Issue 8
News from the Architectural Association

AARCHITECTURE



There comes a time as an architectural student when you just want to say fuck the conceptual crap, the drawings, the smart talk, I just want to build something. I think we all felt that.

Bridge of Styx PG 16



New Releases from AA Publications PG 18



On the Terrace PG 14



Perhaps this best characterises our generation as one that is nonchalant, resourceful and adapts to the problem at hand.

Revolutions of Choice PG 4

Architectural Association
School of Architecture

Clients and Patrons Lecture Series
Organised by Shumon Basar
6PM AA Lecture Hall

THERE ARE MANY WAYS OF PRESENTING IDEAS, BUT EXHIBITIONS WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO REPRESENT AND PROMOTE INSTITUTIONS, I THINK ARE REALLY 'DEAD' AND SHOULD NEVER BE DONE. POLICY ABOUT WHAT ONE PUTS ON THE WALLS IS COMPLEX, INSTITUTIONS ARE COMPLEX, AND CANNOT BE REDUCED TO SIGNS OF SIGNS.*

CITIZEN LAMBERT: PHYLLIS LAMBERT AND TERI WEHN-DAMISCH WITH BRETT STEELE 11.3.09

Teri Wehn-Damisch's biopic *Citizen Lambert: Joan of Architecture* is a unique glimpse into the world of Phyllis Lambert, renowned patron, architect, urban activist and founder of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal. The film switches from biography to autobiography, from public to private, with nods to Orson Welles and Gilles Deleuze. During the 1950s Lambert commissioned Mies van der Rohe to design the Seagram Building, and, through the CCA, has established a formidable architecture collection. After the screening, Brett Steele will discuss patronage, legacy and the art of biography with Lambert and Wehn-Damisch.

Phyllis Lambert studied architecture at IIT, Chicago. She designed the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal, and renovated the Biltmore Hotel in LA. In 1979 Lambert founded the CCA, a museum, archive and scholarly resource for architecture, promoting research and stimulating innovation in design practice. She has received numerous honorary awards for her work.

Teri Wehn-Damisch has lived in France since 1975, where she produced several series on the arts (Zigzag Domino, Ping Pong) for French television. She wrote and directed the documentary *On Snow's Wavelength: Zoom Out* (2001), and with Madelon Vriesendorp, co-authored the film *Flagrant Délit* (1980).

AARCHITECTURE ISSUE 8

2 Stefano Boeri

4 Revolutions of Choice

7 AA Council and Student Representation

8 Cinema Lalibela: Off-Road Architecture

10 The Encounters Around Architecture and Systems Research: (An Introductory Excerpt)

12 Jan Kaplicky: Future Systems

14 On The Terrace

16 Bridge of Styx

17 AA Design + Make Programme

18 New Releases from AA Publications

20 Nicholas Pozner Memorial Fund and Dinner

21 Members' Trips

22 News

24 News Briefs

28 Forms of Inquiry Annex

The Encounters Around Architecture and Systems Research: (An Introductory Excerpt)

By Gonçalo M. Furtado

The following text is an excerpt from Gonçalo Furtado's 'Envisioning an Evolving Environment: The Encounters of Gordon Pask, Cedric Price and John Frazer' [PhD Dissertation], London: University College of London, 2007. The thesis provides a history of exchanges between architecture and the fields of cybernetics, systems research and computation throughout the last five decades. In particular, it focuses on the encounters between three pre-eminent British professionals – Gordon Pask, Cedric Price and John Frazer – and provides a complete account of two outstanding architectural projects related to systems and computation, Generator and Japan Net. It also highlights the architectural relevance of these encounters and the importance of their contemporary legacy – the genesis of the systemic and computational paradigm in architectural design and the promotion of an evolving environment.

In the post-war era, cybernetics and the systems approach have shown new means of dealing with complexity and organisation, which possess broad application. This has been paralleled by developments in computation and Artificial Intelligence. In the UK distinguished work was developed by cyberneticians such as Ashby, Beer, Pask and George.

