

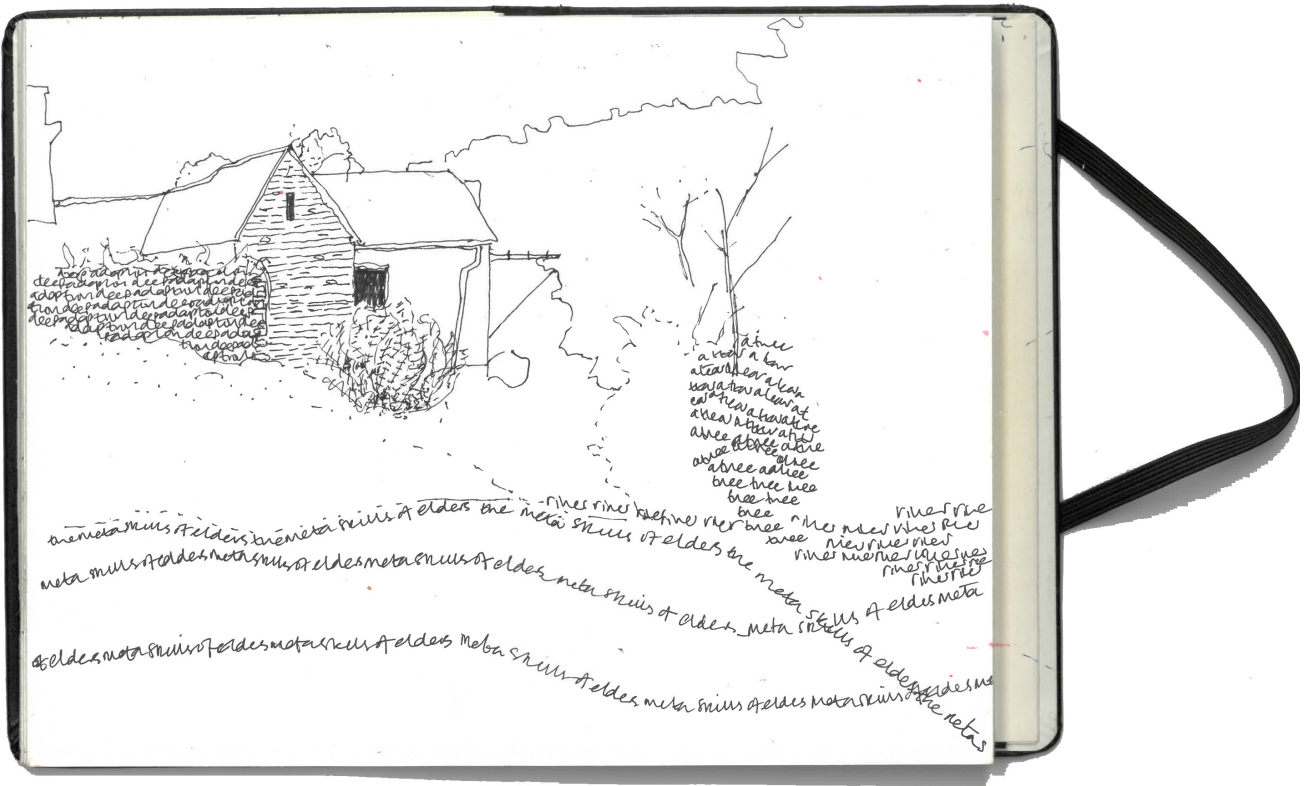
Out of Practice: Manifestos for an LSA Education



Writing from the
London School of Architecture
2015-2021

James Soane

Dedicated to
Will Hunter



Sketch book page from Kissing the Void retreat

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Contents

- P 3 1. Book Review: Being Ecological
- P 5 2. Friction in Fiction: Writing the Future
- P 11 3. Bond House: The Secret Agency of Architecture
- P 12 4. Architecture in the Age of Climate Emergency
- P 13 5. Critical Practice Reader Introduction 2020/21
- P 14 6. Hardcore
- P 15 7. Feel the Force
- P 18 8. Critical Practice Reader Introduction 2019/20
- P 19 9. I Get So Emotional Baby
- P 20 10. Out of Practice
- P 23 11. Class Action
- P 25 12. Towards New Theory at the LSA
- P 29 13. A Manifesto for Academia with Practice
- P 311 14. The Writing is on the Wall
- P 32 15. Changing Architectural Education: Practices in Flux
- P 38 16. Teaching Practice
- P 43 17. Supersized London
- P 46 18. Review of the Cambridge End of Year Show
- P 47 19. Changing Practices
- P 53 20. Home Truths
- P 55 21. Down to Earth
- P 60 22. Climate Models
- P 65 23. Listen
- P 67 24. Practicing Teaching
- P 73 25. Education in Practice

1. Book Review of Being Ecological by Tim Morton

CITIZEN Magazine. 2021

Where was I?

Late autumn sun meant it was warm enough to sit outside, on the timber deck, overlooking a small stream clogged with exploding reeds and faded browning foliage. The chair was wooden with a moss green patterned cushion, brought from inside, and I recall putting my feet up on the balustrade with a sense of liberated indolence.

Few book titles immediately take you back to the time and place you first read it. This is one. It was 17th September 2018. The vivid recall is because the book changed me and I heartily suggest it may reorient you too. Sharing this story is itself an act of 'being ecological', as I am emphasising bodily experience according to the notion of affect. While the author declares he is not going to preach, he invites us to reflect on what is happening to our environment and the natural world. He suggests it is time to pay attention to the voices in our heads telling us things are not right; in other words 'ecological awareness'.

The book's message is not original, that there is a climate crisis; but Tim Morton tells his story differently. His work is considered to be framed within the object-oriented philosophy movement that he has taught and written about prolifically over the past 25 years in an effort to repair what he calls the 'damaged idea' of nature. Here he considers human-kind to be in big trouble, imploring us to recognise that global warming IS mass extinction. He argues that to understand our troubles is not through presenting a terrifying tally of facts and figures, as in many critiques of climate change; instead to explore the critical differences between facts and data, where the fact is an interpretation of the data. He further suggests that if made to feel shame, we seldom act together in a choral and proactive manner but become self-defensive. Worse still, we reinterpret the data as less uncomfortable facts. This tendency to introspection reinforces the destructive paradigm that Homo Sapiens are at the top of the creation pyramid, when there is no such thing: 'Ecological facts are the result of man's wanting to be at the top of the tree'(p28). For Morton this is yet another example of hubristic thinking because facts are neither entirely natural nor true, rather they are an interpretation of a given situation in the human universe.

The Architects Lens

When Morton suggests the problem with most of so-called civilisation's 'human built space' is that it does not accommodate beings already there we perhaps nod in agreement, without really engaging in what it means to dwell in and through the world. Later Morton suggests that perhaps we have designed our world to look like a 'supermarket full of things we can reach out and grab' (p73) we instinctively know this to be simultaneously true and unhealthy: not natural. In his words, uncanny. There is a useful parallel here with the 'junk space' described by Rem Koolhaas, in his book of the same name, when referring to supermarkets, airports, shopping centres and the like. Both authors are acknowledging the unchecked growth of the human project at the expense of the other in favour of creating frictionless man-made environments.

Nature versus Man Made

We are familiar with the term natural; as in yoghurt, the changing seasons, my hair colour, your garden. Yet Tim Morton reminds us that this distinction is problematic; a deadly nuclear isotope is as natural as a blast of fresh air. Nature might encompass our whole world but how we perceive that world is a very unstable construct that changes constantly. Consider the uncanny experience

of seeing vast swathes of countryside give way to big agriculture, or the strangely inward experience of the airconditioned shopping mall; neither are natural but nevertheless alive in some kind of half-life if we are simply calibrating human existence. He argues we urgently need to reimagine how we relate to other living beings, the non-human and the pervasive idea that nature can be controlled. This key theme is woven throughout the text and acts a cantation (the author also practices Buddhism), creating a background rhythm that by the end of the book has found its way into your own head.

Truthiness

This is an apposite word the author appropriates to good effect. First coined in relation to leveraging mass media in 1990's US politics, it has come to mean the assertion that truth can be felt or experienced intuitively without evidence or logic. The word is important, reminding us that we need language to convey meaning, intention and action. Indeed, much of the argument hinges around the need for us to recognise we have been trapped in a fiscal ideology whose language around efficiency and sustainability is about competing for scarce and highly toxic resources. While paying attention to the connection between ideas and language is not new, what becomes clear is that C21st global society finds it increasingly difficult to see meanings and intentions are hidden within language to the extent that notions of truth have become extraordinarily flexible.

Hyperobjects

One of the most troubling yet helpful concepts framed in the book comes in naming the climate crisis a hyperobject. It is an idea so big it is impossible to grasp, like deep time or the event horizon. He speaks of it as something sticky and viscose that we can only see in slices; very physical attributes, that connect to the abstract nature of the problem. It is intrinsically non-local and can transcend linear time, which in reference to global climate change means its impact is through a series of effects such as fire, a drought or a pandemic, although the actual cause is the chemical reaction between carbon and the energy of the sun. Yet there is still a massive debate around the cause and effect/affect; a distracting smoke screen hiding the interests of the powerful few. This is a political problem.

End (of the world)

To summarise the book, I would point to the authors observation that ecological awareness is that of seeing the 'unintended consequences' (p50) of so-called progress. We know there is only one planet and that as a species we have precipitated a catastrophically destructive series of change events. We may claim initial innocence; but from the dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945, the year the author suggests was the birth of the Anthropocene, we have known of the consequences. He goes on to say that the future emerges directly from the objects we design. We might therefore reflect that we have stolen from the future by plundering materials from deep within the earth and we must learn though nature to live ecologically. This inevitably means designing less, repairing and nurturing more; truthfully the end of architecture as we know it.

Postscript

Reading this book in the LSA Critical Practice book club we spent time with the text, teasing out meanings and living with it together. Collectively we related to the way the author speaks about 'fingerpainting a map' to understand the question as we attempted our own sense-making. In other words the process of understanding is not a question of logic or scientific reason, rather it is a personal philosophical and spiritual quest that is approximate, contingent and messy.

2. Friction in Fiction

EDUMET Conference, Universidad de Madrid. 2020

Abstract

The LSA (London School of Architecture) was set up six years ago and delivers a radical post graduate architectural programme. The ethos of the school is to reconnect academia with practice by creating a networked programme of exchange and learning. History and Theory are taught under the umbrella of Critical Practice.

This paper speculates on the value of immersive and personal written responses to the almost impossible challenges posed by the climate emergency. It explores the importance of creative writing as an alternative to the generic dissertation. The student responses offer transformative thinking that kick-start new narratives and ways of being. By opening up the discourse to fictional writing we encounter the framing of architecture as a story of futurity; a space to project into rather than look back on to. As a methodology this connects well to that of architectural practice where every drawing from the sketch to the working document is a representation of intent for something yet to happen.

Preface

This is a strand of research that draws on student writing from the LSA as an original source in order to share alternative approaches to the teaching and learning of architectural theories and histories. Not only does this recognise the influence and thinking of the cohort, it further validates their future practices. They are encouraged to articulate what they believe to be imperative and engage in ethical discourse prompted by the ecological crisis. By opening up the pedagogical discourse to fictional writing we encounter the framing of architecture as a story of futurity; a space to project into rather than look back on to. As a methodology this connects well to that of architectural practice where every drawing from the sketch to the working document is a representation of intent for future action.

Introduction

“We must feel and accept the essential limits of the planetary system on which we entirely depend, and we must embrace our capacity to remake our collective fictions and thereby redistribute social and political power”.¹

What happens when the stories we tell ourselves are the wrong ones; not quite true or damaged? For Genevieve Guenther this question is now a familiar one entwined with politics, fake news and the global agency of the press. However, it also resonates with our architectural-selves when we encounter the tension between what we have been educated and trained to do - design architectural building - and a growing understanding that in a rapidly transforming world this is no longer the default position. We find ourselves in an existential dilemma. In a myriad of different ways the stories of C20th architecture have reached their sell-by date; they are patriarchal, colonial, hierarchical and extractivist. Yet the meta-project of architecture continues to thrive. When activist George Monbiot challenges the mono-capitalist ideology of the status quo, he argues discredited narratives cannot be discarded, they need to be replaced with a new narrative.² In developing this question the collective Open Democracy asks what kind of intellectual, affective relational capacities and dispositions do we need to develop in order to hold space for the emergence of alternatives that are viable, but currently unfathomable?³ This paper seeks to look at how these stories might come to be written in the age of climate emergency.

Part 1

Reality Check

When Daniel Wahl suggests that the story we tell about humanity – who we are, what we are here for and where we are going – no longer serves as a functional moral compass, he is challenging

our fictional relationship with Gaia.⁴ This term references the goddess in Greek mythology who represents the earth as well as the biological principle proposed by scientist James Lovelock in the 1970's as an understanding that all living organisms interact to form a self-regulating complex ecosystem⁵. While some critics have called this a metaphor or myth rather than a mechanism, the traction of the theory appears to have come of age.

A myth can be understood as a legend or invented story and while not necessarily scientifically correct, they exist to explain the human condition. Although our 'enlightened' scientific culture turns its back on such tales, there is an urgent sense that in order to reconnect with the earth we need to rediscover our mythic selves. Indeed, humans have been telling stories for millennia as a way of situating themselves and using their imaginations to creatively interpret forces out of their control. Yuval Harari describes this as a triple-layered reality where, "In addition to trees, rivers, fears and desires, the Sapiens world also contains stories about money, gods, nations and corporations".⁶ At the elemental level it is the interweaving of these myths and stories that make up our understanding of the world. Harari convincingly argues that it is the ability to share narratives with huge numbers, mainly strangers, that gives rise to large scale co-operation whatever the dominant political ideology. Significantly these can change very quickly, as we see today.

Traditional architectural history teaches that these changes are often described as periods, styles or '-isms', and while this fits neatly in to the C19th preoccupation of cataloguing, it presents history as the unfolding chronology of progress. Yet it does little to explain the current crisis which can be viewed as a hubristic belief in the man-made. Far from designing a better world, we find we have destroyed it. Furthermore, as we look through the lens of the Climate Emergency and confront the statistics, we discover uncomfortable facts that demonstrate our actions have created a radically degraded environment in a very short space of time. This tipping point demands us to consider 'after architecture' where the focus of spatial production has to go beyond the building and into a cycle of nurture and repair. We cannot ignore the distressing truth that our world has been created by the destruction of other world's leading to the death and extinction of other species, habitats and cultures. Our precious planet is being exhausted. David Wallace-Wells describes the 'uninhabitable earth' as a place in the near future that has been almost destroyed, suggesting the situation is already much worse that we think. His motivation to inspire action and anger is both to shock and galvanise us into action as there are limited choices to be made that will determine our collective fate for millennia to come. Unless our outdated education systems are reimagined and our biased corporate media challenged, we remain stuck in a singular self-harming trajectory unaware of the complexity and threat. This can be interpreted as the death of Modernism, a human centric myth, and could be the beginning of a regenerative age that is in symbiosis with creation as a whole.

Re-writing History

That history is not static is a challenging notion to many. However, it is only through interrogating the past using newly discovered tools with an awareness of intersectional narratives and prejudices that we can critique the ideology of Modernism so that architecture, as Peter Buchanan suggests, will evolve from focussing on individual buildings and objective issues to becoming an art of reweaving multiple webs of relationships.⁷

When J. G. Ballard suggested that it is possible to write fiction with architecture,⁸ he could have been talking about *Delirious New York*, the seminal 1978 work of urban science fiction by Rem Koolhaas.⁹ For historian David Gissen this tension between fantastical tales situated within equally fantastic structures, amount to a utopian project of escape. He concludes that architects are active in developing this form of fictional political activity though he is unsure how this will play out.¹⁰ Written in 2009 we can see that the questions no longer pertains to form making as proposed by Koolhaas, but those of a global society struggling to reimagine its very existence. The rise of parametrics as a mode of constructing complex geometries is not a breakthrough but, as Doug Spencer suggests, a representation of neoliberal fiction and the flow of spatialised capital.¹¹ Rather than the imagined utopia of human progress it has morphed into a dystopia; literally a 'bad place'. Time and again the architect imagines a future free of contingencies and

consequences and thus remains guilty of propagating the myth of self-determinism. Who do we listen to now?

Re-writing the future

The recent blossoming of organisations and associations that nurture young architecture writers can be seen as a sign of the need for alternative critical positions. In the UK the Architecture Foundation, whose stated mission is to bring new voices to the conversation about London's future, has initiated a number of progressive projects around writing.¹² Notably its New Architectural Writers programme (NAW) is a free plan for BAME emerging talent. Their first publication, *Afterparti*, initiates commentary that builds on a comment from architect Indy Johar who suggests that the purpose of architectural education is to 'disrupt practice'. It features a spectrum of provocative pieces advocating for an ethical community-driven future. This is best summed up by Aoi Philips who in her essay titled *Equipped with a moral compass: examining architectural education's shortfalls*. She reflects that the peer pressure to be ethical and 'listening to people' is powerful in architecture schools yet is very rarely taught.¹³ This revealing insight surely gets to the heart of impasse in the design curriculum; that it is deaf to very problems we need to address.

In the search for other paths and open-ended conversation another Architecture Foundation publication, *Gross Ideas: Tales of Tomorrow's Architecture*, was curated to accompany the 2019 Oslo Triennale and contains 17 short stories that challenge the way we disseminate architecture and to speculate on different futures.¹⁴ The introduction simply concludes that before you can build a better world, you need to imagine it first. It follows that we need to push the boundaries of speculation from the studio onto the page.

Part 2

In the UK 'Part 2' is the term for post graduate education in Architecture defined by the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects).

The LSA finds itself at the centre of a live debate around the future of the planet. For a school of architecture this is progressive and necessary; we have an ethical duty. The ambition is to nurture graduates that feel prepared to enter an unstable world with tools, knowledge and discipline in order to participate in changing and remedy the built environment. In order to challenge the hermetic nature of architectural discourse, the LSA chooses to engage in ecological conversations and research that causes friction; rubbing against the orthodoxy of expansionism and corporate interests.

As a generalisation we can say that most schools of architecture remain focused on the production of form and the pursuit of tangential spatial strategies; what thinker Jacques Attali terms 'distractions'.¹⁵ Theories that describe form making are useless in the face of the scale of transformation required to rebalance our systems of production, consumption and disposal. It makes sense that we are witnessing such a crisis of public confidence as our power structures crumble with a loss of accountability and the rise of populism.

Within traditional 'theory' courses the student work is in the form of a written dissertation. These tend to be related to the philosophy of architecture or some historical aspect that is deeply researched. LSA students connect with emerging ideas that are shaping ethical and ecological questions, giving them permission to develop their own position. Over the past six years a clear agenda has been shaped reflecting upon the importance of a principled framework within the wide bandwidth of practice. The manifesto can be understood as an affirmation of intention seeking to reflect and rethink critical cultural norms or societal behaviors, calling for innovation and equality. The act of producing a progressive story, subverted into the form of a personal manifesto, becomes a space to build a call for arms and to construct an alternative world order.

While the LSA has been pioneering climate emergency leadership and critical practices that expose the end of modernity, few could have predicted the global Covid-19 pandemic. Or could they? While exact details of the 'origin story' are unclear, the phenomenon is not new and has

been understood as a threat by scientists for decades. The cause has been characterised by the erosion of the natural environment, disruption to the ecosystem and the relentless demand for natural resources. This is the direct consequence of progress and it is therefore necessary to replace the twin ideologies of growth and extraction, which lead to intersectional inequalities and a degraded polluted planet, with a new story. COVID has required a different outlook recognising the need for radical practices. If the climate crisis is a failure of imagination, then collectively we must dream about better futures.

The Future is Fiction

Defining futurity as the quality or condition of being in or of the future, we can understand that forms of writing that are explicitly fictional can be framed as a narrative, parable or fantasy taking on both allegorical and projective structures. Referencing the students own work serves to illustrate ways in which this experiment has pushed the boundaries of the traditional knowledge economy within architectural academia.

One / Memory

In a deceptively simple two part essay Calin Barbu presents an inundated future world: “No one knows how many of the Marbles tell true stories, but they line the length of tallest wall you will ever see....Few are the ones who remember that our City used to grow once, when our appetite for dwellings was as relentless as our imagination”.¹⁶ While the reader is drawn into this imaginary world, the narrative continues in part two, the only difference being that the text is footnoted. So when we read; “Barrier after barrier gets built on the edge of our deltas to stop this tug, yet they return to mud before we can repair them, as despite the financial buttressing you have offered”, it is only by referring to the footnotes we learn that these are all live environmental disasters. The future has collapsed into the recent past and therefore the question of climate change is no longer an issue of futurity – it is all around us. Collaged fragments that weave continuity with disconnects and disaster picture alternative modes of being that are presented as parables about our collective failure to live lightly on the earth.

Two / Nature

The discourse of deep ecology implies the interconnectedness that affects our climate and natural cycles. In developing this theme the reconceptualization of nature is at the heart of Maelys Garreaus’ work, where she argues we must abandon and destroy our idea of nature as an endless resource and instead encourage a refreshed ethical vision which encompasses a multiplicity of realities.¹⁷ She suggests that the architect is replaced by a ‘gardener of the earth’ who adopts an anarchistic approach propagating a different environmental culture in order to seed new bonds with nature. Implicit is the sense that the man-made world is not immutable and that an alternative form of exchange is drawn up between species and agriculture that changes the transactional value of ownership. The piece concludes; “The gardener of the earth asks us to remember the mythical thinking of our ancestors in order to redefine and co-exist with the dark and earthy dominant forces of nature”. We are presented with a Dark Eden.

Three / Folklore

In For Future Folklores, Milly Salisbury explores the role of myth as a way of awakening our senses to other worlds that co-exist around us, but that we are not able to see. For her not everyone is a writer, or a speaker, or a creator; not everyone has to reconstruct the stories we are living. Folklore prizes the sharers.¹⁸ As the earth is making signs we cannot ignore, we folk need to clear our throats and find a new voice to speak with. Through interrogating the messages we share and the mechanisms that produce belief, kinship and action the piece acts as an antidote to the toxic tsunami of social media. In a final call for action she invites the architect to consider humble places not of perfection or suspension, but of orientated dwelling.

Four / Assemblage

In an attempt to challenge the neoliberal ideology of constant production Michael Cradock constructs a manifesto only from quotations by others. This rich and complex work begins: “What you are about to read, I did not write”, and suggests the autobiographical nature of such an endeavour cannot be ignored as a summary of personal experiences.¹⁹ The piece argues that originality is not, as most architectural theory suggests, a prerequisite for good design but rather an expression of Modernism itself. He suggests it is merely the product of a late capitalist society obsessed with the new. The act of collage and composition is therefore a more organic and natural process that assembles and reconstructs fragments into wholes and does not abandon the emotional resonance of the past but transfigures it. This sense of entanglement is neither strictly fictional nor factual but occupies the intuitive space of the creative imagination.

Five / Zoo

Writing in concrete prose, Nancy Jackson constructs a child-like, though not childish, view of the world as a zoo where the zookeeper surveys us; resulting in the gradual limitation of our freedoms.²⁰ The poem continues with a series of situated emotional vignettes:

“A mother tells her daughter not to stare at the television for too long, for fear of ‘square eyes’. A grown up and successful daughter stares at her computer screen for too long, watched while she works, and eating at an assigned hour. Her mother smiles proudly, sharing the success with the neighbours. A son, an animal with big muscles and bigger ideas, is re-assigned to a Pupil Referral Unit, where he will learn to ignore his muscles and his ideas. He questions everything. He is told to sit quietly....”

