Untitled Number Seven
ARTIST: Multiple
MEDIUM: Print Journal
DATE: 2005
SIZE: approx. 9" x 11¼" x ½"

DESCRIPTION: Special issue on architecture and exhibition practice

OTHER NOTES: Isn't architecture in some senses always and already a form of exhibition? Aren't exhibitions always and already a type of architecture? Look to this volume to help think through these slippery questions as the discipline of architecture encounters the institutional space of the gallery and museum, and vice versa.
EXHIBITING ARCHITECTURE THE PRAXIS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ARCHITECTURAL CURATORS

IF YOU DON’T ADMIRE SOMETHING, IF YOU DON’T LOVE IT, YOU HAVE NO REASON TO WRITE A WORD ABOUT IT.

— GILLES DELEUZE, DESERT ISLAND AND OTHER TEXTS (1953-1974)

AN ASPECT OF DELEUZE’S ATTITUDE MIGHT BE AT THE CORE OF ALL CURATORIAL WORK, DISTINGUISHING IT FROM OTHER TYPES OF PUBLIC THINKING, TEACHING, AND RESEARCH. PERHAPS THIS TYPE OF AFFIRMATIVE AND, DARE WE SAY, JOYFUL OR OPTIMISTIC ATTITUDE INFORMS ALL ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITS. DELEUZE’S STATEMENT IS IMPORTANT FOR US BECAUSE IT APPROXIMATES THE PASSION OF WHAT MANFREDO TAFURI CALLED THE “OPERATIVE CRITIC,” A TERM WE BORROW IN ORDER TO CONSCIOUSLY REINVEST IT WITH ITS PREVIOUSLY IMMANENT AFFIRMATION. IN OTHER WORDS, WE WANT TO STRESS AND PROMOTE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AFFIRMATIVE AND THE CRITICAL IN ARCHITECTURE.

FOR THIS PRAXIS QUESTIONNAIRE, WE POSED THE SAME TEN QUESTIONS TO FIVE ARCHITECTURAL CURATORS - AARON BETSKY, JEFFREY KIPNIS, FRÉDÉRIC MIGAYROU, TERENCE RILEY, AND JOSEPH ROSA. THESE QUESTIONS REFLECT OUR INTEREST IN THE WAYS INSTITUTIONS SHOWCASE, MEDIATE, AND CONSTRUCT PUBLIC OPINION AND EVENTUALLY AFFECT VERSIONS OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY. THE VARIED RESPONSES WE RECEIVED PROVIDE A PEEK INSIDE THE WORLD OF ARCHITECTURAL CURATION, HIGHLIGHTING THE PROCESS OF PRESENTING ARCHITECTURE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A MUSEUM AND PROVIDING A PARTICULAR REGISTER OF THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURAL THINKING.
TOP LEFT: Clip City: space, architecture and the city in music exhibition took place from January 25 to April 14, 2002 at NAI under the directorship of Aaron Betsky.

TOP RIGHT: Curated by Jeffrey Kipnis, the Mood River exhibition hugged, flew over and danced with the walls of the Wexner Center for the Arts from February 3, 2002 until June 30, 2002.


BOTTOM LEFT: Light Construction show curated at MoMA, by Terence Riley in 1995, thematically grouped an entire generation of now leading architects before they were well known to the public.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Vincent Van Duysen’s “Cascade Chandelier” was presented in Joseph Rosa’s Glamour show, which opened on October 9, 2005 at SFMOMA.
AARON BETSKY

I am the director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI), the largest museum of architecture in the world and the archives of Dutch architecture. The NAI holds the archives of over 800 architects, which comprise more than a kilometer of archive space, and over a thousand models. This includes the work of all architects of national and international importance from the 1850s through to the 1970s, with the notable exception of a significant part of the Gerrit Rietveld Archives. I began my curatorial work in 1993 at SCI-Arc, where I organized small exhibitions on the work of visiting critics and competitions, including the Spreebogen in Berlin.

AUDIENCE
1. AS A CURATOR, IN WHOSE NAME DO YOU SPEAK? OR IN OTHER WORDS, DO YOU EXPERIENCE AND DO YOU ENGAGE THE PRESSURES TO REPRESENT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING? FOR WHOM DO YOU CURATE?

I do not speak in anybody’s name or represent anybody. My role as a curator is to bring art or, in this case, architecture together with an audience. My voice is my own, which is to say that it is my task to articulate a particular point of view that I think will open up perspectives within that determined landscape. The museum takes these artifacts out of time and place, and asks us to look at them seeing what we can learn from them, or to merely enjoy them. One hopes (or at least I do) that the experience in the museum will allow the viewer to understand the historically produced and designed environment more clearly and with more pleasure (or fear) after seeing these artifacts; that the possible futures presented in the museum might open up perspectives for the viewer within that future that are by their very nature unbuilt. The museum takes these artifacts out of time and place, and asks us to look at them seeing what we can learn from them, or to merely enjoy them. One hopes (or at least I do) that the experience in the museum will allow the viewer to understand the historically produced and designed environment more clearly and with more pleasure (or fear) after seeing these artifacts; that the possible futures presented in the museum might open up perspectives for the viewer within that determined landscape.

2. DOES THE POSITION A CURATOR CONSTRUCTS TOWARDS HISTORY ALWAYS IMPLY A PROJECTION FOR THE FUTURE?

The general audience and the urge or need to define a moment (a trend, a problem) in order to educate the general audience and the urge or need to define a moment (a trend, a problem) for the sake of further disciplinary development?

I have little interest in movements or trends, but I am interested in finding and revealing phenomena. For instance, in the exhibition Icons (SFMOMA, 1997), I collected twelve icons of daily life that through a combination of use, design, and promotion had become central to the way we perceive the relationship between our own identity and that of our society. They ranged from blue jeans to BMW’s, and I further showed the qualities I believe made these twelve central pieces iconic with several hundred similar objects. I was mainly interested in the formal characteristics (voids, abstracted whiplashes, the conversion of objects of work into ritualistic objects) that I believed allowed designed objects to be more than things of use. Such thematic exhibitions are valuable because they let the audience see connections between objects, images, and spaces that might otherwise remain obscure.

3. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE URGE OR NEED TO DESCRIBE A MOMENT (A TREND, A PROBLEM) IN ORDER TO EDUCATE THE GENERAL AUDIENCE AND THE URGE OR NEED TO DEFINE A MOMENT (A TREND, A PROBLEM) FOR THE SAKE OF FURTHER DISCIPLINARY DEVELOPMENT?

4. DO YOU CARE ABOUT UTOPIAS? DO YOU LOOK FOR THEM? WHERE?

Yes, they are a wonderfully romantic idea, a shocker and role model. I still think this was the right thing to do, even though it was very complicated. Yes, my motto is: “Fetishization, not commodification.” I believe that the museum is an engine for removing objects, images, and spaces from everyday life, transforming them into fetishes, and then pulling apart those adored things so that we can figure out what is so important about them. The three biggest questions are: first, how do you do this, i.e., what do you choose, how do you enframe the thing chosen, how do you make a fetish (which cannot really be done); two, how do you maintain the fetish even while examining and explaining it; three, how do you prevent the fetish from becoming a consumable icon, or how do you at least manage to preserve something of the fetish even as it is consumed. Only by answering these three questions can a museum remain effective.

