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## CURATING ARCHITECTURE: NOTES FROM THE RESEARCH

by Andrea Phillips

*'I think to speak of a "cultural project" today is too limited, and that is partly because culture has become part of the market economy. Perhaps the only domain that is not entirely absorbed by the market is the political domain. If you talk about real imagination at the service of more than commercial forces or more than strictly limited forces, then politics is a culture in itself. That is also a positive outcome of globalisation: we live in such an incredibly radical moment that the best way to participate is through politics rather than culture.'*

Rem Koolhaas in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist

***Curating Architecture*** was initiated to investigate three concerns: firstly that the conditions of architectural exhibition-making seemed to be limited in some way to the illustration of built form (a limitation that we sought to define), secondly that many artists were involved in a process of eulogisation of utopian architectural schema through the rubric of social participation, and thirdly that what seemed to be missing in these celebrations of keenly contemplated and readily aestheticised building environments was the critical work that might link them to the complex and often disputed political structures from which they emanated. We asked: what is the use of architectural exhibition-making in its expanded form? Can an exhibition of architecture produce a more complex discussion of such a link between architecture and, for instance, the geo-economic formatting identified by Rem Koolhaas as not simply an affect of its cultural participation, but as the surpassing site of the practice of architecture itself?

We came to these questions not, initially, as architects but as artists, curators and theorists engaged in a broader debate about the politics of space, with a concern that such a politics was already producing the limit conditions of curating. If curators, working with artists, are engaged in the attempt to expand the sites of contemporary art into an immanent conceptualisation of sociality (which is clearly in evidence), then a meeting with the prospect of built form is both to be expected (evidenced by the many art-architecture collaborations in progress) and has a critical dimension that, it became apparent, needed exploration: do the curatorial practices of displaying artifacts and images, however contextualized or process-based, act as a brake on thinking and displaying that which might be said to divide art from architecture; the legal, financial, temporal and contractual imperatives of application within a perhaps less fantasized social milieu?

Breaking down these questions in a series of research seminars held over the first year of the Curating Architecture project, it became apparent that what we were really trying to define was the limit of exhibition-making as a tool for any attempt at addressing a condition of politics (indeed the question of architecture as a political form was certainly not agreed upon by seminar participants, some of whom strongly disagreed with this trajectory of the research, others of whom demanded a definition of such). We found ourselves asking whether the work of artists using architecture as a structural and aesthetic tool for the development of their work had anything at all to do with architecture in actual fact? Perhaps the merging of disciplines

was not helpful here. If, as was proposed at one critical point in the seminars, the real site of architectural exhibition was the town hall or public square – that is places where people might be confronted publicly by planning proposals and applications for changes to use of an existing building (exhibitions, that is in which people are faced with ideas for the master-scheming of their own territories) – then the function of architectural exhibition is simply propagandist, and should be understood as such.

Four commissions, exhibited at Showroom, were developed out of the seminars, in order to continue the research in different terms. Rather than provide retorts to the critiques offered through discussion, the artists and architects propose their own research: further questions, therefore, organised in different ways, all of which take the demands of Curating Architecture and turn them about.

AMO, whose use of exhibition formats has consistently provoked its audience to rethink the relation between image, data, ideological rhetoric and built form, has developed an installation that revisits the sites of previous exhibition and publication material. To this they add material from two ongoing areas of analysis – the current Hermitage Museum project and the political relation between Eurasia and Africa proposed by Koolhaas at 2008's FD Summit. The work is densely formatted and insistent in its claim that architecture develops out of shifting global economic and cultural infrastructures. Consistent with this demand that architecture understand itself as a site of politics is the proposal that politics admits architecture, as a spatial and social process, through its doors.

Any prehistory of the current crisis in the financial markets cannot fail to take into account the violence of uneven distributions of capital where it arose, resulting in the literal destruction of lives, buildings, cities and state formations: the antithesis, in other words, of the positivist and individuated hagiographies employed to sell architectural projects. Walid Raad has consistently worked to find mechanisms to express the unrepresentability of such a fiscal and political force. Rather than seek to represent that which has been rendered unrecognisable (the buildings, the artworks) in the wars that have characterized Beirut, his place of birth, Raad has instead sought to produce works that reformat the idea of what has been surpassed. Presenting the work *A History of Modern and Contemporary Arab Art: Part I\_Chapter 1: Beirut (1992-2005) Part I\_Chapter 1\_Section 79: Index XXVI: Artists for Curating Architecture*, Raad proposes a relation between building and museology in which architecture is not a discrete practice but instead an indicative (and implicated) part of the complex relation between the making of culture and its eradication.