As a contemporary fairy-tale the writing is strangely familiar yet also uncanny. Commonplace observations show our desire to be outdoors will not be sated by the cactus on our desks nor will the mud outside the back door satisfy our evolutionary instincts. The final call is nothing short of a “faithfulness to our wild selves, and the wild Earth to serve humankind’s ascension to the higher animals”. This expressive form of writing offers insight though an emotional resonance that object oriented critique filters out.

Six / Adaptation

In 2019 the LSA tailored the curriculum around the concept of Deep Adaptation, a term coined by professor Jem Bendell in his 2018 paper that has garnered much attention.²¹ Here he argues that catastrophic climate breakdown has already begun and will result in societal collapse within the near future defined by the uneven ending of our current means of sustenance, shelter, security, pleasure, identity and meaning. That this was written before COVID-19 is a sobering thought.

As a response I asked if it was acceptable to feel anxiety: about the climate, about our politics, the state of democracy, about the way we practice? As the architecture of our planet accelerates into a state of environmental degradation and unprecedented transformation we are likely to experience a complex emotional response. We prefer to believe that our own contributions to the discourse and profession of architecture have been hard fought and that our practices adjust to keep pace. However, it is disquieting when we take notice of our inner voices; the ones telling us that everything is not OK, that we fear the future and that we need to act now. Everything we have learned has to be unlearned and much of what we value we will have to let go.

In autumn 2019 I signed up to join Bendell along with 18 others for a week long retreat, entitled Kissing the Void, to reflect on the catastrophic damage already done to the ecosystem that will result in untold damage to human society and the natural world.²² In this context it is necessary to differentiate between behaving sustainably and undertaking better and faster work in order to turn around the troubles preventing collapse versus fundamentally shifting our orientations to life, death, the future and the present moment. Through a process of grieving and restoration the group asked if it is possible to adapt to a different way of inhabiting the earth? As part of the exploration there were invitations to draw, create and write. We acted out the four stages of Deep Adaptation: resilience, relinquishment, restoration and reconciliation. The process was un-self-

conscious and spontaneous. This form of creative investigation frees us up from the act of problem solving, which is ineffective, and moves us into the liminal space of encountering the earth. We stared into the void. We were invited to share what our hearts felt. We encountered suffering, grief and uncertainty. We sat around a fire and sang. Most significantly we lived the question.

This paper points towards the value of immersive and creative written responses to the almost impossible challenges posed by the climate emergency. Globally our education systems themselves are stretched to the limit. Our students are intelligent nomads and our institutions have created an economy of exhaustion through the pursuit of academic capitalism. At a time when the disciplining and tracking of creative production is framed a performance-based delivery, it feels as though any non-linear form of discourse is discouraged. Igea Troiani suggests that to exhaust is to empty something; a vampiric consumption which leads to dysfunction.²³ As the health of the planet is in crisis so too are our institutions of learning. In these turbulent times the education of the architect is necessarily a situated political project. Context is no longer an aesthetic issue but a societal, geographical and moral one. Activist Rupert Reed suggests that you can easily imagine a future of ever more prosperity and freedom when looking back on what human beings have achieved. Yet the presence of climate change exposes this imagined future to be a profound illusion.²⁴ There has never been a more important time to rewrite the future.

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3. Bond House: the Secret Agency of Architecture

ABSTRACT Resisting Bond Conference. University of Oklahoma. 2021

Keywords: Architecture, Geopolitics, Spatial Justice, Intersectionality, Climate Emergency

This paper looks at the way architecture is presented through the Craig era Bond films, and in particular the role of 'home'. While the lens of action and fast paced narrative dominates the cultural framing of the franchise, by paying attention to the settings we see there are other layers of prejudice and oppression represented within the fabric of the physical environment.

The closest we come to Bonds' personal back story is in Skyfall, when it is revealed the remote Scottish hideaway is in fact his childhood home. Complete with secret passages, an elderly care taker and a sense of foreboding, the setting is not neutral. Seeing it burning down Bond declares he has always hated the place, thus transferring his passion for destroying people to places. Neither is it simply a metaphor; the destruction of the house signifies a deeper attitude to the environment which is also expendable. This trope is repeated, where buildings and even parts of cities do not survive an encounter with Bond as he walks away unscathed. As with human life, the cost to the planet is never a consideration and it is made clear that everything is sacrificial in the pursuit of *justice*.

In the context of the climate emergency it is critical to challenge and question the environment depicted in film, not as a neutral back drop, but as a mirror to the wider geopolitical context. As Greta Thunberg pointed out, when your house is on fire you act rather than walk away; this is no time to die.

4. Architecture in the Age of Climate Emergency

A Decade of Action: RIBA and the Sustainable Development Goals. RIBA Publications. 2020

The LSA is a new post-graduate school of architecture, set up in 2015, with a clear mission statement: *"Our vision is that people living in cities experience more fulfilled and more sustainable lives. Our school educates future leaders to design innovations that contribute to this change."* Furthermore the school was the first UK school to formally adopt the UN SDG's as a formal reference, and as a result was invited to participate in the RIBA's Ethics and Sustainable Development Commission. In 2019 the school joined the Climate Emergency declaration framing our teaching and learning across all modules with this powerful driver.

As architects we see the UN Sustainable Development Goals as an opportunity to reimagine the way we live and bring to life the design elements of a new, sustainable world. Last year at a lecture to the students Professor Henrietta Moore from the UCL Institute for Global Prosperity explained:

"We are a point where radical new models are needed, and quickly. We need also to consider that sustainable futures mean cities and communities that enable humans and the natural world to flourish. To this end, we cannot continue to think about cities and communities as engines of economic growth. We need to think about, and design for, the health of society, inclusive political institutions, a guarantee of human capital development and civil liberties"

On the very first day of term we ask the students three questions: What change do you want to see in the world? How does your architecture contribute to that change? And who do you want to be as a designer? The school presents theories of change as models for leveraging ideas as a practice which is understood as giving purpose to architecture. Throughout the first year all students are working in practice three days as well as well as working in the studio. A key project is the 'Think Tank' where students and practices work together as a group on an urban proposition. Here the influence of the SDG's is key in aligning research with one or more of the goals, in order to create fundamental links between research undertaken in practice and within the school. In 2019 the school launched Citizen, a new quarterly magazine for everybody engaged in the challenge of creating the future city, which describes this work as: *'Collaborative projects between students and leading architectural practices at the London School of Architecture. The UN Sustainable Development Goals address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. They are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.'* Moving into their second year the project is a 10 month long thesis, which necessarily picks up on research from previous modules, moving towards a thoughtful proposition that is worked through in detail.

When it comes to the role of theory in architecture, the LSA makes a case to move beyond the formal or philosophical concerns that have pre-occupied the discourse for so long, and instead seek to interrogate the levers of power in order to understand the wider agency of the architect in society. This necessarily points to asking ethical questions relating to the impact on our wider environment. As student Josh Fenton points out, *'There is a need for us to continually reiterate our political position as architects – not in terms of parties or alliances, but with our engagement with issues that affect the public.'* We have also been exploring what Professor Jem Bendell terms 'Deep Adaptation', reflecting on the likely consequences of climate change on global society, and considering what kind of radical hope we can seed.

In these uncertain times, with troubles ahead, it is important to create an emotional connection with the natural world, rather than feel there is nothing we can do. The LSA suggests that the future can be different and that change can happen. Student Nelli Wahlsten reflects: *'The reasons why students decide to study architecture are many and varied, but there is often an underlying desire to contribute to the notion of common good.'*

5. Critical Practice Reader Introduction

LSA 2020/21

Twelve months have passed since the last LSA reader and the world has changed; we have changed. While the LSA has been pioneering climate emergency leadership and critical practices that look deeply into the crisis of modernity, few could have predicted the global Covid-19 pandemic. Or could they? While exact details of the 'origin story' are unclear, the phenomenon is not new and has been seen as a threat by scientists for decades. The cause has been characterised by the erosion of the natural environment, disruption to the ecosystem and the relentless demand for natural resources. This is the ecological consequence of progress and it is necessary to replace the twin ideologies of growth and extraction, which lead to intersectional inequalities and a degraded polluted planet, with a new story. Our challenge is to (re)discover how to thrive in harmony with nature and to create a new societal political architecture through radical optimism. We need to ask why we are still at war with each other and the natural systems that support life?

The texts included here reflect the urgency of the situation offering both critical and transformative thinking that kick-start new narratives and ways of being. As Michael Pawlyn notes, architects must urgently go beyond creating sustainable architecture that minimises damage to the planet and design buildings that help repair it. As we move into uncertain times there is no quick fix, and for Daniel Wahl the future lies in designing regenerative cultures. He argues for transformational social innovation that diverge from the neoliberal status quo and answers the question of how do we create design, technology, planning and policy decisions that positively support human, community and environmental health? Alastair Parvin asks profound questions around who owns the land and why. Finding the right question is critical if we are committed to untangling the interdependent relationships of capital, power and competition.

For many the past 6 months have been viewed as a dry run for climate catastrophes yet to come; described by Rupert Reed as a 'lived emergency'. However, there is still time to define the scale of this near-future scenario if we learn the lessons. In her book *No one is too small to make a difference*, Greta Thunberg is direct when she says: I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.

While there is much to be alarmed about, the LSA is not prepared to look the other way and we believe that the future of architecture depends on you all responding in a myriad of different ways. There is a network of people here to help, guide and advise; with you we move towards a world of collective wisdom.

6. Hardcore

PO Box 4. Project Orange Publication. 2020

We have entered a new age; time has caught up with us and it is necessary to change. As Le Corbusier suggested in 1927 we still possess *eyes that do not see*, we are shackled with the past and we need to move on. Make no mistake, the ecological implications of global consumption and emissions is unfolding day by day. In his recent book 'The Uninhabitable Earth' David Wallace-Wells suggests it is not only worse that we think, but the resulting changes will distort every aspect of human life.

What happens next is hardcore: it involves unswerving commitment to new modes of living and development; uncompromising sustainable behaviours; dedication to meaningful sustainable actions with an intensity that has never been so widely shared. Within the past year, we have witnessed Governmental commitment in the form of Green Deals as well as declarations of climate emergency. School children have turned to activism protesting for change while the RIBA has adopted a new ethical code.

As architects we are part of the problem. We design aesthetically, whimsically, joyfully and wastefully. When we think about our own use of hardcore – pieces of stone, brick and rubble used to make the base for roads, paths or floors – we see that this is broken system. Buildings use precious materials that can only be partly re-used when smashed up. Re-cycling and Up-cycling are not truly circular economies because materials are degraded, and no matter how it is spun this is same-system thinking.

However uncomfortable it may seem there has to be a forced break with past as we face up to discontinuity. This can be understood as a process that makes us resilient, encouraging innovation which leads to a period of relinquishing aspects of our lives that are non-essential in order to move to a period of restoration. Learning to live within the means of the planet is a key part of recalibrating our practices. While the construction of intelligent modest new buildings may play a part, so too will be how we adapt existing ones and to opt out of the cycle of seeing new as better and of buying into the throw-away trends and fashions that have become design currency

7. FEEL THE FORCE

Citizen Magazine. LSA. 2020

Part 1 / Adapting

In 2018 Professor Jem Bendell published a paper entitled 'Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy'¹. One year later it had been downloaded over 700,000 times. He asks what does climate change mean for us in practice, and how should our lives change in response to an increasingly unstable and unpredictable future? He also states, having undertaken extensive research, he is of the belief that catastrophic climate breakdown has already begun and will result in societal collapse within the near future: that is the uneven ending of our current means of sustenance, shelter, security, pleasure, identity and meaning. He suggests that it is unlikely that the power of human ingenuity will help sufficiently to change the environmental trajectory we are on. Climate change is not simply a pollution issue; it is a sign of how humanity and culture have become alienated from our natural habitat. This can also be understood as the end point in the project of Modernism as defined by the mastery of man over the planet. Deep adaptation is about how we prepare for societal and ecological collapse.

Tim Morton, in his book 'Being Ecological', talks about the paradox of knowing we have to do something, but failing to act. He suggests this is because the scale and nature of climate change is a 'hyperobject'; an idea or concept so large it is impossible to comprehend. In trying to figure out how to tackle this in practice and within the LSA I further researched the Deep Adaptation Network and discovered an event planned to 'differentiate between doing more, better and faster sustainability work in order to turn around the troubles and stop collapse versus fundamentally shifting our orientations to life, death, the future and the present moment'. It was a retreat held in October 2019 titled 'Kissing the Void' asking how we might approach these times well. I applied and was accepted. What happened next was a revelation. Nineteen people gathered at a farm house in Devon, for six days of meditation, creative play, writing, drawing, sharing and despairing. We acted out the four stages of deep adaptation: Resilience, Relinquishment, Restoration and Reconciliation. We stared into the void and were still, exhausted by our lives. We were invited to say what our heart felt. We encountered suffering, grief and uncertainty. We sat around a fire and sang. *If you listen very closely and you can hear the sounds of roots spreading deep below.* In these times we paused before speaking up.

Part 2 / Other ways of knowing

The Void Is

A gap, a space, a loss

Frightening and frightful

Lost and found, I am lost

I am love

A second, a minute, a year, a century, a millennia – a time

*Time to say, to think, to process, to rename, to learn to relearn to unlearn
to leave behind.*

This void is not your void

It is everyone's void

The ID of VOID

The mind, to lose your mind, to hunt it down to miss it

To find it, in pieces and in fragments, blasted by the void

Infinity and forever, ending in darkness.

This black hole, almost invisible now, is a force sucking us in

Not knowing what is on the other side

But there just might be – another side

We hope

A kiss away

To bear witness in these times is

*A mistake, an error, a blip, a catastrophe
An un-making of all that has been made
It is a breaking.
A huge tear
A tear
An ending of a story
We are being asked to leave now.*

*The lights are going out and it is very dark outside.
Where to go?
Where to shelter?
Who shall I talk to?*

*When my love and I were separated it should have been the end.
And yet I am still here
Alone with others
I am paused*

When the body leads

*A stretch, a move turning into moves
An ache, a new pain, an old heart, a dance
Tentatively thought
A sense of longing hoping to be more free
To move away, in the dance,
More fluid and more powerful and more delicate than ever before.
The flow of your life is here in every tiny moment,
But did you ever know that?
Did you not see that your body faithfully records every single thing
you have ever done, ever thought and ever will do?
Until. Until it has done enough
More than enough, and
Is called by time*

*Your movements will stop, like everybody's always will
To make way for stillness
No movement
Another is just waking*

And now...

*Resting and realising
I find new dimensions unknown
Strange spaces
With a different taste.*

*Running is not possible
I dance with myself, not seeing the ground on which my feet stand
Here the light is dimmer
Cantilevered off the abyss
Seeking out crevices, holes and voids
No stars, just sparks from the beginning
Now embers, glowing
Throwing their ancient warmth
Slowly, almost imperceptibly so, turning ashen
Dimming into darkness
Becoming dimensionless*

Out of the ashes

*Maybe my ashes
Somewhere to place
A ceremony
To make an order from the chaos
To have a final act of creativity with and for myself
Out of the ashes a temporary home
A place
Look into the dust and the grey blackness
There is still a pattern, a memory of beauty
A piece of something next to something
The remains have not entirely vanished
They remain in this
For a moment more*

As temperatures rise

*The warmth that so nourished
Is punishing
One day at a time
Life evaporates, wilting at first,
Lilting, tilting, collapsing
Everywhere dust, ash, smoke
Dark stains where once the tangled substance thrived
Only now I see
The fragile earth*

The Going

*I leave my sword outside, with the others in the dark, and step inside.
Here, alongside, a learning, a leaning an altogether:
Facing up, facing in, face to face, faceless.*

*In meditation and makings I am undone, redone, remade:
Woven into a bright golden precious stitch
Visible as the stars in the tapestry of time.
Never again can this moment be caught.
To be remembered with care, with love.*

I step outside into hot sun and pick up my shield

8. Critical Practice Reader Introduction

LSA. 2019/20

When the LSA was set up five years ago there was a keen focus on how climate change was adversely affecting the world we inhabit and the role architecture can play in mitigation. However, over the past year we have seen an acceleration of events both in the 'natural' world and in our own political sphere that pushes us further into an unstable future. The debate is no longer about whether climate change is real, nor about the medium to long term implications; we are now in a climate emergency. This means that 'business as usual' is not an option if the catastrophic consequences of global warming, climate chaos, ecological collapse and human tragedy are to be addressed. The idea that advanced technology and geo-engineering will save the planet are neither realistic nor sustainable. Rather this reliance on progress and the project of 'the modern' is the root of the problem in the first place, continuing to endorse a narrative of unassailable human dominance over nature. This year we are asking very difficult and often destabilising questions which point towards a need for massive change as our political system fails to engage in the enormity of the problem. Writer Tim Morton describes the issue as a hyperobject – something so big it is almost impossible to comprehend: it is imperative we try to.

Our reader therefore reflects current thinking that is not concerned about individual buildings but rather our global status. The pieces by Rupert Read, Jem Bendell and David Wallace-Wells make for tough reading as they attempt to describe the dimensions of the problem. It can make us feel inert and powerless. Yet there is also a call for us to empathise and connect with the enormity of the near-future, and to embrace radical hope. The 'deep adaptation' needed, as outlined by Bendell, attempts to offer transformational thinking that may equip and ready us to believe that we can make a difference. If the project of architecture and city-making is to create a better world, then there is an extraordinary design challenge to embrace. In the past year we have seen how the voices of school children, Extinction Rebellion and many other activists have challenged the current political and neoliberal status quo as they demand action. At the LSA we are part of this movement and we look to test transformational strategies that offer hope and a future.

9. I get so emotional baby...

Architecture Foundation. 2019

Is it OK to feel anxiety: about the climate, about our politics, the state of democracy, about the way we practice? As the architecture of our planet accelerates into a state of environmental degradation and unprecedented change we are likely to experience a complex emotional response. We prefer to believe that our own contributions to the discourse and profession of architecture have been hard fought and that our practices adjust to keep pace. However it is disquieting when we take notice of our inner voices; the ones telling us that everything is not OK, that we fear the future and that we need to act now. Everything we have learned has to be unlearned and much of what we value we will have to let go.

At the LSA (London School of Architecture) we are framing the two year diploma around the question of how to react in a world of climate emergency. This necessarily means taking stock and figuring out what, if any, influence we may have as architects in the next few decades. One of the truly most disturbing interpretations of the climate science comes from Professor Jem Bendall, a Professor of Sustainability Leadership, whose previous career spanned twenty years working in sustainable business and finance. In 2018 he published a paper titled 'Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy'¹ in which he discusses the inevitable near-term social collapse due to climate change. He argues that we, as a global connected society, are still in denial over the scale and nature of the problem and that we hang onto a belief that it can be 'solved'. As architects we have learned to respond to technical and aesthetic innovations. Yet the issue at stake here is the minimal evidence to suggest any country or system meaningfully reducing CO2 outputs, but there is a great deal of evidence to show that tipping points have already been exceeded and that climate chaos has been triggered. It is therefore critical that we allow ourselves space to discover and accept the stark scientific data in order to move into a process Bendall terms 'deep adaptation'. Here questions of how we become resilient, both as individuals and communities, as well as comprehend the scale of societal transformation that will happen need to be framed.

If all this sounds Biblical, that it is because it is. We have been sharing stories of catastrophe and end-of-days for millennia and yet in the generally temperate global north we have come to believe we have mastered our own destiny though designing our own future. We call this progress. But what if we have reached the end of progress and the necessary trajectory is degrowth? It is time to figure out which story we believe and in so doing share the sense of loss, grief and pain.

Yet we can begin to write radical new stories. Young people who have taken to the streets this year are showing it is possible to influence the dominant political and economic narratives. Just like our weather, they are disrupting the civic climate. Students at architecture schools are in a unique position to explore, test and share radical ideas about futurity. An alternative understanding of our global ecology is already being born, one in which humankind are no longer solely in charge. As a result our cultural strategies and our architecture will necessarily be very different; our cities will not function in the way they do now and our practices will transform out of all recognition.

There is no doubt that this is a moral and ethical emergency asking each and every one of us to reflect on our values, our way of living and how we choose the pathways ahead. It is a time to empathise, re-connect and show solidarity with our global citizens. It is a hugely emotional time.

10. Researching Research

The Business of Research. AD Publication. 2019

“Judgement of architecture is deferred to the market. The ‘architectural style’ of buildings no longer conveys an ideological choice but a commercial one.”¹

Reinier De Graaf

What is practice based research and how does it relate to the business of architecture? This is a question that interests us at Project Orange. While it is generally understood that architects undertake research in the form of learning about new technology or finding out the latest specification, it is generally under the umbrella of CPD. As the RIBA notes, *Continual Professional Development* is a requirement for all chartered architects in order to help you to stay competent, professional, capable and resilient as an architect. Architects are expected to engage in 35 hours per year that are logged. It is worth considering the core ten topics include subjects such as: health, safety and wellbeing; business, clients and services; legal, regulatory and statutory compliance; design, construction and technology.²

The perception that practice is interested only in technical know-how has led to a situation where professional CPD excludes new kinds of knowledge and critical reflection. It reinforces the narrative that architecture is inherently a commercial activity. In addition the ARB notes that all architects are required to maintain competency under their own ‘Architects Code: Standards of Code and Practice’, suggesting that teaching and the study of architecture contribute. However they also signpost the RIBA’s curriculum as a way of fulfilling their own criteria; and so it comes full circle. Yet none of the above address the culture of architecture; how and why we design? What are our values? We are out of practice.

Research through reflection

The distance between academia, as symbolised by the rarefied preoccupations within schools of architecture, and the world of professional practice have polarised. This split is characterised by the sense educators find the reality of practice and contingency surrounding the process of building rather mundane, while offices see schools as indulgent, teaching little to prepare young graduates for challenges ahead. However if we are to accept that architecture is at critical point of change it is surely vital we look to redefine the way we work, the conversations we have and the drivers of practice. In order to understand what Project Orange represent we decided to initiate an inclusive piece of reflection by asking each member of the studio to research into an area of personal interest, with reference to projects that they have worked on in the studio. The power of architecture lies in its ability to creatively project into the future imagining alternative worlds while working within the present. We were interested to see whether we could develop a cohesive document whose authorship was genuinely collective while holding up a critical mirror to the studio bridging the gap between process and outcomes. Our starting point, therefore, was not to try and graft a new theory of practice onto our work, but rather to set up a positive dialogue between ourselves and a wider audience in order to learn from our communal self.

The Process

The project to make a ‘zine’ or pamphlet was tabled in 2009 via a presentation to the studio, inviting everyone to contribute. The format gives permission for staff to openly reflect on some aspect of the work they have recently engaged in. We invited a guest editor to offer guidance, encouragement and academic perspective to the team, while the design of the publication is generated in-house. Initially there was some resistance from the staff who saw it as an extra-curricular chore, and some said it was like being back at school again, which in some ways was intentional. However, as the project took shape it became clear that most people were enjoying the task, and that having two ‘tutorials’ with the editor was enriching and seen as valuable personal development.

PO Box 1 / 2010

“And so we have PO Box. Such an impulse to reflect can signal many things; here it indicates an office that is coming of age. On the cusp of maturity Project Orange has begun to get to know itself better...”