5. WHO WERE YOUR TEACHERS, AND WHO DO YOU SEE AS OUR TEACHERS TODAY—TEACHERS IN THE SENSE OF INSPIRERS, MEDIATORS, SHOCKERS AND ROLE MODELS?

Vincent Scully, George Hersey, Fredric Jameson and later Cesar Pelli and Frank Gehry were my most important teachers in school. I admire the work of theoreticians such as Tafuri, J.B. Jackson, Tony Vidler, Kurt Forster, and Mark Wigley, but I’m not sure who my role models are today.

6. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT YOU FETISHIZE A SPECIFIC ASPECT OF ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION (DESIGN CONCEPTS, THE ARCHITECTURAL OBJECT, THE ARTIFACTS THAT NECESSARILY PRECEDE OR FOLLOW THE DESIGN PROCESS, ETC.)? HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN YOUR WORK?

Influences
7. HOW HAS DIGITAL MEDIA—NOW FULLY INTEGRATED INTO AND EVEN STRUCTURAL TO ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION—AFFECTED YOUR WORK? HOW HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR INSTITUTION’S ATTITUDE TOWARD ARCHITECTURAL ARTIFACTS?

I was the first (or the second, or the third—depending on how you count) curator to include websites and digital architecture in the collection of a major art museum. I still think this was the right thing to do, even though it was very complicated.
Preserving digital archives is an incredibly difficult and perhaps even self-contradictory effort, and one that our institution, in its dual role as an archive and a museum, is trying to confront. In terms of presentation, I have very little interest in showing digital animations. You can watch those at home. What interests me within the traditional space of the museum is presenting installation work that relies on digital media. I am currently trying to establish at the NAI a digital space for the presentation of architecture that exists only in the electrosphere or virtual realm, similar to the one I created at SFMOMA. It may be that we won’t be able to separate the meat from the digital chaff in the future, but who can say?

THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT

8. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OR CHALLENGING SHOW YOU HAVE CURATED?

I did six shows at SCI-Arc, fifty at SFMOMA, and about forty here, and I wouldn’t know how to pick favorites. You learn something from each one; something doesn’t work every time; and they all have some meaning, or you wouldn’t do them.

9. WHAT ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION—CURATED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOURSELF—HAD THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON YOU? WHY? HAS ANY RECENT SHOW MANAGED TO GALVANIZE AN ISSUE FOR YOU, OR SEEMED TO BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR THE DISCIPLINE?

The Frank Gehry retrospective organized by the Walker Art Gallery in 1986 blew me away. I was young, impressionable, and working at Gehry’s firm. The large-scale objects conveyed the essence of the architecture better than any other installation I have seen since. The last great architecture show I saw was Mies in America at the Whitney.

10. MORE GENERALLY, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE DEFINING ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION AND THINKING?

If I knew that, I could retire.

JEFFREY KIPNIS

WHO’S AFRAID OF GIFT-WRAPPED KAZOOS?

DEDICATED TO DAVID WHITNEY

I wish I had never gone to Dia:Beacon; I loathed it. Try to imagine Lou Reed’s “Walk on the Wild-side” chanted by Benedictines—“But she never lost her head, even when she was giving head, doo, do, doo...” in solemn cantus firmus, resonating with languorous, parallel fourths. Gorgeous, but grotesque; that’s how Beacon feels. A pantheon, it casts the reprobate art of the sixties in a morality play that exalts idolatry, the death instinct, and white flight in a single bound, a staging that grows all the more vile as I think back to the original scene, to its iconoclastic rhythms, its impulse to disestablishment, to its characters so grizzly, so utterly urban. Warhol, Beuys, Naumann, Flavin, Ryman, Serra; their once feral stuff here tamed shamelessly by the insidious power of landscape and architecture to work evil with beauty. Even the name of the place is unfortunate; did any of these works mean to stand tall and show the way? (Okay, maybe Judd, to his abiding discredit.) Anyway, I remember the work differently: hunched, fidgety, disaffected, an art whose vain misanthropy gave permission to mine. It drew me to the City. Now these winners of our discontent are made glorious by this son of York.

Beacon is a permanent study installation, of course, not a show. Yet, it performs as a show, a great show, dastard in its villainy to be sure, but great nonetheless. These vituperations are themselves evidence; clearly, I was moved. And for the purpose of considering shows as such, it must first be the absolute value of the displacement—how far from indifference we are shoved as a sheer quantity—that concerns us, before the particular sign or significance of the movement. Yet, the quality of the dislocation, too, must eventually pester our attention, because indifference is not simply a static point on a line, a zero bracketed by positive and negative, even if at any moment in time that is how it feels. It is, rather, an elusive, shivering position in a living vector field in which each and every location is uniquely conjugated by two coordinates, affect and intellect.

Dear Praxis Editors,

As interesting as I find your questionnaire, I find it maddening to answer the questions in that format. Not only are the issues they raise too interconnected in my mind, but also I have a distorted sense of their weight. By the time I answer to my satisfaction some of the important questions that nevertheless deserve but a succinct response (for example: on the impact of other personnel at the museum) I squander time and space out of proportion. The brief answer to that inquiry, as a demonstration, would be something like: “Immensely important, in ways large and small, positive and negative, and in almost every case unimaginable to anyone else but a fellow curator.” But that would merely frustrate the readers, leave them wanting a story or two, like the one about the junior installer who saved my ass and the institution’s reputation by having the presence of mind to put his hand up and stop a crate containing a fragile and irreplaceable glass work that was tipping over while I, the registrar, the chief installer, and half a dozen others stood frozen in our tracks.

But I suspect you are after something less chatty, so if you will allow me the informality of a letter, I will amongst my digressions attempt to address the three issues that mattered most to me as a curator. I realize that most letters do not bear a title, not to mention an epigraph, but the title answers one of your questions, and I wrote the Dia:Beacon fragment and wanted to publish it, but missed the deadline. So I’m attaching it to this piece; it kind of fits.

Remember, I only held the position of curator for four years and only did two major shows—or one major and five minor, depending on how you count. The brevity of my tenure matters a great deal—if for no other reason than for the self-indulgence it permitted. An entirely different set of
considerations has been required by Terry’s impressive string of major thematic exhibitions at MoMA, or Aaron’s astonishing fifty+ shows at SFMOMA in ten years. Quantity has a quality all its own.

The three issues are these: how did I regard the architecture exhibition, how did I cope with the peculiar problems of display that such exhibitions raise, and finally, how did the physical architecture of the institution, in my case Peter Eisenman’s Wexner Center, factor into my work.

From the start, I set out to explore the exhibition as a singular form of theater. All curators do, of course, but my desire was to exaggerate the experiment, subordinating all other considerations. In part that project followed from interests aroused by those French intellectuals and their discourses on representation. In part it derived from a peculiar construal of the museum building as such that I was developing as a defense of conjunctural architecture of the museum—as in Wright’s Guggenheim, Rem’s Kunsthal, Coop Himmelblau’s Groningen, and Zaha’s Cincinnati. The particularity of these buildings set against an increasingly insistent demand from the museum community for a return to architectural reticence in the name of programmatic flexibility, one that seemed to be receiving little resistance from our own critics with the exception of Muschamp. Obviously, the Wexner Center could play an important role in that defense. If I could make the Wexner sing, I figured, I would have not just an argument, but some evidence—and after all, who better to do that than an architecture curator? By the way, in my argument “sing” is not merely a figure of speech, but then I said it was peculiar.

