with slides and lecture notes titled 'Tools for Introducing Universal Design' by Elaine Ostroff and Leslie Kanes Weisman)

schools of architecture and landscape architecture. Students who are exposed to UD and encouraged to apply it in their studio projects, will do the same thing when they become practitioners. So there have certainly been strides in the academy that will increasingly show up in the built environment.<sup>8</sup>

There is another aspect of universal design that I think holds great promise. UD education and practice, with its equal emphasis on human comfort and health, and formal aesthetics, has the potential to elevate the value and importance of good design in the public consciousness. Why shouldn't UD principles be used as a tool to create, rather than respond to building codes and standards, which typically have little or nothing to do with good design outcomes?

I can give you an example of what can happen when innovative design becomes the generator of legislation that creates building codes. In the late 1970's I decided to co-teach a 5th year architectural design studio at NJIT with architect Susanna Torre. We chose to work with real clients - a group of midwives living near Eugene, Oregon on the west coast of the US. These women were trying to establish a free-standing natural childbirth centre there. At the time, the natural childbirth movement had just begun to surface as women sought more control over their own bodies and greater choices in childbearing and childbirth. Then there were only two options – home birth or hospital birth with anaesthesia and surgery. There were no natural childbirth centres or birthing suites in hospitals. With our expert 'clients', our design studio developed a new building type that included pre and post-natal care, educational spaces, and a consumer-controlled, home-like setting in which to give birth naturally. Our students came up with several site-specific prototypes and created a large travelling exhibition to educate the public. One of those students was Jan Bishop, a woman who had returned to school to study architecture after the birth of her son, who was severely disabled as a result of birth trauma from a forceps delivery in a hospital. This studio experience clearly had a profound personal and professional impact on Jan. After graduation at the end of the semester, she went on to get a degree in health care and to work for state government as a health care advocate where she lobbied for and wrote the enabling legislation and building codes that would legally establish free standing birth centres and hospital birthing suites in New Jersey, New York, and other US states. Today Jan is one of the most respected practitioners of health care architecture in North America and beyond.

**C+K: A great example how education and activism can be combined. But what made you then go into politics?**

W: Well, I never really thought that I wasn't in politics! *[laughter.]*

**C+K: But could we call you a politician now?**

W: Yes, I suppose so.

**C+K: So how did you get from being an activist in education to being a politician? Or is that still all part of the same praxis?**

W: Well I'm still an activist and I'm still educating others, though it's taking on a different form for now. One of the things I always

encouraged my students to consider was becoming involved in government so that they could influence policies and practices that relate to the built and planned environment. Around 2002 I started to think seriously about practicing what I had been preaching! I had taught for almost 35 years, more than 27 of them at NJIT, where I had helped to shape the School of Architecture from its earliest beginnings into a highly respected degree granting institution offering undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees. I had achieved full professorship, served as Associate Dean, recruited and mentored students, supervised faculty, written curricula, and created many new courses of my own over those years. I am proud of all of that; but I realized that if I was going to stay challenged and fresh I would have to re-create myself within that academic setting yet another time. I decided that maybe I should seriously consider early retirement so that I could put my energies into working on the issues facing the community where I had spent summers and weekends since 1976.

Southold Town lies at the east end of Long Island, about 100 miles from the Greenwich Village apartment in New York City that I lived in during the academic year. The North Fork, as it is also called, is still quite rural with lots of farmland, wineries, open space, and a string of small hamlets dating back to the 1640's. Everywhere you look there are beautiful creeks, wetlands, and bays. But like most beautiful places, Southold is trying to stave off over development and preserve and protect its natural and historic resources. The dunes along Long Island Sound are eroding; pollution is threatening the purity of our fragile local aquifer. There is a serious shortage of affordable, workforce housing and jobs, which are mostly to be found in tourism, fishing and farming. The population was around 21,000 when the 2000 census was taken, but the numbers always swell in the summer months causing increased traffic and noise. It's a place worth fighting to save and a place where planning and architectural skills will make all the difference in succeeding.

So in 2002 I submitted my resume to the Town Council, our governing legislative body. The Council appointed me the Chairperson of the Southold Hamlet Stakeholders Committee, a community-based planning group, and as an affordable housing advisory commissioner. Both appointments are without compensation. But I had my retirement benefits and some savings to draw on that made pro-bono service financially possible. I quickly discovered that in a relatively small town like Southold you can have a big impact! Leaving academe was a very hard decision to make, but in 2004 I officially retired from NJIT with Professor Emerita status. Since then I've accepted a few invitations for conference keynote addresses and short term teaching appointments at universities where my work in service learning, feminism and universal design is of particular interest. My work in government has expanded. In 2005 the Southold Town Council appointed me to a paid position as a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals. This year I was promoted from Vice-Chairperson to Chairperson and Department Head of the ZBA. The salary is very modest but the responsibilities are substantial, and I do find the work interesting and worthwhile. I spend a good deal of my time writing legal determinations and code revisions, reviewing surveys, site plans, and architectural drawings, making site inspections, and reading land use case law. My father, who died many years ago, would be very happy about this since he



always wanted me to become a lawyer and join his law practice.

**C+K:** **One could say politics are always about negotiating, about give and take, about the prioritising of agendas. Is there any part of your work, your beliefs, your ideals that were easier to convey and practice as an educator and activist outside these kinds of formalised politics? How much do you have to compromise now being in these more institutional, political settings?**

**W:** Yes to the first question. As an educator/activist who was not part of the political system I was able to be an outspoken and uncensored advocate with an idealistic and principled agenda, both inside and outside of the classroom. In school you can deal with theoretical concerns that get 'messy' when they are confronted by pragmatic 'real world' issues. Teaching students how to balance ideology and applied practice was a central goal in my service learning courses. As an appointed public official who chairs the Zoning Board of Appeals, my role in government is a bit different than the legislative role you have just accurately described played by elected officials. The ZBA is a quasi-judicial body that can grant relief to property owners, where justified, from the Town's zoning laws and codes. We don't write laws; we interpret them based on a state mandated balancing test consisting of six state statutes or criteria. There is some negotiating involved in discussing the amount of relief the Board is willing to grant, which must be the smallest possible deviation from the code. I have been asked countless times by the Democratic Party and many of my neighbours and colleagues to run for election to the Town Council and/or the position of Town Supervisor, the person who chairs the Council. That's sort of like being the Mayor of a village or city. It's the Council members and Supervisor who decide where our taxes go, which projects get funded, and which laws get changed and passed. They decide if and when a comprehensive master plan for Southold Town is adopted and most importantly, implemented through changes in zoning, building codes and other laws. I'm not sure I'm prepared to campaign for either of those positions at this time. With my very progressive values, not being born here - you are still an 'outsider' even if you have been living here for 35 years - and a poorly organized local Democratic Party with insufficient infrastructure in place, the odds of winning against the local, well-funded Republican and Conservative Party majorities are small. But I'm not ruling it out. Perhaps my next move will be to move to the Planning Board. I will find the next step when the next step presents itself. I'm not going to be doing zoning and planning for the rest of my life, that's for sure! When I was deeply involved in the Women's Movement I learned how to live with disappointment, how to be thick-skinned, and how to live with irreconcilable conflicts. These abilities have been invaluable to me in the political arena. I do believe it's possible to find satisfying compromise in life. I mean, I still listen to opera even though many of them are pretty sexist. But the music is glorious, even if the message isn't!

**C+K:** **So what is your favourite operatic libretto?**

**W:** One of them is Mozart's *The Magic Flute* because it's so gender bending and humorous. You have to see the humour in life or you're just going to be a miserable person. Everything is very, very serious when you're younger. But humour is important, even critical, if you're going to be a successful activist for a very

**long time.** Without it, you can become totally burned out and bitter. I saw that happen to a number of brilliant and dedicated feminists who were active in the 1960' and 70's I feel lucky to have always had a strong, practical sense of self-preservation that served as a healthy balance to my penchant for risk-taking in the cause of social justice. Somehow I was able to keep one foot in the centre mainstream where I could provide for myself, and simultaneously, the other in an experimental, creative and marginal place. Each nurtured and informed the other. What I learned from the margins I brought in to my teaching and scholarship in a traditional university setting where I was able to have a real and lasting impact. When I think about the thousands of students I've had contact with, if even a small percentage of them were in some way encouraged to use their talents and their educations to benefit this world by ensuring that people have a decent quality of life; if some have chosen to serve clients that typically can't afford to pay for good architectural design as well as those who can; then I feel I've made much more than a living as an activist architectural educator; I've made a meaningful life for myself from my academic career.

**C+K: That is a wonderful final sentence!**

**W:** And it's not over by the way! [*laughter*].







## Think like a Forest, Act like a Meadow

John Jordan *with an introduction by Ariadna Aston*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The 5th AHRA international conference on the topic of Agency was considered at the same time within a research and a pedagogical framework, being integrated as a Theory Forum in the teaching curricula of the M.Arch course. The Theory Forum takes every year different formats including lectures and workshops by invited (or selected) speakers on topics related to theories and histories of architecture and related fields. Previous Theory Forums were looking into issues of Participation, Space, Technologies of Power, Representation, Indeterminacy, Alternate Currents and generated different books and journal publications. At Agency, students were also involved in the organisation of the event, being able to interact with speakers and doctoral researchers from non hierarchical positions. As part of the Theory Forum assessment, they had to write a critical essay which pursued one of the theoretical themes of the conference, discussing how this theme had an impact on their own work and thinking. The present text is an edited version of one of the 5th year essays which relates to John Jordan's paper at Agency.

- Dr Doina Petrescu, *MArch Humanities Coordinator*, School of Architecture, University of Sheffield

<sup>2</sup> Platform London (2010) <http://www.platformlondon.org/publications.asp> [accessed 7 May 2010].

John Jordan uses art to challenge the current way of thinking by bringing together art and the socialist side of politics. In 1987 he became co-director of the social practice art group 'Platform' combining '... the transformatory power of art with the tangible goals of campaigning, the rigour of in-depth research with the vision to promote alternative futures.'<sup>2</sup> Jordan then went on to co-found the resistance collective 'Reclaim the Streets'. In 2002 he set up the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), merging clowning and civil-disobedience. He has written and lectured about the space between art and activism and co-edited the book 'We Are Everywhere: the irresistible rise of global anticapitalism'.<sup>3</sup> Jordan now works with Climate Camp, a group of volunteers who are concerned about climate change and how to do something about it for our future. Climate Camp<sup>4</sup> have organised events where they set up camps near to places that are contributing to climate change e.g. power stations, airports, and run workshops on how to live more sustainable lives.

Making art that was invisible as art, was important... I was sick of doing performances... where I would inevitably end up talking with audiences about definitions of art and why the weird things I was doing in public was in fact art... what I cared about was what it did. Was it successfully transforming society?<sup>5</sup>

This statement from John Jordan's biographical essay reveals how he wants to use art to make a difference to the world. He wrote this essay as a short text with many detailed footnotes. These footnotes make up most of the essay, and are used to refer to authors, activists and events that have made a statement to the world through activism, some of which Jordan has been a part of. This format reflects John Jordan's methods of using an imaginative mechanism to communicate a message. The main text discusses the notion of 'Library Angels' as a story device in which to base moments during his life supplemented by the footnotes. In this sense he uses the idea of the 'Library Angels' as something unexpected in the way

<sup>3</sup> John Jordan (2010) 'In the Footnotes of Library Angels: A Bi(bli)ography of Insurrectionary Imagination', [http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study\\_Room/guides/John\\_Jordan\\_SRG.html](http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/John_Jordan_SRG.html) [accessed 7 May 2010].

<sup>4</sup> See Melanie Bax' Article 'The Other Side of the Fence' in this issue of field:

<sup>5</sup> John Jordan (2010) 'In the Footnotes of Library Angels: A Bi(bli)ography of Insurrectionary Imagination', [http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study\\_Room/guides/John\\_Jordan\\_SRG.html](http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/John_Jordan_SRG.html) [accessed 7 May 2010].

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> John Jordan (2005), 'Notes Whilst Walking on 'How to Break the Heart of Empire'', <http://transform.eicpp.net/transversal/1007/jordan/en>

<sup>9</sup> Climate Camp (2009) <http://climatecamp.org.uk/node/2> [accessed 7 May 2010].

<sup>10</sup> John Jordan (2010) 'In the Footnotes of Library Angels: A Bi(bli)ography of Insurrectionary Imagination', [http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study\\_Room/guides/John\\_Jordan\\_SRG.html](http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/John_Jordan_SRG.html) [accessed 7 May 2010].

his art activism uses unexpected notions like the army of clowns to express the message he wants to get across but also to instigate change.

As an artist I've never been happy merely communicating the problems; I don't want to make more images that tell the world about the atrocities of war; I don't want to do a durational performance that points out the destruction of the biosphere; I don't want to make art about issues, but in them, with them. I want an art that is immediate, that is embedded in the issues themselves. An art that directly intervenes and attempts to transform the problem not illustrate it. I don't want to represent things but to change them.<sup>6</sup>

He discusses the way that he looked at activism and how to organise it in the form of 'free parties [rather] than boring marches... training demonstrators to behave like circus clowns rather than dangerous anarchists.'<sup>7</sup> He also mentions his work with Reclaim the Streets, where 10,000 people took to the streets of the City in London to create a 'Carnival Against Capital' in 1999. The City became 'filled with the hum of profit and plunder and that for a few hours on that historic day was echoing with the sounds of subversive play and leisure'.<sup>8</sup> This event, like the rest of Jordan's work, uses something surprising to encourage a transformation by demonstrating how different a place can be, how differently society can work. His work with Climate Camp attempts to prove how people can live without damaging the environment. In 2006 the group set up a camp in a field next to Drax, a coal-fired power station in West Yorkshire 'for ten days of learning and sustainable living, which culminated in a day of mass action against the power station. Our aim was to kick-start a social movement to tackle climate change'.<sup>9</sup> Their camp demonstrated how people can live without burning fossil fuels in an attempt to stimulate change. The group is made up of a people with diverse backgrounds and professions learning by doing and through participating together. Consensus decision making is a fundamental part of this group, where each individual takes part in every decision. The group works together as a single unit. This notion may sound difficult to implement but when it works it can help to make every person feel important in the work that the group does. John Jordan believes that working together in this sense can be beneficial:

While Activists have the monopoly on social transformation, artists have the monopoly on creativity, both roles continue the unhealthy division of labour and specialism that our culture requires to separate people from each other and to stop us being self reliant.<sup>10</sup>

## Think Like a Forest, Act Like a Meadow

Like lovers carve their names on trees, the earliest books were engraved on beech bark, hence the origins of the word 'book'- 'boc' meaning 'beech tree'.



Under the canopy of an ancient Athenian olive grove, home to Plato's academy, Phaedrus asked Socrates why he never ventured beyond the city walls into the countryside. 'I'm a lover of learning' Socrates answered, 'trees and open country won't teach me anything, whereas men in the town will.' The grove was later chopped down to make siege machines.

The soundtrack of western 'civilisation' is the noise of the book of nature being slammed shut and the rumble of war machines approaching. We are told that Nature is mute, it has nothing to teach us, except that it is a battlefield of all against all. But as the war against our climate and ecosystems tips the physiology of the planet into chaos, the myth that Nature is just 'red in tooth and claw', is unravelling.

The more we study the living world the more we come to realise that the tendency is actually to associate, build relationships, and cooperate. From trees that work with fungi to share sugars and information between themselves to bees pollinating flowers, nature abounds with reciprocity. The fittest are in fact those that relate the best. Perhaps it's no surprise that a culture that rewards greed and domination would rather we forget the true lessons of the natural world.

## Permaculture

Permaculture is an ecological design system whose central tenet is that by observing the way ecosystems such as a forest or meadow work, we can learn to build human habitats that are energy efficient, resilient, waste free and productive. Described by some as 'the art of creating beneficial relationships' and by others as 'the science of connections', Permaculture merges traditional wisdom with contemporary ecological research. The idea of mimicking the patterns of natural systems can be applied to everything from planting edible landscapes to the way a performance is designed, from organising an act of creative resistance to putting on a wild party.

Neoliberal economist Milton Friedman, one of the architects of the collapse once said: 'Only a crisis produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around.' Permaculture is one of the many post-capitalist ideas emerging from the margins: it's a revolution disguised as gardening. At the heart of Permaculture are four interdependent ethics that frame a set of attitudes and principles, each of which encapsulates the complex wisdom of

ecosystem design. What you have in your hands is a set of 13 of these, it's a tool box of common sense, use it as wisely as a forest would.

## Observe, Connect and Interact

Perhaps we are allowing the world to be wrecked not because we are evil or stupid, but simply because in our haste we no longer notice that we are part of it. In this society of speed, nature is the thing out there that flashes past our windshield; something alien and separate which needs saving, but that we don't have time to spend time with.

Some permaculture projects spend a year observing a site or system before acting on it. When we surrender to slowness our world begins to unfold, it unveils its extraordinary patterns; the more we know it, the more it becomes part of us. When an artist creates a form, the material dictates the outcome as much as her own creative input; it is a feedback between clay and hands, camera and subject, stone and chisel. The better she knows her material the more it yields to her creativity. The deepest root of art and permaculture is simply paying attention.

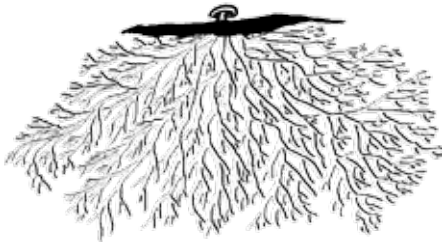
## Understand and Apply Nature's Patterns

We will never fully fathom the depths of nature's wonders: how a salmon navigates thousands of kilometres across an ocean, how an acorn becomes an oak tree, how a flock of birds moves without leaders. But by understanding its patterns we discover wisdoms that have evolved over millennia and design solutions that our super computers could never find.

From snail shells to stellar galaxies, sunflowers to tornados, spider webs to the DNA in every cell of life, the spiral is a recurring pattern in nature. Water pulses and flows in spirals (watch it going down the plughole), yet our culture ignores its patterns, puts it into canals and waste pipes, encloses it behind levees and dams. Water always wants to meander, it hates straight lines. Ignoring this can have devastating consequences; if nature's patterns had been applied to the building of New Orleans there would have been no levees to break.

## The Problem is the Solution

When faced with a problem we tend to freeze and focus on the obstacle, losing sight of any possible solutions. A simple trick is to shift our perspective and begin to see the source of a solution within the problem itself. Bill Mollison, permaculture's co-founder, famously said: 'You don't have a slug problem, you have a duck deficiency.' Increase the amount of ducks and they get free food in the form of slugs, you get free eggs and fertiliser, and no more slugs.



Instead of treating the 45 million car tyres discarded in the UK every year as waste, we could see them as free building materials. With 2000 tyres and less than £40,000 you can build an 'earthship', an off grid passive solar home with its own sewage and water collection (no more bills) and simultaneously reduce the waste mountain. A problem is simply when something is out of balance; it's a feedback signal to remind us that change is due.



## Design from the Whole to the Particular, from Pattern to Detail

The proverb 'can't see the forest for the trees' sums up a capitalist culture that has dissected and blown everything to smithereens, studying the minutiae of life yet understanding so little about its patterns and interconnections. Quantum physics dramatically showed us that there are no discrete parts, just patterns in an inseparable web of relationships. Sometimes the closer we look the harder it is to understand the whole.

Before taking action on the detail we should take a step back and observe the bigger picture. It is only then that we observe how the specifics of a system connect and interact, what the shape of edges and overlaps are, and what the inherent cycles and patterns reveal. The human species is hardwired to spot patterns; we were born 'network thinkers'. We must stop treating the world as a collection of isolated objects and individuals and start looking for the rich patterns and relationships that life is made of.



## Least Change for Greatest Effect

Permaculture aims to reduce all energy use, whether human muscle or fossil fuel. Why build new power stations to heat homes, when we could site houses to capture and store passive solar energy? Why organise a mass action against an oil company HQ when a small affinity group blocking a pipeline could affect their profits more? Instead of planting new orchards why not graft onto already existing wild trees? Instead of draining a pond to grow crops, we could plant willows to coppice and waterchestnuts to eat. It's all about finding the leverage point in a system and intervening there, where the least work accomplishes the most. As the Dalai Lama said: 'If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.'

## Seek, Use and Encourage Diversity

Browse the shelves of a supermarket and you will find at best four types of apples, mostly shipped thousands of miles. Yet the UK once produced more than 6000 different species, ones for every season and taste, many with such succulent names as Laxton's Fortune with a hint of aniseed,



pineapple tasting Claygate Pearmain, the huge sweet Peasgood's Nonsuch and Colonel Vaughan for perfect autumn cider.

We tend to measure diversity by the amount of differences present in a system, yet what makes ecosystems so efficient and resilient is not the quantity of species but the number of beneficial relationships between them. One way permaculture uses diversity is through Polyculture: growing a community of plants together that benefit and support each other. Some plants protect others from pests, some fix nitrogen in the soil, others encourage things to taste better. With some forest gardens boasting more than 500 useful species, it's a far cry from the fragile monoculture of a wheat field.



## Use Edges and Value the Marginal

The point where a forest meets meadowland, or the sea slaps against the shore is the most dynamic parts of an ecosystem. It's in those slithers of space that a multitude of different species coexist, and the engine of evolution moves fastest.

Nearly everything we take for granted in society began as an experiment on the margins. From the idea of universal suffrage to the implementation of the weekend, from the science of climate change to the abolition of slavery, from workers' rights to organic agriculture, yesterday's marginal and impossible eventually becomes today's normal. There has never been a better time to desert the centre and multiply the edges, the greatest creativity and change has always taken place there, and it's from the edge that we can jump and fly.



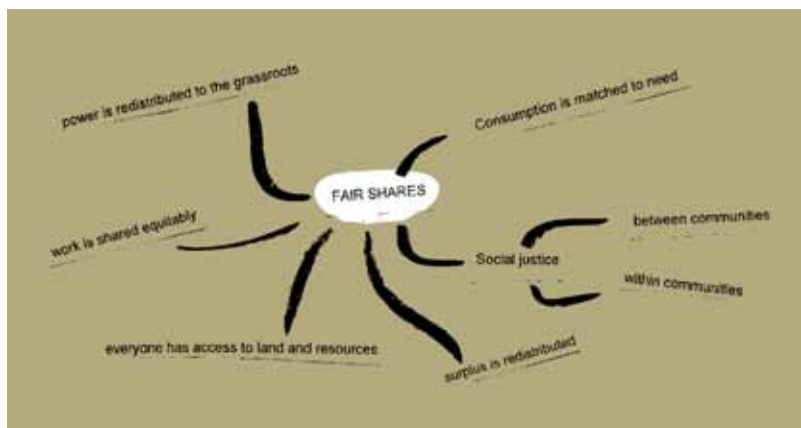
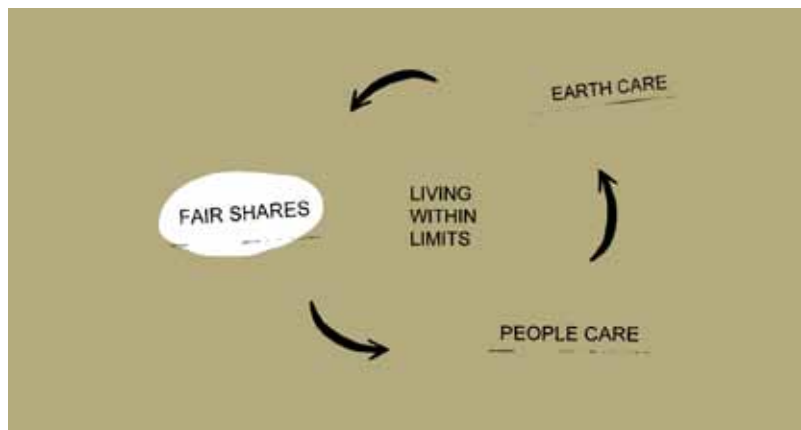
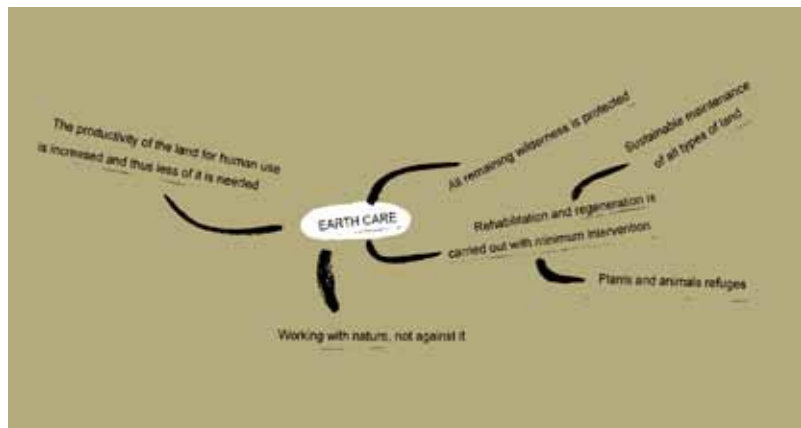
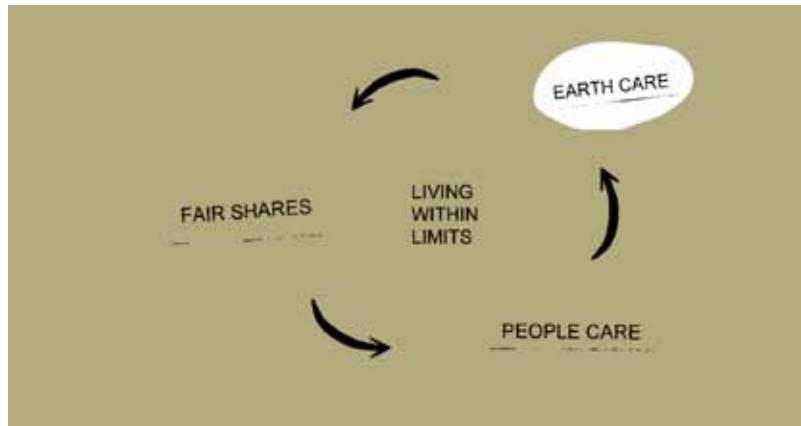
## Each Important Function Supported by Many Elements

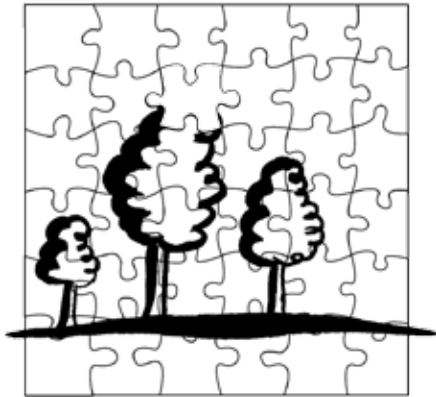
A million people died during the Irish potato famine; blight wiped out the potato crop, only one variety was grown and it was the staple food for a third of the population. Ireland's other crops continued to be exported and British troops made sure the trade didn't stop: making money was more important than feeding the Irish. Similarly, the global economy is entirely dependent on cheap oil, as it becomes scarce and its price rises, a serious systemic crisis looms. In a healthy system however, nothing is indispensable, everything has several back ups.

We can see this working in horizontal protest movements surviving state repression, because they don't have executive committees to infiltrate or leaders to assassinate. We experience it during a recession, when those with multiple skills weather out redundancy better than the specialists.









## Each Element Has Many Functions

I'm writing this sitting on an old wooden church chair which has a pocket built into the back for holding prayer books (in my case it's become a pencil store). It's a simple illustration of 'stacking functions'. In permaculture we try to give every element of a design at least three functions. If a tree is planted it can also provide shade for outside dining, fruit for dessert, leaf fall to fertilise the crops underneath it, roots for preventing erosion and raising the water table.

Multitasking reduces waste and work. When The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination toured the country leading up to the G8 protests, we made a program for the performance in the shape of a large heart with information and images printed on. The design allowed for multiple transformations by the audience during the show's 'lessons in radical origami': first into a dunce hat, then a loudhailer and finally a cornet for holding the delicious free chips distributed during the interval.

## Obtain a Yield

A businessman is walking along a beach. He comes upon a group of fishermen lying in the midday sun chatting. 'Why aren't you working?' he asks. 'We've finished for the day' they reply joyfully. 'We have enough fish for our friends and families'.

'But if you fished all day you could make so much more money' the business man scoffs.

'But what would that bring?' they ask.

'Well, then you could buy bigger boats and nets' sighs the businessman.

'And what would that give us?'

'More fish and more money to invest in things like sonar and employ others to do the work for you' continues the bemused businessman.

'And then what?' ask the fishermen.

'Well then you will never have to work again in your life and like me you will be able to lounge about in the sun without any cares in the world.'

The fishermen burst into laughter: 'But that's exactly what we're doing!'



## Produce No Waste

Shitting in clean water is one of 'civilisation's' many stupid ideas. In nature one system's waste is another's resource. Our shit creates rich compost and one of its roles is to return potassium to the soil, a nutrient key to plant growth. The fact that our shit is flushed into our rivers and seas has meant that levels of potassium in the soil are becoming critically scarce. With each flush we waste 10 litres of fresh water and require huge amounts of electricity to run sewage plants. As a result our waterways become suffocated with nutrients and our climate overburdened with more needlessly emitted CO<sub>2</sub>. What a waste!

A humble solution is the compost loo. Cheap and simple to build they are a step towards a zero waste culture. Shit falls into sawdust, there is no smell and no fouled drinking water. A year later it turns to 'humanure', which can be applied to fruit trees and bushes, not only reducing the need for fossil fuel based fertilisers, but reconnecting our bodies to the fertility cycle.

## Start Small and Learn from Change

In the winter of 1983, a handful of activists escape the city and brave the jungle aiming to 'convince' the impoverished mayan peasants of south eastern Mexico that together they can start a revolution. The Chiapan Indians laugh, the activists stop in their tracks and listen. They continue listening for 11 years and their ideas of revolution change.

Then on New Year's day 1994, as the North American Free Trade Agreement is due to come into force, several thousand masked rebels creep out of the rainforest, take over seven towns and declare war. Twenty four hours later they retreat back to the mountains where they build self managed autonomous municipalities and send out communiqués mixing poetry and propaganda. A new politics is born and the 'antiglobalisation' movement blossoms. The Zapatistas as they call themselves don't want to take over state power but 'construct power' from below, they call for 'one world made of many worlds', a multitude of rebellions locally specific yet globally interconnected. Starting small isn't just beautiful, it can be unimaginably successful when we learn from our mistakes and take one step at a time.



## Apply Self Regulation and Accept Feedback

Every living thing self regulates: when we get hot, we sweat and cool down, ecosystems such as meadows aren't mowed or covered in pesticides, they look after themselves. Even the planet works as a self regulating organism by keeping the atmosphere's temperature compatible to life through the complex chemical and physical interaction of plants, minerals, animals,



13 Attitudes (Card Set). Photo: John Jordan.

fungi and micro organisms. This equilibrium only faltered when we violently intervened by burning fossil fuels. A healthy system requires minimum outside intervention and is constantly monitoring itself for imbalances, mistakes become signposts, feedback is fundamental. In permaculture it is not a project but a system that one designs, and the implemented design is simply a moment of stillness in a system that is forever in motion. Observation never stops, the better the observation, the more responsive we are to the feedback and so know which changes will make a system more self managed and resilient. An efficient system needs less work or inputs from us, except observation, which brings us back to the very beginning - observe, connect, interact – after all it's just a question of paying attention.