Dr Matthew Barac – Guest Editor PO Box 1

In the introduction I wrote that Project Orange are not interested in radical theory and that we do not have a dominant mode of practice but rather we see our projects as narratives or stories. By collecting them together we make a body of work. While this remains true, one essay jumps out as a prescient nudge towards thinking about ‘green’ issues. In ‘The carrot versus the stick’ Abi Tuttle argues that the rhetoric around sustainable architecture needs to be recast in a new light; one that is less about technical solutions and more about an understanding of the environment as a whole. While noting that regulations provide minimum requirements, they hardly inspire the radical change required. There is a critique of the instrumental ‘green machine’ movement and an appeal for ‘cradle-to-cradle’ thinking that attempts to reconceptualise design as a virtuous circle of material re-use. It is a call for action, and one that Project Orange have taken time to develop, but looking back we can see this piece of work as an important catalyst in our development.

Following the publication, the zine was shortlisted for the RIBA Presidents Medal, against Foster and Indy Johar, demonstrating that a small practice can produce legitimate research. PO Box was also presented at the 2012 “Theory by Design” conference at the Artesis School of Architecture in Antwerp, whose premise was to suggest that contemporary architectural theory is typically constructed by academics and within academia with few connections to practice.

PO Box 2 / 2014

“Each piece of text is seen as an opportunity to criticise and understand the nature of representation and the relationship between what is drawn and what is built.”

Jane Tankard – Guest Editor PO Box 2

During the three year period since the first research project there had been a massive demand for architects to produce photo real renders. Brought about by a new wave of tech savvy graduates as well as more powerful software we found ourselves uncomfortable with this simulated reality, so decided to structure PO Box 2 around the question of representation. What does it mean today?

Emma Elston suggests in ‘Rules of Representation’ that architects need to challenge the conventions implicit in drawings; the idea of perfection, minimal inhabitation and order using them instead to reflect more of the world around us. She refers to the collage nature of the studio’s approach to drawings, that attempt to show a more tangible reality, from sketches to the colour coded drawings she had developed for a project in India.

My own essay concluded that through the process of thinking and writing we continue to nudge, uncover and reveal different ways of thinking and designing as architects. We draw because that is what we have been taught to do, but we do it in ways that surprise us and we are open to suggestion. This was shared at the 2014 AAE education practice in a paper titled ‘Education in Practice’. Despite some seeing the publication as non-academic, the conversations around how practice can share their own critical position shaped the direction of the conference.

PO Box 3 / 2016

“PO Box is not just about starting focused conversations but poking the beast, irritating the oyster, cultivating unique thought and expression from their mighty young workforce.”

Gem Barton – Guest Editor PO Box 3

The publication was developed during the first operating year of the London School of Architecture, where I teach, and it is clear that the agenda of the school is reflected in the

ambition of the publication. Titled 'Housing, House, Home' the studio members were encouraged to think about the housing crisis and the agency of the architect. Are we in some ways complicit?

The most original piece of writing came out of conversations between Billy Sinclair and Gem Barton, who encourages new forms of creative writing within architectural discourse. Here the piece is a fictional conversation in two parts that serves to highlight the differences between clients with money, where design is only about delight, and those with fewer choices where design is presented as a negotiation with minimum standards. The casual text cleverly draws attention to the conflicted role of the architect as well as the importance of 'home' whoever you are.

Community of Practice

This research project of writing and thinking has flowed into the 'Critical Practice' teaching at the LSA where instead of producing a cookie cutter dissertation, the students are invited to develop a manifesto for their future selves. It is the chance to examine their own values and trajectories. As one student notes: "The manifesto was crucial to me. The first time I could spend some time to sort many of my thoughts about architecture and try to position myself as an architect and really asking myself why I am doing what I do."

What began as an experiment is now embedded within our studio culture and we are preparing the fourth edition considering the value of architecture. Perhaps the most significant outcome is that we are moving towards becoming what Carlo Ratti refers to as choral architects. We work together as a team, our thinking is fully accessible and therefore open source, and we see others moving in the same direction generating new research out of practice.

Notes

1. *Reinier de Graaf, Architecture is now a tool of Capital, Architectural Review, April 2015*
2. *'RIBA CPD Core Curriculum', accessed 26 June 2018:*
<https://www.architecture.com/education-cpd-and-careers/cpd/cpd-core-curriculum>

11. Class Action

Citizen Magazine. LSA. 2019

Do you find your heart sinks when you hear the retort 'when I was a student', followed by an anecdote describing better times, better teaching with the implication of glory days. This nostalgic thinking is not only tedious, but dangerous. It frames the present as a degraded version of the past. Right now there is an imperative to engage in the present, and in particular the issue of climate chaos, inequality and to challenge normative city making.

It could be argued that most of the societal issues we face are as a direct result of the neglect by those with power, architects included, for whom the project of progress and growth has been prioritised over an approach that nurtures and nourishes life on earth. Today we recognise this urge as the domination of neoliberal thinking, where the impetus to create value has dominated discourse and debate though political frameworks to become received wisdom, or 'common sense'.

In order to challenge the status-quo the LSA chooses to engage in conversations and research that causes friction; rubbing against the orthodoxy of expansionism. For a young architect this means engaging at a political level in order to trace the levers of power and to figure out how decisions are made that affect the built environment. Theories that describe form making are useless in the face of the scale of change required to rebalance our systems of production, consumption and disposal. It makes sense that we are witnessing such a crisis of public confidence as our power structures crumble with a loss of accountability and the rise of alternative truths.

Grass roots action has never been more critical in offering resistance to predominant ideologies that favour inequality, extraction and destruction of the environment. Writing in *The Politics of the Everyday*, Ezio Manzini makes a plea that society needs to engage in projects that are not always framed around profit and to develop wide ranging emancipatory politics that enable a collaborative and collective culture.

The architect of the near future will need not only to repair the damage done to the ecosystem, but to pioneer new ways of living within our means; the doughnut diagram of Kate Raworth. It is clear that the changes required in global governance are not forthcoming from the top down, so the opportunity for transformation has to come through a networked series of micro experiments, support structures and best practice. Coupled with this is a return to the importance of implementing local initiatives that bring people and labour together, rather than outsourcing to the largest global players.

It is here the LSA proposes a *class action* in both senses; as a proactive group approach to design and as an interrogation of the ethical crisis. In the UK, prior to the Industrial Revolution, communities were well served by this form of collective governance which had the power to alter societal behaviours and work for large numbers of people. Today this mode of practice tends to favour industrial-type disputes although the majority of legal challenges are taken through the professional channel of legal challenges on an individual basis. The move to treat justice as a question of a single human right rather than the rights of many, perhaps accounts for the lack of large scale class action. While there is an increasing call for legally challenging toxic corporations and corrupt regimes, compensation will never address the systemic problems wrought on the world's organic system. There has to be a system change that moves towards an understanding of shared richness and shared responsibility.

Actions by the LSA class are seen in the act of collaboration over design projects and through the research leading to the writing of their personal manifesto. The conversation is a tool to understand the complexity of parameters, which begin to look at a better way of belonging within the world. The process of design implicitly creates ethical choices which need to be made explicit, and that the agency of the architect is as an actor within a wider company.

We may not know all the outcomes of our design actions, but we have very sound data that the ways we operate currently cause multiple disruptions. The problem is that so far the scientific evidence is not compelling enough. David Wallace-Wells describes the uninhabitable earth as a place in the near future that has been almost destroyed saying it is already much worse than we think. His motivation is to inspire action, anger even, in order to reveal that there are still choices to be made and alternative directions of travel. If education is about gaining knowledge, skills, beliefs, values and behaviours now is a very good time to reset the agenda and to take action.

12. Out of Practice: Towards New Theory at the LSA

Learning Through Practice, AAE Conference. Westminster University. 2019

Abstract

The 2018 Architect's Journal review of the LSA student written work, presented at the end of year show, was direct in its critique of subject matter suggesting it made for depressing reading. So what should post-graduate students be reflecting upon if not the state of society in relation to the built environment? In considering the role of theory in architecture, the LSA makes a case for the conversation and study to move beyond the formal or philosophical concerns that have pre-occupied the discourse for so long, and instead seek to interrogate the levers of power in order to understand the wider agency of the architect.

This paper reflects on the school's ethical agenda and asks questions on the importance of societal and political theories that inform the teaching practice. From engaging with catastrophic climate change to the failure of government to tackle infrastructure and housing, the LSA encourages students to challenge and re-imagine practise. Too often the concerns of practice are seen academically as 'real world' as opposed to experimental or defiant but which Jacques Attali labels as distractions.

In an increasingly connected but hyper-separated global environment we find that the purpose of architecture has morphed into the appreciation of an asset, which in turn has shaped the physical environment. The cost of this approach to those not inside the virtuous circle of investment and return, is an erosion of community, an increase in living costs and the degradation of the environment. We therefore see the act of constructing a relevant written argument, subverted into the form of a personal manifesto, becomes a space to build a call for arms; to construct an alternative world order; to imagine a kinder society.

No longer is the debate about style, rather about action. It seems that when it comes to the big questions, education is out of practice.

Paper

"The problem is one of adaptation, in which the realities of our life are in question."
Le Corbusier, Vers Une Architecture, 1927

This paper is a reflection on the critical approach to theory adopted by the LSA and directly references the written work of the 2017/18 student cohort. The intention is both to validate their status as practitioners and to offer an alternative curriculum.

Architecture or Revolution

"As for the manifestos, they make for depressing reading and show a student population bogged down by the troubles of today: fake news, climate change and a capitalist property market. There is a desperate call for architects to turn to activism and heal society's ills, but there is seemingly not much confidence in this optimistic view, which is served cold au plat du jour."¹

The 2018 Architect's Journal review of the LSA student written work, presented at the end of year show, was direct in its critique of subject matter suggesting it made for depressing reading. So what should post-graduate students be reflecting upon if not the state of society in relation to the built environment? In considering the role of theory in architecture, the LSA makes a case for the conversation and study to move beyond the formal or philosophical concerns that have pre-occupied the discourse for so long, and instead seek to interrogate the levers of power in order to understand the wider agency of the architect. It seems that when it comes to the big questions, education is out of practice.

Eyes that do not see

In an increasingly connected but hyper-separated global environment the purpose of architecture has morphed into the appreciation of an asset, which in turn has shaped the physical environment. Reinier de Graaf suggests 'Architecture, or more precisely real estate, is governed by a simple law: maximising return while minimizing cost'². The price of this approach to those not inside the virtuous circle of investment and return, is an erosion of community, an increase in living costs and the degradation of the environment. Looking at just one current example, the Spring 2019 issue of the Property Chronicle runs an article on 'How to earn double-digit returns from Polish property', noting that leverage should not be described in moral terms which it argues has become 'fashionable'. It concludes that, 'used well it (leverage) can be a financial tool to boost rates of return and acquire properties.'³ There is no mention of how this may affect the local context, the people or the environment; and the permission given to not feel guilty demonstrates either ignorance at best or more likely denial of the consequences. The LSA challenges this position which is representative of the ubiquitous belief within the neoliberal system that growth and development are the only drivers of investment. We cannot discuss the practice of architecture without first untangling the relationships between power, capital and governance. It is necessary to reflect on ethical questions embedded within societal and political theories that inform a wide range of behaviours. From engaging with catastrophic climate change to the failure of government to tackle infrastructure and housing, the school encourages students to interrogate and re-imagine different practices. Too often the concerns of the profession are viewed academically as a preoccupation with 'real world' problems, unworthy of study, as opposed to the freedom of defiant experiments; though the tide appears to be turning, with critic Jacques Attali labelling this mode of research as a 'distraction'⁴. As Ruth Morrow suggests, the role of the architect is not to assist people towards our own understanding of architectural practice, rather, their own.⁵ Therefore the architect, both as thinker and practitioner, has to recast their relationship with the planet and the public.

The 'styles' are a lie

All students are required to write a Manifesto in place of the traditional dissertation. A manifesto can be understood as affirmation of intention, seeking to reflect and rethink critical cultural norms or societal behaviours, calling for change. We therefore see the act of producing a progressive written argument, subverted into the form of a personal manifesto, as becoming a space to build a call for arms: to construct an alternative world order; to imagine a kinder society. No longer is the debate about style, rather about transformation and action. There is a growing sense among the next generation that global issues such as climate change, neocon politics, pollution and migration must all inform the position of the architect. In 'This Changes Everything', Naomi Klein calls for immediate and radical intervention to stem the unfolding environmental disaster, 'It is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message – spoken in the language of fires, floods, droughts, and extinctions – telling us that we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet.'⁶ As a critique of capitalism and the global economic model, the book is perhaps at its most persuasive when it shows how grass roots collective action, through the use of shared media, is able to affect big change. The education of the architect is moving from developing a personal portfolio with a unique signature, to adopting a political position and developing pro-active strategies in opposition to the dominant development model. The 'project', as defined by Ezio Manzini, is a sequence of conversations and actions on the world bringing it closer to what it needs to be, necessitating the act of design.⁷ This provides a more resilient and meaningful definition of purpose.

Modern state of mind

"There reigns a great disagreement between the modern state of mind, which is an admonition to us, and the stifling accumulation of age-long detritus."⁸

Re-reading Corbusier's own treatise on architecture, almost 100 years since the first essay was published in 1921, it is striking to encounter the urgency of his writing and the call for extensive societal change. However, it is his very ideology, concerned with the rejection of history and embracing the potential for a man-made utopia, which has fed the crisis we find ourselves in

today; a world choked with concrete construction, enmeshed with sprawling infrastructure and a broken eco-system. It is therefore necessary to recognise that the impact of this instrumental thinking, especially through the act of building, has brought about the Anthropocene era (defined as the geological age of significant human influence on the planet's geology and ecosystem). For William Bellamy, this offers up an opportunity, as never before have we been so aware of the interconnectedness of the systems on earth⁹. It allows for a renewed understanding of our relationship to the presence of all living and non-living phenomena. The discourse of deep ecology implies the interconnectedness that affects our climate and natural cycles. In developing this theme the reconceptualization of nature is at the heart of Maelys Garreau's work, where she argues we must abandon and destroy our idea of nature as an endless resource and instead encourage a new ethical vision which encompasses a multiplicity of realities.¹⁰ She suggests that the architect is replaced by a 'gardener of the earth' who adopts an anarchistic approach propagating a new environmental culture in order to seed new bonds with nature. Implicit is the sense that the man-made world is not immutable and that an alternative form of exchange is drawn up between species and agriculture that changes the transactional value of ownership.

Architecture is stifled by custom.

"We are waiting for a dissident group to liberate us from the crushing humiliation of neoliberalism – which delivers only poverty, peonage, crisis and austerity".¹¹

The re-activated architect operates a multidisciplinary practice. Their work is to reveal accountability, to critically read the city and to offer alternative versions that are more equitable; addressing the political and destructive forces at work. New practices emerge as critiques of the existing patriarchal model, employing a high degree of collaboration, networking and sharing experiences. As Josh Fenton points out, 'There is a need for us to continually reiterate our political position as architects – not in terms of parties or alliances, but with our engagement with issues that affect the public.'¹² It is surely significant that it took 16 year old Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg, self-styled climate change warrior, to activate a global awareness campaign that has resulted in hundreds of demonstrations globally. From her first solo protest in the Summer of 2018 she progressed to addressing a meeting at Davos in January 2019 and the UK Government in May 2019. She talks of how people are desperate for hope and is honest about the scale of the problem.

In considering the profession of the architect Tom Badger writes in 'The (Ir)Relevance of Architecture, 'If we are prepared to get rid of the image of an architect as a 'visionary' and focus on more normative forms of design and knowledge generation, we can re-establish the weakened relationship to society and the construction industry'¹³. He also raises the uncomfortable truth that most buildings are constructed without the hand of an architect, which further reinforces the notion that architecture is a subset of construction. So the protectionism that the profession offers, and so closely guards, is the very thing that prevents open access and best practice. Joe Walker, in the 'Sceptical Spiritualist', calls for an open discourse so that the tools of the profession can be shared.¹⁴

All the values have been revised

It is no longer possible to discuss the concept of space without considering its value, ownership and status. Yet, as Alice Hardy notes, the commodification of space has led to a lack of collective participation and communal enjoyment.¹⁵ She is optimistic that provocations are being made through digital activism, tapping into the ability to process big data in order to empower local citizens as well as designers. Underlying this approach is a belief in a more representative democratic system that values societal integration in order to make cities inclusive and accessible to all. There is a move from the power of the individual to the power of the crowd¹⁶

Our relationship with technology is a further concern; the virtual space many inhabit also has its own architecture, power structures and politics. The internet of things has embedded itself into the fabric of our lives; harvesting our data and controlling our information channels contributing to societal atomisation and creating a disconnect from the physical environment.¹⁷ Fraser Morrison concludes that if everything is seamless and streamlined, there is no room to pause; and that a

disconnected world is a way of reclaiming territory, time and space.

When Jane Jacobs wrote that cities can provide for all citizens only when they are created by everybody¹⁸, she opened up a discourse that discredited top down thinking characterised by the master plan and private development. The act of commoning, has come to represent a framework for co-creation and communal action. Pointing to the importance of 'mingling' in public space, Maxim Sass argues that core values are shaped by surroundings and encounters.¹⁹ The market is not equivalent to a client who represents an inclusive public. Collective decision-making protects the interests of the many and leads to a new public place-making mode of practice.

There exists a new spirit

'The reasons why students decide to study architecture are many and varied, but there is often an underlying desire to contribute to the notion of common good'²⁰

The impact of these conversations on the education of an architect is to provide a framework that sees architecture as part of a system that is transformative. As activist George Monbiot argues, discredited narratives cannot be discarded, they need to be replaced with a new narrative.²¹ The students on this programme have begun to exchange ideas, to critically question their trajectories and to tell a new story. They have thoughts about what they believe to be important and have engaged in ethical discussions prompted by the ecological crisis.

"I will pursue architecture which encourages well-being and the role of space-as-care-giver."²²

Notes

1. Christine Murray, *Degree Show Review: London School of Architecture* (*Architect's Journal*, 26th July 2018)
2. Reinier de Graaf, *Four Walls and a Roof* (Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 81.
3. Ben Habib, *How to earn double-digit returns from Polish property* (*The Property Chronicle*, Spring 2019)
4. Jacques Attali, *A Brief History of the Future* (Arcade Publishing, New York, 2009)
5. Ruth Morrow, *Architecture from the Dogs. Radical Pedagogies*, Ed D. Fraud, H. Harriss (RIBA Enterprises, 2015), p. 135.
6. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything* (Penguin, 2017), p. 105.
7. Ezio Manzini, *Politics of the Everyday* (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 37.
8. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (Dover Publications, 1985)
9. William Bellamy, *Solidarity: A call to Nature* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
10. Maelys Garreau, *Manifesto to become a Gardener of the Earth* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
11. Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of Silent Majorities* (Semiotext(e), New York, 1983), p. 44.
12. Josh Fenton, *Ruskinian Property* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
13. Tom Badger, *The (Ir)Relevance of Architecture* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
14. Joe Walker, *The Sceptical Spiritualist, Looking for purpose in Practice* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
15. Alice Hardy, *Whose City?* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
16. Indy Johar, (Retrieved from <https://provocations.darkmatterlabs.org/financing-civic-futures-a3a6075f31c4>)
17. Frazer Morrison, *Nowhere to Hide* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
18. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Vintage Books, 2016), p. 238.
19. Maxim Sass, *Public Sector Service* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
20. Nelli Wahlsten, *Blurring Boundaries* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)
21. George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage, A New Politics for an Age of Crisis* (Verso, 2017), p. 91.
22. Vojtech Nemeč, *The Street Level Bureaucrat* (LSA Manifesto, 2018)

13. A Manifesto for Academia with Practice

Defining Contemporary Professionalism. RIBA Publishing. 2019

What?

What, if instead of creating pollution and landfill as a by-product, our urban developments produced nutrients? What if all new housing created sustainable communities living together in an inspiring healthy environment? And what if our policies and politicians worked in tandem to build resilient cities? As educators, we believe in the possibility of a better future and have a duty to nurture and encourage new conversations inspiring change.

Why?

The London School of Architecture (LSA) challenges the way architecture is discussed within universities and practice. Unusually for a school of architecture there is a very clear mission statement: *'to ensure that people living in cities experience more fulfilled and more sustainable lives'*. Our responsibility is to educate future leaders in designing innovations that contribute to this change. The school subscribes to a set of ethical values that form the bedrock of the curriculum.

From this position the LSA frames an understanding of the city and its inhabitation through the lens of sustainability and resilience. Implicit is a criticism that architecture has divorced itself from those using it as well as ignoring its impact on the planet. Our worldview sees the role of the profession as part of a network, intersecting and collaborating with like-minded stakeholders in researching and promoting restorative thinking acting as agents of change. As George Monbiot observes, change only happens if you replace one narrative with another (better) one. Our society has been atomised and alienated through the forces of globalisation and technology, resulting in over consumption, destructive behaviours and political instability. The power of architecture lies in its ability to creatively project into the future and to imagine alternative outcomes within the present. Futurity can be understood as the art of improving our condition by changing the direction of travel through propositional reinvention. The new story of our profession needs to be one that builds a better habitat for everyone, enhancing community engagement over the singularity of the architect's vision and bringing with it economic, political and environmental evolution.

How?

The two-year Part II programme forms a 'community of practice' where students and professionals within the LSA network co-produce group design projects, while the students are employed three days a week to earn the course fees. This research-led initiative recasts the school as a context for connecting academia and practice as a forward looking *choral* initiative. This challenges the neoliberal version of development in the urban realm, looking instead at tackling head-on the difficult issues of injustice, climate change, civic responsibility and geo-political tensions. The development of a critical approach acknowledges Peter Buchanan's explanation that criticism is concerned with a penetrating engagement and discernment as opposed to theories that 'weave a web of obfuscatory verbiage spinning away from the subject'. For the practices involved in the school's network, the design 'think tank' projects become a vehicle to explore ideas and to partake in a transparent iterative process which is co-created. In some instances, firms have continued to work together after the students hand in, developing the research as well as forming new collaborations. In this way knowledge transfer can be understood as a dynamic flow that informs practice.

Each cohort is invited to reflect critically on the practice they are working with and to construct a personal manifesto for their future selves. The pedagogic model that underpins the LSA is to encourage collisions between grounded ideologies that inform how architects work, with readings and theories whose purpose is to provoke and challenge our own embedded prejudices. Some of the questions chosen by the students mirror their interests and demonstrate the disrupted status quo of our times:

- In what ways has neo-liberalism influenced and shaped our cities?
- What can be done about the declining professional status of the profession?
- How do regulations shape architectural production?
- Where does immigration challenge national borders?
- How fake news and dissimulation has affected architectural imagery?
- What can we do to reverse climate change?

Their writing creates a space in which they can practice and discuss contemporary arguments and challenge normative thinking. There is an urgency to be relevant and propositional.

Returning to the question of the profession, the LSA recognises that as the role of the architect in society has changed, so too must their education. They will need to be resilient, networked, proactive, resourceful, knowledgeable and prepared to be experimental. The quality of our future depends on them.