Mostly, though, I wanted to do it because that was how I preferred to experience exhibitions. I don’t think exhibitions make good documentaries; no, let me correct that, they can make great documentaries, but they make lousy essays and even worse books. Even a seasoned and ardent enthusiast will spend at most two hours in an exhibition, and I would guess thirty minutes is more like the maximum attention span of a more typical member of the audience.

An essay or a book can earn the undivided attention of the reader for many hours and thus the writer has time to unfold the scholarship, the considered argument, the conjecture or the story carefully, and in considerable detail. Again, even the expert does not, cannot, pay such close attention to an exhibition. A better way to think of it would be that each form of cultural production has its own timbre of close attention, its own spectrum of attention; we study, pay rapt or casual attention to, enjoy or merely scan books, films, live theater, dance, art, and building—each in its own way. For me, the question of time and attention are crucial, because I came to realize that museum exhibitions are the most fleeting and ephemeral form of cultural production. We visit them once; our stay is brief; our attention light-distracted by the dance of the other people and the lure of the other things; and though they may travel for a while, once they close, they never ever return.

It seems to me that quite a few of today’s curatorial customs—the heavy use of didactics and headsets, the increasing emphasis on the catalogue, the urge to comprehensiveness, and the assumption that the exhibition must be an essay (i.e., have an idea, prove something, or at least make a point) can be understood as efforts to counteract what is tacitly acknowledged as an essential defect of the exhibition—its transience. It’s not hard to understand the reason why either. You work for literally years; you develop a concept; you comb through and scrutinize innumerable candidates for the checklist; you choose sometimes a hundred or more of these; you beg people to lend the works to you—and I mean you beg; you read your butt off so that you know everything there is to know about them, and if the architects or artists you are working with are alive, god help you deal with them; you arrange and rearrange and rearrange the works in your head and in models till your eyes bleed to get the concept and the experience to mesh in a stubborn set of spaces, and then you pray someone comes to see your show. If they do, when they do they gossip and pontificate and opine as they breeze through it without the slightest interest in, or even awareness of, the sacrifice, the heroism, and yes, dammit, the genius of your efforts. You begin to despise every single one of the moronic motherfu…. Uh, sorry, I digressed.

I believed, on the other hand, that the irreducible, irreproducible effects, the pleasures, the powers, the possibilities of the exhibition were actually due to its fragility. I took a cue from Hamlet. Had the prince wanted to catch the king, to prove his guilt and prosecute him, evidence would have been the thing, but Hamlet wanted something else, he wanted to catch the conscience of the king, for that he needed theater, a play. I wanted something that required even a lighter touch than live theater, because I wanted to put king and company and things all on stage as characters in a micro-play without them even knowing it and to score it with the silent soundtrack that only an exhibition produces. The exhibition is the only kind of theater in which actor, audience, prop, set, lighting, orchestra, and even the stage itself is on stage, all at the same time, and none quite know which role they play. Frankly, as an architectural and design curator, that’s really what I thought my responsibility was, because the only other places you find anything like that are not in the theater of the exhibition, but in bars and schools and libraries and courthouses, you know, just life, in architecture. That is why I never wanted a whole show to travel, though bits and pieces of some did.

A jumbo burlesque we did (if ever there was a team effort on a show, this was it) called Mood River, kind of a Baz Luhrmann thing, got a lot of notice, but the show I believe to have been far more accomplished was Suite Fantastique, five separate exhibitions staged as five movements tied together by an idée fixe.

So, what has any of this got to do with French discourse on representation, you might ask? First of all, the evident embarrassment hobbling an architecture curator...
is that it’s impossible to put buildings inside museums, so we wretched castrati—never able to put our thing itself on display—are forever condemned to representations and simulacra in one form or another. You can imagine the lure in this circumstance of a learned argument that there is no thing itself, that everything is representation. To me, what was incongruously funny was the solemn mantra I heard every art curator without exception and without fail recite about the museum’s responsibility to respect and protect the integrity of the “art-object itself.” I understood the historical and professional issues and shared the sentiment—who wouldn’t—but there was always such a religious tenor to these recitals. Why wasn’t Duchamp responsible to respect and protect the integrity of the stool and the bicycle? Weren’t both made by artists? Or would you rather that the historical and professional issues shared the sentiment—who wouldn’t—but there was always such a religious tenor to these recitals. Why wasn’t Duchamp responsible to respect and protect the integrity of the stool and the bicycle? Weren’t both made by artists?

From a practical point of view, I found the problem of exhibiting design thornier, because design has already been designed for display, both in retail and publication. Since I generally tried to install against type—such as architecture is concerned. In the work Deleuze uses to launch the two comes from the tension between their work; it’s a contest between perfectly matched masters, like the swordfight between Sky and Nameless. But for the purposes of this letter, I just want to note a fairly straightforward point on which their work joins forces.

To get back to the point, as we all know, the quotidian achievement of poststructuralism was to demonstrate conclusively that no terminal signified could exist, and to demonstrate the operation of hidden agendas—political, psychoanalytic, metaphysical, et al.—behind structuralism, phenomenology, dialectical materialism, and all the other discourses that engender such a signified. Because of this achievement, as far as I am concerned, no one with intellectual integrity can any longer place the word representation in italics, quotation marks, or any other device to suggest that it can be recognized, isolated, understood, and domesticated particularly in the defense of an offended represented. Now, for me, what lifts the work of Derrida and Deleuze above the crowd is the profound energy each spends to recuperate the possibility of a positive project from the apparent, but nonexistent, nihilism that a first brush with poststructuralism seems to threaten. The unbearable joy of reading the two comes from the tension between their work; it’s a contest between perfectly matched masters, like the swordfight between Sky and Nameless. But for the purposes of this letter, I just want to note a fairly straightforward point on which their work joins forces.

Even if Derrida gently annihilates the origin and thus the original in its metaphysical guise, he is careful to reconstruct a new economy of the origin and of originality. To say that the copy produces the original as the original is not to say that there is no original, nor is it to reverse the role or status of copy and original. Rather, the subtlety of the argument is that both the original and the copy continue to exist in the operational sense of each term, as provisional constructions, both are always open to reconstruction. This, of course, is but an elementary application of Derrida’s thought of the supplement, which alongside his extraordinary and protracted meditation on the gift, I believe constitutes his most important work as far as architecture is concerned. In the work on the gift, he considers the question of what moves and what is left behind and why, when communication of things, of ideas, etc. occurs between people, practices, or disciplines. What (an architect might ask in this sense) does a program or a precedent give to a building? What does a work give to an exhibition? What does an exhibition give to an audience?

