

The Mortician

Death at One's Elbow

They call it "the law of the instrument": to a carpenter with a hammer, every problem is a nail. In my line of work it is recently deceased things. Bodies of all shapes, sizes, and ages, lives drained from their mortal form, come through the swing doors at the back of the mortuary. To someone like myself for whom the whiff of embalming fluid

Continued on page 18

The Odd Couple

Play the Part

Somewhere in Englewood, Colorado, Oscar and Felix check out some old houses through the windshield of their two-tone 1973 Dodge Coronet.

Oscar These houses deserve a lot more respect than they have received in the architectural world. But I suspect that, as an historian, I look at them in a somewhat different way

Continued on page 20

The Muckraker

Show Me the Money

There is a two-legged red stepstool in the City of Chicago Department of Buildings (DOB) ladies' room. It leans against the windowsill overlooking a courtyard in Chicago City Hall-County Building, a double square doughnut building by Holabird & Roche, circa 1911. A permanently improvised exit route in the event

Continued on page 28

The Outsider

Hanging Around with Architects

I'm from outside the ecstatic, cathartic, sex-crazed roller coaster ride you refer to as modern architectural practice. I'm from the dreary, monotonous, and functional world of rock and roll. Basically, I just hang around with architects. I married in. Some would say up! Sure, I wear black (and I own a pair of ludicrously

Continued on page 33

The Inventor

Cartoon Plan

They said my plan was crazy. But let's not forget, they came to me, after making a major botch of it all, to resolve their mess. It's always the same story: the desperate plea for help before showing you the door.

No, I did not cause the problem, but I was commissioned to fix it—to make legible an environment they had

Continued on page 59

The Talent Agent

Ten Miles, One Year, and Two Worlds Apart

Rumor has it that your museum's architecture and design division is looking to stage an exhibition with some of your old stars and backlot extras, and doesn't mind upsetting a few conventions along the way. Bravo! It's about time we moved beyond the air of innocuous typesetting that characterizes *oh so many* architectural productions

Continued on page 62

The Cameo

Easier Done Than Said

It's hard to imagine being disloyal to New York or Los Angeles. They contain too much and no one ever mistakes a part as representative of the whole. Equally, they play host to worlds (fashion, finance, and art, or entertainment and technology) that are larger and more globally connected than their nominal urban address. Chicago, on

Continued on page 65

You

You Are More

You enter Mies van der Rohe's S. R. Crown Hall from the south. In the sun-drenched entry area, oblique shadows march across your torso: a register of Mies's celebrated thin steel frame façade behind you. You survey the expansive interior. What lies beyond the floating millwork opposite the entrance? You can see across

Continued on page 73

Easier Done Than Said



The Cameo

... [A] terrific number of things were done without any unifying thought, all in the belief that when you don't have an idea you can conceal the fact just by multiplying the instruments.¹

→ From page 3
the other hand, is more like John Carpenter's *Thing*: every cell is the entirety, and it's the only game in town. The biggest thing in Chicago is Chicago. In this way, it may be the last city where you can wear your infidelity on your sleeve. You can get snubbed in this town, which may explain the celebrated feuds of those who have lived for decades in the same tower, worked in the same field, and whose vacation homes are across the street from one another on Lake Michigan. More family drama than company town, Chicago knows how to hold a grudge. But to those for whom the prospect of never working in this town again

¹ Bruno Zevi, "History as a Method of Teaching Architecture," in *The History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture: Papers from the 1964 AIA-ACSA Teacher Seminar*, ed. Marcus Whiffen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 11. Here, Zevi criticizes the post-war "empirical" pedagogy at the University of Rome and other schools of architecture at the time. While this normative, pluralistic model was assaulted in Italy and elsewhere beginning in the sixties,

the situation Zevi and others identified may have been generalized to all domains of architectural culture, or more specifically techniques of architectural delivery from integrated practice to public programming, since the millennium.

² With over a hundred contributors from thirty countries, the Chicago Architectural Biennial was held October 3, 2015, to

is a promise and not a threat, you can have some fun on the way to the unemployment line.