### Further Steps

<http://www.permaculture.org.uk>  
<http://www.permacultureactivist.net>  
<http://www.permacultureprinciples.com>  
<http://www.climatecamp.org.uk>  
<http://www.earthactivisttraining.org>  
<http://www.journalofaestheticsandprotest.org>



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<http://www.labofii.net> / Design: Škart and Simona Staniscia





## The Other Side of the Fence

Melanie Bax

This article reflects upon a personal experience at Climate Camp during the summer of 2009. The Camp took place in a prior non-disclosed location in London to model a temporary self-sustaining community and was a site at which climate change could be discussed in the run up to the Copenhagen climate change conference in December 2009.

The thread that runs throughout the paper questions whether the architecture of the camp expressed the politics of Climate Camp. Climate Camp has been established as an organisation to take direct action on climate change through creating a non-hierarchical, diverse, gender equal and sustainable community. From critiquing my personal experience at the camp I will attempt to conclude whether a temporary camp is a valid option for activists today.

There are four voices present throughout the paper – one of ‘action’, observing the events that occurred during the camp, another of ‘information’ that represents the text messages, meeting announcements and placards that were given by the camp, one of ‘reflection’ which looks at the theoretical context of the camp and finally one of ‘drifting’, describing my personal experience in the camp.

## Prelude

V25/08/2009 22:08

Hi Silver & Green swoopers! Your starting point is outside Stratford station. Be there 12 noon tomorrow! Be on time! x

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the Climate Camp web page 'About Us', found at: <http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/about> [accessed 2009].

Climate Camp is one of the most renowned groups of activists committed to confronting the issue of climate change in preparation for Climate Camp 2009. The camp is for anyone, 'who's worried about our future and wants to do something about it.'<sup>1</sup> People joined different 'swoop' colours that corresponded to their geographic location in the country and these swoops met at various places across London.

Text messages flooded through when the time was right to regroup at a secret location in London to set up the sustainable community. Within Climate Camp only a handful of people knew the actual camp site, increasing the anticipation leading up to the swoop; the police and media didn't know where the campers were going and even they didn't know.

a *Climate Camp was founded in 2006 outside the Drax coal-fired power station, Yorkshire. Six hundred people gathered to camp for ten days and learn about sustainable living culminating into a day of mass action against the power station. 2007 saw Heathrow airport become the target and campers set up to help local residents stop the British Airport Authority build another runway. In 2008 campers focussed on the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station and early 2009 the British economic and political system was targeted during the G20 in London on April 1st in Bishopsgate. Every Climate Camp to this date has worked towards a direct action on a clear target. However this time there was no clear target with an ending direct action; why had a camp been arranged with no target and direct action as the result?*

This was the first Climate Camp to not have a direct action as a result of it.<sup>a</sup> The camp's duration was for one week offering daily workshops that had been designed to inform campers about the issues surrounding climate change and train them to become more confident members of Climate Camp.<sup>b</sup>

## Action 01

26/08/2009 11:51

Ten minutes before noon a handful of people were surrounded by camping equipment with a few reporters and policemen lurking on the periphery. The main entrance of Stratford station was kept clear so everyone could wait politely for the remaining campers to arrive. The wait for the remaining campers turned into the wait for the text message that would reveal the secret location.

b *Many of the campers work throughout the year within smaller groups that share the aspirations of Climate Camp and for them the camp is providing a moment in time in which they can regroup, share knowledge and experiences and motivate themselves as a larger group. The more dedicated members of the camp were viewing this time as the lead up to the Copenhagen conference later in the year.*

26/08/2009 12:24

### *Speakers on: The Importance of Meeting at Stratford Station*

To fill this void in time, some members of the group were elected to speak about the importance in meeting at Stratford station, the site of the Olympics 2012. The subject of the speech concerned the communities of people that had been displaced from their homes to provide land for the newly built structures that are part of the vision of the Olympics.<sup>c</sup> Reporters were scribbling notes whilst photographers were busy





Fig. 1. The reporters surrounding the campers during speeches given concerning the Olympics 2012. Photo: Melanie Bax

documenting the scene, as no climate campers were willing to discuss the camp with them. Prior to the swoop numerous emails had circulated recommending that swoopers without training should not speak with the press.

- c *The speakers appointed gave their opinions on the resulting problems during the construction of the Olympics in Stratford. They declared that through attending Climate Camp the campers were helping the 'poor people' fight their battle on being displaced from their homes making way for the new structures that are provided for the Olympics. The speech wasn't as informative as it should have been and it made you wonder whether anyone that lived in Stratford had been approached by the campers in the past to join Climate Camp and fight their battle against the Olympics. No one in the Stratford swoop group lived in Stratford.*

26/08/200 13:00

SILVER/GREEN: Get on the DLR from Stratford to Lewisham!  
And listen to your instructions from flag people! x

## Action 02

26/08/2009 13:03

After a few moments of hesitation and organising tickets everyone piled onto the DLR banging their luggage into passengers and speculating where the site would be.

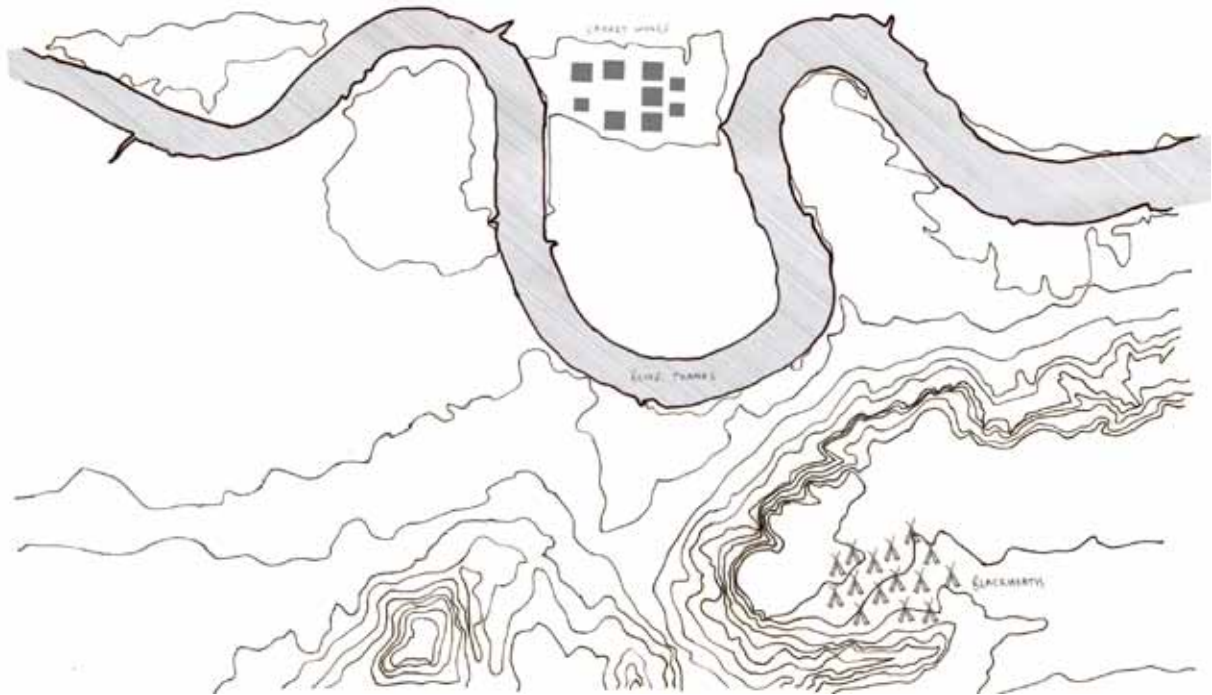


Fig 2. The topography of the area; Blackheath looking down on Canary Wharf. Image: Melanie Bax

### Action 03

26/08/2009 13:05

SILVER/GREEN: Left out of Lewisham stn (DLR) & under bridge. Right up Lewisham Hill, then Wat Tyler Rd, site on your right! x

The campers were heading towards Blackheath, a suitable site in that it was once the location of the Peasant's Revolt led by Wat Tyler in reaction to the oppressive poll tax that King Richard II had imposed in 1381. The Heath is also known to be common land to which everyone has the right to access. It is on high ground with a prominent view over the UK's most symbolic skyline of the financial industry, Canary Wharf. All campers were reminded of one of Climate Camp's reasons to be in London as the tall buildings are considered to be, 'unaccountable, undemocratic and causing catastrophic climate change, these creatures need to be driven into extinction.'<sup>2</sup> Ian Duff a geography teacher expressed his opinion on the relationship between the camp and it's environment in The Guardian:

The most important thing this year is to draw links between the economic crisis, and political crisis, and the environment. The

<sup>2</sup> Climate Camp, 'Ten Reasons to be Camping in London', *The Climate Camp Handbook* (2009), p.16.

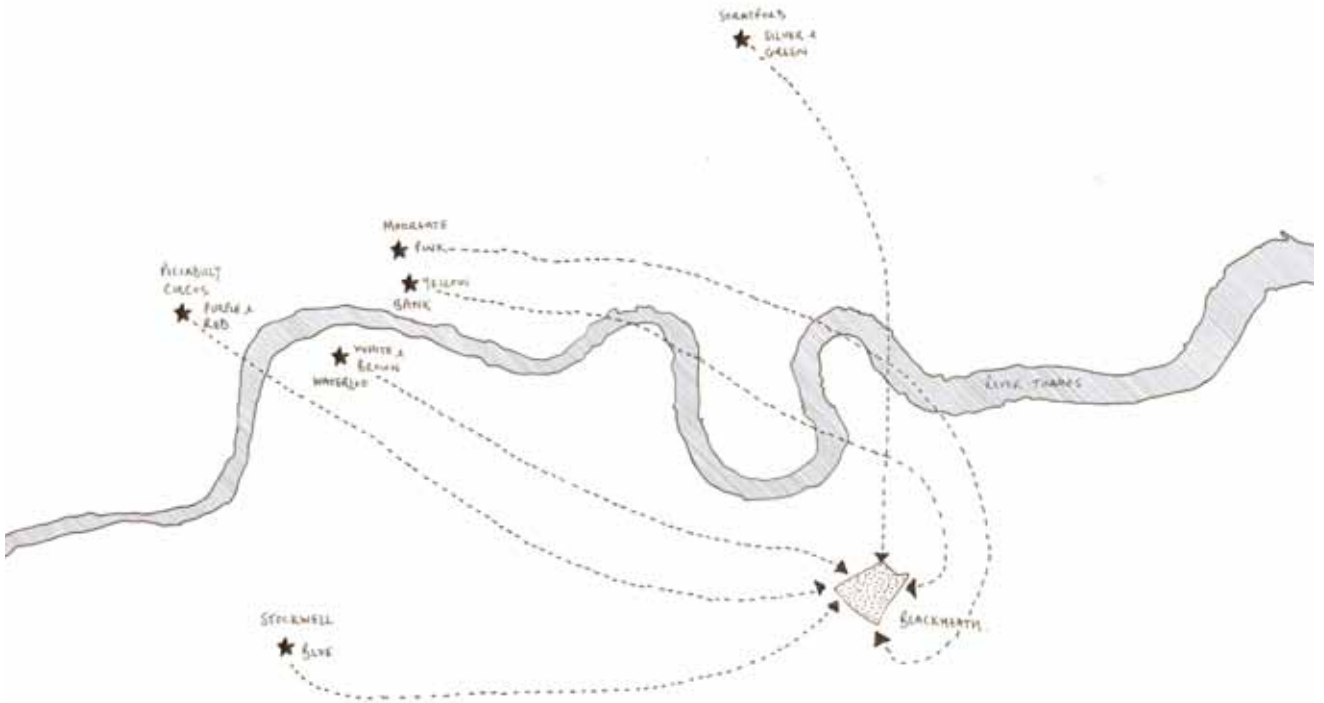


Fig 3. A diagram of the location of all swoop groups that joined and met at the secret location, Blackheath. Image: Melanie Bax



Fig. 4. The financial skyline seen from the tent in the distance. Photo: Melanie Bax

<sup>3</sup> 'Police adopt a low profile as 1,000 activists set up base at site of Peasants' revolt', *The Guardian*, (27/08/2009)

desire for infinite growth, encouraged by corporations, leads to climate change. The space is brilliant because you can see the City of London in the background. What we're here to talk about is the connection with climate change.<sup>3</sup>

There were nine swoop groups located all over London and we crossed paths with the Yellow swoop group travelling from Bank. They were given different instructions so as to approach the site from another direction, giving the campers strength if the police had attempted to stop the camp from being built.

## Action 04

26/08/2009 13:29

On arrival there was significant activity on the Heath with removal vans unloading equipment and tape and tripods being used to temporarily mark out the camp's boundary lines. It was clear these decisions had been made by the organisers who knew the location of the site prior to the swoop, and it was these people who started to erect the infrastructure of the camp helped by a mass of campers.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>d</sup> *Despite Climate Camp promoting it's non-hierarchical nature it was apparent that there was already a hierarchy present- the people that knew how the camp was to be built, people that were trying desperately to help, and the people that didn't know what to do as too many campers were offering help. All that could be done was wait until the primary structures of the camp were erected before individual tents could be pitched.*



Fig. 5. The spatial organisation of the camp with the marquees being laid out in preparation. Photo: Melanie Bax

## *Drift begins*

*To free myself from feeling displaced I began to drift and wandered around the surrounding area of Blackheath. The area is full of beautiful Victorian terraces, boutiques and organic food stores with the majority of residents leading a*





Fig. 6. The Victorian houses surrounding the heath and the camp.  
Photo: Melanie Bax



Fig. 7. The funnelled entrance adorned with 'Welcome to Climate Camp' signage. Photo: Melanie Bax

*conveniently 'green' lifestyle. A resident divulged to a reporter that he would be accommodating towards the campers as long as the noise was kept to a minimum. They needn't had worried about noise levels as a noise curfew was in place on the camp from 11pm every evening to be family friendly. I returned to the camp and was astonished that a steel mesh fence had been erected in place of the tape marking the boundary of the site, enabling one access point to the camp that was manned. A group of young campers drinking beer were sitting at the*

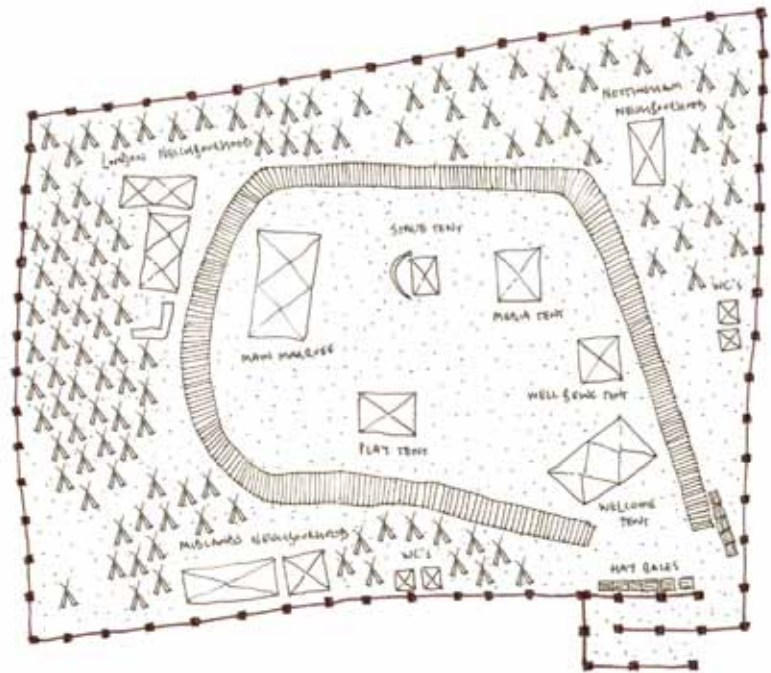


Fig. 8. The layout of the Climate Camp showing different neighbourhoods and entrance marquees. Image: Melanie Bax

*entrance allowing single file only. This momentarily gave me a feeling of unease. I walked through the camp and was surprised at how organised the camp had become within a couple of hours; separate neighbourhoods had been established with appropriate signage for the Midlands, Yorkshire, London, Wales, Scotland...*

e *The uniform of the campers promoted the sentiments of 'we-feeling' secured by the similarities in the campers and a fear of the 'other' was symbolised by the steel mesh fence. This was not what the camp claimed to advocate, the camp should have been diverse and reflecting, 'an unpredictable society rather than a dream world of harmony and predetermined order.'*

Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (London: The Penguin Press, 1971), p.68.

f *Activism should not be a polite protest amongst a community of like-minded people. The camp needed to be within a diverse environment reaching out to as many different types of people as possible, after all climate change is a global issue.*

26/08/2009 20:14

## **WELCOME TO THE MIDLANDS NEIGHBOURHOOD!**

## **YOU HAVE ENTERED LONDON NEIGHBOURHOOD!**

*You could choose a neighbourhood in which to pitch your tent. Some were equipped with kitchens and large marquees that acted as the social spaces of the camp. One of the aspirations of Climate Camp is diversity amongst the campers but this was not evident whilst walking through. A neighbourhood for Oxbridge graduates had been set up and everyone was white, middle-class and dressed in a uniform of heavy boots, organic cotton clothing and dreadlocks.<sup>e</sup> I was disappointed in the location of the camp with it being in a white, middle-class area on the outskirts of central London.<sup>f</sup> This was not what I had*

*imagined to be participating in to make a political stand on climate change.*

26/08/2009 23:26

## 'LONDON'S DAILY NEIGHBOURHOOD MEETING AT 9.00AM'

### Action 05

27/08/2009 08:22

After a night's sleep the London neighbourhood visited the neighbourhood's main marquee to have breakfast and attend the daily neighbourhood meeting. The London neighbourhood was the most populated with people spilling out trying to listen to the two campers leading the meeting. Meetings attempted to provide a non-hierarchical platform to discuss the concerns of the campers. Guidelines had been issued showing the procedures and hand signals required to speak making it feel like a new language that needed to be mastered before you could express an opinion. The meeting was preoccupied with issues concerning the police and media, in particular whether the police should be allowed on site to have a meeting with Climate Camp. It was decided that the meeting should occur off-site as members of the camp were uncomfortable with the police entering.<sup>8</sup> There was no mention of climate change or the workshops that would be happening later in the week.

### *Drift*

*I left the meeting feeling disappointed as it appeared to me that they wanted to be an insular group of people and I was frustrated that there had been no discussion of the real reason we had all met on the Heath. People dispersed and were involved in erecting another marquee or tent, building more composting toilets, washing up after breakfast or general organisation of the camp. There were plenty of volunteers for all these tasks leaving most campers to sit in the sun and chat. I circulated the campsite and wanted to inquire into whether the campers believed it was necessary to enclose the camp in a fence.*

*I found an excitable lady that was sharing her knowledge of Climate Camp once I declared it was my first visit. She was delighted and very enthusiastic about the atmosphere generated within the camp. I inquired into why she thought the fence was provided and whether it was needed. She*

g *The police had been attempting to co-operate with Climate Camp due to the tragic circumstances of the G20 protests in April and by not allowing the police onto the site they were not embracing this as an advantage. Through the lack of co-operation from the campers with the police the wrong message was given to the public. Climate Camp had decreased its chances in encouraging new members of the public to experience the camp. They seemed to like the exclusivity of the camp and the air of mystery they had.*





Fig. 9. The funnelled entrance adorned with 'Welcome to Climate Camp' signage. Photo: Melanie Bax

*admitted it was a defensive structure but believed it made the camp feel 'cosy' enabling everyone to be directed through the funnelled entrance and be welcomed by campers. Moving onto a group of girls washing up in the London neighbourhood I asked for their thoughts on the fence.*

*They didn't think the fence appeared unwelcoming as they suggested it only required some 'Welcome to Climate Camp' banners. At this moment they only had banners expressing their opinions on climate change and thanking the residents for their stay.*

**'CAPITALISM IS CRISIS'**

**'NATURE DOESN'T DO BAILOUTS'**

**'THANK YOU FOR HAVING US'**

*This approach can be likened to the gates in a gated community that Peter Marcuse describes in his article, Walls of Fear and Walls of Support,*

*Granted they may be pleasingly designed, covered with shrubs and flowers, inviting to look at. But their function, certainly as a symbol and generally in reality, is to exclude the unwanted, those feared by residents.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> Peter Maruse, 'Walls of Fear and Walls of Support', *Architecture of Fear*, Nan Ellin (Ed.) (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), p.102.

*One of the girls perceived the camp to be likened to a prehistoric settlement with a moat or a wall surrounding it, implying that they are happy to promote the exclusivity of the camp to the general public and that the people entering and leaving the camp needed to be monitored. The transparent mesh fence attempted, 'to make them visible enough to serve their function, but transparent enough not to reflect hostility or exclusivity.'*<sup>5 h</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Peter Maruse, 'Walls of Fear and Walls of Support', *Architecture of Fear*, Nan Ellin (Ed.) (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), p.111.

<sup>h</sup> *No consideration had been given to the issue that the wall was two sided and how it was perceived from either side of the fence. They wanted to encourage diversity to promote climate change more effectively, but they needed to take down the walls on the common land. I didn't think they were aware of the strength of the message the fence was giving people that weren't part of climate camp. Nobody felt welcomed enough to look around and join the camp - see fig.10 and fig. 11.*

*After being in the camp for a day and a night I realised that I had heard no mention of climate change and the supposed workshops that I wanted to attend to become inspired and gain knowledge. In addition to my confusion about the fence I more worryingly was becoming confused about the reason people were at the camp.*

27/08/2009 22:54

## 'LONDON'S DAILY NEIGHBOURHOOD MEETING AT 9.00AM'

### Action 06

27/08/2009 08:39

Campers were waking to attend the second neighbourhood meeting to discover what new issues concerned the camp and needed to be discussed. Everyone remained engrossed by the perceived problem of the police and spent an hour speaking about this.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>i</sup> *To my discontent, nothing was mentioned about the workshops and climate change, as a reporter from The Guardian observed, 'The problem with the Climate Campers is not a lack of conviction (as some commentators try to argue); it stems, rather, from an obsession with its own structures and its relationship with the media and the police.' This is a situation when the camp needs to introduce a hierarchy as the groups inner workings is not of interest to all the campers and it becomes a tiresome process. Some campers only want to discuss issues of climate change, not how the police and media are managed*

### Drift

*The meeting ended and I walked around the camp in search of changes and noticed the entrance had grown in height, surpassing the two metre high fence by three metres. Hay bales had been delivered and the campers were stacking them up and using them as seats. Visitors now had to weave through the entrance whilst being observed from above. I didn't see many members of the public enter the camp and despite myself being a camper, I struggled to feel like I belonged.*





The Other Side of the Fence Melanie Bax

*discouraging people from joining the camp. When only an hour is dedicated to a neighbourhood meeting in which all campers attend, it should have been used to discuss more interesting ideas concerned with climate change to excite and motivate the campers.*

'The Climate Camp is too self-regarding to be effective' by Peter Beaumont, The Guardian Online, Sunday 30th August. Found at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/aug/30/peter-beaumont-climate-camp-protesters> [accessed 2009].

Climate Camp was set up to be a non-hierarchical, diverse, gender equal and sustainable community and I believe this was unachievable by creating an enclosed camp. The steel mesh fence dominated the architecture of the camp and was not a good representation of the ethos of Climate Camp. The campers wanted to be a contained community to feel safer and monitor the 'other' people that entered their utopian community. A temporary camp could be beneficial to the Climate Camp movement but it needs to break down barriers with members of the public and gain their trust.

Meetings were a central aspect to Climate Camp in order to achieve a non-hierarchical group. However, the campers tended to have similar opinions due to the lack of diversity of people and time spent at meetings was consumed by less important issues. In theory, their ethos of achieving a non-hierarchical group is appropriate for Climate Camp but I have reservations whether this can work well in practice. The majority of Climate Campers have a lot of motivation and energy but there is a fear that they are more interested in the Climate Camp institution rather than fighting for the global issue of climate change.

Fig. 10. (Overleaf, above) Looking into the camp, the steel mesh fence is not strong but acts as a symbol.  
Photo: Melanie Bax

Fig. 11. (Overleaf, below) A member of the public peering into the camp with curiosity.  
Photo: Melanie Bax

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## Resistance and Activist Research: A Workshop with Brian Holmes and Anne Querrien

Kim Trogal and Sam Vardy

Participants: Brian Holmes, Nicolas Laurent, Doina Petrescu, Anne Querrien, Kim Trogal, Sam Vardy

<sup>1</sup> The workshop was organised as part of the seminar series by the PhD research group 'Lines of Flight' at the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture. See, [www.linesofflight.wordpress.com](http://www.linesofflight.wordpress.com) [accessed 2009].

<sup>2</sup> For information on the project see, 56 St Blaise: espace culturel écologique géré par des habitants du quartier St. Blaise, <http://56stblaise.wordpress.com>, [accessed 12th October 2009].

In October 2008, we<sup>1</sup> organised and took part in a workshop in Paris that set out to question the relationship between 'resistance', 'activism' and 'architectural research and practice'. Our guests were the cultural critic, writer and activist, Brian Holmes, and the sociologist and urban planner, Anne Querrien.

The informal workshop shifted from the paths at Parc de la Villette, to a discussion in the space of an apartment, and finally to a gathering at the self-managed cultural space at 56 St Blaise.<sup>2</sup> The following article is an attempt to present and reflect on aspects of the workshop and is in two parts: the first describes some of the issues emerging from the walk, particularly concerning the agency of architecture and practice. The second part is comprised of a dialogue from the discussion that concerns possible forms of action in architecture.

## A Walk Through the Park

Scripted spaces are a walk-through or click-through environment (a mall, a church, a casino, a theme park, a computer game). They are designed to emphasise the viewers journey- the space between- rather than the gimmicks on the wall. The audience walks into the story. What's more this walk should respond to each viewer's whims, even though each step along the way is pre-scripted (or should I say preordained?) It is gentle repression posing as free will. - *Norman Klein*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Norman M. Klein, *From the Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (New York: New Press, 2004), p.11.

We began our walk through Parc de la Villette by following what Tschumi named 'the cinematic promenade.' This staged route is magically disorienting. Connecting a series of gardens, the route plays with hiding and revealing, drawing you around corners, over bridges, through tunnels, yet actually defining nothing. Most of all, it hides your own path from you, it hides where you think you have come from and where you might be going. Confusing, disorienting yet essentially safe ground, it is a scripted space.

It is difficult to write about this park, when so much has been said and proclaimed already. Its master plan by Tschumi is part of the canon of avant-garde architecture and was widely held at the time as a 'revolutionary' architecture. But during the workshop, Holmes raised some fundamental questions about this place that also raise pertinent issues for this edition of *field*. Namely, the ambiguity of architecture as an object and activity, and therefore the ambiguity that exists in our own agency. For now, we will take a short detour through the park and some of the discussions as we remember them, to return to this point at the end. To paraphrase Holmes his questions were, approximately, 'How did it get built in the first instance?' and, as in this case, 'what happens when the state takes over, and decides to build madness?'<sup>4</sup> How did an architect who followed Derrida and Bataille, someone who developed a design and discourse with revolutionary ideas yet who has built nothing, *actually* get commissioned for the construction of one of the largest public spaces in Paris? And what happens when the state decides to build them?

<sup>4</sup> In his master plan for the park, Tschumi writes that 'Madness serves as a constant point of reference throughout the Urban Park of La Villette because it appears to illustrate a characteristic situation at the end of the twentieth century- that of disjunctions and dissociations between use, form, and social values. This situation is not necessarily a negative one, but rather is symptomatic of a new condition.' Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (London: MIT Press, 1996), p.174.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Tschumi and Anthony Vidler, *A&U*, 216 (9)(1988): 9-68.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Tschumi, 'Parc de la Villette,' *GA Document* 26 (1990): 38-47.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in, 'Tschumi's prize-winning proposals for La Villette' *Architects Journal* 177 (14)(6th April 1983): 37-38.

The park, situated on the North Eastern part of the city is 1km at its longest point and 700m at its widest and was previously occupied by the city's slaughterhouses.<sup>5</sup> In 1982 it was the subject of an international competition organised by the French government. The brief effectively called for a radical new type of park and public space, and according to the English language architectural press, it demanded:

a new type of park embodying change in social programme, physical form and social context.<sup>6</sup>

the existing Parisian parks and gardens 'perpetuate symbols of glory and an ethic that should belong to the past' [...] The competition designs, it said, should be [...] 'a meeting point of culture, decentralisation and the right to express oneself in which no-one must feel excluded.'<sup>7</sup>

The utopian brief drew enormous attention with 470 schemes received from 35 countries. The jointly winning submissions, most famously the ones of Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas, were reproduced and much discussed in the journals. Yet it seems that the social issues at stake were much less discussed nor were what the conceptual aspects, such as Tschumi's follies or Koolhaas' strips (the 'neutral spaces'), were actually responding to. So there is of course a story (or many stories) prior to this,



integral to the place, but not within the archive.

Talking informally along the route, Querrien described the post-1968 climate in Paris. She remembers it as one full of restlessness, full of desire for real change. Following the election of Mitterrand in 1981, France's first and only socialist president, she recalls that expectations across the country were high. Everyone was waiting, and had been for a long time. Those in office recognised the urgent need to deliver something; something that could meet the revolutionary ambitions and ideas of 1968. And it was in this climate, that the competition and the brief for the park were established.

Querrien was consulted to consider youth groups in the area in relation to the project and had the opportunity to see the brief and the results of the competition. Querrien explained that the brief asked for an architecture that would allow for the future occupation and self-management of localised sites within the park. She explained that amongst *all* the competition submissions only one architect (Tschumi) had achieved a spatial design that would allow for a different management organisation for the different spaces. His design was presented as the only one meeting the management requirements. Koolhaas' strips, for example, brought unresolved issues of boundaries and access that the follies did not. Querrien's recollections also brought to life the area as it was before the park: the butchers; their unique language; the conditions of degradation in the area and its surroundings at the time. The transformation of the entire area was vast in scale and scope.

<sup>8</sup> Querrien gave us some references of projects in France which could be seen to retain such a utopian, public ambition, and so form a kind of counter argument or counter example to the situation we are experiencing and arguing against. One reference she suggested is the opening of public spaces in relation to the construction of the tramways in some of France's big cities, in particular citing the space near the river Garonne in Bordeaux. The masterplan for the 6km stretch of the riverbank on the right bank, by Michel Desvigne, reclaims old industrial spaces for a new public park comprised of meadows, riverbanks, woods, an approach which the landscape architect calls 'indeterminate nature'. As with Parc de la Vilette, the social aspects of this project are perhaps less discussed in the architectural and design press. Querrien has explained that this new space is intended to be open to all kinds of users, organised as a link between the different neighbourhoods of the city. Whilst the mayor of Bordeaux is right wing, the local equilibrium is towards the left and although gentrification may happen in the future, she explains it was not the aim of this project and is not there yet. The aim of the project, already realised, is to change the city from a sleeping city housing the wine merchants to an open modern city housing all social milieus and *organising relations between them*.

For us, asking the question, 'what made this project possible?' also makes obvious the fact that such a utopian project of this scale (a huge terrain given to the public, with the aim of creating a real public space where 'no-one will feel excluded,' providing spaces for self-management and so on) will never really be possible again in neo-liberal cities. But here perhaps is an important difference between the UK and other countries, such as France, who have a much stronger public sector.<sup>8</sup> In the UK, local or national government is unlikely to be the sole commissioner of such a project, nor would it take on such utopian or revolutionary ambitions. In London for example, the improvement of public amenities and the regeneration of public spaces, such as parks, are undertaken with the *express aim* of facilitating gentrification, and through leveraging an increase in residential property prices aims to 'improve' a locality. Public space improvement has long been a cultural strategy for economic growth.