Deleuze, too, is concerned to recover the possibility of a new originality in light of the demise of the signified; and is concerned as well with the question of transmission, which shows up most clearly in his elusive provocation: the diagram as an abstract machine, but permeates his work in many manifestations. Since knowledge cannot transcend practice to become an ideality—a terminal signified—he imagines a thousand knowledges, each irreducible and irrepresentable, yet all in raucous communication with one another according to the promiscuous machinations of the diagram. Just listen to the passage from D.H. Lawrence on Cezanne that Deleuze uses to launch his own assault on the cliché via Bacon: “After fighting tooth-and-nail for forty years, he [Cezanne] did succeed in knowing an apple, fully; and, not quite as fully, a jug or two...”

For a painter to know an apple fully suggests that though the painted apple is a representation it is also now an original—of which the apple I eat is but a mediocre representation. And presumably there will be a novel-apple and a poem-apple and a chemistry-apple and a gastronomy-apple, and a thousand more, each not only a representation, but a re-originating as long as in its practice it somehow manages to struggle free of its cliché.

I see architecture exhibitions as a practice, and my mission to re-originates the life of architecture—its talents, achievements, and foibles—in the medium of the exhibition. So, my problem wasn’t one of representation, but was the struggle with the clichés of my medium. I used the theater model because I thought of the material I had to work with—models, drawings, and photographs—as performers, actors, after all, in their role as representation, weren’t
they acting? And there are two ways to get to know an actor intimately: read a great biography—i.e., the book way—or see him or her in as many performances as possible, the more challenging the better—the show way.

And the importance of the architecture of the physical facility? Terry Riley, when lecturing on museum architecture, is fond of showing the Winged Victory in the Louvre and making the point that, though he knows little about Hellenic art and therefore the actual merits of the sculpture, the melodramatic staging of the piece by the architecture produces the inescapable effect of assuring him—and most everyone else—that it is the most important of masterpieces. He goes on to tell of the room full of similar works more studiously displayed not one hundred feet away, works that seemed to be less important, though he would have been hard pressed to articulate the differences. Listening to him, it occurred to me that the building achieved its effect by placing the sculpture centered frontally on the landing at the pinnacle of a grand staircase, looking down on the approaching viewer, i.e., placed in the Roman manner, so to speak. As a Greek sculpture, however, the likely optimum view is on the same level and from the oblique, all the more in that the work depicts a goddess on a ship’s prow, a scene you would expect to see from the side. If you really want to see her fabric ripple in the wind, next time you are there, press your back as far into each of the corners of the platform wall as you can. In other words, to achieve its spectacular hyperbole, the architecture had to violently subvert the artwork (Yea for the museum). Stories such as these are legion, of course, and work both ways.

In the last episode of the MoMA 2000 experiment, Barnett Newman’s Broken Obelisk was placed on the 2nd floor escalator landing, the shaft running up the void escalator core—much as so many hanging decorations or chandeliers do in endless malls and department stores. So inured was I to any object in that spatial context, I barely noticed it, doing a double take to see it only as I was leaving. As we walked out the door I asked my companion, a seasoned museum professional and modern art specialist, what she thought of the installation of the Newman. “Where was it?” she replied.

Feeding my habit, I see as many exhibitions as I can in multiple venues, and trust me, the effect of the building on the exhibition—or with the exhibition—simply cannot be overstated. Greg Lynn spent considerable energy designing the installation of the exquisite multidisciplinary Intricacy exhibition he organized, tailoring it specifically and even designing custom chandeliers for that gaping maw of a white box at the Philadelphia ICA, the show’s originating institution. (If you ever want to feel the architectural equivalent to choros-form, go to that building.) When the show traveled to Rudolph’s Art and Architecture building, to one of those notorious galleries plagued with architecture, most of Lynn’s reinstallation effort grappled with overcoming the problems of shoe-horning the show into a smaller space without violating any loan covenants. Yet, when Intricacy opened in New Haven, the difference was jaw-drop amazing. It not only looked better, but the thesis of the show became more palpable. Yet all of this is obvious, and not really yet even about architecture, just building. Let me drag out one more clumsy analogy: the museum building as musical instrument. I know I’m mixing my metaphors, the exhibition as theater, the building as instrument, but really, who cares, it’s just a letter.

I think of the museum building as a musical instrument because the analogy goes some distance for me. Great instruments, the likes of Stradivarius, Steinway, or Fender, all have very particular voices capable of performing some music well—especially music written for it—some okay, some not so good, and some not at all. Such instruments are easy enough to play, but enormously difficult to play well, and very few do. Kazoos are incredibly easy to play and with virtually no work at all, anybody can play anything on—they are “flexible” in the parlance of the moment. Instruments are fussy and difficult and present enormous problems. Think of a screeching out-of-tune violin, or Mel Schacher’s bass guitar work for Grand Funk Railroad. In the hands of a master though, the result is utterly transporting—and for most of us, life defining. On the kazoo there is no such thing as bad playing, good playing, or great playing. No matter what the song, no matter who’s performing, it all sounds the same. What many museum directors seem to want today are gift-wrapped kazos. Who’s afraid of a gift-wrapped kazoo? Me.

While I already mentioned a few attendant effects of a museum building, it goes without saying that what any architect of interest produces is much more than a building with some good effects, and it is in that augmentation that the museum forms a unique and coherent voice, though the voice of a museum is not a version of an instruments voice or persons voice. It’s its own thing, and I believe the preeminent responsibility of the architecture curator is to become a virtuoso at his or her instrument. It’s not about docenting the building, making the subject or subtext of every show. It’s about making it do things it was meant to do and not meant to do, playing it as the architect imagined, but also as the architect never imagined, like John Cage and his erasers. Though the curator should test the limits of the instrument, there’s a difference between knowing when to teeth the strings on an electric guitar and dumbly blowing into the hole of a cello. (I know, this is a lift from Woody Allen.)

Think of Mies and the National Gallery; the architect faced with the task of conceiving a building that imagines a role for art and a future for a nation still suffering the nightmares on its abject devastation, a building to be located in Berlin (site of some of the deepest scars-the Wall just built). It is an easy analysis, no doubt well known to the readers, to read the building as a tragic opera about art, one that starts on the street, climbs to the Parthenon to find nothing but a ghost, descends into the crypt to find art,
buried, and waiting to be reborn. Every nut, bolt, beam, cantilever, view, and every ounce of the building contributes to the architecture. Yet, despite appearances, there is no slip of metaphor here; I am not saying the building is an opera, but that its architecture produces an instrument with a grave operatic voice. It would be easy to do a Rothko or Giacommetti or early Ando show in it, more difficult, though not impossible to do Jeff Koons or Atelier van Lieshout, and still work with the voice of the museum. Mostly, though, from the shows I’ve seen, the curators don’t even engage the building in these terms. It’s as if they did not have enough room; they fill up the pavilion with dividers and temporary walls; not inelegant, but in relation to the architecture: utterly hamfisted. They blow into it.

No one alive today knows that building better than Rem Koolhaas. It is inside him; he not only used it, abused it, and copied it, but he ate it, drank it, snorted it, shot it up, and probably rammed it up his own ass. So when he decided to open his recent Content exhibition there (rather than at the NAI against much protest), he knew what he was doing. As far as I am concerned, the installation was near-perfect; a perfect mess, to be sure; but perfect. The show, as you can imagine, was another of his brilliant insult comedies, and another great one at that. But he used every inch of the architecture of the building with adroit cunning to set off his optimistic counter-thesis. It could be a stunning episode of cultural production if Rem were to (?) design the installation of the exhibitions at the National Gallery for a few years.