Illustration from 'A Gendered Profession' published by RIBA

14. The writing is on the wall

End of Year Catalogue. LSA. 2018

As a practicing architect, who teaches, perhaps one of the biggest shifts I have witnessed since studying in the 1980's is the change in rhetoric and debate around the purpose of architecture. Back then discourse was self-referential and absorbed with conceits that linked the language of architecture to the semiotics of the written word. On visiting the seminal 1988 Deconstructivist exhibition at MOMA, New York, it seemed that the world was on the cusp of massive change. The catalogue talks about contaminated forms that disturb our thinking, suggesting that perfection is secretly monstrous. New forms and urban typologies were communicated through complex drawings, whose opaque 'readings' were much debated, while a series of models suggested radical constructions that promised a new urban realm. We never saw the people. Thirty years on it is clear that the exhibition was a harbinger of a new kind of architectural production, one that owes its genesis to the power of the microchip inspired by the potential of linguistic framing. Still, where are all the people?

At the LSA we are suspicious of form over content and gymnastics over programme. More important is the possibility that propositional architectural thinking can improve the city and start to address ethical questions of inequality and climate change. To author Doug Spencer, the neoliberal project has been propelled by the schism between theory and production, where questions of societal value, labour and resilience are trumped by the seduction of seamless wealth creation. The act of thinking critically is one that demands an understanding of what shapes our physical environment; which is never as simple as the will of an architect. Far more, we have begun to see that Intersectionality, a theory of oppression, is one of the invisible gearing mechanisms that favours certain forms of capital growth over societal values. Increasingly the purpose of architecture is understood as the appreciation of an asset, which in turn shapes the physical environment. The cost of this approach to those not inside the virtuous circle of investment and return, is an erosion of community, an increase in living costs and the degradation of the environment. The contribution of the construction industry to the decline of our ecological system, increase in pollution and rise in CO2 emissions is huge; yet there is little incentive for private enterprise to take on these threats and creatively challenge the status quo.

In order to make sense of the conflicting forces that inform the production of our environment, we need to understand better the practices of architecture. The pedagogic model that underpins the LSA is to encourage collisions between grounded ideologies that inform how architects work, with readings and theories whose purpose is to provoke, re-frame and take on our own embedded prejudices. Only by learning from each other can we begin to imagine alternative roadmaps towards the future. The act of constructing a relevant written argument is subverted into the form of a personal manifesto: a space to build a call for arms; an alternative world order; a kinder society. If architecture is a project of futurity, then the question of design inevitably is charged with taking on these forces with the hope that the future can be an improvement on the present. While thirty years ago we were deconstructing the world, we now urgently need to reconstruct it with sound intentions. The writing is on the wall.

15. Articulating Architecture's Core in the Post-Digital Age

Changing Architectural Education: Practices in Flux. Carnegie Mellon University. 2018

Preface

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

Buckminster Fuller, Critical Path¹

This paper suggests the post-digital discourse in architecture works as a critique of form over content. In an increasingly connected but disruptive global environment we find that the purpose of architecture is returning to a grounded and societal practice, rather than the solipsistic advancement of parametric representation. This has a knock-on effect in the class room, not least because much of the digital knowledge transfer is evidenced on the urban skyline can be traced back to students experimenting, playing and testing in the virtual context of the school project. The dissemination of this approach has seen extraordinary changes in the way cities are perceived. From Jenga tower blocks and liquid town halls to splintered galleries the possibilities of digital design tools have transformed images into construction resulting what James Curl describes as the "flabbiness, shallowness, and superfluidities of so much 'modern' architecture"². Speculation has been reframed as progress. Icons and trophy projects serve to highlight the disconnect between an elitist architecture for the few and the failing built environment for the many. If architects are to engage in the process of democratic big change, a new model is required.

The London School of Architecture

"The LSA could be seen, metaphorically, as sitting on the San Andreas fault between education and practice"³

Thinking about what drives the engine of an architecture school it could be said that many, part time, studio teachers are drawn to academia because it allows them to practice and participate in worlds they cannot in their day job. This simple observation in part explains the distance between architecture as-built and architecture as-taught as an ever increasing gulf. Indy Johar suggests this is an important time for both the profession and academia to recalibrate:

"Architecture sits at the nexus point of change, the tipping point of a new era: this era demands not that we change our design style (though that will be a resultant effect) but more fundamentally how we work both individually and as professions..."⁴

Why is it that the student design project - so free from constraints, so open to interpretation is so seductive? And why is the world of the office and the tangible built environment seen as banal and rigid? In short, why are our schools ignoring the critical issues of our time, choosing instead to pursue the esoteric, the marginal and the impossible? Whether this is within the fantastical digital realm or the esoteric remote site, there is too often a fascination with the edge condition.

Of course this is a provocative generalisation and not a call to simply replicate commercial constraints within the studio. However as Peter Cook recently pointed out there may be an issue of protectionism within the academy, especially in the UK:

"It is a pity the British schools have been rather feeble in making it possible for hard-hitters to come inside - although I strongly suspect that career academics would be ready to point out their lack of delicacy as critics..."⁵

¹ Critical Path, Buckminster Fuller

² Making Dystopia, James Stevens Curl. Oxford University Press 2018

³ Radical Pedagogies, Harriet Harris

⁴ Indy Johar, Architecture-00, *Towards a Future Architecture*

⁵ P12 Architectural Review. Oct 2015 Killing Creativity. Peter Cook

This paper looks at new relationships between practice and academia using the model of the new London School of Architecture which opened its doors in October 2015 offering a two year masters programme. Embedded within the LSA's DNA⁶ lies the idea that there is an alternative dynamic, forward-looking, in-depth conversation to be had between students, teachers and academia. The model rejects the binary positioning of academia versus practice, instead developing a collaborative model where there is an explicit understanding that practice can inform teaching and visa versa.⁷ While appearing logical, it remains one of the few courses that has openly invited practices to share in the wider knowledge economy of practice.

Modelling

"Our vision is that people living in cities experience more fulfilled and more sustainable lives"⁸

As with any educational model there are a series of mechanisms and strategies that have been developed to tease out and test the hypothesis. The students are employed by one of the practices in the LSA network for three days a week throughout their first year. Their earnings cover the fees for the two year course, so the model is significantly cost neutral. First year starts with the Urban Studies programme ending with site investigations for the second year Thesis Project. There are two courses under the banner of 'Critical Practice' titled *Placement* and *Theory*, which is defined as the place where the student is asked to research, consider and propose ideas that relate to how architecture is practiced. The aim is to create a critical collision between speculation about architecture and speculating within architecture.

It is no coincidence that the agenda of the school is reflected in the interests of the founders; in particular Dr Deborah Saunt and Dr Tom Holbrook who have completed their 'Architecture and Design Practice' PhD's with Professor Leon van Schaik through RMIT and Ghent. Leon was invited onto the Academic Court⁹ of the LSA to lend insight into his practices and seek advice as to how this field of knowledge might be brought into the curriculum earlier (i.e. at Masters Level). While the PhD programme is only available to practitioners who have already set up their studios and are ready to invest in questioning and re-framing their own practices, it seemed that there were methodologies and an approach that could be employed to discuss the question of 'why and how' with relation to process and context earlier within the architects' education. At the heart of his premise, as described in *Mastering Architecture*, van Schaik proposes that research and peer review are vital to the growth and innovation of a practitioner¹⁰, surmising:

"Designers who become creative innovators have all found a way to second-order learning: a process of observing themselves as learners and taking charge of the curation of themselves as learners"¹¹

Taking this back into academia, the model suggests that by creating a space between practicing (the three days a week employment) and speculating within the programme there is the opportunity for the student to research and test their ideas, ideals and preconceptions in real time. The students are placed in a 'live' situation where they are both practicing architect and scholar in a position where they can influence and calibrate both scenarios.

⁶ "The LSA is creating a series of new relationships – between students and tutors, between academia and practice, between the discipline of architecture and others, and between the institution and the city – with the purpose of defining a new critical practice for architecture." Will Hunter

⁷ "Architectural Education has therefore (to its cost) often retreated in the academy, to visionary or utopian schemas, released from reality's constraining and normative pragmatism". Mel Dodd p 22 *Radical Pedagogies*

⁸ LSA vision statement <http://www.the-lsa.org/about/purpose>

⁹ Sitting above the directors and faculty who deliver the course, the Academic Court is the ultimate academic judicial body of the school

¹⁰ *Mastering Architecture*, Van Schaik Leon p19

¹¹ *Mastering Architecture*, Van Schaik Leon p 217

In Practice

Working in practice allows the student to gain a view from the ground where they operate as part of a team or system. They are asked to develop a 'Critical Practice Manual', seen as an in-depth research tool, and an ongoing project conducted in the present. Using the workplace as the principal site of investigation, the Manual explores the relationship between process and product, ideas and outcome. Group seminars set up a number of questions that allows the cohort to start interrogating and learning more about their practice through traditional research and reading to reach a mature understanding of ethos and accountability. A dynamic relationship is set up which oscillates between participating in the daily life of an architect then standing back in order to interrogate it. Significantly the practice networks are invited to engage in the process leveraging an opportunity to develop their own perception. In particular we can see this approach aligning with the call by Flora Samuel encouraging architectural practices (or architects) to invest in research-led activities:

"To do research is to work through a problem systematically and reflectively and then, ideally, to disseminate the results of that research"¹²

In other words, research creates an audience who may choose to take action (consult, commission, feedback or share) that in turn forms a virtuous circle of incremental change.

In Theory

Titled 'Methods and Models' the LSA theory lecture series unpacks the role of theories and philosophy in the C20th and C21st, asking key questions as to their influence and success or failure. Here the students are required to produce a Critical Practice Manifesto, which is a tool for them to start measuring themselves by. The explicit question at the heart of the programme is: how do you see your practice in the future? By triangulating between the worlds of theory and practice the programme aims to develop an understanding of the agency of the architect in relation to others in the construction industry, the wider creative economy and the landscape of pedagogic theory. In considering the recent past the LSA recognises Adrian Forty's notion that historical truth is relative and requires us to develop an appetite to challenge our preconceptions, even our education:

"To concentrate on the making of architecture is to miss the point that architecture, like all other cultural objects, is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it"¹³

A further strand of informative new thinking deals with the role of intuition and *research by design*, asking questions interrogating knowledge that can only be gained through design and whether the notion of 'designerly ways of knowing'¹⁴ has traction.

"Although architecture is taught within the walls of academia, its realization happens outside those walls...Confrontation with society, with actors and contextual complexity cannot be denied. On the contrary, it is offering the most rich and potential learning environment that can be imagined".¹⁵

The 2012 'Theory by Design' academic conference in Antwerp, shared a growing concern within European architectural educators that privileging process-led design studios, often deploying abstract theoretical methodologies to create form, results in a huge gap understanding how synthetic design can be understood and validated. Significantly the conference came about because the faculty of design at Artesis University College was about to become part of Artesis

¹² Anne Dye and Flora Samuel, *Demystifying Architectural Research*

¹³ Adrian Forty, *Strangely Familiar*, Introduction

¹⁴ Professor Nigel Cross first clearly articulated this concept in a paper called 'Designerly Ways of Knowing' which was published in the journal *Design Studies* in 1982

¹⁵ "Why theory by design is an issue" De Vos, Els and De Walsche, *Johan Theory by Design*. Artesis p 11

Plantijn University College, and their academic credentials had been brought into question. Staff identified the sticking point to be that much of their research was seen as 'artistic and intuitive' rather than scientific and quantifiable. Thus the conference sought to explore and validate their understanding that design itself, as an activity, has research outcomes. By bringing together teachers, practitioners as well as those who do both, the outcome was refreshing because it revealed a broad spectrum of influences united by the underlying sense that ideas and positions can be developed through the act of designing within the world rather than the self-conscious act of re-making the design process. Reflecting on this in context of the LSA programme, it makes sense to allow the design project to exist both within the school studio and the office, and to use the different situations to feed off one another, to learn, adjust and nudge.

Within the bandwidth of architectural theory it has been important to present students a map, pinpointing co-ordinates and intersections of architectural thinking. Peter Buchanan in writing 'The Big Rethink'¹⁶ for the Architectural Review calls for the influence of the 'starchitect' to be scrutinised and the apparent lack of interest in environmental issues challenged, suggesting:

"Many of today's most accomplished buildings are by highly professional mainstream practices, perhaps partly because of the resources they can command, such as collaborating with the best consultants. These architects, not the avant-garde, constitute the leading edge of practice that other architects study and emulate."

For Buchanan the crisis in architectural place making can be pinned on the appetite to create ever more new forms, new conditions and icons borne out of a response to the rate of change witnessed in today's society. The antidote, he suggests, is for architects to develop a much more robust critical voice, to ride the waves of fashionable ideologies and aesthetics, and to accept that responding intelligently and thoughtfully to a given situation can lead to a collectively better world. It was striking to observe that when interviewing the students for the first intake many of their questions revolved around whether the LSA was to talk about ethics, the environment as well as teaching entrepreneurial skills. There is a growing sense among the next generation that global issues such as climate change action, neocon politics, pollution and migration all must inform the position of the architect. No longer is the debate about style, rather about action. In her book 'This Changes Everything', Naomi Klein invites immediate and radical intervention to stem the unfolding environmental disaster:

"It is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message – spoken in the language of fires, floods, droughts, and extinctions – telling us that we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet."¹⁷

As a critique of capitalism and the global economic model, the book is at its most persuasive when it shows how grass roots collective action, though the use of shared media, is able to affect big change. The education of the architect is not about developing a personal portfolio with a unique signature, it needs to be about taking a position and developing a strategy in opposition to the received model.

Collaborating Practices

"All of us (architects, artists, critics, curators, *amateurs*) need a narrative to focus our practices – situated stories, not grand *récits*"¹⁸

The pairing of students with the LSA's network of practices is an important factor in the development of the learning exchange economy. Firstly practices are asked to identify with one of the thematic 'Think Tank' study topics, and students opt for the area of study rather than a practice per se. They interview each other and while a small percentage conclude there is not an appropriate fit, it has a high match rate. The cohort is advised that in order to learn new ideas it is

¹⁶ The Big Rethink. Peter Buchanan. Architectural Review. December 2011

¹⁷ Naomi Klein, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

¹⁸ Hal Foster, Running Room. Notting Hill Editions. P73

important to move out of a perceived comfort zone, therefore working with an unfamiliar practice should be seen as an opportunity. Each practice is asked to nominate a mentor whom the student consults as a sounding board. A meeting between all the practices is held to discuss their role prior to students starting. It is important that throughout the process of developing their manual and manifesto there is an interested party who can act as an informal consultant. The content of the academic output is shaped by the students' own experiences, their gathering of evidence, the formal lectures and seminar input.

It is significant that many Universities find collaborative group work problematic due to concerns over contested marking; they would rather consider the individual. And when you think about it, this is the beginning of a journey resulting in the architect-as-genius rather than the architect-as-team-player. As a result the ambitious 'Think Tank' project groups five or six practices with the same number of students, working together to develop a research strand. The agenda is negotiated between the school, the students and the practices in order to create a platform resulting in collaborative propositional outcomes. Current themes include; Architectural Agency, Unstable City, New Knowledge, Emerging Tools, and Adaptive Typologies. This approach concurs with Kester Rattenbury's observation:

"Architects need to give their tacit working design methodologies a voice, this involves stepping back from the design and looking critically at what they do, articulating their particular way of working and analysing their tactics"¹⁹

The strategy of asking students and practices to develop a research area gives rise to a body of work that creates a new kind of space for speculation. Here the practices are not leaving their office and moving into the school in order to engage in propositional thinking, rather they are working within their organisation allowing boundaries and edge conditions to be embraced and blurred. This process of negotiated positions and peripatetic engagement goes beyond the old fashioned notion of apprenticeship or the unit system, giving way to the endorsement of collaborative tactics, of strategic testing. It also dissolves the artificial rite of passage that the professional gateway exam excerpts over legitimising the status of the would-be architect.

'Open Source' society

It is not an overstatement to say the role of the architect is in crisis since the landscape for acting and participating in society has radically changed with the rise of new technologies and networks. In his book 'Open Source Architecture', co-author Carlo Ratti unpacks what he sees as the end of Modernism and the birth of a new kind of practice, where design information is connected and networked. Perhaps more importantly he suggests that this is political:

"Put simply, open –source software has achieved an unprecedented level of technological sophistication through communal design, and it has caused a seismic tremor in the socio-political establishment."²⁰

Furthermore the process of engagement is understood by Johar as a system that can be influenced and nudged rather than a set of rules to abide by.²¹

If the students are able to develop and grow in a context that nurtures their own working practices within a space where group work is normalised we hope to redefine the culture of architectural practice as a joined-up endeavour. In order to frame this opportunity the concept of risk taking is discussed and expressed in the tension between the infinite outcomes of a student project whose boundaries are flexible and the pragmatic response to a series of prescribed conditions that define the 'real' world. In order to reflect in both situations an attitude and understanding to risk taking as well as comprehending and learning from failure. As Maria Miller writes:

¹⁹ Kester Rattenbury, Architectural Review

²⁰ P71 Open Source Architecture

²¹ "I think architecture is going to become more and more powerful as we move away from the idea of management and towards creating conditions for behavioural nudges, self-organisation, and a deep influence on systems..." Indy Johar – The Civic Entrepreneur

“Responsible risk-taking is critical to the iterative process of design...(and) can strengthen the innovative process as designers struggle to solve important problems.”²²

In other words one of the common, though often invisible, links between the different contexts of practice is the question of how far to pursue an idea and the value of making calculated decisions that may fail? In practice we see time and time again the role of the architect curtailed by flawed regulations, client direction and self-censoring. However in the new educational economy where students are customers, accruing staggering debt, we see the trend to become risk averse in order to pass; where the risk of any kind of failure is seen as too great. Coupled with a profession that has been de-risked there is the potential for outcomes to be dumbed down at best, so we need to incentivise and re-frame the research-led design project as an opportunity whose resolution may be incomplete, flawed or imperfect. However, deep understanding and learning should not be judged only on outcome but through recognising the rigour that imaginative iterative testing and reworking reveals:

“This imagination, therefore, is not the imagination of a detached dreamer: it grows out of the real, fuelled by the very uncertainty of the rationalists and utopists found so threatening. It is an imaginative vision that both projects new futures and also embraces their imperfections”.²³

In the new world order this does not equate to parametric gymnastics, rather a radical but risky new relationship between people, politics and the planet.

Networking the future

If there is one thing we can take away from the political debacles of recent years, it is that change happens unpredictably; not always in a good way, but in a way that reminds us that we have responsibilities to make the right sort of change happen. As architects we also know that the future lies in our creativity; design is projective. We are trained to model the future.

In order to make sense of the conflicting forces that inform the production of our environment, it is necessary to acknowledge the diverse practices of architecture. The pedagogic model that underpins the LSA is to encourage collisions between grounded ideologies, informing architects labour, with readings and theories whose purpose is to provoke, re-frame and take on our own embedded prejudices. Only by learning from each other can we begin to imagine alternative roadmaps towards the future. The act of constructing arguments in the form of a manifesto creates a space to build a call for arms; an alternative world order; a kinder society. If architecture is a project of futurity, then the question of design inevitably is charged with taking on these forces with the hope that the future can be an improvement on the present. While thirty years ago we were deconstructing the world, we now urgently need to reconstruct it with sound intentions. The LSA model relies, indeed thrives, on the idea of an extended network, on the institution as a loose fit of alliances rather than a campus and the belief that the students are the ones to drive change. In our own way we begin to define a new age of open source post digital architecture.

“If tomorrow’s buildings and cities will now be more like computers – than machines - Open Source Architecture provides an open, collaborative framework for writing their operating software.”²⁴

²² Maria V Miller, Habits of Mind and the Iterative Process in Design: Taking Responsible Risk AAE 2014 Conference Proceedings

²³ Till, Jeremy. Architecture Depends. P192

²⁴ p112 Open Source Architecture

16. Teaching Practice

AAE Education Conference. Sheffield University. 2017

Abstract

This paper looks at new pedagogical relationships between practice and academia reflected in the Masters Course of our London based school of architecture. We reject the traditional binary opposition of academia versus practice to embrace intersectional learning and research. Embedded within the teaching model of the school is the conviction that there is a dynamic and critical conversation to be had between students, teachers and practitioners.

Strategic definition

“When it comes to architectural education in the UK, one thing everyone agrees on is that it’s not fit for purpose any more. Students go through seven years of training, five of which are spent in school, only to end up earning a paltry salary in relation to comparably trained professionals.”¹

This paper has been designed to share and critically engage with the teaching and learning pedagogy of the new LSA (London School of Architecture). The question is whether an alternative educational model can successfully devise a validated curriculum that is able to embed the profession deeply within the programme while maintaining a critical distance from the nature of commercial practice. Too often the gulf between what is taught in schools of architecture and how practice operates is alluded to from both sides with little intention of addressing the gap.

Our manifesto identifies five behavioural prime values: propositional, relevant, innovative metropolitan and entrepreneurial. Embedded within the teaching model of the school is the conviction that there is a dynamic and critical conversation to be had between students, teachers and practitioners. We therefore challenge the traditional binary opposites of academia versus practice. However the LSA is not alone in redefining the parameters of architectural education. While programmes at Bath and Cardiff have long pioneered sandwich courses, there is a progressive integrated work place learning course at Sheffield. In Lyon architect Odile Decq set up her Confluence school, which is described as a site of emerging new relations between systems of thought and modes of construction, reflecting:

“The Confluence challenges students to become pioneers in confronting problems encountered in the world and to use new tools to address them.”²

We also suggest it is necessary to see ways in which the production of architecture is an essentially political act and to challenge what Naomi Klein refers to as the triple crises of neoliberalism, economic inequality and climate change.³

Brief

In order to frame the discussion a short history of the development of the school is useful. Founder Will Hunter, then the deputy editor of the *Architectural Review*, published an article in 2012 proposing ARFA – *Alternative Routes For Architecture* – in order to challenge conventional models for architectural education and asking professionals and academics to offer their thoughts. As Hunter questioned:

“Are architecture schools housed within the state-controlled university system really the best place to create the next generation of architects?”⁴

This generated a debate swiftly leading to the pro-active notion that the most effective response was to create what Jos Boys refers to as a grassroots new school.⁵ In addition the brief called for a reduction in student fees and therefore a different model of funding. The outcome was to partner with practice in a two-way conversation whereby a student would be employed by practice three days a week and the practice would become involved in the programme of the

school. The equation showed that students could earn £12,000 on base rate salary, working part time for one year which would offset the fees for the entire two year course.

Clearly the 'learn as you earn' paradigm crosses over with the standard student year out, but demands a new kind of relationship between the practice, the student and the school. This is fundamental to the forward looking re-casting of the entrenched hierarchy as a one way street, instead initiating a pivotal dialogue rooted in projects, research and writing.

Design

As the agenda of the school took shape we forged a working relationship with London Metropolitan University who became our Partner Institution. During the initial QAA stage we held a number of peer led reviews, testing the idea of the course and resulting in a series of critical commentaries and advice. Once validation from the University was received, we sought to gain accreditation from ARB and RIBA. Interestingly a number of commentators questioned why a new school wished to follow such an established pattern. However this is to forget that validation is for the students and their future career rather than as a badge for the school.

At the heart of the course lies a fundamental belief that learning through critical practice creates a research-led agenda that begins to challenge the education of the architect, creating a space for the network of practices to reflect and develop. This is a very different premise to the model where part-time tutors (mostly in work) come into the school to teach, as a way of furthering an agenda often not pursued in their every day career. They buy into the often esoteric values of the school as a means of escape, and to further an alternative conversation borne out of frustration with the 'real world'. Here we invite practicing architects both to share their knowledge and experience as well as to be propositional.