Ângela Ferreira is best known for her large-scale sculptural works that take icons of modernist design as their starting points and embed them in the complex forms of colonial heritage to which she understands they relate. For *Curating Architecture* she produces a new work that explores the breadth of the research process involved in her gathering of historical, associative, anecdotal and autobiographical material, thus laying open the relation between architectural fact-finding and sculptural assemblage. Here it becomes clear that the dissembling of

fact-based evidence common to the processes of artistic production, and the assembling of facts pronounced in architectural research, have commonalities at their inception; the process of application differing radically in formal and conceptual terms.

This difference is also pronounced in Nikolaus Hirsch and Philipp Misselwitz' contribution to *Curating Architecture* which proposes the architectural programme for a new kunsthalle building based on the spatial analysis of current models. Collaborating with artists and curators who are invited to design units for the prototype which the architects then assemble, Hirsch and Misselwitz put forward the literal invention of a kunsthalle built around what are often utopian demands. In doing so they not only suggest the architect as a type of über-curator (thus upending the speculations of the *Curating Architecture* project *in toto*), but also propose the concept of application as a fissure between art and architecture in terms that are both practical and idealistic.

Hirsch and Misselwitz refocus *Curating Architecture* on the ambivalent relations between the claims of artistic and architectural display and the ambitions of curating that could be said to produce a set of over-easy identifications that remove critical distance from a practice that might be in need of it.

We should have a great deal of care about this dominant mode of information-dissemination in pseudo-artistic form, normalized by the collaborative modes of curatorial process. As a vehicle for the dissemination of ideas about the social forms of space-making that make up our worlds, how could curating architecture be that which it is not yet, that is, a form which provokes questions about the consensualising logic of aesthetic display?

Celine Condorelli, in her text for the project, suggests that such a question is conditional upon the understanding that architecture is support, and that support is a process that is unimaginable outside of structure and supplementary to it at the same time. Here is the beginning of a poetic understanding of architecture the logic of which, paradoxically, might eradicate exhibition completely.

Hesitantly I would say that, having strived to find an outcome that adequates a new way of displaying architecture to proper technical, aesthetic, political and conceptual affect, it seems to us now that the display of architecture is, in its current state, only ever a paradoxical formatting of material and as such consistent with the outcomes of artists engaged in staging built form. The question then remains, is the display of architecture always constrained by these conditions and the paradoxical presentations to which they lead, or is it possible to construct an alternative form of curating that transforms the current field of activity? The implication might be that this new form of curating, if it is to be correlate with the politics of architecture and the ambitions of a critical approach to the built environment, might necessarily surpass exhibiting all together.

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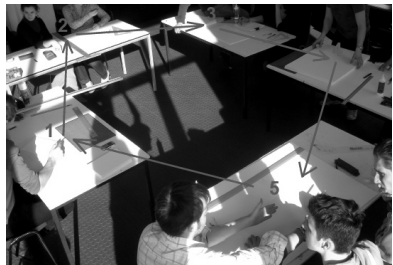
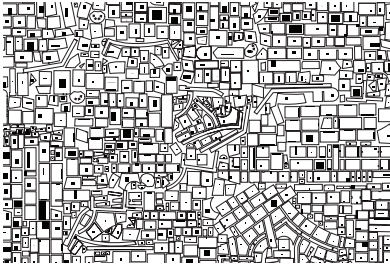
## COMMISSIONS

AMO – Rem Koolhaas/Reinier de Graaf

Ângela Ferreira

Walid Raad

Nikolaus Hirsch & Philipp Misselwitz



## AMO – REM KOOLHAAS/REINIER DE GRAAF

**AMO, the research** wing of the Office of Metropolitan Architecture led by Rem Koolhaas, has consistently intervened into the process of exhibition-making in ways that provoke new thought on the relation between architecture and its exhibited manifestation as a political and persuasive form. For Curating Architecture AMO produces an installation that restages past exhibitions of the Office's projects in Brussels, Venice, Istanbul, and through the pages of their prolific publications in the context of current economic conditions.