And make no mistake about it, Eisenman’s Wexner Center has every bit the voice in its totality and its details that the National Gallery has, albeit a totally different one. It endeavors everywhere to contest the exhibition’s right to the attention of the viewer and to challenge the works on display to an intellectual debate, whether they want to argue or not. And does it present difficulties: it’s visually noisy, it has clusters of columns cluttering the floors of the galleries, important displays walls slope, it violates the no-return principle (twice), it casts moving grid-shadows on the works as the day passes, and, well, you know the rest. Yet these are not merely cranky stunts, they add up to something, to its architectural idea for critics and students, but also to its voice as a curatorial instrument. I didn’t have enough practice to become a virtuoso, but I found it exhilarating trying to learn to play it. It could really sing.

Yours truly,
Jeff
become the artistic adviser for the French Ministry of Culture in 1992.

AUDIENCE
1. AS A CURATOR, IN WHOSE NAME DO YOU SPEAK? OR IN OTHER WORDS, DO YOU EXPERIENCE AND DO YOU ENGAGE THE PRESSURES TO ‘REPRESENT’ SOMEONE OR SOMETHING? FOR WHOM DO YOU CURATE?
The Pompidou Center is a public institution that operates through two different departments: the National Museum of Modern Art and Industrial Creation. The museum holds a large collection and maintains a policy of dissemination through exhibitions, publications, and formation. As the Pompidou Center was conceived as an experimental institution, the curators’ roles usually involve making propositions in this spirit to the director of the museum and the president of the Pompidou Center. The museum’s mission is to provide the largest possible audience with an overview and a panorama of both the contemporary scene as well as a retrospective view of history. Through a program of approximately forty exhibitions a year, we are able to maintain an enormous diversity in the shows we present. In this way, Non Standard Architecture—a very conceptual show with 80,000 visitors—was considered as great a success as the Joan Miró retrospective that attracted 450,000 visitors. I see my contribution to this public institution as a way to reinforce the identity of our collection. We are collectively defining something like a permanent prospective on the situation of architecture and design, which also mandates a reconsideration of the way we present exhibitions.

MISSION
2. DOES THE POSITION A CURATOR CONSTRUCTS TOWARDS HISTORY ALWAYS IMPLY A PROJECTION FOR THE FUTURE? WHAT TYPE OF TEMPORALITY DO YOU WORK WITH OR IN AS A CURATOR?
A curator is by definition a contemporary figure, always bound to a general cultural network that implicates him in a permanent aesthetic debate. This debate in turn drives the logic of historicizing (and rehistorizing) as well as the economy of the prescriptions that define creative choices in actuality. It seems to me a given that the curator has to define himself through an aesthetic position in order to organize an efficient discourse on history and to offer diverse principles of readability and interpretation of contemporary work to the public. Consequently, a perspective on the future is defined as a confrontation between the critical purpose and the reality of the creative front. Perhaps even more important than establishing this critical position is for a curator to conceive of exhibitions as cultural events and to allow them to function as a proponent of the actual future. Personally, in order to break with the postmodern economy of reference, I try to develop an active and critical historical archeology as a type of a reenactment in the face of contemporary situations.

4. DO YOU CARE ABOUT UTOPIAS? DO YOU LOOK FOR THEM? WHERE?
For me, this is a paradoxical question. On one hand, when I established the FRAC Collection, I had to rediscover an entire field of architectural research from the 1950s to the 70s by important architects such as Constant, Superstudio, Yona Friedman, Claude Parent, Site, and Coop Himmelb(l)au, who had been assimilated as utopian architects. On the other hand, utopia is for me a very specific phenomenon, not bound to notions of humanism. The technological utopia of the avant-garde, dismissed by the Marxists and later by the postmodernists as unrealistic, was by definition a prospective on the possible, which seems to be more and more operative today. Banham’s “well tempered environment,” and Superstudio’s and Archizoom’s infinitely extensible rationalist cities are today more effective (Koolhaas) than all the sociologies of the housing were. I admit, I don’t like the term utopia, as it is often used to discredit or point out the “unrealism” of a project. Architecture expresses itself through many languages, including unbuilt and unbuildable ones.

INFLUENCES
5. WHO WERE YOUR TEACHERS, AND WHO DO YOU SEE AS OUR TEACHERS TODAY—TEACHERS IN THE SENSE OF INSPIRERS, MEDIATORS, SHOCKERS AND ROLE MODELS?
We no longer live in an age of master-thinkers. The production of “label” architects in the 1980s destroyed the structure of master-type legitimacy. The infiltration of corporate names into architecture (Gehry and the Guggenheim, Koolhaas and Prada, Nouvel and Cartier) corresponds with the “end of the grand narrative” defined by Jean François Lyotard and now the structure of legitimation of disciplinary knowledge is defined instead by criteria of operativity and performativity. Although I was personally initiated into philosophy through poststructuralist thinkers, I am not sure that their (still ontological) framing of philosophy and aesthetics could perform today as it did during the Oppositions era in the 1970s. If I were a young architect today, I would need a more operational access to knowledge in order to define my own position, and I would try to find—in the work of the most advanced architects or critics—elements of strategies necessary to devise an original prospective.

THE ARTIFACTS
6. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT YOU FETISHIZE A SPECIFIC ASPECT OF ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION (DESIGN CONCEPTS, THE ARCHITECTURAL OBJECT, THE ARTIFACTS THAT NECESSARILY PRECEDE OR FOLLOW THE DESIGN PROCESS, ETC.)? HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN YOUR WORK?
The tenets of modern movement expanded architectural language to include new tools of production and communication, and thus the architectural project gained autonomy from the classical codes of representation. As architecture gained a presence as a cultural fact in magazines and graphic design, drawings and models became autonomous elements of discourse. Rather than limit the definition of architecture to the artifact of a building, I am interested in extending the study and analysis of architectural culture to include graphic design, drawings, and models. Exhibiting architec-
tecture involves presenting the conceptual explorations that influenced the design, as they have a strong pedagogical function for the public.

7. HOW HAS DIGITAL MEDIA—NOW FULLY INTEGRATED INTO AND EVEN STRUCTURAL TO ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION—AFFECTED YOUR WORK? HOW HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR INSTITUTION’S ATTITUDE TOWARD ARCHITECTURAL ARTEFACTS?

When I organized the first Archilab in 1999, most of the architects exhibited digital files as well as numerous (non-digital) models and prints; the idea of the virtual was still fantastmatic and unreal. Today, the ubiquity of digital media has profoundly transformed the logics of conception and production in architecture. The fact that computation cannot be assimilated as a unilateral tool of representation, but instead has to be seen as generative, suggests a radical mutation in the way we will produce and build architecture (in some way similar to the historical fracture instigated by Werkbund), structured my objective for Non Standard Architecture. When it comes to our museum collection, the presence of digital media does not change much. We purchased many models for the NSA show, and I always asked the architects for the original files and prints of the most determinant elements of the conceptualization. When it comes to the museum, the change effected by digital media is in some ways similar to the appearance of video in museum collections in the 1970s.

THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT

8. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OR CHALLENGING SHOW YOU HAVE CURATED?