In my kind of town, it's difficult to separate your evaluation of any event from your status as native. The discussions here are invariably cast in terms of what something can do for Chicago, what it says about Chicago. The city's legendary vendettas all share a foundational storyline, with various plots and endings, of what's best for the family. And so, not surprisingly, the inaugural Chicago Architecture Biennial (CAB)² occasioned all the hopes and fears of its reputed hosts: what would inviting the architectural world to Chicago accomplish? Would it expand opportunity for future alternatives, or produce a mirror in which Chicago would be unable to find its place: Century of Progress for a new millennium, or Bean without a view?

The latter fear was addressed by subcontracting a show-within-a-show of Chicago architects working on Chicago problems. But here, what was delegated as a feint, as a shot of parochialism taken to inoculate the entire show against any such contamination, ended up having the opposite effect. For it turns out that all the anxieties and anticipations about Chicago were unfounded. Rather than compel Chicago to catch up to the world (for better or worse, depending on the family to which you belong), the CAB exposed that the world had now caught up to Chicago. All practices, so it seemed, were now local: Canadians working in Canada, Mexicans in Mexico City, Danes in Copenhagen, Sydneysiders in New South Wales, Vietnamese in Ho Chi Minh City, Indonesians in Jakarta, South Africans in Johannesburg or Cape Town, Milanese in Milano, Angelenos in LA. The message of global provincialism: do locally, exhibit internationally. This local emphasis not only confirms the old adage that charity starts at home, but it reinforces the suspicion that discipline only begins at a distance, and explains co-Artistic Director Joseph Grima's revealing aside that "we didn't necessarily choose [the participants] based on their merit."³ In other words, they were presumably selected as a way

January 3, 2016, at various locations throughout the city, though with the vast majority of the exhibition housed in the Cultural Center of Chicago. The CAB was presented by the Office of Mayor Rahm Emanuel in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (Michelle Boone, Commissioner) as well as the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. While the Biennial's Artistic Directors Joseph

Grima and Sarah Herda eschewed any assigned theme, the implicit subject was architecture's diverse forms of agency in addressing the social, economic, and environmental issues of the day.

³ "AD Interviews: Joseph Grima / Chicago Architecture Biennial," *Arch Daily*, October 19, 2015, <http://www.archdaily.com/775633/ad-interviews-joseph-grima-chicago-architecture-biennial>.

to map the world and its problems, an unstated criterion that exonerates in advance any reservations about uneven quality. Here, *doing* good obviates the demand for the work to *be* good.

In addition to validating regional identity, the Biennial's second preoccupation derived from "the city that works" was with addressing the real problems of the day: getting it done, practically speaking. Uniformly, the show's reviewers celebrated this presumed turn to real, everyday concerns. The only minor dissent (such as that issued from the critic for *The Guardian*) was that it should have had even greater "direct engagement with the real problems facing the city of Chicago," suggesting that the visiting participants be "put to work."⁴ While it may be a truism that an architect's work is never done, that used to imply that architecture remain unbuilt and perpetually incomplete, whereas today it reinforces a demand for endless interface and engagement, prompt delivery, and ecstatically jumping from one form of doing to another.⁵ With its walls of research, documentary archives, interactive engagements and pervasive modes of cost estimating, the exhibition details the exhaustion of confronting the here and now. Where Colin Rowe once famously characterized modernism as "the architecture of good intentions," the Biennial now raises in its wake the construction of fuzzy math.⁶

If the paradoxical localism of the international firms on display provides the CAB with its *hic*, the exhibition's *et nunc* is given by its second, implicit theme of current political economy. From the sides of buses to ATM screens across Chicago, the City's official, and tellingly metric, tagline for the CAB promised "96 Days of Innovation in Architecture and Design." Unlike newness or novelty, the business connotation of innovation presumes answering a need or demonstrating an impact on society: lower costs, economic growth, increased productivity or efficiency, the creation of added value, the identification of best practices, expansion into new

markets. Looking to increase returns on established givens, innovation's time frame is the now, or at most next quarter's product line. While it conjures risk-taking, it banks on a world of more of the same, only bigger, faster, cheaper. Innovation is utilitarianism masquerading as futurism.

How an association with architecture might address the City's innovation envy was never entirely clear, as architecture is generally concerned less with satisfying needs than anticipating them. Even a critic as committed to technological innovation as Reyner Banham did not confuse the peculiarities of architecture for the provision of shelter, an accommodation that, Banham suggests, "on their good days, all the world and his wife can apparently do better."⁷ Unlike more recent design fields and technical industries, the second oldest profession hasn't had to live or die on the basis of its innovations, content to get by on its other cultural charms and ability to fabricate desire. Architecture is committed to different temporalities, mobilizing untimely combinations of the past and future precisely *against* the present, an alternative to the perpetual "now" that innovation establishes as the baseline for its metrics of improvement.