Given the shift in the local demographics that continues to take place in the areas surrounding this project, it could be said that this park has also functioned as a device for gentrification. Yet, as Querrien pointed out, as soon as the butchers left the space, their ways of working no longer needed or accepted, gentrification as a process began. She drew our attention to the fact that to actually prevent gentrification and maintain social groups as they were would demand the organisation of a quasi-ghetto. This raises important questions, of how and to what extent are we able to intervene in processes of economic change, and how do we position ourselves in relation to them?

Querrien also told us of the process of consultation she was involved in for the park. This concerned the prevention of violence relating to youth groups in the area, noting that there was an evident social difference between the people visiting the museum and the park, and the people living there. The ambition was to allow the park to be used both by youth living in the surroundings, as well as visitors coming from other parts of Paris, the regions or abroad. The consultation work took place over a few months, in which the research group began to build relations amongst



the differing (sometimes competing) groups in the locality. This process, of enabling the youth groups to become organised and to participate in the self-managed spaces of the park, was stopped abruptly. A different research group, with another agenda, was employed to continue the task. They pretended to organise activities for youth whilst refusing to put confidence in their capacities of self-management. In the park today, of the 26 follies that were intended to facilitate occupation or appropriation by others, many remain unoccupied; some have been incorporated into the permanent running of the park, such as a ticket office, a first aid centre, or the entrance to 'Cité de la Musique;' and some house commercial functions such as cafés or fast food chains. None of the follies were given to youth groups to organise their activities, as one of the rules for the management of the follies is that groups must be self sufficient financially.

These two aspects highlight for us the issue of architecture's fundamental ambiguity, which in fact was always one of Tschumi's interests. His concern lay with the 'disjunction' of space and its use, that architecture is 'constantly unstable, constantly on the verge of change.'<sup>9</sup> For him, this disjunction was 'its strength and its subversive power.'<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the ambiguity of architecture puts its own power into question, firstly as an object, in terms of its power as a means of control over others, and potentially as an enabling device. It thus highlights both architecture's potential for resistance and its simultaneous risk of incorporation or instrumentalisation. Secondly, the ambiguity that exists, is not confined to architectural objects, such as the follies or the routes, but extends to all associated social processes; *everything* from commissioning, procurement, to consultation, participation or the long-term demographic changes that follow. All are, or can be, subject to instrumentalisation. Ambiguity is both a problem and a possibility over time. For us, the walk and discussions through the park, directly connected this question to the question of the role (and authority) of the designer or architect.

For Tschumi, there is famously no *architecture* without event or activity. Yet, Holmes brought here a new point of interpretation, through the work of cultural critic Norman Klein. Klein's work looks at architecture, amongst other forms, as a 'special effect.' Here he analyses how spaces are constructed as 'illusionistic spaces' and used as devices for manipulation. These are spaces that seduce and construct 'ways of seeing.'<sup>11</sup> What is interesting in Klein's analyses is the complicity of the audience in their own seduction. Often in the spaces he analyses, such as the ones in Las Vegas, misuse or transgression is actively encouraged. In his words they are 'scripted-spaces', where the journey you make through a space appears to be an act of free will, but there exists a collusion between designer and audience in the 'co-creation' of the space. For Klein this is one of the devices of capitalism used to absorb political shock, or most usually to elicit consumerism. Holmes asked if we have moved from scripting to being scripted? At the risk of grossly misunderstanding him, we are not only thinking of the 'users' of the park, but also the architect and their own beliefs and intentions. A belief in the 'co-creation' of architecture, its ambiguity or 'disjunction' is also the cutting edge of capitalism.<sup>12</sup>

This is important to consider as in the UK the state now takes a new role and form, numerous state agencies, both local and national work in often complex partnerships to deliver services or certain programmes.<sup>13</sup> This is especially true for city development and urban regeneration, which are undertaken by complex associations. They take the form of networks, it is notoriously difficult for an outsider to understand how they actually work. At both local and national levels, government agencies have in many cases 'slimmed down' and sub-contracted (i.e. privatised) their former responsibilities. In a general sense, the state's focus has shifted away from welfare towards economic development and growth. Given these major

<sup>9</sup> Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, p.19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Klein, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Here we mean to emphasise an applicability of Klein's analysis of the co-creation of a space as a kind of 'scripted' freedom, or tolerated transgression, that applies to Tschumi's notion of disjunction (where architecture itself is seen to exist in the event). Klein's work has highlighted for us how other contemporary, participative aspects of architecture and urban regeneration may also operate in this way: such as approaches that aim to 'activate' a space; event-based approaches to making or transforming spaces in the city; or even participative projects that attempt to engage people directly in the design. These approaches are of course not radical in their own right, but are tools that can be used for different motivations, potentially providing a venue for a 'scripted' freedom.

<sup>13</sup> Querrien has latterly emphasised to us the important differences that exist between our own experiences in the UK and what is taking place in France, for example in France, public-private partnerships are not very well developed. She explains that the field around the Great Library (the Library François Mitterrand) cannot be finished without huge public money; whilst the work of ANRU (Agence Nationale pour la Rénovation Urbaine) is mostly public urban regeneration that organises gentrification, but is also obliged to organise a social mix.

shifts in both the formation and function of the state in contemporary neo-liberal cities, we must accept that an architecture that strives to be 'revolutionary' will not be possible through these channels, if indeed it ever was. What then, are other forms of action we might take?

## A Discussion in the Apartment

### Clear Spaces

SV: Sam Vardy  
DP: Doina Petrescu  
BH: Brian Holmes  
AQ: Anne Quirren

**SV: I would like to start this session by introducing some broad questions that we might tackle directly or indirectly, namely: what might be some distinct spatialities of resistance? And at which points do architecture and resistance make the other more, or less, possible? More specifically, an architecture of resistance might consider practices that open up opportunities to revise and remake our local context, harnessing peoples' desires to change and adapt their environment. There is, however, an noticeable tendency to identify those practices that challenge accepted patterns of behaviour as problematic or abnormal. This agency of people to transcend the 'formative context', the act of transgression as an expression of desire, Roberto Unger calls *negative capability*.<sup>14</sup>**

DP: [The] capability to say 'no'... but still 'capability'—which means a positive movement.

**BH: Yes, so you are refusing something, but making something at the same time.**

AQ: You are not obliged to do what you think you are obliged to do.

**SV: This idea is connected to that of resistance in that, if people feel that they can make that change, to their context, then that is what is important. If that isn't there, that feeling, then resistance is less possible. The question then might be, how might the practice of architecture engender that feeling? This makes resistance a *potential* somehow, of architecture.**

BH: How might the potential be realised?

**SV: Well, that's what I would like to discuss – this is the question.**

AQ: This is actually the opposite of participation, what you are talking about. The confidence in negative capability is a confidence in your ability to change yourself, but it is a kind of not participating, not giving any chance for participation but giving the *idea* of flight or escape.

**SV: But if it is understood as a collective negative capability,**

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.36.

**then...**

**BH:** Well that's when it becomes interesting... If you manage to keep the state, and the powers of capitalist reorganisation *out*, then this is a *space* [created]. Already to keep them out is really difficult. One thing that is semi-successful in this is massive crime, [which] carries its own problems, but I can see that in terms of negative capability. Architecture though, is usually about building something new, and so with the new comes possibilities: to reorder, to regulate, to expropriate and so on. I would think that to attach architecture to this negative capability, this 'keep them out', while you are doing something in a space that is cleared of management, enforcement and so on—the architecture here is probably *not* going to be about building something from scratch, right?

**SV:** **Yes, it would be an approach that would build on what is already there, and build on relationships that already exist.**

**AQ:** An example from a conversation with [Patrick] Bouchain: there are areas for nomadic people, and in the French law, the [authorities] are obliged to create these areas [which may] be built on non-authorised areas for building. Now the French non-nomadic do not have right to build on an area not authorised for building. Bouchain says we must make a legal struggle for the French to be equal to those that roam, and have the right to build in such a nomadic way. He says that you must create (he does not say negative capability) an analysis of the law, all the interstitial spaces in the law, to create new rights for people to build their homes.

**BH:** **A utopia! I would like to think of an example that involves, not Roma peoples, but (and it is exactly what you are heading towards) something that I could be part of. There must be some more other than EcoBox.<sup>15</sup> You can theorise anything, but it is really important to have actual human situations to deal with. So for example – Exodus collective in Luton in the UK. That is really interesting. They are called Exodus, but their slogan is more or less 'We are staying here.' What constitutes their collective is to have... outdoor Reggae parties—a sound system collective out of, I think, housing estates that have been squatted. Does it still exist?<sup>16</sup> That is worth looking into, its a big inspiration.**

<sup>15</sup> For details of the EcoBox project by atelier d'architecture autogérée see, Urbantactics.org (2000-2008) <http://www.urbantactics.org/projects/ecobox/ecobox.html>, [accessed 11th October 2009].

<sup>16</sup> The Exodus collective ceased to exist in 2000. During their active time, they developed the Long Meadow Community Free Farm, which incorporated not only space for music events, but an organic farm, and housing.

**Killing Desire**

**DP:** What is also interesting is if this can last? What is the mechanism of making this sustainable, or long-term? In one of John Jordan's texts he is questioning why it [isn't] possible any more, now, to organise a 'carnival' as it was in the 1980's and 90's, even knowing that there might be enough reasons to do it again. They are trying to do this and there are just a few people turning up, whereas it was amazing to get thousands of people all over the globe doing this in one day [previously]. So why or what makes things possible at a moment, and the same things not possible any more?

**BH:** **I have two answers to that, one is you have to have**

**hope, right? This is the obvious one, you have to be enthusiastic, you have to want, there has to be desire. But the other thing is about control. The desire is actually killed deliberately. Deliberate actions to kill desire. Usually it's done in two ways: with direct oppressive force, and then with a kind of banalising discourse of cynicism. The combination of the two is really strong, producing something called depression, and that's where [Franco] Bifo [Berardi] has really produced discourse that's so important, that people don't know how to deal with it, but he's right, he knows what he's talking about.**

### Assemblages And Evasion

**SV:** Questions of how to create sites of resistance has been interesting for me in conjunction with considering the Free Radio movement in Italy, and its most well known station, Radio Alice. Looking at Guattari's writings on this can, I think, set up some ideas about the potential affects of an architecture or a spatial practice.

**AQ:** **Can you explain a little? Because for me, radio is typically a non-material space, because we have a miniaturisation with Free Radio—you have a box like this [small gesture] which was the thing to send the sounds and it cost less than €1000 and so everybody wanted to have this. Radio Alice was very militant, in a room like this one, with people coming and it does not need any 'architecture' in the normal sense of architecture, that is building space, but [is a] social relations space, with a lot of people, a network of people sending news, coming to speak at the machine.**

**SV:** It is that assemblage of many different forms that is interesting. Although the radio itself did not require its own specific architecture, I wonder whether we could conceive of a practice of architecture that attempted to consider itself, in that way, as an assemblage, one that has different aspects to it, that isn't *only* about the construction of a physical space or object.

**BH:** **Well I was told that there are housing estates in the Greater London area where people set up radios in abandoned apartments. The first thing they do is brick up their window, as the police will come in on a rope through the window. Tunes are worth money, its 'popular' music that is copyrighted, and you have to pay for that. So you broadcast for a week or so until they [the police] find the thing and so the whole thing is set up, and you have to have an architectural knowledge to escape from the police because the whole point is that you do it until you are raided, and when you are raided you must escape with your equipment, because its too expensive to lose.**

**SV:** Some of them have lasted quite a long time in this nomadic way.

**BH:** **There is definitely a real architectural knowledge there.**

**SV:** The difference between the pirate radio stations in the UK and free radio was that pirate radio was set up by groups of people to

'represent' a kind of *speciality*, in a way, for example a Reggae station or whatever, and the DJ was given importance as the 'expert'. In free radio, it was breaking that down more. Guattari speaks of the 'locals', the 'modernists' and the 'militants'. The 'locals' were the community radio people who would, again, claim to be representing a given group, 'modernists' are the technicians who can make the perfect sound, but it wasn't about that in Free radio, it was low tech and crackly, and the 'militants' were using the radio to 'persuade' the masses.

**DP:** **So it was almost more important the situation of broadcasting and what this created. Although we have never broadcast for real, at EcoBox we gathered the people, we recorded the elements to be broadcast, so the situation was spatially and socially very important, more than the product, more than the broadcasting itself. I think that this is some how the difference also—in free radio, the fact that everybody could access the radio and broadcast was more important.**

**BH:** In fact what is being talked about, the same exact things, with the same kinds of players, has been done in our lifetime, right now, with Indymedia. The same exact roles going on, the same situations, and its with the same kinds of necessary resistance. I was at the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis and you had a collective called the Eyewitness Video Collective. They arrived in Minneapolis after having four years before gained evidence against police abuses resulting in 400 convictions of [the] police dept. The first thing that happens is that the house where they are staying gets raided, all their equipment, computers, cameras, all taken by the police. Second thing that happens – they get their second set of equipment, which they had ready, because they knew this was going to happen, and they go out on the street and start using it, until the third thing, they get busted again towards the end [of the event].

**AQ:** **In terms of architecture, when people are involved in resistance networks, with a place to stay, this place must have a door [at the back]—for escape. So in the Hausmann setting, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century buildings, you have two sides, linked with services perhaps. Also, generally, even in the working class, most people had somebody living with them and paying a rent, so that they were not too dependant on the salary, but this was forbidden. So a lot of reasons made the new standard plan to be with only one entrance, to provide a kind of control system. So new resistance buildings should definitely be with two sides!**

**BH:** Escape seems to [be] becoming more important.

**AQ:** **Its an interesting concept actually.**

## Everyday Resistance

**NL:** Nicolas Laurent

**NL:** **I heard of a radio station on a housing estate, where I have a flat. The people who take part are the teenagers and people living on the estate. They address the**

**issues and concerns that are particular to the estate. The interesting thing there is that it is not particularly activist, but it is creating a voice. By tapping into that, it brings on another perception of the space.**

BH: You can do that legally pretty easily too. You have the right to broadcast for a certain number of metres usually, and you can do a 'daisy chain', so you don't even need a permit, if you have the community desire to have a radio. You have a transmitter here, and a *receiver-transmitter* here, and so on... and it means you can actually cover a whole housing estate with no need to even have a permit.

**DP: This is a good example of 'negative capability' because you see the results of this way of doing or making. You won't call it resistance, but it is somehow resistance, in a way of inventing something – a way of, say, not listening to the BBC, and listening to your community radio [instead].**

BH: And also [by] not having a permit, you are also resisting having to deal with the bureaucracy.

**NL: It means that if there is pressure coming from somewhere, there is also a greater sense of unity as well. Not just with people involved in the radio, but people getting used to listening to what other people have to say. For example, there was a very recent threat that the council would sell half of the estate, which would be demolished to be able to pay for the refurbishment of the other half. So a meeting was called, 70 attended the first, and three times that number attended the second. That was a huge number for something where you would usually get three or four people turn[ing] up.**

BH: And do you attribute that to the radio?

**NL: No. To a sense of knowing that there [are] a number of activities going on, the radio is one of them, to a response to a threat.**

BH: Its easier to respond to a threat when you have people to respond to.

## Talking Space

**SV: ...very often power is invisible, or the way that it is being exerted is difficult to identify.**

BH: That's because you are [an] individual, so maybe you can identify but you can't do anything. You can only do something when you have other people to do it with. That's something that I have really noticed a lot, because its actually hard to get other people, and this is one of the reasons why culture is political, because its a way to be with other people, and you can naturally respond to a threat then, because you already have the capacity to talk, which, in many cases, you don't in contemporary life.



## Advocacy? Three Modes of Operation for the Activist Architect

Georgeen Theodore

The article proposes three ways of operating that are based on a re-reading of advocacy planning: '*Choose a cause*', '*Create a constituency*', and '*Add an agenda*'. Firstly, in '*Choose a cause*', the article revisits Davidoff's notion of the advocacy planner, but explores how the tools and representational techniques have changed the process and its products. Secondly, in '*Create a constituency*', it examines a new model of project initiation that occurs without a client, which differs significantly from Davidoff's conception of how the advocate works. Thirdly, in '*Add an agenda*', it discusses techniques of building additional agendas into a project that are external to (and sometimes even in conflict with) the client's goals.

By identifying these ways of operating as an advocate, the article seeks to define a proactive alternative to traditional professional practice.



<sup>1</sup> In his landmark 1965 essay 'Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning', Paul Davidoff argued that planners should be advocates for the underprivileged and poor, advancing their interests much in the same way that a lawyer represents a client. Davidoff's work, which responded to the urban crises in American cities in the 1960s, sparked new forms of activism in architecture and planning that influenced a generation of practitioners through the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> For descriptions of a range of activist practitioners, see Michelle Provoost and Wouter Vanstiphout, 'Facts on the Ground: Urbanism from Mid-Road to Ditch', *Harvard Design Magazine* (Fall 2006/Winter 2007), Clare Cumberlidge and Lucy Musgrave, *Design and Landscape for People: New Approaches to Renewal* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 2007), and Mario Ballesteros, ed., *Verb: Crisis* (Barcelona: Actar, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Interboro is Tobias Armbrorst, Daniel D'Oca, and Georgette Theodore.

<sup>4</sup> The site, formerly owned and controlled by the United States Army, was sold by the federal government to Bayonne's Local Redevelopment Agency (the BLRA) with the specification that a portion of the site be dedicated to maritime uses. However, the BLRA wants to redevelop the site as a luxury waterfront community, and inclusion of certain maritime uses—such as a container port—makes the redevelopment process more difficult. The BLRA has been working behind the scenes to invalidate the original terms of the agreement in order to eliminate specific maritime uses. However, the ILA considers the inclusion of a container port essential to its livelihood and has continually (although at times ineffectually) challenged the BLRA's plans.

In his landmark 1965 essay 'Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning', Paul Davidoff argued that planners should be advocates for the underprivileged and poor, advancing their interests much in the same way that a lawyer represents a client.<sup>1</sup> Davidoff's work, which responded to the urban crises in American cities in the 1960s, sparked new forms of activism in architecture and planning that influenced a generation of practitioners through the 1970s. Rejecting the idea of planning as a rational science that operates from a 'neutral' professional position, the proponents of advocacy planning pointed out that planning is by its very nature a political endeavor. There are always winners and losers in every plan and development proposal, and the planner (and designer) has to pick sides.

The idea of rational planning, the proponents of advocacy planning argued, was ultimately nothing more than a smoke screen for planning as a tool in the hands of the powerful. What if, advocacy planning asked, instead of 'automatically' working for the powerful, planners would consciously pick sides, and use their professional position and expertise to work for less powerful constituencies in the city? This question, addressed by advocacy planners of the 60s and 70s, obviously raises a number of other questions that advocacy planning ultimately failed to answer: What is the planner's agency and professional position? Does she work as a free agent or as a bureaucrat with a hidden agenda? Who are her clients? Individuals? A community? And what is a community after all?

After the American planning profession's near extinction in the 1980s, there is today a renewed interest in planning as a means to bring about political and societal change. Recently a small number of designers worldwide have customized ideas of advocacy planning in very specific, often small-scale and sometimes surprising looking projects. Often operating from a position of professional independence, blurring or entirely dismissing the boundaries between planning, architecture and art, these practices take cues from earlier models of advocacy in planning, yet strive to find answers to these open questions in the particularities of specific projects.<sup>2</sup>

As principals in the planning and research office Interboro, I and my partners have revisited aspects of advocacy planning over the last couple of years to investigate how they might play a larger role in practice.<sup>3</sup> Using a number of our projects as examples, I would like to address some of these questions regarding the architect and planner's role as an advocate.

## 'Choose a Cause'

### Bayonne Community Outreach Services

In 2007, Interboro was approached by the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) to help advocate for the retention of container port uses on a highly contested waterfront site in Bayonne, New Jersey. A local planning agency was in the process of redeveloping a former military ocean terminal, and the ILA believed that port uses were illegally excluded in the masterplan.<sup>4</sup> Rather than develop a 'counter' plan, Interboro suggested that the ILA should focus their efforts on informing and educating the public of the illegality and costs of excluding container uses in the redevelopment. Taking form as a mail-able broadsheet, the project 'Bayonne Community Outreach Services' fights for the Longshoremen's cause.

In this project, my partners and I have taken on a role that most closely aligns with Davidoff's definition of the advocacy planner, in that we worked for a clearly defined client whose cause we deemed worth fighting for.

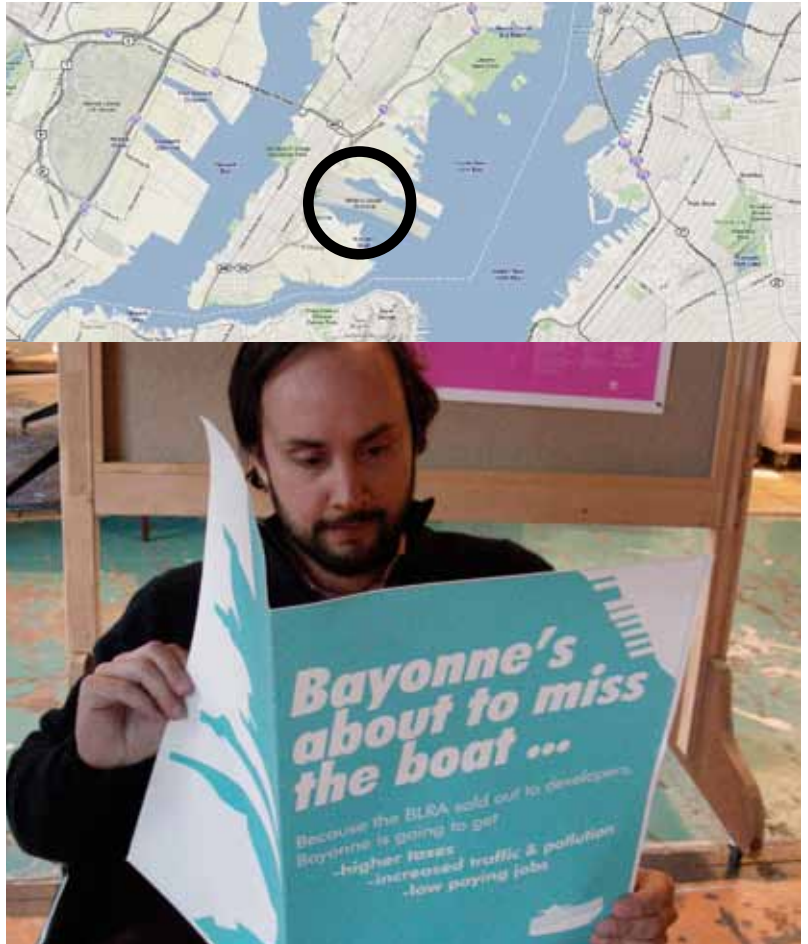


Fig. 1. (Top) The site on the peninsula of Bayonne, New Jersey, in the context of New York Harbour

Fig. 2. (Above) The broadsheet

But while Davidoff describes the advocacy planner's role as preparing a plan that articulates the interests of a poor or powerless group, we instead focused our efforts on visualizing the impact of the redevelopment efforts. We brought these illustrations together in one document, a broadsheet, to be distributed to the community's electorate—not the city's planning agency. So, in terms of both product (we developed a publication rather than a plan) and a process (we are bypassing the city's planning agency), we have adapted and changed what the advocacy planner traditionally does.

We chose to develop the project in this way because the decision of whether to retain the container port uses would ultimately be decided by a local referendum. We focused our efforts on addressing Bayonne voters and proposed making a broadsheet, an easy to read, multi-paged flyer that can be distributed by hand or mailed.

Our challenge was to help resident voters understand the economic and spatial implications of two competing development scenarios: namely, a new residential waterfront community vs. maritime port functions. On the one hand, we needed to untangle the complex legal wrangling of the project and its site, and on the other, we had to relativize the conflict in terms of the issues that mattered most to residents. The broadsheet could



Fig. 3. With these illustrations, we sought to 'ghostwrite' the constituents' responses to future development. We focused on the issues that mattered most to the electorate: taxes, jobs, and traffic.

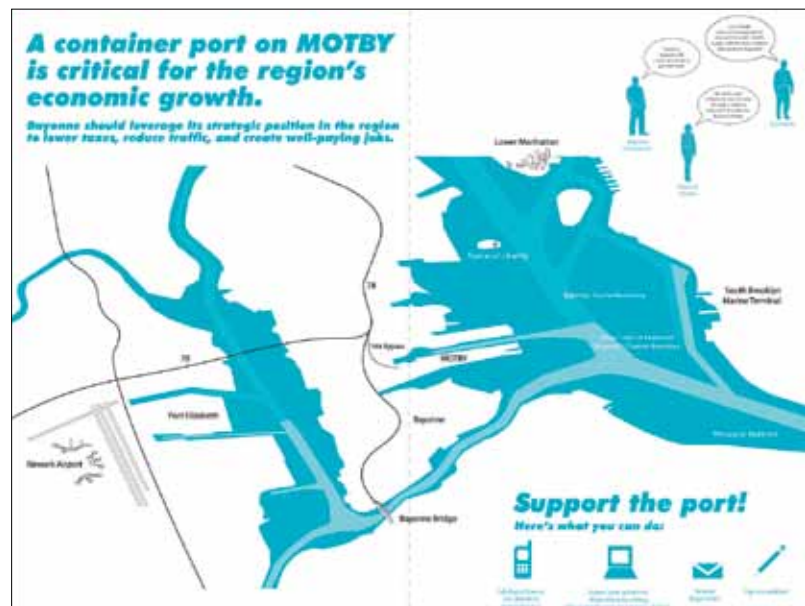


Fig. 4. Although residents focus more on the local impacts of the development, we also highlighted the regional implications of the project.

be used in two ways: one, as a 'script' of talking points for ILA members to use as a guide in their door-to-door canvassing of Bayonne neighborhoods; two, as a mailer to be sent out to Bayonne households.

The broadsheet turned out to be an effective way of engaging a local public that otherwise would not have learned about and discussed this planning issue. While the use of information graphics and design certainly goes beyond typical planning work, this particular approach presupposes the presence of a clearly defined and well-organised 'client' or community. In the case of this project, the 'client' was the ILA, who came to the project with a budget, a distribution network, and an agenda.





Fig. 6. We developed a set of cards that visualised each vision. Above, the 'New Housing' card.



Fig. 7. Most visions have clients. For example, housing's clients are new homeowners.

## 'Create a Constituency'

### Deploy the 'De-Voider'; Improve Your Lot!

In other Interboro projects, our planning work has gone beyond advocating for existing, organised, and well-deserving 'clients.' In 'Deploy the 'De-Voider'' and 'Improve Your Lot!', advocating includes the assembling and organizing a community *that does not yet exist*. Rather than waiting for a client to approach us, we have created a constituency by rendering visible a (yet to be identified) public's practices, naming the community, and helping it organize. Advocacy shouldn't always be about helping an existing constituency obtain its stated goals, but about producing or assembling a public out of the infinity of practices that exist in the city.

'Deploy the De-Voider!' was Interboro's entry to the Van Alen Institute's *Urban Voids: Grounds for Change Competition*. The project was awarded an honorable mention. Our response to the competition, which asked entrants to come up with new visions for vacant land in Philadelphia, was to stress that there are already a lot of visions for vacant land in Philadelphia. Instead of envisioning a vision, we decided to use the competition as an opportunity to advocate for an existing vision that no one would have any economic incentive to take on. As advocates, we thought we could tease out and make visible a vision that already exists, but that has fewer resources (i.e., money, advocates, institutional support) or less legitimacy than some of the other visions. Our point wasn't that the other visions are bad; it's that they don't really need our help.

Driving and walking around the city, we saw evidence of many of these existing visions, ranging from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's vision of transforming empty lots into neighborhood gardens, to Philadelphia Green's vision of cleaning and 'greening' empty lots to improve a neighborhood's image, to the Mural Arts Program's vision of local artists painting the party walls adjacent to vacant lots. We began by taking an inventory of these existing visions; this inventory took shape as a set of cards that visualized each vision. Each card identified the vision, its



Fig. 5. Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program commissions local artists to paint the party walls fronting vacant lots.

advocate and clients, and whether the vision was strategic or tactical. For example, affordable housing is one of the strategic visions we identified. As a vision, affordable housing receives institutional support from a number of different advocates (from the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, the City of Philadelphia, and the National Homebuilders), all of whom have budgets, staffs, and supporters. This vision also has a clear set of clients: new homeowners.

<sup>5</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.37.

<sup>6</sup> We evaluated 'desirability' from our own perspective, which is, of course, subjective.

We also identified what we called 'tactical' visions: practices that have no advocates, no institutional support, and no budgets, such as garbage dumping. Other 'tactical' visions included fantasy gardens, home extensions, private parking, and micro-enterprises. We considered these visions to be tactical because each was realized by a self-interested individual, working from the bottom-up, without any consideration of a larger, overall plan. Building on Michel de Certeau's conception of strategies and tactics, here 'tactical' visions represent the 'art of the weak.'<sup>5</sup>

As a means to evaluate these competing visions—both strategic and tactical—we mapped them according to 'desirability'<sup>6</sup> and capital. We created a graph with capital on the x-axis and desirability on the y-axis. For example, the aforementioned garbage dumping was located in the very cheap and very undesirable quadrant, whereas new housing was located in the expensive and desirable quadrant. This diagram was useful for us as planners and architects to define where we want to operate. In the case of this project, we chose to focus on the quadrant defined by high desirability and low capital, which is the only quadrant without advocates, i.e: the only quadrant without institutional support, i.e: the only quadrant that needs and deserves help. One way we thought we could help was to develop a product line we call 'De-Voider', a cheap kit of parts that helps individuals appropriate empty lots. The practices we identified in the quadrant defined by high desirability and low capital—such as building a house extension or parking a car—could be made easier with small, relatively inexpensive, 'off-the-shelf' items such as the 'instant curb cut,' which can be used to convert a vacant lot into a driveway, and the 'carport unit' which transforms an empty property into a securable garage, and so on.



Fig. 8. Some visions have no advocates, like the vision of transforming vacant lots into fantasy gardens.



Fig. 9. Marcelino Esquilin, using found objects such as carousel horses, created a fantasy garden out of his vacant lot.

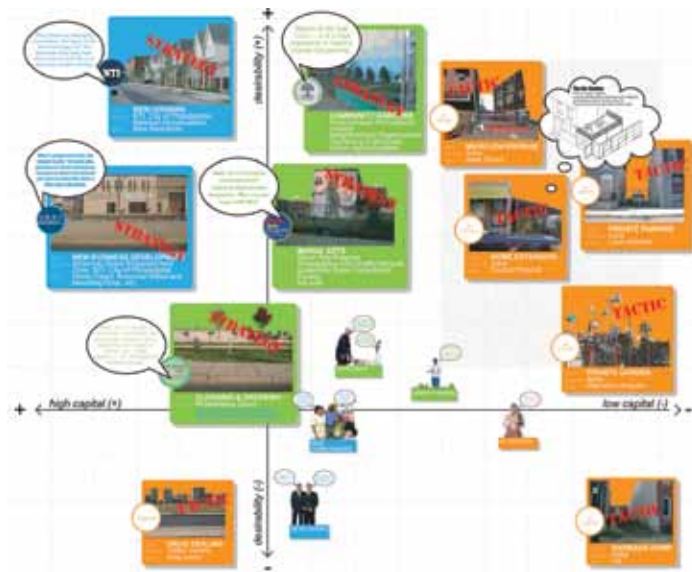


Fig. 10. We mapped a variety of visions according to capital and desirability. We also identified which visions are strategic and which are tactical.