This question is impossible to answer. The most challenging exhibition is always the next one, and each exhibition corresponds to an intense moment of personal engagement. The show Bloc, Le monolithe Fracturé, which I curated for the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, was an homage to André Bloc (the founder of L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui), Claude Parent, and Paul Virilio. This show required me to confront the politics of a French architecture culture entirely devoted to a light neo-modernism. The exhibition Radicals (1965–1975), was a very challenging proposition—traveling around Europe, the show reevaluated the cultural position of Europe during the 60s and 70s against the unilateral post-modern discourse of the Gregotti camp. However, the recent Non Standard Architecture exhibition at the Pompidou Center was decisive for me, because it was the first step in what I hope will be a significant theoretical proposal on the contemporary situation in architecture.

9. WHAT ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION—CURATED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOURSELF—HAD THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON YOU? WHY? HAS ANY RECENT SHOW MANAGED TO GALVANIZE AN ISSUE FOR YOU, OR SEEMED TO BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR THE DISCIPLINE?

Unlike art, architecture rarely relies on the economy of the exhibition in order to create a specific disciplinary event. Traditionally, most architectural exhibitions are historical or monographic. Of course, there are rare exceptions, such as the 1927 Weissenhof Siedlungen, 1934 Machine Art, the Venice Biennale of 1981, or, Deconstructivist Architecture in 1988, but those types of programmatic exhibitions are few and far between in comparison to the large number of very traditional presentations (which are often only promotion for the architects). But I sense that things are changing. A new generation of curators seems to be extending the function and the structure of exhibitions into new productive instruments of discourse. Architects are increasingly interested in a direct engagement with the public, thus presenting the possibility for direct access to the logic of their work. Diller + Scafido’s exhibitions are exemplary for me, in this regard, for their exigency and quality. More recently, I was stimulated by the Koolhaas exhibition in Berlin: coherent and effective in presenting the continuity of his work. Greg Lynn’s Intricacy at the University of Pennsylvania affirmed the clarity of his vision, and I hope he will have the opportunity to organize a larger exhibition.

10. MORE GENERALLY, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE DEFINING ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION AND THINKING?

In organizing Archilab with Marie-Ange Brayer, our intention was to create a forum for architects and critics to share the forefront of their research, “the contemporary moment” as you said. The five Archilab conferences gathered over 150 teams of architects and 50 critics, from which emerged two primary trajectories, with many complex interactions. One came from Koolhaas’s influence, in Holland and in Spain (formalized by the Metapolis festival), but included contributions from architects in France, Germany, and East Europe. The idea of the generic city bound to a world culture has become determinant, replacing the ancient sociologies of the postmodern historical city. The other trajectory emerged from Columbia University’s “paperless studio,” initiated by the development of new procedures, new uses, and new materials, and has opened the road to strong international research on the consequences of computation. Our most persistent interrogation—located at the permanent crossing of these two trajectories—requires defining the future social, economic, and political determinants of the practice and discipline of architecture. To invent and to preserve the diversity and the singularity in architecture is the challenge for tomorrow.


**TERENCE RILEY**

My title is the Philip Johnson Chief Curator for Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art. I am responsible for the accessioning, de-accessioning, exhibition, and conservation of the museum's collection of design objects, graphics, architectural drawings and models, etc. In addition to organizing exhibitions, I am also responsible for shaping the overall exhibition program for architecture and design.

I was the staff advisor to the architect selection committee that commissioned Yoshio Taniguchi to design the museum's expansion and renovation. I have subsequently acted as an advisor to the director for design related issues on the project. I am responsible for the re-installation of the collection, including the design of the Architecture and Design galleries within the envelope provided by Taniguchi. I was a practicing architect (and still am) and teaching at Columbia when I organized my first exhibition on the work of Paul Nelson. It was a rather unselfconscious process; I had access to Nelson's drawings (he was my great uncle) and Robert Stern gave me a grant to retrieve and catalogue them. I didn't see myself as doing anything particularly different from my design and teaching work.

**AUDIENCE**

1. **AS A CURATOR, IN WHOSE NAME DO YOU SPEAK? OR IN OTHER WORDS, DO YOU ENGAGE THE PRESSURES TO 'REPRESENT' SOMEONE OR SOMETHING? FOR WHOM DO YOU CURATE?**

The Museum of Modern Art is not unlike a university in the sense that the institutional affiliation has all sorts of implications, potentially good, bad, or neutral. At the same time, both types of institutions privilege individual authorship and welcome intellectual debate. Personally, I share MoMA's broad commitment to the cultural phenomenon of modernism, as it emerged in the late 19th century and continues to develop today. Inasmuch, I am able to act within the institution in a necessarily affirmative way rather than "represent" the institution. If there is a distinction to be made between the two attitudes, I would say that the latter lacks the optimistic engagement of your references to Deleuze and Tafuri. I don't think I could do what I do convincingly if I felt any external pressure to do something in any way other than the way I feel it should be done.

Who do I curate for? Curators have double duty these days, with both institutional responsibilities for the growth and care of potentially valuable collections as well as assuming a more public role as educator, provocateur, advocate, and critic. MoMA was, interestingly, chartered as an educational institution rather than as a museum and I think the difference is evident.

**MISSION**

2. **DOES THE POSITION A CURATOR CONSTRUCTS TOWARDS HISTORY ALWAYS IMPLY A PROJECTION FOR THE FUTURE? WHAT TYPE OF TEMPORALITY DO YOU WORK WITH OR IN AS A CURATOR?**

A curator's work doesn't have to imply a projection of a specific future. Many exhibitions and publications represent scholarly investigations of the distant past with little discernable relevance to contemporary life. However, I am more interested in what Lewis Mumford called the "usable past," that is, topics that might be historical but when presented in a certain way not only expand or revise our perceptions of them but have evident implications for contemporary practice as well. That was why we commissioned the German photographer Thomas Ruff to make new images of Mies's work for the Mies in Berlin project, for example. By colorizing and digitally manipulating both old and new images, Ruff made Mies's work less remote and more retrievable for contemporary use. As such, I would say that all of the exhibitions I have done are in some way working through a contemporary framework that suggests—but does not proscribe—a future.

3. **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE URGE OR NEED TO DEFINE A MOMENT (A TREND, A PROBLEM) IN ORDER TO EDUCATE THE GENERAL AUDIENCE AND THE URGE OR NEED TO DEFINE A MOMENT (A TREND, A PROBLEM) FOR THE SAKE OF FURTHER DISCIPLINARY DEVELOPMENT?**

In developing exhibition proposals, I have always looked for themes that could speak to both the general audience (the majority of visitors to MoMA) and the professional/critical audience. To ignore one or the other is a terrible waste of an opportunity, as any issue that is vital to one audience should have some real resonance with the other. The critical/professional audience is most attuned to the issues inherent in the subject of an exhibition and is also most likely to pursue the arguments through more extended formats: the catalogue, reviews, symposia, exhibition texts, etc. However, in the experience of the exhibition itself, I have tried to strike a position that necessarily accommodates the imbalance in knowledge between the critic/professional and the layperson, without compromising the subject. For instance, I almost never use the word "architecture" in the show's title (e.g. *Light Construction, Tall Buildings, etc.*) as I think it implies specialized rather than general knowledge. I have also selected topics in which both the professional/critical and the general audiences have a particular interest (e.g. *The Un-Private House*). Finally, when writing for an exhibition—whether it be an essay or wall text or digitally accessible information—I have kept in mind that the general audience at a museum might not have an extensive technical background but is usually very well educated, interested in ideas, and sensitive to the visual world. In other words, my goal has been to stage critically important shows that also legitimize the general audience's participation in a wider dialogue.