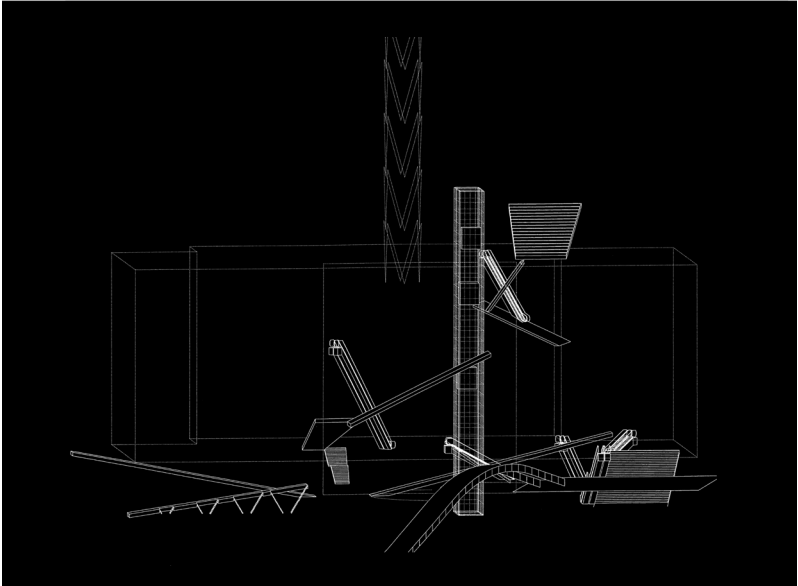
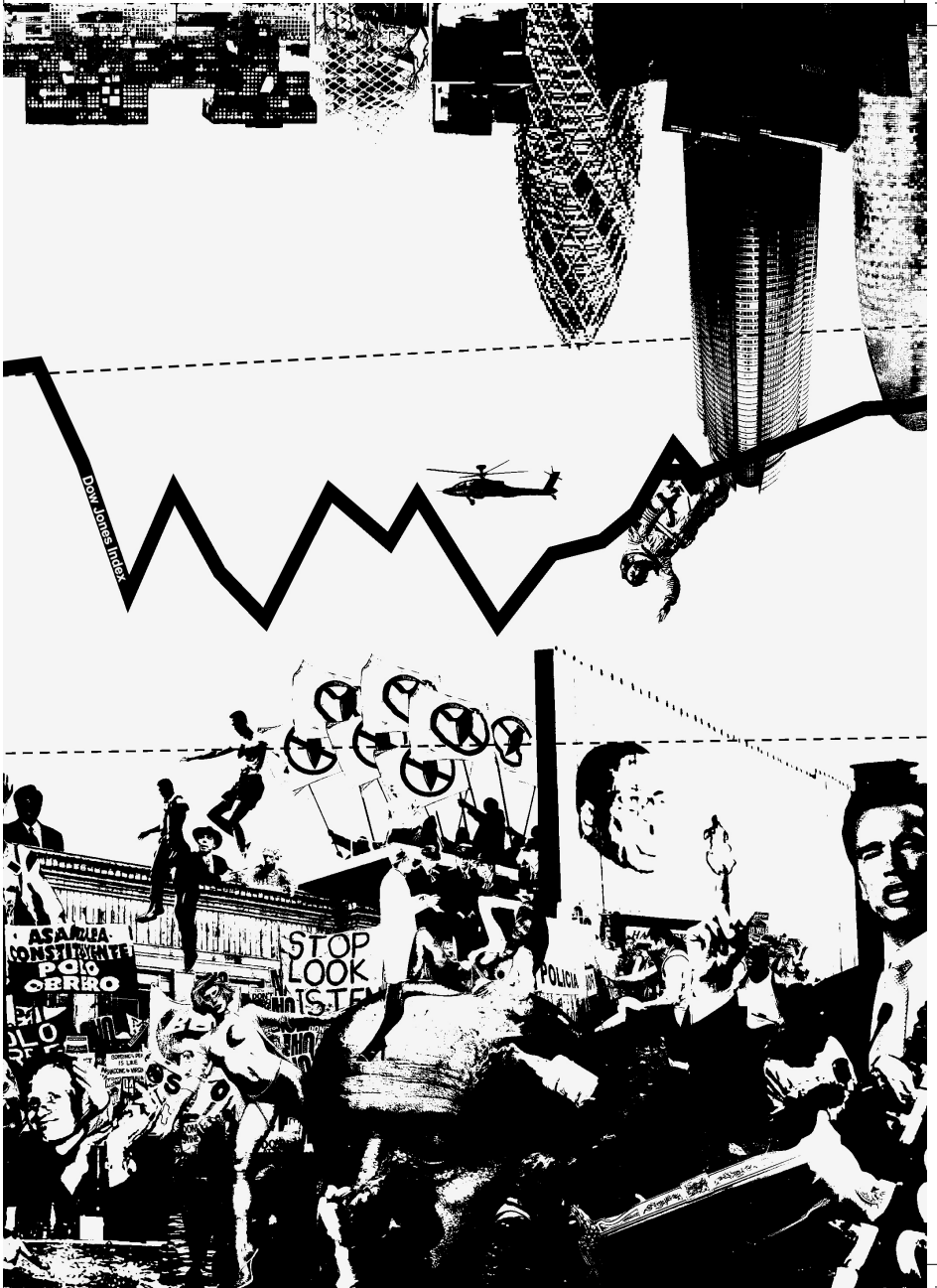