The misfit between architecture's capacities (and time frames) and the demand for innovation no doubt explains the need for an "expanded field" model of the show, as socially engaged art, neighborhood development, and construction technology appear more willing and able to deliver returns than architecture. But art, engineering, and activism, no matter how the elements are recombined, do not add up to architecture. Within architecture, "research" is the genre that this simultaneous demand for intimacy and innovation assumes, the primary medium for the opportunistic ambulance chasing of the here-and-now, whether in the guise of urban documentation, evidence-based design, or big data. Accompanied by lists of credits to donors, consultants,

4 Oliver Wainwright, "Chicago Architecture Biennial Secures the City's Place as a Mecca for Building Buffs," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2015. The degree of consensus among the reviewers of the show has been astounding, but also reveals the contracted imaginative landscape that architecture (and its criticism) today occupies. This agreement stems from the default set of priorities that are assumed to be beyond dispute. For example, there was no discussion about architectural stars, only whether they had

been sufficiently expunged; no challenge to the bottom line of "reality," but merely an accounting of the degree to which everything adequately adhered to a reality principle. Equally, the common targets of the show that were enthusiastically bid good riddance by the assorted critics included: "theoretical posturing" (Ned Cramer), "form making for its own sake" (Christopher Hawthorne), "formalism and iconicity" (Sarah Williams Goldhagen), and "navel-gazing formalism" (Blair Kamin).

What these journalists systematically misunderstand is that architecture is more usefully evaluated as a genre of fiction, not one of fact.

5 Or what some Biennial participants have referred to as "post-medium specificity." See, for example, MOS's appropriately titled monograph *Everything All At Once*, which could serve as a mantra for the work of many within the current generation who collapse media and history into a perpetual present.

6 The preoccupation with numbers, costs, and statistics ran throughout both the show as well as its promotion, with daily email updates on attendance figures and media impact. In stacking superlative upon superlative, the show was officially described as both "the first" and "the largest" international survey of architecture in North America, the grammatical impossibility elided in the serial celebration of priority and size.

community members, and office staff, what gets praised by reviewers of the show as “research” is less a positing of counterfactuals or hypotheticals than the first phase of gaining a commission, the illustration of given public policy as a prelude to groundbreaking.

In this communal context, the Biennial has been triumphantly hailed as signaling the demise of that eleven-letter expletive “starchitect.” Of course, to accept that term is to extend the demagogic dysphemism, when what one is really announcing is the passing of a particular form of architectural subject: an auteur able to articulate an architectural project through a reconfiguration of design practice and criticism. In trading stars for stats, or displacing positions with presumed priorities, the agency that the CAB aims to highlight is a species of collaborationism, a mediated or negotiated agency: the kind that takes a village, a computer, an archive. Or a steam ring generator, a robot, a spider.

Here, German artist Tomás Saraceno’s cubes of spider webs gone amok serve as a fitting emblem for the entire curatorial strategy. Departing the dark room filled with stage-lit glass boxes of filaments spun by busy little arachnids, one can’t help but see the afterimage throughout the show, whether it is Pedro&Juana’s elaborately interconnected lighting installation in the lobby, the computer-scripted projects of New-Territories/M4 and Aranda\Lasch nearby, Didier Faustino’s chain-link nests of DIY protest pods, the pervasive information graphics of global flows, or the intimate network of personal and professional connections and travel schedules that—in lieu of theme or “merit”—must serve to explain the entire ensemble and global cast. With its deference to natural processes and a loss of authorship, the exhibition is shrouded in webs, traps for those who would try to generalize beyond the experience itself, or do more than pick their favorites and move on. Without the burden of having to understand or explain signature authors, we are commended essentially to “like” the

7 Reynier Banham, “The Black Box,” in *The Critic Writes* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996): 294. This sense was confirmed upon entering Tatiana Bilbao’s “\$8000” model home fitted out with IKEA furniture, and wondering whether the Swedish company known for its frugal, DIY design intelligence would not have produced happier results, in terms of shelter, by conceiving the overall house as well.

8 Cathy Lang Ho, “The Big Ideas Behind the Chicago Archi-

ture Biennial,” *Architect*, November 10, 2015.