4. **DO YOU CARE ABOUT UTOPIAS? DO YOU LOOK FOR THEM? WHERE?**

I don't think utopias have played a big role in my work at MoMA although some would argue that any retrospective is a utopian, or at least idealized, view. When I organized *The Changing of the Avant-garde*, which was a collection of visionary drawings mainly from the 1970s, I often wondered if
there were such visions being produced today and, if not, why? And if so, why wasn’t I as interested in them as in the drawings from the past? I do believe that architecture is a fragment of a larger whole, whether it is a literal or literary vision of a new world.

INFLUENCES
5. WHO WERE YOUR TEACHERS, AND WHO DO YOU SEE AS OUR TEACHERS TODAY—TEACHERS IN THE SENSE OF INSPIRERS, MEDIATORS, SHOCKERS AND ROLE MODELS?

Having never set out to be a curator, I have to say I am mostly a product of on-the-job training. Philip Johnson was an incredible influence, particularly in terms of understanding the way in which an exhibition can communicate ideas. Yet, our relationship was, in a sense, too complicated as well as a bit competitive to be characterized as teacher and student. He once said that I was afraid that he would become my incubus, which was an overstatement but not without a core truth.

I have never had a conversation with Jeff Kipnis and not learned something. I think he is one of the most thoughtful thinkers about architecture today. I think Rem Koolhaas is a great dialectician, a consistent asker of the right questions. Herbert Muschamp trashed as many of my attacks as I could thrust intellectually and personally.

THE ARTIFACTS
6. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT YOU FETISHIZE A SPECIFIC ASPECT OF ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION (DESIGN CONCEPTS, THE ARCHITECTURAL OBJECT, THE ARTIFACTS THAT NECESSARILY PRECEDE OR FOLLOW THE DESIGN PROCESS, ETC)? HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN YOUR WORK?

Not really. Architecture is so complicated to convey that I have never obsessed about one aspect over the other. If there is one preoccupation that could be called fetishistic, I do think I tend to emphasize the generative sketch. Perhaps this can be seen as evidence of privileging epiphany over process, even though, as an architect I know full well that the supposed “Eureka!” drawing is often made after the fact.

7. HOW HAS DIGITAL MEDIA—NOW FULLY INTEGRATED INTO AND EVEN STRUCTURAL TO ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION—AFFECTED YOUR WORK? HOW HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR INSTITUTION’S ATTITUDE TOWARD ARCHITECTURAL ARTIFACTS?

As a topic, the role of digital media and architecture was essential to the arguments behind a number of exhibitions I organized including Bernard Tschumi: Architecture as Event, Light Construction, and The Un-Private House.

As a medium rather than topic, I think it is now a bit of a commonplace to have digital media and web sites as part of architectural exhibitions. In The Un-Private House, however, we tried to push it a bit and included a “dining table” as an interface, designed in conjunction with the MIT Media Lab. Rather than being isolated behind screens in carrels, the visitors sat around a round table that was essentially a big touch screen with sensors under the surface. Eight people could call up digital information and images that were projected onto the surface. Everyone could see what everyone else was doing and it became more public, more exhibition-like than a solitary pursuit. You could even share with others by sending images to the center of the table for everyone to see. It was extremely effective and there have been some attempts to replicate the idea.

A number of the things we have collected recently have been digitally produced—drawings, models, etc.—as well as design objects that could only have been produced through digital technology.

THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT
8. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OR CHALLENGING SHOW YOU HAVE CURATED?

I think I would have to say Light Construction. Even though it was ten years ago, I still feel it is really relevant and could also have a second chapter. In putting the show together, I was really trying to get under the skin—as it were—of not only current architectural practice but also the issues driving it. The exhibition included a number of people that might now be said to be obvious—Gehry, Koolhaas, Piano, etc. However, I am also pleased that a good number of other architects who were relatively unknown at the time were included: Kazuyo Sejima, Herzog + DeMeuron, Ben van Berkel, Abalos + Herreros, Toyo Ito, Peter Zumthor, Gigon + Guyer, Joel Sanders, etc.

When I visit architecture schools, I regularly see dog-eared copies of the Light Construction exhibition catalogue in the studios and consider that a certain kind of validation. In other words, by focusing on the whole visual, literary and cultural phenomenon of the digital moment, the show had a longer shelf life than a Biennial kind of survey of what’s new. Maybe Mies was right and we don’t need a revolution every Monday! (Sorry if that sounds conservative.)

9. WHAT ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION—CURATED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOURSELF—HAD THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON YOU? WHY? HAS ANY RECENT SHOW MANAGED TO GALVANIZE AN ISSUE FOR YOU, OR SEEMED TO BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR THE DISCIPLINE?

Jeff Kipnis’s Perfect Acts of Architecture was as close to a perfect act of curating as might be possible. As with all great achievements, he made it look easy. When he told me the basic outline of the show, it occurred to me that it was an incontestable argument for itself. And even though I had collected some of the key works that were critical to the show (Koolhaas’s Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture and Tschumi’s Manhattan Transcripts), I hadn’t seen them in the way he did. What made it important was that it was retrospective but not historical, not a long view back but a look over the shoulder that explained everything about where we are today. His text was brilliant but the argument was primarily visual and very accessible to those willing to invest the retinal energy. It was also unsentimentally selective, focusing on only four architects’
works, and subsequently had a razor sharp focus. It reminded me of Octavio Paz’s essay on Marcel Duchamp—a slim volume that says so much.

10. MORE GENERALLY, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE DEFINING ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION AND THINKING?

It’s a bit too essentialist to cite one and only one aspect of contemporary culture. How about two?

The first is the ongoing pursuit of an architectural product that matches our technological means. The second is the critical differences between the inevitably local condition of architecture and the global forces that conceive and create it. If I could keep going for about two hours I would explain how they are the same thing.

JOSEPH ROSA

I am the Helen Hilton Raiser Curator of Architecture and Design at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). My previous positions have been: the Curator of Architecture at the Heinz Architectural Center at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, PA; Chief Curator at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.; Director of the Columbia Architecture Galleries at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University in New York City. My first curatorial project was an exhibition in 1989 on the work of Albert Frey. I was asked by David Gebhard at the University Art Museum at the University of Santa Barbara to guest curate a traveling exhibition based on my book Albert Frey, Architect. In the exhibition I visually reconstructed Frey’s career with a wide range of drawings from various archives in the United States and Europe.

AUDIENCE

1. AS A CURATOR, IN WHOSE NAME DO YOU SPEAK? OR IN OTHER WORDS, DO YOU ENGAGE THE PRESSURES TO ‘REPRESENT’ SOMEONE OR SOMETHING? FOR WHOM DO YOU CURATE?