Diagram from *Expansion and Neglect*  
AMO



YES wallpaper  
AMO

YES wallpaper (detail)  
AMO



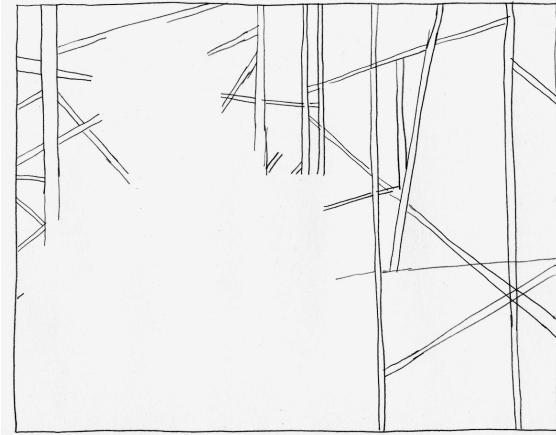
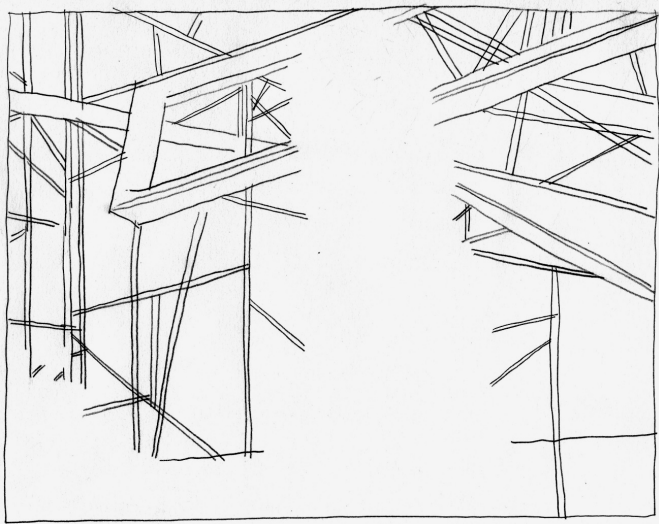
## ÂNGELA FERREIRA

Ângela Ferreira produces large-scale sculptural works that capture relationships between diverse historical situations, motifs of design and cultural politics. Over the past decade Ferreira has worked on the complex formats of African modernism with their divergent and contradictory political inscriptions.