9 This abdication of responsibility extends to the “professional” reception of the show as well, where Blair Kamin, commenting on one wall text, concludes “most viewers are likely to say: ‘Huh?’” Blair Kamin, “Chicago Architecture Biennial a Sprawling, Captivating Mixed Bag,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 7, 2015. Here, the role of the critic appears to be no more than identifying with the presumed confusion

work. But this passing of authors is merely the flip side of the extinction of the public, a “public” that the show and its supporters ostentatiously embrace and yet structurally eradicate. For there can be no public, no collective, when the exhibition’s shifting address is an atomized “you.” And the show’s supporters have exactly identified, if completely misunderstood, this connection between the dismissal of “big names” and the Biennial’s implicit message that “architecture can be defined in individual, personal terms.”⁸ This explains the ingratiating idiom of much of the work that alternates from the earnest to the ironic, from therapeutic solution to critical commentary, both of which are designed to make *you* feel good, to flatter your conscience or your sophistication.

This second person address contributes to the designed misdirection of the show—where any obligation to articulate a collective communication is displaced in favor of the individual reception of personal likes—and is enthusiastically aided and abetted by an expanding network of accomplices after the fact.⁹ In a world of doers on the hunt to hook up with potential likers, all that is required is an interface for the arrangements to be made. And this is what the exhibition (or, more generally, the network of “cross-promotional public programming”) facilitates: a species of agency *assisted*, with the self-fulfilling prophecy of the curator as its primary subject. In the dubious contemporary pursuit of “agency without authors,” the show ultimately announces the arrival of the practice of curation in place of the advance of positions or argument, and it does so in part by rebranding old format as new content.

The rebranding began with the primary title for the CAB, “The State of the Art of Architecture,” which was recycled from a symposium Stanley Tigerman organized at the Graham Foundation in 1977.¹⁰ To the extent that this earlier event has been referenced, it has been to note how far the field has progressed demographically in the last forty years, detailing the increased diversity of the class of 2015. Tigerman himself has written optimistically about

of an imaginary viewer, and moving on. In other words, do not try to explain, situate, or elaborate, but simply empathetically affirm and mimic. Like it or leave it.

10 Asked to present and debate a project and position with the group and public audience, the participants included members of New York’s “Whites” and “Grays,” Los Angeles’s “Silvers,” the “Chicago Seven,” and several Europeans: Tom Beeby, Stuart Cohen, Peter Eisenman, James Freed, Frank Gehry, Michael Graves,

John Hejduk, Craig Hodgetts, Helmut Jahn, Charles Jencks, Jack Robertson, Robert Stern, and James Stirling, along with Tigerman. Three years later, the first autonomous architectural Biennale debuted in Venice (“The Presence of the Past”), and included over half of the above Chicago symposium participants. Paolo Portoghesi, the director of the exhibition, polemically framed the event as an investigation of architecture’s return to history and its abandonment of modernist orthodoxy.



Frank Gehry, Gehry House, Santa Monica, California, 1978.
Stud as postulate: deviating standards.

the transition from his generation (born circa 1930) to the present group (circa 1970). As part of a larger structural shift, however, this statistical fact is neither surprising nor worthy of self-congratulation. What is more striking is that in 1977 the participants were selected to debate positions (to advance *difference as construct*) while in 2015 the public is convened to witness results (to celebrate *diversity as fact*). The two “State of the Arts” mark the transition from an age of ideology (and disagreement) to one of identity (and empathy).

This shift to a space-time that can best be described as all here and all now has the corollary effect of flattening history along with ideology, ultimately representing the connection of the newer generation to earlier groups of “starchitects” who had pioneered the hijacking of everyday materials and construction systems, the figural use of architectural elements (roofs, chimneys, stairs), the abstract manipulations of serial geometry, the introduction of mapping and non-linear processes, the deployment of data and graphic argument. Gehry, Rossi, Hejduk, Eisenman, Koolhaas: without their work, one would be unable to see exposed stud walls, networks and cocoons, or walls of research, to name just a few of the uncanny resemblances that run throughout the exhibition, as architecture *at all*. The developments in the Cultural Center largely represent the modest application of discoveries made over the previous two generations. That the current deployment of the exposed stud wall (let’s say, with otherothers’s “Offset House”) can appear to derive from a concern with McMansions, waste, the environment, and so on, forgetting its initial appearance in a small house in Santa Monica in 1978, is an arresting incident of disciplinary amnesia, testimony that the critics are more attuned to justifications than genealogies.¹¹



otherothers, Off-Set House, Sydney, Australia, 2015.
Stud as penance: redeeming waste.