**Improve Your Lot with the De-Voider**  
*Start making use of vacant land!!!*

**Affordable**  
Good prices and available at local stores
  **Easy to Install**  
Can be added to over time
  **Modular**  
Made to fit the Philly lot (12' starter kit)
  **Attractive**  
Spruces up the street




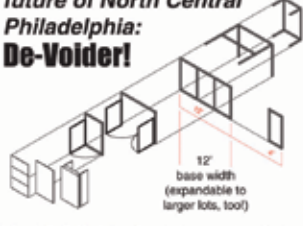

<b>Instant Curb Cut</b>  <b>\$19.99</b>	<b>Carport Unit</b>  --Security --Protection from the elements --No searching for street parking <b>\$159.99</b>
<b>Gazebo Unit</b>  ***Barbeque not included <b>\$79.99</b>	<b>Introducing the newest weapon in the war for the future of North Central Philadelphia: De-Voider!</b>  12' base width (expandable to larger lots, too!)
<b>Shed-Fence Combo</b> Storage AND Privacy!!  <b>\$39.99</b> per bay	<p>What is <b>De-Voider</b>? It's a line of cheap, modular, hardware components that offer entrepreneurial Philadelphians a quick, efficient, and attractive way to "improve your lot!"</p> <p>It's easy to assemble, it's easy to transport, and it's perfectly tailored to Philadelphia's standard 12' lot! Made from 2 1/2" x 2 1/2" aluminum profiles and plywood panels. <b>De-Voider</b> products have been known to increase home-equity!</p> <p>***All prices non-transferrable</p>

Fig. 10. We proposed the 'De-Voider' product line: cheap, off-the-shelf items to be sold at the local hardware store or Home Depot.

Another project in which we rendered a constituency is called 'Improve Your Lot!', which began as a winning entry to the *Shrinking Cities—Reimagining Urbanism*<sup>7</sup> competition. One of the most visible consequences of urban 'shrinkage' is vacant and abandoned land, and in 'Improve Your Lot!' we take a close look at this phenomenon in the city of Detroit, Michigan. Over the years, there have been many spectacular proposals of how to repurpose Detroit's vacant land (rope it off and return it to nature, create a museum of ruins, and so on); in contrast, 'Improve Your Lot!' focuses on a mostly overlooked and unspectacular phenomenon of Detroit's vacant land crisis: that most of the vacant land actually consists of small, single-family lots next to occupied homes, and that recently, many of these vacant lots have been bought up by the owners of adjacent houses.

We call this phenomenon *blotting*, and the expanded parcel a *blot*. Blotting suggests that despite very low property values and other unfavorable conditions, there are nonetheless ways in which individual Detroit residents 'make do' and actually take advantage of shrinkage by expanding and improving their property. While these improvements occur incrementally and from the bottom-up, the cumulative effect of this practice is a large-scale, unplanned 're-platting' of the city. We began this project by driving around and looking for clues of these

<sup>7</sup> Shrinking Cities is a project (2002-2008) of the German Federal Cultural Foundation, under the direction of Philipp Oswalt (Berlin) in co-operation with the Leipzig Gallery of Contemporary Art, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation and the magazine Archplus.

For more information about the competition, see <http://www.shrinkingcities.com/wettbewerb.o.html?&L=1> [accessed 2009].



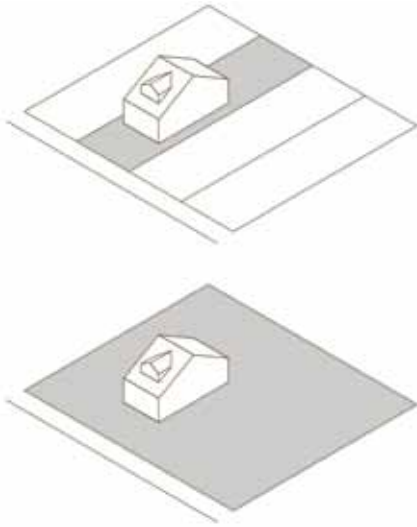


Fig. 11. The first steps of 'creating a constituency' are to name a practice (in this case 'blotting'), and second, make that practice visible.

Fig. 12. (Below) Driving around the City of Detroit, we found evidence of all sorts of blots. Homeowners have expanded their lots to create house extensions, garages, driveways, expanded yards (including spaces for trampolines, satellite dishes and formal gardens).

practices. Some blots were visible because of physical improvements; for example, we found evidence of garage blots, trampoline blots, satellite dish blots, above ground pool blots, driveway blots, and carport blots. Other blots were not so easily identifiable; by searching through the city's cadastral maps, we found evidence that many homeowners had purchased the vacant lots next to their homes. However, they had not yet made any improvements on their expanded property.

Like in the 'De-Voider' project, we visualized these practices through a combination of photography, mapping, and diagramming. We present each case study in a narrative format that explains—through drawings and short texts—how the blot was formed. Furthermore, we visualized the cumulative effects of blotting. By tracing and projecting these property expansions at the scale of a block and beyond, we show that these self-interested actions have a transformative potential.

By rendering these stories visible, we advocate not only for a particular practice (blotting) but for a particular public—the public of blotters that have never been identified as such. We have used these visualizations to introduce the blotting phenomenon to institutions and organisations that might have an interest in strengthening these practices—such as land bank supporters, community development corporations, and city planning officials. We are also working to make it easier for more people to create blots through the development of a 'blotblog', where the newly formed public of blotters can swap expertise, stories, and advice about improving Detroit's vacant lots.



Fig. 13. The expansions of the Anderanin family's property reflect the incremental way in which many blots are formed. In 1932, Jean Anderanin, the family matriarch, purchased one home on one 30x100 foot lot. At this time, every lot had a home. By 1991, the Anderanin property was surrounded by vacant, City owned lots. In 1992, Jean bought the two adjacent parcels. In 1999, her son Michael Anderanin, Jr. purchased two more. Then in 2002, Michael Jr. bought one more lot. By 2004, the Anderanin property had been reconfigured as a six parcel blot. Enclosed by a fence, and improved with a gazebo, koi pond, and a small poultry coop, what began as one 30x100 foot lot is now a 180x100 foot garden blot.

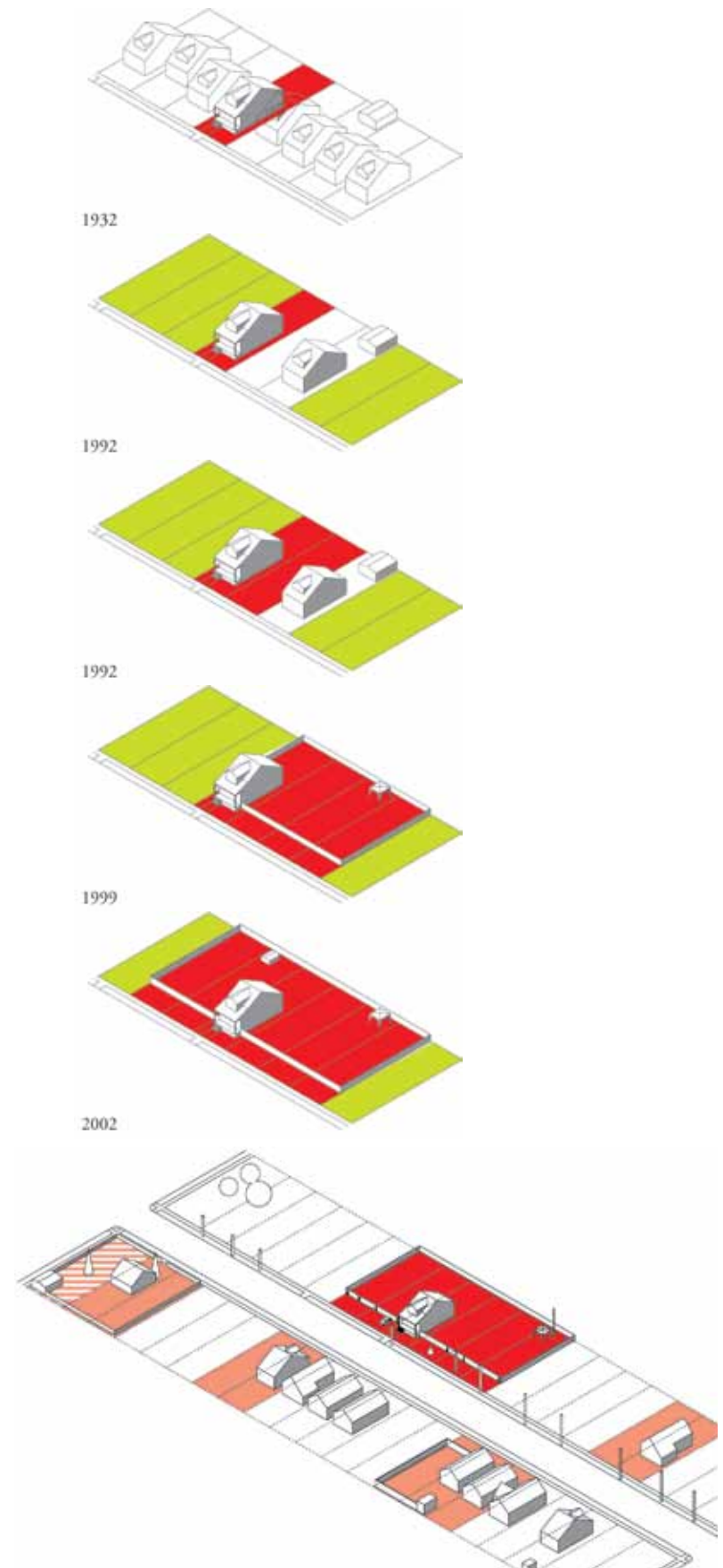


Fig. 14. The Anderanin family blot, shown in red. There are four additional blots on this block, shown in pink.



## Add an Agenda

### Lent Space

A third way to reconsider and expand the role of advocacy in the design process is to incorporate social, political, or environmental agendas into traditional, service-based projects. These agendas are not client generated or driven. In this way, the architect serves doubly: on the one hand as a professional service provider and on the other as an activist advocating for a particular cause or outcome. While this may seem contrary to traditional notions of advocacy, in that the primary client may be powerful and not in need of an advocate, architects could have the greatest impact in this role, since this kind of thinking could be applied to a much larger number of projects.



Fig. 16. The project is located on a prominent site in Soho, New York. (The parcel was previously occupied by four buildings - now destroyed - as shown on the aerial above.)

In Spring 2008, Interboro was asked by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC) to develop a design for a large sculpture garden on a prominent and vacant site in Soho. The project, eventually entitled 'Lent Space', had an unusual parameter: it should be designed and built for a three to five year life span, after which it would be replaced by a large residential tower. The landowner, who was partnering with the LMCC for the project, had just started the lengthy and politically-charged process of changing the site's zoning from industrial to residential, and was hoping that the temporary provision of a public amenity would help the rezoning process along.

The project's program and scope was shaped by the sometimes conflicting aspirations of these two primary stakeholders: the LMCC (as represented by its chief curator) and the landowner. The LMCC curator had his own agenda related to the selection and display of art. The landowner hoped to improve her relations with the surrounding community by providing a temporary open space; yet, she didn't want the project to look 'too permanent' to avoid the community getting accustomed to having a neighborhood park and demanding that it remain in perpetuity. Additionally, the landowner required that the entire site be enclosed by a fence.

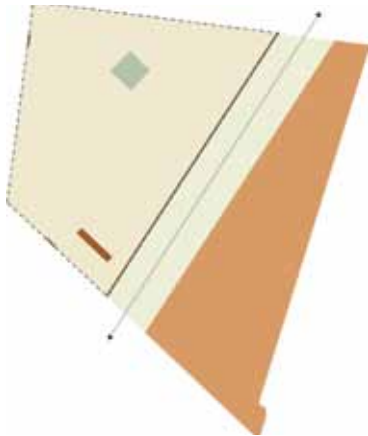


Fig. 16. At night, the fence is closed. The public can use the street as a throughway.

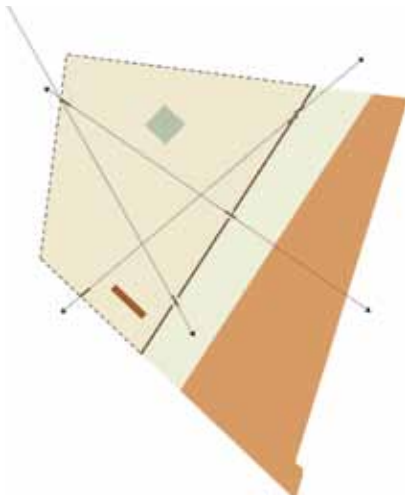


Fig. 17. On typical days, certain panels will be pivoted open to encourage pedestrian shortcuts through the site.

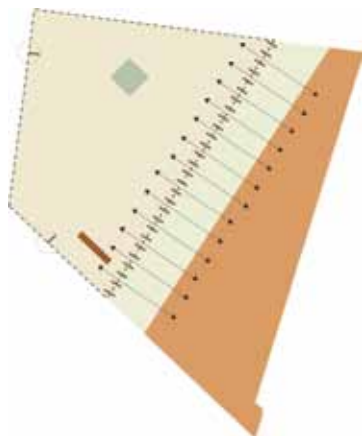


Fig. 18. During special events, all of the panels will be pivoted open, creating a loggia, blurring the boundary between inside and outside.

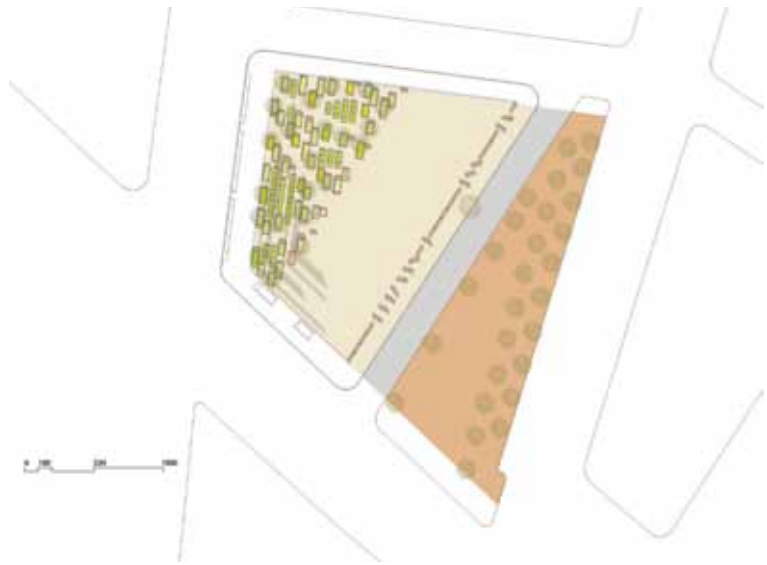


Fig. 19. The site is organized in bands: to the west is a planted threshold composed of individual planter boxes, in the center is a 'program' space, to the east is a fence made of rotating panels.

We organised the site by creating two thresholds along the east and west sides of the site, framing a large, open 'program' space in between. On the east side, we introduced an operable fence made of pivoting panels. The fence's open-ness or closed-ness depends on each panel's rotation. At night when the park is closed, all of the panels line up to create a barrier to prevent people from entering. On an average day, a number of panels are rotated to open up the site along primary pedestrian desire lines, running from building entries to subway entrances, for example. In this way, the opening of these paths encourages people to use the space as an everyday shortcut. At special events and on weekends, all panels are rotated ninety degrees to completely open the eastern edge of the site, creating a loggia-like condition that blurs the boundaries between what is perceived as inside and outside of the site.

The west side of the site faces Varick Street, a corridor with many office buildings. On this western edge, we proposed a planted threshold. This zone is filled with a variety of modular planters containing grasses, shrubs and trees. The planters are clustered to create primary paths through the site (that coincide with the pedestrian desire lines mentioned above), as well as smaller discrete spaces between planters to sit. Given this landscape's proximity to the neighborhood's large office population, we expect that this area will be heavily used by office workers at lunch time and during smoke breaks. Through these design moves—such as opening up the site and creating amenities for constituents not identified in our client's brief (smokers, vendors, area high school students)—we sought to increase the public-ness of the space.

The primary design intervention—the operable fence—looks more like a piece of furniture that could be moved off of the site rather than a permanent installation. Thus, the fence fulfilled the landowner's requirement that the site be physically enclosed and not look too permanent; yet, as an urban design element, it is quite ambiguous. (What is it? Is it a fence? What's inside versus outside, public versus private and so on.) For us, the fence offered an opportunity to add an agenda to the project. In this case, the added agenda—which was to make an enclosed,





Fig. 20. (Overleaf, above) View of the site looking east. Photo: Michael Falco

Fig. 21. (Overleaf, below) View of the planters Photo: Michael Falco



Fig. 22. The fence is made public by adding a bench and a surface for art (the band above the 'window'). By changing the fences' rotations, a variety of different social seating areas can be created.  
Photo: Dean Kaufman

privately-owned site as open and as accessible as possible—was in opposition to the landowner's requirements. So while we enclosed the site, we also undermined the fence; on the one hand, by making it operable and thus permeable during most of the day, but more importantly, on the other hand, by making the fence itself public, turning it into an object that can be interpreted, used, and appropriated in many different ways.

We used this way of thinking on other parts of the project as well. While both the client and the landowner wanted to have some planting to 'soften' the space, we believed it was important to conceive of the planting plan as temporary. We hated the idea of planting and cultivating a large garden that would be destroyed at the project's end after a couple of years. Our planting concept conceives of the sculpture garden as a tree farm, as a landscape incubator for the area. Our plan is as follows: In Year One, nursery trees will be planted on site. In Year Three, after those trees reach a sufficient size, they will be transferred to pits on neighboring streets to become street trees. In Year Four, the cycle will be repeated with more street trees being planted. In Year Five, when the owner starts construction on her new building, all of the planters will be moved to neighboring public spaces. So while the sculpture garden is open and operating, people can see the materials for the future open space network of the neighborhood.





Fig. 23. Here you can see how we imagine this working over time. In Year One, nursery trees will be planted on site.



Fig. 24. In Year Three, after those trees reach a sufficient size they will be transferred to pits on neighboring streets to become street trees.



Fig. 25. In Year Four, the cycle will be repeated, with more street trees being planted.



Fig. 26. In Year Five, when the owner starts construction on her new building, all of the planters will be moved to neighboring public spaces.



Fig. 27. The fences have a central axis around which they can be rotated.  
 Photo: Michael Falco

Of course, this concept worked very well to address the landowner's fears about the community getting too accustomed to having a garden; the garden wouldn't disappear but move and expand. But for us, it offered the opportunity to build in an environmental and urban agenda into the project.

## Rethinking Advocacy

In summary, '*Choose a Cause*', '*Create a Constituency*', and '*Add an Agenda*' represent operations that seek to rethink the role of advocacy in contemporary architecture and planning. Rather than replicating the Davidoff model of advocacy planning, where the planner works within her traditional professional boundaries, planners and architects should re-tool advocacy so that it is interdisciplinary, speculative, and ultimately more expansive about who and what to fight for. This requires seeing the practice beyond the traditional boundaries of the master plan or the building. Rethinking what deliverables or products to provide, upending the convention that every project should start with a client's need, and embedding social, political, or environmental agendas into the projects we pursue, these all depend on us keeping an open mind about what we do. These approaches or modes of operation aren't intended as an advocacy 'check-list', but instead suggest that architects and planners should be more opportunistic and entrepreneurial, finding or inventing a specific approach for each specific situation. As risky as this may be, this can enable us to most agilely advocate for particular outcomes, and lend agency to our desire to influence and shape the physical landscape.





## Urban Negotiations – Nomadic Kitchen and Strategies of Practice

Mick O'Kelly

Urban Negotiations are art strategies that find possibilities for art to engage in real life issues. Nomadic Kitchen is an interstitial art initiative that occupies a place between art and urban space. This work engages with issues of self-organisation, in the process negotiating the urban environment with the residents of Vila Nova, a *favela* community in Sao Miguel, Brazil. Nomadic Kitchen is one urban practice among many in a collaborative and participatory action in the production of public and private space. The emergent strategies for this artwork evolved through a series of workshops with residents of Vila Nova. The working strategy created a place of agency between participants. The project embraces 'informality' as another kind of intelligence whose tactics bring a collective visibility to the project and other kinds of urban negotiations. The structure will function as a locus where residents self govern and develop flexible and creative ways of building a context for living. The structure of Nomadic Kitchen is flexible, fluid, nomadic and adaptable to different occasions and contexts of informal urban practices.

Urban decisions around producing public and social space are made while cooking, eating and meeting in the Nomadic Kitchen. This interstitial sculptural structure becomes a place of dialogue while defining the conditions that determine its situated conditions and public space. The consequences of Nomadic Kitchen explore the potential limits of art production as an urgent action in creating an aesthetic-ethical-spatial-politics.

## Spatial Phenomenon as Places for Action

Social space is produced and structured by conflict. With this recognition, a democratic spatial politics begins.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p.xxiv.

This paper explores the limits of aesthetic practice within the wider dimensions of urban actions and cultural complexity. Rather than being preoccupied with the aesthetic object as the final designation, the work emerges as a process of negotiations whose dynamics bring a visibility to spatial encounter occupying ethical and political relations. The work explores art and non-art actions as spatial encounters made legible by men, women and children in how they negotiate the contingency of their local environment within wider global complexity. Space is not a natural phenomenon but rather is socially produced and negotiated. This work engages with aesthetic-spatial-politics as an ethical encounter. Ethical encounters are created in how we engage with each other in making a commitment to a situation. These relationships are experienced in urban practices and the built environment on a local and global scale. How might ethics impinge on a situation? Is the ethical moment identifiable in a specific situation? Is the ethical context determined or indifferent to specific circumstances and guided by an absolute condition? When ethics impinges upon an art situation that is a spatial encounter, how might this be welcomed and revealed? Ideas of spatiality can be perceived as a static entity, a void we fill with objects such as sculpture, architecture and mundane artefacts. There is a tendency to perceive space as occupying physical qualities, it can be mapped and measured, a material concrete mass that is real and fixed.

New thinking around spatial organisation experienced a radical re-conceptualisation after the Second World War. Urban expansion and the increase in population accelerated into all forms of space on a global scale. Space was no longer regarded as an ontological natural phenomenon, occupying only its physical mass, seen in historical time/space geographical configurations.<sup>2</sup> New discursive spatial configurations proposed space as non-physical, fluid, flexible and conceptual. These notions embodied space as a social production. That is, we produce and construct the spaces we inhabit. This new lexicon imagined expanded and complex ideas of spatiality as 'smooth', 'nomadic', 'rhizomic' and 'multiple'.<sup>3</sup> This radical re-conceptualisation of spatial production shifted the focus from urbanism as a design question envisaged by orthodox urban planning practices, to more axiomatic complex configurations of how we inhabit spatial geographies on a local and global scale. This proposition strives for thinking spatiality that is not representational but constitutive and indeterminate in the pursuit of new boundaries, for reinventing subjectivity, for a new urban imagination. Within these situated conditions, the site of this discourse is placed between the formal city as a predetermined object/artifact that renders public and private space prescriptive, fixed and rational, and the informal city, regarded as illegitimate space, non-space, in some instances not even registering on local maps. Informal settlements and marginal communities are signified as zones of exclusion. These are spaces of proximity, interstitial spaces of 'territorial assemblages'<sup>4</sup> whose structures are in an indeterminate state of impermanence and incompleteness.

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari create a new lexicon of thinking spatially, reorganising and re-conceptualising subjectivity and space beyond physical bodies and spaces to a new organisation of thought that is 'nomadic' and 'rhizomic', and which pursue 'lines of flight'. This way of thinking challenges conventional forms of representation (of the body) as being constitutive rather than non-representational.

<sup>4</sup> 'The territory is the first assemblage, the first thing to constitute an assemblage is fundamentally territorial'. *Ibid.*, p.323.

## Globalisation and Mobilising Forces of Resistance

The background for this project is embedded within the forces of globalisation amidst cultural fragmentation, economic deregulation and failed political systems. This offers an operational field for action between

people, places and situations. In the most part these operational fields of action are dysfunctional and bring to the surface tensions of discontinuity. Such tensions offer opportunities for artists and other practitioners to build new forms of support and solidarity, to generate agency and enablement as alternatives to strategies of globalisation. Nomadic Kitchen and non-art urban negotiations are tactical responses to global phenomenon, but operate within spheres of influence that may be parallel but disconnect. While many urban negotiations operate as discrete barely desirable self-organised interventions, occasions such as the World Social Forum create a platform of connectivity and forum for exchange that is trans-national.

The forces of Globalisation dominate space; in their wake great distances are collapsed, urbanism is deterritorialised as micro and macro sites of encounter. The future of Urbanism beyond Modernism no longer holds a universally applicable image, neither for a cultural vision nor as a method of intervention for artists, architects or town planners. The global-cities or megalopoleis are not only challenged and influenced by their own expanding suburbs but by their secondary cities and beyond. The reach of these influences is considerable, not only addressing centre and periphery but also intersecting with formal and informal economies on a global scale. Informal urbanism offers non-analytical alternative ways to negotiate and articulate particular urban practices in finding new urban imaginings. Urban Negotiations are art strategies that find possibilities for art to engage beyond systems of representation and the symbolic aesthetic,

<sup>5</sup> The World Social Forum is a networked programme for the mobilisation of citizens around the world. The ambition of the Forum is to create an International Platform of Solidarity as set out in Porto Alegre Charter of Principles: 'an open meeting place where groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or any form of imperialism, but engage in building a planetary centered on the human person, come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action.' The architecture of the Forum was a compact infrastructure of tents. This temporary nomadic city of tents consisted of make shift lecture theatres, conference halls, restaurants, coffee kiosks, camping areas, cinemas, Internet and cybernetic centres of communication, public toilets and showers. Like informal urbanism, favelas, barrios and shanties, the Forum's architectural assemblage resembles a 'dock-onto, plug-into and clip-onto' mechanism that connects with the infrastructural grid of Porto Alegre. The ease and casualness of negotiating the scheduled events and conversing with other delegates created a fluid or liquid space of encounter. Mobility is the condition for the production of thought that is nomadic and flexible, open to non-hierarchical systems of politics and governance. The Forum created a place to examine new models and other kinds of imaginings for democracy that began as a grass roots structure. This was achieved through the horizontal network of exchange between NGO's and others involved in creating collaborative desire and agency.



Fig. 1. World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2005.  
Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2005.

discovering other forms of legibility within the indeterminate and contingent conditions that residents inhabit in Vila Nova. The impulse for this project evolved out of a series of conversations between Mudanca de Cena, an NGO organisation working with communities who live in social zones of exclusion in São Paulo, and myself while attending the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005<sup>5</sup> (see Fig 1). Following these exchanges I was invited by Mudanca de Cena (MDCN) and Nova União da Arte (NUA) to find possibilities for art to collaborate on an urban intervention in Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil. Vila Nova is an informal settlement about 24km north east of São Paulo. It sits between the river

Tietê and a railway track on reclaimed land that is prone to seasonal flooding during the rainy season (see Fig. 2). It has a population of 45,000 inhabitants, more than half of which are approximately 18 years of age and under. Vila Nova is robust and resolute in its determination to exist and modernise as a regenerative urban community. At the same time it is environmentally fragile, difficult to urbanise and susceptible to clandestine developers and planning authorities. Up until the 1970s, informal settlements were mostly ignored by formal urban planners and frequently not regarded as part of the formal city register. Their existence was illegitimate and provisional.



Fig. 2. Aerial Photograph of São Miguel, Paulista, Brazil. Photo: Mudanca de Cena, 2006.

As communities organised and formed subaltern groups, they found their own voice and mechanisms to agitate State Authorities to provide infrastructure, to supply water, electricity, sanitation, roads, footpaths, refuse collection and public space. Government investment in urban regeneration is always a project in progress and always seems to be in a state of catching up. Informal settlements through self-regulation and self-organisation struggle to avoid eviction and to secure land tenure. New tools of negotiation evolved to help create a public vision around the realities and diversity of urban habitation at local government level. These were known as 'special social interest zones' (ZEIS) or 'areas of special social interest' (AEIS), the concept of ZEIS was to identify specific needs and alternative strategies for living by informal communities. Participatory Budgeting is such a strategy where citizens are resourced to affect the planning and management of their localities (OP).<sup>6</sup> To recognise the diversity of informal settlements new categories in spatial planning legitimately started to look at and address the relationship between formal and informal urbanism. Recife, a city in the North East of Brazil was the first city to adapt ZEIS strategies in the 1980's and Porto Alegre adopted participatory budgeting in 1989.

Nova União Da Arte (NUA) in Vila Nova is an NGO organisation that negotiates these volatile urban conditions in creating a context for living. They appropriate art activities to build confidence around individual character and creativity in the social process of daily life. These strategies

<sup>6</sup> Participatory Budgeting translates as 'Orçamento Participativo'. It fosters citizen involvement in the planning and management of their locality. Belo Horizonte, a peripheral city to the north east of Brazil was the first to establish a participatory housing budget. Participatory budgeting is now common in other Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Uruguay, and Argentina.



are carried out through workshops in theatre, dance, music, and arts and crafts. NUA and MDCN have been active agents in creating community and campaigning for social inclusion as part of the urban regeneration project in Vila Nova. Until 2005 these urban negotiations were performed in an informal self-build community workshop space in Vila Nova.

The São Miguel city authorities demolished the NUA community workshop space in Vila Nova, denying NUA a public arena for deliberation around their needs and desires. The workshop structure was an informal self-build initiative, a temporary 'make-do' structure that was basic in its ability to function as a workshop space for residents and the wider community. The facility comprised two buildings divided by an open area. The dimensions were 12m x 5m and 8 x 5m. This included spaces for a workshop, office, classroom and toilets. When I visited in January 2005 it was a very bright and cheerful place with a welcoming atmosphere. The workshop space was demolished on the grounds that it was an illegal structure and also because it did not comply with legitimate building and health and safety regulations, specifically inadequate toilets for child use (see Fig. 3).

<sup>7</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1984), pp.29-30.



Fig. 3. Nova União Da Arte Workshop Space and its demolition in Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil. Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2005.

In advance of finding a position for art intervention I was invited to attend a number of meetings that addressed the hegemony of NUA and their future strategies for survival in Vila Nova. This, for me, was a place for listening, a geo-sounding and mapping of parallel desires and energies, in advance of action that would in time have a collective pulse. To remain sensitive to the volatile and uncertain conditions of informal settlements requires solidarity in exploring potentialities for new urban spatial narratives. The recognition of these volatile conditions of survival requires its own logic of spatial organisation. In informal urbanism this logic is non-hierarchical in its forms of improvisation and has a self-knowledge that impinges upon the regulatory codes of formal planned space. All of these meetings took place in the kitchen/dining room of Hermes Cabruera, the NGO and team leader of NUA. Responding to the enthusiasm and desire of these meetings through a series of dialogues and consultation meetings, I proposed an art initiative titled 'Nomadic Kitchen'.



## Nomadic Kitchen an Aesthetic-Spatial-Politics

While NUA are in a moment of rupture and transition without a place for deliberation to construct a sustainable action plan for residents and community, Nomadic Kitchen operates as an interstitial artwork that engages in the process of creating urban narratives with the residents of Vila Nova.

The challenges of this art intervention were:

1. To address the transient nature of spatial organisation in informal settlements.
2. To build a communal space and develop a sustained programme for NUA and Vila Nova regeneration.
3. To develop a collective assemblage of fidelity and desire for a public image of what Nomadic Kitchen might become. How will we invite and recognise ethics as agency in the process of the artwork?
4. How to inscribe an ethical aesthetic into the organisation of space that permeates the different scales and dimensions of the work. Thus an ethical aesthetic becomes one undifferentiated action in producing urban space.
5. To find the limits and dimensions of an artwork to engage in urban regeneration.
6. To find a form where art becomes an event for change in spatial organisation.