The LSA put out an open call to practices inviting them to become part of their network, explaining that there were three key ways of being involved. The first becoming an employer of a student, the second as a participator in the group 'think tank' projects and thirdly as a design tutor in second year.

"The LSA is creating a series of new relationships – between students and tutors, between academia and practice, between the discipline of architecture and others, and between the institution and the city – with the purpose of defining a new critical practice for architecture."⁶

Construction

The course aims to foster new ways of working through collaboration and group work, analogous to what Carlo Ratti terms a choral profession⁷. At its most basic this is because most architects work in teams and with other people; they are not a lone genius. It should be noted that while London Met were supportive of this initiative, it became clear that the marking of group work in higher education is not generally supported which perhaps goes some way in explain why architecture programmes favour the individual, both literally and societally.

Although the actual work students undertake in their three days employment is no business of the school, by creating a space between practicing and speculating within the programme there is the opportunity for the student to research and test their ideas, ideals and preconceptions in real time. They are placed in a 'live' situation where they are both practicing architect and scholar and potentially in a position where they can influence and calibrate both scenarios. To reinforce ties with the school 'Think Tank' design projects are run by practice leaders who develop a thematic brief which is taken on by groups of five or six students over a period of fourteen weeks.

The first year begins with an Urban Studies programme and ends researching the brief for the second year Thesis Project, which is characterised as their 'Proto-Practice' year. Two courses under the banner of 'Critical Practice' titled *Placement* and *Theory*, are where the student is asked to research, consider and propose ideas that relate to how architecture is practiced. The aim is to create a critical collision between speculation about architecture and speculating within architecture.

Underpinning our critical theory is the research of Leon Van Schaik who writes in *Mastering Architecture*, that research and peer review are vital to the growth and innovation of a practitioner, concluding:

“Designers who become creative innovators have all found a way to second-order learning: a process of observing themselves as learners and taking charge of the curation of themselves as learners”⁸.

In order to tease out and engage with the practice network, the students are required to write a critical practice Manual reflecting their observations and participation. The LSA asks that each student be assigned a mentor within the practice who allows up to half an hour a week for the student to ask questions and access issues and protocol they may not be party to. We invite the students to consider the culture of the office in parallel with the managerial structures, design philosophy and attitude towards technology. This is supported by a series of group seminars that focus the students on finding a lens to view the practice, as well as sharing their experiences with the class. By way of an example one student working for a small all-women practice wrote her piece on ‘Practicing Equality’ while another placed at a large multinational practice explored ‘Borderless Sustainable Globalism’. We also asked that students include a technical case study as a mechanism to explore the way material detailing and sustainable thinking operate in the commercial context.

Throughout the first year theory teaching is framed through questioning the nature of architectural practice and production taking on board Peter Buchanan’s observation that theory tends to ‘weave a web of obfuscatory verbiage spinning away from a subject while criticism is concerned with a penetrating engagement and discernment’⁹. Using the vehicle of a personal manifesto the students are asked to consider their own agenda, their ethical position and to propose a way of thinking that equips them for their second year and beyond. As one student responded at the end of this year:

‘The manifesto was crucial to me. This was the first time I could spend some time to sort many of my thoughts about architecture and try to position myself as an architect and really ask myself why I am doing what I do.’

To illustrate the diversity of thinking, this year one student wrote ‘Atlas Paddling’; a part fictional account of a flooded future world triangulated with descriptions of cities that today flood on a regular basis. Taking a more journalistic approach ‘Fake News’ explored the way in which architectural imagery projects a series of perfected scenarios devoid of real life contingencies. Both pieces push the boundary of architectural writing, in order to construct new perspectives on current practices and scenarios.

In the second semester the Design Think Tank project is perhaps the most radical aspect of the programme where half a dozen students and practices collaboratively produce design research. Here the groups are charged with looking at the spatial consequences of rapid expansion, climate change and data modelling in order to make informed propositions. Everyone is looking at current urban challenges and in particular those of London. Our students are agents for change and believe that in order to be in a position to actively engage in the city, they need to use their time in education to understand and research the current condition. As George Monbiot reflects in ‘How did we get into this mess?’ it is ideas that determine whether human creativity works for society or against it.¹⁰

This year one group, under the umbrella title Global Currents, looks at the impact of poor air quality in London. Eighteen months ago this subject was hardly discussed, certainly not by architects. Through grass roots lobbying and recognition by the Mayor this is now seen as a pressing issue intertwined with transport, infrastructure and emissions. All students present their final group work to a public audience and it was encouraging that one group, SWARM, were subsequently invited to share their work at a keynote presentation at the annual BNA, the Royal Institute of Dutch Architects. Importantly too is the implication for the practices, and this year we

saw a number of the professional teams continuing their dialogues, and in one case working up a competition proposal together.

Moving into second year, the students consider the history of architecture as a history of design methodologies. Here the hegemony of modernism is destabilised, allowing the discussion to reach back in time to the classical tradition, the Beaux-Arts as well as the canon of C20th 'greats'. The student output is in the form of drawings, based on an architect or practice, as opposed to a written document. The work seeks to uncover the tools for excavating all the layers of significance in an architectural approach. It is forensic in its focus, and by asking students to draw, is another way in which the threads of architectural knowledge can be synthesised.

The rest of the year is spent developing two design projects, where the first shorter exercise is set up to allow students to test their own design methodology which is then critically reflected upon and refined for their thesis project. This is evolved alongside technical teaching inviting experimentation speculation and testing of strategies for the use of materials, structures, form, inhabitation and sustainability. While a number of the students expressed regret that they were no longer working in groups, the school has taken the position that it is the contrast between different working modes that gives them the tools for their future practice.

In use

Having run for only two years the project of the LSA has gained traction and momentum. The school received its ARB accreditation in 2017 and in June was validated by the RIBA who commended the school for offering a sense of empowerment and independence to students. In parallel the feedback from practices involved, such as PDP, is as important:

"It is the school's commitment to research and collaborative working methods that makes their educational model unique to other architecture schools and really sets them apart. Alongside their practice work and associated assignments, the students are also grouped together with practices from the LSA Practice Network to form 'Design Think Tanks' in order to explore a shared research question."¹¹

Returning to the pioneering work undertaken by Leon Van Schaik, we believe the programme reflects his conviction that as "We move away from the notion of the architect as the abstract entity 'architect' and move much more into architects as research question-driven practitioners."¹²

Conclusion

The LSA confronts what some see as our corrosive value system that places profit above the well-being of people and the planet. Our vision, through architectural education, is to enable people living in cities to lead more fulfilled and sustainable lives.

We recognise that the school is finding it's feet and the first cohort have been inspiring in their belief and engagement in shaping the school. Their feedback has been invaluable, resulting in changes to both the timetable and the content. Perhaps the most critical comments have centred around the dichotomy of teaching a more equitable vision for practice while expecting students to be super-human at times, balancing working to earn money with the intense pressure of producing a portfolio. However the final word goes to one of our recent graduates reflecting:

"The programme is interesting and progressive and I am glad I came here over anywhere else. When I compare my cohort to that of friends at other institutions I believe that we have the broader and more significant skill base and relevance to the profession and the changing world".

Notes

¹ Douglas Murphy, *ICON* (02.04.15).

<https://www.iconeye.com/opinion/comment/item/11771-london-school-of-architecture>

² <http://confluence.eu>

³ Klein N, *No is not Enough* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p. 121.

⁴ Will Hunter, *Alternative Routes to Architecture* (*Architectural Review* 28.09.12).

⁵ Jos Boys, *Building Better Universities: Strategies, Spaces, Technologies* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 28.

“There are other-grassroots-up- initiatives, responding to the difficulties caused for potential learners by increasing tuition fees and perceived inadequacies in the existing university provision.”

⁶ Interview between Anna Winston and Will Hunter, *Dezeen*, (14.04.15).

<https://www.dezeen.com/2015/04/14/london-school-of-architecture-will-hunter-design-museum-accessible-education-cost-neutral/>

⁷ Carlo Ratti and Matthew Claudel, *Open Source Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson 2015), p. 106.

⁸ Leon Van Schaik, *Mastering Architecture* (UK: Wiley, 2005) p. 217.

⁹ Peter Buchanan, *Architectural Review* 21.12.2011). p. 22.

¹⁰ George Monbiot, *How did we get into this mess?* (London: Verso 2017), p. 1.

¹¹ Rae Whittow-Williams, *PDP practice website post*, <http://pdplondon.com/articles/practice-makes-perfect-our-first-year-with-the-london-school-of-architecture>

¹² Leon Van Schaik, *Mastering architecture and creative innovation* (London: RIBA Symposium, 2007)

17. Supersized London

Housing Conference. University of Vienna. 2017

Supersized – a term introduced by Macdonald's in the 1990's denoting extra-large portions. In 2004 Morgan Spurlock made the film 'Super Size Me'¹ charting the unhealthy impact of a fast-food diet. In architecture we see the trend for overdevelopment leading to obese urban fabric and what Rem Koolhaas refers to as *junkspace*².

Introduction

The presentation focuses on the urban and infrastructural development in Canning Town, London. Project Orange Architects³ has been involved for ten years in master-planning and then designing a residential block consisting of 216 apartments, of which 25% are affordable. The question we asked ourselves is: how it is possible to create urbane, robust and resilient urban environments knowing that the site conditions and density required from the developers are extreme?

The housing Crisis

London house prices have risen 670% since 1995. Officially London has a 'housing crisis'; politicians finally acknowledge this although community groups have been campaigning for the past 25 years to ensure better housing provision. While city authorities are charged with encouraging and controlling urban development, in London this is through the agency of the 33 local borough planning departments and the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act. However it can be argued that the real power lies with the private developer. In an age where speculative development is the main route to market, both for both private and social housing, the pressure on councils to approve much needed new housing is immense. Furthermore the larger the development the more money the council receives from section 106 agreements (a planning gain paid for by the developer). This leads to fragmented thinking in favour of individual sites rather than the neighbourhood as a whole. Locals are seldom consulted, save for a cursory open meeting, and resistance is mostly ignored. A recent article in the Guardian explains the problem stems from the fact that the limits are never spelt out in black and white, so "developers always try to get away with more"⁵

Canning Town Context

Canning Town is an area of East London and part of the London Borough of Newham situated in a former docklands backland area to the north side of the River Thames. Historically the construction of the Royal Victoria Dock in 1855 led to housing development for the workers and by the late C19th a large African community arrived due to shipping links with West Africa. By the turn of the century the demise of the docks led to the area becoming known as a slum. New post-war building led to a first wave of regeneration, though in 1968 the nearby 22-story Ronan Point collapsed causing a nationwide scandal. According to Newham London Borough Council, Canning Town is among the five percent of most deprived areas in the UK. Housing provision is a huge issue. To Newham's credit since 2013 there have been 800 prosecutions locally for illegal landlords⁶ demonstrating a thriving underground market exploiting poor families desperate for accommodation. Thus their regeneration programme costing £3.7b including 10,000 new homes aims to transform the area physically, socially and economically.

Strategy

The 2006 masterplan by Erick Van Egeraat identified a series of development opportunities with Rathbone Market seen as a key urban marker. Architects CZWG were approached to plan the site in three phases while Project Orange collaborated and were commissioned to design phase three. It soon became clear that the financial pressure to make the economic equation viable led to a densification of the site. We are therefore interested in understanding the problem of sustainable planning, resilient aesthetics and homemaking in an economy where value is defined by property prices rather than as a long-term community investment. Additional site challenges were to mitigate

the noise and pollution of the busy A13 highway, to deal with the flood risk at ground floor and to provide 970 sqm of amenity space.

We began to analyse the site taking the common goal of sustainable development as *to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations*. Our research suggested that concepts of 'safety' and 'home' were critical to making a place that could become its own neighbourhood. We changed the masterplan strategy of using the main cores as primary entrances to having a single pedestrian gateway into the scheme, meaning everyone comes into a shared garden. In collaboration with a landscape architect we sought to refine the public realm as well as making a vegetable garden on the lowest flat roof. The upper 'blue' roofs are designed to hold water, slowly releasing it through rills in the landscape to soak-away planters thus minimizing flooding of the overloaded drainage system.

While planning itself is not concerned with aesthetics, the architectural challenge is to create a form and mass that is articulated with character. Too often the novelty of endless design possibilities lead to an architecture that shouts out, aspiring to be iconic. The choice of dark brick to wrap the exterior elevations created a robust shell, which contrasts with the cream light reflecting brick of the internal surfaces of the courtyard. Our approach to animating the facades was to take a compositional approach, leading to asymmetric vertical cascades of balconies and windows. This non-linear design process challenges the orthodoxy of the grid as an ordering device, though the structure is entirely logical. We observed that most buildings are an extrusion from the ground upwards, resulting in the profile being cut off horizontally at the top. Our design breaks up the roof line to create a skyline with some character.

Completion

The project was largely completed in January 2017 with all three phases providing 652 homes, 4,000 sqm for retail and 1,000 sqm of office space over an area of 1.56ha at a net density of 418 units per hectare. The majority of apartments were bought by a private residential sector (PRS) landlord who let the units out, while Notting Hill Housing Association operate the 25% affordable homes. In general the quality is good, however it was decided the concierge would not be used 24 hours which we believe to be a mistake. The roof top vegetable garden has yet to be used, mainly because there has not been an invitation to the community to become involved. In light of the recent Grenfell Fire the use of brick cladding was a robust design choice. The landscape appears to be successful in that it offers a safe family friendly space, as well as working as part of the sustainable strategy.

While we believe the project makes a valuable contribution to the area, there is a sense the density may be too great. It is a concern that along with other new developments adjacent to this site, these new mega blocks are now being used as a precedent for the next, even larger, phase of development. The consequence of a supersized urban diet leads to a cycle of consuming more land, building bigger yet still not solving the housing crisis. How can we curb the appetite for supersized architecture while giving people the homes they need?

Postscript

Perhaps technology is part of the answer. New initiatives, such as Urban Intelligence⁷ in London and the Open Data Infrastructure Map⁸ of Manchester are digital tools that aim to connect many networks including water, transport, green spaces sharing it with the public. This allows a more transparent discussion that links up separate sites with infrastructure at many scales. However we need to ensure that this information is democratic and not just another tool in the neoliberal project. For many in the UK there needs to be a return to publicly owned council housing, that can be appropriately distributed. Currently there is an absence of equitable delivery and planning coupled with a fundamental belief in home ownership for all, which is clearly unrealistic. We concur with writer Anna Minton when she talks about needing a new social contract in housing and planning to ensure that housing becomes a public good once again and not just a financial asset.⁹

Notes

¹ *Spurlock, M. (2004), Super Size Me. Samuel Goldwyn Films, USA*

² *Koolhaas, R. (2012), Junkspace with Running Room. Notting Hill Editions. London*

³ www.projectorange.com

⁴ www.landregistry.data.gov.uk

⁵ *Wainwright, O (2017), Tinder for Cities. Guardian, London*

⁶ *Minton, A. (2017) The great London property squeeze. Guardian, London*

⁷ www.urbanintelligence.co.uk

⁸ www.mappinggm.org.uk

⁹ *Minton, A. (2017), The Housing Crisis isn't inevitable. New Statesman, London*

18. The Cambridge Show

AJ Review. July 2017

The Arcsoc Cambridge show, once again at the charmingly dilapidated Bargehouse on the Southbank, has a clarity not seen for years. There was a cornucopia of models and painterly drawings elegantly distributed across three floors. The question as to whether an end of year show demonstrates the ethos of a whole school is often meaningless as the diversity of teaching and representation is so broad and varied you have to study the rubric. However here it seems the school is collectively heading in a new direction. The second and third year work was legible and charming, while the part 2 MPhil director explained that their revised programme focussed on international facing research led practice. While I agree with their assertion that the diploma is not a 'rehearsal for a professional career', the work displayed a curiously arms length attitude to the built environment. Though I commend the clever collages of Cameron Cavalier whose Tottenham Stadium project is both playful and provocative.

Controversially, in my view, this year the AJ have asked reviewers to look through the lens of employability when considering the work. On face value this seems to be a retrogressive step and one that plays into the narrative generated by the old guard, that students learn nothing of use these days. Often this plays out though the interrogation of the 'technical' aspects of a project, which from the wisdom of practice can seem naïve. So what. The pendulum swing that distances academia from practice has been disrupted, and we are beginning to witness refreshing conversations that intertwine questions of the possible and the near future with the propositional.

From a student perspective the first year is a big leap into the unknown and at Cambridge there is a live project with 'real' clients that resulted in a series of play structures. I remain to be convinced that using 'play' is an effective introduction to architecture as the work, while engaging and quirky, has a tendency to be child-like. The leap from first to second year is pronounced, and there are three studios with a focus on the integration of structure, materials and environmental thinking (they also still have five exams!). Studio 1 looks at the timely question of housing in Tottenham Hale resulting in studied hybrid propositions, while Studio 2 uses the same area to re-think the role of public space. Their joint charette with Central St Martins students appears to have provided a great opportunity for collaboration demonstrated though a series of atmospheric drawings and detailed models. In contrast Studio 3 takes a more conceptual approach heading out of the city taking on board what they describe as 'critical drawing'. These pieces of work are sometimes precious but never obtuse – they address the matter of architecture.

Third year operates as a traditional unit system with three pathways. The work of Studio 1 at Woolwich Arsenal tackles head-on the shiny new world of Developer London. While the sense of context is often missing – the drawings suggest a calmer more interconnected realm where the public space is as important as the object buildings. The huge master-plan model played the developers at their own game, with Thomas Nuttall's petal-planned tower taking on the scale of it's ugly neighbours. Studio 2 travelled to Liverpool, taking the troubled area of Toxteth as a Peri-Urban site and introducing a riot of colour and lush growth. The confidence of the proposals were as striking as they were believable (although having grown up nearby I did not see much evidence of the city I know). By contrast Studio 3 proposes a rural winery in Enfield and a distillery in Clerkenwell – surely hitting all the buzz words in one go. Here the work is more beguiling and bucolic, foregoing the contingencies of such programmes in favour of an artful logic.

There is much to learn from this year's show, but by the time you read this it will be over. The profusion of models reminds us that they are tools to explore materiality and narrative, not just finished form. There is no question that the students are not prepared for practice; the real question is whether practice is prepared for them? This year Cambridge has emerged from the shadows.

19. Changing practice

End of Year Catalogue. LSA. 2017

Introduction

“The LSA could be seen, metaphorically, as sitting on the San Andreas fault between education and practice”ⁱ

I have had a hunch for some time now that many studio teachers are drawn to academia because it allows them to practice and participate in all the things they cannot do in their day job. Not only that, the distance between architecture as built and architecture as taught is an ever increasing gulf, as Indy Johar explains:

“Architecture sits at a nexus point of change, the tipping point of a new era: this era demands not that we change our design style (though that will be a resultant effect) but more fundamentally how we work both individually and as professions...”ⁱⁱ

Why is it that the student design project so free from constraints, so open to interpretation is so desirable to be a part of? And why is the world of the office, the built environment and the tangible seen as so banal, rigid and straight? In short, why are our schools ignoring the critical issues of our time, choosing instead to pursue the esoteric, the marginal and the impossible?

Of course this is a provocative generalisation. However as Peter Cook recently pointed out there may be an issue of protectionism:

“It is a pity the British schools have been rather feeble in making it possible for hard-hitters to come inside – although I strongly suspect that career academics would be ready to point out their lack of delicacy as critics...”ⁱⁱⁱ

The LSA forges new relationships between practice and academia and embedded within our DNA^{iv} lies the idea that there is an alternative dynamic, forward-looking, critical conversation to be had between students, teachers and academia. The model rejects the binary positioning of academia versus practice, instead developing a collaborative model where there is an explicit understanding that practice can inform teaching and visa versa.^v It seems so logical and yet it remains one of the few courses that has openly invited practices to share in the knowledge economy.

Strategies

As with any educational model there are a series of mechanisms and strategies that have been developed to tease out and test the agenda. The first year starts with an Urban Studies programme and ends with research for the second year Thesis Project. There are also two courses under the banner of ‘Critical Practice’ titled *Placement* and *Theory*, which are defined as the place where the student is asked to research, consider and propose ideas that relate to how architecture is practiced. The aim is to create a critical collision between speculation about architecture and speculating within architecture.

It is no coincidence that the agenda of the school is reflected in the interests of the staff and advisors; in particular Dr Deborah Saunt and Dr Tom Holbrook who have recently completed their ‘Architecture and Design Practice’ PhD’s with Professor Leon van Schaik through RMIT and Ghent. Leon was invited onto the Academic Court^{vi} of the LSA to lend insight into his praxis and seek advice as to how this field of knowledge might be brought into the curriculum earlier (i.e. at Masters Level). While the PhD programme is only available to practitioners who have already set up their studios and are ready to invest in questioning and re-framing their own practices, it seemed that there were methodologies and an approach that could be employed within the LSA to discuss the question of ‘why and how’ with relation to process and context. At the heart of his premise, as described in *Mastering Architecture*, van Schaik proposes that research and peer review are vital to the growth and innovation of a practitioner^{vii}, concluding:

“Designers who become creative innovators have all found a way to second-order learning: a process of observing themselves as learners and taking charge of the curation of themselves as learners”^{viii}

Taking this back into the school the model suggests that by creating a space between practicing (the three days a week employment) and speculating within the programme, there is the opportunity for the student to research and test their ideas, ideals and preconceptions in real time. The students are placed in a ‘live’ situation where they are both practicing architect and scholar in a position where they can influence and calibrate both scenarios.

Critical Practice: Placement

Working in an office allows the student to gain a view from the ground where they operate as part of a team or system. They have been asked to develop a ‘Critical Practice Manual’, seen as an in-depth research tool, and an ongoing project conducted in the present. Using the workplace as the principal site of investigation, the manual explores the relationship between process and product, ideas and outcome. Group seminars set up a number of questions that allows the cohort to start interrogating and learning more about their practice through traditional research and reading thus understanding the nature of the office by working there. Thus a dynamic relationship is set up which oscillates between participating in the daily life of an architect then standing back in order to interrogate it. Significantly the practice networks are invited to engage in the process in order, perhaps, to leverage the opportunity to develop their own perception. In particular we can see this approach aligning with the process Flora Samuel describes in her book encouraging architectural practices to invest in research activities:

“To do research is to work through a problem systematically and reflectively and then, ideally, to disseminate the results of that research”^{ix}

In other words, research creates an audience who may choose to take action (consult, commission, feedback, share...) which in turn forms a virtuous circle where input affords output.

Critical Practice: Theory

Titled ‘Methods and Models’ this lecture series unpacks the role of theories and philosophy in the C20th and C21st, asking key questions as to their influence and critical success or failure. Here the students are required to produce a Critical Practice Manifesto, which is a kind of mission statement for them to start measuring themselves by. The explicit question at the heart of this is: “How do you see your practice in the future?” By triangulating between the worlds of theory and practice the programme aims to develop a critical understanding of the agency of the architect in relation to others in the construction industry, the wider creative economy and the landscape of critical theory. In considering the recent past we need to recognise Adrian Forty’s notion of historical truth is relative and requires us to develop an appetite to challenge our preconceptions, even our education:

“To concentrate on the making of architecture is to miss the point that architecture, like all other cultural objects, is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it”^x

Research by Design

A further important strand of informative new thinking deals with the role of intuitive thinking and *research by design* through asking questions that interrogate what kind of knowledge can only be gained through design and whether the notion of ‘designerly ways of knowing’^{xi} has traction.