To amend Marx (famously paraphrasing Hegel), all events and persons in history occur twice, though not, as Marx added, along the fault line of tragedy and farce, but rather the first time as conceit, the second as condition. The Second City for the City of Masks, statistics for theatrics, diversity for difference, research for argument, empathy for disagreement, identity for ideology. But if the architectural break with a dominant modernist practice was set out precisely in ideological terms (for example, as codified with the 1980 Venice Biennale), it was launched via the figure of the architectural auteur. Personality, in other words, was the paradoxical carrier for ideology in architecture.¹² As ideas born in the seventies began to be widely realized throughout the world by the nineties, the architectural author was rechristened as the star-architect by the demands of the market as well as for the convenience of global journalism. In this slide from disciplinary author to media star, the significant question was no longer “what does it mean?” (or, what establishes architecture’s conceptual status as a project?), but simply “who did it?” Ideology (argument or intent) was trumped by the question of identity.¹³ As a larger social agenda exerted its influence on architecture by the new millennium, the question arose—from a mainstream front of academics, journalists, activist curators, and “social entrepreneurs”—what right “they” had to impose personality-driven icons on “you.” So stars were out and you was in, now summarized by Cathy Lang Ho’s happy ending for the Biennial as the passing of “big names” for equally valid, individual definitions of architecture. Yet stars and you are two sides of the same coin: a personal currency where identity is enough and “who did it?” is merely revised to “who’s it for?”

In contrast to the preoccupation with identity that runs through the vast majority of work in the Biennial, the display of work by Johnston Marklee (JML), “House is

a House is a House is a House is a House,” takes up an alternative design politics of indifference. The projects of JML begin by confiscating and cropping a canonic architectural image, whitening out the existing building, and overexposing their now voided project in an expansive *décollage*. Their architecture results from a scraping away of the image, reframing a found site, audience, and time that is significantly and conspicuously not their own. Here, the *tabula rasa* is the project, a vague formwork surrounding found occupants and view, providing nothing to look at. What this recovery of an earlier *mise-en-scène* demonstrates is an architecture totally unconcerned with the identity of client or place: for “whom” and “where” simply do not matter. The “site” of the project is architecture itself: the conventions of type, precedent, and image-memory that constitute the disciplinary and popular fabrication of architecture, and that allow both the acknowledgment and deviation of what came before. *A house is a house is a* As a discursive practice, architecture is obligated to continually invent its predecessors and rescript the past along with the future. It is this conceit that allows architecture as a cultural form to elude the new masters of fact, conditions, or urgencies. One can *argue* with precedent, as “ends” are still up for grabs; but one can only *deliver* on urgencies, or *optimize* for innovation, in an endless succession of technical means.

The staging and reception of the Biennial presumes that all acts of architecture (or more accurately for the show, applications of technique) are *sui generis*, impossible to produce without embedded intimacy and voluminous documentation, or so diverse and unique that each recipient can evaluate the work only on her own terms. Criteria have inflated along with means to such an extent that they have become little more than impressions. This abdication of criticism produces a literal acceptance of things at face value—at present worth, you might say—and parallels the activity of a generation of designers that appears keen simply to get things done, and that has generally had more occasion at an earlier age to build. If previously architects might cover lack of opportunity by re-writing accidents as intentions (“*I meant to do that*”), the pragmatic work ethic

11 That is to say, current causes (or “urgencies” in the parlance of the day) rather than historical possibilities. This repression of influences appears even with more recent work, as when An Te Liu’s “Title Deed” (2009, a monochrome green Monopoly house outside Toronto), the Object Orange project in Detroit (2006, the guerilla marking of houses slated for demolition by the city), or the

“Blue Building” (2005–9, a derelict building in Rotterdam saturated in blue paint) are systematically erased from the discussion of Amanda Williams’s “Color(ed) Theory” painting of abandoned houses on the South Side (2014–15). It is as if entering Chicago, one presses a giant reset button, a disciplinary do-over where nothing happened before.