Like 'an event as a political occurrence' artwork has the potential to alter the space of a situation or context.<sup>8</sup> How one constructs a house, a street, or maps a journey with their body, ruptures the flow of how inhabitants navigate and produce a place, not as a passive traveller/spectator but as producer. This is not the same as the psycho-geographic mapping of the Situationist International. Their interest in the ephemeral was a subversion of the aesthetisation of place as a surplus action.

The consequence of this action is that the production of space is not motivated by cultural consumption but as an aesthetic-political production. The social production of desire is an action to create change. This can be on a monumental scale i.e. the construction of a motorway or a shopping mall, or it can be an interstitial and temporal event, outside the gaze of the multitude, but having significant consequences for an individual, small group or community i.e. Nomadic Kitchen in Vila Nova. What is the ethical-aesthetic in desire and how does it work in an art situation? Desire is motivated by the principle of fidelity to a specific situation. Desire is constructed and produced in articulating passions, actions, enunciation and outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Consequently desire is an application in an event; it calls into question the event in a situation, it is an action, it is not representational but is constituted and finds meaning only when it is put into action. It encourages and responds to collective action. These actions are given urban forms through the motivation and method of how we might live. We might also ask, what are the dimensions of desire in an art situation? When an individual / citizen uses desire as a tactical strategy to negotiate a way of life, they assemble agency for an individual or a group. These actions generate agency and create territorial assemblages. To encounter a territorial assemblage is not an historical or linear negotiation but rather it is lateral and spatial, geographical and geo-political, it is also an ethical encounter. Informal settlements offer alternatives to existing spatial arrangements of human endeavour. Urban negotiations operate on many fronts and in many directions, these are 'lines of flight'<sup>10</sup> to use Deleuze and Guattari's phrase, they are schizoanalytic lines that transgress the social field creating ruptures in

<sup>8</sup> Alan Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, (London: Continuum, 2007). Badiou develops the concept of the eruption of an event, splitting the situation in two. As a political act the event and its situated conditions are always changed.

<sup>9</sup> 'Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations... Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions'. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.215.

<sup>10</sup> 'Lines of flight' are different from horizontal and historical lines in that they are schizoanalytic lines that operate in bundles and multiple pathways. The notion of the Body without Organs is such a conceptualisation of the new ideas of subjectivity composed of complex lines that resist analogue perception. See, *Ibid.*, p.203.

sites of political, aesthetic and spatial encounter. Urban negotiations (Nomadic Kitchen) adapt the notion of the *schizoanalytic lines of flight* as tactical manoeuvres of survival and aesthetic practices, in how humans produce public and private space. The alignment of this concept is not singularly invested in formal aesthetic qualities and theory but rather at the level of political economy. Nomadic Kitchen is a tactical manoeuvre, an everyday urban practice that operates between consumption, desire and production, and the inherent contradictions of formal spatial organisation and state governance. Informal urban practices are precarious and unpredictable; *schizoanalytic lines* capture the most creative energies to rethink the situation and negotiate the limits of action.

## Urban Desire and Ownership

Producing desire requires a collaborative process that will in turn bring together a collective sense of ownership and imagining that strengthens resourcefulness beyond the immediate situation. What kinds of knowledge, methods and tools empower non-analytical approaches to urban desire? In July 2005 I ran a series of workshops with residents and participants living in Vila Nova. Participants in the workshops included parents, children, teenagers and the NGO team who organise NUA. From these workshops emerged an individual and collective visual aesthetic for what Nomadic Kitchen would become, and an aggregate of desire for a new imagined urbanism. Through drawings and maquettes a bricolage<sup>11</sup> of collective imagination made visible this aggregate of collective desiring. The workshops developed and revealed an imaginative vision between the participant groups and the artist. This explorative strategy found an aesthetic creative process that looks to multiple possibilities for a nomadic urban structure (see Fig.4).

Building a sense of collective imagination and possibilities for what the project might become was grounded in terms of the dimensions of the site and the capacity to dream. Hermes Cabruera offered his family house to the project as he was relocating his family to a new dwelling (see Fig 6). The dimensions and boundaries of land was a place to dream and imagine a new confluence of positions for thinking and acting differently. The emphasis on visualising nomadism is to keep 'thought' nomadic and adaptable to the changing conditions of the informal *milieu*. Life in informal settlements is temporal and contingent to the situations at hand, this does not aestheticise the concept of nomadism but acknowledges the need to hold thought as flexible to the urgency of the situation. Using bits of drawings, masking tape, glue and cardboard, the project Nomadic Kitchen would in time take on life, scale to urban dimensions, and spill out of the workshops into the street and alleyways in unpredictable and diverse ways. A desire to celebrate nature was a recurring motif in many drawings and maquettes despite the reality of Vila Nova being mostly on a floodplain, barren wasteland and a scatology of open sewers.

This process explored and interrogated the real life complexity of *favela* informality but with a lyrical sensibility revealing imaginative drawings and models of plants, flowers, trees, vegetables, a kitchen and gardens, all aligning with ideas of nature. To respond to nature and explore the imagination of this desiring process, it was initially proposed to build a temporary / nomadic garden on the workshop roof. This hiatus was initially motivated by the limitation on space but just as significantly, it disrupted the conception of the garden as implicitly a natural phenomenon. This garden would be above ground on the roof, an interstice between the earth and the sky. With recycled plastic tubs, pots and bottles this modest roof garden would intersect and disrupt the nature/culture dilemma of informality, of spatial organisation that is

<sup>11</sup> 'It could be said that the engineer is always trying to make his way out and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within'. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp.18-20.

Ernesto Laclau suggests that the bricolage is an ethico-political encounter within an incomplete system and that the system itself is ethical. See, Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p.79.



Fig. 4. Nomadic Kitchen Workshops in Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil.  
Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.

peripheral to the normative city. The initial impulse was to consider the garden as a retinal experience and not as a gardening action.

### Collective Action and Structural Transformation

To advance the process from a space of desiring and imaginary aesthetic to a physical structural reality, involved appropriating different regimes of knowledge and know-how in making legible collective action. The process acknowledges that Nomadic Kitchen as an art initiative is one urban practice among many in this collaborative action, bringing together different players in the regeneration process and in the production of public and private space in Vila Nova. To this extent the residents are embedded and integrated into the origination of the work; this makes their position that of co-producers in the urban negotiations of Nomadic Kitchen. The parameters of this urban action bind together the context and different language narratives of a migrant community engaged in the process of creating new structural transformations. At this juncture the project occupies conflictual positions between legality and illegality. To establish the project as a legitimate enterprise, the artwork (Nomadic Kitchen) must comply with mandatory building, planning, and health and safety regulations. Being a legitimate enterprise would secure government funding for NUA to carry out its work. As with many forms of unofficial urban intervention which occur between state authored approval and the micro tactics of a community trying to survive urban transgressions, the state frequently turns a blind eye. In such situations urban negotiations are tactical strategies of silent encroachment. For NGOs to work with children they must be licensed by the state. To acquire a licence the project Nomadic Kitchen must provide separate toilets for boys and girls, adults and a disabled toilet.

What are the forces where the formal and informal engage with each other and what are the tools of communication to legitimise that process? The assemblage of crayon drawings, bits of masking tape and cardboard maquettes would not do it for the rational analytic planning methods employed by formal urban planning. There was the need to utilise the language and internal logic of architecture, to establish the concept, to

detail the building methods and communicate the project to the City Planners. This shift in territoriality invests the project with protean qualities in-between the legitimate and illegitimacy. Through established networks of support contact was made with an emerging architectural practice Group 5 / Obra who were invited to collaborate. Obra reviewed all material documentation and research carried out in the workshops, enabling them to frame the concept and context of the project. The drawings and maquettes from the workshops were an inspirational influence in developing and making design decisions. This approach to design moves beyond formal concerns of design and decision making, to privilege the end users as priority and to value informal non-hierarchical kinds of intelligence. Fig. 5 shows a digital design model based on the workshop material and maquettes. Acknowledging the limitation of space, it was proposed that the kitchen and temporary garden would be located on the roof of the one storey two-bedroom house. This would utilise the limited space and symbolically bring a new visibility to the project and to the public image of NUA and the surrounding community. Situating the Nomadic Kitchen on the roof created a public visibility that ruptured and registered a break with the ordinary function of people and place



Fig. 5. Digital drawing of Nomadic Kitchen by Group 5/Obra, 2005.

### *Mutuário* and Collective Desiring

The *Mutuário* is collective assemblage of urban building where the community synchronises their desires, energies, passions and expenditure towards a collective action. This collective action is central to the idea of community where the collective good is served by individual need. The Nomadic Kitchen was constructed with *Mutuário* collaboration and support, by the NGO team and local residents. This process of building and extending onto existing informal urban structures is common practice for families in need of additional space. This is an art/architecture of urgency whose interstitial aesthetic is based on improvisation and appropriation. It is a labour of reciprocal economy between neighbours (see Fig. 6). The structure of Nomadic Kitchen will function as a locus where residents self govern and develop flexible and creative ways of building a context for living in Vila Nova. The structure of Nomadic Kitchen is flexible, fluid,



Fig. 6. Mutuário, collective building action Nomadic Kitchen, Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil. Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.

nomadic and adaptable to different occasions and contexts. This aesthetic is sympathetic to the self-build, 'making-do' strategy of the informal architecture of *favela* communities. As urban negotiations these strategies function as tactical responses to the ever changing conditions of informal settlements. As urban actions their tactical potential is determined by the ability to respond to the limitations of the situation that is always outside individuals' autonomy. Urban decisions around producing public and social space are made while cooking, eating and meeting in the Nomadic Kitchen. This interstitial structure becomes a place of dialogue while also defining the conditions that determine public space.

Urban Negotiations seek out the fluidity of spatial entanglement, where creative urban practices adapt to the changing condition of the local terrain. The Nomadic Kitchen is structured and built on contingency, indeterminacy and aesthetic-political complexity; its structure is an assemblage and not a predetermined constellation of parts, a process of absorption into the formal networks of the normative city grid. These transient assemblages while occupying a local situated-ness plug into the global networks of São Paulo, the libidinal flows, flows of utility and capital. This tactical interstice between local and global almost never comes without contradiction. Nomadic Kitchen's status as a temporary interstitial artwork is integrated into an informal and unofficial house built on appropriated land. The site is clearly materially and discursively disputed as it straddles simultaneously, multiple conflictual positions i.e. the land and existing house is illegally appropriated yet the Nomadic Kitchen has legitimate approval by the formal regulatory instruments of the city. There are similar and dissimilar interests at play distinguishing the relationship of formal (state control) and informal (self-organisation) in working out human narratives of what De Certeau calls 'daily life'. Nomadic Kitchen would best be considered, not as kitchen object but as 'kitchen process', in a continuing state of negotiation where the aesthetic always leaves enough room for residents to inscribe and interpret its future. The aesthetic of mobility and flexibility of the Nomadic Kitchen is not exclusively about the physical structure but about the mobility and flexibility of thought of its occupants. The materialisation of Nomadic Kitchen is a manifestation of its affects and of how it becomes a useful tool in negotiating the public domain (see Fig 7).





Fig. 7. Nomadic Kitchen, Front View, Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil.  
Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.



Fig. 8. Nomadic Kitchen, Rear View, Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil.  
Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.

### Spaces of Appropriation Legitimacy and Agency

Informality as a way of life contributes and expands the conditions for the future of an urban vision. While informal urbanism is perceived as peripheral to the dominant practices of the normative city, its influences are experienced in all forms of production of urban spaces. During the course of the project I set up a number of round-table meetings with affiliated participants and residents in Vila Nova. These were informal conversations held in the Nomadic Kitchen to discuss ideas of public and private space. To identify in more universal terms the ephemerality and concreteness of its existence, and in particular the places in Vila Nova





Fig. 9. Appropriation of Space, Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil. Photo: Mick O’Kelly, 2006.



Fig. 10. Roundtable meetings in Nomadic Kitchen, Vila Nova, São Miguel, Brazil. Photo: Mick O’Kelly, 2006.

where citizens have access to public space. It was widely agreed that the only public urban forms identified in Vila Nova were the schools. Beyond this there are no public places to meet, i.e. public parks, gardens or play areas for children. Many adults specifically mothers expressed: ‘There is no public space in Vila Nova, and we can’t bring the children to public parks as they are too far away, and we can’t afford the bus fare’.<sup>12</sup>

These perspectives confirm the legitimization of formal constituted public spaces. For informal communities the conditions that constitute public space are authorised and administered by the state but their public vision is always somewhere else. The theory of public space as a universal

<sup>12</sup> Views expressed by parents attending round table meeting in Nomadic Kitchen about what is public space and who has access to public in Vila Nova.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. M. Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p.61.

concept suggests that it must be valid for everyone. It is a gift from the State: it belongs to no one and everyone at the same time. This would be its universal claim.<sup>13</sup> But in informal settlements, *favelas* and *barrios*, public / private space does not so much pre-exist a priori for urban negotiations to take place in. Public space in informal settlements are spaces of occupation and appropriation and are created through the process of repeatedly reinventing themselves over and over.

Appropriation of space is a provocative act created and constructed by human intervention and intrusion into the space of urbanism. Such actions emerge out of discourse but it must be acknowledged that discourse is not external to the process of appropriation, it is a spatial construction within the conditions of appropriation itself. Spaces of appropriation are places of action that create the very possibility of discourse to emerge. How this is actualised creates a dislocation between regimes of practice. Regimes of practice are multiple and operate across discursive levels that are semiotic, linguistic, aesthetic and political. Such dislocations are actualised through the forces of social dislocation and power relations i.e. determination (power of governance) and autonomy (self-organisation). This implies that the authority of power is determinate and centred and that autonomy is seen as peripheral, resistant and divergent. Centres of power impose a structure; social dislocation frustrates the centrality of the structure. The following examples will explore the appropriation of spaces and spaces of appropriation, legitimacy and agency. Some forms of intervention are collaborative and peripheral to the formal city model while others are individual, motivated within the legitimate planned space of São Paulo.

Aligning political practice, public action and art practices offers temporal moments of intrusion and transgression into the public domain. This locates an interweaving of a complex configuration of positions where the boundaries are constantly in a state of flux. Appropriation of space is a creative response to such configurations. Creative responses to the absence of public space, to its negation are produced in informal appropriation as urban actions. These are commonly referred to as vacant spaces, empty or open spaces where a person or group occupy and inscribe a new use. Appropriation of empty spaces opens new trajectories of use, like De



Fig. 11. Public Private negotiation of Urban Space, Ave Cons Rodrigues Alves, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.



Fig. 12. Public Private appropriation of Urban Space, Rua Paulo Avelar, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.

#### Certeau's tactics of walking.

If it is true that a spatial order organises an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualises some of these possibilities. In a way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> de Certeau, p.98.

These are tactical incursions where creative urban practices adapt and challenge the changing condition of informal urbanism. Nomadic Kitchen is one such incursion into an appropriation of space. Adjacent to the site of the project there is an empty space; an abandoned piece of land that once had a tight network of informal houses. Residents have erected make shift goal posts and transformed this open/empty space into a football pitch (see Fig. 9). This is a creative act of antagonism,<sup>15</sup> operating on the limits of legality between formal and informal urbanism as legitimate or illegitimate enterprises. Where one feels hopeless and overpowered in not having a choice of where to live, informality as another kind of intelligence subverts the situation at hand, turning disadvantage to advantage in how one works in between the situated conditions and reveals unexpected improvisation. Informal appropriation of empty spaces offers another understanding on what is public about space. This illegitimate occupation, 'making-do' tactic is about isolated actions, a response to the outside space of the formal city. Public spaces of appropriation operate as spaces of exclusion, beyond civilization and society whose actions change the organisation and operation of urban forms. The appropriation of space to become public space is about making a new lexicon for its future users. De Certeau's tactics of appropriation delineate space as contingent and relational. 'Dancing on a tightrope requires that one maintain an equilibrium from one moment to the next by recreating it at every step by means of adjustments; it requires one to maintain a balance that is never permanently acquired'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.20-21.

<sup>16</sup> de Certeau, p.73.



Fig. 13. Camelô, Street Trader, São Paulo, Brazil.  
Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.



Fig. 14. Street Market, Rio Branco, Motorway São Paulo, Brazil.  
Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.

Appropriation of public space is equally not only a condition of the expanding informal periphery but is also a phenomenon of the formal normative city. Fig. 11 shows the improvisation of car gates customised to wrap around the car parked in the porch. Fig. 12 shows how residents have built a terrace of ramps to accommodate the difference in levels between the car porch, the footpath and the road. In each case residents have appropriated what is regarded as public space for their private use. In each occurrence the boundary between public and private becomes unclear. These are grey areas, liminal spaces of appropriation that harness new modalities of public and private spaces of human encounter.



## Geo-Spatial and Geo-Economies of Survival

Ideas of periphery are not always situated on the margin and marginality can be embedded within the *milieu* and flux of the normative city. The marginal can operate as a form of silent encroachment within. The distinction between the formal and informal extends beyond the boundaries of the geo-spatial to geo-economic. As seen from fig. 9 and 10 their relationship is more malleable than one would imagine. Street traders known as *vendor ambulante* or *camelô* operate in the pedestrian streets, parks and on the downtown motorways of São Paulo. This offers new networks of migratory trading practices that are interstitial economies of survival. There are thousands of such *vendor ambulante* or *camelôs* operating across São Paulo. Their strategies of survival draw attention to formal economies and their tactical counter-response of black market trading and shadow economies; in the process their spatial tactics revitalise the street and the future dynamic of the city. These urban trading practices highlight the tensions between the regulated and unregulated flows of people, consumerables and capital. In conditions of indeterminacy such practices operate on a larger scale across geo-political economies worldwide.



Fig. 15. Prestes Maia, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo: Mick O'Kelly, 2006.

The term '*Camelô*' means to blend into the immediate surroundings and become invisible. This urban negotiation is a tactical application whose actions create multiple connections, possibilities, and situations. It exploits the collapsed infrastructure of city planning and the gridlock of the motorway network. It exploits a failure in the system that constructs desiring assemblages in an interstitial informal economy that subverts the balance of power. These mobile trading practices are spatial manoeuvres where the traders claim and re-appropriate space, collaging their desire onto those of the car drivers stuck in traffic. These tactical manoeuvres of the *camelôs* do not go unnoticed by multi-nationals and big corporate business. Companies realising the opportunity and potential of marketing their wares sub-contract the *camelôs* as distribution points to push their slogans and logos, peddling anything from chocolate bars to cars, mobile phones and the sex industry (see Fig 11).

Similarly, Rio Branco is a motorway in the centre of the city where



residents have successfully campaigned and succeeded in creating a moratorium on traffic flow each weekend. From 10.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. each Sunday the motorway is a traffic free zone. In part this moratorium initiative was motivated by the desire to dull the noise of the endless flow of traffic. The motorway was an emergency response from the city planners to reduce the gridlocked traffic and get more cars through the city. It did not accommodate for the noise pollution that residents living parallel to the moving traffic would have to endure. Each Sunday it becomes an informal market, creating openings for trading material goods and services. These include mobile cafés, bicycle repair outfits, barbeque stations, a place for deliberation and a five kilometre running, pedestrian space. These spatial incursions are micro-revolutionary sites of encounter that reveal the cultural complexity, between formal and informal, centre and periphery. (see Fig 14).



Fig. 16. Library and literacy classroom in Prestes Maia Favela, São Paulo. Photo: Mick O'Kelly 2007.

## Becoming Library and Infinite Expansion

Until recently Prestes Maia was an illegal settlement in the heart of São Paulo. It is twenty storeys high, the tallest vertical *favela* in Latin America. Two and a half thousand people, approximately six hundred families, occupied this building which was formerly a textile factory. The residents were under constant pressure of eviction from the city and police wanting to repossess the building in order to redevelop it in accordance with the image of a modernist urban planned city (see Fig. 15). The library in the basement of Prestes Maia is another example of a micro-revolutionary site of encounter.

This project began when Lamartine Brazilliano, a resident of Prestes Maia found a bunch of discarded magazines, which he made available to the rest of the occupants of the tower block. This public act was responded to with reciprocity, visitors donated books and magazines, building an archive whilst creating lines of connectivity with other members of the *favela*. The library functioned as a place of exchange and encounter. The architecture of the archive is indexed and coherent but with an eclectic assemblage of surprising juxtaposition and fusion of parts. Encyclopaedias sit comfortably along side popular novellas, philosophy alongside children's

storybooks, magazines alongside academic journals, all arranged not by intellectual proximity but according to shape and size. The aggregate of its dimensions are always in negotiation, continually changing shape, it is an open-ended proposition, in a sense a library always becoming. The action of constructing the library creates `lines of drift`, lines of inter-connecting travelers who pass through the system of lending and borrowing. Two evenings per week there were literacy classes for children and adults. This was an informal initiative to learn the linguistic tools of signification that give access to the formal public sphere. There is no natural available light in the basement so what little there is comes from a vine like network of raw electric wiring borrowed from the street above. The concept of lines here serves to reveal the urgency and complexity of this urban intervention to the formal city that engulfs it outside. The impulse of the library is not containment but infinite expansion and spreading, always reaching out. The library functions as a way of mapping human interconnectedness and relations.

## Modes of Practice and Interstitial Blind Spots

It might be argued that informality, as an assemblage of hybrid practices of spatial organisation, will continue to play a significant role as antagonistic and destabilising to the future of formal urbanism. These are relational and incomplete systems of transference and transaction where disparate worlds collide and intertwine and their boundaries create a malady of trajectories yet to be imagined.

Urban Negotiations as tactical strategies of practice, and more specifically Nomadic Kitchen as an interstitial structure and urban negotiation, tests the coextensive potential of an aesthetic-spatial-politics to engage in finding the potential limits of an art situation and the social production of space. The project offers a discourse through its affects, instruments and method, creating different kinds of actions as an agency for exchange. What is critical, is determining the value of that exchange. Implicit in generating value regarding the art enterprise is the role of audience in relation to the artwork. It is more than muted that the audience or spectator brings the artwork into existence. The space and convention in which one experiences an art situation is mostly an isolated encounter where the image draws the spectator into a ritual or theatre of illusion and mimesis; where the artwork operates within an enclosed system of appearances, what the philosophers call 'the thing in its self'.<sup>17</sup> In this scenario the materiality of artwork holds syntagmatic relations, meaning and representation is determined within the narrative itself and not some external reality in the world. Institutional art spaces are autonomous spaces of withdrawal from the *milieu* of the public. Collaborative or participatory practice generates a multiplicity of energies and passions that emancipate collective desiring in a common social production. The art event acts not as an aesthetic object but as an alibi to do something else.

This process visualises independent thought and validates equality of intelligence and distribution of roles towards a reciprocity of exchange, all the while being alert to recognising the newness in a social situation and the action to transform it. Nomadic Kitchen's location in an informal settlement where residents generate their own narratives through urban practices, supports the thesis of this project. The residents are insiders, their position is one of occupancy and use and not the gaze of the spectator, the voyeur or outsider. This artwork proposes that there is no audience that creates meaning, completes or legitimises the artwork. The residents of Vila Nova are citizen producers of Nomadic Kitchen and the wider spatial politics that produces subjectivity, community and a common space for action. The function of desiring production within this urban

<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Company, 1987), p.29.

action is to locate the labour of desire not as surplus expenditure but as an urgent action in self-organisation. The potential for (Nomadic Kitchen) as an aesthetic-spatial-politics to engage in the production of space in urbanism, creates a new dialectic and project paradigm. In part this asserts that new models of art practice engage a *public* but not audience or spectator. In the process of producing space, the *public* is constituted in multiple trajectories creating a plurality of subjectivity. Perhaps one needs to approach this mode of practice as a penumbra of effects that are caught in its interstitial blind spots. This practice tries to find legibility for an urban imagination and to locate the protean dimensions of an art practice that occupies the discursive fields of an aesthetic-ethical-spatial-politics, which are in a continued state of indeterminacy and contingency.



## ***'Territori in Circolo': Architectural Praxis for the Survival of Rural Communities in the Italian Mezzogiorno***

Daniele Vadala'

The Italian Mezzogiorno and particularly Calabria looks like a 'green desert' where the environmental degradation proceeds with the marginalisation of many small communities, whose survival is at risk. Santa Caterina dello Ionio, 450 meters above the Ionian Sea is among the most valuable settlements founded in the Middle Age on the Gulf of Squillace, a particular model of defended enclosure fully combined with the site, rich in cultural and environmental values.

The project 'Territori in Circolo', promoted by the association Pheozemia with the local parish, aims to engage the neighbourhood in discovering the relationship between natural resources, urban forms and community life, on this Mediterranean edge of Europe. The project concerns a territory of 2.000 residents, whose profile, stretching from the mountain to the coastline, presents a significant cross-section of this extreme part of the peninsula. The idea of linking different objects and places along this section of Ionian Calabria finally aims to introduce advanced actors and shapes in a declining rural area of the Italian Mezzogiorno.



## Rural Italy and the Marginal Urbanities

If we take into consideration the problem of the abandon of rural areas as a central issue in spatial planning, the case of the Italian Mezzogiorno comes out as particularly relevant, since it is mainly composed of rural territories whose strategic importance has not been properly recognized. In Italy, out of 30 millions hectares of land, 23 millions hectares are made up of hillsides and mountains, forming the 76% of the whole national territory. In the Mezzogiorno<sup>1</sup> this percentage is 80%, while in Calabria is 90%. In the North it goes down to 70%. It should also be observed that in large part, these rural territories coincide with municipalities, of less than 5 thousand residents. These small municipalities are 5780 in Italy, out of 8101, and make up 72% of the whole. While they represent only 19% of the population of Italy, their territorial surface makes up 55% of the national territory.

In the last sixty years, these rural areas have suffered a considerable abandon in economic production and social cohesion in spite of significant external economic flows: a certain expenditure from the state and immigrant remittances from Europe and overseas. The result of this draining process is not difficult to sketch out: the rural territories of Italian Mezzogiorno begin to look like an extended 'green desert', mostly made up of degraded woods, idle arable lands, wild pastures and abandoned fields. Here and there, a myriad of small historical settlements lay high above emerging rocks, stuck between the countless valleys of the Appennino, the great backbone that goes uninterrupted along the Italian peninsula. These settlements, ranging from 1.000 to 3.000 inhabitants, are generally linked to the main coastal corridors through transversal provincial roads that, even if structured with suitable road beds, nonetheless present steeply

<sup>1</sup> The Italian Mezzogiorno comprises in a strict sense, the six southern regions of the peninsula: Campania, Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Puglia and Calabria, in a wider sense it also includes the major isles of Sicilia and Sardegna.



Fig. 1. The village of Santa Caterina dello Ionio. Photo: M. Condo'

sloping courses due to the gradient of the coastal hills.

It is obvious that in the current economic phase, characterized by ever higher levels of exchange in resources, goods and services, the presence of these physical thresholds affects in many aspects the urban functionality, from the efficiency of logistic services – that strongly influences the retail market in the small villages – to the profitability and convenience of the local transport services. In the course of these last decades, on top of these basic weaknesses, further reductions came with regards to the public services, with a particular effect on the historical hilltowns. To the obsolescence of many grid-infrastructures such as water systems and the lack of a general fuel gas pipe in many of these centres, has been added the discomfort produced by some legislative measures recently introduced by the Italian government to control the public finances.<sup>2</sup>

### A Slice of Ionian Versant: Santa Caterina dello Ionio

So let us give our attention to Calabria, where the territorial unbalance reaches an exemplary dimension and character, with a very high number of historical hill-towns facing abandon if not already deserted, in contrast to all the recent urbanization, concentrated on the coastal ribbon. This configuration comes out in a paradigmatic shape on the Ionian side of Calabria, namely on the Gulf of Squillace. This area, between the 9th and 10th century A.D., experienced flourishing urban settlements, a dispersed net of small urbanities, regularly castled, to form a shielding line of communication from the pirate-like incursions that regularly affected the Central Mediterranean from the early Middle Age to the beginning of the Modern Era.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these norms directly affect the small centres, with special regard to primary education, such as the standard recently introduced providing for the shut-down of the primary schools that do not have fifty children. This measure has been greeted in many rural villages of Calabria with pacific demonstrations, for example with the request by the senior citizens for admission in the primary school - as the number of their grandchildren is not sufficient to maintain a service that is also a civil right guaranteed by the Republican Constitution. This protest has underlined how the protection of the primary school is decisive to the social cohesion and the survival of these historical villages, beyond the stiff parameters of a finance act.



Fig. 2. Santa Caterina and the Gulf of Squillace on the Ionian side of Calabria. Image: M. Condo', D. Vadala'

The historical settlement of Santa Caterina dello Ionio overlooks the Gulf of Squillace at its southern end, not far from Cape Stilo, in an approximately barycentric position between the ancient foundations of Crotona and Locri. The modern municipal borders, shaped like a lengthened isosceles triangle, go over the historical feudal tenure of Santa Caterina, defining a significant section of the extremity of the Italian peninsula which includes at relatively short intervals, very different geomorphological, natural and anthropical settings, following one after the other. Twenty minutes drive along the provincial road is enough to reach the historical centre of Santa Caterina, 480 metres a.s.l., while it is half an hour drive from the coast to the mountain village of Elce della Vecchia at 1.100 metres a.s.l. When observing now the administrative division of the small municipalities facing the Gulf we see a typical layout where the municipal limits are arranged transversely to the coastline.

In each of these territories, a dual urban scheme can be normally identified:

1. A medieval hill-town, generally on a rocky relief emerging from the coastal hills, at a height between 200 and 500 metres,
2. A linear coastal settlement, developed in the second half of the 20th century along the national road and the railway.

Even if the administrative boundaries suggest the territorial integration from the coastal ribbon towards the hills, facts show exactly the contrary: an effective integration within this dual scheme does not exist and the distance perceptible among the coastal settlement and the hill-town is much more than the real distance.



Fig. 3. Administrative boundaries of Santa Caterina and altimetry of the territory. Image: M. Condo', D. Vadala'



Fig. 4. Medieval lane in the historic village. Photo: D. Vadala'



Fig. 5. Mountain village in the upper part of the territory of Santa Caterina. Photo: D. Vadala'

## The Role of the 'Open Assets'

The project 'Territories in Circle' comes from these assumptions trying to give a contribution to a fundamental question: how a small, once rural, community on the Mediterranean edge of Europe can play a role in the XXI century's urban society. In an economic framework, which is substantially different from the pre-industrial era, an answer to this question could come from the estimation and utilisation of local resources now largely unexploited. The places of the project are composed of edifices



Fig. 6. 20th century's coastal settlement along the national road.  
Photo: D. Vadala'

and properties that can be defined open assets. With this expression we mean objects and places that, for their legal status, but especially due to their intrinsic quality have had a distinctive role within an urban community and continue to have a particular public value. These assets are often in a serious state of abandon, even if there is still interest shown in them, due to a popularity linked to the memory of outstanding community events: bridal feasts, religious ceremonies, the olive crop and harvest time. In the Italian Mezzogiorno a considerable part of these assets belongs to the Catholic Church and represent a very important



Fig. 7. Survey in the Canonical House of S. Pantaleo and the survey in the 'Circolo Cattolico' (Church of Annunziata).  
Photo: D. Vadala', M. Condo'





Fig. 8. Survey in the Canonical House of S. Pantaleo and the survey in the 'Circolo Cattolico' (Church of Annunziata).  
Photo: D. Vadala', M. Condo'



Fig. 9. Rooftscape of Santa Caterina from the Canonical House.  
Photo: D. Vadala'

resource not only from a purely economic aspect, but especially from a social aspect, particularly in the historical centres facing abandon.