“Although architecture is taught within the walls of academia, its realization happens outside those walls...Confrontation with society, with actors and contextual complexity cannot be denied.

On the contrary, it is offering the most rich and potential learning environment that can be imagined".^{xii}

Attending and presenting at the 2012 'Theory by Design' academic conference in Antwerp, showed that there was a growing concern within European architectural education that by privileging process-led design studios that often use abstract theoretical methodologies to create form, there is a huge gap in understanding how synthetic design can be both understood and validated. Significantly the conference came about because the faculty of design at Artesis University College was about to become part of Artesis Plantijn University College, and their academic credentials had been brought into question. The staff identified the sticking point to be that much of their research was seen as 'artistic and intuitive' rather than scientific and quantifiable. Thus the conference sought to explore and validate their understanding that design itself, as an activity, has research outcomes. By bringing together teachers, practitioners as well as those who do both, the outcome was refreshing because it revealed a broad spectrum of influences united by the underlying sense that ideas and positions can be developed through the act of designing rather than the act of critically reading the design process. Reflecting on this in context of the LSA programme, it makes sense to allow the design project to exist both within both the studio of the school and the office, and to use the different contexts to feed off one another, to learn, adjust and nudge.

Alternative Agendas

As a practitioner who teaches, I am wary of offering up a dogmatic credo that can only lead to a single interpretation. Instead my instinct has been to present students a map, pinpointing coordinates and intersections of architectural thinking. By way of contrast the lecture series given by the polemicist Peter Buchanan refers to his own thoughts published first in the *Architectural Review* under the title 'The Big Rethink'^{xiii} where the influence of the 'starchitect' is scrutinised and the apparent lack of interest in environmental issues challenged, suggesting:

"Many of today's most accomplished buildings are by highly professional mainstream practices, perhaps partly because of the resources they can command, such as collaborating with the best consultants. These architects, not the avant-garde, constitute the leading edge of practice that other architects study and emulate."

For Buchanan the crisis in architectural place making can be pinned on the appetite to create ever more new forms, new conditions and icons seemingly borne out of a response to the rate of change witnessed in today's society. The antidote, he suggests, is for architects to develop a much more robust critical voice, to ride the waves of fashionable ideologies and aesthetics, and to accept that responding intelligently and thoughtfully to a given situation can lead to a collectively better world. At an anecdotal level it was interesting to observe that when interviewing the students for the first intake, many of their questions revolved around whether the LSA was going to talk about ethics, the environment as well as entrepreneurial skills. There is a growing sense among the next generation that global issues such as climate change action, neoliberal politics, pollution and migration all must inform the position of the architect. No longer is the debate about style, rather about action. In her book 'This Changes Everything', Naomi Klein suggests that immediate and radical intervention is required to stem the unfolding environmental disaster:

"It is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message – spoken in the language of fires, floods, droughts, and extinctions – telling us that we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet."^{xiv}

As a critique of capitalism and the global economic model, the book is perhaps at its most persuasive when it shows how grass roots collective action, though the use of shared media, is able to affect big change. The education of the architect is no longer about developing a great personal portfolio with a unique signature, it needs to be about taking a position and developing a strategy that can make a difference.

Collaborating Practices

“All of us (architects, artists, critics, curators, *amateurs*) need a narrative to focus our practices – situated stories, not grand *récits*”^{xv}

The pairing of students with the LSA’s network of practices was extensively debated, concluding in more of an ‘arranged marriage’ than a personal choice. That said, all students were interviewed by the practices, and a small percentage on both sides decided the chemistry was not right, so alternative options were made available. While this may seem undemocratic, the thinking we shared with the cohort was that in order to learn something new it was important to move out of a perceived comfort zone, therefore working with an unfamiliar practice should be seen as an opportunity. In general this seems to have worked. The model clearly states that the contract between the student and the practice must reflect the standard employment terms appropriate to each office. Furthermore there is no explicit teaching during the three days the student works. Each practice was asked to nominate a mentor whom the student could use as a sounding board. A meeting between all the practices was held to discuss their role prior to students starting. It is important that throughout the process of developing their manual and manifesto there is an interested party who can act as an informal consultant. The content of the academic output is shaped by the students own experiences (and their gathering of evidence), the formal lectures and seminar input.

By contrast the ambitious ‘Think Tank’ project seeks to group 5 or 6 practices with the same number of students, working together to develop a research strand. Here the agenda is negotiated between the school, the students and the practices in order to create a platform resulting in collaborative propositional outcomes. The current areas include; Architectural Agency, Unstable City, New Knowledge, Emerging Tools, and Adaptive Typologies. Concurring with Kester Rattenbury we may agree:

“Architects need to give their tacit working design methodologies a voice, this involves stepping back from the design and looking critically at what they do, articulating their particular way of working and analysing their tactics”^{xvi}

Thus the mechanism of asking students and practices to develop a research area which gives rise to a body of work creates a new kind of space for speculation. Here the practices are not leaving their office and moving into the school in order to engage in propositional thinking, rather they are working within their organisation which is allowing boundaries and edge conditions to be embraced. Our collective hope is that this process of negotiated positions and peripatetic engagement goes beyond the old fashioned notion of apprenticeship and give way to the endorsement of collaborative tactics, of strategic testing and most importantly dissolving the artificial rite of passage that the part three exam has excerpted over legitimising the status of the would-be architect.

The Future

It is not an overstatement to say the role of the architect is in flux as we know that the landscape for acting and participating as an architect has radically changed with the rise of new technologies and networks. In his book ‘Open Source Architecture’, co-author Carlo Ratti unpacks what he sees as the end of Modernism and the birth of a new kind of practice, where design information is connected and networked. Perhaps more importantly he suggests that this is political:

“Put simply, open –source software has achieved an unprecedented level of technological sophistication through communal design, and it has caused a seismic tremor in the socio-political establishment.”^{xvii}

Furthermore the process of engagement is understood by Johar as a system that can be influenced and nudged rather than a set of rules to abide by.^{xviii}

Risky Business

If the students are able to develop and grow in a context that critically nurtures their own working practices within a space where group work is normalised we hope to redefine the culture of architectural practice as a joined-up endeavour. In order to frame this opportunity we also need to introduce the idea of risk taking. There will inevitably be a tension between the almost infinite outcomes of a student project whose boundaries are flexible and the pragmatic response to a series of prescribed conditions that define the 'real' world. So in order to critically reflect in both situations we need to engender an attitude and understanding to risk taking as well as comprehending and learning from failure:

"Responsible risk-taking is critical to the iterative process of design...(and) can strengthen the innovative process as designers struggle to solve important problems."^{xix}

In other words one of the common, though often invisible, links between the different contexts of practice is the question of how far to pursue an idea and the value of making calculated decisions that may fail? In practice we see time and time again the role of the architect curtailed by flawed regulations, client direction and self-regulation. However in the new educational economy where students are customers, accruing staggering debt, we see the trend to become risk averse in order to pass; where the risk of any kind of failure is seen as too great. Coupled with a profession that has been de-risked there is the potential for outcomes to be dumbed down at best, so we need to incentivise and re-frame the research-led design project as an opportunity whose resolution may be incomplete, flawed or imperfect. Critical understanding and learning should not be judged only on outcome but through recognising the rigour that imaginative iterative testing and reworking reveals:

"This imagination, therefore, is not the imagination of a detached dreamer: it grows out of the real, fuelled by the very uncertainty of the rationalists and utopists found so threatening. It is an imaginative vision that both projects new futures and also embraces their imperfections".^{xx}

What have we learned so far?

The LSA is work in progress, with students juggling work placement with their studies, staff who are all on fractional posts and practices who are participating in the margins. Our practice relies, indeed thrives, on the idea of an extended network, on the institution as a loose fit of alliances rather than a campus, and the belief that the students and practice can drive change. In our own way we begin to define a new age of open source architecture:

"If tomorrow's buildings and cities will now be more like computers – than machines - Open Source Architecture provides an open, collaborative framework for writing their operating software."^{xxi}

Notes

- ¹ Harriet Harris, *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education and the British Tradition* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2015), p. 188.
- ² Indy Johar, (2015), *Towards a Future Architecture*. *Open Architecture*, p.1.
- ³ Peter Cook, (2015), *Killing Creativity*, *The Architectural Review*, p. 12.
- ⁴ *LSA Student Handbook 2015*.
- ⁵ Mel Dodd, *Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education and the British Tradition* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2015), p 22.
- ⁶ *The London School of Architecture, 2015, People*. Online: <http://www.the-lsa.org/people> (Accessed 2016).
- ⁷ Leon Van Schaik, *Mastering Architecture: Becoming a Creative Innovator in Practice* (Academy Press, 2005), p. 19.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- ⁹ Anne Dye, Flora Samuel, *Demystifying Architectural Research: Adding Value to Your Practice* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2015), p. 145.
- ¹⁰ Adrian Forty, *Foreword*. *Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture in the City*. Ed. Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Alicia Pivaro and Jane Rendell. (London: Routledge, 1996)
- ¹¹ Nigel Cross, (1982), *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, *Design Studies*, 3(4) p. 221-227.
- ¹² Els De Vos, Johan De Walsche. *Why Theory by Design is an Issue*, *Theory by Design*. (Antwerp: Artesis University College, 2012), p. 11.
- ¹³ Peter Buchanan. *The Big Rethink Part 1: Towards a Complete Architecture*, *Architectural Review* (2011)
- ¹⁴ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. XXXX.
- ¹⁵ Hal Foster, Rem Koolhaas, *Junkspace/Running Room* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2013), p. 73.
- ¹⁶ Kester Rattenbury, (2014), *Revealing Secrets*, *Architectural Review*, p. 1.
- ¹⁷ Carlo Ratti, *Open Source Architecture* (Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2015), p. 71.
- ¹⁸ Indy Johar, *Future Practice: Conversations from the Edge of Architecture*. By Rory Hyde, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 46.
- ¹⁹ Maria V Miller, 2014, *Habits of Mind and the Iterative Process in Design Taking Responsible Risk*, AAE 2014 Conference Proceedings, Iowa State University, p. 78.
- ²⁰ Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends* (MIT Press, 2013), p. 192.
- ²¹ Ratti, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

20. Home Truths

PO Box 3. Project Orange. 2016

Interior Investment

Continuing our inter-office conversation 'Housing, House, Home' we need to question the current neoliberal perception that building homes is primarily seen as a financial investment (for the developer) with the 'promise' to the buyer of a lifestyle and an asset that will inevitably increase in value. This premise has contributed not only to the housing crisis in London, but more fundamentally erased the architectural conviction which understood housing as a civic and community action-led proposition. From intelligently integrating a building into the fabric of the city to creating homes that were functional and characterful, we now see iceberg developments divorced from their context and fitted out as bland four star hotels. The public appear to have been duped by glossy brochures, twinkly CGI's and an aspiration to join the property ladder at any price. On reflection have we, as a profession, been guilty of assisting in propagating these myths?

Cookie Cutting

At Project Orange we see the seismic difference between designing a house or home for an individual/family and proposing a 'roll-out' scheme for a development. With an individual we invest in the creation of a brief, understanding the particular circumstances and responding in a sympathetic and hopefully life-enhancing manner. The process is long, complex and necessarily emotional resulting in a project all parties feel invested in. It is a home. When it comes to the question of apartments within a development we find ourselves in a situation where the brief is a given – "it's what sells". When questioning this, we are told that the marketing team know best. There is no room for empathy and generosity. Ironically when it comes to the exterior architecture there is much less interference or opinion unless it relates to the density (read profit) or a perception of popularity (read icon). It seems that the commodification of the home as a product is completely market-led. But why don't people object and why are they apparently content with cookie cutter homes that are small, inflexible, banal and overpriced? In part the housing crisis means there is little choice. However it also suggests that buyers have lost touch with the idea of what a home means, and the sense of community that forms around groups of households. As Reiner de Graff recently reported:

"Judgement of architecture is deferred to the market. The 'architectural style' of buildings no longer conveys and ideological choice but a commercial one."

Estate Agency

In an effort to offer more creative and flexible homes we undertook a more experimental approach with a live project to see if we could push the idea of customisation with a developer client. Until recently it used to be possible; you could choose your kitchen and bathroom for instance. Not anymore as it is apparently too expensive. What if we figured out a range of materials that had similar properties (thickness, cost, robustness etc) that could be substituted easily without any substantial changes? To do this we created a single rendered view and exchanged the materials to illustrate the completely different ambiances that could be achieved – brick or timber floor, white or coloured kitchen, blue or yellow walls, exposed or closed ceilings etc. Each image conjured up a different sense of 'home'. While this met with enthusiasm, the predictable argument came back that it was too costly. What transpires is that it is not the price of the materials or even the workmanship – it is the headache and expense of project managing differences. Next, inspired by the Masters Housing in Dessau, we moved to an even simpler concept – what if we clad the apartment in materials that could be painted: kitchen doors, blank doors, MDF panels, plaster walls etc and created an app where potential clients could play with the colours and textures of their apartment. This was presented to the marketing team, who responded that they were concerned people might choose the wrong colour which would be detrimental to the development. Maybe there could be 2 or 3 different 'looks' over the whole development. What can they mean? We are left feeling that the role of the architect/designer is marginalised and that design is merely the packaging for a financial exchange.

Homing instincts

So we have to work in other ways, we have to be less transparent, we need to become double agents and practice our resistance incognito. Not because we disdain our clients but because we believe there is more to offer. Does this sound arrogant? It could do, but that is not the starting point. Our evidence base is that the designs we have undertaken for individuals is more creative and that the outcomes are specialised, personal and negotiated. In our own homes we chop and change, we personalise, we refresh and we live in spaces we have designed. Our instincts therefore lead us to see that the lack of design, the basic material choices and inflexible layouts in larger developments work against the idea of allowing families to create their own home. Look at the apartments in the Barbican with their strong aesthetic that is robust, resilient and characterful compared to our own specifications where we often end up with painted plasterboard, engineered wood flooring, plastic switches, particle board cabinets and cheap down lights. Little of it is recycled or recyclable and there is a 10 year lifespan dictated by the NHBC insurance cover. We therefore need a new commitment between client, architect and purchaser to provide a home of lasting value. We need a manifesto.

Homiefesto

- 1. Design houses and housing that are robust, resilient and can be knocked about in the future.**
- 2. Specify materials that are aesthetically rich, resource light that can be repurposed. No more landfill for the future.**
- 3. Use design to maximise the local situation. From window sizes through to storage, the specificity adds value.**
- 4. Forget integrated technology. This changes all the time and is a gimmick. Install services that can be exchanged in the future.**
- 5. A place to go outside is more than just a projecting deck/balcony. Creating a connection to nature means designing a garden – however small.**
- 6. Consider wear and tear in 25 years time, even in 50 years time. From the outside to inside design details that can be repaired, re-finished and modified by real people (not specialists).**
- 7. Never have a washing machine in the kitchen. Every home needs a proper utility room (not a cupboard). Minimum size 1200mm x 2000mm.**
- 8. If you cannot achieve any of the above, then design a well considered shell, with the minimum requirements so people can buy cheap space in which they can craft their own homes.**

21. Down to Earth

A Gendered Profession. Published RIBA. 2016

Introduction

In her conclusion to 'This Changes Everything', Naomi Klein's climate change wake-up call, she suggests that the most likely way to influence political change (and therefore critical environmental re-balancing) is to encourage grass root, people-driven movements. She notes that one such precedent is the gay and lesbian rights movement. Her 'architects' of change are seen as a wide community whose goal is to challenge the status quo of the extraction industry, and thereby the capitalist system.

This chapter seeks to explore whether the tactics of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) architect activists have a place in the debate on reimagining the world, as a result of their own experiences, coming back down to earth.

The Social(ist) agenda

*"The Socialist movement is not the coinage of one man, of one body of men, or of one nation; it is the expression at once of a necessary phase of economic evolution, and of a yearning which fills the hearts of the people of all countries and nations throughout the civilised world to-day – a yearning which individuals may formulate, but which no individual can create."*¹

When William Morris penned his pamphlets under the umbrella of The Socialist Platform in 1885, it was in a context of huge social change brought about largely by technical advances. To him the class system was seen as the mechanism of wealth creation for some but mainly poverty and entrapment for the many. He sought nothing short of a new ideology for society and invited ordinary working people, with their Unions, to join what he called an international 'Socialist commonwealth'.²

One hundred and twenty years on we have reached a different crisis, yet one that also demands unified collective action. Morris was prescient in his assumption that the capitalist project was on course to marginalize and divide peoples, and that its reach would be global. He was also visionary in anticipating a future where the cause and effect of mechanization, and now digitization, was irrevocably connected to wealth creation and immense poverty, as well as unhealthy living conditions and the degradation of the environment. Returning to Klein's own writing we find that her argument pivots around the inability of (capitalist) corporations to change or adapt in the face of overwhelming evidence that so much of our industrial and extraction practices are producing toxic by-products and environmental disaster stories. It appears the project of globalization has led to the dominance of big business resulting in big mistakes, not only for the environment but for people, and in particular those that are marginalized. Her invitation to change is echoed in the words of architect Indy Johar, whose mantra is 'socially driven sustainability', reflecting:

*"Change can no longer be the responsibility or the capability of a single actor, organization or domain. Change needs movements. Movements of actors both on the demand and supply side of innovation and intervention".*³

Indeed the snowballing call for climate change action has been increasingly well documented in the media, to the ire of the oil, gas and coal industries. In the run up to the 2015 Climate Change Conference, COP21⁴, there were huge numbers of high profile demonstrations rallying politicians to take note. In London the Campaign Against Climate Change⁵ estimated 70,000 people took part, united by the call for people to push for the urgent and radical action needed to prevent the catastrophic destabilization of global climate. Similarly in the USA, the People's Climate Movement organizes hundreds of local events:

“The People’s Climate Movement hopes local organizers will develop creative, inspirational events that call attention to the urgent need for immediate action on the climate crisis while highlighting the range of communities and constituencies involved in this new movement for climate justice.”⁶

Tellingly, the UK’s architectural community seems to be less vocal with precious little call for action from the RIBA, not least because it is estimated more than 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions are buildings-related and only going to rise. Why is that architects, who are uniquely positioned to make a difference in our planned future, are so silent?

Linking arms

While the link between LGBT activism and climate change action may seem initially obtuse, it has been insightful to track these subject areas in the press over the course of 2015. For example the contents of a speech given at the White House on September 22nd 2015 by Pope Francis, who in the same breath called for international support of gay marriage and climate change action while addressing the crowd.⁸ Around the same time, responding to Obama’s surprise decision to reject the construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline, Time Magazine suggested that this action represented a critical hinge point in the debate; not because of the scale of this particular pipe line, but because the act itself was symbolic of change:

“Every movement needs symbols, litmus tests and roles. It needs clear-cut battles and clear-cut victories. Movements need a Selma to get to a Civil Rights Act, a Stonewall to get to gay marriage, a Boston tea Party to get to independence.”⁷

The case of the Keystone XL pipeline is important because it proved to be a tipping point: a moment where local resistance could no longer be ignored. Indeed post COP21 such cases increasingly seem to reflect that common sense has prevailed, illustrating that in the face of overwhelming evidence, new narratives have the capacity to be adopted. It is testament therefore to the power of grass-root initiatives that substantial and meaningful political change can be brought about by previously invisible groups of people. Unlike the socialist preachers in Victorian Britain described by Morris, today’s activists come from diverse backgrounds and geographical regions, united by a commitment to massive change.

The potential success of the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference lies in the agreed text that represents a consensus of 195 participating parties; in other words, the majority of countries on the planet. Could we be witnessing the first truly global treatise? Looking at the various independent lobbying groups and non-state parties, the contribution by WECAN (Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network) is particularly worth capturing in full:

“WECAN engages women grassroots activists, Indigenous and business leaders, scientists, policy makers, farmers, academics and culture-shapers in collaboration. Our goal is to stop the escalation of climate change and environmental and community degradation, while accelerating the implementation of sustainability solutions through women’s empowerment, partnerships, hands-on trainings, advocacy campaigns, and political, economic, social and environmental action.”⁸

Importantly, this inclusive mission statement both names the problem and proposes a strategy. It draws on the legacy of women’s rights activism in bringing structure and purpose to the environmental crisis. Similarly, New York based ‘Queers for the Climate’, when asked how the LGBT community could help fight climate change, were clear on their position. They were a community who knew how to organize and fight as well as having experience in telling stories and sharing messages that have the power to move people into action.⁹

“The many rights won by the gay community wasn’t just in the courts and in the legislatures; it was really just family to family, friend to friend, workplace to workplace.”¹⁰

Queers for the Climate founder Joseph Huff-Hannon, underscores that agents for change are often found close to home, within the community and the workplace, which can then be galvanized and leveraged into a powerful voice that has traction. It is the people and the stories they tell that propel the cause, rather than the facts themselves. He also talks about the innate

creative talent within the LGBT community as an asset when developing tactics that challenge the status quo. The use of humour, design and empathy are all tools and traits that have been harnessed in the campaign for equality and understanding. In our globalized, connected world we find that the narrative for key drivers of change are often reported as being political, economical or both, but rarely social or creative. So could it be that when it comes to architects and their profession, one of the very qualities that describe an architect, creativity, has been sidelined in dealing with the need for change?

Designing change

Returning to the UK profession of architecture, it has been well documented that there is an increasing tension between the RIBA and the wishes of its members for change. Despite the instigation of diversity policies, female presidents and role model projects to name a few; the 'old boys club' label still sticks. A recent critical article in the Guardian quotes Danna Walker, chair of Architects for Change as saying:

"I can understand why people think the RIBA is a remote thing, not connected to day-to-day practice. The way we all practice has changed, and we need something to reflect that."¹¹

Surely this is the nub of the issue? If the critique surrounding the relevance and activities of the wider profession, the RIBA and our educational system are to be answered, we need new and inspiring stories to be written that reflect positive change as well as areas that require action. The reason allegations of institutional sexism and racism abound is because the RIBA appears to resist change, and prefers to act behind closed doors. It struggles to be inclusive and to inspire, despite a revolving door policy of electing a new president every two years. Indeed the notion that the role of the architect is in crisis thrives precisely because it's previous incarnation 'at the top of the tree' no longer fits; and until this is accepted it is likely there will be limited progress. Too much time is spent bemoaning the emerging new order and not enough time is invested in crafting new opportunities and spaces in which to act. Architects should be part of an ethical system and be prepared to take on the causes of our time. As Jeremy Till highlights, the crisis of the profession is one that evades change, refusing to recalibrate itself in the world we find ourselves, suggesting we must:

"...move from the idea of an architect as expert problem-solver to that of architect as citizen sense-maker; a move for a reliance on the impulsive imagination of the long genius to that of collaborative ethical imagination, from clinging towards notion of total control a relaxed acceptance of letting go."¹²

It also requires us to consider where new ideas, new ideologies and focus come from. Is it top-down, from the heart of the establishment, or is it from the people whom it serves? In other words is policy something we are asked to sign up to or is it something we create together? If it is the latter, then perhaps it is time to shout a bit louder?