Johnston Marklee, Hill House, 2001. [Case Study #22, Julius Shulman]. Discipline as convention = reframe history (erased Koenig).

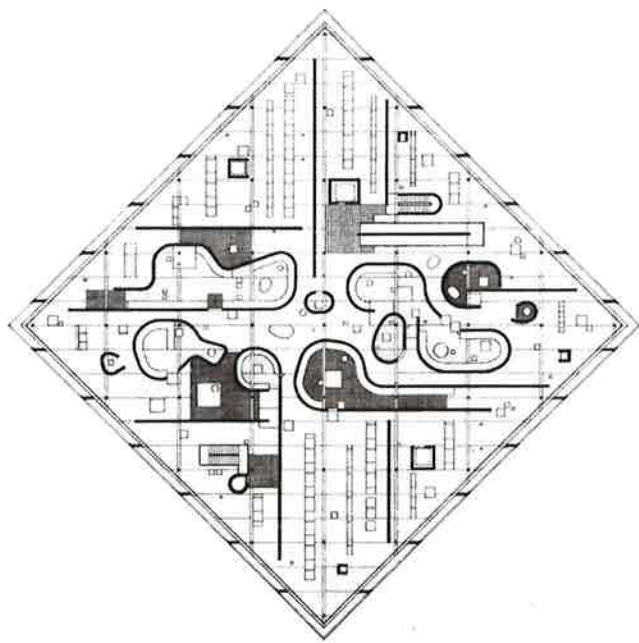
today can more accurately be characterized as “*I did to mean that.*” Doing is believing, and seemingly the only kind of speech available.

In the case of otherothers, as discussed above, the preoccupation with “doing” evident in the reception of the work operates to obscure its historical legacy. The situation manifests itself differently with those whose attachments are more to the construction of art than the cause of justice. In the projects of Pezo von Ellrichshausen (PvE), who are among the most talented of the newer generation, there is rather a conceptual inversion relative to earlier ambitions. If PvE revisits the rotated plans, isometric projections, and painterly elaborations of seriality first developed by John Hejduk fifty years ago, it is now to decidedly different ends. In the sixties and seventies, these projects were deemed architecture largely to the extent that they resisted building. Today, they are conceivable as architecture only to the degree they are in fact realized. From resistance to realization, the site of the architectural project has shifted from the “placelessness” of the drawing and its process of projection, to the localized structure as an index of the collision between ideal geometry with the contingencies of material methods and standards. Whatever happens is what was meant, no more and no less.

12 For a discussion of the ways in which personality served first as a form of intellectual break with the dominant teleology of a technically driven modernism, see Penelope Dean, “That ‘70s Show,” in *Chicagoisms*, ed. Alexander Eisenschmidt and Jonathan Mekinda (Zurich: Park Books, 2013): 22–37.

13 This specific formulation of the problem, as well as the general tenor of the argument elsewhere, is indebted to the work of Walter Benn Michaels, in particular *The Trouble with Diversity* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2006) and *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Restricting the discussion to the representational realm, the shift can be witnessed in two distinct understandings of the model. In 1976, the year before the Tigerman symposium and with many of the same protagonists, the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) hosted an exhibition entitled "Idea as Model" that sought to free models from their traditional instrumental attachments and open their potential to act as conceptual document. Today, by contrast, one might say we have entered a new paradigm of "model as building," certainly accelerated by product delivery demands supported by various Building Information Modeling (BIM) platforms, but also evident in the enthusiasm for prototypes, mock-ups, proof-of-concept models, and simulated environments through which many among the current generation primarily develop (or rather "test") their work. With BIM's real-time, interactive simulation model, what had previously existed as representation (plastic, artificial) is transformed into a thing-in-the-world, an independent entity with a life of its own, beyond authorship and ideology (again, think spider webs). In this way, architecture's



John Hejduk, *Diamond Museum C: floor plan*, 1963–67. Pen and black ink on tracing paper, 90 × 90.5 cm. The plan as primitive for the projected cube: the flattening of architecture as drawing.

14 This reconstitution of model as reality is not limited to the economy of integrated construction practices, but finds its corollary in the transformation of model into

artwork, into self-sufficient "original," a thing-in-and-for-itself, as in the case of Andreas Angelidakis's *bibelots*. Here, the interactive life of the object is completed by the personal,

consummation with present concerns charts a trajectory beyond representation.¹⁴ As much of the work in the CAB demonstrates, you can't meet reality halfway: give it 1/8" and it'll take 1:1.