These assets were frequently given to the parish church by affluent private donors and sometimes by ordinary people for the benefit of the entire community and particularly for the poor. In the past, these properties could also be generically left for the benefit of the people; therefore at the opening of an holograph will, a problem could arise on who those properties should be assigned to, so if the will should be intended as an



Fig. 10. Survey in the unfarmed field of Maneda. Photo: D. Vadala'

Boundary	S. Pantaleone	Catholic Circle Canonical House	Maneda
790 s.l.m.	1100 s.l.m.	480 s.l.m.	20 s.l.m.

Fig. 11. Distribution of the open assets in the territory of Santa Caterina. Image: M. Condo', D. Vadala'



Fig. 12/13. Open assets: the 'Circolo Cattolico' (Church of Annunziata) and the Canonical House. Photo: M. Condo', D. Vadala'



Fig. 14/15. Open assets: the Canonical House. Photo: D. Vadala'

<sup>3</sup> Anecdote told by a local notary.

endowment to the Municipality or to the Parish.<sup>3</sup> After the emptying of the historical centres in the second half of the 20th century, the primary function of much of these assets has gradually vanished and their future is today rather undetermined. If in the past they had actually contributed to the needs of the poor and the maintenance of the parish priests, today these are for the most part, ruined buildings and properties let to private citizens, but often completely uncultivated. In Autumn 2006, the young parish priest, recently appointed to Santa Caterina, asked the volunteers of the association 'Pheozemia' to help him verify the state of



Fig. 16. Open assets: the unfarmed field of Maneda. Photo: D. Vadala'



some buildings and lands held by the Catholic Church in different places of the parish. The survey led to the location of a sequence of edifices which had been abandoned in the late Sixties and of lands which are let out at a very low price to private tenants who hope to get hold of these properties through a sort of pre-emption right in the future. It emerged, with this reconnaissance that some of the ecclesial tenures in the territory of Santa Caterina were particularly relevant for their landscape, cultural and ethno-anthropological values as well as being positioned in different environments: the historical centre, the coastal hills, the woods at the foot of the mountain ridge of the *Serre Calabresi*.

**The 'Circolo Cattolico'**, former Church of the Annunziata and seat of the same brotherhood, whose origins dates back to the 16th century, a period rich in ecclesial buildings promoted by lay organisations that in Calabria had particular importance in the care of the sick people. This edifice, of great artistic value, was shut down in the 1950's as a place of worship and used till the early 1980's to host the circle of the lay organisation 'Azione Cattolica'. Due to its position close to the main church of Santa Maria Assunta, this one aisle edifice was also used as a parish hall for get-togethers that traditionally came after weddings.

This much-loved place by the community lays now completely abandoned and due to its value, both intrinsic and instrumental, risks being purchased by private entrepreneurs and definitively removed from the public use

**The Canonical House of San Pantaleon**, formerly the second parish in Santa Caterina then closed down after the demographic shortage of the historical centre. It was considered a particularly 'rich' parish, holding a forestal property at the foot of the Serre, in the upper part of the land of Santa Caterina that produced chestnuts, acorns for the pig-breeding, legumes and potatoes for the benefit of the local clerics and



Fig. 17. Open assets: the woodland of San Pantaleo. Photo: D. Vadala'

the numerous families who had been working there. The parish house, next to the church of San Pantaleone, does not have special artistic value, lacking that monumental character which distinguishes an edifice of particular importance from ordinary buildings; nonetheless it displays the technological and functional character of popular architecture, being located at the centre of that part of the town which was the most intensively populated and once occupied by olive presses and mills. The internal distribution of this tiny edifice offers a complex domestic section with a specific historical-anthropological value. Due to the wealth of the parish of San Pantaleone, the canonical house was divided in a great number of small rooms, with a particular intermediate floor, which could be entered through a small trap door and used as a warehouse for agricultural products.

**An unfarmed piece of land** of about 5 hectares, placed in a countryside popularly known as Maneda. This area, rather distant from the coast, has the form of a deep depression against a fairly high relief in the coastal hills belt, an area noticeably characterized by particularly fertile clay soils, appropriate for a variety of cultivation (olive trees, grapes, fruit trees, wheat). These soils, formed by the alluvial deposits of the Pliocene, sometimes emerge from the coastal landscape in the typical form of the calanques.

**A woodland area** of 16 hectares, situated in the upper part of the territory of Santa Caterina, at the foot of the Serre Calabresi, a few kilometers from the historical centres of Brognaturo and Serra San Bruno. This plot of forestal land of great environmental value, once pertaining to the parish of San Pantaleone, was endowed, in the 1950's of two edifices to support agricultural production and to host the tenants. These edifices, built thanks to a fund from the Italian government, are now completely abandoned and in ruins.

The idea of recovering these assets for the benefit of the entire community gradually came up. As the Church had once been endowed with these assets with the specific purpose of helping the poor in the community, now the public use of these properties, in a completely different socio-economic setting, would have been advisable and consistent with the will expressed by the donors.

Even more the necessity arose of amplifying the value of these assets in the frame of a far-reaching collaborative project and try to open up this community which is now strongly conditioned by economic, social and environmental emergencies and cut off from any kind of scientific and cultural relation, notwithstanding deep anthropological connections with its own territory.

### 'Territori in Circolo'

In this particular context, the parish church, spiritual guide of the community, could not fail to extend this responsibility to the care for the built environment and its significant places, becoming an agent of



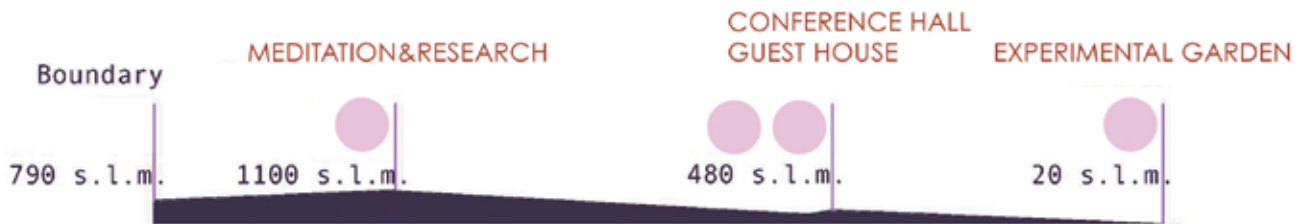


Fig. 18. 'Territori in Circolo': distribution of the activities.  
Image: M. Condo', D. Vadala'

<sup>4</sup> For contacts mail to  
pheozemia@hotmail.com

local development, too. In this effort the parish met the assistance of Pheozemia,<sup>4</sup> a social promotion association based in Santa Caterina whose aim is the *promotion of urban and environmental renewal as an appropriate approach for the enhancement of local identities*.

The association founded in 2008 by a group of researchers in the field of architecture and natural sciences, is interested in experimenting sustainable approaches to the modification and management of the built environment, particularly in those areas which are at risk of economic, social and cultural marginalisation such as rural areas, urban-rural fringe zones, degraded urban neighbourhoods. In this regard the role of Pheozemia and the partnership with the Catholic Church is of particular interest, as this relationship is intended to bring into being a kind of innovative social action rarely experienced in the Italian Mezzogiorno. Not seldom in Italy, in marginal contexts suffering from lack of social services, the Catholic Church plays an important role, replacing public local authorities which are often distant or ineffective. Still, in a declining rural area, it makes no sense to try to provide static social aids to an ageing population, it is rather important to give basic tools for a creative intervention on the built environment making of it an instrument of economic and cultural development.

The joint effort of the parish 'Santa Maria Assunta' and the association Pheozemia, meet the experience of the training centre 'Europa 2010', based in Rome and interested in the environmental management and the mitigation of the intercultural conflicts with a special regard to the Mediterranean area. The subjects promoting the project so recognize how the general development of the community and the growth of the human being are linked to the quality of the physical setting, intended as a whole of built-up and natural environment.

On that basis, on April 2008, they have agreed to start a co-ordinated programme of activities around the theme of the safeguarding and care of the world, where the built and natural environment, rather than being seen as something abstract and distant, is recognized as a primary source of knowledge, experimentation and construction of the community. The idea of recovering the community's open assets in the frame of this wider cooperation programme showed some tricky elements for its implementation, colliding above all with the present-day ownership of a part of these properties, namely those terrains and rural edifices situated outside the historical centre.

It must be said that the property rights on those assets originally given to the Parish, have been transferred in 1984, to the Institute for the Sustenance of the Clergy of the Italian Catholic Church and actually subtracted from the full possession and use by the local Parish. Nonetheless, it was decided to override the problem starting a negotiation with the ISC in order to prepare a model of usufruct for these properties, whose involvement concerns the second stage of the project.

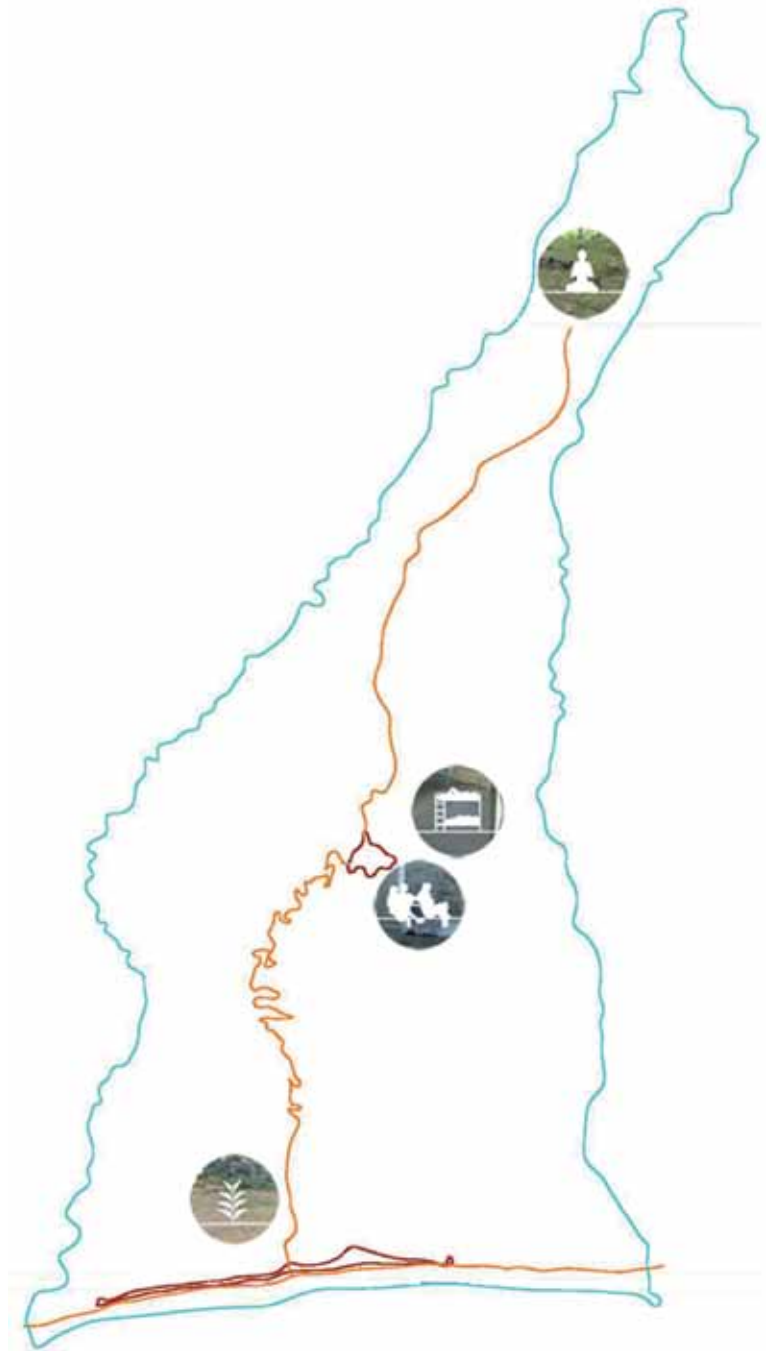


Fig. 19. 'Territori in Circolo': general plan.  
Image: M. Condo', D. Vadala'



Fig. 20/21. The place of Conference Hal and the place of Guest House.  
Concept Image: M. Condo'

At the end of 2008 a preliminary program was finally arranged, foreseeing the involvement of a set of complementary objects and properties - in different stages and with different modalities - in the framework of a cooperation programme of scientific and environmental research, in order *to experiment original approaches for the regeneration and sustainable management of the rural territories.*

The program 'TERRITORI IN CIRCOLO: Read the Environment to Build Communities' foresees at one go activities of scientific and cultural co-operation concerning three main areas:

1. Urban regeneration between natural and built environment
2. Rural territories as open assets: models of sustainable management
3. Human spirituality and the Environment: the sense of places

A significant broadening of the partnership is necessary to support these activities, with a group of seven organisations among partners and patrons which are ready to support the programme:

- Pheozemia Association of Social Promotion - Santa Caterina dellp Ionio
- Europa 2010 Education and Training Centre - Rome
- Pontifical Faculty San Bonaventura Seraphicum - Rome
- University of Messina
- State Forestry Corps
- Municipality of Santa Caterina dello Ionio

The open scheme of the programme enables other organisations - such as universities, enterprises, non profit organisations - to join the programme



Fig. 22/23. The place of Experimental Garden and the place of Meditation. Concept Image: M. Condo'

and add further elements and contribute to the improvement of the project. However, we can already define how the canonical properties and the different places will be introduced in the framework of the project and used to the benefit of the entire community.

## Project implementation

In the first stage of the project, some basic maintenance and restoration work is to start for the complete use of two complementary edifices whose revitalization is aimed at the creation in the historical centre of Santa Caterina of an operations base for all the activities in the project:

1. **The Catholic Circle**, once refurbished, will be used as a small auditorium or conference hall for temporary exhibitions, thus enhancing the cultural life of the community. It will also be the showcase of the project 'Territori in Circolo' where the results of the research activity are displayed and shared with everybody.
2. **The former canonical house of San Pantaleone**, transformed in an independent guest house for cultural tourism, will also host the participants in the programme during the teaching courses and the training activities.

The second stage of the project is meant to 'put in a circle' the terrains owned by the parish in different places of Santa Caterina, in order to make them the core of the educational activities foreseen in the project which, in this second stage, is meant to spread from the historical centre to the surrounding territory.

3. **The field in 'Maneda'** will be used as a botanical garden to study vegetal crop response to increasing temperature associated

with climate change and desertification and for starting experimental productions.

4. **The wood in 'San Pantaleone'** will host specific educational and research activities for the protection of the wildlife and the woodland environment. The final stage of the project foresees the complete restoration of the masonry buildings and their purpose as a guest house for periods of retreat, meditation and scientific research.

The project 'Territori in Circolo' aims to propose a pragmatic approach to the survival of the rural communities, in a vision of targeting local development, for the most part doing without ordinary external support: the hypothesis is that not only the places of the project, but the human resources too, necessary to run the project, have to be found in the territory and specifically trained for this purpose.

This community-oriented praxis of strategic planning lays on three specific objectives:

5. **Increasing the integration among different aspects** in the territory of Santa Caterina: the coastal area, the historical centre with its surroundings, the woodland.
6. **Creating chances for new incomes through economic activity** in the field of higher education, environmental management and cultural tourism.
7. **Promoting the interaction of the local community** with a cluster of external players, promoters and beneficiaries, that will be involved in the course of the programme.

The cost estimated in 2008 for the entire project is about 315.000 euros, including the start of the first cycle of the educational and research programme. The main partners are not able to present this sum, so asking for sponsorships is the only feasible way, soliciting subjects interested in supporting with their brand a project of creative environmental renewal. At the same time, a complete and unconditioned use of all the areas is necessary in order to start the programme, so an agreement has to be drawn between the partnership and the Institute for the Sustenance of the Clergy, which now holds the rights on the properties where the activities will take place. This land was rented at very low price to private tenants who do not really use it, but simply renew the contract in order to try one day or another to get hold on these. At the moment a negotiation has started in order to solve all these problems, including the question of the rights possibly acquired by the tenants.

In the meantime a preliminary work has been undertaken aimed at the promotion of the project with the local community and training of the human resources that will be involved in the direction of the project. The parish has provided for such purpose some spacious meeting rooms within the former parish nursery school and three different workshop activities have been started in October 2009 concerning scenography, landscape photography and performing arts. At the moment, this



preliminary work is implemented without any funding sources other than the unpaid voluntary work of the experts involved and the small contributions from the young participants in the workshop activities.

This step-by-step practical approach is meant to wake up resources now latent in this territory, especially human resources, that in the future will give stability to the project. It is the only realistic way to start introducing both advanced actors and contemporary urban shapes in this peripheral area of Italy, suspended between the centre and the periphery of the world, on the Mediterranean edge of Europe.



## Educational Possibilities of Humanitarian Architecture

Andrew Powell

This article aims to question the educational possibilities in humanitarian architectural projects across the world. As a sub-set of financial aid given by the wealthier developed countries, generally those in the West, to less developed countries elsewhere, the issue of humanitarian architecture is by no means new. Responses to low-cost housing design and emergency relief structures following catastrophes have been pursued by a number of figures since the 1960s, including architect-theorists like Nabeel Hamdi, Shigeru Ban and Buckminster Fuller. An ideal advocated by Hamdi is to 'start where you can' and, at the same time, look for multipliers, because 'small may be beautiful but big is necessary and inevitable'.<sup>1</sup> However, the possibilities of such design and architectural initiatives as educational tools and settings for architecture students is much less explored, and this is an area that I have personally become involved in through my experiences as a project initiator and coordinator first for Architects 4 Aid and most recently attending a workshop with Architecture Sans Frontières.

In this article I would like to reflect on the pressures involved in humanitarian projects and ask if they might be more creatively integrated both into the educational system in Britain and as a means to reinvigorate the architectural profession, so often driven purely by financial profit. This paper will draw on my personal experience and important reports in the field of humanitarian shelter and the conditions of informal settlements, to reflect on and draw attention to, key questions for education and practice.

<sup>1</sup> Nabeel Hamdi, *Small Change* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2004).

## Is There a Need for Greater Understanding of the Work of Architects Working in the Humanitarian Sector, and a Recognition of the Potential Learning Opportunities Created?

To what extent does the reconstruction period of post-disaster and informal settlement relief work offer an environment which is amenable to students to learn from? From my work in the humanitarian sector I believe that if approached in the right way with the correct guidance and ongoing support, this setting creates and provides an unparalleled stimulating and inspiring learning environment. Offering opportunities to engage directly with clients and user groups, develop a comprehensive understanding of unfamiliar and often locally available materials, and experience behaviour in a range of challenging environments working at a one-to-one level. Benefits may often include occasions to experiment with methods of communication, community consultation, cultural exchange, development of a brief and wide range of practical skills. These are the kinds of experience and skills much sought after but rarely acquired in commercial practice of architecture today. In addition to gaining a valuable insight and understanding of working across different cultures, as well as developing sustainable practice and understand the challenges faced by countries in the developing world which are set to experience much of the world population growth – the latter now estimated to be 9.1 billion by 2050. ‘Almost all growth will take place in less developed regions’, as has been noted by the United Nations.<sup>2</sup> This figure needs to be set against the estimated one billion people, or one-third of the world’s urban population, who currently live in slum conditions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Official United Nations population estimates, see <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/pop918.doc.htm> [accessed 2009].

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (London: Earthscan Publishing, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Max Lock Centre, 'The Role of the Principal Professions', *The Built Environment Professions in Disaster Risk Reduction and Response. A Guide for Humanitarian Agencies* (London: Max Lock Centre, Westminster University, 2009), p.12.

The term ‘disaster’ for the purposes of this article encompasses the results of natural or man-made catastrophes, and also the preparedness to assist in mitigating the risks of any future disasters. In almost all cases it is a setting where need greatly outweighs the means available, and skilled personnel are in short supply. This learning setting is likely to be as part of the efforts of a long running campaign or in the case of natural disaster, it will often come many months after when the immediate relief phase has passed, and when the need for strategic planning and design becomes critical for longer term interests. It is usually at this later stage that not-for-profit Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s) and/or other well organised Community-Based Organisations (CBO’s) are brought together to assist local communities to move from the transitional relief phase to medium-/longer-term recovery. It is also at this stage where the services that architects can provide are put to best use: services noted by the Max Lock Centre,<sup>4</sup> revolve around an understanding of the complex needs of clients and users in collaboration with multi-disciplinary teams, and then developing and realising designs based on these discussions. More specifically, the tasks involved include: inspecting and surveying sites/existing buildings; consulting with clients and users on their requirements; coordinating the work of other professionals; testing design ideas to establish feasibility; developing selected options; preparing reports and design information ranging from site layouts to the technical details of

construction and specification for estimating costs; meeting regulatory requirements; ensuring good project performance; guiding construction processes; and aiding future maintenance. From what I have understood from my architectural peer group, and my own experience, the current practice of architecture in the UK manifests itself in a very substantial percentage of British architects working on commercially-focused developments which benefit a relatively small percentage of end users. Again, from my observations, the current culture of architectural practice all too often appears to encourage students and trainees in such basic activities as scheduling, codifying, arranging, repositioning elements, and selecting building items from catalogues; there is far less encouragement in terms of listening, learning, understanding, constructing briefs and community collaboration. And with a period of recession now upon us, the current situation severely diminishes and limits the ability of architectural practice to inform the educational curriculum in any positive manner. Clearly, something has to be done to break this vicious circle.



Fig. 1. A typical alternative meeting space and educational field setting, Kericho, Kenya. Photo: Andrew Powell

## Specific Case Studies and Approaches Adopted

The case studies outlined below in this article are of projects which I have personally been involved in an architectural capacity, and highlight the kinds of approaches practiced and adopted, as well as critically identifying the additional skill shortage experienced at the time. Although not always explicitly conceived in advance, the approaches noted here are reflections of the specific needs that transpired in each case:

### **‘Enabler/problem solver’ approach**

This project was sited in the Rift Valley, Western Kenya, and carried out in 2006/07; it was for a low-cost/high-value education building. I was part



of team of two architectural staff working with a UK-based NGO, *Hand in Hand*, along with a locally active NGO on direct involvement with the school committee and local community members.

### **‘Skilled supporter’ approach**

This project was sited in Romania, and is from 2007. It focused on a more humanitarian approach to heritage, assisting communities in sensitively moving forward as is desperately needed without losing long held and important values. Here I was part of team of eight architects working with another UK-based NGO and the ‘Mihai Eminescu Trust’, a locally based NGO, and the local community.

### **‘Catalyst’ approach**

This project was sited in Myanmar/Thailand, in 2007, and was for a community bridge. My involvement and intervention led to a successful private practice secondment from members of Buro Happold to provide specialist bridge knowledge and to assemble a competent and appropriate design team. It involved working together with a UK-based NGO, a US-based NGO called ‘Whispering Seed’ and of course again the local community.

To get a context for how a period of work experience in the international humanitarian sector may form a viable architectural education model, it is worth citing the current guidance for architectural schools given in the Royal British Institute of Architect’s ‘Criteria for course validation at Part 2’, which covers postgraduate architectural education. The RIBA’s Part 2 Criteria requires that that every UK student (or overseas student on a RIBA-validated course) must demonstrate knowledge, gain understanding and complete a portfolio to show competence in the following five topic areas: Design, Technology & Environment, Cultural Context, Communication, Management Practice & Law. Of these, it could be argued that Design is the topic area least incubated by a period of field-based learning – but if the aim is not to challenge established successful models, but to compliment and add diversity for those students who desire greater engagement with the social and environmental aspects of design, then clearly a field-based setting can provide more overt connections and opportunities for learning about Design as well as the other topic areas.

As a student studying in London I became familiar with the daily commute on public transport to university, packed up close to smartly dressed business commuters. Following completion of my formal university studies I became familiar with a journey of a different kind. This daily journey consisted of a 45-minute journey along a mud track following a turning off the main tarmac road between Nairobi and Kericho in a highland area famous for its tea plantations, west of the Rift Valley in Kenya. The existing site designated for a proposed primary school provided me with an educational experience of a different kind, one which cannot be gained within university. On my arrival on site in Kenya, the scale of the need and the importance of assessment and priority became

poignantly clear. After meeting with a collection of stakeholders connected with the school, from committee members, community elders, teachers and end users, the tasks and roles that would be required began to take form.



Fig. 2. Improvisation of materials for design, Kericho, Kenya.  
Photo: Andrew Powell

Simple activities due to the context became rich multi-layered educational tools. Conversations with students attending the existing educational facilities became a direct source of architectural engagement with an all important end user – the ultimate jury as to the success of a building. It revealed much about their needs, hopes, the activities important to them, the qualities of space they enjoy, and the ideas and visions they have for viable solutions to go forward.

A day spent working alongside builders assembled from the local community revealed the often overlooked basic problems of producing consistent, evenly shaped building blocks from locally available materials. The first task was to construct formers which could produce efficient block volumes from a locally available mix of mud and natural compounds. Tried and tested methodologies were developed for quantities, additives, baking times, cooling times, etc., based on skills retained by members of the community though viewed by others as outdated. An intimate understanding of these basic technologies alongside more contemporary design strategies began to reveal a more sophisticated use of the building materials available.

The daily routine would typically involve the journey to site with the locally based NGO, usually beginning with sessions working with one or more of the stakeholders, individually or as groups, intermittently spliced with reflective sessions working with my fellow colleague. Periodically we would be present for, or facilitate meetings with the local authority representatives, local architectural students and practitioners from the



Fig. 3. Gathering, interpreting and collecting from the context, Kericho, Kenya. Photo: Andrew Powell



Fig. 4. Gathering, interpreting and collecting from the context, Kericho, Kenya. Photo: Andrew Powell

region, as well as other development organisations active in the region in the hope to extract relevant information. We looked for ways on how to most successfully communicate and over time began to invent methodologies to aid our data collection and analysis; enabling use of qualitative and quantitative questionnaires, structured interviews and game play. For example using a postcard from our homes that reflected key aspects of our familiar and cultural landscape as a prop, asking participants to draw and create their own to highlight aspect and features of their environment they considered important. The NGO introduced us to more tried and tested collection and analysis methods, such as a



Fig. 5. Example of current existing school, Kericho, Kenya.  
Photo: Andrew Powell

*transect walk* and SWOT analysis: broken down as strength, weakness, opportunities and threats, used to gain insight of the site and context of any future design.

Remaining aware of limitations, not least the obvious budget restraints, the daily routine later in our posting involved greater time spent on proposals and presentation/workshops of potential design interventions, accessing, collecting thought and testing location and material propositions. At times enabling use of an impromptu workshop located on the school site used for constructing school furniture, as a facility to test feasibility of material and construction ideas on small scale. After school hours, my colleague and I would return to our residences. Often using the time to write up and establish ways to present our findings. At key stages communicating and exchanging information via email and Internet based virtual platforms to our UK base and partners in the UK. In this way we were engaged in a two-way dialogue with stakeholders and coordinators at our UK base. Whereby in an educational model the coordinators at a UK base could be suitably replaced by university based supervisory tutors. Although in this instance, my time working in Kenya was framed as pro-bono built environment service for the recipient and host community, what also became increasingly clear was that it was I that learnt greatly from this experience. In this context, stakeholders were at the same time both students and teachers, and my role took on that of both enabler/problem solver and student. I had received a wealth of educational capital and hopefully I had imparted some useful ideas and knowledge. I still remain in touch with the members of the local based organisation that hosted and assisted me, and an invitation has been made for me to return in the future when another opportunity exists.

Under the heading of *Design* in RIBA-approved Part 2 courses, their



Criteria (in summary) state that a student *will produce and demonstrate coherent and well resolved architectural designs that integrate knowledge of:*

- Social, political, economic and professional context;
- Briefs, critically appraised to site, sustainability and budget constraints;
- Regulatory requirements, accessibility, health & safety by way of building codes & Local Authority;
- Philosophical approach, revealing an understanding of theory in a cultural context;
- Test, analyse and critically appraise design options;
- Work as part of a team

I would argue that a period of learning in an alternative field setting achieves and even extends the ambitions set out by the RIBA. It adds knowledge and skills that enable the qualified architect to benefit from more relevant challenges being faced across the world in modern times. In each case the experience with the field-based NGO proved to be invaluable and deeply educational, and allowed an opportunity for me to gain a rapid awareness of the local design context and environment. This formed the basis for a set of dynamics that seem to be eminently suited to raise important questions and suggest specific skills and solutions.

Here are some examples of the learning outcomes resulting from these experiences – an increased awareness of a varied design approaches, hands-on making, improved social and communication skills, an idea about reflective practice, awareness of the impact of global issues, a greater understanding of the physical and social context of design, exposure to multi-disciplinary models, as well as generally feeling far better equipped to deal with concerns about architectural sustainability in tough situations. It is in contrast to these experiences that the role of practicing architects and trainees in British firms has been slowly eroded, to the extent that the benefit of such a comprehensive learning package is almost impossible to find here. The sorts of initiatives I have been describing would help to increase the awareness and presence of architects, both within other academic courses and wider society, and could give a more positive public perception of what architects do. The better form of reflective practice and learning resulting from these case studies would also inherently assist in creating a more collaborative form of practice and learning. The most recent Presidential inaugural address for the RIBA noted that ‘collaboration’ was the big word and challenge for industry and practice today. The same speech noted that the RIBA acronym should stand for ‘Relevant, Influential, Bold and Adding value’, qualities which I believe an adoption of such forms of learning from humanitarian projects overseas would help to reinforce in our profession.

I would also argue that a greater understanding of the position of architects and architecture within a globalised market would result. My experiences in the case study projects highlighted that while UK-educated architects have many skills to offer, there are many complimentary skills



- 5 Mind the Gap! Pg 12 – ‘In the foreseeable future, in most low-income developing countries, professional skills and expertise in the built environment will remain a scarce resource, particularly in the more remote regions’.

- 6 Charles Setchell & Tom Corsellis, *Gaining a Sense of the Sector: A Participatory Workshop on Shelter and Settlements Activities*, (USAID, InterAction, 2006).

p.3 - In which Charles Setchell (OFDA/ USAID) states: 'The limited presence of shelter experts within humanitarian organisations and insufficient numbers of external consultants have led to shelter decisions increasingly being made by generalists ill-equipped to do so.'

p.5 - In the same report Tom Corsellis (Senior Director, Shelter Centre): 'Ongoing constraints include;... underdeveloped relationships and coordination with the academic and private sectors. A preference for product-based versus research and dialogue based funding makes it difficult for knowledge development initiatives to get financed. Efforts at developing a relationship of trust between the private sector and the humanitarian community require greater attention in order to incorporate available technological advances'

- 7 Widely acknowledged throughout student community. Also understood through conversations of myself and fellow professionals with students at various levels from university studio level, pier groups to views explicitly expressed at 2008 UIA congress in Turin by students and young professionals of both sexes, many complaining of too few outlets for their sense of commitment to working in developing countries on social and economic development projects.

that currently are often sadly lacking. These include skills in areas such as stakeholder analysis, effective consultation, holding workshops and forums, opening up minds, managing expectations and limitations, extracting and articulating opportunities. It is not just a case of what valuable lessons might be learnt, but the meaningful way in which such lessons energise awareness and become woven into one's mind. Such experience promotes additional skills and knowledge of local and national political contexts, and of political obstacles, conflicts and/or barriers that may exist. Many of these skills are highly sought after and effective when returning to the UK construction industry setting. In addition, there is an opportunity to gain experience and integrate related skills often associated with engineering, planning and surveying.

## Potential Example Mechanism to Move Forward

**STUDENT <> Northern-based HEI <> Southern-based HEI <> Locally-based NGO/CBO**

(School of Architecture) (School of Architecture)

Fig. 5. Proposed example mechanism.