The idea that the architectural profession is out of kilter with the zeitgeist is as much an issue for other creative industries. Addressing the fashion world, veteran consultant Lidewij Edelkoort warned about the dangers of an industry placing itself outside of society and how its own education system is redundant:

"We still educate our young people to become catwalk designers; unique individuals, whereas this society is now about exchange and the new economy and working together in teams and groups."¹³

Interchanging 'catwalk' with 'icon' and you could equally apply this to most schools of architecture where cherished notions of authority, genius and leadership coalesce around the efforts of an individual. Yet while change is in the air, there remains a real need for the education of the architect to be reframed. Where might we search for new strategies, models and inspiration?

Setting a New (a)gender

“Despite the fact that ‘going green’ may not be directly related to issues of sexuality, advocating for change is something with which many in the LGBT community have experience.”¹⁴

Historically we find that big change is most often either affected by the powerful and privileged few, or by the concerted actions of many. Considering the mandate fought for, and largely won by the LGBT community, we see that creative action and the tactics of inclusion have led to better equality, same-sex marriage and a political voice. Here, the few became many. The intersection between the LGBT community and climate change activists is the common ground in their belief that to instigate change you first have to raise awareness in your own backyard. The next step on the journey is to share your story, and to find new audiences who can empathize, understand and support fresh initiatives. Crucially, however, Klein tells us that new operative models must demonstrate that they improve on the existing one, bringing benefits along the way. The ‘hair-shirt’ cliché of the green movement in the nineteen-seventies took a long time to shake off because it carried negative connotations, that often demanded personal sacrifice rather than offer positive choices.

However when the guardians of power choose to ignore, or pay lip service to, significant and urgent calls for change, they risk alienating parts of their community or electorate. Often this leads to a contagious sense of disenchantment and anger, that in turn gives rise to public demonstrations, tactical campaigning and front-page headlines. This confrontational model of people versus government, was never truly the DNA of a democracy that promised government by the people. The answer has to propose alternative models and roadmaps towards the future. Yet it seems when it comes to the question of human rights - environment, gender, identity - the fight is not over.

A survey conducted by the AJ in 2016 added further data supporting the observation that the RIBA is struggling to stay in tune with its members.¹⁵ Although there is evidence the body has begun to consult more widely, the decision to create a series of subgroups (e.g. Architects for Change, Small Practice Group, Sustainable Futures Group, Traditional Architecture Group), all of whom represent different aspects of ‘the problem’, appears to alienate members further by ring-fencing minorities. It seems that the model of satellites orbiting the sun is no longer a useful or current mode of practice. A healthy democratic architecture culture needs to celebrate diversity as a central aim: the governance needs to operate transparently and openly; council must show they are listening and they need to affect radical change. It has to reset its ambitions to become a different kind of organization – one that shouts louder, waves its banner higher and cares about people and the environment. By contrast Stonewall are very clear about their mandate:

“We have laid deep foundations across Britain - in some of our greatest institutions - so our communities can continue to find ways to flourish, and individuals can reach their full potential”¹⁶

Wouldn't it be great if this applied to architects and architecture as well? Right now, there is a long way to go. When asked to comment on the results of the 2015 survey into LGBT attitudes within the construction industry, spokesperson Matteo Lissana talks about the huge resistance to change and the struggle for gender equality. He refers to out-dated modes of practice that choose to compartmentalise diversity, ultimately alienating a vast talent pool. This sounds much like the RIBA's format for focus groups. As further evidence of how out of touch the profession of architecture has become, not one company from Stonewall's annual Workplace Equality index is from the construction industry and yet all of the Armed Forces are included. While the RIBA is reported to have been ‘disappointed’ this hardly suggests a call to arms. The survey also reported that only 27% of LGBT employees feel comfortable being open about their sexuality at client meetings. Once again we see the failure of our profession to take on the challenges facing architects in society.

Coming Back Down to Earth

Having a down-to-earth attitude suggests one's feet are on the ground; being pragmatic, practical and realistic. It is the opposite of having one's head in the clouds. When it comes to understanding

the challenges faced by climate change and gender equality, architect's need to stand firmly on the earth and be grounded; both are issues of human rights. We need to recognize that individually we are not able to 'solve the problem', but that we can still influence change, we can still be effective and together we can have a voice. With reference to climate change; what's at stake is not just the shape of our own towns and cities our lifestyles, it's the whole ecosystem. It's the nature of our planet. Over the past two hundred years we have accelerated the destruction of the environment to the point where it is now in peril. We are finding out that as a species we have become the architects of our own catastrophe.

Visiting the 'This Changes Everything' website, we see it gathering traction and showcasing groups acting under the banner of 'Beautiful Solutions':

"The climate change crisis is not just a threat – it is an opportunity to chart a different course. Beautiful Solutions gathers the most promising and contagious strategies for building a more just, democratic, and resilient world".¹⁷

This inspires us to make a choice. Do we carry on, business as normal, or do we strive for change, seeing it as a new opportunity? Do we challenge our institutions and our politicians or do we continue to indulge in self-reflexive arguments? Can we learn from the creative strategies of the LGBT activists who have fought hard for equality within the community? I suggest we can and we must. It's time to come back down to earth and act as the architects of our collective destiny. It is what we were educated to do. We can change the future.

The final word goes to Gerod Rody, founder of 'Out for Sustainability' who sums up his own experience:

"This planet is our home and caring about it is not just a straight-hippie thing anymore ... When I came out, it opened my perspective on the world. I realized how connected we are, whether we like it or not. Once you wake up to your own sexuality there is no going back. The same is true for understanding we can make real progress in the environmental challenges of our time. It may be tough, but together we can see the next generations of kids, whether queer or straight, do more than survive. I know we can see them thrive."¹⁸

Notes

¹ N. Klein (2014), *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (Penguin: London), p.453

² W. Morris (1885), *The Socialist Platform*, The Commonweal. Vol 1, No 1, (Socialist League, London)

³ I. Johar (2015), *The Challenge of Massive Change*, Dark Matter Laboratories (Online) Available at: <https://medium.com/hub-engine>

⁴ The twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) took place from 30 November to 11 December 2015, in Paris, France.

⁵ *The Campaign Against Climate Change*, Climate March London: 29 November 2015 (<http://www.campaigncc.org>)

⁶ S. Sachs (2015), *Environmental Activities*, Indigenous Policy Journal. Vol 26, No 3, (<http://www.indigenouspolicy.org/>)

⁷ The Pope (2015), 'Pope Francis' visit to the White House', Washington D.C., US. (Retrieved from <http://www.popefrancisvisit.com>)

⁸ K.Ilgunas (2015), What Obama's Rejection of Keystone Means for the Climate Fight. *Time Magazine* (<http://time.com/4130621/paris-climate-conference-keystone/>)

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¹⁰ B. Merchant (2014), 'Queers for the Climate' Are Trying to Save Fire Island from Rising Seas', *Motherboard* (<http://motherboard.vice.com/read/queers-for-the-climate-fire-island>)

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¹⁵ K. Russo (2015) Interviewed by H.Richmond for 'Why are gays more friendly?' *Grist*

¹⁶ L. Mark (2016), 'AJ survey results: RIBA is out of touch but not yet out of time', *Architects' Journal*

¹⁷ *Stonewall* (2015) 'Our Mission'

¹⁷ 'Welcome to Beautiful Solutions' *This Changes Everything* (<https://solutions.thischangeseverything.org>)

¹⁸ G. Rody (2015), Interviewed by H.Richmond for 'Why are gays more friendly?' *Grist*

22. Climate Models: Bending the Rules

Architectures and Feminisms Conference. Stockholm University. 2016

“July 2016 was the hottest month the world has endured since records began in 1880”.

Model Behaviour

Architects love physical models: they can be empowering and yet cute; they can be made of junk yet be profoundly spatial; they can be perfect or they can be an approximation. At best a model is a way of understanding a context, a scale and a form. Conceptually they were seldom the thing itself but rather a tool for representation. Today the idea of ‘model’ has been disrupted; it has morphed into a series of phenomena through gaming, art-practice and predictive science to becoming a fetishised purpose and the object itself. Our gaze is distracted and we struggle to separate fact from fiction, dream from reality. We model ourselves to fit into a world we believe we can control; but the truth could not be more different. The behaviour of our model is capricious.

Traditional forms of climate modelling take data from the atmosphere, oceans land surface and ice in order to study and predict future climate trends. The World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) recently reported:

“While as a climate research community we do not tune our modelling efforts to achieve specific temperature targets, we must be aware that political interest in these targets is high and growing.”

It is increasingly clear that society, whether political or social, is unable to conceptualize a future that will be progressively disrupted by climate change. Whilst the weather is understood to be both natural and sometimes destructive, the idea of it being fuelled by our own pollution seems impossible to digest (although it is actually happening). To many, while the question of futurity is mediated through a belief in Geoengineering technology, that may even be able to disentangle or at least mitigate our own mess, this option belongs to a far future, rather than a near present that is measured in decades if not years. As architect and critic Peter Buchanan describes, the crisis we face is that the model has evolved:

“Constant change has been the backdrop of our lives. But now the nature of change has changed. Instead of, or besides, being subject to the forward propulsion of ‘progress’, we are in the throes of comprehensive systemic collapse.”

We must necessarily engage with perceptions of the ‘modern’, where modernisation equates to progress and progress equates to success. Increasingly critics suggest that the project of modernity and unsustainability are intertwined. David Roberts suggests that this is a scale problem, which pitches climate against the individual:

“Climate is so unfathomably large and diffuse, and our actions — individually, even as countries — so local and parochial in comparison. It’s difficult to live with that gap.”

So, if we know that big-change is happening, and we recognise that something has to be done, then we need to engage with those in power. Not surprisingly this has proven to be anything but straightforward. But who are ‘we’?

Straight to the Point

One of the conflicts at the heart of the identity question remains one of labels – queer theory often pitches LGBT identity against the heteronormative paradigm as a binary opposition where, as Jose Munoz states:

“Queerness is essentially about the rejection of the here and now and insistence on potentiality of concrete possibility of another world”

This reflects an underlying belief that normative existence is seen as the true blueprint for the future. However in light of the knowledge that climate change is and will continue to disrupt the circumstances

that have created the arguably successful Neocapitalist project, we require new narratives that recognise the entanglement of identities as well as an understanding that the future will not be conditioned by what is or what has been, but what it may have to be. Even if current generations will not be affected by the build-up of greenhouse gases, there is no question that the next generation will be. And yet to fully understand the question of futurity we need to interrogate the common presentation of the future as belonging to straight, white nuclear families. Certainly we are used to seeing pictures of 'happy families' with scaremongering slogans suggesting that the heteronormative lifestyle is under threat. Furthermore by pushing the connection between family and home with environmental health and wellbeing, the responsibility is privatised or at least deferred by the very system that causes environmental instability. As ecofeminist author Greta Gaard writes, it is significant that those who link queer with anti-nature claim to value nature – when in fact these are the very people who sanction destructive behaviours.

Returning to the common cultural paradigm that cisgender is natural and therefore, by extension, belongs to nature in contrast with queerness which is understood as unnatural and therefore not belonging to the natural order, we see how redundant this two-dimensional position has become. Indeed this belief is convenient and useful precisely because it validates the stable, powerful minority; whereas looking in the other direction at environmentally unstable settings we see the poor, those who work in low paid jobs and those with few choices. In other words climate chaos has been created out of societal inequalities with those most at risk being the least responsible. However this pervasive view has been called into question, not least through the lens of ecocriticism, to the point at which Nicole Seymour is able to suggest that in order to empathise with environmentalism it is necessary to do so through a queer eye. Her arguments invite us to rethink what we know about our relationship to 'mother nature' in terms of gendered readings and power structures. This kind of radical re-thinking is necessary if we are to have a chance of critiquing other more tangible and dangerous responses.

We want NUCLEAR power
But the question remains: R-U-CLEAN?
The answer appears to be: UNCLEAR

In 2006, in an extraordinary apparent turn-around, environmental activist James Lovelock wrote that he supported nuclear power. To many this seemed to be a reversal of all that he had held dear; the idea that humanity would introduce further jeopardy to an otherwise fragile world. However reading his book 'The Revenge of Gaia' one senses the deep pain with which the author has reached this conclusion. His argument is that things have got so bad, we do not have time to incrementally repair the damage; and that given society is addicted to electricity, he suggests nuclear generators may be the least harmful way to produce power for now. He also warns over any reliance on technology as a permanent fix, reminding us that we can never replicate the natural process' and cycles of the earth:

"The idea that humans are yet intelligent enough to serve as stewards on the Earth is amongst the most hubristic ever".

He makes the point that we all know we need to do something, but what? Looking from the position of deep ecology, where the right to wellbeing of all the living and non-living is seen as equal, we begin to sense that the very foundations of our civilization were predicated on the idea that the world was so big, it was an endless resource. We have since come to know that this is not the case. We are running out of space and materials – poisoning the earth in the process – but more importantly we have run out of time. Whether nuclear power is the answer is a big question, and I doubt it, there is a surge in building such power plants, so clearly it is happening. However this is not a sign that government is subscribing to the Lovelock model of Gaia, but rather the re-emergence of the lucrative nuclear energy industry. In the UK the £18bn Hinkley Point deal was signed in September 2016, making it the most expensive infrastructure project in the world, ever. We seem to be hedging our bets.

Risky Business

Inevitably we come round to discussing the question of risk; to ourselves, to the environment and to the future. We have seen how the idea of the future is often framed by a hetero/wealthy/white viewpoint, even when they are talking about threats, and where the threats are to their offspring. However the realization that this is not just a risk to the future, but a risk to the present is beginning to gain traction. Naomi Klein talks about how China is fast becoming an eco-conscious nation, not least

because the children of the new establishment are sickly due to the toxic urban environments of the power cities.

The threat of climate change is also registering as a matter of national security, with the Pentagon concerned about the 1,774 coastal military installations the US operates; they refer to it as a 'threat multiplier'. However the problem remains how to model this threat? In theory science should be able to provide useful data, and yet has proved risky time and time again. The Australian government have admitted that the emission cuts they undertook to implement at the COP 2015 summit were based on false data. Independent models have suggested little will change in the next 15 years. Meanwhile globally, some \$14tr is slated for new fossil fuel extraction and freight over the next 20 years.

With so many examples to draw on, we see that the real risks are being played out between government and big business. Government does not wish to alienate the business interests of commerce, especially the extraction industry, while industry wants to be seen as sensitive enough to the 'issues' in order to maintain their market share. In fact this symbiotic relationship is a closed loop, as they rely on each other to survive and thrive. There is no critical feedback in this co-dependence, no real consultancy with the people they serve and certainly no sense of urgency. Business is worried about the risk of not being successful in the political short term. We, on the other hand, are increasingly desperate; searching for ways to shake up this cosy, dualistic reciprocity and to effect deep change. We therefore find that in order to make our voices heard, we have to resort to grass roots strategies – to tell stories between ourselves and for once technology is on our side. Communication has never been easier.

Networking the Future

"Let us be clear. Our planet and all species are in serious danger, humans caused this - and our response must be substantive, urgent and everywhere."

The Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, WECAN, calls for a paradigm shift in how we all live on the planet and to protect the Earth's diverse ecosystems and communities. They talk about the importance of leadership by women and of having a diverse network embracing a whole-systems approach. The urgency is reflected in calls for climate justice, again noting that those most affected by climate change are paying the price for the growth, development and pollution model that has not helped them. So, if we engage in the challenge to redefine the old view of our ecosystem as something that is straight-forward and under our control, how might a new definition or model advance the conversation?

A useful precedent resides in the progress made by the LGBT community who through strategic action fought for equality and rights for same-sex couples across the world. It is no coincidence the popular symbol of the rainbow flag, was conceived, in 1978, as a statement of human rights. Each colour conveyed a meaning and in this context it is timely to remind ourselves that many of them reflect a deep connection to the planet: red is life, yellow is sunlight and green is nature. It is also a spectrum of colours and values, the significance of which continues to be understood and played out. While this flag is internationally recognised, it seems that there is no such symbol or flag for the environmental movement. The nearest universal symbol is that for re-cycling...which is hardly the same thing. In a world where ethical positioning has become reduced to a logo or a brand strapline we see how the wishes of climate change activists are mirrored in rhetoric, and yet there is no genuine follow through, no commitment to change. We need to move beyond petitions that live and die in a couple of weeks, hashtags that trend then disappear and headlines that become yesterday's news, into a progressive joined up conversation with multiple participants. As Cam Fenton reported:

"It's 2016, politicians don't need the climate movement to apologise for them not doing enough, they need to us to organise to force them to do more...For the climate movement to be successful, we need a movement ecosystem that's dynamic and full as the rainforest"

(Trans)action

The crisis faced by many activists is whether it is better to attack from the inside or the outside, whether to assimilate or transform and can be particularly true when it comes to the examination of queer identity. However I would argue that the question of how to rebalance our relationship with the

planet goes beyond the question of individual identity, and even of national identity, to one of casting a new identity for democracy; one that is able to transform our worst habits of Capitalist consumption and to embrace a constellation of identities. In a world so deeply interconnected and entwined we have observed how so many facets of modern life have become similar; an indication that despite claims to cultural diversity, we are in fact being regularised. We want to wear the same things, eat the same food, travel to the same places and be the same people. The fight to be different is critical to the success of any climate-led strategy precisely because the very nature of our planet is one of massive diversity. This ecology is the result of millennia of evolution and yet in the past 100 years we have begun to effectively and systematically destroy it. The natural world demonstrates that the question of ecology, nurture and survival is a symbiotic paradigm where reliance is dependent on circumstance. Being different is the key to participating in the model. If you eliminate and destroy parts of the framework, then inevitably the laws of cause and effect will ensue. While the planet is not going anywhere soon, the nature of the planet is in a state of agitated flux, and we the architects. There is further concern that the so-called success of the Paris Climate summit is being politically leveraged to suggest we have cracked the issue, and made serious progress. As John Vidal puts it:

“Climate change has become for government an excuse to build nuclear power and ditch other green policies... After 20 years of battling to get government to take the climate seriously we must wake up to the fact that the very air we breathe is killing us and making us bankrupt.”

Some radical thinkers there is only one solution; to deploy all the resource currently used in the extraction industry and elsewhere into making tools for renewable energy. Only by cutting out CO2 emissions can we expect to keep some kind of climatic status quo. The situation has been likened to a war, and it is hard to argue that the aftermath of nearly all climate related disasters resemble a war zone. The problem is no one wants another war, and the metaphor is unhelpful.

Less Power is More Power

“This is a change model which requires us to reimagine leadership from being an organisational issue to one of building movements around shared purpose and mission”

Off course the supreme irony when it comes to climate justice, is that all of us are in the about-to-be if not already oppressed majority. In thinking about any major societal change; be it gay marriage, legalization of drugs, age of consent, human rights, we know that such changes to the law are preceded by years of grass roots campaigning

“Twenty years ago, nobody would’ve thought that gay marriage was possible, but the culture has changed. And a lot of that definitely has to do with smart, strategic, interesting and nonstop organising and campaigning by LGBT people and their friends, family and allies”.

The problem for climate action is that it requires more than a few new amendments, successful legal challenges and high-profile political wins. This question comes down to the architecture of our power base, the accepted model for (unsustainable) growth and for the ongoing plundering of our resources. So far, stories of destruction, the tracking of lost environments and the death of species only seem to re-enforce how lucky and privileged ‘we’ are (especially when the ‘we’ are the powerful few). Large corporations, nationalised industries, banks and the global financial system are based on a model that is not only out of date but has become carnivorous. We are now feeding our own destruction.

The only way we can mitigate the damaging consequences of future disasters is to recognise that we can build alternative societal models, ethical financial structures and systems enabled by technology that work to nurture not destroy. We have to be radical; we have to engage in queer tactics to celebrate diversity and we have to beat on the doors of power. As architects, we know that within experimental new forms we can create a sense of place, a house and a home, a habitat and an environment. We can find the familiar within the unfamiliar. We need to believe the mantra ‘think globally, act locally’ has traction. The future is not an organization or a manifesto, not a government or an industry rather it is a communal consensus with multiple opportunities; shared intentions to redefine what climate leadership can look like. Stop extraction, stop burning fossil fuel. This means living with less, changing our routines and investing in other ways of living.

If there is one thing we can take away from the political debacles of recent years, it is that change happens unpredictably. Not always in a good way, but in a way that reminds us that we have

responsibilities to make the right sort of change happen. As architects we also know that the future lies in our creativity; design is projective. We are trained to model the future.

Postscript

By chance I came across a recent interview with Lovelock who, at 97 in 2016, is energetically provoking the establishment, revealing that some of the climate change predictions and models he had referred to in his earlier work had proved to be overly pessimistic and doomsday. In fact he has turned his gaze to the future of artificial intelligence and robots, which he sees as another path towards destruction, reflecting that robots won't care one bit about climate change. And yet, while indeed there may be other causes for concern, surely as the unelected custodians of the planet, we know we have to believe we can do better.

23. Listen

Blupeprint Magazine. 2016

For a profession that claims to be so concerned with the needs, not only of architecture but also of society - namely 'better buildings, communities and the environment' - the continuing gender imbalance in architectural education and practice is a difficult subject. Difficult, because it's been stagnant for some thirty years. Which is precisely why James Benedict Brown (De Montfort University), Harriet Harriss (Royal College of Art), Ruth Morrow (Queens University Belfast) and James Soane (London School of Architecture) decided to work together to explore, curate and propose possible professional and pedagogic solutions.

James Benedict Brown, Harriet Harriss, Ruth Morrow, James Soane

For a profession that claims to be so concerned with the needs, not only of architecture but also of society - namely 'better buildings, communities and the environment' - the continuing gender imbalance in architectural education and practice is a difficult subject. Difficult, because it's been stagnant for some thirty years. In 2016, ninety two per cent of female architects reported that having children would put them at a disadvantage in architecture; five per cent more than in the previous year. That so many women feel that their profession is prejudiced against them is shocking enough; but the fact that we have no reliable statistics to report male architects' opinions about fatherhood is equally telling.

Beyond the confines of our discipline, a new generation of inclusive feminist critique is emerging, much of which (like our own profession's stated ambition) is characterised by a broader civic commitment. But whereas, after World War II, the architectural profession rallied around its obligation to fulfil a social need, the mainstream of our profession has capitulated its servitude to capitalism.

We believe that feminist thinking is a meaningful mechanism to respond to the inequalities of capitalism. But as we watch its 'fourth wave' unfold, we are met all too often with the stubborn misconception that feminism is only for and about women. The conversation has to be collectively critical: women cannot dictate a solution to men, just as men cannot dictate a solution to women. One could argue that it is a failure of our profession to resolve its own internal inequalities. At stake is more than just the lack of female representation. Sexism and gendered practices in architecture condemn all of us to a set of expectations around stereotypical behaviour. Male architects suffer from the same ingrained mechanisms of gender stereotyping that prejudice women, obliging us to place professional commitments above those to our family and children. And for those whose gender and sexuality do not fit comfortably within the binary conception of male or female, gay or straight, we find that the progress made in improving workplace conditions in the architect's studio has yet to be matched in other aspects of the profession, not least the construction site.

It is therefore critical to dispute not only the traditional binary definition of gender, but also a mono-dimensional conception of gender along a spectrum, one that ultimately categorises everyone between the same binary. We need to think beyond women's experiences of architectural education, practice and culture; gender is instead the key for a broader and more inclusive understanding of how our identity affects our experience of life and work. In order to recast the role of the architect in society it is imperative to take on the political and economic challenges entwined within the gender debate, in order to practice ethically and inclusively. It is critical to recognise that we operate within relative frameworks. As we age, climb the ladder of progression, grow as an architect – we change too, more than we might like to think.