While the City allows architecture to be torn down with one hand, its Biennial attempts to compensate by expanding architecture's domain with the other. You may have lost Prentice, the event seems to suggest, but you've gained relevance: economy, environment, and equity. Though it is clear that the organizers have tried to design an exhibition that is unable to be generalized due to the sheer diversity of its contents, it is not at all clear that these are differences that make a difference. There may be more practices represented, but fewer "projects" in the larger sense of the term: an expanded menu of options, but less choice. It is not that the field has expanded, as we are lead to believe, but that we have become looser in our categories. There are many practices, in other words, all-too-happy to conflate multiple media as they diversify their product lines among various niche markets.



Pezo von Ellrichshausen, 2012–13. Clockwise from top left: 12008121844, 30304132000, 70704131200, 61008132120. Oil on canvas, each 60 × 60 cm. The 3-D projection as instance of specific construction: the inflation of drawing as object (painting and/or building).

emotional investment into the specific bibelot.

15 The Columbia minishow, in a particular confirmation of Marshall McLuhan's diagnosis,

demonstrates a nostalgia for an earlier medium, the slide collection, and proceeds to reframe it as the content for its specific practice of putting found archives on display.

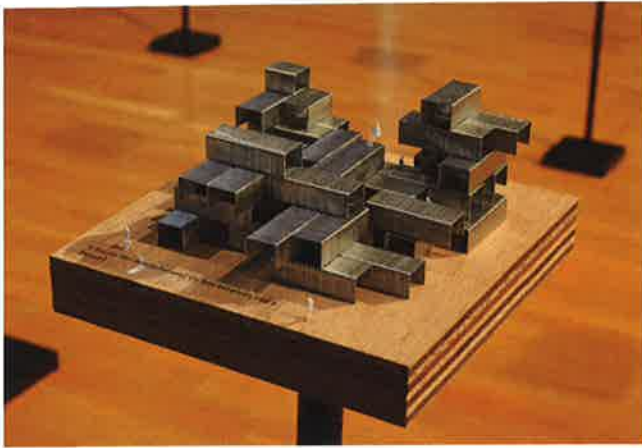


Atelier Bow-Wow, *Piranesi Circus*, installation at the Chicago Architecture Biennial, 2015. Discipline as constraint = stage breakouts.

Given the expenditure involved, the proliferating pan-ennials today have become too big to fail, and they unsurprisingly follow the model of guaranteed success mandated by a culture of delivery. At the same time, they are also too big to believe. The work solicits neither agreement nor disagreement (and how could it, when the ends are assumed *a priori* as “good”?), and there is no particular belief structure in place or contested disciplinary agenda. Following other aspects of architecture, exhibitions, too, have become subject to professionalization and specialization. As a consequence, the exhibition as having something to say has been eclipsed by the exhibition as a job to be done. In this regard, the final lesson of the CAB is to confirm this transfer of agency over exhibitions from architects to a new class of biennial directors. Paradoxically, then, the effect of abandoning a specific agenda or position in favor of traveling the globe to sample a disparate range of practice-types and media is precisely to demonstrate the urgent need for curation. Such is the madness to the method. This begins to explain the delegation to sub-curators who managed their own nested shows-within-a-show, including Columbia University’s “Contact High.” Exhibitions, which had previously served as the format or medium through which architects would convey projects and positions,

have now become the content themselves.¹⁵ If these biennials-en-abyme confirm the show’s overall lesson that exhibitions, an old medium, are now the thing to be delivered through a new format of a perpetual curation, there are nonetheless a few moments in the show where potential counter-positions can be glimpsed.

Occupying the courtyard of the Cultural Center, Atelier Bow-Wow’s “Piranesi Circus” is at once at the center of the show and outside it, literally generating a hole within the Biennial. Always visible through the windows of the exhibition and yet never accessible, “Piranesi Circus” runs through the entire section of the building, another world making its appearance in this one. A catalogue of unlikely forms of circulation and escape (ramps, suspended bridges, four-story ladder, cantilevered balcony, trapeze), the project launches the thought experiment that we might live by a different set of codes (building codes, health and safety regimes, facility management regulations, and so on), and questions the particular avoidance of litigation and risk that defines and limits our current possibilities of inhabitation and arrangement. (And may also reveal why architecture in the peculiarly risk-averse US is so much less exciting than that in Japan.) As Michel Foucault says of Borges’s Chinese encyclopedia, “Piranesi Circus” provokes the