Building on these existing positive interfaces, I believe the above model could be developed to facilitate a mechanism to allow the preparation, support and monitoring of a more successful learning environment for architectural students. The student could receive and assist in constructing preparatory information via this mechanism and line of communication. This could then be developed prior to embarking on the placement on the overseas humanitarian project. Hence the aims, objectives, references, methods, programme and draft submission materials could all be outlined in advance. This data could then be built upon and monitored as the project develops, and as experience informs the design proposals. Many trans-spatial technologies and electronic platforms have developed in recent years that could aid this form of learning, including widely used communication tools like email, inter-university extranets, electronic virtual blackboards, through to secure information exchange hosting areas and online group discussion forums. It could propagate a transfer of knowledge and understanding in both directions for architectural students, architectural schools, architectural practices and host communities.

In addition, this more reflective method of practice and learning is well within the remit of many if not all of the current criteria for validation at UK Part 2 course, and indeed its potential for building up skills has far greater reach. As has been suggested in this paper, there exists a demonstrable need from the NGO community for greater numbers of built environment professionals. This has been outlined in various leading shelter sector reports, for example the pamphlet on *Mind the Gap!* that was produced for RICS by Max Lock Centre at the University of Westminster,<sup>5</sup> along with the influential and forward-looking overview titled *Gaining a Sense of the Sector 2006*.<sup>6</sup> The conclusion of the latter document notes that: ‘The conversation repeatedly emphasized the need

for more skilled professionals in the shelter sector and the need for donors and institutions to be proactive in launching such courses'. Architects already possess vital skills sets and their abilities are much needed and often currently the least affordable within the international development setting. It has also been widely acknowledged that an appetite exist amongst architectural students to assist in this area of practice,<sup>7</sup> which would result in the numerous positive learning outcomes as have touched upon. All that currently appears to be missing is a proper mechanism to facilitate more of these learning interventions.

I understand that a responsibility exists in education to prepare students for the British marketplace, but I believe there also exists an equal responsibility to serve the needs of society at large. Based on my research and observed successes, my view is that the framework and mechanism outlined in this paper demonstrates a method by which architecture-orientated individuals and organisations can make positive contributions to reconstruction programmes activities. Any limitations of formal job roles currently appears more to do with lack of appropriate knowledge across cultured, and a misconception of what architects can offer by many within NGO community, rather than any real hindrances.

Today, we hear every day of apocalyptic forecasts of environmental disaster, and such predictions, whilst highlighting important concerns in public consciousness, may also be obscuring rational policy discussion. Indeed, focusing attention primarily on a longer-term and worldwide phenomenon could mask the more immediate problems of current conditions. Now, with many architectural students and trainees likely to find it very hard to get jobs in British practice over the next few years, in what appears to be an extremely deep economic recession, why then should not more of them offer their skills and be able to learn from working in useful humanitarian projects across the world?

If as a profession, it is felt we have skills to offer in this wider global setting, then why shouldn't the profession respond? And if it were indeed to decide to respond in this way, isn't the locus of this response most likely to come from within the academic community in countries like Britain? Humanitarian activity maybe unable to solve disparity in wealth and opportunity in the world, but it certainly is able to mitigate the worst effects. And might it in fact bring other potential gains to the profession, addressing issues which are often ignored but which are crucially important to its future survival? Might existing as yet unresolved questions such as gender inequality and greater ethnic/socio-economic diversity in British architectural practice also be in part addressed by the forms of overseas practice and learning such as I have been describing?

So, to conclude, might there be a more sustainable and ethically balanced approach to humanitarian architecture that could mutually benefit universities and architectural practices alike? This mutually beneficial relationship could create in turn a more challenging and inspiring professional environment, providing a setting in which to develop knowledge and design responses that might raise ambitions and be more

sensitive to the vernacular and the needs of the built environment in poorer developing nations. Individual acts in themselves are often only small-scale interventions, but as a culture of practice, together many small acts can initiate and contribute to solutions to the wider context – and thus address increasingly urgent environmental dilemmas and the continued social disenfranchisement which seems unfortunately to so typify our modern age.



## Let Loose the Loganberries of War: Making Noise and Occupying Space in Govanhill

James Benedict Brown and Tom Warren

In Govanhill it's getting grim,  
The Cooncil says we cannae swim  
But if they willnae dae oor biddin',  
We'll pit the Cooncil in the midden  
People Power is gonnae rule,  
Gi'e us back oor swimmin' pool!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'It's Getting Grim' (key of E, to the tune of 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star'), *The Govanhill Pool Campaign Songbook*, (2001)

In the early hours of Tuesday 7 August 2001 approximately two hundred and fifty police officers - including mounted officers and an aerial surveillance unit - converged on Calder Street in the Glasgow neighbourhood of Govanhill. Accompanied by eight sheriff's officers bearing court orders for eviction, they had come to bring to an end the longest public occupation of a civic building in British history. For the previous 135 days up to seventy local residents at a time had occupied a building described by Historic Scotland as 'an architecturally and historically important part of the city's history ... particularly important culturally in that until recently they offered a valued and distinctive facility open to all members of the community.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Historic Scotland, 'Govanhill Baths Statement of Significance', *Historic Scotland* (January 2005)

It took almost twenty hours to evict the protesters and seal the building with steel shutters. By late evening a crowd of approximately 200 people had gathered on the streets outside. Eggs, flour bombs and fruit were thrown at police officers, and the air was thick with the overpowering stench of garlic powder, three catering-sized tubs of which had been emptied around the building to confuse sniffer dogs sent into to locate the last of the protesters.



<sup>2</sup> Historic Scotland, 'Govanhill Baths Statement of Significance', *Historic Scotland* (January 2005)

<sup>4</sup> David Eyre et al, 'Three Lord Provosts and a closed pool', *The Herald*, (02/04/2001): p15

Glasgow Corporation opened Govanhill Baths in 1917. In the words of Historic Scotland, 'baths and washhouses were often an adjunct to a public library or hall, at Parkhead for instance, providing a clear example of the City's paternalistic sense of social responsibility'.<sup>3</sup> Govanhill Baths are just a block from the neighbourhood's branch of the city library, one of several thousand financed by Scottish-American businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Where libraries and schools represented the architectural manifestation of a philanthropic desire to provide education and knowledge, the baths demonstrate the city's early twentieth century obligation to provide its citizens with a reliable supply of hot water for exercise and hygiene, fundamental in the fight against typhus and cholera. One part of the building features private cubicles with bathtubs for washing, while a large washhouse was equipped with hot tubs, mangles and driers for the cleaning of clothes. At the time of the closure of the Baths, at least one hundred apartments in Govanhill's tenement blocks had no bathroom at all, and as many as four hundred had no hot water.<sup>4</sup>

Govanhill is one of Glasgow's only remaining neighbourhood of 'hard to the pavement' tenements; a tightly packed grid of three and four storey nineteenth century blocks. The basic tenement has two or sometimes three apartments on each floor, with front doors accessed off a shared staircase called a close. At ground floor level, the close serves both the street to the front and the back court to the rear. Slotted between shops on the busier streets or between ground floor apartments on the quieter roads, some closes have modern security doors with strong magnetic locks and noisy intercom systems. Others have limping doors that don't quite catch, either through age or deliberate vandalism. Generous ceiling heights and large windows, many still with the original counter-sunk windows that can be opened and folded into the apartment for cleaning, ensure these outwardly shabby apartments are still attractive homes. In the disowned and generally uncontested intermediate zone between close door and apartment door, the generally poor conditions of the shared stairwells, corridors and back courts is indicative of the problematic relationship between owner-occupiers and renting tenants, many itinerant or migrant workers. Govanhill suffers from the highest number of drug overdoses in the city, the greatest incidence of domestic abuse, the second greatest



Fig. 1. Tenements and shops, Allison Street, Govanhill.  
Photo: James Benedict Brown

<sup>5</sup> Official Report of the Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee, 7 October 2008

<sup>6</sup> Derek Alexander, 'Govanhill declared Scotland's murder capital', *Sunday Mail*, (24/08/2008)

<sup>7</sup> The 'A8' nations are those that joined the EU in 2004, namely the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The 'A2' nations of Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Marcela Adamova, Sarah Jeffery and Lydia Zelmanova, *Roma Evaluation 2007: Report on information collated between March and June 2007*, (Glasgow: Glasgow Braendam Link, 2007)

<sup>9</sup> Official Report of the Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee, 7 October 2008.

<sup>10</sup> John Couzin, *Rent strikes: Radical Glasgow*, (Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University, 2006) at: [http://www.gcal.ac.uk/radicalglasgow/chapters/rent\\_strikes.html#Glasgow](http://www.gcal.ac.uk/radicalglasgow/chapters/rent_strikes.html#Glasgow) [accessed 2009].

<sup>11</sup> Govan Hill Baths, <http://www.govanhillbaths.com/> [accessed 2009].

incidence of alcohol abuse and the highest level of serious crime in the city.<sup>5</sup> The district's murder rate is five times that of Glasgow's average, and more than twelve times that of Scotland overall.<sup>6</sup>

Govanhill's tenements have become home to generation upon generation of both Scots and immigrants. By 1850 there were some 300,000 Irish in Glasgow, and they were to be followed by large communities of Jewish, Polish and Russian immigrants that by the First World War only one Glaswegian in five had been born in the city. After the second world war families arrived from India, Pakistan and China. With the recent arrival of A8 and A2 immigrants, the local population in Govanhill has swelled to about 15,000.<sup>7</sup> In 2007 there were thought to be around 2-3,000 Roma in Govanhill.<sup>8</sup> The most excluded of all economic migrants in Glasgow, due to their ineligibility to claim financial and social support from state services, the only work available for many Roma is through unlicensed employment agencies and gang masters. In many instances these agencies provide accommodation tied to their employment, frequently of a substandard quality and for grossly inflated rents.<sup>9</sup>

The campaign to re-open Govanhill Baths is one in a long history of public protests that have seen Glaswegians acting collectively to resist threats to their built environment. During the first world war, as men and women came to the city to work in the factories and shipyards, demand for housing outstripped supply. Many private landlords dramatically increased rents on their tenement properties, particularly affecting those families who had seen their adult men go to war. The fabric of the tenements became a fundamental tool in the defence of homes against Sheriffs collecting unpaid rent. All manner of communication was used to summon help, everything from drums, bells, trumpets and anything that could be used to create a warning sound to rally the supporters who were mainly women as the men were at work in the yards and factories at these times. They would then indulge in cramming into closes and stairs to prevent the entry of the Sheriff's officers and so prevent them from carrying out their evictions. They also used little paper bags of flour, peasmeal and whiting as missiles directed at the bowler hatted officers.<sup>10</sup>

The same tactics of improvised communication and denial of entrance were to re-appear some seventy-five years later, when tenants in Govanhill joined the popular refusal to pay the Community Charge (or 'Poll Tax') introduced by the Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. Trialled in Scotland a year ahead of England and Wales, the tax was designed to fund local services by calculating a domestic charge on the number of people living in a property rather than the notional rental value. This favoured the wealthiest and penalised the poorest, especially in Govanhill where many large families lived in unmodernised apartments. Bailiffs tried to gain access to residential properties in pursuit of unpaid charges, but once again the collective defence of Govanhill's closes and the use of domestic cooking ingredients as missiles emphasised the sturdy resilience of the neighbourhood's architecture.

Two decades later, Govanhill Baths Community Trust, the charitable body established to re-open Govanhill Baths has met every fortnight since 2001<sup>11</sup>. A charity shop and events such as the Soup, Song and Swallie night in a local pub continue to raise funds for the campaign. In 2009 the Trust formed the subsidiary Art Regeneration Team who, that year, curated an exhibition entitled *Deep Breaths* during the Baths' participation in Glasgow's 'Doors Open Day'.<sup>12</sup> Govanhill-based artist Marielle MacLeman created a piece for the semi-derelict Turkish Baths Suite entitled *Immediate Extract / Passive Resistance*, an intricate collage of hand-drawn and digitally manipulated words and images forming an illustrated

<sup>12</sup> *Deep Breaths* artists included: Becky Campbell; Malcolm Dobson; Pamela Doherty; Hazel Donaldson; Vicki Fleck; Christine Gibson; Olivia Guertler; Annie Gray; Danielle Heath; Rebecca Lindsay; Katie Lowery; Susan MacAskill; Marielle MacLeman; Iain McLean; Nikki McWilliams; Jeni Pearson; Hugh Pizey; Lucie Potter; Louise Schmidt; Ally Wallace; Chris Wallace; Andrew Wild; Lynn Wray

daydo rail. Inspired by the faded Edwardian Baroque grandeur of the room, in which eight years of neglect had caused paint and wallpaper to peel, MacLeman set out to respond to the rich history of the 'Save our Pool' campaign. Onto a repeating pattern derived from key architectural features of the baths, such as the bright red cast iron balustrade and concrete roof beams of the main pool, and an overlapping Pay up for Glasgow motif (the motto of the city's council tax campaign), MacLeman layered drawings and prints of architectural details with silhouettes of mounted police officers and the fruits that were hurled at them.



Fig. 3. Immediate Extract / Passive Resistance (general view).  
Photo: Marielle MacLeman, 2009

Extracts from press reports, diaries and protest song lyrics written during the occupation are inscribed on ribbons that flutter over the pattern.

As a terrified police spokesman recalled: 'A section of the crowd became particularly violent towards police officers and started throwing whole pineapples.'

'Anti-capitalist protesters take note. Stock up on apricots. Arm your battalions with bananas. Let loose the loganberries of war.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Robert McNeil, 'Robert McNeil's Week', *The Scotsman*, (12/08/2001)

MacLeman's work playfully recollects the improbable words spoken and sung as the local community came together to fight for the preservation of a public service. The narrative of *Immediate Extract / Passive Resistance* reminds us that this protest by occupation was not limited to the Baths themselves. Denied access to space and services felt to be theirs, the campaigners playfully attracted sympathetic media attention with other acts of spatial occupation.

'Campaigners fighting to save the Govanhill swimming pool took their protest to the Glasgow City Council headquarters today by staging an 'aerobics raid' on the City Chambers ... As staff and people paying their council tax looked on, protesters switched on a portable music system and launched into an aerobics session.'<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 'Pool Protesters Exercise the Right to Demonstrate', *The Evening Times*, (10/05/2001)







Fig. 5. Immediate Extract / Passive Resistance (detail).  
Photo: Marielle MacLeman, 2009

of £15,000 per month, costing the city more to keep the baths shut than it had to keep them open.

"The pool is not going to reopen. It could be operated by other people but not by us. I do not know if the protesters will be consulted about the use of the building. If they want to stay that's up to them but we'd rather they got on with the rest of their lives."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Glasgow City Council Labour Party spokesman. Quoted by Ross, S. *The Herald*, 2 April 2001.

<sup>19</sup> *Sunday Herald* 15/04/2001

A minute from the (Labour controlled) City Council during the occupation noted that 'we don't like the word community [as] it makes the area sound like a ghetto.'<sup>19</sup> Such derogatory attitudes to society and the public realm in Glasgow were, in part, to inspire GLAS, a cooperative of architects, designers, teachers and activists centred around the University of Strathclyde Department of Architecture, that from 2001-4 curated a sequence of urban interventions that critiqued the capitalist production and appropriation of the city. Bravely entering some of Glasgow's more troubled neighbourhoods in a diminutive three wheeled van, their 'Urban Cabaret' sought to provoke reactions and debate about an increasingly privatised and managed public realm.

'Urban Cabaret promotes your rights to the city. That you should have a right not to be continually monitored by CCTV cameras. That you should have a right to affordable housing. That you should have a right to sufficient community facilities. That you should have a right to protest and congregate everywhere in the city.'<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> GLAS. *GLASpaper no. 1*, September 2001. Available: <http://www.glaspaper.com/>

Their actions were documented in *GLASpaper*, the first issue of which drew parallels between the ongoing fights to save Govanhill Baths and to oppose the privatisation of public housing stock. Glasgow Housing Association, a not-for-profit private company, is the largest social residential landlord in Europe, a title it inherited from Glasgow City Council when it assumed control of thousands of residential properties in 2003. The 1980 Housing Act obliged cities such as Glasgow not to invest in social housing, and ultimately to transfer their social housing stock from public to private ownership. While housing associations had existed





Fig. 6. Main pool, Govanhill Baths, 2008. Photo: James Benedict Brown

in Scotland since the nineteenth century, they were normally voluntary organisations that sought to campaign for tenants' rights. Govanhill Housing Association was founded in 1974, not with the intention of building new homes, but of preventing further demolition and encouraging the improvement of existing residences. It was established with the assistance of ASSIST Architects, at the time a young community-based architectural research unit at the Strathclyde Department of Architecture. Developed from the degree theses of Peter Robinson and Raymond Young, ASSIST rejected the professional description of the architect as author-artist, establishing itself in shop units in Govan and Govanhill and acting as facilitators for residents to improve their own tenements. In 1984, ASSIST was spun off from the university as ASSIST Architects Limited.<sup>21</sup>

In 2004 Govanhill Baths Community Trust were to re-establish that link with Strathclyde, when it started working with NORD, a Glasgow based practice co-founded by GLAS-member and Strathclyde tutor Alan Pert. Effectively working 'pro bono' until complete funding was secured, NORD developed a feasibility study for the redevelopment of the pool. NORD produced the option appraisals necessary for the Trust to secure further funding. In partnership with the university, a vacant shop opposite the Baths has re-opened as the Govanhill Centre for Community Practice (CCP), a social enterprise dedicated to continuing action research in the community.<sup>22</sup>

After eight years, Govanhill Baths remain closed. It is still too soon to tell whether the occupation, the singing, the aerobics and hurled fruit have contributed to the improvement of an impoverished neighbourhood. But by valuing the existing, engaging in sustained and respectful research, and reflecting the glimpses of good humour that have sustained stakeholders through difficulties and setbacks, Govanhill is a site of extreme richness for those interested in the urban built environment. There is no place for the arrogance of an author-architect and a blank canvas solution, and Govanhill has already been lucky enough to avoid complete demolition once. With the *Deep Breaths* exhibition and the opening of the Govanhill CCP, the popular campaign to re-open them has moved beyond a simple protest, and become a generator of creative practice and sustained research.

<sup>21</sup> Phil McCafferty, 'Organisation Case Study: ASSIST Architect'. (Edinburgh: eca, 2008) available: <http://wiki.eca.ac.uk/index.php/ASSIST> ; see also: ASSIST Architects Office Brochure, 2009

<sup>22</sup> Govanhill Baths Community Trust. *Centre for Community Practice Info Sheet*. (2009) available: <http://www.govanhillbaths.com/downloads/GBCT%20CCP%20Info%20sheet.doc>



## Homepage: Internet Activism and Women

Sarah Considine

The anthropological relevance of the emergence of the internet in the 1990's cannot be underestimated. As usage of the World Wide Web inflated towards the end of the decade and the repercussions of its capabilities were visualised, the internet began to form an almost utopian fantasy. It illustrated a new world in which anything was possible: 'Promises touted by corporate advisers, politicians, and cyberfanatics alike were staggering: empowerment, convenience, global democracy, wealth, communities unfettered by geography, mutable identity, and even the erasure of gender and race.'<sup>1</sup> These early utopian hopes of the World Wide Web have long been contextualised to an interface that, in many ways, mirrors or supports the reality of the 'real-world'<sup>2</sup>. Around a decade later, we are coming to terms with the strengths and limitations of the internet and notably its role in political debate, community and strategy.

<sup>1</sup> Christa Erickson, 'Networked Interventions', in Bingaman et al. (eds.), *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.225.

<sup>2</sup> While it is important to note that new technologies like the internet are very much 'real', for the purposes of this essay the terms 'real-world' or 'real-life' refer to the physical, place-based actions.

## Activism on the Internet

Traditionally political activists have been fervent in the usage of new technologies and means of communication. The internet is a relatively recent addition to a long list of new devices, like radio, TV and newspaper print, that activists have used to communicate, raise awareness and subvert.<sup>3</sup> As a 'new media' and new communication technology, it is important to highlight the internet's capabilities as a device for change: 'It is not only instant and transspatial but multilateral, including many participants and connecting many different activist groups.'<sup>4</sup> This connectedness and inclusiveness of the internet has huge implications on the principles of community, collective identity and democracy. Politically speaking, the internet has the potential to transform politics, not least through its vast ability to store information and user's ease of retrieval, that 'destroy(s) the monopoly of knowledge that the governments too often hold.'<sup>5</sup> The politics of the internet is mainly issue focused. Where the likeminded don't have a physical space, virtual space congregates political and social communities, consolidating an identity and creating a new form of online democracy where web space is power.

Online political activism and internet based strategy can be loosely categorised into two forms. Firstly, there is internet activity that supports 'real-life' activity. This may be sites that organise and facilitate 'real-life' protest, for example the Climate Camp website<sup>6</sup> that instructs and informs protestors on everything from the practicalities of dates and locations of protests, to guidance on direct action techniques. Or this could be the web presence of a political group with an established real-life presence, for example Greenpeace's website<sup>7</sup> which is largely used to report on real-life activity. Secondly there is internet activity that can be classified as protest in its own right. This can take the form of viral messaging, infiltrating of computer programming or 'hacktivism'<sup>8</sup>. In Naomi Wolf's online lecture at the Hudson Union Society, she highlights the importance of disruption and disturbance in activism and protest. 'For a protest to be effective, you have to stop traffic... For a protest to do anything, you have to disrupt business as usual, I don't mean violence, I mean dissent'<sup>9</sup>. 'Stopping traffic' is of course possible online as it is in the real world. With 'the repressive powers of technocapitalism'<sup>10</sup> dominating cyberspace, there is scope for inventive subversion and disruption. The internet has formed such a highly integrated part of our lives, for socialising, shopping, banking, entertainment, that disruptions to these services and the inconvenience that this causes is the new form of 'traffic stopping'. Of course, the distinction between these categorisations is rarely clear, and is often a culmination of the two.

## Women Online

Men talk more often, they talk for longer periods, they adopt 'centring' positions (forcing females to hover around); men define the topic, assume the legitimacy of their own view, and override women who do not see the world in their terms... The only difference between the real world and the virtual world is that, if anything, male domination in cyberspace is worse!<sup>11</sup>

The presence of women on the internet is, in many cases, discouraging at present. Considering the high hopes of women (alongside many disenfranchised races, communities and cultures) that the internet presented a fresh start against deep-rooted oppression, meaningful female and feminist contributions to cyber-politics have been scarce. This encourages the question: what attributes of internet activity discourage

<sup>3</sup> Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (eds.), 'Introduction' in, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Oxford and Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Camp for Climate Action, <http://www.climatecamp.org.uk>, [accessed 2009].

<sup>7</sup> Greenpeace, <http://www.greenpeace.org>, [accessed 2009].

<sup>8</sup> The term 'hack' does not only refer to its popular reading of illegal trespassing of computer based systems, but rather any appropriations of technology: 'If you wanted a cup of tea and did not have an electric kettle, but did have a coffee maker and used it to heat water for your tea, this unexpected use of a coffee maker is a hack.' Tim Jordan, *Activism! Direct Actions, Hacktivism and the Future of Society* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p.120.

<sup>9</sup> FORA.tv, 'Naomi Wolf at the Hudson Union Society' (Jan 2009), [http://fora.tv/2009/01/16/Naomi\\_Wolf\\_at\\_the\\_Hudson\\_Union\\_Society](http://fora.tv/2009/01/16/Naomi_Wolf_at_the_Hudson_Union_Society), [accessed 2009].

<sup>10</sup> Arturo Escobar, 'Gender, Place and Networks: A Political Ecology of Cyberculture', in Wendy Harcourt (ed.), *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p.31.

<sup>11</sup> Dale Spender, *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1995), p.193.

<sup>12</sup> Marisa Belausteguigoitia Ruis, 'Crossing Borders: From Crystal Slippers to Tennis Shoes, in Wendy Harcourt (ed.), *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*, (London: Zed Books, 1999), p.23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Chyng Sun and Miguel Picker, *Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality & Relationships*, DVD (Media Education Foundation, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p.32.

<sup>16</sup> Sohail Inayatullah and Ivana Milojevic, 'Exclusion and Communication in the Information Era', in Wendy Harcourt (ed.), *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> See Case Study Section, 'War Zones' which gives examples of some of the milder responses to Maggie Hadleigh-West's posted video (see next page).

<sup>18</sup> Monika Merkes, 'Do Women and Men Use the Internet and E-mail in Different Ways?', *PC Update: Magazine of the Melbourne PC User* (July 2001) at <http://www.melbpc.org.au/pcupdate/2107/2107article13.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Internet activists are defined by positive responses to the question 'Do you 'blog', 'post' or 'chat' messages of a political content?'. See Hill and Hughes, p.29.

<sup>20</sup> Ruis, p.23.

female participation? Marisa Ruis, author of 'Crossing Borders'<sup>12</sup>, believes that men have written the rules for the internet and as a result women lack control or real access. This refers to the languages of technology and its obstructions to accessibility. Ruis views the internet as a male, repressive 'master', who's 'instrument' of domination is an exclusive language:

The master's cybertool needs to be deconstructed and dismantled in order to be used not only by female cyborgs expert in technical languages, but also by subjects that are capable of interpreting multiple systems of mediation, translation, impersonation and representation of the voices of 'others'.<sup>13</sup>

If this is an accurate interpretation of virtual gender disparity, a key 'tool' of repression is the sexual degradation of women on the internet. There is an 'estimated 420 million pages of pornography online'<sup>14</sup>, which accounts for an overwhelming 60-70% of web-surfing time<sup>15</sup>. The internet's incessant display of women as sexual objects serves to 'immortalize the product of a distorted view of sexuality within patriarchal societies...'<sup>16</sup>. The alarming levels of misogyny (alongside appalling racism) that can all-too-regularly be found on the comment pages of interactive websites like YouTube<sup>17</sup>, serve to illustrate the darker side of freedom of speech in combination with anonymity. Search results for 'feminism' show more cases of mocking and undermining the movement than genuine feminist activities. These observations of the image of women on the internet certainly support Ruis' claim that the internet projects a repressed and traditionalist view of women.

Monika Merkes' study of gender differences in internet use clearly outlines a number of distinctions between male and female patterns. Firstly, women see the internet as a 'tool for activity', whereas men see it as a 'technology to be mastered' and are also more likely to view internet usage as a play-thing or a gadget. This suggests that women are less likely to use the internet as a past-time or form of entertainment. Secondly, Merkes suggests that due to the female tendency to use the internet for specific purposes, women are less likely to carry out long internet trails or 'stumble-upon' web content. Merkes also observes that in mixed-sex public discussion forums, women are far less likely to contribute, and when they do, they are less likely to receive a response<sup>18</sup>.

Differences in internet usage could be partly explained by the computer's location in the home. For many cultures, the domestic environment is traditionally a women's place of work. Gender orientated territories within the domestic environment regularly exclude both women and men, and the computer is most likely to be in a traditionally male space like an office.

Internet activists are overwhelmingly male (according to the Pew Centre survey 71.8% of internet activists are male and 28.2% are female)<sup>19</sup>. While many feminist and women's groups have websites and blogs (linear forms of online activity), very few have adopted more imaginative uses of the internet. This could, in part, be explained by the 'language' barrier, or technical barrier that Marisa Ruis describes in 'Crossing Borders'<sup>20</sup>. Advanced computer literacy could be seen as the perfecting of a hobby or pastime, a luxury that women traditionally don't have time for in the domestic environment. However, this would insinuate that it is female inadequacies that deter more in depth forms of internet participation. It is also very possible that this absence is a conscious choice, based on feminine attributes like a common value that women place on 'face-to-face' or real life communication.

Female reluctance to maximise the internet as a tool for and a site of women's progress and activism could be explained by the direct



<sup>21</sup> Michael D. Ayers, 'Comparing Collective Identity in Online and Offline Feminist Activists', in Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers (eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.145-164.

<sup>22</sup> Escobar, p.32.

comparisons that have been made between 'face-to-face' and 'screen-to-screen' communication, rather than by considering the two as interdependent. In the essay, 'Comparing Collective Identity in Online and Offline Feminist Activists', Michael D. Ayers compares two separate experiences of women's groups—one which uses a simple form of website and one which continues with real life, physical meetings. Unsurprisingly, Ayers concludes that the predominantly 'face-to-face' group and the predominantly online group have very different characteristics<sup>21</sup>. It is this 'either/or' mentality and failure to understand and appreciate the complete interdependency between the real and the virtual world that alienates female web users. Truly successful internet activism is reliant on a duality of approach or 'an ongoing taking back and forth between cyberpolitics (political activism on the internet) and ... place politics, or political activism in the physical locations at which the networker sits and lives.'<sup>22</sup>

## Cases of Female Contribution

It is important at this stage to highlight notable contributions by women to online activism. This serves to illustrate that while these contributions are fewer in quantity, successful content does exist. They demonstrate innovative ideas and aspirations, but also show a grounding or connection with the real world. Noting that three of these examples are film-based, it is possible to draw a link between female desires for face-to-face or more human forms of contact, and successful internet coverage. The following case studies signify a variation of forms of online activism and political communication, used by women.

Each case study forms an example of one of the many ways in which the internet can be focused for specific political strategy or used as a key activist tool—direct action, communication, education or public journalism. While these terms are not an absolute or finite categorisation of activist tools, they form a basis for highlighting the goals of internet activism. 'Direct Action' refers to the 'stopping of traffic' previously considered. It uses disruption of everyday activity to highlight and draw attention to issues. Communication, in this context, refers to the role of the internet in uniting the like-minded. Webspaces create environments in which disenfranchised groups can communicate and share ideas. Education refers to the important role that the internet has in storing information and creating usable forms of information retrieval. And Public Journalism refers to the ability that the internet has to break the monopoly of mainstream media journalism as forms of activism. While these examples are to some extent chance findings, they demonstrate key areas of internet protest.

## Direct Action

### 'War Zone' by Maggie Hadleigh-West



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIW9iRMSqY>

'War Zone' is a short film that presents public space through the eyes of a woman, highlighting the everyday harassment and intimidation that women are subjected to by men. Through the simple act of walking the streets, Hadleigh-West not only demonstrates her experience but also attempts to reclaim space that she feels has been taken out of the public realm by the actions of her 'abusers'. Hadleigh-West retaliates against common forms of sexual harassment through the use of a camera, her 'weapon', directly filming and questioning the motives of her harassers. The film offers an empowering glance at the effect of her refusal to accept the 'natural order' of the streets and her refusal to underestimate these actions.

Hadleigh-West's form of online protest is, in many ways, typical of female participation online. While the notion of 'stopping traffic' or causing disruption has no doubt been achieved, Hadleigh-West uses the 'real-world' as its site and cyber-space as its portal of projection. She uses real human interaction as the central point of topic, and the internet is merely a circulation device. This is a very successful technique. Hadleigh-West is in no danger of removing her cyber-protest from a contextual grounding, but rather places herself, her camera and the viewer at the centre of the issue.