This is why we turned our ideas into a book: *A Gendered Profession* – which sought to address a fundamental issue of representation, one that is inconclusive and emerging. This issue of representation is being played out not only in books such as these, but, more tangibly, in the built environment around us. It also questions why it seems so difficult to teach architects about gendered spaces, arguing that if we are to change our starchitect culture, then we must change how we train students. This also requires us to scrutinise the 'master-pupil' relationship, and how

competition and long working hours can reaffirm stereotypical 'hegemonic masculinity' arguing for new and different labour practices and hours of work that suit both genders; that resist traditionalism, discrimination and academic capitalism. Whether architecture can learn from other disciplines' efforts in order to create more gender equitable environments is also brought into focus, concluding with a statement of hope for a profession in which tacit values and judgments made on stereotypical assumptions will become a thing of the past.

We need a diagnostic check on our profession. The condition is on-going, and the case is not closed. An inclusive discussion on the subject of architecture and gender is needed, one that can address some of the injustices facing our discipline. We are under no illusion that the gender question will ever go away but instead embrace instead the principle of fourth wave of feminism that an attitude of inclusion will nurture a more discursive and enriched forum.

24. Practicing Teaching

AAE Charrette Magazine. 2016

Abstract

This paper looks at new relationships between practice and academia taking the example of the new LSA (London School of Architecture) whose first cohort began in October 2015.

Embedded in the LSA model of education is the idea that there is a more dynamic and critical conversation to be had between students, teachers and practitioners. We no longer believe that the binary opposites of academia versus practice are useful. This model seeks to engender learning through practice by embedding students within architectural firms for 3 days a week and asking the practices to proactively collaborate with the school to develop a dialogue that is both speculative and reflective. The students are asked as part of their critical theory course, to generate a piece of research that explores the DNA of the practice they are working with.

The premise aims to show that there are new and fertile territories to be explored through critically re-framing the interaction between students and practice. It is also an opportunity to open up the conversation about new teaching pedagogies within architectural education in the context of LSA where all parties operate in part time mode.

Introduction

“The LSA could be seen, metaphorically, as sitting on the San Andreas fault between education and practice”

I have had a hunch for some time now that many part time studio teachers are drawn to academia because it allows them to practice and participate in all the things they cannot do in their day job. Not only that, the distance between architecture as built and architecture as taught is an ever increasing gulf:

“Architecture sits at a nexus point of change, the tipping point of a new era: this era demands not that we change our design style (though that will be a resultant effect) but more fundamentally how we work both individually and as professions...”

Why is it that the student design project so free from constraints, so open to interpretation is so desirable to be a part of? And why is the world of the office, the built environment and the tangible seen as so banal, rigid and straight? In short, why are our schools ignoring the critical issues of our time, choosing instead to pursue the esoteric, the marginal and the impossible?

Of course this is a provocative generalisation. However as Peter Cook recently pointed out there may be an issue of protectionism:

“It is a pity the British schools have been rather feeble in making it possible for hard-hitters to come inside – although I strongly suspect that career academics would be ready to point out their lack of delicacy as critics...”

This paper looks at new relationships between practice and academia using the model of the new London School of Architecture which opened its doors in October 2015. Embedded within the LSA’s DNA lies the idea that there is an alternative dynamic, forward-looking, critical conversation to be had between students, teachers and academia. The model rejects the binary positioning of academia versus practice, instead developing a collaborative model where there is an explicit understanding that practice can inform teaching and visa versa. It seems so logical and yet it remains one of the few courses that has openly invited practices to share in the knowledge economy.

Strategies

As with any educational model there are a series of mechanisms and strategies that have been developed to tease out and test the agenda. The first year starts with an Urban Studies programme and ends with the research for the second year Thesis Project. There are also two courses under the banner of 'Critical Practice' titled Placement and Theory, which is defined as the place where the student is asked to research, consider and propose ideas that relate to how architecture is practiced. The aim is to create a critical collision between speculation about architecture and speculating within architecture.

It is no coincidence that the agenda of the school is reflected in the interests of the staff and advisors; in particular Dr Deborah Saunt and Dr Tom Holbrook who have recently completed their 'Architecture and Design Practice' PhD's with Professor Leon van Schaik through RMIT and Ghent. Leon was invited onto the Academic Court of the LSA to lend insight into his practices and seek advice as to how this field of knowledge might be brought into the curriculum earlier (i.e. at Masters Level). While the PhD programme is only available to practitioners who have already set up their studios and are ready to invest in questioning and re-framing their own practices, it seemed that there were methodologies and an approach that could be employed within the LSA to discuss the question of 'why and how' with relation to process and context. At the heart of his premise, as described in *Mastering Architecture*, van Schaik proposes that research and peer review are vital to the growth and innovation of a practitioner. He goes on to conclude that:

"Designers who become creative innovators have all found a way to second-order learning: a process of observing themselves as learners and taking charge of the curation of themselves as learners"

Taking this back into the school the model suggests that by creating a space between practicing (the three days a week employment) and speculating within the programme, there is the opportunity for the student to research and test their ideas, ideals and preconceptions in real time. The students are placed in a 'live' situation where they are both practicing architect and scholar in a position where they can influence and calibrate both scenarios.

Critical Practice: Placement

Working at a practice allows the student to gain a view from the ground where they operate as part of a team or system. They have been asked to develop a 'Critical Practice Manual', seen as an in-depth research tool, and an ongoing project conducted in the present. Using the workplace as the principal site of investigation, the manual explores the relationship between process and product, ideas and outcome. Group seminars set up a number of questions that allows the cohort to start interrogating and learning more about their practice through traditional research and reading thus understanding the nature of the office by working there. Thus a dynamic relationship is set up which oscillates between participating in the daily life of an architect then standing back in order to interrogate it. Significantly the practice networks are invited to engage in the process in order, perhaps, to leverage the opportunity to develop their own perception. In particular we can see this approach aligning with the process Flora Samuel describes in her book encouraging architectural practices to invest in research activities:

"To do research is to work through a problem systematically and reflectively and then, ideally, to disseminate the results of that research"

In other words, research creates an audience who may choose to take action (consult, commission, feedback, share...) which in turn forms a virtuous circle where input affords output.

Critical Practice: Theory

Titled 'Methods and Models' this lecture series unpacks the role of theories and philosophy in the C20th and C21st, asking key questions as to their influence and critical success or failure. Here the students are required to produce a Critical Practice Manifesto, which is a kind of mission statement for them to start measuring themselves by. The explicit question at the heart of this is:

“How do you see your practice in the future?” By triangulating between the worlds of theory and practice the programme aims to develop a critical understanding of the agency of the architect in relation to others in the construction industry, the wider creative economy and the landscape of critical theory. In considering the recent past we need to recognise Adrian Forty’s notion of historical truth is relative and requires us to develop an appetite to challenge our preconceptions, even our education:

“To concentrate on the making of architecture is to miss the point that architecture, like all other cultural objects, is not made just once, but is made and remade over and over each time it is represented through another medium, each time its surroundings change, each time different people experience it”

Research by Design

A further important strand of informative new thinking deals with the role of intuitive thinking and research by design through asking questions that interrogate what kind of knowledge can only be gained through design and whether the notion of ‘designerly ways of knowing’ has traction.

“Although architecture is taught within the walls of academia, its realization happens outside those walls...Confrontation with society, with actors and contextual complexity cannot be denied. On the contrary, it is offering the most rich and potential learning environment that can be imagined”.

Attending and presenting at the 2012 ‘Theory by Design’ academic conference in Antwerp, showed me that there was a growing concern within European architectural education that by privileging process-led design studios that often use abstract theoretical methodologies to create form, there is a huge gap in understanding how synthetic design can be both understood and validated. Significantly the conference came about because the faculty of design at Artesis University College was about to become part of Artesis Plantijn University College, and their academic credentials had been brought into question. The staff identified the sticking point to be that much of their research was seen as ‘artistic and intuitive’ rather than scientific and quantifiable. Thus the conference sought to explore and validate their understanding that design itself, as an activity, has research outcomes. By bringing together teachers, practitioners as well as those who do both, the outcome was refreshing because it revealed a broad spectrum of influences united by the underlying sense that ideas and positions can be developed through the act of designing rather than the act of critically reading the design process. Reflecting on this in context of the LSA programme, it makes sense to allow the design project to exist both within both the studio of the school and the office, and to use the different contexts to feed off one another, to learn, adjust and nudge.

Alternative Agendas

As a practitioner who teaches, I am wary of offering up a dogmatic credo that can only lead to a single interpretation. Instead my instinct has been to present students a map, pinpointing co-ordinates and intersections of architectural thinking. By way of contrast the other half of the lecture series is given by the polemicist Peter Buchanan who refers to his own thoughts published first in the Architectural Review under the title ‘The Big Rethink’ where the influence of the ‘starchitect’ is scrutinised and the apparent lack of interest in environmental issues challenged, suggesting:

“Many of today’s most accomplished buildings are by highly professional mainstream practices, perhaps partly because of the resources they can command, such as collaborating with the best consultants. These architects, not the avant-garde, constitute the leading edge of practice that other architects study and emulate.”

For Buchanan the crisis in architectural place making can be pinned on the appetite to create ever more new forms, new conditions and icons seemingly borne out of a response to the rate of change witnessed in today’s society. The antidote, he suggests, is for architects to develop a much more robust critical voice, to ride the waves of fashionable ideologies and aesthetics, and to

accept that responding intelligently and thoughtfully to a given situation can lead to a collectively better world. At an anecdotal level it was interesting to observe that when interviewing the students for the first intake, many of their questions revolved around whether the LSA was going to talk about ethics, the environment as well as entrepreneurial skills. There is a growing sense among the next generation that global issues such as climate change action, neocon politics, pollution and migration all must inform the position of the architect. No longer is the debate about style, rather about action. In her book 'This Changes Everything', Naomi Klein suggests that immediate and radical intervention is required to stem the unfolding environmental disaster:

"It is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message – spoken in the language of fires, floods, droughts, and extinctions – telling us that we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet."

As a critique of capitalism and the global economic model, the book is perhaps at its most persuasive when it shows how grass roots collective action, though the use of shared media, is able to affect big change. The education of the architect is no longer about developing a great personal portfolio with a unique signature, it needs to be about taking a position and developing a strategy that can make a difference.

Collaborating Practices

"All of us (architects, artists, critics, curators, amateurs) need a narrative to focus our practices – situated stories, not grand récits"

The pairing of students with the LSA's network of practices was extensively debated, concluding in more of an 'arranged marriage' than a personal choice. That said, all students were interviewed by the practices, and a small percentage on both sides decided the chemistry was not right, so alternative options were made available. While this may seem undemocratic, the thinking we shared with the cohort was that in order to learn something new it was important to move out of a perceived comfort zone, therefore working with an unfamiliar practice should be seen as an opportunity. In general this seems to have worked. The model clearly states that the contract between the student and the practice must reflect the standard employment terms appropriate to each office. Furthermore there is no explicit teaching during the three days the student works. Each practice was asked to nominate a mentor whom the student could use as a sounding board. A meeting between all the practices was held to discuss their role prior to students starting. It is important that throughout the process of developing their manual and manifesto there is an interested party who can act as an informal consultant. The content of the academic output is shaped by the students own experiences (and their gathering of evidence), the formal lectures and seminar input.

By contrast the ambitious 'Think Tank' project seeks to group 5 or 6 practices with the same number of students, working together to develop a research strand. Here the agenda is negotiated between the school, the students and the practices in order to create a platform resulting in collaborative propositional outcomes. The current areas include; Architectural Agency, Unstable City, New Knowledge, Emerging Tools, and Adaptive Typologies. Concurring with Kester Rattenbury we may agree:

"Architects need to give their tacit working design methodologies a voice, this involves stepping back from the design and looking critically at what they do, articulating their particular way of working and analysing their tactics"

Thus the mechanism of asking students and practices to develop a research area which gives rise to a body of work creates a new kind of space for speculation. Here the practices are not leaving their office and moving into the school in order to engage in propositional thinking, rather they are working within their organisation which is allowing boundaries and edge conditions to be embraced. Our collective hope is that this process of negotiated positions and peripatetic engagement goes beyond the old fashioned notion of apprenticeship and give way to the endorsement of collaborative tactics, of strategic testing and most importantly dissolving the

artificial rite of passage that the part three exam has excerpted over legitimising the status of the would-be architect.

The Future

It is not an overstatement to say the role of the architect is in crisis since we know that the landscape for acting and participating as an architect has radically changed with the rise of new technologies and networks. In his book 'Open Source Architecture', co-author Carlo Ratti unpacks what he sees as the end of Modernism and the birth of a new kind of practice, where design information is connected and networked. Perhaps more importantly he suggests that this is political:

"Put simply, open –source software has achieved an unprecedented level of technological sophistication through communal design, and it has caused a seismic tremor in the socio-political establishment."

Risky Business

If the students are able to develop and grow in a context that critically nurtures their own working practices within a space where group work is normalised we hope to redefine the culture of architectural practice as a joined-up endeavour. In order to frame this opportunity we also need to introduce the idea of risk taking. There will inevitably be a tension between the almost infinite outcomes of a student project whose boundaries are flexible and the pragmatic response to a series of prescribed conditions that define the 'real' world. So in order to critically reflect in both situations we need to engender an attitude and understanding to risk taking as well as comprehending and learning from failure. As Maria Miller suggests:

"Responsible risk-taking is critical to the iterative process of design...(and) can strengthen the innovative process as designers struggle to solve important problems."

In other words one of the common, though often invisible, links between the different contexts of practice is the question of how far to pursue an idea and the value of making calculated decisions that may fail? In practice we see time and time again the role of the architect curtailed by flawed regulations, client direction and self-regulation. However in the new educational economy where students are customers, accruing staggering debt, we see the trend to become risk averse in order to pass; where the risk of any kind of failure is seen as too great. Coupled with a profession that has been de-risked there is the potential for outcomes to be dumbed down at best, so we need to incentivise and re-frame the research-led design project as an opportunity whose resolution may be incomplete, flawed or imperfect. Critical understanding and learning should not be judged only on outcome but through recognising the rigour that imaginative iterative testing and reworking reveals:

"This imagination, therefore, is not the imagination of a detached dreamer: it grows out of the real, fuelled by the very uncertainty of the rationalists and utopists found so threatening. It is an imaginative vision that both projects new futures and also embraces their imperfections".

What have we learned so far?

Returning to the question of transient teachers in architecture education we can say that all the players at the LSA are part time. From the students juggling work placement with their studies, to the staff who are all on fractional posts to the practices who are participating in the margins. Maybe we are seeing that there are no 'full time' roles for the future of architectural educators? The LSA model relies, indeed thrives, on the idea of an extended network, on the institution as a loose fit of alliances rather than a campus, and the belief that the students are the ones to drive change. In our own way we begin to define a new age of open source architecture.

"If tomorrow's buildings and cities will now be more like computers – than machines - Open Source Architecture provides an open, collaborative framework for writing their operating software".

25. Education in Practice

AAE Education Conference. University of Sheffield. 2014

Introduction

PO Box 2 is the second research 'zine' produced by Project Orange, the practice I co-founded. This paper reflects on the way research in the studio shapes the design ethos of the practice. We also wish to explore what academic knowledge resides in practice.

By way of introduction I would controversially like to quote the peer reviewed response to my abstract which noted:

"PO Box 2 seems interesting...(but) as it stands doesn't make a theoretical contribution at all".

In so many ways this throws down the gauntlet by highlighting the tension between the often-incongruous agendas of the academy and the practice. While the process of research and propositional thinking is the life blood within a school of architecture, the same is only partially true within practice. There is no compulsion to have to explain or justify built work within the same terms of reference as a thesis project. Our starting point, therefore, is not to try and graft a theory of practice onto our work, but rather to set up a critical dialogue both between ourselves and a wider audience

Another question that also came up relates to the relevance and sphere of influence of our own research. Clearly it is self-financed and printed, which until recently, would have attracted the term 'vanity publishing'. As teacher and critic Leon Van Schaik points out, the business of curating and reframing your own work is critical if there is an appetite for self-evaluation:

"Becoming a curator of yourself is a way of: knowing how to handle yourself at each stage of your journey as an individual creative person; locating yourself in the supportive and challenging environments that forge mastery; finding those peers who help you transform mastery into a platform for intellectual change; and seeking out those situations that clarify your creative breakthrough into innovation"

Leon Van Schaik. *Mastering Architecture* (p. 21)

In our multi-media centric world there seems to have been a change in attitude: the freedom to self publish is now understood as an opportunity rather than a reflection of failure to find a publisher. So in order for it not to be a piece of marketing or propaganda, the work has to be edited and disseminated. We are looking to trade our currency as critical thinkers. To that end the first PO Box was presented at the "Theory by Design" conference at Artesis School of Architecture in Antwerp. In his introduction Johan De Walsche noted:

"Contemporary architectural theory typically is constructed by academics, and within academia. Connections to practice are few."

Why Theory by Design is a valid Option. De Walsche Johan.

He goes on to expand the theme conference to explore alternative models of research which do not necessarily put academic and practice based knowledge in opposition, but rather asks whether:

"...considering theory as a social practice...can design, in all its meanings, be the medium to have new insights effectively shared? If so, making these processes explicit will advance not only academic architectural research, it will fundamentally impact on professional practice and on architectural education as well."

Ibid p24

Structuring the Conversation

At Project Orange the act of designing is most often a dialogue between 'ideas' and 'instinct'. While we favour a narrative approach, where the telling of the process informs not only an understanding but the outcome, we also have become increasingly aware of how important the notion of intuitive

thinking is. This presents a conundrum – if something is invisible, personal and intuitive – how can it be made explicit or described as an intellectual construct? Rather than falling into the redundant binary positions where academia is in opposition to practice and theory to intuition, we are interested in synthesising these poles into a conversation. As Jane Tankard notes in her introduction to PO Box 2:

“..design is a process that enables architecture to manifest itself as a transformative and evolutionary mechanism in contemporary and future social contexts,” and goes on to say: “This focus on the relationship between theory and practice through a series of short essays is a useful and timely reminder of the necessity for the profession to consider and act upon these contexts.”

PO Box 2, Introduction, page 3

Our belief is that by making space for critical reflection we begin to gather together groups of ideas, interests and observations that mirror those of our collaborators as well as creating a collective memory.

Information Gathering

As Ruth Silver notes in her contribution there is another dichotomy to be reckoned with that the process of design is often computative rather than overtly creative:

“As architects we spend the bulk of the duration of a project compiling information. This information takes many forms whether this is drawings, spread sheets or written specifications. Regardless of format, what they contain is data: grid lines, levels, clauses, thicknesses and constraints. That is, information for building”

PO Box 2, What information is Beautiful?, Page 47

Looking around the studio on a typical day most people are tapping away on a keyboard, some listening to music. This is punctured by questions, informal discussions, phone calls and gatherings. Our own structure is loose. We all sit in the same space, there is no hierarchy in terms of a seating plan, we have no admin staff so everyone chips in, and most significantly we believe that a good idea is worth pursuing whoever puts it onto the table. Mostly this ‘flat’ model works until it comes to a question where experience counts. Often this may be a technical or procedural issue or it might be one relating to communicating ideas. However sometimes it becomes an altogether more subjective question regarding more abstract values such as: meaning, style, concept or relevance. Because we do not have what might be known as a ‘house style’ or an obvious philosophy we need to discuss and debate the matter. This in turn has led to a scenario where everyone is a stakeholder both in terms of the output and the success of the studio. In order to evaluate this process we see the discussion as part of a formative assessment while the research zine is the summative assessment in so much as it is a formal and audited piece of work.

Representation

Increasingly we have found that our thoughts revolve around the question of representation. Not only in the sense of ‘how should we draw this’ but also addressing the more difficult question of ‘what might this mean’. So the brief evolved for PO Box 2 for everyone to take on this overall topic and to triangulate it back to work that they have been doing in the studio. This connection is critical in order to build up a body of knowledge that relates to the practice, rather than a collection of observations that are looser fit. We used a CPD session to present our themes in 5 minute slots followed by a more general discussion. Each person then submitted an abstract to Jane Tankard, our guest editor, who offered feedback and one to one tutorials over a three month period. This live and fast-track programme encouraged the team to take an idea from concept through to fruition with mentoring along the way, while continuing with their main focus of production.

Drawing Inspiration

Taking the document as a whole there are a number of threads that are worth looking at in more detail. Firstly there is the idea that the act of making a drawing becomes the starting point for a

project. These tended to be smaller installations or competitions such as the RHS Chelsea Garden or Room for London. Another theme is that of curation, which is especially true for our hotel projects, and unpacked by Emma Elston in her piece "Rules of Representation". There was also a sense that in many ways the role of the sketch was part of the intuitive design process. As Guido Vericat explains in his piece:

"Sketching is a way of thinking about architecture and space making. It is a medium by which one can 'annotate' one's thoughts, track the internal conversation and make it visible to be refined, shared and further interrogated".

PO Box 2, 'Drawing the Internal Conversation', P 24

Here the observation revolves around the notion of iteration and how something tentative becomes a process through which design is discovered. By contrast Thomas Partridge questions the ever-evolving role of computer modelling commenting:

"The tools now at the disposal of anyone with a computer allow the creating of exceptional architectural imagery where nothing is exceptional about the architecture; seduction without substance".

PO Box 2, 'Simulating the Future', p 71

He goes on to question the power of the seductive image but goes further to speculate on the future of digital models to communicate far more than just a photo real perspective view. Both points of view are both valid and relevant, and by juxtaposing them in print we are able to consider each in turn, debate the conversation and perhaps try something new at the next opportunity.

Live(ly) or (a)live

With reference to the theme of this conference it is legitimate to ask why is the putting together of a collection of essays in anyway a 'live' project? I suggest the answer lies in the context. At School the simultaneity of learning experiences is part of the course though the synthesis of different knowledge bases happens within the studio. In a professional context the space and ability to reflect is compromised often due to the complexity, and tedium, of procuring buildings. While at a design level the outcome from the school and the practice may look the same, the translation from model to 1:1 demands considerable resource. Making space and time therefore creates the condition for reflection and calling it a project helps. So if by (re)creating the milieu of a school we can also tap into a sense of enquiry based on real time observations rather than, say, historical precedents. Even more critical, is the sense of direct participation. There is a palpable dynamic between the discussion and the project; in other words the act of taking and formalising a view through writing, starts to influence the actual design process. In this sense I believe the value of this kind of research is that it proactively examines, catalogues and questions past projects in order to look forward to future ones.

Conclusion

The outcomes from the publication were two fold. Firstly we have produced a document for public consumption, we have put our ideas onto the table. But secondly we have collectively opened up new ways of thinking for ourselves, some of which were implicit while others the result of the process itself.

How this enters into mainstream academia remains ambiguous. If Architecture itself is to be understood as a cultural entity then buildings must represent a significant part of the outcome. It may be for others to assess, critique and debate. However by engaging the debate internally the processes and ideas that shape the practice become more apparent, and by being prepared to open this further propels the narrative into another field, that of research. In my own essay I reached the following conclusion:

"We therefore continue to nudge, uncover and reveal different ways of thinking and designing as architects. We draw because that is what we have been taught to do, but we do it in ways that surprise us. We are open to suggestion."

PO Box 2, 'Drawing Inspiration', Soane. P8