Sou Fujimoto, *Architecture is Everywhere*, installation at the Chicago Architecture Biennial, 2015.
Discipline as concept = release the virtuality within the real.

liberating laughter that follows “the impossibility of thinking that.” In other words, it is a visitation from “elsewhere,” one that suggests the most significant context or site we labor under is neither geographic nor environmental (i.e., “natural”), and not motivated by facilitating the exhaustively defined needs of a universally-disabled subject, but an artifice of laws and convention. As such, it projects a specific alternative to the culture and politics of “accessibility” (or faux transparency) writ large.

Distributed in the no-man’s-land between the Biennial’s full-scale face-off between earnestness and irony, Sou Fujimoto’s “Architecture is Everywhere” escapes any prefabricated address or addressee, site or client. The project consists of seventy-odd, small wood tiles supported by waist-high posts arranged in a loose grid, with each tile or plot staging an encounter among three things: a found object (staples, packing foam, potato chips, matchboxes, painted twigs, crumpled acetate, ashtray, plastic bottle, binder clips, pine cone, clothes pins, etc.), a series of tiny scaled figures, and a brief statement (principle, question, or aphorism). As an organization in the space, the effect of the loose grid is that it both provides and withdraws orientation, frustrating any metric accounting of the field (it was surprisingly impossible to make an exact count of the elements), and one never proceeds through the zone in the same way. With an incredible economy of means, Fujimoto’s project indirectly points out that what may *look like* architecture in the exhibition (heroic full-scale constructions lauded as “modest” solutions) is not, while that which does not mimic building may provide the closest approximation of how architectural imagination and orchestration work. In other words, operating on building as subject matter (as most of the artists within and outside the exhibition do) does not make an architectural project, nor turn the agent into an architect. In this way, Fujimoto invokes Hans Hollein’s almost fifty-year-old

polemic “Everything is Architecture” (1968), though with some significant differences. Fujimoto is not saying (as Hollein concludes) that “all are architects”: in other words, the ability to see the architectural possibilities of potato chips does not retroactively make Frito-Lay an architectural office. “Architecture is Everywhere” implies that architecture in fact has no site, it is not local, but, as a way of seeing the world, the discipline provides a mobile intelligence for the proliferation of spatial and organizational concepts. As a concept generator, Fujimoto avoids the current tendency to collapse models into reality (the BIM trajectory of verisimilitude), and inversely transforms aspects of reality into imaginary models.

As the world has not just come to, but rather *become* Chicago, the intimacies of place and currency, the demand for the here and now, the up close and personal, is now everywhere. But that’s nothing to write home about. The only way architecture (and its exhibition) can expect to engage the world is not by holding up what will always be an inadequate mirror, providing the backdrop for a collective selfie, but by operating ruthlessly on and through its own terms. Its obligation is to shape the world, not map it. Both the Bow-Wow and Fujimoto projects demonstrate that, while the familiarity of the city, along with its external metrics of reality, is not a particularly good lens through which to see or evaluate architecture, architecture remains a potentially powerful means through which to envision and transform the city.

Projects require conceits, and today conceits are at war with conditions. We have witnessed “bigness” reduced to big data, “infrastructuralism” recast as bridge repair. Within the cultural politics of neo-liberalism, architecture is hardly unique in this situation, where the subject is “you,” the medium is “research,” and the deliverable is, well, “doing.” What is specific, however, is that architecture is so spectacularly ill suited to satisfy these demands. Always a collective form with an extremely long half-life (as either drawn or built), architecture embodies within itself multiple ontologies of political economy, alternatives that continue to surround and stage us despite their patent “inefficiencies” for the limited event horizon of the now. Architecture remains one of the rare expressions in everyday life that provides a continuous experience of those other worlds and their distinct forms of organization and value, and simultaneously lays claim on a future that architecture’s particular techniques of projection allow. Architecture is a plastic practice, exactly positioned to enact alternatives: to produce holes in the world, stage breakouts, and release the virtuality captured in the real. The world “as it is” never constitutes a sufficient condition for architecture. And if you propose to “do” architecture—whether producing it, exhibiting it, or writing about it—that should not go without saying.

Easier Done Than Said
The Cameo