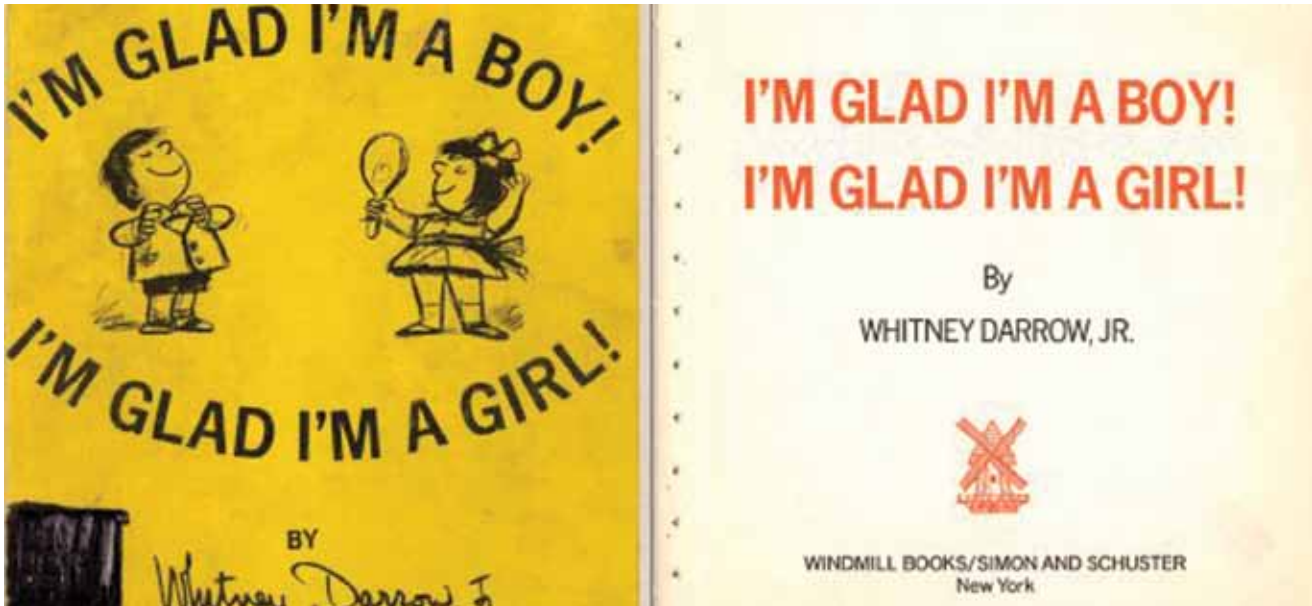
Further to this simple strategy, its online presence gives the issue a real-time context. The anonymous comment pages of YouTube serve to illustrate exactly the objectification that Hadleigh-West illustrates in her film. With such comments as 'don't worry, in 10 years time no one will stare... and you can live the rest of your precious life in peace free from the oppressive stares of men'<sup>23</sup> and 'if she doesn't want to be looked at then why the hell is she wearing such revealing clothes?'<sup>24</sup>, the correlation between Hadleigh-West's physical streets and the virtual spaces of the internet, are blindingly clear. She has succinctly exposed the issue of male street-harassment and used the internet to not only circulate that issue but to demonstrate its constant undermining.

<sup>23</sup> A comment on, Maggie Hadleigh-West, 'War Zone', at YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHIW9iRMSqY>, [accessed 2009].

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

## Communication

## Young Feminist Forum



<http://spacefem.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=38360&sid=1bfe1fd15a9a3854d07d9141e8aed281>

This young feminist forum or 'chat-room' is one of a few on the internet. Whilst the format is very much low-tech, the significance of these sites is vast. This particular forum offers young women and men the opportunity to address 'other' ideas of gender in a media that is largely used to project single images of gender roles. Discussions and ideas on the site are broad, ranging from which cartoon characters are most admired to questioning 'why Facebook's default image is a white male'. As one user writes, 'feminism is about asking questions' and the site facilitates the simple act of uniting young people with similar questions at an influential age.

This form of online participation draws upon Ruis' view of female internet participation being highly restricted by technical language barriers<sup>25</sup>. By using such low-tech formats, the site greatly increases its inclusiveness. It also reduces any predisposed format or topic structure, allowing users to pose questions and create new 'threads' easily. While it could be argued that this linear format has a number of inadequacies regarding the limitations of its use, this is merely a side-issue to its overall aim—to provide a format in which like-minded people can communicate without language-barriers.

<sup>25</sup> Ruis, p.23.

## Education

**'Killing us softly: Women in Media' series, by Jean Kilbourne**



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svpMan9cWyo>

Jean Kilbourne's online lecture series represents an opportunity for women to critically consider the image and objectification of women in the media. By recording and analysing the methods that the advertising industry have used to typecast the female image, an overriding trend appears. Kilbourne often uses humour to highlight the ridiculous nature of the pressures that the media place on women to achieve a prescribed ideal appearance. By posting this lecture series on an easily accessible site like YouTube, the ideas are made public to a greater number of users and as a result enter the public forum.

Similarly to Hadleigh-West's film, Kilbourne uses the internet to circulate ideas rather than to formulate them. The nature of the catalogue of visual information that Kilbourne uses relates well to film format, while her own presence retains the sense of face-to-face communication. She educates her audience through the process of heightening the senses to the forms of gender pressure that are so common in the media that we need to relearn how to see them.

## Public Journalism

### Arab Women's Speak Out: Profiles of Self-Empowerment



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnqL-ocObXs>

This project was conceived as a device to communicate ideals of self-empowerment to the repressed women of the Arabic nations, notably Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. The documentary is a collaboration between the Communications Program of the John Hopkins University and 30 Arabic female 'role models'<sup>26</sup>. While the format of the documentary is simple in nature (a number of interviewees describing their paths to success and the obstacles they had to overcome), the ready availability of this material on the internet is key.

<sup>26</sup> Virtual Activism (2009) <http://www.virtualactivism.org/articles/arabwomen.pdf> [accessed 2009].

<sup>27</sup> Lamis Alshejani, 'Unveiling the Arab Woman's Voice through the Net' in: Wendy Harcourt (Ed.), *women@internet* (London: Zed Books, 1999) pp.214- 218.

As Lamis Alshejani illustrates in her article 'Unveiling the Arab Woman's Voice through the Net'<sup>27</sup>, the greatest difficulty in unlocking Arab women's online potential as a site of liberation, is the technical language barrier. However, this documentary uses the internet in the most basic manner to highlight the human voice. Journalism has played a highly important role in internet activism. Considering the limitations and corporate pressures on mainstream sources of journalistic media, the internet offers an open forum for the dissemination of information. The case of Arabic women is particularly significant. Considering the limitations of communication and expression that many of these women would have experienced within their homelands, the internet forms a kind of free state. 'Arab Women's Speak Out' demonstrates how key pieces of journalism can bring to light women's rights issues that are all too often ignored by the mainstream media.



## Female Prospects on the Internet

With the internet forecasting itself as a permanent aspect of human culture, the place of women and the role of gender on the internet is a key issue for activists to address. As a site for political change, perhaps the most important question is: Does the internet encourage political apathy? Is an easier and more convenient internet activism, or 'activism at a distance'<sup>28</sup>, slowly replacing an activism that requires greater commitment, and as a result demands greater attention? 'People feel like they're doing something useful when they push the send button, even though spam like petitions and e-mailed chain letters have not been proven effective...'<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Escobar, p.31.

<sup>29</sup> McCaughey and Ayers, 'Introduction', p.6.

At what point does online activity make an impact on the real world and when it does, is its impact reduced by its origin? Successful internet activism and social change is achieved by ensuring that the connection between the virtual action and its real-life motive is strong. For women, this connection between online activity and physical realities may still seem fragile.

For many communities that seek the internet as a site of equality, the internet forms a kind of a 'sand-box', or a world in which aspirations can be tested in a free environment with limited consequences. However, this image of the internet is an illusion. As a site of political protest and a tool for communication, it is important to ground the capabilities of the internet within its limitations. There are issues of inclusiveness with internet use – namely its Western bias, and its exclusivity to computer owners and the computer literate, eradicating vast socio-economic groups and cultures from the debate. The disparity between rich and poor is as prevalent in the cyber world as it is in the real world<sup>30</sup>. It is also important to remember that online activity can be and is monitored and censored. Many countries have national firewall's that block access to foreign websites and search engines, for example China's 'Great Red Firewall'<sup>31</sup>. But most fundamentally the internet is shaped around the physical society from which it is created. For women and those affected by assumed gender roles, the internet reflects this patriarchal society. Language barriers, gender directed lifestyles and traditional domestic roles ensure that female online activity is reduced. The modern role of the internet is to arm with knowledge and to make ideas accessible, but until the internet is a truly accessible facility, this optimistic notion is in jeopardy.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, p.225.

<sup>31</sup> See, Alfred Hermida, 'Behind China's Internet Red Firewall', BBC News, 3 Sept 2002, Technology Section, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/2234154.stm>, [accessed 2009].



## Agency and Gift of Architecture

Tim Gough

If agency signifies (first definition, and amongst other things) the ability to act, then architecturally this power is complex in the sense that it is deployed at one remove, that is, via agency (second definition), and such in at least two directions or registers: the agent acts both through others and for others. Taking its clue from an early written building contract, this paper discusses the role of the architect as agent in this light. On the one hand, the role of agent can be seen as a parasitical one, an unnecessary burden (financially and morally) on the 'real' act of construction. In this sense, we might think of the ideal of a direct and perhaps more natural relationship between construction and inhabitant – a relationship unmediated by the law, the contract, and agency, a relationship where the architect is redundant. This status of the agent/architect is discussed in relation to Saint Paul's notion of 'sin' and the possibility of a salvation which is linked by Badiou to the gift, kharisma; and the article concludes by positing what the nature of an architectural gift might be.

## Introduction

Costacciaro stands on the Via Flaminia, west of Gubbio; a small fortified town past which the Roman road from the capital to Rimini still runs. In 1477, Francesco di Giorgio Martini was formally commissioned as the architect for various works of fortification and civil engineering to the body of the town. The contract is recorded in the *Fondo Notarile* of the Gubbio archive as follows:

In the name of our Lord, Amen. On the 17th day of May 1477 in the home of my notary. There being present Bartolomeo Antonii Cellis de Villa Vignoli and Fanne Nannis de Castro Turris, and Rentio Spagne de Villa Submontis Count of Gubbio being called upon as witnesses to the underwritten:

Franciscus Georgi de Senis [ie Francesco di Giorgio Martini, from Sienna] in the place and in the name of the Lord, Federico Duke of Urbino, has given and placed the work described below with Master Johanni Jacobi, Master Pietro, the Masters Laurentii, and Master Caleazzo ser Ferandi de Riva Sancti Vitalis.; they being present and in accord; namely the construction of a wall at and for the fortified town of Coastacciaro, together with certain vaulted water sources placed below the designated ravelin according to the prepared designs and specifications. What touches upon the performance of this work is under the above worthy Francesco.... The contractors solemnly promise to construct the above work and do the masonry work faithfully and according to the rules of the art and subject to the approval of Francesco himself. They promise to make appropriate foundations and do all the other work needed to complete the effort and fulfil the contract in accord with what the prefect [ie architect] Francesco has ordered and will order.

...The aforesaid contractors have promised to observe and



Fig. 1. Ravelin, Costacciaro, Umbria, Italy, by Francesco di Giorgio, 1477. Photograph: Tim Gough.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Michael Dechert, *City and Fortress in the Works of Francesco di Giorgio* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Washington DC, 1983), p.143.

fulfil all these conditions under penalty of 100 ducats for whoever does not comply. The aforesaid contractors....herewith undertake to fulfil the foregoing and to observe and comply with each and all of the conditions and not to do anything contrary...<sup>1</sup>

Such contractual arrangements involving client, builder and architect exist to this day. Those involved with 'practice' will recognise here the supposedly banal outlines – indeed the specifics - of OCT:, FIDIC: or other standard forms of building contract: the dating; the witnesses; the promise



Fig. 2. Defensive tower, Costacciaro, Umbria, Italy, by Francesco di Giorgio, 1477. Photograph: Tim Gough.



on the part of contractors or undertakers to act; the sanction for not so acting; the specification; the design; the appeal to common good practice and workmanship and so on; all within the auspices of overarching law which allows for and guarantees specific legal agreements.

Who, or what, is here the agent? Inherent in this contract for performance – in all similar contracts – is an ambiguity and complexity regarding the status of agency. If on the one hand, agency means the ability or power to act, and specifically the power to act as a human, directly and with choice, with autonomy – then this power is marked, and damaged, by the legal structure which is here set up. This legal structure's also one of *agency*, but this time agency in another of its many meanings, or rather in the meaning that is diametrically opposed to the first: the meaning of the rerouting of action away from the principal, the originator, to someone who represents, who takes the place of the principal. In short, the displacing of action to the agent, the disrupting of *agency* (first meaning) by *agency* (second meaning).

We find that agency as action becomes, in these contractual arrangements at Costacciaro, always at one remove, and such in at least two directions or registers: the agent acts both *through* others and *for* others.

Which of the parties to this contract is, then, ostensibly the agent (second meaning)? Who takes the place of the principal? We are told explicitly: the architect, Francesco di Giorgio, is 'in the place of' his master, Federico Duke of Urbino (commonly known as Federico da Montefeltro). The architect takes the place of the client for the purposes of the building contract, acts as agent for the client. The law of agency, including the principle of *Respondeat Superior* codified in British law in the 17th century whereby the agent acts for and therefore binds their principal – Federico, in this case – is already at work at this early date. But is this date so early? We could suppose the opposite – that this date is already late, that the possibility of the substitution of agency (action) by agency (agent) is *always already* at work; that is, that agency is constitutive of the subject, of the 'for itself', of that being which each of us is (however we may wish to name it), and therefore that as soon as there is anything like 'the human' there will be *agency* as well as *agency*.

The agent – Francesco di Giorgio – has been clearly identified, we may believe; but his presence, ready to act in place of the Duke, is not taken for granted within the contract, precisely because he is not actually present. Those who *are* present – that is, the witnesses – are necessary in order to guarantee a lack of presence, perhaps the ghostly presence, implied by these arrangements – a lack of presence not only of the principal (the Duke), but also that of Francesco himself, the agent.

We have so far understated matters as to this operation of agency (second meaning), this displacement of agency (first meaning). Agent-like rerouting structures the whole of the Costacciaro contract, and not just that part relating to the Sienese architect. We have supposed that the Duke is the principal, the one on whose behalf the work is carried out,

but this is a reduction by analysis from the situation there. The whole of the contract – both written and constructed - is done 'in the name of our Lord', that is, not the Lord Duke of Urbino, but the godhead. All parties to the contract stand in the place of and continue on his behalf the work of their Lord in heaven. This overriding authority and agency is carried through the more specific route of a second one who is called 'Lord', that is the 'Lord, Federico Duke of Urbino' in whose further name the work is arranged; and then only via the one who takes his place and speaks on his behalf – the architect, who in turns places the work with the contractors.

What is to be remarked here is not so much the fixed hierarchy of belief within a traditionally-ordered society, guaranteed by the godhead and giving authority to the Duke, but rather the iterated structure of substitutions – of agency - which gives this hierarchy its possibility and which thus precedes any such supposedly fixed hierarchy. What the ruler (the Duke in this case) will understand if he is a great ruler – and Federico da Montefeltro most certainly was - is the political importance of precipitating and maintaining this 'fixed' hierarchy out of the movement of agency; and thus it is his task (and that of his trusted agents) to be master of the law of agency, to comprehend it and play it effectively by means of, for instance, a contract such as that above, and the consequences of the action it requires – in this case, architecture.

There is something, according to a certain quite pervasive logic, to be deprecated in this process of substitution. In general, the agent is perforce in the position of the *parasite*. Specifically, it will be said that the architect is not involved in the action itself, but instead is managing, overseeing, directing, criticising and removing resources from the thing itself which needs to be achieved, the real matter at hand – in this case the actual construction of the ravelin, the good, honest and uncomplicated labour of the laying of stone on stone. Not responsible in person but, if at all (slippery status that it is), as a bystander who nonetheless demands their cut, their percentage, the architect as agent we might say is the very figure of the useless, or worse-than-useless, disrupting the presence of the true master to the true servant by rerouting or diverting the immediate intentions of the former as directed toward the latter.

This pervasive logic is explicated by Badiou, in his atheistic book on Saint Paul,<sup>2</sup> where he necessarily uses the term *sin* in this regard, and links it, as Paul does, to the place of contract, of writing, that is, of law:

Sin is the life of death. It is that of which the law, and the law alone, is capable..... Paul is striving to articulate a de-centring of the subject, a particularly contorted form of its division. Since the subject of life is in the place of death and vice versa, it follows that knowledge and will, on the one hand, agency and action, on the other, are entirely disconnected.<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of law is that agency as action (our first meaning) is stained by agency as separation (our second): 'For Paul, the man of the law is one in whom doing is separated from thinking... sin is not so much a fault as

<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, Saint Paul – *The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). As Giles Deleuze notes (in *Logic of Sensation* trans. by Daniel W Smith (London: Continuum, 2003), p.124, 'Christianity contains a germ of tranquil atheism' which Badiou makes use of in his book. We do not need to have faith in order to appreciate the momentous structural task Paul of Tartus accomplishes.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.83. Badiou links this with Lacan's famous anti-Cartesian thought of the subject: there where I think I am not, and there where I am, I do not think. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits A Selection* trans. Alan Sherridan (London: Routledge, 1977), p.166. The title of Lacan's essay is relevant to our topic: 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious; or, Reason since Freud.'

living thought's inability to prescribe action.' For Paul, the structure of sin is the disruption of intentionality within the subject by means of the law; likewise, the action of the law in sustaining the movement of agency disrupts the intention of the principal, of the 'Lord', and by means of the letter of the contract reroutes it via in this case the exemplary agent, the architect.

As with all phenomena of foundational importance, this movement plays both ways. Saint Paul says: the law breaks the immediacy of action, and this is sin; agency as separation from original intention is introduced. We say: agency, as original separation from intention, as the break between knowledge/will and agency as action, is what 'causes' law to exist in the first place. If there were no agency (as separation) there would be no law. The law is the means of dealing with the non-presentness of an action, both in terms of contractual arrangements (as exemplified by the written building agreement at Costacciaro) – which are only necessary because the principal is not present when the works are being done – and in terms of criminal law where adjudication occurs within the rule of law whilst taking account (and making an account of) the non-presence of a past (illegal) act. 'Cause' is in fact the wrong term here: instead, a reciprocal conditioning is at work between law and agency such that we cannot grant one the position of being a cause, of being first (either logically or temporally). Between them lies not a relation of cause and effect, but rather a *disjunctive* relation of community, to use Kant's terminology from his table of categories in the first critique<sup>4</sup>, where, not coincidentally, the relation is characterised as one of the interplay of 'agent' and 'patient'.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans Normal Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1929), p.113 [B106].

In the case of the building contract at Costacciaro, it can be shown that this stain of Pauline sin marks each member of the chain of agency in which Francesco di Giorgio sits, both empirically and essentially. (The one exception to this is that being which is defined as exception itself, namely the Lord, the godhead; the further definition of which is to lack this stain, to lack sin.) Taking the Duke Federico da Montefeltro and to speak empirically: an illegitimate son, his position as ruler of Urbino and Gubbio was obtained only after his younger half-brother was assassinated – an act for which suspicion has long fallen on Federico himself.<sup>5</sup> To speak essentially: this particular stain is only an instance of the general rule that an earthly sovereign is guilty, that is, can only have gained their position through a necessary fault that runs through *all* moments of foundation (of a state, dynasty or rule).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Kirkbride, *Architecture and Memory – The Renaissance Studioli of Federico da Montefeltro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p.13 and p.32.

<sup>6</sup> See the work of René Girard in this regard, particularly his *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (London: Athlone, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Alain Badiou, op. cit., p.84.

<sup>8</sup> See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), *Meditation 35 – Theory of the Subject*; and 'The Political as Truth Procedure' in *Metapolitics* trans. Barbara P. Fulks (New York: Verso, 2005).

But whilst the law and sin are thus shown to be unavoidable, Saint Paul famously frees us from them by means of salvation, and, by this ideational act of creating and setting into effect salvation, establishes the world religion of Christianity in its Pauline cast. What does this 'salvation' mean? Two things, according to Badiou. The first is 'that thought can be unseparated from doing and power', that 'the divided figure of the subject maintains thought in the power of doing.'<sup>7</sup> This Badiou calls a 'truth procedure', a process or event of truth which he explicates elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> The fact that it is a 'truth procedure' is the reason why it is effective in instaurating a world religion, and he links this procedure here to grace,

which is the possibility for a 'pure act', pure agency.

The second meaning of salvation is revealed by its disjunction from 'reward' or 'wage', that is from what is contractually owed: as Badiou says, 'it pertains to the granting of a gift, *kharisma*.'<sup>9</sup>

To return to the specifics of architecture and Costacciaro, and now to save the situation there from a parasitical deprecation: it is in this possibility of salvation by means of the granting of a gift that we might hope to see the ethical task of the architect as agent, a task which reaches beyond the contractual and calculated legal relations in which she necessarily stands. It reaches beyond these written relations towards what is *not* mentioned in the Costacciaro contract, namely the community itself<sup>10</sup> for which the town is constructed. The community is that body towards which the architect acts as an unwritten and uncontracted agent, just as the Duke, for all his invocation of analogies with his Lord in heaven (such invocations being the routine ruse of power), rules by virtue of and as agent of the community which brought him to power.<sup>11</sup>

Why do we claim that the architect acts as agent for the community? For in this claim we wish to posit that unless - outside all contractual, legal, rewarded and predicable duties - the architect acts as generous agent towards the community, unless a gift occurs in the creation of the work, then there will be no such thing as architecture, properly defined. And this occurrence of the gift is the location of an ethics of architecture - an ethics necessarily outside the realm of law, just as justice is also beyond the law.

The architect acts as agent for the community because, if it is to be possible for a gift of architecture to be granted to it, then architecture must be defined thus: as an active and eventful reciprocity which engages the community. In no other manner could it be possible for such a gift to occur. Since the specific nature of architecture concerns the environment - buildings, places, landscape - this engaging reciprocity is for it the interplay between people/community and place/buildings; or between subject (us, community) and object (buildings). Architecture is inherently *situational*, in the meaning of the term which Sartre gives it: 'the situation is a relation of being between a for-itself [us] and the in-itself ['objects', environment] which the for-itself nihilates.... The situation is the subject illuminating things by his very surpassing...'<sup>12</sup> Architecture is inherently *disjunctive*, to again use the term from Kant's table of categories: it is to do with the reciprocity of agent and patient (in this case, people and place), a relation which itself is termed one of community.<sup>13</sup>

The architect acts as agent for the community insofar as they have a view to the communal - that is, situational and disjunctive - being of architecture. This act of respect has, necessarily, the nature of a gift; it will only occur beyond any rule of law, beyond any contract, and beyond any duty. In the case to hand: there is a so-called pragmatic task for the architecture to fulfil, namely the protection of the fabric of the town and the Duke's realm by means of a defensive bastion and tower. If the work of architecture does not achieve this, then the legal requirements have

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, p.77.

<sup>10</sup> The full form of the contract does include a reference to the commune of Costacciaro, but only insofar as they are to provide building materials delivered to the site.

<sup>11</sup> As noted in Kirkbride op cit, see James Dennistoun, *Memoires of the Dukes of Urbino* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851), vol. 1 pp. 417-20 for details of the written constitutional agreement signed between Federico and the citizens of Urbino before they permitted him to enter the city to become ruler.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* trans. Hazel E Barnes (London: Methuen, 1958), p.549.

<sup>13</sup> loc. cit. Or, to put it another way, architecture is inherently *theatrical* in the meaning of the term which Michael Fried gives it when he used it disparagingly to describe minimalist or 'literal' art. Cf .Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art Forum* 5 (June 1967), pp. 12-23.

not been discharged. But this is a necessary and *not* sufficient condition for what the architect should achieve; or, better put, the pragmatic aspect should only be an effect of analysis and reduction after the event, *not* at the origin of the creative and generous act. The creative and generous act of the architect is to operate on and maintain the scope of an *unreduced* situation. The sign of this at Costacciaro is explicitly given in the terrible and unexpected beauty of the ravelin – why, according to the law, should a bastion be beautiful? – and less explicitly and perhaps more intriguingly in the simple and everyday beauty of the tower.

Finally, and more radically, the work of architecture is to have the nature of a gift because the community to which this gift is given *does not yet exist*. It is a community to come,<sup>14</sup> a community of future possibility, a community of those who perhaps have nothing in common aside from that which may come to occur by means of the architecture thus thought and created. It is not simply that the community of Costacciaro as a legal body is not party to the formal contract between architect, Duke and builder, since we can envisage that they might well be; but more that the community thought outside the law and thought in terms of an eventful architecture *cannot possibly be party to a contract*. There is nothing there of which the architect could be an agent except a sort of ghostly presence – if we can imagine such a thing as a futural ghost, the ghost of an architecture or community to come. And yet the architect, in acknowledging the essentially futural nature of architecture, should – it is a matter of ethics that they do – respond as this spectre's agent. We see that on the one hand the architect envisages the battle-to-come which will rage around the bastion- and tower-to-come, and gives that untameable event an indeterminable and open possibility or series of possibilities; and on the other, the uncalled-for event of beauty will occur here for one who approaches these architectural works from out of an unknown future. The agent of the future unknown: such might be the situation of architecture.

<sup>14</sup> On this, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).







## Notes on Contributors

**Ariadna Aston** is a 6th year MArch student at the University of Sheffield School of Architecture.

**Melanie Bax** recently graduated from the University of Sheffield with a Masters in Architecture. Along with Sarah Considine, she has created the project 'We ♥ the Suburbs' to research the UK suburbs and explore the opportunities in working with a local community with no predetermined end product. She has worked in architectural practices in London, New York and Madrid and taught at the University of Sheffield. Her interests lie in the processes involved in participatory practice and translating this into an architectural project.

**John Jordan's** work merges the imagination of art and the social engagement of politics. He applies creativity directly to social movements, acts of rebellion and disobedience and is much more at home with notions of art as transforming process than representation. Co-director of social practice art group Platform (1987-1995) he then went on to be a co-founder of the infamous cultural resistance collective 'Reclaim the Streets' (1995-2000). He has written and lectured extensively about the space between art and activism, including at the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona and the Tate Modern, London. In 2003 he co-edited the book 'We Are Everywhere: the irresistible rise of global anticapitalism' a Verso bestseller and now translated in 7 languages. He was senior lecturer in fine art at Sheffield Hallam University from 1994 until 2003, when ran away from academia to go to Argentina after the popular uprisings there, to work on the film 'The Take' with Naomi Klein. In 2002 he set up the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) which toured the UK leading up to the 2005 G8 summit in Scotland. He has now gone AWOL from CIRCA but it continues to be part of the iconography of the alter-globalisation movements. He is presently working on the Camp for Climate Action – a temporary self managed ecovillage and direct action base - and co-writing (with the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination) a book and fictional road movie project set in Utopian communities in Europe.

**Cristina Cerulli** qualified as an *architetto* in Florence in 1999. Since then she has worked in practice and academia and has been a lecturer at the School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield since 2005, after completing her PhD on inter and intra project learning within design practices. In 2008 she co-founded, with Mark Parsons, Studio Polpo a social enterprise architectural practice. At the School of Architecture Cristina coordinates Knowledge Exchange activities, she is also responsible

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Cristina's research, teaching and design practice is underpinned by a desire to collaborate with others in ways that question and rethink the boundaries between approaches, roles and disciplines.

**Sarah Considine** is a Masters graduate of the University of Sheffield, School of Architecture. She has co-founded the project 'We ♥ the Suburbs', a design and research project that addresses suburbia through public consultation, probing of local policy and collaborative design with fellow contributor Melanie Bax. She has also worked in architectural practice, teaching and research in London and Sheffield. Her current architectural interests lie in practice that embraces an expanded role of the architect as mediator, initiator, translator and cross-disciplinary go-between.

**Tim Gough** leads the third year Design Studio 2 at Kingston University School of Architecture and Landscape, and lectures in the history and theory of architecture. He is partner in Robertson Gough, an artist-architect collaborative based in London. His recent research interests include phenomenology, the work of Gilles Deleuze, and the Roman baroque. Published papers include *Cura*, an essay in *Curating Architecture and the City* (2009); *Let us Take Architecture* (publication and symposium at the Wordsworth Trust with artist Lucy Gunning, May 2007); *Non-origin of Species – Deleuze, Derrida, Darwin*, essay in the *Journal Culture and Organisation*, Issue 4 December 2006; and *Defiguration of space*, an essay in *Figuration-Defiguration*, edited by Atsuko Onuki and Thomas Pekar, published by Iudicum Verlag, Munich (Germany) 2006.

**Leslie Kane Weisman** is Emerita Professor and former Associate Dean of the School of Architecture at New Jersey Institute of Technology which she joined as a founding faculty member in 1975. She has also held appointments in architecture, planning, and women's studies as Visiting Scholar at the University of Ulster in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the George A. Miller Endowment Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Brooklyn College, and the University of Detroit.

Included in her pioneering work in design education is the co-founding of *Sheltering Ourselves: A Women's Learning Exchange*, an international educational forum on housing and economic development for low-income women and their families, on-going since 1987, and *The Women's School of Planning and Architecture* (1974-1981), a national summer program for women in the environmental design professions and trades. A sought-after speaker, she frequently delivers keynote addresses and featured speeches at professional conferences, and guest lectures at universities throughout North America, South America, Great Britain, Europe, and Australia. Her current public sector work includes appointments to the Southold Town Zoning Board of Appeals and the Affordable Housing Advisory Commission. For forty years, Leslie Kane Weisman has dedicated herself to defining and solving the social problems that plague society through

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**Florian Kossak** is a lecturer at the University of Sheffield School of Architecture where he runs a MArch design studio, lectures history and theory, and directs the MA in Urban Design course. He got his doctorate from the Edinburgh College of Art with a PhD thesis on experimental architectural exhibitions. He has previously taught in Munich and Glasgow and practiced in Germany and the UK with a focus on exhibition curating and design. He was a founder member of the worker's cooperative G.L.A.S. (Glasgow Letters on Architecture and Space). Publications include several authored and (co)edited books and exhibition catalogues. Current work includes research into urban histories and the praxis of experimental architecture exhibitions. He is a member of the research center *Agency*.

**Mick O'Kelly** is a Dublin based artist. He is currently doing a PhD with Interface at the University of Ulster Northern Ireland. He currently teaches in the Faculty of Fine Art at the National College of Art Dublin Ireland. He has studied for his BFA at the National College of Art and Design Dublin, (1982-1985) and did his MFA at the California Institute of the Arts USA, (1995-1997). He is a visiting artist to art schools in Ireland, UK, Germany, France, Finland, USA and Brazil. He has exhibited nationally and internationally and engages in contextual art initiatives beyond the gallery and museum structure. Ongoing concerns in his work and research acknowledge the changing nature of contemporary art, and issues of situated practice, location and context.

**Andrew Powell** is a qualified practicing Architect, trained at Oxford Brookes and Westminster University in the UK. He holds a long standing deep interest and experience in humanitarian sector, specifically disaster shelter relief and informal settlements/sustainable development. Responding to a number of years of commercial practice and experiences in the humanitarian sector, he has been increasingly forced to ask serious questions about the nature of architectural practice, gathering research and firsthand experience of a context in which the skills of architects are arguably most needed, but can least be afforded.

**Georgen Theodore** is an architect, urban designer, and educator. She is founding principal of Interboro, a New York City-based architecture, planning, and research office and an Assistant Professor at New Jersey Institute of Technology, where she is currently the Associate Director of the Infrastructure Planning program. The focus of her research is the contemporary city. Her recent projects have concentrated on the development of new techniques of visualizing, analyzing and evaluating urban dynamics, with the ultimate goal of opening avenues for architects and planners to engage the changing urban environment in new ways.

**Kim Trogal** is a PhD student at Sheffield University. Her current research, *Affective Urban Practices*, is a study into alternative modes of practice and feminist ethics. The study is supported by the LKE Ozolins Award from the RIBA. She has taught undergraduate studio at Sheffield



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**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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