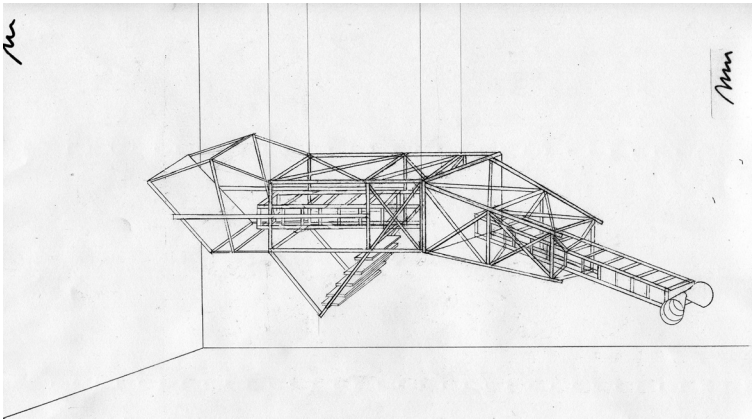
Ferreira is currently working on a series of mobile stages that develop from a long research project on Maputo, her home city, and the way in which its haphazard relation to revolutionary politics is inscribed into both the memory and spaces of post-colonial Africa. Ferreira is working with several starting points that include: Jean-Luc Godard's documentation of his attempt to set up a democratically generated TV broadcasting service in Mozambique after the revolution of 1975; Jean Rouch's filmic experiments in Africa; the architecture of radio transmitters across revolutionary Mozambique; Mozambican 'Modernism'; Gustav Klutsis' mid-1920s portable agit-prop kiosks; and a YouTube video of Bob Dylan playing his 1976 song *Mozambique* on an outdoor stage in the US. For *Curating Architecture*, Ferreira will present the research material for this investigation in a new work that articulates the connections between utopian architectural form and the artistic rearrangement of such.

Ângela Ferreira  
*Hard Rain Show* (installation view)  
Berardo Museum, Lisbon, 2008









For Mozambique  
research material  
2007-08

## WALID RAAD

### Scratching on Things I Could Disavow

A History of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Arab World  
A project by Walid Raad

'**The Arab world** has witnessed in this decade the emergence of a number of contemporary artists and cultural institutions. The planned construction of art museums and art schools in the UAE raises questions about how contemporary visual art will be conceived, made, distributed, and consumed in the Arab world, and beyond.

In 2007, I initiated an art project about the history of contemporary and modern art in the Arab world. Proceeding from Jalal Toufic's concept of "the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster," I consider whether and how culture and tradition in the Arab world may have been affected, materially and immaterially, by the wars that were waged there.

The images reproduced in the next three pages are photographs of spaces I imagined and included in design competition entries for museums being built in the Middle East. The photographs reproduce my designs on a 1:1 scale. In my entries, I proposed that no doorway and/or entrance inside the museum should exceed six centimeters in height.'