Cyberneticist and experimental psychologist, Gordon Pask, the crucial figure of second-order-cybernetics who was awarded the Wiener gold medal, is identified as a seminal promoter of cybernetics in the fields of art and architecture since the 1960s. Pask also developed particular ideas on 'general intelligence' (as distinct from the more rigid understanding of Artificial Intelligence) and his own major second-order cybernetics achievement – Conversation Theory – which interestingly had one of its first expressions in architecture. Clearly, Pask understood computation as something interactive, and conversation as the basis of meaning exchange.

In relation to architecture, modernist thinking was affected by the breakthrough attitude of the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, there were many parallel avant-garde practices, including Archigram and Yona Friedman, and they presented their work jointly with Cedric Price in the 1966 IDEA. The two projects mentioned in this short text pertain, not coincidently, to Price. This maverick of British avant-garde architecture was a tireless promoter of flexible impermanent architecture open to users' participation, a concept from which arose post-modern questions concerning the role of architecture in society and the architect's status. Price's early acknowledgement of the potential of the new informational and computational technology permitted the formation of influential bases for the later development of high-tech and digital architecture.

From 1976 onwards, Cedric Price worked on a project engaged with systems and computers – the Generator. This envisioned a flexible architectural complex on the Florida-Georgia border, consisting of a grid into which a crane would deliver cubical spatial modules and other components in various arrangements. My thesis reveals Price's exhaustive pursuit of an impermanent architecture open to users.

Price's aim of a 'responsive architecture' was furthered by John and Julia Frazer's systems consultancy. The Frazers' up-to-date research provided a system that enabled and stimulated the regeneration of the complex and, furthermore, they envisioned Generator as possessing its own life and mind – a proactive rather than a reactive structure. Price and the Frazers' encounters reflected, at the time, the availability of computation opened by the microprocessor, and such encounters led to its recognition as the first intelligent building.

John Frazer continued to develop outstanding computational research on the seed technique, intelligent modelling systems and evolutionary architecture. He became a crucial name associated with evolutionary design computation, and his insights continue to exert their influence today.

In 1982, Pask's Microman offered a seminal envisioning of man-machine symbiosis in a more holistic Information Environment, and his involvement with 'Andragology' led to Conversation



John Frazer, Cedric Price, Gordan Pask & Robert Mull. Photo Valerie Bennett

Theory's extension into the Interaction of Actors theory. Pask also reencountered Price in 1986 for Japan Net. Here, Pask gave a unique expression to Price's premises of change and permanent information exchange, envisioning Kawasaki as an ample evolving system, and expressing his own second-order-cybernetics' interests. Frazer and his unit, in turn, developed outstanding research that would lead to the 'Universal Constructor' and subsequent electronic models and exhibitions at the AA. His research coincided with a revisiting of the Generator project (1989–90) for which a model containing interactive adaptation and evolutive capacities was envisioned. When one of Frazer's electronic models was exhibited at the AA, Pask identified it as an expression of the Information Environment.

Also at the AA, Pask manifested his interest in experimenting with the 'Thoughtsticker', and in promoting the 'Information Environment' and the 'Architecture of Knowledge' epistemology. He became involved in the organisation of events at the AA that dealt with time and emergence issues [e.g. with Bunschoten], and even intended to conceive an evolving computation animation called 'A of K' to be exhibited together with Frazer's electronic model.

In 1995 Frazer published a major account about *An Evolutionary Architecture* (AA Publications), a new paradigm that equated architecture with an 'artificial life form'. This new paradigm resembled Price's own search for a 'responsive architecture' and computer aided design methods that would benefit users. Pask authored the foreword, and he also revealed his interest in writing a work entitled 'Architecture of Civilization, Culture and the Information Environment', in line with his later concerns with a civilisation encompassing the temporal evolution of culture, architecture and thought.

Throughout that time the new techno-cultural order of the Information Society was established, influencing architecture at the level of urban, building and design. The current interest in thoughts of complexity and emergence and in a more evolving environment has its roots in systems research and computation. Gordon Pask, Cedric Price and John Frazer have had long-lasting influences and retain contemporary relevance to work developed by a range of architects and artists.

Gonçalo Furtado is a Member of the AA
paskpricefrazer.blogspot.com