While there are various ways to operate as an architectural curator—in museums, art institutes and university galleries—the role of the curator is structurally defined by whether or not the institution has an architectural collection. For example, numerous museums have architecture curators but do not hold a permanent architectural collection (even though those same institutions have painting and sculpture collections with respective curators). These institutions operate as Kunsthals, so the curator’s primary role is to generate exhibitions using material from outside the institution’s holdings. By contrast, a museum or institution that maintains an architectural collection requires that the curator steward and acquire works for the collection so to continually strengthen its holdings. So there is a significant structural difference between how architectural curators can operate in different institutional contexts.

As a curator, I speak in a voice filtered through the institutional framework of the museum. An example of how this works as an operative critic (a role every curator plays) is SFMOMA’s annual Design Series (DS) that I instituted. This program is comprised of a small exhibition and a catalogue and showcases emerging talents in architecture, industrial design and graphic design. Lindy Roy (DS1), Yves Béhar (DS2) and this spring 2X4 (DS3) were all brought into the collection—or added—during my tenure, prior to being selected for the series.

As a curator, you curate for many audiences. However, since demographically, few institutions have architectural collections (or architectural curators), the general museum going public finds contemporary art more accessible than contemporary architecture. Curating an exhibition that addresses critical contemporary issues in design, production, and theory requires the construction of an ideological framework from which the issues can be easily understood.

MISSION

2. DOES THE POSITION A CURATOR CONSTRUCTS TOWARDS HISTORY ALWAYS IMPLY A PROJECTION FOR THE FUTURE? WHAT TYPE OF TEMPORALITY DO YOU WORK WITH OR IN AS A CURATOR?

Yes, even if the subject matter (either a “movement” or an individual architect) is historical, it is still filtered through a contemporary lens. Some curators are historically grounded and tend to showcase past ideologies. This tends to negate the inventive optimistic character of the historical past as a model through which to evaluate and elevate current pedagogical ideologies, and that could make a significant shift in future acts of architectural productions. I am a firm believer in employing the historical past as a device to view, critique, and analyze recent methodologies in architectural design.

The notion of temporality in curatorial work is inevitable. When contemporary
positions are taken and views debated, it is only as time passes that these positions are codified and transposed into historical, canonized views.

3. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE URGE OR NEED TO DESCRIBE A MOMENT (A TREND, A PROBLEM) IN ORDER TO EDUCATE THE GENERAL AUDIENCE AND THE URGE OR NEED TO DEFINE A MOMENT (A TREND, A PROBLEM) FOR THE SAKE OF FURTHER DISCIPLINARY DEVELOPMENT?

These needs are synonymous; negate one and the curatorial framework falls short. Although scholarly essays accompany them, exhibitions are not books on walls. In fact, they are the inversion of books. You need to say the least and let the work speak for itself.

4. DO YOU CARE ABOUT UTOPIAS? DO YOU LOOK FOR THEM? WHERE?

Of course. I look for them in the ideological constructions of architectural intentions.

INFLUENCES

5. WHO WERE YOUR TEACHERS, AND WHO DO YOU SEE AS OUR TEACHERS TODAY—TEACHERS IN THE SENSE OF INSPIRERS, MEDIATORS, SHOCKERS AND ROLE MODELS?

If I had to select individuals who have influenced me vis-à-vis teaching or writings, they would include; Diana Agrest, Roland Barthes, Peter Eisenman, Albert Frey, Barbara Neski, Joan Ockman, and Bernard Tschumi. Again, if I had to select our “teachers” for today they would be: Peter Eisenman, Greg Lynn, Michael Hays, Jeff Kipnis, R.E. Somol, and Manual Delanda.

THE ARTIFACTS

6. WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO ADMIT THAT YOU FETISHIZE A SPECIFIC ASPECT OF ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION (DESIGN CONCEPTS, THE ARCHITECTURAL OBJECT, THE ARTIFACTS THAT NECESSARILY PRECEDE OR FOLLOW THE DESIGN PROCESS, ETC.)? HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN YOUR WORK?

I think all curators fetishize aspects of the production they exhibit or acquire for their collections. For me it is the conceptual aspect of the design process—the hand or digital drawing that captures the intentionality of the designer. I like to include earlier works of an architect in an exhibit since they showcase progressive acts of making rather than perfected acts of making. As an example, we recently acquired hand drawings from the early works of Le Corbusier, Mies, Kahn, Kiesler, and Abraham/Pichler, as well as limited edition digital prints of recent designs by Lindy Roy, Preston Scott Cohen, Greg Lynn, Douglas Garofalo, Kolatan/MacDonald, Hernan Alonso Diaz, and PATTERNS.

7. HOW HAS DIGITAL MEDIA—NOW FULLY INTEGRATED INTO AND EVEN STRUCTURAL TO ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION—AFFECTED YOUR WORK? HOW HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR INSTITUTION’S ATTITUDE TOWARD ARCHITECTURAL ARTIFACTS?

As a curator and writer, I have been very interested in how digital ideology has influenced the discipline of architecture. So when I arrived at SFMOMA, I instituted a framework to bring digital drawings into the collection. Our methodology is modeled on that of photography, where the notion of an original does not exist. Limited edition prints are produced to specific archival guidelines that will allow them to exist for decades. We have acquired key works by digitally-literate designers that are emblematic of the early period of digital production (of course, we also have in the collection numerous designs on DVDs that have been converted to other mediums for posterity, as well as models produced directly from digital files). I felt it was essential to initiate this process, since important work was being excluded from collections due to its medium, and this omission threatened to result in a vast historical gap in disciplinary knowledge. I saw it as an opportunity to establish a significant holding for the museum.

THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT

8. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OR CHALLENGING SHOW YOU HAVE CURATED?

Probably, my exhibition Glamour: Fashion, Industrial Design, Architecture, which opened this past October. Glamour is a culturally loaded word that, depending on its context, can have either complimentary or pejorative nuances. While the significations and interpretations of glamour are vast in scope, it is mostly equated with visual spectacle, and gains power from its position outside normative culture in the disciplines of fashion, industrial design, and architecture. A significant portion of the exhibition (and catalogue) traces the aesthetic character of glamour from its negative association with mid-century “decorative” civic and public modern buildings to today’s digitally literate designs. Words once employed to criticize mid-century “decorative” mainstream modern architecture that displayed nonfigurative patterning—adjectives such as excessive, serial, tattooed, and scaleless—may now be used to describe the formal characteristics of a new avant-garde architecture, where digital methods of conception and production are enabling designers to translate decorative forms or surfaces into load-bearing structural elements.

9. WHAT ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITION—CURATED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOURSELF—HAD THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON YOU? WHY? HAS ANY RECENT SHOW MANAGED TO GALVANIZE AN ISSUE FOR YOU, OR SEEMED TO BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR THE DISCIPLINE?

The Richard Neutra exhibition curated by Thomas Hines and Arthur Drexler at MoMA in New York City—in the mid 1980s. The most recent exhibition would be Frédéric Migayrou’s Non Standard Architecture at the Centre Pompidou in Paris last year.

10. MORE GENERALLY, WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE DEFINING ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY MOMENT IN ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION AND THINKING?

The fact that theory has become instrumental through digital literacy in both the pedagogy and the practice of architecture.