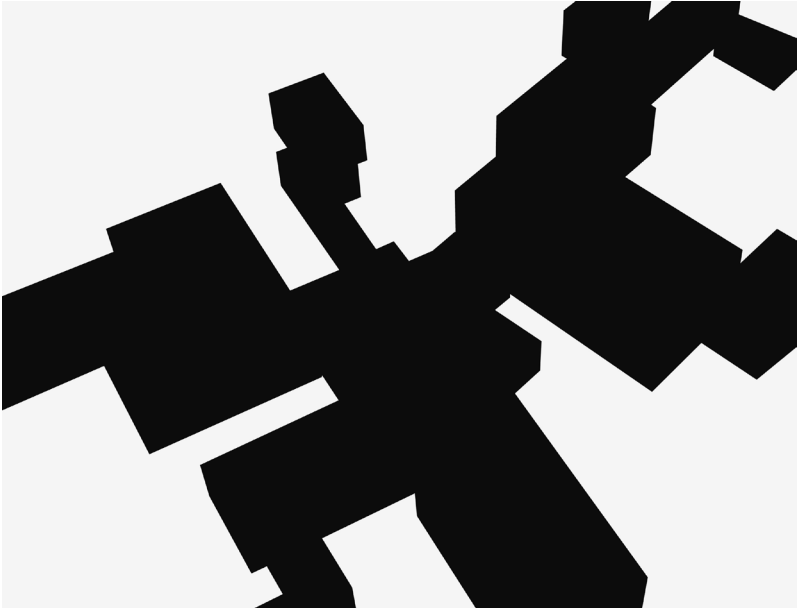




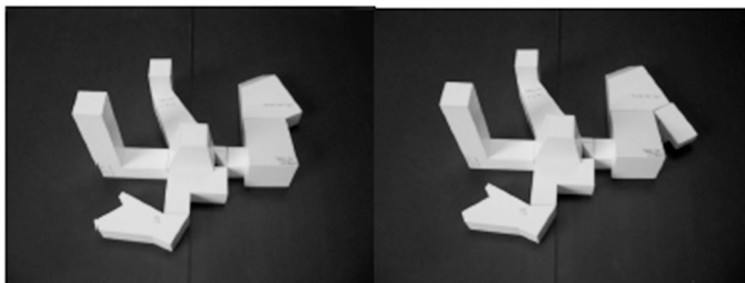
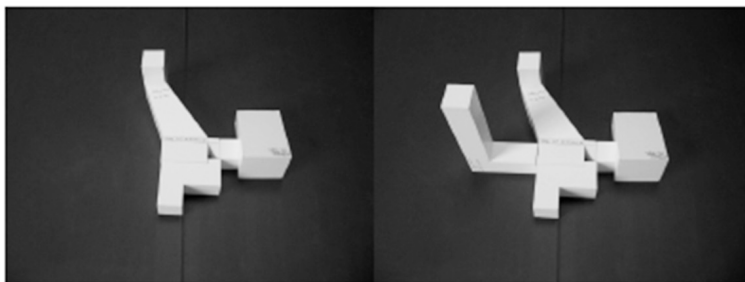
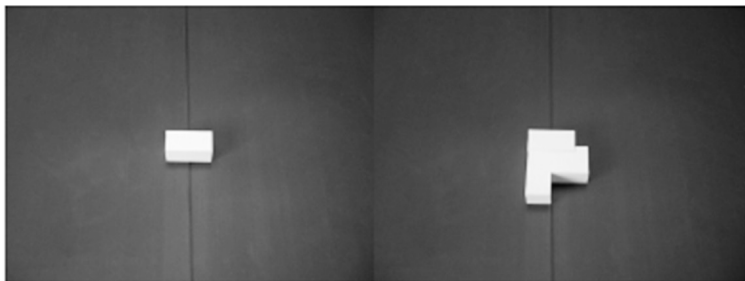
## NIKOLAUS HIRSCH & PHILIPP MISSELWITZ

Nikolaus Hirsch & Philipp Misselwitz propose the literal reinvention of a kunsthalle which they will present in model form in the gallery, responding to the perceived necessity for divergent or aberrant patterns of spatial design in current museum and gallery models clearly evident in recent curatorial and artistic projects. Institution building is the result of interdisciplinary and collaborative processes, which involve many authors and reflect the larger political, socioeconomic and cultural context that could be understood as 'site'. Yet paradoxically it is still broadly assumed that the spatial-physical entity of the institution must be coherent physical structures conceived by single authors (architects). Hirsch & Misselwitz investigate new models of institution building, using the reality of collaboration as a trigger, and seeking to find appropriate architectonic, programmatic and organisational languages. 'Institution building' is understood as an accumulative and open ended process that will be constructed as a sequence of autonomous yet related programmatic components.

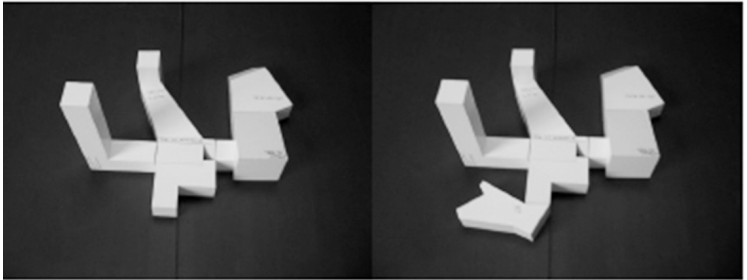
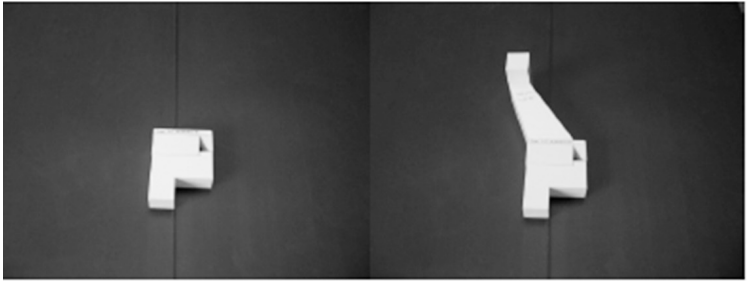
*Exquisite Corpse* invites artists (including Rirkrit Tiravanija, Anton Vidokle, Willem de Rooij, Tobias Rehberger, Judith Hopf and Raqs Media Collective) to participate in producing a collaborative drawing, which will evolve in a series of fax exchanges and eventually be transferred into a three dimensional model. In each step of the accumulative process, one spatial element of an imaginary art institution will be added. As such Hirsch & Misselwitz propose the architect as the ultimate curator, a provocative observation that renegotiates the current role models.



Nikolaus Hirsch and Phillip Misselwitz  
*EUK Scenario*  
2008







Nikolaus Hirsch & Philipp Misselwitz  
*Model Sequence*  
2008

## BIOGRAPHIES

### **AMO – Rem Koolhaas/Reinier de Graaf**

The Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), led by Rem Koolhaas, is a leading international partnership practising contemporary architecture, urbanism, and cultural analysis. While OMA is dedicated to the realisation of buildings and master plans, AMO, its research wing, is a think tank that operates in areas beyond the boundaries of architecture and urbanism. AMO's portfolio includes work for Universal Studios, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, Harvard University, Condé Nast, Heineken, and Ikea. Recent works include the development of in-store technology for Prada, a strategy for the future of Volkswagen, a strategy for TMRW, a new organic fast food chain, work for Platform 21 (a new design institute in Amsterdam) and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

### **Ângela Ferreira**

Ângela Ferreira was born in Maputo, spent the 1980s in South Africa and has lived and worked in Lisbon since 1992. She is best known for large scale sculptural works that are constructed through a complex theoretical and historical research process involving the scrutiny of specific locales, particular buildings and the migrations of design that become evident through such observation. In 2007 she represented Portugal at the 52nd Venice Biennale with the installation *Maison Tropicale* which re-viewed Jean Prouvé's modular housing scheme. She is currently working on the installation series *For Mozambique*, which takes her home city's relation to modernist design as its starting point. In 2008 versions of this work have been shown at Parasol Unit, London, the Sao Paolo Biennale and Centre d'art contemporain, Rennes.

### **Nikolaus Hirsch & Philipp Misselwitz**

Nikolaus Hirsch (Frankfurt) is an architect and professor at Städelschule. Recent projects include Unitednationsplaza, the European Kunsthalle and an art laboratory developed with Raqs Media Colective in Delhi. He has curated ErsatzStadt: Representations of the Urban at Volksbühne Berlin and has recently published *On Boundaries* (Sternberg Press, 2007).

Philipp Misselwitz (Berlin/Istanbul) is an architect and curator. Together with Nikolaus Hirsch he is leading the research project 'Spaces of Production' on behalf of the European Kunsthalle Cologne. Curatorial activities include Shrinking Cities and Liminal Spaces including conferences in Ramallah, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and an exhibition in Leipzig.

**Walid Raad** (New York/Beirut) is an artist and an Associate Professor of Art in The Cooper Union, NY. Raad's works to date include mixed media installations, performance, video and photography, and literary essays. Raad's recent works include The Atlas Group, a fifteen-year project between 1989 and 2004 about the contemporary history of Lebanon, with particular emphasis on the Lebanese wars of 1975 to 1991.

Raad's works have been shown at Documenta 11 (Kassel, Germany), The Venice Biennale (Venice, Italy), Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin, Germany), Homeworks (Beirut, Lebanon) and numerous other museums and venues in Europe the Middle east and North America.

## CURATING ARCHITECTURE SEMINARS

In 2007 a series of Curating Architecture research seminars was held in the Department of Art, Goldsmiths, through which artists, architects, curators and theorists were invited to contribute to an argument about how and why contemporary curating might relate to the procedure and production of architecture. These presentations and discussions, which are all documented on the Curating Architecture website, have been intrinsic to the development of the exhibition. They also form a novel body of knowledge.

### SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

**Louisa Adam** (student, MFA Curating, Goldsmiths)

**Yannis Arvanitis** (student, MFA Curating, Goldsmiths)

**Shumon Basar** (lecturer, Architectural Association; co-director, Newbetter)

**Stephanie Bertrand** (student, MFA Curating, Goldsmiths)

**Achim Borchardt-Hume** (curator, Tate Modern)

**Celine Condorelli** (architect and curator, Support Structure; Eastside Projects)

**Wouter Davidts** (architect; University of Gent)

**Nikolaus Hirsch** (architect; unitednationsplaza, Architectural Association)

**Lisa le Feuvre** (curator, National Maritime Museum; lecturer, MFA Curating, Goldsmiths)

**Suhail Malik** (head of critical studies arts practice, Art Department, Goldsmiths)

**Andrea Phillips** (reader in fine art, Art Department, Goldsmiths)

**Miranda Pope** (curator; project manager, Curating Architecture)

**Peg Rawes** (lecturer, The Bartlett)

**Edgar Schmitz** (artist; lecturer, Art Department, Goldsmiths)

**Cally Spooner** (student, MFA Curating, Goldsmiths).

**Nathalie Weadick** (director, Irish Architecture Foundation)

**Eyal Weizman** (architect; director, Research Architecture,  
Goldsmiths)

**Rob Wilson** (curator, RIBA)

**Dorian Wiszniewski** (architect, lecturer, Architecture Department,  
University of Edinburgh)

#### **GUEST SPEAKERS**

**Sarah Ichioka**, curator, Global Cities; director, Architecture  
Foundation

**Iwona Blaswick**, director, Whitechapel Gallery London

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**, co-director, exhibitions and programmes and  
director of international projects, Serpentine Gallery, London

**Andrew Benjamin**, professor, Monash University Melbourne

**Cynthia Davidson**, director, Anycorps; editor, Log

**Kayoko Ota**, curator, architect, OMA-AMO Rotterdam

**Silke Schatz**, artist

**Curating Architecture** was launched with a lecture by  
Vito Acconci in March 2007.

#### **DOCUMENTATION**

[www.gold.ac.uk/visual-arts/curating-architecture](http://www.gold.ac.uk/visual-arts/curating-architecture)

## RESPONSE BY CELINE CONDORELLI

This conversation is fictional, and uses extracts from the Curating Architecture seminars which took place throughout 2007, and were attended by invited participants. It has been heavily edited and does not reflect the discussions accurately – speakers names have been omitted.

**So, there is** a real dilemma, when you see these images. While they are effective images, one wonders who the person behind them is? From what perspective, and observing whom? And what does that actually say?

**The question then** becomes about what kind of response can be accounted for. Is it an individual experience? Is it a more immersive one, and somehow a giving up of agency?

**This relates to** a far broader question: how can one exhibit the medium of architecture – or perhaps even more broadly, urbanism?

**In artistic terms** we would talk about the difference between artistic practice and art work, and we look to the artistic practice first and foremost: how can that be discussed in relation to architecture, architectural practice?

**There is a** difference between a graphic exhibition and a show that sort of internalises the object, the topic and the things that are communicated in one way or the other.

**Well I can't** get my head around an exhibition that is only illustrated ideas.

**Firstly, if it's** not about physical experience it's pointless to make an exhibition.

**There is a** question shooting right out of that which seems much more interesting, and it has something to do with institutionalisation and collections and current contemporary questions about the possibility for an exhibition to be a fact or a mediator in the freeing of a certain potentiality.

**You know as** a matter of fact I don't want to talk just about this show, I want to kind of expand the idea of the architectural show, or exhibition.

**We could turn** it around and ask if a curator would be a helpful colleague in undertaking an urban masterplanning exercise?

**But also whether** an exhibition is the right site for a new urban project to be debated by the community?

**But what is** this notion of a responsive civically educated public?

I am not sure whether such a public can effectively exist in a condition of global urbanism. Because what would that public be actively civically engaged with? What object is there to engage with under a global condition? A building is not available under a global condition.

**This is not** a call for participatory communitarian discussion.

**Is it the 'public'**, global or otherwise, that has a claim on the positions being put forward, is it a public that is in the active projecting position in relation to what is being projected, or not?

**I guess what** it comes down to is that I don't believe in inclusivity.

**There is a** great deal of fetishisation in the architectural world, particularly in the theoretical architectural world that is

influenced by art, of 'undoing' architecture, which prioritises the 'user' to the point where it becomes a weak version of relational or socially engaged arts practice.

**We are not** just a vaguely interdisciplinary architectural think-tank here.

**Why are you** commissioning artists as part of Curating Architecture?

**We are asking** artists to reframe the questions.

**Have you discussed** commissioning architects?

**The research isn't** about curating buildings; it's about curating architecture.

**There seems to** be an implicit thought here that architects are generally better

**Perhaps we should** be using a more general definition such as 'spatial practice'?

Celine Condorelli is developing the collaborative project support structure and is architect-curator, Eastside Projects, Birmingham.